

Cinematic Projections in the Poetry of H.D., Marianne Moore, and Adrienne Rich

by

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B.A., Queen's University, 2009  
M.A., McGill University, 2011

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## **Supervisory Committee**

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## Abstract

This dissertation examines the influence of film on the poetry of H.D., Marianne Moore, and Adrienne Rich. It builds on scholarship by Susan McCabe (2005), Lawrence Goldstein (1994) and others, who have traced the way twentieth-century American poets reacted formally to film culture in their writing. My project responds to the call of the editors of the volume of *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* for critics to interrogate how authors harnessed the aesthetic and political possibilities opened up by cinema. This study draws from theories of feminist film phenomenology by Vivian Sobchack and Laura U. Marks to analyze the aims and arguments of the texts.

The literary works studied include: H.D.'s *Sea Garden*, "Projector" series, *Trilogy*, *Helen in Egypt*, and film essays; Marianne Moore's animal poems from the 1930s and early 1940s and film essays; and Adrienne Rich's *The Will to Change*. This dissertation argues that the poets drew from film to renovate their poetic vision and forms and ply at questions of power, visuality, and bodies. The poems articulate an awareness of the filmic gaze and how it constructs feminine or animal others. Through careful analysis of the poems, this dissertation locates each poet's particular rapport with film and how it influenced her literary style and prompted her to challenge dominant patriarchal scripts.

This dissertation makes several original contributions to twentieth-century Anglo-American poetry scholarship. It sets these three authors alongside one another to reveal how their engagements with film inspired their poetics and politics at various points throughout the twentieth century. The conclusions herein determine how the poets turned to film to construct their poetic projects. The dissertation offers new readings of the work of H.D., Moore and Rich as queer women poets invested in film culture.

Keywords: H.D., Marianne Moore, Adrienne Rich, poetry, film, cinematic poetry, twentieth-century American poetry, modernism.

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## Dedication

“When I was alive, I aimed to be a student not of longing but of light.”  
—Maggie Nelson

For Dominique Barclay, Lorraine Barclay, and Huguette Marti, who bequeathed to me  
pragmatism and empathy.

## Introduction: Cinematic Projections in Poetry

The screen becomes a page.

—*Cinepoetry*, Christophe Wall-Romana

54. Long before either wave or particle, some (Pythagoras, Euclid, Hipparchus) thought that our eyes emitted some kind of substance that illuminated, or “felt,” what we saw. (Aristotle pointed out that this hypothesis runs into trouble at night, as objects become invisible despite the eyes’ purported power.) Others, like Epicurus, proposed the inverse—that objects themselves project a kind of ray that reaches out toward the eye, as if they were looking at us (and surely some of them are). Plato split the difference, and postulated that a “visual fire” burns between our eyes and that which they behold. This still seems fair enough.

—*Bluets*, Maggie Nelson

### Overview

This project investigates the writing of the modernist poets Marianne Moore and H.D. and the modernist-influenced contemporary poet Adrienne Rich and how they addressed these two simultaneous threads of filmic infiltration and poetic innovation in the early to mid twentieth century. I broach two major questions with regards to literary history: how did poetry process the medium of film and how did these poets’ particular relationships with film affect their poetic output. By the early to mid twentieth century, film became a part of ordinary American life; the careers of Moore, H.D., and Rich intersected with film at differing points of film’s trajectory. H.D. and Moore witnessed film transition from silent film to talkies while Rich experienced the emergence of French New Wave. In response, each poet cultivated her own specific rapport with the medium: H.D. made films and wrote film criticism in the 1920s and 30s; Moore’s fascination with and reviews of travel and animal documentaries influenced her phase of lauded animal poems; and Rich composed odes to French New Wave directors during her late 1960s political and aesthetic awakening. Their keen investments in cinema, particularly foreign film that countered the American mainstream, came to bear on their writing. More than just a passing interest, film came to play an important role in each poet’s own development as demonstrated through their poems’

subject matter, visual metaphors, and formal experimentation. I argue that the poets broached formal styles that were novel in the context of their own poetic careers, rather than radically re-inventing poetic possibilities. These parallels with films I identify in the poems were metaphorical and a deliberate choice on the part of the poets—a strategy to emphasize pre-existing formal possibilities in order to articulate newfound political, social, aesthetic understandings and realities that film enabled.

Essentially, I demonstrate how their particular, idiosyncratic positions in American society as queer women helped them cultivate a countercultural poetic impulse. Film, especially European film and the avant-garde, inspired them to counter American cultural and poetic norms; they generated new forms and voices, cultivating a queer relationship to contemporary culture and poetry. Their particular poetic aesthetics differ intensely, but a divergence from cultural and literary norms unites them. H.D. builds sparse oracular visions to survive the trauma of World War II; Moore embraces esoteric, opaque surfaces to defamiliarize the human rapport with the natural world; Rich breaks down her celebrated modernist style and embraces an associative form geared toward dismantling dominant culture. Although I posit that these poets' projects take on a queer valence, my study is not an attempt to establish a queer genealogy or canon, but rather to examine the ways in which these poets, as case studies, cultivated poetic responses to film. They are a constellation of poets who identified with film from outside of their American cultural milieu and whose queerness in relation to their society has implications for the kind of filmic poetry they produced. I examine how, through poetic form, the poets break from the normative cultural scripts and power structures, especially in relation to the other, of twentieth-century mainstream America.

I ask how these poets' responses to film articulate a triangle of ideas in relation to bodies, power and visibility. I posit that film challenged the poets' conceptualizations of

visuality, experience and embodiment. In turn, the poets tapped into film's unique underscoring of perceptual experience. The medium inspired the poets to test out new forms and examine relationality. Even further, the poetic processing of film led to investigations into how visuality and power are enmeshed. I suggest that the poets grappled with the gaze, Plato's "visual fire" that Nelson describes, and the effects of the phenomenological and psychological projection humans engage in while looking. They contend with the implications of the visual fire as it burns between object and viewer. The poets explore this double nature of seeing—perceiving and projection—that film amplifies and brings to the forefront. Moore explored the gaze and power relations with regards to animal-human relations and Rich and H.D. considered the ramifications of the gaze and power for feminist resistance and thought to counter patriarchal literary traditions. Rich was interested how poetry and film fit into the assemblage of social resistance while H.D. initiated a film discourse to address feminine bodies and the gaze. H.D. and Moore and Rich responded to the filmic cultural shift by turning to questions of visuality, power, and form. My project articulates these poets' experiences of film and how film altered their literary visions, inspiring formal aesthetic innovations and bringing to light questions of power, language and visuality.

### **The Moving Picture in Poetry**

The theoretical framework for this project is informed by formal analysis, biographical and historical context, and film philosophy. Building on this framework, each chapter analyzes poetry that engages with film and traces its historical, aesthetic and theoretical currents to discover what this filmic poetry can tell us about the poets' relationship to visual culture as well as language, representation, and power in the early and mid twentieth century. The history and theory support readings that demonstrate the poets' investment in

contemporary media and their works' dialogue with contemporary film and film theory. Form is at the centre of this project, which introduces new understandings of how H.D., Moore and Rich engaged with film to critique concepts of visuality and power. This understanding enhances the historical basis for the study of these poets' relationships with film, but also transfigures it to prompt theoretical and historical questions about representation, film and language in the twentieth century and how poetry provided a veritable basis for such critiques. The poets created critiques of these issues and film through their evolving poetic forms. This project traces this critique and interrogates the dynamic, nuanced relationship H.D., Moore, and Rich fostered with film in their eras.

Modernist literature, concerned with the innovation of new forms and challenging the bounds of representation, coincided with the advent of photography and film, new technologies of representation. Film and photography introduced novel platforms for representation with the potential to destabilize traditional notions of representation, thus providing modernist writers with productive grounds with which to experiment formally. In a historical account of the rapport between literature and film, Michael North outlines how the emergence of visual media, such as film and photograph, played a necessary role in the development of art in the early twentieth century. He writes:

Many of the most radical formal experiments of the twentieth century can be traced back to the new association of word and image suggested by the photograph. In fact, it would not be too far wrong to say that modernism itself, as a pan-artistic movement, begins with the critical interrogation of the relationship between text and image, brought equally into literature and the visual arts by mechanical recording. (12)

He argues that the newfound presence and active influence of photography and film ultimately transformed modern literature by its questioning of the presumed workings of

representation. Part of this representational shift was a heightened awareness of the interaction of text and image. The new visual technologies prompted writers to consider how images inscribe like language and function by way of rhetoric and how text retains and performs its visual properties. North explains: “The new media did influence modern art and literature at a very basic and material level, as alternate methods of inscription, and for this reason they offered to modernism a formal model and not just another type of subject matter” (12). Indeed, modernist writers like H.D. and Moore and more contemporary writers like Adrienne Rich achieved new forms for poetry while contending with their filmic age. They also added to the discussion by contemplating how media relates to experience, embodiment and power, noting how power structures and circulates within and structures language and culture.

And so while H.D., Moore, and Rich write with film and photography in mind thematically, often deploying visual metaphors, they begin to experiment formally to call attention to visuality, the gaze, and bodies. Ultimately the modernist poets Moore and H.D. and the contemporary poet Rich integrated the formal and theoretical ramifications of film’s presence in their lives, the larger culture, and their particular artistic subcultures. If the ways in which the subject encounters image and text—reads and expresses signs—has changed due to new media, then poetry, as a field of representation, necessarily absorbs and processes this altered relationship. Mechanical recording with its proliferation of icons and emphasis on the rapport between text and image alerts the poet to the shifting parameters of perception and language. As Rich puts it: “free in the dusty beam of the projector / the mind of the poet is changing” (49). H.D., Moore and Rich work through this kinetic relationship between image and text that new media brought to the forefront and, in response, produce poems that articulate this changing cultural, poetic moment. Even further, this innovation in dominant representational modes, from textual to visual, provides a unique moment to question and,

perhaps, disrupt normative relationality. H.D., Moore, and Rich perceived the potential of film to affirm dominant power relations as well as disrupt them. This inclination comes through in H.D.'s critiques of the representation of women in film, Moore's uncanny empathy for animals, and Rich's quest to forge a progressive social order in her American present.

This project considers each poet's distinct rapport with film while also looking to broader trends as to discern how film influenced their poetic forms. I suggest that H.D., Moore, and Rich engaged with film in unique ways while also reworking poetic form under the influence of cinema and broaching questions of power and relationality. Wall-Romana's study of French poetry and film is an important starting point for my thinking. He charts the history of French poetry and film in the early twentieth century, claiming that, "poets' cinematically mediated practice, bypassing notions of cinema as an illusion or a factory of die-cast cultural products, gave rise to a new and distinctly virtual ecology of the text" (5). In other words, poets' engagement with film as mediated experience provides a generative space to renew their relationship with text. In summation, the cinema for poets resists a commonplace view of film as fleeting, fantastical escapism or subscription to the ideological machinery of capitalism, and, instead, stands as a vital practice for allowing poetry to contemplate experience in the twentieth-century, its manifold halls of screens and mirrors. Wall-Romana argues that poetic language can help locate the effects of film in this new age. He gives the example of how Collette's film reviews forge a visceral point of connection between the bodies on screen and the bodies of spectators. While poets drew from the cultural reservoir of film, their formal experiments also demonstrated that "[c]inema is not an aura-destroying apparatus faking the bridging of distance. The way it makes present the distant and the Other may awaken an audience to the ethics of the manifold and to its own agency" (10). Wall-Romana argues that cinema is a productive medium through which the aesthetic

experience bequeaths to its spectators a way to relate to the other that acknowledges distance and empathy as well as a sense of agency; the act of watching film enables spectators to comprehend the interchangeability of, and therefore relation between, subject and object in a visual culture based on perspective. Film facilitates new perspectives on relationality and embodiment that, despite the illusory presentation of film, is actually quite sincere—moving images may emulate sight and, in doing so, the phenomenon of film prompts veritable sensory reactions. I argue that non-mainstream cinema awakened the poets to formal experimentation as they worked through normative social scripts, responding to their dominant culture. From their positions as idiosyncratic queer poets whose identities radically diverged from normative roles, they questioned received notions of representation and perception and thus articulated a newfound experience of relationality that resists normative, hierarchical power relations. The poets respond to film in such a way that suggests they see the medium as able to both distantly objectify as well as create relational space for the other. Their access to this relationship took the form of revised poetic projects.

I argue that the poets harness this simultaneous sense of perception and experience<sup>1</sup> film offers in order to imagine new relational dynamics beyond the bequeathed, oppressive structures. To further this discussion I draw from Vivian Sobchack. Wall-Romana's poet is like Sobchack's film spectator. Sobchack, whose work is also among my starting points, emphasizes the sense-making *and* sensual qualities of the encounter with film:

Watching a film, we can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and feel the movement as well as see the moved. As viewers, not only do we spontaneously and invisibly perform these existential acts directly for and as ourselves in relation *to* the film before us, but these same acts are coterminously given to us *as* the film, as mediating acts of

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<sup>1</sup> In "The theory of the body is already a theory of perception," M. Merleau-Ponty concentrates on perception as embodied and subjective: "we have found that underneath the

perception-cum-expression we take up and *invisibly perform* by appropriating and incorporating them into our own existential performance; we watch them as a *visible performance* distinguishable from, yet included in, our own. (10)

Essentially, film offers a profound dual experience of perception and experience. Sobchack's intervention in film theory is relevant to poetry that deals with film because of her formulation of the active spectator reading and experiencing film. She articulates how bodies not only witness but also contribute to the meaning making and -feeling of art, and this dimension of embodiment is important to cinematically minded poetics. Sobchack argues that the figuration we call film necessitates a "radical reflection on the act of viewing and its relation to our being-in-the-world" (54). Sobchack, like Wall-Romana, posits that film is not a passive act of consumption but, rather, an experience of "signification and communication [that] calls for a *reflexive turn* away from the film as 'object' and toward the act of viewing and its existential implication of a body-subject" (51). Thus film necessitates existential reflection, as the viewer is aware of her status as an embodied object and a subject with interiority. In turn, this reflection allows for the possibility of new forms of relationality between the self and other. The viewer can respond to the screen as though it were another body, world, or entity worthy of empathy and engagement. For Sobchack, film operates based on the knowledge that the lived body is "both the *subject of seeing* and an *object for seeing*" (53). My project susses out how H.D., Moore, and Rich processed this dual sensation of perspective and experience, how it brought them to confront received notions of gender and embodiment in their poetry and seek out forms that could account for a sense of productive, imaginative, empathetic visuality. Their film-inspired poems broach implicitly what Laura Mulvey explicitly defines as scopophilia in her seminal essay "Visual Pleasure," in which she illustrates the totalizing gaze of film that renders feminine bodies objects in the service of patriarchy (7). And yet these poets found film illuminating and radical with regards

to uprooting oppressive power dynamics and instituting an awareness of gender and embodiment and how this all plays out with regards to the relationship between self and other.

I term this empathetic and engaged visuality that encompasses Sobchack's radical reflection "haptic visuality." Since "haptic" essentially means "of or relating to the sense of touch, in particular relating to the perception and manipulation of objects using the senses of touch and proprioception" (np). I deploy haptic in the case of Moore to identify a mode of looking that acknowledges the psychological and phenomenological valences that accompany the act of looking. The haptic is the self-reflexive touch and ethics that inform the onlooker's gaze. The term is a method to articulate a self-aware gaze or visual fire and experience of looking—in contrast to a classical definition of looking that purports to enact an objective distance while actually indulging in a totalizing, oppressive, hierarchal perspective. The haptic gaze is a visual strategy—a means to remind of the spectator's position and the reader's role in meaning making and bodily relating when viewing film. I borrow the term "haptic" from Laura U. Marks whose work follows Sobchack's critical cinematic intervention. Marks writes:

Haptic images do not invite identification with a figure so much as they encourage a bodily relationship between the viewer and the image. Thus it is less appropriate to speak of the object of a haptic look than to speak of a dynamic subjectivity between look and image. (2)

Marks' work in *Touch: Sensuous Theory and Multisensory Media* articulates an aware way of looking. I take this awareness and deploy this sense of the "haptic" to argue that haptic visuality is an ethical way of looking that acknowledges both empathy with and distance from the perceived object. The poets, in my opinion, work through this haptic visuality in their poetry, as an addendum to the filmic culture they encounter that, at times, encourages

empathy and, at other times, reifies hierarchal structures of power that objectify animals and feminine bodies. Marks writes that “haptic cinema,”

appear[s] to us as an object with which we interact rather than an illusion into which we enter, calls on this sort of embodied intelligence. In the dynamic movement between optical and haptic ways of seeing, it is possible to compare different ways of knowing and interacting with an other. (18)

Building on Marks’ scholarship, I argue that the poetic encounter with moving images can articulate this self-conscious turn during an era in which being and seeing become even more enmeshed. In contrast to the colloquial view of film going as capitalistic and physically bound, film-inspired poetry emboldened these twentieth-century poets to re-envision poetic form and pry at issues of visuality, power, and relationality.<sup>2</sup>

This project examines each poet’s relationship with film and the effects it produced in their writing. My study explores the unique dynamic and historical context of the authors’ engagements with and writing on film. I believe it is important to consider each poet’s relationship with film as its own cinephilic world that provides insight into film, literary history, the poet’s own career, and these issues of haptic visuality. I argue that the poets’ entanglements with film prompted form- and consciousness-changing revelations in their poetic trajectories: they altered their poetic form to contend with dominant cultural scripts. In taking this approach, my study examines both the link between film and literature in the twentieth century and the poets’ own filmic world making and writing. Rancière makes a case for cinephilia as a critical tactic, adjacent to film theory, that accounts for the multiple challenges to definitions of art and representation it provokes. The usefulness of cinephilia,

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas’s discussion of the caress speaks to the gaze that touches and the politics that underpin this encounter. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas claims that the caress is an anticipatory masculine gaze that peers beyond perception (258). In contrast, Marks’ haptic gaze imports both a sense of touch and self-awareness in order to broach the object of perception and touch.

according to Rancière, is that it “affirmed that the greatness of cinema lay not in the metaphysical high-mindedness of its subjects or the visual impact of its plastic effects, but in an imperceptible difference in the ways of putting traditional stories and emotions into images” (2). Indeed, Rancière focuses on how film permeates both high art and everyday experiences:

To consider only the shots and processes that compose a film is to forget that cinema is an art as well as a world to itself, that those shots and effects that vanish in the moment of projection need to be extended, to be transformed by the memory and words that make cinema exist as a shared world far beyond the material reality of its projections. (6)

Rancière argues that film breaks into the mundane modern experience in minute yet meaningful ways. He suggests that film possesses an experiential world-creating quality. As a result, it is important to consider that film exists as a large-scale material phenomenon and a perceptual experience—it is intimately wound up in collective and individual psyches. My project examines how this very real and metaphorical world-making quality of film inspired the poets to reconfigure poetic form and to articulate the changing relationship between reality and representation in the twentieth century. In doing so, I argue that the aforementioned poets created new worlds through their poetic critiques of film and that film itself produced a change in their literary output. From this vantage point, the poets were able to address issues of embodiment, power, and visuality prompted by film in poetic language.

### **The State of the Field**

I have chosen the literary texts for this study because they present three American poets responding to the rise of film culture in the twentieth century. They also account for and articulate a particular and dynamic relationship between poetry and film. The specific

rappports between these poets and film are part of a larger and ongoing area of study in the field of literary history that examines literary engagements with visual arts and media. The works of H.D., Moore, and Rich evoke questions with regards to the formal generation and philosophical preoccupations enabled by poetic encounters with film.

Poetry that engages with film takes root in, and necessarily diverges from, the tradition of ekphrastic poetry.<sup>3</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell claims that the prevalence of ekphrasis in contemporary poetry stems from “the pictorial turn,” the cultural shift from words to images that began in the late nineteenth century with film and photography and that continues today (11). Additionally, Elizabeth Bergman Loizeaux points out the dialogic quality of ekphrasis: when a poet addresses a work of art, unlike a natural object, the poem considers another artist’s statement “already made about/in the world” (5). Ekphrasis heightens the sociality of the lyric to include speaker, addressee, and artist within a public context. Richard Stein identifies the key role of the audience in the ekphrastic situation: “the reference to a second art gives a new and important role to the reader-spectator, who shares the writer’s contemplation of an external artifact” (4). Ekphrasis inherently consists of a triangulated rapport between speaker and the audience via the art object. Yet film in twentieth-century poetry complicates the ekphrastic tradition of a speaker describing a piece of visual art to an audience. While filmic poetry stages an ekphrastic encounter between text and image for an audience, it must also account for how moving images rework the experience of the spectator’s perception and sense of embodiment. Film, the art in question, emulates the sensation of reality in new ways. In traditional ekphrasis, speaker and audience join forces to contemplate an object, such as a painting or a statue. Film, however, imparts to its audience a

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<sup>3</sup> I refer to the literary critical use of the term ekphrasis to denote writing that contends with visual art. Although the ancient rhetorical definition of ekphrasis as “A speech that brings the subject matter vividly before the eyes” (1) that Ruth Webb discusses in *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* is pertinent in its sense of dynamic, visual conjuring through text.

sense of being both subject and object that further complicates the poetic engagement with film.

In this case, James A.W. Heffernan's simple, working definition of ekphrasis as "the verbal representation of visual representation" (3) in *Museum of Words* is too general for a discussion of filmic poetry, which relays an increasingly perplexed rapport between moving image and text. Heffernan locates a dynamic narrative thrust in ekphrasis: "it typically delivers *from* the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication" (4). According to Heffernan, the encounter of text and image imbues the ekphrastic lyric with the potential to conjure a newfound narrative beyond what the original piece of visual art presents. While Heffernan's ekphrastic definition accounts for dynamism, ekphrasis, in the era of film, blooms into a textual negotiation with screens of moving images gleaned from reality through mechanical reproduction. While my project diverges from a traditional ekphrastic study, I am interested in pursuing how this interaction of film and poetry created new forms and narratives for the poets in question.

The foundation of my analysis relies on historical documents that point to how film infiltrated the lively careers of H.D., Moore, and Rich in important and peculiar ways. Although the archives and important critical historical studies bolster my research and approach, my analysis elaborates upon this precedence, pursuing formal criticism that examines how these encounters with film percolated and subsequently shaped specific literary texts by the authors. The archives of H.D., Moore, and Rich provided insight into how these poets' writing practices were interwoven into a range of artistic fields and social networks. While I gleaned direct evidence of their interactions with film from letters and collected materials, I also gained an appreciation of how the literary life is inextricable from

visual, institutional, political currents. The social and material webs I glimpsed in the archives piqued my curiosity and affirmed my instinct to follow this particular filmic thread.

My project is a historical one invested in the particulars of the poets' reception of film. I draw from *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism*, edited by James Donald, Anne Friedberg, and Laura Marcus; the volume presents excerpts and facsimiles of the first English-language film journal *Close Up*, established and edited by H.D. and her professional and romantic partners Kenneth Macpherson and Winifred Bryher. The volume affords innovative critical insight into the entwined history of literature and film in the early twentieth century. It also contextualizes the philosophies underpinning this inaugural literary cinematic enterprise. The editors of the volume state their intentions of the project in relation to discourse on literary modernism:

We want to give their [H.D. and Dorothy Richardson] speculations on film and cinema wider currency primarily in order to pose the question whether *literary* modernism – and especially the modernism of women like Virginia Woolf as well as the *Close Up* contributors – should be seen in large part as a response to, and an appropriation of, the aesthetic possibilities opened up by *cinema*. (original emphasis vii)

The volume asks a key question I take up in my project. How and in what ways did the writers harness the aesthetic potential offered to them by film? While the volume provides cultural context and analyzes the modernists' writing on film, my project pushes this query further to consider the formal, political ramifications of these specific authors' engaged responses to cinema. I articulate how these queer poets approached film outside of the American mainstream to reconsider visibility, power and relationality in poetry. In the case of H.D., I track the poetics, forms, and themes of her later epic poems that drew from classical

mythology to address contemporary concerns. The authors ascertain H.D.'s significant involvement with film as resonant with her overall poetic vision:

Although H.D.'s approach to the cinematic is in many ways idiosyncratic, to be understood as an aspect of her broader concerns with language and symbol, psychoanalysis, mysticism and spiritualism, classicism and the celebration of women's beauty and power, her perspectives on film and her contributions to *CU* were nonetheless central to its project. (98)

Film fits into and helps tether the poet's constellation of visionary interests. Likewise, Carrie J. Preston observes in *Modernism's Mythic Pose* that performance is a useful organizational thread that sews together H.D.'s diverse interests:

critics struggle to reconcile H.D.'s work in diverse genres, even as they refer to her as a model of the interdisciplinary art and criticism that is central to both modernist and gender studies. Mythic performance is a pliant rubric that can encompass her dramatic monologues, verse drama, film theory, acting, and long poems, all of which look back to prior genres and subjectivities so as to gaze more directly on modernity. (191)

While Preston perceives H.D.'s poetics in relation to various forms of performance, such as gender, dance, theatre, and film, she locates H.D.'s mythic vein as rooted in cinematic poetics:

Disappointed by sound film and Hollywood, H.D. returned to poetry, but predominantly to long poems like *Trilogy* (1944-1946). She incorporated montage and other cinematic techniques with classical and typological allusions to alter a reader's perceptual habits and produce an experience akin to ritual participation. (11)

Preston notes H.D.'s linking of embodiment and experience with film by way of poetry and suggests that her writing invites its audience to participate with it in a ritualistic sense. I follow a similar path, though I seek to demonstrate how H.D.'s filmic poetics build over the course of the poet's career and how they culminate with formal questions about femininity, representation, and embodiment. Due to H.D.'s explicit records of filmic endeavours, such as film writing, acting, and making, the bulk of the historical scholarship focuses on H.D.'s own rapport with film. In light of this, my study answers the call of these aforementioned volumes for more considerations of how film inflected the literary ethos of H.D. and her fellow twentieth-century poets Moore and Rich with whom she shared a filmic interest.

In *Cinematic Modernism*, Susan McCabe formulates a psychoanalytical critical intervention that treats both H.D. and Moore as filmic poets. She makes the case for how both modernist poetry and film configure and fragment the body. McCabe points out that the modernists wrote in the era of both film and psychoanalysis. In assessing Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H.D. and Moore, McCabe argues that "the medium of film opened up a new vocabulary for modernist poets not only to challenge modes of mimetic representation, but also to explore and reconstruct cultural tropes of fragmented, dissociated corporeality" (3-4) emergent due to the cultural force of film and psychoanalysis. She pinpoints a central modernist paradox: "a desire to include bodily experience and sensation along with an overpowering sense of the unavailability of such experience except as mediated through mechanical reproduction" (3). Furthermore, what yokes these instances of poetry and film is this concept of the screen upon which bodies are cast and to which bodies respond. Film and poetry make the body both distant and visceral. The spectator of film and the reader of poetry encounter the display of bodies in both poetic and filmic experiences. McCabe's treatment of Moore and H.D. is thorough and brings to light the impact of psychoanalysis and cinema on the work of the modernist poets. However, where her reading focuses on the self

as estranged other, I am interested in how the poets deploy poetry to forge a connection to feminine and animal others. While McCabe's critical understanding is a fine beginning, this project probes further to account for the poets' cinematic vision as a way to articulate the more porous experience and position of subject and object and how the poets can be read as part of a historical moment and cinematic network. These poets invoke not only the aesthetics and language of film, but also this awareness of self, this seeing *and* being, in relation to other bodies and communities that the experience of film provokes.

### **The Cinematic Projections of H.D., Moore and Rich**

My study analyzes the poetry of two modernists and a contemporary writer. While this grouping of poets references different historical moments, the poets, regardless of context, formulate divergent poetic responses to film. Moore and H.D. grappled with film at an earlier point in the twentieth century than Rich, but all three poets share an affinity for European film and regard foreign cinema as a site of poetic inspiration. Rich's mid-century break away from modernist tradition towards new forms actually resonates along the same lines as the modernist mantra. Is her revolution still a modernist impulse? Laurence Goldstein points out that Rich's cinematically inspired reinvention belongs to a modernist tradition invested in "inventing new artistic forms under the influence of technological changes, while at the same time nostalgic for at least some of the superseded values" (186). Rich's turn away from her modernist-inflected past oddly aligns her with it. Like H.D. and Moore, Rich adapts language in light of concurrent technological and social changes. Rich's connection to social movements of the 1960s, however, charges her with the belief that cultural innovation can shape the political spheres. While H.D. and Moore configured the transformative possibilities of poetry as mystical and ecological respectively and with attention to ethics, Rich perceives poetry in terms of emotional, ethical sociality. Rich's seemingly modernist impulse also

highlights how reinvention often simultaneously draws from the past and bleeding edge contemporaneity and how that particular position is a constant in the history of poetry. Poets write in innovative and classic ways concurrently and consistently. Preston focuses on case studies including H.D. And, in doing so, critiques the modernist studies' dominant narrative of exclusively ground-breaking forward motion in literary modernism:

By foregrounding solos, I direct attention away from clashing factions (Imagism, Futurism, etc.) to their particular events, genres, ideas of subjectivity, and how they both develop from and revise earlier constructions. Modernism was rarely quite so new as advertised, and an antimodern critique is present in many versions of modernism. (8)

Similarly, I pursue H.D., Moore, and Rich as examples of poets whose formal inclinations intersect with the innovation of modernist literature, but also as poets who participate in nuanced cycles of revision, invention, and looking both forward and looking back.

This tension between innovation and classical allusion comes to light in Moore's writing on *Lot in Sodom*, directed by James Sibley Watson and Melville Webber and starring Hildegard Watson, for *Close Up*. Moore's fascination with *Lot in Sodom* is notable because of her personal rapport with its makers and cast, but also because the film articulates this modernist discourse of reaching back to tell classical stories in innovative forms like avant-garde film. The film has, of course, a rapport with literary modernism. The creators of the film were part of Moore's literary circuit: Sibley Watson was the editor of *The Dial* during Moore's heyday and Moore and Hildegard Watson were friends who kept a prolific correspondence over their lifetimes. In the review, Moore's focus on somatic movement, especially Hildegard's performance, in *Lot in Sodom* and the merged textual-visual quality of film resonate with H.D.'s poetic investigation of feminine bodies in *Helen in Egypt*. Also, Moore investigates movement and the arresting power of the gaze in film.

Unsurprisingly, Moore's review opens with a positive declaration: "*Lot in Sodom*, derived from the Book of Genesis—and not a talkie—is the best art film I have seen" (310). Moore tackles the avant-garde film, its biblical origins and homoerotic choreography, with relish. She delights in how the camera work and backdrop of the film conspire to create a poetic atmosphere. Moore compares film to other literary and artistic figures:

Here, the camera work, with a correlating of poetic influences—the Blake designs in the fire, the Pascin, Giotto, Doré, and Joseph Stella treatment—shows us wherein slow motion, distortion, the sliding track, can be more legitimate than the face to face stage-set. Personality coalescing with a piece of stone, the obliterating cloud of doves, "the silver cord" and other historic color, are incontrovertibly conclusive for the art of the film. (311)

Moore's critical eye sees the film as in conversation with art, history, and literature. She pays attention to every flickering moment and is captivated by the film's images and movements. Moore views the film as a meeting point for text and image.<sup>4</sup> Also, she highlights the kinetic physicality of Hildegard's performance. The review lingers on Hildegard's facial expressions and gestures:

insurmountably the lissom nymph, and fair, as companion figure to so grief-stricken and striking a piece of archaeology as Lot; but rapt, listening premonitoriness [sic] of face and attitudes throughout, are right; and as part of the pause before the destruction, the figure running down steps with garments fluttering aside, is a dramatic ace. (310)

Even though Lot's wife's ultimate fate involves achieving total stasis by turning to a pillar of salt, Moore celebrates her dramatic dynamism in the film. She describes her as "lissom," honing in on her embodiment on screen. Once more, Moore identifies what film brings to

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<sup>4</sup> In doing so, Moore touches on the hieroglyphic quality of film that H.D. celebrates in her writing.

mediation: the emphasis on corporeal gesture that reminds of embodied experience. Moore identifies a grammar in Hildegard's movements, like the motion of the animals in documentaries—one that renews her interest in what representation can do and the awe it can conjure through rendering bodies into a visual language.

The trope of looking back figures in Moore's writing on *Lot* and appears in the poetry of H.D. and Rich. This trope comes to represent how Moore, H.D., and Rich envision film-inspired poetry that innovates while also drawing from the past. Rich and H.D., however, focus on this trope in their poems that borrow from the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Even H.D.'s lengthy *Helen in Egypt* explores this trope thematically as Helen reminisces and tries to glimpse past events of which she is unsure, playing off of the adage about Helen's face and channelling it into a more introspective journey into new literary territory not contained in the original myth. Lot, Helen, and Eurydice are suspended in a purgatory between forward and backward movements in which variant directions and realities haunt and, therefore, come to represent the poets' poetry that absorbs past and contemporary influences. Because of these concomitant impulses, this study warrants bringing Rich into dialogue with such modernist heavyweights as H.D. and Moore.

The first chapter, "Cinematic Visionary: H.D.'s Filmic Consciousness" analyzes H.D.'s poetry and film criticism. I trace H.D.'s career trajectory from Imagism to her creation of film and film discourse and then consider how these earlier encounters with film percolate in her later epic poems *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt*. I demonstrate how film techniques, such as the close up and montage, and tropes, such as the femme fatale, underpin *Sea Garden* and this, in combination with her film essays, demonstrate a burgeoning feminist theory of film that comes to bear on her later poems that tackle issues of representation with regards to wartime cultural trauma and feminine figures.

In her early poems and film essays, H.D. attends to the treatment of feminine bodies visually and keenly observes how the screen has the potential to further objectify feminine subjects. To counter this trend she observes in film proper, H.D., in her later career, formulates epic poems to reframe and re-centre feminine bodies in visual terms and thus forges a nuanced representation of the feminine other in the age of prolific visual mechanical reproduction. I show how film played a role in defining H.D.'s poetics and politics of formal regeneration in her later epic poems that meld mythologies with contemporary political, social, technological issues. H.D. resuscitates the femme fatale and conjures radical identification with the feminine other in the cinematic age.

Chapter Two, “‘A [re]visionary of natural creatures’: Marianne Moore’s Haptic Poetics,” analyzes Moore’s lauded animal poems from the 1930s (and a few from the 1940s) to examine her reconstruction of human-animal rapports. I argue that the poet’s investment in animal and travel documentaries that she reviewed for H.D.’s magazine *Close Up* alerted Moore to the power and ethics of looking at animals.

The poet disrupts the normative stance of mastery over nature in order to create an embodied, vulnerable way of looking that foregrounds both mutuality and distance with regards to the animal other. I demonstrate how this preoccupation with human-animal relations underpins Moore’s take on the genre of the *ars poetica*. Moore’s irregular forms and esoteric references undermine stereotypical depictions of animals and reframe the animal other to affirm their dignity and the otherness. Through this uncanny style, Moore pushes back against the authoritative gaze of 1930s animal documentary and travel film and constructs a haptic visuality that operates with strangeness, distance, and empathy in her own animal poems.

The third chapter, “Adrienne Rich and the Filmic Mood,” interrogates the rise of Rich’s political consciousness in conjunction with her interest in French avant-garde cinema

in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The chapter analyzes Rich's *The Will to Change* (1971) to illuminate this significant moment in the poet's career. I argue that in the collection Rich crafts a filmic lyric that resonates with the subjunctive mood—a world-creating grammatical mood. Her formal innovation adapts the visions of French filmmakers Jean-Luc Godard<sup>5</sup> and Jean Cocteau to serve her own feminist, social justice project.

While many of poems in the collection deal with film straight on by overtly responding to French New Wave film, I posit that the long poem *Shooting Script* formally enacts a filmic ethos that articulates Rich's radical progression in poetry and politics. Like H.D., Rich is concerned with how film emulates normative power structures and circulates oppressive relations. But Rich identifies a liberating cinematic mood in French New Wave film that she inserts into her charged and dynamic poetry of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Experimental film helped her envision alternate worlds and social relations to make space for the leftist, feminist, Civil rights and queer issues of her contemporary American culture. I suggest that *The Will to Change* demonstrates how Rich's engagement with film was integral to her poetic, social, and political renewal.

The works discussed in this dissertation present an analysis of the poets' variant film-inspired poetics. By focusing on the poetry of H.D., Moore, and Rich, I examine continuities that demonstrate the complicated overlap that takes place between the filmic and literary worlds. However, I also read for how each author transforms poetic form to address representational and technological changes in the twentieth century. Filmic encounters inspired each author's literary ethos at important moments in their career. Although each poet's direction and rapport with film is unique, they illuminate poetry's necessary relationship with contemporary art forms and media. Even further, they illustrate how film

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<sup>5</sup> Similarly, Susan Sontag, a fellow important American feminist thinker, found Godard's influence transformative for her cultural criticism as documented in her essays on the director's films.

poses provocative questions with regards to representation, bodies, and power. Interestingly, H.D. and Rich interrogated the gendered dynamics of the film and Moore contemplated human relations with the animal other. In many ways, the poets anticipated discourses surrounding the gaze and projection.

## Chapter One: Cinematic Visionary: H.D.'s Filmic Consciousness

“I myself have learned to use a small projector and spend literally hundreds of hours alone in my apartment, making the mountains and village streets and my own acquaintances reel past me in the light and light and light.”

—H.D. in response to an interview question for the *Little Review*, 1929

H.D.'s early forays into Imagism and her filmmaking and film writing in the 1920s and 1930s anticipate the cultivation of filmic poetics in her later, longer poems, *Trilogy* (1944-46) and, to a greater extent, *Helen in Egypt* (1952). Her interest in Imagism and immersion in the film world allowed her to examine film tropes and techniques as she broached questions about the treatment of feminine bodies in media. The stages in her early career contributed to the creation of her generically experimental long poems that deal with the rapport between reality and representation in the age of mechanical reproduction. In her later poems she fuses mythology, poetry and visuality to map the historical and formal shifts of representation in the twentieth century.

### I.I

#### Overview

H.D. is a visual and visionary poet known for her occult brand of modernism and early Imagist poems. Considering her through a filmic lens, however, merges these two dimensions of her poetry and, even further, brings to the forefront the depths, paradoxes, and world-making possibilities of her poems. H.D.'s engagement with film was a critical artistic passage that informed the modernist structures and strategies as well as the mysticism that underpins her poetry. Her film-inspired poetry developed over the course of her career: at first she experimented with Imagism and then participated in film making and theory, which lay the groundwork for the emerging filmic sensibilities that came to fruition in her later poetry. The formal qualities of her early Imagist poems, although often construed as

photographic, resonate with contemporary film techniques, such as montage and close up. Even further, the formal adaptations of her later poems contemplate the interaction between visual and linguistic realms—how image and text relate and the literary, psychic ramifications of the increasingly visual culture of the twentieth century. Her poems treat time and culture as rotating, overlapping images, a method deeply akin to the newfound rendering of representation afforded by the film reel. Her poems act like screens upon which she projects overlying motifs of history, from Ancient Egypt to modernity. Importantly, her poetic surfaces contain mystical depths.

In H.D.'s poetic oeuvre, Adalaide Morris unearths “a case for poetic language less as a medium for identification and introspection than as an agent of thought, perception, and meaning in the ongoing life of a culture” (1). H.D.'s poetry is not merely a barometric measurement of her intellectual and emotional inclinations, but, instead, her writing absorbs and activates modernist thought in the age of mechanical reproduction. This chapter considers how H.D.'s earlier poems explore cinematic techniques, such as montage and close up, and tropes, such as the femme fatale, while her later long poems *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt* formally respond to film while contemplating issues of representation in the filmic age. H.D. steeped her early and later poetry in visual terms and metaphors and her long poems demonstrate a newly cinematic imagination and treatment of representation. If film called attention to the received notions of representation and altered the perception and reception of images, then H.D.'s poetry enacts a cinematic, literary mode of expression enabled by the modernist era; a poetry that investigates art's ability to redefine the relationship between representation and reality. Identifying with foreign silent film, the Anglo-American modernist forged a queer rapport with film that fostered a questioning of dominant, patriarchal scripts and provided the poet with an avenue of survival and renewal in the face of martial conflict.

The language of visual media often frames historical accounts of H.D.'s poetry. For example: Robert Duncan, a San Francisco Renaissance poet and one of the first literary critics of H.D., renders her poetry in photographic and cinematic terms. For Duncan the image—still versus moving—provides a dichotomous formula for poetics in *The H.D. Book*, a lengthy and early addition to literary criticism on H.D. in the context of modernism. Duncan interprets Pound's own practice as "where language operates somehow like a magic lantern or a motion-picture projector in relation to the receiving mind that is a screen" (313). Duncan borrows Pound's idea of poetry as illumination projected onto screens and subsequently expands the theory in order to discriminate between poems that are static like photographs and poems that are dynamic like moving pictures. Accordingly, Duncan describes the Imagist poetry of H.D. and Pound as stationary, noting that the "reiterated hardness and cut-edges" of H.D.'s rock flowers "[exist] in a garden as if frozen in time, as if time had come to stop in the photography" (313). Elaborating upon this photographic view of H.D. and Pound, Duncan continues to suggest, "these stills are few in number. After a handful of imagist poems, the poets were interested in movement" (313), veering towards a cinematic form in the later poetry. Duncan claims that H.D.'s early Imagist poems possess photographic qualities until the point at which she graduates to film-inspired forms later on. Duncan argues that H.D.'s collection of poetry, *Trilogy* (1946), "remind[s] of the transitions and montage that developed in the moving picture" (313), identifying a dynamic quality in the writing that comes from H.D.'s compounding of contemporary, historical, and mythic time. Duncan perceives H.D.'s later, long poems as kinetic and cinematic. In deploying this analogue, he emphasizes visual terms as an integral part of the literary history of modernism. Similarly, Preston identifies a sense of movement<sup>6</sup> in H.D.'s poetry. Taking these

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<sup>6</sup> Preston's reading of "Oread," a quintessential H.D. Imagist poem, actually demonstrates how the poem emphasizes and enacts movement through sound, verbs, and image choices

categorizations of H.D. as filmic further, I demonstrate that H.D.'s imagist *Sea Garden* poems, though somewhat resonant with photography, actually articulate an interest in bodies, montage and trope in a way that is analogous with film. She then develops this interest into a profound cinematic ethos in her later epic poems. From her vantage point as a queer bohemian American writer living away from her culture, H.D. anticipates feminist film discourse that counters patriarchal norms, carving out a space to explore the ramifications of the gaze in the portrayal of feminine bodies.

H.D. considers film and language as stemming from a hieroglyphic tradition. In the poet's vision, film offers an amalgamation of text and image that functions like an alchemic equation, paving the way to renew thinking about art in relation to reality. Although H.D.'s engagements with filmmaking and writing film criticism peaked during the 1920s and 30s, her formal cinematic consciousness emerges in the long poem *Helen in Egypt*—a generic mutant of the epic that contains filmic, dramatic, oral, romantic, and lyric dimensions. Her immersion in the world of European cinema, an alternative to the mainstream Hollywood film of her home culture, resulted in the poet's integration of filmic forms and tropes, such as montage and the femme fatale, into her poetry, as with "Projector" and *Sea Garden*. Even her interest in psychoanalysis, as outlined in *Tribute to Freud*, dovetailed with her theories on film and projection.<sup>7</sup> Ultimately, H.D. constructs a cinematic poetry in *Helen in Egypt* and, to

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(197-198). Preston situates this poetic movement as connected to performance, dance, and film.

<sup>7</sup> *Tribute to Freud* recounts H.D.'s meetings with Sigmund Freud in the early 1930s as client and student of psychoanalysis. While the memoir describes her appointments with Freud in Vienna from 1933 to 1934, H.D. further examines her own psyche in the text, exploring her rapport with literature, myth, and war in quotidian terms. Notably H.D. describes in great detail the visions she encountered while visiting Isle of Corfu, which she deems "The Writing on the Wall" for their hieroglyphic portent. Freud translates the visionary picture writing for H.D. as a desire to reunite with her mother (65). While H.D. begins the section on the visions with Freud's interpretation, she is more concerned with describing the experience of the visions, leaving them open to more interpretation rather than solving them like a puzzle. What comes across in her description is how the experience unites her deeply with Bryher, who, once H.D. is tired, carries on the work of perceiving the final image in the series—Nike.

a lesser extent, in *Trilogy*: these long poems contemplate the parameters of reality and representation in the cinematic age. Her work with *Sea Garden* and *Helen in Egypt* probe at the effects of the gaze with regards to feminine characters. H.D. experiments formally in order to enact a poetics informed by her earlier film ventures. While the poet approached formal experiments and issues of media as an Imagist and filmmaker earlier on in her career, she eventually composes a cinematic epic with *Helen in Egypt*. Her version of the epic poem is formally diverse, absorbing dramatic, lyric, and romantic strains, foregrounding Helen's interiority and the consequences of her notorious role as the mythic femme fatale and, in doing so, the poem processes cultural modes of representation across the boundaries of textuality, orality, and visuality. H.D.'s film career played a pivotal role in her construction of her later experimental, mythical poetry; thus she creates a resistant, alternative vision of poetry, inspired by film, that examines form and power.

## I.II

### *Sea Garden's Hard Femmes*

While the publication of *Sea Garden*, considered an exemplar of Imagism, predates the active years of H.D.'s film career, the collection still taps into visual trends of the early twentieth-century—chiefly film. H.D. explored cinematic ideas in her early poetry, worked in film and film theory in her mid-career, and then developed her filmic consciousness in the later, lengthier poetry. This early experiment in the representation of feminine bodies that pursues tropes that appear in literature and cinema anticipates H.D.'s later enactment of working through feminine figures in relation to cinema in *Helen in Egypt*. The eternal association of her early career with Imagism deserves further consideration in light of her evident and lifelong preoccupation with visual media. The image-focused characteristics of

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H.D. and Bryher form an audience to the visions, thus cementing their bond. H.D.'s visions are a portal through which material and spiritual worlds meet, where her interior visions become externalized.

H.D.'s Imagist poems actually push beyond the visual stasis they are known for and align with kinetic cinematic techniques, such as montage and close-up. Certainly, *Sea Garden* adheres to the credo of Imagism at its base: compact, economic language and concrete images guide the stark depictions of hardened flowers weathering the elements. But these characteristics also evince a filmic gaze operating within poetry. H.D. deploys Imagist techniques in such a way that her poems about crystalline flowers emit a visual fire that burgeons on cinematic as the poems make use of juxtaposition as a precursor to montage—H.D. removes all extraneous matter and verbiage beyond the austere images and the poem's field of vision scans and focuses on the flowers. The *Sea Garden* poems operate by way of a sequence of chiselled images that import a cinematic quality into H.D.'s version of Imagism. Her depictions of strange, hardened flowers flag an investment in radical femininity; they queer traditional formulations of femininity, thus the poet pursues, through form, a feminist politique that counters normative feminine scripts.

H.D.'s Imagist technique in *Sea Garden* resonates with the ideogrammic method Pound explores in his own poetic practice. The rhetoric and ideology of Imagism coincide with the characteristics of cinematic montage—the emphasis on concrete images and the act of cutting and splicing images. Furthermore, film theorist Sergei Eisenstein's<sup>8</sup> definition of cinema stresses the importance of montage to film and explains how cinematography functions like ideogrammic language. In "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram," Eisenstein explains, "Cinematography is, first and foremost, montage" (30) and continues on to examine ideogrammic languages, like Chinese and Japanese, as an exemplar of montage. For Eisenstein the ideogram is the building block of the cinematic chain. Although H.D.'s imagist poems appear to be stark, potentially stationary images, the multitude, layering, and

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<sup>8</sup> *Close Up*, the first English-language film journal that H.D. helped establish, published the first English translations of Eisenstein's film essays.

juxtaposition of these images demonstrates her burgeoning formulation of poetry in cinematic terms.

For example, even the title of the collection *Sea Garden* relies on juxtaposition to work. The collection takes place in an invented in-between space of water, earth, and wind. The garden is made up of imagined nautical versions of real flowers that transcend their earthly roots and meander into the estuary-like space. This movement is possible through H.D.'s renaming of seemingly innocuous bouquet of gentle flowers. *Sea Garden* is home to a slightly innovative garden variety of flowers: "Sea Rose," "Sea Lily," "Sea Poppies," "Sea Violet," and "Sea Iris." By adding "sea" to the names of mundane flowers, H.D. conjures a new underwater strain of vegetation, drawing from both real world and an imagined other world. The poems build on real flowers and their grounded, material world connotations and thrust them into an invented, wild territory of sea, land, and air. H.D. has "sea" precede the names of mundane flowers; this juxtaposition conjures something fantastical while also connecting to the earthly world and a long history of flower poetry. Also, this simple, novel juxtaposition between earth and water creates fluidity between the elements, fostering an environment where new flora grows. H.D.'s use of juxtaposition at the level of titles is a dynamic process, more fluid than the mythology of stasis in typical discussions of Imagism. H.D. has her garden embody a paradoxically stationary yet fluid identity as stoic yet watery, earthly yet liquid. The flowers are grounded, material and mundane and yet magically sprout from the sea and air. Through taking on the floral emblem of femininity, *Sea Garden* cultivates figures that defy received notions femininity, embracing a complex formulation of radical femininity that runs counter to traditional gender roles and ideals.

H.D. deploys juxtaposition and uncanny cuts in the poem "Sea Iris" to compose a dynamic, sensory journey within the poem. The poem stutters to begin: "Weed, moss-weed" (12). This short, opening line enacts this inventive movement, how H.D. brings to life novel

worlds through unexpected suture. The poem begins with the simple plant and then reiterates the noun as if to correct itself: the flower in question is not merely a weed, but rather a “moss-weed.” A sutured hybrid plant appears where there was not one before. And so the poem moves to create space for slight invention within the natural order. H.D. continues this conjuring of new organisms through compact juxtapositions by addressing the flower and bestowing it with even more monikers:

Fortunate one,  
scented and stunning,  
rigid myrrh-bud  
camphor-flower (13)

In this stanza, the speaker addresses the flower, calling it “myrrh-bud” and “camphor-flower” as a way to expand *Sea Garden*’s imaginary environment, detailing its space in terms of scent. These epithets sew together two unlikely terms, highly fabricated plant-based resins with natural organisms and this juxtaposition highlights the central paradox of H.D.’s sea garden, its natural unnaturalness. The combining of the plant with a plant-product creates a compact neologism that elucidates the processing of a plant from organism to product. This manufacturing of the natural world into product hints at how representation, especially film, is also a rendering process, culling from material and metaphorical realms. The presence of resins in the poem also adds fragrance to the atmosphere and, in doing so, suggests movement as scent moves through space. While these hyphenated names do not operate as a large-scale reel of montage, they function similarly to montage in a minute way, creating new, strange meaning out of two yoked ideograms. In *Sea Garden*, this juxtaposition-verging-on montage often arrives by way of the hyphen, which acts as suture between images. In fact, these sutured images are elaborations that enrich the atmosphere of the

poems, creating new realms and feminine figures out of the bequeathed tropes to counter traditional images and roles.

In the next moment, the speaker declares “sweet and salt — you are wind / in our nostrils” (13), collapsing divergent tastes, sweet with savoury, and then collapsing senses, tastes with scent. The wind then disperses the flower’s scent stamp, creating the illusion of space in the poem. The incense of the sea iris blows through the poem, bestowing it with dynamism and calling attention to the floral sensory experience. The sea iris may be stationary, but its stark incense travels, hinting at decadence and eroticism and importing a sensual and kinaesthetic quality into the poem. This attention to smell and its expansive air-bound radius underscores the lush, sexual physicality of the readers. It also serves to arouse readers and implicate them viscerally as the audience of the savage flowers. In the poem, the sense of scent functions like an interface, transmitting information about the flower to the reader, conjuring this sense of movement and embodiment. H.D.’s focus on the olfactory sense brings a dynamic, sensual element to the poem, undermining stereotypical characterizations of her Imagist poems as crystalline and static.

Indeed, H.D.’s cultivation of a new brand of feminine figures forges innovative formulations of femininity that break with convention; H.D. fosters, through poetic form, conceptualizations of complex feminine roles that defy received feminine binaries, such as the Victorian rose and the femme fatale. These particular, resistant investigations of feminine bodies in *Sea Garden* make sense in the broader context of her later cinematic pursuits. The poems contend with the visual, sensual rendering of floral femme fatales. H.D.’s highly focalized depictions of the flowers as feminized bodies recall the scrutinized female stars of cinema. And yet H.D.’s awareness of the fetishistic valence of the gaze allows her to harness the visual fire upon portraying her hard floral femme fatales. The feminine characters of her poems manage to resist violent appropriation. Her figures are not others splayed on display,

but strange protagonists who exist in paradox. The figures of the sea garden come to oppose stereotypical tropes of women as victim or femme fatale—instead H.D. presents feminized figures that endure the degradation of their environment with a tensile fortitude and flexibility, collapsing this conventional dichotomy. Their strength comes from a combination of fragility, strength, and malleability that eviscerates the victim/femme fatale binary. Her scrutiny and questioning of representation of women appears in her film essays as she advocates for a complex and ethical rendering of femininity in cinema. In her film criticism for *Close Up*, she studies such reputable figures as Joan of Arc from Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* and Greta Garbo in American and German films, illuminating a keen interest in the framing of feminine bodies through film and in film culture. In turn, these film essays cast a new light on the hardened feminine figures of *Sea Garden*, illuminating how H.D. views film as capable of transcending as well as reinforcing oppressive confines of the patriarchal gaze. In contrast to mainstream, normative scripts for film and culture, H.D. writes to liberate her feminine heroines, plotting their escape into an alternative poetic, filmic, and spiritual space.

In *Cinematic Modernism*, Susan McCabe argues H.D.'s poetry, film reviews, and performance in the film *Borderline* dislocate the values of mainstream, patriarchal cinema in order to conceptualize new forms of female embodiment.<sup>9</sup> I am interested in how H.D. integrates juxtaposition and the trope of the femme fatale into *Sea Garden*, playing with embodiment and identification, and cultivating a poetic ethos that analogously gestures towards cinema. In *Sea Garden*, she plays with juxtaposition, movement, and feminine figures, hinting at the cinematic poetics she enacts more fully in the long poems of her later career. The cut-up, eroticized feminine bodies in *Sea Garden* pose an ideological challenge to the poet as she supplies the collection with torn and scattered flowers emblematic of women.

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<sup>9</sup> McCabe continues this argument to the conclusions that H.D. uses film to rework feminine figures from the language of psychoanalysis.

*Sea Garden* channels cinematic tropes of the femme fatale—all the while cutting and splicing the flowers and subjecting them to the torture of the elements in ways that both resist and prescribe somatic violence.

Of course H.D.'s interest in the trope of the femme fatale predates her cinematic engagement and, as Cassandra Laity has argued, finds its root in literary history. In *H.D. and the Victorian Fin de Siècle: Gender, Modernism, Decadence*, Laity makes a case for H.D.'s defiant use of the erotic in the face of male modernists' cult of impersonality, arguing that H.D. rebelliously opted for a synthesis of decadent romantic and modernist techniques. This generative combination resulted in erotically charged poems that reinvigorate the lyric. She writes:

*Sea Garden* appears to draw upon the Decadent Romantic connection of lyric, monologue, and quest-romance forms in which antithetical eroticized landscapes frequently enact a drama of imprisonment and escape — usually in the tenuous trap of the Venusberg and an alternately regenerating landscape of psychic and erotic power. (43)

Indeed, H.D.'s use of the femme fatale in her flowering landscapes stems from this literary history. And although H.D.'s significant engagement with film comes after the publication of *Sea Garden*, her sensitivity to representations of feminine bodies in these early poems and then in the film essays illuminates her continued preoccupation with this trope in her writing. Laity writes: “From the early *Sea Garden*, H.D.'s poetic narratives of desire shuttle between the erotic masks of the Greek androgyne and the Sapphic femme fatale she had inherited from the Decadent Victorian Hellenists” (xii). While H.D. inherited the trope of the femme fatale from her literary antecedents, she was able to relate it to her contemporary culture, finding its resonance with film. In fact, this early attention to feminine costumes denotes

sensitivity to these issues and may have helped her become an astute film critic with regards to her writing on bodies, gender and sexuality.

As a critic of film, H.D. was acutely aware of the ways in which film treats women's bodies in ways that perpetuate tropes that align with the abuses of patriarchal society. In fact, H.D. decried Carl Dreyer's *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1927) for its remorseless cruelty. In a review of the film in *Close Up* from 1928, H.D. declares the film a sadistic experience for the female viewer and recounts how its traumatic affect carries over into lived reality:

Why is it that my hands inevitably clench at the memory of those pictures, at the casual poster that I pass daily in this lake-side town? IS it necessary to be put on guard? *Must* I be made to feel on the defense this way and why? Also why must my very hands feel that they are numb and raw and bleeding, clenched fists tightened, bleeding as if beating at those very impregnable mediaeval church doors? (130)

H.D. portrays the film's affective consequence: how the torture of the young Joan manifests in H.D.'s own body, leaving her with the impression that her hands are numb and raw in railing against Joan's own constraints. She reconstructs the feminine body through text as a means to counter Joan's own disabused body in Dreyer's film. H.D. probes at the representation of violence in this film—or more precisely the film's delight in portraying Joan's torture—and illuminates how it invades her own sensory experience. The review re-enacts the violence, demonstrating its transmission to the viewer's own body and writing. H.D. performs identification with the heroine and thus an affective endurance of her torture. She illuminates how watching film is both an act of perceiving and experience and becomes invested in what is at stake in this process. The close ups of Joan's face, the technique for which Dreyer's film is lauded, are simultaneously the source of this identification and sadism for H.D. Since she views film as a point at which representation and reality merge, the

depiction of violence spills over into the viewer's reality, inscribing its story onto her own body. The poet questions the ethical consequence of this sadistic gaze and the film's devotion to fetishizing the abuse a young woman. In H.D.'s account, the trauma of Joan's torture haunts its audience and has the potential to infiltrate their psyches. That the violence is highly voyeuristic, visual and gendered is of note to H.D. ("but I do mind watching and watching and watching"). Throughout her essay she asserts how the film violates the boundary between reality and representation through first-person statements that convey the moving images as witnessed event: "I myself watched Jeanne D'Arc being burnt alive at Rouen" (131). Her twice-confirmed first person places the emphasis onto the female viewer empathizing with Joan and puts forward a subjective female experience to counter the objectification of the saint's body by the violent filmic gaze.<sup>10</sup>

H.D. articulates a burgeoning feminist discourse with regards to the gaze. The poet's unease with how the film treats the figure of Joan gestures towards the theory of scopophilia in film that Laura Mulvey developed in the 1970s. Mulvey writes:

Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as the signifier for the male other, bound by the symbolic order in which man can live out his phantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as the bearer of meaning. (7)

Mulvey elucidates the legacy of women as object in film, which resonates with H.D.'s misgivings about the objectification, paired with torture, that Joan endures in *The Passion of Joan of Arc*. Beyond scenes of persecution, the extensive use of the close-up in the film arouses affective responses as the characters' facial expressions provide the progression for the narrative. The close-ups of Joan of Arc's emotive, agonized expressions inspire pathos and the young woman's silent, tormented face on display anchors and gives meaning to the

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<sup>10</sup> This reclaimed first-person voice emerges in the monologues of *Helen in Egypt*, giving voice to the dispersed femme fatale.

film. Her face becomes the screen upon which the film inscribes its agenda. H.D.'s reservations with regard to the rendering of Joan's relentless suffering and incarcerated body onto screen and into symbol anticipate Mulvey's critique of the patriarchal scripts that render women objects of the spectator's gaze in mainstream film of the early and mid twentieth century.

H.D. further contemplates the treatment of women's bodies in cinematic culture in her essay "Beauty" for her "The Cinema and The Classics" series for *Close Up*. H.D. demonstrates her fascination with the ways in which film culture, especially mainstream film (which she dubs the Ogre, i.e. the American censor), contorts women's bodies, rendering them into reductive stereotypes. H.D. brings to the forefront this issue through comparing the presentation of Greta Garbo in the American romantic comedy *Torrent* to her role in the German film *Joyless Street* directed by the Austrian G.W. Pabst. In the American film context, H.D. writes: "I had seen Greta Garbo, deflowered, deracinated, devitalized, more than that, actively and acutely distorted by an odd unbelievable parody of life, of beauty, we were efficiently offered (was it at the Capitol about a year ago?) 'The Torrent'" (106). H.D. views the American film's depiction of Garbo as a form of violence in which the Hollywood film strips the actor of her life force. Again, her depiction of Garbo's femme fatality relies on floral metaphors. In this case, Garbo is deflowered and deracinated in the harsh Hollywood context. H.D. expresses palpable outrage at this cinematic environment that batters her beloved "Nordic flower" (107). She further contends with this depiction of Garbo as a femme fatale:

Greta Garbo in Montreux, Switzerland, trailing with frail, very young feet through perhaps the most astonishingly consistently lovely film I have ever seen ('Joyless Street') black lashes, with waist-lined, svelte, obvious contours, with gowns and gowns, all of them almost (by some anachronism) trailing on

the floor, with black-dyed wig, ogre, had seen fit to devitalize this Nordic flower, to graft upon the stem of a living, wild camellia (if we may be fanciful for a moment) the most blatant of obvious, crepe, tissue-paper orchids. A beauty, it is evident, from the Totem's stand-point, must be a vamp, an evil woman, and an evil woman, in spite of all or any observation to the contrary, must be black-eyed, must be dark even if it is a nordic ice-flower and Lya de Puttiesque. Beauty is what the Lump and the Leaven alike demand. So 'beauty, here it is,' says the Ogre. The Ogre knows that the world will not be sustained, will not exist without that classic, ancient Beauty. Beauty and Goodness, I must again reiterate, to the Greek, meant one thing. To Kalon, the beautiful, the good. Kalon, the mob must, in spite of its highbrow detractors, have. The Ogre knows enough to know that. But he paints the lily, offers a Nice-carnival, frilled, tissue-paper rose in place of a wild-briar. (107)

H.D. deplores how the American cinema, *The Ogre*, reduces Garbo to a vamp, effacing the complexity of her beauty in favour of mean trope for the masses. Importantly, H.D. deploys floral imagery to describe Garbo. While this choice of metaphor would appear to be reductive and articulate Victorian ideals about femininity as passive and beautiful, H.D. reworks floral motifs, inscribing resilience and fortitude into floral imagery. Flowers are part of her poetic mythology of feminine strength. In a similar vein, *Sea Garden* sets this precedent through its representation of flowers as fierce emblems of survival, reconstructing feminine beauty to encompass this fortitude. Notably, H.D. draws a distinction between the tissue-paper rose and a wild briar, casting Garbo as a fierce wild flower artificially tamed for Hollywood. In H.D.'s vision, Garbo's transition to American film is a poor adaptation, compromising the actor's eternal spiritual heights, reducing her power to disposable material mainstream commodity. H.D. writes, "Beauty was made to endure, in men, in flowers, in hearts, in spirits, in minds,"

furthering her definition of beauty as synonymous with hardness and the strength of endurance. H.D.'s critique reclaims Garbo's beauty and reasserts her ferocity and dignity beyond reductive corporate framing. The review goes on to celebrate Pabst's *Joyless Street* as presenting and respecting Garbo's multifaceted femininity. H.D.'s essay counters Hollywood's violence to Garbo's persona and corrects the normative script and stereotype, celebrating the European art cinema model of Garbo that values her strength, radical spirit, and complexity. As with H.D.'s review of Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*, the Garbo essay serves as an act of reclamation, critiquing somatic violence and rewriting the script that constrains representations of women's bodies. These essays resonate with H.D.'s later poetic projects of reclaiming women's voices from mythology and history and demonstrate her radical turn away from mainstream and normative gender roles and scripts.

H.D.'s close attention to and conjuring of feminine bodies in *Sea Garden* resonates with her burgeoning cinematic interests as well as plays a role in her distinct formulation of modernism. Laity writes:

*Sea Garden*'s white, chiselled, or brazenly coloured and marred sea flowers, its decadent overflowed Venusbergs, and evasive (Swinburnian) linguistic practices thus form a narrative of competing sexualities and 'unnatural' desires that deliberately implicate the authorial 'I' behind the volume. (42)

Laity points out that H.D.'s insertion of decadent and queer sexuality into her poems challenges her male modernist contemporaries' ideas about impersonality, like Pound and Eliot, and remind of the authorial presence guiding the poems. The seemingly innocuous flowers of *Sea Garden* push against patriarchal scripts and gender norms that underpin literature and the broader culture. While I agree H.D.'s *Sea Garden* poems challenge a monolithic formulation of modernism and a patriarchal ethos, these sensual, hardened, deeply embodied flowers also implicate more than the author. They actually provoke the reader or

viewer of the poem to respond to the myriad bodies of these femme fatales in their abject landscapes. H.D. sets out to reconstruct feminine archetypes through sensual, empathetic entanglement.

For example, the fragmented and mutilated flower in “Sea Rose” contrasts with Victorian idealizations of femininity. The poem opens with the collection’s signature stuttering address: “Rose, harsh rose” (3)—repetitive pattern of elaboration reoccurs similar to the opening of “Sea Iris.” At first the speaker bestowing the sea rose with the epithet “harsh rose” feels like a condemnation, but as the poem soldiers on, this becomes a reclaimed sentiment, a compliment and badge of pride. The sea rose is brazen and harsh as a survival tactic and thus “more precious / than a wet rose” (3). This construction is a strange tautology—how is a sea rose more precious or difference from a wet rose? The repetition echoes “Sacred Emily,” a poem from H.D.’s contemporary Gertrude Stein, written in 1913 and published in 1922:

Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose  
 Loveliness extreme.  
 Extra gaiters,  
 Loveliness extreme.  
 Sweetest ice-cream.  
 Pages ages page ages page ages. (187)

Stein’s poem enacts this “loveliness extreme”—stretching the rose beyond itself and encouraging an intense and absurd present tense. Like Stein’s famous poetic provocation, H.D.’s harsh sea rose is a wet rose and yet is more precious than a wet rose. The playful engagement of the rose in women’s modernist poetry is fitting: the image is loaded with Victorian ideals ready for formal and thematic corruption. Yet H.D. does not skewer the rose, but, rather, crafts a newfound narrative for this emblem of traditional femininity, bestowing

the already loaded image with an innovated complex harshness and heartiness. She recasts feminized roles and bodies.

H.D. emphasizes the rose's sensual valence, transforming it, through the hyphen that manufactures juxtaposition, into a "spice-rose" (3). This new brand of flower sewn with spice upends the image's blandness and infuses it with aroma, flagging its usual sensuality: "Can the spice-rose / drip such acrid fragrance / hardened in a leaf?" (3). Laity roots this floral eroticism in literary history: "Although briny and 'clean,' [the flowers] retain the suggestion of erotic power, defiance, and difference of the more lurid 'strange flowers' in Swinburne, Poe, and Baudelaire" (50). But in the case of the ending of "Sea Rose," the sexual suggestion is notably formulated as a question and so the poem does not only rely on its literary predecessors, but also implicates the reader, reaching out and asking if this description resonates. The poem does not simply describe the spice-rose but addresses the audience, requesting their participation in the sensuous dialogue. The rhetorical question relays an olfactory experience that is inaccessible but imaginable, calling on the reader to relate to the feminine body in sensuous terms. This dialogue resists the pure objectification of the rose and, instead, fosters a sense of mutuality between viewer and object as they co-create the sensual, aromatic experience of the rose.

H.D. mocks the rose as a symbol of gentle femininity or as a euphemism for genitalia. To contest these stereotypes, she uses montage to examine the rose and underscore its subtle strength and ability to endure a harsh climate. Line breaks emulate the cutting and splicing of images and actions. The speaker describes the movement of the "Sea Rose": "you are flung on the sand / you are lifted / on the crisp sand" (3). Amidst a cool, indifferent backdrop, the elements send the flower into motion with each line functioning like a shot, shifting the poetic gaze to follow the flower's movement and zooming in and out on the rose's hardened anatomy. Ironically, through this incisive montage of "this meagre flower," the figure of the

rose emerges as resilient. While praising the rose's harsh quality, the poem cuts and strips its body:

Rose, harsh rose,  
 marred and with stint of petals,  
 meagre flower, thin,  
 sparse of leaf, (3)

The final three lines of the first stanza decrease in length as the speaker describes the flower, thus enacting the stripping bare that the poem portrays. Initially marred or besmirched with petals—the word choice of “stint” recalling unsavoury or demeaning work—the flower proceeds through the stanza as each line pares the body more thin and bare until it is bereft of greenery. The stanza enacts a stripping bare of the sea rose. And yet this violent striptease actually emphasizes the sea rose's resilience despite language's battery. The rose perseveres despite its seeming disintegration throughout the stanzas. It emerges hardened and fragrant—intact and thriving sensually. H.D. presents a rigid yet malleable, brittle yet hardened, thin yet fertile, natural yet abnormal femme fatale through the reworked figure of the sea rose. Laity writes “Although *Sea Garden's* flowers are deliberately left ungendered, they do suggest an ‘unnatural androgyny’” (5). The flowers possess queer androgyny, but that does not necessarily negate their femininity. Instead, H.D. formulates a complex feminine gender presentation for her strange sea garland. The sea rose is a queer hard femme.

McCabe notes the abundant images of fragmentation in the collection: “Images of torn flowers, broken shells, scattered leaves and petals constitutes a somatic cartography where fragment and part supplant nostalgia for the ‘whole’” (141). While the act of cutting and splicing the flowers, like the sea rose, could enact symbolic violence,<sup>11</sup> the abruptness

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<sup>11</sup> This fragmentary description also invokes the blazon, a problematic trope for this feminist reading. H.D.'s flowers, however, are not idealized for their beauty, but rather celebrated for their ability to endure experience.

and irregularity of the effects also work to emphasize fragment over the whole and thus dismantles the privileging of dominant, totalizing narratives. The parts of the flowers are whole in and of themselves, resisting the dehumanizing blade of the poetic blazon. Instead, the scattered parts and images of the flowers surface as recalcitrant within the wreckage of *Sea Garden*. She adapts the cinematic technique of juxtaposition and cutting to depict fragmented yet hearty flowers, forging an alternative discourse for feminine bodies. In light of H.D.'s essays on women in film in which she validates feminine endurance and takes on film's reductive corporeal treatment of women, *Sea Garden*'s project of undermining traditional feminine tropes comes more sharply into focus.

Film percolates under the surface of *Sea Garden*. These early poems are known for their photograph-like quality, but they also move through a series of juxtapositions that emulate movement, broaching the silent film H.D. admired. Her cut-and-paste hyphenated images resemble a prototypical formulation of the film technique of montage. *Sea Garden* in its minute movements and cuts upon addressing feminine bodies weaves the cinematic into her model of Imagism.<sup>12</sup>

H.D. cultivates queer feminine figures of resistance in *Sea Garden*. Her first collection provides an early example of H.D. contemplating cinematic trope and form in relation to femininity. In "The Concept of Projection: H.D.'s Visionary Powers," Morris writes that "[t]he poems in *Sea Garden* are thrown out as bridges to the sacred" (105). These sacred bridges, however, in addressing the gods and transforming objects into symbols, rescue the feminine forms from degradation, nudging them toward an earthly sacredness amidst the harsh atmosphere. For example, in "Sea Lily," the flower is "slashed and torn / but doubly rich" (4) abused by the elements, and yet all the more lush because of it—like Garbo

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<sup>12</sup> This intermingling of cinema into photography recalls Chris Marker's *La jetée* (1961) a film composed of still photographs with one scene of flickering movement.

whose regal beauty endures despite Hollywood's attempt to compromise it and violate her.

The sea lily's environment overwhelms; its main currents are hostile to the body:

Yet though the whole wind  
 slash at your bark,  
 you are lifted up,  
 aye – though it hiss  
 to cover you with froth (4)

Like the sea rose, the lily rises up in defiance of antagonistic environment, enduring the base material realm's destructive of her body. The heroines of *Sea Garden* endure with the dignity Dreyer withholds from Joan and survive just as Greta Garbo emerges despite Hollywood's casting her as a facile femme fatale. For H.D., the femme stars of cinema function much like the flowers of *Sea Garden*: they are sacred vessels that endure the hostile climate of normative culture.

### I.III

#### ***Close Up & Borderline: H.D.'s Filmic Passage***

H.D. devoted her creative energies to cinema in the 1920s and 30s—making films with the POOL Group, Macpherson and her partner Bryher, and writing film criticism for *Close Up*, the first English-language film journal the coterie established. This period of cinematic thought and experimentation impacted H.D.'s poetic career, shaping the vernacular of her life and writing. H.D. and her peers were not only incorporating film into their thinking and writing: they were forging the discourse on film with *Close Up*. As a result of her intimate engagement with the nascent field of film criticism, H.D. contemplated the connection between textual and film representation, the boundaries and potency of the new medium in relation to text. Cinema, with its multi-media forms and its calling into question the parameters of representation, played an integral role in the development of H.D.'s

modernist mode of expression. While *Sea Garden* predates this era of cinematic effort and experimentation in H.D.'s life, those earlier poems disclose traces of an interest in cinematic forms and trope, which H.D. develops more fully in her epics.

H.D. was an active creator of film in the early twentieth century. She not only wrote about film in *Close Up*, but also acted in Macpherson's silent films, *Borderline* (1930) and *Wing Beat* (1927). She contributed significantly to the feature-length production of *Borderline*. The film was an international, communal effort: directed by MacPherson, produced by Bryher, and starring Paul Robeson, a major figure from the Harlem Renaissance. H.D. played the role of Astrid in this avant-garde domestic melodrama. While the amateur film slipped under the radar during its time, scholars have, of course, returned to it with renewed enthusiasm due to the production's strange convergence of cultures—British, American, and continental Europe—and its portrait of the theories and ideals of the intellectuals behind *Close Up*. The intention of the filmmakers was to test out theories the group had been exploring in their writings, translating text into film and theory into practice. Her involvement in such large projects as *Close Up* and *Borderline* exemplify her multidisciplinary artistic practice—which her particular model of modernism involved working across media and significantly included film.

Due to her commitment to film at the end of the 1920s, film permeated her life. The correspondence between H.D. and Kenneth MacPherson during the late 1920s and early 1930s relays the effervescent enthusiasm of the POOL group in their cinematic pursuits. Macpherson writes to H.D. animatedly about his expeditions to film sets, spying on the actors and directors of European cinema that *Close Up* was in the midst of promoting. In a letter dated October 25, 1927, Macpherson describes such an experience to H.D.:

Squeals upon squeals. Just back, only just from Staaken studios where Hary Liedke (yes that's him) sat beneath 20 huge "Sun" lamps four mercury vapour

ones, and two eye level ones. In a barber's shop, having his chevaux's coupe'd. Yes, I had a great kick out of it. But, oh oh ohohoho hoho, dead dog. ... it wasn't the studio, it was the getting back!!!! (n.p)

Macpherson, yipping like his canine epithet of "Rover" that marks their correspondence, recalls his encounters with the film industry in Berlin, Germany during the late 1920s. His tone fluctuates friskily between mockery and enchantment as he avidly relays a bright enthusiasm for the world of European cinema. He exudes candour and conveys a sense of falling in love with European film; and thus he reports back to H.D., his confidante and fellow film conspirator. Their exchange demonstrates how film has come to configure their lives and how they narrate their experiences with the language of film in mind:

Here is the conte – We arrived at AAFA, having been urgently summoned over the phone. A small Hun said Meeeeester Markferson? I said ja ja. Ve vill now going at Staaken. Me. Oh, ja ja. Downstairs into Friedrichstrasse. Into taxi  
 Small Hun: Me no speaking Englitsch. Me: Me no speaking Hunitsche.  
 Silence. Fido: (mit grin, most affable) Ich mitze sprachen gebvohl ihnen gebrufcht. Small Hun. (looking puzzled) Hein? ..... Aie, ja you haf reason to forgotten. Fido: Snigger. Silence. We pull up. A new man gets in. Newspaper man. Speaks English. How de do. Convivial restraint falls like plop of drowned river weed. On through handsome boulevards, all very straight and flat. On on. After a half hour Zeppelin sheds on the offing. Saaken. Rain pappers gently. One hous is here, you see other dotted thinly over flat landscape, greenly wet with wet leaves flapping.

We manoeuvre through long sub roadlets past sparse buildings, sheds red brick wet houses and stretches of rutted grass and long shallow wood gates. Into a courtyard. Staaken. Cars wait. We go in. We are in a Zeppelin shed

dark, silent, strewn, impossibly lofty. Broken up sets clutter and litter room edges. Across vast dark grey space to another door. Through. Sounds of a piano, glimmers of arc lamps behind lofty built up litter. Onward. Aha. On the set. A barber's shop. Harry Liedke sits with pained expression being shampooed. All going well. Whistle. Lights "billed." Only the mercury vapour lamps are kept burning between scenes. (n.p.)

As Macpherson's account progresses, the text emulates cinematic genres, tropes and styles. The rapid pace of Macpherson receiving a call and being summoned to the studio signals an adventurous jaunt spurring on action. He renders the people he encounters into painful stereotypical characters, like the Hun and the newspaperman. The letter jumps from comedic dialogue with individuals to panning the landscape where he emphasizes specific visual details such as the lone house and the wet leaves, imitating a long shot, its panorama and pacing. The curt sentences are akin to notes to a film script meant to evoke a strong visual in lieu of lengthy descriptions. While the dialogue Macpherson reports is base, its comedy takes root not merely from linguistic and cultural difference but from a slapstick framing. The text bounces back and forth like a confrontation in a silent film. Angry, confused faces juxtapose with outrageous dialogue in inter-titles. The text reads like film script. The jaunty description of the film studio recalls the clatter, montage, and jittery juxtaposition of Macpherson's own film endeavour *Borderline*. He manoeuvres the stream of images and their movements at a rapid pace, giving not only the impression of giddiness but also nodding to the cinematic art of which he and H.D. are so enamoured.

Like Macpherson, H.D. had devoted a significant portion of her life to film at this point in her career. Consequently, her particular modernist-style of writing was entwined with the film world. While the POOL group may have not achieved renowned film status during their time, for a marked period of their lives they were immersed in the latest film culture,

following Hollywood film and reviewing and brushing up with the world of European cinema. Even further, *Close Up*'s environment of modernist writers commenting on film underscores the critical rapport between film and literary modernism. Indeed, Dorothy Richardson, author of the *Pilgrim* series, was a frequent contributor to the journal, and the editors solicited articles from such touchstones of the canon of literary modernism as Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein. The first venue to publish the English translations of film theorist Eisenstein, *Close Up* covered a variety of European and international films and directors, investing in an outlook of film that accounted for a global and diverse definition of the medium, much like the cosmopolitan scope of modernist texts. In the introduction to the collected journals, Friedberg argues that the writers of *Close Up* "us[ed] writing to extend the cinema's effect" (3) in that "they advocated a cinema that mirrored the aesthetics and production of their own written discourse: discourse *about* the object, artfully designed, psychologically astute, independently financed, free from commercial constraints" (3). They were invested in carving a space for radical, counter-mainstream film and discourse. *Close Up* did not merely report on film; its writers actively created discursive film culture, trying to invent new incarnations of the medium that resisted normative values. They helped shape the language of film. The journal's existence and mandate emphasize how interwoven text and film were at this time—*Close Up*, as an early example of film theory, reminds how film is not an isolated medium and, rather, it exists in tandem and in dialogue with literature and a larger network of film viewers and makers. A unique feature of *Close Up* was that its writers tried to think about film beyond the constraints of the market. As a result, H.D. was able to push poetic and cinematic boundaries with Bryher's patronage. For example, H.D.'s series of essays *Cinema and the Classics* seek to situate film in lineage from classical Greek drama. But as is typical of H.D., film is not replacement for classical literature: it is a revolution that

superimposes onto the past.<sup>13</sup> H.D.'s film essays argue for a coalition of cinematic innovation and literary precedent. For H.D., European experimental film heralds literature into a novel era and produces innovative modes of thought that counter the mainstream market and its bequeathed aesthetics and values.

This symbiotic relationship between text and moving image permeates the writing of H.D.—neither text nor film take hierarchical precedence, but rather they enter into each other's productions. As Laura Marcus notes, H.D.'s fascination with Egyptian hieroglyphs is not suggestive of some teleological ethos in which visual culture supplants literary culture, but, instead, her emphasis on this ancient pictorial language is about “[r]etrieving the common roots of both film and literature in the hieroglyphic tradition” (103). H.D. sought to understand visual culture and text in relation to each other, as coexistent media rather than part of a linear evolution, much like her deployment of classical myth in tandem with contemporary issues. H.D.'s poetry recognizes the poetic page as an interface for media to interact and overlap, for image and text and time to coalesce. This cyclical understanding of the rapports between image and text, present and past, representation and reality gains traction in the long poems, beginning with *Trilogy* and culminating in *Helen in Egypt*.

H.D.'s early poems demonstrate her curious filmic inclinations and their impact on her poetry. Importantly, she writes about film as poetic and oracular in her twin poems “Projector” and “Projector II” published in *Close Up* in July 1927 and October 1927 respectively. The dyadic poems align film and Greek mythology in pursuit of prophetic knowledge, positing a triangulated relationship amongst film, poetry and oracular insight. In “Projector II,” the light of the Apollonian figure creates images and thus worlds:

This is his gift;

light,

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<sup>13</sup> This self-conscious push forward while also looking back is reflected in *Close Up*'s tagline, “REFERENCE BOOKS FOR THE FUTURE.”

light  
 a wave  
 that sweeps  
 us  
 from old fears  
 and powers (354)

H.D. imbues the projector figure with god-like abilities of power and omniscient perception. She perceives the light of the projector as a gift from the classical heavens. The poem series illustrates how H.D. configures film as spiritual and mythological in addition to technological. In “Projector,” she situates film in lineage from old technologies and histories:

Light takes new attribute  
 and yet his old  
 glory  
 enchants; (349)

Through the repetition of light, H.D. forges a continuity between ancient mythology and new media, suggesting they are technologies of light that exist in relation to each other. Light predates film, but cinema renews its ability to enchant. The short lines in which abstract ideas take verbal action—“Light takes” and “glory / enchants”—creates a sense of happening, emphasizing the transformation of illusion and abstraction into the realm of the real. Most importantly, H.D.’s projector poems suggest that the interpretation of film is poetic. The light or inspiration of the projector appears to lead to spiritual or occult knowledge. These poems that follow H.D.’s Imagist period contend with the concepts of light and knowledge, enmeshing poetry and film in the process.

Film, for H.D., exists in relation to other media and psychic realms. This particular vision of film distinguishes H.D. from her *Close Up* peers. Her focus on film, as with her

writing, brings to light mythology, occultism, psychoanalysis, women's roles, and subversive incarnations of beauty. H.D.'s turn to hieroglyphics to address film and these topics finds its basis in the study of psychoanalysis and film. Marcus notes that this interest fed into a utopian dream of film proffering a universal language capable of "bridging national differences or, at least, in allowing for a clear, undistorted perception of the terms of such differences" (104). This view of film as a means to address if not assuage political, cultural tensions is evident in *Borderline*'s focus on racial prejudice. Although, H.D.'s work with *Borderline* demonstrates an interest in the bridging of differences through cinema, she was also deeply invested in the act of bridging itself. As I will argue later in this chapter, her epic poems linger on the transcendent potential in the act of translation and transformation, the kinetic energy released when moving between languages and modes of representations.

H.D.'s fascination with crossing representational borders stems from her work on *Borderline* as evidenced by her writing on the film for a pamphlet distributed by *Close Up*. In the essay, she identifies the film's title as coming from the transient cultural and geographical backdrop of the film: "There are in Europe, many just such little towns as this particular borderline town of some indefinite mid-European mountain district. There are trains coming and trains going" (221). The geography of the film exists as a crossroads with constant movement and turnover where cultures intersect and where film and the psyche brush up against each other. H.D. takes the term *borderline* to denote cultural and formal liminality. Specifically, she points to the marginalization of the POOL group's exploration: "Mr Kenneth Macpherson is himself, you might say, borderline among the young cinema directors. He is not at all allied with the ultra-modern abstract school of rhomboid and curve and cross-beam of tooth pick or coal shovel" (223). She imbues Macpherson with an outsider's status that defies national borders and aesthetic paradigms, asserting Macpherson's alienation from strictly English or German filmic sensibilities. In light of this lack of

affiliation, she describes his work ethic as a “German-Russian approach yet with keen knife-blade of indigenous intrepidity” (224). According to H.D., Macpherson, in his borderline status as a filmmaker, is capable of uniquely bridging national and aesthetic differences. The marginality of their film functions on material and psychic levels, contemplating the differences amongst regions, cultures, races, psyches, and media. This intermediary sense in *Borderline* resonates with the environmental and psychic estuaries of *Sea Garden* and the fraught shadow identities of Helen in *Helen in Egypt*. Further, her underscoring of Macpherson’s outsider status articulates this investment in queer, radical, counter identities with regards to film and art making. She emphatically perceives the aesthetic and political potential in this in-between zones and identities to counter traditional literature and mainstream film.

H.D. envisions film as entwined with the psyche, foreshadowing the themes and hybrid form of *Helen in Egypt*. She identifies the approach to *Borderline* as “the art of dream portrayal” (232) and then delineates her position on film as a site of psychic and filmic intertwinement. Ultimately, she defines the medium as the following:

Film is art of another dimension, including not only all art but including all life. Art and life walk hand in hand, drama and music, epic song and lyric rhythm, dance and the matter of science here again, as in some elaborate “allegory” of the Florentines, take hands, twine in sisterly embrace before their one God, here electrically incarnated, LIGHT. (232)

H.D. sees films as possessing the ability to bridge realms and genres. She suggests that film absorbs multiple media and artistic modes. In her account, film’s melding of life and illusion, dreamtime and reality, exposes the entwined rapport between representation and reality. H.D. enacts this mixing of genres in her hybrid epic poems, as we will see in the next section.

H.D.’s thinking on film in this essay relays the poet’s belief that film may expand its borders

to incorporate other genres of art and forms of reality. Like Sobchack's viewer, H.D. apprehends how film enacts experience and perception. Therefore film possesses a transcendent quality as it yokes differing media and merges experience and perception, making one aware of the self as both object and subject. This power comes from another godly dimension in H.D.'s terms: mechanical reproduction takes on a spiritual portent, allowing access to higher realm. And so H.D. elevates the medium to Hellenic heights, rooting film in the past while also viewing it as a portal to mystical enlightenment or knowledge. Evidently, H.D.'s thinking on film in relation to *Borderline* and *Close Up* during the late 1920s and early 1930s pushed her towards spiritual and formal questions she would tackle in her long poems of the 1940s. Importantly, H.D.'s definition of film as a screen that combines illusion and reality is a key tenet of her long poem *Helen in Egypt*, a text that questions the boundaries of representation and reality. Formally, the poem absorbs various genres—lyric, epic, narrative, film, voiceover, inter-titles—to enact a filmic imaginary.

#### I.IV

##### **The Filmic Epic: *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt***

After H.D.'s early Imagism and mid-career film making and criticism, the poet, during her later, post-war career, turned to the modernist long poem as a means to process the twentieth-century experience of war and the evolution of representational technology. H.D. positions *Trilogy* and *Helen in Egypt* as modernist epics that absorb other genres. Her formulation of the long poem verges on epic, or perhaps could be called a modern filmic epic. Mikhail Bakhtin's conceptualization of the novelized epic of the nineteenth century aids with comprehending and defining the modernist adaptation of the epic poem in the twentieth century. According to Bakhtin, the evolution of traditional genres such as the epic in the nineteenth century is indebted to the emergence of the novel:

They become more free and flexible, their language renews itself by incorporating extraliterary heteroglossia and the “novelistic” layers of literary language, they become dialogued, permeated with laughter, irony, humour, elements of self-parody and finally—this is the most important thing—the novel inserts into these other genres an indeterminacy, a certain semantic openendedness, a living contact with unfinished, still-evolving contemporary reality (the openended present). (7)

H.D. incorporates romantic, lyric, and dramatic modes in her version of modern epic poetry. Her formulation of the modern epic exemplifies this evolving contemporaneity with its polyphonic modes. She offers an alternate vision of what is possible for epic poetry as the genre enters the modern era of fiction and film. This generic hybridity demonstrates how parameters of the epic expand to incorporate multiple discourses, or what Bakhtin calls polyphony and heteroglossia. To take Bakhtin’s vision further and introduce film into the conversation: what happens to the epic in the twentieth century when film becomes central to culture and discourse? H.D. addresses this question with regards to form with her late-career penchant for the long poem that draws from epic and multiple other genres. Her long poem is a more mutable, open-ended formulation of the epic—a hybrid epic that absorbs drama, lyric, and romance.<sup>14</sup> H.D.’s epic invests in large scales of time and history and yet offers intimate lyric moments of psychosocial contemplation that process the ramifications of martial conflict.

Her epic is also a revisionist woman-centric long poem that some<sup>15</sup> have argued is a domestic anti-epic or drama that resists a masculine tradition of the epic, although modernist

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<sup>14</sup> Another example is William Carols Williams’ *Paterson* that brings the modernist long poem to the American everyday, merging epic pretensions with the quotidian.

<sup>15</sup> Gregory situates *Helen in Egypt* in lineage from Greek drama and Friedman characterizes it as anti-epic. I will address these categorizations later in the chapter upon discussing *Helen in Egypt*.

scholarship treats H.D.'s long poems as epic. I argue that rather than composing an anti-epic, H.D. cultivates a hybrid, modernist epic. Marsha Bryant describes *Helen in Egypt* as romance epic and locates this fusion as resonant with Hollywood. In "The Modernist Long Poem Goes to the Movies," Bryant writes:

Her longest poem, *Helen in Egypt*, coincides with a wave of postwar ancient epics featuring feisty heroines and romance plots, including *Loves of Three Queens* (1954) and *Helen of Troy* (1956). DeMille's 1956 version of *Ten Commandments* grafts a love triangle on the Biblical Exodus story, bringing overwrought emotions to overwrought style. (79)

Bryant views H.D.'s inclusion of a romance plot alongside Helen's quest for identity not as competing generic strains, but as a hybrid venture that speaks to its cinematic cultural moment. Ultimately she argues that *Helen in Egypt* is "a hybrid genre that parallels the work of her Hollywood counterparts" (79-80). By taking up ancient myth and contemporary conflict, H.D. clearly positions herself as writing in the epic mode. Her epic vision of war depicts cultures pushed to their brink so that they overlap with ancient time; her sense of time extends archaeologically. Her long poems contemplate Ancient Greece and Egypt to contend with war-torn Europe and its aftershock. Her epic expands its generic parameters to accommodate poetry in a post-war and post-film era. Although H.D.'s epics may align with Hollywood's romantic-epic hybridity, her politics deviate from Hollywood's mainstream narratives as she even evaluates the psychological ramifications of war and film culture's treatment of women in *Helen in Egypt*. As evidenced in her writing on Garbo, H.D. distrusted Hollywood's formulations of femininity and championed, instead, a complex, radical vision for her feminine protagonists. While her long poems are dramatic, lyric, romantic, H.D.'s vision and scale are epic. She renovates epic to suit the modern era, appropriating the

traditionally masculinist mode to account for multiple discourses, feminist protagonists, and the psychosocial consequences of war.

She begins her foray into experimentation with the epic genre in *Trilogy* (1944-46), a long poem that contains three acts, each composed of numbered, shorter poems. The acts with their shorter scenes signal a dramatic, almost cinematic change in H.D.'s writing. The commitment to the longer poem with its smaller units and voices echoes the cinematic form of long-form storytelling. Settling into the epic poem, H.D. begins a cinematic poetic chapter, opting for a feature-length suite of poems that contemplate the modern psyche in an era of rapidly changing forms of representation and in the wake of wartime conflict. As H.D.'s World War II-inspired epic, *Trilogy* focuses on cycles of cultural and formal evisceration and reconstruction, making a case for the endurance and relevance of literature in times of trauma. Scholarly consensus posits that *Trilogy* reckons with war-torn Europe. Duncan, of course, viewed the poem's transitions and compounding of time as cinematic. In addition to this processing of cultural trauma, *Trilogy*'s intense emphasis on representational cycles and formal experimentation also suggests the accompanying prominence of visual media and changing modes of representation during this era. *Trilogy* articulates H.D.'s filmic thinking and anticipates the poetics she develops more fully in *Helen in Egypt*.

Although the poem ostensibly takes the form of the epic, the text contemplates the endurance and mutability of form, setting the stage for generic crossings of H.D.'s later epic *Helen in Egypt*. For H.D., poetry is a palimpsest-like space that combines historical, mythological, and cultural legacies and brings to the forefront the world-making possibilities of art. To process the carnage of World War II, *Trilogy* deploys mythology and poetry as conduits to spiritual realms, treating the poetic screen as a portal to past and future epochs. The poem responds to the devastation of war-torn Europe, specifically the London Blitz of 1940 and 1941 that H.D. herself witnessed. The poem begins modestly and quietly—"An

incident here and there” (133)—but crescendos to account for conflict of biblical proportions that spans ancient and modern times. The relentless bombing pushed H.D. to reach for historical and mythical resonance as she wove an epic out of overlapping historical, mythological, and contemporary threads, locating the present-day conflict in lineage from the struggles of ancient civilizations, such as Pompeii, Greece, Egypt. In *Psyche Reborn*, Friedman explains how H.D. envisions the perseverance of destruction and its relation to language in *Trilogy*:

The fire in London, like the fire in Pompeii, is a special kind of flame—  
Apocryphal fire, destruction which brings rebirth. H.D. approaches external  
reality in the same way she learned to read the mysterious script of psychical  
reality from Freud. The rubble contains, she believes, a coded message whose  
interpretation can reveal an order underlying the surface reality of chaos.  
(103-4)

In *Trilogy*, H.D. renovates the epic’s depictions of martial conflict to account for the daily, intimate and psychological: “An incident here and there, / and rails gone (for guns) / from your (and my) old town square” (133). The modest beginning mourns altered civilian space and everyday materials transformed for military purpose. H.D. invokes the martial but initially pushes it to the margins by placing the guns in parentheses and, instead, emphasizes the loss of the structures of daily life. The poem, of course, begins in *media res*, as any epic must, but the perspective is different. H.D. focuses on how war has transformed civilian experience and how it is in the midst of dissolving under the pressure of apocalyptic conflict. She underscores the personal connection to public space, claiming an intimate relationship with the old town square. The poem’s exegetical dedication to Bryher infuses a rare personal valence into the epic genre. This opening with its quiet devastation of the everyday and connecting of Bryher and H.D.’s queer romantic relationship to public space re-centres the epic to display the devastation of the intimate and personal. H.D. borrows the convention of

in media res from the epic, but alters its vantage point to focus on the devastation of quotidian civilian life and queer domesticity at the mercy of the martial.

*Trilogy* asserts a cyclical rendering of time rather than a linear narrative of successive cultures. Immediately after this stripped down vignette of eroding civilian modern life in the first stanza, the poem perseveres to extend its timeline beyond the present era. The poem describes the town square:

mist and mist-grey, no colour,  
still the Luxor bee, chick and hare  
pursue unalterable purpose

in green, rose-red, lapis;  
they continue to prophesy  
from the stone papyrus: (133)

This emblem of mundane civic life is not only eroding due to war but also receding into the grey mists of time. Amidst the devastated backdrop, ancient hieroglyphs, the “Luxor bee, chick and hare,” emerge to convey prophecies. The totalled public infrastructures become a site of reading and prophecy. In H.D.’s *Trilogy*, rubble is actually a series of images inscribed on stone papyrus. H.D.’s epic merges modern and ancient language and conflict. While this strategy of temporal and cultural overlap appears to displace contemporary anxiety and trauma into the ancient past, H.D. deploys this displacement to conjure a new perspective that points to the endurance, mutability, and transference of culture despite world-annihilating war. In *Trilogy*, H.D.’s reliance on the myths of past cultures is not merely a futile act of alleviation, but, rather, a visionary fortification of the connections between language, representation, preservation and survival. To abide the destruction of her physical reality, H.D.’s *Trilogy* invests in the metaphorical, spiritual realm, turning to the power of

inscription—language and its new life in film. The presence of hieroglyphs in the opening of *Trilogy* insinuates H.D.’s interest in the image as part of this project of poetic perseverance. Her epic is more than a response to the trauma of World War II, it is an enactment of cultural resilience through literary, visual forms.

The opening of “The Walls Do Not Fall” continues to meditate on the disintegration of the material world and corporeal fallibility. To redress this state of ruin, the poem focuses on how structures, like the walls and frames of buildings, remain despite rampant destruction:

there, as here, ruin opens  
 the tomb, the temple; enter  
  
 there as here, there are no doors:  
  
 the shrine lies open to the sky,  
 the rain falls, here, there  
 sand drifts; eternity endures (133-134)

*Trilogy* paints a picture of a bleak, blitzed cityscape that somehow retains a skeletal structure. The alliteration of “eternity endures” underscores continuity, how a unit of sound or meaning perseveres, renewed in the next unit, suggesting a semblance of survival and preservation embedded in language. The poem yokes ancient and modern cultures—“there” and “here”—bringing together disparate times and places by way of the adverb “as.” Once more, the poem suggests that language has the capacity to compress time and place, to bring together disparate entities through analogy. In these opening verses, even as ruin opens and destruction falls, language sutures and endures at an incredibly minute level despite the overwhelming large-scale conflict and decay in the physical realm. H.D. dwells on the sustaining power of the walls of language and representation. For example: although the shrine is stripped of adornments, door-less, and open to the sky, and thus vulnerable to the

physical world, its symbolic role as bridge to the divine remains. This sustainment of spiritual function endures through the symbolic order, through the metaphoric power of language. And so “The Walls Do Not Fall” describes the endurance of spiritual communion by way of metaphor in the face of the obliteration of the material realm. H.D. furthers this idea through a corporeal conceit:

The flesh? it was melted away,  
 the heart burnt out, dead ember,  
 tendons, muscles shattered, outer husk dismembered  
 yet the frame held:  
 we passed the flame: we wonder  
 what saved us? what for? (135)

These stanzas fixate on malleable, extinguishable flesh. In light of apocryphal war, H.D. seeks regeneration in language. H.D. turns to the endurance of the spiritual, metaphoric realm while the physical world crumbles. Even as death, destruction and decay rule, the frame of things holds, saving the collective. In H.D.’s oracular vision, flesh dissipates, but language, text, photograph, film, preserve bodily elements through the auras of dream, metaphor and illusion. For example: at the point at which the body is destroyed, H.D. reconstructs it through poetry, naming its parts, conjuring its metaphorical presence and reconstructing it from memory even though it has melted or been dismembered. The poem performs an inverted blazon—the naming of the body parts reconstructs it spiritually. The frame holds just as the colon orders and holds onto the word “held,” enacting this stability of which the poem speaks. In *Trilogy*, language is the frame of culture. *Trilogy* enacts this cultural decay and regeneration in the wake of martial conflict.

In “The Walls Do Not Fall,” text is an anchoring device, enduring even as cultures wane or rebuild: “yet the ancient rubrics reveal that / we are back at the beginning” (141).

Despite war's erosion of culture and the physical world, the poem perceives a path forward through language:

you have a long way to go  
 walk carefully, speak politely  
 to those who have done their worm-cycle,  
 for gods have been smashed before  
 and idols and their secret is stored  
 in man's very speech, (141)

In *Trilogy*, the sacred is stored in human language. The poem describes the epic heroic quest as making it through the “worm-cycle,” surviving material destruction of smashed idols and carrying the story through writing and speech. The sacred is preserved through various versions of language—mundane, spiritual, text, image:

in the trivial or  
 the real dream's insignia  
 in the heron's crest,  
 the asp's back,  
 enigmas, rubrics promise as before  
 protection for the scribe;  
 he takes precedence of the priest,  
 stand second only to the Pharaoh (141)

H.D. locates power in the enduring, regenerating hieroglyphic language and culture. She does this through emphasizing the sacred vocation of the scribe in Egyptian culture, identifying her

own position of visionary poet with the scribe. “The Wall Do Not Fall” is a regeneration machine, identifying the perseverance of culture through the spiritual and metaphorical valences of language. Even as gods fall, their sacredness remains, embedded in the language, both lofty and trivial; language is the real dream—the illusion, representation that constructs reality. In “The Walls Do Not Fall,” H.D. casts language as a sacred vessel that endures despite apocryphal conflict.

In the second portion of *Trilogy*, “Tribute to the Angels,” the epic poem delves more deeply into configuring media and the transmission of language. While “The Walls Do Not Fall” portrays language as enduring, “Tribute to the Angels” focuses on its mutability. Indeed, “The Walls Do Not Fall” bears witness to survival of language amidst the rampant destruction of the material world. “Tribute to the Angels,” however, envisions language as a thread that reconstitutes the world. Notably, this section of the long poem opens by invoking Hermes, and recalling both Hermes Trismegistus and the Hermes of hermeneutics. Hermes Trismegistus is “patron of alchemists” (148) and author of the sacred texts *Hermetic Corpus*. Hermes is a significant multivalent figure for H.D., a polyvalent figure intimately woven into her own personal mythology by way of her horoscope.<sup>16</sup> He is a hybrid figure that spans both Ancient Greek and Egyptian myths. The multiplicity of the figure of Hermes is useful, foregrounding H.D.’s investment in the sacred valence and cross-cultural expanse of the author. In Greek myth, Hermes is also traditionally known as the messenger to the gods, a

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<sup>16</sup> Friedman argues that Hermes’ key role in *Trilogy* relates to H.D.’s own horoscope: First, Mercury was the ruler of H.D.’s Sun sign. Since Adams described Mercury extensively in terms of his roots with the Greek Hermes and the Egyptian Thoth, H.D. most likely looked beyond his attribute as the god of commerce to an inner reading she based on his symbolic associations with the Greek Hermes, the Egyptian Thoth, Hermes Psychopompous, Hermes Trismegistus, and the Christian “Word.” As Thoth, he invented writing; as Psychopompous, his magic wand Caduceus led the dead souls to a new life in the underworld; as Trismegistrus, he was the patron of alchemy and hermetic wisdom; as the Greek Hermes, he was the patron of both science and art; as the Christian “Word,” he was the agent of creation and salvation. Hermes is the dominant force in H.D.’s chart, and he appears as her personal patron in the *Trilogy* with all these symbolic association. (185)

communicator. H.D. deploys the multivalent figure in her hybridized, modern epic. Hermes, like the contemporary poet, is a mystic, messenger and crosser of boundaries. This invocation of Hermes, with his hybrid personae, resonates with the generic polyphony of H.D.'s epic. The opening fragment enacts this alchemic reworking of myriad broken and discarded materials:

his metal is quicksilver,  
 his clients, orators, thieves and poets;  
  
 steal them, O orator,  
 plunder, O poet,  
  
 take what the old-church  
 found in Mithra's tomb  
  
 candle and script and bell,  
 take what the new-church spat upon  
  
 and broke and shattered  
 collect the fragments of the splintered glass  
  
 and of your fire and breath,  
 melt down and integrate,  
  
 re-invoke, re-create  
 opal, onyx, obsidian,

now scattered in the shards

men tread upon (148)

H.D.'s epic vision is alchemic: these stanzas command Hermes, as poet and orator, to re-invoke and re-create the world by recombining its broken materials. His metal of choice is "quicksilver," signalling mercurial flexibility. In combining mutability with communication, the poem continues its motif of reintegration through language, but also nods to H.D.'s own renovation of the epic—both the motif and form enact H.D.'s poetic ethos of survival through linguistic renovation and recombination. This ethos is focalized through the figure of Hermes whose key role as re-constructor stems from his communicative vocation. In invoking the multivalent Hermes, the poem emphasizes mutability and regeneration of language during this crucial moment in twentieth-century Western history. This opening section of "Tribute to the Angels" summons an atmosphere of transformation and intermingling that carries on through the long poem.

In the final section of "Tribute to the Angels," H.D. extends this motif of alchemic transformation. The poem contemplates how the creation of light is a visual phenomenon of mixing:

And the point in the spectrum

where all lights become one,

is white and white is not no-colour,

as we were told as children,

but all-colour;

where the flames mingle

The poem perseveres through the ravages of war and turns its gaze towards light, enacting a movement towards spiritual reflection. “Tribute to the Angels” concludes with a reminder of the light as an amalgamation of multiple colours. This definition of light as all the colours is useful to H.D.’s oracular, filmic poetics—light, poetry, and film houses various modes. This refrain of hybridity echoes the alchemy of H.D.’s epic in the filmic age. This section of the long poem begins with a command for Hermes to recreate the world out of language and various discarded materials and ends with a reminder of light as a mixture of colour. H.D.’s epic casts language and light as multivalent generative forces in times of apocalypse and war.

In light of contemporary martial conflict, *Trilogy*’s key motif, the spiritual endurance of language, is important to the writer’s epic poetics. The poet deepens the alchemic regeneration of visibility, text, genre, history, and mythology present in *Trilogy* in *Helen in Egypt*. Thus H.D. begins her adaption of epic poetry in the wake of conflict and the filmic age. Her advocacy for textual continuity and hieroglyph speaks to how she envisions the relationship between literary and visual cultures as revitalizing. *Trilogy* is an integral step in the development of her later poetics. *Trilogy* establishes H.D.’s appropriation of the epic to broach the psychosocial effects of conflict and her expansion of the genre to absorb multiple modes, which paves the way for *Helen in Egypt* to complicate these issues with gender and film.

H.D. turns to mythology, the hieroglyph and combining ancient Greece and Egypt in *Helen in Egypt* to consider contemporary poetry and the evolution of representation. This book-length poem is an epic poem based on the many myths and variant texts surrounding Helen. The poem exists as an alternate epic that encourages polyphony and refocuses the epic to foreground the spoils of war (“the Towers will fall; / Helen will be your share / of the spoils of war;” [52]). H.D. draws from Stesichorus and Euripides’s *Helen* to tell an alternative myth that claims Helen was never in Troy and that Zeus had, in fact, transported

her to Egypt while the Greeks and Trojans fought for an illusion. In retelling Helen's conflicted tale, the poem contemplates psychosomatic, spiritual, and quotidian ramifications of conflict, and the relationship between text and image. The poem stages the interactions between multiple, intersecting mythologies and poetic modes over time.

H.D.'s renovated modern epic absorbs romantic, dramatic, lyric, and filmic modes to accompany the story of the illusionary Helen and her variant identities. This formal and thematic proliferation brings to light the tension between reality and representation in the cinematic age. While this conundrum is inherent to any mode of representation, what is particularly compelling about H.D.'s update of the epic to consider Helen's identity is this resonance with how film peddles in realistic images. The tension between reality and representation emerges in a question from Helen and Achilles' lyrical speech ("Which was the dream / which was the veil of Cytheraea?" [36]). H.D. configures the imagined realm in the reoccurring motifs of dreams and veils. Eileen Gregory reads this question as flagging a broader issue of representation: "the question seems to call for a distinction between imaginary and real happening, the dream or veil in contrast to something 'actual,' with 'reality'" (229). Gregory concludes that a prominent feature of the text is the questioning of the boundaries that divide reality from imagination, arguing that "the distinction insisted upon here between dream or veil and *something else* presumably more real cannot be maintained in the poem: all is imaginary, all is real, all is dream, all is waking" (original emphasis, 229).

This sentiment of uncertainty resonates throughout the epic's combining of mythologies and questioning of origins. For example, Helen contemplates her family:

why should Helen be given  
peace through eternity  
and Clytaemnestra doomed

and claim by her son, Orestes?

or is it a story told,

a shadow of a shadow,

has it ever happened,

or is it yet to come?

do I myself invent

this tale of my sister's fate? (69)

Helen's future and origins are both supremely uncertain—they are a shadow of a shadow.

She also experiences guilt and anxiety over this uncertainty, unable to distinguish the distinction between myth, history, and imagination. Her recollection of a story that has yet to come compresses the real and imaginary, the past and future, and rings throughout the text:

*“She re-tells a story that may still be in the future”* and *“Achilles remembers ‘Odysseus’ wanderings that had not yet happened”* (70). The compression of time, like the compression of real and imaginary, creates a disorienting, dreamy atmosphere that questions the boundaries between history and myth. The poem's logic and structure are permeable membranes. The origins of Helen, like H.D.'s own epic, are shadowy and polyphonic.

In a similar vein to her contemporaries Lindsay and Stieglitz, H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt* deploys the hieroglyph as an analogue for the rapport between textual and visual language. But even further, H.D. uses this very question of the overlap between text and image to unveil new parameters of representations in which reality and imagination also merge. H.D. considers how filmic technologies muddle the distinction between reality and representation—suggesting that reality is indeed composed from constructed signs and, in

turn, illusion contains a potent force that informs reality. *Helen in Egypt* operates with a filmic grammar and poetics: the long poem moves from scene to scene as it softly suggests modern reality is structured by imaginary images and representation is composed of images that appear to be rooted in reality.

This engagement of the ancient mythical past is characteristic of modernism. This reaching back to process the present preoccupies the writing of such prominent modernist writers and thinkers as H.D., Pound, Woolf, Eliot, and Freud. The Hellenic gesture functions not merely as erudite allusion but, rather, as a way to stage contemporary anxieties. Vassiliki Kolocotroni argues that modernist writers turned to Hellenism in order to process the cultural concerns modernity produced. She writes that modernist writers treat Greece as a site of “haunting continuities” through their “meditation on mythical motifs, magical objects and staged encounters between ancient rituals and contemporary crises” (1). This ghostly invocation of the Greek past stems from contemporary anxieties about modern life and art. In the case of H.D., the Hellenic staging in *Helen in Egypt* and *Trilogy* works through this issue of rapidly changing technology and representational media. Gregory adds to the chorus, further suggesting that H.D. wanders to the jurisdiction of Greek tragedy and Euripides’ plays in order to contemplate the destructiveness of modern war (220). In her own and borrowed terms, H.D.’s Hellenic bodies configure the modern subject in the age of violent war and the mechanical reproduction of images. They are a screen upon which the poet projects questions of technology and politics. But H.D.’s use of ancient mythology is also a function of continuity rather than merely a displacement. As *Trilogy* demonstrates, she perceives literature and visual culture as potent forces that meld genre and time for cultural, spiritual survival and that actually stem from ancient language and hieroglyph. The lengthy mythological narrative and the multi-genre form of her epic poems allow for a prolonged contemplation of how film alters the workings of language and cultural consciousness. Rather

than displace the contemporary concern of new media into the ancient past, H.D. renders time into interlocked images, like a zoetrope. She fuses the myths of Egypt and Greece in order to treat the relationships between image and text, literary and visual cultures, not as a plotted, continuous and teleological trajectory, but, instead, as simultaneous. The structure remains while the images and histories flicker past in a concurrent panorama. The circularity of the film reel is useful to H.D.'s bridging of various historical, mythological, and contemporary times in her vision of the epic.

H.D. deploys historical and mythical analogies to work through modernist questions with regards to mechanical reproduction, especially the representation of women's bodies in the filmic age. McCabe argues that film "crystallized a cultural debate in modernity over the unstable conjunction between the mind and sensate body" (22). Even further, she claims that "cinema for H.D. is the medium most capable of articulating borderline bodies" (134), such as hysterical and bisexual women. According to McCabe, a central concern that permeates modernist poetry is "a desire to include bodily experience and sensation along with an overpowering sense of the unavailability of such experience except as mediated through mechanical reproduction," suggesting that filmic language allowed poets to articulate this paradoxical desire to represent embodiment through disembodiment and objectifying means. McCabe states that filmic techniques such as cinematic montage and camera work "often exposed the body's malleability" (3). If film demonstrates bodily fallibility and flexibility through the cutting and pasting of corporeal images, it also ultimately suggests that language, in text and image, has the potential to construct bodies and inscribe through them. As we've seen, H.D. tentatively explores this inscriptive destruction and reconstruction of feminine bodies in *Sea Garden*.

In *Helen in Egypt*, H.D.'s invocation of mythology upon representing women considers the ramifications of cinematic representations of bodies, bringing issues of

construction, imagination, and translation into the fold. H.D. works to blur the supposed divide between text and image and between consciousness and body through poetry. *Helen in Egypt* is a retelling, or rather a recreation, that reconstructs the ultimate femme fatale—Helen of Troy. This resurrection brings to life an alternate feminine body and story, creating multiple bodies and stories. H.D.’s formulation of the myth hinges on linking text with image and language with sight, which become enmeshed in the newly embodied mythology that sorts through the possibilities of new media.

*Helen in Egypt* is a difficult and strange long poem, subverting traditional generic categorization all the while drawing from classical literature. Gregory situates *Helen in Egypt* in lineage from Greek drama, Friedman that argues it is an anti-epic concerned with the inner, domestic lives of women, and Morris connects its timbre and voices to acoustical technologies. In her study on the cultural work H.D.’s poetry performs, Morris suggests that “[m]odern and contemporary technologies helped to shape the literary production and continues to shape the literary reception of H.D.’s poem *Helen in Egypt*” (60). Morris theorizes that audio technologies underpin the poetic landscape of H.D.’s long poem, explicating that the aural qualities of H.D.’s poetics find root in the ubiquity of disembodied voices produced by the radio era. In addition to this aural quality inspired by the age of radio, *Helen in Egypt* relays cinematic qualities: it draws from ancient Greek culture to stage and process representations of bodies, particularly feminine bodies, in the cinematic age. The structure of the long poem—multiple shorter poems or vignettes of slow psychological contemplation—proceeds in a way that relies on a filmic logic. The poem moves from one shot to the next with scenic development and intercutting. Preston remarks how H.D.’s long poems function like cinematic montage in a way that alters “a reader’s perceptual habits” to “produce an experience akin to ritual participation” (11). The text’s call for participation also reminds of the experience, or ritual, of watching film. *Helen*’s movement between short

scenes depends on a bridging on the part of the reader akin to the visual grammar gleaned from watching film. Filmic thinking normalizes the drastic psychological, mythical, history, and geographic jumps of *Helen in Egypt*. Also, the poem emphasizes hieroglyphics—visual language—as a transformative force. While disembodied voices haunt *Helen in Egypt*, like radio-era missives or perhaps even inter-titles, visuality structures and comes to the forefront in the poem. *Helen in Egypt* dwells on imagistic language, corporeal representations, psychological meditations, moving by way of sutured scenes. The poem emits a distinctly cinematic aura.

*Helen in Egypt* claims as its origin Stesichorus's *Pallinode*, a fragment that counters the traditional Troy legend by situating Helen in Egypt instead of Greece. H.D.'s long poem, however, is not a translation, but an elaborate revision of this other myth. Although H.D.'s poem asserts its debt to Stesichorus, the actual placement of Helen in Egypt, its themes of doubling, scapegoat, and war and the dramatic mode that informs the poem stem from Euripides' *Helen* (Gregory 218). Embarking on her Helen tale culled from Euripides and Stesichorus, H.D. sets the stage for the epic's primary motif: the distribution of real Helen and phantom Helen ("She is both phantom and reality" [3]) that she will complicate and recapitulate throughout the poem. The poem grapples with the confusion of real with represented realms, body with projection, in order to enact the ramifications of representations of feminine bodies and stories. With this particular motif, H.D. asks what happens when mechanical reproduction renders feminine bodies and projects them across space and time? What lives does the phantom self lead beyond its originator? These poetic questions resonate with how film fosters this idea that illusion and authenticity are related rather than distinctly divided.

The poem's enactment of ghostly ancient origins embodies this tension between illusion and authenticity. The quest in H.D.'s epic is Helen's slippery identity, turning the

focus away from martial conflict to its psychological ramifications and resonating with the poem's multi-modal filmic form. The poem presents Helen coming to terms with her shadowy, split identities as its quest, suggesting what is at stake for the spoils of war and the traditionally objectified femme fatale. Book One opens with a performance of poetic relation to Stesichorus's *Palinode*, situating H.D.'s epic as in line with Greek epic and forging a genealogical connection to other variations of Helen myths. The inaugural prose caption introduces the audience to the alternate or new Helen few have encountered:

*According to the Pallinode, Helen was never in Troy. She had been transposed or translated from Greece into Egypt. Helen of Troy was a phantom, substituted for the real Helen, by jealous deities. The Greeks and Trojans alike fought for an illusion. (1)*

This transplanted, shadowy Helen is a powerful figure. This initial gesture refocuses the epic's concern with military conflict, turning away from the warring Greeks and Trojans to foreground Helen's identity quest and crisis. The potency of the illusionary Helen is pronounced: she haunts and brings about the fall of Troy. The alternate myth transmutes Helen of Troy into multiple texts, bodies and places. Her image in Troy is enough to spark the demise of an empire. But there exists another Helen, an Other, who is real, usurped by tales of the imaginary Helen. Following this introduction, much of the text documents Helen's grappling with her phantom image in Troy—the reputation that precedes her, the haunting of this other life. According to this telling, Helen resides in Egypt, and yet the aura of her beautiful body participates in the alternate universe of Troy. The premise of this particular myth is the relationship between text and subject: multiple iterations of Helen's identity emerge through multiple versions of a story. H.D.'s Helen exists in manifold forms and so her Egyptian self must contend with the spectre of her femme fatale body projected over the epic screen of Troy. The proliferation of phantom images and identities of Helen's

character parallels anxieties over the production of moving images afforded by mechanical recording in the filmic age. Furthermore, this is a tale about transposition, how a myth travels and bends over time and telling and how Helen herself traverses cultures. Just as the story transports Helen from Greece to Egypt, H.D. overlays ancient myth with film, ancient myth with new media.

While H.D. possesses epic ambitions, *Helen in Egypt* also weaves other genres into its form. H.D. culls from Euripides, flagging the poem's dramatic alignment. Even further, she structures the text in books with suites of poems that resemble acts and scenes, presents characters' rotating dramatic monologues, and deploys prose captions that resemble a Greek chorus. These characteristics in particular nudge the text in the direction of the dramatic mode. The poem constantly draws attention to events as scenes with its formal convention of numbered short sections within larger books (or acts) and the introductory captions that set the stage for each scene. *Helen in Egypt* generates a heightened atmosphere of performance. Yet the suspension of linear narrative and focus on visuality impede the purely dramatic aspirations of *Helen* and, instead, reveal H.D.'s flirtation with film. The multiple lyric scenes with prose that takes the interrogative form, asking questions instead of narrating, forces the audience to jump from scene to scene as one would with a film. H.D. draws from epic, lyric, and dramatic modes to compose a twentieth-century epic with a filmic ethos. Ultimately, H.D.'s use of the dramatic mode brushes up against her filmic inclinations—the psychological intensity of the multiple short scenes dwelling on Helen's fraught plight recalls the early Imagist impulse to strip away the superfluous as well as the close up contended with in Dreyer's *Joan of Arc*. H.D. focuses intensely on the thoughts behind the face that launched a thousand ships:

the sails of the thousand ships,  
the Glory that compressed me

when I faced his anger

we would have burnt out in a flash (45)

H.D. transforms Helen's infamous face into an action and has her protagonist face Achilles.

H.D. transmutes Helen from object to actor in her renovated epic form, creating a psychological close up that examines Helen's fraught existence that traverses time and myth.

*Helen in Egypt* explores the translation of embodied subjects into objects via representation, resonating with the filmic rendering of physical reality into moving images. The epic explores the embodied experience of text and image, linking text with pictures through the figure of Helen. Helen's story inscribes itself on her body while the poem disperses her character across various realms. Far from the din of war that the ghost version of herself has incited, Helen embarks on a project of interpreting the hieroglyphs that surround her in Egypt:

I feel the lure of the invisible

I am happier here alone

in this great temple,

with this great temple's

indecipherable hieroglyph;

I have "read" the lily,

I can not "read" the hare, the chick, the bee,

I would study and decipher

the indecipherable Amen-script. (21)

Helen enters the great temple in order to read, or attempt to read, her cultural milieu. While her attempt at reading underscores the provisional workings of language, how the signifier circulates whether or not a reader comprehends its meaning, the use of shudder quotation marks forges a connection between visual and textual literacy. Helen looks at, rather than reads, the text. The reading Helen engages in is a form of literacy that illustrates the role of visuality in textuality.

In order to undertake the act of reading, Helen must enter a sacred cultural site, like a museum, library, or cinema, that houses on its walls the signs of Egyptian culture. She attempts to interpret the pictures as a means to situate herself in this newfound realm and to understand her identity. Her own story exists in an arena larger than the personal: the question of her identity expands to the realms of myth and history. Helen's personal conflict is cosmic. Despite her struggles with literacy in this new cultural context, Helen can read one hieroglyph easily: "the thousand-petalled lily; / they are not many, but one" that is "repeated endlessly, / upon the walls, the pillars" (21). In fact, Helen identifies with this sign of multiplicity inscribed infinitely upon the walls. The lily, like her, is a paradoxical symbol: a single sign that that means "many." Helen's ability to decipher the hieroglyphs comes from her identification with the signs: "for her, the secret of the stone-writing is repeated in natural or human symbols" (22). This particular moment enmeshes language, image, subject, and object. The key for Helen is to understand the link between reality and representation. It goes further: "She herself is the writing." Helen's cognition of this other language comes from her recognition of her own self as language and symbol. The poem deals with the translation of human bodies into symbol via text and image. Film, with its mechanical reproduction and proliferation of images, heightens the poet's awareness of the potency of representation to transmute bodies into projected and iterant signs.

Significantly, what compels Helen to apprehend the hieroglyphs is movement. Upon closer inspection of hieroglyphic writing, Helen uncovers movement and transformative potential, which distinguishes it from static writing. Helen relays her past tepid engagement with hieroglyphic writing, declaring that “[she] was not interested, / [she] was not instructed” (22). Although Helen feigns literacy: “I said, I was instructed in the writ; but I had only heard of it” (22) she does not possess an understanding of the pictures. Initially, Helen is apathetic about the image writing. The pictures do not excite her nor does she comprehend them. The priests of her culture disparage the language depicted on Egyptian papyrus scrolls brought to Greece as inferior to Greek culture. Due to cultural bias and apathy, the writing fails to capture Helen’s imagination until she experiences an epiphany steeped in kinesis:

but when the bird swooped past,

that first evening,

I seemed to know the writing,

as if God made the picture

and matched it

with a living hieroglyph (23)

The bird’s movement ignites an understanding of the images in Helen’s psyche. Motion arrests Helen and suddenly she can comprehend the writing. The movement is the swooping, but also that that the bird flutters between lived reality and represented reality. The bird oscillating between language and reality elevates the writing from script to illuminated image. Helen imbues her newfound literacy with divine connotations and the language becomes both transcendent (“as if God made the picture”) and organic (“a living hieroglyph”). She grasps both the image and the item it represents: this duality of object and image of object, allegedly matched by God, is what inspires Helen, allowing her to read the

images as well as identify a potency in them. What spurs her literacy, however, is the moving image. The living hieroglyphs renew Helen's understanding of language and of herself. The poem presents the moving image as a veritable transformative force, alluding to H.D.'s own filmic awakening.

In this moment, Helen's linguistic epiphany becomes an embodied translation. Once Helen comprehends the living hieroglyphs, she accesses Egyptian mythology and transmutes into Isis. Helen describes entry into Egyptian culture:

in the dark, I must have looked  
an inked-in shadow; but with his anger,  
that ember, I became

what his accusation made me,  
Isis, forever with that Child,  
the Hawk Horus. (23)

The poem converts Helen into Isis, which coincides with her transcendent apprehension of hieroglyphs. In gaining language, she also gains culture, obtaining mythical dimensions and roles. Helen reflects on how she must have resembled "an inked-in shadow," appearing like script—the text connects Helen to writing once more. Helen becomes a figure of translation. At the moment in which she is capable of translating the writing, her body enters another cultural dimension. This passage depicts Helen inaugurating a new wave of visual language, one of movement and transformation. She realizes her identity quest through a linguistic transformation. Her elevation to Isis remedies her shadow self as the destructive Helen. H.D. weds Helen's identity quest with her experience of the living hieroglyph and her identity quest models H.D.'s turn film for renewed poetic inspiration and a spiritual way forward in light of oppressive war and dominant, patriarchal scripts.

This translation of Helen's mythological body, performs an analogy to film. For H.D., film is like the living hieroglyph, interweaving picture and text and reality and imagination, recalling her definition of film in her *Borderline* essay. H.D. accomplishes this through the parable of Helen who transforms into Isis in a moment in which image and language constitute a permeable membrane between cultures and media. In this poem, Greece and Egypt superimpose, just as reality and the language representing that reality overlap. As a result, Helen's body disperses across cultures since she is both Helen and Isis. The ignition to Helen's transformation is her understanding of hieroglyphs. The potential energy of the bird image, the fluttering between reality and image, conveys not only meaning, but also alters her perception and inspires literacy. Through this passage, H.D. contends with the transformation of text in light of the emerging culture of film. H.D. recognizes the force of living and moving images, how they can transform and overlay one's reality, finding that the visual realm is another language, one imbued with transformative possibilities for the subject. Moving images invoke the duality of one's sense of seeing—perception and experience. Similarly, Sobchack emphasizes the sense-making *and* sensual qualities of the encounter with film:

Watching a film, we can see the seeing as well as the seen, hear the hearing as well as the heard, and feel the movement as well as see the moved. As viewers, not only do we spontaneously and invisibly perform these existential acts directly for and as ourselves in relation *to* the film before us, but these same acts are coterminously given to us *as* the film, as mediating acts of perception-cum-expression we take up and *invisibly perform* by appropriating and incorporating them into our own existential performance; we watch them as a *visible performance* distinguishable from, yet included in, our own. (10)

This dual experience of perception and experience that film provides recalls and rouses the senses of the viewer. Her participation is as both a subject and an object in the image making and reading. Like Sobchack's film viewer, Helen witnesses the living hieroglyphs and comes to know this coterminous act of seeing and perceiving. For H.D.'s Helen, viewing results in renewed visual literacy as well as an existential awareness in which she notes the dual life of the images inside and outside of the parameters of the representation and her own status as a literate subject and viewable object. This experience affords her insight into her fraught identity. The viewing alters Helen: she absorbs the images and the process projects her into another realm to take on another goddess identity. Through this parable of Helen's visual literacy, H.D. points to the transformative and culture-making possibilities of filmic representation, how it accesses the overlap of image and text to produce new awareness of how film frames women's bodies. In *Helen in Egypt*, Helen transcends the gaze by absorbing text and image and becoming the reader of her own diaphanous identity.

Another striking feature of *Helen in Egypt* is its prosimetrum form, its mixture of prose and poetry. H.D.'s stylistic choice to hybridize the text emanated from a recorded reading she gave in 1955 for Norman Holmes Pearson in which she introduced each lyric segment with a prose caption. After this reading, she then decided to integrate prose overviews into her manuscript to accompany her cryptic lyrical roving. This relationship between prosaic and lyric modes is curious: the prose captions complement the lyrics, but they do not fully explicate the mysterious images. Often, they ask more questions than they resolve: "What does [Achilles] mean?" (37); "The dream? The veil? [...] She asks, 'are we homesick for what has been?'" (45); "Is this Helen actually that Helen?" (47); "she compares Theseus with Achilles, and asks, 'how have the arcs crossed? how have the paths met?'" (189); and so on. Like Dante's *Vita Nuova* and Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*, *Helen in Egypt*'s prosimetrum style lends to internal commentary and counterpoint. The moments of

prose contemplate from another vantage point the lyrics' suggestions and movements much like the chorus in a classical Greek play.

This mixture of prose and lyric stages an encounter between linearity and non-linearity, thus further disrupting a teleological telling of the story. The combination of narrative and lyric necessarily brings about the question of time since temporality is what distinguishes the two genres. Monique Morgan defines each genre by way of time, explaining "narrative requires temporal progression, while lyric is a suspended moment that stops the time of narrative and focuses instead on the 'now' of composition and reception" (4). Lyric operates by way of the suspension of time, while narrative works towards the progression of time. In *Helen* the lyric segments interrupt narrative prose elements that carry only trace amounts of narrative; therefore the when of the story is confused. There is movement because of the narrative element, but the lyric mode dominates and runs interference. Ultimately, H.D.'s epic refutes an exact time or forward momentum since its lyric modes refuse to adhere to a timeline and the prose elements do little to further a plot. The direction of the momentum is internally focused rather than linear. Bryant observes:

Rather than exerting the kind of action we expect from epic heroes, the poem's protagonist and her lovers spend considerable time ruminating over the past. Through dreams and visitations from the gods, Helen also forecasts her future as a perpetual memory and cosmic image. H.D. sees epic scope in Helen's spellbinding love, tortured emotions, and intense musings. (81)

In H.D.'s epic, Helen's interpersonal struggles and intense contemplations of myth play out on the cosmic level. Her struggle to love Achilles is as devastating as the destruction of Troy. As Friedman writes "Helen's identity and the meaning of war are contained enigmatically in heightened moments or tableaux" (65). These alternate scales, the personal and epic, combine. Similarly, Ancient Greece, Ancient Egypt, and H.D.'s own wartime twentieth

century intermingle. These varying points of time can be read alongside each other, and thus the carnage in Ancient Greece bleeds into Europe in World War II. The images of hieroglyphs and dream enactments Helen encounters in Egypt resonate with the emergence of modern film and filmic thinking. The prose-poetry interface of *Helen* engenders a rupture in time and genre so that the poetic page can explore multiple moments in history and modes of textual-visual representation without taking up a teleological perspective in pursuit of resolution. This breakage in time that the poetic and prosaic loops simulate fosters a literary climate rife for interweaving: aesthetic modes interact—prose and poetry, text and image, romance and epic, personal and cosmic, and mythical and historical nodes blur. H.D.’s epic projects blended genres and epochs on its surface screen.

The dual modes are a product of the overall overlapping form, figures, and themes of *Helen in Egypt*. While critics like Brian Glaser and Friedman have considered the psychoanalytical and feminist implications of H.D.’s interactive textual modes in *Helen*, Susan Barbour uncovers the history of the poem’s prose elements and concludes that the long poem “constitut[es] a unique example of a reflexive modernist text that fuses poetry and prose as well as oral and textual consciousness” (2). According to Barbour, the poem’s hybridity denotes a complex relationship to Euripidean drama and twentieth century orality. In this light, the poem becomes a register of other modes of expression, absorbing and processing dramatic and oral genres through its structure. I add film to this compendium of media that the poem grapples with in its mutable form. H.D.’s preference for silent film is of note.<sup>17</sup> Silent film with its captions is an example of a dual text-image mode and it informs the hybridity of *Helen in Egypt*. The prose in the poem functions as a pseudo-narrative companion to the poetic image-saturated dreamscape. The poem unleashes lyric images that circulate on the screen of the page while the prose captions intervene to guide the reader’s

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<sup>17</sup> In “The Mask and the Movietone,” H.D. discusses her preference for silent film over the talkies.

attention and vision, adding a vague sense of decipherment to complement the challenging and obscure poem-images. The duality that the poem embodies demonstrates the breadth of textual representation that the era of cinema activates. The text functions as narrative, lyric, text, and image. The poem evinces twentieth-century epic poetry's absorption and processing of other genres of text and even other forms of media, thus enacting Bakhtin's polyphony. While this ability may have always been possible, the cinematic mode calls attention to how modes of representation rub up against and bounce off of each other. H.D. tests the expanse of poetry, how it processes the cultural modes of expression across the boundaries of textuality, orality, and visuality.

Furthermore, the prose captions resonate with the film technique of the voiceover. The common technique in which an omniscient disembodied voice hovers over the embodied images circulating onscreen resonates with the prose-poetry dynamic in *Helen*. The speaker of the voiceover relays narration from an unseen position off-screen, cultivating power through the refusal to disclose a bodily form. In contrast, the players on screen are made vulnerable through their visuality and embodiment—the gaze of the camera comes to know their bodies while the speaker remains covert, evading this knowing gaze. The voiceover possesses narrative authority, claiming the images. Traditionally, there is an uneven distribution of power between the voiceover and images—the voice tells the story while the images bend to the will of orality. Similarly, prose possesses narrative authority in contrast to lyric due to the lyric's suspension of narrative time and focus on image. This analogy of prose/poetry as voiceover/images draws out the resemblance between the images of film and lyric poetry that circulates throughout H.D.'s poetry.

The prosaic-poetic hybridity of *Helen in Egypt* does not mimic filmic composition. Film, however, highlights these crucial issues of embodiment, power, visuality, and language for H.D. The poet responds to film by constructing a filmic epic that expands to absorb

various modes—lyric, romantic, dramatic. The large-scope of film befits H.D.'s own poetic, oracular project that considers the role of feminine figures and the spiritual, psychological impact of martial conflict. The prominence of the living hieroglyph in her later long poems gestures to her preoccupation with the cyclical nature of language and how image and text correlate historically and during her own moment. She draws parallels between Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs and the silent films of her day, which she watched, wrote about and even made. H.D. constructs a filmic poetic that can house multiple modes that counters traditional forms, dominant narratives, and the oppressive power of the gaze. She accomplishes this through championing strength of the objectified femme fatale. She processes and questions the ramifications of media as they enliven her poetry.

## Chapter Two: “A [re]visionary of natural creatures”: Marianne Moore’s Haptic Poetics

In the 1930s, Marianne Moore’s interest in animal documentaries prompted the poet to consider the ethics and implications of looking at animals in her well-known animal poems. The poems interrogate the gaze, revealing its stance of mastery over nature and, in contrast, forging of a vulnerable, haptic<sup>18</sup> way of looking that foregrounds respectful distance and relationality between the human and non-human other in her poems. This preoccupation with reworking visuality particularly preoccupies Moore’s take on the genre of the *ars poetica*. Even further, her poems explore the animal as spectacle and how visuality informs human relations with the non-human natural world. Ultimately, Moore appropriates the authoritative gaze of 1930s animal documentary and travel film and, in contrast, constructs a haptic visuality that operates with strangeness, mutuality and empathy in her own animals poems.

### II.I

#### Overview

In stereotypical scholarly accounts of Marianne Moore, the poet plumbs scientific and artistic realms for obscure materials that she then plants in her cabinet of curiosities. Lauded for her research skills, Moore is often configured both as a poet-scientist as well as a painterly poet due to her respective interests in flora and fauna and the art world and her providing her readers with dazzling glimpses of animals. Her poetic descriptions of animals yoke a documentary impulse with an attention to visual and material properties both gleaned from contemporary museum culture, the art world, and the Bronx zoo. The influence of science, visual art and museum culture in her writing is evident. But, with the exception of

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<sup>18</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, I deploy haptic in the case of Moore to identify a mode of looking that goes beyond the tyranny of the gaze and that acknowledges the psychological and phenomenological valences that accompany the of looking, i.e. the complex relationality between viewer and object. I borrow this term from Laura U. Marks to denote an empathetic and engaged form of visuality that encompasses Sobchack’s radical reflection upon looking at and bearing witness to an image

McCabe's analysis of Moore's avant-garde montage and fetishistic gaze in *Cinematic Modernism*, few have studied how film influenced Moore's poems about animals from the 1930s and early 1940s. These poems contemplate how humans perceive animals and foreground questions about the politics and ethics of looking and relating to the animal other. Film, as a mechanized technology and artistic endeavour, dovetails with Moore's hybrid identity as cool scientific observer and visual artificer. Yet, even further, cinema helped crystallize her unique poetic perspective, heightening her awareness of the gaze, which she analyzed in her mid-career modernist animal poems.

Moore composed many of her animal poems in the 1930s. This epoch marks Moore's peak interest in describing animals in poetry *and* it coincides with her involvement with H.D.'s film journal *Close Up* for which she wrote reviews of animal and travel documentaries. The poet critically forged a substantial portion of her literary legacy in the 1930s, crafting complicated odes to strange creatures of the natural world with her signature perplexing syntax, and erudite, esoteric references. Her penchant for oddity and difficulty works to defamiliarize the human rapport with the natural world. Furthermore, these poems represent this significant 1930s poetic moment for Moore, a moment that she disabused later in her career as she revised and altered her earlier poems. Tracing the origins of these animal poems of the 1930s and determining their relation with film is crucial to understanding Moore's career and the ethics of looking that she cultivated during this time. The early versions of the animal poems composed during the height of her film going and -reviewing days capture Moore's investment in reconsidering the power that underpins the human gaze. Similar to H.D.'s contemplation of feminine bodies on screen, Moore became sensitive to the role of visuality and how it possessed the potential alienate and objectify the other—in this case animals. Her interest in film led to her to renegotiate ways of perceiving and relating to the non-human other.

Her film reviews and poetry from this time offer insight into how cinema inspired Moore to contemplate looking at animals in poetry. Her animal poems construct a dynamic and complex experience of the animal, rooted in an ethos of embodied relationality, that implicate reader as a viewer of her strange version of the animal spectacle. Her artful renderings of animals enact a sensual, synesthetic approach: she reminds the reader of the body in uncanny ways. Her range of references calls attention to the fabrication involved in interpreting animals in human language and thus underscores a respectful distance too. Ultimately, she constructs a haptic poetic vision based on simultaneous distance and relation—a rapport that is both intimate and distant—in contrast to conventional film’s dominant gaze with its hierarchal perspective and doctrine of mastery. She probes at the visuality of animal documentaries and revises it to account for relationality amongst humans and non-humans. While her poems do not sidestep the human will to project onto animals, her esoteric, idiosyncratic references, jarring line breaks, and emphasis on tactile materiality undermine stereotypical depictions of the animal other. Moore’s haptic poetry is paradoxical, which works to restructure how humans relate to and look at the images of animals, restoring an ethical distance and recognizing mutual bodily vulnerability rather than furthering a monarchical observation of the non-human world.

Harold Bloom calls Moore “a visionary of natural creatures” (19), but what distinguishes Moore’s ability to envision animals is her distinct approach to visuality—her disruption of a conventional visuality that seeks to dominate its subjects. Moore participated in traditional acts of looking that treat animals as commodity and spectacle—the zoo, museum, animal films. Even more so than the museum or zoo, film made the poet more acutely aware of visuality and how it frames the natural world. Critics often link her poetic vision with the fields of science and fine art, but film helped her to question the ethics and erotics of looking at moving images. Indeed, film gave Moore access to highly mediated

visual, sensory experiences with the non-human world, the ramifications of which she processed in her infamous animal poems.

Depictions of animals in film prompted Moore to stage her own encounters with the non-human world in poetry. In his essay on Moore, “The Experience of the Eye,” Hugh Kenner argues that Moore’s poetry aestheticizes the ocular experience specifically through descriptions of animals. He concludes that:

this rendition of the experience of the eye [...] compels our minds to move across an opaque and resistant surface, that of the printed language, in emulation of the eye’s experience moving across the contours of a pangolin’s armor; and it impedes the facilities of the conclusion drawn, the thing said, the instance appropriated into a satisfactory system, on the principle that while psychic experience flows naturally into utterance, optical experience requires to be carefully anatomized before we can too readily allow it to be psychic (24).

Kenner emphasizes the textual surface of Moore’s poetic renderings as pivotal to experiencing the animal. Surface as the point of engagement is integral to haptic visuality in film and, in this case, this haptic, visual skin extends to Moore’s poetry.<sup>19</sup> Even further in his argument, Kenner resists the notion of an easy or direct translation of visual sense into the textual domain. He suggests that in order to transmit the visual into the poetic, Moore performs the business of anatomy. Moore’s strange and meandering descriptions resist easy analogies: for example, she attributes a wide-ranging litany of unanticipated items to such a mundane creature as a cat. Kenner argues that this uncanny anatomizing constitutes an ability to perform the job of looking ethically, i.e. without claiming to fully know or understand the object of her perception. Moore’s poetry focuses on the experience of the eye and how the act

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<sup>19</sup> Marks writes: “Haptic looking tends to rest on the surface of its object rather than to plunge into depth, not to distinguish form so much as to discern texture.” (8)

of looking is entwined with ethical questions about the relationship between viewer and subject. I extend this discussion of Moore's visual renderings of animals and consider how they rework the gaze and participate in constructing ethical modes of looking at and relating to the animal other. As she describes and dissects the animal, Moore's poetic gaze lingers on the surface of the image, making the dynamic strange and disruptive. Moore questions the normative view of human mastery over the animal other.

The travel and animal documentaries she critiqued for *Close Up* prompted her to investigate the animal on screen in her oeuvre of the 1930s and beyond. Moore perceives how visibility interweaves with power, and so she interrogates film's role in this relationship. In particular "The Pangolin," regarded as an *ars poetica* of Moore's high modernist epoch, defines the figure of the artist as a tech-savvy innovator. Additionally, poems such as "The Steeple Jack" (1932), "The Hero" (1932), "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron" (1941), "The Plumet Basilisk" (1933), and "Old Tiger" (1932) illuminate Moore's investigation of the animal as spectacle. The poems emulate and critique the genre of the animal film, interrogating the act of humans looking at animals. Moore's attention to looking and technology in her *ars poetica* suggest an interest in film in her poems of this era. Her filmic inclination puts pressure on the power and relational dynamics of the animal as spectacle in her poetry.

Moore's haptic poetics jostle the dominant gaze in order to enable a consideration of ethical acknowledgements and representations of the non-human world. Though her poetic strategy deploys film techniques and tropes, she renegotiates the implications of looking. Responding to animal documentaries, she translates the ocular experience into text in ways that account for corporeality, otherness, and mutuality. The animal poems create a space for uncanny and embodied experiences with the non-human world. The animal poems of the 1930s and early 1940s perceive how culture deploys the animal body as a site of projection. Moore does not necessarily evade this projection or demolish this attitude of human mastery,

but her poems demonstrate an urge to call attention to this projection and domination, subverting them subtly and connecting with the non-human world in unanticipated, disruptive ways.

In contrast to the sentimentality of animal documentaries, Moore imposes a journalistic, non-fiction voice full of quotations and factual information. As Marie Borroff demonstrates, Moore turned to the prose of articles and advertisements as “a source not only of subject matter but at times of inspiration” (43). She enshrines her exotic animals in odd prosaic descriptions and obscure references that defy stereotypical depictions of animals. In doing so, she rewrites animal documentaries as well as renovates the lyric romantic ode to the natural world. The complexity of these long animal poems speaks to humans’ paradoxical rapport with the animal other: Moore strives to relate to them ecologically while flagging difference. Her depictions are difficult and opaque in ways that defamiliarize the animal other, reminding of their otherness. She still renders the other into human language, but in a complex, ethical way that accounts for mutuality and difference at the same time. The poems rework the gaze, making it strange and encouraging Moore’s audience to relate to non-human bodies in new ways beyond the dominant cultural scripts.

## II.II

### **The Animal Spectacle in Documentary Film**

Museums and films mediated Moore’s encounters with the natural world. The animal documentaries of the early twentieth century of which Moore was enamoured functioned both as environmental educational tool and as spectacle. Like the American Natural History Museum, their purpose was to teach the public to foster a relationship with nature within the confines of capitalist human culture all the while aestheticizing the non-human world.

Moore’s poems about animals diverge from her source material, its informational, resourceful

purpose and its sentimental morality, and, instead, partake in a project of ethically representing the non-human other.

Bergmann Loizeaux argues that writing on a work of art differs from writing on a natural object in that the work of art constitutes an already-made statement already about world and that this staging of the relationship between words and images is more of a dialogue (5). And yet this strict dichotomy Bergman Loizeaux points to as dividing art and natural object assumes unmediated access to the natural world, as if human knowledge of the non-human world were not steeped in language, representation and bias—as if representations of the natural world don't carry various agendas.<sup>20</sup> In fact, many of the natural objects and phenomena Moore wrote about she accessed through media—framed by museums, print culture, photography, and film—and thus have something in common with a work of art. Beyond this, the framing of the non-human world in the human world relies on the veil of language. Moore's poems that describe nature draw from the inevitable convention of appropriating nature to demonstrate mastery over it. Her view of nature is not free from human culture, especially when encountering nature through film, print and museum. Moore's poems about animals imagine and reanimate animals in poetry, like the ekphrastic desire to speak for the image. Film provided Moore with an imaginary circus from which she could draw inspiration. And yet Moore enacts a haptic poetic that subverts the conventions of anthropological documentaries, undermines the mastery of the domineering human gaze and seeks out an uncanny way to represent and relate to the natural world.

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<sup>20</sup> For example: the natural objects of the American Natural History Museum were part of a modernist project of educating urban populations and familiarizing them with the natural world through a commerce-inspired enterprise of consumption and commodification—displaying artefacts taken out of their ecosystem and framed like department store items for sale (Raine 179).

Moore researched poems by visiting museums and galleries, incorporating art and natural science into her poetry with a magpie-like compulsion.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Bonnie Costello concludes: “in the teeming field of the visual arts, [Moore] found one of her largest supplies of ideas and images” (214). Adding to scholarship on Moore’s engagement with visual culture, Linda Leavell traces how Moore’s visits to galleries inducted the poet into the art world in *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts*. She makes a case for the influence of the contemporary visual art scene as a key influence on Moore’s brand of modernism in addition to and, perhaps, even more than the literary establishment. Even in the innovative movement of modernist literature, Moore is an odd contradiction—at the vanguard of various contemporary cultural and social currents (the art world, first-wave feminism), but devoutly bookish rather than bohemian. Indeed, she read and wrote art reviews for publications, and so her writing brought her into the constellation of the art world. Moore’s subscription to art and museum culture shaped her poetry in such a way that her work straddled both literary and visual fields, importing the properties and materials of the art world into her writing. For example, Catherine Paul argues that Moore’s engagement with the curatorial practices and exhibits at the American Natural History Museum came to bear upon her editorial practices. She argues that Moore compiled *What Are Years* (1941) with a museum-like ethos of display that made the collection more accessible to the public. Evidently Moore’s affiliation with the art world not only provided her with material and inspiration, but also distinctly shaped her literary endeavours.

Critics, such as Costello, Leavell and Ellen Levy<sup>22</sup>, note the refuge Moore found in the museum and gallery, but her visual affinity extends beyond fine art and includes the arena of film. Film, though often overlooked as an influential force, fuelled Moore’s poetic practice

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<sup>21</sup> Her collage-like nest of culled materials now rests at the Rosenbach Museum in Philadelphia in manifold files.

<sup>22</sup> Levy’s *Criminal Ingenuity* reads the work of Moore, like John Ashbery and the artist Joseph Cornell, as occupying the space between literary and artistic worlds.

in ways that are similar to and yet distinct from her well-documented engagement with museum culture and the art world. In a letter to Bryher from 1933, Moore declared Bryher: “I doubt that there is anyone living who is more enthusiastic about movies than I am” (296 *Selected Letters*). Moore’s vehemence signals at the very least an active engagement with cinema that scholars with the exception of McCabe have mostly ignored. Moore’s enthusiasm for film underscores her intense visual affiliation and how the moving images of animals shaped her poetic discourse. The painterly portraits of Moore do not account for the movement, scrutiny, and montage that push Moore’s ekphrasis past its traditional borders and into the burgeoning genre of film-inspired poetry. Moore’s visual eye moves with dynamism and superimposition, with the kind of visual focus and obsession that the age of film heralded. An ethical consideration of the politics of looking also accompanies these film-inspired poems. Furthermore, Moore’s cinematic ekphrasis anticipates ecopoetics, as suddenly she turns the ekphrastic gaze towards the moving images of living organisms and considers how language, art, nature, and culture interact. Animal and travel documentaries proffered Moore vistas of new geographies and ecosystems, which she could address with an ekphrastic enthusiasm and thus call attention to the relationship between nature and human culture, reality and representation. In addressing representations of the natural world in anthropological documentaries, Moore sought to examine and redress the power of the human gaze and began to interrogate visuality for new ways of relating to the animal other.

In her aptly titled essay “Fiction or Nature?” (1933), Moore explores the sensational qualities of documentaries that she sought out at the Brooklyn Institute of Art and Science. Many of the animal documentaries were promoted as educational events, accompanied by a scholarly lecture at the institute. Moore attended these lecture-and-film nights with great enthusiasm. Moore opens “Fiction or Nature?” with a brief review—one paragraph—of the

German film *Mädchen in Uniform*<sup>23</sup> before she segues into far more intricate and embellished descriptions and reviews of nature and travel films. Even then, Moore devotes part of the review of the German film to observing how it contrasts to Hollywood, which “has the bad luck to be outstarred [sic] by its whereabouts: eucalyptus-trees, calico horses with pale eyes, bits of sea-coast with cormorants or pelicans, or rolling hills with shadows” (303). In reviewing the European film, her eye wanders to the Southern Californian landscape and animals, somehow transforming the genre of Hollywood movie into an example of the nature and travel documentary she adores, emphasizing Hollywood’s scenic value. For Moore, the natural world is the true star of commercial Hollywood film. In writing about Hollywood film, Moore forges an unlikely relationship with the natural world, complicating even the blockbuster machine’s gaze.

As she moves on to describe the animal and nature documentaries, she performs a similar unexpected generic reversal and deploys an animated tone that imbues the nature films with the eminence, energy and gossip of Hollywood film. Moore claims that in Brooklyn “nature films would not here come last in the category of choices; nor films of other countries,” declaring the borough’s preference for nature films over mainstream romance film (“loveing [sic] pictures” [303]). Moore’s account of these documentaries pays attention to their aesthetic and narrative gestures, considering them under the parameters of fiction-forward films. She describes a scene from *Congorilla*: “the crocodiles and the great prehistoric bulrush-and-palm hippopotamus scene with twitching ears, submergings, and unanimous yawnings” (304), noting the action and conflict between the animals. The documentary emulates a human-centric action film with conflict and tensions between groups of animals. As Laura U. Marks notes: “[c]inematic conventions have a lot to do with our powers of putting ourselves in the other’s paws” (25). Moore prods at these conventions of

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<sup>23</sup> Notably, in her review she incorrectly identifies Greta Garbo as starring in the film, imagining the actress as part of the cast in her own recollection of the film’s ecology.

projection and personification, testing their parameters, and investigating how they frame the animal other in human terms.

Moore applies cinematic conventions to the animal documentary to achieve a defamiliarizing effect. She jostles the stereotypical vision of the animals and typical human voice of authority, having the animals enact cinematic conventions associated with other film genres. For example, she deems a scene featuring sheep in *Seeing Europe on a Budget* “a hit” (304). Other highlights from the film include: “Hungarian pigs fed from both sides of the trough, the momentum of the drove resulting in an occasional pig chairing; a flock of ducks entering a pond on a glide so smooth the transition from running to floating was undetectable” (304). She is drawn to scenes that focus on the visual delight of movement. Moore’s penchant for how the film captures particular scenes with dynamic flourishes illustrates her fascination with the movement of the animals on screen. The momentum of a drove of pigs and the ducks’ subtle transitions are a grand spectacle of kinetic embodiment in film and a source of awe for Moore. She continues to emphasize the movement of animals in film throughout the review: “Nor could anything but motion suggest the pompous inability of the elephants to be stereotypes, the top-heaviness of the three-tiered parasols, the wiriness and blood of the horses” (304) in *I Am From Siam*. In this example, Moore pays close attention to the elephants and how their filmed movement in particular produces specific anthropomorphic effects. Her use of “stereotype” is interesting because it flags the interaction of nature and fiction that the essay complicates. In *This Strange Animal World* Moore observes: “The wild kangaroos in flight, undulating like the rapids of a dangerous stream, as they crossed the ditches and scrub, were impressive” (305). Moore tracks the representation of animal bodies and how film aestheticizes their movements. She is aware of how film deploys the gaze to coolly observe and consume the animal body. In this essay, she identifies a discourse of nature that relies on film conventions. I argue that this film discourse she

develops carries over to her poems as she envisions a haptic vision of and relation to the animal other.

For Moore, the animal films she encountered in the 1930s functioned as research for her poetry, providing a reservoir of moving images of animals. The filming of animals served as a prompt for Moore to investigate the newfound terms of representation in the cinematic age. As a result of cinema, McCabe argues, Moore's line breaks enact fetishistic montage, with jarring cuts similar to avant-garde silent film. Certainly, her unconventional line breaks twist and turn, create motion, emulating the scenes of nature she was so drawn to in travel and animal documentaries. But her poems also enact a critique of and a dialogue with human gaze of film. She seeks to reinvent the conventions that frame animals, opting for a haptic gaze that affords the animal other difference and dignity.

Moore curiously locates a sense of awe in the representations of embodied animals' dynamic gestures. As with her interest in zoos, her focus on filmed animals touches on issues of human language and power. As John Berger writes in "Why Look at Animals?":

animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what separates us from them. The more we know, the further away they are. (14)

Awe comes from otherness. Film emphasizes its ability to distance the animals it portrays from the audience of humans who observe; it makes the audience patently aware of how watching them transforms animals' movements into discursive gestures. As Donna Haraway writes:

People like to look at animals, even to learn from them about human beings and human society. People in the twentieth century have been no exception. We find the themes of modern America reflected in detail in the bodies and

lives of animals. We polish an animal mirror to look for ourselves. The biological sciences' focus on monkeys and apes has sought to make visible both the form and the history of our personal and social bodies. Biology has been pre-eminently a science of visible form, the dissection of visible shape, and the acceptance and construction of visible order. The science of non-human primates, primatology, maybe be a source of insight or a source of illusion. The issue rests on our skill in the construction of mirrors. (21)

Marks furthers this sentiment by noting how film constructs that mirror, distinctly making the animal other: "In disavowing any commonality between self and other, one renders the other a screen for projection, whether it is to project noble-savage fantasies on other humans or bestial-animal fantasies on beasts" (24-25). Moore's poem demonstrates sensitivity to that mirror and an effort to warp its contours with skill to restore curiosity and dignity when looking at animals. As Moore investigates animal documentaries, her attention to cinematic convention and personification indicates an awareness of the power that underpins the human gaze.

Moore herself calls attention to this transformation of animal body into representational trope in "Fiction or Nature?" and suggests that human representations of the natural world are an aesthetic, power-infused construct. Her essay considers the implications of looking at animals in film and tends to the role of looking in constructing narratives about animals. In particular, she lingers on the camera's scrutiny of an owl in one of the films:

The sensation of these five reels perhaps was the continuous very close close-up of a long-eared (i.e., rabbit) owl—tiger-striping on red-amber body-color—among well-twigged branches of a tree like the tamarack, with a shaft of evening sun slanting down from Mt. Evans; both eyes flaming yellow but the

eye in shadow, round with round pupil; the one toward the sun—iris and pupil—narrowed to a vertical oval. (306)

Moore's patent emphasis on the animal's eye is telling. She designates its glare as a response to the camera's "very close close-up." The camera gazes at the owl and the owl returns the gaze in shadow. Moore's highlighting of this episode signals her interest in how film stages a face-to-face encounter with an animal<sup>24</sup>. In this example, the owl's shadowed eye returns the gaze but refuses to mirror the human and thus asserts its own perception beyond human comprehension. Typically, as Marks notes, the returned gaze of the mirror serves as an empty saccharine gesture: "and when the creatures gaze into the camera, their eyes seem to communicate with the depths of our souls. The overall effect is to allow the human viewer an identification with the nonhuman subjects, a way to get into their furry or feathered heads" (25). Similarly, Moore is drawn to the animal's returned gaze, noting its symbolic potency. She recognizes it as discursive moment in human interactions with nature. And so she teases out this gaze in her text. Moore's description of the close up of the animal's eye demands affect; the purpose of the close-up is to enhance emotion. Consequently, the documentary pries until it meets the animal's eyes—eyes that return the gaze, but in a different way from human seeing. Moore's scrutiny of this moment denotes her interest the gaze and how humans look at animals. For Moore, film is a tool to navigate and own animal bodies, much like the zoo, but with her emphasis on the owl's returned glare she questions the human gaze and how looking constructs the rapport between humans and non-humans. Moore takes an interest in how film objectifies animals, rendering them into images that exist inside and outside of human culture.

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<sup>24</sup> Levinas in *Alterity and Transcendence* describes an ethical intersubjective exchange as a scenario in which the subject experiences transcendence while allowing the other retains its alterity, its difference. Lévinas's intersubjective relationship is based upon acknowledging difference, separating the "I" from the other (ix).

Moore turns to these animal documentaries to experience a deeply mediated sense of awe that stems from both the natural world and art. While H.D. sees the screen as an illuminating mystical portal, Moore sees it as Haraway's polished mirror, articulating the rapport between humans and the non-human world. Moore looks at animals in film to find inspiration not merely in the dazzling scenes of animals in exotic ecosystems but also to explore how film codifies the movements of non-human animals, transposing their bodies and movements into language. Ultimately, her writing on animals stems from her investigation into the power dynamics that underpin looking at animals. Her poems construct a haptic gaze as a means to relate to animals in new, mutual ways, holding them at both distance and proximity in order to constitute an ethical relationship with the non-human world. Moore's poems work to restore distance whereas animal documentaries collapse and sentimentalize. Her lengthy poems of intense, unanticipated descriptions restore dignity to the otherwise subsumed, objectified animal other.

### II.III

#### **Moore, Film, and the *ars poetica***

While "Poetry" is Moore's notorious *ars poetica*, Heather Cass White argues that "The Pangolin" more adeptly articulates Moore's poetic ethos during the 1930s. Indeed, Moore identifies the body of the artist as in tune with the pangolin, configuring the figure of the poet as an ingenious animal-machine and then as a human-animal man. These hybrid artists speak to Moore's processing of the shifting technologies of art in the filmic age: as the art of representation evolves, the skin of the artist mutates too. Moore situates the modernist melding of art and machine as consistent with the principles of the renaissance and stretches this line of thinking to consider the human as relational to the animal as rather than in opposition to it.

Cass White notes that the poem's primary placement in *The Pangolin and Other Verse* emphasizes the importance of "The Pangolin" to Moore's earlier poetic ideals. She illuminates the implications of the poem's reordering:

The pairing of these poems and the privileging of "The Paper Nautilus," [in the earlier collection] show beautifully the difference between Moore in the thirties and Moore in the forties. The former decade saw her triumph of independence and invention as a poet; the latter initiated a series of new struggles from which Moore would emerge quite changed. (xxi)

According to Cass White, the declining health of Moore's mother accounts for these struggles that altered Moore's perception so much that the maternal figure of "The Paper Nautilus" eclipsed the artist-engineer figure of "The Pangolin" by the time *What Are Years?* was published. I argue that the Moore of the 1930s was keenly attuned to poetic invention as she integrated contemporary debates about art and representation in the age of film into her poems. This fierce poetic vision involved reconsidering the workings of visibility. Cass White continues:

The differences between "The Pangolin" and "The Paper Nautilus" are stark, and suggest the intellectual and emotional shifts I have outlined: where the male pangolin roams about stealthily and sturdily to nourish himself, the female paper nautilus "scarcely eats" until her eggs are laid. "The Pangolin" ends with the image of a man renewing his courage in the glare of a sublime sun; "The Paper Nautilus" concludes with the image of the cradling arms of a maternal creature. (xxi-xxii)

In addition to the poem promoting a vision of an active artist, "The Pangolin" resonates strongly with Moore's interest in new film-enabled perspectives and technological ingenuity during the 1930s. The roaming pangolin nourishes engages with his environment, feeding off

of it and finding artistic inspiration in his climate. The figure in “The Pangolin” is artistically and technologically innovative. While Moore’s construction of this kind of artist figure speaks to her poetic, cinematically attuned attitude in the 1930s.

“The Pangolin” evinces Moore’s film-inspired poetic ethos of the 1930s, paying homage to the machinery and artistry of the armoured creature. The pangolin is “the night miniature artist- /engineer, is Leonardo’s / indubitable son?” (27). Moore focuses on the animal’s hybrid, cyborg qualities, a “machine-like” (29) and “mechanicked” (30) creature that fuses machine and nature. The peculiar spelling of “mechanicked” embeds a strangeness into the animal’s natural, artistic, mechanical body and is suggestive of the supernatural world of occult magick, creating a figure whose body straddles many realms, the real and uncanny, natural and mechanical, animal and human, artistic and scientific. Moore’s fascination with this multivalent artist figure is telling. He is a renaissance figure in lineage from Da Vinci, culling from art and natural science and, like Moore, studying fine art and natural science in order to create. In this poem, rather than envisioning the animal as a spectacle in order to emulate nature documentaries, Moore explicitly identifies with the pangolin as an artist, forging a sense of artistic camaraderie with a figure that defiantly and unexpectedly draws from many fields. The animal’s body is mechanical and natural, an entity that the poet seeks to relate to in a way that evades the consumptive human gaze. She looks at this body not as a site of ownership, but as a similar hybridized animal, embedded in natural and synthetic webs. Since the poem is the genre of the *ars poetica*, she forges a radical sense of empathy with the animal rather than merely scrutinizing its body to pose questions about human power and art. Certainly Moore uses the animal’s body to express a merging of scientific and artistic impulses; its hybridized body yokes biological, mechanical, artistic perspectives. But she also imbues the animal with a facet of humanity that she also identifies with—art-making. The figure of the pangolin is a crafter, sensitive to variant fields of

knowledge. By casting the animal as a tech-savvy artist in lineage from Da Vinci, Moore takes aim at received tropes of the animal as pure, natural and outside of culture. She rebrands the pangolin in deeply cultural terms but, in doing, so calls attention to how human language mediates her perception of the animal. Ultimately, this rendering affords the animal other dignity and a complex identity beyond the conventional, patronizing depictions of animal documentaries.

In Moore's vision, the pangolin is an artist figure that toils to survive. The poem's gaze converses with animal documentaries as it depicts the body, artistry, and survival of the pangolin. And as with the animal documentaries she admires, Moore visually dazzles her audience by detailing the animal's corporeal qualities and behavioural habits. And yet she pushes this perspective beyond the traditional perspective of animal documentaries. She deploys a haptic gaze that encourages the tactile, sensual texture of the animal's skin in order to encourage an unexpected, visceral engagement with the animal other. She begins the poem with a very close close-up:

Another armoured animal—scale  
lapping scale with spruce-cone regu-  
larity until they  
form the uninterrupted central  
tail-row. (27)

Moore's poetic eye is particularly cinematic in these opening lines; she makes use of techniques akin to close up and the fetishistic montage McCabe describes in *Cinematic Modernism*. She zooms in on the animal's textured body, emulating a close up that zooms until the units of the exterior shell recall the natural pattern of the spruce-cone. These focused descriptions and line breaks produce the effects of superimposition and montage. The animal's skin functions like a film screen, producing an uninterrupted series of images that

unite and overlap as they proceed. The first stanza emphasizes movement: the “lapping” close-up of the pangolin’s armour moves in such a way that the reader is confronted with a living skin screen, a body that exists in relation to and yet distinct from the observer. The first line’s dismissive, alliterative listing of the pangolin—“Another armoured animal”—is incredibly general. Indeed, this is a matter of “scale”: the scope of the first stanza jumps from extreme ambiguity (“another [...] animal”) to extreme specificity (the distinct pattern of the animal’s skin). The result is a cinematic close up on the animal, but the perspective isn’t in the voyeuristic, possessive one of the animal film. Rather, Moore evokes a sensual visuality, proffering her readers a way to relate to the animal body-to-body. Moore’s abrupt movement from generality to precision is striking and affective, dragging the reader between the two extremes of faint generality and intense, sensual proximity. This immense contrast alerts the reader to the range and scope of the gaze, its power to be vague or painfully precise. In wielding the gaze’s seeming omnipotence, Moore borrows the gaze of animal documentaries, but as a way to rework visuality into haptic sensuality in order to better approach the animal. She wields the drastic range to defamiliarize the other, recognizing it as a fellow living creature that exists inside and outside of human culture.

Although Moore appears to treat the animal’s body with a filmic eye, she also forges identification with the pangolin as a hybridized body and labouring artist. Indeed, the mutable, expanding skin of the animal-artist channels the evolving parameters of art amidst new media; artist and body of work are cyborg-like, welding natural, technological, and textual interfaces. The pangolin forages for ants during the night, “stepping / in the moonlight, on the moonlight” (28)—he enacts a lyric choreography with the lunar light. His tail is a “graceful tool, as prop or hand / or broom or axe”—a multipurpose instrument invoking both artistry and technology as part of his hunting method. These two lines juxtapose the “graceful tool” with the blunt, mundane tools of “broom or axe,” eliciting an

unanticipated swivel towards bathos. This bathetic tone lauds the animal without placing it on a pedestal. Later Moore reminds that “To explain grace requires / a curious hand” (29): in other words, beauty requires handiwork, craft, *and* an element of curiosity or peculiarity. The poem presents a graceful, dexterous, multitalented portrait of the animal, evading simplified, cartoonish renderings of the animal and encouraging readers to broach the pangolin with the respectful distance of curiosity.

The poem mediates on the lyric. Moore depicts artistic toiling by moonlight:

a true ant-eat-  
er, not cockroach-eater, who endures  
exhausting solitary  
trips through unfamiliar ground at night,  
Returning before sunrise; stepping  
in the moonlight, on the moonlight  
peculiarly, that the out-  
side edge of his  
hands may bear the weight and save the claws  
for digging. (28)

The poem emphasizes the labour underpinning art making—artists are not only minds creating great thoughts, but bodies forging and working in the physical realm. Moore uses the pangolin to remind of the artist’s physicality and the material constraints of art making. Artistic craft for this creature is mechanical yet graceful, utilitarian yet artistic, embodying Moore’s Protestant work ethic. The poem emphasizes the pangolin’s hands and claws that create art, bear weight, and dig. The artist toils in solitude through his material habitat, enacting a poetic stereotype as the poem revisits the trope of the Romantic artist. But her poet-animal, instead of viewing nature from a cultivated distance, burrows into the soil for

sustenance while touched by lyric moonlight. Moore contends with the lyrical mode—as signalled by the animal stepping in and on the moonlight—and fuses it with mechanical, natural, human and animal bodies and voices. Moore challenges the stereotype of the Romantic poet and patronizing stereotypical depictions of animals by merging the pangolin with the artist figure.

As the poem progresses, the gaze shifts from animal to human while maintaining the animal documentary vision. This transition makes for an overlap in which Moore treats the human with the curiosity and otherness typically reserved for animal subjects. This subtle shift from animal to human aligns the two figures due to perspective, artistry, and, importantly, their corporeality:

Beneath sun and moon, man slaving  
to make this life more sweet, leaves half the  
flowers worth having,        needing to choose  
wisely how to use the strength;—  
a paper-maker  
like the wasp; a tractor of foods-stuffs,  
like the ant, spidering a length  
of web from bluffs  
above a  
a stream; in fighting, mechanicked  
like the pangolin; (20)

Moore places the human in the natural other's world through simile. The analogue simulates sameness while also acknowledging difference, as opposed to the metaphor's assertion of sameness. The human is both like these animals and yet different from them. This perspective in which the poem compares human behaviour to the behaviours of the wasp, ant, spider and

pangolin recalls the personification of animal documentaries that typically frame animal behaviour in human cultural terms. This reversed anthropomorphism is uncanny, creating a caricature of man in emphasizing his likeness to animals. This particular transition of human-animal overlap recalls Walter Benjamin's take on the animal-human caricatures, such as Mickey Mouse who "proves that a creature can still survive even when it has thrown off all resemblance to a human being. He disrupts the whole hierarchy of creatures that is supposed to culminate in mankind" (545). Moore in forging a likeness between human and animal as artist figures disrupts this received hierarchy and chain of being that props up human power. Instead, her cinematic view of the human poet as animal-like promotes points of intersection and divergence amongst the human and other industrious animals. Lyrically inclined ("beneath sun and moon"; "making life more sweet"), the poet crafts writing just as other organisms produce paper, food, material and social webs—these are all products of daily life in this ecological network of simile and survival. The use of the simile emphasizes this ecological network whereas metaphor would have seamlessly effaced the linkages, artificially collapsing the distinctions between human and animal. In this stanza, simile functions as a point of intersection between species because the word "like" brings to the forefront links amongst human and non-humans. Simile is a useful tactic to acknowledge similarity and difference. And so Moore's rendering of the human and non-human acknowledges mutuality and distance. In this particular stanza, Moore aims the gaze normally reserved for animals at the human, thus forging a connection between the entities while also destabilizing normative, hierarchal ways of looking by inviting this self-reflection. Moore reworks the perspective of the animal documentary to make strange conventional ways of looking at animals and to underscore the power embedded in these processes.

The poem concludes with a human artist figure staring into the sublime of the sun as its light renews his inspiration. This repeated motif of cycles of moonlight and sunlight

edifying the artist is a seemingly Romantic gesture. But as the poem's shifted gaze from pangolin to human denotes, the view of the human remains similar to the view of the pangolin, creating an uncanny point of connection with the animal. The human is an animal abiding environmental cues at the same time as waxing lyrical by them. The poem markedly frames the man as an animal:

Consistent with the  
 formula—warm blood, no gills,  
 two pairs of hands and a few hairs—that  
 is a mammal; there he sits in his  
 own habitat,   serge-clad, strong-shod. (31)

The poem identifies the artist as a mammal during this moment of artistic inspiration, reworking the chain of being that downplays human animality. Moore draws attention to the man's animal features in the moment in which he gazes at the sun and chants a moniker of artistic renewal:

‘Again the sun!  
 anew each  
 day; and new and new and new,  
 that comes into and steadies my soul!’ (31)

The human is both animal and artist and the poem reminds the two are not mutually exclusive. Furthering this overlap between human and animal in this *ars poetica*, the man's gazing at the sun reverberates with the owl scene from “Fiction or Nature?” in which the animal stares back at the camera as “both eyes flam[e] yellow” with “one toward the sun” (306). The use of the gaze is a self-aware reworking of the clichéd cinematic convention. In Moore's poem, the gaze is reworked to forge a moment of communion that acknowledges itself as trope. The gesture is notable because the artist gazes at the sun, modelling a poetic

position as he looks towards the sun and the cultural cusp for inspiration. And yet in her return to this sun-gazing figure, Moore resists the lyrical pathway of human conquering nature and rendering it beautifully, and, instead, seeks to identify with the animal as a poet, as a fellow agent of art making.

Through likening the poet to the industrious pangolin, Moore conceives of the artist figure in the early twentieth century as one who toils to merge past poetic traditions of the lyric with the new mechanized tools of film. Through attention to the labour and body of the pangolin, Moore illuminates the physicality of art making and connects human and animal through the body and labour. And so Moore appropriates the gaze of animal documentaries and then wields it as a haptic tool for the creation a new, strange ways of looking at the animal in relation to the human and looking at the human in relation to the animal. This strategy forges a human/non-human rapport that, like the simile, is based on similarity *and* difference. Although the hybridized body of the pangolin becomes a screen for Moore to work through these haptic poetics, it is also a protagonist that Moore affords distance and dignity all the while casting the animal as a fellow creature and artist, different but worthy of respect.

## II.IV

### **The Ethical Gaze and Spectacle of the Animal Other**

While “The Pangolin” relays Moore’s keen interest in technology and animals in relation to her poetic ethos, the poems of the 1930s and early 1940s enact the gaze of documentary film and have the animal perform as spectacle. For the poet, film accentuated how visuality and power intersect. Many of Moore’s poems of the 1930s, such as “Old Tiger,” “The Steeple-Jack,” “The Hero,” and “The Plumet Basilisk,” and “He ‘Digesteth Hard Yron” (from the early 1940s) interrogate these issues and engage the genre of the

animal documentary. In some cases, the poems simulate the documentary genre's exploration of exotic animals in their environments, but often the poems stray from the course and embark on elaborate, learned, obscure, and peculiar descriptions of animals that subvert the clichés and sentimentality found in the animal documentary. These poems emulate and critique the spectacle of animal, engaging with the ethics of looking at animals. At times, the poems fathom how animals are engaged in this process as spectators or invisible specimens. Moore's personification makes the simple and easy technique of anthropomorphism strange; she reminds of its false sheen all the while using it in unexpected ways. In deploying personification and exploring the act of looking, Moore questions the received animal-human power dynamic and invites a newfound relationality that foregrounds empathy and distance.

Moore's exploration of personification and spectacle converges in "Old Tiger," a poem in which the speaker addresses the animal. The poem situates the tiger as spectator of other animals through a series of questions. The address of the Tiger flags, of course, William Blake's own "The Tyger." And yet the poem serves as a resistant elaboration of the Romantic poem. In Moore's visualization, the tiger exists in relation to symbolic *and* ecological forces. An array of animals perform for the tiger while the speaker seeks to articulate the tiger's judgements of the interspecies relations, simulating an interpersonal relation with the animal. In this way, the poem invokes the traditional chain of being, but then corrupts the strict hierarchy through a series of questions that indicate connection rather than separation and that assume counterintuitive perspectives. Moore focuses on the ecological network that the tiger and speaker are necessarily part of despite their regal spectator status. In particular, the poem emphasizes the facial expressions of animals as they engage in various ways of looking, focalizing these observations through a dialogue with the old tiger. Moore depicts animals gazing and perceiving as humans do—paradoxically formulating looking as a personified act that suggest alternative perspectives beyond the dominant human one. In this

focus on animals looking, Moore essentially asks the question “why look at animals looking?” She scrutinizes this human gaze and promotes, in its place, a haptic vision of animals as relatable yet distinct entities.

For example, the interrogative mode of the poem appears to speak for the tiger and yet, at the same time, lets the descriptions hang open-ended. The poem begins by addressing the old tiger, establishing the animal’s superiority over the other animals he gazes upon:

You are right about it; that wary  
presumptuous young baboon is nothing to you; and the  
chimpanzee?

An exemplary hind leg hanging like a plummet at the  
end of a

string—the tufts of fur depressed like grass (45)

The unusual beginning in which the speaker addresses the tiger creates a presumptuous intimacy: obviously the speaker ventriloquizes the tiger. However, the choice of the second person rather than the first person to articulate the tiger’s opinions acknowledges this distance between human and animal. The intimacy is evidently artificial. Ironically, this distance occurs during an affirmation or confirmation of accuracy (“You are right”). And yet the repetitions of questions reveal a tacit uncertainty. The speaker gives the impression of relaying the tiger’s thoughts and yet the questions accrue, further undermining the certainty of these stray observations. The speaker imagines the tiger’s monologue upon viewing other animals. For example, the speaker evaluates the relationship between tiger and baboon (“that [...] baboon is nothing to you” [45]), making a judgement call on the interaction from afar and signalling a desire to map out interspecies relations. The presumption on the part of the speaker emulates the scientific voices of authority from the animal documentary genre—the

speakers who are charged with evaluating the animals' behaviours and relationships with each other. Moore parodies this particular, imperial type of human intervention and presumption. Even more the speaker's interrogative mode demands a response, disclosing a yearning for connection with the tiger and to engage in a dialogue despite a vast gulf.

"Old Tiger" is a poem structured by way of sight lines that contemplate the gaze. Moore facilitates a discussion on interspecies relations through depicting significant variations of the act of looking. Looking in this poem becomes a fraught act that organizes power relations in the animal world. The poem performs an over-the-top monarchical survey of the animal kingdom in such a way that foregrounds the disrespect of this imperial gaze. For example, after describing the chimpanzee, the speaker asks of the tiger "what is there to look at?" (45). The question seemingly possesses derogatory connotations, staged as a dismissal of the chimpanzee's significance to the tiger. And yet the poem takes great care to detail the chimpanzee: the "tufts of fur depressed like grass / on which something has been lying—nominal ears /of black glass—" (45). The irony of a dismissive question followed by an elaborate visualization signals the distance Moore enacts in this poem to critique this hierarchal attitude that informs gazing at the natural world. The speaker further answers the question by listing more animals, panning to a surrounding field of vision dotted with lively organisms:

what is there to look at? And of the leopard, spotted  
underneath and on

its toes; of the American rattler,

his eyes on a level with the crown of his head and of

the lesser

varieties, fish, bats, greyhounds and other animals of

one thickness

the same may be said, they are nothing  
to you and yet involuntarily you smile; (45)

The poem invokes an eighteenth-century hierarchal chain of being in which the tiger who surveys the animals is greater than the “lesser / varieties.” The poem declares, once again, these other creatures are meaningless to the tiger. Yet they prompt a positive, involuntary facial reaction, suggesting the hierarchal view is flawed. The poem depicts the visceral experience of the tiger as spectator and fellow feature. If taken further, the odd dismissive refrain—“they are nothing to you”—actually conceptualizes the animal other as existing without the cultural baggage humans assign to them. From the tiger’s perspective they are material entities rather than symbols and thus the negation of “they are nothing to you” signals an escape, that they are nothing or, rather, something outside of human language. The poem cleverly articulates the limits of the human vision by placing the tiger as the main spectator and underscoring a physical and emotional response. The poem negotiates and formulates ecological interconnections in peculiar and new ways. In doing so the poem shuts down the hierarchal attitude that underpins looking at animals. In her other poems, Moore simulates a haptic experience of looking and bodily relation rather than hierarchal ownership, but in this poem she begins by patently paying attention to the gaze and then slowly dismantling this particular power-based convention of looking at animals.

Moore’s tiger poem spends a great deal of time examining the sight lines of its animal inhabitants as a way to re-conceptualize relationality. The American rattler has “eyes on level with the crown of his head” (45) that return the tiger’s spectator gaze. The poem characterizes the tiger as scholarly, having read Dante’s Hell: “in / the thick / of the enlightenment along with the cultured” (48), observing the other animals from an erudite distance: “looking at

them with that fixed, abstracted li- / zardlike expression of // the eye which is characteristic / of all acute observers” (48). The speaker projects onto the erudite tiger’s estrangement from the other animals. The joke is that the human is distanced from the other animals due to his affinity for human culture. The human speaker projects her distance from the natural world onto the tiger. Part of Moore’s tactic in “Old Tiger” and in other poems is to deploy erudite references in her descriptions as to distance the creatures out of respect for their peculiar otherness. This ironic strategy resists of animal films that sentimentally collapse that distance. But even more so the speaker declares that “you // see more than I see but even I / see too much” (45-6). The speaker relates to the tiger as a fellow predator whose “opposition is pastime and struggle is / meat” (45). The poem situates the human speaker and tiger as relational organisms distanced from other animals due to their predatory and spectator position. Moore’s combining of spectator and predator intimates an active<sup>25</sup> aspect of seeing. This gesture underscores how humans’ looking at animals is part of an ecological dynamic in which power and actions are at stake. In this moment, ferocity and predation become enmeshed with seeing. Yet this type of seeing is “too much”; its power is excessive. The speaker expresses fatigue over this hierarchal mode of looking at and relating to animals.

The poem goes on to conceive of humans and animals in networks and ecologies and culture, considering how the variant creatures and their behaviours compose a community:

“The select many”:

are human, you are inhuman and the misterious [sic] look,

the way

in which they comport themselves and the conversa-

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<sup>25</sup> Phenomenologist Alva Noë argues in *Action in Perception* that action and perception are inextricably intertwined since “to perceive you must be in possession of sensorimotor bodily skill” (11). Moore’s association of predatory animals with the act of looking accentuates this particular connection between action and perception.

ion imported from the  
birdhouse, are one version of culture. (46)

The speaker distinguishes between the human and inhuman, accounting for difference between human and the animal other. And yet the culture of this mysterious sect comes from birdhouse, from clusters of animals. The poem envisions an ecological niche as a version of culture that the tiger surveys. Moore creates a destabilizing climate that questions the validity of the received predatory hierarchal chain of being in which the speaker, old tiger, and fellow animals are enmeshed and instead envisions a scene in which multiple animal and human cultures overlap.

The poem contains Moore's signature paradoxical adages. "Old Tiger" at one point anticipates the key idiom of "He 'Digesteth Hard Yron": "The power of the visible / is the invisible" (100) in the less formally proverbial but similarly themed lines: "In that exposition // is their passion, concealment yours" (46). The poem plays with vision and concealment, provoking the boundaries of human knowledge and sight just as "The Plumet Basilisk" toys with the lizard's cloaking of his own body. This paradoxical friction permeates the final lines of the poem:

you know one thing, an inkling of which has not  
entered their minds; you  
know that it is not necessary to live in order to be  
alive. (48)

Once more the poem differentiates the tiger from other animals by way of knowledge, inviting the tiger into the post-Eden human world. The contradictory epigrammatic wisdom that concludes "Old Tiger" echoes menacingly with the mention of non-living life. It calls to mind taxidermy and its human-mastery-over-nature fantasy: the seemingly living animals rendered into dead artefacts made to perform nature in museums. The poem also provokes the

question how did the tiger obtain this knowledge? Is the old tiger a tiger skin or taxidermied tiger comforting the Imperial human? The poem elevates the tiger through interrogation, but, in doing so, asks what separates him from the other animals? Does the old tiger haunt the speaker? The poem interrogates conventional human-animal relations through disrupting and parodying the hierarchical chain of being.

The finale's paradox questions the definition of what is living in an era of simulated experience and moving images. Moore's use of the oxymoronic adage is a subtle tactic. She weds a familiar, wise tone while subverting common sense and expectations. This particular form allows her to engage traditional conventions of looking at and describing the animal other all the while ironizing and upending hierarchal power relations with the non-human other and within human-animal relations. On a general level, the poem adopts the authoritative voice of the animal documentarian, but the animals perform strange feats that undercut these stereotypes. She configures humans and tigers as aligned through hierarchal spectatorship that distances them from a broader, ecological community. In "Old Tiger," Moore ironically deploys the hierarchal gaze to convey it as a fraught experience that corrupts humans' abilities to relate to other animals with respectful distance.

Moore's investment in renegotiating ways of looking and relating to animals often makes use of movement and dynamic gesture in poetry. While critical of the documentary gaze, the poet grasps how the movement of film produces a visceral reaction in the viewer akin to awe. And so she infuses movement into poetry, harnessing the dynamism of cinema. For example, "The Steeple-Jack" is a quaint scene brought to life through Moore's poetic rendering. Indeed, Bromwich argues that "The Steeple-Jack may now seem a more complacent piece of naturalism than it really is" and is a meditation on the mind's strength of sight. (109). While the poem takes its initial root in naturalism and ekphrasis, it also enacts a cinematic, sensual turn in representing the natural world. The poem's initial reference to Albrecht Dürer situates

the poem as an ekphrastic poem invested in art history: the etchings and scenes of traditional fine art come to mind. The poem begins: “Dürer would have seen a reason for living / in a town like this, with eight stranded whales / to look at” (50). This initial scene is jarring: the stranded whales form a composition that the speaker judges with a cool aesthetic distance, suggesting their doomed plight is a likely subject for an etching. Thus the poem conjures a distant, voyeuristic, aesthetic pleasure through the act of looking, especially in relation to an older artistic medium that produces static images, like etchings. The poem opens with a critique of looking at animals without empathy. The opening lines depict a stark contrast: setting a human’s reason for living against the tragedy of the stranded whales. The cruelty comes not only from the cavalier attitude towards the animals’ plight, but from their visual rendering into aesthetic artefact by the artist’s eye. Immediately Moore makes use of this juxtaposition to emphasize the fraught relationship between humans and the non-human world and art’s role in this dynamic.

Additionally, the static, etched image of the animals does not do justice to the dynamic breadth of animal life and experience. The rest of the poem emits a distinctly cinematic quality with dynamic depictions of movement, empathy and awe throughout the poem’s various vantage points. Moore contemplates etching in the context of the twentieth-century, an era in which the image is constructed from real-life images and by way of cameras. Certainly, Moore invokes art history through Dürer, nodding to the artist’s stationary depictions of quotidian life, but her poem seeks to relay the movement and empathy that the haptic eye enables. Moore hails Dürer and his etchings, but swiftly transports his work into a more dynamic realm through cinematic framing: “water etched / with waves as formal as the scales / on a fish” (50). Moore breaks down the image of water, calling attention to its composition of smaller moving parts, as she did with the pangolin’s armour, that form the larger picture. The poem then compares the waves with scales of a fish

and the simile becomes a form of superimposition as the visual patterns fade into each other. The comparison of wave to fish scale harkens to how Dürer etched the realistic yet imaginative renderings of the world and how poetry in the age of cinema can work to etch similar imagined realities.<sup>26</sup> Although this invocation of Dürer establishes Moore's investment in art history, it also signals Moore's multi-modal focus in which she draws from a range of art materials, evoking multiple generations of visual media. In calling on Dürer, Moore announces an interest not only in the history of visual art but also in how a range of artistic modes—textual, visual, cinematic—render scenes of life and the natural world.

She focuses on the intricacy of animals' movements in such a way that prompts visceral response and in order to focus on the corporeal reality of the animal other. As a result, Moore's sketch of the seagulls in the next stanza resonates with her descriptions of filmed animals in "Fiction or Nature?" as she enumerates the animals in a flying flock, accounting for their bodies as fluid, moving parts of the poetic image:

Only by one in two's and three's, the seagulls keep  
     Flying back and forth over the town clock,  
 Or sailing around the lighthouse without moving their wings—  
 Rising steadily with a slight  
     Quiver of the body—or flock  
 mewling (51)

The movements Moore records are minute: the seagulls barely move their wings, demonstrating only a slight quiver, but Moore's detailed focus is intense enough to capture the subtle shifts of the seagulls in order to conjure a kinetic quality underneath a seemingly serene image. This close scrutiny, like the very close close-up of the owl, relays a pleasure

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<sup>26</sup> The wave as moving unit or force recalls the conclusion of "In The Days of Prismatic Color" where truth sustains confrontation with waves amidst "the gurgling and all the minutiae" (41).



understanding. Moore harnesses the gaze in this instance and then slackens its firm grip, questioning its privileged, knowing stance. These lines suggest much of what humans perceive in the natural world is not knowable in human terms and hence is confusion. This acknowledgment of lack of knowledge deviates from the script of mastery embedded in the animal documentary.

“The Steeple-Jack” deploys a cinematic perspective to consider the material qualities that underpin representation. The poem concludes by following the steeple-jack, a craftsman undertaking the repair of a church in the act of “gilding the solid-/ pointed star” (53). The Steeple-Jack stands at a lofty height while performing the ordinary task of repairing a physical object of symbolic importance. Moore’s focus on the repair of the church’s star underscores the materiality embedded in symbolic systems—as with how film produces sensory astonishment through portraying images of the physical world. Even more, the poem follows the Steeple-Jack’s vantage point so that the speaker ascends in order to look down at the human and non-human world, examining it through a privileged lens surveying the scene:

The  
 place has a school-house, a post-office in a  
 store, fish-houses, hen-houses, a three-masted  
 schooner on  
 the stocks. The hero, the student,  
 the steeple-jack, each in his way,  
 is at home. (53)

Striking a cinematic pose, the poem occupies the position of the all-seeing camera’s eye to portray the quaint village. Also, the heightened vantage point of the final stanzas casts human activity in a similar light to the animals and habitats of a documentary. The poem takes on a zoological view of the poem’s cast of humans, rendering them like the subjects of animal

documentaries and Moore's own animal poems and defamiliarizing the human subject in the process. Moore forges a point of intersection amongst human and non-human bodies through the act of looking. The poem surveys human, animal, and human-built structures as part of the town or ecosystem. As the poem concludes, it continues to focus on the materiality and fallibility that accompanies the symbolic order: the worker performs the quotidian work so that the star can illuminate its sign. Moore emphasizes materiality and metaphor as intertwined. Even the star "which on a steeple / stands for hope" (53) needs material repair and labour. Moore reworks looking in "The Steeple-Jack" to remind of the corporeality and vulnerability of human and non-human bodies. Ultimately, Moore renders her human and animal subjects mutually vulnerable, rerouting the gaze towards a haptic space of relationality. Moore aims to refute the hierarchal module of human mastery over nature and advocate for a relational ecosystem. The poem adapts the filmic gaze to survey human and non-human figures, envisioning them as embodied and enmeshed.

Originally "The Steeple-Jack" formed the first part of three-act poem titled *Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play* that Moore later revised into separate entities. The original title of the long poem articulates Moore's multi-modal sensitivity, indicating this particular poem's hybridity and adaptation of various media. The long poem with its original title speaks to Bakhtin's polyphony as Moore integrates strains of the novel and drama into the poem. This combination of novel, poem and play resonates with film due to its status as the super medium that absorbs dramatic, novelistic, and poetic inclinations. Like H.D.'s hybrid epics, Moore's lengthier poem demonstrates a broadening and proliferation of modes and voices that speaks to her filmic inclinations.

The third section of the poem, later titled "The Hero," contends with relating to the natural world and its others. Moore creates a strange atmosphere of familiarity, fear and empathy that elucidates how looking is the grounds for both creating distance and forging

relationships. The poem toes the difficult line of resisting romanticizing the non-human other while also acknowledging its veritable difference. The poem begins as a journey:

Where there is personal liking we go.  
 Where the ground is sour; where there are  
 weeds of beanstalk height,  
 snakes' hyperdermic teeth, or  
 the wind brings the "scarebabe voice"  
 from the neglected yew set with  
 the semi-precious cats' eyes of the owl  
 awake, asleep, "raised ears extended to fine points," and so  
 on—love won't grow (57)

This initial sentiment suggests an itinerary based upon affinity, but then the stanza swerves towards a scene of uneasiness: highly vocal wind, piercing snake teeth, and giant weeds produce a natural terrain terrifying to human sensibilities. This opening atmosphere conveys humans' lack of control over the environment—even the owl defies the known world by possessing cat eyes. This otherworldly garden does not cultivate human love or invite the human world in despite the inaugural suggestion of embarking on an affable journey. The speaker continues to affirm a collective human distaste for this natural scene in the second stanza, declaring "We do not like some things and the hero / doesn't" (57). The uncertain territory and deviating head-stones inspire fear in the protagonist, a so-called hero. The poem performs disdain for what the human cannot control or understand. The hero's fear comes to fruition with the hidden owl, who reappears only to further terrorize: "The hero shrinks / as what it is flies out on muffle wings, with twin yellow / eyes—to and fro—" (58). The natural world poses a challenge to the hero who is suddenly incapable of conquering or taming the natural world despite traditional scripts that would position the hero as master. Unlike the owl

in the animal documentary whose gaze signals a human-like quality, the owl in this poem hides and averts its eyes, shutting down the possibility for connection and inspiring a visceral reaction of fear instead of recognition. The hero's "skin creeps"—a cliché that underscores human bodily vulnerability. The poem's cartoonish depiction of the natural world notes how human understanding of the non-human world is often based on fear, with projection stemming from rampant human emotion. The poem with its anxious atmosphere diverges from Moore's typically neutral treatment of the animal world; as John M. Slatin notes "the creatures in Moore's poems are rarely so violent, even in self-defense" (147). And yet this extreme rendering of the natural world counters Moore's poems that portray the natural world in uncanny ways. Her turn towards fear displays the flipside of romanticizing nature—vilifying it. Moore delves deeper into human projection onto the natural world by foregrounding the fear of the feral and unruly animal other that informs human fantasies of mastery over nature.

Moore follows this alienating interaction between hero and the natural world with a peculiar scene of misrecognition from the Bible. This swift jump from horrifying wilderness to biblical parable is mystifying:

Jacob when a-dying, asked  
 Joseph: Who are these? and blessed  
 both sons, the younger most, vexing Joseph. And  
 Joseph was vexing to some. (58)

Despite the contrast between vignettes, the emotional timbre of the scene resonates with the hero's flight through this enduring sense of apprehension. The hero's skin creeps, which is followed by a scene of diverted blessing by way of touch. This parable of Jacob blessing the sons in the wrong order echoes Jacob's own history of having stolen his brother Esau's blessing by donning an animal skin. Given the context of the poem, this thematic rhyming of

Jacob trickily gleaning a blessing by donning animal skin and then Jacob's inverted blessing of Joseph's sons signals a disruption in the standardized hierarchy. The animal skin disguise counters patriarchal lineage. These moments of mixed up blessing undermine the sanctify of the familial patriarchal order. Even further, these diverted blessings operate by way of touch—the skin is an interface that can be manipulated to disrupt received notions of order. Loosely, these associations gesture towards how networks, kinship, ecosystems, are forged out of communion and distance, unease and empathy. The body—touch and animal skin—tethers animals and humans in familial and ecological webs that are fraught emotionally, based on affinity and aversion. The poem suggests that the forging of relationships and the familiarity or mutuality with the other necessitates recognizing difference and dissonance. Moore's intimate portrayal of uneasy relationships counters patriarchal lineage and, instead, views biodiversity not as a utopia, but as delicate network of variant relations.

This emotional rhyme of strange familial relations repeats in the next stanza: the Pilgrim looks “upon a fellow creature's error with the / feelings of a mother—a woman or a cat” (58). The term “fellow creature” signals the strange kinship Moore has been breeding in the poem through the conflation of species and the conflicted biblical blessings. The speaker interweaves feline and maternal figures, enmeshing human and animal genealogies to add to this supernatural environment. Moore corrupts the chain of being by situating animals and humans in familial proximity. In the final stanza, Moore returns to the Old Testament to continue this thread of disavowal: “Moses would not be grandson to Pharaoh” (59). The poem continues to move towards discomfort, hybridity, mixture, and questioning the bonds and hierarchies of kinship amongst humans and animals. The hero ultimately articulates this strange mixture of affinity and aversion in connecting with animals: “It is not what I eat that is / my natural meat” (59). The easy internal rhyme of “eat” and “meat” propagates the sense of singsong cliché we saw in the first few stanzas and masquerades as bequeathed wisdom. In

the context of an animal poem, the mention of meat jolts the established fable-like human-animal relations to recall the capitalistic, agricultural reality that brings urban humans into contact with animals. The zoo, museum, and nature film are carnivalesque anomalies—animals are present in quotidian life, in the everyday line of sight, but as products rather than relational entities. The hero's disavowal makes the consumption of meat strange: the statement's awkward phrasing calls into question the naturalness of meat and this conventional interspecies interaction. The fear the poem introduces refutes expectations. The hero does not deftly fight the natural world or rise up to lofty protagonist's heights. In fact, the hero is shown to be messily embedded in larger ecological, biblical, capitalistic webs of references. Moore challenges normalized interspecies relations—animal as sinister other, as fellow friend, as meat—and emphasizes the competing currents of aversion and affinity that form familiar bonds. While "The Steeple-Jack" asks questions with regards to empathy for the animal other, "The Hero" wades into darker, uncertain territory. Either way, Moore's poems undermine the hierarchal chain of being and articulate the strangeness of received notions of interspecies interactions.

Moore further pursues this defamiliarizing rendering of the animal other in "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron,'" which models an animal documentary that interweaves fiction with nature.<sup>27</sup> Paul argues that the poem functions "like many educational exhibits" and "asks its visitors to look with renewed and more responsible vision at the world around them than they had before entering" (192). But Moore affords the ostrich a certain level of distance and quality of unknowing that respects it as a living other deserving of respect beyond human consumption and classification. With this poem, Moore presents an educational exhibit that actually works to obscure and mystify its audience. The poem depicts the ostrich as an

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<sup>27</sup> In "About One of Marianne Moore's Poems," Wallace Stevens writes that the strength of this poem is "not in its meaning but in this, that it illustrates the achieving of an individual reality" (98). This specificity of reality speaks to Moore's countering of totalizing narratives and construction of a patent and strange portrait of the animal.

enigmatic figure while dissecting the animal's body and cultural resonance, setting up a tension between knowing and unknowing and thus complicating the masterful human gaze. The poem configures this tension as "The power of the visible / [being] the invisible" (100), gesturing towards the knotted relationship of power, knowledge, and visibility, especially with regards to the animal other. Moore's performance of anatomizing of the ostrich situates the animal as a many-layered figure and product of human knowledge; this cultural and environmental investigation into the ostrich reconstructs the human rapport with the non-human other. Moore makes her readers aware of the animal as distinctly other and outside of human language and yet connected to human culture.

The poem tracks the various modes of human knowledge that map onto the ostrich's body. Notably, Greek references inform the poetic footage of the ostrich; the poem combines scientific enquiry with mythology, a typical Moore gesture. Indeed, the subject's entrance into the poem in the first stanza invokes various forms of human-constructed knowledge as Moore opens the poem with both mythological and paleozoological cues. In doing so, the poem interweaves literary and biological records of the past to chart the histories of extinct species and ancient cultures. In the first stanza, cultural and zoological legacies combine to define the animal's body:

Although the aepyornis  
 or roc that lived in Madagascar, and  
 the moa are extinct,  
 the camel-sparrow, linked  
 with them in size—the large sparrow  
 Xenophon saw walking by a stream—was and is  
 a symbol of justice. (99)

Through the figure of the ostrich, Moore unwinds zoological and cultural genealogies. The bird bears both physical (“size”) and metaphorical traits (“symbol of justice”) that situate the animal in natural and cultural ecosystems and histories. Moore focuses on how animals participate in both natural and cultural webs and constitute human knowledge.

The poem observes the ostrich in natural environments and in human myth. Emulating the animal documentary, the speaker observes the spectacle of the animal’s entertaining behaviour: “he / whose comic duckling head on its / great neck revolves with compass-needle nervousness” (99), and his natural habitat: “[he] who builds his mud-made / nest in dust yet will wade / in lake or sea till only the head shows” (100). Alternatively, the poem observes the ostrich’s place in human lore:

The egg piously shown  
as Leda’s very own  
from which Castor and Pollux hatched,  
was an ostrich-egg. (100)

Moore replaces the egg from Castor and Pollux’s origins story in Greek myth with an ostrich egg. The egg is also a gift for “an / emperor who admired strange birds” (100). The involvement of the ostrich in human culture as a symbol or as an artefact seems harmless enough until it escalates in the next stanza with a banquet where “[s]ix hundred ostrich-brains [are] served” (100). The human engagement with the animal spans curious observation, mythology, gift giving, and decadent consumption—Moore’s listing of these various uses for the animal and its products suggests that the gaze may render animals symbolically and physically, often in violent terms. In progressing through these different ways of relating to the animal, the poem demonstrates the breadth of the gaze’s power. Ultimately, Moore shows the ostrich to be a surface upon which humans inscribe their own power and understandings of the world. The poem, like an animal documentary, becomes an arena in which to perceive

the animal other in human terms. And yet the poem's patent awareness of these multiple forms of projection undoes its firm mastery and invites readers to engage with the animal's surface in complicated ways, both as fellow creature and as those who wield the invisible power of the gaze.

The poem's inaugural vignette depicting the ostrich takes place in Ancient Greece. The ostrich is, "The large sparrow / Xenophon saw walking by a stream" (99). First of all, the poem initially defines the ostrich by the Ancient Greek name for it, the camel-sparrow. This name that draws on two other animals calls attention to how the organism exists not merely as an object of scrutiny but our understanding of it is produced through relations. This reference to other animals insinuates the relational and provisional nature of human-constructed ecological knowledge; she defines the animal through its resemble to other known creatures. Furthermore, Moore's introduction of the ostrich combines zoological fixation with mythological inference through the figure of Xenophon, and thus situates the animal in both ecological and cultural spheres. Xenophon was a historian and known for his kind treatment of horses. Moore's reference to him is esoteric and opaque: these two characteristics—his compassion towards animals and commitment to historical scholarship—only tangentially define the ostrich, contributing to the poem's mystifying aura. The animal becomes known through obscure human references. This esoteric reference functions as to simultaneously distance and bring into focus the ostrich, forging a human connection with the animal but making it tendentious. Moore defamiliarizes the ostrich through obscure, highbrow references that turn the animal into an unfamiliar, hard surface. Paradoxically, the distance Moore cultivates reminds that the animal is both bodily and cultural, existing both inside and outside of culture. This restored distance enacts a haptic ethos of relating to the animal though human terms while acknowledging the limits of that knowledge and power.

Importantly, Xenophon provides a model of a human who embodies ecological ethics. Even further, Xenophon's primary function in the poem is that of the spectator: his first action is to watch the exotic animal in its natural environment. Xenophon performs the act of looking; his position as observer likens him to an audience member. Like a modern filmgoer, he bears witness to the ostrich within its ecosystem. With this poem, like the animal documentaries Moore consumed, the observer perceives not only the bird's ecological situation, but also its body rendered into a physical and cultural surface. Film creates an environment in which the animal connects to a human system of entertainment and education—a spectacle. Xenophon models Moore's poetic observer of animals, inevitably engaging in the spectacle but committed to affording the animal its distinctness and dignity. His presence in the poem flags the consumptive impulse in human-animal relations, but also imports the spectre of ethics, suggesting another balanced way of perceiving the animal, a haptic vision that negotiates a dynamic, embodied experience of looking at the animal. The poem enacts an ecosystem of human and non-human bodies interacting in cultural and corporeal terms.

To further this discussion of animal as spectacle, Moore accentuate acts of looking throughout the poem. The text displays how “This bird watches his chicks with / a maternal concentration” (99), emphasizing the gaze through a chain of looking: readers observe the bird watching his offspring. Her attribution of the term maternal to the male ostrich upends normative the gender roles humans foist upon the animal world, turning to it to reinforce human cultural standards. By focusing on the male ostrich's maternal quality, Moore defies expectations and forces readers to contend with a version of parenthood outside patriarchal conventions. She describes the act unexpectedly and calmly, thus staying away from the sentimentalizing trope of motherly animal affection common in animal films. Also, the

emphasis is on the ostrich's act of watching, suggesting that the animal possesses its own point of view that is inaccessible to the human.

This poem describes the bird's behaviours almost as a nature documentary would, but then imports deeply intellectual references and wry humour in lieu of sentimentality or slapstick. The experience of cinema, like museum and zoos, afforded to members of the urban middle class, of whom Moore was a part, an opportunity to look at animals. Film elaborated this legacy of looking at animals. But film presents the tantalizing emulation of reality, implicitly suggesting ownership over nature through visual power the way taxidermic and imprisoned animals presents the colonial fantasy of human mastery over nature. In "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron,'" Moore hails the ostrich visually and thus participates in this cultural rendering of the animal, but in a way that restores distance. Furthermore, she redresses the consumptive attribute of the gaze, forging an ethical rapport with the non-human other that accounts for difference and acknowledges projection.

To accomplish this critique, Moore's ostrich becomes an elaborate spectacle. In the poem, Moore recounts a vaudevillian hunt for the ostrich. In this caper, Moore characterizes the ostrich as sceptical ("the leopard // is not more suspicious"), though in a roundabout way, of men because of their performative and predatory behaviour:

How

could he, prized for plumes and eggs and young,  
used even as a riding-beast, respect men  
hiding actor-like in ostrich skins, with the right hand  
making the neck move as if alive  
and from a bag the left hand strewing grain, (99)

The stanza's framing of men's behaviour as form of puppetry imports a lowbrow theatricality into the poem. The human actors join the animal spectacle. The poem affords the ostrich

moral distance from the men who disrespectfully play with the skins of dead ostriches. Moore affirms the animal usefulness, “prized for plumes and eggs and young,” and grants him dignity while the humans in the poem mock and hunt. She juxtaposes the men’s slapstick theatricality with the ostrich’s almost regal intelligence. Even further, the men’s decoy performance results in the animal’s death. This stanza that foregrounds the theatricality of the hunt renders the animal into bits—both in the material and comedic senses—for consumption. Moore inserts a subtle critique of the capitalist fetishization of animals that spectacle culture promotes, even though she was an enthusiastic participant in it. The poem further declares “eight pairs of ostriches / in harness, dramatize a meaning / always missed by the externalist” (100). The reduction of the ostrich to owned object removed from its ecosystem and placed in human servitude deprives it of significance. Moore argues that the ethical imperative is to envision the organism as part of an ecosystem rather than an isolated commodity. The poem critiques this hyperbolic slapstick spectacle of predation that strips the ostrich of dignity. In contrast, the poem, through its critique and unanticipated depictions of the animal that resist cliché, enacts a haptic gaze that engages with the animal’s cultural and corporeal surface, calling readers envision the animal in unexpected ways and as distinct create enmeshed in cultural, physical, ecological webs with humans.

Furthermore, Moore uses the figure of the ostrich to explore the gaze’s connection with knowledge. The question of how film produces knowledge is of concern to Moore and she interrogates the all-knowing and all-seeing claims of the human gaze. In deploying the ostrich, stereotypically known for hiding its head in sand to diminish visibility, Moore considers the relationship between visibility and knowledge. Moore writes that “eight pairs of ostriches / in harness, dramatize a meaning / always missed by the externalist” (100), a strange adage-like phrase suggestive of meaning its marks. The adage hints at meaning beyond the traditional sight lines of human knowledge as articulated by the gaze. The ostrich

emits meaning that the human who perceives it cannot necessarily discern or possess. And so the poem critiques the seeming sense of absolute knowledge embedded in the act of looking at animals. Instead, there is meaning to be gleaned in relating ethically to the animal other in dignified and unexpected ways and recognizing the limitations of human knowledge of and power over natural world others.. Moore cultivates distance from this fellow living body and braids the ostrich into a complex, cultural, natural, scientific mythological, filmic landscape. The poem plumbs the depths of human knowledge of the ostrich as Moore excavates obscure references and uses related to the animal. However, the poem ultimately focuses on the limitations of the gaze to probe and understand the creature.

Over the course of the poem, the ostrich becomes a symbol of rebellion against human cultural commodification that the gaze enables. The mythological references situate the ostrich within human culture and while the animal's cultural connotations are certainly projection on the part of the poet, the impulse is also an attempt to situate the ostrich within human terms and relate to it as another organism in a larger ecological web rather than merely devour the parts of the ostrich. Moore establishes a continuum in which seeking biological and mythological understandings of the animal lands as an ethical attempt to comprehend the cultural significance of the animal instead of merely invading its habitat. In this poem, the distinction between imperial gaze and haptic looking comes from a sense of self-awareness and limit as Moore forges a complex ode to the ostrich as parent, commodity, spectacle and ultimate other who exists both within and outside of human scope.

And so in "He 'Digesteth Harde Yron'" Moore deploys the ostrich as a means to contemplate the parameters and power of visual culture. In typical Moore fashion, the poem proffers idiomatic wisdom: "The power of the visible / is the invisible" (100). As an enigmatic paradox, the adage suggests the combination of opposites, nesting the invisible within and yet excavating it from the visual realm. In wedding these opposites, Moore

suggests that visual culture is complex enough to house opposing ideas and competing impulses. The animal other is both distinct and relatable, rather than a mere foil to human culture. Moore comprehends that the gaze operates by way of power embedded in perception. Also, for Moore a nature film, despite offering knowledge of nature, actually demonstrates nature as product of culture. Ultimately, Moore expounds that the invisible resides within the visible world, thus making a case for haptic looking. The guiding power of the gaze is beyond the visual realm while at same time articulated within it. The visual realm communicates as it obscures. Although animal documentaries may educate the public, the natural world exists on its own terms that are unknowable within the constraints of human language and culture. Through this ostrich-focused poem that emulates the animal documentary, Moore explores how animals are simultaneously visible and invisible to humans, existing both inside and outside of human language and the human field of vision. She complicates the mastery that accompanies humans looking at animals and instead forges a haptic poetic approach that renders the ostrich animal as a strange yet relatable other, part of cultural and ecological networks with humans. This poem articulates Moore's project of reworking the alienating, domineering gaze of anthropological documentary film and human culture and to reframe the animal other as present yet distant.

In "The Plumet Basilisk," Moore explores visual renderings of animals in the filmic age. Informed by the animals and vistas of documentaries, Moore accomplishes this task by looking at the figure of the plumed basilisk—also known as the "Jesus Christ lizard" for the animal's ability to run short distances across water. The poem features this animal that exhibits the miracle-like behaviour of Christ—the ultimate example of the animal spectacle. The nicknamed animal is an explicit case of human projection onto the animal other, its body and behaviour. Moore's choice to engage with this particular animal flags how we use the animal as a site of projection for human power and language, and yet Moore is sure to

underscore how the other exists indifferently to the connotations attached to it. Moore's tactic celebrates the animal as spectacle while at the same time acknowledging the animal's indifference to and existence outside of human language. Even further, the use of the spectacle aims to unhinge the totalizing power of the gaze, instead, encourage a new way of seeing the animal other. Moore hopes to identify, amidst all this visual dominance, another mode of ethical visibility that accounts for distance. Her haptic approach steeped in sensuality renovates the gaze of the animal documentary beyond its stereotypical reductions of the animal other. As a result, the poem behaves like Moore's beloved animal and travel documentaries—swivelling globally through variant geographic scenes, zooming in on the lizard and other animals. Borroff observes this cinematic zooming in Moore's animal poems: "Other images suggests the 'zoom shot' in which the camera eye can approach the subject far more closely than the human eye—for example the description of the 'minute leg' of the Malay dragon 'trailing half akimbo' after it has dived from a tree top to a hanging spray" (48). Yet the poem enacts animal film conventions in order to reroute them. And so the dizzying discourse of the poem calls attention to the artifice with which humans register the animal other.

For Moore, the plumed basilisk is an excellent example of the cinematically, culturally mediated experience of an animal. In addition to carrying the connotations of Christ, the animal's exhilarating behaviour and strange body becomes a spectacle. The animal as spectacular cinematic specimen calls into question the parameters of reality and representation, how they inform each other. In this wake, Moore deploys the spectacle in such a way that promotes a sensory relation to the animal, its skin and screen, rather than domineering mastery. Moore seeks a sensual and strange mode of viewing the animal to redress the conventions the filmic gaze.



works through the fantasy of animal documentaries, that humans can feel like they know and own the animal other. And yet, she underscores the potency and validity of relating to the mirage. In addition to performing, the lizard also “hid[es] as the chieftain with gold body hid” (75). At the very point the animal conceals his body, the poem cloaks him in the story of El Dorado. Covering the body in gold is a flamboyant act of concealment and retreat. The lizard, even in hiding, is rinsed in myth. Despite the intense scrutiny of the gaze, the poem posits the lizard as the ruler of all that is “invisible or visible”—like Moore’s ostrich. Moore emphasizes how the basilisk, as the monarch of reptiles and the Jesus of lizards, stretches across fields of knowledge both known and unknown to humans. The poem articulates that the animal exists within and outside of human language. Despite the ownership of the gaze, the poem conjures a vision of the animal inflated to a global spectacle, both visible and invisible to the human eye. With the figure of the magical plumed basilisk, Moore probes at the gaze’s power and limits.

Furthering Moore’s fascinating and bold turn to non-fiction discourse, the poem poses as a travel documentary, flipping through various geographies and referencing a range of global toponyms. Indeed, Moore cites prose pieces, such as Frank Davis’s “The Chinese Dragon,” W.P. Pycraft’s “The Frilled Lizard,” and F.W. Hutton’s “Animals of New Zealand” in her further notes in 1967’s *Complete Poems*. Drawing from these disparate prose sources, Moore composes a poem that, like a travel documentary, compresses time and space, jumping from different backdrops and settings within the frame (or on the page). In keeping with the narrative technique of documentaries, Moore provides titles that relay information and organize the footage into labelled scenes for viewers to consume. The poem travels voraciously. In a poem dedicated to a Central American lizard, Moore also references Copenhagen, the Tower of London, and China. Much like Moore’s review “Fiction or Nature?” the poem flits about globally, focusing on multiple ecosystems and countries,

creating a montage-like, panoramic atmosphere. Evidently, the poem channels film with its fast-paced globetrotting and montage-like associations. This compression of toponyms creates a highly artificial poetic environment for the lizard to dwell as the poem scavenges for endless portrayals of the lizard across national and cultural borders.

Moore structures sections of the poem with titles such as “IN COSTA RICA,” (twice) “THE MALAY DRAGON, and “THE TUATERA” to signal new scenes that take place in new environments. The titles allude to various lizards: the plumed basilisk of Costa Rica, the mystical Malay dragon of Indonesia, and the New Zealand tuatera or sea lizard. The poem about the plumed basilisk spirals out to include more global variations on the figure on the lizard, including fantastical creatures like the “serpent-dove peculiar / to the east” (76). The speaker creates a genealogy of lizards, both real and mythical, as the poem travels the globe. For example the tuatera “lays ten eggs / or nine—the number laid by dragons since ‘a true dragon / has nine sons’” (77). The poem overlaps the mythological and real lizards—a gesture that calls attention to how even the depictions of real animals rely on human language and myth. In keeping with this sentiment, the New Zealand section abruptly concludes in Copenhagen with the image of two dragons statues “twirled by the architect” to “symbolize four-fold security (77). This rapid, compressed globetrotting emphasizes the lizard’s divergent yet ubiquitous configurations in human culture. The tuatera passage contrasts the animal’s living conditions, its den and “bird-reptile social life” (76) with an architectural configuration of the dragon as emblem of security for the stock market in Danish culture. The rapid and stark juxtaposition illuminates the various interpretations of this particular genre of animal and how its meanings are context specific. The care Moore gives to tracking the global patterns of the lizard is painstaking and displays a sort of distant respect or strange affection for a creature she can research infinitesimally while acknowledging she may never understand it. The spectre of the lizard figure roves mythically and globally—its multiple,

related yet divergent identities echo H.D.'s multivalent Helen figure. Moore also considers the ramifications of the animal other in the filmic age—the prolific versions that she condenses into her compendium-like poem. Moore constructs a travel narrative for the lizard figure and the poem voyages into idiosyncratic corners of human culture to pay homage to the animal. The poem's roving and abundant references underscore the pervasive extent to which human culture frames the animal. Moore's inclusion of multiple, international lizard figures elucidates the animal's variant meanings; this prolific panorama of lizard archetypes illustrates its enduring constructed meanings across cultures.

The poem roams around the world in search of variant lizard creatures and returns to Costa Rica in the final section. Even as the poem returns to Costa Rica to observe the basilisk in his natural habitat, the gaze continues to wander: "This is our Tower-of-London / jewel that the Spaniards failed to see" which refers to "the innocent, rare, gold- / defending dragon" (79). Swiftly, the poem invokes both Spanish colonial and British imperial histories in order to praise the basilisk. Moore's framing of the animal defies expectations, bringing up imperial, colonial legacies to laud the animal's beauty. This reference suggests the continued current of ownership that underpins the human gaze as Moore underlines the gaze as an imperial force. Importantly, the poem stresses how the conquistadors failed to perceive the preciousness of the lizard. Moore rewrites this oversight by associating the lizard with the crown jewels, imbuing him with regal qualities as the crown jewels metonymically represent the monarchy. Moore upends this imperial legacy and situates the basilisk as a monarch, inverting the classical chain of being. This radical move raises the tiny creature up not merely as a spectacle but as a dignified creature worthy of respect.

Moore's attuned description of the animal's gaze signals the poem's analogue to film. As with her emphasis on the owl's eye in "Fiction or Nature?" the poet underscores the lizard's act of looking and demonstrates how it mirrors as well as diverges from human behaviour.

Her use of the gaze serves as a commentary on the clichéd moment of empathy, but also serves as a meditation on looking as a fraught act of power. Earlier in the poem, the lizard gazes at his likeness in a stream and later on the poem compares the gazes of humans and lizards. According to the poem, night “is for man the basilisk whose look will kill; / but is // for lizards men can / kill, the welcome dark—with the galloped” (78). The lizard’s gaze arrests; his looks kill figuratively while men kill literally. Moore applies the idiom “If looks could kill” to the lizard’s gaze. Evidently, the animal mirrors human behaviour—a meta-moment of knowing projection on the part of the poet that asks if animals look the way humans look? Moore uses this mirroring to call patent attention to anthropomorphism—how humans’ looking at animals always involves figuration. Like the ostrich that watches its young, the lizard partakes in the gaze in his own way. Furthermore, the comparison hints at the power relations embedded in human-animal relations. The lizard may look, but humans’ power of looking possesses fatal, consumptive, obliterating ramifications. The poem in this instance performs a critique the gaze. In its place, Moore constructs a mode of looking that grants distance and respect animal in order to promote a relational rather than domineering rapport with natural world others.

The poem describes the basilisk’s camouflage in highly aesthetic terms. His flight from the arena of sight grants him entry into the fields of art and music:

By the Chinese

brush, eight green

bands are painted on

the tail—as piano keys are barred

by five black stripes across the white. This octave of faulty

decorum hides the extraordinary lizard (77-78)

The speaker cloaks the animal in paint and music when it hides. The faulty decorum of human culture persists, shrouding the basilisk in highly artificial terms. Yet something about the luxury of the painterly imagery invites the reader to relate to the sensual opulence as a visuality that passes between bodies. The musical metaphors continue:

spiderclawed fingers can twang the  
bass strings of the harp, and with steps  
as articulate, make their way  
back to retirement on strings that  
vibrate till the claws are spread flat. (78)

The gaze of the poem focuses intently on the animal's bodily movements, picking up on the minute, musical vibrations of the basilisk's steps. The turn towards the musical further bolsters Moore's treatment of the lizard as low and highbrow multi-sensory spectacle—from carnival curiosity to symphonic harpist. The lizard's varied genres of spectacle resonate with film's fluctuating status as high art in avant-garde circles and lowbrow due to its broader appeal. In addition to frustrating artistic and generic categories, the basilisk evades the boundaries of species. The speaker notes how "the plummet portrays / mythology's wish / to be interchangeably man and fish" (78), as if the water-running lizard has achieved mystical transcendence. The inter-changeability between man and fish recalls a haptic sense in which bodies relate to others despite species and power dynamics. The key verb, however, is "portrays", which further illuminates how the speaker has cast the animal in a role—in this case a mythological cameo—appealing to humans as a figure of mutability. The animal as the spectacle of the other transmutes and transgresses known categories: the lizard appears to defy the laws of physics and achieve the Christian miracle of skirting across water. The animal globetrotts and mutates form. The lizard is important to Moore because its behaviour sparks human curiosity and fascination, compelling comparisons between the animal and

human culture, underscoring how animals take on mythological aura. In describing the basilisk in highly artificial terms and linking the animal to various artistic genres and modes, Moore illuminates how the animal exists through human code; through anthropomorphism we suit it in various garbs and filters. And yet, at the same time, the playful encourages the reader to approach the animal in haptic terms and question the nature of the human gaze. Through myriad absurd visions of the basilisk, the poet reminds of power and touch that accompany the human gaze and advocates for respect that restores the peculiarity and otherness of the animal.

The poem seeks to assuage the domineering gaze of the film. While film purports to document more objectively, Moore in her review of various animal documentaries demonstrates that she understands how the human act of perceiving animals is still loaded with cultural filters. And so her lizard, even in hiding, cannot escape rendering:

he is alive there  
                   in his basilisk cocoon beneath  
 the one of lizard green; his quicksilver ferocity  
                   quenched in the rustle of his fall into the sheath  
 which is the shattering sudden splash that marks his temporary loss. (80)

Even in disappearing and becoming invisible, the lizard is still present and visible. As with the ostrich, the lizard's escape symbolizes the limits of human perspective: we cannot gain access to the animal world even with the advent of film that purports to explicate the animal kingdom. Instead, Moore has her animals perform eloquent spectacles in poetry to probe at the limits and range of the gaze. Borroff calls Moore's animal poems, including "The Plumet Basilisk," "surreal world photographs" that:

bespeak an *intellectual* curiosity as readily satisfied by the printed page as by visible phenomena themselves. The minutiae of external appearance serve in

the poems as data, pointing toward an apprehension of the object in terms of essential form or emblematic significance. (48)

Borroff rightly observes that Moore's highly visual and intimate details point towards a renewed sense of comprehension, but she does not ask what is at stake in this rendering of the animal in such terms. This strange scrutiny and data-driven poetry forges a new way of seeing the animal. Moore expounds the idea of the animal as emblem, stretching its meaning geographically and in strange ways. Upon approaching the limits of the traditional, masterful gaze, Moore suggests that the way forward is to cultivate a haptic rapport that underscores empathy and distance. The plumed basilisk performs, eternally candied-over by human culture; in Moore's unexpected treatment, however, she restores respect for it as an exotic other. In "The Plumet Basilisk," Moore upends the stereotypical conventions and gaze of animal documentaries, finding unanticipated ways to perceive and relate to the animal other in order to promote an ethical gaze based on empathy and distance. As the lizard jumps and dazzles in Moore's prosaic, filmic poetics, she acknowledges the unbridgeable distance or un-leapable gulf between human and animal and yet proceeds anyway unlike the animal documentaries that proceed loudly with a totalizing spirit.

Moore's animal poems contemplate the haptic dimension of looking, aware of the gaze as something that touches and constructs the natural world. Moore investigates what the nature of that touch is. These poetic critiques of animal documentaries articulate how the gaze traditionally obscures its power and sense of touch while supporting normative hierarchal relations with nature. Moore achieves radical revisions through renovating the lyric Romantic ode to the natural world ("no anonymous / nightingale sings in a swamp" [79]) and reworking the animal film. Her process of obscure references and complicated analogies defamiliarize conventional portraits of animals. Her gaze is intense in terms of quality and quantity as the poems invoke painstaking details at great length. Ultimately, her poems attempt to afford her

animal subjects dignity. She constructs a haptic gaze loaded with sense of distance and worth to critique the dominant invasive gaze of mainstream film and culture.

Also, Moore's patent and strange attention to animals removes the emotional connection that typical renderings of animals generate. For Moore, this is an ethical issue; she carves space in her poems to demonstrate the animal's unknowability and otherness while framing them in poetry. Similarly, Adrienne Rich contemplates the ethics of representation in her poetry, but for her the ethical and emotional are intertwined. Moore, a First Wave Feminist, made use of this wry distance and a journalistic, non-fiction poetic voice, prying the emotional valence out of her animal odes, in order to situate herself as an ethically minded poet. Her gaze is ethical and not emotional as a point. And yet there is some pathos in her affinity for the peculiar, eccentric animal. These animals are "humble, little-known, or lightly regarded figures singled out for special commendation in Moore's poems" (Borroff 60). And Moore's gaze restores to these creatures respect in contrast to the objectifying gaze of documentary film. Her patent focus on exotic animals largely unknown to her American audience bestows dignity to the non-human other.

**Chapter Three: “To know the extremes of light / I sit in this darkness:” Adrienne Rich  
and the Filmic Mood**

“I believe poetry speaks not from a separate sphere but in a different voice.” – Adrienne Rich  
Oct 14, 1991

In the late 1960s and early 1970s Adrienne Rich underwent a political awakening and significant poetic shift that coincided with her interest in French avant-garde cinema. Her collection *The Will to Change* (1971) illuminates this pivotal point in the poet’s career and how film played an integral role. Many of the poems in the collection contemplate film thematically: they respond to and revise the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Jean Cocteau, making use of their progressive imaginations and critiquing their patriarchal values. Even further, the long poem *Shooting Script* enacts formally a filmic ethos that articulates Rich’s radical poetic, political progression. Her poetic awakening coincided with her political alignment with leftist politics in the late 1960s—a fraught time in which social justice movements, such as women’s liberation, anti-war protests, lesbian and gay rights, African American civil rights, gained traction through protest. *The Will to Change* demonstrates how Rich drew from film in order to imagine poetry anew at a crucial moment of social movement in American culture.

### III.I

#### Overview

The experience of film afforded Adrienne Rich glimpses of alternative worlds and prompted her to envision an innovative poetic ethos for her feminist, socially engaged project. The futuristic and strange vision of avant-garde film inspired the poet. Rich’s *The Will to Change* (1971) culls from cinema, particularly French experimental directors such as Jean-Luc Godard and Jean Cocteau. While Rich obtained status as a notable American poet

in her time, her intellectual engagement with the French New Wave and avant-garde cinema of the mid-twentieth century dramatically influenced her writing during the late 1960s and early 1970s.<sup>28</sup> *The Will to Change* demarcates a pivot in Rich's career as she migrated away from a restrained modernist-influenced form that characterized her earlier award-winning collections of poetry, such as *A Change of World* (1951) and *The Diamond Cutters* (1955). *Snapshots of a Daughter-in-Law* (1963) marked Rich's initial move towards a feminist, politicized personal poetics in the early 1960s. Also, its invocation of photography exemplifies Rich's turning to visual media for poetic renovation. The formal looseness and fantastical exploration of *The Will to Change* extended this radical project even further. Film catalyzed Rich's progressive poetics and politics. *The Will to Change* as a collection denotes a foray into more experimental and political territory; it tip The 1960s politicized Rich<sup>29</sup> and she returned to poetry with a newfound verve and radical integrity. I argue that Rich's interest in avant-garde film is, at first, thematic as she deploys material from French film and optical metaphors in "The Burning of Paper Instead of Children," "Planetarium," "I Dream I Am the Death of Orpheus," "Images for Godard," and "Pierrot le Fou"—poems that make up the first section of *The Will to Change*. With *Shooting Script*, Rich internalizes the formal and political potential of avant-garde film and enacts an experimental, filmic grammar concerned with transformation. The progression in *The Will to Change* that I track, from a thematic interest in film to formal an innovative film-inspired form, maps onto Rich's political awakening and desire to reconstruct her social reality as America contended with war, racism, women's liberation, and LGBT rights. She found aesthetic solidarity in the visual language of experimental French film, and then constructed a challenging poetic provocation to match her political sensibilities. While Rich's following collections *The Dream of*

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<sup>28</sup> In a letter to David Kalstone dated April 28, 1971, Rich relayed that she was ghostwriting a book on films of the uncanny.

<sup>29</sup> While teaching at City University New York in the late 1960s, Rich became involved in the women's movement, anti-Vietnam and Black Panther activism (Mahoney n.p.)

*Common Language* and *Diving into the Wreck* are better known and lauded for their political integrity, I argue *The Will to Change* is an important moment for Rich. It is not merely a bridge to the later celebrated work: it is an exploratory poetic vessel in its own right.

In a recent article for the *New Yorker*, poet and critic Claudia Rankine, author of *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), praises Rich's legacy as a poet invested in transformation:

As readers, when we are lucky, we can experience a poet's changes through language over a lifetime. For me, these lines enacted Rich's statement, in "Images for Godard" (1970), that "the moment of change is the only poem." Rich's own transformations brought her closer to the ethical lives of her readers even as she wrote poems that at times lost patience with our culture's inability to change alongside her. (n.p.)

Rankine identifies *The Will to Change* as the crucial, transformative text for Rich that brings to light the poet's commitment to an ethical movement towards societal change through language. Frustrated with institutionalized injustice, Rich sought out the poetry of social movement. Rankine notes that the dynamic, ethical transformation of *The Will to Change* is Rich's attempt to reach beyond the oppressive traditions and climate of her present society.

As a collection, *The Will to Change* marks a departure from the high modernist aesthetic for which Rich had garnered praise and awards in her early career. Auden's glowing comments about her first collection, the Yale Younger Poets Prize-winning *A Change of World*, established the emergent poet as indebted to an earlier era and emphasized her respect for tradition.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, Rich discarded the bequeathed modernist mode in the National Book Award-winning collection *Diving into the Wreck*, an important collection and point of

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<sup>30</sup> Auden selected Rich's first book for the Yale Younger Poets Prize and praised how the poems were "neatly and modestly dressed, speak quietly but do not mumble, respect their elders but are not cowed by them" (7).

departure for the poet. But before *Diving into the Wreck* cemented Rich's reputation as a politically significant poet, *The Will to Change* ushered in the sea change. The transitory shape of *The Will to Change* is that of the avant-garde film imaginary—the wandering images and shifting scenery of Cocteau and Godard. The mutable screen with its images made of light governed Rich's poems, rather than the modernist geometry of her past collections. The mantra of *The Will to Change* is “the poet is at the movies” (49). The architecture of the poems opens up to account for the filmic mind. At first, the poems tread filmic ground thematically, in terms of metaphor and atmosphere, revising the innovative yet distant realms of French New Wave film. Rich's often overlooked long poem *Shooting Script*, which concludes the collection, enacts a formal dive into experimentation, rerouting the poet's trajectory from a traditional script towards a mutable, film-like screen of possibility and re-imagining. Evidently, film played an important role in Rich's career as she shifted gears to experiment formally and formulate a new language to address the radical movements of her contemporary American society.

*The Will to Change* articulates an important moment for Rich in which the cinematic lens merges with the lyric mode, disrupting time in such a way that the poet may envision social progression. Rich borrows the world-making possibilities and forward vision of French film as a means to articulate a space outside of her American cultural present. Just as Rankine notes, Rich possessed the transformative ability to imagine society beyond its oppressive present structure and state. I suggest that this impulse comes across much like the subjunctive mood—a verb mood that barely exists in English but exists in French. It articulates unreality in its variant forms—uncertainty, possibility, desire, opinion, obligation, imagined alternative worlds, and actions that have yet to occur. Rich deploys poetry and culls from French film, in a manner similar to the subjunctive tense—a yet-to-be imagined reality beyond the known

present. She then forges her own filmic lyric that echoes the subjunctive mood and puts it to work in *The Will to Change*. The language and visuals of French avant-garde film motivate Rich to project beyond her contemporary moment in these poems. In *The Will to Change*, Rich apprehends the reality-making possibilities present in cinema and seeks to harness the medium to reinvigorate the lyric form in the service of her activist-minded poetry.

### III.II

#### **Rich and the Film (Re)generation**

The publication of *The Will to Change* coincided with two important contemporaneous threads in American culture—social justice revolutions and rapid technological transformations of the twentieth century. At this important juncture, Rich belonged to a generation of Americans who witnessed and activated social change; in the late 1960s, the poet's political commitments converged with her artistic pursuits. Importantly, Rich's interests in art and politics focalized around film: the poet was a member of the Film Generation,<sup>31</sup> the liberal arts-educated progressives who felt an aesthetic and political affinity with French film at a time of tumultuous American politics. Rich was part of this audience, composed mostly of poets, painters, and academics, who, as Goldstein writes, "sought the new life of surfaces offered by experiences of cinema" (180). As a poet searching for formal and cultural innovation, Rich was fascinated by European cinema and subsequently invested in the novel aesthetic experience French New Wave films provided. Goldstein teases out this important dynamic in Rich's film life: "she rejects American popular culture as a subject and, by her demanding stylistics, aligns her poetry with the high cultural discourse of the art film" (180-81). Yet Rich did not wish to simply escape her cultural moment and identify as an elitist; her seeming flight from American popular culture and, in its place, refuge in European

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<sup>31</sup> A term coined by Stanley Kauffman to denote liberal, educated Americans who turned to art house and European film while mainstream American film declined in audience members beginning in the 1940s.

high art loops back to her commitment to revolutionizing American culture rather than leading her to stray entirely from her cultural, political moment. Her quest for new aesthetic and political experiences led her to align her poetry with European film. She sought a new language through which to address her political climate and out of which to break down oppressive traditions. Film offered her a shift in perspective that had aesthetic and political ramifications for her work.

Rich's filmic interest was not snobbery, pure fandom or rejection of American culture, but actually a critical engagement with it. Her cinematically focused poems do not idealize the French art house film: she uses the challenge these experimental films pose to establish in her poetry a questioning of traditional norms. And her filmic-inspired poems introduce her own questions with regards to gender and women's voices in this time—issues eclipsed and downplayed in the films themselves. As with H.D.'s projects of retelling ancient myths from women's perspectives, Rich excavates the obscured feminine characters in order to push against the patriarchal constraints that Godard and Cocteau do not explicitly address. She reaches beyond the limits of their cinematic cities of language and finds the dark alleys, unearthing feminine perspectives and desires that the male gazes have missed. She borrows the strangeness of French cinema, turning to fragmentation and a looser formal style and updating the lyric in the process. Her newly forged filmic lyric addresses the movement and fragmentations of her precarious, cultural moment. Ultimately Rich revels in the futuristic aesthetic of avant-garde French film in order to revise the imagination of poetry and the language of her own culture.

In *The Moment of Change*, Cheri Colby Langdell argues that Rich's break from the past and traditional poetry in the late 1960s stems from the fact that "her own identity as a woman [was] breaking through" (108) in light of "the change in the national perspective on

the role and position of women in America” (111). Langdell argues that Godard’s films aided Rich in achieving this newfound poetic as her poems of this time model an open form of relaxed or absent punctuation, broken lines, and fragmentary collage that emulates Godard’s jump cut and the jerkiness of his innovative handheld camera. According to Langdell, this formal move expresses Rich’s personal and social progress during this turbulent era:

Since everyone’s personal reality is now changing too rapidly and dramatically to be captured in any but filmic form, so she adapts her poetic form to the form of Godard’s futuristic films, venturing into a territory not yet fully explored in her poetry, the erotic: loving is experience as the body changes and moves, and to render love, like the New Wave films she loves and the films of Buñuel, the poem itself must move ceaselessly as it changes shape and consciousness. (108-9)

According to Langdell, Rich’s filmic vision makes use of the aesthetic of film to imagine a future capable of transcending the contemporary struggle with abusive power structures and her personal renaissance. In an era of witness, injustice, and revolution—the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movements, Women’s Movement—filmic poetry allows not only for testimony but also imagined possibilities beyond inherited patriarchal values. Rich’s filmic lyric processes these social issues in her poetry. Even further, I contend that film is useful to Rich not only as a site of cultural and personal processing, but also as a screen for cultural imagining. The filmic screen conveys alternative realities using the visual grammar of the everyday, thus inspiring Rich to adopt a filmic ethos that articulates new worlds beyond her contemporary moment. French New Wave helps initiate Rich’s poetic and social breakthrough.

The problem with Langdell's reading, however, is that she brings the method back to Rich breaking through as an individual, rather than acknowledging the larger cultural scale Rich was addressing with her filmic lyric. Claire Keyes performs a similar kind of reading of *The Will to Change*, tracing how Rich breaks through to the female principle and becomes a hero and "a symbol of transformation" (132). While Rich's political awakening is integral to comprehending the transformative ethos and aesthetic as well as the use of filmic form in *The Will to Change*, the alteration that the collection enacts merely appears personal because Rich deploys the subjective lyric position. In fact, Rich uses the lyric to address her American present: the lyric allows her to step outside of conventional, contemporary time, displacing her concerns into the poetic sphere. The mode is a cultural mask posing as a subjective position—the speakers of *The Will to Change* are caught in conflicting times and geographies. Rich's personal breakthroughs are always political and invested in collective ethical movements. The lyric, as an atemporal mode, allows Rich to escape her cultural moment and comment on it, constructing new visions. Rich wields her lyric like an experimental film camera, focusing on strange episodic bursts and probing at the constraints of mainstream culture. For Rich, the lyric is subjunctive and collective as she detaches from her contemporary moment in order to explore these issues in an atemporal space. The pause of lyric poetry stops time, allowing the poet to step outside of the teleological trajectory. The oppressive past, the tumultuous present, and the uncanny future abate. She deploys the lyric like the subjunctive mood to explore uncertainty and desire and command change. Poetry and the subjunctive mood are both a speculative space—an alternate reality that imagines and constructs possible ways forward. *The Will to Change* is the lyric breath before the push for revolution formally and socially beyond the present tense of America. More is at stake here than Rich attempting to prove herself as "a person of integrity" (111) as Langdell argues.

Instead, Goldstein proposes that “clearly Rich herself was studying the shape of Godard’s films as a way of breaking out of her former rhetoric and developing an idiosyncratic style that spoke to her rebellious generation” (181). Rich borrows from French film *and* grammar, conjuring a filmic lyric subjunctive mood, to construct a filmic language of aesthetic and political change. Taking cues from French New Wave films, Rich adapts the lyric to articulate this prospective shift in time. The cinematic lyric of Rich steps outside of time in order to envision new worlds beyond traditional dogma and bequeathed attitudes. Rich’s break away from tradition towards new forms resonates along the same lines as the modernist mantra—however her “it” refers to something different, the social arena that houses power relations. Her revolution is two-pronged—formal and social. To accomplish this project, Rich ushers in this renewed vision through the subjunctive lyric mode, borrowing the terms of the French avant-garde. Rich touches on her social, political climate, but she does so from the speculative space inspired by French New Wave.

In Rich’s *The Will to Change* the poems function as sites of perceiving and processing in the filmic age. James McCorkle traces how observation plays a critical role as a survival method in Rich’s poetry, especially in *The Will to Change*. According to McCorkle, Rich’s commitment to bearing witness in her poetry distinguishes Rich from other poets known for their intense perception, like Elizabeth Bishop and Emily Dickinson, because Rich “asserts a social and political necessity.” McCorkle identifies Rich’s formal engagement with observation as having an innate social function. According to McCorkle, “The role of the poet is to be the eyes of the community; eyes which re-member that community and implicitly transform that community. She is both observer and transmitter” (n.p.). In McCorkle’s account, Rich keenly attends to the visual realm as part of the process to prompt social change. Her poetry observes and transmits: it is a technological device, recording and

responding. In filmic terms, Rich dons the role of both viewer and director in order to radically transform the world around her in *The Will to Change*. Her filmic poems go beyond bearing witness: they are about reworking language. McCorkle concludes that Rich's film poems tackle how "[t]he filmic gaze is the discourse of men, and like language, but more problematically, must be re-visioned" (n.p.). The task of *The Will to Change* is reformatting language and film to house and project a socially progressive ethos.

Rich's project of adapting film and language into a progressive formulation involves the disruption of normative time. In the poem "Pierrot le Fou,"<sup>32</sup> McCorkle argues, Rich's new open form resonates with the film:

The poem's six scenes or divisions, the use of abrupt line breaks, dropped lines, and stanzaic patterns, inscribe cinema's gestural jump-cuts as poetic logic. The glance, or the ongoingness of looking without arriving at totality, is explored as a new poetics. We take in parts, never the whole, when glancing; thus the glance proposes movement, time, showing, and making. The glance revises or revisions language to emphasize its diachronic mode. This horizontalism expresses the human scale of language and that language is the medium of our social and personal being. (n.p.)

McCorkle views the poem's innovative horizontal vision as divergent from a vertical or linear trajectory. There is still movement, but it is process-based and ongoing rather than driving towards finality. He aligns this poetic logic of ongoingness with the avant-garde filmic aesthetic, suggesting that the filmic poem destabilizes the finitude of narrative and linear time. This particular ongoing gaze brushes against this sense of speculation rather than determination, as Rich steps outside of the traditional narrative of linear time or vertical space to consider other routes that have come before and may come after. Rich takes cues from the

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<sup>32</sup> This poem takes its name from Godard's 1965 film *Pierrot le Fou*.

episodic association of Godard's films, like *Pierrot Le Fou*, that resist teleological narration. The lyric, like this version of anti-teleological avant-garde film, exists in a state of continuousness because it never arrives at a finale and, instead, urges on the next line or image; it depends on non-linear logic. It lives in the moment and jumps to the next without the determinism and finality of teleological narrative that governs mainstream film. In this context, the glance is useful in that it discloses images without over-determining conclusions. This non-totalizing glance validates the jump cut, splitting metonymy into finer units. The part does not stand in for the whole; the part contains its own wholeness. The fragmented images, associative logic, and gaze that breaks down teleology are of interest to Rich's poetics and politics of re-envisioning. Like the French New Wave films, Rich desires new resists the vertical, linear thrust that traditionally sews images and narratives together. Rich's poems of the late 1960s align with avant-garde film in that they aim to subvert mainstream expectations, break down old scripts, and embrace the productive chaos of the inverted order.

Rich turns to film, just as the French filmmakers themselves turn to poetry. In this mutual pilfering, filmmaker and poet project onto the other mode, announcing the desire to abandon the constraints of dominant culture and forge new pathways. Goldstein writes: "Rich's movie is like Godard's book of poetry, an aesthetic strike against injustice" (197). These cross-discipline references cause rupture—Cocteau's brawling poets, Godard's redeeming book of poetry, Rich's flight into the cinema. In *Alphaville*, Lemmy Caution responds to the robot overlord's question: "What transforms night into day?" with "Poetry" as the answer. The filmmaker renders poetry into a form of alchemic technology as it transforms night into day, suggesting that it has the power to conjure a new dawn or epoch. Similarly, Cocteau envisions Orpheus as a modern dimension-travelling poet. In *Pierrot le Fou*, the protagonist's intensive reading of literature and philosophy and diary writing

accompanies his fierce rejection of bourgeois society and flight into rebellious chaos. In these films, the directors offer a techno-mystical vision of poetry, positioning it as a site of transformation and processing. In *Alphaville*, Paul Éluard's book of poetry is what allows the characters to step outside of the repressive regime. While neither poetry nor film necessarily delivers the transcendent possibility it represents, this similar act of displacement articulates the will for change in both Rich and the French New Wave directors.

Rich harnessed the images and language of French film to renovate her own poetic ethos. Specifically, Rich culled from the futuristic cinemasces of the French avant-garde to construct an alternative space in her poetry. This poetic displacement is akin to the subjunctive mood of the French language as it constructs a speculative space, invigorating her own poetry aesthetically and politically. The subjunctive verb mood allows one to express an abstract, uncertain, or wished for state. While it barely exists in English, the mood articulates unreality—possibility, desire, uncertainty, obligation, paradox, acts yet to occur. I argue that while few instances of the subjunctive mood appear grammatically in the collection, Rich harnesses this type of expressive possibility in the poems of *The Will to Change*. Rich plays with possibility, desire, uncertainty, obligation, and paradox all the while willing these yet-to-occur transformations to transpire in the social sphere. For Rich, the otherworldly images of the French avant-garde express this subjunctive mood. Rich borrows this subjunctive sentiment that articulates alternatives to reality that hinge on desire, uncertainty, possibility, paradox, anticipation. *The Will to Change* envisions filmic poetry as a way to foster other and new realities. Rich engages with French film thematically in the poems of *The Will to Change* and then develops her filmic ethos of renewed potentiality in the long poem *Shooting Script*.

### III.III

#### *The Will to Change's* Filmic Threads

The first half of *The Will to Change* engages in filmic imagination thematically, investigating visual metaphors and drawing from French New Wave films. For example, *The Will to Change* invests in ocular instruments and considers how they construct history and culture. Rich focuses on a range of lenses—from the telescope to modern photography and film cameras. Rich wields these optical apparatuses throughout the collection as she attempts to redress language and history, playing with angles and light in order to revise bequeathed oppressive narratives. She makes visual technologies a viable component of her poetic mission of re-envisioning. These optical tools cultivate new ways of viewing and are crucial metaphors for reorganizing the swayed power imbalances embedded in received language and history. In “Planetarium,” the speaker invokes the forgotten tale of astronomer Caroline Herschel and embarks on a defiant revision that underscores how dominant historical narratives exclude and oppress women’s labour and their intellectual contribution to knowledge. Armed with Herschel’s forgotten telescope, Rich deploys the lyric as a mode to combat narrowness of the inherited historical perspective. The speaker rediscovers Herschel and, in doing so, re-enacts the astronomer’s forgotten activity of discovery, appropriating it for a cultural mission of re-reading received history for concealed information and re-organizing the known constellations to redefine and expand the cosmos. The poem reformats the lyric and alters its perspective as a means to reorder and change the rules and stories that govern the known universe.

The poem looks to space to contemplate how myth and science coexist and how women figure historically and presently in human society.

Galaxies of women, there  
 doing penance for impetuosity  
 ribs chilled

in those spaces of the mind

An eye,

‘virile, precise and absolutely certain’

from the mad webs of Uranusborg (13)

The speaker turns to the sky to see and read a history of women’s exploited labour and repressed history. Space is not a neutral territory, but a politicized site that reflects human culture and its oppressive structures. These lines also articulate a paradox embedded in the observational power of the lyric eye as it enacts precision and certainty while also stemming from madness. This inaugural invocation of conflicted sight sets the tone for the poem’s investment in duality and collapsing traditional patriarchal binaries. In her poem, women are both hysterical monsters and scientific knowledge makers. Rich’s lyric holds these extremes in suspension in her own recasting of the cosmos. The uncovering of women’s lost history is configured as “every impulse of light exploding // from the core / as life flies out of us” (13). This supernova spurred on by these punished women ushers in a call for a new cosmic order.

Rich activates this venture of challenging perspectives on history on the level of the poetic line. The poem begins with a chiasmus: “A woman in the shape of a monster / a monster in the shape of a woman” (14). Rich uses this formal inversion to emulate the disruption of linear history and traditional logic. This inverted repetition broken into two lines flags the arbitrariness of the association of women and monsters—the inversion twists the received notion of women as monstrous and marginal. The repeated inversion enacts circularity, suggesting that this alleged logic is also circular and subjective and, importantly, part of a constructed narrative. Rich uses the metaphor of constellations to focus on this cultural construction of monstrous femininity. In this way, the metaphor dismantles received

stories and creates new lines of narrative and connections for her leftist, feminist project. Thus the opening signals how the received perspectives serve a dominant patriarchal culture rather than conveying a reliable portrait of the cosmos. Rich's use of the chiasmus undermines the reliability of received myth so that she can connect the dots in new ways. The point of departure signifies Rich's investment in constructive alternative histories and worlds in poetry.

Rich probes at the dark corners of history to excavate repressed stories and illuminate new cultural configurations. After recounting this history of a neglected female scientist, the speaker pronounces:

I am an instrument in the shape  
of a woman trying to translate pulsations  
into images for the relief of the body  
and the reconstruction of the mind. (14)

In this stanza, Rich investigates the modern, progressive lyric. The speaker embodies, translates, and reconstructs culture through moving images. Just as the telescope enables the astronomer's exploratory vision, Rich's poetic retelling of a repressed history allows her to envision alternate stories, to forge other worlds, and to question the oppressive values of mainstream society. The speaker undergoes a transformation: translating pulsations into visual terms. This translation is a reparative somatic and mental experience that disrupts the status quo. This somatic-visual transformation stems from Rich's "Film-Generation" philosophy—it is a means to break away from quotidian repressive regimes. And so the declaration of "What we see, we see / and seeing is changing" (14) emphasizes Rich's linking of vision with revolution, suggesting that minute alterations in perception have larger societal ramifications. Encouraged by film, Rich revises her lyric to contemplate poetic and political transformation. Linking these ocular metaphors with progression, Rich asks for new

narratives that defy teleological, patriarchal history and its prescriptive scripts. She borrows these senses of resistance and speculation from French New Wave, channelling them into the filmic lyric of *Shooting Script*. While her long poem enacts her filmic poetics, Rich asks for change thematically in “Planetarium.” As a result, “Planetarium” foreshadows the filmic vision that the final long poem performs. “Planetarium” pries at bequeathed narratives, seeking to reinvent the stories and constellations of culture and unravel the normative knots of dominant scripts. Through a focus on renewed vision and ocular instruments, the poem conceives of the reconstruction of the cosmos.

As a member of the Film Generation, Rich constructed filmic poetry in response to her dissatisfaction with her contemporary American cultural climate. This sentiment of critical exhaustion percolates in “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children.” The poem declares “In America we have only the present tense” (18). The statement signals Rich’s criticism of America’s contemporary ethos, its contemporary paralysis. In contrast to the American present, Rich turns to the imaginative potential of French film as a way to flee the present tense and her contemporary political and discursive state. The French avant-garde provides another set of images as well as another language in which the possibility of wished-for time exists. The poem’s atmosphere of stagnation and numbness in the face of suffering suggests a need to escape the confines of the American present. Rich desires a way to imagine possibilities outside of present time, a way to compose alternate worlds, which resonates with the purpose of the subjunctive mood. Rich aims to insert the subjunctive state of “to be” and “would” into the will to change. The filmic lyric allows the speaker of Rich’s other poems to step outside of the present and imagine other worlds in order to remedy the precarious present in America—“I am in danger. You are in danger” (18). The subjunctive provides Rich a means to counter the stasis and danger of the present. Rich is interested in

how temporality and revolution interact. This step outside of time isn't static, but, rather speculative—an attempt to rework present language in order to forge a way forward outside of “the oppressor's language” (18).

“The Burning of Paper Instead of Children” enacts Rich's fraught rapport with temporality at this moment in American history. The poem dwells passively in the present. The speaker struggles to engage with her surroundings and fails to conceive of the past and the future. The poem references literature and history but does not call on visual or cinematic culture; the speaker is stranded in the present tense without the filmic lyric. Her frustration with time and language underpins Rich's lyric search for the subjunctive mood in the cinematic poems of the collection. In this particular poem, Rich makes use of both poetry and prose to explore static and unproductive temporality. The lyric lines step outside of time in a way that is static as opposed to usefully imaginative while the prose sections recount the present, its dangers and disturbances, but are unable to proffer foresight or a dynamic way forward. In other poems in this collection, Rich merges the lyric with a subjunctive mood, but in this example she uses the lyric to articulate an inert state that describes the contemporary historical moment in America. The present tense of the prose suggests frustration with what Rankine deems “our culture's inability to change” and failure to realize the goals of the social justice leftist movements. The passivity of the poem stems from fatigue in the face of local and global suffering. The speaker is callously removed, unable to respond to the pathos of the present or past. The children's present action of burning books ignites memories of the past, Hitler's burning of books, and yet the speaker is unmoved and unreactive to this violence: “the burning of a book arouses no sensation in me” (18). The speaker has a fixed relationship to time and thus a narrow scope—she lives in the present tense, unable to connect present actions to the past or the future. This unaware stagnation that the speaker dwells in represents

the narrowed perspective of teleological narrative, a view of history as a linear series of events rather than a circular or interconnected movement in which many lives and states are enmeshed. The poem's lull suggests Rich's desire for a renewed, kinetic lyric.

A moment of pathos and passion emerges briefly in the poem's discussion of Joan of Arc. The speaker locates some understanding of the present through her curious interest in the female saint, her illiteracy and burning at the stake. In this scenario, the speaker looks to the French past for precedent on how to respond to her current American reality, empathizing with Joan: "I know it hurts to burn" (17). The speaker expresses dissatisfaction with the ability of literature to inspire empathy or guide in times of crisis: "there are books that describe all this / and they are useless" (17). She recognizes that communication is necessary for survival, "this is the oppressor's language // yet I need it to talk to you" (16), but she has trouble envisioning a way through the confines of received language. Stuck in America's present tense and oscillating between lyric and prose, she claims, "I cannot touch you and this is the oppressor's language" (18). These bequeathed literary and historical frameworks that have led to the present reality are unable to provide the speaker with transcendence or enduring empathy. However, the speaker can muster some empathy for Joan due to her illiteracy and association with the hyper-visual: "so blue, / I think, It is her color" (15). This vibrant blue of the cover of W.P. Barrett's *Trial of Jeanne d'Arc* provokes a fluttering of sympathetic response from the speaker, thus suggesting that a non-textual mode can inspire the speaker to mobilize beyond her present context and into the imaginary or historical realms. This dynamic identification with Joan is a rare moment in the poem's otherwise stagnant, indifferent atmosphere. The speaker is drawn to the surface of the text, its visual allure beyond its contents. Even further the utterance of "I think, It is her color" forges identification between the speaker and Joan by way of the slippage of the statement.

Pronouns are grammatically legible and yet rely on contextual information. “I” is a deictic shifter,<sup>33</sup> a pronoun without a stable context that easily slides into ambiguity. Ironically, though pronouns are weighted with the task of assembling identity (“I am”), they are also grammatically steeped in uncertainty. The speaker’s visceral reaction to Joan’s colour forges a point communion between the two girls, destabilizing their distinction. On a grammatical level, the utterance “I think, It is her color” works to conflate “I” with “her,” furthering this identification and merging of identities. That the parents take the book away is telling: the authority figures attempt to stifle this cultivation of radical empathy, the effacing of boundaries between and merging of the young reader and the martyr. Rich’s speaker responds to Joan like H.D. identifies with her face on screen. Both poets touch upon this moment of radical empathy in which reader and viewer identify with a sainted feminine figure of strength and rebellion. The speaker’s dynamic, subversive identification with Joan is a powerful moment that breaks with the poem’s otherwise fatigued present tense.

While H.D. relates to Joan of Arc as a feminized filmic figure and is concerned with Dreyer’s reduction of her to a tortuous face on screen, Rich’s poem relates to the figure of Joan in a stark, visual way, revelling in the figure as abstraction. Joan becomes associated with the colour blue. Dreyer’s reduction of Joan for H.D. is violent, whereas Rich’s reduction of Joan to abstraction is inspiring for her young speaker. Rich’s poem purifies the saint into a colour,<sup>34</sup> rendering her a visual figure and emblem of the non-literary, which provides the speaker with refuge from authority. The speaker relates to the blue cover as if it were another body that she can engage with while dreaming. This turn to visual abstractions followed by identification with Joan forges a pathway to Rich’s filmic lyric that she cultivates throughout

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<sup>33</sup> Deixis is a linguistic term for words that require context to be understood.

<sup>34</sup> Joan of Arc is the patron saint of modern and contemporary queer women writers, such as Rich, H.D. and especially Eileen Myles’ poetry and prose frequently feature the young saint. Also related: Maggie Nelson, a friend and student of Myles, wrote about her obsession with the colour blue in *Bluets* (2009).

the collection. In other poems in *The Will to Change*, Rich integrates the lyric with filmic inspiration, constructing a subjunctive mode in order as an alternative to her American present. “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children” emits a need for expression beyond the American present tense and beyond received literary and historical genealogies. This poem sets the stage for Rich’s lyric to step out of linear time. Rich’s urgent desire for new modes of expression comes through in this poem; she searches for a lyric lens that is not only perceptive, but also projective. Rich vies for a poetic tense that expands what can be imagined to be possible and, in turn, alter her present through a poetic, visual re-articulation. The poem expresses fatigue with its present-day America, its suffering and stilted teleological narratives, and finds some radical empathy through identifying with the rebellious figure of Joan of Arc. “The Burning of Paper Instead of Children” is part of Rich’s journey towards experimentation because it articulates her desire for change in small and large scales, at the level of language and culture.

This speculative, experimental vision of New Wave French film allowed Rich to re-envision cultural scripts and create an activist, feminist poetic project. She accomplishes this type of rewriting in “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus” and “Images for Godard.” Armed with the lyric Rich creates parallel, subjunctive worlds outside of traditional scripts. The poem capitalizes on this subjunctive mood because it displaces or re-imagines a film that already displaces and re-imagines a classic myth. For example, in “I Dream I’m the Death of Orpheus,” Rich recasts Cocteau’s *Orphée*, the director’s own revision of the myth of Orpheus, from the point of view of the character of Death. Rich works with Cocteau’s own speculative mode and then inserts female desire into the myth. She imbues Death, the ultimate femme fatale, with interiority and narrative control. While the film cultivates empathy for Death and portrays her as a powerful figure, Rich’s rendering pauses to allow the

lyric to fully contemplate Death's point of view. Also, the poet brings Cocteau's Death into Rich's own social reality as an activist writer in her American climate. Rich's reimagining of the tale is reminiscent of H.D.'s own rewriting of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth—except that Rich steps outside of the husband and wife pair and bestows the figure of Death with desire and interiority. Death is a free agent outside of the heteronormative pairing. Rich emphasizes a feminine identity that deviates from the traditional heroine in the husband-wife dyad of the tale and thus validates desire outside of the traditional structure of marriage and heteronormativity. Instead of the victim Eurydice, Rich focuses on the taboo sexuality and interiority of Death. The lyric asserts death's subjectivity through the repetition of "I am" at the onset of the first few lines:

I am walking rapidly through striations of light and dark thrown  
under an arcade.

I am a woman in the prime of life, with certain powers [...]

I am a woman in the prime of life (19)

Death's incantation of "I am" and "I am a woman in the prime of life" ironically asserts her vitality, linking her with life rather than death, thus Rich reverses Death's traditional connotations. In Rich's retelling of the myth of Orpheus, Death is a vital character and a powerful, political figure: she is "a woman with the nerves of a panther / a woman with contacts among Hell's Angels / a woman feeling the fullness of her powers" (19). Her connections to large networks of outlaws and revolutionaries, like the Hell's angels, Black Panthers, and feminists, situate her as a rebel. Rich adds to Cocteau's modernizing of the myth by bringing in her own political, social circles and agendas. In Rich's telling, Death is a modern and politicized character living outside of the traditional script for women—rather than isolated archetype, she is an empowered agent tapped into political currents. In this

version, the main character of Orpheus is relegated to the prop-like “dead poet” perched in her backseat as she drives. Indeed, these are scenes from the film, but Rich refocuses the camera in this film so that Death becomes the protagonist rather than the antagonist of the film and of myth. Death’s monologue reframes the story, while Orpheus recedes into the background. Ultimately, Orpheus is “on the wrong side of the mirror” (19). While the mirror is the main mode through which characters travel to the underworld in the film, the phrase also pertains to the poet’s relationship with mimesis. Orpheus as a dead poet is an emblem of the order of old artists, men who operate in isolation and brawl over ego as in the opening fight scene of the film. Rich positions this old coterie as on wrong side of the mirror, on the wrong side of modernity, critiquing these writers who succumb to romantic stereotypes and subscribe to mimesis. In contrast, Death is an artist-figure who fashions another version of the story, privy to the knowledge that art has the power to organize and structure reality. Rich situates Death as an experimental, post-modernist author who recognizes that despite film’s reality-portraying features, it does not reflect reality but rather constructs it—which is why it is so useful to Rich’s activist project. In Rich’s retelling of Cocteau’s film, Death is an artist emboldened by desire and empowered through subversive political networks. She is “a woman with a certain mission,” capable of imagining another reality where feminine desire is articulated and artists mobilize politically on both sides of the mirror. Rich imagines an alternative script for the femme fatale. Her renovated myth proffers an alternate worldview, resonating with the work of the subjunctive mood to articulate other possibilities. Rich constructs alternate universes of possibility in *The Will to Change* to resist the dominant, patriarchal histories and myths. Although “I Dream I Am the Death of Orpheus” deals with this imagined script mostly in metaphor rather than formal innovation, Rich’s thought experiment brings her a step closer to deploying the subjunctive filmic lyric she develops

fully later in the collection. “I Dream I Am the Death of Orpheus” initiates the speculation that she turns into lyric subjunctive in *Shooting Script*. For Rich, this poetic speculation that rewrites bequeathed literary scripts reverberates personally and politically, questioning the dominant discourses that govern her conflicted American present.

In *The Will to Change*, Rich explores how vision intersects with innovation and how film redefines the act of seeing in the twentieth century. In the case of the poem “Pierrot le Fou,” Rich recalls the 1965 film of the same name by Godard.<sup>35</sup> Yet she does not retell the story, as she does in her other film-inspired poems. Instead, the poem recounts the embodied experience of watching the film, investigating how filmic seeing integrates into the lyric position. Rich harnesses film’s power to underscore the experience of seeing, making it strange, in order to explore filmic mediation a potential site for radical thinking and social movement. In effect, Rich critiques the prying, cool, domineering gaze of mainstream film, revamping it into an ethical experience of relation, reminding of the embodied experience of bodies watching film and empathizing. This emphasis on the experience of watching the film underscores what Rich perceives as the radical potential of experimental film, the self-awareness it prompts. In Rich’s mind, film reorganizes one’s relationship to seeing, simultaneously grounding the act in the embodied world and pushing it towards heightened abstraction. In Rich’s handling of *Pierrot Le Fou*, seeing becomes not merely a visual gathering of data, but an embodied and psychic experience. In “Pierrot Le Fou,” Rich recalibrates the act of seeing to account for its psychic and corporal layers. She wields the visual fire to radically reflect on the simultaneous act of seeing and experience.

The speculative potential Rich identifies in film operates on the phenomenological level. And she integrates this phenomenological awareness into the lyric in such a way that

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<sup>35</sup> The film both honours and critiques American culture by borrowing a pop art aesthetic and parodying American military involvement in Vietnam.

the speaker accesses mundane reality in a new way—recording, seeing, and revising.

Sobchack writes, “a description of the film experience as an experience of signification and communication calls for a *reflexive turn* away from the film as ‘object’ and toward the act of viewing and its existential implication of a body-subject: the viewer” (51). The existential implication of the body-subject embedded in the act of viewing possesses radical lyric potential in the hands of Rich. Sobchack argues that filmic figuration requires “radical reflection on the act of viewing and its relation to our being-in-the-world” (53). Rich takes this reflection and integrates it into “Pierrot Le Fou” in order to activate a discussion on empathy and embodiment. To portray this reflective viewing, Rich addresses the second person in the first section of the poem. This address of the second person emulates the rhetorical address of film, how watching a film forces the viewer to confront the embodied and existential components of seeing. The film asks the second person to watch and reflect, reminding of one’s embodied experience of the world and film. Borrowing the rhetorical address of film, Rich asks the second person to confront life rendered in photographic and filmic images—to imagine their experience as both lived experience and objectified aesthetic.

This provocation opens the poem:

Suppose you stood facing  
 a wall  
     of photographs  
 from your unlived life (25)

The speaker asks the second person to imagine pouring reality into units of mechanical reproduction, inspiring the dual, opposing reactions of embodiment and disassociation. The wall is a screen upon which the second person may construct new narratives out of images garnered from reality as well as project the body into unlived experiences. In both instances, the speaker claims ownership over these experience-objects. Rich plays with how film blurs

this separation between experience and representation by way of mediation. The command to “suppose” is an approximation of “if” gesturing towards the subjunctive mood grammatically in English. Like “if,” “suppose” is a thought experiment akin to the subjunctive mood. To suppose is to imagine and to enter the subjunctive alternative space of desire, uncertainty and possibility. In this poem, Rich requests that the subject project themselves into un-lived experiences and, perhaps, experience radical empathy, to relate to the screen as another body similar to the viewer’s own. The projection onto the screen and onto the other is not a cool projection of distance, but one of intimate, corporeal proximity. Rich explores a haptic visuality of relationality. The film prompts Rich to consider film watching as a corporeal experience full of radical potential, encouraging the viewer to cast a wide empathetic net.

“Pierrot Le Fou,” like many of the poems in *The Will to Change*, is a multi-part poem that fluctuates in direction and tone. This particular six-part poem alternates between sections with short couplets and stanzas with longer, block lines. The abrupt, disparate sections of the six-part poem emulate the film’s post-modern, pop-art pastiche. Yet every step of the way, Rich calls attention to the act of watching and brings the body back into the act to encourage a corporeal engagement with film. For example, the second part of the poem melds tactility with language: “On a screen as wide as this, I grope for titles. / I speak the French language like a schoolgirl of the ’forties” (25). Rich enacts synaesthesia by merging the visual reading of titles with touch, bringing into relief the physicality of language and then furthering this sense of embodiment by attaching her language competency to the body of schoolgirl, a subject emphatically marked by gender and age. Furthermore, the experience of watching the geography of the film prompts the speaker’s own recollections, her own lived experiences embedded in the un-lived life on screen:

Those roads remind me of Beauce and the motorcycle.

We rode from Paris to Chartres in the March wind.

He said we should go to Spain but the wind defeated me.

France of the superhighways, I never knew you. (25)

The speaker responds viscerally to the visual cues, recalling her own experience of traversing France by road. The driving scenes of *Pierrot Le Fou* inspire the poem's enactment of the sensation and heft of March winds: the visual and tactile combine once more. The poem embodies both lived and unlived experience by way of cinema. In addressing the limit of her own lived knowledge and experience ("France of the superhighways, I never knew you" [25]), the speaker articulates the phenomenological paradox of film—its conflation of virtual and actual experience. The speaker asserts that she does not know that particular terrain just after also detailing her own approximation of the experience, in effect linking the lived and filmic by way of bodily knowledge. The road trip as an itinerary for the feminist protagonist recalls Death's journey in "I Dream I Am the Death of Orpheus." The poem continues to emphasize the potential somatic valence of film even further: "How much the body took in those days, and could take! / A naked lightbulb still simmers in my eyeballs" (25). The choice of the verb "simmer" welds heat and tactile sensation to the sense of sight. The poem's synesthetic image of the strained vision demands a visceral reaction from its readers just as film demands a visceral reaction from viewers. It also reminds of the eye's ability to sense and touch—a moment of the haptic gaze. The speaker proclaims bodily strength and limit, the scale of what a body can endure is mutable, and then the response to light—this juxtaposition reattaches the corporeality to sight and reminds that the eye is a vulnerable organ. As a result, Rich's poetic visual imaginings aim to exist in both abstract and material realms.

The third section of the poem re-enters the subjunctive mode of imagining. The refrain of "suppose" begins the section and, at this juncture, the poem associates storytelling with survival:

Suppose we had time

and no money

Living by our wits

telling stories

Which stories would you tell? (26)

Survival depends on wits, making up stories, perhaps new ones because the old narratives will not do anymore. The speaker answers her own question. The question, evidently, is both rhetorical and functional:

I would tell the story

of Pierrot Le Fou

who trusted

not a woman

but love itself

till his head blew off

not quite intentionally (26)

Finally, the poem makes explicit mention of *Pierrot le Fou*. Rather than re-telling the film, Rich merely references it, appropriating its chaotic atmosphere with its fanciful flight, irreverent violence, imagination and subversion of expectation and narrative. In this moment of supposing, of forging a speculative space, the speaker reaches for the film—"I would tell the story" (26). She seeks new stories beyond the bequeathed traditions and finds something useful, potentially life saving in the colourful mania of *Pierrot le Fou*—ironically since the protagonist blows off his own head in the finale. Yet the speaker privileges corporeal knowledge above all:

I would tell all the stories I knew

in which people went wrong

but the nervous system

was right all along (26)

The poem once again infuses the story with a corporeal valence. Rich conjures this simultaneous sense of deviation as intuitively right, the veering off the beaten teleological narrative track actually contains a bodily rightness. This subjunctive discourse Rich champions in *The Will to Change* connects avant-garde filmic seeing to physical sensation and knowledge.

In the fourth section the speaker almost retells *Pierrot le Fou*, making use of its Robert Louis Stevenson island atmosphere: “The island blistered our feet [...] / You started keeping a journal on a coconut shell” (26). The speaker embodies the various features of the film—the Mediterranean environment and the relationship with the diary writing in *Pierrot le Fou*. But after this momentary sensory dip into the landscape of the film, the speaker swiftly reaches beyond the ecology of the film and summons a litany of other filmic experiences:

When I close my eyes  
 other films  
       have been there all along

A market shot:  
 Bins of turnips, feet  
 of dead chickens

close-up: a black old woman  
 buying voodoo medicines. (26-27)

The speaker recalls a multitude of scenes harvested from other films now embedded in her memory. She revels in her own cinephilic world. The poem, like the film, refuses to follow a

neat narrative and instead spirals out, touching other films and experiences rather than tucking neatly into a direct narrative path. The speaker then goes on to search for the you, “scanning reel after reel” (27). The addressee vanishes from sight and recorded film: “even the shots of the island / miss you / yet you were there” (27), relaying a disconnect between the enmeshed circuit of film and memory in which the speaker is wrapped.

In the final section of the poem, Rich recapitulates a meditation on filmic seeing. The closing motif repeats: “To record / in order to [...]” (27-28) and the poem puts forward a philosophical investigation into seeing in the filmic age. Recording is now part of the act of seeing and remembering. The poem confirms the normalized integration of filming into being and seeing: “To record / for that is what one does” (28), playfully echoing Descartes’ “I think, therefore I am.” This certitude is both ironic and sincere as Rich contemplates how film integrates into bodily experience and memory. In “Pierrot le Fou,” Rich gestures towards how filmic seeing is visceral and interrogates its complication of reality and representation. In Rich’s treatment, the poem, like film, becomes a site of recording and circling around experiences both lived and unlived. Importantly, the poem explicitly asks one to “suppose”—to rethink the bequeathed rules and parameters of known reality and imagine new experiences and worlds. It also models a filmic re-seeing, which further invites playful engagement with experience and the larger culture. Borrowing *Pierrot Le Fou*’s frantic upheaval of bourgeois values, Rich’s poem encourages imaginative reconstruction on the personal and social levels. Through supposing, “Pierrot Le Fou” approaches the formal innovation and enactment of a filmic lyric that Rich later pursues in *Shooting Script*.

In “Images for Godard,” Rich imagines the evolving fate of poetry as fused with film. And so the poet prods at the newfound possibilities of language in the cinematic age. As demonstrated throughout the collection but especially in this homage poem, Godard’s films

provide Rich with an exciting visual terrain to play with as she tracks the development of poetry in her contemporary moment. The poem opens:

Language as city:: Wittgenstein  
 driving to the limits of the city of words  
 the superhighway streams  
 like a comic strip

to newer suburbs (47)

Rich borrows from Wittgenstein: “Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses” (18). In keeping with suburban development that characterized the mid-twentieth century, Rich then adds the superhighway and suburbs to the urban plan metaphor, proposing that the parameters of language are changing even further in light of film. Film enlivens the comic strip of daily urban and suburban life into motion. For Rich, cinema expands the boundaries of language: “when we come to the limits / of the city / my face must have a meaning” (47), rendering bodies patently into language as with the close up. In the first section of “Images for Godard,” Rich sets the mood of revolution, establishing poetry as mutating in light of experimental film.

Like her predecessor H.D., Rich experiments with montage in the second portion of the poem as the speaker moves in sequence from rear-view mirror to car to sea to sun to espresso cup to vinyl raincoat by way of light and patterns that visually resonate and rhyme. The effect is dizzying as the speaker, energized by the act of viewing that commences the section, wields an unfettered image-making power that spawns this litany of images in montage. The poem shimmies through a catalogue of Godard icons. For example, “the swirls

of nebula // in the espresso cup” (48) recalls a particular vignette from his essayistic *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her* (1967). The images collect, like the cosmic espresso, float freely in her poem while also recalling Godard’s voiceovers that mediate on capitalism, culture and language in radical ways. In the poem, Rich reduces the scenes down to their images and sews them together. In this section, she borrows Godard’s palette of primary colours, the colours that define *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her*: yellow (“the extremes of light” [47]; “the sun” [48]) blue (“blued in a plateglass pane” [47] “the sea” [48]) and red (“reddened in the reflection” [47]; “the red Triomphe” [48]). This visual rhyming with Godard through colour and image is an aesthetic and political act of solidarity. It signals Rich’s newfound project of inquiry into the limits of language and inherited capitalist social systems, picking up the questions posed by Godard’s provocative film. Amy Taubin writes on the film:

Better to describe *2 or 3 Things* as a machine that morphs the colliding meanings of words and objects with dazzling speed, and generates an astonishing array of metaphors, paradoxes, digressions, and, above all, dialectical relationships, between idea and action, word and image, sound and picture, interior and exterior, microcosm and macrocosm. The swirling surface of a cup of coffee is transformed into the primordial ooze and also the infinite universe. (n.p)

Rich adopts Godard’s dazzling speed and this trend towards digression and paradox in her Godard-inspired poems; it is liberating for the poet to take up collision to articulate social and formal progression. “Images for Godard” demonstrates Rich’s playing with the images and ideas of Godard as with a palette—an effort that she truly makes her own in *Shooting Script*.

Evidently, the speaker of “Images for Godard” gleans knowledge and transcendence from this experience of montage and the act of piously attending a film: “To know the extremes of light / I sit in this darkness” (47). Rich locates a frenetic and transcendent

potential energy in film that the speaker must harness to enact change. Like H.D.'s vision in her "Projector" series, Rich's lyrical epiphany has its roots in film going. In the third section, the poem then shifts to an instructive mode with infinitive verbs as if they are enlightened idioms gleaned from film: "To love, to move perpetually / as the body changes" and "To be stopped, to shoot the same scene / over & over" (48). Despite the infinitive's promise of action, the poem slides to a stop, stalling and repeating. The poem enacts a circularity that coincides with the initial momentum. This sense of circularity continues in the fourth section:

At the end of *Alphaville*  
 She says *I love you*  
 And the film begins  
 that you've said you'd never make (48)

The speaker opens the section with the finale of Godard's *Alphaville* only to turn it into a beginning, repeating the sequence. The poem absorbs the narrative *Alphaville* but strips it of resolution by recommencing the film. "Images for Godard" gestures towards cinematic lyric though the manipulation of time; Rich traps the world of the poem and its speaker in a filmic cycle—she attaches her lyric to the film-reel's cycle.

The poet also elaborates the romantic script of the film, extending its storyline in the speculative space of the poem. Rich addresses Godard and conjures the film that "you've said you'd never make // because it's impossible" (48). What follows is the eros Rich identifies as lacking in the film itself:

to touch the breast  
 for a woman  
  
 to know the sex of a man  
 That film begins here

yet you don't show it

we leave the theatre

suffering from that (49)

Rich's poetic erotic film begins upon leaving the theatre. The omission, the censure of bodies, is a kind of suffering. This particular kind of affect is related yet inverted from H.D.'s suffering at the hands of Dreyer's sadistic treatment of Joan in *Joan of Arc*. In Rich's vision, it is the lack of showing that causes the audience pain. Rich rewrites Godard's script to account for the body and desire, as she does with Death in "I Dream I Am the Death of Orpheus." Prompted by film, Rich deploys poetry as the speculative space that can show the impossible beyond present realities and beyond the filmmaker's own vision—the subjunctive, paradoxical, the uncertain, what is "difficult to show" (48).

In the final section, the poem becomes a quasi-manifesto for dynamic filmic poetry. Just as "seeing is changing" in "Planetarium" (14), the speaker supplements this declaration with "the mind of poet is changing" in "Images for Godard." Rich asserts that, "the notes for the poem are the only poem" (49), abandoning the meticulous polish of her previous poetic path and, instead, advocating for process over product. Rich is interested in the mutability of poetry, its growth beyond the limits of the old city. Film enables this lyric growth for Rich. The poem emulates this poetic growth and movement in igniting the present continuous tense: "the mind collection, devouring" (49). "Images for Godard" performs Rich's moment of change:

the mind of the poet is the only poem

the poet is at the movies

dreaming the film-maker's dream but differently

free in the dark as if asleep

free in the dusty beam of the projector

the mind of the poet is changing

the moment of change is the only poem (49)

For Rich, film, poetry and change are intertwined. Poetry reaches beyond the limits of the old city by taking a tour through the world of experimental film. The poet's mind expands and therefore imagines scripts beyond mainstream narratives and even the director's own visions. "Images for Godard" declares that the poet is at the movies as if she is out to lunch, but it is this idleness, freedom in the dark and engagement with vernacular culture that fosters the poet's progress. Rich envisions poet and filmmaker as intertwined yet distinct, dreaming the dream differently. The poem patently weaves the poet's evolution with the filmmaker. According to "Images for Godard," the poet co-opts the filmmaker's dream and alters it further. Through film, Rich rediscovers the subjunctive—uncertainty, desire and possibility—and puts it to work in her lyric. In the final line Rich commits to her poetic, dynamic stance, spurred on by her experience of Godard's avant-garde film that she draws from only to envision differently. The mantra "the moment of change is the only poem" suggests direness, that something is at stake in Rich's project. Rich's political awakening comes through her poetic engagement with Godard. The repeated interweaving of film and poetry with a revolutionary thread in the first half of *The Will to Change* reflects Rich's poetic evolution and social justice awakening. She eagerly channels the innovation of avant-garde film to envision new poetic mode and social order. This filmic musing precipitates into a filmic lyric in Rich's long poem *Shooting Script*.

### III.IV

#### Rich's Feature-Length Poetics in *Shooting Script*

While many of the poems in *The Will to Change* look at film, the collection culminates with an in-depth examination of filmic poetry in the final poem of the collection, *Shooting Script*. The lengthy multi-part poem references cinema less overtly and, instead, enacts a cinematic long poem. The project departs from her adaptation of French New Wave. Rich's *Shooting Script* is her own foray as a director of filmic poetry; the poem scrolls through divergent cinemascesapes that recall various genres. As fourteen poems divided into two parts, *Shooting Script* is a long poem that contemplates the experience of dialogue and communication in contemporary and mythic terms. Like H.D.'s *Helen in Egypt*, it is a modern long poem built out of poetic fragments that disrupt linear time and that favour overlapping nodes and moods. While *Helen in Egypt* portrays H.D.'s epic pretences, *Shooting Script* is a long poem with filmic pretences. In *Shooting Script*, Rich explores the parameters of poetic language in the filmic era.

While other poems dwell on film thematically or explicitly respond to French New Wave films, this long poem enacts poetic movement inspired by the aesthetics and politics of film. The title itself suggests the act of transformation—the translation of text into film. Shooting is the action that hoists script into the realm of cinema. The key use of the present participle and its status as a continuing tense emphasizes the on-going act of transformation; this sense of movement underpins Rich's emerging political awakening alongside her filmic ethos. *Shooting Script* is Rich's moment of poetic, political transformation. The title also playfully takes aim at dominant societal discourses. *Shooting Script* suggests undermining or overthrowing the normative values or scripts that structure society; while "shooting" refers to the act of filming, it also brings up this sense of upheaval—flipping the table, throwing up or taking down something. The act of shooting with its violent connotations connects to Rich's

contemporary climate of anti-war protests, the Vietnam War, and the violence of the state that social movements met during this fraught time in American culture. “Script” in conjunction with “Shooting” gives the impressions that Rich is attempting to annihilate traditional cultural scripts. Also, the film script is an intermediary step in the production of film—a peculiar textual artefact integral to film and yet undisclosed to the audience, much like normative scripts that underwrite cultural interactions. And yet the script is powerful in its seemingly invisibility—it is what ordains actions in film and in life. Like H.D., Rich understands and respects the potency of script, but, in Rich’s case, the poet seeks to break away from past scripts as her mode of survival during a time of social, political upheaval in American society.

For Rich, the long poem becomes an exploratory vessel and an analogue to film.

Indeed, McCorkle argues that:

The filmic analogue or model is most extensively and successfully explored in “Shooting Script.” [...] The title suggests incompleteness specifically because it is a version or a plan for a film not yet made and that may turn out entirely different. The poet comes a role player, the self a mask, the poem a script. Though the poem is a newsreel of items describing a destructive culture, the poem also examines language and poetry as implicated in that destructive culture. (107)

In *Shooting Script*, Rich cycles through various vignettes and the poet becomes an itinerant, almost documentarian figure exploring the destructive currents of her society. McCorkle flags this destructiveness and situates poetry as embroiled in it. Yet Rich also probes the limits of present culture, viewing poetry as implicated and also capable of reaching beyond the plight of contemporary political realities as an ethical imperative. Indeed, McCorkle writes:

We must assume an ethical relation to language if self-definition and political change are to take place. Rich discovers, as we do, through the process of the poem's own movement, that language's transformative power lies in its projection toward a future through the ongoing, discursive transactions of language. (107)

Rich's turn to a fragmentary, dynamic and unresolved poetic mode in *Shooting Script* emulates the sense of ongoingness she culls from filmic montage and this imperative drive to gesture toward worlds beyond the present. Harnessing the cinematic glance that disrupts metonymy, Rich inaugurates a poetic dimension in which the part functions as whole even or no matter the whole. This rupture extends to dismantle narrative time, with the lyric moving away from metonymy. Rich's cinematic poems undercut linear time and finality, allowing the part or fragmented moment to function outside the service of linear narrative. This ushers in the associative, mutable visual logic that marks Rich's later poetry. *Shooting Script* with its multi-part meandering borrows the episodic narration of French New Wave film and undercuts the teleology of traditional narrative. Rich probes at poetic moments beyond totalizing discourse, engaging in continuous currents ("the wheel of an endless conversation" [53]). *Shooting Script* interrogates language and time as a continuous cycle rather than a static grid or determined path. As a result, Rich's lyric absorbs the episodic, fragmented discourse of experimental film in order to reconstitute the known world.

The first poem in the series announces the long poem's investment in the dynamic state of discourse. The poem begins strapped to this kinetic discourse: "We were bound on the wheel of an endless conversation" (53). The first line enacts in multiple senses the epic's inaugural gesture—*in media res*. The poem begins by entering the unceasing churn of conversation and the first person plural brings speaker and addressee along for the mythic eternal ride. This initial action signals the cyclical nature of time and discourse. The poem

situates text and film as part of a larger cultural conversation. Rich demonstrates that through participating in filmic culture, the poet and reader constitute a community as they form an audience, a collective witness to the changing times and media. In this particular poem, we are committed to eternal time, bound to discourse like a fated mythical hero. Following this dynamic initiation, Rich embarks on a litany of images of varying scales that concern the anticipation of transformation and communication:

Inside this shell, a tide waiting for someone to enter.

A monologue waiting for you to interrupt it.

A man wading into the surf. The dialogue of the rock with the breaker.

The wave changed instantly by the rock; the rock changed by the wave  
returning        over and over. (53)

The human and non-human worlds await eagerly the next instance of dialogue, participating in the endless chatter, fostering a climate of anticipation and momentum in the poem, shifting in scope quickly, from shell to human. The shell, a receptacle known for emulating the sounds of the ocean, awaits contact, to participate in acts of transmission and reception like the human wading into the surf. The landscape isn't passive or indifferent: it desires an interlocutor just as the monologue craves dialogue. In Rich's rendering, images aren't inert or self-containing—they beg for rhetorical reaction, the active viewer who does not merely witness, but actually responds. Rich argues that cinema has transformed viewing and observation into a participatory form of discourse. Cinema as a sensory and existential experience demands a complex participatory reaction from the audience. It also braids the “you” and “I” of poetry into a collective “we,” desirous of missives. Film is changing the mind of the poet so that her poetics are open to dialogue. The verbs in this first poem adhere to the present participle, the continuous present, emulating the endlessness of the wheel of

conversation. Rich paints a landscape hungry for sound and movement, emulating filmic representation.

With the fragmentary, dynamic long poem, Rich knit the filmic into her poetics. The poem rotates through a cycle of seashore and discourse images, reciting: “A cycle whose rhythm begins to change the meaning of words” (53). The poem’s cyclical itinerary involves the alteration of meaning with each rotation. This cyclical list works through discursive progression, contemplating how representational technology influences language and how meaning changes with time. In the next line, the speaker utters “A wheel of blinding waves of light, the spokes pulsing out from where we hang together in the turning of an endless conversation” (53). The poem initiates this sense of the cyclical nature of discourse. The wheel of light recalls the film reel, drawing from the circularity of film as apparatus and how a film can play on loop. The reel invokes the anti-teleological quality of French New Wave, which Rich admires and deploys lyrically to resist normative, linearity. The blinding wheel brings to mind the breaking wheel—a torture device. This valence of the wheel image underscores how language not only responds to violence but also enacts it, resonating with the violent connotation of shooting lurking in the title of the long poem. The waves of light also suggest the immersive light experience of film, its pulsations of light yoking the audience together in shared experience. The use of the word “pulsing” echoes “Planetarium” and its speaker whose body translates the pulsations into images. In this segment of *Shooting Script*, the speaker extends her somatic translation to construct a collective who, together, experience the transmission of light and images. The interlocutor is no longer a lone agent seeking to right historical wrongs, but, rather part of a larger audience, a new generation of filmgoers. In this initial section of the long poem, Rich dwells on representation as generative cycle and meaning as forged through dialogue

The long poem conjures an atmosphere of innovation by gesturing to past forms. In this spirit, Rich adds many ghazals—or, rather, bastardized ghazals—to the collection, including one poem explicitly labelled as “Ghazal V” in *Shooting Script*. In fact, the inclusion of the ghazal, with its contained verses, imbues the entire poem with a ghazal-like ethos. The roots of the form are found in Iranian, Pakistani and Indian music.<sup>36</sup> The inclusion of the ghazal in this long poem is formally provocative and unexpected. And yet its presence yokes the poem to the past as well as the imagined future. In turning back to this older non-Western form, Rich pushes back against the totalizing force of Western culture, acknowledging that the neoliberal oppressive spirit of her contemporary moment, while seemingly ubiquitous, is not the only form of reality and language and that other forms and cultures exist distinct from her own American culture.

Traditionally the ghazal’s form is such that each couplet stands autonomously while subtly repeating a refrain in the second line. The poem encourages a sense of isolation in that each couplet is a sealed off unit that functions independent from the rest of the poem and yet contains an echo of the other couplets. This paradoxical collision of independence yet repetition is useful to Rich’s project in *Shooting Script*, a multi-part long poem in which each vignette presents its own world while also carrying forward a united filmic mood. In Rich’s hands, the traditional form of ghazal resonates with avant-garde montage in that each stanza, like the filmic image, stands on its own and does not purport to serve or represent the whole. The ghazal resonates with the non-teleological, episodic structure of Rich’s poems and French New Wave films. The paratactic structure of the ghazal allows Rich to counter narrative time and, instead, meander poetically with a non-linear logic. This inclusion of the innovated traditional ghazal in the long poem enacts the cycle of adaptation and rotation that

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<sup>36</sup> Agha Shahid Ali introduced the form to an American poetry audience, but not until after Rich wrote *Shooting Script*. In the 1960s, Ravi Shankar and Begum Akhtar made the ghazal popular in the English-speaking world.

Rich introduces in the first section. Rich appropriates the ghazal from Mirza Ghalib, as she notes in the epigraph, and modifies the form for her contemporary moment. She portrays this formal adaption as urgent: “Now tell me your story till the blood drips from your lashes. Any / other version belongs to your folklore, or ours” (54). The speaker’s imperative demands for the telling of the story and the blood it induces create an urgent, uneasy atmosphere, contributing the feeling of violent risk that underpins the long poem. The speaker yearns for the contemporary, adapted version of the story, one that stems from and yet still diverges from the collective tradition of folklore. With her adaptation of the ghazal, Rich’s collection cycles forward while remaining simultaneously connected to past discourse. With this gesture, Rich suggests that the smaller poems in *Shooting Script* function like the stanzas of the ghazal: they contemplate a topic and function as part of the whole while retaining distinct integrity rather than metonymic servitude. Even the two part-structure of the long poem alludes to the two-line stanza of the ghazal, as the form of *Shooting Script* moves out in concentric circles—from couplets in the ghazal to the overall two halves of the long poem. Lines function independently, but they still contribute to a net mood—one of cyclical movement, rather than pointed, teleological resolution. In this way, the long poem breaks from formal scripts to pursue a new way of conceiving of time, history, and narrative as cyclical.

The poem articulates various mantras of ongoingness. As the poem endures, and the speaker observes in the final lines of the third poem that, “going comes before gone, over / and over the point is missed and still the blind will turns for / its target” (55), vocalizing this sense of ongoingness Rich takes from avant-garde film. The speaker asserts that even finality exists as a continuous verb before it shifts into the past—“going comes before gone”—echoing the refrain of endlessness. These lines search for a target, a point, and a conclusive answer to narrate experience while illuminating the fruitlessness of this task. The poem

emphasizes process over product, similar to the how in “Images for Godard,” “the notes for the poem are the only poem” (49). And then in the first line of the fourth poem: “In my imagination I was the pivot of a fresh beginning” (46). The speaker retreats into her psyche to regenerate her trajectory, shifting her sights onto a new bold world. This sentiment of turning over echoes in the last line of the fifth poem: “Sleeping to dream of the unformed, the veil of water pouring over / the wet clay, the rhythm of choice, the lost methods.” (57). The poem is rife with this feeling of turning over, recasting the formed, wetting the clay as methods of representation are discovered and transformed. Rich’s filmic poetry recasts the clay of language and directs it towards a collective, progressive ethos. The poet’s pivot point is caught up in film.

In contrast to this thrust forward, the fifth poem dives into a mythical yet mundane space where villagers enter the fray and embark on a lengthy walk. The peasants are a bizarre jaunt into a rural space in light of Rich’s overt cosmopolitanism. The poem dips into the genre of anthropological documentary, calling to the forefront rural life in the face of urban anxieties. The poem strikes a curious documentarian pose. But Rich isn’t interested in distancing this rural scene through the cool gaze of anthropology documentary;<sup>37</sup> instead, she establishes continuity in discourse despite alterations over time—a recursive connection. The speaker gains the ability to identify with the peasants once she locates their language: “They seem strange to me, till I began to recall their dialect” (57). Rich’s speaker does not look wistfully at an idealized, distant past, but rather she empathizes and forges a connection through the physical hardships and dialogue. Rich depicts empathetic relations as forged out of language, and even further, through embodied language as the speaker observes: “The sole of the foot is a map, the palm of the hand a letter, / learned by heart and worn close to the body (57). These moments of embodied language resonate with lines from “The Will to

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<sup>37</sup> The integration of the genre of the anthropological documentary recalls Moore’s own engagement of the gaze of the animal documentaries.

Change,” in which the speaker suggests: “We are living through a time / that needs to be lived through us” (42). Rich argues that the duration of time and cultural change is embodied, that political and cultural shifts play out on the physical plane. The collective audience both sees and experiences the action of film and cultural progress. For Rich, poetry is a speculative tool that has real-life implications; language and representation are imagined and then lived through the body. *The Will to Change* takes seeing as an embodied and imaginative act as its core.

While Rich treats film as a conduit for re-envisioning poetics and politics, she is careful not to cast treat the light-fuelled medium as a clear window into reality. Markedly, Rich subverts the trope of light as clarity in the sixth poem, associating it with contamination. It becomes a kind of “bad light” that “eats away at the clarities [the speaker] had fixed on,” (58) compromising her ability to perceive. Rich renders light a vermin-like agent as “it moves up / like a rodent at the edge of the raked paths. // Your clarities may not reach me; but your attention will” (58). In this poetic treatment, light obscures and erodes rather than illuminates. Rich momentarily strips light of its transcendent connotations, and, instead mixes it into the cloudy contaminate of human language. Interestingly, the speaker distinguishes between clarity and attention; the gaze endures despite the lack of clarity. Connection between the first person and second person is still possible through sustained attention or viewership. The gaze may not be clear or free of bias, but it may establish dialogue and communion. The presence of the audience is more important than the clarity of the message. Rich reverses the trope of light as clear lens to stress the connective possibility of the act of viewing rather than film as clear conduit of enlightenment. The speaker continues: “You are beside me like a wall: I touch you with my fingers and / keep trying to move through the bad light” (58). She communicates touch by way of touch. Also, Rich reverses the trope of the wall as a barrier to connection. The poem configures the wall as a tactile site capable of fostering conversation; it

is the site of projection and haptic communication. The wall with its screen of bad light is suddenly part of the apparatus of discourse, projecting imagination and sensations. Rich's reverses tropes, such as light as clear and pure and the wall as a barrier to connection, as means to perceive new ideas and visions of relationality through language.

This idiosyncratic moment of connection in the physical world continues in the seventh poem. As it ends, the speaker picks "the wax to crumbs in the iron lip of the candelabrum," and exchanges them with another who "take[s] the crumbs of wax as I picked them apart and handed them over" (59). This exchange between speaker and addressee insinuates that speech is malleable, moving between figures and forms, liquid and solid, melting and reforming in the hands of the addressee. The endless cycle of conversation from the first poem reincarnates in this exchange, manifesting as the transformation of physical forms. The scale of this poem is minute: "When the flame shrinks to a blue bead, there is danger; the change of light in a flickering situation" (59). The poem situates the local in relation to the macro—overwhelming, large-scale, dangerous winds, such as global and national conflict and patriarchal abuse, register in daily life and reduce the light of the candle's flame to a small bead. Further, the poem associates light with text: "Stretched on the loom the light expands" (59), using the metaphor of the loom to knit light, a metaphor for film, and text together, and emphasizing their interrelated rapport in a project of re-envisioning language. The light expands across the loom, like a screen despite the larger looming danger. The first section of the long poem ends with these reoccurring acts of transference in which light, discourse, and physical materials become mutable and interlinked: "Someone who never said, 'What do you feel?' someone who sat across from me, taking the crumbs of wax as I picked them apart and handed them over" (59). Like the wheel of endless conversation at the beginning of the section, the speaker is now enmeshed in a looping exchange on the physical plane as the first act of the poem concludes. A material

exchange superimposes onto conversation; the crumbs of wax take the place of the questions. The speaker picks apart the crumbs of wax and then passes them back. The first half to the poem returns to the cyclical nature of discourse, but spirals out to incorporate the physical, mundane world, emphasizing the malleable aspects of language on a personal scale. The endless conversation continues through a gestural, tactile interchange. The exchange of the melting and cooling wax suggests mutability and miniscule change. In light of the large-scale violence of her contemporary moment, Rich insinuates the possibility of social progression playing out at the minute, mundane, interpersonal level.

The second half of the long poem appends the first half, resonating with Rich's unique adaptation of a ghazal-like formal structure. It is a second act that functions much like the second line in the couplet of the ghazal—attached but not entirely devoted to the symmetry of the unit as in the sonnet couplet. The alleged looseness of Rich's form in *The Will to Change* is not without form. The eighth poem in the series and the first of the second poem diverts from the dynamic mood of the first half. Instead of this focus on formal motion and innovation, the second act of the poem heralds in an atmosphere of stagnation, swollenness, and over-saturation: "The woman is too heavy for this poem" (61). A physical and psychic abundance weighs down the poem. The syntax becomes cluttered and slows down with lines that spill over the edge of the line. The poem is rife with a sense of overwrought profusion leading to uselessness. Rich juxtaposes two potential uses of poetry: "Entering the poem as a method of leaving the room. / Entering the paper airplane of the poem, which somewhere before / its destination starts curling into ash and comes apart" (61). She contrasts two views of the usefulness of the poem in the twentieth century: poetry as escape route versus poetry as didactic expedition—entering the poem as an exit from reality or as a moralist rationalizing of it. Rich configures each method spatially as a threshold one crosses. And so, the tone is critical as the speaker reduces these two aims to bathos and

unveils their stark futility: poetic refuge becomes just leaving the room and didacticism deflates into an unfurling, burning paper airplane. The woman of the poem is “rooted to memory like a wedge in a block of wood” (61), and becomes an emblem of blockage. The progressive cycle of conversation stalls upon adhering to the past. Rich then addresses the second person, the critic: “You call this a poetry of false problems, the shotgun wedding of the / mind, the subversion of choice by language” (61). The claims levelled against poetry include: mental rashness, subterfuge, deceptiveness—in short: rhetoric for the sake of rhetoric. In contrast to this poetry of false problems, Rich proposes a list of actions to counter this stasis the poem has found itself in: “to pull the sooty strings to set the / window bare to purge the room with light to feel the sun breaking in on the courtyard and the steamheat smothering in the shut-off pipes” (61). The speaker embarks on a domestic to-do list, foraging through soot and steam to find the room purged with light and transforming the mundane squalor into a poetic endeavour. The quotidian setting becomes a site of poetic fabrication. While initially full of doubt and stagnation, the poem eventually rises out of the muck unexpectedly, rummaging through domestic space to find poetic magic in the smallest of scales. This final turn of the poem escapes the initial stagnation by transforming the mundane into a productive poetic space of pathos: “To feel existence as this time, this place, the pathos and force / of the lumps of snow gritted and melting in the unloved corners of / the courtyard” (61). The poem focuses on seemingly stagnant details of the everyday but then animates them. Thus Rich proves how to generate kinesis out of a seemingly torpid reality and deploys quotidian language as a dynamic tool of re-imagination. The beginning of the second half of the long poem excavates poetic light from the mess and boredom of daily life. In response to overwhelmingly oppressive large-scale influences reducing the small flame at the end of the previous section, the first poem of the second act portrays a poetic reimagining of mundane squalor, focusing on small changes reverberate outward.

Extending this exploration of mundane materiality in relation to hierarchical oppression, Rich returns to the camera's gaze and its impact of the embodied subject in the ninth poem, titled "(Newsreel)." The speaker of this scene dons the mask of a young soldier, presumably male as he watches war footage, searching for traces of himself and treating it as a record of his own life that will reveal "actual persons known to me and not seen since; impossible not to look for myself" (62). He views the newsreel like a mirror, a reflection of his own experience, trusting the gaze to enact mimesis. But the footage he watches deviates from his own experience, disrupting his faith in the film's veracity and foiling his desire to identify with the turmoil depicted. The experience of film differing from his desire and experience is jarring and confusing for the speaker—perhaps touching on the masculine privilege of seeing the world as he knows it reflected back to him in film and culture. This thread of disrupted cognition harkens back to H.D.'s epic *Helen in Egypt* and the murky distinction between illusion and reality. Like H.D.'s Helen, the speaker experiences this confusion somatically: "Somewhere my body goes taut under the deluge, somewhere I am / naked behind the lines, washing my body in the water of that war" (62). While the speaker fails to find himself in the film footage of the war, he retains the muscle memory of a related event that the experience of witnessing the film recalls. The distinctions between reality and illusion, history and fantasy, dream and experience, become blurred as the speaker relates in a very real way to the footage that does not actually align with his own lived experience. In Rich's epic, war plays out on screens, recalling the proliferations of images of the Vietnam War in America. The poem alludes to how newsreels impart pathos and spectacle of war—the footage is both real and part of narrative.

Even further, in twentieth-century cinematic epic, the speaker witnesses war as part of an audience: "But this is not the war I came to see, buying my ticket, stumbling / through darkness, finding my places among the sleepers and / masturbators in the dark" (62). The

experience of viewing violent history exists alongside other mundane or nefarious activities that take place in the cinema. But most of all, the footage prompts the speaker to consider perception in relation to reality and representation.

Upon viewing the newsreel, the speaker recalls being both object and subject of film. While an audience member, the speaker questions the memory of events and their relation to the public record. Rich suggests that one's response to film is both corporeal and psychic since this looking evokes the speaker's own experience of filmed participation in war: "Once I know they filmed us, back at the camp behind the lines, / taking showers under the trees and showing pictures of our girls" (62). The speaker is rendered into a filmic object while showering and peddling photographs of women. This transposition from viewer to actor elides the traditional binary of viewer/object and masculine/feminine. This bodily vulnerability he experiences articulates the somatic repercussions of film, how the body becomes an icon traversing cultural media. In this visual economy, all subjects and experience are filmable and tradable. Women's bodies historically circulate as aesthetic, sexual objects, but Rich points out that men, especially the soldiers, embodied pawns of the American Vietnam war, enter this filmic exchange due to their fallibility in this martial environment. Their cultural currency hinges on their physical value. The speaker experiences both familiarity and alienation upon encountering war footage, which emphasizes the dual potential of film to objectify and empathize. The soldier's experience divides into that of subject and object as he enters the movie theatre. The experience itself becomes an object due to the mechanical process of filming: "Someone has that war stored up in metal canisters" (62). The poem also calls into question how film purports to represent reality through the function as proof: "somewhere my innocence is proven with my guilt, but / this would not be the war I fought in" (62). In this scenario, the soldier's deeds are ambiguously both innocent and guilty—film can be ambivalent, but not objective. Film bends to the cultural scripts and

narratives that underpin reality. In fact, Rich suggests that the alleged realism of film demonstrates that verisimilitude is figuration rather than a privileged access point to objectivity. The soldier's confusion over trying to reconcile filmic representation and personal experience, echoed in the duality of his guilt and innocence, pronounces Rich's newly raised filmic consciousness, her awareness of film as illusion that constructs lived experience. The poem integrates the soldier's dual experience of participating in war and watching its footage, flagging Rich's investment in contesting mainstream, violent cultural scripts. This newsreel section depicts how American geo-politics resonate in personal and filmic terms, suggesting Rich's view of the personal as political, especially amidst the backdrop of the widely televised Vietnam War.

The second section of the long poem cycles through a panorama of different, moody vignettes—the poem moves through war documentary, mystical domesticity, dark pastoral, and the urban grit of neorealism. All of these divergent scenes create worlds unto themselves, exercising the imagined realities of Rich's lyric subjunctive. Rich imagines cinematic illusion in relation to mysticism in the tenth section of the long poem. She depicts an oracle who comes to stand for cultural visions of film—both film and psychic are a medium. This pun allows Rich to contemplate the mystical view of cinema by addressing a clairvoyant. The figure of the psychic alludes to H.D. and her oracular and mystical regard for poetry and film. In Rich's poem, the psychic possesses mutable, mercurial qualities and inspires a large, devoted following, thus becoming an emblem of film. The medium, though met with reverence, is the site of significant human projection:

They come to you with their descriptions of your soul  
 They come and drop their mementoes at the foot of your bed; their  
 feathers, ferns, fans, grasses from the western mountains.  
 They wait for you to unfurl for them like a paper flower, a secret

springing open in a glass of water.

They believe your future has a history and that it is themselves. (63)

Clients enter her home, armed with a cornucopia of material gifts and proceed to project their desires and beliefs onto the psychic. The seekers hope to glean access to spiritual knowledge through proffering material gifts and attaching themselves to the psychic's body: ("old bracelets and rings they want to fasten onto you" [63]), as a means to chart the mystical realm through physical gestures. Indeed, the poem functions as a critique of this occult view of film. The poem is sympathetic to this impulse to locate mysticism in the experience of film and respectful of the psychic and her traditionally feminized practice and form of knowledge. But the needy masses that hungrily seek her out with their toppling piles of ornamental offerings overwhelm the psychic. She barely acts in the poem, but is rather acted upon by the clients. While *Shooting Script* harnesses the speculative and revolutionary potential of film, this section of the long poem performs a critically considers this view of film as a spiritual portal. The decadent physicality of psychic's abode and the clients' gifts are appealing and hint at an aesthetic reward in this mystical view of film.<sup>38</sup> In this section, the psychic reflects back to her clients' their own desires, much like the captivating fantasy of film. Rich deviates from H.D.'s oracular view of film and, instead, sees its social, collective potential in the material realm. The poem concludes by comparing the psychic to a letter and a mirror and, in doing so, yoking epistolary form with visual media: "You are a mirror lost in a brook, an eye reflecting a torrent of reflections. / You are a letter written, folded, burnt to ash, and mailed in an envelopment to another continent" (63). The projection the "I" enacts in relation to the "you" in a letter is akin to projection onto a screen. Through this alchemy of address, the psychic stands for film—the point at which society projects fear and desire.

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<sup>38</sup> This filmic oracular pays homage to H.D.'s own occult modernism and psychic rapport with film.

The eleventh poem turns into a dark pastoral lyric as the speaker travels further into the kaleidoscopic cinemascapes. While hiking, she encounters a mare's skeleton, its death paradoxically indicates "another sign of life" (64) and the remains of the animal, like the dead yet living signs in cinematic footage, gets absorbed into human culture and language. The speaker knows this scene from art: "In the desert these bones would be burnt white" (64), referencing Georgia O'Keefe's skeletal desert paintings. Evidently, the skeleton becomes a "statement [that] is here and clear" (64). The animal, in death, comes to resemble signs of life, just as non-living cinematic footage comes to signal or stand in for the simulation of life. The skeleton even appears to return the gaze of the hiker: "The pelvis, the open archway, staring at me like an eye" (64), echoing the speaker's own voyeurism in the face of the animal's dead body. The pelvis of a dead mare meets the speaker's eye: this human-animal interaction brings up issues of gender and animality. The object stimulating the speaker's visual eye is animal, feminine, and most notably dead. This visual exchange enacts the potency of the gaze. The speaker projects onto the dead animal, which foregrounds the power of the human gaze—how the visual fire animates regardless<sup>39</sup> of the object's own agency or liveliness. The speaker's desire to be met by a face suggests the enduring impulse to anthropomorphize, as Moore illuminates in her animal poems. This interaction underscores the potency of the human gaze.

The poem enacts an ironically playful curiosity as the hikers joyfully prod at the animals' bones and bounce through the woods after the encounter. The brush with the animal's carcass reminds them of their own vitality. They have had a cinematic, or vicarious, encounter with death that has entertained them and they leave the theatre of death, roused to celebrate human history through theatrical role playing of tropes "mining the speech of noble savages, of the fathers of our country" (64). Yet the questions surrounding the animal's death

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<sup>39</sup> This is an example of pareidolia: the human tendency to perceive faces in inanimate objects.

remain ominous and suggest death by human hand (“Did she break her leg or die of poison?” [64]). The death of the mare is twofold: first she is killed by humans and then absorbed into human culture as spectacle. The speakers are viewers who rejoice and learn from their framed encounter. The mare, like the psychic, is another screen onto which the viewers project their fears or desires. As a result, Rich draws attention to the gaze as a potentially radical site of re-envisioning or as a reinforcement of the status quo.

The poem then shifts to a scene of urban decay. The mare’s bones morph into skeletons littering the city streets as the sacrifice of human history and capital in the twelfth poem. The speaker trolls New York amidst an atmosphere of dissolution. In this scene, the perspective shifts dramatically away from the morbid pastoral to the urban grit of New York in 1970. Here the skeletons are human, marked by class due to their placement in New York’s subsidized housing; the bones and detritus of the past pull the poem out of a pastoral escape into urban realism. Immediately, the speaker declares, “I was looking for a way out of a lifetime’s consolations” (65), setting a dejected mood in which despair accompanies the commercial exchanges of capitalist life. In this poem, mortality permeates the speaker’s world: she sees decay in old sun-damaged cloths while wholesale window-shopping and she can only sense where she is geographically with the loss of light. The poem resounds like a death knell:

When I give up being paraphrased, when I let go, when the  
 beautiful solutions in their crystal flasks have dried up in the sun,  
 when the lightbulb bursts on lighting, when the dead bulb rattles  
 like a seed-pod. (65)

The speaker articulates an impending loss, living with signs of imminent death and deterioration. And so the cloths from her window shopping are actually “mummies’ clothes,” that have foreboding ramifications for the capitalist market in which they circulate: “they

have lain in graves, they were not intended to be sold, the tragedy of this mistake will soon be clear” (65). Even time and the weather succumb to the market: “Vacillant needles of Manhattan, describing hour & weather; buying / these descriptions at the cost of missing every other point” (65). The speaker expresses frustration with this abjuration of history and this rendering of everything, the geography of New York and human life and remains, into capital. The poem adopts the genre of Italian neorealism, nodding to the clash of modernity and tradition depicted in such films as *Mama Roma*, in which the old and new modes ultimately fail vulnerable factions of humanity. This is especially stark in contrast to the pastoral jaunt of the previous poem. Both these sections contend with the consumptive, objectifying potential of the gaze—the hikers view the dead animal as spectacle, the urban realm is reduced to the dregs of capital. The long poem with its episodic bursts of shorter poems enacts these variant generic shifts with Rich swivelling through cinematic modes and moods in her epic conversation with film. This flickering through a panorama of cinematic modes and genres signals Rich’s turn to a filmic lyric in her poetry as a means to reframe her world and imagine new ones.

In the penultimate section of the poem, the speaker embarks on an exploratory mission. This poem with its investigative thrust anticipates “Diving into the Wreck.” As in Rich’s iconic poem, the speaker tests historically dangerous waters, charting new territory in order to resist the old tradition hounding her: “once it wouldn’t have occurred to / me to put out in a boat, not on a night like this” (66). Instead of diving into the water, the speaker dives into night, reclaiming the darkness she has been taught to distrust and retraining herself to manipulate the vessel of the boat: “I had no / special training and my own training as against me” (66). Like the instrument of translation from “Planetarium,” the speaker must retune herself in relation to the objects around her. In this portion of the poem, the speaker resembles Eurydice, rising out from the darkness of Hades. But in Rich’s rewriting, she

wields the boat and rescues herself. While Rich at times poses as Orpheus in this long poem, a poet peddling through worlds, she also channels Eurydice and embarking on an updated journey. The dark atmosphere aids in liberation: “I had always heard that darkness and water were a threat // In spite of this, darkness and water helped me to arrive here” (66). She accesses knowledge and emancipation by way of darkness, like the filmgoer from “Images for Godard” who states “To know the extremes of light / I sit in this darkness” (47). Rich, empowered by the experience of film, directs Eurydice to enter a new world that deviates from traditional myth. This speaker will eventually morph into the freedom and knowledge seeker of “Diving into the Wreck” but first she learns to command a boat through new waters. *The Will to Change* imagines the journey Rich undertakes in her later collections. The filmic lyric with its subjunctive articulation of possibility, uncertainty and desire enables Rich’s renewed poetics.

The final poem is a call arms to enter this dynamic, filmic reality of ongoingness, to continue the wheel of conversation with the knowledge gleaned from dipping into variant filmic experiences. For Rich, film is reminiscent of the subjunctive mood and this filmic experience is a journey that takes place on and off screen. As with the Eurydice-like figure from the previous section, this speaker is an explorer armed with tools and gear reminiscent of the cultural aquanaut of Rich’s “Diving into the Wreck.” In *Shooting Script*, the explorer has “grains of the glacier caked in the boot cleats” (67) instead of flippers and is equipped with “the prism in your pocket, the thin glass lens, the map of the inner city, the little book with gridded pages” (67) instead of the diver’s “book of myths, and loaded [...] camera, and checked [...] edge of the knife-blade,” (22). The filmic explorer of *Shooting Script* actually anticipates the cultural trailblazer of “Diving into the Wreck” (67). This resonance across poems imbues Rich’s earlier filmic period with significance as it influenced her later poetic

pioneering. The subjunctive mode of film allowed Rich to begin to contemplate the dive into new poetic waters.

The speaker of *Shooting Script* in its final segment advocates for an anticipated journey from the subjunctive and into the infinitive. The journey is prompted by images that stimulate a pivot point: “Whatever it was, the image that stopped you, the one on which you came to grief, projecting it over & over on empty walls” (67). The projected images of film looping over and over incite the speaker’s call to action and revolution. Following the affective response to visual media, the speaker instructs: “Now to give up the temptations of the projector; to see instead the / web of cracks filtering across the plaster” (67). The speaker shifts the focus away from the screen and imagining of other worlds and onto the material world with its cracks in need of repair and reinvention. While calling for a cessation of the distractions of the filmic world, the poem still carries forward a filmic mode of being. Rich’s filmic lyric is integral to her process of conceiving how to move from the conditional of would towards innovative will. Giorgio Agamben contends with this poetic potentiality:

On the writing tablet of the celestial scribe, the letter, the act of writing, marks the passage from potentiality to actuality, the occurrence of a contingency. But precisely for this reason, every letter also marks the nonoccurrence of something; every letter is always in this sense a “dead letter.” (269)

Rich’s *The Will to Change* rests on this precipice of possibility, occurrence and nonoccurrence, willing movement whether it comes to pass or not. The experience of experimental film alerted Rich to imagine newfound aesthetics and worldly possibilities. In turn, her script is contingent in both senses, articulating possibility and emergency.

The poem then becomes a list of actions in the form of infinitive verbs. The poem shifts its focus to action—the ongoingness of the task at hand, the infinite work to be done, the filmic mode that continues to flicker in lived reality, refusing resolution and urging on

revolution and endless conversation. Rich shifts from the subjunctive world of possibilities to the infinite world of continuous action, connecting the moods through envisioning text and film as a part of the revolutionary module. The first action of this passage is: “To read there the map of the future, the roads radiating from the / initial split, the filaments thrown out from that impasse” (67). The act of reading is the way forward and through the impasse, to embrace splits and fracture. The prism lens is a tool for the explorer of new possibilities—fractured light alters perspective and the explorer-poet can then use this altered vision to jostle old structures and envision new realms. The process of meandering through the filmic avant-garde, through the fractured light of the prism activates a pivot point for Rich that leads to change. The poem ends with the suggestion of continued change and movement. The speaker calls for departure from familiar territory: “To pull yourself up by your own roots; to eat the last meal in / your old neighbourhood” (67). These two actions of change, uprooting and a farewell ritual of biblical proportion, suggest rebirth in a new form. The phrase “pull yourself up” riffs on America’s capitalist mantra of pulling oneself up by their bootstraps. Instead, Rich imagines uprooting America’s present capitalist mood, and advocating for a new mode for America to pursue, the much-needed move away from bequeathed gender roles and tradition towards a newly forged and socially just society. Amidst a turbulent, violent climate, Rich’s turns to film in *Shooting Script* to cultivate a way forward for her poetics and politics.

Claire Keyes observes that, “As the title ‘*Shooting Script*’ asserts, these poems are not the finished product—not the movie. Rich follows through, then, on what she says in ‘Images for Godard’: ‘the notes for the poem are the only poem’” (123). The unfinished or note-like quality of the long poem and its short generic fluctuations enact projective verse according to Keyes. But it is also a commitment to a filmic mode of ongoingness, a desire to live in the infinitive tense after imagining new possibilities by way of the subjunctive mood. Rich

composes a filmic feature-length poem that travels through variant worlds, exploring moods and genres. Rich becomes Orpheus travelling through various underworlds. In *Shooting Script* Rich wades through multiple vignettes in order to set in motion the expedition she will undertake in “Diving into the Wreck.” Armed with the imaginative, subjunctive mood gleaned from the French avant-garde, Rich melds the long poem with the feature film. In doing so, she counters traditional poetic, cultural scripts. Her speaker becomes both Orpheus and Eurydice, both objectified feminine and masculine bodies, pastoral and urban, all rendered in poetic and filmic terms. In Rich’s moment of change, the poet must become an agent as well as a viewer.

After *The Will to Change*, Rich went on to establish herself as a prominent twentieth-century American poet committed to social justice. The collections that followed, The National Book Award-winning *Diving into the Wreck* (1973) and *The Dream of a Common Language* (1978), cemented Rich’s lauded poetics and political position. Yet *The Will to Change* was the pivot point for Rich and, as suggested by “Images for Godard,” the poet underwent a radical poetic and political shift under the influence of French New Wave. Film was the catalyst for Rich’s renewed poetic approach, encouraging Rich’s political and poetical progression. Her poetics continued to evolve throughout her career, and she eventually veered away from the filmic lyric of *The Will to Change*, but this moment did open up her verse. There are, however, a few instances of this filmic turn in the later poetry. For example “Cartographies of Silence” continues the endless dialogue of *Shooting Script*:

A conversation begins  
with a lie. And each  
  
speaker of the so-called common language feels  
the ice-floe split the drift apart (16)

The conservation in “Cartographies of Silence” focuses on fissures and omissions in mainstream narrative. Rich illuminates the missing voices in history as she once envisioned the repressed figures of history and pushed beyond French New Wave’s own limitations in *The Will to Change*. *The Will to Change* generates new conversations, but *The Dream of a Common Language* mourns the silences; its speakers feel bereft in the face of alienation and inadequacy of conventional language. Still the project of *The Will to Change* to challenge dominant scripts resurfaces in Rich’s later poem. “Cartographies of Silence,” however, engages with sonic metaphors instead of optical ones to contemplate the constraints of dominant culture. Here the speaker defines “the technology of silence” as distinct from absence, looking for the stories that have disappeared but that exist nonetheless as a “blueprint to a life” (17). Rich’s emphasis on sonic technology differs from but shares some space with her earlier filmic interventions. The poem alludes to Carl Dreyer’s *Passion of Joan*, although Rich’s treatment of the film differs somewhat from H.D.’s take on it:

The silence that strips bare:

In Dreyer’s *Passion of Joan*

Falconetti’s face, hair shorn, a great geography

mutely surveyed by the camera

If there were a poetry where this could happen

not as blank spaces or as words

stretched like a skin over meanings

but as silence falls at the end

of a night through which two people  
 have talked till dawn (18)

Rich turns to the repeated close-ups of Maria Falconetti's tortured face in her performance as Joan for Dreyer's film. In Rich's account, the close-up stands in for the oppressed history of women. The camera discloses this generative silence visually, although the speaker questions whether poetry can actually redress this injustice and violence. Importantly, the speaker makes use of the subjunctive mode ("If there were") upon wishing for a poetic language retrieve these silences and forgotten histories. Once more Rich turns to the subjunctive mood of film to push the boundaries of poetic imagining to challenge the failings of dominant discourses. "Cartographies of Silence" demonstrates how Rich continues the poetic project of renewal she embarked on in *The Will for Change*.

Although her filmic experiments in *The Will to Change* opened up her style, embracing a more avant-garde aesthetic, the loose strangeness she experimented with in *Shooting Script* rarely emerges again. Only the long poem *An Atlas of the Difficult World* from the 1991 collection of the same name unfolds in a similarly cinematic way. This long poem feels more like a dream-like pseudo-documentary that dwells on the violence of Western America's manifest destiny and its exploitative labour. It formally approaches the associative non-linear poetic ambiance that characterizes *Shooting Script*. But *The Will to Change* allowed her to set her lyric free from a tightly bound form. In *The Will to Change*, Rich explores desire, impossibility, uncertainty, and obligation. Her later poetry returns to coherency but benefits from her having strayed from structure and constructing alternative spaces in *The Will to Change*. Rich's filmic moment and turn released a dynamic energy; it was her first breakthrough as an Orpheus figure traversing the other side of the mirror.

### **Coda: Cinematic Projects in Poetry**

Ultimately, H.D., Marianne Moore, and Adrienne Rich reacted to and appropriated what the editors of *Close Up 1927-1933: Cinema and Modernism* define as the “aesthetic possibilities opened up by *cinema*” (vii). My project responds to these editors’ call to track the influence of film on literary modernism. Certainly, H.D., Moore, and Rich engage with film in metaphorical terms, treating its presence as analogous to literature, but also envisioning film as means to work through poetic form and received power structures that govern the self and other. This study expands on McCabe’s psychoanalytical treatment of H.D. and Moore and their investment in the body during the era of psychoanalysis and film. I extend this inquiry to note the formal, historical components of their poetic engagements with film and how they illuminate relationality and a triangulation of visibility, bodies, and power, especially in relation to non-human and feminine bodies. I elaborate on McCabe’s categorization of Moore and H.D. as filmic poets by considering Wall-Romana’s suggestion that “[film] makes present the distant and the Other” (10). This sentiment echoes Sobchack’s argument that watching film hinges on the simultaneity of perceiving and experiencing. Marks maps onto Sobchack’s argument the haptic mode of seeing as a means to highlight the body and gaze and how relational, embodied, and psychological the act of looking actually is. I follow Rancière’s provocation that cinema is an art and world unto itself and seek to elucidate the poets’ filmic world visions. I pick up on these critical threads and identify how the poets contend with the gaze, power, and bodies in film-inspired poetry.

Simply put, the poets ply at what is at stake when a visual fire burns between object and viewer. The writers harness the phenomenon and energy of projection that film makes patent. Film, in Rich’s poetry, provides a critical point of self-reflection that may lead to regeneration and societal progress. For Moore, her writing about film provokes an awareness of the gaze and her poems consider the ethics that structure human/nonhuman relationships in

uncanny ways. H.D.'s film career and writing inspired a poetic investigation into the representation and deployment of feminine bodies. I postulate that the poets encountered film as a site for the reification of oppressive power relations and as a portal to new, ethical understandings of the other and all the complex combinations of these two experiences in-between. Like any medium, film can be a tool of ingrained dogma or of profound imagination—it may embody both of these inclinations to varying and combined degrees.

I selected this particular literary triad because of each poet's documented investment in film and film discourse. Their poems ask questions about visibility, power and representation. But also, they all have obtained status as atypical yet prominent poets—they are lauded and idiosyncratic. Certainly H.D., Moore and Rich are part of the canon of American poetry—a party composed of many queer poets. And yet there is something particular about these poets whose trajectories counter American twentieth century cultural normativity. H.D. and Moore are autodidacts and Rich grew critical of her academic milieu. In their strange position as privileged outliers, these educated, affluent women led fairly radical lives that resisted heteronormative gender roles and that deviated even from countercultural scripts pertaining to gay male poets of the twentieth century. From their unique vantage points, they could experiment, writing poetry that processes the times through which they lived. Their poems counter cultural norms all in distinct ways; each achieves a formal fingerprint that is unmistakably her own and that questions dominant American culture. These queer women poets turned to atypical films—literary films, animal documentaries, French New Wave—as a means to articulate and identify with otherness.

Due to their explicit engagements with film, the poets also provide examples of the literary realm contending with the terms and language of film. Specifically, I am interested in how the term “cinematic” permeates literature and critical writing. This descriptor comes up consistently in current arts and literary criticism; often writers apply the term to works of art

that demonstrate a focus on movement and visual and aural sensory experiences. Today the language of cinema infiltrates the vernacular. The works of H.D., Moore and Rich provide examples of past moments in which writers first began to import the experience and language of cinema into poetic and critical writing. In examining these examples of film-inspired poetry, I hope to call attention to how poetry first engaged with the workings and language of film.

Lisa Robertson's long poem *Cinema of the Present* (2014) appropriates this belated filmic sense that pervades contemporary literature and thought. The poem is a montage of statements that flicker between alternating lines of italic and roman type that play out like foreboding dialogue full of both portent and randomness. *Cinema of the Present*, published January 1, 2014, appears almost a century after H.D. published *Sea Garden*. And yet Robertson's choice to harness the spirit of film demonstrates the lingering effects of cinema in the realm of literature. Filmic metaphors and language prove useful to a twenty-first century conceptual poet such as Robertson because culturally we are still grappling with our relationship to cinema and its affective simultaneity of perceiving and experiencing.

Robertson's long poem processes this mediation of experience through visual culture and language. The poem's oscillating lines and its environment of motion do not emulate film or reality, but demonstrate how language produces the present. Robertson reformats time, rendering it circular. Through the persistent address to the second person and the random repetition of particular lines, the reader inherits the world of the long poem and is made to participate in the construction of a zoetrope-like journey. The form with its commitment to motion through the montage of statements unwinds like a film-reel and like a social media feed. Robertson's production of the present tense in poetry draws attention to how media articulate and frame our relationships with time and reality.

Robertson applies montage and juxtaposition to the matter of subjectivity. The

repeated address of the second person makes use of deixis, playing with how “you” is a word that requires context in order to make sense. In the poem, the second person inhabits a litany of contexts that sometimes relate or repeat. The you of the poem stretches and jumps between worlds. The juxtaposition of far-reaching statements demands that the reader insinuate the connections to connect the action, much like encountering the flickering images of the film reel. The speaker asks “And what is the subject but a stitching?” (13). The question functions like a ballast in the stream of pseudo-dialogue. Later the poem extends this mystifying contemplation of subjectivity: “*Because of subjectivity, you said. // And the daily inversions of protocol.*” (20) Robertson’s disorienting use of “you” is analogous to montage and suggests that subjectivity is a patchwork mediated through language and media. Similarly, the poem’s statement that, “You were being internally photographed” (14) inverts protocol. The line flips the script as the internal world is shown to be as vulnerable to being photographed as the exterior realm. These ambiguous yet specific passages hint at the in-depth effects of media and language in the creation of subjectivity and modern consciousness.

Robertson’s investment in film illuminates how film, despite shedding its novelty, continues to haunt literary culture. For example, Renée Jeanne Falconetti’s face from Dreyer’s *The Passion of Joan of Arc* remains a spectre, making a cameo in Robertson’s long poem:

*But you are not Mademoiselle Falconetti’s face.*

The pools of bile on the floor of the operating theatre glinting beneath heaving lamps.

*But you did not disappear to yourself.*

You rest just to the side of this great, innocent, manipulated, faith in the individual will.

*But you have not been educated to use it.*

What is a pronoun but a metaphor?

*But you'll wedge open the artificial and malleable caesura for a moment  
longer.*

You'll see.

*But your desire is not an instrument.*

You become the girl who swims underwater.

*But your theory of rest begins at the horizon.*

Because you could express herself with her face it had become your face. (21)

With this invocation of Falconetti's face from Dreyer's film, Robertson's poem situates itself in lineage from poets like H.D. and Rich who contemplate the fraught relation to the close-up of Joan's tortured face. The poem's incessant reiteration of "You" addresses the reader like a viewer, tangentially suggestive of relationality and identification of film fosters. Robertson, however, refutes the identification with Joan's face. She offers a rebuttal to critics and poets who relate to Joan—"But you are not *Mademoiselle Falconetti's face*." The inclusion of the honorific emphasizes her gender and youth—even the text of the poem cannot escape these constructed markers of identity and conjures the saint's body while trying to refute her. And yet the passage swivels and declares, "Because you could express herself with her face it had become her face," returning to an expressive identification with the close-up face. Either way, this seemingly belated return to Falconetti speaks to the potency of the image and its persistent ramifications for feminist thought. This recurrent image is fitting for Robertson's project of circular time and filmic thinking. In a poem that disrupts linear time, Robertson's retrieval of an iconic moment in cinema makes sense. Robertson shows that this feminist process of relating to the figure of Joan endures. The affect of Dreyer's intense close-up reverberates in poetry a century later. Through all of this, the poem remains self-aware and interrogative, bolstering and undermining its project of potential relations with the question:

“What is a pronoun but a metaphor?” This self-questioning spurs on the poem’s circular momentum.

Robertson’s use of Falconetti’s tortured face signals her feminist poetics and necessarily forges a point of connection between the conceptual poet and H.D., Moore and Rich who are also concerned with the gaze’s rendering of the other. Feminism as theory and practice underpins Robertson’s production of form and time in *Cinema of the Present*. Sam Lohmann suggests, “form, in this work, is freedom’s technique. It’s how writing produces the present in which it finds the authority to change” (n.p.). Accordingly, Robertson assembles a long poem concerned with film to initiate action. The long poem contends with the bodies and power, slyly fluctuating from vernacular utterances and material images to scholarly abstractions: “Again you store meaning in your body” (75); “*You are provisional and unconcerned with the entire feminine machinery*” (72); “When you do it in your videos, you’re female” (16); “*Let feminism be this girl raging at a chandelier*” (37); “Feminism wants to expand the sensorium” (50); “You wore the dress as payment for entrance to the symbolic order” (53)”; and so on. Like the poets of the previous century, Robertson turns to the language of film culture to fuel an ongoing feminist project of speculation and action in poetic language.

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