

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

SKELETONIZATION, CAMERAFLAGE, LOITERING: HABITS OF WITNESSING AFTER
THE GREAT WAR

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ABSTRACT: SKELETONIZATION, CAMERAFLAGE, LOITERING: HABITS OF WITNESSING AFTER
THE GREAT WAR

In contradistinction to the paradigmatic version of war witnessing presented by Paul Fussell, this project tracks American non-combatant poetic modes of witnessing World War I. In the United States, interest in the Great War sparked a boom in journalistic photography that coincided with the growing production of little magazines, meaning that the look of the war on the page was codifying in newspapers at the same moment as the look of the poem on the page was codifying in magazines. This dissertation argues that the “look” of the war on the newspaper page and the “look” of the poem shared a radical communicative efficiency called “skeletonization,” the act of minimalizing or occluding text or detail.¹ This process can also intensify, magnify, or shatter the text’s effects, which is where poetic practices have intervened. Though skeletonization generally perpetuated the feel of the flesh-witness accounts Americans craved—by producing the “I” and the seeming intimacy borne of seeming immediacy that a reader could then encounter personally—skeletonization and the related processes of re-fleshing, cameraflage, and loitering were actually a far more complicated and composite process of transmission and reconstruction. This more complicated version of viewing and reading the war therefore presses on the lyric

¹ “Skeletonization” is a *Chicago Daily News* term for the more widely known journalistic term, “cabelese,” the process or product of excising extraneous language or punctuation from a newspaper story prior to sending it by telegram in order to save telegraphing costs. This was of paramount importance for *Chicago Daily News* war foreign correspondents in a period where telegraph costs could run as high as ten cents a word. Skeletonization also required an act of “re-fleshing” on the other end, where editors intuited and added back the missing language and punctuation prior to publication. I use these terms both literally and figuratively in the dissertation to describe the assumptions made around the process of transmission. For a fuller account of the term “skeletonization,” see the introduction and Appendix A, where I reproduce correspondence between Berlin foreign correspondent Ben Hecht and his editor C. H. Dennis. Newberry Midwest MS Hecht papers, box 2 folder 19, and box 56 folder 1183.

assumptions we have inherited about how the war was witnessed; it asks us to reconsider who counts as a witness.

I test out the look of wartime as a lyric problem by proposing three experiments in witnessing. Each involves a journalistic photographic provocation derived from the way in which War Department censorship framed who deserved protection, and what they required protection from—for example, (white) war wives and mothers deserved protection from the visually graphic death of any body they could imagine as their husband's or son's. Each experiment then close reads archival photographs and their captions to rework the terms of visual skeletonization, highlighting what journalists deemed necessary viewing and the ways they prepared audiences to read in to images, even when that reading might be at odds with the War Department's goals. Such potential "errors" in transmission can have poetic effects, and each of my experiments concludes by close reading the content and look of poetry by a female American poet who is generally not taken as a flesh-witness to the war, but whose work speaks to that chapter's photographic question, in order to show the productive ways in which skeletonization can go awry during the process of re-fleshing. The kinds of witnessing that these poets give us are material, formal, and theoretical. They focus on the relationship between who looks and chooses and what is seen (Marianne Moore); how the everyday crops up and exceeds us when we hope to "solve" the extraordinary rather than the daily (Gertrude Stein); and how the fight to be seen as ordinary both requires and repudiates the extraordinary of graphic violence (Gwendolyn Brooks). Together, these experiments enlarge the canon of Great War poetry, and help reframe that war as "wartime," thereby offering analogs and cautions for the way we view mediated war today.

My introduction, "Skeletonizing the Great War," explains the prevailing War Department understanding of witnessing in World War I, gives a material history to the term skeletonization,

and makes the case for a more capacious definition of witnessing. Chapter 1, “‘What is closer to the truth’: Marianne Moore Takes ‘imaginary possession’ of the War’s ‘well excavated grave,’” makes a specific case for adding home front women to the ranks of witnesses, by pairing Marianne Moore’s “When I Buy Pictures” and “A Grave” (1921) with the War Department’s edict to not print photos of American or Allied dead and the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra*’s determination to run body-empty photos with captions that asked their audience to read death back into the photograph. Reading through theories of metaphor and simile, I present Moore’s critique of the soldier-male witness who “uses up” a scene of witnessing: Moore’s poems demonstrate that the notion of the sanctified witness not only limits whose views of aesthetics and trauma are taken seriously, but are also inconsonant with how everyday witnesses experience the relationship between viewing and imagination. In Moore’s poetry, the provenance of a view suffuses it and survives the viewer, as opposed to being exhausted or used up by its witness. I close the chapter with an experimental visual analogue for Moore’s version of witnessing by examining overlaid editions of Moore’s “A Grave.”² In my palimpsest we can see that printing history moves the text without the author’s volition, producing a liveliness that is unauthorized.

Following Chapter 1’s focus on mediating absence as animation—the dead soldier’s body markedly missing from journalistic photographs; the euphemisms that represent him in captions; and the variable lines in Marianne Moore’s poetry, which imitate the non-conscious movement of the dead beneath the water’s surface—Chapter 2 investigates war mediations that insist on liveliness as nonrecuperative. “‘Listen while I tell you all the time’: Gertrude Stein and Alice B.

² The title of this poem shifts over Moore’s various revisions of it. The original draft is called “A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea”; the first circulated printing in the *Dial* (1921) titles it “A Graveyard,” and later book printings title it “A Grave.”

Toklas Elegize ‘Cameraflage’ in Coincidence” provides an alternative relationship between photography and elegy by focusing on witnessing in the context of the evidentiary paradigm. I first look at War Department and journalistic photographs of camouflage and of “cameraflage,” *Colliers*’s neologism for photographic manipulation. In both of these kinds of photograph, a living soldier almost invariably helps to direct the reader’s eye to the “real” camouflaged subject or object or to the “cameraflaged” “fake.” I then read these photographs alongside the nearly forensic sense of identity that Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas were asked to establish as American Fund for French Wounded “searchers” during 1918 and 1919, as reflected in Stein’s poetry from World War I and in two later texts, *Stanzas in Meditation* (published in its entirety in 1956) and *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* (1948). These texts emphasize points of linguistic and photographic texture where individual identity (such as that of Gertrude Stein’s lover May Bookstaver) or murder (in *Blood*) become coincident with the history and landscape that surrounds them. The resultant form of elegy, and the connective reading it demands, makes aural or visual puns the center of a system of contingency that cannot discount any individual’s experience in its re-fleshing. In this model of witnessing, the dead (or the “buried” beloved) come to life as the landscape of the page and the history of the nearby villages; this version of elegy is therefore a more generous, contemporary sense of melancholy that can help make a visible continuity between postwar losses and their wartime causes, a remediation Elizabeth Outka has argued we need.

This version of elegiac witnessing finds its visual analogue in something like the photogram assemblages of new vision, where the shapes and angles objects and subjects make together are of greater interest than their individual identities or histories. Chapter 3, “‘The last bleak news of the ballad’: Gwendolyn Brooks Loiters, After Mamie Till-Mobley’s Baby,” takes

up this version of elegiac witnessing as a theory, looking again to see what was occluded by the flesh-witness version of World War I that was produced for “wives and mothers.” This chapter returns again to the idea of the body-empty photograph that was regulated to protect these women from the traumatic vision of the war. I note that despite the U.S. government’s edict against graphic violence in the newspaper, the same government and many of the same newspapers were willing or complicit participants in race-based terrorism toward African Americans, which indicates that the government did not believe *white* wives or mothers would be likely to imagine their own husbands or sons into the torture blacks underwent. At times, Southern newspapers literally cameraflaged black bodies out of World War I-era national photographs; even when blacks were present in photos, they were either ignored—skeletonized out as not crucial to the story—or hypervisualized—skeletonized as the spectacular threat that was always legible as such. This chapter therefore examines lynching postcards, which formed a collectivizing visual currency for some whites, alongside photographs of the anti-lynching Negro Silent Protest parade (1917) and the 1955 post-mortem lynching photographs of Emmett Till that reclaim the lynching image for some blacks, deracinating it from lyric interchangeability and re-fleshing it with particularized identities instead. Through the ballad form employed by Gwendolyn Brooks in her lynching poems (1945–1960), her paired Emmett Till poems “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon” and “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till” and the “verse journalism” of her later career, I argue that these photographs require a wary form of looking that is constant, a way of loitering indefinitely in the “meanwhile” of the skeletonized image and around its edges.

INTRODUCTION: SKELETONIZING THE GREAT WAR

—*we imagine after it*—
John Keats, note on his copy of *Paradise Lost*, I.706–30

This dissertation responds to a historically situated lyric concern: how was World War I, whose direct conflict did not reach North America, relayed to readers in the United States? What do those modes of relay, of witnessing, allow readers to see, and what do they occlude? What are the stakes of seeing and not-seeing that war, and what bearing do those stakes have on our contemporary lyric and collective seeing and not-seeing of the wars in which the United States is currently entangled?

In this dissertation, World War I was relayed to American readers through journalistic photographs, but became visible through poetry, meaning the war occurred for them in two lyric forms. John Stuart Mill tells us that poetry—what later theorists have reframed as *lyric* poetry in particular—is “feeling confessing itself to itself in moments of solitude,” intimate and solitary. Unlike eloquence,¹ which “supposes an audience,” “pouring itself out to other minds...endeavoring to influence their belief, or move them to passion or action,” “the peculiarity of poetry appears to us to lie in the poet’s utter unconsciousness of a listener,” and therefore the audience’s reception of lyric is always as an eavesdropper, one who “overhears” the meditative confessions of a mind at work.² Mill extends his definition of poetry’s meditative intimacy to other media; he specifically mentions music and painting but we might add

¹ Eloquence is described elsewhere in Mill’s essay as oratory proper, a term that makes more sense to the modern ear for the thinking about the communicative impulse of literature or art since it is allied with the work of rhetoric.

² John Stuart Mill, “Thoughts on Poetry and Its Varieties,” *The Crayon* 7.4 (April 1860): 95.

photography, a medium in which a scene's overhearing is built in through the camera's supposed one-to-one indexical presentation, but where that same one-to-one indexicality provides no immediate interpretation of the information presented, demanding that the "listener" do the work of decoding.

Historically, Mill's notion of poetry as private experience corresponds with what we count as war poetry: we privilege the accounts of those whom Yuval Noah Harari calls "flesh-witnesses" to combat, those poems that detail the extreme physical and mental distress of soldiers along with the soldier's double repudiation, "It is impossible to describe it" and "Those who were not there cannot understand it." Unlike eyewitnesses, who in Harari's account are tasked with transmitting factual information and who can therefore "exhaust" a story in telling it, flesh-witnesses are tasked with experiential knowledge and retain their authority no matter how many times they tell their tales.³ But readers desire a sense of communion with flesh-witnesses: readers in Britain during the World War I era took soldier-poets' writing to be the most paradigmatic and trustworthy account of that non-transmissible experience of combat. In the general understanding of combat as sublime, transformative, traumatic, and therefore aporetic, readers saw poetry's partial transmission of this experience as essentially authentic in its intimacy, its direct communication between the male combatant and the reader who could never quite feel what he had felt.⁴

³ Yuval Noah Harari, *The Ultimate Experience: Battlefield Revelations and the Making of Modern War Culture, 1450–2000* (Hampshire, UK and New York: 2008), 7. On the relationship between flesh-witnesses, eyewitnesses, and historians, see Yuval Noah Harari, "Scholars, Eyewitnesses, and Flesh-Witnesses of War: A Tense Relationship," *Partial Answers* 7.2 (June 2009): 213–228.

⁴ Paul Fussell's landmark *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford, 1975) is the first book to make this claim explicitly. Given a comparatively well-educated British officer corps, years of stagnant warfare in which to write, and a reading public who answered war poetry in the newspapers with poems of their own, "poetry virtually became a mass medium in Britain,"

For British audiences, poetry became a dialect in which the war was spoken, but while American audiences learned the language of lyric, they did not learn quite the same pronunciations. Discussing British war poetry, T. S. Eliot describes a bifurcation into two rigid camps, “romance” and “reporting”;⁵ in both the poetry printed in Great Britain and the reprints that quickly made their way to America,⁶ pride of place fell to the “reporting” poetry, or eyewitness poetry, because of its perceived veracity and immediacy, its “real-time representation of [the] trench experience” of flesh-witnesses.⁷ But for American audiences, who could not hear the guns at night, tour mock trenches, or as frequently claim a parent, child, or sibling in the war, the sense that “over there” truly existed was, as David Kennedy has called it, “purely an affair of

spawning 2,225 published poets, according to Catherine Reilly. See Edna Longley, “The Great War, History, and the English Lyric,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Literature of the First World War*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 57. Longley argues poetry was the medium of choice because of its flexibility as a medium: it was quick to write and to read; could describe an instant or a longer narrative; could be a revision of a diary entry or the mnemonic beginnings of a memoir; and “allow[ed] for improvisation [and] rapid response” (60). To this we could add that poetry and lyric marching songs are not necessarily far separate; and that the flexibility of the lyric “I” could make a poem feel both personal and universal.

⁵ T. S. Eliot, “Reflections on Contemporary Poetry,” *Egoist*, 6 July 1919.

⁶ See, for instance, *The War in Verse and Prose*, ed. W. D. Eaton (Chicago: T. S. Denison & Company, 1918).

⁷ The intervening forty years have broadened what war writing is considered of value, as studies and anthologies began to include non-combatants; see especially Catherine Reilly’s work on female war poetry, *Scars Upon My Heart: Women’s Poetry and Verse of the First World War* (London: Virago, 1981); and work by Allyson Booth, *Postcards from the Trenches: Negotiating the Space between Modernism and the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Sarah Cole, *Modernism, Male Friendship, and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Santanu Das, *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), and Vincent Sherry, *The Great War and the Language of Modernism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); who work to put the war into cultural perspective. This dissertation participates in this newer trend, but recognizes that the “trench poets” are still regarded by most as the pinnacle of Anglophone response to the war.

the mind,”⁸ and required hearing an *American* first-person singular pronoun, an “I” in eyewitness. Long before American soldiers joined the conflict and provided a few of their own poetic representations there were American journalists in place. Because journalistic access to the front lines was restricted, the few major publications with licensed foreign correspondents could report war news in the first-person “I” of “our man at the front,” who could claim to be on the “inside” of stories, rather than reliant on the information released by the United States War Office or syndicated by the Associated Press.

In American writing, then, photographs and short accounts were the primary point of access for the war. Even once American forces entered the war in 1918 their flesh-witnessing was limited to their localized assignments, and so most subscribed to military newspapers like *The Stars and Stripes*, which at its war peak had a staff of 300 and 526,000 readers at home and abroad.⁹ There, too, most trusted accounts were the first-hand accounts or sketches made by soldiers, who were encouraged to write in. But, as poet and *Chicago Daily News* embedded foreign correspondent Paul Scott Mowrer¹⁰ describes the experience of combat in his “Inscription for a Trench,” combat could be difficult to witness safely:

Here may no man lift up his head, and live.
The furies rush and bellow, night and day,
Mysterious creatures whimper through the air,
Yet none may know their face, or what they say.
Medusa turned the gazer’s form to stone:

⁸ David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 46.

⁹ Alfred Emile Cornebise, *Ranks and Columns: Armed Forces Newspapers in American Wars* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1993), 74. *The Stars and Stripes* was one of dozens of ground-forces papers. Published under the auspices of the American Expeditionary Forces, it did not boast photographs, but did employ sketch artists. On the role of African American newspapers in the rhetorical war effort, see William G. Jordan, *Black Newspapers and America’s War for Democracy, 1914–1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

¹⁰ Mowrer was the *Chicago Daily News*’s Paris correspondent from 1910 through to the 1930s, when he returned to Chicago to run the paper.

Here he who dares to look becomes as clay.¹¹

The flesh-witness versions of events were therefore often recorded by eyewitnesses, reporters who took down the words of those who fought. These accounts filtered through to the general American public through newspaper stories and photographs.

Despite artistic awareness of pictorialism and the Photo-Secession movement, which held that photography was as manipulable an art form as any other, photography was generally understood by Americans as the most “realistic” medium because of its indexicality; newspapers advertised the newness and accuracy of their accounts by directing readers to their photographs. As military experts described their anxiety about photography at the time, “there is something substantially reliable in a picture obviously taken from a photograph. Nothing would seem to be more authentic than a snapshot. It does not occur to anyone to question a photograph”; therefore, “the public *is* so susceptible to the message of a photograph.”¹² Readers’ belief in the photography’s realism in turn created a sense of personal intimacy. Susan Sontag gives a paradigmatic account of Virginia Woolf’s encounter with photographs of violence from the Spanish Civil War; Woolf’s response is essentially lyric, for she reads the photographs as personal interpellation that nonetheless would have the same hold on any reader. As Sontag notes, “Invoking this hypothetical shared experience [of seeing war photographs that a male colleague has also seen] (‘we are seeing the same dead bodies, the same ruined houses’), Woolf

¹¹ Paul Scott Mowrer, “Inscription for a Trench,” *Hours of France in Peace and War* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1918), 64.

¹² Arthur Ponsby, *Falsehood in War-Time* (London and New York: Garland, 1928), 135, and Lieutenant-Colonel Kendall Banning, *Military Censorship of Pictures in World War I* (Washington, D.C., c. 1919), 23. Quoted in Susan Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989), 136.

professes to believe that the shock of such pictures cannot fail to unite people of good will”; that is, her “I” and her interlocutor’s “I” are both touched, individually and together.¹³

These accounts of intimate, universal lyric transmission privilege a very particular narrative of the war (the experience of white, male combatants) aimed at metaphorically and literally protecting, rhetorically swaying, and being memorialized by, a very particular audience (white wives and mothers). In providing a fuller account of how poetry and photography were actually transmitted to American audiences, this project works to provide a more useful set of paradigms for war witnessing: paradigms that are more inclusive of the experience of non-combatants, and that work to grieve and therefore recognize as protectable a wider set of American bodies. To think of these accounts and photographs as lyric in a broadened sense is to think of them as part of a genre Virginia Jackson defines as “privacy gone public,” and conversely as “addressed to the interpreter”; as “present-tense immediacy” but also as “an invitation to interpretation.”¹⁴ Claiming lyric interdependence for non-poem representations of the war is, oddly, a chance to dehierarchize our reading of the war, in favor of “everyday” objects but also in favor of poetry: it’s no longer necessary to take poems as the preeminent product of the war, and it’s also no longer necessary to think of proximity—the eyewitness’s “I”; the photograph’s indexicality—as the foremost concern in examining this writing. In this project I therefore work bifocally, using contemporaneous archival photographs and poems in drafts and in published form, to propose a more accurate and inclusive version of war witnessing. Each chapter proffers a theory or method of witnessing derived from a particular American female poet to counter a problem in transmission created by the crossed wires of the American War

¹³ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 6. Sontag is quoting from Virginia Woolf’s *Three Guineas*, 1938.

¹⁴ See Virginia Jackson, *Dickinson’s Misery: A Theory of Lyric Reading* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 53.

Department, which oversaw the Committee for Public Information and therefore the censorship of American war journalism, and the newspapers that worked with and around the CPI. The results of my work join the work of Catherine Reilly's work on female war poetry, and work by Sarah Cole, Santanu Das, Vincent Sherry, and Allyson Booth, who work to put the war into cultural perspective. This dissertation participates in this newer trend, but recognizes that the "trench poets" are still regarded by most as the pinnacle of Anglophone response to the war. I therefore aim to expand the archive of what counts as poetry of World War I; contribute to the relatively undeveloped intermedial investigation of poetry and photography, which so far has many avant-garde poet practitioners but less scholarly footing; and offer three experiments in modes of witnessing that may have broader purchase than the circumscribed timeline of World War I.

Skeletonizing: Paring the War Down

The backdrop to any supposedly intimate encounter between the American newspaper reader and the page in front of her was the chain of transmission that brought the news of war from abroad. This statement is both a truism and less obvious than it appears, because though a paper might tout its eyewitness war coverage—which clearly meant that the paper had a correspondent stationed abroad or a contact in the American Expeditionary Forces, either of which had to be getting news back to the publishing editor in the United States *somehow*—the emphasis so emphatically fell on the eyewitness's immediacy to the scene of telling, and to the "vision," as Richard Menke puts it, of "information without accoutrements."¹⁵ Thinking more seriously about the chain of transmission, however, emphasizes the shared military, authorial, editorial, and

¹⁵ Richard Menke, *Telegraphic Realism: Victorian Fiction and Other Information Systems* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008), 19.

readerly poetic task of mediating the vision and violence of the war. Taking on a neologism from the editorial offices of the *Chicago Daily News*, I call this chain of transmission and interpretation “skeletonization.”¹⁶

Skeletonization refers in particular to the process of preparing a newspaper story to be telegraphed by stripping it down to what many newspapers called “cablese,” which left only the most essential language for a receiving editor on the other end of the telegram to reconstruct into the original meaning for publication. The *Chicago Daily News*, one of the first papers to have a full time team of foreign correspondents in Europe, had been sending breaking news by telegram since the late 1800s¹⁷; however, the cost of sending a telegram increased during World War I, often to as high as ten cents a word, at the same time that the demand for foreign reporting was increasing. The cost of keeping a foreign correspondent housed and fed and the cost of sending and receiving multiple cables for each foreign story printed¹⁸ raised publishing costs significantly

¹⁶ As a verb, “skeletonize” dates to the seventeenth century and remains active today; the verb refers both to rendering a body or document and to sketching or creating a draft. The *Chicago Daily News*’s more specialized noun has less cachet, and does not appear in the *OED* or *Merriam Webster*’s.

¹⁷ The *Chicago Daily News*, owned by Victor Freemont Lawson, began publication in 1875. Lawson’s sister financial venture, the *Record*, first relied on telegrams to cover the Spanish-American War, and turned that service over to the *Daily News* in 1901. At that time, cable costs amounted to more than double the salaries of all correspondents. See John Maxwell Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye: A History of American Foreign Reporting* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2009), 179.

¹⁸ For just one example, see January, February and March 1919 letters and cables between the *Daily News*’s new Berlin foreign correspondent Ben Hecht and his frustrated editors Charles H. Dennis and Edward Bell, and Dennis’s and Bell’s internal correspondence regarding Hecht’s articles. The story that was originally written and skeletonized by Hecht travelled to Amsterdam, London, Paris, and finally back to Berlin, now with the editor’s cover (with embedded quotations from Bell, Lawson, Hecht, and his interviewee Philipp Scheidemann, the Social Democratic Party member who had recently declared Germany a republic rather than a monarchy) and another editor’s (lost) re-skeletonized version of the cable, meant to instruct Hecht regarding how to skeletonize. Had the story run, it would have passed to the Chicago news desk as well, and finally to the public. For a transcription of Hecht’s original cable and the note from his editor regarding that draft, see Appendix A. Newberry Midwest MS Hecht papers, box 2 folder 19, and

during the war, putting many smaller daily and weekly papers out of business entirely. For the papers that remained, skeletonization was financially vital.

Skeletonization depended upon the dream of an author who knew what was crucial to include and a reader who was able to “re-flesh” his original meaning from the skeletonized telegram. That utopian collective effort looks a great deal like composing and reading an imagist poem. Take, for example, American Expeditionary Force photographer and *Chicago Tribune* foreign correspondent Floyd Gibbons, who describes the sensory experience of being shelled in the following way:

You know the old covered wooden bridges that are still to be found in the country? ... Have you ever heard a team of horses and a farm wagon thumping and rumbling over such a bride on the trot? Multiply the horse team a thousand times. Lash the animals from the trot to the wild gallop. Imagine the sound of their stampede through the echoing wooden structure and you approach in volume and effect the rumble and roar of the steel as it rained down.¹⁹

And here is Gibbons again, at the cost of \$3.70 rather than \$8.30: “You know covered wooden bridges still found in country have heard horses wagon thumping rumbling over at trot multiply team lash animals to gallop imagine sound of stampede through echoing structure approach rumble roar of steel rain.” What might skeletonization look like in practice, then? Rather like an inexpert imagist poem.²⁰ Like an imagist but also like any poet from Homer onward, Gibbons

box 56 folder 1183. I am grateful to the Newberry’s “Making Modernism” Summer Institute of 2013, helmed by Liesl Olson, for the time and resources to investigate these letters, and for the chance to work with the personal papers and papers of the *Chicago Daily News*’s Paul Scott Mowrer and Ben Hecht.

¹⁹ Floyd Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn’t Fight* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1918), 314.

²⁰ To be clear, I am the one who skeletonized Gibbons’s description; I have done so based on the rules C. H. Dennis relayed to Ben Hecht in a letter dated February 7, 1919. Quoting Bell and Lawson, Dennis emphasizes, “the question of ‘stops’ depends a good deal on the character of the story. The more concrete it is, the less need there is for ‘stops’: the more abstract it is, the more need for ‘stops,’ if the desk man is not to get lost in the mist,” and reminds Hecht that atmosphere must work in service of an underlying “subjective” account, which is both a work of

asks his readers to perform an imaginative work of asymptotic amplification, in order to approach, but not to capture, the sound of war. But the process of re-fleshing often went awry, destroying that dream of collectivity. *Chicago Daily News* editor Junius Wood complained in 1917 that “excluding ‘stop’ or ‘period’ from cables led to ‘bad results in printed copy, sentences split, joined together wrongly, entire sense changed,’”²¹ and the *Daily News* editors constantly bickered over the amount to skeletonize lest they leave each other with “blind word puzzles” that would re-flesh inaccurately and transmit incorrect information to the public.

In my work, it is the way that skeletonization goes awry that is most of interest. I use the term heuristically to describe the restricted war intelligence that the War Department and Committee for Public Information deemed safe to transmit to civilians through photography, and speak of re-fleshing as the imaginative work of reconstruction that civilians, and in particular poets, made of that skeletonized visual information. The War Department’s rules for skeletonization were primarily aimed at preserving vagary in regards to any details that might aid Central Powers forces—so they restricted any written or visual information related to troop movement or size. But, as I discuss in detail in Chapter 1, the War Department was also intent on preserving civilian morale. “‘The average mother,’ it was assumed, ‘sees her own boy subjected to the dangers portrayed...and she visualizes her own son in each corpse she sees pictured’”;

description and a work of “interpretation”: “Your quick eye for color and movement and epigram is a great asset,” he asserts, but, “I feel that having a great opportunity to get a notable dispatch you first laid out a fine framework, then threw a gob of color on the canvas and went away. The business of interpreting these people is a big, serious business. The world is interested.” See the Newberry Hecht papers, MMS Hecht, Box 56, folder 1183.

²¹ Hamilton, *Journalism’s Roving Eye*, 180.

“because the public *is* so susceptible to the message of a picture, there is a need of care in selecting those which might undermine that *morale*.”²²

The improvisational solution to this problem was to avoid picturing corpses or allied soldiers in any form of extremity: of over 3,000 photographs printed in the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra*—my main journalistic photographic source text for this dissertation—only three show the allied dead at all, and only a score or two show even the enemy dead.²³ This censorship was theoretically external (all photographs and articles passed under the watchful eyes of the Committee for Public Information), but the vast majority of censorship was internal: the CPI held comparatively few photographs back, yet photographers largely refrained from taking pictures of the dead and dying. While there were certainly both perceptual and practical concerns that contributed to the visual reticence regarding these “horrors,” here I want to foreground what Jacqueline Goldsby calls the “cultural logic”—“a worldview transformed into an objective force”—that we can see at work in the concern over photographs of allied war deaths.²⁴

²² Banning, *Military Censorship of Pictures*, 23–4 and 11. Quoted in Moeller, *Shooting War*, 114–15, 137.

²³ Or, as Moeller claims, “War, as witnessed in the photography of the AEF, was something that happened only to the other side” (137). The body count I give above is my own, based on *The War of the Nations: A Pictorial Portfolio of World War I Compiled from The Mid-Week Pictorial Extra Published by The New York Times* (New York: New York Times Company 1919. Rpt New York: Arno Press, 1977); Moeller recognizes even fewer: “Unlike during the Spanish-American War, no photographs of dead Americans were published in the press during World War I. Neither shrouded nor shadowed corpses were allowed to be shown” (136).

²⁴ Goldsby’s definition of cultural logic depends, here, on Guy Debord’s definition of the function of spectacle, from which the quotation above derives. For Goldsby, the “cultural logic” surrounding lynching allowed the practice to continue overtly (“spectacularly”) and also surreptitiously (“secretly”), precisely because lynching upheld the racist and racialized social norms that underwrote the country’s wish to consider the practice antiquated and isolated in its effects. See Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2009), especially pp. 26–7.

The cultural logic that prioritized protecting “the average mother” from images of flesh-witnessing in its extremity was the same cultural logic that made women the heritors of war stories but never believed that they could be the protagonists or speak with cultural authority about their own experiences of the war. As I argue in the third chapter, it was also the same cultural logic that protected “the average mother” or wife from the perceived threat of rape by African American men by overdetermining the bodies of African American men and boys in extremity in lynching images, and by otherwise editing African American bodies out of the white visual imagination, retouching images of street scenes to erase black bodies or passing them by in the captions as though they were simply the landscape against which white bodies became visible.²⁵

Skeletonization and re-fleshing enforced this cultural logic to a point, but they also had the capacity to jam transmission or to send it awry. This was because of the multiple goals of skeletonizers and their readers. The War Department’s skeletonized images were further skeletonized by journalists, who captioned and grouped them, often with different goals than those of the War Department. The discourse on the relationship between a photograph and its caption generally agrees that these two forms interanimate. For Walter Benjamin and Susan Sontag the caption nearly always has the upper hand, because the affective charge of the photograph is difficult to harness while the narrative or rhetorical directions in which a caption

²⁵ Here I am referring to two kinds of images: lynching postcards, which generally travelled from hand to hand or through the postal system rather than in newspapers; and Southern newspapers, which until the 1950s and 60s regularly functioned as organs of white supremacy by segregating the news, announcing or covering lynchings or other acts of racial terrorism, and editing photographs to erase black bodies so that at least in its visual presentation the South could remain segregated. See Ira Harkey, *The Smell of Burning Crosses: A White Integrationist Editor in Mississippi* (1967, rpt. United States: Xlibris, 2005).

points are easier to follow or trace.²⁶ For Ariella Azoulay, Judith Butler, and Lyn Hejinian, the caption, as a frame to the image, works synecdochally for the always-constructedness of the image, and does not determine our interpretation.²⁷ The journalistic images and their captions in this dissertation support this second line of thinking, for it is often the productive tension between the image and its caption—and even the caption’s space on the newspaper page—that asks the reader to look more closely at the photograph’s graphic presentation. As Johanna Drucker articulates the relation between frame and content, “graphic devices”—all of the extradiegetic markers present on a page, including its blank space, its headings, its typeface, and the like—“encode models of reading, and the means of navigating a textual environment. They delimit the ground on which the figure of narrative emerges. They are the workings of the stage for the action. And then, they articulate the actions through the distinctions and relations they support.”²⁸ Drucker concludes that before we experience content we experience its presentation through the graphic devices of the page itself—and that framing therefore becomes an often unnoticed narrative component of a text. In the content-meager but atmosphere-rich photographs passed by the CPI, the interanimation of the caption and the photo on the page becomes particularly crucial to the work of re-fleshing.

²⁶ See Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, and Walter Benjamin, “Little History of Photography” (1931); trans. M. W. Jephcott and K. Shorter, in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol 2., ed. M. W. Jennings, H. Filand, and G. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939) and “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968).

²⁷ See Ariella Azoulay, *Death’s Showcase: The Power of Image in Contemporary Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001) and *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012); Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009), and Lyn Hejinian, “Wild Captioning,” *Qui Parle* 20.1 (Fall/Winter 2011): 279–99.

²⁸ Johanna Drucker, “Graphic Devices: Narrative and Navigation,” *Narrative* 16.2 (2008): 136.

In chapter 1 I show that journalists countered the American Expeditionary Force's atmospheric body-empty photographs of landscape with captions that tended to read death back in, using highly poetic language to transform the landscape itself into the flesh-witness to the scene of destruction. In chapter 2, journalists engage War Department images of camouflage with an anxious but celebratory language of cunning soldierly deixis. The goal of such captioning was to show mothers at home that their soldier sons were themselves cunning and inventive and were not at risk from the enemy's underhanded trickery. Secondly, these images initiate readers to the dangers of "cameraflage," or image editing, as the dangerous propaganda produced by the Central Powers, or released by unscrupulous American publications that were intent on presenting the war as Americans *imagined* it rather than as it actually appeared.²⁹ In both cases, the caption's journalistic impulse to not only describe the image it accompanies but also teach viewers how to read these images brings my project into resonance with the work of Alison Landsberg, who sees the nascent film industry of the aughts and teens as a pedagogical opportunity for American cinema goers, whom the film industry taught to practice taking others' memories and experiences on and off. For Landsberg, this practice is ethical and radical in nature in part because it is shared: "As memories that no one person can own, that people can only share with others and whose meanings can never be completely stabilized, prosthetic memories

²⁹ *Collier's Weekly*, January 26, 1918, 12–3. For an elaboration see Moeller, *Shooting War*, 151ff. Though photographic technology was sufficiently advanced to capture certain kinds of action (bombs on the point of explosion, for example), it rarely did. Brigadier General Russel explains the difficulty of being a World War I photographer as being the flip side of a logistical coin: "In raids and advances, every advantage is taken of poor light conditions and... little success has been attained in action pictures. When conditions are good for fighting they are, of necessity, poor for photography, and vice versa" (Moeller 124).

themselves become a challenge to the ‘total possession’ of private property, by subverting the capitalist logic that produced them.”³⁰

*Re-fleshing: Making the War “Newish”*³¹

Though the impulse behind the skeletonizing captions in chapters 1 and 2 is consonant with Landsberg’s project, if American newspaper readers had successfully picked up the skills of imagining community that Landsberg advocates, there would be no need for Chapter 3, which centers on generally uncaptioned lynching photography. These photographs counter the body-empty photos of the first chapter, but show that making the black body overly present was not considered a concern for “the average mother,” revealing a deep divide between the American bodies that could be imagined to matter and the American bodies that were considered expendable. Chapter 3 particularly reinforces this bifurcation of the American readership and reinforces the need for versions of witnessing that therefore do not depend on flesh-witnessing for their legitimacy, since the flesh-witnesses to lynching scenes were either those who were subject to lynching and whose accounts of pain and innocence were either spectacularized or disregarded, or those who perpetrated racial terrorism under the guise of protecting white, female viewing subjects.

In this chapter and in the others, it is female, non-combatant, poets who take up the project of skeletonization with skepticism, re-fleshing scenes in ways that send them most

³⁰ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 147.

³¹ In *Report from Part One*, Gwendolyn Brooks speaks of a new kind of apostrophe: “my aim, in my next future, is to write poems that will somehow successfully ‘call’ (see Immau Baraka’s ‘SOS’) all black people...not always to ‘teach’—I shall wish often to entertain, to illumine. My newish voice will not be an imitation of the contemporary young black voice, which I so admire, but an extending adaptation of today’s G. B. voice.” *Report from Part One* (Detroit, MI: Broadside Press, 1972), 183.

completely—and potentially productively—awry. Journalistic photography was becoming codified in newsprint during the same period in which American avant-garde poetry was making use of the same “graphic devices” in the pages of little magazines and in newspapers. Imagism in particular is intent on presenting a skeletonized version of a scene, a quick, near-photographic description that also takes the layout of the page into strong account; an imagist poem, a skeletonized cable, and a body-empty photograph may therefore sometimes read similarly, and it is for this reason that I originally paired avant-garde poetry and photography in this project. However, I have found that though poetry and journalistic photography share the interest in radical economy that skeletonization names, poetry in this project responds askance to the very project of skeletonization, preferring to re-flesh in ways that approximate Lyn Hejinian’s concept of wild captioning, as a “wild” and unpredictable palimpsest that both throws wrenches into the work of interpretation and absorbs the wrenches that images throw.

For this reason the dates of the dissertation begin before World War I was announced, and certainly before Americans became combatants. It also closes long after the war finished, for the lyric misconception and poetic visuality that subtend the photographic in the war span a much longer period. I begin the project with 1912 for two reasons: this is the year Marianne Moore cites as the starting point for an *American* version of imagism through the work of Amy Lowell (though most would call H.D.’s “imagiste” work, published in *Poetry Magazine* in 1913, the first in the genre)³²; and 1912 is the year *Poetry Magazine* began printing in Chicago. Though I do not discuss it explicitly in any of my chapters, *Poetry* is integral to the work of this dissertation. The magazine was by no means the main publishing venue for the three poets of this dissertation, but it was famously helmed from its instantiation by a female editor, Harriet

³² Marianne Moore, “‘New’ Poetry Since 1912” in *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*, ed. Patricia C. Willis (New York: Viking, 1986), 120–24.

Monroe, and has been long-running and catholic in its tastes, even as regards the avant-garde. It therefore served as a crossing point for the canonical, celebrated poets whose work I examine in this dissertation, Marianne Moore, Gertrude Stein, and Gwendolyn Brooks. Moore was published there at a crucially early point in her career, long before her first volume appeared;³³ certain of Stein's hermetic *Stanzas in Meditation* found an early home in print in *Poetry* in 1940;³⁴ and, among other of her work, the first two sonnets of Brooks's "Gay Chaps at the Bar" sequence were published there in 1945, before *A Street in Bronzeville* appeared.³⁵

Brooks's inaugural publication in *Poetry* (November 1944) also coincides with a memorial essay for Eunice Tietjens, the magazine's early contributor and longtime associate editor and board member. Tietjens is illustrative of another reason for setting the dissertation's

³³ "To an Intra-Mural Rat," "Counseil [sic] to a Bachelor," "Appellate Jurisdiction," "That Harp You Play So Well," and "The Wizard in Words" appeared in the May, 1915 issue of *Poetry*; "To an Intra-Mural Rat" was the only of these that Moore chose to print in her first authorized volume, *Observations* (Dial Press, 1925). After a long gap, three selections from "Part of a Novel, Part of a Poem, Part of a Play" in the June 1932 issue prepared readers for *Poetry*'s "twentieth birthday number" "with poems mostly by early contributors" of October 1932, and Moore published there again in "prize award numbers" in 1934, '35 and '36. A fortieth anniversary issue in 1952 similarly primed the magazine for Moore's translations of La Fontaine in 1953 and '54, and a reprint of "The Wizard in Words" ran in the 1972 "First Appearances" issue (alongside a reprint of some of Stein's stanzas from *Stanzas in Meditation*). Moore also contributed numerous reviews, primarily in the early '30s.

³⁴ Part Two stanza i, Part Four stanza iv (with one correction and one standardization), Part Three stanza iii (with a "can" where original drafts have a "may"), Part Five stanzas lxxxi–lxxxiii (with "cans" where the original drafts have "mays," and a change from an indentation to a line break). As Chapter 2 discusses, some of the typographical standardizations here are likely the work of the editorial staff at *Poetry*, but the "cans" in the published version of these poems importantly show Toklas's editorial hand.

³⁵ "Gay Chaps at the Bar" and "Still Do I Keep My Look, My Identity..." ran in *Poetry* in the November 1944 "Prize Award Number," before *A Street in Bronzeville* appeared with Harper in 1945. *Poetry* published "The Children of the Poor" and "A Light and Diplomatic Bird" in March 1949; these poems both appeared in *Annie Allen*, for which Brooks won the Pulitzer Prize in 1950. "Old Mary," "We Real Cool," "Strong Men, Riding Horses," and "The Bean Eaters" appeared in September 1959 issue, before the release of *The Bean Eaters* (Harper & Brothers, 1960). "Henry Rago" ran in the memorial issue for Rago, November 1969, and "Winnie" for Winnie Mandela in the 75th anniversary issue, October–November 1987.

opening date with *Poetry*: in addition to her own career as a poet and her editorial work at the magazine, Tietjens worked as a journalist, serving as a Paris war correspondent for the *Chicago Daily News* from 1917–1918. That is to say that the war’s cheek-by-jowl relation to poetry in *Poetry* is illustrative of my general methodology in this dissertation: the poets I discuss are not always writing explicitly about World War I or World War II, but their work is always in conversation with combat.

In engaging poets who are not generally billed as war poets I mean both to expand the canon of who we can think of as witnesses to World War I and to help us rethink what counts as witnessing. This kind of reformulation draws on the work of writers like Rachel Galvin, whose *News of War* examines the strong links between war rhetoric and civilian poetry in the World War II period, arguing that civilian poets use meta-rhetoric to self-interfere with their own accounts to “puncture the audience’s smooth absorption or enchantment by the work”;³⁶ Elizabeth Outka, who reminds us that an integral part of the war story, the civilian toll of the influenza pandemic of 1918 and 1919, has been all but overshadowed by the lyric accounts of World War I’s flesh-witnesses to combat;³⁷ and Mary Favret, whose *War at a Distance* reminds us that wartime “always falls between expectation and belatedness,” producing unjoined feelings and unarticulated affect as “a persistent mode of daily living and a habit of mind” that make even a lyric reading of war work a more mediated version of eventfulness than an immediate one.³⁸ My approach to poetry of witness agrees with Carolyn Forché and Duncan Wu, whose *Poetry of Witness* is the best contemporary anthology of witness poetry, that the work of witness is always

³⁶ Rachel Galvin, *News of War: Civilian Poetry 1936–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 26.

³⁷ Elizabeth Outka, “‘Wood for the Coffins Ran Out’: Modernism and the Shadowed Afterlife of the Influenza Pandemic,” *Modernism/Modernity* 21.4 (November 2014): 937–60.

³⁸ Mary Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 77; 15.

communal even in its most individual form, but I take issue with Forché's sense that because the news is "neither wholly fact nor wholly fiction, never true to objective truth or subjective reality" poets of witness necessarily take news writing as a "degenerate form of art," and wholly disagree with her stipulation that poets must have "personally endured" the conditions they describe in order to be considered witnesses, for this criterion perpetuates flesh-witnessing as the standard of witnessing altogether.³⁹ My project also recognizes the home front and the everyday as crucial to our view of the war, proposing skeletonization as a mediated, belated⁴⁰ vision of wartime that ghosts the scene of poetry, rather than claiming war as the scene of poetry proper.

My ways of reading poetry and photography are anchored in archival close reading, and see these textual conditions as importantly material, conditioned by time, place, and mode of production. All three chapters use archival research and close reading strategies to juxtapose the content and shape of a particular category of photograph with the contents of poetry and the look of the poem on the page, following the general strategies for genetic reading set out by George

³⁹ Carolyn Forché, *Against Forgetting: Twentieth Century Poetry of Witness* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1993), 36, 30. See also *Poetry of Witness: The Tradition in English, 1500-2001*, ed. Carolyn Forché and Duncan Wu (New York; London: W. W. Norton, 2014).

⁴⁰ Where belatedness invokes both Roland Barthes's melancholic understanding of the photograph as a frozen, indexical portrayal of what "will have been" and as the main tenet of trauma studies, in which the moment of trauma is not the experienced catastrophe but rather the retrospective accretion of that event's resonances. See Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), especially 92–99), and (for one end of the discourse surrounding trauma) Sigmund Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia" and "Beyond the Pleasure Principle," collected in *The Freud Reader*, trans. and ed. Peter Gay (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985). On embodied knowledge as inarticulable, see Joy Parr, *Sensing Changes: Technologies, Environments, and the Everyday, 1953–2003* (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2010); on "crisis ordinariness" as a counter term to trauma that foregrounds the reception of a traumatic event as "the spreading of symbolizations and other inexpressive but life-extending actions throughout the ordinary and its situations of living on"—in other words, as improvisational and experienced in real time—see Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012), 81.

Bornstein, Jerome McGann, and Robin Schulze.⁴¹ I remain cognizant, too, of the material and financial conditions of producing modernism on the printed page, as articulated by Mark Morrisson, and Suzanne Churchill and Adam McKible.⁴²

The three kinds of experimental witnessing I extend through Moore, Stein, and Brooks in the pages that follow may help us expand the canon of World War I poetry; ideally, they also offer new versions of witnessing poetry on the page. The first chapter, “‘What is closer to the truth’: Marianne Moore Takes ‘imaginary possession’ of the War’s ‘well excavated grave,’” asks what happens when information is redacted, and suggests that it seeps through in unexpected and in fact unauthored ways to animate the page of poetry itself. The archive is photographs from the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial Extra*,⁴³ all of which are body-absent photographs; photographs and articles from the *Reader’s Digest* issue from which Marianne Moore culled information for her “When I Buy Pictures”; Moore’s archival drafts of “A Graveyard” and

⁴¹ George Bornstein, ed., *Representing Modernist Texts; Editing as Interpretation* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991); Jerome McGann, *Black Riders: The Visible Language of Modernism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) and *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); and Robin G. Schulze, ed., *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907–1924* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002).

⁴² Mark S. Morrisson, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences, and Reception 1905–1920* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2000); and Suzanne W. Churchill and Adam McKible, eds., *Little Magazines and Modernism: New Approaches* (Hampshire, United Kingdom: Ashgate, 2007).

⁴³ The papers that thrived during World War I already had established foreign correspondents and a network of overseas editors, and were deep pocketed, parsimonious, and supplemented their correspondents’ stories with photographs. The *New York Times*, whose debut photographic *Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra* boasted faster rotogravure printing, became successful enough as a standalone photographic illustrated section that it was eventually spun off as *TIME* magazine in the 1930s. The *Times*’ success during the war years is also a testament to the *Times*’ willingness to spend lavish amounts on double-urgent cable costs: \$780,000 a year during the war, according to Robert Desmond, *Windows on the World: The Information Process in a Changing Society, 1900–1920* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1981), 316. The *Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra* is therefore the primary photographic source text for much of my dissertation.

“When I Buy Pictures”; initial printings of those poems in the *Dial* and the *Egoist*; and a palimpsest of later printings of “A Graveyard.” The methodology is a close reading of syntax and diction within journalistic rhetoric, and syntax, diction, and spatial use of the page in drafts and in publication. The movements we see depend in part on the author, in part on material conditions, and in part on no hand at all. At the chapter’s end I propose a palimpsest as a visual “wild caption” to Moore’s work.

The second chapter, “‘Listen while I tell you all the time’: Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Elegize ‘Cameraflage’ in Coincidence,” asks what happens when information is mistakable, and suggests that this contingency is the source of amusement as well as tragedy; coincidence and contingency begin as wartime concerns but bleed ultimately into the material of the everyday. This expands the necessary field of vision in elegy, requires a longer history, and ultimately thwarts most attempts at adjudication, potentially unseating the lyric subject as the main subject of elegy. The methodology is a close reading of war poems Stein published during World War I in the American Fund for French Wounded *Bulletin* (1918) and in *Vanity Fair* in 1919; manuscript and typescript drafts of a private love war in the stanzas of *Stanzas in Meditation*; and the first printing of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, which Alice Toklas oversaw. This chapter pairs photography of camouflage from the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra* with Stein’s early writing to discuss coincidence, but ultimately proposes the photogrammatic work of avant-garde new vision photographers as a better “caption” to the kind of spreading elegy that Stein and Toklas create in their reciprocal work.

The third chapter, “‘The last bleak news of the ballad’: Gwendolyn Brooks Loiters, After Mamie Till-Mobley’s Baby,” circles back to the concept of the propriety of body-empty photography by working through lynching photographs, a significantly different photographic

archive that requires working through from World War I to 1960, when Gwendolyn Brooks published her poems “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon,” and “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till” in response to Till’s visually spectacularized 1955 lynching. This chapter requires a separate photo archive because most papers did not reproduce lynching photographs, mostly because photography was a relatively high tech endeavor for most small newspapers in the era, and because image space was devoted to white events. Specialty papers like *The Crisis* (the NAACP’s newspaper, which devoted considerable space to the anti-lynching crusade), and larger, established papers like the *Chicago Defender*, occasionally did include photographs of lynchings; these papers were banned in the South, and even *The Crisis* and Ida B. Wells were concerned that reproducing photographs of lynchings might encourage copycat crimes. Simultaneously, Southern newspapers were themselves often the organ of community-sponsored terrorism against African American bodies. Southern papers, and sometimes Northern ones as well, summarily sided with lynchers, described blacks in stereotypical, degrading, and defamatory language that presumed guilt, and announced lynchings ahead of time, thereby both providing “evidence” of guilt where none existed and encouraging crowds’ scopophilia. Aside from the hypervisibility of lynching, being black meant quite literally being airbrushed out of the scene in the South: photographs in which blacks were part of a crowd were “cameraflaged” to exclude them. For these reasons, Chapter 3 does not center on newspaper photography but rather on the occult trade of lynching postcards, which counter the body-empty photos of the first chapter; and on the post-mortem photographs of Emmett Till that circulated in *Jet*. This chapter uses Gwendolyn Brooks’s lynching poetry, coupled with other poetry of witness of hers, to advance a theory of looking that could begin to address this photographic lacuna in our studies of World War I. Following Brooks’s own

language, I call this form of witnessing loitering; it suggests sustained attention to the everyday rather than the spectacular. Here I do not offer a “caption” of my own; such a wild caption would turn to film rather than photography, promising a constant sitting-in. However, I address some of the ways that loitering might help us read contemporary poetry and journalistic photography in the conclusion, where the poetry of Paul Scott Mowrer and the poetry of Claudia Rankine become consonant in their desires to perform memory work by “waiting with” others.

Ultimately I hope that my work helps in the effort to “break the frame.” Breaking the frame is the work that Judith Butler believes “[calls into question] a taken-for-granted reality,” “exposing the orchestrating designs of the authority who sought to control the frame”⁴⁴ and rendering more visible those who deserve the right to our grief and therefore our consideration. This project helps to make the work of seeing and reading more visible *as* work, and may help us keep mediation in mind in our own wartime, which always seems to arrive to us as simultaneously immediate and outside of our view.

⁴⁴ Butler, *Frames of War*, loc. 531.

CHAPTER 1: “WHAT IS CLOSER TO THE TRUTH”: MARIANNE MOORE TAKES “IMAGINARY
POSSESSION” OF THE WAR’S “WELL EXCAVATED GRAVE”

Recently, Alexandra Pechman wrote of the notoriously self-editing modernist poet Marianne Moore, “there is no such thing as a definitive edition of her poetry.”¹ Here Pechman hits upon a truism in Moore scholarship: a poet who believed her latest draft was always the best draft, Moore continually endeavored to make her poems anew, revising some upwards of fifteen times. Pechman claims that “[Moore’s] belief that the record of her work could be rewritten—despite the impossibility—is a 21st-century problem,” and this may also be true. Pechman means to indicate that Moore’s reception in the archive means that any of the poet’s attempts to erase herself have been undone by her scholars, in the same way that no work published on the internet can be erased without a trace. Pechman is correct about this, and this dissertation chapter participates in precisely the kind of scholarship that Moore might abhor. But I think Pechman is also correct about Moore in a deeper way: the thickness of reference in Moore’s work makes hers a hyperlinked poetry before the term. That thickness of reference also makes every one of her works deeply embedded in her historical moment—and in the historical moments that led up to her own. For me, it is this sense of Moore’s poetics that make them a “twenty-first-century problem,” but it also marks her work as a response to a distinctly twentieth-century problem: she was reacting to a question about ownership and provenance that came to the fore during the crisis of witnessing that marked the twentieth century’s first world war.

¹ Alexandra Pechman, “Track Changes,” June 29, 2016.
<http://www.poetryfoundation.org/features/articles/detail/89898>

In July 1921 Moore published two poems in the New York *Dial* magazine. At first we might wonder that she was able to have them published at all, since her poems made an unexpectedly backward-looking aesthetic statement about the relation between viewership, ownership, and historical provenance. The *Dial*'s editors James Sibley Watson and Scofield Thayer had only been printing the *Dial* since 1919, and the publication they had reimagined as an avant-garde little magazine had a checkered past. Originally Ralph Waldo Emerson's and Margaret Fuller's Transcendentalist publication (1840), the magazine had taken a break and then a turn for the more generally philosophical in the 1880s, followed by a second turn for the radical and anarchist in 1914. It had wrestled between the political and the literary in the immediate postwar, and had only become explicitly "devoted to the modern arts"² when Thayer and Watson began publishing out of their Greenwich Village offices. Though the *Dial* remained more aesthetically conservative than some of its little magazine contemporaries—notably the *Little Review* and *Poetry* magazine—in Thayer and Watson's editorial shift the little magazine took a vested stake in differentiating itself from former iterations published under the same title, and in proving its newness.³ But according to the editors, showcasing newness was also a commitment

² This is Alfred Kreymborg's description of *The Dial*, in *Troubadour: An American Autobiography by Alfred Kreymborg* (New York, 1925, rpt., New York: Sagamore Press, 1957), 260. Kreymborg, former editor and publisher of the then-defunct *Others: A Magazine of Verse*, recounts Marianne Moore's first encounter with the *Dial*'s editors at a party thrown by Lola Ridge (his former assistant editor at *Others*) in 1919.

³ Robin Schulze notes, for instance, that when Moore began writing book reviews for the *Dial* in 1920 at Thayer's suggestion, the magazine's managing editor Gilbert Seldes turned down her initial pitch: she wanted to review *The Earthenware Collector*, a book on British pottery. In a second round of pitches, Moore suggested *The Letters of Henry James*, for which the *Dial* already had a reviewer in mind, and G. and W. Grossmith's 1892 *The Diary of a Nobody*, which Seldes noted "is a rather old book which has probably been reprinted recently [...] so my reply to your note starts unhappily." (Gilbert Seldes to Marianne Moore, 17 April 1920, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Philadelphia. Quoted in Robin G. Schulze, *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907–1924*, [Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002], 426). The *Dial*

to continuing a tradition: “We believe that what is best and of most real human value in art is shared by both the more traditional type of creative work and by the more radical creations of our younger contemporaries,” Thayer wrote in the *Dial*’s statement of purpose;

We believe that the best way for one of the younger men to evaluate what he and his friends are doing, the best way for him to determine whether or not they are attaining in their work the essentials which underlie the mere surface trend, is to see this work of theirs placed side by side with other work which they in common with all the enlightened public acknowledge to be good and to contain in it those essential aesthetic or human values which make art worth having.⁴

Printing the “more radical creations of our younger contemporaries” alongside the work of “older and more traditional workers” would give the younger generation credibility in the eyes of the reading public, Thayer argued, but it would also give the young artist the valuable experience of standing *ab extra*, outside of himself. “Most of these younger American artists have, prior to the inception *The Dial*, not seen their work except in their own books or in journals devoted almost wholly to works of their own type”; publication in the *Dial* would allow an author to see himself “in juxtaposition.”⁵ The editors of the *Dial* believed a) that they offered authors the self-awareness necessary to evaluate and improve their art; b) that an artist’s self-awareness depended on comparison (“work placed side by side with other work”; work “in juxtaposition”); c) that the proper register for comparison was vision (the problem was that newer American authors “have...not *seen* their work except in their own books”); d) that the problem could only be remedied when young American artists “*s[aw]* this work of theirs placed side by side” with established work that was held in common esteem); and finally that the standard to which artists

was interested in contemporary, literary work, and at the outset its editors seemed less interested in Moore’s eclectic sense of what might be germane background to that work.

⁴ “*The Dial* / Statement of Purpose,” *Dial* Office Files, Scofield Thayer Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Collection, YCAL MSS 34.

⁵ “*The Dial* / Statement of Purpose”

stroke was ownership (good work would “contain in it those essential or human values which make art *worth having*”).

Thayer’s 1919 mission statement is illustrative of an aesthetic dilemma around newness that was occurring in many World War I and early-postwar magazines. Still, it is his terminology around vision, ownership, and comparison that I argue is more broadly at play in the period, alive in the thinking of poets, journalists, and American Committee for Public Information war censors alike. In particular, the *Dial*’s need to argue that artists could own and improve themselves most successfully by detachedly viewing themselves on the page and in comparison to other artists is in part a reaction to war rhetoric around witnessing, and the degree to which a witnessed event could be successfully transmitted to an absent party.

The War Department, which considered itself to be in charge of military and civilian morale, theorized graphic violence as potentially traumatizing to soldiers and civilians alike when the lives of loved ones were—or could be imagined to be—at stake in the violent scene of the First World War. According to the War Department’s logic, if the presence of soldiers on the front could fight to shield civilians at home from actual violence, its own efforts to control images and information could also shield those at home from the scenes of war. A soldier who was traumatized on the front was a true flesh-witness: he “used up” the violence of a scene, buffering a mother at home from experiencing it. By restricting what visual evidence of the war was circulated in the media, the War Department believed they could perform the same service a soldier-witness performed on the front. Photographs therefore eschewed any imagery of death, and used the soldier’s living body to signal safety: a soldier was keeping watch over American households, protecting them from trauma; someone—another soldier, or a journalist—was also recording American losses *as* trauma; if the initial soldier died, he would not be forgotten.

The government's production of a scene of trauma that had no dead bodies ultimately bifurcated and exalted the (always male) soldier-witness, through the actions that journalists took to meet censorship requirements while continuing to tell the story they wished to tell. In the effort to absorb trauma, the soldier became a real body that could be wounded or killed (but not photographed), and simultaneously became a nearly religious accounting that could withstand its human death (but could only be figured as a living body). The real body therefore could not stand outside the scene of witnessing, yet could stand outside of itself, in spirit. This also made the territory around that soldier atmospheric and auratic: something only he could own; something a photograph could only begin to reproduce or transmit.

Because the journalistic photographs of this period were heavily censored in their imagery, journalists became heavily biblical and allusive in their captioning language in order to toggle between the demand that the human body be vulnerable in defense of those at home, and the demand that the soldier be a witness with an undying viewpoint. These photos process absent, only-implied dead bodies and destroyed landscape as atmosphere by means of narrating stillness. This form of processing, literary ekphrasis, often utilizes comparative language—of metaphor, simile, or analogy—in order to make a stilled scene *move*. Ekphrasis is the government's or journalist's attempt to repair the bifurcated witness. It combines the stillness of the soldier's potentially dead body and his movement (the text that keeps the memory of the soldier alive). Ekphrasis manages this desire to repair by means of figurative language. In some theories, the simile is the most overt form of repair: it compares the unknown to the known, proffering points of similarity or difference as a way to close a gap of certainty; and it reminds the thinking mind of its aliveness, its ability to knit seemingly diverse information. I argue that in this reassuring, explanatory impulse simile shares a literary history with the traditions of

ekphrasis and epitaph, which both posit an outsider relation between the viewer and the object in view and tout the viewer's ability to stand *ab extra* and judge the objects before him without involving him emotionally.

Put in the guiding terms of this dissertation, the military found that photographs skeletonized a scene too exactly, and elicited anxiety in the audience that received and re-fleshed the missive. The War Department therefore attempted to restrict what visual information was available in transmission, deciding, in other words, what language was worth its cost in a telegram. Journalists did transmit these images as given, but employed high lyric captions ekphrastically, in a way that tended to increase the auratic sense of the message therefore privileging being there in person (a male "privilege") over reading about it (a female "privilege"). But that same auratic, atmospheric effect in re-fleshing often had unintended consequences.

Thayer and Watson's author Marianne Moore—who would later go on to take Thayer's place as editor at the *Dial*—responds to this bifurcating rhetoric of the ownership of trauma through ekphrasis as well in her 1921 *Dial* poetry submissions "When I Buy Pictures" and "A Graveyard." I pose Moore's similes against the War Department's reassuring tradition. For Moore, the simile is part of a tradition of imagination characterized by Gertrude Buck, William James, and I. A. Richards, in which describing one object or experience in terms of another does not keep the viewer *ab extra* but rather throws him bodily into the experience.

Moore's form of narrating the scene in these poems is lyric, invested in aesthetic provenance but also in partial or non-ownership, and in this her poetry counters the assumption that any one viewer can own the landscape of the war, or that only a soldier can be a witness. The "art worth having" (in Thayer and Watson's language) or the scene of trauma worth

absorbing (in the War Department's understanding) is not simply contemporary, for Moore. Moore chooses "that which would give me pleasure in my average moments,"⁶ and by this standard the artwork could vary in medium, genre, location or era of provenance, and "brow." Juxtaposing a laundry list of artworks with each other, Moore concluded that it was the artworks' recognition of provenance that made them great: "...of whatever sort it is, / it must acknowledge the forces which have made it; / it must be 'lit with piercing glances into the life of things.'" But Moore also questioned the desirability, even the possibility, of owning a scene. Her poem opens, "When I Buy Pictures, / or what is closer to the truth, / when I look at that of which I may regard myself as the imaginary possessor," and the emphasis is on ownership as at best imaginary.

Moore's second poem, on the verso of "When I Buy Pictures" and therefore prefaced by it, opens, "Man looking into the sea— / taking the view from those who have as much right as you have to it yourself— / it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing / but you cannot stand in the middle of this: / the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave."⁷ The man's inability to stand in the middle of the view—his inability to be either entrenched in the scene, absorbing it, or outside of it, judging—arises from the sea's inability or unwillingness to mirror him. In "When I Buy Pictures," an artwork that wears its provenance would allow the viewer to "take it in hand as a savage would take a looking-glass," presumably with a mixture of wonder and fear at the self-reflection that such a juxtaposition could offer.⁸ But the war's aesthetic commitments are different: there *are* bodies underneath the waves, they *do* erupt at unexpected

⁶ Marianne Moore, "When I Buy Pictures," *The Dial* 71 (July 1921): 33.

⁷ Marianne Moore, "A Graveyard," *The Dial* 71 (July 1921): 34.

⁸ Moore's 1924 notes to "When I Buy Pictures" attribute the line "lit by piercing glances" to A. R. Gordon's *The Poets of the Old Testament* (1912) (*Observations* [New York: The Dial Press, 1924], 98), but the line is also reminiscent of William Wordsworth's "Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey." Because the *Observations* printing of "Pictures" no longer included what had been the final line in the *Dial* magazine printing, the contextualizing source material for taking an item in hand "as a savage would take a looking-glass" has been lost.

moments, and they refuse to be owned. Moore's poetry helps us see the historical problems around the war as problems not merely of trauma but of reading, and she attempts to solve these problems by proposing a resisting relation of reader to text, one that challenges popular conceptions of metaphor as a relation of resemblance and equivalence.

If we follow Moore's example and take reading to be a historically thick work, the stakes for reading and viewing are manifold. First, as I have suggested, mirroring may be pedagogical: the body mimics in feeling what the body sees. I believe that in "A Graveyard" a voyeuristic desire to "tak[e] the view" analogizes the national desire to see the war. But the poem's speaker, merging over time into the poem itself, understands "the view" to be problematic: viewing seems unable to recognize the loss below the sea, but also desires to own it; desires to bring that which is missing close. "When I Buy Pictures" helps to train the gaze, arguing for a knowing that attempts and fails to destroy its object, and which therefore cannot coopt. As the overt description of mirroring in the last lines of "Pictures" suggests, the body *may* be sensitive to a kind of sight that it cannot always articulate directly. The turning and twisting of volitionless dead bodies in "A Graveyard" mimics the movement of the sea itself, but that turning and twisting also seems to animate the phalanx of waves, the rowers, and even the viewers who cannot see the bodies. Though its effects are imprecise—the "man looking into the sea" does not seem to be a direct correlative for the "others who have worn that look" or for the sea's own ravenous look—history may inhere in the very atmosphere of looking, for what we cannot see directly or know objectively may still play out in us and through us.

In recognizing our desire to take "imaginary possession" of objects and experiences as an act of mirroring that expresses a historical trajectory that we take part in but cannot own, we can perhaps resolve, or at least temporarily put aside, the distance that separates the war front from

the American home front. In using Moore to resolve this specific problem of historical reading, I intend not to explain but deepen our understanding of her poetry. She proposes a destructive, extensive witnessing that accounts for the reader's embeddedness in the act of simile.

Protecting the Public from Visual Trauma: The Soldier's Body as Buffer

The dominating military conception of witnessing during World War I saw the witness as a mind potentially overcome by being present at a scene of violence in which his fellow soldiers were killed, maimed, or in persistent, irremediable danger. In this model of transmission, the witness psychically absorbed physical violence done to other bodies as something like an atmosphere, and then re-expressed it in repetitious, involuntary physical or mental actions. The traumatized witness might also be physically wounded, but as often as not, trauma was a psychic wounding whose causes were not directly correlated to physical injury and whose expression did not seem to correspond to their root causes.

Trauma could therefore look like a body playing out an odd inversion of a patriotic rhetoric that imagined bodies making a forceful impression on the war-atmosphere. American soldiers were going to break the stalemate in Europe with offensive tactics that could counteract the passivity of the trench mentality that had set in for French and British soldiers. In 1917, General Pershing claimed: "All instruction must contemplate the assumption of a vigorous offensive. This purpose will be emphasized in every phase of training until it becomes a settled habit of thought."⁹ But rather than the forceful, forward impact of bodies on a scene, American men at war in late 1917 and early 1918 were bodies moved by the war atmosphere.

⁹ General John J. Pershing, *Final Report of Gen. John J. Pershing* (Washington, D.C., 1920), 15.

Late 1917 and early 1918 were a “war of semi-movement,” to quote *Chicago Tribune* war correspondent Floyd Gibbons, as men moved back and forth between trenches with hardly any real territory gains.¹⁰ In other words, what seemed like an offensive war was a defensive one, and the “settled habit of thought” became defensive ducking. After constant shelling, soldiers’ bodies began to move more quickly than even their minds registered: “time after time the collective judgment...and consequent prostration of the entire party was proven well timed by the arrival of a shell uncomfortably close.”¹¹ That preconscious ducking responded to a thickness of sound, taste, touch and smell,¹² as both soldiers and civilian journalists noted the difficulty of describing the front in terms as simple as vision. That atmosphere, caught up in a soldier’s body, its premonitions of danger, and its motion, could also be communicated through the body as a traumatic tic, as a witness’ absorption and re-expression of a vision of destruction.

In seeing World War I as “the first war in which the atmosphere itself became an arena of combat,”¹³ we can begin to understand the War Department’s many negotiations of how this space of destruction should be transmitted. For the War Department, visions of destruction created a very real problem of morale, both for soldiers who might encounter their comrades’ destruction and for those at home, who might be similarly affected if they saw evidence of

¹⁰ Floyd Gibbons, *And They Thought We Wouldn’t Fight* (New York: Doran, 1918), 247–8.

¹¹ Gibbons, *And They Thought*, 231. As Susan Moeller notes, Erich Maria Remarque tells of a similar experience: “A man is walking along without thought or heed;—suddenly he throws himself down on the ground and storm of fragments flies harmlessly over him;—yet he cannot remember either to have heard the shell coming or to have thought of flinging himself down.” Quoted in Susan Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 96.

¹² On this point, see especially Santanu Das, whose *Touch and Intimacy in First World War Literature* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) argues for the centrality of the “intimate, affective level” (5) of touch in the literature of World War I—touch reinforced war knowledge as flesh-witnessing, bodily and non-transferrable.

¹³ Moeller, *Shooting War*, 98. Moeller is thinking specifically of the use of warplanes, which made air’s mediality especially palpable.

certain soldiers' destruction in news sources. In part because photography was largely presented as an objective medium and not an artistic representation of events, the photographic presentation of death was considered realistic and shocking in its own right: as contemporary sources had it, "A bullet may kill a man, perhaps two, and a round from a machine-gun [can] bring down an enemy 'plane. But the influences of the photograph are wider, more deadly,"¹⁴ because "there is something substantially reliable in a picture obviously taken from a photograph. Nothing would seem to be more authentic than a snapshot. It does not occur to anyone to question a photograph."¹⁵ As the War Department negotiated the public's need for information and its own fears that "the public *is* so susceptible to the message of a picture,"¹⁶ it developed a sense of war as a scene that the bodies of armed men could own and protectively absorb.

Thus the body of the soldier became a protection against disturbance that threatened to become trauma for the viewing public, if the viewer had a personal stake in the war. The personal stake in American men's lives—that threatened to reconstitute images as injurious at home—was often figured as specifically feminine. As the War Department's Major Kendall Banning expressed it, scenes of destruction and particularly of human destruction might kindle in an average viewer "the anti-war spirit so persistently cultivated by the enemy," but intimacy's effect could transform a scene entirely: "such pictures caused needless anxiety to those whose friends and relatives were at the front" because "the average mother sees her own boy subjected to the dangers portrayed...and she visualizes her own son in each corpse she sees pictured."¹⁷

¹⁴ "Aero-Photography," *Abel's Photographic Weekly*, December 21, 1918, 533, 537.

¹⁵ Arthur Ponsby, *Falsehood in War-Time* (London and New York: Garland, 1928), 135.

¹⁶ Lieutenant-Colonel Kendall Banning, *Military Censorship of Pictures in World I* (Washington, D.C., c. 1919) 23, quoted in Moeller, 136.

¹⁷ Banning, *Military Censorship*, 23, 7, 23, quoted in Moeller, 136, 114–15, 137.

Because photography was taken as a nearly irrefutable means of presenting a one-to-one reality, anyone might be *disturbed* by a scene of destruction that they assumed to be real, and a soldier's mother might even be *traumatized* by such a photo when the process of imaginative substitution the photo set off in her made her own potential loss feel present and real.

This understanding of the relationship between trauma as a reaction to something seen, and photography as the direct transmission of a scene, meant that while certain losses on the battlefield would be inevitable, the War Department was tasked with mitigating the trauma of those losses. Their strategy conflated viewership and ownership, and as a result, photography's ability to transmit information about the war became a problem of transmitting trauma. In cases where the partial transmission of potentially troubling information was desirable but the transmission of trauma was not, as when relaying information to the public through the news, the War Department believed that as protectors they were morally obligated to shield wives and mothers. They did so by restricting access to the objective correlative that would spark imagination, since with the correct input imagination could create trauma. If photos of dead boys were not printed in newspapers, American mothers would have a harder time visualizing and therefore imagining their sons in pain or in death. And so, as Major Banning put it, "the general policy was adopted of withholding such views from the public,"¹⁸ and the War Department considered the problem of trauma-by-witnessing partially solved.

This solution reinforced that the war front was the sole locus of witnessing, and therefore that soldiers were the only witnesses. However, the War Department declared that civilians were

¹⁸ To be clear, war censoring restricted more than just the portrayal of dead bodies. Also restricted (because "the American public does not want horrible pictures," i.e., for reasons of morale rather than because the images might compromise the immediate safety of troops) were photographs of "the mangled remains of a fallen airplane...the wreck of a war vessel...a trench of American dead...an operating room in a military hospital...the picking up of Americans killed in action." Banning, *Military Censorship*, 23–24, quoted in Moeller, 136, 114–15.

responsible for making photographic documentation of the war possible, suggesting that the witnessed view would necessarily somehow outlive the war front. “Are You One of Those Reluctant Ones? It Is Your Patriotic Duty to Offer Your Lenses to Your Government,”¹⁹ propaganda read, implying that it was a soldier’s duty to take up the camera’s witnessing work on behalf of the civilians who equipped them with their own home cameras. The goal of this witnessing was one of shielding that doubled a more literal, military protection: in the same way that troops could “hold the line” or “go over the top,” a soldier might “hold” a vision of destruction in order to protect it from enemy control; he might also be the first line of defense for civilians, the buffer zone that protected the American public from an image of destruction in the same way that he protected, say, a French village from German bombardment.

Figure 1.1 exemplifies how photographs could function as an absorptive protection. The caption to the photograph reads, “One of the great guns that are manned by men from the



(Figure 1.1: *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra*, “One of the great guns...”)

American coast artillery, and that can be transported to any part of the fighting zone where railroad tracks are or can be laid.” In this figure, American readers of the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra* aren’t told much at all about the *kind* of gun pictured—its range, accuracy, or speed; how it’s loaded; how many people it takes to man—but they are assured that this gun opens,

or even captures, new horizons. In point of fact, it was quite difficult and expensive to lay new

¹⁹ “Are You One of Those Reluctant Ones?” *Abel’s Photographic Weekly*, January 12, 1918, p 9.

railroad track, and rather easy to scupper an army's advance by destroying the track lines along which that army meant to travel. But the language of the caption here emphasizes the opposite aspects. This "great gun" can operate wherever track runs, and—importantly—wherever track can be laid. Regardless of the actual feasibility of running new track lines, the suggestion here is that any landscape that can be seen or imagined is ripe for tracking, and that any landscape that can be tracked can also be held, defended, and absorbed.

This "great gun" makes the landscape ownable not only by virtue of soldiers laying track through it, but also by transforming the landscape with a visual offensive, penetrating it to make a scene available to witness. As J. T. MacCurdy has argued, only one in every 1,400 shells launched during World War I killed a soldier—shelling was used less as a form of accurate killing than as a way to clear the landscape and intimidate the enemy.²⁰ A gun like this would be used to bombard trees, barbed wire, and fortifications, clearing the landscape for view and for modification and ownership by American troops. But in clearing a view, it would also create the noise, smoke, and destruction that made the scene into the kind of atmosphere that soldiers and journalists argued could only be absorbed by the body, and never effectively described or pictured in the newspaper.

Thus the War Department's pictorial "solution" used armed men to provide the public with, and protect the public from, visions of war. This solution depended on elevating the American soldier into a particular kind of witness, one that was both bodily disposable and immortal. The complicated linguistic circumlocutions necessary to bifurcate and elevate this witness also gendered trauma itself. For the War Department, the journalists who made the war known to the American reading public, and most war poets, the idea that the *view* of the trauma

²⁰ J. T. MacCurdy, *The Structure of Morale*, quoted in Moeller, 96.

or the *scene* of the catastrophe could and must be managed and owned also meant that certain landscapes, certain aesthetic experiences, could only be owned by men.

Ekphrastic Transmissions of Trauma: Bifurcating and Exalting the Male Solider-Witness

When the War Department relieved civilians of their own cameras, split the soldier into the body that absorbed trauma and the American Expeditionary Force photographer that recorded a war scene, and censored the AEF photographer's images to prevent the transmission of trauma through imagination, the Department also opened the door to explanatory captioning and journalistic interpretation. The work of explaining the new technologies of a war scene, or of describing what the camera did not catch well, also meant invoking more lyric ekphrases,—verbal representations of visual representations—that could hauntingly invoke the dead or missing by evoking what was not visually present in a photographic scene. Ekphrastic writing is normally held apart from its visual counterpart, and is often measured against it, to see whether it could reliably “stand in” for the artwork. For this reason, ekphrasis is conceptually helpful in discussing the role of a photograph and its caption, since the photo and caption struggle with the redundancy that the genre of ekphrasis invokes—the problem that the written may simply copy the visual—and with the opposite problem, in which neither the visual nor the written completely cover the experience they depict. Though the photograph and its caption are only as old as the nineteenth century, ekphrasis gives a long aesthetic-historical trajectory to the questions of skeletonization, for it invokes the hope that an experience can be transmitted in a medium that is not its own original; foregrounds the difficulty of producing such a mediation; and becomes concerned with the fallout of that mediation's success or failure. Ekphrasis also motivates certain questions that are thought to be media-specific: the dream of a photograph that can have the

same narrative movement as a piece of writing, and the dream of a journalistic account that can remain as iconically static, or citable, as a photograph.

The photograph and caption of figure 1.2 exemplify what W.J.T. Mitchell has called “ekphrastic indifference”: the sense that words alone cannot depict an experience, that they can at best “‘cite’ but never ‘sight,’” whereas visual art can present a fuller version of the experience.²¹ This is to say that ekphrastic language can never be successfully ekphrastic; a picture remains more true than the thousand words that describe it. Here the caption is indeed ekphrastic—it is a verbal representation of a visual representation—but it is indifferent: it is not intended to stand alone without the photograph it describes. The captions to figure 1.2 read, “Grotesque Masks the Only Protection Against Gas.” “Above are shown the various types of gas mask in use in the different armies. Shapes differ, but the principle varies little. From left to right are kinds used by American, British, French, and German troops.”



(Figure 1.2: *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra*, “Grotesque Masks...”)

beyond what is merely apparent: the caption makes no effort to explain how the masks work, or even to point out any differences in function or durability for different nations’ masks. The kind of information that is transmitted is more

The caption’s language is hardly descriptive, but rather informational, indexical. In order to understand the new technology of gas masks, a reader will need to see them, but (as in the case of the “great guns” in figure 1.1), the level of understanding remains superficial here, technologically speaking, and does not go

beyond what is merely apparent: the caption

²¹ W.J.T Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 153.

about establishing technology as protection, and curating a collection as reassurance: gas is dangerous, but gas masks protect the troops. And we know they do so because here are four young men, standing upright, safely labeled and categorized by the caption.

With so little information about the gas masks in question, readers must follow the only cues they are given, and so the indexical work of the caption is also crucial in amplifying the visual work of the photograph by its failure to be adequate to the image. The caption directs the eye by pointing, but leaves the reader to fill in the tonal space. Moving from left to right, the viewer might notice an increasing slump in posture, or a shift from the elephantine mask at left to the googly-eyed looking version at right. The caption promises that these “grotesque” technologies stave off the danger of gas, and suggests that, because “the principle [that informs the masks] varies little,” different nations are equally safe in battle. But though these masks purportedly perform the same function, the American whose pack is in front of him nonetheless looks better equipped than the German with a worn and stained coverall, whose mask seems to be held on by string. Countering the caption, the image suggests that Americans are the best technologically equipped; because they are the best protected, they are the most safe.

As I examine in greater detail in Chapter 2’s discussion of photographs of decoys and camouflage, the photographs that ran in the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra* also express an anxiety around a photograph’s ability to fully convey an experience; here again the caption serves as a necessary, didactic supplement to the image. In Chapter 2, where the images are primarily about using vision to decode technology’s ability to hide (and therefore protect) a dangerous soldier, I argue that the caption serves as an anxious compensatory measure, training the eye to find the hidden body. In figure 1.2, as well, ekphrastic indifference does not seem to be solely an anxiety about the accuracy or capacities of language (this is the side of the divide

that WJT Mitchell stresses), but also an anxiety about the *photograph*'s ability to single-handedly communicate an experience.

For journalists, dependence on the caption derived in part from the photograph's inability to capture the entire landscape of the war at once. Banning's perception was that the American public wanted

the kind of battle picture that he was accustomed to seeing in the motion picture play...[or] as painted by artists in Philadelphia or New York. They [these fictionalized pictures] had real punch; they showed men being bayoneted and gassed, and airplanes swooping down with machine guns shooting and flags waving, and shells exploding, and tanks charging, and prisoners being captured 'n everything—all in one picture!²²

Without proper tutelage from an accompanying narration, these viewers could not recognize war as atmosphere, the fact “that the indistinct little print of a half dozen doughboys lying in an open field, really showed them pulling forward in the dim light of early dawn, in the face of a rifle fire so intense that one could almost hear the pin of the bullets as they cut through the grass.”²³

This is to say that a merely visual photograph could not always successfully contain its scene, no matter how powerful that visual transmission; that the photograph is no more necessarily commensurate with experience than its written, ekphrastic counterpart; and that it often depends upon that counterpart. Mitchell terms “ekphrastic hope” the optimism that ekphrasis can overcome the division between image and text, creating a synthetic experience in which both the narrative elements generally associated with text, and the static iconicity generally associated with visual media can exist in the same moment for a reader/viewer.²⁴ For Mitchell, ekphrastic hope indicates our desire to close a distance between caption and image, and we can see a mild version of it even in something as simple as the indexical term “German” that

²² Banning, *Military Censorship*, 12–13, quoted in Moeller, 125–6.

²³ Banning, 12–13.

²⁴ Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 152, 158.

asks us to infer that the soldier at the far right is somehow “rumpled; less well prepared” or that asks us to extend those visual inferences to the idea that the Germans are more vulnerable than their American counterparts.

I believe we can see a more rhetorically important ekphrastic hope at play in figures 1.3 and 1.4, below. In these cases, journalists need their captions to overcome War Department restrictions around certain types of imagery. These regulations, adopted semi-voluntarily by all American newspapers and the photographers that worked for them, forbade certain types of photographic representation: no specifics about troop location, size, or rank could be included either in a photograph or in its caption, for if the newspaper “fell into the wrong hands” that information could imperil the men and plans described. In addition, as described above, the War Department believed certain types of photographs could imperil civilian morale: a blanket moratorium was issued regarding picturing American or Allied war dead. Attempting to fulfill these censorship regulations and also present the reading public with the frontline stories they demanded, papers like the *Times* routinely resorted to high-lyric, elegiac language to caption photographs in which, to the untrained eye, it often appeared that nothing at all was happening. These euphemistic captions could change the



tone of the photographs by changing the scope of the witness, as in the caption to figure 1.3, which begins to indicate how the role of a single soldier witness could become displaced. First, as with many images that are captioned journalistically, this one is double captioned through the title and then the caption: “What Was Once Ypres Cathedral” captures a nostalgic overall tone, indicating as it does that the ruins we *do* see is not the ages-old cathedral that we *should* see. The second caption seems more informational, but is generally ideological in its approach as well: “The mangled ‘West Front’ lifts itself above the shattered body of the old church. This British official photograph shows how she keeps watch by night over what is left of this Belgian shrine.” Set completely in silhouette, what is presumably the right-hand tower of Ypres cathedral²⁵ mirrors the body of the soldier posted to guard it, and the caption plays on this visual similarity, invoking the “shattered body of the church” in place of dead or living soldiers. The human body, which makes up an important visual aspect of the landscape, is subsumed into a larger sense of British guardianship (“this British official photograph shows how she keeps watch...”). Given that the building is *already* a shattered body (and had been, really, since the first attacks on Ypres in 1914), the claim to “keep watch” is less a promise to protect “what is left of this Belgian shrine” and more a promise to bear witness to the destruction that has already occurred. Drawing on the religious symbolism of the cathedral, the caption promises a witness that is larger still than the soldier who guards the cathedral or the British army that soldier represents. In

²⁵ To the best of my understanding from other photographs taken during and shortly after the third battle of Ypres in late 1917, this photograph may in fact be miscaptioned: this structure’s towers look much more like those of the Ypres Cloth Hall than like the spired frame of St. Martin’s. If I am correct that the photo is of Cloth Hall and the caption makes reference to St. Martin’s cathedral instead, the mismatch may come from a single mistake, or from the number of different writers and readers involved in skeletonizing the information as it moved between Belgium and the *Digest*. It is also possible that the caption is “skeletonized” to maximum effect, invoking the religious symbolism of sacrilege, eternal memory, and miraculous rebirth by naming a cathedral rather than a business structure.

the context of the caption’s descriptive mode, “the mangled ‘West Front’” may possibly refer to a feature of the cathedral visible here, but in the symbolic linguistic economy in which the caption operates, the “West Front” is also the Allied defensive more generally, “lift[ing] itself” like a soul “above the shattered body” to witness the scene.

Though the soldier’s body is an important visual element of the photograph in figure 1.3, it is one that the caption overwrites, replacing the “he” of soldier with the “she” of the church. The caption to figure 1.4 amplifies this effect, though it cannot dispose of the soldier completely, either. In the lower right-hand corner of the photograph we can see the shadow of its photographer, but the caption makes no mention of him: “Stripped and shattered trunks of trees



at Verdun standing in their desolation like ghosts keeping watch over a valley of the dead.”

For the *Times* it was not common practice to acknowledge the soldier-photographer (or journalist-photographer) unless commenting specifically on photography as a war technology. But here the photographer’s visible shadow does precisely the work of

(Figure 1.4: *New York Times Pictorial War Extra*: “Stripped and shattered trunks of trees...”)

witnessing that the caption seems invested in attributing elsewhere. Invoking “a valley of the dead,” with its biblical echo “yea though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death, I shall fear no evil,” the caption makes a claim for an imperiled condition mitigated by eternal protection. However, in this case eternal protection is not necessarily religious: it is

“trees...standing...like ghosts keeping watch” who create the shadow in the valley of death, guarding the dead. As mourners through the pathetic fallacy²⁶ the trees are also soldiers themselves. This is to say that the trees here stand in for the most legitimate possible witnesses to the war—its soldiers—while also pointing to a paradox of wartime witness: the most legitimate witnesses of the war were generally considered to be the men who did not survive to tell about it.²⁷

That paradox exists just as completely in figure 1.3, where the destroyed physical structure and the living physical body are both present and erased in the caption’s language of description. But despite the complex temporality of “What Once Was Ypres Cathedral,” the ideological import of figure 1.3 seems easier to grasp at first glance or first read: the language of the caption is exclusively constative—no “ifs” or “as ifs”—and the metaphoric exchange of bodies is straightforward—structure for body, body for nation, nation for soul, which can survive to witness the destruction of body and nation. In figure 1.4, that exchange is hampered by the complexity of the caption’s syntax: “Stripped and shattered trunks of trees at Verdun standing in their desolation like ghosts keeping watch over a valley of the dead”—adjective, adjective, noun that seems to stand as an object but finally becomes the subject of a gerund, modified by location and adjective; comparative, noun (subject), gerund, noun phrase (object) with entangled modifiers (it is unclear whether “valley” modifies “dead” or “dead” modifies “valley”). Especially in this latter case, the language of the caption grounds the possibility of witnessing in

²⁶ A term I discuss more fully later in this chapter, in relation to Moore’s “A Graveyard.”

²⁷ Take, for example, John Brophy’s 1929 anthology *The Soldier’s War: A Prose Anthology* (London: Dent, 1929), where the criterion is “men who have waged and suffered [war], not vicariously, but with their own bodies” (x), and Paul Fussell’s codification of the same in *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975). In works like these, poets like Wilfred Owen, who was killed in action, serve as the epitome of war witnessing, because their bodies absorbed the war (and were therefore absorbed by it), but their poetry remains as testimony to what the body witnessed.

the human subject but estranges the possibility of death from that subject, both through the kinds of stories the caption tells and through the twists and turns of the caption's language.

In these figures, ekphrastic hope extends beyond the hope that words can represent an image, expressing as well a hope that the bodies represented can stand in synecdochically for the protection that the armed forces and their god afford those on the home front. In this bifurcation of soldier and spirit, description and aesthetic synthesis, we can smell quite a lot of ekphrastic fear, as well: the body an American mother might fear dead sometimes *was* dead, and the visual aporia of his missing figure is partially what forces the bifurcation within the image and the caption. And that aporia, though glossed over by the caption, may remain in the image and the mind.

Censorship restrictions suggested that an *ab extra* viewer, any mother at home in the States, could digest images of the war safely so long as they did not contain a metaphoric stand-in for her own son. The military assumed that picturing violence could transmit trauma by the process of substitution, which is to say by metaphor, but that leaving a scene visually blank could circumvent that process: without a recognizable scene of violence or loss, a mother's mind would not make this leap. But William James's essay regarding the 1906 San Francisco earthquake and subsequent fire posits that the opposite is true: it is not the image of destruction, but rather the imaginative work of encountering the absence of such an image, especially at a remove that prevents the viewer from believing that he or she can help, that traumatizes the mother at home. In the language of ekphrasis, it is the combination of ekphrastic hope and ekphrastic fear that is traumatizing: realizing that the disjunction between image and description can be overcome in the mind, and realizing at the same time that overcoming this breach loses the self in the possibility of the other.

By James's account, it is not seeing death or destruction that produces trauma. Instead, trauma inheres in the effort to imagine a scene from a distance; any missing information sets the gears of traumatic imagining going. Writing of the earthquake's aftermath, James claims that individual misfortune and the loneliness of mediated catastrophe take the highest mental toll:

We soon got letters from the East, ringing with anxiety and pathos; but I now know fully what I have always believed, that the pathetic way of feeling great disasters belongs rather to the point of view of people at a distance than to the immediate victims.... Surely the cutting edge of all our usual misfortunes comes from their character of loneliness. We lose our health, our wife or children die, our house burns down, or our money is made way with, and the world goes on rejoicing, leaving us on one side and counting us out from all its business.... In our drawing-rooms and offices we wonder how people ever do go through battles, sieges and shipwrecks. We quiver and sicken in imagination, and think those heroes superhuman. Physical pain whether suffered alone or in company...is always more or less unnerving and intolerable. But mental pathos and anguish, I fancy, are usually effects of distance. At the place of action, where all are concerned together, healthy animal insensibility and heartiness take their place.²⁸

For James, mediation could be defined as the loneliness produced by the radical discontinuity of one's own circumstances when measured against the outside world's essential continuity. It is the sense of passivity and futility we feel when "left to one side, counted out." James's language here equates physical distancing with temporal distancing: to be left to one side is to be abandoned in social space; to be left there while the "world goes on rejoicing" is to be abandoned in social time. A great disaster is different, James posits, because it happens to a community, and preserves a collective sense of social space and social time; it successfully redefines a group's "where" and "when." Cataclysmic events produce physical pain but, because they are suffered socially, they also knit a common concern, an "animal insensibility" that is the

²⁸ William James, "On Some Mental Effects of the Earthquake" (*Youth's Companion*, June 7, 1906). Collected in *Memories and Studies* (New York: Longman, Green and Co., 1911, 207–26), 224–6. The jury of contemporary trauma theorists is still out on whether trauma can happen at a distance in the way that James describes, but many theorists of the Shoah have come to argue that trauma is temporally transmissible, handed down to later generations. The same is certainly true of the long reach of slavery.

opposite of loneliness. To be on the outside of a catastrophe looking in—to be the recipient of a newspaper account of destruction with no means of helping those who are hurt or missing—is to “quiver and sicken in imagination,” where one cannot help but *feel* the disaster but also cannot help but realize that one is not *actually* feeling the disaster.

In a study that slightly predates William James’s essay on trauma, rhetorician Gertrude Buck presents the inner workings of the ekphrastic imagination in terms of how the human mind grapples with metaphor, thereby connecting trauma and ekphrasis. Studying Vassar students’ reactions to metaphor in the late 1890s, Buck suggested it was less the stand-in and more the imaginative *process* of sorting out a metaphor that could aid or injure a reader, depending on his or her ability to find a satisfactory correlative, what she called “something at least analogous.”

The sudden tension brought about in the mind by the almost simultaneous introduction of the two elements in the metaphor means physically a sudden catching of the breath, a sense as if the lungs were being forced wide apart. Anyone who notes his sensations while reading a metaphor will, I doubt not, discover something at least analogous to this experience. The breath cannot be released until the unity has been reached. Then, with a sigh or a laugh, it is let go, the lungs fall together.... Having found its beginning, the same process occurs in us that took place in the mind of the writer. The metaphor grows and branches into two main trunks. We follow this division with a symmetrical expansion of the two lungs, a bracing of the two feet on the floor, a sense of balance ever returning to a single center and ever distributing itself anew.²⁹

When we are in the process of coming to understand one thing in terms of another, Buck tells us, we pause on the edge of breath, unbalanced and discombobulated. If we manage to resolve the tension of the metaphor—if we follow the writer’s (or, in the cases we’ve been examining, the photographer’s) line of sight—we inhabit his or her expression, but also hover outside of it, able to take possession of it. Buck’s theory sees metaphor as communal; when she speaks in terms of “anyone” or “we” she emphasizes metaphor as a general human process of cognition, necessary

²⁹ Gertrude Buck, “The Metaphor: A Study in the Psychology of Rhetoric” (Ann Arbor: Inland, 1899). Buck’s work is comparatively unknown; for a quick gloss see <http://rhetoricensemantics.wordpress.com/2012/05/17/gertrude-bucks-theories-of-eloquence/>

for articulating thought to itself and also for articulating thought through language. In this system metaphor is not an impoverished—or for that matter a heightened—linguistic event, but rather a form of processing that encodes historical information in personal experience, a kind of evolution.

Writing slightly later, the rhetorician I. A. Richards agrees. For Richards, our perception of the world itself is always already a kind of metaphor, and “words are the meeting points at which regions of experience which can never combine in sensation or intuition, come together.”³⁰ Richards posits words as second-order interpretive acts whose work as interpretation remains the most clear when we use language metaphorically—which is to say when we perform “a borrowing between and intercourse of *thoughts* [rather than a displacement of words], a transaction between contexts” that makes us aware of each context and of our own process of cognition or interpretation. Buck makes the body the seat of understanding, suggesting that we simultaneously come back into understanding and back into our breath; Richards emphasizes that *understanding* is not the point of metaphor: “A metaphor may work admirably without our being able with any confidence to say how it works or what is the ground of the shift.” The key is rather in noticing the shift.

For the War Department and the journalists that follow the War Department’s censorship guidelines, bifurcating the soldier’s body is a metaphoric process that is a) meant to set the soldier himself as a buffer between destruction and those at home by using his body to absorb the atmosphere and view of destruction; b) meant to relieve the pressure of the possibility of that soldier’s death by excluding the visual evidence of the destruction of American bodies; and c) meant to encode that process of witnessing and remembering in the body of the soldier as the

³⁰ I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (New York; London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 94.

body of the state. Here, the sometimes real and sometimes metaphorical work of owning the landscape and owning its trauma seems meant to register at the level below a reader's recognition—we are reassured by the soldier guarding the Ypres cathedral, and also reassured by his codification as “the mangled West Front” “keep[ing] watch.” Metaphor's ability to pull the mind from one location to another is often touted; this is what the term means in the original Greek.³¹ For some theorists, metaphor is also laudable in its discretion: it takes its comparisons as given, and this means that readers can also take them on principle—only some will do the magnificent work of noticing their minds in action as Richards recommends that we do, despite the overtness of the descriptive act. Watching how one term in a metaphor takes over the ground of its companion term (how the vehicle swallows the tenor), we can see a soldier's body absorb and attempt to use up a scene.

In observing that process, we can also see that metaphor fails to protect when it succeeds at pulling the mind between two locations in an imaginative ground. For American soldiers, witnessing destruction in order to absorb it and prevent its retransmission resulted in physical or mental trauma. As I have shown in this examination of World War I photographs and captions, the attempt to absorb a scene ends up exalting the male soldier-witness while simultaneously bifurcating him. The metaphors journalists invoked in their ekphrastic captions in order to breach that shattered symbolic body introduced the space for imagination—and therefore reanimated the paused trauma of the scene the body had absorbed. That is to say that from the War Department's perspective journalistic coverage might adhere to the regulations of censorship and still destroy morale completely. Here, metaphor's strong closure—its insistence that one thing is

³¹ The Oxford English Dictionary etymology describes metaphor as originally derived from Greek, where it meant to bear or to carry over.

another, inhabits another—forces the absorption that makes the soldier’s body transmit in ways beyond his control and without meaningful relationship to the original.

Simile may therefore be a better model for imagining witnessing as productive, but only if we diverge from Gertrude Buck’s understanding of it. For Buck, simile is the more settled form of metaphor: we already know what we think about two separate things, and are explicitly aware that we are comparing them. In her estimation this thinking is more abstracted, less emotional or physical. At first blush, this does appear to be a way to preserve the body of the soldier: he can stand *ab extra*. But Buck’s understanding of the abstracted simile makes it a more possessive action; we are weighing and judging. This is not the way simile comes across in the work of war witnessing: in the anxiousness of figure 1.4 (above), the caption’s simile may be its least settled aspect. “Stripped and shattered trunks of trees at Verdun” works metaphorically, using the tree trunks as stand-ins for soldiers’ bodies. “Ghosts keeping watch over a valley of the dead” metaphorizes the soldier as a witness by emphasizing an eternal gaze. It is the simile hinging the metaphors—“[the trees] standing in their desolation like [ghosts]”—that brings attention to the act of comparison. Therefore, countering Buck, I would argue that ekphrastic similes may function as something closer to the metaphoric case. Even when they aim for judgment and closure, they remain ultimately open-ended. I am suggesting that the “as” in these similes works to call attention to the work of comparison, and that the simile successfully derails itself in that call to attention and cannot close down neatly. Though the ekphrastic simile begins by suggesting epigrammatic succinctness, it stalls in its own description, and the process of relation that comes to the fore in simile remains there, as guesswork or as an unanswered question. For the ekphrastic journalism and poetry that I encounter in this chapter, simile is *not* the analytic version of metaphor but rather the emotional process of witnessing destruction at the

physical remove of *ab extra*, without assuming that witnessing equates with ownership, or that a scene can be “used up” in being viewed.

Undoing the Male Ab-extra: Marianne Moore and Viewing's Non-Ownership

As we saw above, the moment Kendall Banning suggests is most like the war is the moment a photograph can point to, but cannot transmit: it is the moment of waiting and bated breath as bodies crawl slowly and painfully through mud and debris. The moment that we assume to be the most war-like is the moment of confusion—charges and gunfire and bombing and action—and the one that no photograph could capture. That unowned moment is the one Marianne Moore seems to figure best for us by means of simile and conditionality, at the end of her 1921 draft of the poem “A Graveyard.”³² There, the poem’s narrative gives out; too much is going on at once:

The wrinkles progress upon themselves in a phalanx—beautiful
under networks of foam,
and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the sea-
weed;
the birds swim through the air at top speed, emitting cat-calls as
heretofore—
the tortoise-shell scourges above the feet of the cliffs, in motion
beneath them
and the ocean, under the pulsation of light-houses and noise of
bell-buoys,
advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which
dropped things were bound to sink—
in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor con-
sciousness.

³² Moore’s poem was likely originally composed in 1916, and was then entitled “A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea.” Drafts were in major flux through 1918, when the poem was consistently called “A Graveyard.” By 1921 the text of “A Graveyard” was mostly settled, but Moore changed the title a final time in 1924, ultimately choosing “A Grave.” I make more of the changing look and title of the poem later in this chapter; the current reading emphasizes the changing content of the poem.

This synesthetic experience of Moore's metaphors (birds that swim but mewl like cats) is complicated by the difficulty of attributing a series of deictics—"heretofore," "them," "that," "they"—and these referents move by means of the word "as," which takes two different meanings in these lines. It is a temporal marker of continuity first (the ocean advances "as usual"), and then a comparative that does not hold ("looking as if it were not that ocean..."). This upset of referents and orientors works to reinforce the unsettledness of the scene as the poem closes, and this unsettledness again reconfirms the claim of the poem's opening: "Man looking into the sea— / taking the view from those who have as much right to it as you have to it yourself— / it is human nature to stand in the middle of a thing / but you cannot stand in the middle of this: / the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave."

That claim, that some looks desire to "take up" a view so that no one else can look at it, approximates the War Department's understanding of how trauma could best be defused: the soldier who desires to protect his nation looks at a scene of trauma and his witnessing uses up the scene, rendering it harmless in its absence. Moore's poem contradicts that understanding in two ways, ultimately arguing that a reified view, which privileges one viewer over another, neglects the historic background of witnessing, and suggests the artificial closure of a bad metaphor. In Marianne Moore's poetry, to witness is not to own.

First, "A Graveyard" notes that some scenes have nothing to surrender to the rapacious viewer's sightline ("the sea has nothing to give but a well excavated grave"), or that some scenes will not give in to that scopophilia ("the sea is a collector, quick to return a rapacious look"). As I will show later in the chapter, this contradiction comes most fully to light in the poem's internal movement on the page. That movement, like the movement of the bodies under the ocean in the

poem's last lines, is neither intentioned nor volitional: it is the work of printing history, and suggests that a view is always in flux, and is unownable for that reason, too.

Moore's poem also implicitly claims that it is spurious to privilege one *viewer* over another, as the War Department implicitly chooses to do in positing and then bifurcating its soldier witness. As Susan Schweik has convincingly shown, the credibility of the poets of World War I was defined almost exclusively by their eyewitness status: those who could claim to have seen active battle were considered "serious" poets, the voice of "lonely masculine authority of experience," while those who remained at home were simply beside the point.³³ It was only during the more "total" conflict of World War II that a soldier might find he "cannot even feel that his rendezvous with death is more certain than that of his Aunt Fanny, the firewatcher."³⁴ In the American context, where a degree of hardship was widespread and borne by both genders but war-related deaths were still largely a soldier-male province, what could count as being a witness to the war could finally become a national question rather than a theoretical question with a foregone answer. In that later context, Moore's poetry could be hailed as encapsulating the relation between soldier and civilian life. But when Moore began composing "A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea" in 1916, her poem could not have been read as a credible war poem, because, as an American at home, a civilian, and a woman, she could not be considered a credible witness to the war.

Here I will give just one example of this dichotomy in witnessing status, which Moore herself may also have noticed. During the war one of Moore's regular source texts, the *Literary*

³³ Susan Schweik, *A Gulf So Deeply Cut: American Women Poets and the Second World War* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 32. See also Schweik's introduction regarding the politics of gender in war poetry, and, for a reading of Moore as specifically a poet of World War II, see Chapter 1.

³⁴ Robert Graves, "The Poets of World War II," *The Common Asphodel: Collected Essays on Poetry 1922-1949* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), cited in Schweik, 32.

Digest, ran war coverage and poetry by both men and women, but treated differently the male and female formulations of war pride, grief, and nostalgia (see figure 1.5). Volume 56 (January 5, 1918), in which Moore read about the looting of Jerusalem and in which we can find “What was once Ypres cathedral,”³⁵ contains a page of poetry collected from contemporary books,



(Figure 1.5: *Literary Digest* 56 (January 5, 1918), 34. “Current Poetry,” all by women.)

magazines, and newspapers. In this issue the poetry included is exclusively by women, and of the seven poems included, two are overtly about the perils of war at sea. The brief introduction to a poem called “The Captive Ships at Manila” notes with surprise, “Curiously enough, some of the best sea poems of the time have been written by women,” yet, responding to another death-at-sea poem, the introduction distances the poem’s subject matter from current politics by distancing its female author through her gender and her supposed

³⁵ We know for certain that Moore read at least some portions of this issue of *Literary Digest* because the *Observations* printing of “When I Buy Pictures” cites as source material the photograph that accompanies the article about the looting of Jerusalem (as I discuss later in this chapter). There is no guarantee that Moore read the poetry section of this issue of *Literary Digest*. However, if she did, she would have encountered the poems I reference above, and coincidentally also a poem by Gertrude Buck.

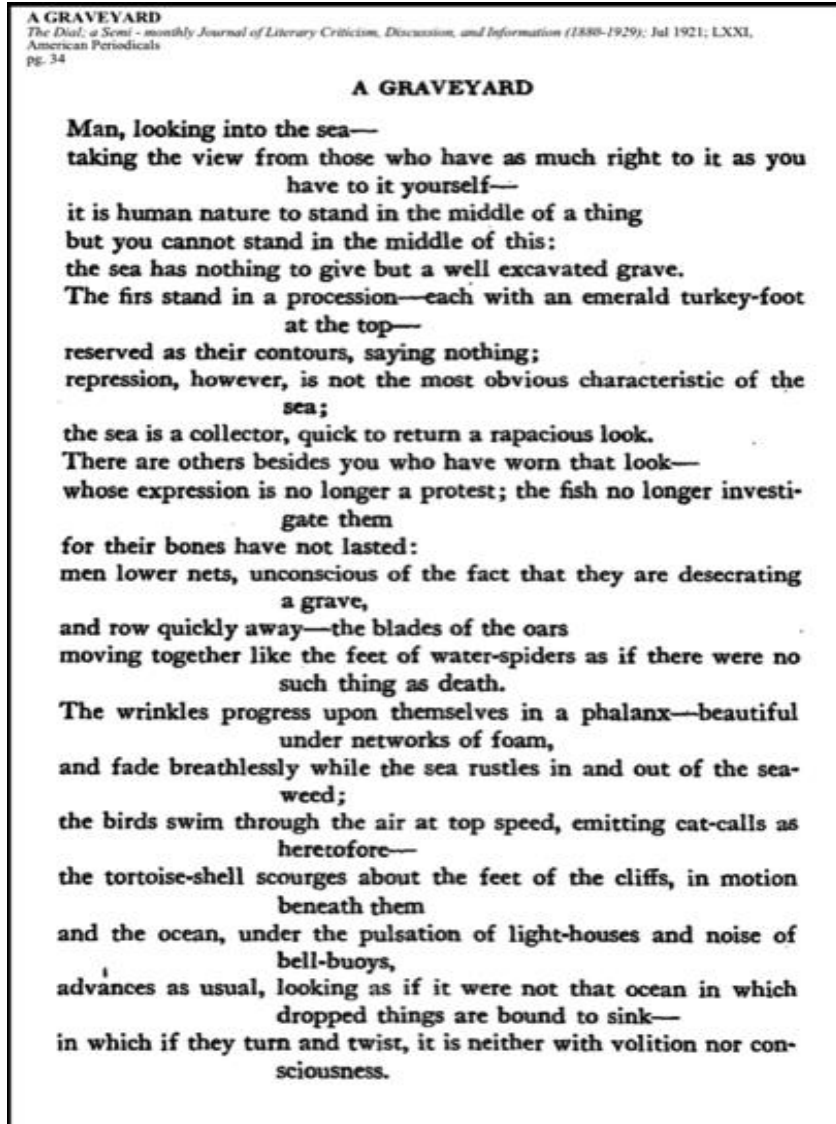
sources: “Edith M. Thomas has some graceful verses in the *New York Times*, founded on a Greek anthology.” Opening Theodora Garrison’s “The Unknowing,” the compiler claims, “Here is a mood familiar to all who have loved and lost most delicately portrayed. The simplicity and restraint of the poem add to its power.” The implication here is that a woman *can* be a witness to the mood of loss, but that loss must be generalizable beyond the context of war. But that attitude is ludicrous, for in fact this may well be a war poem. The first stanza of Edith M. Thomas’s two-stanza poem reads, “They do not know the awful tears we shed, / The tender treasures that we keep and kiss; / They could not be so still, our quiet dead / In knowing this.”³⁶ By reframing their efforts as either classical (and therefore not contemporary) or universal (and therefore not “about” war) the editors of *The Literary Digest* elide the witnessing these female poets do. To be considered a war witness, one needed to be a soldier.

I do not wish to claim that Moore meant “A Graveyard” to be a direct response to this attitude, or that she was composing a war poem specifically. Indeed, unlike her avowed war poems “Reinforcements” (World War I) and “In Distrust of Merits” (World War II),³⁷ the references to armed conflict are less overt in “A Graveyard.” Still, it is a war poem, for it problematizes the role of war witnessing that seemed to belong to men—and, more specifically, male soldiers alone.

³⁶ *Literary Digest* vol. 56, January 5, 1918, p. 34.

³⁷ The latter was written, as Schweik notes, in response to a “newspaper photograph of a dead soldier” (*A Gulf So Deeply Cut* 35).

Early drafts of the poem posit a more specific persona or a more generalized lyric speaker



(Figure 1.6: Marianne Moore’s “A Graveyard,” *Dial* 71 (July 1921))

at different times, and both moves open up the possibility of a female witness rather than a soldier’s perspective. The man in the middle of things is not the speaker, for instance; rather, in early drafts, there is an “I” who rows over the dead bones, where eventually “men lower nets.” In the undated Rosenbach draft known as TMS E,³⁸ the following three descriptions seem to have been written to test out what could follow the line “there are others besides you who

have worn that look,” and were probably meant to replace a deleted question: “~~To what purpose?~~”

³⁸ For the Rosenbach drafts, I rely on Bonnie Birtwistle Honigsblum’s meticulous PhD thesis, which presents typescripts of Moore’s drafts of six early poems, and notes variants in printing until 1967. Bonnie Honigsblum, “Revision in the Poetry of Marianne Moore: Variorum Editions of Six Early Poems,” (Dissertation, University of Chicago, 1985). I follow as well Honigsblum’s terminology for the draft material: HMS: holographic manuscript; TMS: typescript.

<i>The fish have ceased</i>	<i>whose bones comply</i>	<i>who cannot apprise me</i>
<i>To investigate them</i>	<i>when fishes investigate</i>	<i>as I row across them</i>
<i>Whose bones cld but comply</i>	<i>When whose contemporaries</i>	<i>row across them</i>
<i>fish approached them</i>	<i>unconscious</i>	<i>that I can desecrate</i>

As this draft material makes clear, Moore was moving between types of witnesses and their degree of agency (“I can desecrate”); she was similarly concerned with the degree of agency we can afford to the dead. Are the bones able to directly inform the living of their existence? The answer to this question seems uniformly to be “no”: the bones are bound to comply with the interest of others, but cannot speak without a proxy. (The entirety of HMS B, RML reads, “dead things (can but) comply / with what is said of them.”) If the bones are unable to inform, can the sea do it? “[T]he sea no longer bvears [sic] witness to th [commotion] caused by dead bones.” Who is being apprised or not apprised? Is it an “I” who rows across the bones? Is it a “you”? Is it “others”? Can the I or the you or the others know of these bones without being “apprised”? The answer to this question seems to be both yes and no. In this draft material, it seems the bodies beneath the waves are the first phalanx, but in printed versions of the poem it is the sea’s waves that march in formation, “[t]he wrinkles progress upon themselves in a phalanx—beautiful under networks of foam / and fade breathlessly while the sea rustles in and out of the seaweed;” (see figure 1.6), suggesting that something about the experience transmits between the bodies and their medium. Possibly—depending on how we understand Moore’s similes and conditionals, as I will soon address—the medium communicates with the receivers on the surface, whose determination to “row quickly away—the blades of the oars / moving together like the feet of water-spiders as if there were no such thing as death” seems as much a move toward repression as it does a mark of true unconsciousness.

While considering degrees of agency, Moore tried out the possibility of an “I” that rows across the bones, capable of unconsciously destroying their sanctity yet capable of understanding what she is doing if the bones are able to communicate with her. But Moore’s poetry prohibits this kind of telling: in this same draft, marginalia indicates “bones have no / way of remonstrating,” and the earlier draft HMS B (“dead things (can but) comply / with what is said of them.”) concurs. Draft material also shows that the identity of the rower had been fraught from the outset. HMS A, the very first draft, calls the rowers “people now at their best, whose clothes are a / Testimony to the fact,” and TMS E’s main text calls the rowers “the contemporaries” of the dead: “There are others besides you who have worn that look. ~~To what purpose?—~~ / Unconscious of the fact that they are desecrating a grave, / their contemporaries row across them—the blades of the oars...” In contrast to these more general or universalized perspectives, TMS E shows Moore testing the “I” described above, and also shows her testing the perspective or personage of the witness as a “you”: “whose bones cannot ~~apprise~~ you / ~~as you~~ row across them ~~that you are~~ desecrating...” This move from “I” to “you” may make the poem something closer to a dialogue with the original “man looking into the sea,” working in the way that the line “there are others beside you who have worn that look” works, to hail the man directly; or the line may invoke a more capacious or interchangeable “you.” “I” and “you” may better universalize the experiential side of witnessing that Moore seems to problematize. But neither pronoun captures the contemporary, war-born understanding of witnessing as successfully as does her ultimate choice to make the rowers “men,” as the published versions of the poem have it.

The earliest draft material of “A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea” (1916) turns on a different trope of witnessing, for in the poem’s first version Moore experiments overtly with the elegiac tradition as itself a form of witnessing. “A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea” was

originally written in syllabic stanzas; over the draft life of the poem Moore revised to a single stanza with no strong syllabic pattern. Despite this major change in form, the content of the poem remains fairly stable, with one important exception: the first draft contains a stanza that Moore later cut completely. That stanza reads,

The cypresses of experience dead, yet indestructible by circumstance; shivering and stony in the water; not green

 But white; surrounding all that is loathsome; inanimate
Scavengers guarding permanent garbage; watched over by sharks which cruise between
 Them—petrine like death yet not so petrine as patient; everything everywhere
 Yet nothing, because nowhere, infinity defined at last, still infinity because there
 Where nothing is.

By beginning with the cypress tree, Moore explicitly sets an atmosphere of mourning that harkens to Greek and Roman epitaphs. In the classical tradition, the cypress in particular is the tree of mourning, and nature—rather than a human contemporary—is often the witness to a death and the grief of those left behind. Nature ratifies that observed grief by enacting it: trees stunt; rains howl; the sun hides its face. Later commentators called this enactment the pathetic fallacy. In his 1892 *Elegies and Epitaphs: A Comprehensive Review of the Origin, Design, and Character of Monumental Inscriptions*, Charles Box notes that the cypress’s fruit is bitter and its bark evergreen,³⁹ suggesting that the tree may originally have been chosen as a representative mourner because of its pathetic qualities: the bitterness of the fruit matches the mourner’s bitter pain; the greenness of the bark promises that that the liveliness of the tree would keep that loss alive and new in memory. “A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea” invokes the time-honored

³⁹ Charles Box, *Elegies and Epitaphs: A Comprehensive Review of the Origin, Design, and Character of Monumental Inscriptions and of Other Necrological Literature, Whether in the form of verse or less ambitious prose; to which are appended fully 300 Epitaphs or Mottoes, Classified to suit the exigencies of different times of life; Also, Dissertations upon Ancient and Modern Cemeteries and Disused Burial Grounds, &c, Elegies and Epitaphs upon Celebrated Persons, Latin and Musical Epitaphs, &c.* (Gloucester: H. Osborne, 1892), 129–30.

pathetic fallacy in which nature's grief mirrors, ratifies, and extends a mourner's, in order to allow Moore to borrow the poet's authority to witness.

When Moore invokes the time-honored pathetic fallacy in "A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea," she opens the terrain of witnessing up by harkening backward. In the elegiac tradition, witnessing is about acknowledging pain, and part of that witnessing is an extreme ambivalence. The bereaved lover is always unsure that the page will successfully contain or remember his pain; he is often stubbornly melancholic, unwilling to consider the possibility of recathecting in any future encounter; even when he believes he may someday love again, no new love will ever eclipse the love he has just lost.⁴⁰ The elegy is therefore a genre that prides itself on the extremity of its emotional present moment, and it is also a genre invested in the written form, language's ability to still and preserve a scene for all time. When Moore adopts the elegy's cypresses, she gains the genre's explicit ambivalence toward healing, and she also inherits this dual temporality.

Based in part on editing suggestions she received from Ezra Pound, Moore eventually moved away from the syllabic stanzas of these first drafts. Pound's criticisms also convinced her to behead the poem, cutting this first stanza entirely. This deletion and non-syllabic reorganization are by far the most drastic changes Moore made to the poem during its draft life, and they do much to change the scope of witnessing yet again. In moving away from the lyric "I" of the elegy and also the dramatic "I" (the personified rower she had envisioned in early drafts), Moore keeps the poem from having a speaker; the meditative tone reseats ownership in a moving target of viewpoints rather than in a coherent subjectivity. Importantly, however, elegiac

⁴⁰ I discuss the pathetic fallacy and the modernist elegy at greater length in Chapter 2, but Peter Sacks's *The English Elegy from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) is the paradigmatic psychoanalytic reading of the elegiac mode. In Sacks's way of reading Freud and the elegy, the elegy is both structurally similar to the mourning process and a symbolic structure into which the mourner can place her grief: the "compensatory power of literature" (xi) allows her to move on to a new beloved.

ambivalence continues to underwrite the later versions of the poem, and the elegiac temporality does, as well. The crush of the present moment comes through in the synesthesia of the poem's final lines, as noted above. But those final lines also work out a shadowy history to the landscape of the present.

For Moore, the historical provenance of ambivalence is crucial, and its effects are aesthetic as well as more generally inclusive of a female perspective on the war. In 1915 Moore met Alfred Stieglitz, the editor and publisher of *Camera Work*, and J. B. Kerfoot, art critic for *Life* magazine, and the three debated what made good art good. Moore claimed that good art produces the internal imbalance that makes one search for its provenance in the hopes of finding its source, and therefore the source of its pleasure.⁴¹ Stieglitz and Kerfoot initially seemed to disagree, claiming that the past—an annoyance or a haunting—could not have any place in good art. But they eventually came around, as Moore recounts by letter to her brother Warner:

Both Mr. Stieglitz and Mr. Kerfoot downing me saying that a haunting quality was not the earmark of good art—but of bad art. I said I meant the sort of thing that annoyed you until you had to trace it to the source where you first encountered it and he said “oh that's a different thing—that's another sort of haunt.”⁴²

Haunting, which we can define as the projected pleasure of ownership that depends on the historical past's encroachment, seems to be the subject of this poem, and of its companion piece “When I Buy Pictures.”

⁴¹ Here I want to be careful to distinguish Moore's understanding of the pleasure of haunting art from a Gertrude Buck's understanding of the pleasure we receive from metaphors. Both poets theorize that we seek the root of an author's thinking, but ultimately the two do not think about pleasure analogously. For Buck, pleasure seems to derive from having found that source—inhabiting or absorbing the original author's thought. For Moore, pleasure seems to come from searching for the source, rather than finding it.

⁴² Quoted in Victoria Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity* (London: Ashgate, 2010).

WHEN I BUY PICTURES

or what is closer to the truth,
when I look at that of which I may regard myself as the imaginary
possessor,
I fix upon what would give me pleasure in my average moments:
the satire upon curiosity, in which no more is discernible than the
intensity of the mood;
or quite the opposite—the old thing, the mediaeval decorated
hat-box,
in which there are hounds with waists diminishing like the waist
of the hour-glass
and deer and birds and seated people;
it may be no more than a square of parquetry; the literal biography
perhaps—
in letters standing well apart upon a parchment-like expanse;
an artichoke in six varieties of blue; the snipe-legged hieroglyphic
in three parts;
the silver fence protecting Adam's grave or Michael taking Adam
by the wrist.
Too stern an intellectual emphasis upon this quality or that, de-
tracts from one's enjoyment;
it must not wish to disarm anything; nor may the approved triumph
easily be honoured—
that which is great because something else is small.
It comes to this: of whatever sort it is,
it must acknowledge the forces which have made it;
it must be "lit with piercing glances into the life of things;"
then I "take it in hand as a savage would take a looking-glass."

(Figure 1.7: Marianne Moore's "When I Buy Pictures," *Dial* 71
(July 1921))

closer to the truth, / when I look at that of which I may regard myself as the imaginary the
possessor, / I fix upon what would give me pleasure in my average moments:" The language
of self-possession—"I," "me," "my"—is strong in these first lines, but that self ultimately arrives
by a pole vault into the mirroring that imagination provides: "when I *look* at that of which I may
regard myself as the imaginary possessor." After this initial moment in which imagined object
possession facilitates self-construction and self-possession, Moore's speaker makes clear how
amorphous the object of possession is or can be: what is worth possessing could be "the intensity

As the first of the two
poems printed in *The Dial*
71, "When I Buy Pictures"
sets the tone to "A
Graveyard" for any reader
who is moving through the
issue in order. As we saw,
the identity of the observer is
mainly at issue in "A
Graveyard," and it is clear
Moore was thinking about
the role of the observer in
her drafts of "When I Buy
Pictures," as well: "When I
Buy Pictures," Moore's
speaker begins, "or what is

of the mood”; perspectivalism (as represented by the medieval perspectivalism on a hatbox, and what sounds like the flattened angles of a cubist artichoke); or Adam’s “literal biography,” ending with his expulsion from Eden and his subsequent mortality. The “I” that appears in the poem’s second clause and in the final line in the *Dial* printing was yet more pronounced in the TMS C draft’s ending, and so was the activity of the artwork itself. “It comes to this: of whatever sort it is, *I see that it is lit / it must decisively* acknowledge the forces which have made it w*ild* *piercing glances*”⁴³ Moore wrote, and then tried out an addendum:

*It must be a distinct distillation of personal experience
omit x + y that interests me impersonally
It must be acclaimed
does not need to plead its desirability
I see that it is lit by piercing glances into the life of things
It answers my questions
It makes no distinction between
It compels analysis + does not disappear
under admiration
It does not disintegrate under repeated admiration
It snakes
Snaking away my discretion
and it continues in force ~~and while~~ I bury it
and having made a note of the grave, dig it up—
and I take it in hand as a savage
wld take a looking glass*

In this draft, both the artwork and the “I” are highly active. The artwork is subjective—the “*distinct distillation of personal experience*”—and also objective—“*[it] interests me impersonally*”; “*it compels analysis.*” Initially it seems that the aesthetic realm of this poem offers two avenues of remove for the artwork’s interaction with the “I”—the imagination of possession in the poem’s first lines; and the analogical simile in the last. But these avenues turn out to be within the scene of action as well, and are not *ab extra* positions. Perhaps as a result,

⁴³ Again following Honisgblum, typewritten text from Moore’s draft is here indicated in roman text; handwritten revisions appear in italics.

the artwork cannot be “used up”: the art worth owning “*does not disappear / under admiration / It is does not disintegrate under repeated admiration.*” The stuttering repetition of admiration feels right, here: as Moore looks for the ideal verb for what the artwork does not do, she is pushing against the verbs that would normally describe the bifurcated witness in the scene of destruction—the physical breakdown, on the one hand, and the absence or presence of a recording voice, on the other. In this draft, the lyric speaker actively tests both aspects of the artwork by being its recording and resurrecting witness: “*I bury it / and having made a note of the grave, dig it up—.*”

At first it seems as though the speaker is the one manipulating the aesthetic scene, since she is the one doing the interring and disintering. Yet the artwork⁴⁴ is (to reiterate) not used up in act of being viewed; rather, it is capable of action verbs as well (it “answers,” “makes,” “compels,” “does not disappear,” “does not disintegrate,” “snakes,” and “continues”), making the last line of the draft particularly effective. In burying and disintering the artwork, the active lyric “I” finds a kind of correlative, what we infer to be a mirror of the self in the final line. But that correlative is not quite a double for the “I,” because the relation inheres by a simile that also invokes a conditional: the speaker “take[s] [the artwork] in hand *as* a savage / *wld* take a looking glass.” Based on quotation marks in draft TMS D and following, we know this is an unattributed quotation, and that set of relations—simile; conditional; quotation that haunts the poem without a source we can consult—distances the statement further from the speaker. After the strong metaphors of the adjacent lines, these methods for exaggerating distance make the final simile

⁴⁴ Though I am analogizing the artwork as a destroyed landscape in this section, in Moore’s “When I Buy Pictures” one mentioned artwork truly indexes a destroyed landscape. As I explain below, Moore’s later drafts mention “the silver fence surrounding Adam’s grave,” a direct reference to a religious icon journalists feared had been destroyed or stolen during the looting of Jerusalem in late 1917 and early 1918. Moore’s poem is a direct witness, then, to the ways that art and landscape meet in destruction.

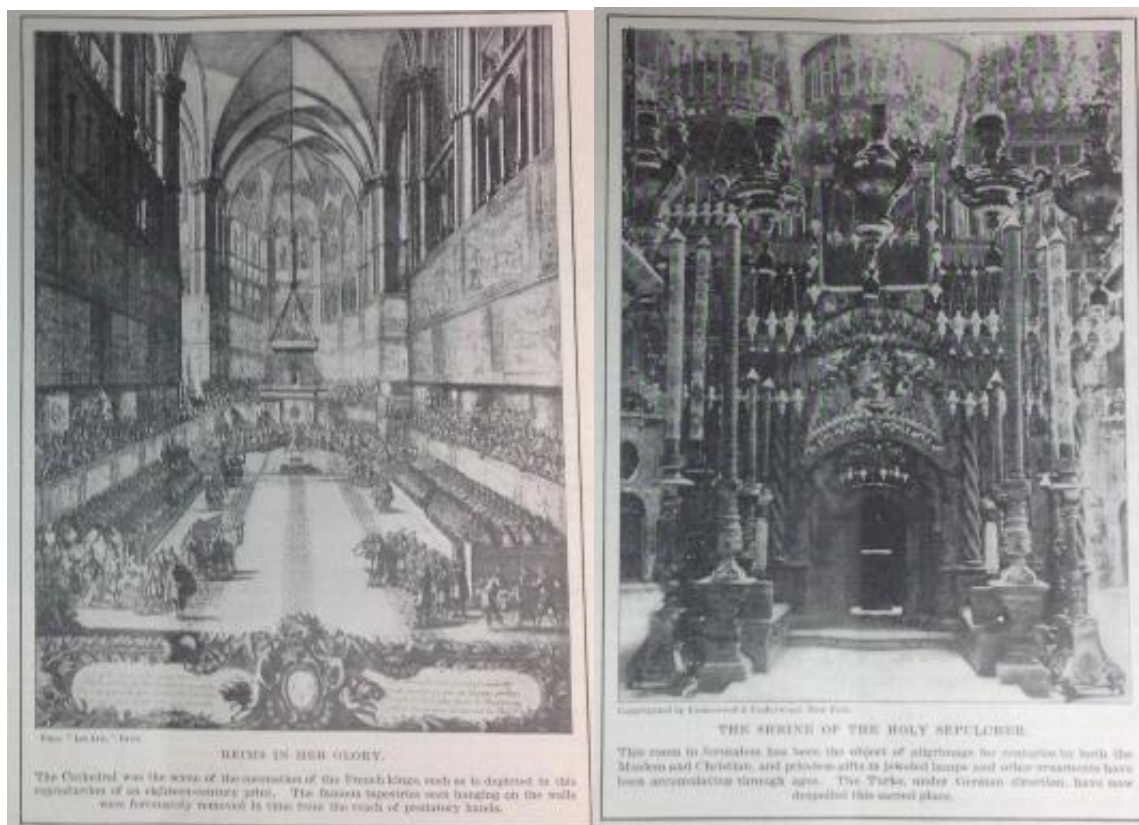
especially conspicuous: with what emotion, precisely, would a savage pick up a mirror? And, though the final line objectifies the artwork completely—the artwork is the mirror, and the speaker is the one who raises it—the activity of the artwork in the adjacent lines means the object retains a liveliness here. Moore has made us feel that the emotion that strikes a “savage” when she lifts a mirror is an emotion cast by the mirror itself.

This reading of TMS C’s final lines emphasizes the witness’s interactive view of a scene. The scene is not depleted by being viewed; rather, it haunts the viewer. And, returning to Moore’s conversation with Stieglitz and Kerfoot, that kind of haunting is of aesthetic value. Even when discussing burying and disinterring the living force of the artwork, Moore’s lyric “I” maintains that this is “what would give me pleasure in my average moments.” Moore’s language is playful here, and that playful tone may seem somewhat surprising, given that one of the artworks she pulls into adjacency is actually a contemporary war scene.

In the earliest draft of “When I Buy Pictures” (TMS A), Moore mentions Adam this way: “that...which means / just as much or just as little as it is understood to / mean by the observer—the grave of Adam, prefigured by himself,” and this language held for the unauthorized printing in *Poems*.⁴⁵ However, TMS F shows Moore toying with new information: Adam is not in the typed draft at all, but the poet’s handwritten notes at the bottom of the page read, “*the silver fence protesting*”, “*of silver or of what you please.*” And TMS G integrates this citational information: “the silver fence protecting Adam’s grave or Michael holding Adam by the wrist.” The notes to the 1924 printing in *Observations* gives the provenance of this change in content: in 1918, Moore’s drafting shifted slightly to account for a *Literary Digest* article she read about the looting of Jerusalem. After a series of back-and-forth battles in 1916 and 1917 between British

⁴⁵ Most of the language and line breaks in the *Poems* printing of the poem are identical with TMS A, including the stanza breaks that Moore abandoned in the *Dial* printing.

forces and Turkish forces under German command, in late 1917 the city changed hands. Popular coverage likened the German control of Jerusalem to the destruction of Reims, and the *Digest's* photographs of the cities' captured religious sites are visually reminiscent: both are still intact in these images, but the known destruction of Reims gives a proleptic argument about the destruction to come in Jerusalem, just as Adam's intact body prefigures his death and ornate grave.



(Figure 1.8 (left) and Figure 1.9 (right): *Literary Digest* 56 (January 5, 1918): 23, 27: “Reims in Her Glory...” (sketch) and “The Shrine of the Holy Sepulcher” (photograph). The caption to figure 1.9 reads, “This room in Jerusalem has been the object of pilgrimage for centuries by both the Moslem and Christian, and priceless gifts in jeweled lamps and other ornaments have been accumulating through ages. The Turks, under German direction, have now despoiled this sacred place.”)

The photograph of the Holy Sepulcher is Moore’s source material for the line “the silver fence protecting Adam’s grave,” a detail she took from the article accompanying the photograph, which explains the “associational value” of the Holy Sepulcher as “that which is of intrinsic

value, [such as] the silver fence erected by Constantine to enclose the grave of Adam...” In that highly propagandistic article, the *Literary Digest* summarizes points already made in the *New York Times* and the *New York Sun*, where the British are hailed as the protectors of history and culture because they have not looted Bethlehem, and the Germans are accused of brutalizing both priests and artworks at Jerusalem. In this comparison, the German army’s “new religion” (alternately characterized as destruction by means of thievery, and as destruction for its own sake) is horrific because it cavalierly disrespects tradition and history: “It would be interesting to hear the comments of the German generals, and of the German lieutenants...when they hear—if they ever do—that the British in Palestine are so little appreciative of “military necessity” that when attacking the Turks they sometimes have refrained from the usual artillery preparation because it would have destroyed structures and sites held in reverence by considerable numbers of people.”

Moore’s interest in the arts generally and in photography specifically have been well documented⁴⁶; however, the photographic reference and war resonance of this line in “When I Buy Pictures” has not been investigated before. We can see that while Moore is most overtly interested in Adam’s grave as an “intrinsic value” that can bring an average viewer pleasure even in average moments, but the wartime precariousness of artworks underwrites the line, as well. When the Jerusalem looting of Adam’s grave takes its place among the litany of artworks in “When I Buy Pictures” with neither more nor less emphasis than any of the poem’s other real or imagined artworks, Moore is holding aesthetic viewership and war witnessing to the same ethical

⁴⁶ On Moore and artistic sociality, see especially Bazin, *Marianne Moore and the Cultures of Modernity*. For a particularly strong account of Moore’s relation to the “sharply focused realism” of precisionist or straight photography propounded by Stieglitz’s crowd, see Linda Leavell, *Marianne Moore and the Visual Arts: Prismatic Color* (Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1995).

and historical standards: neither can be taken out of the fabric of other artworks or events; neither can be fully owned. We must therefore think of Moore's work with the drafts of "When I Buy Pictures" as a study of the witness's responsibility to a scene. As Moore revised, the active "I" of TMS C initially remained, as did the strong sense that the artwork was active but indebted to its creator and cognizant of that debt. Drafts TMS B and TMS D, in particular, activate the language around recognizance: the artwork must "admit," "attest," "acknowledge," "acknowledge decisively," or "acknowledge etc." its provenance. But later drafts show that Moore worked to decide between the active "I" and the knowing artwork, pulling them into separate versions of the poem. The *Dial* 71 printing (1921, figure 1.7 above) emphasizes the former, while the *Egoist Poems* of the same year emphasizes the latter, ending with the lines "it comes to this: of whatever sort it is, it / must make known the fact that it has been displayed to acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it; / and it must admit it is the work of X, if X produced it; of Y, if made / by Y. It must be a voluntary gift with the name written on it."⁴⁷ By 1924, when Moore published the poem in *Observations*, she had cut both the X and Y portion and the citational simile, refocusing the poem on the qualities of the artwork rather than its cognizance or the action of the I. In the printing that would stand for the next 30+ editions of the poem,⁴⁸ Moore ends, "It comes to this: of whatever sort it is, / it must be 'lit with piercing glances into the life of things'; / it must acknowledge the spiritual forces which have made it."

⁴⁷ For clarity of argument in citing TMS C (above) I've kept only the lines Moore indicates as part of attempt "2." When she writes "Omit x + y," this seems to be not a set of new lines she wishes to include, but rather a note to herself to exclude the following lines: 3 "and it must admit that it is the work of X, if X produced it; *into the life of things* / 4 of Y, if made by Y. ~~It must be a voluntary gift with the name written on it.~~" In the draft, Moore has slashed through the lines she calls 3 and 4, replaced them with the long handwritten note 2, and then ends with the lines "*and I take it in hand as a savage / wld take a looking glass.*" The lines regarding X and Y were part of draft TMS A, TMS B, were printed in the *Egoist Poems* (1921), and TMS D.

⁴⁸ Honigsblum 97.

Refocusing the witnessing relation on an intrinsic quality that cannot be depleted by viewership, and on a haunting force that creates the object independent of the viewer, Moore tells us that the art her lyric I “fixes upon” is that which preserves the entire archive, that which refuses to elide conflict or its own history. Here, modernist aesthetics are not to be divorced from war witnessing for Moore: she adds both tradition and the viewer’s own complex reaction (the imaginative possession) into what makes artwork valuable. In claiming that art should give pleasure, the speaker sides with the aestheticism commonly considered a central modernist tenet, but in specifying that this pleasure is not a sublime transport but rather that which will be of use “in average moments,” the speaker affirms the “lowbrow” side of modernism. She sides with a sense of the commercial, repeat value of art, its connection to the everyday: here, art’s haunting derives from its close proximity to us, its constant appearance in our line of sight. If the daily pleasure of the work is part of the viewer’s response, and the viewer’s response is part of the work’s provenance—as are, for instance, the meticulous notes drawn from everyday sources for which Moore is famous—this speaker claims a modernism that views artwork as processual rather than *ex nihilo* or “finished.” “When I Buy Pictures” explicitly paints possession as imaginative experience rather than legal ownership, and implicitly marks that experiential relation as historically contingent.

If we understand the looting of Jerusalem as important subtext to Moore’s “When I Buy Pictures” but accept it as one subtext among many, I think we can begin to grasp the reframing of witnessing and of trauma that Moore’s work promises. Moore opens the field of who can be a witness to war trauma, suggesting that any viewer can be a credible witness, and that viewership does not occur solely on the battlefield. Her poetry also offers a more expansive notion of the ways in which trauma registers, and in what ways, if any, it can survive us and also aid in our

own detachment, our everyday survival of it. When Moore's lyric "I" takes an artwork in hand as a savage would take a looking glass, the "I" recognizes two important things about the artwork. First, she recognizes its similarity to herself, its mirroring capacity, as I have described it above. But she also recognizes its fragility.⁴⁹ The artwork's fragility is literal, for it can be destroyed as the siege and looting of Jerusalem illustrate. But that fragility is also figurative; it is the result of the viewer's artistic treatment of the artwork and the act of viewing. Here again Moore's form of witnessing works by undoing the narrative version of witnessing. In the last lines of the *Dial* version of "When I Buy Pictures" it is not possible to say who acts, finally; whether the viewer controls the mirror or whether the mirror controls the viewer. And in the perspectively vertiginous lines that close "A Graveyard" narrative goes astray, beginning as a simile but ending as an unmet conditional: "and the ocean, under the pulsation of light-houses and the noise of bell-buoys, / advances as usual, looking as if it were not that ocean in which dropped things are bound to sink— / in which if they turn and twist, it is neither with volition nor consciousness." Moore's twisting clauses and her paratactic approach create a fully fleshed world that is also a shadowy one: the ocean looks as though it were not the ocean...that we perhaps know it is; the grammar of the unclosed conditional statement here is also the grammar of the subjunctive mood, which names a wish or an emotion rather than a fact. Even taking this wishful reality as reality, the final line of the poem ends on two strong "no's" in the bodily

⁴⁹ Here I am reading in the general vein of D. W. Winnicott's understanding of object usage: in order to successfully recognize the world as other than the self, the child must not only see herself in relation to the object, but must attempt to destroy the object. The child comes to love the object for surviving her attempt to destroy it—and therefore her threat to it must be real; the object must truly be vulnerable. In attempting, and failing, to destroy the object, the child is assured of the object's ability to survive her—and she is therefore able to love, and use the object and the world of which that object forms a part. See D. W. Winnicott, "The Use of an Object," *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 50 (1969): 711–16, and Juliet Mitchell, "Theory as an Object," *October* 113 (Summer 2005): 27–38.

neither/nor. But those no's don't equate to a known yes. The world Moore constructs does not assume that the scene of trauma can be fully articulated or fully owned. It is not a place a reader can "stand in the middle of"; be the outright possessor of; or consume.

By making the fragile scene (both the art object and the destroyed scene of trauma) ultimately ungraspable by means of the simile that becomes and conditional that will not close, Moore extends the reach of the scene of witnessing. Unable to destroy the scene, Moore's poetry instead respects it and refuses to use it up or to claim a present moment's complete contemporaneity, as the mourning "I" in an elegy might do. For any witnessing "I" of Moore's, there will always be a history underwriting the present; for any of Moore's readers, there will always be bones under the sea. As in Winnicott's object-use theory, this respect (or love) for what is neither self-identical nor destroyable sets the witness up to exist at a certain productive distance from the object, and therefore makes room for the object to exist independent of the witness.

"a grave a graa grave": Moore's Page as Enactive Witness

Reading Moore in Winnicott's terms crystallizes a potentially non-traumatizing and productive role for the war witness; Moore's poetry broadens the description of the witness and of the scene of witnessing. Reading these theorists together can also help us to reimagine the relation of authorial intent to the life of the printed textual object. Ideally, the poem will have a life outside of the author, and outside of her editorial choices. Because Moore was a notoriously stringent reviser of her own work, carefully attendant to the effects that changes in punctuation or line length might have on presentation and thus on meaning, the community of scholars around Moore has largely assumed that her authorial choices in revision are particularly meaningfully

intended and successfully executed.⁵⁰ Scholars have therefore mostly followed the author's wishes as to which poems—and in which versions or printings—should be considered canon, and most criticism focuses on these printings. In Moore's version of witnessing, which releases the object from the subject, it makes more sense to read Moore's work by following Jerome McGann's sense that authorial intention matters neither more nor less than other social context that surrounds a poem's printing.⁵¹

In her variorum edition of Marianne Moore's early poems, Robin Schulze stakes an important set of claims regarding modernist textuality and our contemporary interpretation of it. All work with archival drafts and repeated printings demand critics' circumspect attention of course, but rather than settle on one authoritative version of a poem's text, Schulze decides instead to present Moore's work in a series of states, arguing that "*each* of Moore's versions constitutes a discrete historical and bibliographic event" that holds a temporary stability but does not serve as a teleological stage in the production of any "final" version that best represents the author's intentions.⁵²

Schulze's approach to Moore may not always be feasible: Moore's first authorized collection *Observations* dilates from 120 pages in the original to 500 pages in Schulze's *Becoming Marianne Moore*, and even in this more inclusive form Schulze is only able to account for *published* versions of the poems that appeared *prior* to their 1924 collection in *Observations*.

⁵⁰ Regarding authorial intention in textual studies, see the field-defining work of W. W. Greg, "The Rationale of Copy-Text," *Studies in Bibliography* 3 (1950–51): 19–36, and Fredson Bowers, "Some Principles for Scholarly Editions of Nineteenth-Century American Authors," *Studies in Bibliography* 17 (1964): 223–28; and G. Thomas Tanselle, "The Editorial Problem of Authorial Intention," *Studies in Bibliography* 29 (1976): 167–211.

⁵¹ Jerome McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); see especially "The Socialization of Texts," 69–87.

⁵² Robin G. Schulze, *Becoming Marianne Moore: The Early Poems, 1907–1924* (Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), 16.

Still, this approach is instructive and sets my own practices in this chapter and this dissertation more generally. First, Schulze's approach reminds us that in the period in which the New Critical tenets of the stable, closed, non-intentioned and non-authored text were beginning to find their wobbly footing, Moore and many other modernist authors with editorial involvement in the literary circles surrounding the little magazines happily found their printing—and often therefore their *compositional*—decisions responsive to the input of their editors, friends, and readers, and to the technologies of production to which they had access. McGann recognizes the modernist poem as a “socialized text,” the product of an author's own historical and social milieu (which includes the technological capabilities of printing, production, and literary circulation in her period) and also the product of the reader's reception, based in part on paratext around the printed poem.

As I have argued regarding skeletonized news articles and captioned photographs, the dream of a univocal transmission relies quite heavily on a communally produced, socialized text. Yet the journalistic and artistic production of the period rarely make any reference or homage to that communal production; instead they act in most journalistic cases as though the author were himself a medium of seamless transmission, and in most artistic ones as though the author were a singular genius. Moore's texts are overtly socialized in that they are heavily, and often explicitly, citational and juxtapositional, as we have seen in the revision patterns to “When I Buy Pictures,” above, but all poetry in circulation is socialized as well by the technologies of its production and dissemination, and this is equally the case for poets like Moore, who famously claimed that in her work “omissions are not accidents.” Of course some omissions (and additions) in the printing process *were* accidents, or editors' strong suggestions for emendations. In the case of “A Graveyard,” for instance, it was Ezra Pound's revisions to the earlier draft entitled “A Graveyard

in the Middle of the Sea” that convinced Moore to drop the first two stanzas completely; Moore consistently asked for Thayer and Watson’s feedback regarding poems she wished to publish in the *Dial*, and it is in response to Thayer’s praise for the explanatory notes she sent along with “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” and his request that she “must surely give us those footnotes in full measure” that Moore ran citational endnotes to *Observations* and each of her books thereafter.⁵³ Some “accidents” were “silent corrections” that Moore did not see before a text’s version went to the printer, or that she allowed to stand in later printings as well. And some changes were out of the poet’s hands entirely but deeply affect our reception of her poems.⁵⁴

One such change is in Moore’s indentation when drafting versus the presentation of a Moore poem on the page of (for instance) the *Dial*. Moore generally composed on wide sheets of paper (or standard paper turned sideways) to accommodate her longer lines, but none of her printers turned their pages sideways, nor were they always careful about *where* they broke Moore’s longer lines. As in the case of Gerard Manly Hopkins,⁵⁵ Marianne Moore’s own indentation generally highlights matching in rhythm or count, and not in rhyme—and so in remaking the line breaks and indentations of the poem, each of Moore’s successive editors slightly shift the legibility of her structures, simply by changing the look of the poem. This is

⁵³ Laurence Stapleton discusses Moore’s correspondence with Ezra Pound regarding “A Graveyard in the Middle of the Sea” in *Marianne Moore: The Poet’s Advance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978), 20–5, and notes. Thayer’s 1924 letter to Moore is cited in Schulze, 436.

⁵⁴ The most major of these “accidents” is the entire Egoist printing of Moore’s unauthorized first book, *Poems* (1921), which H.D. and Bryher sent for publication without Moore’s consent (according to Moore). *Poems* contained a substantially different draft version of “When I Buy Pictures,” which I discuss in greater detail in a later section; Moore’s first authorized book publication of the poem retains some aspects of both 1921 printings. See Schulze 256–7, “Notes on ‘When I Buy Pictures,’” and 18–33 for a full draft version of the *Poems* printing of “Pictures” and for Moore’s commentary on the publication of *Poems*.

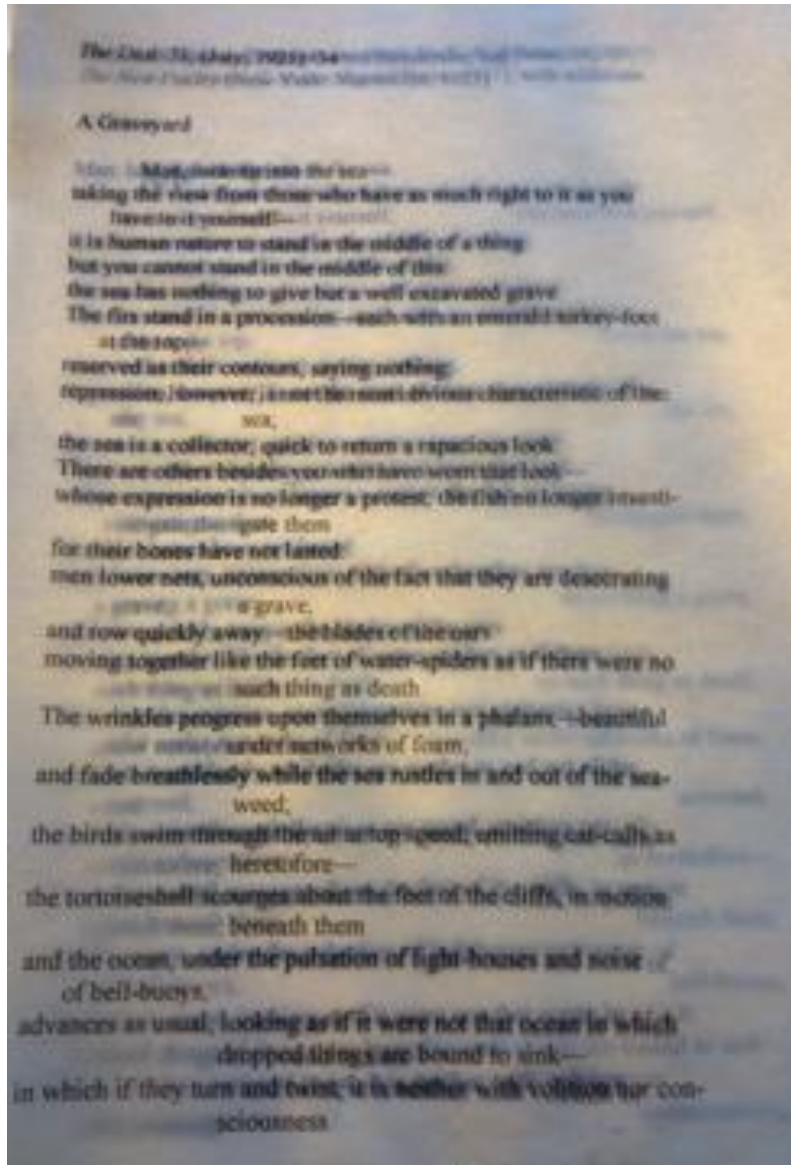
⁵⁵ See Randall McLeod, “Gerard Hopkins and the Shapes of His Sonnets” in *Voice, Text, Hypertext: Emerging Practices in Textual Studies*, ed. Riamonda Modiano, Leroy F. Searle, and Peter Shillingsburg (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2004): 177–297.

because these breaks affect the coherence that Moore strove for in terms of stanzaic repetition: especially in her earlier work, Moore established an idiosyncratic syllable count for each line in the first stanza of her poems, and then met that count in each succeeding stanza. In draft form, then, Moore's stanzas often have a ragged right-hand margin but the repetition of that raggedness creates a visual patterning; in printed form, that raggedness often appears wilder, and is matched by an inconsistent left-hand margin, where printers have sometimes marked wrapped lines by indentation and sometimes have assumed readers will intuit the run-over without paratextual indication. I turn now to an experiment with one such case of printings, overlaying versions of Moore's "A Graveyard" in order to show that the "gestures—the shapes—"56 of Moore's poetry are often involuntary gestures.

Taking the body language of a Moore poem as only partially voluntary simply highlights the ways that printing history always change the presentation of a poem. However, taking the body language of "A Grave[]" in particular as only partially voluntary provides a fitting objective correlative to the methodology of witnessing that the poem inhabits. The poem is in part "about" the uneasy and unintentioned movement of dead bodies below the surface of the sea; in very broad strokes, a palimpsest that overlays differently dated printings of this poem may make a visual and sonic argument about form's involuntary fit to content.

⁵⁶ Here I am appropriating the language Randall McLeod uses to describe Hopkins's appropriation by his friend and editor Robert Bridges (among others). McLeod says, "I want to demonstrate that the gestures—the shapes—of Hopkins's sonnets are often ones that others have given them. This essay, then, is about the body language—the appropriated body language of Hopkins's sonnets" (180).

Figure 1.10 is a homemade palimpsest of four published versions of Moore's "A



(Figure 1.10: "A Graveyard" becomes "A Grave." Palimpsest of printings from 1921, (the *Dial*), 1923 (*The New Poetry* anthology, ed. Monroe and Henderson), 1924 (*Observations*), and 1967 (*Complete Poems*). Poems are overlaid from earliest to latest date; the 1921 printing appears on top.)

Grave[]," and serves as a visual experiment in what it would mean to meet the demands of Moore's imperatives to witness how history inheres in art objects, objects from which the witness may struggle to separate herself. I attempt to take full account of variants in Moore's printings, and wish to show their changing morphology over time. In order to meet these requirements of Honigsblum's and Shulze's methodologies, I've taken a page from Michael Davidson, who reminds us that modernist poet

George Oppen's compositional method involved tacking new versions of a poem's lines over

older versions, creating a topographical thickness at the stickiest points of the poem. Davidson recommends an analogous reading strategy for excavating source texts when readers encounter a

difficult poet like Susan Howe; her source material creates what Davidson calls a “palimtext.”⁵⁷

Randall McLeod uses a raking light to detect variants in printing; he is interested less in the composition history or textual references of a poem than he is in the clues that a poem’s reprintings can give regarding the printing processes that produced it. Here I experiment with a translucent palimpsest of four of Moore’s printings. Moore’s claim that “omissions are not accidents” may generally lead scholars to discard her older drafts for her newest revisions, but her version of witnessing claims that the old always inheres in the new, and that to think otherwise is to reify the scene we are trying to witness. A translucent palimpsest therefore exemplifies Moore’s aesthetics of witnessing as I understand them. Imagining “A Grave[]” as the caption to an image for a moment, a palimpsest would also provide the visual side of the ekphrastic pairing, and would therefore allow me to test the War Department’s version of witnessing.

Here I use the 1921 printing in the *Dial* (when the poem was still titled “A Graveyard”); Harriet Monroe and Alice Corbin Henderson’s reproduction in their 1923 poetry anthology *The New Poetry* (under “A Graveyard”); Moore’s authorized printing in her first self-selected collection *Observations* (“A Grave”); and the printing from Moore’s last authorized collection, the 1967 *Complete Poems* (“A Grave”).⁵⁸ These printings emphasize Moore’s semi-volitional involvement in the printing process, and also show four editors’ choices regarding how to approach Moore’s runover lines, which provide the largest visual variation in these printings.

⁵⁷ For Davidson’s work with Oppen and Howe, see Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material Word* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 64–94.

⁵⁸ Here I have retyped the poems with attention to the spacing and line breaks of each, but my version only approximates the leading and kerning of the originals. The uneven margins to the left and right in my palimpsest are an artifact of production: I could not get enough height for a truly aerial view. Hopefully this approximation still shows the longer lines of the poem’s second half, and gives a sense of the spine and chunky shadows created by the run-over lines.

Thayer and Watson choose to enjamb these lines at a strong middle margin, creating a spinal column of short words at the center of page: as we see in figure 1.6, the central words for the reader's eye are: "have to it yourself—"; "at the top—"; "sea"; "gate them"; "a grave"; "such thing as death"; "under networks of foam"; "weed"; "heretofore—"; "beneath them"; "bell-buoys"; "dropped things are bound to sink"; "sciousness." This strong spinal column breaks the lines in such a way that we can see printed ribs to the left and the right; the poem feels balanced.

Monroe and Henderson's printing (1923) enjambes runover lines slightly from the left margin, and runs the poem over a recto-verso, so though nearly the same portions of longer lines appear as runovers (with the exception of "vestigate" where the *Dial* has "gate," and the more meaningful "consciousness" rather than "sciousness"), the overall effect is much different: the first half of the poem, which has fewer long lines and therefore fewer runovers, presents a darker chunk of text on the page; the poem's half seems to hold steady nearer the lefthand margin and disperse on the right.

The Dial Press's 1924 *Observations* also indicates runover lines by a short indent from the lefthand margin, but the book is printed in larger type than is the *New Poetry* anthology, and runover lines are therefore slightly longer and feel more substantial: here we have "to it as you have to yourself"; "foot at the top"; "the sea"; "investigate them"; "crating a grave"; "were no such thing as death"; "tiful under networks of foam"; "seaweed"; "calls as heretofore—"; "tion beneath them"; "of bell-buoys"; "which dropped things are bound to sink—"; "nor consciousness." Here the poem's opening still looks like a stronger, darker block of text and the poem's body still disperses as its progresses. However, the runovers more frequently contain enough syntactic markers to keep a reader going: they do not feel like superfluous or floating words, but invite the reader to move backward to earlier lines, or to plunge ahead.

The 1967 printing in the *Complete Poems* produces the most diametrically opposite effect to the 1923 and 1924 printings, because here runover lines are enjambed at the right-hand margin rather than the left-. In this printing, what begins as a dense block of text at the left margin transfers to a fairly dense block at the right margin, as the longer lines mean more frequent runovers. Here again we see larger syntactic units in the runovers: “you have to it yourself”; “foot at the top”; “the sea”; “investigate them”; “desecrating a grave”; “no such thing as death”; “beautiful under networks of foam”; “seaweed”; “as heretofore”; “beneath them”; “bell-buoys”; “dropped things are bound to sink”; “consciousness.” Like the *Dial* printing, this produces a fairly balanced-looking poem, though here the balance is produced by a shifting; the poem is transacted from left to right.

When I overlay these printings, the overall effect is a kind of widening to the poem’s right edge; the body is like a loppish, beheaded right triangle. In addition to the strong spine that the *Dial* printing furnishes, we can see the shadow of a darker curve of text beyond the righthand margin of the *Dial* printing, and a toothed lefthand margin. To see the blurry meat of the poem surfacing underneath the 1921 bone structure is predictably eerie; that blurriness gives the unmistakable sense of movement because of the runover lines’ repetitions are fading intervals: take, for instance, the “sea sea sea” of line 11, or the smudgy “a grave a graa grave” of line 18. When the runover lines also bleed into each other mid-word, the inherent contradictoriness of this approach surfaces. This is, I think, helpful in reading Moore’s drafts counter-ekphrastically: here Moore’s work does not move by the narrativity of the lines, nor does the palimpsest successfully still that movement; everything is all mixed up; the sightline is clouded. Such an ekphrasis corresponds best to what Patricia Clough calls “enactive witnessing,” a form of present-oriented processing wherein there may be no narrative trajectory to the

witness's account, and no therapeutic goal to witnessing.⁵⁹ Countering the War Department's hope that trauma could be absorbed and contained, and the concomitant bifurcation and sacralizing of the male soldier-witness's body, Moore's poetry offers a witnessing that arises out of the body of the landscape itself. That witnessing is collectively experienced but unowned because only partially imagined, an opened simile that becomes an incomplete conditional statement. Chapter 2 examines camouflage, evidence, and body doubles in the work of Gertrude Stein, taking up the challenge of this unowned history and the blurred or undistinguished body in which it inheres.

⁵⁹ Patricia Ticiento Clough, "Reflections on Sessions Early in an Analysis: Trauma, Affect and 'Enactive Witnessing,'" *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19.2 (2009): 149–159. See especially 153 and 156.

CHAPTER 2: “LISTEN WHILE I TELL YOU ALL THE TIME”: GERTRUDE STEIN AND ALICE B.

TOKLAS ELEGIZE “CAMERAFLAGE” IN COINCIDENCE

In 1918 and 1919, Gertrude Stein published suites of poems in *Life* and *Vanity Fair* about her war work with Alice Toklas for the Red Cross’s American Fund for French Wounded. Regarding her poem “The Great American Army,” the editor of *Vanity Fair* claimed, “Gertrude Stein, the first and most representative of so-called Cubists in prose, has, since the outbreak of the war, been living in France and working in war relief as an ambulance driver. Few American women have taken a more active part in the conflict than she.”¹ For Stein, literary cubism was a means of portraiture, capable of presenting disparate angles of an individual’s personality for simultaneous viewing. And as she later explained in the voice of Alice Toklas, cubism was also associated for her with the war work of camouflage:

[T]he Picassos...went again to Spain and he came back with some spanish landscapes and one may say that these landscapes...were the beginning of cubism....There was...particularly the influence of the late Cézanne water colours, the cutting up the sky not in cubes but in spaces. But the essential thing, the treatment of the houses was essentially spanish...[In his painting, Picasso had] emphasized the way of building in spanish villages, the line of the houses not following the landscape but cutting across and into the landscape, becoming undistinguishable in the landscape by cutting across the landscape. It was the principle of the camouflage of the guns and the ships in the war. The first year of the war, Picasso and Eve, with whom he was living then, Gertrude Stein and myself, were walking down the boulevard Raspail [in Paris].... All of a sudden down the street came some big cannon, the first any of us had seen painted, that is camouflaged. Pablo stopped, he was spell-bound. C’est nous qui avons fait ça, he said, it is we that have created that, he said. And he was right, he had. From Cézanne through him they had come to that.²

¹ *Vanity Fair*, June 1918. In *Reflections on the Atomic Bomb: Volume I of the Previously Uncollected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1973), 13.

² Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) (New York: Modern Library, 1993), loc. 1208ff.

Stein and Picasso are correct; camouflage was in fact designed and implemented by artists, including some cubists, who were employed by national militaries to help solve an essentially lyric problem around vision and its skeletonized transmission. Early in the war Allied and Central Powers forces³ realized that aerial photographs functioned like John Stuart Mill's definition of poetry: any supposedly private situation, though "confessing itself only to itself," could be "overheard" in a photograph, since that technology indexically reproduced all visual details. Anything that could be photographed by aerial surveillance was therefore originally taken to be accurate without distortion, and could therefore allegedly be accurately analyzed and interpreted to reveal crucial details about location, manpower, and materiel. In the guiding language of this dissertation, aerial photography was understood to skeletonize too successfully: no matter how hermetic or obscure an aerial scene seemed, with the right set of eyes any visual information that had been captured could be re-fleshed. Using knowledge gleaned from naturalists' studies of animals in the wild, artists were therefore tasked with visual dissembling. Their work was to break up or blend the shapes and colors of soldiers, materiel, and landscapes in order to make the visual information in photographs "undistinguishable in the landscape" and therefore hamper interpretation by opposing forces.

Camouflage could also hinder the journalistic and evidentiary tasks of re-fleshing, by making identity and the process of identification equally suspect. Photographers and journalists working for the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial War Extra* and other publications reveled in

³ Originally proposed as a safety measure for American troops during the Spanish-American war by naturalist Abbott H. Thayer, camouflage was first adopted by the French in 1915, the British in 1917, and the Americans approximately contemporaneously. In each case, camouflage units were headed by trained artists. For a synoptic account, see Roy R. Behrens, "Art, Culture, and Camouflage," *Tate Etc.* iss. 4, (Summer 2005), <http://www.tate.org.uk/context-comment/articles/art-culture-and-camouflage>.

the cunning of camouflage, but also responded with anxiety to camouflage's blending of figure and ground, which produced a visually "undistinguishable landscape" that created potential dangers for soldiers and for their own journalistic work of interpretation. I argue that these anxieties manifest descriptively and visually: descriptively, journalists used captions and over-text to alert their readers to the propagandistic and rhetorical dangers of what they termed "cameraflage," or image-faking or -tampering; visually, they employed soldiers as the camera's deictic prosthesis in the landscape, teaching readers to read for clues by pointing out where and how to look for unexpected similarity and difference.

This chapter counterweights the military and journalistic uses of camouflage with Gertrude Stein's continual decision *not* to "re-flesh" a skeletonized scene. Her work serves as a provocation to the supposed efficiency of skeletonization. I argue that Stein's work often reverberates with the questions about the legibility of identity that camouflage raises, and which she and Alice Toklas experienced firsthand when they volunteered as Red Cross American Fund for French Wounded Searchers, helping the AFFW to identify soldiers who had gone missing in combat. Her sonic play always does much to dehierarchize which words take emphasis and which words provide the backdrop for that emphasis, effectively "becoming undistinguishable in the landscape by cutting across the landscape," blending what we traditionally think of as figure and what we traditionally construe as ground.⁴ But as her 1919 poem "A Deserter" shows, camouflage does not always eradicate difference by blending; it can equally amplify difference

⁴ I take these terms from Thayer's terminology for object that is to be camouflaged (figure) and the background into which it is meant to recede (ground). Unlike foreground and background, which change places based on perspective, figure is always attempting to *become* ground in Thayer's version of camouflage. The relation between figure and ground in dazzle camouflage is slightly different—see the first section of this chapter.

by highlighting coincidence, the unexpected features of resemblance that one thing or person shares with another when they are thrown into contingent relation.

“A Deserter”

Simple Narcissus flung in a flower.
It does sound like that.
Are you sorry for him.
Both brothers dead
That has nothing to do with it.
Colic and indeed he was sick.
That was from working.
Working by us.
Who then Narcissus in then the box.
Can you think this is funny.

I cannot forget Narcissus Deschamps. He was a deserter. He had had them brothers killed in the war. He was a professor and took pleasure in a bout of box. He told us he was an automobile assayer. He worked very well and he got the colic and the police caught him.

We know him.⁵

Stein’s poem is a tale of a war deserter who seems to have successfully posed as a civilian for a time by professing a false identity, but who was eventually caught when he fell ill. The form of the tale is about the coincidences within it. Like many of her other cubist portraits, the prose and verse stanzas repeat loosely the same information with differing emphasis, approaching the subject by fractured, angled circumlocution. The classical allusion regarding Narcissus’s name (“Simple Narcissus flung in a flower”) accentuates that doubling by making the second stanza the imperfect mirror of the first, and by setting the alternating lines in the first stanza into dialogic echoes that attempt to referee what facts matter in Narcissus’s desertion, capture, death, and representation (“Both brothers dead / That has nothing to do with it” “That was from working. / Working by us.”). This contingency extends, ultimately, to the sonic and visual levels,

⁵ First published in a suite of Stein’s World War I poems in *Vanity Fair* (March 1919); reprinted in *Reflections on the Atomic Bomb*, 40.

where “deserter” sounds like “professor” and “assayer”; the box of the first stanza (the police station? A coffin?) becomes a gaming “bout of box” in the second; and we hear the rhyme of “colic” and “sick” and see the letters of “colic” in “police.”

In point of fact, based on the account Stein lays out in the *Autobiography* and her work at the time, Deschamps was likely a victim of the “Spanish grippe” (or influenza) and not of colic,⁶ though of course he may have had both. When she changes the name of Deschamps’s deadly illness to that of a sonically convenient (because sonically coincident) affliction, Stein suggests her investment in questioning which facts count: in “A Deserter,” camouflage brings contingency to light, and contingency, in turn, brings a network of ethical and emotional questions to bear. Does the fact that flu can be replaced with colic, and that colic “sounds like” sickness mean Narcissus was destined to be caught? Does the fact that this Narcissus Deschamps “sounds like” the Narcissus myth make him legible in the myth’s terms, entrapped by self-entrancement? Does the fact that both of Deschamps’s brothers were killed in combat justify his desertion, help to explain but not justify it, or have no bearing on it whatsoever? When Narcissus works *by* (but not necessarily *for*) the “us,” do “we” become responsible for him? For adjudicating his guilt or innocence by knowing about him, or knowing him?

In Stein’s work, all of these questions are activated by the possibility of play. The final line of the first stanza points to one of the stanza’s speakers, and also points outward toward the audience, reminding us of this: “Can you think this is funny?” But this is serious play: Stein had already answered elsewhere in her war poetry, “It is not a joke. / A war is not a joke.”⁷ As I discuss more thoroughly near the end of this chapter, in 1918 and 1919 influenza ravaged war-

⁶ *Autobiography*, loc. 2531.

⁷ “The Work” was originally published in the American Fund for French Wounded *Bulletin* in 1917 and then collected in *Bee Time Vine and Other Pieces (1913–1927)*, preface and notes by Virgil Thompson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 192.

and home-front communities across the globe, a part of the war story that Elizabeth Outka argues has dropped out of our narrative of that period in large part *because* the effects were not confined to the battlefield but rather equalized soldiers and civilians. One effect of changing “flu” to the sonically playful “colic,” then, is that the childhood illness pulls the (former) soldier back into the civilian realm. The rhyme both creates an inevitable link between Deschamps and death—colic/sick→death—and highlights the ridiculous contingency of that death. In particularizing Deschamps in this way, Stein’s sonic play makes him available for a more particular, personal elegy.

The stanzas together underline this, tacking as they do between the “facts” of Deschamps, which are generally written in the past tense, and the present tense adjudication of those facts. Stein’s encounter with Deschamps’s camouflaged identity, and her attempt to understand the import of her interpretive proximity to him, reemphasize the effects of camouflage’s misinterpretability, among which undecidability features prominently. Misinterpretability and indecision are a very modernist version of the elegy: as she outlines the supposed “facts” and questions them, Stein toggles between the past and the present tense, ending on an inability to forget Narcissus Deschamps, a reminder to never forget him, the question, “Can you think this is funny?” and what seems like a false statement, “we know him.” Though Deschamps is dead, this inconclusive ambivalence forces him into the present tense in a melancholy reimagining of the elegy that is coincident with other modernist reinterpretations of the genre, as I show in the chapter’s second half. In between the wars, I argue, Stein often works in the idiom of mistakability that camouflage inhabits, purposely defying skeletonization’s imperatives. Over this period, her dangerous gaming becomes increasingly elegiac in the modernist sense. The end result is a kind of elegy that resembles a photogram, placing its investments in the relation

between objects or people rather than in the individual object or person. This angled, interstitial interest allows for a form of elegy that is not centered on the human, but rather on the landscape and the background to a human drama. In thinking of elegy as a form of assemblage that constantly exceeds its frame, this chapter moves between the imaginative animation of death featured in Chapter 1 and the seen but ungrievable African American deaths that Chapter 3 makes visible.

Camouflage: Using the Camera's "most accurate witness" to "convey a misleading Impression"

Camouflage was originally designed as a countermeasure against a new form of warfront reconnaissance: planes armed with the surveillance technology of cameras. These surveillance planes flew reconnaissance over enemy territory to view troops, structures, and artillery, but military intelligence forces on all sides quickly realized that the indexical nature of photography made cameras more dangerous than human surveillance alone. Where the speed of a moving plane might cause a trained lookout in a plane to miss less obvious features of troop buildup in a landscape, the camera's indexical nature meant that it recorded everything in its sightline without differentiation. As the British manual *The Principles and Practice of Camouflage* (1918) explained, unlike a human airman, "the camera is a most accurate witness, and a photograph will always record something."⁸ In order to make sense of the "something" that the camera recorded, however, reconnaissance teams still needed expert analysts back of the front—those who could read the oversaturated details of the photograph and skeletonize the most relevant ones, surmising from patterns of shadow or the way dirt was removed from an area what kind of

⁸ *The Principles and Practice of Camouflage* (London, 1918), quoted in Tim Newark, *Camouflage* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 60, 62.

artillery might be present and in what numbers, what the height of a building might be (and therefore what its use might be), or what kind of trench digging and troop movement might be taking place.

For militaries, the ideal would have been to block the enemy's reception of visual information entirely, as the War Department believed censoring images of dead Allied bodies had done for American civilian viewers. As Chapter 1 addresses, the absence of visual information did not in and of itself restrict the possibilities for interpretation—viewers re-flesh whatever is available to them—and in the case of aerial photography, visual privacy was particularly difficult to achieve. Aerial photography was by no means simple or guaranteed to capture everything—as Lieutenant Cecil Lewis of the Royal Flying Corps put it when recording his efforts at the Battle of the Somme, there were always a chance that a photographer would miss an important shot:

It [the camera] was slung on the side of the fuselage outside, and was a real old studio model, complete with leather concertina, mahogany frame, and boxes of plates.... There was a sort of rudimentary “ring and ball” sight to give you some idea of what you were taking—as you leaned out into a 70-mph wind and tried to see through the sight without getting your goggles blown off. To take a photo you grabbed at a ring on the end of a bit of wire, which was skittering about in the gale, and to chingethe plages there was a sort of mahogany knife handle which you pushed steadily forward and then pulled back. This was at the back of the polished cigar box full of 24 plates.⁹

Despite these complications, aerial photography was comparatively efficient and effective.

Militaries therefore tried to shoot down enemy surveillance planes, but primarily turned their efforts to the re-fleshing side, attempting to manipulate how visual information would be interpreted: “The chief opponent to overcome is the expert, who, with the advantage of time and undisturbed concentration which are lacking to the aeroplane observer, is able to interpret what is

⁹ Log entry of Lieutenant Cecil Lewis, 9 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps. See the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum's exhibit “Legend, Memory and the Great War in the Air.”

recorded on photographs. The art of camouflage lies in conveying a misleading impression as to what that something [the “something” recorded by the camera] means.”¹⁰ Hoping to shift experts’ interpretations, militaries began breaking up the visual shapes of artillery by painting segments different colors; by painting tarpaulins the colors of the landscape so that they could be thrown over trenches or building projects; and by occasionally manufacturing decoy structures and soldiers in order to confuse opposing forces and misdirect enemy fire.¹¹

Where the military attempted to sway the re-fleshing of skeletonized information by manipulating what information appeared to be visible in a photograph, newspapers attempted to train their readers to be better analysts of camouflaged scenes. In the previous chapter I argued that censorship laws around the representation of war dead produced an unexpectedly poetic visual register in journalistic photography: images of empty or destroyed landscapes, paired with highly euphemistic and biblical language, did not show death and yet asked viewers to read death in. This imaginative act of could also be cognized bodily. As the viewer/reader encounters the caption’s metaphor or euphemism, she begins to hold her breath, suspending all but her cognitive animation; it is only when she “places” the metaphor that she begins to breathe again. In these photographs and their captions, even living human figures begin to be read as indeterminate, both living and dead; inanimate objects become witnesses or sentinels; and readers ratify the witnessing act by mimicking and then surpassing it, suspending life and then returning to it. The captions to journalistic body-empty photographs encouraged this affective, experimental relation between readers, the photographic material they were encountering, and the information those

¹⁰ Newark, *The Principles and Practice of Camouflage*, 62.

¹¹ For a more detailed explanation of the panoply of camouflage techniques, see Newark, *The Principles and Practice of Camouflage* and Behrens, *False Colors: Art, Design, and Modern Camouflage* (Dysart, IA: Bobolink Books, 2002), and *Camoumedia: A Compendium of Research in Art, Architecture and Camouflage* (Dysart, IA: Bobolink Books, 2009).

photographs indexed by absence. Camouflage photography produced a different kind of journalistic re-fleshing, which invited a different response from newspapers' readers.

As Roland Barthes and others have argued, it is photography's indisputable indexicality that forces the imaginative encounter with death: "I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*. I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake."¹² Readers who witness the photographic absence of death by physically enacting the working through of a metaphor are, I think, physically acknowledging the future anterior of what they see (or don't see) pictured. For Judith Butler, who reads Barthes through Susan Sontag's desire for photographs of atrocity to "haunt us," the fact that the photograph will survive the life it documents instantiates not only an affective form of grief but also an interpretive one; it acknowledges the life in question *as* a life by ratifying its grievability.¹³ But grieving, mourning, presuppose a time at which grieving will be concluded: in arguing for grievability, Butler emphasizes a kind of closure that Barthes's examination of photography seems sometimes to resist.¹⁴ The emphasis in journalistic photographs of camouflage is elegiac, but it does not perform the work of grieving. Instead, when Barthes speaks of recognizing his mother as what "will have been" in the Winter Garden photograph, he treats her image as an immobile fact that

¹² Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1981), 96.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2016), loc. 1830. "So the photograph is linked through its 'tense' to the grievability of a life, anticipating and performing that grievability....If we can be haunted, then we can acknowledge that there has been a loss and hence that there has been a life this is an initial moment of cognition, and apprehension, but also a potential judgment, and it requires that we conceive of grievability as the precondition of life, one that is discovered retrospectively through the temporality instituted by the photograph itself."

¹⁴ This is not to discount the importance of Butler's extension of Barthes's and Sontag's work. In fact, the shift in frame that reminds us that "to be haunted is precisely to apprehend that [pictured] life before precisely knowing it" (loc. 1830) is precisely the necessary shift in frame that loiterly witnessing provides us, as I describe in Chapter 3.

makes photography melancholic in Freud's original sense: "[W]hen it is painful, nothing in it can transform grief into mourning. And if dialectic is that thought which masters the corruptible and converts the negation of death into the power to work, then the photograph is undialectical: it is a denatured theater where death cannot 'be contemplated,' reflected and interiorized; [it] excludes all purification, all *catharsis*."¹⁵

This side of the photograph—the spectral present/future that cannot be touched or made use of in any way—is what we would immediately take to be elegiac or melancholic in the image, but Barthes also describes the photograph as “hav[ing] something to do with resurrection”; it “does not call up the past.... The effect it produces upon me is not to restore what has been abolished (by time, by distance) but to attest that what I see has indeed existed. Now, this is always a scandalous effect.... What the Photograph feeds my mind on...by a brief action whose shock cannot drift into reverie...is the simple mystery of concomitance.”¹⁶ Concomitance bears Eucharistic overtones, but at its simplest it means “concurrency” or “coexistence”—that is, coincidence.¹⁷ Visual coincidence created a series of anxieties for journalists, all of which emphasized recuperation. First, a photograph of successful camouflage could look like boring landscape with nothing to pique a reader's interest. This had been precisely the point that the naturalist Thayer had wished to convey with his careful drawings and photographs, but for a public that wanted photos of what they imagined war looked like—the kind of fake battle picture that “showed men being bayoneted and gassed, and airplanes swooping down with machine guns shooting and flags waving, and shells exploding, and tanks

¹⁵ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 90.

¹⁶ Barthes, 82, 84.

¹⁷ Oxford English Dictionary, “Concomitance,” “Concomitant.”

charging, and prisoners being captured 'n everything—all in one picture!’¹⁸—truly successful camouflage photos in which action and objects instead “became undistinguishable in the landscape” held little intrinsic visual interest.

Journalists were therefore under pressure to show that in skeletonizing the war they were skeletonizing correctly, choosing the details that were of crucial importance for understanding and that could be re-fleshed into an accurate account of what was happening on battlefields abroad. Camouflage photographs released by newspapers therefore almost always lean quite heavily on captions that emphasize military cunning, technological newness, and the discerning eye of the reader, which is always filtered through a soldier proxy who is also a proxy for the journalist’s own camera. It is the support of the language that recuperates the image as of interest, that neutralizes the potentially unsettling destruction that camouflage routinely depicts, and that does the pedagogical work of training American viewers where and how to look at images that seem visually flat or unimportant. And the repetitive language in these vaunting, pedagogical captions tends to be accompanied by a set of visual repetitions—precisely the double take that the coincidence of camouflage bakes into any situation.

Take, for instance, the following images from the *New York Times Mid-Week Pictorial Extra*, which explicitly frame the double-take as a technology, both beautiful and dangerous.

¹⁸ Lieutenant-Colonel Kendall Banning, *Military Censorship of Pictures in World War I* (Washington, D.C., c. 1919), 12–13, quoted in Susan Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat*, (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 125–6.



(Figure 2.1 (left): “What seems a dead horse would, if closely examined, show a place of hiding.” Figure 2.2 (center): “The dummy horse here shown is really an engineer’s listening post.” Figure 2.3 (right): “Tree climber in black and white, American front.” Reproduced from *The War of the Nations, 1918: A Pictorial Portfolio of World War I, Compiled from the Mid-Week Pictorial*. New York: New York Times, 1919. Rpt. New York: Arno Press, 1977.)



(Figure 2.4 (left): “German observation post constructed within the hollow of a shell-broken tree.” Figure 2.5 (center): “Concrete German observation post at la Bassée cleverly camouflaged with shattered roof to simulate a worthless house.” Figure 2.6 (right): “Trafalgar Square, in London, was transformed to represent a war-scarred village on the Western Front, and people were invited to ‘feed the guns with bonds’ and thus help end the war.” Reproduced from *The War of the Nations*.)

First, photographs of camouflage do important work in making visible the scale of death and destruction that the body-empty photos passed by the War Department seek to hide. Unlike the photographs we examined in the previous chapter, these do depict death, readily admitting that it does occur on battlefields: “What seems a dead horse would, if closely examined, show a place of hiding” (figure 2.1) tells us that horses die in war, and its photo shows that fake dead horse in what would have been a realistic pose, legs raised and stiffened by rigor mortis; more obliquely, “Concrete German observation post at la Bassée cleverly camouflaged with shattered roof to simulate a worthless house” (figure 2.5) accompanies a photo of a decoy house so dilapidated that it seems unlikely its inhabitants could have survived its bombing or shelling, had they been home at the time.

Despite the gruesome imaginings these photographs bring to mind, however, these captions are neither grief stricken nor awed by the sacrifice to a greater cause, as we might expect from the hallowed, biblical captions of the last chapter. This difference in tone likely stems in part from a human-animal divide—horses, at least, are allowed to die in war; their deaths (perhaps because they are non-human animals) are unremarkable enough that they are not a taboo subject for photography, and acceptable enough that the horses needn’t be eulogized or reanimated in the captions. Furthermore, horses’ deaths are common enough to be considered unremarkable for soldiers, as well: though many soldiers’ memoirs describe the sounds of dying horses and the smell of their decaying flesh as more disturbing than the death of human comrades, since the horses were truly innocent victims of the war, the loss of a horse was common enough and non-threatening enough that a horse’s corpse on the battlefield would not alert a passing soldier to imminent danger. Because this death is common, because this death is non-threatening, the American army’s camouflage unit began manufacturing fake dead horses in

1918, with the idea that living soldiers could hide inside, ready to spy on and attack the unsuspecting enemy.

Reading with Chapter 1's emphasis on analogy and metaphor, we can see the army's fake dead horse as a literary allusion to the Trojan horse.¹⁹ This analogy is important, because it provides readers of the newspaper with a known structure for imagining the benefits and costs of trickery, a photo-only version of the "war-scarred village on the Western Front" of the Trafalgar Square reconstruction (figure 2.6). Meant as a place of hiding—a defensive position that, through its cunning, becomes an offensive position—the horse can function as the stand-in for a real live soldier; "dead," the horse can also stand in for the real dead soldier who cannot be pictured; fakely dead, inanimate, the horse can also be the space of relation between the living soldier and the dead one, a space for readers to insert themselves as allied soldiers while *also* imagining the scene of imminent death for opposing forces.

The literary abstraction that allows a reader to feel his or her way into these opposing positions may also remind her of the risk of these positions: the fake dead horse, the Trojan horse, is also a kind of gaming that is a dangerous gamble. Reproducing the decoys photographically, the *Times* shows how easy it would be to mistake a decoy for the real thing; because both allies and enemies use camouflage or decoys to hide the real danger, this clownish mistakability is a deadly serious business. It is perhaps for this reason that the *Times* photos always seem to emphasize the cunning of aliveness: every photo of a decoy has a live soldier in it, examining or demonstrating the disguise; nearly every caption remarks upon the craftiness and care required in the production and detection of the decoys ("What seems a dead horse would, if closely examined, show a place of hiding"; "The dummy horse here shown is really an

¹⁹ My thanks to Stephanie Anderson and John Wilkinson of the Poetry and Poetics Workshop for suggesting this parallel.

engineer's listening post"; "Concrete German observation post at la Bassée cleverly camouflaged with shattered roof to simulate a worthless house").

Equally cunning, the camera itself is engaged in the work of detection and revelation. The three categories of camouflage—figure-ground blending meant to make an object disappear into or mimic the surroundings, as in the case of the fake dead horses; figure-disruption or dazzle meant to confuse or distract the viewer's eye, as in the case of the "tree climber in black and white"; and coincident disruption, a mix of these first two categories meant to deflect the gaze—were derived in part from the scientific findings of naturalists, and in part from the curious techniques of juxtaposition and collage in abstract art, as Stein and Picasso quipped. Michael Taussig, Ann Elias, and Roy Behrens²⁰ have remarked the strong similarities between camouflage technique and the work of the surrealists in the following decade; in passing, Taussig attributes the lack of scholarship on this connection to a scholarly discomfort with the idea that art and war—or gaming and levity and war—should be so closely related for artists, and especially for artists who generally claim to oppose war. But as Taussig puts it, in examining camouflaged shapes,

We see twice over. We see the camouflaged thing, and then we see the thing "behind" the camouflage and admire both our cleverness and that of the designer, not to mention God who contrives nature in such a way, our eyes included, that it includes its camouflaged deceptions of selves that are not-selves as well.... For is it not the case that confusion and misdirection is an aesthetic, such that dazzling exists because it has deliberately and aggressively no purpose, which is to say it has a "higher" purpose, something beautiful, playful, exciting, sexual, and sacred, owing much, I dare say, to the breakup of wholes and the disruption of the boundary between figure and ground?²¹

²⁰ Michael Taussig, "Zoology, Magic, and Surrealism in the War on Terror," *Critical Inquiry*, 34.S2 (Winter 2008): S98–S116; Ann Elias, "Camouflage and Surrealism," *War, Literature & the Arts* 24.1 (2012); Behrens, *False Colors*, and "Camouflage," *Encyclopedia of Perception*, ed. E Bruce Goldstein (Sage Publications, 2010), 233–35.

²¹ Taussig, "Zoology," S110.

This serious play has two important components, according to Taussig. The first is the sense that every act of camouflage is motivated; it always has an origin, a story, a “behind,” and therefore its obscurity can be undone, and its meaning understood. In these journalistic photographs we can see this recuperative drive to understand the motivation “behind” camouflage in the need for a double take: in the two photographs of the fake dead horse—the first showing the horse head on; the second showing it from the back, the 180-degree switch in perspective revealing the engineer hiding inside. The engineer insists on the liveness of this technology, as does the “tree climber” in figure 2.3 and the observing soldiers in figures 2.4, and 2.5. None of these images present a soldier in a warring pose; each of these men is still, an observer who shifts the work of war from action to vision. Beginning with the vision of the untutored eye of a newspaper reader, we can see the language of the captions swing from what is visible to what is “true”: “Seems,” “dummy,” “cleverly camouflaged” “to simulate”; “would, if closely examined”; “show,” “here shown,” “is really.” By producing an observer and a hortatory explanatory caption, the *Times* scenes help to defuse the danger of misidentification: though the explanatory caption suggests the reader could be fooled by the image alone, the soldier shown inspecting the decoy appears as a pedagogical proxy, never fooled. As in the 180-degree movement from the front of the mistakable side of the dummy dead horse to its vulnerable side, the soldier is near, “closely examining,” and his body tells the viewer where to focus in order to see what is hidden.²²

²² For two strong accounts of the way a body, caught in a photograph or on a screen, could serve as a living archive of pedagogical features *and* a prosthetic extension for memory and imagination, see Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter 1986): 3–64, and Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

In including a pointing soldier to solve the pedagogical crisis of directing a viewer's sight, and in including a living ally as the reader's proxy to address the existential crisis of indeterminate death and destruction, journalistic photography of camouflage also introduced a new anxiety around the fallibility of photography itself. Serving as the physical embodiment of the pointing manicule of a pre-modern text, the body of the accompanying soldier acts as a technology of observation, discernment, and record-keeping. But these are human traits, of course, and humans are fallible: the caption; its emphasis on the liveness of the pointing soldier; the soldier's invitation to "admire both our cleverness and that of the designer" of the camouflage and of the human body; all remind us how precarious our ability is to distinguish between the "false" and the "true," and that we require a compensatory, durable, and distributable pedagogy in order to successfully do that work. When the pedagogical tool is human, it is also questionable, depending on its alliances and its motives: human hands were also responsible for the cunning duplicity of camouflage in the first place, and the publications that ran these images did not forget this. In a 1918 article bemoaning the difficulty in telling "real" and "fake" war photographs apart, *Collier's Weekly* captioned a "fake," "To the uninitiated eye...[t]he picture on the right, being French, is more ingenious [than its Russian counterpart]. It pretends to be a snapshot taken from an airplane at a height of 10,000 feet and shows a German aviator with hands up in signal of surrender. It was made by superimposing two photographs, working in the necessary detail with a brush, and rephotographing—cameraflage."²³

²³ "Real War Pictures—And the Other Kind," *Collier's Weekly*, January 26, 1918, 12–13. Cited in Moeller, *Shooting War*, 150–1. Moeller's account of American suspicion around the potential duplicity of images circa World War I is also generally instructive; see her sixth chapter.

“Cameraflage,” a portmanteau play on “camouflage,” reinforces that to camouflage is to purposely obscure, or “to hide anything from your enemy,”²⁴ and also intimates that the more allied or proximate a camoufleur is, the more convincing (and therefore dangerous) her fake could be, even to her allies. In this play on words, then, *Collier’s* figures the reader/viewer as the camera’s extension but also as its enemy, and visa-versa. Over the course of the 1920s and 30s, this indecisive relationship between camera eye and reader’s eye would intensify, in part because cameras would become portable enough—and necessary focal lengths would shorten enough—that the photographer’s *own* body could both hold the examining camera and come into focus in front of the lens. I examine this indecisive relationship, known as the “new vision,” more completely in the final section of this chapter. But we can already see its effects at play in Gertrude Stein’s self-celebrating portraits.

“*Can You Imitate Disaster*”²⁵: *Cameraflage and the American Fund for French Wounded*

Photographically and linguistically, we can see Gertrude Stein constantly maneuvering between camouflage and cameraflage as she focuses the lens and comes into focus before it, but unlike the military and journalistic uses of camouflage and cameraflage, her work is almost never recuperative, reveling instead in a play of coincidence and contradiction that asks more questions than it answers. Her linguistic interest in repetition, proliferation, and sonic coincidence, which seem to predate World War I and also predate her more overt photographic experimentation with identity, were channeled, I argue, through her war work with the American Fund for French Wounded, in which (among other, more generic war work) she and Alice Toklas were charged

²⁴ This definition, given in the *London Daily News* (May 25, 1917), is the first use of the word in English, according to Roy Behrens. See “Art, Culture and Camouflage.”

²⁵ Virgil Thomson declares this poem title “refers to the second battle of Verdun, by which Miss Stein and her friends ‘were not so frightened’ as they had been the first time.” *Bee Time Vine* 200.

with taking testimony from French and American soldiers in order to resolve the identities of missing comrades. This work inflects Stein's work of managing her own visual identity, as regards coincidence and intentional misinterpretability. As we have seen with "A Deserter" above, these same questions dog her World War I poetry, but they come to their most complete fruition in her interwar works, including *Stanzas in Meditation* and *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*.

Even before the celebrity of Stein's playful misidentification in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein had begun to change her visual identity. Stein often orchestrated her own portraits, for instance; in 1922 her friend Man Ray—the avant-garde photographer and artist known for his photograms and other Dadaist works—became her official photographer, a role in which he served until 1930. Portraits of Stein grew intentionally playful in the 1920s, for in that period she began refashioning herself as more distinctly masculine, though she never eschewed female style entirely. In 1926 Toklas gave Stein a short, "Grecian" haircut, and Stein began wearing suits or loose dresses. Stein and Toklas also began appearing in public dressed in an "homme-femme" style that seemingly rendered their romantic relationship legible in conventional visual terms, inscribing a gendered norm on each partner by means of their contrast with each other—Stein and Toklas don't contrast simply by wearing a suit and a dress, but by wearing a solid suit and a patterned dress; flats and heels; crossed hands and handbag (figure 2.7).²⁶

²⁶ I cannot make out all of the notation in pen along this portrait, but the right-hand side reads, "ces photos [...] seront teinte sepia" [these photos will be sepia-tinted], suggesting either an instruction for a printer or a note to the current recipient about a future printing of the portrait. Sepia-tinting might play down the color contrasts between the two women's outfits somewhat, but would also play up the augustness of the image, suggesting as it does nineteenth-century family portrait albums.



(Figure 2.7 (left): Gertrude Stein (left) and Alice B. Toklas, Aix-les-Bains, France, c. 1927. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas Papers, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, New Haven; Figure 2.8 (center): “Gertrude Stein,” Sir Cecil Beaton, 1937. Gelatin silver print. The Cecil Beaton Studio Archive as Sotheby’s, London; Figure 2.9 (right): Gertrude Stein posing for Jo Davidson, Man Ray, c. 1923. Gelatin silver print. National Portrait Gallery)²⁷

Here we can see identities that “blend in” by assuming and playing with a set of known conventions; but, as camouflage’s play with coincidence reminds us, the same things that make the couple “blend in” *as* a couple make them “stand out” as well, because their homosexual couplehood is unconventional and hardly recognized even when legible, normatively speaking.²⁸ Cecil Beaton’s 1937 photograph of Stein (figure 2.8) also puns on her gender identity, by establishing her as masculine in the foreground (larger; androgynously dressed) and feminine in the background (smaller; dressed in a skirt and blouse). This photograph is a montage (a work of

²⁷ These images were collected in the Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery’s exhibit “Seeing Gertrude Stein: Five Stories,” October 14, 2011–January 22, 2012.

<http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/stein/intro.html>

²⁸ Stein and Toklas declared themselves married in 1908, and celebrated with a honeymoon in Venice. Despite this, they were referred to as “Miss Toklas” and “Miss Stein,” (never Mrs., and never under a single last name, as convention would have dictated) throughout their lives. As I detail later in the chapter, Stein and Toklas did participate in at least one playful, epistolary family structure with their friend and publicist Carl Van Vetchen.

cameraflage where the trickery is evident) that makes its gendered argument about Stein precisely by portraying her twice in the same frame. As the curator for the National Portrait Gallery exhibit “Seeing Gertrude Stein,” puts it, “Stein is married to herself, the montage suggests, imperial Stein [in the foreground] to lesbian Stein [in the background]. Beaton, in his diary for 1939, began to call Stein ‘General,’ echoing those who for more than a decade had noted something domineering in her dress and manner. In this instance, he used the same composition he commonly used for couples—dominant male and supportive female—to interpret Stein’s immense self-love.”²⁹

Beaton’s bifocal, cameraflaged critique of Stein amplifies the effect of multiplicity that is already nascent in Man Ray’s 1923 photograph of Stein posing for sculptor Jo Davidson (figure 2.9). Man Ray’s photograph was part of a story about Stein and Davidson that ran in *Vanity Fair*, the same magazine that had published Stein’s poem “A Deserter” almost four years prior. For the February, 1923 issue, Stein produced a “portrait” of Davidson that approached the painter and sculptor from a series of linguistic and formal angles, alternating between verse and prose, heavy repetition and sections that seem more content-driven than sound-driven.³⁰ Davidson’s sculpture presents a portrait of Stein, too, of course, and Man Ray’s photograph proliferates her identity as Stein proliferates Davidson’s in her poem. In this photograph, the sculpture, Davidson, and Stein share the same sightline and none is a clearer focus than another. The sculpture of Stein is also one of three pictured in the studio, all of women, so Stein becomes one woman among four;

²⁹ <http://www.npg.si.edu/exhibit/stein/pop-ups/02-03.html>

³⁰ “A Portrait of Jo Davidson,” *Vanity Fair* 19.6 (February 1923), 48. In the article, Man Ray’s photograph is accompanied by a small image of a Stein bust by Jacques Lipschitz and a reproduction of Picasso’s portrait of Stein.

seated behind the sculpture, seemingly slightly smaller than it,³¹ screened by Davidson and with her features partially obscured by shadow, she looks like the decoy rather than the original.

I believe it was Stein's work with the American Fund for French Wounded that so amplified the ambiguity of identity in her image and in her writing, for in reaction to instructions to work within the evidentiary paradigm that would choose between the figure and the ground, Stein repeatedly worked to tack between the two. Starting in 1916, Stein and Toklas performed war work by serving as liaisons between distribution centers and hospitals around Paris (and later closer to the French-German border), helping to order and deliver supplies, writing for the American Fund for French Wounded (an organization affiliated with the Red Cross) and its publications, and corresponding with the families of wounded soldiers. In April 1918, Toklas was put in charge of a particularly sensitive task, in which, as Head Searcher for her region, she would interview wounded soldiers in order to find out details about comrades who had not yet been located. The details Toklas gleaned were to be written up and sent to the AFFW and Red Cross headquarters, whence they would be sent in turn to soldiers' commanders to be used in the identification of the dead or missing, and to families in the United States.

This task was part of the Red Cross's attempt to remedy a deficiency in record-keeping: over the course of 1917 and '18 most branches found that the original identification tags issued to soldiers (which normally included name, rank, and sometimes religion or region) were insufficient, as they could be blown off of a body, stolen as souvenirs by opposing troops, or simply lost in the body's transit. Unless good records were kept both within the regiment and at

³¹ Though the sculpture is approximately three-quarter size, the pallets on which Davidson has placed it to make it a comfortable work height make the sculpture slightly taller than Stein; Davidson's choice to slightly exaggerate roundnesses in Stein's figure, and Man Ray's angle, which puts the sculpture very slightly in the foreground, give the illusion that the sculpture is larger than the model.

permanent headquarters back from the front line, a man could easily go “missing” when he died, for his tag would be sent to headquarters, leaving the body without official identification. Over the course of the war most branches therefore adopted a second tag, which could remain with the body even after death; the Navy went so far as to seal each sailor’s right thumbprint into the metal of his tags.³² This form of record-keeping drew on crime forensics at home, and the instructions the AFFW sent to Toklas³³ utilized the language of testimony and eye-witnessing that would also have been used to establish identity in a court of law:

The searcher should interview the informant as a lawyer should a client. The searcher may have no doubt whatever that the witness, in making his statement, has the right man in mind, but, it must be remembered, that the wife or mother who does not see the witness herself, would be hard to convince.

If the report gives bad news she will naturally hope that the witness has made a mistake of identity and is speaking of some other man.

The first thing therefore, is to convince her on that point. The difficulty is to get from the witness a description that will carry conviction.

The kind of description usually given I.O 5.6 tall about 25 years old is never positively convincing at the inquiry at home, for it would obviously apply to scores of men in the regiment.

Take down everything which will interest the inquirer, try to visualize the scheme and ask all questions which a wife or mother would ask.

State clearly about each fact whether the informant was an eye-witness or whether he was told by others. If told by others note the Regimental or other address of the eye-witness so that the Paris Bureau of the American Red Cross may communicate with this eye-witness[.]

The searcher must take down the fullest possible details of the incident in the first person and in the narrator’s own words. The account must, of course, make it quite clear whether and how far the narrator was an eye-witness.

If the informant says, “I saw this man killed”, was his death instantaneous?, and does he know if the body was buried and where?

It is also important to note if the ground was held or lost, for, if it was held, the missing man’s body could have been found and buried, in which case it may be possible to find the grave. The length of time that men have known each other should be stated to

³² Moeller, *Shooting War*, 124–5.

³³ Toklas’s French was far superior to Stein’s; though both worked in the Searcher capacity, in any case in which the two interviewed a French soldier, Toklas’s report would have been considered more forensically trustworthy.

enable the writer to judge whether the informant knew this man well enough to recognise him at a distance or in the middle of a charge at early dawn in the mist.³⁴

Yet, in addition to confirming a death in the forensic language of eye-witnessing, Toklas is asked to determine identity not by means of facts that could be common to many and could therefore be mistakable—intelligence officer, 5’6,” 25ish—but rather by difference, by the facets of identity that are more intimate, and which would be noticeable by a friend and recognizable to a lover or family member. In order to provide the most accurate and believable account, Toklas must “take down the fullest possible details of the incident in the first person and in the narrator’s own words,” inhabiting someone else’s eye. And in order to ask for the details that will make up the most convincing narrative of recognition, Toklas must imagine into the mindset of the beloved wife or mother, and must record what is visual or gestural, that which would allow a friend to “recognise [the missing person] at a distance or in the middle of a charge at early dawn in the mist.”

Here the AFFW asks Toklas to record identity completely and indiscriminately, as a camera would, but also to work deictically as a soldier in a photograph of camouflage would, pointing out the details that matter. Though this work is not happy work, it is recuperative: it is meant to resolve the faint hope that a “mistake of identity” has been made, for in quashing the hope that a soldier is still somehow alive, the AFFW intends to allow wives and mothers to begin grieving their dead and missing loved ones. We can see an important difference here between the War Department’s assumptions about wives and mothers and the AFFW’s assumptions: for the War Department, photographs must be body-empty because a mother is too quick to imagine any pictured body as a proxy for her own son. For the AFFW, a photograph (or, lacking a

³⁴ Letter to Alice Toklas at Nîmes, from “M. Shaw” of the Head Hospital Department, Paris, April 9, 1918. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 76.

photograph, an eyewitness description) must be as individual and specific as possible, lest a mother refuse to imagine her son into the scene. These differing affective roles for the viewing audience, as projected by the creators of these images, remind us that that stakes of skeletonization and of witnessing are importantly different for these two types of photography.

As we have seen in the portraits of Stein above and in Stein's "A Deserter," she thinks of identification differently; her approach is playful and necessarily resists complete coherence. "The Work," a poem she published in the *AFFW Bulletin* shortly before she and Toklas began their work as searchers,³⁵ emphasizes the processual nature of identification, and sets up the even more radically ambiguous work of adjudication and contingency of "A Deserter." Here is part of the second half of "The Work":

It is not a joke.
A war is not a joke.
Did he die there because he was mortal and we leave Rivesaltes. Be nice to me.
This is apropos of the birthplace of Maréchal Joffre. We visited it and we have sent
postal cards of it. The committee will be pleased.
It is not a bother to be a soldier.
I think kindly of that bother.
Can you say lapse.
Then think about it.
Indeed it is yet.
We are so pleased.
With the flag.
With the flag of sets.
Sets of color.
Do you like flags.
Blue flags smell sweetly.
Blue flags in a whirl.
We did this we had ribbon of the American flag and we cut it up and we gave each
soldier one with a pin and they pinned it on and we were pleased and we received a
charming letter from a telephonist at the front who heard from a friend in Perpignan that
we were giving this bit of ribbon and he asked for some and we sent them and we hope
that they are all living.
The wind blows.

³⁵ "The Work" was written in Nîmes in 1917; this excerpt is about a third of the length, and falls about two thirds through the poem. Reprinted in *Bee Time Vine*, 189–194.

And the automobile goes.
Can you guess boards.
Wood.

Naturally we think about wind because this country of Rousillon is the windiest corner in France. Also it is a great wine country.

Can you guess hoop.
Barrels.
Can you guess girls.
Servants.

The women of the country still wear the caps of the country.

Can you guess messages.

Indeed.

Then there meats to buy.

This is apropos of the small Benevol hospitals who try to supply the best food.

We like asparagus so.

This is an interview.

Soldiers like a fuss.

Give them their way.

This is meant to be read they like a fuss made over them, and they do.

Yes indeed we will.

We are not mighty.

Nor merry.

We are happy. Very.

In the morning.

We believe in the morning.

Do we.

This means that I have always had the habit of late rising but for hospital visiting I have to rise early.

Please be an interview.

This is when we do not think we would know what to say.

Please be an interview with dogs.

Please comfort me.

Please plan a game.

Please then and places.

This is apropos of the fact that I always ask where they come from and then I am ashamed to say I don't know all the Departments but I am learning them.

In the meantime.

In the meantime we are useful.

That is what I mean to say.

In the meantime can you have beds. This means that knowing the number of beds you begin to know the hospital.

Kindly call a brother.

What is a cure.

I speak french.

What one means.

I can call it in time.

In lines like “This is an interview. / Soldiers like a fuss. / Give them their way. / This is meant to be read they like a fuss made over them, and they do,” we can hear echoes of the AFFW’s call to think about the final audience; Stein clarifies that it is not that soldiers like a fuss per se, but that they like to be fussed over. Certainly in creating tiny flag pins for soldiers to wear in battle Stein and Toklas are creating their own dog tags of sorts, and those markers of identity stretch at least 120 miles from Nîmes to Perpignan; similarly in sending post cards to the AFFW committee Stein and Toklas are tagging themselves, loosely affiliating their celebrity with Joffre’s and creating a loop in which the AFFW’s Paris home base and Joffre’s Rivesaltes birthplace are connected. But the refrains of Stein’s poem question this relation between relevancy and purpose: “this means,” “this is apropos of,” “can you guess.” That relation unfolds sonically in rhyme and in wordplay—Joffre and soldier; soldier and bother; lapse and please—and through visual and geographical association—the miniature irises called blue flags and the blue in the French flag; at the poem’s end, the flowers the soldiers pick and the once-distant location of the telephonist come together: “We do not understand the weather. That astonishes me. / Camellias in Perpignan. / Camellias finish when roses begin. // It is astonishing that those who have fought so hard and so well should pick yellow irises and fish in a stream. / And then a pansy.” The things that the poem’s “we” learn over its course—such as how to run a car with limited fuel; how to judge a hospital by the number of beds it makes available; how to graciously accept thanks in smiles—unfold in counterpoint to floral relations that seem sonically motivated though they may truly be geographically contingent as well.

And then a pansy.
I did not ask for it.
It smells.
A sweet smell.

With acacia.
Call it locusts.
Call it me.
I finish by saying that the french soldier is the person we should all help.

At the end, Stein's "I" aligns herself with a proliferating flower ("call it me") and with a larger "we" whose aid she requests in the service of the soldiers "we hope are all living." Perhaps unsurprisingly for a processual poem that is part travelogue, her focus shifts continually between the individual and the landscape, presenting a version of identity that is highly context- and detail-dependent and yet hardly individual. This version of identification might align with the AFFW's focus on getting the details of the scene, but it certainly eschews the AFFW's strong desire to close down "mistakes of identity." In Stein's interrogation of camouflage, as "A Deserter" reminds us, contingency and mistake are precisely what create identity, and distributive doubling is precisely what makes identity interesting.

In daisy-chaining the identities of pansy, acacia, locust, herself and the soldier—of geography, poets, and war—Stein is working with a theory of language that "becom[es] undistinguishable in the landscape by cutting across the landscape." This theory relies on the mistakability of camouflage to reactivate dead language. Stein calls the language that is most alive that which is context-dependent, and can therefore be mistaken: as she states in "Poetry and Grammar" (1935) and *Narration* (1935),³⁶ she prefers articles, prepositions, and conjunctions to

³⁶ Based in part on the earlier essays ("Poetry and Grammar" among them) later collected in *Lectures in America*, Stein wrote and presented four lectures at the University of Chicago in 1935, which were then collected as *Narration*. During this time she and Toklas were staying with Thornton Wilder, with whom Stein was team-teaching undergraduate seminars at the University. For more regarding the influence of Chicago on Stein's essays on contemporaneity and narrative, see Liesl M. Olson, "'An Invincible Force Meets and Immovable Object': Gertrude Stein Comes to Chicago" in *Modernism/Modernity* 16.4 (November 2009), and *Narration*, introduction by Thornton Wilder, foreword by Liesl M. Olson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). For additional strong work on Stein's lectures, see Lyn Hejinian's *The Language of Inquiry*

nouns, because the former “remain[] as a delicate and a varied something” while the latter are too completely attached to their objects or their ideas. “That is the reason that slang exists,” she posits, “it is to change the nouns which have been names for so long. I say again. Verbs and adverbs and articles and conjunctions and prepositions are lively because they all do something and as long as anything does something it keeps it alive.” Following Stein’s statements, Lyn Hejinian has analogized Stein’s preferences in language this way: eras of usage have set the definitions of nouns; these nouns can be thought of as the geologic features of a landscape. Though nouns do change, the changes are slow enough to be imperceptible to anyone standing in the present moment; instead of the diachronous, geologic history of individual words, a viewer takes a synchronous view of the landscape, taking the established features of the landscape for granted, but nonetheless placing them in relation to each other in the present moment. We might call the spaces in between the known features that which determines the atmosphere of the landscape—the verbs and adverbs, and particularly the articles, conjunctions, and prepositions—the portions of the landscape that are lively, lively because they are in relation and therefore in motion; lively because as words they are ambiguous or mistakable, and therefore “mean” by means of context.

Stein’s description of nouns and articles may help us begin to see what it means to break down the distinction between the figure and its ground, which is to say to take seriously both the danger and the amusement of camouflage and the questions around identity that the technology raises. Based on her description, we could say there seems to be a simple reversal of importance: rather than focus on the noun (or verb) in a sentence, Stein asks us to focus on the “ground” that connects these features, interesting in its relationality and therefore its activity. I am suggesting

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), and Astrid Lorange’s *How Reading Is Written: A Brief Index to Gertrude Stein* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2014).

that the type of AFFW identification interviews Stein and Toklas performed in 1918–19, and the journalistic photography around decoys and camouflage that were circulating at this same time, begin to produce an alternative type of war elegy: one that is attuned to the specificity of a loss, but also to the absurdity and contingency of that specificity. In turn, this broader definition of elegy, in which positive identity is not taken as a given but is rather precisely the loss in question, helps us read two of Gertrude Stein’s notoriously difficult texts: the hermetic long poem *Stanzas in Meditation* and the “failed detective novel” *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*.

Alice, May, and “Can”: Cameraflaging the Camouflaged in *Stanzas in Meditation*

Thinking of Gertrude Stein’s work as in part a response to the evidentiary norms around identification that underwrite camouflage most obviously means shifting the discussion of her thoughts on war from the memoiristic *Wars I Have Seen*, published in 1946,³⁷ to the processual portraits of World War I that are skeptical of any skeletonized version of identity and that use the very journalistic language of eyewitnessing to make that case against it.³⁸ But it also means thinking of Stein’s intervening texts as potentially inflected by the double take of camouflage, the indeterminacy of the double-take that is beautiful and dangerous and that makes romance,

³⁷ Work on Stein and war often focuses, for good reason, on her World War II work: her translations of Marshal Pétain; the suspicious survival of her art collection despite Nazi looting in Paris; and her and Toklas’s own survival as homosexual Jews who chose nonetheless to live out the war in Vichy France. For a comprehensive list of articles against Stein’s wartime politics, and a dossier in support of Stein’s work, see Charles Bernstein’s “Gertrude Stein’s War Years: Setting the Record Straight.” <https://jacket2.org/feature/gertrude-steins-war-years-setting-record-straight>

³⁸ For a comprehensive discussion of Stein’s *Wars I Have Seen* as an eyewitness war text that nonetheless employs “a journal-like, genre-mixing...anti-newspaper” to minimize moments of threat, see Rachel Galvin, “Gertrude Stein and the War She Saw,” *News of War: Civilian Poetry 1936–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018). Importantly, as Galvin points out, Stein and Toklas were flesh-witnesses to World War I and World War II; Stein’s prose style works to imitate the kinds of flesh-witness and eyewitness reports that would have been taken as serious accounts of these conflicts.

amusement and elegy proximate to one another. This in turn means thinking of elegy as a more capacious poetic category.

In Stein's own language, the process of nominalization is about contingency, and the processing of losing what is arbitrarily and contingently important to oneself is about denying, avoiding, adoring and replacing:

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. It is doing that always doing that, doing that and doing nothing but that. Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns. That is what poetry does, that is what poetry has to do no matter what kind of poetry it is.

[...]

I have said that a noun is a name of anything by definition that is what it is and a name of anything is not interesting because once you know its name the enjoyment of naming it is over and therefore in writing prose names that is nouns are completely uninteresting. But and that is a thing to be remembered you can love a name and if you love a name then saying that name any number of times only makes you love it more, more violently more persistently more tormentedly. Anybody knows how anybody calls out the name of anybody one loves. And so that is poetry really loving the name of anything and that is not prose. Yes any of you can know that.³⁹

In other words, poetry's fierce attention to a noun makes that noun meaningful again. But love's fierce focus is always a bit coincidental and arbitrary—we never really can say why we love who we love, or why that should make us want to repeat his or her name; we just do—and so in love a noun comes alive as an article would, relationally. In order for the name of the beloved to

³⁹ "Poetry and Grammar" 231, in *Lectures in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1935). The erotic overtones of nominalization are clear in Stein's own language, but as Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes, for Stein erotic intensity is a form of critique as well: "Love, sex, and poetry are hitched in Stein's theory, as they are in Williams's and Pound's....But Stein (unlike Pound and Williams) is negotiating a double territory between critique and fascination" (76). For DuPlessis, Stein's punning is a romantic logopoeia that is insistently analytical, a feminist critique of the "love plot" that makes language its erotic focus. Rachel Blau DuPlessis, "'Corpses of Poesy': Some Modern Poets and Some Gender Ideologies of Lyric," in *Feminist Measures: Soundings in Poetry and Theory*, ed. Lynn Keller and Cristanne Miller (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 75–81.

identify the beloved and no one else, it must actually be possible to imagine another with that name, and let the name feel wrong.

Two of Stein's interwar texts are in particular about this process of contingent naming and its contingent wrongness and loss. Both the hermetic *Stanzas in Meditation* and the detective novel *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* were published posthumously but composed in the early 1930s, following the identity crisis that Stein's first successful novel produced in her. In 1932, Stein wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* through Toklas's "I," and also asked Toklas to transcribe the longhand versions of a new set of poems, later to be the book *Stanzas in Meditation*, from the school notebooks in which Stein had recorded them.⁴⁰ This writing relationship, with Gertrude as author and Alice as transcriptionist, was a longstanding one for the two, and it had a private side: Stein would often write love notes in the notebooks, which Toklas presumably read but never transcribed. But *Stanzas in Meditation* became a principle way of writing back to that gap through editorial emendation.

In the summer of 1932, *Stanzas* became a serious battle over the indexical work that nouns, proper names, and auxiliary verbs can do, and the possibilities of substitution and contingency provided the main theater of operations. While revising the proofs for the *Autobiography*, Stein ran across the draft of an early short story that would later be published as *Q.E.D.*, which told of her unhappy 1902 love affair with May Bookstaver. Stein and Toklas had not yet met each other in 1902, but had, before their self-proclaimed marriage in 1908, told each

⁴⁰ I take much of the information in the section that follows from Ulla Dydo's archival work with the *Stanzas* in her *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises, 1923–1934* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2003). I am indebted as well to Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina's *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2012). Stein's chief work on the stanzas took place during 1932; individual stanzas appeared in diverse publications, and all eighty-three appeared together for the first time in 1956, printed by Yale University Press with an introduction by Donald Sutherland.

other the histories of their respective love lives; Stein left the Bookstaver affair out of hers. Toklas prepared a first typescript of *Stanzas* from Stein's notebooks, but apparently learned of the affair with Bookstaver shortly thereafter, and read Bookstaver's given name into Stein's every use of "may" as noun and verb. In the second typescript, Toklas convinced Stein, who notoriously avoided revision whenever possible, to change nearly every instance of "may" to "can." Ulla Dydo notes that the manuscript version of *Stanzas* contains these changes, too, in Stein's own hand, suggesting either that Toklas asked Stein to change the manuscripts or that Stein made the substitutions of her own volition. Or perhaps the two eventually came to a détente: a very few "mays" do remain unchanged in the final typescript.⁴¹

As John Ashbery put it, in reading the *Stanzas* "it seems not so much as though we were reading as living a rather long period of our lives with a houseful of people,"⁴² and in certain instances the effect of allowing (or disallowing) May Bookstaver to be one of our roommates is particularly stark. The final four stanzas, for example, are overtly about choosing. "To know the difference between two," to "say which of two," is to be a well-trained deictic witness: a soldier who points out the decoy; a camera that takes the place of a pointing hand; a Gertrude Stein or an Alice Toklas asking the necessary questions about a lost companion.

Stanza LXXX

May [Can] she be not often without which they could want.
All which May B. [can be] which.
I wish once more to say that I know the difference between two! [.]

Stanza LXXXI

The whole of this last end is to say which of two.

⁴¹ See for instance Stanza X.

⁴² Ashbery's review of *Stanzas* is collected in Hollister and Setina's edition, 51.

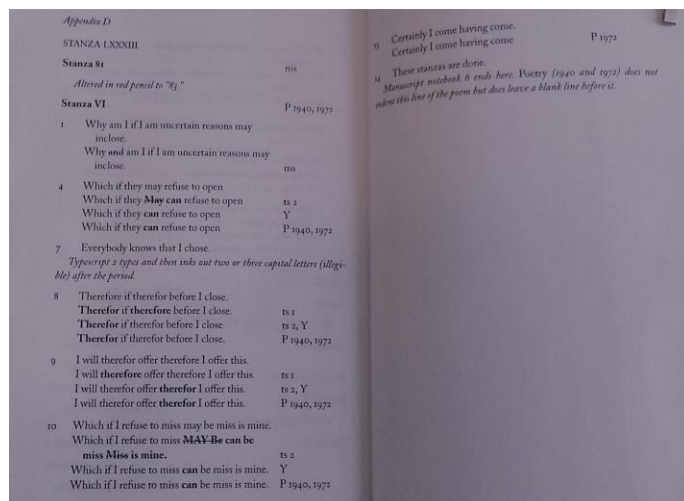
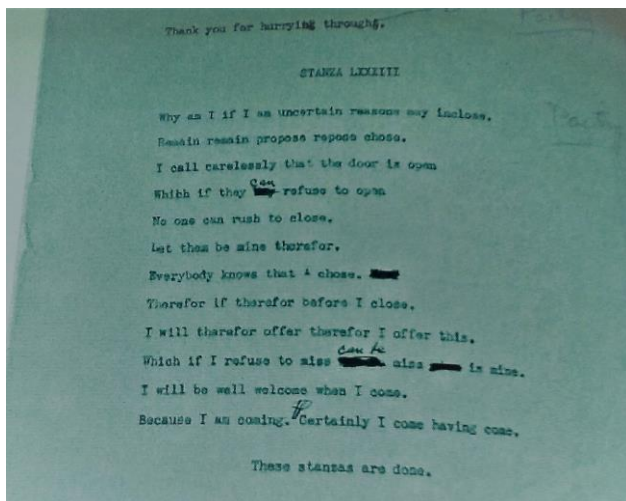
Stanza LXXXII

Thank you for hurrying through.

Stanza LXXXIII

Why am I if I am uncertain reasons may inclose.
Remain remain propose repose chose.
I call carelessly that the door is open
Which if they May [can] refuse to open
No one can rush to close.
Let them be mine therefor.
Everybody knows that I chose.
Therefore if therefor before I close.
I will therefor offer therefore I offer this.
Which if I refuse to miss MAY Be [can be] Miss [miss] is mine.
I will be well welcome when I come.
Because I am coming.
Certainly I come having come.
 These stanzas are done.

In reproducing these stanzas, I've conflated some aspects of manuscript and typescript history: Stein's handwritten notebook pages (the manuscript from which Alice was typing) generally says "may be"; in typescript 2, Toklas emends "may be" to "May B.," which Stein crosses out and replaces with "can be," which is what survives in final, printed copies of the poems. Identity is crucial, here, and identity is sonic.



(Figure 2.10 (left): Typescript 2, page 186, Part V, Stanza LXXXIII; Figure 2.11 (right): Appendix D, Stanza LXXXIII with manuscript, typescript, and printing variations. Reproduced from *Stanzas in Meditation: The Corrected Edition*, ed. Susannah Hollister and Emily Setina (New Haven: Yale University Press), 258, 378–79).

Numerous critics have remarked upon the absence of clear plot or reference in *Stanzas*, and Stein called it her “long dull poem,” her “achievement of the commonplace.” To think of the commonplace as long, dull, done, and simultaneously sonically salacious and unresolved is to say that the debate over the “mays” in the text works in part as a reminder about the necessary and intentional gap between the eventual audience for that commonplaceness (us) and the initial audience (Toklas). In a way, that question of audience takes over: Toklas’s attachment to the “mays” in this text seems almost like a dirty pun repeated to the very edge of sense, since there are almost no characters to speak of in the poem. Even if each “may” *could be* (plausibly or implausibly) taken for May Bookstaver, this work of wholesale replacement reads as an odd way to eradicate the offending relationship, since it seems simply to change the referent, making “can” over into a code word for Bookstaver—and since, especially in a text with so few referents, any outside reader would not notice the mays, notice the change, or know how to “decode” either one. The internal scandal of the text really does seem to become long, dull, done.

While Toklas's choice may indeed keep May Bookstaver buried in the text of *Stanzas* (under "can"), suggesting that the noun itself is arbitrary and that its intimacy emerges through its repetition, I believe her decision accomplishes more than simply this. As Ulla Dydo and Joan Retallack have pointed out, the effect of the may-can change in *Stanzas* is more far-ranging than the biographical debate seems to have been. First, "may" is not only a proper noun but also a temporal indicator (and the difference between April showers and May flowers is not insignificant in a text that does often deal in flowers), and it is also a way of announcing condition. When Stein replaces her earlier lover's associations with conditionality with the firm and knowing ability of "can," she alters the pull of the words in the world that makes up a stanza, and alters the stanza's agency as well. Take, for instance, this short stanza from Part I, which has few repercussions for the section as a whole. The only changes between the original typescript and the third versions are a switch between these words in the first and the third lines, but they exert a force on the stanza as a whole, changing its emphasis from something like the open sounds of contingency to the harder edge of ability.

Stanza IX

With which they may [can] be only made to brush
Brush it without a favor because they had called for it
She may [can] be never playing to be settled
Or praying to be settled once and for all
To come again and to commence again of which
They will be frequently enjoyed
Which they never do as much as they know
That they like where they happen to have learnt
That seeds are tall and better than they will
It is much chosen.
Every year dahlias double or they froze

With the "may"s in, we move sonically from possibility (maybe) to construction (made), and hear the rhyme in may and play and pray and they, aligning settlement and stability with

wholeness in the “all,” which might carry forward into the tall and the dahlias, depending on pronunciation. We hear the long “a”s in “favor.” The “they” reads as may’s counterpart and perhaps as a counterpart to the month of May: if the dahlias do not double, it is not the flowers that freeze but the pronouns, in a kind of sympathy. Reading with “can’s,” we move sonically into calling, coming again and commencing again, and into the impersonality of “it is much chosen.” The “or,” which throws off the syntax of the last line, comes home in full force: the options are multiplication or sterility, nothing in between.

Any text teaches its readers how to operate in its presence, but suppressed marital drama aside, *Stanzas* has a particularly steep learning curve, and one in which learning to read seems more an act of getting to know strangeness than it is a recognition of rhythms or patterns, characters or plots. The text is chiefly monosyllabic, repetitive, and full of pronouns that have no clear referents within the world of the poem. Donald Sutherland describes the accretive effect of feeling familiar with this kind of opacity as specifically American, for the text is one in which the words move “not unlike the sequence of units in a comic strip,” oddly “tend[ing] to stay put and not to progress, to stand or arrive intensively—to vibrate—but to contain no succession.”⁴³

Reading Stein’s understanding of sentences and paragraphs back into lines and stanzas, Sutherland argues that her lines are structural or spatial but that the stanzas as a whole are temporal.⁴⁴ Writing about plays and landscape, Stein notes, “I felt that if a play was exactly like a landscape then there would be no difficulty about the emotion of the person looking on at the play being behind or ahead of the play because the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is

⁴³ Sutherland’s introduction to the 1956 printing of *Stanzas* is reproduced in Hollister and Setina’s edition, 42.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40–4.

there....”⁴⁵ For Stein, the landscape of language is a present moment in which elements sit next to each other, a set of concurrents or synchronicities. Think again of a photograph, in which the notion that coincidence will necessarily occur—that the photographer cannot be aware of all that her hand will grasp—helps to ratify our sense that the elements in the photograph truly were co-present. Puns and rhymes depend, in their look, on the synchronous letters on a page and on the arbitrary differences of spelling that that synchronicity reveals—as Hejinian would describe it, puns are a panoramic fact of language—but puns also depend, in their meaning, on the diachronous history of the words involved. Though Stein cares for etymologies, she cares much more for the roughhousing that words do when a glance finds them together. *Stanzas* functions as an elegy not only because one of its concerns is a previous love affair, but because it asks us to think about the distinctions between the surface we are allowed to see and the diachronous identity that seeing can occlude.



(Figure 2.12 (left): Unidentified friends of Gertrude Stein’s during a group trip to Venice, c. 1904; Figure 2.13 (right): Toklas and Stein on their honeymoon in Venice, 1908. Photographers

⁴⁵ In “Plays.” *Gertrude Stein: Writings 1932–1946*, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: The Library of America, 1998), 263.

unknown. Stein and Toklas papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 76.)

In figure 2.13 above, Stein and Toklas on their 1908 honeymoon have not yet established their own visual signatures of celebrity; they look like any other Venetian tourists (see figure 2.12). “What seems a dead horse would, if closely examined, show a place of hiding.” Who is not looking? Who would find a place of hiding if they were more careful in their examination? The fake horse that is a “can” might hide a live, soldiering “May,” but, as these photographs show, the May is crucial to guide the audience; she must appear either in the photograph, in the hollow of the “can” (curled inside “the dummy horse here shown,” looking at the “observation post constructed within the hollow,” at the edge of the debris “cleverly camouflaged...to simulate a worthless house”), or, if she is not a physical marker like the tree-climber’s pointing hand, she must be subtended in the caption, reminding us to look more closely, to distinguish between “seems” and “would” in the cross-outs of the manuscript.

The first typescript of *Stanzas in Meditation* contains the “mays”; the second contains Stein’s handwritten annotations to “can’s”; the manuscript revisions similarly have Stein rewriting her lover into place in her own hand. The third typescript, which Toklas typed as well, presents her with editorial power: she simply typed “can” for any place that previously had a “may,” and Stein did not change these replacements back. By the time the book appeared in full in 1956, ten years after Stein’s death, no trace of the “mays” remained (see figure 2.10). As Bookstaver’s mays are buried deeper and deeper in the obscured autobiographical bed of the text, what rises to the surface is a question about the relationship between sonic contingency and choice, the surprising hold that names have over objects, and therefore whether synchronicity can hold when a geologic or diachronous replacement has been made. I want to suggest quite simply that these concerns, which are equally linguistic, philosophical, and generic insofar as the

elegy is concerned, become a driving force behind Stein's next work, her self-proclaimed "failed detective novel" *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, the 1933 novel draft that broke the writer's block that the celebrity of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* had produced in Stein.

"Listen while I tell you all the time": Contingent Continuity in Blood on the Dining-Room Floor

Though Stein seems intent on closing the door to *Stanzas*—

Therefor if therefor before I close.
I will therefor offer therefor I offer this.
Which if I refuse to miss can be miss is mine.
I will be well welcome when I come.
Because I am coming.
Certainly I come having come.
These stanzas are done.

reads the version of Stanza 81 that she authorized for *Poetry* in 1940—the same stanza "call[s] carelessly that the door is open / Which if they can refuse to open / No one can rush to close," and that insistence on non-closure is of course at work in the buried body of the poem. The tension between a sealed off loss and a resistance to closure makes *Stanzas* a modernist elegy par excellence. Though the elegiac meter and mode long predate the assumption that an elegy will deal in death, the twentieth century has taken the modernist elegy to be the work of mourning. Mourning work, as codified by Sigmund Freud in his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," describes the successful process of withdrawing attachments from a dead beloved and allowing them to recathect around a new love object. Those who are unable to give up the beloved are termed melancholic; their inability to create new attachments (or their inward-turning attachment to the self, born out of a refusal to surrender or replace the beloved) prevents growth. Taking the

elegy as the literary correlative to the mourning cycle, readers like Peter Sacks,⁴⁶ writing in the 1980s, would map the turns in poems like Whitman's "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd" as paradigmatic of healthy mourning: in ultimately substituting the poem for the lost president, Whitman is able to take comfort in the "lilac and star and bird twined with the chant of [his own] soul." This means that poems like Eliot's *The Waste Land*—in which April's fecundity reads as cruelty rather than as promise, and in which the various speakers' voices seem unable to create the peace they crave—remain melancholic, non-compensatory.

This is one, brief example of the way the modernist period, as read through its literature, has been taken as a melancholic era, obsessed with forgetting its forebears and simultaneously obsessed with collecting its own contemporary "fragments to shore against its ruin" in the effort to produce recuperative wholes.⁴⁷ This reading frames modernism and its avant-garde forms (the hermetic whole, the inscrutable fragment, the abstract artwork, and the devotion to an everyday that nonetheless refuses to engage the political content of its day) as Peter Pan-ish, stuck in childhood. The complicated love relations underpinning a work like *Stanzas*, and the almost ludicrous written drafts that trap that set of relations in an amber of coincidence and contingency, begin to represent a version of a modernist elegy.

As Judith Butler and others have pointed out, the inability or refusal to mourn (and therefore to come to an end of mourning) carries a political charge. Melancholia helps

⁴⁶ Peter Sacks's *The English Elegy from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985) is the paradigmatic psychoanalytic reading of the elegiac mode; my quick gloss of Whitman here is in the spirit but not the word of his text, as Sacks focuses on British elegies. In Sacks's way of reading Freud and the elegy, the elegy is both structurally similar to the mourning process and a symbolic structure into which the mourner can place her grief: the "compensatory power of literature" (xi) allows her to move on to a new beloved.

⁴⁷ On this point, see Tammy Clewell, "Introduction" to *Mourning, Modernism, Postmodernism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2009), 2–6, and Leo Bersani, *The Culture of Redemption* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Clewell traces Bersani's claims to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*.

individuals refuse the cooptation of their beloveds into a patriotic narrative, and helps keep devastation historically visible; it can therefore also help to bring previously unrecognized subjecthoods into public view.⁴⁸ Because melancholia refuses to participate in the national work of moving on, it has the potential to be a valuable tool of resistance. Even when melancholia is the stuckness of trauma, therefore, its ability to “keep things unsettled” is an important form of national work⁴⁹ and—for Derrida—an ethical self-reckoning that founds the possibility of intersubjectivity on a personal and a group level, both: “faithful interiorization [of the memory of the beloved] bears the other and constitutes him in me (in us), at once living and dead. It makes the other a *part* of us, between us—and then the other no longer quite seems to be the other, because we grieve for him and bear him *in us*...an aborted interiorization is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection.... We weep *precisely* over what happens to us when everything is entrusted to the sole memory that is ‘in me’ or ‘in us.’”⁵⁰ More recently, reexaminations of Freud’s “The Ego and the Id” (1923) and *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926) have shown that Freud saw the ego’s identification with the lost love object (i.e., the incomplete introjection of memories of the lost beloved) as a vital part of ego formation—suggesting that melancholia is not as distinct from mourning as Freud originally posited.⁵¹

⁴⁸ For Butler in *Frames of War*, those who are formally recognized by governments are “grievable” bodies; the “ungrievable” demand a similar attention, and the melancholy that stands in for mourning here marks a national failure to take these elided citizens into account.

⁴⁹ The language of unsettledness I use here derives from Patricia Rae’s excellent introduction to *Modernism and Mourning* (New Jersey: Bucknell University Press, 2007), 18.

⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida, *Mémoires: For Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay, Jonathan Culler, and Eduardo Cadava, ed. Avit Ronell and Eduardo Cadava (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 32, 33, 35.

⁵¹ See Kathleen Woodward, “Late Theory, Late Style: Loss and Renewal in Freud and Barthes,” in *Aging and Gender in Literature: Studies in Creativity*, ed. Anne Wyatte-Brown and Janice Rosen (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1993), 82–101.

These re-readings of what the elegy is and what it can do are important for recognizing the subjecthood, for instance, of Narcissus Deschamps, the war deserter who has no place in patriotic poetry but whose death by random sonic coincidence—colic or influenza—also makes no sense in a skeletonized version of what counts and matters for war literature. Thinking of elegy as closure and resistance to closure can aid our reading of *Stanzas* as a text that is hermetic, memorializing, and funny. And a more capacious, melancholic form of elegy is crucial for a reading of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*. As Jahan Ramazani describes the genre, “Modern elegies betray in their difficult, melancholic mourning the impossibility of preserving a pristine space apart, of grieving for the dead amid the speed and pressure of modern life.”⁵² Resistive rather than quietist, childish, or navel-gazing, Stein’s *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* examines interwar life in a small French village under the guise of a mystery novel; the text abandons the traditional injustice of murder to pursue the elegiac potential of melancholically addressing grievances that occur between citizens over the longer durée.

In *Stanzas* we watch Stein and Toklas negotiate what identity means, via their poetry’s concern “with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing” “using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing” the noun, the proper name. As I remark above, the proper noun’s arbitrary sound is important: because it is the subject of repetition, it sets a structure that the poem as a whole begins to fill in, and sets the sonic tone the reader will follow. *Stanzas* attempts to address and caress the noun or the proper name. As Stein camouflages May Bookstaver into her “mays” and her “maybes,” Toklas cameraflages Bookstaver back out, undoing the arbitrariness of the possibility “article” of May by replacing her with the ability “noun” of “can.” Stein’s posthumously published detective

⁵² Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry of Mourning: The Modern Elegy from Hardy to Heaney* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 14.

novel, *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* (1948), pushes the article-making of nouns to the limit by engaging the coincident and contingent tendencies of the detective genre. The ultimate effect reinforces the elegiac potential of camouflage.

Blood participates in a genre where traditionally a causal relationship adheres between an object and its referent. In detective stories, objects, names, stray phrases, or information that appears out of sequence begin their lives as coincidences, and serve a structural function, either as clues or as red herrings. As the distance-reading strategies of Franco Moretti argue, clues become the point of contact between a “dead history” and the detective’s present moment; they are the visible edge of the pause or state of exception that crime creates in the otherwise forward flow of law-abiding literary time.⁵³ The detective is therefore in charge of worrying the coincident edge of this suspension until she can explain the crime and allow normal time to resume. Crucially, her reconstruction demands a common listener, an independent agent who can ratify the world the detective returns to normalcy: perhaps more than other genres, the detective story demands a Watson, as the elegiac mode demands a listener.⁵⁴ Though Stein elsewhere describes the coincidence of war as soothing, almost nostalgic⁵⁵ and tells us that it was when crimes were solved or wars ended that there was “a let down from the interest” in the writing of them,⁵⁶ she also recognizes that in order for a coincidence to register there must be an audience in relation to it; an audience capable of change. Asked what she thought of the atomic bomb,

⁵³ A pause is precisely how Stein describes American soldiers during World War I: “standing, standing and doing nothing standing for a long time not even talking but just standing and being watched by the whole French population and their feeling the feeling of the whole population that the American soldier standing there and doing nothing impressed them as the American soldier as no soldier could impress by doing anything.” See *Narration*, 17.

⁵⁴ Franco Moretti, “The Slaughterhouse of Literature,” *Modern Language Quarterly* 61.1 (2000): 217.

⁵⁵ See Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (New York: Random House, 1945), 18.

⁵⁶ *Narration*, 40.

Stein answered that she “never could take any interest in it,” because “I like to read detective and mystery stories I never get enough of them but whenever one of them is or was about death rays and the atomic bombs I never could read them. What is the use, if they are really as destructive as all that there is nothing left and if there nobody to be interested and nothing to be interested about [...] [I]t’s the living that are interesting and not the way of killing them.”⁵⁷ Perhaps for this reason, *Blood*’s most common refrain is “§ Listen while I tell you all the time.”⁵⁸

Stein describes *Blood* as a failure for many reasons, chief among them being the lack of a corpse, lack of an ending, and the inability to keep details from proliferating, which was the reason she could not seem to develop an ending. But interestingly Stein defines a good detective story in a nearly opposite way, as well, calling it a continuity of beginning and ending in which the answer is a let down from the interest.⁵⁹ By this model, the best detective case is one where a new mystery crops up mid-story, perpetuating the suspension. *Blood* may therefore be a marvelous detective story, for it simultaneously recounts three non-simultaneous events that occurred near Stein and Toklas’s summer home in 1932: the death of an English acquaintance, which the police deemed suicide; the death of a neighbor, deemed an accident; and the sabotage of Stein and Toklas’s car, deemed Stein and Toklas’s own fault for hiring unscrupulous servants.⁶⁰ But Stein sees these events as connected, by telling us, “§ There were two visitors, not

⁵⁷ See “Reflection on the Atomic Bomb” in *The Previously Uncollected Writings of Gertrude Stein I*, 161.

⁵⁸ Gertrude Stein, *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*. Composed 1933, posthumously printed under Alice Toklas’s supervision (New York: Banyan Press, 1948). All subsequent references to this edition will be cited in-text.

⁵⁹ See “Why I Like Detective Stories” in *The Previously Uncollected Writings of Gertrude Stein II*, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1974), 146–50.

⁶⁰ On the complicated background events to *Blood*, see especially Brooks Landon, “‘Not Solve It but Be in It’: Gertrude Stein’s Detective Stories and the Mystery of Creativity,” *American Literature* 53.3 (Nov. 1981): 487–98.

young, both women. What happened, nobody saw, but everybody knew. That is everybody knew except the two visitors. They only saw the result, that is they were only aware of a result” (3).

Aware only of the results, Stein’s novel is set up to go about the process of detecting, telling us all the time not of the crime but of the crime’s lateral surroundings. Speaking both descriptively and generically, Stein’s narrator approaches these surroundings like a photogram—a form I’ll discuss shortly—examining opacity from all angles: at various points the novel feels like a society tale, a fairy tale, and a genealogy, and all the mundane details of daily living come up for review, from the undersides of cars to the eating habits of neighbors to descriptions of the garden. In Stein and Toklas’s war work, in the numerous possible definitional approaches to the elegy, and in the detective genre, these kinds of details would suggest the possibility of resolution—the possibility of choosing between “can” and “may”—if not a final choice or resolution. But where *Stanzas in Meditation* feels hermetic, *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* feels so open as to be unplaceable. The tale materializes through a series of coincidences that produces a narrative accretion, but in the end it privileges none of those details.

§ Lizzie do you mind. § If a woman is an old one and remembers to like any one she is not an old woman and she does not remember to like any one. § This is not a crime. § But it can become one if after a while the one whom she remembers does not sleep at night. [...] § The horticulturist the eldest son did not sleep at night. [...] § Now is there any connection between this and the fact that he had said that the hotel-keeper’s wife she who had not died in her bed but on the cement walk instead had walked in her sleep. § Do you think knowing that he did not sleep would make him say what he said. § I personally do not think so. § I think it possible that she did walk in her sleep. § I think in any case his saying this had no connection with his not sleeping. (33–4)

Here the narrative focus defines what is not-crime and then allows that definition to be invaded by what might be crime by swinging from Lizzie-you to Mme. Pernollet to Alexander to Mme. Pernollet to Alexander to Mme. Pernollet to Alexander to you to I, suturing mind to memory and memory to seeing or knowing too much and knowing to thinking, or more specifically to not-

thinking-so. Despite the narrator's insistence that there is no connection between not-sleeping and murder, a reader following aural clues will pick up on the pun that ties sleepwalk and cement walk, and might hear "dead" under the pile up of rhyme at said/bed/instead/said.

These accreting "clues" might be said to be coincidences, as (supposedly) unrelated as not-sleeping is to sleepwalking—and this is precisely the point. From here, Chapter IV veers off to discuss another coincidence that does not matter, returns to discuss a marriage as a form of coincidence as well, and finally concludes, "§ Do you see, nothing is surprising but a coincidence. A fact is not surprising, a coincidence is surprising and that is the reason that crime is surprising. There is always a coincidence in crime. § There are so many ways in which there is no crime" (36). The narrator's emphasis in all three cases is double: first, she insists that there is no causal relationship between the two sides of the coincidence ("I think in any case his saying this had no connection with his not sleeping"), and that this is interesting; second, she highlights an intrinsic interest in both sides of the coincidence, an inevitable trip into what looks like digression. But a coincidence is also a meeting of successions, a linking of seemingly diverse strands such that events seem to be contingent. Thinking of all coincidences as eventually related suggests that knowledge can only be retroactive, never proleptic, and from this point of view a clue cannot be picked out from a red herring: the diachronic interest in linguistic material, or even the calcification of events, becomes obscured in a snapshot view of any synchronous scene. Here it is proximity alone—of one event to another, one word to another—that produces connection.

Perhaps for this reason, for Stein's narrator "to try is to cry": prose sections rhyme and pun; the prime suspect and the dog share the same name, becoming indistinguishable; suspense falls into banality as everyday history turns out to be a fabric of small-scale crimes and cruelties;

in short, *Blood* flattens out. Slavoj Žižek explains the clue as the detail that sticks out or refuses to belong to a scene, a pure signifier without a signified. Once a reader has noticed a potential clue, she cannot return to the objective: the entire landscape starts to look strange. Žižek explains the detail as the subjectivizing effect of a text, its repressed phallic element,⁶¹ that which pierces or hits home. Stein's *Blood* shows that an accretion of sharp details eventually produces a bed of nails; the pressure of reading, equalized over this bed, is no longer enough to pierce the skin.

Stein calls *Blood* a failure because there is no way to separate the murder from its surroundings. She takes this to be a literary problem, the difficulty of extracting a story from the history that holds it: "the trouble was that if it [the murder mystery] all happened and it all had happened then you had to mix it up with other things that had happened and after all a novel even if it is a detective story ought not to mix up what happened with what has happened, anything that has happened is exciting exciting enough without any writing, tell it as often as you like but do not write it not as a story."⁶² But for me *Blood* does a different, perhaps more important, work. In its doubling of character and value, coincidence forces a kind of blending or weaving of narrative strains, proliferating and mutating interest and dehierarchizing crime by focusing to such a complete degree on everything that is not the missing corpse. As Stein's narrator tracks down coincidences or follows up genealogies, the text enters more and more into the realm of the everyday, which extends the possibilities for crime, because crime is no longer spectacular (murder) but rather the longer processes of decay, neglect, and disrespect in the past and future. Crime becomes something that happens (or at least could happen) to anyone. "How confused are you all," the narrator questions and simultaneously asserts, "but I, I am not

⁶¹ Slavoj Žižek, *Looking Awry: An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 88–91.

⁶² Stein, "Why I Like Detective Stories" 148–9.

confused. § It really is not confusing. § How many houses and families do you know about now. § One two three four five. § And how many crimes. § One two three. § And how many possible crimes. § Six” (27). Crime and its possibility always exceed the participants in the crime, an excess whose documentation and understanding seems to require recursion:

What did you say. § Could any place be shut away in time. To prevent crime. § Four three five what. § Has everybody got it straight. So far we have two families and besides a country house. § We have three times crime. § Remember there was a country house where everything happened one day, and other things happened the other days. § Then there was a funeral. Read the beginning again. (19)

Constantly asked to listen, to return to the beginning, to hear cement walk under sleepwalk or Alexander the suspect under Alexander the horticulturalist, Stein’s text creates bubbles of familiarity at the points where strains cross into coincidences. These coincidences do not mean, not even in Žižek’s sense of being pure signifiers; rather, like a loose tooth in the mouth or an anonymous set of hands feeding pigeons in Venice, they simply remind us of their continued presence.

§: *Towards Photogramming the Melancholic Elegy*

Where Alice Toklas purposely cameraflages the manuscript drafts of *Stanzas* in order to erase May Bookstaver as much as possible from the printed versions, the work of *Blood* shows a different photographic relation to camouflage, skeletonization, and elegy, invoking a yet more capacious understanding of the role of coincidence and contingency. The “I” of *Blood* begins the as the deictic, pointing soldier of camouflage photography, hoping to teach us where to look and when. “They saw only the result, that is they were only aware of a result. § Why should blood on the floor make anyone mad against automobiles and telephones and desks. Why. § This is what happened. There were dogs in the house by they were no bother. Listen carefully” (3). But the pointing soldier is in this case also the photographer, since Stein’s “I” is both in the story and

recording the story. This aligns her with the photographers of the new vision, a mostly European interwar art movement that touted the primacy of vision over writing but who did so, as Rosalind Krauss argues, by presenting “the artist/photographer as a writer and the camera projected as a surrogate hand—the instrument not of instantaneous vision but of writing...trick[ing the new photographer] out as a scribe.”⁶³ Reading through the lens of Sigmund Freud’s *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Krauss argues that this concern over the supremacy of one or the other form of reading reflects a technological concern with memory’s embodiment, making it again a contest over one of elegy’s main functions.⁶⁴

For Freud, as technologies become more pervasive and portable, they become prostheses, “the tool[s] by which man makes his organs more perfect.”⁶⁵ With the camera, Freud believes, man “has created an instrument which registers the transitory visual impressions, just as the gramophone disc retains the equally transient auditory ones; both are at bottom materializations of the power he possesses of recollection, his memory.” We might expect the camera to be a surrogate eye—a microscope or a set of x-ray glasses—but, as Krauss notes, Freud makes the camera over into a hand, able to record fleeting phenomena as memories in the way writing had previously been able to do, “able to record a present speech for transmission to an absent place or a future time.”⁶⁶ This is the *goal* of prosthesis, but Freud’s larger focus is not on the ways in which man *has successfully become* a god, but the ways in which he *wishes* to become one; the

⁶³ Rosalind Krauss, “When Words Fail,” *October 22* (Autumn 1982), 92.

⁶⁴ Krauss, 92. My thoughts here have also been informed by Hal Foster’s *Prosthetic Gods* (Cambridge, MA, and London: MIT Press, 2004), which gives a more detailed description of the “double logic of prosthesis” as both “an extension and constriction of the body” (109). However, Foster’s logic remains tied to the metaphor of castration complex; while true to Freud’s own work, this reading of prosthesis is less relevant here than is Krauss’s non-psychological focus on the middle distance between the photographer and the object photographed.

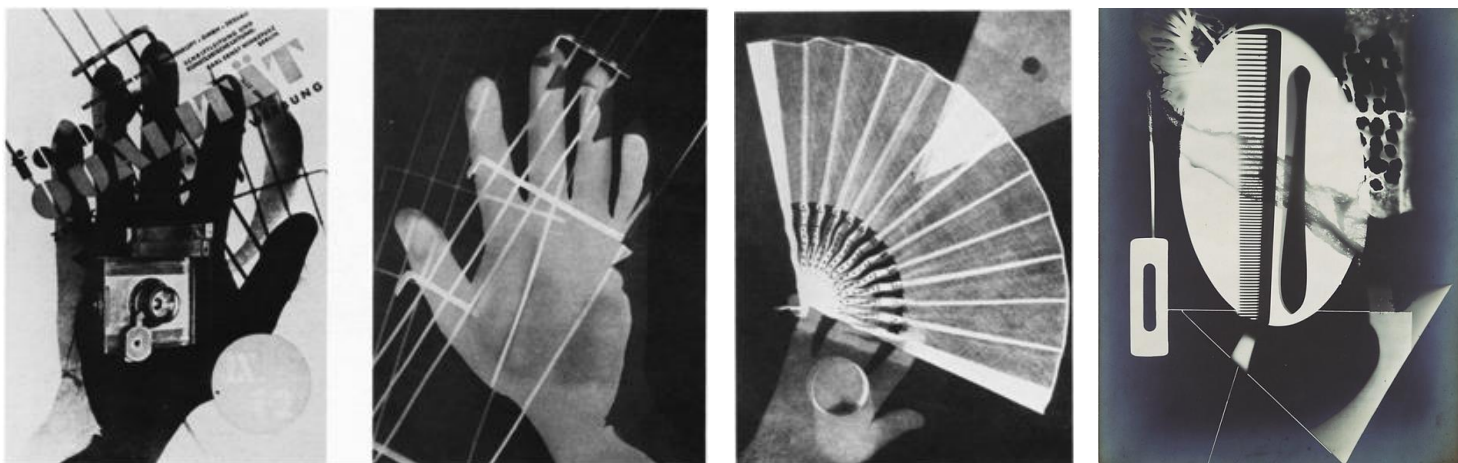
⁶⁵ Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1958), 34.

⁶⁶ Freud, 34.

flaws, insufficiencies, and anxieties of physical and metaphorical prosthesis are a deep source of discontent in Freud's text. These anxieties are mirrored, as I argued above, by the anxieties of camouflage photographs in general and their need for a deictic witness to guide the American eye. But the hope for a cataloguing, ordering grasp that is present in both Freud's work and these same camouflage photographs has an even more pronounced place in the photograms of the new vision.

To produce a photogram, the artist arranges a set of objects on a sheet of photosensitive paper, and then exposes the sheet to a light source. Because photograms require direct contact between the paper and the object, objects can never be closer nor more distant than they appear; their relation to their image is purely indexical in the strongest Peircean sense. Unlike a photograph, in which the photographer may wish to focus on one aspect of the scene but cannot help but bring other details to the viewer's eye, the photogram depends on the purposeful arrangement of each of its elements—and reminds viewers of the (middle-distance) hand that did the arranging. We can clearly see the “selfie-length” of the photogram in some of the photograms⁶⁷ below by László Moholy-Nagy and Man Ray—who was in this period Stein's official photographer as well—for their hands often appear in the frame.

⁶⁷ Man Ray's sense of an ordering grasp goes even farther: he makes his photograms eponymous, calling them “rayographs.” As Krauss points out, when the photogrammist's hand appears in the final product it simultaneously marks the work as “artwork” and as a product of “reality.”



(Figure 2.14 (far left): László Moholy-Nagy, title page for *Foto-Qualität*, 1931; Figure 2.15 (middle left): László Moholy-Nagy, [Photogram], 1925–27; Figure 2.16 (middle right): Man Ray, [Rayograph], c. 1924; Figure 2.17 (far right): Man Ray, “Rayograph; Comb, Straight Razor Blade, and Other Forms,” 1922.)

The photogram’s ability to order and regulate its components, and to frame them insistently as collections produced by an artist’s hand, is in part an effort to state authorship and to compensate (as the deictic soldier is) for what may intentionally confuse the uninitiated eye. Its ultimate emphasis, however, is on relationality, and that emphasis often undercuts the sense of the ordering hand. Photograms are collages, and announce themselves as assemblages, territories bounded by the components that compose them. Photograms tend to feature collections of everyday objects arranged to emphasize their shapes in relation to one another. The relation of an object’s own angles, for instance, or its shape on the page in relation to the shape of a nearby object, defamiliarizes these everyday objects by heightening a viewer’s awareness of the opacities and shades they create: though it’s vaguely possible to discern most of the objects in Man Ray’s 1924 photogram (glove or hand; pipe; fan; handkerchief), we quickly turn our attention to the work of these objects’ proximity; the left thumb and index finger coupled with the dip in the pipe stem mirror, for instance, the Vs created by the fan ribs, and it is these shapes that draw our attention more than the objects that throw them. Over the course of

Blood we experience a similar turn from the “I” as the subject-supposed-to-know to one character in relation to others; she becomes part of the town she describes. Chapter XVI in its entirety is a question: “Did I tell of the thing I meant when I said very well” (64). And the last invocation of Lizzie alongside the “I,” in the final chapter, shows some exasperation with their relation: “§It is almost at once why they call me as mine. § Think well of no danger that they will come or go away or no difference with which they last or no account for which in which arrange. § Lizzie do you understand. § Of course she does. § Of course you do. § You could if you wanted to but you always want something else but not that but not that yes. § Listen while I tell you all the time. § There was a country house in which...” (78–79). The “I” dissipates; the “you” follows her own interests; the two appear only at the angle created by the house and the tale.

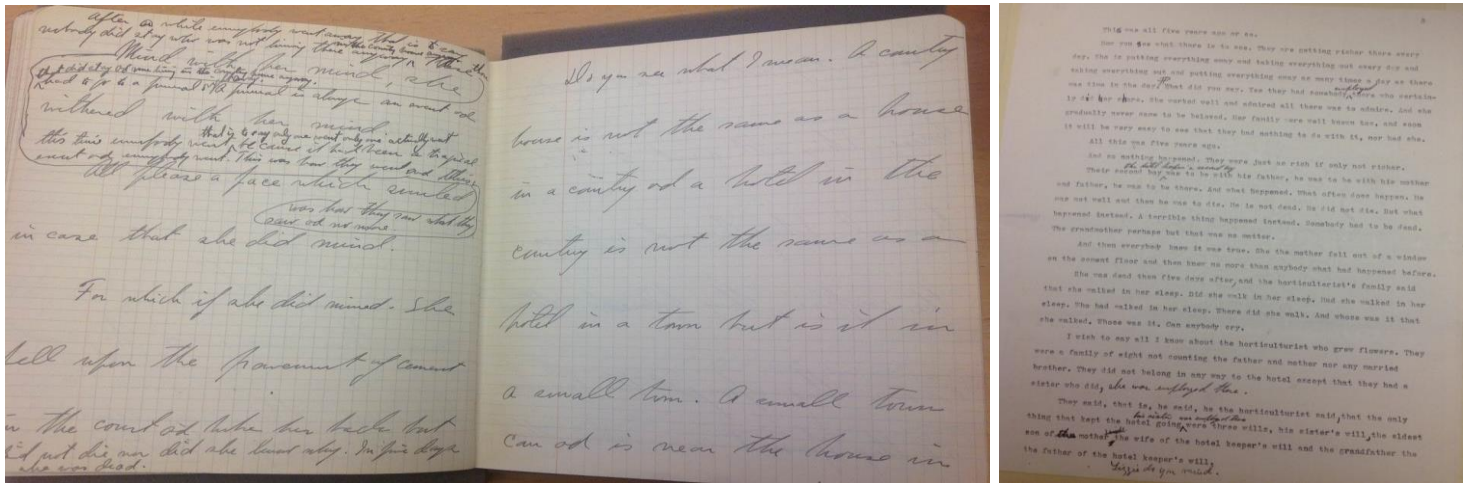
Photograms emphasize the relation between angles and light and dark—even when we can recognize objects in the frame, the aesthetic asks us to read for relationality rather than for content—and photograms are also eternally concerned with the middle distance. The hand in a photogram is often its author’s, and therefore the artist (the seeing eye) and the collection (the hand, the fan, the pipe, the unidentified object in the upper right-hand corner) are only an arm’s length from one another. To be at this middle distance allows the artist to laugh (“can you think this is funny?”) as well as to cry (“to try is to cry”; “a war is not a joke”); like the other objects in the photogram, she is part of the assemblage herself, but she is no longer its objective arbiter nor its main object. The middle distance also allows the assemblage of the photogram to continue to grow: while the collection begins as a chosen group, an elegy like *Blood* suggests that there is no way to include an object in a collection without including its history. That history is always relational to the history of the objects that surround the object, available in part through temporal coincidence and in part through visual and sonic mistakability.

The accretion of names, locations, and coincidences in *Blood* make it an informal elegy for the region, insofar as it is an assemblage record of the angles of relation between the inhabitants and their surroundings. The printed text of *Blood*, which Alice Toklas oversaw after Stein's death in 1946, underlines this public elegy. Toklas printed *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* with Banyan Press, then a newly established hand-printing press under Claude Fredericks, who was operating the tiny business out of the basement of a New York butcher shop. Fredericks's carefully chosen design typographically emphasizes the crossing of diachronous strains of interest in Stein's text: unlike later printings of *Blood*, where Stein's paragraphs are separated by white space, the Banyan edition uses the section symbol, which resembles the crossing of two S's (§), to set thoughts off from one another while continuing to highlight their physical proximity.⁶⁸

The result is a block of text, paragraphs that continue for chapters. In her correspondence with Banyan Press in 1947 and 1948, Alice Toklas may be writing back to Stein and the complexities of love's contingent entanglement. Her decision to include the section symbol and create blocks of text on the page closes some of the open doors Stein had left in *Stanzas*, making the text of *Blood* into tighter rooms (stanzas) rather than airy, open paragraphs. Around the time she began writing *Stanzas in Meditation* and *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*, Stein had posited

⁶⁸ In a February 25, 1948 letter to Toklas, Fredericks and his associate and then-lover Milton Saul set the timeline for *Blood*: they say they have been “working night and day (and Sundays) to finish BOTDRF. Blood is now all over the apartment and enters its last week of work,” and will then take it to the binders for publication by mid-March. Part of their slowness, they claim, is a problem of type: “Perhaps Carl [Van Vetchen] has told you some of the difficulties we have had—the most interesting being the abundance of ‘h’ in Miss Stein’s language. Due to the great number of articles and relative pronouns (plus the horticulturalist & the housekeeper) ‘h’ was gone when our cases were still full of all the other letters.” Fredericks hastens to point out that Garamond, the typeface they have chosen for *Blood*, is based originally on a French typeface with ties to the seventeenth century, linking *Blood* to France. Stein and Toklas papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 76.

that American writing differed from English writing in the independence of its parts—its words had detached from their prehistory and were now moving on their own—and in the sense that time no longer happened in necessary succession: “we really now do not really know that anything is progressively happening.”⁶⁹ For written texts, this means that laying words down one after another after another creates meaning locally, and through connotation: for this reason, Stein found larger blocks emotional.



(Figure 2.18 (left): *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* in manuscript. Figure 2.19 (right): *Blood* in typescript with Stein’s handwritten emendations. Stein and Toklas papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 76.)

With Toklas’s typographical help, the structure of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* may not be a failed architecture, but rather a productively undifferentiable space, a space that takes its atmosphere from its contents.⁷⁰ For a writer like Stein, who often crafted her texts to fit their

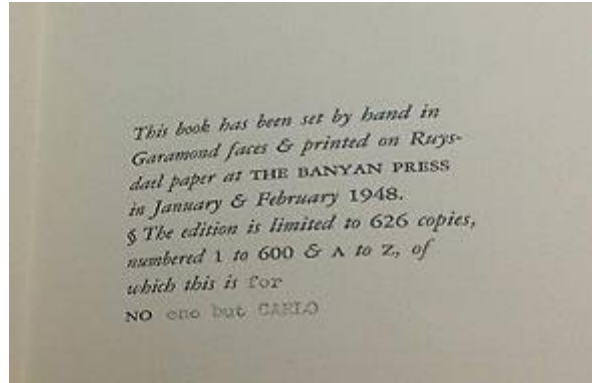
⁶⁹ *Narration*, 17.

⁷⁰ Toklas evidently thought highly of Fredericks’s and Saul’s work on *Blood*. Though the Beinecke does not have her correspondence to the couple, a letter Fredericks sent her on May 10, 1948 includes some of her praise for the printing of *Blood*: “we were pleased by what you said about BOTDRF—it was just the thing we wanted to hear most, that it suited and did not distract”; “I’m glad you think BOTDRF is both beautiful and readable—and tht it is essentially Stein and not Banyan. That is what we were aiming for.” By May 10, approximately 80 copies of

containers perfectly—ending a Part of *Stanzas in Meditation* where a notebook ended, for instance—the blocks of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* become rooms (stanzas) in a “house in the country” in which what begins as an individual history becomes a family history, and then a regional history; the history of a place. The crime that goes unsolved in Stein’s text becomes the opening of a series of elegies, all of which are a diachronous tunneling into the era and the landscape that occur synchronously: the work of elegy is, ultimately, to be interested, open, and aware of historical contingency.

Toklas’s typographical decisions in *Blood* also function as a personal elegy for Stein, a post-facto détente over the tunneling coincidences of *Stanzas*. As the colophon page to *Blood* shows, the hand-set print run was limited to 626 copies; the University of Chicago’s edition is number 574 in the series, for instance, and that number is carefully handlettered in red ink by the printing staff: “§ *The edition is limited to 626 copies, / numbered 1 to 600 & A to Z, of / which this is / NO 574.*” But the colophon page for Carl Van Vetchen’s copy of the book was personalized by typewriter, presumably by Alice Toklas herself. “*This book has been set by hand in / Garamond faces & printned on Ruys- / dael paper at THE BANYAN PRESS / in January & February 1948. // § The edition is limited to 626 copies, / numbered 1 to 600 & A to Z, of / which this is for / NO one but CARLO,*” the colophon reads; what I’ve emboldened has been added by typewriter.

Blood had sold. Stein and Toklas papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 76.



(Figure 2.20: The colophon page of Carl Van Vetchen’s copy of the Banyan Press edition of *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*. The Banyan Press edition was the first edition of the text, and was printed in a single run in 1948. Note that Banyan employs the section symbol §, which is not present in manuscript or typescript, or in later editions of the text. Note also Toklas’s type-written addition, wordplay around Banyan’s “no,” the abbreviation for “number.” Stein and Toklas papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, YCAL MSS 76.)

Dedicating the book in this fashion, Toklas partially replaces Bookstaver with Van Vetchen, who was a close mutual friend for both Stein and Toklas: in correspondence, the three friends often name themselves “Papa Woojums,” “Mama Woojums,” “Baby Woojums,” and circulate between the identities associated with each familial role (so sometimes Van Vetchen is Papa, and sometimes Baby, for instance, though the most common relations are Alice as Mama, Gertrude as Baby, and Carl as Papa). Toklas’s pun on “NO **one**” both names Van Vetchen as first in Toklas’s thinking (“number one”) and makes him more special than all 626 recipients, taking him out of numerical circulation entirely as “no one but.” Dedicating the book at the end rather than the beginning, however, allows the reader to be anonymous for the majority, and guarantees a listener for the story, Van Vetchen aside. Toklas’s addition also plays with the number play of *Stanzas in Meditation* and closes a rhyme with that poem’s last three lines:

I will be well welcome when I come.
Because I am coming. Certainly I come having come.

These stanzas are done.⁷¹

⁷¹ Here I cite from typescript 2, which includes both Stein and Toklas’s handwriting, rather than the versions printed in *Poetry*.

for NO one but CARLO

Giorgio Agamben has argued that a poem is most troublesome at its close, because the enjambment⁷² that characterizes poetry and ensures the important tension between sound (meter) and sense (syntax) throughout the body of a poem ends when the poem does, in what he considers “a poetic impossibility: the exact coincidence of sound and sense.”⁷³ The final line of Stein’s *Stanzas* functions as an envoy, the poetic device that is for Agamben the poem’s clarion call of emergency, its attempt to suspend itself before sound and sense could successfully coincide. Attempting to resolve whether the end of a poem is the ultimate unification of sound and sense in prose—which marks the extinction of poetry—or something like a messianic falling into silence that communicates everything, Agamben seems to hesitate. In the case of Toklas and Stein, Toklas’s rhyme closes Stein’s again, seemingly acknowledging her, answering her “everyone knows that I chose” by choosing her in the friendly, familial, and working relationship that the two women shared with Van Vetchen, communicating everything in the pun. But, like the coincidence signified by the section symbol §, rhyming “done” with “no one” also answers the question of the text’s culprit—there is no single one—and opens the mystery back up to the larger, prosier world of Belley that Stein seemed to court.

To be in the landscape and history of crime in Belley in 1933 is to be an elegiac witness to the before and after of World War I. What can studies of the modernist elegy learn, then, from

⁷² Strictly speaking, Agamben does not seem overly concerned with enjambment as the run-over line, but rather with the concept of a line or thought that continues after its space on the page ends. See the Dante poem he cites on page 113, which is not technically enjambed (there are three end-stopped lines of five, but more crucially for Agamben there are two kinds of rhyme in operation), but serves as his example of a poem’s successfully “falling into silence” at its anti-enjambed end. I take a similar liberty here with Stein’s end-stopped lines for the sake of their rhyme.

⁷³ Giorgio Agamben, “The End of the Poem,” 113, in *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

photos of fake dead horses, cameraflaged airplanes, photograms, and Stein's unusual, irreverent texts? To my mind, this progressive explanation of the new vision's inscriptions of memory can help us approach the questions that scholars such as Elizabeth Outka have recently posed regarding the distinction between the war front and the home front in the war period and just after. In her forthcoming project "Raising the Dead: War, Plague, Magic, Modernism,"⁷⁴ Outka reminds us of the lacuna modernist studies currently faces regarding elegy in the interwar period. As she describes the situation, modernist texts, and therefore scholars of modernism, frequently miss the "erosion of distinctions [between war dead and civilian dead] in 1918," when the influenza swept Europe and the United States. As I address briefly in my discussion of "A Deserter," death was indiscriminate; five to ten times as many civilians died during this period as had in the four-year stretch of the war.⁷⁵ Outka ascribes our lack of attention to this global pandemic (the "shadowed twin to the war") to the illogic of the pandemic, which often killed or disabled the young adult population; the ease of assimilating death into other death; and the difficulty of explaining a death that was neither just and patriotic or (to take that same death from the flip side) unjust and unnecessary: in the industrialized Western world, there is no vocabulary, no rhetoric, for an act-of-God killer that follows on the heels of a manmade killer like World War I.

The elegiac forms I have suggested here do not entirely answer Outka's observation, of course. But they do begin to suggest a way of examining the deaths that happened in proximity to war death—the deaths of horses, but also of French grandmothers living in the middle of the countryside—as equally important to, and imbricated in, those war deaths. This kind of

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Outka describes her forthcoming work in "Wood for the Coffins Ran Out": Modernism and the Shadowed Afterlife of the Influenza Pandemic," *Modernism/Modernity* 21.4 (November 2014): 937–60.

⁷⁵ Outka, 937.

examination allows us to address a lacuna particular to American scholarship of World War I: the imbrication of racial violence and war violence. The following chapter begins to help us see the racialized history of vision in the United States as part of what has been camouflaged and cameraflaged out of our national vision of that war.

CHAPTER 3: “THE LAST BLEAK NEWS OF THE BALLAD”: GWENDOLYN BROOKS LOITERS, AFTER
MAMIE TILL-MOBLEY’S BABY

I have argued throughout this dissertation that skeletonization is a process of information transmission gone awry. Always intended by journalists to be an economizing linguistic and visual technology of stripping information to only its essential elements so that readers could fill in the gaps and receive an accurate approximation of the original message, skeletonization tended to produce more than its constituent parts. Given a body-absent photograph and a caption, readers created ghostly, imaginative scenes (as we see in Marianne Moore’s “A Graveyard” in Chapter 1); given photographs that question the ability to successfully distinguish between coincidental bodies or objects, readers created increasingly complex relational assemblages (as in Gertrude Stein’s photogrammatic elegy *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor* in Chapter 2).

This chapter begins with another story of skeletonization gone awry. Here I examine the inadequacy of the original unmarked language of skeletonization, and conclude with Gwendolyn Brooks’s attempts to address this particular version of message distortion. In images marketed to white audiences, racism functionally skeletonizes bodies by stripping them of individual identities and stories and reducing them to “essential” information that can be presumed. Brooks responds to this particular form of skeletonization’s attempt to induce the sort of imaginative excesses available in war photography by slowing the transmission process and asking viewers to loiter at the scene of racial marking. This loitering is essential, I argue, to our understanding of what bodies and images the skeletonization rhetoric of World War I treats as notable and grievable and which bodies go unrecognized as such and therefore go ungrieved.¹

Even images meant to communicate the need for equal rights demonstrate the skeletonizing effects of racism in images marketed to white viewers. On July 28, 1917, between

¹ The language of framing and grievability here derives from Judith Butler’s in *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (New York: Verso, 2009). For Butler, images actively frame interpretability and understanding.

5,000 and 10,000 African American men, women and children marched silently down New York City's Fifth Avenue as part of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Negro Silent Protest Parade.² Most directly, the NAACP called the protest in answer to riots in East St. Louis earlier in July, in which thirty-nine blacks were killed and thousands dispossessed when white mobs set fire to the black part of town and attacked fleeing residents, lynching several.^{3,4} In addition to this widespread civil disruption, the protest renewed attention to a 1917 Memphis lynching and a particularly brutal and highly publicized 1916 lynching in Waco, Texas. The NAACP's protest flyer tied these forms of racialized terrorism to the daily inequities of "Jim-crow Cars, etc., Segregation, Discrimination, Disenfranchisement" that, combined, forged "the growing consciousness and solidarity of race...a union that may never be dissolved."⁵

² The NAACP called for 10,000 marchers; the *New York Times* estimated that 8,000 marched, observed by an audience of 20,000, and the *New York Tribune* estimated 5,000 marchers. National Humanities Center, "NAACP Silent Protest Parade Flyer and Memo, July 1917," <https://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/maai2/forward/text4/silentprotest.pdf>. Papers of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Pt. 7: The Anti-Lynching Campaign, 1912–1955; Series B: Legislative and Publicity Files, 1916–1955. "Negroes in Protest March in Fifth Av." *New York Times*, July 29, 1917. "Negroes Parade in Protest against Race Riot," *New York Tribune*, July 29, 1917.

³ "Race Rioters Fire East St. Louis and Shoot or Hang Many Negroes," *New York Times*, July 3, 1917.

⁴ This violence was a belated reaction to a slowdown in production of aluminum necessary for war materiel: when white workers at the Aluminum Ore Company struck, the company hired from the growing pool of black migrants who had come north in search of war factory jobs. Violence began over this division of labor and escalated over the course of the summer; the Silent Protest responds to the fever pitch reached between July 1 and July 3. See "The Massacre of East St. Louis," *The Crisis* 14.5 (September 1917): 219–238.

⁵ "NAACP Silent Protest Parade Flyer and Memo, July, 1917."



(Figure 3.1: NAACP Negro Silent Protest Parade, July 28, 1917. Shaumburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Photographic Prints Division. NYPL catalog ID (B-number): b15860790)

Emphasizing their unity, the protestors grouped themselves by age and gender, and wore coordinated colors—women and children wore white, and men wore dark suits. The *New York Times* made much of this unity, “Those in the parade represented every negro organization and church in the city. They marched, however, not as organizations, but as a people of one race, united by ties of blood and color, and working for a common cause.” In contrast to their elaborate descriptions of the reactions and attire of individual white women who were involved a silent war mourning protest parade in 1914,⁶ the *Times* coverage of the Negro Silent Protest Parade treated African Americans as a single entity, or as 10,000 bodies that are substitutable for each other: not a single individual reaction was listed, and no participant names were given

⁶ “Protesting Women March in Mourning,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1914. For example: “Miss Portia Willis, the Head Marshal, carried a bouquet of purple and white asters tied with black, and a great bunch of gladiolas and asters with broad ribbon bands was carried by Mrs. Bertha Mally.” “Mrs. Ida Harris, originally from Odessa, was one of the marchers. She is a suffrage leader in the Second Assembly district. Even the men in her district were wearing black yesterday, she said, honoring the Peace Parade and sorrowing for suffering relatives in Germany and in Russia.” “There were also twenty negro women.”

except those of the NAACP protest organizers. Instead, the *Times* noted the overall respectability of the march, with the exception of one political point. Because the march was silent, marchers held banners designed or approved by the NAACP, appealing to their audience through religious, economic, and democratic slogans. According to the *Times*, only one sign was deemed too politically sensitive:

Among the banners was one which immediately attracted the notice of the police. It displayed a picture of a negro woman kneeling before President Wilson, and appealing to him to bring democracy to American before carrying it to Europe. The police declared the banner to be objectionable, and the committee in charge of the parade readily withdrew it. [...]

Although the Wilson banner displeased the police, they raised no objection to these: "Make American Safe for Democracy," "India is Abolishing Caste, America Is Adopting It," and "Memphis and Waco, Centres of American Culture."⁷

Despite the sometimes disparate nature of the banners, the *Times* again emphasized the unity of the marchers' purpose, and ultimately gave the march their approbation: "Excepting for this incident [the Wilson banner], the parade was in all respects one of the most quiet and orderly demonstrations ever witnessed in Fifth Avenue. True to their word, the negroes made it a 'parade of silent protest.'"⁸

The Parade knowingly made careful use of markers of respectability—clean, coordinated clothing; permitted marching that began and ended on time; silent, coordinated steps—in order to reinforce the view that the marchers were law-abiding citizens deserving of equal rights. Especially following on the heels of the East St. Louis riots, respectability was also a safety strategy. But I would argue that the quiet, orderly unity that the *Times* praised was also a canny use of image technology, one that drew the strategies of lynching photography against the grain to produce anti-lynching propaganda.

⁷ "Negroes in Protest March in Fifth Av." *New York Times*, July 29, 1917.

⁸ *Ibid.*

The parade presented rows of marchers in similar attire for a reporting audience that was unlikely to remark upon specifics anyway—the *Times* individuates white female marchers in a smaller procession; in a large, African American one, the reporter makes no effort to do this, but instead thinks in large blocs of age, gender, and race—creating a human backdrop against which a series of complex argumentative points could be made in *written* format, where they were harder to mistake or take out of context. The camera’s near-panoramic view of the march responds to the logic of lynching postcards, in which the spectacle of the terrorized and dehumanized black⁹ body serves as the backdrop against which white bodies are individuated and collected to reinforce their dominant status. In the photos of the march or the eye of a spectator, the coherently organized and carefully monochromatic parade of bodies becomes the backdrop for language: the organizers have pre-captioned the image. The banner captions tell viewers that lynching is not only a crime against humans but against ideals; that labor, war, race, and patriotism cannot be disarticulated: the lynching of black males, for reasons that were primarily economic but were passed off as sexual, was the backdrop against which white patriotism could articulate itself.

Yet these images are haunted by the identities and individualities of the pictured bodies, the information that has been redacted in order to transmit these messages with the least possible “noise.” It is against this backdrop of redacted individuality that I now turn to loitering as the means by which poet Gwendolyn Brooks fleshes out bodies skeletonized by racism. In this

⁹ Though by the 1800s most lynchings in the East and South were of black men, the story is of course more complex than this. In his *Lynching in the West*, Ken Gonzales-Day argues that in the Western territories and as late as 1947, lynching often operated within the bounds of the judicial system and not supposedly outside of it, as in the South. As a result, though more minority criminals were lynched than were white criminals, the statistics are not as stark, suggesting that the West formed its national identity in relation to race differently than did the South and the Northeast. See Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850–1935* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 2006.

Chapter I discuss the genealogy of loitering as a juridical term of surveillance and a literary term of tourism or *flânerie*, and explore how Brooks plays these two aspects of viewership off of one another in the content of “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith” and in the form of “Ballad of Pearl May Lee,” two poems from her first collection, *A Street in Bronzeville* (New York: Harper, 1945). The first of these poems presents readers with a South Side Eliotic antihero for whose leisurely, loitering and self-absorbed *flânerie* Brooks’s narrator shows class-based disapproval. Nonetheless, the narrator continually addresses a “you” who stands in for a white viewer, interpolating surveillance of surveillance directly into the poem while also interceding on her protagonist’s behalf. The effect is to create a vision of Chicago that is larger than the character loitering in it, and Brooks continues this tactic of loitering in the margins of the storyline in her lynching poem “Ballad of Pearl May Lee.” There the structural effect is a clear avoidance of lynching through the pastoral scene of sex, an odd alignment with lynchers through a laughter that conveys more than speech could. The methodology of viewing that Brooks develops in these poems provides an ethical alternative both to the overdetermined, erased black body in lynching photography, and an ethical alternative to the potentially voyeuristic counter-lynching imagery produced by *Jet* in the graphic postmortem images it released of the fourteen-year-old lynchee Emmett Till in 1955. Brooks’s two Emmett Till poems, “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon,” and “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till,” (*The Bean Eaters*, Harper, 1960) do not picture Till himself at all, in fact; they work instead to invoke him through close, slow examination of everything around his murder. Brooks’s version of witnessing is a loiterly sitting in that rehumanizes without expecting such work to be anything more than elegiac.

When Race Structures Loitering and Loitering Structures Lynching: Law, Literature, Satin-Legs Smith, and Pearl May Lee

In the 1917 Silent Protest Parade, the route black marchers took corresponded roughly with the parade route generally used for civic parades in New York City at the time. This was unusual, for it was not the normal route assigned to African American civic parades: for instance, when plans were made for the 1919 victory parades for the triumphal New York 27th Division, white soldiers were to parade below 110th St., and the African American troops in the 13th regiment of that division were to parade separately, at 135th.¹⁰

Even with a permit, to hold an anti-lynching parade in the middle of Manhattan was a gamble. In the war context, the fungibility of black bodies effaced black effort within the armed forces, and that same interchangeability made it easy to reapply war rhetoric originally directed at the enemy to black American citizens during and after World War I. As Risa Goluboff has shown, law enforcement's assumptions about whose labor and life was valuable was nearly always determined by who was believed to belong. "[V]agrancy laws were linked to a conception of postwar American society [...] in which everyone had a proper place. The vagrancy law was often the go-to response against anyone who threatened, as many described it during vagrancy laws' heyday, to move 'out of place' socially, culturally, politically, racially, sexually, economically, or spatially."¹¹ Those laws had systemically been more frequently or harshly imposed upon black citizens than white citizens, though in the South Black Codes had historically also made vagrants or loiterers of whites who associated with African Americans "on terms of equality," or kept sexual company with them. In most states, the 1866 revision of the

¹⁰ *New York Times*, January 24, 1919.

¹¹ Risa Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation: Police Power, Constitutional Change, and the Making of the 1960s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), loc. 119.

Black Codes only strengthened Southern vagrancy laws, and the repercussions were still being felt during the Great Migration period and into World War II: African Americans who attempted to move North or West for industrial war-work were often hamstrung by vagrancy laws that made free passage difficult in an attempt to restrict their labor to agriculture.¹²

The First and Second World Wars combined the language of loitering and vagrancy with the language of xenophobia and enemies, to deadly effect. Despite the service to their country—or sometimes because of the equality such service suggested—black returning servicemen were lynched disproportionately compared to the black population overall,¹³ and the lynchings of 1916 and 1917, followed by spates of riots throughout the 1919 Red Summer, brought the white fear of large groups of African Americans into sharp relief. Black soldiers in the 8th Regiment were rumored to have stolen weapons from the armory during the race riot in order to turn them on white rioters.¹⁴ When white families protested the “Negro invasion” along the boundaries maintained by the Hyde Park-Kenwood Association in Chicago, they did so both in militaristic terms and with war materiel, bombing 58 houses and establishments between July 1917 and March 1921 and describing the black neighbors they hoped to deter as “unclean outcasts of society to be boycotted and ostracized.”¹⁵ Once the U.S. had demobilized, at least a third of all

¹² Theodore B. Wilson, *The Black Codes of the South* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1965), 68; Risa Gobloff, *Vagrant Nation* 116–117; John T. Eliff, *United States Department of Justice and Individual Rights, 1937–1962* (New York: Garland, 1987), 72.

¹³ See the Equal Justice Initiative’s 2016 report, “Lynching in America: Targeting Black Veterans,” (2016). <http://eji.org/reports/online/lynching-in-america-targeting-black-veterans>.

¹⁴ *The Negro in Chicago: A Study of Race Relations and a Race Riot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922), 29.

¹⁵ *The Negro in Chicago*. See Chapter IV, “The Negro Population of Chicago,” subsection on bombings, and Chapter IX, “Public Opinions on Race Relations.”

accounts of “minor” racial violence (which often led to attempted lynchings, even in the North) involved white or black soldiers, or both, often in disagreements over jobs.¹⁶

Needless to say, even in a desegregated Northern city like New York or Chicago, at any point of racial tension a black resident might suddenly feel that, though he had done nothing differently than normal and was simply on her way to the same job she went to every day, he was suddenly considered out of place, subject to the widely variable laws of pedestrian surveillance generally known as loitering law. Just after the 1919 race riots in Chicago, for example, flyers went up all over the South Side, written by black residents for black residents, cautioning that safety came through unity with white residents, and, paradoxically, that unity with whites meant moving through white spaces alone rather than in company, and as quickly and orderly as possible. The *Chicago Whip* put up a PSA poster:

The Whips Dont’s for avoiding trouble: Dont forget that interests of white and colored people are so intertwined you cannot harm one to any extent without damage to the other. Dont congregate on corners. Dont carry a chip on your shoulder. Dont allow your sentiment to overcome best judgment. ...Dont forget that the good name of Chicago is at stake.¹⁷

Woodfolk Bank, a bank staffed by African Americans and aimed at African American clients, made a race-based argument for patronage. Those who were smart were cool-headed, never loitered, and invested within their own community, the bank claimed: “Keep cool heads. Don’t gather on the corners. Stop all loud talking. Respect the Soldiers and visit Woodfolk’s Bank when you need money or want to deposit your money. ...LET US GET TOGETHER NOW.”¹⁸

And the Committee of Colored Citizens put it point-blank: to loiter in conversation with another

¹⁶ Arthur Waskow, *From Race Riot to Sit-In: 1919 and the 1960s* (Garden City, New York: Double Day & Company, Inc., 1966), Appendix A.

¹⁷ *Chicago Whip*, EXTRA, August 2, 1919, one-page sheet, in Waskow, Appendix B, “Posters in Negro Areas of Chicago During the 1919 Riot.” Apostrophes for contraction omitted in original source.

¹⁸ In Waskow, Appendix B.

was to be other than law-abiding: “ATTENTION! ALL LAW-ABIDING CITIZENS: “THE RIOTING IS OVER SO GO ON BACK TO WORK AND Help the Police Keep the Situation in Hand by Not Congregating on the Streets, Car Lines, or Corners, Holding Conversation.” Signed Committee of Colored Citizens.¹⁹ Two of Gwendolyn Brooks’s lynching ballads are set against this dangerous side of loitering: “Ballad of Pearl May Lee” (1945), which is discussed below, attends to the threat inherent in a seemingly pastoral sexual loitering; and “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed” (1960) tells of a black family that moves into a white neighborhood, and the violence that follows.

By the time Gwendolyn Brooks was writing her first book of Chicago poetry, *A Street in Bronzeville* (1945), the aim of loitering charges had begun to change. Increasingly, vagrancy and loitering charges were being used to detain or punish political activists including communists and union sympathizers, and, as Brooks was writing her Emmett Till poems “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon” and “The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till” in 1960, loitering and vagrancy had become de facto synonyms for civil rights activity, which were charged under that same set of statutes nationwide.²⁰ The charge was convenient for law enforcement because the claim was at the discretion of the arresting officer, had a vague definition at best that made it flexible to numerous kinds of so-called crime, and applied in public spaces (though officers sometimes charged private citizens with loitering or vagrancy inside their own homes).²¹ As a result, police could

¹⁹ Waskow Appendix B.

²⁰ As the *Baltimore Afro-American* put it, “For Integration? You’re a Vagrant.” *Baltimore Afro-American*, January 19, 1963, 12. Quoted in Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation* 123.

²¹ “In Birmingham and elsewhere, officials made their vagrancy arrests in private homes or other private spaces.” Goluboff recounts a handful of such cases, such as the 1961 case of a New Orleans African American home in which three freedom riders were arrested for vagrancy, even though the police had no warrant and were not given permission to enter. (120)

break up sit-ins and protests without worrying about court retribution for their actions. The charge carried social stigma, because it allied the plaintiff with socially predatory undesirables, such as the supposed shiftlessness, suspiciousness, and mal-intention of the gambler, prostitute, or itinerant who stole or squandered the goodwill and profit of his respectable social counterparts. Loitering made headline news in all the leading black publications, for instance, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested for it in Montgomery, Alabama in September of 1958. As Charles Moore's photograph illustrates, loitering was the kind of charge that would be brought by an officer who "knew it when he saw it"; the immorality of the act was often seemingly ratified by the fact that any photography of Civil Rights loitering was taken when the offender was in the course of being arrested—held by police, as King is here—or in jail. The very presence of the police or the jail cell in such photos "proved" the wrongdoing of the loiterer, who might, without an officer present, simply look like a man in the act of walking, standing, or sitting. In their presence, police officers indicate the guilt of the arrestee, and point to a purported public danger that civilians might otherwise not see.



(Figure 3.2: Charles Moore, "Arrest of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Sept 3 1958," *Montgomery Advertiser*)

For the law, being out of place is a matter of skin color, but the precariousness of that claim becomes immediately clear in a loitering photograph like this. Absent the context of the station house, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. could easily appear in a photograph and be classed²² as a respectable citizen—in this photo he remains a well-kempt man whose good quality suit, tie, and hat all remain in place even while he is thrown off balance by an officer, and even while his right arm is wrenched behind his back. From the point of view of a bystander on the street, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s exterior and interior match. From the point of view of the arresting officers, however, his actions are seditious; his respectability is a front. Loitering charges therefore trouble the one-to-one transmission of content between producer and viewer that skeletonizing assumptions seek to make, and this is in part because loitering has another, happier American history.

Though loitering and vagrancy were officially criminal charges in the United States until the early 1970s and continue to obtain today through stop-and-frisk policies, trespassing laws,²³ and stand-your-ground laws,²⁴ the sense of the term popularized by white, middle class guidebooks

²² I use the term “classed” intentionally: because vagrancy laws were sometimes fiscally determined, civil rights activists were often sure to dress for middle class respectability, as though always waiting for a camera or a judging eye. Despite the patina of respectability and the money in an activist’s pocket—meant to show that he or she was employed and not a vagrant or loiterer—the judging eye of a police officer might arrest on vagrancy or loitering charges. Ultimately, then, it was the court of the camera for which activists were dressing. Goluboff 121–123.

²³ In April of 2018, for instance, Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson were arrested for “suspected trespassing” in a Philadelphia Starbucks when they, like many white patrons, waited for a friend before ordering. Ultimately the charges were dropped and Starbucks and the city of Philadelphia settled with the two men. Starbucks’ promise to provide sensitivity training to all of its employees nationwide acknowledges that the arrests were a kind of racial profiling around who is allowed to wait where, and with whom.

²⁴ The Supreme Court ruled vagrancy, loitering, and suspicious persons laws unconstitutional in 1971–72, in *Palmer v. City of Euclid* (1971), *Coates v. City of Cincinnati* (1971), and

of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century was positive rather than negative. When Brooks employs the term loitering in “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith,” or when she uses loitering as a methodology of insider-outsiderhood in “Ballad of Pearl May Lee,” I believe she is invoking this literary history of loitering, as well.

In this white literature, to loiter, at home or abroad, was to pursue a leisurely exploration of the exterior world through the slight ironic distance of an amateur. Like Baudelaire’s and Benjamin’s *flâneur*, the loiterer is a good witness because he does not set out purposely to witness; his viewpoint is therefore a slightly more perspicacious version of what the average man on the street would notice.²⁵ As *Publisher’s Weekly* describes the term in relation to Helen W.

Papachristou v. City of Jacksonville (1972). However, as late as 1993 the Supreme Court struck down a Chicago loitering case because it believed the definition of loitering to be too vague (“ordinance’s definition of loitering as ‘to remain in any one place with no apparent purpose’ does not give people adequate notice of what is prohibited and what is permitted, even if a person does not violate the law until he refuses to disperse.” “[A] law fails to meet the requirements of the Due Process Clause if it is so vague and standardless that it leaves the public uncertain as to the conduct it prohibits” (*City of Chicago v. Morales* [1999])). Stop and frisk laws, however, remain disproportionately applied by race, and generally hamper the movement of African Americans and other minorities. Stand-your-ground laws similarly extend the castle doctrine that normally permits householders to deter intruders with force, extending the self-defense right to employ force against a perceived threat in any location where the user “has the lawful right to be.” Because both the “lawful right to be” and the perception of threat are often racially determined, whites benefit disproportionately from stand-your-ground laws and statutes, again hampering the free movement—not to mention the safety—of African Americans. In one study of FBI findings from 2005–2010, nearly ten percent of white-on-black homicides were considered justified, compared with one percent of black-on-white homicides; for states with stand-your-ground laws, the justifiability of black-on-white homicides rose negligibly, but the justifiability of white-on-black homicide rose to fifteen percent. See John K. Roman, “Race, Justifiable Homicide, and Stand Your Ground Laws: Analysis of FBI Supplementary Homicide Report Data,” The Urban Institute, 2013.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/23856/412873-Race-Justifiable-Homicide-and-Stand-Your-Ground-Laws.PDF>

²⁵ Charles Baudelaire, “The Painter of Modern Life,” *Figaro*, 1863. Walter Benjamin, “Paris: Capital of the Nineteenth Century,” (1935), and *Arcades Project* (1927–1940). My thoughts in this section have been shaped as well by Susan Buck-Morss, “The *Flâneur*, the Sandwichman and the Whore: The Politics of Loitering,” in Beatrice Hansenn, ed., *Walter Benjamin and The*

Henderson's *A Loiterer in New England*, a loiterer is one who "loves to linger over the beauties of any locality and enjoy each detail to the utmost."²⁶ Henderson is the perfect loiterer because after training at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts she travelled in Europe, returning "a true art critic without the pretensions of a critic"; that is, for Paul W. Bartlett, who wrote the preface to Henderson's *A Loiterer in New York: Discoveries Made by a Rambler Through Obvious Yet Unsought Highways and Byways* (1917), Henderson is an attractive loiterer because she serves as an amateur professional, even though her motive is personal profit.²⁷ Bartlett takes Henderson's challenge to be to convince fast-paced New Yorkers to "'idle' [for] pleasure and profit," and here, too, he puns on the financial concern that Benjamin would later argue put an end to the *flâneur*.²⁸ Henderson herself makes clear in her dedication of *A Loiterer in New England* that her loitering there is nostalgic, for she grew up in New England, and has returned to describe what it was as well as what it is now. In these cases, loitering is for insiders—or at least near-insiders. The "profit" of loitering is educational or imaginative, and is aimed at these insiders.

Henderson introduces a complication regarding insider- and outsider-hood when she begins her postwar guide to Paris (1921). There, she claims that though "its fundamental setting [is] practically intact, Paris is enormously changed" as a result of World War I, due in part to the influx of outsiders of various stripes—war refugees from elsewhere, as well as France's internal

Arcades Project (New York; London: Continuum, 2006), 34–65, Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), and, especially, Risa Goluboff, *Vagrant Nation*.

²⁶ Anonymous review of Helen W. Henderson's *A Loiterer in New England*. *The Publishers' Weekly* 96 (1920), 149. Henderson authored a popular series of loiterer's books, including guides to D.C. (1912), New York (1917), New England (1919), and Paris (1921).

²⁷ Paul Bartlett's preface to Henderson's *A Loiterer in New York: Discoveries Made by a Rambler Through Obvious Yet Unsought Highways and Byways* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1917), ix.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Though Bartlett's use of "profit" means to highlight cultural education, his terminology is reminiscent of Benjamin's later claim that the *flâneur* melts into his more modern counterpart (the journalist, photographer, sandwichman, etc.) through capitalism's monetization of public space.

refugees and job-seekers. These new Parisians are not Parisians, Henderson argues, and though they are homeless, they are not loiterers: “Paris is invaded by several millions of homeless persons, whose sole preoccupation is food and shelter” whose “uncompromising eyes” of “foreigners and aliens” “see in the great cathedrals only space takers, in the old palaces useless impedimenta.”²⁹ The experts have promised that “Europe will come back,” but Henderson sees the “poetic depths of the loved city” as forever separated from the present by “that vast gulf of emptiness which represents for us now the interminable period of the war.”³⁰ As in her other texts, however, Henderson ultimately finds that a picturesque bit of the cityscape helps the “true” Paris reemerge for her: even when one stained-glass rose window had been replaced with an air raid siren, Notre Dame never looked of a piece with the ration-suffering city that surrounded it, and now the rose windows have been put back.³¹ For Henderson, loitering is about finding the flexible and the irrepensible that architecture and landscape can index; loitering is about admiration, not hunger.

These literary versions of loitering strongly imply, time and again, that loitering is not simply a term of disapprobation but also a slight discomfort with the sight of one’s surroundings; that slight discomfort leads to a digressive or descriptive seeing that constantly falls between the touristic and the personal. Gwendolyn Brooks’s loitering poems pull from this terminological strain of loitering as well, so in addition to the sense of constant exterior surveillance that the juridical meaning of loitering lends, loitering in her poetry tends to have a slight pull toward the exterior or the potentially unimportant. The combination can be slightly playful, as in her “The

²⁹ *A Loiterer in Paris* (New York: George H. Doran Co., 1921), 24–25.

³⁰ Henderson, *A Loiterer in Paris*, 28–29.

³¹ Henderson, 29–30. Henderson does not have a book about Belgium, but we can imagine that, even were she to find nothing but destroyed cathedrals, the author would find the picturesque heart of the country in the ruins.

Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith,” or deadly serious, as in “Ballad of Pearl May Lee.” Always, however, the combination shunts the reader to the edge of what would purportedly be the poem’s main scene: the central event of a Brooks loitering poem is never the point that is truly under discussion.

We see this interest in peripheries first in Brooks’s “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith,” where the ostensible subject matter is the Sunday pleasures of an upwardly mobile young black man who figures as part of the Great Migration. Numerous critics have aligned Smith with T.S. Eliot’s Prufrock,³² which suggests that Brooks invokes the literary tradition of loitering here. Brooks’s narrator spends the majority of her time on Smith’s actions as he moves between sartorial choices, food choices, film choices, and sexual choices at the end of his day, and her attention is careful, if slightly disapproving. “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith” is the first use of the term “loitering” in Brooks’s canon; Brooks uses it to stop the action for a moment between Smith’s late breakfast and his trip to the movies. When Smith exits his home, “sounds about him smear / Become a unit. He hears and does not hear...” the street scene around him, and the interior scenes that the street noise indexes (alarm clocks as well as the El). His vision is similarly distracted: “Pictures, too, as usual, are blurred. / He sees and does not see the broken windows...” the spectrum of ages and classes that are on their way home from church. When Smith loiters, however, these backgrounds come into focus for readers as an echo of his own repressed background. Brooks sets Smith’s loitering off visually, using that line to anchor the white space between the hungry who cannot afford to eat at restaurants and the vendors who

³² See in particular Karen Jackson Ford, “The Sonnets of Satin-Legs Brooks,” *Contemporary Literature* 48.3 (Fall 2007): 345–373; Judith Saunders, “The Love Song of Satin-Legs Smith: Gwendolyn Brooks Revisits Prufrock’s Hell,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 36.1 (Winter, 2000): 3–18; and Ann Folwell Stanford, “‘Like Naked Banners for Some Gathering War’: Readers, Aesthetics, and Gwendolyn Brooks’s ‘The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith,’” *College Literature* 17.2/3 (1990): 162–182.

cannot survive without the traffic of the hungry; in a discussion of music that proffers and then forecloses the romantic, she goes on to discuss Smith's own hunger.

[...] men estranged

From music and from wonder and from joy
But far familiar with the guiding awe
Of foodlessness.

He loiters.

Restaurant vendors
Weep, or out of them rolls a restless glee.
The Lonesome Blues, the Long-lost Blues, I Want A
Big Fat Mama. Down these sore avenues
Comes no Saint-Saëns, [...]

Brooks describes men “estranged / From music and from wonder and from joy / But familiar with the guiding awe / Of foodlessness,” and then describes the songs of the streets as neither churchgoing nor the elevatedly Romantic music (of Grieg, Brahms, Saint-Saëns, Tchaikovsky) preferred by the class to which Smith seems to aspire. Loitering makes a quick turn here, from the blues of the streets that correspond with the hunger and depression of the men, to the Romantic against which Smith's life is ultimately defined: though he is full from breakfast, he could not “love” the Romantics because “a man must bring / To music what his mother spanked him for / When he was two” and everything else about his life story, “His heritage of cabbages and pigtails, / Old intimacy with alleys, garbage pails” and “all his missed desserts.” That history has a certain romanticized nostalgia to it, certainly; “the deep (but always beautiful) South / Where roses blush their blithest (it is said) / And sweet magnolias put Chanel to shame,” but this nostalgia is also overpowering: “The pasts of his ancestors lean against / Him. Crowd him. Fog out his identity. / Hundreds of hungers mingle with his own.” As the poem progresses, however, Smith considers himself full, individual, and complete: he and his date have dinner at Joe's Eats, which serves large plates and, crucially, dessert to make up for what he

missed as a child: “Coffee and apple pie. You go out full. / (The end is—isn’t it?—all that really matters.)” And the poem ends on the fulfilling note of his lover’s body, “*Her body is like new brown bread / [...] / Her body is a honey bowl / Whose waiting honey is deep and hot.*” The omniscient narrator is more skeptical of this repletion, and it is the moment of loitering that explains why this is so.

Smith’s idling gives us time to explore the street scene and read in it the sympathy for deep poverty that is a common theme in Brooks’s *A Street in Bronzeville*; by negation, his loitering also reinscribes the boundaries of his world, since the farther reach of the imagination, Romantic music, is outside of his appreciative scope even though he can now afford dessert. Brooks’s treatment of Smith is charitable overall, though it may not initially seem so. The poem seems to question Smith by negation; like the mention that there is no Saint-Saens, the omniscient speaker notes Smith’s idling, his decision to skip church, his roster of female company, his expensive fashion choices, and his general preference for the exterior over the interior, as in the street scene where he neither hears nor sees distinctly. In this context, his loitering may be the imaginative condition that allows us as readers to witness the street scene around him and to come to understand Smith’s personal history and motivations; though the narrator does not seem to believe Smith is privy to these himself, she is in constant dialogue with these aspects of his personality, forestalling readerly criticism by chiding him gently herself. Smith’s loitering is a resting point for readers, so that they may gather a more complete sense of the scene.

Loitering has a sharper, more dangerous edge in Brooks’s “Ballad of Pearl May Lee,” where surveillance seems even more pernicious. In this poem, Brooks actualizes the link between the effect of war witnessing and life on the home front by allowing its witness to loiter

outside of the safer (if more closely surveilled) urban scene that she normally employs. The female speaker witnesses from what is presumably a Southern home as her lover Sammy is “wrapped around a cottonwood tree” outside of her line of sight. Sammy is killed by a white mob, presumably somewhere in the South, for consummating what the speaker takes to be the consensual desire for a lighter taste of the milk and cream of a white woman’s “pink and white honey.” The entire poem is addressed to Sammy and spoken in Pearl May Lee’s voice as his lover, and the articulateness of Lee’s descriptions give the reader a clear sense of the scene and of her emotions regarding her lover’s infidelity and the consequences to which that infidelity leads. But her emotions are articulated best in a sound rather than a set of words: her rage manifests as laughter.³³ That laughter is a self-destructive force—“I cut my lungs with laughter, / Laughter, / Laughter. / I cut my lungs with laughter”—and, perhaps, a self-salving force—“And what was I doing? Laughing still. / Thoug never was a poor girl lornner”; “Oh, dig me out of my don’t-despair. / Pull me out of my poor-me. / Get me a garment of red to wear. / You had it coming surely.” From the outside, however, the eruption of that internal struggle reads as either passive inaction—“They dragged you into a dusty cell. / [...] And what was I doing? Laughing still”—or as actively menacing—“And I was laughing, down at my house. / Laughing fit to kill.”

Either interpretation aligns the speaker with the white crowd of “a hundred hoot[ing] after” Sammy. Her laughter is set off from others’ by a stanza break and a geographical break between their lynching in what is presumably a forest and her indoor imagination of that scene, but she also leaps those breaks by a conjunction: “And they laughed when they heard you wail. / Laughed, / Laughed. / They laughed when they heard you wail. // And I was laughing, down at

³³ For an excellent reading of Pearl May Lee’s rage, see the introduction to Jacqueline Goldsby’s *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). My treatment of the poem expands on Goldsby’s, which does not associate the speaker’s laughter with the crowd’s.

my house. / Laughing fit to kill.” Sammy’s desires are tied up in racism’s logic, and the speaker’s laughter at the idea that justice has been served—“surely, surely”—is also an uncomfortable expression of momentary alignment with the white lynch mob whose laughter sounds like hers.

As a form of potentially useless expression, Pearl May Lee’s laughter starts alongside Sammy’s incarceration, *in medias res*: “Then they took you, off to the jail / A hundred hooting after. / And you should have heard me at my house. / I cut my lungs with laughter.” While the action around Sammy’s lynching takes place in the past tense throughout the poem, the speaker’s laughter is in either in the continuous past (“And I was laughing, down at my house. / Laughing fit to kill”) or in a past tense that also reads as present (as in “I cut my lungs with laughter”); foregrounding the imploring, present-tense imperative: “Oh dig me out of my don’t-despair. / Pull me out of my poor-me. / Get me a garment of red to wear. / You had it coming surely, / Surely, / Surely, / You had it coming surely.” When Pearl May Lee looks and laughs in the present tense, she is carrying the past into the present, attaching these spaces and temporalities through loitering.

Repetition is customary in the ballad form, and here the fourth stanza, “But you paid for your white arms, Sammy boy, / And you didn’t pay with money...” and this fifth, imperative stanza repeat with slight variation as the final stanzas of the poem, again with the effect of pulling the past into the present. The repetition amplifies the original point, but also—importantly—changes it slightly. The penultimate stanza uses “dinner” where “white arms” were before, emphasizing a move from the blazon to the symbolism of eating for which it seems more immediately relevant that Sammy would have to “pay the bill,” a move that seems to normalize the lynching even though dinner’s cost is human flesh and suffering, “your [Sammy’s] hide and

my [Pearl May Lee's] heart." The final stanza includes "ohs" before each of the imperatives, and end stops each line with a period rather than the first iteration's commas. The effect here is more subtle: in stanza five, the lines read hypotactically, so that the two repetitions of "surely" seem to reinforce "you had it coming." In the final stanza, the aspirate "ohs" could be taken as invocation, but read instead as a turn from laughter to sigh or lamentation. By forcing fuller end stops, Brooks unhooks the clauses of the stanza, creating parataxis rather than hypotaxis. Together, these changes emphasize finality, but they do not suggest consequentiality: each "surely" stands alone, more a question than a convinced certainty. In this the final stanza undoes the tit-for-tat payment plan rationale of the penultimate stanza, asking, *did* Sammy have it coming? *should* he have had it coming?

Though Pearl May Lee acknowledges Sammy's death at the hands of the anonymous "they," makes clear that the death is extrajudicial, and associates herself with this murder in thought if not in deed, her focus is not on the lynching, which takes up just four lines in the poem. When Brooks's speaker presents Sammy's lynching, she does so quickly and as a near non-event so far as the poem is concerned, though of course the lynching is significant to the speaker. The short lynching stanza takes its power not from new descriptive energy but from the rest of the poem's fabric. "And my glory but Sammy she did! She did / And they stole you out of the jail. / They wrapped you around a cottonwood tree. / And they laughed when they heard you wail." The first line reminds us of the white lover's promise to "tell every white man in this town"; the second, though new, reminds us of the second stanza in which "they" "dragged you off to jail"; the third is entirely new and imagistic enough to prevent us from knowing for certain what was done to Sammy, and the fourth's laughter is a combination of the white laughter throughout the poem and—as we learn at the beginning of the next stanza—the speaker's own

laughter. By leaving open-ended what kind of violence Sammy suffers, Pearl May Lee seems to turn away from the scene. The rage expressed in the poem suggests that she does not care what Sammy's fate was or that the specifics of his fate do not matter—although of course her impotent laughter, her assertions about her loneliness and her despair, and the very non-specificity of the lynching suggest instead that her lover's suffering is in fact too painful to her for her to encounter. Brooks encodes that turn away from the violence and pain of lynching itself within the plot and sound repetitions of the poem at large, so that the lynching threads out into the white lover's speech above and the sex act itself, into Sammy's earlier jailing, and into the poem's ubiquitous laughter.

Against that backdrop of laughter's necessary and "useless expression" Pearl May Lee's focus twists. Rather than a full, descriptive encounter with the lynching, Pearl May Lee "crushes" her lover's sex scene "in a steel of study."³⁴ When she "fancies" Sammy's encounter with the white woman, Sammy's timescale meets Pearl May Lee's for the first time, and description gets thick:

I fancy you out on the fringe of town,
The moon an owl's eye minding;
The sweet and thick of the cricket-belled dark,
The fire within you winding...
Winding,
Winding...
The fire within you winding.

Say, she was white like milk, though, wasn't she?
And her breasts were cups of cream.
In the back of her Buick you drank your fill.

³⁴ This language is from Brooks's poem "looking," also in *A Street in Bronzeville*. "Looking" emphasizes the impotence of a parent's desire to protect her child from all the cruelties of soldier life; looking is better than speaking, the poem suggests, because language is superfluous and looking at least allows a kind of temporary control, since the image can be saved in the mind's eye.

Then she roused you out of your dream.
[...]

This is where the poem lingers: one stanza on the pastoral setting, in the present tense; one on the body of the lover and the sex itself, in the past tense. Initially, the vividness of Pearl May Lee's description, and the content of that description itself, removes us from dusty jail cells by pastoralizing the dream of sex, setting it in the land of crickets, moons, owls, cream-white beloveds, and internal fires. This turn is important precisely for its vividness and its reconstruction: for the first and only time in this poem, there is another avenue for social relations. That avenue is beautiful, and the poem loiters there. But that same turn from the extrajudicial landscape to this dreamscape also reads as escapism, and Brooks circumscribes it even as she continues to describe it. She reminds us that the pastoral is also always a space of oversight: it is not outside of town but at the "fringe" of town; the moon's eye surveils this illicit sex, and "shame [...] thread[s] through" the white lover immediately. The two stanzas that follow the imagined description of the white lover's body are in that lover's voice, and her speech becomes the launching point of the lynch mob's retaliation. One cannot remain in the pastoral for long.

In her generic and formal swings between urban and pastoral; narrative, ballad and (especially in the soldier section of *A Street in Bronzeville*) sonnet, Brooks works in a digressive mode that seems initially aligned with Ross Chambers's definition of loiterature. Among other things, loiterature "understands reality, nephew-fashion, to be a cultural matter and categories therefore to be generically constituted"; "loiterature demonstrates its generic understanding of the constitution of reality by its conformity to two consequences that flow from such an understanding: the possibility of digression and the familiarity of the other. If generic categories are contexts that can be differentiated but not separated, then slippage between contexts is

always possible and digression, as the mode of such slippage, demonstrates their continuity.”³⁵

Throughout her career, Brooks’s poetry loiters in this fashion, modulating genres in relation to law and aesthetics both in order to show the way that reality slips between them. As she explains in an interview with George Stavros in 1970,

Stavros: How do you feel about some of your other poems, now that you’ve mentioned those with specific social commentary? Is it fair to classify them in the same way—for example, the Beverly Hills, Chicago” poem or “A Bronzeville Mother Loiters in Mississippi. Meanwhile, a Mississippi Mother Burns Bacon”?

Brooks: I couldn’t put these poems in a second little book, under the title “Social Poems,” “Social Speech.” I just feel that they’re poems. I think the wonderment or resentment is inside the person who is making the accusation, if it is an accusation, and usually when people about the social content of the poems, they are accusing you of doing something dastardly.

Stavros: I didn’t mean to do that. But one more point. You wrote in 1950 that poetry must do double duty: “At the present time, poets who happen also to be Negroes are twice-tried. They have to write poetry, and they have to remember that they are Negroes.” Then several lines later: “*They* are likely to find significances in those subjects not instantly obvious to their fairer fellows. The raindrop may seem to them represent racial tears....The golden sun might remind them that they are burning.”

Brooks: That’s carrying it a stretch too far, as poets will do, I suppose; but at least in Chicago we have had spirited conversations about whether a black poet has the right to deal with trees, to concern himself with trees. And one of the things that I’ve always said was, certainly, certainly a black poet may be involved in a concern for trees, if only because when he looks at one he thinks of how his ancestors have been lynched thereon. Well, that’s a way of saying that in the black experience *everything* is important just as it is in the white experience.

Stavros: And it can be important in its own right, can’t it? It is, of course, possible for anyone to look at a tree and see just a tree, or...?

Brooks: It is possible, but if a black person looks *long* enough, he just might think of other things that a white person might not...especially if you’ve seen some of the pictures in *Jet* magazine of what has happened on some of those trees—horrific.³⁶

Even when Brooks’s *Satin-Legs Smith* is “just” loitering, then, her loitering poems show the impact of loitering law, and of lynching’s tie to the heightened visibility of black bodies in spaces that are presumed to be white. And these poems reinforce how strongly the public spaces

³⁵ Ross Chambers, *Loiterature* 52.

³⁶ George Stavros, “An Interview with Gwendolyn Brooks,” *Contemporary Literature* 11.1 (Winter 1970): 19–20.

of patriotism are assumed to be white, and how vulnerable the white private home is assumed to be. “Ballad of Pearl May Lee” is indeterminate in its historical setting: it exists at any point after the easy availability of Buick cars, and in any part of the country where cottonwoods grow. Yet in addition to the Jim Crow public sentiment that animates the vigilante crowd, loitering laws could stop either Sammy or his white lover “on the fringe of town,” and the “shame” that causes the lover to cry rape has as one potential source the knowledge that her consensual desire would be read as prostitution. It is this juridical context in which Pearl May Lee invokes “the moon an owl’s eye minding,” and in this juridical context that Satin-Legs Smith’s ancestors “lean against him”: again, a disproportionate number of black American servicemen were lynched while in uniform—sometimes for *wearing* their uniforms—and many lynchings began with a black man reputedly “loitering” near a white woman’s house.³⁷ Smith’s childhood in the South and his adulthood in Chicago suggest his parents may be part of the great migration of the 1920s; the reference to Mickey Mouse marks his Sunday trip to the movies as definitively post-1928, and Smith’s zoot-suit places him in the 1940s. Smith’s suit also reinforces our sense that, even in Chicago, Smith is bound by loitering laws that are attuned to his status as an African American male: the 1943 zoot-suit riot of Los Angeles targeted minorities who chose the fashion, aligning

³⁷ Philip Dray ties the crime of loitering and the fear of soldiering together: “Corporal John C. Jones’s ‘surliness’ rubbed folks in Minden, Louisiana the wrong way when returned from overseas.... On August 8, 1946, police charged Jones with ‘loitering’ for having been discovered in a white woman’s backyard, even though the woman, Mrs. Sam Maddry, Jr., refused to press charges, and it’s not clear whether he had even been in the vicinity.” Jones was brutally lynched for this supposed crime. Regarding returning World War I soldiers, Dray reminds us, “Of seventy-six reported lynchings of blacks nationwide in 1919, many were of returning soldiers. Whites, it seemed, were afraid that having learned ‘social equality,’ that is, the privilege of sleeping with white women, as was vividly rumored, in France, returning blacks would surely expect the same kinds of rights here and would be uncontrollable. Veterans were attacked with baseball bats, arrested on trumped-up charges, assaulted for even discussing their wartime service.” Philip Dray, *At the Hands of Persons Unknown: The Lynching of Black America* (New York: Random House, 2002), 374, 247–48.

a lack of patriotism with race itself, through sartorial expression. Though he is likely generally safe in his own neighborhood on a Sunday afternoon, when Smith wears his suit outside, he is particularly vulnerable to charges of vagrancy, loitering, or worse. When Brooks openly engages this term, she imports loitering's power not only to provide an access to the romanticized past, but also loitering's power to show that past as other than picturesque or ideal.

The Lynching Postcard Triple-Take: Loitering Next to Emmett

The structural loitering in Gwendolyn Brooks's "Ballad of Pearl May Lee" begins to offer a methodological counter to the kind of viewing generally associated with lynching photography. Brooks's poem includes the lynching as its main event, but addresses that event aslant by turning its main narrative attention to the pastoralized sex scene between Sammy and his white lover, and by using the repetition inherent in the ballad structure to reinforce the effect of the sex and the lynching on Pearl May Lee, putting her in uncomfortable, temporary alignment with the white lynch party. Refocusing the poem on Pearl May Lee and on the sex scene that so angers her repeats, in some senses, the work that lynching photography does: it makes the event of Sammy and his death less important than the narrative that continues around him. Brooks shows us that this shift is dangerous when her protagonist finds herself in temporary, but repeated, alignment with the white lynch mob that constitutes its community through the lynching as an act of extra-judicial "justice." But Brooks also provides a measure of privacy to Sammy's lynched body, by shifting the focus to the ongoing narrative that survives him rather than remaining voyeuristically attached to the space of his wounds.

Brooks's digressive loitering methodology is one solution to the problem of lynching photographs, and as I will argue in the next section, it seems particularly useful when

encountering the disastrous, fleshly photographs of Emmett Till. But it is also a methodology that seems, at first, to perpetuate the racial terrorism of original lynching photographs. By leaving the lynching victim behind in order to discuss everything that is *not* the victim, Brooks's poetry could be said to mimic the way that most lynching photographs made the lynched victim the putative subject, only to ultimately emphasize the white individuals and white community matrix behind which the lynched black body functioned mostly as backdrop. In order to understand the use of Brooks's approach, then, we must first better understand the operation of lynching postcards, and the revolutionary work of Mamie Till-Mobley in choosing to show her son's body in its full destruction.

Jackie Goldsby has called lynching America's "spectacular secret:" a secret because the brutality of this generally lethal extra-legal form of racial discipline was meant to be coercive not only in its practice but in the invisibility it gained from local sanction and national willingness to turn a blind eye.³⁸ Originally applied in parts of the United States where government had not yet officially been established—and therefore seen as the necessary substitute for courthouse government³⁹—by the turn of the twentieth century the majority of the country saw lynching not as legal action but as a passionate outburst in cases where the law was hamstrung. The passionate immediacy of lynching supposedly made it excusable, in the way that a crime committed in the heat of the moment generally carries a lesser sentence than does premeditated crime.⁴⁰ This same passionate immediacy also made lynching a particularly cruel weapon: if truly unpremeditated, it was unpredictable and unpredictably applied; if ungoverned, the kinds of force applied and the

³⁸ Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*, 1–12.

³⁹ Though the majority of lynchees in the West were white, people of color were disproportionately lynched.

⁴⁰ See Christopher Waldrep, "Word and Deed: The Language of Lynching, 1820–1953," in *Lethal Imagination: Violence and Brutality in American History*, ed. Michael A. Bellesiles (New York: New York University Press, 1999): 229–260.

kinds of “justice” doled out could vary greatly in the lethality of their effect.⁴¹ Ida B. Wells claimed as early as 1900 that lynching was always less about a fear of miscegenation than it was about property law and insubordination for which racial mixing became the euphemism. That euphemism distracts and allows for far crueler and more spectacular acts of violence against black men,⁴² and Goldsby has shown that a similar euphemism exists regarding the backwardness of Southern states. Though lynching was used as a modern tool of racial terrorism, it was instead classified as sporadic and backward, increasing the practice’s spectacularity: by the 1950s, lynching cases made national news because they were considered unusual, and that very sense of irregularity meant that lynchers almost always got off without penalty.

Meanwhile, the modernist apparatus of the spectacle, the photograph, circulated outside of the law’s reach. It was not uncommon for lynchings to be photographed, often by the local white press or by independent photographers, but occasionally by local black photographers as well. In addition to occasional first printings in local papers that could boast good photographic reproduction, these images often continued to circulate long after the lynching. This circulation was as postcard images, which local photographers could make. Though the mails disallowed the circulation of indecent postcards—ones considered pornographic or overly violent—these postcards could be traded hand to hand, or could be mailed in a sealed envelope.

Lynching photographs and postcards therefore modeled racial violence and the consumer desire for racial violence as an open secret. Though lynching postcards were generally fewer than newspaper images, they were the most emblematic version of the oppression of the spectacular secret. These postcards were a shorthand currency of threat when whites sent or

⁴¹ The plates in James Allen’s *Without Sanctuary: Lynching Photography in America* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Twin Palms, 2000) show lynchings of differing levels of brutality, and with victims in various states from living and defiant to dead and putrefying.

⁴² Ida B. Wells, “Lynch Law in America,” 1900.

showed them to blacks, usually a currency of warning or reminder when blacks sent them to each other, and often a voyeuristic or titillating currency when they circulated exclusively amongst whites, indicating either participation for which one white man or boy expected recognition from his peers, or a statement of desire, the wish to commit similar violence.⁴³ While all photography retains the coercive power to show or withhold the matrices of care, relation, and objectification that constitute the construction of the subject of the nation,⁴⁴ lynching postcards in particular visualize the constant threat of racialized killing that served as the foundation of all relations between whites and blacks, and served in particular as an extension of the humiliation of that violence.⁴⁵

Photography's presumed indexicality played a major role in the kind of witnessing that lynching postcards could claim and produce. First, a photograph was proof of the image's having been taken, and therefore the photograph could also be proof that what met the camera's eye existed: as Roland Barthes has it, the image provides the "this-will-have-been" that ratifies the thing pictured as an event. So photography confirmed that lynching happened. Sometimes, if the body was not mutilated beyond recognition, a photograph indicated who had been lynched. And sometimes, depending on who was in the camera's line of sight, a photograph indicated that a particular individual had been in a lynching crowd. A photographic postcard—a "wish you were

⁴³ Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret*. 214–282.

⁴⁴ See the introduction to Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 2000.

⁴⁵ As Shawn Michelle Smith puts it, "Photography documented lynching but also played a role in orchestrating it. Making a photograph became part of the ritual, helping to objectify and dehumanize the victims.... [Photographs] expanded the domain of lynching to those absent, extending the culturally divisive of lynching beyond the purview of any particular mob so that both the threat of lynching and its flagrant proclamation of white supremacy could be seen and consumed by an ever more dispersed crowd." Shawn Michelle Smith, "The Evidence of Lynching Photographs," in *Defining Moments in American Photography: Lynching Photographs*, ed. Anthony W. Lee (Berkeley; Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2007), 16–17.

here!” from a lynching scene—traded in part on that constative historical indicator, and in part on the postcard’s generic claim that the sender had witnessed the sight or site himself. That is to say that in addition to spectacularizing the lynched body, the photographic lynching postcard made an event of the witness who was often also a perpetrator.



(Figure 3.3 (left): Lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith, 1930, Marion, Indiana. Figure 3.4 (right): Lynching of John (Jack) Holmes, 1933, San Jose, California. Reproduced from James Allen, *Without Sanctuary* <https://withoutsanctuary.org/>)

The two postcards above are quickly illustrative of this point. The photograph on the left shows one of the most visually notorious twentieth century lynchings, that of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith. The image is so notorious because it was mass-produced by photographer Lawrence Beitler, who sold postcards at fifty cents apiece; these photographs have circulated quite widely. Though Shipp and Smith are clearly the object of spectacle—the pointing finger directs our eye—they are not the *main* point of the image. Instead, as a note on a found copy of the postcard indicates, the image is evidence of a crowd-goer’s existence; the bodies are simply the background against which the white crowd goer comes into visual relief for the recipient of the postcard: “Bo pointn to his niga.”⁴⁶ In this small self-captioning, Bo, not the dead man—and who knows which of the two is indicated by the pointing?—is the one who solicits our attention. Bo both affirms his individuality and his role as part of a larger community of whites who

⁴⁶ *Without Sanctuary*, plate 27 and additional information from plate 28.

(supposedly) uphold justice; in sending his postcard to his recipient, he also shares his property, “his niga” with the recipient, bringing him or her into the community that upholds morality.

In the Holmes postcard (figure 3.4), by contrast, the naked white body and all of the clothed white bodies observing it are turned away from the camera. This photograph captures the spectacle of the lynching, but leaves the white body a *body* rather than the flesh of strange fruit on a tree.⁴⁷ We know this for certain because, though this white body underwent no visible torture and though neither his identifying face nor his risqué genitals are visible, the spectacle of his nakedness was enough to stop a newspaper’s action: “This photo appeared in the morning edition of the San Jose newspaper. The city fathers were sufficiently offended by the nude male figure on the front page that they had the entire edition confiscated.”⁴⁸

I argue, therefore, that in addition to the terror the lynching postcard could induce by its indexical relation to a brutal reality, and by being privately circulated as a prurient voyeuristic photograph of that brutality, the lynching postcard was terrifying because its genre—“I was here, wish you were here!”—shifted the role of the lynched body to one of monument or backdrop—in the normal postcard context of “I was at the Eiffel Tower!” “I saw Mount Rushmore!,” “I was at a lynching!,” the “here” of “wish you were here!” presumes the event of another man’s body as the location. A postcard that gazes at a lynched body and locates a lyncher as the *real* site of interest—“Look where *I* am! Look what *I* did!”—makes the sender’s collusion with the recipient the prominent feature.

⁴⁷ The distinction between body and flesh, according to Hortense Spillers, is first one of thought: “before the ‘body,’ there is the ‘flesh,’ that zero degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of disclosure, or the reflexes of iconography.” “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* 17.2 (Summer 1987): 64–81.

⁴⁸ *Without Sanctuary*, plate 68.

It is sadly no exaggeration to claim that the black body was historically used as the backdrop to white collective life, and that white visual archives literally cameraflagged all but the most conveniently collectivizing black bodies out of social space. Through the 1950s, Southern newspapers were regularly segregated into white news and black news; black news was hardly covered unless it might be of interest or amusement to white readers. As Ira Harkey, editor of the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* and later the Pascagoula, Mississippi *Chronicle*, notes, “Even the big city paper, *The Times-Picayune*, when I first started to work for it in 1939 and until the early 1950s, had a flat rule that Negroes were not to appear in photographs published in its pages. That meant not even incidentally, as part of a background. Photos of street scenes were scrupulously scanned by picture editors and every perceivably black face was either incised by scissors or erased by air brush. When Negroes were mentioned in illustrated stories, they simply did not appear in the accompanying art,” or, when an unavoidable subject in the photograph’s field, a black body simply went unmentioned in the caption:

The North Mississippi Herald of Water Valley, as late as 1961, was able to run a three-column photo of three men standing before the first bale of cotton ginned that year in Yalobusha County. Occupying two-thirds of the photo are two Negro men, smiling proudly into the camera as if they had something to do with the first historic bale. Maybe they chopped it. But the cutlines do not even mention them. “Harold Allen (right),” the cutlines read, “Yalobusha Farm Bureau president, raised the first three bales of cotton to be ginned in North Yalobusha County last Tuesday.” Period.⁴⁹

These editorial practices make newspaper photographs and articles unreliable sources for information about black life in general and lynching in particular,⁵⁰ and reinforce the auratic

⁴⁹ Ira Harkey, *The Smell of Burning Crosses: A White Integrationist Editor in Mississippi* (1967, rpt. United States: Xlibris, 2005), 47.

⁵⁰ The Montgomery, Alabama *Advertiser* has recently acknowledged its role in perpetuating stereotypes of African Americans and in functioning as an organ of state- and local-terrorism by summarily assuming the guilt of blacks accused of crimes and by advertising upcoming lynchings in its pages. Brian Lyman, “‘There Will Be Lynchings’: How the *Advertiser* Failed

power of lynching postcards. In those images, for the white photographic subject, the structural violence of lynching is often unproblematically individuating and collectivizing; for the black photographic subject, the particularity and uniqueness of the body is often defamiliarized, generalized, and made into “flesh.”⁵¹ In the language of skeletonization, lynching photography by whites for whites so calcifies and limits the language of the black body that this part of the transmission is always lost; though the black body is hyper present in the image, it has little or no affective charge for its white viewers, and serves merely as the landscape or background against which the white body reconstitutes itself.

The postmortem photographs of Emmett Till taken in 1955 therefore marked an important moment in lynching photography: these images so upset the genre that they shook loose the calcified skeleton of the black body, forcing it to be imagined back into the visual and narrative frame. In the summer of 1955, fourteen-year-old Emmett Till traveled south to Money, Mississippi to visit relatives. There he may or may not have whistled at a local shop clerk Carolyn Bryant; that night, he was brutally murdered by Carolyn’s husband Roy and Roy’s half-brother J.W. Milam. Like thousands of war mothers, Mamie Till-Mobley (then Mamie Bradley) was encouraged to let her son’s remains be buried where he fell. But, acting as though Mississippi were a foreign land, Till-Mobley insisted that her son be repatriated to Chicago, to be buried in his home ground. Invoking a mother’s personal right to witness, Till-Mobley insisted that the boy’s casket be opened; horrified by the damage her child had suffered, she had his corpse photographed by *Jet* magazine, and allowed the images to run in the pocket-sized publication.

Victims of Racial Terror,” *Montgomery Advertiser*, April 20, 2018.

<https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2018/04/20/there-lynchings-how-advertiser-failed-victims-racial-terror-eji-peace-justice-memorial-montgomery/499656002/>

⁵¹ My thanks to Megan Tusler for helping me to think through this complication.

Jackie Goldsby has argued that the photographs of Emmett Till's body work against a major early-twentieth century presumption fostered by photography's indexicality. As I show in chapters 1 and 2, Americans often assumed that photographs were immediate because they were objective: they brought distant things close; they registered and transmitted events in real time because the emotions felt in reaction to a photograph could feel entirely unmediated. Goldsby argues that the advent of television coverage heightened this presumption, since live broadcasts claimed to connect spatially disparate locations by relaying the same event to each in real time, at local time. The effect was thereby to downplay the *affective* immediacy of photography, since the latter was no longer considered as temporally immediate.⁵² This could give the impression that all life—from the most mundane to the most evental—was available for viewing. And it made visual confirmation the standard in evidence collection. This meant in turn that the post-mortem photographs of Emmett Till failed to convince juries of his assailants' guilt. First, the photographs were not of the moment of lynching, so there was no proof that the men charged with his death had been there when the murder was committed.

Second, though they are close-ups of Till's face, the Till post-mortem photos resist the affective legibility of the portrait genre. In that genre, a collection of external, stylistic details supposedly works as synecdochic evidence of the interiority of the sitter.⁵³ Because Till's body had been so badly ravaged by his attackers and by the combined effects of water and time, his face was completely unrecognizable to his mother, despite her metonymic attachment to Till's casket. As Milam and Bryant's lawyers argued in court, photographs of the recovered body's face could not serve as an evidentiary portrait of a certain kind of boy, or even as a portrait of a

⁵² Jacqueline Goldsby, "The High and Low Tech of It: The Meaning of Lynching and the Death of Emmett Till," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 9.2 (Fall 1996): 245–282.

⁵³ On this point, see the discussion of evidentiary detail that Alice B. Toklas and Gertrude Stein were asked to solicit as Red Cross Searchers.

particular boy with distinguishable features; the defense claimed that the body shipped back to Till-Mobley might not even have been Till at all. A different kind of material evidence, Till's ring, ultimately had to serve as confirmation of his identity, and that confirmation was still not enough to convict his assailants.⁵⁴

Goldsby's point is well taken. For many it was a mix of revulsion, fear, and frustration around the Till photographs—around photography's power to relay such horrific and heartbreaking images in near-real time, and the medium's simultaneous inability to be enough to jail the perpetrators of such hate crimes—that marked the Till murder as one of the Civil Rights movement's first major calls to action. Among many others, Fred Moten marks the moment of these photographs as something new in the history of photography and civil action:

His casket was opened, his face was shown, is seen—now in the photograph—and allowed to open a revelation that first is manifest in the shudder the shutter continues to produce, the trembling, a general disruption of the ways in which we gaze at the face and at the dead, a disruption of the oppressive ethics and coercive law of reckless eyeballing, reckless whistling, which contains within it a call, the disruption of the disruption that would have captured, an arrest of the spirit that arrests, a repetitive close.⁵⁵

The disruption of the *Jet* photographs is important in its continuity with traditions of the open secrecy of lynching photography, as well as in the disruption produced by the photographs' newness; this disruption is in essence the black body passing from backdrop to individual again. In the version of reindividuation that *Jet* offers Till, he must be reinserted into narrative, made a child again before the horror of seeing his body turned flesh can do the work it needs to do. *Jet* does not loiter in the way that Gwendolyn Brooks would, writing in 1960; instead, *Jet* loiters by slowing down what would otherwise be the regular story of a boy on his summer vacation.

Though it is painful and shocking to read that story and the photographs that accompany it, the

⁵⁴ *Look*, January 1956.

⁵⁵ Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 199.

version of ethical witnessing that *Jet* proposes requires that we *do* read, slowly, from the beginning of Till's summer vacation to the visible end of it. Ethically, for *Jet*, the kind of looking that is sufficient to the Till photographs is a looking that loiters spectacularly; that sits in; that won't leave. That looking calls attention to individuality and specificity, and the look may be harsh even where its effect on civil rights discourse seems hopeful.

The *Jet* photographs reiterate Mamie Till-Mobley's belated witnessing as the open secret it is by running photographs counter-narratively, from the detective's point of view. Rather than beginning their account with Till's post-mortem photographs as a detective story or a yellow-journalistic account would begin with the "scene of the crime," the September 15, 1955 issue starts with a family portrait of Mamie and Emmett, in the upper left-hand corner of the left-hand page 6. Opposite the Till family is the sheriff of Greenwood, Mississippi with the gin fan that was wired around Till's neck; he lays his arm along the fan in a gesture that is not unlike Mamie's arm around Emmett's shoulders though his face is more grimly set. In a strip at the bottom of right-hand

page 7, we see Till's two young cousins and the uncle with whom he stayed during his trip.

Left-hand page 8 has quarter-page photographs in a strip at the bottom. In the left-hand photo, Mamie and



(Figure 3.5: Emmett Till post-mortem photos, *Jet Magazine* September 15, 1955, pages 8 and 9)

an unidentified man encounter Emmett's face. Mamie stares directly at him, her eyes downcast; her companion holds her and stares directly out of the photograph at us. Emmett's face in the lower righthand corner of that shot is hard to understand, at first: in order to catch the dead body's horizontal position and the vertical stance of the witnesses, the camera is angled up from near his chest, making his chin and nose more prominent than they would be were we staring at him head-on. But of course he is hard to understand primarily because his face is misshapen and bloated. The righthand image on page 8 rights the perspective, so that Emmett is face to face with us. This image is a bust: we recognize where misplaced features should lie in part because of other features that enter the shot. Emmett's hairline and his shirt collar become his most human features; the other features require some imagination in order to be properly placed.

Page 8 and facing page 9 finally visually complete the crime scene that page 6 evokes in language: this is what lynching looks like. The image on facing right-hand page 9 takes the entire page; it repeats the destroyed face a third time. In this case, all contextualization has been abstracted: there is no red ink as on other pages; Emmett's hairline blends into the dark background of the photo; his white shirt collar looks like a triangle at the lower left-hand edge of the image. Looking at this face abstractly, we notice texture foremost. If there is a thing that this image "looks like," it is a rubber mask. But a rubber mask needs holes for the wearer's eyes, and despite all that is missing from Emmett's face (including the eyes), there are no holes, either; this lack again accentuates the putty-like texture of the face, and what appears to be wire caught at Emmett's temples. The verso for this image, page 10, returns to a different kind of equally familiar news: in the upper left-hand corner of the page, a twelve-year-old spelling whiz is caught in the embrace of her smiling grandmother. The child quit while she was ahead at the \$64,000 Question, preferring to be known as "Gloria the undefeated champion [rather] than

Gloria the girl who lost.” Gloria’s happiness and success are clear and genuine—she has a college savings plan, money to spend on herself, the recognition of her school and her family—but she also reads as a reminder about stopping this side of the full prize: it would be a stretch, even dangerous, for a young black woman to win the \$64,000 Question.

But the effect of the triple repetition of Emmett’s destroyed face—the belated unveiling that fits the image to the word, and so confirms what we have known all along—sandwiched by his own childhood and the safety of another black child’s happiness, is not closural. Something more complicated is going on, a kind of sitting with the image of Emmett that requires a swerve away from him in order to fully encounter that image. Here’s Moten, again, on belatedness and repetition:

And why is the memory of this mutilated face, reconfiguration of what was embedded in some furtive and partial glance’s refusal, so much more horrible, the distortion magnified even more than the already incalculable devastation of the actual body? Does the blindness held in the aversion of the eye create an insight that is manifest as a kind of magnification or intensification of the object—as if memory as affect and the affect that forges distorted or intensified memory cascade off one another, each multiplying the other’s force? I think this kind of blindness makes music.⁵⁶

What happens when this face is unveiled in fact, repeated in fact, and then repeated indefinitely in memory? As Moten emphasizes, this kind of repetition makes a political appeal that is also an aesthetic appeal; this increasingly abstracted view of Till’s face means we must encounter the look of his body as something other than or in addition to a horror and a call to justice; it is also, again, the body of a boy. Most overtly, Mamie Till-Mobley’s manifold preference for publicity—her decision to have her son’s casket opened so that she and others could see the depth of the destruction, her decision to bury the body with Emmett’s features unretouched, and her decision to allow photographs of the body to run in the press—uses

⁵⁶ Moten, *In the Break*, 199.

photography's indexicality to insist on the accuracy of the horror. In point of fact, these photographs insist, a face can become so bloated it will be nearly unrecognizable to its mother; a face can be destroyed well enough that it hardly looks human.

Like a lynching postcard, *Jet* spectacularizes Till's body⁵⁷; unlike a lynching postcard, Till is not the backdrop for white individuation and community formation, for he is reskeletonized as only himself. In the close-up space of page 9, there is no space for a (white) body to steal the foreground or the role of being a body who can provide eyewitness testimony or recount the story of a summer vacation gone awry. Spectacularizing and abstracting Till's face therefore undoes some of the auratic work of the lynching postcard: it insists on the importance of the life that has ended in its individual, everyday history; it insists on the importance of *this* spectacle as a spectacle that can be interchangeably applied; and it lays these facts open to the reading audience who are normally the subject of lynching but not the owners of its images.

Given *Jet*'s pocket-sized format and the fact that it was the only publication to run images of Till's face, we can imagine it as a partial analogue to the postcard.⁵⁸ And we can think of the open secret of these images circulating among a black audience as the flipside to a lynching postcard circulating among white communities: *Jet* was the African American reply to magazines like *Life* and *Time*, but though its circulation was quite high among black readers—between 200,000 and 450,000 subscribed—that readership was still only a fraction the size of the

⁵⁷ Dora Apel refers to Emmett Till's funeral as a "spectacle funeral" that counters "spectacle lynching." Dora Apel, "Lynching Photographs and the Politics of Public Shaming," in *Defining Moments*.

⁵⁸ There are key differences, too, of course: a postcard suggests an addressee, and leave space for personal communication; the *Jet* images take up the page to the margin, which means that there is no space left for writing. Though the *Jet* article and photographs may have been clipped and sent between family members, any note would have to be separate, even if it shared an envelope with the image.

readership of *Life*, which boasted 5.5 million subscribers in the 1950s.⁵⁹ So when Mamie Till-Mobley invokes the format of the lynching postcard, she also assumes and reproduces some of its aesthetics: its titillating and decomposing horror; its secretive trade; its insistence on its own reality. But Till-Mobley's *Jet* photographs also insist on recomposing the individual out of the backdrop; pulling the invisible and the unseeable back into the scene. *These* aesthetics demand a particular kind of looking, according to Gwendolyn Brooks.

The Last Bleak News: Verse Journalism and Reskeletonization

From the juridical point of view, everything about Emmett Till is loiterly and dangerous to public safety—from the perspective of the Jim Crow South, Mamie Till-Mobley simply should not be in Mississippi; Till himself should not have been there; their very presence is immoral and cause for police intervention, both on behalf of the black family and on behalf of all the white families with which the Till trial might come into contact—and therefore transgressive. Bound by the Jim Crow laws that Emmett Till's murder trial failed to shift, Till-Mobley's black body is taking up white air, white space, in the courtroom and the national imagination; as in the loitering guides of the earlier part of the twentieth century, her sense of the present turns out to be neatly cordoned off by the long reach of history, for despite the national outrage around Till's death, his killers were freed.

Brooks's poems take a slightly different tack, therefore. Rather than loitering in Till's own space, they loiter in the Southern white female imagination, critiquing "the beat inevitable" of the ballad form, full of maids and villains who do not quite hew to their specified roles or to

⁵⁹ Johnson and Johnson, *Jet's* publisher, claimed to have 200,000 readers at the beginning of 1950s. See Brian Thornton, "The Murder of Emmett Till: Myth, Memory, and National Magazine Response," *Journalism History* 36.2 (Summer 2010): 96–104, for *Jet's* higher figures c. 1955, and for the readership figures of *Life*.

the teleology of the happily ever after of fairy tales. Brooks finds the space that is most sacred and toys with it, testing the unusual angles. Brooks transgresses the social norms afforded black poets by invading the space of Carolyn Bryant's kitchen and consciousness and loiters there, burning bacon, picking up on the family's morning routine, and enflaming that routine. Though the Carolyn Bryant character "tries" to stay in the present, "she could not resist the idea / That a red ooze was seeping, spreading darkly, thickly, slowly / Over her white shoulders, her own shoulders, / And over all of Earth and Mars." This redness is, precisely, the imaginative potential of loitering: it is extraterrestrial, "a hatred" that "burst[s] into glorious flower."

Brooks's loitering here is pregnant with opportunity; we are waiting to see that glorious flower bloom. And Brooks's later poetry sometimes does engage hatred and anger as necessary and correct responses to racism, though never without concern. But the subject of loitering in "A Bronzeville Mother" and in the companion poem "The Last Quatrain of the Ballad of Emmett Till" is instead the "meanwhile." In these poems, it is always the case that two things are happening simultaneously; especially in "A Bronzeville Mother," Brooks puts simultaneous happenings in parallel, and things on either side of the parallel influence each other. As "she" (Carolyn Bryant, who was the woman at whom Till was accused of whistling) fantasizes about being the "milk white maid" in myth/ballad, she forgets her real-life world and the bacon burns; when her husband slaps her child, she imagines "a lengthening red, a red that had no end"; when he holds her, "she tried, but could not resist the idea / that a red ooze was seeping, spreading darkly, thickly, slowly, / Over her white shoulders, her own shoulders, / And over all of Earth and Mars." The poem only partially interrogates the catastrophic, outsized effects of Bryant's adherence to myth, but it does show how the everyday creates an outsized, slippery space for itself in thought. That logic forces readers to the conclusions that "she" only approaches: that the

same myths that filled out ballad meters have horrible real life consequences, even for those who had no part in setting the myth originally, or who fit its parameters poorly, if at all.

In another poet, perhaps this imaginative potential would be generative—we can hypothesize Carolyn Bryant as a civil rights activist; or, in Ross Chambers’s *Loiterature*, the sonic thickness of Brooks’s work would allow for a kind of digressive pleasure, as it does in a poem like “The Sundays of Satin-Legs Smith.”⁶⁰ But Brooks deflates the scene instead, as she does in other poems with female protagonists or actors in *The Bean Eaters*.⁶¹ The imaginative potential of loitering precipitates into only “the last bleak news of the ballad,” Mamie Till-Mobley’s loitering alone in an empty room.

⁶⁰ Chambers describes the pleasure of the “time-out” of non-critical literature in “Time Out: Meditation and the Escalator Principle.” Digression provides pleasure by progressing step by step but smoothly; its virtuosic pyrotechnics dazzle the eye (*Loiterature* 123). Brooks’s pyrotechnics often dazzle with their smoothness, but as her interview with Stavros reminds us, she doesn’t stop for time-outs. Teju Cole put the same point this way, in response to the arrest of Rashon Nelson and Donte Robinson for sitting in Starbucks: “Keen-eared Prof Vijay Iyer notes that playing overhead during the arrest was Dizzy Gillespie’s Salt Peanuts. A compact contemporary history of public space could be written with the title, ‘Black Music, Yes! Black People, No!’... Racism is not about actively doing stuff to you all the time—it’s also about passively keeping you on tenterhooks. We are always one sour white away from having the cops arrive. And the cops! The cops are like a machine that can’t stop once set in motion, what Fela called ‘zombie.’ When the cops arrive, the human aspect of the encounter is over. This is why I always say you can’t be a black *flaneur*. *Flanerie* is for whites. For blacks in white terrain, all spaces are charged. Cafes, restaurants, museums, shops. Your own front door. This is why we are compelled, instead, to practice psychogeography. We wander alert, and pay a heavy psychic toll for that vigilance. Can’t relax, black.”

https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10155943676667199&id=200401352198.

⁶¹ Here I’m thinking most specifically of another lynching poem from *The Bean Eaters*, “The Ballad of Rudolph Reed.” Despite the omniscience of that poem’s narrator, and Reed’s opening quoted monologue, the poem ends specifically on female witnesses, whose vision accomplishes nothing: “Small Mabel whimpered all night long, / For calling herself the cause. / Her oak-eyed mother did no thing / But change the bloody gauze.” In these poems of Brooks’s, black women are left to clean up the mess that racism’s selective seeing overlooks.

*The Last Quatrain of the
Ballad of Emmett Till*⁶²

AFTER THE MURDER,
AFTER THE BURIAL

Emmett's mother is a pretty-faced thing;
 The tint of pulled taffy.
She sits in a red room,
 drinking black coffee.
She kisses her killed boy.⁶³
 And she is sorry.
Chaos in windy grays
 through a red prairie.

Like Pearl May Lee's rage, Carolyn Bryant's hatred is ultimately "the raw / Insistence of an idle desperation" and she will live it out; Mamie Till-Mobley's sorrow has no outlet, and the height of loitering's imagination in that poem, the colorful digression of "Chaos in windy grays / through a red prairie" has no verb to activate it. In these poems, the space of loitering is exclusively a space of continued internal sitting-in, bounded always by race and by gender. However, it may possibly be that the precipitate of loitering is a shared understanding that the structure of Till-Mobley's ballad and the historically white myth that Carolyn Bryant imposes onto it works for neither of them. Brooks proffers, then, at best, not interchangeability but rather a shared sense of sorrow.

Brooks's sorrow makes Till visible to us, but avoids spectacularizing his body. Instead, the spectacular in "A Bronzeville Mother" is reserved for national myth and for the newspaper headlines that reinforce it, which are, crucially, not Southern headlines but rather Northern

⁶² Gwendolyn Brooks, *The Bean Eaters* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960), 26.

⁶³ In my opinion, it's possible that when Mamie Till-Mobley "kisses her killed boy," she is kissing a photograph. But such a literal reading seems strange in context. It is equally possible that the timeline of the poem has already been rerouted through memory's meanderings.

descriptions of Southern white bigotry. These headlines, the Northern skeletonization of lynching, are spoken through the mouth of Big Fella, Roy Bryant, and they compete for space in Carolyn's imagination with the mythology of her childhood; though the inflection is different, Brooks uses headline-style capitalization for both, creating a kind of critical equivalence that keeps the North on the hook for lynching as much as it blames the South. This, too, is loitering, is sitting in: an elegiac sorrow is not confined to one mother or one locale. I am suggesting that the activist version of Brooks's loitering really is sitting-in itself, adding back what has been skeletonized out of the national narrative. And we see her at this work in her own verse-journalism,⁶⁴ where she dilates time:

The first thing I saw at Court Square corner
was black men, lifting that bale....

In Montgomery
when it was 1955
when it was 1965
when Martin King was alive and loud—
the civilrights men were many.
The civilrights men
hit it out as hatchets with velvet on.
Hatchets with velvet on.
With sometimes the hatchets hacking through.⁶⁵

Here Brooks's "meanwhile" moves us from slaves straight through to Civil Rights workers, witnessing the black bodies that were, as Ira Harkey reminds us, erased from the visual history that subtends our understanding of World War I.

⁶⁴ Brooks uses the term "verse-journalism" (and claims to have invented the form) to describe her contribution to *Ebony's* 1971 photo-essay "In Montgomery."

⁶⁵ Gwendolyn Brooks (poetry) and Moneta Sleet, Jr. (photography), "In Montgomery." *Ebony* XXVI.10, August 1971, 42–48.

CODA: “AS BLUE AS NIGHT, OR MEMORY”

Here is a photograph that does not exist.

The President, smiling or solemn, standing before the White House or the Capitol on November 11, 2018, the one-hundred year anniversary of the World War armistice. His dark suit, his red tie, his red MAGA baseball cap. Flanked by service members costumed in uniforms from every war the nation has fought thus far. A tank grinding down Pennsylvania Avenue. Jets in formation above the scene, their contrails scraping the sky, a white rainbow stretched flat.

President Trump had originally wanted some version of a military parade for his inauguration; then, after seeing President Emmanuel Macron’s Bastille Day military parade in July, 2017, he briefly considered holding a “really great” patriotic parade for Independence Day in 2018 in order to “try and top” Macron’s. The Office of the Secretary of Defense suggested moving the parade to commemorate the one hundred year anniversary of the armistice, thereby effectively reframing Trump’s quest for personal glory in national, memorial terms. That shift would also effectively camouflaged the hawkish propaganda of military parades, which are contemporarily associated with North Korea, China, and Russia, with the ostensibly peaceful goal of the “war to end all wars.”¹

This non-photo requires a caption.

Captioning: “The Price of Freedom”

¹ Tamara Keith and Tom Bowman, “Trump’s Military Parade Could Cost as Much as 50 Million,” NPR, February 15, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/02/15/585924807/trumps-military-parade-could-cost-as-much-as-50-million>

Though the parade was meant to “emphasize the price of freedom,”² this photograph does not exist because the estimated cost of the parade rose to at least \$92 million—too high a price to pay.³ The President therefore postponed the parade indefinitely but at least to 2019, claiming that his “great celebratory military parade” was being “held up” by D.C. politicians. However, Trump’s original, bellicose desires for spectacularity have presumably been abandoned for the time being, for there’s been no talk of memorializing peace on June 28th, which would mark the one hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles. The President’s attitude toward memorialization therefore easily elides 1776, 1918, 2017, 2018, and 2019. It also concatenates war and peace in its effort to convert the symbols of a difficult national history into one man’s personal glory.

By looking at the nonexistent image of this hypothetical parade, we can see how the photograph and the author of the photo-op skeletonize war’s corpses and sacrifice out of the scene when they show contemporary, living troops crowding around the President in historical costume. If this image appeared in the *New York Times*, as it undoubtedly would, the caption might be straight-facedly descriptive: “Mr. Trump reviews the troops of the Washington, D.C. Veterans’ Day Parade.”⁴ Given the *Times*’s increasingly sardonic headlines, however, the caption

² “Planning and Execution Guidance for a Veterans’ Day Parade,” Memorandum for Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff, March 8, 2018.

<https://apps.npr.org/documents/document.html?id=4406302-3-9-2018-Parade-Memo>

³ Eileen Sullivan, Helene Cooper, and Michael D. Shear, “Citing Costs, Trump Retreats on Massive Military Parade in Capital,” *New York Times*, August 17, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/17/us/politics/trump-military-parade.html>

⁴ Unlike the photographs I consider in the body of this dissertation, a contemporary war photograph that appears in the *New York Times* would almost certainly appear in color. *Time* magazine began printing color images in 1933, but its parent publication the *Times* remained black-and-white until 1993 (when special sections, such as the “Books” or “Travel” sections, began running their illustrations in color), and the Page 1 stories retained black-and-white as late as 1997. Because the *Times* publishes on 27 leased presses across the country and not all of these presses are color-equipped, the *Times* still prints some pages in black-and-white today. Trump’s

might also pointedly remind the broader public of the amnesiac work that this skeletonization performs. Calling this photograph “The price of freedom” would reference the Secretary of Defense’s memo. But “The price of freedom” would also play explicitly with the visual diversion of living, celebratory bodies for the sacrifice of the dead and wounded; the visual diversion of nostalgia for past victories in place of real conversation about our present wars; and the fiscal diversion of defense spending that would pay for the parade at the expense of medical care for veterans. These costs are ones the image captures only in absence; the price of freedom is precisely what we *cannot* see.

The price of freedom is what we cannot see.

Ultimately, President Trump spent the 100th anniversary of the Armistice at ceremonies in Paris; unlike most European world leaders, he missed the graveside ceremonies at the Aisne-Marne American Cemetery and Memorial because his helicopter could not fly in the “near zero visibility” rain conditions.⁵ He chose neither to attend the Paris Peace talks the following day, nor to lay a wreath at the American Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington Cemetery when he returned to the States.⁶

On the 100th anniversary of the Armistice, Jemel Roberson was shot and killed by police officer Ivan Covey at the Chicago-area club where Roberson was on-duty as a security guard. Roberson had subdued a patron who had fired on others during a bar fight; club patrons called the police. According to witnesses, the police shot Roberson “not even five seconds” after

military parade would almost certainly have been a front-page story, however, meaning that this imagined photograph would have appeared in color both on the web and in print.

⁵ “Armistice Day: White House Defends Trump WWI No-Show,” BBC, November 11, 2018. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-46179291>

⁶ Dan MacGuill, “Fact Check,” *Snopes*, November 16, 2018. <https://www.snopes.com/fact-check/trump-veterans-day-56-years/>

arriving, firing on the black “armed subject” numerous times despite shouts from bystanders and other bar security guards that the “armed subject” was a security guard and not a threat.⁷

Accounts conflict regarding the ease with which Roberson could be identified as a security guard, and whether he was told to drop his gun before Covey fired on him.⁸ These conflicting accounts are difficult to resolve; to date, the bystander cell phone footage and police body camera footage that has been released only pick up after Roberson was shot. For Roberson’s mother and for many witnesses, however, it is clear that the police re-fleshed the scene too quickly—assuming without asking; spectacularizing by adding in danger where there was none; turning the “good guy with a gun” into the villain on sight and faster than the speed of thought—simply because he was black.

“It is difficult / to get the news from poems”⁹

It was not until I read about Jemel Roberson’s death that I realized, with a shock that felt like familiarity, that this entire dissertation has been written not only *about* wartime but *during* wartime. This observation is obvious—it seems that over the course of the dissertation I must have lost the forest for the trees if I’m just now recognizing my own relation to wartime—but also non-trivial. First, as Sarah Sentilles argues, the visual complexity of contemporary American race relations is inextricable from contemporary American war coverage; the

⁷ Matthew Walberg and Zak Koeske, “Witness to Shooting of Security Guard Jemel Roberson: Officer Opened Fire ‘Not Even Five Seconds’ After Warning,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 16, 2018. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/daily-southtown/news/ct-met-jemel-roberson-security-guard-shooting-witness-20181115-story.html>

⁸ P. Lockhart, “A Black Security Guard Caught a Shooting Suspect—Only to Be Shot by Police Minutes Later,” *Vox*, February 6, 2019. <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/11/12/18088874/jemel-roberson-police-shooting-illinoisian-covey-video>

⁹ William Carlos Williams, “Asphodel, That Greeny Flower,” 1962. <https://poets.org/poem/asphodel-greeny-flower-excerpt>

spectacularity of the former becomes more spectacular, and potentially dehumanizing, because of our long history with the latter. She argues that our visual conventions for protecting our war dead from the indignity of our gaze, while photographing the bodies of dead Iraqis or Afghans, mean that when we show the dead bodies of black American civilians we open these bodies up to a dangerous othering that equates them with foreign enemies. "...[T]he very fact of visual access to the dead marks them as 'other'[P]ublishing some images while suppressing others sends the message that the visible bodies are somehow less consequential than the bodies granted the privilege of privacy."¹⁰ Put otherwise, our contemporary visual understanding of civilian bodies is conditioned, in part, by our historically shaped visual understanding of the bodies of combatants.

Furthermore, the degree to which these juxtaposed accounts of President Trump and Jemel Roberson go nearly equally unmarked on our visual radar—the fact that even beginning to consider them requires my re-fleshing images that don't exist—reminds us that war “becomes a barely registered substance of our everyday” for those of us who are non-combatants and who therefore always experience war as mediated.¹¹ Crucially, this re-fleshing reminds us that wartime is not only about what the government deems “war”; it is *also* about the historical and affective atmosphere that war invokes for its country. It is the “dislocation of the bounded terrain usually associated with war, and the extension of the war into a realm without clear limits.”¹² For Mary A. Favret, wartime sets war's mediation up alongside its sense of temporal fixity (*this* war, right now; *our* everyday) and flux (a sense of temporal familiarity), and against feeling's

¹⁰ Sarah Sentilles, “When We See Photographs of Some Dead Bodies but Not Others,” *New York Times Magazine*, “At War,” August 14, 2018.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/08/14/magazine/media-bodies-censorship.html>

¹¹ Mary A. Favret, *War at a Distance: Romanticism and the Making of Modern Wartime* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 9.

¹² Favret, 18.

intensification and also its drift. Favret's work engages primarily with British wars pre-1900. However, her work on poetry and atmosphere beautifully captures the "difficulty of finding sounds or forms to which feeling can attach itself," and the degree to which "meditation itself becomes an object of emotion" during wartime, and the ways that mediation therefore demands our thoughtful scrutiny.¹³

Barbie Zelizer reminds us that, because of our difficulty with detecting mediation in wartime's journalistic photographs, what we are able to take away from this genre is never actually the "news." Zelizer's work has found that there are more journalistic photographs produced during times of war than there are during times of peace, perhaps because of the lingering sense that photographs are more evidentiary than other forms of representation: despite more than a century of scholarship that reminds us that photographs do not provide transparent access, readers still generally look to them to tell what is "true," and "current." Zelizer finds this assumption particularly problematic during wartime, because based on her surveys "images function more in wartime like non-journalistic modes of representation than in times of peace"—that is, they are more likely to be aesthetically charged, "dramatic, pleasing, or shocking"—and they "gravitate more in wartime toward familiar depictions of the past than in times of peace."¹⁴ These images, the ones viewers deem "memorable," work symbolically or connotatively, invoking the past as a parallel for the present so that readers have a framework for interpretation.

*"What is that memory?"*¹⁵

¹³ Favret, 11, 15.

¹⁴ Barbie Zelizer, "When War Is Reduced to a Photograph," in Stuart Allen and Barbie Zelizer, eds., *Reporting War: Journalism in Wartime* (Oxon, Canada: Routledge, 2004), 121, 118.

¹⁵ Claudia Rankine, "February 26, 2012 / In Memory of Trayvon Martin," *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis, MN: Greywolf Press, 2014), 89.

Zelizer concludes that “war coverage often hinges on a vehicle that works against the grain of ‘good’ journalism [that is, newsworthiness] yet adheres precisely to the grain of ‘good’ memory work.”¹⁶ Good memory work can mean oversimplified interpretation—the catachresis of one war for another, one image for another. At times, uncritical catachresis has certainly been a goal not only for President Trump but also for the War Department, as we saw in Chapter 1; the journalist camerafleurs of Chapter 2; and the white trader of lynching postcards in Chapter 3. In all of these cases, someone, bent upon aiding or forestalling interpretation, has recognized Favret’s wartime “difficulty of finding sounds or forms to which feeling can attach itself,” and has chosen to induce feeling by troping.¹⁷

Troping can be dangerous because the skeletonizing side of mediation is not the only one that is non-transparent. Re-fleshing can be equally complex, and when a viewer depends uncritically on troping’s shorthand, she risks reading parallels as equivalencies, and risks reproducing and thereby perpetuating a particular canon of reference. However, as Claudia Rankine argues in discussing the Black Lives Matter movement, troping can also be one way of emphasizing a pattern that might otherwise go unnoticed. Responding to the police shooting of Michael Brown, Rankine explains that we must read the police’s decision to leave Brown’s body uncovered in the Missouri sun for four hours as a kind of rhyme with the public grief that Emmett Till’s open casket produced. “The police, in their refusal to move Michael Brown’s body, perhaps unknowingly continued where [Emmett] Till’s mother left off,” for,

whatever their reasoning...the police made mourning his [Brown’s] death part of what it meant to take in the details of his story. No one could consider the facts of Michael Brown’s interaction with the Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson without also thinking of the bullet-riddled body bleeding on the asphalt. It would be a mistake to presume that

¹⁶ Zelizer, 124.

¹⁷ Favret, 11.

everyone who saw the image mourned Brown, but once exposed to it, a person had to decide whether his black body mattered enough to be mourned.¹⁸

Here Rankine argues that the troped pattern of seeing dead black bodies as “other” or “enemy”—a history that the visual and rhetorical work of World War I accentuated—can perhaps be interrupted by inverting the pattern of increasingly private grieving that World War I also accentuated. For Rankine, in showing the bodies of dead black civilians we do run the risk that these bodies will be made other yet again. And, when Black Lives Matter performs a “sustained state of national mourning for black lives,” national mourning becomes a new pattern that can sink back into old ones—a “mode of intervention and interruption that might itself be assimilated into the category of public annoyance.”¹⁹ However, that risk is valuable. In making that grief public by making those images public and asking the public to index their annoyance, journalists are asking viewers to start looking before skeletonization begins. They are asking readers to reevaluate what sinews connect flesh to skeleton.

*“Mediation itself becomes an object of emotion: of comfort, complacency, relief, anxiety, impotence, complicity”*²⁰

I initially imaged this dissertation to be a description of the ways in which the readers of World War I-era avant-garde poetry attempted to use the event of photography to be traumatized by the war.²¹ However, as we have seen, any party to the photographic event—from the War

¹⁸ Claudia Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life Is One of Mourning,” *New York Times Magazine*, June 22, 2015. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/22/magazine/the-condition-of-black-life-is-one-of-mourning.html>

¹⁹ Rankine, “The Condition of Black Life,” n.p.

²⁰ Favret, 15.

²¹ Ariella Azoulay describes the photographic event as the photo that a witness with a camera sometimes produces; for Azoulay, the possibility of photographic witnessing is the event of the photograph, regardless of whether a photograph ultimately results from it. For these reasons, all

Department to the photographer to the journalist to the editor to the reader—can intervene in or interrupt the supposedly outwardly stable event of photography. Their interventions can be responsible or irresponsible, ethical or otherwise, and their choices always reframe the photographic event in ways that redound to the event of photography itself.²² Looking more carefully at this era-specific poetry and photography, I have shown that inducing trauma—spectacularizing the scene of death in its visual mediation in order to create an object to which feeling can attach itself iteratively and endlessly—is one potential effect of this secondhand witnessing, but it is not witnessing’s goal. Instead, the goal is something closer to loitering.

Loitering, as I define it in Chapter 3, is a visual orientation or method, a slow attention to the everyday. While slow attention may produce Roland Barthes’s prick of recognition or pathos—the *punctum*—it does not necessarily do this. Instead, the loitering gaze may simply hold space. In Rankine’s case, loitering with Michael Brown’s body is not about spectacularizing him, it is about recognizing him as a fact in and of the American landscape. Loitering recognizes witnessing’s inadequacy—we saw Brown; we did nothing—and, as Rankine notes, it therefore makes space for us to re-recognize grief and mourning. Importantly, loitering makes these spaces durational: for Rankine it is crucial that the Black Lives Matter movement creates the possibility of a *sustained* state of national mourning, a contemporary elegy, because that endurance can help push against our quick decisions to see parallels as equivalencies. In this, loitering may perhaps allow us to do “good” journalism alongside “good” memory work.

parties to photography must recognize their ability to harm and be harmed by it. For Azoulay, this relationship of mutual precarity is photography’s most useful, leveling feature, and is one that breeds the potential for responsible “civil” viewership. See Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

²² Here I mean to invoke, yet again, Judith Butler’s notion of the frames of war, in which reframing a given photographic event always brings to light again the precariousness of those photographed. See Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2009).

It is difficult to get the news from poems. What is that memory?

Loitering retains the risk of failure that Rankine articulates (holding a space for grief may be rejected and troped by some as nuisance, or worse); it also retains the Civil Rights danger that, simply by holding space where one has the right to be, one may be participating in voyeurism or even in “reckless eyeballing.” It also retains the more white and upper-middle class sense of recklessness that could be described as *flânerie* and play. This sense of play, with its heart in interest, is crucial for understanding how loitering could productively respond to the dead-or-alive cameraflage photographs of Chapter 2. It also helps us understand that, in approaching World War I with the desire to be traumatized, non-combatants at home were approaching skeletonized images with curiosity. In engaging imagination to re-flesh the image, skeletonization possibly provided the opportunity for easy troping, since of course readers would imagine in light of the visual and literary canons they knew. But loitering before skeletonized material *also* provided World War I-era readers the opportunity to imagine something new.

Like me, Mary Favret believes that some good can come out of wartime. “Wartime may establish something that war would otherwise destroy, namely a culture...wartime writing and art might be able to make the imperceptible felt.”²³ In this dissertation and this coda, photography bears the ethical brunt of this demand, since photography has had fewer centuries to work through its supposedly realist truth claims vis-à-vis ethics, while poetry has had centuries to sort this in its fictional register. But for me photography cannot exist in this dissertation without poetry, because it is in poetry’s loitering that photography’s imperceptible ethic can be felt.

²³ Favret, 18.

*“The smoke above its purple roofs was blue”*²⁴

Poetry’s sense of wartime is messy. It is peopled with colors and colored with people; it is all mixed up. It is that feeling that catches you when you are in the middle of doing something entirely other. Paul Scott Mowrer’s 1918 poem “A Wind that Blows from Picardy” exemplifies this feeling. Each stanza takes the form of a rhetorical question about the non-combatant: “Brown-haired woman, quiet and wan, / Pressing a babe to the heavy breast— / The breast he loved to slumber on— / Why do you stir with strange unrest?”²⁵ In this poem, Mowrer makes these questions doubly rhetorical by threading the missing “he” into each stanza, and by employing a constative final stanza in place of a question. “A wind that blows from Picardy— / From Picardy, where lie the slain— / A wind that blows from Picardy / Is breathing low beside the lane.” Though invoking the missing “he” in the quotidian lives of the soldier’s female family could seem to indicate that these women smell death on the wind, or have a premonition about the death that the final stanza implies, the final stanza does not *answer* the rhetorical questions. In giving the wind the agency to witness and to tell, and in making these women sensitive to the wind’s breathing, Mowrer transforms these listeners to loiterers in a landscape that is simultaneously dead and animate—and it is this simultaneity that the loiterers seem to feel.

Mowrer amplifies this simultaneity in the final poem of *Hours of France in Peace and War*.

“Memory”

I walked alone at eventide.

²⁴ Paul Scott Mowrer, “Memory,” *Hours of France in Peace and War* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1918), 71.

²⁵ Mowrer, “A Wind that Blows from Picardy,” *Hours of France*, 65.

Behind me lay the melancholy hills where sank the sun;
 Before, a darkening slope, a winding road.
 And lo, as I reached the summit, at my side
 I heard a host of little footfalls patter and run—
 A flock of sheep! And at their head a cloaked shepherd strode.
 Below me lay the village, their abode.
 The smoke above its purple roofs was blue
 As was the twilight gathered there,
 As blue as night, or memory, and I knew
 Somewhere,
 In another land, an age of gold,
 I too had led my sheep at evening to their fold,
 And I was very old.

“Memory” sits all alone in a section of its own, also called “Memory,” which follows the “Hours of War” section and seems intended to serve as a bookend to the “Ode to France” that opens the book.²⁶ Formally, “Memory” is both a throwback and a push forward: by number of lines, accented metrics, and rhyme scheme it is a sonnet, a form Mowrer reserves almost exclusively for his war poems, but the highly irregular syllable count per line makes it feel newer. Mowrer’s formal choices echo the content of the poem, which straddles a dark present and a “golden” past.

*“As was the twilight gathered there,”*²⁷

Though not explicitly a war poem (except for the post-war context of its placement in the book), the poem reminds us that thematic content need not be war-laden in order for a poem to be a poem of wartime. Here the speaker moves, via flashback, from the role of loiterer (in the sense of *flâneur*) to something more Jesus-like. The poem opens with the speaker walking alone,

²⁶ In the Table of Contents, “Ode to France” appears set off from “Hours of Peace,” as “Memory” is set off in its own section from “Hours of War.” However, the TOC and the contents do not quite match: the title page for “Hours of Peace” precedes “Ode to France” in the book itself. Typographically, “Memory” is therefore more distinctly set off from “Hours of War,” since it has its own title page. However, as I argue above, its atmosphere depends heavily on the content of the war poems that precede it. Similarly, no book published in 1918, as the war was only just ending, can intend “memory” without the attendant sense of “memorial.”

²⁷ Mowrer, “Memory,” 71.

surveying the landscape between two dusky hills that will get darker as the night continues to come on. When he reaches the best lookout spot on one hill, a shepherd and flock (pregnant with all their Christian symbolism) break his physical solitude. Following with his eyes the path the shepherd and sheep will take, the speaker descends visually into the village, where visuality, space, and temporality intermingle and become confused. In a poem of two- or three-line sentences, the final, seven-line sentence is unusual: it suspends action in favor of an atmospherics of war, collects new rhymes (here the poem switches from interlinking a/b/c lines to d/e couplets and an f triplet) and throws the speaker into the past even as it maintains the feel of the present tense.

The village's blue smoke signals present habitation, marking the stoves or fireplaces in the houses. However, in a book of war poems, that smoke also reminds us of villages in ruins—the fate of many French towns in the war, as “Pastoral” from the “Poems of War” section makes clear. To a degree, “Memory” answers the rhetorical, apostrophic questions of “Pastoral” and “A Wind that Blows from Picardy,” returning the shepherd to his family, resurrecting the village, and renaming smoking ruins as cooking smoke. This smoke merges, nevertheless, with the blue of the fading light, the same blue as memory itself. The undecidability of this simile—“as blue as night, or memory”—recalls the similes of Chapter 1, where what has been skeletonized out of the frame proliferates in the mind, and ultimately retakes the space of the image.

*“As blue as night, or memory”*²⁸

In this case, the skeletonized image of this town cameraflages in an unexpected way: the four indistinctly separated concepts (smoke, twilight, night, memory) and the two concepts they index

²⁸ Mowrer, “Memory,” 71.

(a forgotten golden age in which poets can serve as protectors—a time that must both precede the shadows of war and also hold the promise of rebuilding—and the current landscape that hides but does not blot out the effects of that war) arrive in a flashback of sorts, and they age the speaker. Elsewhere in *Hours*, Mowrer emphasizes the importance of the loiterer/poet: it is he who seems useless—who watches a river’s flow or the eyes of all passersby, “[his] errand all forgot”—who can create “a spell...in [his] music, as of days / To kindness and the faith of beauty vowed.”²⁹ The poet’s spellbinding serves a necessary social function, for his faith in kindness and beauty embodies love and friendship even for the “lowly” in life, and, as we might imagine from the fact that he can become transfixed by the mundanities of the everyday, he is one of the few who notes the details of the world. Mowrer recognizes that the wartime threats to a poet are mental as well as physical, and require the response of an entire community. He pleads, “Then we will kiss the horrors from your eyes, / And bid you charm us as you used to do. / Come back again! for beauty never dies, / But those who keep the faith are very few.”³⁰ The last line’s emphasis on the socio-religious function of poetry—a rare and fragile faith in beauty that can be shattered by the “horrors” of war—makes the work of “charming” the “us” a reciprocal effort, for the “us” are responsible for the recuperative care the poet needs after war. The penultimate line recognizes the circularity of this situation, emphasized by the pleonasm “come back again!”, where “come back” should do. Though Mowrer may see the *flâneur*/poet’s work of shepherding as “alone at eventide” in “Memory,” that role settles in to the thicker, more social, and circular memorializing of twilight/smoke/blue/memory—the realm inhabited by the women loitering at home.

²⁹ Mowrer, “To a Poet, Mobilized,” *Hours of France*, 51.

³⁰ Mowrer, “To a Poet, Mobilized,” 52.

*“brother, dear brother, that kind of blue”*³¹

Over and against Mowrer’s muddied blue, Claudia Rankine’s poem “February 26, 2012 / In Memory of Trayvon Martin” proposes sky. That sky is also muddied.

Your hearts are broken. This is not a secret though there are secrets. And as yet I do not understand how my own sorrow has turned into my brothers’ hearts. The hearts of my brothers are broken. If I knew another way to be, I would call up a brother, I would hear myself saying, my brother, dear brother, my dearest brothers, dear heart—

On the tip of a tongue one note following another is another path, another dawn where the pink sky is the bloodshot of struck, of sleepless, of sorry, of senseless, shush.³²

“The sky is the silence of brothers all the days leading up to my call.” “The sky is blue, kind of blue.” “My brother is completed by sky. The sky is his silence.”³³ In the situation video for which the poem is a script, we can see the sky out of a car window cluttered by faces, lights, old footage of Jim Crow signage, a lynching rope, sit-ins, highways, trees, daily life. Unlike many of the poems in *Citizen*, “In Memory of Trayvon Martin” employs the first person as well as the second person, meaning that in this poem Rankine does not double the speaker by projecting him or her directly onto us. While we are still interpellated by the second person address, by using the first person as well Rankine can have it three ways, soliciting our attention, reseating the second person as the general interlocutor of the apostrophe, and designating a specific interlocutor (perhaps Martin). The effect is elegiac, in that the elegy so often solicits a response from the dead even as it recognizes that such a response is impossible.

³¹ Rankine, “In Memory of Trayvon Martin,” 90.

³² Rankine, “In Memory of Trayvon Martin,” 89. Though I do not include the poem here in full because of its length, it is well worth reading. Rankine and her partner, John Lucas, have created this script and the situation video that accompanies it, available on Vimeo. <https://vimeo.com/129007034>.

³³ Rankine, “In Memory of Trayvon Martin,” 90.

The effect is also familial. In the situation video, the spoken text differs slightly from the script Rankine provides in *Citizen*. After the pink of the sky, Rankine says, “Someone wrote, ‘I said he’s my brother, I don’t know why I would have said that.’ Maybe she knows the violence done to the body of a brown child in the time before this one. Because I am a sister, because I have brothers, it’s as if I’ve always known.” That loitering of affiliation also answers a shift earlier in the script. Aloud, Rankine says, “On my birthday, they say my name. They will never forget we are named. What is that knowledge? Is it sadness?” In the text, the line reads, “They will never forget that we are named. What is that memory?” In the shift from knowledge to sadness to memory, Rankine moves us slowly to the possibility of mourning and to the possibility that memory can also be something else or something more.

“What is that memory?” || “Wait with me. Wait with me though the waiting might be the call of good-byes”³⁴ || What is that memory.

We can use the thickness of that muddied blue to listen³⁵ to the sky. There we might hear the overbearing tone of Trump’s jets flying in the formation that leaves that white rainbow of contrails. We might also hear the silence of Jemel Roberson, hanging up. If we keep listening, then we’ll hear the quiet static on the line of all the noncombatants who loitering there in wartime, *don’t hang up*.

³⁴ Rankine, “In Memory of Trayvon Martin,” 90.

³⁵ In a future version of this work, it might make sense, given poetry’s deep interest in sound, to incorporate scholarship on sound as well. Tina M. Campt’s *Listening to Images* (London and Durham: Duke University Press, 2017) reminds us to listen to the sounds of the black diasporic quotidian that interrupt the “quiet” photos of state biopower.

APPENDIX: CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT BEN HECHT AND

CHICAGO DAILY NEWS EDITOR C. H. DENNIS, FEBRUARY 1919

*Telegram from Ben Hecht to C.H. Dennis*¹

Chicago Daily News Rene Feibelman Pays Bas Hotel Amsterdam Holland

Berlin February third

In room where once sat Bismark von bulow hollweg sits today phillip scheideman who once upon time tailor and who may end first president new german republic stop twas ten at night when I entered room stop plainly dressed young woman steered me down more less historic corridors stop massive red hangings white frescoed walls portraits emperors and battlefields and then mr scheideman dash a tall dignified looking man who bears striking resemblance late buffalo bill stop he shook hands stop he offered me cigarette stop it contained first real tobacco Ive smoked in berlin stop quote are you a socialist mr scheideman quote I asked stop when mr scheideman had finished answering I gathered that he was and wasnt stop there had been election stop people germany not given socialists majority stop therefor would be wrong impose socialist government on country stop quote therefor quote he concluded quote I stand ready make compromises to serve will people and found for germany democratic republic quote stop quote not socialist state then quote I repeated stop quote no quote said scheideman quote socialization industries government ownership and all theoretical points socialism will

¹ These transcriptions are my own, from archival documents in the Newberry Midwest MS collection. See Newberry Midwest MS Hecht papers, box 2 folder 19, and box 56 folder 1183. My further commentary about these archival items is available here: <http://publications.newberry.org/digital/making-modernism/ben-hechts-wwi-dispatch-and-editors-reply-1919>

come if at all later quote stop mr scheideman regarded ruby scarf pin quote cant be otherwise
quote he went on germany needs big business capitol stop soldiers workmens council dead stop
impossible for it survive stop german revolution was not socialist revolution but democratic one
stop this events have shown stop quote this to my knowledge was scheidemans first admission
present and future government not only anti sparticust also anti socialist same as american stop
quoteif you should be elected president germany would you take up official residence in ex
kaisers palace I inquired stop quote it is little unimportant thing quote said scheideman quote but
since typical of americans to be interested in little things I answerstop never quote he concluded
stop quote kaisers palace is museum of old germany stop place for relics not for future new
germany stopquote // [page 2 starts here] scheideman then continued to talk of high aims noble
programes new germany stop outside beyond corridors some hundred visitors waited dash
diplomats soldiers civil servants friends politicians etcetera stop I had entered room half
expecting interview new species political messiah stop I left historic room conscious of having
spoken to affable combination of Bismarck and hinky dink of south clark street chicago stop
Hecht

Handwritten letter from C.H. Dennis to Ben Hecht:

Chicago Daily News, Chicago

Paris Bureau, Paris

Feb. 7, 1919

Dear Mr Hecht:--

I am very glad to know that you have arrived at your field of operations in spite of the many obstacles that you encountered. Mr Bell has sent me copies of several of your cables and it is evident that you are finding much of interest to write about. The inclosed cable [now lost], showing how it was edited in the London Office, should be studied by you as a valuable lesson in skeletonization. Our rule is, of course, to be careful not to skeletonize so closely that the home office will have merely a blind word puzzle when the dispatch arrives. However, I think Mr Bell has shown good judgment in saving the office from paying cable tolls on ninety-five unnecessary words in your dispatch. On the subject of the word "stop," which unquestionably is used much too freely by most of our correspondents, Mr Bell writes me: "As Mr. Lawson once remarked, the question of 'stops' depends a good deal on the character of the story. The more concrete it is, the less need there is for 'stops'; the more abstract it is, the more need for 'stops,' if the desk man is not to get lost in the mist." Personally I think "stop" is needed very little and that it is greatly overdone.

In this cable your sketch of Scheidemann is excellent in describing him and his surroundings. However, I feel like echoing his reproof, "It is typical of Americans to be interested in little things," since you pass over what the man said of real moment with these words: "Scheidemann

then continued to talk of the high aims and noble programme of Germany.” Was not here the meat in the cocoanut? Was not this what you went to see him for? Surely the views of its leading men are hungrily desired by the world, which wishes to discover the precise mood of present day Germany. Further, I am wholly at a loss to understand why you should call Scheidemann an “affable combination of Bismarck and Hinky Dink.” This is playing leapfrog in the presence of a corpse or whistling in church. I feel that having a great opportunity to get a notable dispatch you first laid out a fine framework, then threw a gob of color on the canvas and went away. The business of interpreting these people is a big, serious business. The world is interested. It is a prodigious opportunity.

I trust you will find much good material in Weimar. At this moment I am a little disturbed lest you treat things only for surface effects. Naturally such effects add color and life and interest, yet after all they are merely the settings for the big elements lying below--the subjective side, as Mr Bell would say. This side will have to be studied and interpreted if we are to escape the charge of superficiality, even frivolity. While the world is being made over we cannot simply get about playing hopscotch among the tombs of empires.

Thus endth the sermon. Your quick eye for color and movement and epigram is a great asset. Doubtless you will be a valuable acquisition to our foreign news service when you get in mind the full scale of values in informing dispatches interpreting historic characters, incidents, movements and tendencies.

The peace conference just now is in the trough of the sea, but things are moving favorably. I am

now planning to sail for America at the end of February. I trust that you and Mrs Hecht are fairly comfortably situated by this time. I shall be glad to hear from you fully and frequently by mail provided you find opportunities to write. Only by full and frank correspondence can one come into full understanding respecting correspondents' needs and the office's requirements and points of view, which in some degree at least reflect the public's wishes.

Very truly yours,

C. H. Dennis

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