

Spring 2005

# Choran community: The aesthetics of encounter in literary and photographic modernism

Emily M. Hinnov

*University of New Hampshire, Durham*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation>

---

## Recommended Citation

Hinnov, Emily M., "Choran community: The aesthetics of encounter in literary and photographic modernism" (2005). *Doctoral Dissertations*. 266.

<https://scholars.unh.edu/dissertation/266>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctoral Dissertations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact [nicole.hentz@unh.edu](mailto:nicole.hentz@unh.edu).

# NOTE TO USERS

Page(s) not included in the original manuscript and are unavailable from the author or university. The manuscript was scanned as received.

127

This reproduction is the best copy available.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>



CHORAN COMMUNITY:  
THE AESTHETICS OF ENCOUNTER IN  
LITERARY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC MODERNISM

BY

EMILY M. HINNOV

B.A. English and Theatre, Allegheny College, 1995

M.A. English, Simmons College, 1999

DISSERTATION

Submitted to the University of New Hampshire

in Partial Fulfillment of

the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

English

May, 2005



UMI Number: 3169083

Copyright 2005 by  
Hinnov, Emily M.

All rights reserved.

### INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

**UMI**<sup>®</sup>

---

UMI Microform 3169083

Copyright 2005 by ProQuest Information and Learning Company.

All rights reserved. This microform edition is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company  
300 North Zeeb Road  
P.O. Box 1346  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

**ALL RIGHTS RESERVED**

**© 2005**

**Emily M. Hinnov**

This dissertation has been examined and approved.



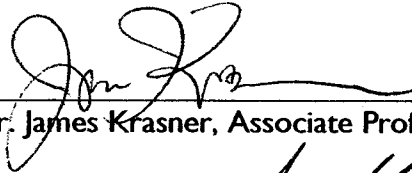
Dissertation Director, Dr. Robin Hackett, Assistant Professor of English



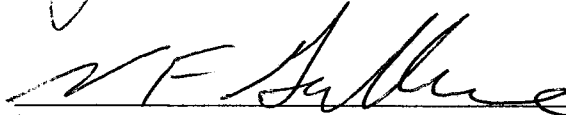
Dr. Lisa MacFarlane, Professor of English and American Studies



Dr. John Ernest, Professor of English



Dr. James Krasner, Associate Professor of English



Dr. Nicolletta Gullace, Associate Professor of History

4/14/05

Date

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my aunt, Linda Ralls Macy, whose passionate and inspiring example has upheld my mind and spirit in moments of uncertainty.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my dissertation committee, Drs. Robin Hackett, Lisa MacFarlane, John Ernest, James Krasner, and Nicolletta Gullace, for their support and guidance through the process of researching and writing my dissertation. I would especially like to express my gratitude to my director, Robin Hackett, for her steadfast encouragement and unwavering attention to my scholarship, without which I would not have been able to realize the full potential of this project. In addition I want to acknowledge the financial support provided by the University of New Hampshire's Dissertation Year Fellowship, as well as the Summer Teaching Assistant Fellowship and several travel grants which allowed me opportunities to conduct further research and participate in various academic conferences which helped me to better prepare for writing this dissertation. With one of these Summer TA Fellowships, I was able to undertake research at Smith College's Mortimer Rare Book Room, where I found photographic images from Leslie Stephen's family album, one of which I am grateful to have secured permission to include here. I appreciate the kind helpfulness of the entire staff at Smith. I should also mention that an early version of part of chapter one was previously published in *Woolf Studies Annual* vol. 8 (May 2002) of Pace University Press as "Shufflings of Kristeva: The Choran Moment in Virginia Woolf."

Even more vital to my successful completion of this dissertation is the strong support of my own community of colleagues, friends, and loved ones. My dissertation survival group, Mark John Isola, Jennie-Rebecca Falcetta, and Greta Methot, provided me

with infinite and necessary encouragement at a level that I can only hope I have been able to reciprocate. UNH's Dissertation Workshop, presided over by our fearless leader, Dr. Susan Schibanoff, has offered to me a welcoming place to try out drafts and revisions, as well as important strategizing sessions. Talks, both "academic" and decidedly not, with my cherished colleagues Freda Hauser, Andrew Lopenzina, Keith Botelho, Tonda Liggett, and Anne Bramblett, have been immensely valuable in sustaining me through sometimes difficult moments of transition from graduate student to professional self. There are many more friends and family members—Josh, Jill, Charles, Jen, Kevin, Jim—whose advice and confidence I have greatly appreciated. I have always relied upon the nurturing support of my mom, Sarah MacQuarrie, whose patient encouragement continues to help me maintain belief in myself. And finally, I want to acknowledge the unfaltering love and affirmation of my husband and partner, Erik Hinnov. I never would have come this far without your light, so thank you.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.....	x
ABSTRACT.....	xi

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION: LITERARY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC MODERNISM/S.....	1
Counternarratives of Self and Community.....	1
The Choran Moment as Humanist Practice.....	12
Literary Modernism, the New Psychology, and the First World War .....	16
The “Double Vogue” of African American Modernism and Primitivism.....	24
Primitivist Modernism and the Choran Moment.....	34
Modernist Photography and the Art of an Intersubjective Choran Moment.....	42
The Choran Moment as Political Aesthetic.....	49
A New Modernism of Communal Interconnectivity.....	55
I. THE PHANTASMIC MOTHER.....	78
Virginia Woolf’s Fiction, Gertrude Käsebier’s Photography, and Utopian Maternal Longing.....	78
The Maternal Utopia in Photographic Images of Mother and Child.....	84

Virginia Woolf's Textual Choran Moments.....	93
The Collective Vision of Woolf's Choran Moment.....	115
II. MODERNIST VISIONS OF "SELF" WITHIN COMMUNITY.....	127
Zora Neale Hurston's <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> and James Van Der Zee's Harlem Photographs.....	127
The Reimagining of Self and Other in <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> .....	134
The Power of African American's Modernist Vision.....	149
Modernist Interconnectivity and Hurston's Literary Legacy.....	154
III. CONNECTING WITH THE SELF/OTHER.....	169
The Problem of Primitivism and the False (?) Intersubjective Moment in Nella Larsen's <i>Quicksand</i> and Sylvia Townsend Warner's <i>Mr. Fortune's Maggot</i> .....	169
Countenancing the Divided Self in Nella Larsen's <i>Quicksand</i> .....	178
A Counter-reading to Conquest: "Primitivism" and Utopian Longing in Sylvia Townsend Warner's <i>Mr. Fortune's Maggot</i> .....	200
A Coda on the Utopian Choran Moment as Counternarrative.....	218
IV. VIRGINIA WOOLF'S COUNTERNARRATIVES OF COMMUNITY IN <i>THREE GUINEAS</i> AND <i>BETWEEN THE ACTS</i> .....	231
Woolf as Feminist Humanist.....	234
Reading Against Fascist History: <i>The Waves</i> and <i>Three Guineas</i> as Visions of Pacifist Humanism.....	239
Choran Redemption and <i>Between the Acts</i> .....	249
The Future for Modernist Interconnectivity.....	259



CONCLUSION: THE LEGACY OF CHORAN COMMUNITY.....	263
A Vision of Ethical Encounter in James Agee's and Walker Evans's <i>Let Us Now Praise</i> <i>Famous Men</i> .....	263
Agee's and Evans's Social Document of Interconnection.....	269
Coda: Reflections on the Post-Choran Moment.....	284
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	290

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

PHOTOGRAPH	PAGE
Leslie Stephen, <i>Julia Duckworth Stephen with Virginia</i> .....	74
Gertrude Käsebier, <i>The Manger, or Ideal Motherhood</i> .....	75
Gertrude Käsebier, <i>Mother and Child (Decorative Panel)</i> .....	76
Gertrude Käsebier, <i>Blessèd Art Thou Among Women</i> .....	77
James Van Der Zee, <i>A Harlem Couple Wearing Raccoon Coats Standing Next to a Cadillac on West 127<sup>th</sup> Street</i> .....	125
James Van Der Zee, <i>Memories</i> .....	126
Walker Evans, <i>Burroughs Family Portrait, Hale County, Alabama</i> .....	261
Walker Evans, <i>Bud Fields and His Family, Hale County, Alabama</i> .....	262

ABSTRACT

CHORAN COMMUNITY:

THE AESTHETICS OF ENCOUNTER IN  
LITERARY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC MODERNISM

By

Emily M. Hinnov

University of New Hampshire, May, 2005

This dissertation examines novels, photographs, and phototexts by British and American artists published between the world wars in order to argue that these works re-envision community through a narrative aesthetic, which I term the chorán moment, that communicates the possibility of genuinely empathetic understanding between self and other. My study of literary and photographic modernism is based upon these modern artists' awareness of an ever-present, organic community allied in common knowledge of the interconnection among humanity offered through convergence with and respect for difference. These chorán moments of correlation are key to the aesthetics and therefore the politics of modernist writers Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston, and photographers Gertrude Käsebier, James Van Der Zee, and Walker Evans.

The artists I discuss share a common humanist concern for creating moments of wholeness in their work. Moreover, their evocations of chorán moments lead to communal interconnectivity for both artist and audience. The longing to rediscover a

choran moment allows modern artists and audiences to rediscover a wholeness of self—the first step toward finding intersubjectivity and, finally, interconnective community through art. The ethical encounter, enacted in the choran moment, invites both contemporary audiences and the present scholarly community to read modernism as an attempt at rebuilding interconnectivity. Through my intervention into established critical categories of Modernism, I identify a particular expression of the period by examining how a broad selection of writers and photographers engage with a common humanist concern for recreating community through their art. My assessment of a diverse set of writers and photographers enables literary critics to include all of these previously unconnected artists under a new critical category of modernist narratives of community in order to see the work of these modernists as interconnected, resonant, and mutually productive. We are the scholars who can benefit from these artists' potentially transformative aesthetic of modernist choran moments and communal interconnectivity.

## INTRODUCTION

### LITERARY AND PHOTOGRAPHIC MODERNISM/S:

#### Counternarratives of Self and Community

The past only comes back when the present runs so smoothly that it is like the sliding surface of a deep river. Then one sees through the surface to the depths. In those moments I find one of my greatest satisfactions, not that I am thinking of the past; but it is then that I am living most fully in the present. For the present when backed by the past is a thousand times deeper than the present when it presses so close that you can feel nothing else, when the film on the camera only reaches the eye. But to feel the present sliding over the depths of the past, peace is necessary. (Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past" 98)

This dissertation examines novels, photographs, and phototexts by British and American artists published between the world wars in order to argue that these works re-envision community through a narrative aesthetic method, which I term the chorán moment, that communicates the possibility of genuinely empathetic understanding between self and other. These chorán moments of correlation, I suggest, are key to the aesthetics and the politics of modernist writers Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Nella Larsen, and Zora Neale Hurston, and photographers Gertrude Käsebier, James Van Der Zee, and Walker Evans. In using this term I do not mean to evoke the conventionally read "epiphanic moment"<sup>1</sup> as focused on the solipsistic individual. Rather, the chorán moment results from the portrayal of correlation and wholeness *between* characters. The artists I discuss share a common humanist concern for creating moments

of wholeness in their versions of narrative modernism. Moreover, their productions of choral moments lead to communal interconnectivity for both artist and audience. The ethical encounter enacted in the choral moment, invites both contemporary audiences and the present scholarly community to read modernism as an attempt at rebuilding interconnectivity.

This dissertation will build upon what other scholars of Woolf, Warner, Larsen and Hurston have shown as these artists' attempts to recognize our shared humanity and, perhaps more importantly, to oppose structures of dominance between self and other. Specifically, I focus upon the ways in which the choral moment resists conquest narratives by instead contributing counternarratives of community. The ideal of choral community implies an understanding of connection among its members which speaks back to modernist master narratives of imperialism, racism, sexism, fascism and otherwise destructive, or other alienating constructs of difference, linking this political concept represented in the text to the aesthetic, textual, choral moment. My concept of the choral moment builds upon Julia Kristeva's concept of "the semiotic chora," a prelinguistic state of consciousness experienced in infancy, to describe an aesthetic device that represents the illuminating encounter between more than mother and child. I remain slightly uncomfortable with this psychoanalytically-based term because I question whether the chora is a totalizing construction based upon a white Western perspective in and of itself. Yet I hope here to make productive use of psychoanalysis in the service of the sociopolitical interpretation of literary modernism. Rather than ending her discussion of the effects of the "semiotic chora" with a focus on the individual psyche or even on one-to-one relationships, Kristeva utilizes psychoanalysis as a model for accepting the

otherness within to form an ethics that will embrace peoples of different nations and ethnic backgrounds. Expanding upon Kristeva's work, as well as that of Gloria Anzaldúa, Mary Louise Pratt, and Homi Bhabha, as these literary and cultural theorists focus upon meeting places between selves, I argue that the choran moment allows modernist artists (and potentially readers) to rediscover not only a wholeness of self but, more significantly, intersubjectivity and, finally, interconnective community.

I am aware that "wholeness" and "oneness" are themes historically consistent with fascism. As Simonetta Falasca-Zamponi observes, "The possibility of unifying around national symbols ensured the cohesion of otherwise inchoate 'masses,' their shaping into a homogenous political body" into a "unitary hierarchically structured whole" (5; 189). Falasca-Zamponi attempts to "distinguish totalitarianism's homogenized wholes from democratic models of social unity, totalitarianism's aesthetics from a democratic radical one" (193). The only idea of kinship allowed under fascism was the "feeling of community" that "would presumably produce a disciplined fascist citizen who would subordinate his or her self to the organism of the state" (Berezin 249). A comprehensive explanation of fascism itself is beyond this scope of this dissertation. However, following Falasca-Zamponi, my definition of choran unity allows and respects difference. The choran moment and its consequential interconnective community do not absorb individual desire in order to advocate worship of an ideologue ruler; nor does it depend upon mechanistic or war-mongering notions of a regenerative collective. To repeat Falasca-Zamponi's phrase, the choran moment enacts a "democratic radical" aesthetic.

My overarching argument is that the modern artists I discuss variously depended upon choran moments as shaping elements of their art. As women writers,<sup>2</sup> Woolf,

Warner, Larsen, and Hurston were consistently vexed with hegemonic constructions of history that might seduce readers into repeating and recreating patriarchal, fascistic, or racist institutional networks of power in which everyone becomes complicit. Their interwar work represents resistance to ongoing, systematic, and external violences of sexism, war, imperialism, and fascism perpetuated by the inherent power of the patriarchy throughout history, both inside the private sphere of the home and outside in the public community. In their attempts to envision and reimagine interconnective community outside the confines of the dominant cultural narrative, which relegated them to specific and narrow roles related to gender, class, and race, these authors relied upon the choran moment as a feature of their writing.

As the work of contemporary photographers Gertrude Käsebier, James Van Der Zee, and Walker Evans show, a similar choran moment is available in the photograph. Informed by Walter Benjamin's concept of "redemptive optics" and John Berger and Jean Mohr's triangle of photographic interpretation, I look to photographic images as exhibiting fleeting yet revelatory instances in which photographic subjects, viewers, and artists might honor their interconnectedness with other selves. For Benjamin, Berger, and Mohr, the interaction between photographic artwork and audience creates an energetic exchange which has potential to bring about social change. The modernist ideal of photography as a meeting place across the divide of cultural borders—promising a utopian encounter and a new mode of being—compares with these novelists' use of fiction to fight against modern manifestations of empire, racism, and sexism. Otherworldly images created by modern photographers Käsebier, Van Der Zee, and Evans share a corresponding utopian vision. Modernist photographers embraced the concept of art as looking into the arbitrary world



for a pattern and a harmonious whole. For many modernists, the photograph stands for a mystical, intersubjective experience, revealing the intensity and heightened essence in the everyday. By blurring boundaries between subject and object, a momentary union between seer and seen is possible (Shloss 104-5). It is this sense of a collective flash in time, a vital moment of expansion and (re)discovery of common humanity, that Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston represent in their fiction to resist history-making as a brutalizing force. The modernist photographers I discuss use their medium in much the same manner. In what Edward Pavlic calls "modernism's reunification project" (xvii), "The relationship between internal and social identities is disrupted, broken, reimagined, and possibly renewed...[in] improvised methods of becoming." The previously divergent artistic projects of modern literature and photography followed two parallel trajectories in the interwar period: one where Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston were exploring the idea of the choran moment in their work, and the other where photographers of both sexes were concerned with the philosophical implications of their aesthetic.

What I mean by "narrative modernism" is not just literature, and is different from either "realism" (in relationship to literature) or "pictorialism" (in relationship to photography). I intend this as a term to encompass both the novel *and* the visual art of photography as narrative modes of communication. I mean to draw a comparison between the quality of narrative I see evident in both the photograph and the novel, particularly when discussing the potentially transformative aesthetic of the choran moment available in each. My study of modernism features those modern artists whose work reveals awareness of an ever-present organic community allied in a common knowledge of the interconnection, through convergence but with respect for difference,

among humanity. In this dissertation, through my intervention into established critical categories of Modernism, I identify a particular expression of the period by examining how a broad selection of writers and photographers engage with a common humanist concern for recreating community through their art. These artists are not commonly discussed together in studies of modernism in terms of this unifying principle for selection. More often, discussions of modernism have separated these artists by dividing them into categories related to, in the order in which I will discuss them in this introduction: theories of psychoanalysis and gender studies, histories of world war and fascism, discussions of the Harlem Renaissance, studies of race and class primitivism, theories of modern photography, and concepts of aesthetics and cultural studies. My assessment of a diverse set of writers and photographers enables literary critics to include these previously unconnected artists under a new critical category of modernist narratives of community and to see the work of Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, Gertrude Käsebier, James Van Der Zee, Richard Wright, James Agee and Walker Evans as interconnected, resonant, and mutually productive in creating an innovative view of literary modernism.

My discussion of particular novels, photographs, and phototexts progresses from individual choron moment to choron community, following a trajectory from texts which focus on the self who yearns for maternally-connected wholeness to those representing the individual's recognition of intersubjectivity or cohabitation with other selves and, finally, to those which suggest the outward projection of compassion to embrace community. Specifically, in my first chapter I compare maternally-connected choron moments in the photography of Gertrude Käsebier to those in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*

(1927) to show that this modernist aesthetic, as represented in both photograph and novel, resists death and destruction by reaffirming wholeness of self in part by recreating memories and experiences of maternal bonds. Chapter two presents my reading of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) and contemporary photographic images of African Americans by James Van Der Zee as important, complex representations of modernist African American communal identities in what is now known as the Harlem Renaissance. My interpretation of *Their Eyes* claims that moments of interconnectivity enable us to finally read Hurston's novel as a feminist polemic of humanist community. Thus, the structure of analysis in this dissertation moves from the maternally-based choron moment toward intersubjectivity and finally to choron community.

In chapter three, I argue that Nella Larsen's story of an African American woman's quest for full selfhood, *Quicksand* (1928) and Sylvia Townsend Warner's satirical, anti-imperialist novel *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927) include problematic moments of intersubjectivity; using these novels, I explore the ambiguities of idealized utopian encounters. Larsen and Warner's protagonists are seduced by instances of utopian longing. Both Warner and Larsen undertake the quandary of using primitivism to imagine the space between selves in their novels; by reason of their own positionalities in regards to race, they arrive at dissimilar conclusions about the possibility of full interconnectedness. In this chapter, I confront the problem of primitivism and its relationship to the ideal of the choron moment.

In the final chapters of this dissertation, I contend that for this brief yet energizing time between the wars, the novel and the photograph productively came together with

the phototext as hybrid of both media. In chapter four, Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* provides a jumping off point for my consideration of James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in the conclusion. The photograph and the literary text productively converged in 1938 with the publication of *Three Guineas* in Britain and the simultaneous composition, production, and revision of *LUNPFM*, published in 1941 to little acclaim. These phototexts, and Woolf's final novel *Between the Acts*, share a similar concern for creating an art both politically and aesthetically engaged in reimagining a sense of interconnectedness in a world burdened with war, poverty, racism, and uncertainty.

In chapter four, I turn to discussion of the novel and phototext as exemplified by one author's canon. This chapter shows how Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) and *Between the Acts* (1941) reveal her desire to forge a collective that will use art, both photographic and literary, to transform the present to formulate a new, more ethical society. Like the work of Woolf and Hurston, Agee's and Evans's phototext, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941) incited readers to act politically in a call to socially-engaged action against oppression that took effect upon this phototext's rediscovery in the late 1960s. I argue in my conclusion that *LUNPFM* represents both the possibility and the failure inherent in this modernist project of envisioning interconnective community. Agee and Evans's phototext is vexed with the devastating onset and effects of Americans' widespread abject poverty resulting from the Great Depression, yet represents a measure of reticent optimism in its attempt to sustain the possibility of making use of the choran moment once again. I will bring my dissertation to a close by historicizing the choran moment as a particularly modernist phenomenon that could not be fully realized because of the global disasters of the Depression, fascism, World War II, and the Holocaust. Here I discuss Agee's and

Evans's *LUNPFM* as responding to the legacy of modernist interconnectivity, focusing on this phototext's acknowledgment of the paradox inherent in the simultaneous desire and impossibility of connection between self and other at this time in history. The modernist question of art vs. activism is paramount in my conclusion,<sup>3</sup> which suggests that the invigorating power of art to create counternarratives finally depends upon communal, open interaction and interpretation. Once again by revising our understanding of traditional categories of modernism, we, as present and future literary critics, although I want to be clear that I am not making this claim for all of modernism, can see these artists as fitting together in their desire to recreate community with art. We are the scholars who can benefit from these artists' potentially transformative aesthetic of modernist choral moments and communal interconnectivity.

The implications of my work may be illustrated by a brief exemplary discussion of Virginia Woolf's essays on writing. Woolf is a modernist concerned with the social role of art, and is now accepted as a political theorist as well. For example, in her final, unfinished work, "Anon," she recapitulates her ongoing argument in favor of the democratic structure of the reader's relation to the author. Her discussion draws attention to her view of the ego in much modern writing as aggressively male and domineering. By asking her own readers to participate in making meaning without the almighty "I," her novels "advance a collective idea of character...We are to see ourselves as part of a collective audience...linked to readers of the past and future as the writer is engaged in building the structure of 'literature' as a historical effort" (Marcus, *New Feminist Essays* 9-10). Thus Woolf invites collaborative meaning-making when it comes to possible social outcomes of art in future generations.

Virginia Woolf views aesthetics as a vehicle for social action that might bring about humanistic unity. In her autobiographical piece, "A Sketch of the Past," Woolf ruminates on an early childhood memory of seeing a flower and realizing, "That is the whole...the revelation of some order...some real thing behind appearances" (71-72). In her search for coherence and interconnectivity, she speaks to the web-like linkage between all of humanity, accessible through our participation in art: "We—I mean all human beings—are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art, that we are parts of that work of art...we are the words; we are the music; we are the thing itself" (72). Here she also describes her profound pacifism in that for any wholeness to exist, "peace is necessary" (98). A deep sense of peace can be found in Woolf's present moment, yet the depths of Woolf's "deep river" of consciousness contain an interweaving of past, present, and future. She sees beauty in whole "moments of being" that transcend modes of living death with fullness of mind and spirit—all within the mesh of a wider web of humanity—forging connections between her artistic philosophy and the modernist writer's project of self and communal formulation. Woolf's humanistic approach to life and art opens up the possibility for a communal awareness based upon convergence in spite of difference.

Through common engagement in what Woolf's contemporary cultural theorist Walter Benjamin calls the "redemptive optics" available in the newly democratized role of art, Woolf contends that audiences might collaborate and participate with a new version of living aesthetics. Benjamin famously argued that in the mechanical age of reproduction, art has lost its original aura. For Benjamin, the dialectical image afforded by the lately egalitarian place of art in modern society offers a veritable constellation of interpretations. Moreover, the reproduced photographic work of art produces flashes of insight about

what history as the story of the past might mean, which, with the benefit of communal interaction, will lead to social transformation for both artist and viewer. As other readers have persuasively argued, Woolf and Benjamin were both concerned with artwork composed of fragmentary materials as a response to the seeming whole of the fascist threat.<sup>4</sup> Through collective response and interpretation by its “readers,” art might rebuild genuine wholeness and a sense of community, revealing a counternarrative to any despotic narratives of dominance perpetuated throughout history by those in power. Woolf’s vision of the world as a living work of art in which the wider audience must play an integral part speaks to Benjamin’s concept of redemptive optics; both modernist philosophers provide relevant context for the choron moment as a narrative device (found both in the novel and the photograph) which creates the opportunity, through cooperative (re)action, to rebuild community.

Through my work, I mean to suggest a reading practice in which contemporary critics strive to realize the potential of aesthetics in revealing the coequal presence of self and other, both in literature and in life. More precisely, by reading these texts we can perhaps think in terms of *selves* rather than *self-and-other* as we imagine the future, and thereby eradicate the commanding culture’s insistence upon demarcating a destructive understanding of difference. The implications of such literary analysis are that it demands ethical decisions from those scholars who read, examine, and teach literature in the present. As scholars, we must, upon reading these modernist texts, recognize and accept the interconnection among humanity as well as act upon the empathetic practice emerging from this understanding. In the process of building bridges, we can recognize, as AnaLouise Keating reminds us, that “spiritual activism begins with the personal yet moves

outward, acknowledging our radical interconnectedness" (18). By embracing the otherness within, recognizing and accepting one another as selves in process, these modern artists began the project of a just transcendence of ideological and historical brutalities. As recipients of this newly recognized literary tradition of now interconnected artists, we might continue this project in our readings of modernism today.

### The Choran Moment as Humanist Practice

I love the other, who is not necessarily me, and who gives me the possibility of opening myself to something other than myself...what I call love is openness to the other, and it is what gives me my human dimension, my symbolic dimension, my cultural and historic dimension. (Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* 379)

Psychoanalyst and linguist Julia Kristeva justifies the use of psychoanalysis, a discipline that has often been criticized as limited by its white European perspective, in enacting political and social change. As Kelly Oliver writes, Kristeva

works to emphasize the role of the imagination...in the construction of our sense of ourselves and others. Kristeva suggests that we cannot change our practice until we change the way we imagine ourselves and others. Significant political change and policy reform can result only from changes in our individual and cultural imaginary. (xxvi-xxvii)

In *Strangers to Ourselves* (1991) and *Nation Without Nationalism* (1993) Kristeva argues that the pattern of alterity is already found within the subject, suggesting that we can learn to live with others if we recognize ourselves as subjects in process, as well as the presence of the other within. For Kristeva, this acceptance is built on love. She maintains that psychoanalysis, with its attempts to embrace the otherness within, becomes a model for



an ethics that will embrace difference: “The ethics of psychoanalysis implies a politics: it would involve a cosmopolitanism of a new sort that, cutting across governments, economies, and markets, might work for a mankind whose solidarity is founded on the consciousness of its unconscious” (*Strangers to Ourselves* 290).<sup>5</sup> Kristeva’s emphasis on the individual’s co-relationship with those who are abjected is central to my use of a psychoanalytically-based term to describe this modernist phenomenon of ethical encounter.

The theoretical foundation of my discussion lies in psychoanalytic theories of the maternal bond in the development of the individual subject. Kristeva has transformed Lacanian philosophy into feminist theory<sup>6</sup> by reinventing the imaginary realm of Lacan’s mirror stage as the “semiotic chora,” in which the infant’s babblings to her mother and herself<sup>7</sup> (between which the child cannot yet distinguish) are understood as a connection or return to the semiotic, prelanguage, pregendered and maternally bonded state of existence.<sup>8</sup> The return to the maternal has been celebrated by feminist theorists such as Elaine Showalter and Hélène Cixous.<sup>9</sup> The chora, a pregendered space of unified existence<sup>10</sup> connected with the maternal core, offers a precursor to Woolf’s concept of androgyny in which the “masculine” and “feminine” sides of our being are melded and become indistinguishable. Here I define “maternal” as not necessarily gendered; although we are symbiotic with the maternal body as we experience the chora, this encounter exists for both sexes and occurs before gender is even encoded by the symbolic realm of language. Derrida suggests the connection between androgyny and the chora in his determination of *khóra* as a space “beyond categories” (95), an “opening” (103) that originates before gender classifications in the “preoriginary, before and outside of all

generation...[to] the dream [that] is between the two, neither one nor the other” (*On the Name* 124-126). Derrida’s sense of “khóra” lies outside its Platonic origin of a feminine receptacle. According to Derrida, “in order to think *khóra*, it is necessary to go back to a beginning that is older than the beginning, namely, the birth of the cosmos” (126). I also view the chora as a place of “neither this or that,” a place where genders are preformed, intermingled, indistinguishable; thus gender (and potentially race and class) here is fundamentally irrelevant. We are caught up in the constrictive binaries of gender difference once we reach the symbolic state of existence; the presence of androgyny in Woolf’s depiction of the choran moment, for instance, shows that we can recapture the choran experience by striving toward just that sense of androgyny.<sup>11</sup>

During the 1980s a new generation of critics began attacking the concept of androgyny as intellectually limiting; Toril Moi sought to “deconstruct the metaphysical belief in two relatively fixed, immutable, complementary but opposing genders” (Kaivola 237), and argued instead for a “third” sexed position. By the 1990s the debate had become passé in the academy, but Kari Weil persisted with an argument that future discussions of androgyny should consider systems of difference other than gender. Weil asserts that we should include race, ethnicity and sexuality and to “envision a meeting rather than a joining across gulfs of difference” (Kaivola 238). Following Weil, I suggest a meeting place between constructs of difference where an all-embracing sense of consciousness I find best embodied by the concept of the choran moment.

In order to further articulate my understanding of the choran moment, I turn to Marjorie Pryce’s idea of “transitivity” as a term that “encourages us to avoid substituting one category for another and...to be more attuned to the borders across and between

categories” (526). I suggest that in this transitive moment, societal constructions of sex, gender, and race claim no significance in determining any kind of hierarchical difference. For me, the choran moment represents this possibility of a communion where, although gender, race, sexuality, and class are ever-present, we might look for the bridge between structures of difference. The third space offered by this choran rift ironically allows for an opening—a freeing, personal interplay with various modernist (con)texts, producing pleasure for the reader/viewer in intense, inspired, almost sacred moments of being.

The modernist writings and photographs I discuss illustrate this ideal, androgynous, third-spaced understanding of the choran moment. This space offers a kind of epiphany, or a “delicious caving into [the] self” (Anzaldúa 51) which incites artists, viewers, and readers to begin reforming more ethical associations with other selves.<sup>12</sup> Gloria Anzaldúa powerfully expresses this notion of multiplicity as well with her articulation of literary criticism along the border:

Borderlands are physically present wherever two or more cultures edge each other...where people of different races occupy the same territory, where under, lower, middle and upper classes touch, where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy...Living on borders and in margins, keeping in tact one’s shifting multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an ‘alien’ element...not comfortable but home. (Preface par. 1-2).

Her metaphor of borderlands illuminates how photographers and writers who strive to mend the fissure between self and Other might recreate a sense of wholeness in their work.<sup>13</sup>

Kristeva's view of the redemptive power of psychoanalysis springboards my discussion of the choral moment and modernist interconnectivity toward a more socio-political and culturally-engaged way of reading, one that I believe these artists invite in their work. For Woolf, Warner, Larsen, Hurston, and their contemporary cultural theorist Walter Benjamin, the democratization of art could bring about political change through collective engagement in making meaning and resisting dominant constructions of history. The chapter of modernism I am exploring includes writers and artists concerned with creating a compassionate society where the whole, spiritual and physical, as well as inner and outer, self can be recognized and cultivated in order to understand one's unspoken interconnection with others. For these modernists, as reflected in their hopeful aesthetic, the importance of honoring other selves in the process of becoming, while allowing for unity in difference, is crucial to the survival of humanity.

#### Literary Modernism, the New Psychology, and the First World War

I participate in critical discussions connecting literary modernism and the contemporary culture's fascination with the new science of psychoanalysis. The process of coming to identity in modernist literature depended upon the individual's desire to confront and converge with the otherness without and within. Modern novelists in particular were striving to create new perspectives on how to represent the workings of the mind in literature. In "The Art of Fiction" (1888), Henry James argued that the novelist's ability to portray psychological depth was an important function of the novel. As twentieth century writers grew bored with realistic characterizations in fiction, many

agreed with Woolf in her groundbreaking essay “Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown” (1924) that, “On or about December, 1910, human character changed” (12). Accordingly Woolf called for a shift in emphasis in the modern novel from outside notions of character to inside notions of the psyche. E.M. Forster, in *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), shares Woolf’s concept of representing the perpetual flux of the mind and illuminated moments of being in the novel. In her earlier essay “Modern Fiction” (1919), Woolf objects to Wells, Bennett and Galsworthy as “materialists” (209) and social critics with a Victorian progressive sense of improvement instead of asking “how do we live and what do we live for?” She views these materialists as soulless writers who concentrate on life’s outer structures in their depictions of character’s development over long periods of time. Woolf recommends looking to psychology as fodder for a new kind of fiction:

Examine for a moment an ordinary mind on an ordinary day. The mind receives a myriad impressions...From all sides they come, an incessant shower of innumerable atoms; and as they fall, they shape themselves into the life of Monday or Tuesday...Life is not a series of gig lamps symmetrically arranged; but a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. (212)

Striving to gather the intricacies of human psychology in literature, Woolf urges, “Let us recover the atoms as they fall upon the mind in the order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness” (213). She contends that the moderns need to look to the “dark places of psychology” to examine the inner self, “the ordinary mind on an ordinary day” (215) revealed in the intricacies of moment-to-moment streams of

consciousness rather than in the superficial conversations of clichéd social relationships. Woolf concludes that “the infinite possibilities of the art and remind us that there is no limit to the horizon...everything is the proper stuff of fiction” (218).<sup>14</sup> By examining the inner self, “the spirit,” she appeals to “life” and the central experience of consciousness (215). Even in this early essay Woolf gestures toward a wider, more all-encompassing vision of art and its power to bring to us the “infinite possibilities” of this shared life.

More recent critical studies of modernism have shifted the focus from psychology to examinations of gender. The recuperative gynocritical work of feminist scholars in the latter part of the twentieth century opened up limiting masculinist conceptions of Modernism. Feminist scholars in newly emerging women’s studies departments in the 1970s and ‘80s began turning to the concept of gender as socially constructed, allowing for more fluid, flexible, and multiple definitions of gender. Bonnie Kime Scott’s establishment of an alternative twentieth-century canon states that the novel form was especially useful for women writers in their attempts to reckon with modernism’s reconstructions of “mind, body, sexuality, family, reality, culture, religion, and history” (*The Gender of Modernism* 16). Further, when we focus on gender as a theoretical category of inquiry in the scope of modernism, “we are also encouraged to think about the structure of categorical systems, the number of variable positions they entertain, and the permeability of boundaries within and between them” (3). Scott was one of the first feminist scholars to argue toward a gendered reading of modernism.<sup>15</sup> Scott’s work, and that of other feminist scholars, serves as further impetus for me to extend my study of Modernism toward a deeper understanding of literary modernisms as less monolithically singular and more expansive and inclusive.

This attention to gender as a critical category within the study of modernism takes into account those writers and artists previously left out of the Modernist canon. Woolf suggested the category of the “Outsider’s Society” of female writers who are marginalized because of class and economics. Black writers were previously seldom considered with the “makers” of modernism, although many modernists were captivated by black cultural expressions and were intensely interested in the “primitive” in the period roughly from 1910-1940.<sup>16</sup> In a time when psychoanalysis was conceived of as an exciting new science useful for discovering the origins of the self, post-impressionism and African art were viewed as inspirations for creating the new mode of expression known as modernism. At the same time, feminine language was equated with chaos, the womb, dung, and jellyfish for male modernists Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, and James Joyce. Accordingly, modernism encompasses a “bewildering array of shifting” identities for women, especially black women; Scott concludes that: “Mind, body, sexuality, family, reality, culture, religion and history were all reconstrued” (16) during the period when literary modernism was made new.

In light of that permeability between and among categories of identity, particularly within the context of modernism’s quest for a more coherent sense of self, we must also interrogate the equally important issues of race, sexuality, class, and nationality inherent in the modernist project. Here I join debates stressing the interrelatedness of the construction of blackness and whiteness in the development of modernist aesthetics. It has been well-established by scholars such as Nathan Irvin Huggins and Houston A. Baker, Jr.,<sup>17</sup> among others, that the Harlem Renaissance was developed, in part, through the symbiosis of black and white culture. During the period of literary history encompassing

the Great War and the beginnings of the Second World War, modern writers from both sides of the Atlantic, as well as either side of the gender and color lines, took up the novel form<sup>18</sup> with the desire to explore questions of identity in their creation of personal and national narratives. Paul Gilroy argues that writers such as Richard Wright, Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois all began as African Americans and became something else, something which evades specific labels or fixed notions of nationality or identity; their exile denotes “a desire to escape the restrictive bounds of ethnicity, national identification and sometimes even ‘race’ itself” (*The Black Atlantic* 19).<sup>19</sup> Following Gilroy’s idea of the black Atlantic—a non-traditional tradition, “an irreducibly modern, ex-centric, unstable, and asymmetrical cultural ensemble that cannot be comprehended through the Manichean logic of binary coding” (198)—I contend that the construction of blackness in the literature of the New Negro movement has much to do with the construction of identity in the literature of white women. In order to interrogate the category of Modernism, it is necessary that we critique the concept of race and the assumption that nonwhite or nonmale-authored texts represent some kind of Modernist Other.

Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston’ novels (as well as Käsebier, Van Der Zee, and Evans’s photographs) were created during a defining political movement between the wars. The continuing quagmires of racism and sexism which plagued British and American culture in the interwar period evidenced an extension of oppressive patriarchy, as well as economic depression and failed initial promises to help the working class. Grim social circumstances, particularly for women and blacks, remained fairly status quo. Against this backdrop, the novels and photographs I will discuss become triumphs of criticism and possibility for the life of humanity.<sup>20</sup>



As many feminist theorists of war have observed, such as Gilbert and Gubar in their series *No Man's Land*, war itself was often characterized as a battle between the essential qualities of the sexes so that institutions in power could reestablish rigid gender-based roles. As Susan Kingsley Kent notes, "The perceived blurring of gender lines occasioned by war's upheaval led many in British society to see in a reestablishment of sexual difference the means to re-create a semblance of order" (99).<sup>21</sup> Nicoletta Gullace also argues that the increased militarization of British society during the First World War depended upon traditional notions of gender and citizenship: "The creation of a cultural episteme in which notions of duty, loyalty, and Britishness gained an authoritativeness that undercut the hegemony of sex in defining the rights of citizenship" (10). Gullace shows us that the Great War was in part waged through and by conventional gendered constructions of British citizenship that ensured legitimacy both for masculinized soldiers and newly enfranchised female patriots who played an active role in perpetuating the view of male resisters as feminized traitors to Britannia.

The most extreme propaganda was the social policy of the Nazis, who also participated in the reinscription of standard gender roles: "driven by the twin demands of preserving racial and sexual domination..., the Nazis' unparalleled intervention in reproduction and family life undermined the power of individual men within their families—the very power the government had vowed to preserve" (Higonnet 9). Along with Nazi social policy came increased prejudice regarding race, sexual orientation, and religion.<sup>22</sup> Siobhan Somerville discusses anxieties regarding racial difference and homosexuality beginning at the turn of the century, as well as the overt fascinations with the newly emerging ideas of sexual transformation provided by a weakening of the

boundaries of gender and sexuality. Her central argument is that formations of notions about sexuality are parallel to and saturated by discourse on the racialization of bodies (2). Following Somerville, we must recognize the ways in which the instability of multiple categories of difference allow us to view whiteness and blackness as a crucial part of the history and representation of sexual formations (5).

Fascism, as a reflection of racial and sexual dominance, was on the rise throughout most of the Western world between the wars. Mabel Berezin writes, "During the 1920s and 1930s, virtually every country in Europe has a fascist movement, or a political movement that displayed the characteristics of the fascist impulse, but relatively few of them progressed to political regimes, that is, took control of the state" (13). Fascism was in part a movement that could supposedly "forestall the spread of standardization and degeneration" into a "reinforced order and hierarchy" to propose "a model of modern existence that foresaw a comforting continuity of master narratives of privilege and domination" (Ben-Ghiat 3). There is no denying the horrifyingly despotic effects of Nazi Germany, coming into full implementation by 1938. The monolithic center of power represented by this most extreme fascist regime rejected any kind of ethos that would guide behavior toward others, denying the fact that the modern artists I discuss understood: "One is a self only among other selves. A self can never be described without reference to those who surround it" (Taylor 35).

The need for those in power (Anglo men) to keep races and genders in hierarchal semblance was reflected in American social policy as well. Racism was one of the worst consequences of this hegemonic system. As James De Jongh reminds us, the reality of life for nonwhites in the 1920s and '30s remained much the same; blacks continually struggled

against those master narratives that represented them as Other. Although several hundred thousand Negro Americans fought in the First World War, lynchings, race riots, and deportations occurred once those soldiers came home. In the face of fascism and white Americans' perpetuation of blacks' second-class citizenship, especially in the case of African Americans in the military, many blacks' former belief in whites' mutual respect was shattered (79). By the time the Harlem riot of 1935 erupted, "the optimistic spirit [of the 1920's] had eroded, and the hopefulness had turned bitter and resentful" (25). Even Harlem, a place of refuge and solace for many African Americans and immigrants from Africa and the West Indies throughout the 1920s, suffered economic and social deterioration by the 1930s.<sup>23</sup> Ann Douglas argues that it was actually the African Americans who embodied the true "lost generation" (87) of modernism. It is important to remember as I discuss the work of such Harlem Renaissance writers as Hurston and Larsen that artistic and intellectual achievement did not win for blacks political, economic, or educational parity with whites.

These historical contexts beg the question of whether any vision of a collective based upon an ethos of empathy could coexist with mechanisms of fascism, war, and racism. In the aftermath of total war on the Other, as well as the prospect of further devastation, "the discourse of militarism...permeate[d] the whole fabric of society, touching...men and women" of all classes and races (Higonnet 4). Jay Winter claims that, "After 1945, older forms of the language of the sacred faded, and so had optimism, the faith in human nature on which it rested" (228). Could art, as a sacred source of restoration against oppression and death, provide any sense of communal interconnectivity up until that time? The diverse texts I study here under the new

category of modernist narratives of community offer an important response.

### The “Double Vogue” of African American Modernism and Primitivism

[I]f the Negro was in vogue in the 1920s, there was a double vogue: on the one hand, the rather exploitative passion for the primitive and exotic seen in cabarets and revues, and even in the influence some white patrons tried to exert on their African-American *protégés*; on the other hand a more genuine interest among white modernists, an interest which was not necessarily devoid of misunderstandings. (Geneviève Fabre and Michel Feith, *Temples of Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance* 11)

Claude McKay’s poem “The Harlem Dancer” (published in his *Harlem Shadows* collection in 1922) celebrates the beginnings of the Harlem Renaissance, the period of unprecedented expression by black artists of African American culture in the 1920s. McKay’s work also reveals a counternarrative to an ideal or completely celebratory vision of this period; the figure of the Harlem dancer embodies both pride and ambivalence inherent in the black experience. As the focal point of the Harlem club, she “seemed a proudly-swaying palm” (l. 7) who inspires the admiration of “even the girls” (11). All those under her spell “Devoured her shape with eager, passionate gaze” (12), while beneath the surface of the dancer’s sensual expression, “her falsely-smiling face” (13) proves to the speaker that “her self was not in that strange place” (14). The Harlem dancer must “wear the mask” of Paul Laurence Dunbar’s minstrel sideshow or primitive exotic while striving to maintain a strong inner power that cannot be exploited by her applauding on-lookers.

*Harlem Shadows* includes other sonnets which speak to the importance of struggle against white supremacy, which must have seemed at times like a doomed resistance. The

split between the ideal and the actual, the subject of political reality for blacks, is most potently evident in "If We Must Die," which was written in response to the overwhelming violence of rioting and lynchings in a dozen northern urban centers during the Red Summer of 1919. Here McKay threatens the white supremacists with the strength of those African American soldiers who had been ridiculed upon their return from the front:

O kinsmen we must meet the common foe!

...And for their thousand blows deal one deathblow!

...Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,

Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

The work of Claude McKay offers us a complex political context out of which novels by Hurston and Larsen were produced. Although with less militancy and more humor, Hurston and Larsen (the latter with even more bitter irony) negotiate the dual purpose of Harlem Renaissance literature to celebrate black cultural forms and avoid denigrating or primitivizing the black experience, especially in the eyes of a white audience who projects a double consciousness on both artist and artwork. Hurston and Larsen leave us with no simple version of the period now known as the Harlem Renaissance. Instead, we must look at this time as representing the vexed kind of "double vogue" embodied by African American modernism. In a study that invokes Modernism as a category of critical inquiry, it is vital that I advocate for making connections between the work of Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston. Therefore, it is essential that I clear space here for an extended analysis of the Harlem Renaissance as a movement inherently associated with white modernism.

If we are to accept the argument that notions of race, sexuality, gender, and class are all interwoven, circulating, and mutually interdependent categories, then it is impossible to view the Harlem Renaissance as a mere subset of Modernism. I participate in literary critics' observation of modernism as a movement inextricably linked with expressions of black culture. By as early as 1910 (Woolf's year of great character transformation in modern fiction), many black artists felt they had a responsibility to advance the development and survival of black writers. Du Bois's *Crisis* magazine was the literary vehicle for the NAACP and a source of African American art that could reach a black readership. By all positive accounts, the Harlem Renaissance generated a literary and cultural explosion that would establish the black writer as a seminal force in its artistic engagement with contemporary issues of ideal literary themes, cultural identity, and psychological reconstruction. Alain Locke boldly argued that literature should be used to reform African American social identities. His introduction to *The New Negro* (1925) reflects his confidence in young black artists' commitment to represent black America in new progressive terms.

During the 1920s African American art and literature gained recognition as a significant component of world culture. Numerous people of color from the South and the Caribbean moved to Harlem in New York City, where the blending of cultures helped foster a blossoming of the arts. A prodigious amount of poetry, novels, plays, music, art, and social commentary in the neighborhood newly transformed by the Great Migration of African Americans to the North was produced during the era between the world wars that it is now known as the Harlem Renaissance. Also sometimes referred to as the New Negro Movement (following Alain Locke's anthology), this period championed ideals of

racial pride and uplift as powerful tools for African American artistic expression.

According to Locke:

With this renewed self-respect and self-dependence, the life of the Negro community is bound to enter a new dynamic phase...The migrant masses, shifting from countryside to city, hurdle several generations of experience at a leap, but more important, the same thing happens spiritually in the life-attitudes and self-expression of the Young Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education and his new outlook...From this comes the promise and warrant of a new leadership. (4-5)

African American artists, actors, performers, and writers took up Locke's call for uplift and led the battle against intellectual and artistic bias.

The borough of Harlem became the unofficial capital of Black America during the period from 1919 to the Great Depression, and Harlem has since been viewed as the unrivaled center of African American culture at this time. Over 454,000 blacks left the South between 1910 and 1920—749,000 in the next decade.<sup>24</sup> Nightclubs, community centers, cafes, publishing houses, photography studios, and art galleries sprang up in Harlem amidst a tremendous level of energy and excitement, yet many were owned and operated by whites who barred entrance to African Americans unless they were performers. By the mid-1920s, Harlem was advertised as the "Nightclub Capital of the World," boasting over 125 clubs where white patrons could luxuriate in slumming and releasing their supposed primitive sexual drives. It is important to recognize the long-held minstrel tradition underlining the popularity of Harlem clubs. This tradition, dating back to the 1840s when white artists put on black face and performed stereotypical acts for white

and black audiences, and in the 1860s when black performers began their own shows, necessitated that black performers meet the expectations of white audiences and behave as “darkies” or “coons.” Yet by the 1920s, minstrelsy also held within it the possibility of empowerment, or at least condemnation of stereotypes: “Black minstrels not only imitated whites-playing-blacks but also burlesqued them; minstrelsy involved stereotype upon stereotype, opponents as look-alikes, mocking and criticizing each other” (Douglas 75).

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), perhaps the most important pretext of the Harlem Renaissance, W.E.B. Du Bois makes the definitive statement of modernism and its connections with black culture: “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line” (vii). Du Bois recounts the moment when he became aware of the Veil and its restricted access to whole selfhood as a white girl refuses his calling card. He contends that “Negroes” are

born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world—a world which yields no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One feels his two-ness, an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (3)



His text emulates the search for a coherent sense of self as a particularly modern black American experience: “this longing to...merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost...He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both Negro and an American...This, then, is the end of his striving: to be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture” (4). As a result, the black artisan is troubled by “the contradiction of double aims...The innate love of harmony and beauty that set the ruder souls of his people a-dancing and a-singing raised but confusion and doubt in the soul of the black artist” (4-5). Ultimately for Du Bois, uplift will come from the intellect and a collective striving for community: “Work, culture, liberty—all these we need” in “the ideal of human brotherhood, gained through the unifying ideal of Race” (110).<sup>25</sup> This “plural, socially constructed self provides the basis for modernist communions as well as fractures” (Pavlic 7), culminating in the concept of a performative and communal identity.

As an emblem of the promise of the Harlem Renaissance, Jean Toomer’s *Cane* speaks to early twentieth century black culture’s penchant toward community. According to Darwin T. Turner, in his introduction to the novel, it is “Hot, rich, sensual, alive, redolent with suggestions of emotionalism, primitivism, savagery, and jazz, it fit the mood of many Freudian-inspired Americans shattering the chains of a primitivist past” (xvi-xvii). Although I agree with Turner’s assessment of the complexity of Toomer’s work, I think that Toomer, rather than ridding himself of the “primitive past,” suggests, not unlike Du Bois, that reconvergence with it will fortify us for the future. *Cane* is a song for an era that was slowly ending, however primitivist his depictions of “the folk” may be. Like Du Bois’s yearning for a kind of transitivity between two worlds, Toomer strives to collect and

combine humanity into one race, to recreate an “intermingling...and sympathy with thoughts and feelings of the other” (Du Bois 110), and “to look frankly into his eyes and feel his heart beating with red blood” (111) in “the opening of heart and hand of the best to the worst, in generous acknowledgment of a common humanity and a common destiny.”

The Harlem Renaissance transformed American identity, history, and culture in general, and by some accounts, fortified the greater black community. Many written studies have examined this history, focusing on the popular culture of Harlem and illustrating the complex interactions between luminaries like Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, Zora Neale Hurston, Claude McKay, A'Lelia Walker, and W.E.B. Du Bois. Various start and finish dates have been quoted; anywhere from the teen years to the late thirties. “Shuffle Along,” the first Broadway musical written, produced, and performed by African Americans in 1921, has been seen by many as its start, while the Great Depression of 1929 signaled the beginning of the end. For many scholars looking back on the decade of the 1920s, the Harlem Renaissance, as a cultural and artistic explosion, signaled a spiritual emancipation unparalleled in African American experience. It would be impossible to examine the Jazz Age without understanding the complex role that African Americans—and the black community of Harlem—played in the modern re-identification of American culture. F. Scott Fitzgerald himself said that the Jazz Age was inherently black. Never before had so many white Americans read the thoughts of African Americans and embraced the black community’s productions, expressions, and style. My project echoes that of Ann Douglas, who notes, “Although these movements are studied separately, they are at bottom, as the terms ‘Aframerica’ and ‘Aframericans’ were meant to suggest,

inextricable; whites and blacks participated and collaborated in both projects” (5). Again, I believe that we must intervene into established critical categories of Modernism, such as the Harlem Renaissance, in order to identify a heretofore unrecognized version of literary modernism as a time when writers and photographers engaged with a common humanist concern for recreating community through their art.

The other side of this rather sunny narrative of “The Harlem Renaissance” is the political and social reality for blacks living in America (many in the so-called Mecca of Harlem) in the first part of the twentieth century. The Harlem Renaissance has too often been read as a white-washed myth of progress and cooperation. As James DeJongh reminds us, “Harlem’s promise and sense of liberation made it possible to overlook a widening range of social evils the community was already suffering even in the 1920s” (9). For black artists, there was little escape from the dominance of white sponsorship (and often outright ownership) of their art. Bruce Kellner<sup>26</sup> speaks to the uneasy partnership between black and white culture during this time: “The black writer both thrived and suffered, torn between well-meant encouragement from the white race to preserve his racial identity (usually described as ‘primitivism’) and a misguided encouragement from his own race to emulate the white one” (93). On the other hand, Kellner argues that the Harlem Renaissance would never have developed as it did without the support of white patrons such as Albert C. Barnes, Walter White, Mrs. Rufus Osgood (Charlotte) Mason, Arthur and Joel Spingarn, and Carl Van Vechten.

Many white patrons emphasized the vibrant life in Harlem, which they identified as folk culture or primitivism. As far as Van Vechten<sup>27</sup> (the most controversial), however, Kellner finds him mostly blameless: “There is nothing in any of his work to suggest that his

respect and admiration were not genuine, and it is clear that his desire to share his discoveries resulted in a cultural interchange unique at the time” (103-4). It is true that his novel *Nigger Heaven* (1926) created a large white readership for black culture, but its focus is on Harlem’s seamier side. Kellner finds that the novel both instructs and panders to its white audience, while simultaneously representing the real political and social experiences of Harlem life: “It is consciously didactic, a deliberate attempt to educate Van Vechten’s already large white reading public by presenting Harlem as a complex society fractured and united by individual and social groups of diverse interests, talents, and values” (104). His wife Fania stated that, “color prejudice and racial strife are due to ignorance and thoughtlessness. They will disappear as knowledge and culture advance” (qtd. in Coleman 121). According to Leon Coleman,<sup>28</sup> the Van Vechten’s party-giving was “a social means to a racial end” (123) of interracial community. Still, the kind of primitivist stereotypes many black writers felt the need to perform in their writing tended to gloss over the difficulty of African American experience in favor of presenting a more savory version for the white reading population footing the bill.<sup>29</sup> Can the seeming anti-racist sentiments and behaviors of white patrons like Carl and Fania Van Vechten expunge the existence of otherwise hurtful and domineering presence of white patronage during the New Negro Renaissance?

According to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., it was the confusion between art and propaganda that truly plagued the Harlem Renaissance (“Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext”).<sup>30</sup> The concept of racial uplift was derived from Victorian notions of spiritual and moral ideas, and writers felt the need to assimilate their work with these ideals in order to be accepted by white audiences: “The race against Social Darwinism and the psychological remnants of slavery meant that each piece of creative writing became a political

statement” (154).<sup>31</sup> Du Bois, in a 1921 edition of the *Crisis*, writes, “We insist that our Art and Propaganda be one,” emulating an image of the “artist-redeemer.” As a result, Gates argues, black literature “came to be seen as a cultural artifact...or as a document and witness to the political and emotional tendencies of the Negro victim of white racism” (155).<sup>32</sup> The structure of black literature was “atomized” and “‘form’ was merely a surface for a reflection of the world” or “attitude toward race.” As a result, the “critic became social reformer, and literature became an instrument for the social and ethical betterment of man.” Black writers such as Richard Wright borrowed Marxism and its “base and superstructure and made it...race and superstructure.” And in the ‘40s and ‘50s, the same idea of race and superstructure appeared in one form or another. Even black critics “employed ‘blackness’-as-a-theme” (156) to forward arguments about African American’s social dilemmas. But by the 1930s, the fabled city of Harlem itself had deteriorated into economic deprivation and residential segregation, a “vicious cycle of ghetto living” (DeJongh 74). Among the writers of the New Negro movement, as DeJongh claims, there was silence by the end of the 1930s (78), and by the 1940s, Harlem was well-known as an emerging ghetto of America’s large urban centers (80). Still, the figure of Harlem represented for many black writers of this period “both the potential of an immanent selfhood and the ironies and actualities of black life” (211).

In discussions of the Harlem Renaissance, it is necessary to remember that, as Ann Douglas writes, “The New Negro was a figure with few claims on mainline America’s attention, interest, or sympathy. If he insulted or displeased, he could be cut off, erased, without thought or regret” (104). When Nella Larsen was accused of plagiarism in 1930, there were no legal charges, but her career never recovered from this blow. It seemed

that “in America, whites might borrow from blacks with impunity, but Negro use of white materials is always suspect” (86). It is difficult to determine how much mutuality between black and white culture could have existed in light of Larsen’s fate. Essentially because she was a black artist working within the confines of a white racist culture, she was cut off and almost erased from what has developed into the African American literary canon. Thankfully, Larsen’s rediscovery in the 1980s allows her legacy to resist such erasure. It is just that kind of exposure—of the interconnections between black and white modernism—I strive to rearticulate in this discussion of modernist narratives of community.

#### Primitivist Modernism and the Choran Moment

Once more, I want to emphasize the point that the Harlem Renaissance is an integral movement of transatlantic Modernism and one tied in with modernists’ new interest in psychoanalysis. My focus is a strain of modernism made evident through the work of Hurston, Larsen, Warner, and Woolf as case studies; their work reveals choran moments and a hopeful desire for interconnective community. With that in mind, I’d like to conclude this section with a relevant quote from Ann Douglas’s *Terrible Honesty*:

We don’t have psychological configurations that fit and express the black experience or psyche as Freud’s suited the white moderns...Perhaps the complexities of performance, the dialectic of individual and group, the art of masking, both political and aesthetic, in which all black Americans have been to one degree or another...trained, offers the best starting point for

such a paradigm, and suggests the nature of the black psychic participation in the dark aftermath of the 1920s. (473)

For African American modernists such as Hurston and Larsen, there was no totally analogous method to white psychoanalysis for understanding the inner and outer selves. In Nella Larsen's words, "there were no advantages of the spirit of the white world" (qtd. in Douglas 91). Both black and white modernists relied upon the mask in order to delve into notions of the self. Black artists of the Harlem Renaissance took on the mask of primitivism in order to express their own culture as a rich experience of modern American life, just as white writers relied upon the problematic trope of primitivism in order to discover the self through a new kind of literature.

Here I engage more fully with the theoretical conversation focusing on black aesthetics as central to the formation of modernism; I concur with Sieglinde Lemke's argument in *Primitivist Modernism* (1998) that there is no modernism without primitivism.<sup>33</sup> Lemke claims the inextricability between black and white cultural expressions in the development of modernism; she argues that "the ideological base of the Harlem Renaissance follows th[e]...pattern of finding one's identity through one's cultural other" (191). Lemke speaks to the exchanges of culture which pervaded this period, contending that "between 1906 and 1938, this cross-cultural dynamic of interracial collaboration, borrowing, reappropriation, and outright parody influenced the making of European and American modernism" (148). Marking the years 1906 and 1934 as touchstones of primitivist modernism, Lemke reminds us that 1906 was the year of Franz Boas's address at Atlanta University, in which he declared to a largely African American audience that, "You need not be ashamed of your African past" (7). The engagement with African

sculpture and masks began with Picasso's 1907 abstract painting *Demoiselles D'Avignon*, which depicts a primal scene of the aesthetic encounter between African and European art. Also significant at the beginning of the twentieth century was Paul Whiteman's symphonic jazz concert (performed in 1924), along with Josephine Baker's famously exotic and sensual *danse sauvage*. Lemke claims Baker's dance as the embodiment of the "dialectical interplay at the core of primitivist modernism" (8). Of course this was also a time of appropriation of black culture by whites who invaded the whites-only Harlem clubs to wallow in Duke Ellington's "jungle-style" jazz. The year 1934 marked the publication of Nancy Cunard's *Negro: An Anthology*, a 900-page collaboration between black and white artists that proclaimed the collective essence of art as a model of Communism (9). The mid-1930s also saw the birth of the Nègritude movement, black neoprimitivism in Paris, eventual decolonization, and the Francophone African independence movement. Through all these historical and cultural frameworks of the first part of the twentieth century, modernism has always been uneasily hybrid and biracial. Both blacks and whites relied upon and negotiated the trope of primitivism in order to express their understandings of an emerging individual and communal culture. Cunard reflects one rather limited perspective on this phenomenon: "Notice how whites are unreal in America: they are dim. But the Negro is very real. He is there. And the ofays know it. That's why they come to Harlem—out of a curiosity and jealousy and don't know why" (qtd. in DeJongh 11). Evident in Cunard's statement is both the fascination and stereotyped assumptions many whites believed about black culture. Following Lemke, I am concerned with how "marginalized and despised black cultures were pivotal in the creation in the creation of



transatlantic modernism” (9), and vice versa, in the cultural hybridist and intra/interchanges of primitivist modernism from Britain to America.

Toni Morrison, in *Playing in the Dark* (1992), makes a similar point in her discussion of the underpinnings of the “surrogate” (26) blackness present in the development of modern American literature and identity. Morrison argues that:

The subject of the dream is the dreamer. The fabrication of the Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary mediation on the self; a powerful exploration of the fears and desires that reside in the whitely conscious. It is an astonishing revelation of longing, of terror, of perplexity, of shame, of magnanimity. (17)

It is important to note that Morrison never uses the term “primitivism,” nor does she engage in debates about primitivism. Her discussion of surrogate blackness helps us to question whether or not using this name continues to work at all. Instead Morrison discusses “American Africanism” (6)—the lore and tropes connected with the African presence in literature written by whites in their figurations of blackness—as opposed to the term primitivism, which refers to actual people in history. She also uses the word “self” rather than “Other” (15 and 90) in her discussion of the ways in which whiteness perpetuates itself.

Morrison, and other scholars of modernism,<sup>34</sup> expose whiteness as a previously invisible construct in the study of modernist texts. For Morrison, the notion of the white self always depends upon the black other, a fact we might only recognize once we step back and notice the fishbowl we all live in. Morrison believes that whiteness studies are important, especially in American literature, because race is inescapable; there is no

“race-free” zone (13). She contends that the ignorance about “black surrogacy” in American literature has much in common with formerly ignored feminist readings of literature. Morrison makes the case that American literature is constructed by the encounter between blackness and whiteness, and that that interchange enriches the text (16).

Crucial to the subject of this dissertation is Morrison’s warning that literary criticism does damaging work through “intellectual domination” and “totalizing approaches” to scholarship which perpetuate the naturalization of whiteness and aggressiveness while ignoring blackness (8-9). In exposing structures of thought, Morrison shows us that notions of subjectivity are constructed through binaries. Her focus on the “writerly conscious” reveals the white author’s own figurations of blackness as an othered “mediation on the self” (17). Specificity is the prescriptive to the violence of primitivism,<sup>35</sup> but we still need to acknowledge who the dreamer is, as well as the “parasitical nature of white freedom” (57). Morrison suggests that we look to contemporary culture to determine “how black idiom and...sensibili[ties]... ha[ve been]...appropriated for the associative value they lend to modernism—to being hip, sophisticated, ultra-urbane” (52). Like Morrison, as she writes, I want to change the focus and shift the lens of our readings of modern literature: “My project is an effort to avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject” (*PITD* 90). Her redirection offers important insight into the dynamic of primitivism as a fundamental part of modernism. The focus becomes the white face behind the projective mask of primitivism, a site from where we, as scholars who study modernist literature, might uncover a deeper understanding of how modernists re-envisioned the self and the larger community.

I argue that primitivism, as recast in Hurston's, Warner's, and Larsen's work, offers a moment of prelinguistic unity that marks the beginning of a process by which artists, and those reading these works, might imagine how to reform associations with others. Primitivism is used as a method by which these writers question whether we might actually be able to erase social borders. I recognize the historically racist notions of primitivism and its deep implications with imperialism. Primarily beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, cultural ideologists polarized the ideas of the primitive and the "civilized" in order to justify an often brutal imperialism; the assumption that "savages" needed to be civilized contributed to notions of the "white man's burden."<sup>36</sup> However by my own definition, primitivism signals a longing on the part of the artist for a prelanguage connection between self and other represented in modern literature.<sup>37</sup> These fleeting yet revelatory instances in which characters sense their own authentic selves as well as (re)discovering and honoring their interconnectedness with other selves often emerge in "primitive" experiences and encounters of protagonists in modern novels. In light of Morrison's counsel, I want to emphasize the difficult issue of race as I conceptualize the chorán moment in these texts. The chorán process in modernist literature is not inherently connected to racial identity or necessarily expressed through radicalized notions. Yes, white modernist women writers call upon "primitivism" as an entry point, but black artists do as well and possibly for the same purpose.

The relationship between primitivism and race is of central importance in this dissertation, but modernists' reliance on the trope of primitivism is not just tied with racial constructions of difference. Furthermore, "primitivism" is problematic not just as a racialized construct but also as an anachronistic move, as Anne McClintock discusses,

which could include judgments about how economics should work. “[T]he panoptical stance...is enjoyed by those privileged positions in the social structure, to whom the world appears as a spectacle, stage, performance...Under modernity, experience took on the character of the spectacle” (122).<sup>38</sup> Racial primitivism is not completely analogous with class primitivism, which in itself assumes capitalism as a naturalized norm. Class primitivism reifies and romanticizes the “simple,” pre-industrial, pre-capitalist life above the present without regard for the effects of disease or poverty often experienced in real-life non-industrial, non-capitalist peoples. Fictional and photographic texts of the time dramatize this form of fascination.<sup>39</sup> For instance, Thomas Hardy had a deep sense of moral sympathy for England's lower classes, particularly for rural women. He became famous for his compassionate, often controversial portrayal of young women victimized by the self-righteous rigidity of English social morality; such as in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891). Hardy, through his elegiac style, idealizes the working class and commemorates this dying race.<sup>40</sup> Many modern artists fell into the trap of overromanticizing the so-called primitive experience of lower class working people as somehow more authentic or pure while also continually relegating them to a life of drudgery and poverty.

This type of primitivism was an overwhelming element of the modern American historical narrative of continued progress in the Great Westward Migration. Practitioners of class primitivism simultaneously memorialized and displaced native peoples, exploited droves of immigrant workers and denied them full citizenship, and separated the “worthy” from the “unworthy poor” in social reform movements. This primitivistic attitude carried through from the nineteenth into the twentieth century. Leah Dilworth provides a particularly apt explanation of the implicit connection between primitivism and modernity:

For its practitioners, primitivism is a source of authority, a gesture that demonstrates the essential nature or the primacy of their notions, because the primitive is imagined at a state somehow previous to modernity and therefore more real, more authentic...Primitivism seems to offer a cure for what ails modernity, because it imagines the differentiation is a later, inauthentic development, that things were more whole, more harmonious at some time “before.” (4-5)

The historical empire of the lens, through both the camera’s eye and the philosophical vision of class primitivism, represents a problem of modernity and a dark otherside of the choran space.<sup>41</sup> Class primitivism, although its presence will haunt the edges of much of the modernist work I explore in this dissertation, will become a particularly important lens of analytical inquiry in the conclusion.

In order to mediate historical understandings of primitivism, I would like to consider primitivism through the lens of Homi Bhabha's idea of the third space afforded by hybridity of binaries like black and white to embrace a kind of “open ended ness” (Lemke 150) or a “contact zone” (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 4) in looking at the interplay between primitivism and the choran moment in modernist texts. With the work of Mary Louise Pratt in mind, we can look for points of convergence in difference. In these contact zones we can begin the creation of a counternarrative to conquest in the space between self and other. This potentially radical moment, as the initial stage in an equal encounter that seeks to respect (without judgment) the experience of another, becomes a possible working site between genders, cultures, races and sexualities in the reformulation of community. I am striving to redefine a notion that has more in common with Ann E. Kaplan’s idea of

“two-way looking”<sup>42</sup>— looking that is mutual and relational (a process), as opposed to the gaze, which constitutes its subject as inferior and unable to look back (a one-way subjective vision). This intersubjective space embodied by the chorán moment creates a new set of looking relations toward hybrid subjectivities in-between and multiple subjects on the borders (Kaplan 5). In mingling this possibly transcendent moment of maternal reunion and outer recognition of others’ selfhood with the modernist fascination with primitivism, I propose that modernist writers such as Warner and Larsen sought to create a sense of interconnectivity—against encroaching threats of all kinds—in their writing. It is my project here to explore that possibly redemptive characteristic of modernism.

#### Modernist Photography and the Art of an Intersubjective Chorán Moment

Discussions of the history of photography have often separated social realism, or documentary photography, from the pictorialist, or art photography that is often aligned with modernism, as reflected in Gertrude Käsebier’s “art for art’s sake” brand of camera work. Yet these two modes of photography have existed alongside one another since the 1840s, and indeed have often been practiced by the same photographers, both amateur and professional.<sup>43</sup> It is no coincidence that photography came of age at the same time as did ethnography, cartography, modern imperialism, criminology, sexology, and psychoanalysis. Imperialist photography itself has been used as a tool to measure, categorize, assimilate, conquer, and primitivize its subjects since its invention. Photography emerged as a technology of surveillance within the context of a developing global economy and the attempt to order and classify a myriad of physical types: “Like

money, photography promised...to embody a universal language...capable of communicating on a global scale through the universal faculty of vision" (McClintock 123)<sup>44</sup> However, photographic culture of the modernist period did not necessarily always exemplify this desire to master reality through vision by categorizing others according to agreed upon stereotypes. Instead, various modernist photographers envisioned their medium as an art form that could communicate concepts of intersubjectivity, unity, and harmony.

Modernist photography is a medium that embodies the paradox of the choran moment: the simultaneous desire and impossibility of art's ability to actually create utopian interconnection between self and other. Since the invention of photography in 1849, there has existed an ongoing tension between the documentary image and the photographic work of art. Beginning in the early twentieth century, modernist photographers, both pictorial and straight, viewed art as holding within it the possibility for creation of a profound, momentary yet significant intersubjective relationship between artist, work of art, and audience. This task began as an extremely personal process. The tenets of aestheticism chronicled in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* (1890) were particularly attractive to the photographer and the artistic values of the turn of the century: apparent minimal effort, minimal means, limpid composure, and yet exact and taut composition to create an overall, total effect of a whole (Taylor 19).<sup>45</sup> The Wildean philosophy of art is closely aligned with the pictorialist's desire to create high art in scenes depicting Pre-Raphaelite beauty and symbolism in timeless modes of the mystical and otherworldly.

As heirs of the “high art” photography of the 1850s and ‘60s and its prevailing literary and painterly styles, pictorialists dominated the form for the last decade of the nineteenth century; with their emphasis on classicism, religion, symbolism, and abstraction, so-called “pure” photography flourished (Flukinger 133) at the beginning of the modernist period. Consequently, by 1900 the photographer (through the introduction of advertising as fine art) was equated with the artist or the painter (Kirstein, “Photographs of America: Walker Evans” 187). Photographers whose work blurred the supposed boundary between document and art, such as A.L. Coburn, sought to make an artistic equivalent of the modern nature of city life and embraced the modern conception of art as looking into the arbitrary world for a pattern and a harmony: “order existed in an imperfect state in the mind of the artist, and he found an objective correlative for his own idea of the world” (Taylor 25). Indeed, modernist photographers appropriated new understandings of psychology as a medium with which to investigate the inner self and to theorize their art. Photographs were supposed to, like Dorian’s portrait, reveal the unseen, inner essence of the person pictured, yet this belief was also championed by those looking at police mugshots of suspected criminals, or images of the lower and working classes used as ethnographic specimens for supposed proof of Western white male’s superiority. The famed spokesman, first for pictorialism and finally for pure photography, Alfred Stieglitz, writes: “My photographs are ever born of an inner need—an Experience of Spirit...I have a vision of life and I try to find equivalents for it sometimes in the form of photographs” (Letter to J. Dudley Johnston, 3 April 1925).<sup>46</sup> This statement reveals the quintessential philosophy of high art photographers of the early twentieth century: that art should be derived from an interior vision that then looks outward in order to capture that unique



version of the harmonious world. It also shows us that we must be ever mindful of the fact that photographers can exploit different elements of their medium for various purposes and audiences while at the same time viewers can, depending upon the circumstance in which the photograph is made available to them, see or not see what the photographer or subject intended when the image flashed into existence.

The relationship between the chorán sensibility inherent in modernist photographers' philosophy and the modernist ideal of organicism is the desire in both instances for the artist to envision a sense of wholeness through their art. Early twentieth century photographers, such as the American Photo-Secessionists, believed that if one could see clearly enough, then one could see the evidence of universality and the transcendent human spirit immanent in the visible world. For photographers such as Stieglitz and Paul Strand, the photograph stands for an intersubjective experience. Stieglitz believed that "What is of greatest importance is to hold the moment, to record something so completely that those who see it will relive an equivalent of what has been done" (qtd. in Shloss 104) through straight photography's direct treatment of the subject (105). Similarly, Edward Weston used photography to show the intensity and heightened essence of the everyday, claiming, "Life is a coherent whole...interrelated, independent parts of the whole" (qtd. in Eisinger 67). Coburn also exhibits this chorán awareness in his search for the "expression of an idea, and all the parts must be related as to form a harmonious whole. It cannot be a work of art unless it has this quality of wholeness" (24).<sup>47</sup> Like the photographic chorán moment, Henri Cartier-Bresson's idea of the "decisive moment" is an instance of complete reciprocity, the "simultaneous recognition in a fraction of a second" (Shloss 7) of the unity of photographer and subject, the congruence of

self-expression and revelation of the Other in an ideal vision of synchronization that Roland Barthes would explore through his conception of the punctum in *Camera Lucida* (1981). Like Coburn, Cartier-Bresson echoed the philosophy of the majority of modernist photographers: that the photographer must be unobtrusive in discovering the “unseen harmony” of the world. Thus modernist photographic art itself embodies a desire to capture the ever-elusive choran moment.

I rely on John Berger’s theory of photographic ways of seeing in order to explicate how the photographic narrative connects with the psycho-linguistic idea of the choran moment. In *Another Way of Telling* (1982), Berger writes of the viewer’s interaction with the photographic image as a kind of magical retrogression to some kind of originary state of the self, where one might once again find wholeness: “Our response to appearances is a very deep one, and it includes elements which are instinctive and atavistic” (87). Further, he discusses how the photographic moment exists in a kind of luminal space between the movement of time and the stasis of the image:

A photograph preserves a moment in time and prevents it being effaced by super session of further moments. In this respect photographs might be compared to images stored in the memory...remembered images are the *residue* of continuous experience, a photograph isolates the appearances of a disconnected instant. (Berger’s italics 89)

Berger contends that we give photographs meaning through our interaction with the image and our memory; “when we find a photograph meaningful, we are lending it a past and a future” (89) by actively taking it out of its ambiguity. The intense exchange between viewer, photograph, and subject creates a dynamic narrative, potentially giving energy to

both the image and the viewer. The instant of the photo encourages the viewer to embody the moment; we inhabit the story within the triangle of interpretation. The spectator must fill in the gaps, becoming more active in collaborative meaning-making: “In a sequence of still photography...the energy of attraction...remain[s] equal, two-way and *mutual*...one memory triggers another” (288). We restore the image to a “living context” through the “context of experience” (289). Therefore, photographs allow a deeper, more balanced “energy of attraction” on the part of the viewer in the moment of seeing, drawing the reader into recovery of memory and creating narrative out of the moment captured on film. The frozen instance of stasis invites the moment of energy and thus expansion, unlike the continuum of a sequential narrative or an ongoing motion picture.<sup>48</sup> This expansion makes it possible to conceive of a photographic choron moment because the triangle of interpretation allows the viewer to imagine connection with the narrative of the image, and thus correlation with the subject and photographer.

The photographic moment of interconnection between self and other is an important point of comparison with the literary choron moment in this dissertation. Both Berger and Barthes discuss the power of the photographic narrative moment. Barthes’s moment happens in his recognition of the “punctum”—the specific “notion of punctuation” in any photograph that elicits “that accident which pricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (26-27). He continues, “However lightening-like it may be, the *punctum* has...a power of expansion” (45). For Berger, as the viewer becomes more closely engaged with the image, “[that coherence] extend[s] the event beyond itself...[and] the particular event photographed implicates other events” (121) through this open instance. Barthes states that the photographer “gives life” through this gesture of “making

permanent...the truth—the truth for me” (110). In Berger’s moment of stasis with “the expressive photograph...we are at home in our mother tongue” (129). This flash in time, a brief but revelatory moment that can be recaptured in the memory of the maternal bond and its coterminous sense of the self as whole, informs my conception of the “language” of the choran moment and links that idea with the photographic narrative moment. I argue that Berger’s and Barthes’s construction of the expansive photographic narrative provides a gateway to the choran moment. If we accept the photograph as a work of art that holds within it the prospect of unity between self and other, then it follows that the photograph contains the utopian potential of the choran moment.

I view photography as a fruitful medium through which to discuss the phenomenon of the modernist choran moment. When contending with modernist photographs which depict a choran moment, we must remain cognizant of the oscillation between the documentary and artistic photograph. More importantly, we need to remind ourselves of the relationship between point of view and Berger’s interpretive triangle when we consider whose punctum is whose. My hope in this process of interpretation is that we might uncover a new understanding of modernist photographs as complex embodiments of choran art. Once yet again, I reiterate that in connecting literary and photographic narratives under the concept of modernist choran vision enables scholars of modernism to see the work of such seemingly disparate artists as Woolf and Käsebier, Hurston and Van Der Zee, Wright and Evans, as having in common a communal understanding of modernist art.

### The Choran Moment as Political Aesthetic

We need to recover the vital nexus, the live, hurtful, jubilant response to literature itself. (Ihad Rasan, "Let the Fresh Air In; Graduate Studies in the Humanities" *Beauty and the Critic* 204)

In recent accounts of the postmodern age of deconstruction, identity politics, and cultural studies, the study of aesthetics has been deemed naïve and idealist by many cultural theorists. Aesthetic readings of art seem to have no application to the historical, political, and social dynamics of literary production. Ever since the Frankfurt School's work in the '40s, '50s and '60s, aesthetics have been dismissed as "elitist and insufficiently political" (Beach 95). Gene H. Bell-Villada sums up: "The sharp distinction between aesthetic experiences and most other human concerns has been regarded as fundamental, axiomatic, the very point of departure from any literary theory that seeks serious learning and intellectual responsibility" (2). Yet this debate continues and is crucial to the subject of this dissertation.

I place my argument about modernist choran moments and consequent interconnective community within the context of the battle between critics who emphasize aesthetics to imply that there is a universal standard of beauty and critics who emphasize political readings without much mention of aesthetics. I believe that the art produced by the group of modernist writers and photographers concerned with expressing interconnective community is inherently political. The seeming fissure between aesthetics and politics is a productive space for inquiry, and I see them working together in the choran moment. More precisely, I'm arguing that the aesthetic of interconnectivity is also a politic. Finally, I contend that our attention, as critics of

modernism, to their use of aesthetics for ethical purposes can become, in itself, a theory of reading ethically. It is the power of the audience's response—how we read and shape a community of readers—that finally enables a redefinition of community itself.<sup>49</sup>

I maintain that Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston—along with their photographer counterparts—share a common artistic aim that is a reassertion of humanistic interconnectivity. If this concern can be characterized as an aesthetic project, then we can conclude that an attempt at recreating community in a literary or photographic text is an artistic endeavor that indeed inspires beauty *and* political awareness. As Elaine Scarry writes, “beauty, far from contributing to social injustice...or remaining neutral to injustice as an innocent bystander, actually assists us in the work of addressing injustice” (62). She does, however, address the problematics of beauty:

The political rejects beauty on the grounds that it is too powerful, a power expressed both in its ability to visit harm on objects looked at and also in its capacity to so overwhelm our attention that we cannot free our eyes from it long enough to look for injustice. Berated for its power, beauty is simultaneously belittled for its powerlessness. (85)

Her answer is to quote Iris Murdoch, who, in a statement which ironically echoes nineteenth century definitions of the literature of reform, notes that “anything which alters consciousness in the direction of unselfishness...is to be connected with virtue” and that the most “obvious thing in our surroundings which is an occasion for unselfing’...is what is popularly called beauty” (112-113). Finally, for Scarry, “It is clear that an *ethical fairness* which requires ‘a symmetry of everyone’s relation’ will be greatly assisted by an *aesthetic fairness* that creates in all participants a state of delight in their own lateralness”

(her italics; 114). These artists' concern for social justice works through beautiful chorán moments where this concept of "unselfing" is expressed.

Before we can arrive at the modernist chorán moment of unselfing, it is necessary to return briefly to what came before it at the turn of the century. With their break from the traditional idea of transcendent beauty and aesthetic authority, early modernists first began to self-consciously create art associated with decadence and the avant-garde. As Matei Calinescu puts it, this results in "a major cultural shift from a time-honored aesthetics of permanence, based on a belief in an unchanging and transcendent ideal of beauty, to an aesthetics of transitoriness and immanence, whose central values are change and novelty" (3). Modernity in the broadest sense is reflected in the irreconcilable opposition between the values corresponding to the objectified, socially measurable time of capitalist civilization, and the personal, subjective time erected by the unfolding self, which constitutes the foundation of a modernist culture intensely interested in psychoanalytic introspection. Advances in natural, social, and behavioral sciences "suggested that everyday 'truth' is an immensely deeper, nonpalpable reality. At the same time, owing to the decline of religion, some transcendent, spiritual principle beyond the natural scientific and materialistic seemed at the time even less than likely" (Bell-Villada 133). Nineteenth century theorists Ruskin, Pater, and Wilde lost religion and found its replacement in art, leading to the conclusion that "Modernism could not have existed without the aestheticist legacy" (162). The aesthetics of modernity must then strive to address this loss of faith. Calinescu argues that "aesthetic modernity should be understood as a crisis concept involved in a threefold dialectical opposition to tradition, to the modernity of bourgeois civilization (with its ideas of rationality, utility, progress), and

finally, to itself, insofar as it perceives itself as a new traditional form of authority” (10). The idea of modernity as an aesthetic encapsulates ideas of radical, anti-bourgeois attitudes and diverse means of resistance to the dominant, traditional culture.

The relationship between modernist aesthetics vs. modernist politics is confusing because all future-oriented sociopolitical doctrines thought of themselves as the avant-garde. For Marxist critics, the word avant-garde developed along strong political and radical lines (Calinescu 113); this may be why Marxist critics dealing with avant-garde literature preferred to characterize it as modernist because that word was less likely to be associated with negative or decadent art-for-art's sake ideology of “moral and social indifferentism” (Bell-Villada 5). The appearance of the avant-garde “connected with the moment when some socially ‘alienated’ artists [at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century] felt the need to disrupt or completely overthrow the whole bourgeois system of values” with its pretensions of universality (Calinescu 119). By this definition, aestheticism reads as “a symptom of ‘the alienation of the artist’ from bourgeois society or even from mankind at large” (Bell-Villada 9). Nevertheless, the connection between aesthetics and politics is clear, even if modernist artists would not necessarily emphasize it: “The Modernists’ approach to established traditions... corresponds to their political situation. Bohemianism and its postures of revolt notwithstanding, few serious Modernists saw themselves as challenging their entire past” (146). Yet even the revolutionary attempt to defy values of the past with art of the present moment indicates a merging of aesthetics and politics.

Paul Ricoeur writes that Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud were the “three masters of suspicion” who instituted a “fundamental criticism of modern culture” (qtd. in Soderholm



2). Following this argument, literary modernism is both modern and anti-modern. It is “modern in its commitment to innovation, its rejection of the authority of tradition, its experimentalism; anti-modern in its dismissal of the dogma of progress...in its sense that modern civilization has brought about the loss of something precious” (Calinescu 265), and in its lament for the fragmentation of what was once whole. The debate over aesthetics and politics since the 1930s, with the turn to Leftist and Socialist ideals, has simplified the moderns as pure aesthetes because T.S. Eliot and the “spiritual right” defended literature as a “separate formal domain” (Bell-Villada 183). The Agrarians and the New Critics of the 1940s sought in poetry “a deeper vision and a nobler way of life, not to be found in a liberal capitalist system” (188); this return to art for art’s sake continued into the ‘50s and ‘60s.

It may still be too early to tell whether the postmodern project is simply a further continuation of modernism. According to Calinescu, “Abandoning the strictures of the avant-garde and opting for a logic of renovation rather than radical innovation, postmodernism has entered into a lively reconstructive dialogue with the old and the past” (276). Deconstruction might actually be seen as the “latter day elaborations of the Western tradition of Art-for-Art’s-Sake” (Bell-Villada 196), where literary art bears no reference to “Truth.” For Bell-Villada, “following the horrific political, economic, and military crises that engulfed the bourgeois powers from 1914-1945, artistic Modernists in the postwar order emerged as the most highly prized of styles, eventually assuming a normative role in the elite institutions” (201). Calinescu writes that the antihumanistic urge of writers and artists during the first decades of the twentieth century was not only a reaction against Romanticism and Naturalism but a movement that saw that man had

become obsolete and that “the rhetoric of humanism had to be discarded” (125). Against this background, then, how are we to read the aesthetics of four women writers, both black and white, American and British, bourgeois and working class?

Indeed, modernist aesthetics remain a compelling focus in the study of literary modernism, and Christopher Beach speaks to the fairly recent revival of the aesthetic. He argues that aesthetics find their place in academic discussions of modernism by: redefining aesthetics in ethical terms; linking it to materialist analyses of culture; and using it to deconstruct itself (Soderholm 6). In attempting to recuperate the aesthetic as political, we need to take into account what Beach calls “the politics of form, by which I mean the precise historical meanings of a formal innovation and the way in which it might be received by specific communities of readers” (100). If we look at aesthetics as the “mobile intercessor who allows us to formulate the important questions about history, politics, and art today” (110), then we can begin to read modernist texts through a productive aesthetic lens. An aesthetic approach opens up ways of looking at how the modernist novel or photograph reveals a desire on the part of the artist to construct an ethical encounter. I would like to focus on the fulcrum between aesthetics and politics—where we might connect ethical reading with the recognition of this modernist aesthetic. If the current community of readers is to understand Woolf, Warner, Larsen, Hurston, Van Der Zee, Agee and Evans’s photo/texts with the goal of fully realizing their attempt at rebuilding a sense of community through their reliance on the choron moment, then we also need to concede that the perceived divide between aesthetics and politics has never been absolute, that one can fruitfully lead to the other.

### A New Modernism of Communal Interconnectivity

Myths of historical narrative have great power to predetermine social outcomes, and if the novel and the photograph can in any way stop time and allow the reader or viewer to contemplate human choices, then we might find instances of human agency in the real world. Jane Marcus contends that often for Woolf, history says that we do what we have always done; none of us are truly unique (*New Feminist Essays* 199). Yet writers Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston, as well as photographers Kasëbier, Van Der Zee, and Evans venture a resistance against this model of history, even if only represented in ephemeral moments. It is those arrested moments that allow us what Gloria Anzaldúa calls “the space in-between from which to think” (172), offering personal (and possibly communal) transformation.

The model of history at work in the texts I discuss is participatory. If we agree that narrative is “intersubjective discourse that takes place within a social space and a historical time,” then it is true that “we make sense of our experience by telling stories that draw from...a cultural tradition that is intersubjectively shared. In this process we develop personal and social identities as subjects of communication,...in the real-life world in which we take part” (Falasca-Zamponi 2-3). For those of us reading, writing about, and teaching modernism today, our realization of the democratic quality of modernist literature and photography can bring about political change through shared engagement in making meaning and resisting dictatorial constructions of history. This focus engages with ethical political concerns to finally, with the benefit of our retrospection, reinvent Woolf’s “Society of Outsiders,” a utopian vision of society which could rebuild anew humanity’s

interrelationships by resisting tyranny of all kinds. I consider the present as my historical context in order to determine how this modernist aesthetic reshapes an understanding of social order for readers in the present generation. Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston are writers trying to understand the complexities of individual and communal psychology by creating aesthetic instances of connection in their work. Their work, in part, answers the questions of how to go about the inscription of the reality of psychological space and what forms can remain faithful to the intricacies of memory and human experience. Their answers often reside in the longing for communal connection between people. Their work invites us as readers today into that resonant and potentially productive communal space.

It is important to note also that significant realizations of these writers' cultural currency came from later readers, revealing how aesthetics extend and have substantial effects on the literary establishment. None of these writers—Woolf, Warner, Hurston, and Larsen—although they enjoyed varying degrees of success as they published their novels, were fully recognized during their lifetimes; their feminist reimaginings of community came from future understandings and readings. Theirs was a predominantly elite enterprise, yet the work of these writers reminds us of the power and possibility inherent in our revised readings of literature to reshape the canon, recreate the academy, and forge new academic departments and disciplines such as women's studies, gender and cultural studies, African American studies, Harlem Renaissance studies, and studies of Twentieth Century literature and culture in general. I believe there is value in an aesthetic approach of reading modern literature and photography, even as it emerges from divergent social and political environments, because it offers readers the opportunity to

continually reshape studies of modernism. The choral moment and modernist interconnectivity come out of differing circumstances framed by a shared ethical value of humanism<sup>50</sup> which Woolf, Warner, Hurston, and Larsen felt compelled to envision in their writing. Considering aesthetics as a theory of reading, I hope to show that there is an important element of modernism yet to be fully integrated into our understanding of literary and photographic art in the interwar period.

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Most important for my purposes of comparison is Joyce's bildungsroman of the artist, for instance. Joyce employs the illuminated "look back" inspired by the mutual gazes of his protagonist and onlooker within the epiphanic moment; it is this returned gaze that engenders Joyce's notion of a kind of productive stasis, which in turn offers the revolutionary possibility of intermingling subjectivities, and finally offers a renewal of Stephen Dedalus's sense of his own authenticity. This moment is most explicitly evident in the scene between Stephen and the "sea bird girl" he encounters on the beach after he has decided not to pursue the priesthood. Stephen meets in the sea bird girl a sort of holy ghost/Virgin Mary figure, a human angel with balanced "error and glory" that would never pluck out his eyes for looking. With her look back at Stephen—"her eyes turned to him in quiet sufferance of his gaze, without shame or wantonness" (Joyce 186)—a moment of possible intersubjectivity is born in the amniotic soothing of the "gently moving water...faint as the bells of sleep." This moment, however, does not reach beyond Stephen's ultimate focus on himself to become transitive, expansive, or communal. It allows for Stephen to come into his own identity as an artist, but that realization depends upon his outward projection onto the seabird girl, whose existence can only be seen through Stephen's somewhat voyeuristic eyes.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps coincidentally, all of these women writers either lost their mothers at a very young age or became disconnected from any maternal figure during their young lives. None of them had children of their own either. This biographical connection, although tenuous and certainly not a focal point of my argument, might help to explain each writer's desire to recapture a sense of maternal wholeness and thereby cancel that loss through their own artistic process. As I will explain further in this introduction, I do not want to suggest that this project of creating choron moments and modernist interconnectivity is an exclusive concern of women artists. Although I was not able to find many instances of choron moments in modernist literary works by men, my focus on particular photographers lends both male and female perspectives. I do not intend to essentialize "masculine" or "feminine" sensibility in creating works of art or fall back on stereotypes about women supposedly being more inclined toward peace and nurturing. Yet other similar illuminated moments appearing in novels by such male modernists as Joyce (noted above) or D.H. Lawrence remain solipsistically epiphanic.

---

<sup>3</sup> The question Kristeva tries to answer is, can the wholly other be embraced ethically? The possibility lies in the basic human condition of being called by the other. However, embracing the other requires vigilance in avoiding degeneration into a rescue project that views “their” condition as inferior or assumes “their” need of assimilation into a privileged ideology.

<sup>4</sup> See Karen Jacobs, *The Eye’s Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture* (Cornell UP, Ithaca and London, 2001). For further discussion of Woolf and Benjamin’s relationship to each other and with fighting fascism, see Leslie Kathleen Hankins’s chapter, “Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin Selling Out(Siders)” in *Virginia Woolf and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Garland Publishers, 2000): 3-35 and Marilyn L. Brownstein’s “Silver Spoons and Knives: Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin (Some Notes on a Practical Approach to Cultural Studies)” in *Virginia Woolf: Emerging Perspectives* Eds. Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow, Intro. by Jane Lilienfeld (New York: Pace UP, 1994): 204-9.

<sup>5</sup> Walter J. Ong’s book *Orality and Literacy: The Technology of the Word* (Routledge: London and New York, 1982) speaks to the nostalgic longing for utopia I am investigating. For instance, his idea of a “prehistory” in the “oral character of language” (5) resonates with Lacan’s Imaginary and Symbolic stages of language and the development of consciousness, the theoretical framework upon which Kristeva’s semiotic chora is based. His discussion of the difference between the literate mind and the mind engaged with “copia” reminds me of Woolf’s depictions of Mr. Ramsay trying to reach the end of the alphabet that is his thought process and Mrs. Ramsay weaving waves of fluidity in her own in *To the Lighthouse*: “Since redundancy characterizes oral thought and speech, it is in a profound sense more natural to thought and speech than is sparse linearity. Sparsely linear or analytic thought and speech are artificial creations, structured by the technology of writing” (41). This longing and yearning for the wholeness of the mother tongue and the baby babblings of oneness is an important element of the phenomenon I have been striving to articulate in my work.

<sup>6</sup> My discussion of the Lacanian origins of Kristeva’s chora stems from Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” Alan Sheridan, trans., *Ecrits, A Selection* (1949) 1-7. Briefly stated, Jacques Lacan reappropriates Freud’s Oedipal stage into his own theory for the process by which we acquire language. Lacan maps our movement from the imaginary stage

as an infant ecstatically unified with the maternal body, to a false but pleasurable sense of synthesis with his mirror image, and finally to the child who is thrust into the world of difference. Once “he” realizes that he is separate from his mother and his own reflection, he must conform to the parameters of the symbolic order of language and greater society; language acquisition strives to restore (symbolically) the unity that has been lost.

See Julia Kristeva, “A Question of Subjectivity—An Interview” *Women’s Review* 12 (1986) 19-21, Phillip Rice and Patricia Vaughn, eds., *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (New York: Arnold, 1996) 131-7. For a comprehensive collection of Kristeva’s work, see Kelly Oliver, ed., *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> Out of this union comes the meaningful language of emotions, a “nonexpressive totality” (35) that is “nourishing and maternal” (Kristeva, *The Portable Kristeva* 36) and is apart from, yet equally as viable as the written language of the symbolic by which we are indoctrinated. In Kristeva’s words, “Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax” (38). By syntax, Kristeva refers to the inevitability of the symbolic realm’s intervention into the prelinguistic; the imaginary space of the chora is interrupted and irrevocably changed by the acquisition of written language. There is an immediacy in the moment and the emotion associated with the use of this otherlanguage, a kind of spontaneity that brings about the urgency and the authenticity of the imaginary experience I have long associated with Woolf’s incandescent moments of being. Although the chora has no stable identity and no traditional construction of language, Kristeva argues that it is the origin of poetry, and music and poetry are intimately linked. Kristeva indicates in the return to the maternal sphere of the semiotic that we are “searching for the inscriptions of language of the archaic contact with the maternal body which has never been forgotten...they are to be found in the tempo of the voice, in the rapidity of delivery...or in certain musicalities” (“A Question of Subjectivity” 135).

Kristeva points out that the expression of this “recourse to the semiotic” (137), or “state of disintegration in which patterns appear but...do not have a stable identity” (133), is in no way a monopoly of women. As Bonnie Kime Scott has pointed out in *Joyce and Feminism* (Indiana UP and Harvester:



Bloomington, IN and Brighton: Bloomington UP, 1989), James Joyce incorporated this concept into his own work through use of a fluid, stream of consciousness narrative in which the speaker has no fixed identity; Joyce himself also had a particular affinity to a “feminine” version of language. Yet in her reworking of Lacan, Kristeva lends credence to the power of a traditionally “female” realm of emotional language and expression similar to the “womanspeak” psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray delineates as “decentered, irrational, and nonlinear, unlike the logocentric, hierarchal expression of patriarchy” (Haberstroh 125). Kristeva’s emphasis on the magnificence of the chora even suggests that it is not important that the female infant could not properly delve into the male world of the symbolic.

<sup>8</sup> Didier Anzieu’s *The Skin Ego* (Transl. Chris Turner. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1989) deals explicitly with the womb as a tangible experience. Anzieu posits a theory of consciousness dependent upon attachment to the maternal body. While the young infant cannot distinguish between an inner and outer face, s/he experiences “interface” (37), a feeling of “unifying whole” in the skin of self and mother. Later, this “imaginary space” (38), developed “on the basis of the mutually inclusive relation of the bodies of mother and child,” allows the ego to fully and healthfully cohere. Anzieu elaborates as such: “By Skin Ego, I mean a mental image of which the Ego of the child makes use during the early phases of its development to represent itself as an Ego containing psychical contents, on the basis of its experience of the surface of the body” (40). This concept has something in common with Kristeva’s chora; Anzieu’s ideas of “reciprocal empathy and an adhesive identification” (63) inherent in the symbiotic relationship between mother and child find a role in the self finding wholeness and eventual communion with others. In particular, his articulation of the almost photographic quality of the state of symbiosis, which “persists; time is frozen, repetitive or oscillating, cyclical” (64) is relevant to my concept of the choran moment. Once again, however, I hope to divorce my discussion of the choran moment and interconnective community from a purely psychoanalytic theoretical base in order to imagine a less universalizing, perhaps more sociopolitically-engaged reading of modernist literature and photography.

<sup>9</sup> See Hélène Cixous, “Sorties,” Phillip Rice and Patricia Waugh, eds., *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (New York: Arnold, 1996) 137-144, Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977), and “Toward a Feminist Poetics,” M. Jacobus, ed.,

---

*Women Writing About Women* (1979) 25-33; 34-6. Phillip Rice and Patricia Waugh, eds., *Modern Literary Theory: A Reader* (New York: Arnold, 1996) 99-108.

<sup>10</sup> Some readers may wonder how I could use a phrase such as “unified existence” in light of postmodern theory. What I hope to suggest here is that this sense of wholeness exists before we are subjected to ideological constructs of gender difference.

<sup>11</sup> Lisa Rado outlines how the phenomenon of androgyny represented the possibility of ultimate artistic genius for modernists:

These writers present inspiration not as the incorporation of ‘masculine’ qualities but rather as generated by the precarious coexistence of female consciousness and a masculine other-self that goes beyond mere pseudonym...modernist literary men and women share the desire to embody the newly perceived strengths of both sexes and to transcend sexual and artistic limitation altogether. (13)

Freud suggests in “Psychology of Women” (1933) that “the proportions in which the masculine and feminine mingle in the individual are subject to quite extraordinary variations” (155; qtd. in Rado 18). He also notes that “what constitutes masculinity or femininity is an unknown element which is beyond the power of anatomy to grasp” (156). Following Freud, then, modernists grapple with the idea of a transcendent androgynous sublime.

Like Lisa Rado, I refer to the contemporary definition of androgyny as a fusion of the binaries of sex; since the 1970s, androgyny has been referred to as a mixture of historically determined feminine and masculine characteristics within the same person. Similarly, Karen Kaivola draws upon Woolf’s writing to speak of androgyny as an “intermix” (235) of the sexes and genders. While androgyny and Woolf’s concept of it was initially popular in second wave feminism, it later came under heavy critique by scholars and social activists. For a brief time in the 1960s and ‘70s, critics such as Carolyn Heilbrun and Nancy Topping Bazin admired Woolf’s vision of androgyny’s ability to provide men and women freedom from the constraints of gendered determinates of behavior. But by 1977, Elaine Showalter argued that Woolf’s concept was a mere fantasy, one that necessitates the denial of a distinctly female literary tradition. For additional edification on the debate surrounding Showalter’s critique of *A Room of One’s Own*, as well as a useful guide on the

development of feminist literary theory, see Mary Eagleton, Ed. and Intro., *Feminist Literary Criticism* (London and New York: Longman Group UK, 1991).

<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, this attempt to embody the space between self, body and other creates an occasion for Marianne Hirsch's (*Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997) "unidirectional looking," an interrelationship among those involved in the triangle of agency and interpretation.

<sup>13</sup> In Anzaldúa's words, "suddenly I feel everything rushing to a center, a nucleus. All the lost pieces of myself come [together], magnetized toward the center. *Completa*" (51).

<sup>14</sup> Consequently, many women writers were grappling with their fictional responses to questions Woolf raised: Is there a women's sentence?, or form? Is there a woman's subject matter? Is there some characteristic orientation involving both?

<sup>15</sup> With this perspective on modernism in mind, we are much like Lily Briscoe, tangled in a "golden mesh" of interconnection that is "polyphonic, mobile, interactive" (4). Ultimately, Scott argues toward a new scope of modernism with no interest in limited definitions of modernism in sub-categories. She emphasizes attention to holes, gaps, and versioning and the concept of gender as performance. One of her important conclusions lies in her reminder that the New Women of the suffrage movement were "midwives of modernism who brought forth women as well as men of modernism" (*Refiguring Modernism* xxxvi). In Scott's reconstructed history—1914, 1928, 1939—she emphasizes the fact that Woolf, Dorothy West, and Djuna Barnes were affected by the men of 1914 and shared a common critical interest in Joyce. Scott describes the connection/s between modernism/s as embodied by the golden mesh, the web, the ball of yarn; not all strands lead to Eliot, Pound, and Joyce. Her idea of the women of 1928 calls attention to the second rise in modernism.

<sup>16</sup> Scott questions in *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Bloomington, IN: Bloomington UP, 1990): "How did the Great War, which has generally been seen as a deep influence on modernist views of the world, have different effects on men and women writers?" (5). Both worked on the home-front and in the war itself. The 1920s as a time of new excitement and freedoms, particularly for women, but by 1941, all the major experimental works had been written and Lawrence, Mansfield, Yeats, Woolf and Joyce were dead.

When considering issues of the canon, Scott evokes the “men of 1914”—Eliot, Pound, and Lewis, as they proclaimed in *Blast* in that year. Richard Ellman and Charles Feidelson assembled *The Modern Tradition* in 1965 and concurred, and included little on any women writers aside from Woolf and George Eliot. Her book tests the limitations of such canonization of male writers.

In *Reframing Modernism: The Women of 1928* (Bloomington, IN: Bloomington UP, 1995), Scott evokes the image of the web in the scaffolding to represent a more comprehensive view of modernism/s. By moving into the web, previously limited understanding of modernism breaks down. The web is Woolf’s analysis of the process of writing, insisting on exploring new territories (xvi).

<sup>17</sup> See Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971), and Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>18</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin’s *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays* (Ed. Michael Holquist; Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) argues that it is the novel which represents a democratic zone of dialogic relations and hybrid combinations for characterization.

More relevant to my argument here is the work of Kevin K. Gaines in *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: U of NC Press, 1996). Gaines pertinently describes of the interrelationship of black and white representations of self in the development of modernism. I concur with Gaines in that, “black modernism was the flourishing of contestation around racial representation ...with the centrality of minstrelsy as a foundation for both black *and* white middle-class subjectivities” (*Uplifting the Race* 207).

<sup>19</sup> Commenting on the work of Richard Wright, Gilroy evokes the power of black transatlantic writers in general:

His desires—to escape the ideological and cultural legacies of Americanism; to learn the languages of literary and philosophical modernism even if only to demonstrate the commonplace nature of their truths; and to see complex answers to the questions which racial and national identities could only obscure—all point to the enduring value of his radical view of modernity for the contemporary analyst of the black diaspora. (173)

---

The black Atlantic can be defined “through this desire to transcend both the structures of the nation state and the constraints of ethnicity and national particularity.”

<sup>20</sup> During the First World War, women in Britain and France were allowed to work in manufacturing, public transportation, factories, and on the Front as medical workers in the form of ambulance drivers and nurses, among other previously prohibited workplaces and services. These new roles were a kind of liberation for middle and lower class women. As Angela Woollacott, “Sisters and Brothers in Arms: Family, Class, and Gendering in World War I Britain” *Gendering War Talk* Eds. Miriam Cooke and Angela Woollacott. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993): 129-147, states, “Working-class women acquired an unprecedented degree of financial autonomy during the war. They were less dependent on husbands and fathers than they had ever been” (137). Yet militant suffragism was put aside in favor of the fight for Britannia; after the war, women were no longer needed in the pro-war movement, as the essentialist recoil in the early ‘20s occurred to force men and women back into their separate spheres. Susan Kingsley Kent, among others, has argued that, “The postwar backlash against women extended beyond the question of women’s employment; a *Kinder, Küche, Kirche* ideology stressing traditional femininity and motherhood permeated British culture” (115). While the cult of the mother prevailed, conservatives promulgated an official intelligence test to demonstrate that national intelligence was declining because women were not procreating at the previously more prolific rate.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Higonnet, et. al., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1987), notes that there is a debate about the benefits of women’s increasing liberties during wartime. In the essay “The Double Helix,” Margaret and Patrice Higonnet use the metaphor of the double helix to show to evoke “the paradoxical progress and regress that has characterized women’s status and representation during the two world wars...[in that] relationships of domination and subordination are retained through discourses that systematically designate unequal gender relations” (6).

Claire Tylee, who weaves women’s experience of war into canonized history, reminds us that, “The idea of war was intimately connected with many other values of Western culture. To challenge its heroic image was to undermine ideas fundamental to their world and to their conception of history” (20).

---

<sup>22</sup> “Both homosexuals and Jews were accused of being sterile or of causing sterility,...thus preventing the birth of healthy children” (Carlston 28).

<sup>23</sup> It is telling to note that no “Negro” novel about the Great War appeared because the war did not “emblemize modernity” for blacks (Douglas 88). The American government refused to let its Negro soldiers participate in the Paris victory parade at the end of the war, while the response to returned soldiers was the rise of the KKK, lynchings, race riots, and deportations. Despite these negative aspects of life in Harlem, “the strategy of black Manhattan...was to emphasize Negro achievement rather than detail Negro losses; whites may not have recognized Negro martial heroism, but blacks did” (Douglas 89). W. Allison Sweeney published the *History of the American Negro in the Great World War* in 1919 while James Weldon Johnson outlined “a proud history of black struggle and achievement” in *Black Mountain* a decade later. Black artists who were part of the New Negro movement responded to their social predicament with optimism because none of the violence or discrimination was new to them, while the increased exposure and financial backing for the Talented Tenth was. As Douglas puts it, “This sense of black optimism was short-lived and never without doubts and conflicts, but in the early years of the modern era, New York’s Talented Tenth felt themselves to be not lost but found” (90).

<sup>24</sup> I rely on Ann Douglas for these and the following statistics.

<sup>25</sup> Siobhan Somerville, in *Queering the Colorline: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000), provides a useful summary of the relationship between race and identity at the turn of the century. She begins by outlining the separate but equal law in 1896, which “reconfigured th[e] binary [between slave and free] by articulating it in exclusively racial terms, the imagined division between ‘black and ‘white’ bodies” (1). She notes that there were an unprecedented number of lynchings between 1889 and 1930, and that American imperialism was rampant. The United States’ expansion in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Hawaii, Panama, and the Philippines—employing the discourse of a “civilizing mission” to enlighten the “darker” races—occurred just as Modern ideas about race became crystallized. Indeed, “as racialized social boundaries were increasingly policed so too were emerging categories of sexual identity” (2). With the backdrop of crises surrounding the definitions of homo and heterosexuality, she argues that the category of race was deployed just as perceptions of sexuality were

---

demarcated in late nineteenth century sexological and race scientific theory to show that the two concepts of identity are mutually supportive.

<sup>26</sup> See “‘Refined Racism’: White Patronage in the Harlem Renaissance” Victor A. Kramer, ed. *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined* (New York: AMS Press, 1987): 93-106.

<sup>27</sup> Van Vechten has been figured most prominently in assisting members of the Harlem Renaissance in their search for an audience for their portrayal of “Negro” life. Van Vechten wrote generally about Negro arts in *Vanity Fair* and various New York periodicals, assisted in getting Negro artists published and brought them to the attention of the public, and provided social contacts between black artists and their white counterparts by throwing massive parties in his home. Van Vechten was a great proponent of the artistry in black spirituals (he launched the concert career of Paul Robeson and promoted Bessie Smith), and believed that there was a wealth of “exotic and novel material” in the picturesque elements of Negro society (Coleman 115). He also enjoyed a deep friendship with James Weldon Johnson and promoted Hughes and Hurston.

<sup>28</sup> See “Carl Van Vechten Presents the New Negro” Victor A. Kramer, ed. *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, 107-127.

<sup>29</sup> In the original Knopf dust jacket for *Nigger Heaven*, artist Aaron Douglas’s drawing of “crab antics” represents the conflict within a culture between two value systems, here respectability and reputation in Harlem society (Scruggs 153). In the midst of a popular view of Harlem as a heavenly city for blacks, Van Vechten deflates Alain Locke’s argument that this is the place for the New Negro community to strive for greatness by pointing out that Harlem has just as many problems as other cities (166). Many Harlem Renaissance novels examine the various reasons why different levels of black society failed to make connections that might benefit the black community.

<sup>30</sup> *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined* does not seek to provide “definitive answers” about the nature of the Harlem Renaissance or “The New Negro” but offers additional insights into the interrelationships between blacks and whites during this period. Kramer outlines the early manifestations of the black aesthetic in the critical writing of W.E.B. Du Bois and looks at the Harlem Renaissance as a disappointment, yet he notes that this is true of all artistic movements (5). He suggests that the cultural

---

climate of the '20s made it possible for the explosion of talent we label the Harlem Renaissance, but of course the literary establishment cannot fully demonstrate a movement's power except in retrospect: "The poet as prophet cries out and only much later do we fully hear" (5).

<sup>31</sup> Kevin K. Gaines concentrates on black elites' responses and challenges to white supremacy since the turn of the century (xiii). The self help ideology of uplift taken up by middle-class, educated blacks of the "better class" during the post-Reconstruction assault on black citizenship and their supposed biologically inferior status (xiv) cannot be separated from dominant modes of knowledge and power relations structured by racism. There was a desire for independence and self-determination, yet at the behest of whiteness and white ideals of the bourgeois family.

<sup>32</sup> Darwin T. Turner's "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Theory of a Black Aesthetic" *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*, 9-30, argues that the black aesthetic was articulated distinctly by Du Bois before the Harlem Renaissance.

<sup>33</sup> Critical readings of black modernity/modernism have abounded since the 1980s. Examples include: George Hutchinson's *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1995) highlights the role of American pragmatism and cultural nationalism as a common thread between the Harlem Renaissance and mainstream American modernism; Ann Douglas's *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996) provides useful material concerning contact between black and white intellectuals; Houston A. Baker's *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987) denies any fruitful connection between African-American writing and American modernism because he argues that the prevailing racist and bourgeois assumptions of American and European modernist writers make their claims and insights null and void to a politically engaged black letters (Pavlic 51).

<sup>34</sup> More recent work on the interplay between whiteness and blackness in modernist literature includes Robin Hackett's study of *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004). Hackett demonstrates the connections between modernist white women's texts by such authors as Woolf, Warner, Cather, and Olive Schreiner, and their use of the trope of "sapphic primitivism," a literary device whereby blackness and working-class culture are



seen as representing sexual autonomy, including lesbianism, for white women in their portrayals of race, class, and sexuality.

Jane Marcus's *Hearts of Darkness: White Women Write Race* (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers UP, 2004) observes the ways that Woolf, Djuna Barnes, Nancy Cunard, and Mulk Raj Anand contend with the end of empire and the rise of fascism before the Second World War in their work. Of particular note is Marcus's dialogue with one of her best-known essays, "Britannia Rules *The Waves*," where she argues for *The Waves* as an anti-imperialist novel. In this book, she scrutinizes the moral value of such a buried critique on Woolf's part. In her chapter on "A Very Fine Negress" she analyzes the painful subject of Virginia Woolf's racism in *A Room of One's Own*, claiming that Woolf's sympathies for the outsiders of society would not easily include black women.

<sup>35</sup> Marianna Torgovnick, *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1990), makes a similar argument.

<sup>36</sup> Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush argue that "Primitives never existed, only Western 'primitivism'...[which] supplied the necessary Other against whose specter embattled Victorian society reinforced itself. This construction was the defensive expression of a specific moment of crisis – the prehistory of a future whose unsettling shadow had just crossed the horizon" (*Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995): 2.

<sup>37</sup> Here I evoke Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the "mestiza" available in the borderland between cultures: "Perhaps here in "this radical, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an 'alien' consciousness is presently in the making—a new mestiza [hybrid] consciousness, una concienciade mujer [maternal consciousness]. It is a consciousness of the Borderlands" (*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987): 77.

<sup>38</sup> Photography was used for police filing, war reporting, military reconnaissance, pornography, encyclopedic documentation, family albums, postcards, anthropological records, sentimental moralizing, inquisitive probing, aesthetic effects, news reporting and formal portraiture (McClintock 123).

<sup>39</sup> Particularly pertinent are Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886) and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* series. As a result of such the studies

as those of Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso, Victorian readers began connecting the “atavistic” criminal with the lower classes, as well as the underlying passions of sexuality that must be repressed by God-fearing, upwardly mobile, middle-class Victorians. The effects of these anxieties are represented in much of British literature associated with the turn of the century.

<sup>40</sup> Another perhaps more critical example of literary texts which deal with class primitivism is Katherine Mansfield’s short story “The Garden Party” (1922), which narrates the class-based inculcation of consciousness for Laura, an affluent young woman who is fascinated yet repulsed by the working and lower class. Her neighbors, the Sheridan’s, are viewed as the degenerate lower class by Laura’s family and associates, yet Laura recognizes them as somehow more real while ignoring the violence and the tragedy of their life in the wake of the death of a husband and father. Still, readers can’t help but notice that their life is drudgery. By the end of the narrative, Laura has no language to describe what she has seen in her encounter with wretched poverty.

<sup>41</sup> In the case of whites taking photographic images of Native Americans as they expanded westward, John C. Faris states that Navajos within the Western idea of history are always already “adaptive and assimilative” (195) and that “Navajo has essentially been captive to photography ever since” the first images of them were taken in 1866 (196).

<sup>42</sup> Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze* (New York: Routledge, 1997), argues for a kind of redemptive optics: “Looking will connote curiosity about the Other, a wanting to know (which can of course be oppressive but does not have to be), while the gaze I take to involve extreme anxiety—an attempt in a sense not to know, to deny, in fact” (xvii). She admits that “looking is never innocent, and is always determined by cultural systems” (5). Here she relies upon Lyotard’s concept of the differend, which signals the desire to both “know” the Other and its impossibility. The concept of being in-between allows for multiple identities, coexisting and held in suspension. This strategy of reversal, producing new meanings from oppressive signifiers, allows for Barbara’s “healing imperialized eyes” (18-19). Kaplan hopes that working through the negativity of difference prepares the way for recognition of the Other that might allow engagement across the gap marked by the differend (23). She argues for “a ‘knowing’ in a way that is more kinesthetic, bodily, sensual [where]...[b]oth the colonized and the women colonizers

become subjectivities-in-between, both irrevocably changed by their interaction in the new space within which they live and work because of imperialism” (167).

<sup>43</sup> The International Exhibition of 1862 brought to the fore the controversy about photography as an art form; since there was no consensus about the status of photography, the photos were placed under the “Machinery” category in the exhibition hall. As Roy Flukinger notes,

By the time the exhibition closed its doors, over one million visitors had had the opportunity to examine photographs. The status of photographs in the International Exhibition of 1862 serves as a metaphor for the medium’s position in Great Britain from the 1850s into the 1880s...Like a Dickens protagonist, photography was expected to know its place and not attempt to cross barriers of class or taste. (11)

At the same time, an awareness of domestic and social problems, inherent in late Victorians’ philosophy of photographic art, emerged; attitudes began to “shift away from a dispassionate, intellectual approach toward a deeper understanding and discussion of social and economic ills” (82). Realism was infused with romanticism and the abstract was replaced with the specific image. For instance, “street types” were sought and isolated as intriguing subjects for documentary photography—John Thomson’s images of the lower class of London in 1876 were some of the most popular. Capturing his subjects in everyday life, Thomson brought realism into the documentary photograph and aimed to reveal a “deeper understanding of his camera’s subjects and the conditions that affected them” (83). These ostensible documentary photographers, such as Jacob Riis and Lewis Hine, were always conscious of the artistic quality of photography in order to capture the most compelling image of an often aestheticized primitive subject.

<sup>44</sup> Alan Trachtenberg contends that the ordering of facts into meaning is a political act: “the viewfinder is a political instrument, a tool for making a past suitable for the future” (*Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans*. NY: Noonday Press, 1990): xiv.

James R. Ryan, *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1997), argues that mass produced photographs of British settlers and exotic natives became “common icons” of “fabricated evidence of the splendour of colonial life” (11). The invention and dissemination of photography concurred with the extraordinary expansion of Britain’s overseas empire in a

---

record of Britain's progress and achievement from family albums to official archives, representing a collective form of colonial memory of Britain formed and maintained through imperialism (12).

<sup>45</sup> According to Walter Pater, to create art one had not only to recognize the heightened moment, but to submit to its charms rather than industriously pursue them: "Art comes to you, proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality to your moments as they pass, and simply for those moments sake" (qtd. in Taylor 17). Late Victorian texts that champion art and reject realism show a concern for sustaining intense and beautiful moments. This anti-realist, art-for-art's-sake sensibility is evident in novels of the time, such as Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), where the aesthete protagonist strives to literally become a work of art so as to maintain the ecstasy of youth and beauty. Dorian Gray fashions a vision of himself as a piece of art to become timeless.

<sup>46</sup> Stieglitz's work was often politically and socially neutral, focusing instead on the private, subjective psyche. His excitement over "The Steerage" (1907) reveals his desire to slum with the lower classes; he revels in their "primitivism" and his appreciation of them collapses into autobiography (Shloss 110).

<sup>47</sup> Ansel Adams, a natural expressionist, also viewed art as a source of universal symbols of life and eternity. Coburn was more flexible than anyone else, according to John Taylor, in traversing the aesthetic terrain between Whistler and Wyndham Lewis (Taylor 23).

<sup>48</sup> As Maggie Humm, *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003), argues in her discussion of Woolf's *Three Guineas*, "The affect of the Spanish Civil War photographs is far more effectively captured in Woolf's memory traces than as published photographs, because memory traces represent ongoing states or processes, not static, frozen images" (205).

<sup>49</sup> As my dissertation unfolds into particular discussions and readings of modernist texts, I am determined to remain ever-aware of my own strategic intervention into traditional critical categories, through acknowledgement of complex cultural and historical contexts, so as not to appear naïve in this assertion about the interplay between aesthetics and politics. In connecting these women writers (particularly black and white women writers), I assert that they share a countervision of community because,

---

in part, they have been excluded from the dominant historical narrative of modernism. I believe that we must look to the borders of this dominant narrative in order to create a new center of counternarrative because, ultimately, there is no “pure” art (or art free of political dimension).

<sup>50</sup> Their version of humanism differs from the classical definition in that it goes beyond a focus on the purely individual toward an intersubjective understanding of the self.



*with Virginia*  
Leslie Stephen, *Julia Duckworth Stephen with Virginia* (circa 1884)



Gertrude Käsebier, *The Manger or Ideal Motherhood* (1899)



Gertrude Käsebier, *Mother and Child (Decorative Panel)* (1899)





Gertrude Käsebier, *Blessèd Art Thou Among Women* (1899)

## CHAPTER I

### THE PHANTASMIC MOTHER:

#### Virginia Woolf's Fiction, Gertrude Käsebier's Photography, and Utopian Maternal Longing

The luminosity of a plate from the Stephens's family photo album, taken by Leslie Stephen circa 1884, patently illustrates the photographic choron moment. It is an image of Julia Duckworth Stephen with her daughter Virginia. Virginia, about two years old, poses with pleasure in the sanctuary of her mother's nurturing arms. Julia bends her head slightly toward Virginia in a gesture of deference and love; Julia appears contented yet protective of her daughter. Their black velvet dresses, with matching buttons and similarly lacey detail, and their hair, parted in the middle, mirror each other, suggesting the closeness of this mother/daughter dyadic embrace. Diaphanous white light contrasts with the black dresses and background and emphasize the luminous halo surrounding this mother and child, further indicating that the bond between mother and child is otherworldly. Virginia's wide-eyed look back at the camera illustrates the fact that although she is comfortable within her mother's embrace, she, like any precocious toddler, looks ahead to her own independence. Woolf's memory of her childhood consciousness is intense, as she demonstrates in "A Sketch of the Past," where she describes profound memories of her childhood at St. Ives. Woolf remembers sitting in her mother's lap and laying in the nursery listening to the amniotic flow of the ocean waves outside her window: "If life has a base that it stands upon, if it is a bowl that one fills and fills—then my bowl without

a doubt stands upon this memory...It is lying and hearing this splash and seeing this light, and feeling, it is almost impossible that I should be here; of feeling the purest ecstasy I can conceive" (64-65). Here I suggest that this photographic chorán moment and this passage attest to Woolf's deep understanding of the maternal union and its significance in her life and art.

The chorán moment involves a longing for a maternally bonded utopia, as I establish in my interpretations of the photographs and fiction of Virginia Woolf's opus. In this chapter, I focus on the modernist self who yearns for maternally-connected wholeness; I compare chorán moments in the late Victorian photography of Gertrude Käsebier to those in Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927), as well as her other fiction, in order to show that both Käsebier and Woolf made use of maternal longing in envisioning wholeness through their art. My readings show that the literary and photographic aesthetic of interconnectivity, represented through the evocation of the chorán moment, resists death and reaffirms a wholeness of self by recreating memories and experiences of maternal bonds.

The work of Woolf's great aunt, mid-Victorian photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, stems from traditional pictorial iconography of Madonna and Child where pictorial photographers attempted to envisage classical painterly modes in their camera work. Gertrude Käsebier utilizes the pictorial techniques championed by Cameron, such as their depictions of Pre-Raphaelite perfection and timeless imagery of the mystical and otherworldly—in stark contrast to her realist Victorian contemporaries.<sup>1</sup> Both photographers' central concept for artistic expression is the image of mother and child in blissful intersubjective repose, much like the opening image of Virginia and Julia. In filtering

Käsebier's images through the idea of a visual choran moment, my readings strive, in part, to recuperate images by a woman photographic artist who has, by some critics of photographic culture, been rightly been implicated in structures of dominance.

Studies of the maternal gaze and its influence on the infant's consciousness find in the mother's look a profound power in shaping the child's state of wholeness. Within the imaginary stage of the chora, the infant sees her own mirror image as whole and true, connecting my version of the chora with readings that link photographic and psychoanalytic studies of maternal moments. In their introduction to *Pregnant Pictures*, Sandra Matthews and Laura Wexler note the connection between visual representations of maternity and Kristeva's work: "The reification and reflection inherent in such visual images is a crucial stage in the child's initial creation of an image of the self" (7). Similarly, Kaja Silverman distinguishes between the look that is returned and the gaze that is an instrument of objectifying ideology (qtd. in Hirsch 156), while D.W. Winnocott "conflates the mother with the mirror...reflect[ing] the child back to herself...Looking is unidirectional and specular: when the child looks she sees herself; when the mother looks she sees the child" (157). For Daniel Stern, "the mother act[s] as an interlocutor in an intersubjective relationship with the child: if she sees, she must also be recognized" (158). I suggest a similar type of intersubjectivity, not only between the mother and child in Käsebier's photographs, but also with the viewer. If the mother and child can telescope between each other, primarily through physical and visual coherence, then the idea of mirroring is implied in the photographic choran moment for the viewer as well.

I want to distinguish between psychoanalytic theories of infant consciousness and experiences a viewer might have looking at an image, but I also suggest a similarity in terms

of the feeling of wholeness understood by both child and viewer. The mother and child see each other through moments of wholeness, while the child finds completeness in the reflection of the mother's look because it reifies her own sense of unity. Perhaps then, we, too, as viewers embracing the consciousness of the choron moment, can see ourselves in the experience of the infant in the utopian glint pictured. Just as Barthes is able to "give birth" to his mother in contemplating the "Winter Garden" photograph, willing viewers can resurrect their own maternally-bonded self. Thus a tiny freedom, a sense of life inherent in the intertextuality between our own memory of a similar cohering moment and the image at hand, is born.

I intend to uncover the connection between maternal longing in the photographic mode of Käsebier's modern art and Woolf's literary modernism. Like Käsebier, Woolf belonged to the first generation of women to become active photographers and cinema-goers from childhood and was familiar with photographic challenges to representation. Woolf's great aunt Cameron took hundreds of photos of family and friends, and with Roger Fry, Woolf edited and introduced a collection of Cameron's photographs. As Woolf writes in a letter to Vanessa, "I am trying to find Cameron photographs of Mama—Can you lend me any negatives?" (*A Change of Perspective: Collected Letters: Vol. 3, 1923-28* 380). Woolf's desire to find photographic images of her mother indicates the haunting maternal presence that persists throughout her life. One reason Woolf would request Cameron's negatives might be to reproduce them for the benefit of her own private gaze, a detail that reveals both Woolf's ache to reclaim her lost mother and the instrumental role Cameron's photographs play in coping with this wish. This longing for reconnection with the maternal body—as explicitly connected with similar

illuminated moments created by the camera—is one that resounds with the choran realm Kristeva articulates over forty years later.

Woolf alternately longs for and struggles against the phantasmic Angel in the House<sup>3</sup> in both her life and her fiction, especially in *To the Lighthouse*. Most importantly, the “wedge-shaped core of darkness” Lily Briscoe, in *To the Lighthouse*, strives to negotiate in her finished painting embodies the fertile, maternally-connected understanding of a whole self just as the illuminated, matrixial triangle of photographic interpretation gives life to both image and viewer. Lily’s androgynous sensibility and her final painting attest to the potential power of art in expressing this ongoing process of finding a whole self within a wider, possibly more ethical community. I will explore this longing for the closeness and integrity that the maternal body provides as the first step in the ethical encounter made possible by the modernist aesthetic of interconnectivity—the choran moment. Woolf’s fiction is haunted by the maternal matrix embodied by Cameron’s images of her mother Julia Duckworth and in the work of Gertrude Käsebier. What follows is a discussion of the photographic maternal utopia, a moment I will then explain is revealed in much of Woolf’s fiction in the ‘20s and ‘30s.

Maggie Humm, in *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema* (2003), aims to show that “evaluation of the *marginalia of the margins*—ordinary but marginalised cultural artefacts such as photo albums and ‘image/texts’—can help us rethink modernist aesthetics” (Humm’s italics 4). Here, as in her previous publications on the subject, Humm reveals how Woolf’s photographic artifacts in the Monks House albums exemplify an “unconscious testimony to her childhood past” (43), disclosing in turn the contribution of visualization technologies and

maternal memories to Woolf's notions of identity and creativity. Photographs, then, become a maternally-connected source of identity for Woolf, a "joint co-emergence in difference" that embodies the "psychic borderspace" of mother and infant in their matrixial encounters (qtd. in Humm 79). For Woolf, as Humm argues, photographs resist death in the way that mutual image-making recreates memories and experiences of maternal bonds.

Humm's excellent analysis of domestic photographs taken by Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell provides us with a new perspective on women's ways of looking and their effect on modernist aesthetics.<sup>4</sup> However, as she admits, Humm does not explicitly discuss how this photographic theory might further illuminate similar moments described in Woolf's fiction, other than to provide a cursory analysis of *To the Lighthouse* and a particular emphasis on Woolf's episodic pieces in "Portraits." Humm's point of focus remains on these previously underrepresented photographs: "the albums do not simply provide corroborating evidence for the role of the visual in Woolf's fiction, but, in themselves, richly reveal Woolf's subjective feeling in a visual form" (43). I agree with Humm's assessment of the importance of Woolf's photographs, and I build upon her argument to show that, although undoubtedly connected with the iconography of Victorian photography, these visually-inflected choron moments may also be revealed in Virginia Woolf's fiction. In a series of triangular relationships—between mother and child, husband and wife, lovers and strangers, artist and vision—the reader/viewer is invited to perform and recreate the choron moment in the process of reading these modernist texts.

## The Maternal Utopia in Photographic Images of Mother and Child

For me, photographs...must be *habitable*, not *visitable*. This longing to inhabit, if I observe it clearly in myself...is fantasmic, deriving from a kind of second sight which seems to bear me forward to a utopian time, or carry me back to somewhere in myself...awakening in me the Mother (and never the disturbing Mother).  
Barthes, *Camera Lucida* 38-40

In *Camera Lucida* (1981), Roland Barthes muses on a memory of his mother brought on by viewing an image of her as a small child in the “Winter Garden” photograph. He recounts the resurgence of his authentic self in his interaction with this image: “We supposed, without saying anything of the kind to each other...the frivolous insignificance of language; the suspension of images must be the very space of love, its music. Ultimately I experienced her, strong as she had been, my inner law, as my feminine child” (72). This recapturing of a prelanguage state of maternal bonding results from Barthes’s personal interplay with the text of this photo and the memory of caring for his mother in her aged illness. Through this interchange between the memory and the image, the photo speaks to him, creating, for both Barthes at the moment of experience and readers at the moment of reading, an instance of the photographic chorán moment.

Moments such as these are evocative of Kristeva’s prelinguistic state of wholeness, and can be detected in the fiction of the photographic text. Beautiful illustrations of the visual chorán moment are present in Gertrude Käsebier’s images of mothers and children in the 1890s through the 1920s. These photographic moments echo with those pictured by Julia Margaret Cameron,<sup>13</sup> and feature the kind of matrixial encounter Woolf offers readers through her fiction. Although Käsebier almost exclusively privileges the white



woman's maternal gaze in her camera work, she also invokes the possibility of allowing a more open vision of the mother-child bond through her photographs' capacity to represent this flash of intersubjectivity—across boundaries of difference. The chimera of the choral moment available to each individual viewer provides the first stepping stone in recreating a fullness of self among others. Käsebier's work evidences a pre-modernist struggle with the conscious, performative presentation of a maternal space through the manipulation of pictorialist elements (also tied with the overwhelming cultural hegemony of domesticity and empire).

In the late 1880s, Käsebier (1852-1934) became incredibly successful as a New Woman photographer, with a husband and three children of her own. Käsebier is best known as a portrait photographer and Photo-Secessionist aligned aesthetically with her teacher and colleague Alfred Steiglitz, who proclaimed the supreme art of photography. The pictorialists were the first proponents of art photography in their hope that the medium could transform the world; critical discussions of their work have resulted in modernist questions of artistic intention and control.<sup>14</sup> Influenced by impressionist painting, pictorialists created diffused and romanticized images of nature and dramatic tableaux which often reflected the Victorian culture's fascination with the Pre-Raphaelites. Later, in the early part of the twentieth century, pictorialists incorporated the realism of the personal eye, resulting in the transformation from pictorial to straight photography. Pictorialist photographers often manipulated their images through stage-managing, costuming and retouching to elicit certain emotional responses from the viewer. Käsebier's images suggest that she was familiar with the idea that the photograph induces narrative. Like many of the other famous women photographers of her specific historical

moment, many of whom she mentored (such as Imogen Cunningham and Laura Gilpin), Käsebier “*actively invented, inscribed, and disseminated an exclusionary rhetoric of gender*” (Wexler’s italics; 181) through her popular images of feminine domesticity that, according to Laura Wexler, attest to the legitimacy of empire. As Wexler argues, Käsebier concentrated on reflecting her “‘Ideal’ vision of Anglo Saxon high culture” (183) and “heroic white motherhood” (184). She notes that in Käsebier’s pictures of mother’s supposedly innate “integrity and invulnerability,” the women appear “ethereal and swathed in white” (185), and thereby enforce a visual code of whiteness as ideal.

Beyond this determination of Käsebier’s ideological shortsightedness, I argue that her photographs, specifically “The Manger” (1899) and “Mother and Child (Decorative Panel)” (1899), evoke this photographic artist’s imaginative trajectory of the spiritual union between mother and child.<sup>15</sup> The need for this kind of nostalgic reconnection with the maternal is particularly modern in the sense that by some accounts, modernists expressed a desire to rediscover wholeness through deeper understandings of early states of consciousness. This view of modernism might help explain why photographers like Gertrude Kasëbier sought to express this longing in images of mothers and children. Following this line of thought, Berger notes that:

The period in which photography has developed corresponds to the period in which this uniquely modern anguish has become commonplace...to preserve experience, to re-create an area of ‘timelessness’, to insist upon the permanent...The private photograph is treated and valued today as if it were the materialisation of that glimpse through the window which looked across history towards that which was outside time” (108).

If the photograph can somehow exist outside of time, then the viewer's interaction with the image offers the possibility of reading against predominant views of history. It is important to note that the photographic choron moment—one that suggests Barthes's sense of expansion—is what enables viewers to resist the kind of totalizing history that would stratify the image and the image-makers within a narrative of exploitation and conquest. Through soft techniques and camera angles that invite the viewer's empathetic perspective, Käsebier offers a potentially different reading of maternal luminosity.

“The Manger,” or “Ideal Motherhood” (1899) reveals precisely that kind of incandescent unity with the lost maternal body. Through the soft and velvety pictorialist lighting, the viewer is allowed a glimpse of the ethereal, almost otherworldly bond between the mother and her baby cradled closely to her breast. In this light of bliss, the protective gauze (symbolic of the amniotic sac) enshrouds them both, emphasizing their symbiotic harmony. The subjects' explicitly physical connection—the mother appears to be breast feeding her child—further emphasizes the tenderness of this nourishing maternal moment of interplay.<sup>16</sup>

Noting a precursor to Käsebier's work, Carol Mavor comments that Julia Margaret Cameron's children are charming and seductive and presented with eroticism, “as if they have been touched all over” (22). She continues her commentary on the silky manipulation of the photographic images:

It is as if the messiness of their hair, the touch of their fingers caught unaware, the sensual feel and look of their child-bodies has been magically caught in the emulsion. It is as if the entity of childhood, a strange jelly, has been smeared into these pictures, which were developed without regard to

the rules, producing photographs that were (and still are) distinctly fleshy, dreamy, blurry, delightfully sloppy, otherworldly—like the skin of children.

(25)

This sensual play, in the creation of glossy, touchy images of children, finds itself recapitulated in Käsebier's late Victorian images of mother and infant, yet Käsebier's photographs are even more iconographic.

“Mother and Child (Decorative Panel)” expresses the intimate, telescoping bond between the mother and the babe, Steiglitz's wife Emmeline and their daughter Kitty. The baby girl is innocently and cherubically naked, while the mother, draped in aesthetic Arts and Crafts style robes, crouches over her, protectively supporting her chubby hands with her own assured maternal grasp. Both mother and child actively relish the covenant of maternal body and child, yet the child here is allowed a sense of freedom—here visually represented by the child's stance as turned away from her mother. For this photograph as well as the other two I will discuss in which children are present, the children are afforded agency within the choran space.<sup>17</sup>

Käsebier expressed the ideal of her own philosophic independence as an artist: “she believed that the key to artistic photography was to work out one's own thoughts alone, and that ‘if you want to have real art you must go it on your own’” (Michaels 82). This fact points to another intersection between her photos of mothers and children and the illuminated moment they create: the duality of the imaginary verging on the symbolic. Jessica Benjamin elaborates upon Daniel Stern's “intersubjective model” to argue that:

Instead of reflecting the child's image back to the child, [the maternal gaze allows] the mother [to] introduce herself, her own feelings and

preoccupations, and the mother and child need to work together in negotiating that which connects and that which separates them. This mutuality does not harm the child; on the contrary, it is the key to the child's healthy development of a sense of self in relation to another. (qtd. in Hirsch 159)

Although the subjects in Käsebier's pictures languish in the exquisite moment at hand, there often remains an awareness (perhaps reflected in the image of Virginia and Julia) and even an acceptance of the fact that a division must eventually come.

Nowhere is this consciousness of inevitable separation made more apparent than in the famous "Blessèd Art Thou Among Women" (1899). Even Laura Wexler can't help but comment that this is "Käsebier's best known photograph—one of her most beautiful and most deservedly celebrated images" (191). The mother in "Blessèd Art Thou..." benevolently shepherds her daughter from one stage of consciousness to the next. As Wexler notes, the daughter, Peggy Lee, is "at a threshold." I suggest that this "threshold" is the space between the transition from imaginary *jouissance*<sup>18</sup> with the maternal body (in "The Manger" and "Mother and Child") and the symbolic social spectacle of proper, culturally inscribed female identity. Here there is still a physical connection between the mother and her daughter (Agnes lightly touches Peggy's shoulder), and although the child is significantly older than one in Lacan's rendering of the mirror stage, she stares straight ahead as if she recognizes her own reflection and thus her own separate image.<sup>19</sup> In regards to Käsebier's work, Judith Fryer Davidov notes the "construct[ion of] pictures of an (illusory) unity of mother and child in the prelinguistic realm—that is, a time before, or at the moment when, the female child must enter the symbolic world of subject and object

in which she, as the recipient of male desire, is assigned the place of object” (67). Following Davidov, I contend “Blessèd Art Thou...” as a prime example of the prelinguistic orb.

As I intimated earlier in this chapter, the choran space encourages a kind of triangular process of reading. Following Marianne Hirsch, “The triangular field in which the signifier, signified, and interpreting subject interact in the process of symbolization is much like the triangular field of the photograph...Power, in this structure of play, is not unidimensional or unidirectional: it circulates in multiple ways within the process of...reading pictures” (176). Davidov looks for the interval between self/body/Other that can be traversed to create openings, possibilities of meaning and photographic ambiguity through the lens of feminist film theory and the work of women photographers, an instance she calls the encounter. This crossover space, wherein women photographers could claim a space of their own while also traversing the photographic space, provides “a strategy for claiming agency for oneself by representing otherness, particularly when it is practiced by women photographers emerging from a tradition (into which they had to place themselves) of a history of art that had consistently represented them as other” (6). I admit bias in my own reader-response to Käsebier’s photographs. Nor do I find Käsebier blameless, or ignore her complicity in replicating the Angel in the House ideology of her day. Regardless, it is problematic to read Käsebier’s photographs *exclusively* as markers of white imperialist dominance, thereby completely denying their artistic quality, as critics such as Davidov and Wexler have tended to do.

I maintain that Käsebier’s photographs of mothers and children can be read as monuments to the transcendent possibility of the choran moment envisioned before the

indoctrination of cultural subjectivity. This is not to say that Käsebier does not operate within nineteenth and twentieth-century political ideologies (particularly the supposed inherent domesticity of mother and child) to access a “universal” belief in supreme maternity through her art. However, I believe it is possible for viewers today to see them iconographically—in a more open, less deterministic light. Susan Bernardin, Melody Graulich, Lisa MacFarlane, and Nicole Tonkovich concede (in their reading of images taken by one of Käsebier’s contemporaries) that photographs can also be read iconographically:

The continuing presence of the photograph, its existence as an object through the passage of time, allows it to perform doubly: it can both record an encounter in question, making it available to other readings, other uses, sometimes through resistant readings, sometimes through parodies, and sometimes through outright challenges. (*Trading Gazes* 6)

Once again, it is possible to read both aesthetically and politically when considering modernist artistic expressions of wholeness.

The chora offers a space “to disrupt master narratives” (Arnett 156); therefore I believe it is possible to read Käsebier’s photographic choran moments as counternarratives to despotic notions of history told by those in power. Even in its self-conscious pictorialist depiction of a late nineteenth-century domestic space by a white, bourgeois woman artist, Käsebier’s photography irradiates the whole choran experience, and in like manner, viewers, as her “reading” audience, need only look deeply into her photographs to rediscover feelings of wholeness and home. These imagistic narratives, along with the literary narratives I discuss, bring together the notion of a universal aesthetic and a politically affective form of art. As I will soon discuss, Woolf’s fiction as

well is imbued with longing for maternal bonds. I suggest that like Virginia Woolf's fiction, Gertrude Käsebier's photographs can reconnect viewers with a powerful instance of wholeness that, through our present viewing, eliminates restrictive borders between adult self and child self, and potentially self and other.

Virginia Woolf's memories of family and friends, and especially her mother, punctuate and expand as residues throughout her fiction in what I designate as choron moments. Woolf was interested in photography from 1897 on, particularly in the form of "album-like visual narratives" (Humm, "Visual Modernism: Virginia Woolf's 'Portraits' and Photography" 94). Maggie Humm argues that from the age of fifteen when Woolf got her first Frena camera, photographs framed her world ("Virginia Woolf's Photography and the Monk's House Albums" 219). Humm focuses on what Benjamin calls "the unconscious optics of modernity or the ways in which photographs can register moments outside immediate perception" ("Visual Modernism" 94) to argue that the Monk's House Albums reveal Virginia Woolf's subjective feelings about her family in visual form.<sup>20</sup> Humm notes that an 1892 photo of Woolf with her parents focuses on the unrepresentable and the immemorial, and that this image carries on in her memory and resonates with her fiction: "The photographs allowed Woolf to be in touch with the phantasmic world of her childhood." She argues that Cameron's image of Julia Duckworth, Woolf's mother, haunts her albums because she is so drawn to the maternal: "Like a palimpsest, the album sequences offer a crucial insight into those psychic mechanisms structuring Woolf's aesthetic. All photographs are a language and Woolf's language was maternal...Woolf literally wrote 'through' the maternal" (238). Woolf wrote of her mother often, and a prime example is this: "She has haunted me" (L3: 374). Further, her mother's early death



meant that Julia became a phantasmic mother, a mother who can only exist as an image (Humm 239), and was therefore one whom Woolf was compelled to replicate throughout her fiction.

### Virginia Woolf's Textual Choran Moments

I begin to long for some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words, like the shuffling of feet on the pavement. (Bernard in *The Waves* 341-2)

Virginia Woolf conceptualizes the need for a “female” voice in modernist writing in chapter four of *A Room of One's Own*. Woolf notes that Jane Austen, like Shakespeare, was not conscious of gender in her writing and she thus wrote in her own (perhaps “feminine”) way (68). She then asserts that since women writers have no “common sentence ready to use” (76); they need to take on their own voice rather than adapt themselves to the public style established in the canon by male writers. In her essay “Women and Fiction” (1929), a precursor to *A Room of One's Own*, she addresses this necessity:

The very form of the sentence does not fit her. It is a sentence made by men; it is too loose, too heavy, too pompous for a woman's use. Yet in a novel...an ordinary and usual type of sentence has to be found to carry the reader on easily and naturally from one end of the book to the other. And this a woman must make for herself, altering and adapting the current sentence until she writes one that takes the natural shape of her thought without crushing it or distorting it. (48)

From this rather brief yet important assertion she later develops her theory of the androgynous mind in *A Room of One's Own*—that which she believes all writers of genius possess. For Woolf, androgyny ultimately indicates a conjoining of our masculine and our feminine selves, suggesting the deconstruction of fixed concepts of masculinity and femininity. She makes this concept evident with the metaphor of two characters, male and female, stepping into a taxi and somehow coming together. This initial binary understanding of gender transforms instead into a merging of the two into one that, for Woolf, finally represents androgyny: “It is when this fusion takes place that the mind is fully fertilized and uses all its faculties. Perhaps a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine” (AROOO 98). Again, it is this sense of a meeting and an intermixing of genders that seems to be the predecessor for the eventual goal of realizing the preoriginary state of androgyny that was once possessed in the choron state of consciousness.

Woolf extends her concept of androgyny into the realm of the writer and the literary legacy they might create. Androgyny also depends upon the anonymity of the writer, as Maria DiBattista writes:

The creative power differed, Woolf felt, from the creative power of men, but she insisted that the success and expression of that power depended on that impersonality or anonymity, that absence of special pleading, which lends to art 'that curious sexual quality which comes only when sex is unconscious of itself'. (17)

Although Woolf often appears to privilege the creative power of the female mind, thus calling for a female determination of language that can “break the sequence” (AROOO 81),

her claim is for androgyny as that which frees the mind from societal as well as biological constructions of gender that might otherwise impede the true voice of the artist. Moreover, Woolf's concept of androgyny is available through reconnection with the chora; it is in the very unconsciousness of gender that the writer (and hence the reader) can embrace a true sense of an ecstatic unified, integrated self. At the same time this androgynous chora opposes rigid patriarchal notions of gender Woolf so sought to eradicate. Kristeva explains that "Any creator necessarily moves through an identification with the maternal, which is why the resurgence of this semiotic dynamic is important in every act of creation" ("A Question of Subjectivity" 136), and Beth C. Schwartz states that "This anonymous world is, for Woolf, the locus of creation" (726). Woolf's androgynous space of generative artistry anticipates Kristeva's theory of the chora as the origin of creativity that transcends the binaries of gender (and potentially other structures of difference).

I conceptualize the choran moment as, in part, inhabiting a "third space" of androgyny; my readings of choran moments in Woolf's texts rehabilitate limiting perceptions of androgyny in Woolf's oeuvre. Toril Moi picks up on what Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* has missed in determining Woolf's androgyny as a failure to confront her own (essential) femaleness. Moi instead focuses on the Kristevan idea of the unitary self in Woolf's artistic vision, and arrives with Kristeva at a third realm of feminism "in which women are deconstructors of the very dichotomies upon which patriarchy is based, primarily the dichotomy of fixed gender identities" (Trotman 3). Thus, as Nat Trotman explains, a rupture between masculine and feminine is actualized, "creating a new space in which I find pleasure" (3). Since androgyny is placed outside the

realm of “traditional, patriarchal discourse and its objective, rational, linear worldview, it must align itself with the subjective, the irrational, the realm of pleasure” (5), or the third space of the chora. Marjorie Garber also builds upon Moi’s concept of a third-sexed recognition of androgyny. For Garber, bisexuality, like androgyny, undercuts the seeming stability of the opposing poles of masculinity and femininity: “The third’ is that which questions binary thinking and introduces crisis...The ‘third’ is the mode of articulation, a way of describing a place of possibility” (qtd. in Kaivola 11). As do Moi, Trotman, and Derrida, Homi Bhabha employs the concept of hybridity as a third designation to introduce the idea of the fundamental instability of the supposed pure forms of masculinity and femininity, and finally argues for a mixture of those terms. Bhabha characterizes the hybrid moment as one that rearticulates “elements that are neither the one...nor the Other...but something else besides which contests the terms and territories of both” (“The Commitment to Theory” 13). Following Moi and Bhabha, I argue here that sexes and genders are rendered insignificant in the choran moment. As Trotman writes, “a tiny freedom is born” (7). This choran aperture allows for a freeing, personal interplay with Woolf’s texts, producing pleasure for the reader in its intense, inspired, almost sacred moments of being.

In Woolf’s unfinished essay, “Anon,” which she began in September of 1940, we find the most patent recognition of the choran aesthetic. Here Woolf lays out her representation of the ultimate androgynous mind, the Anonymous writer who is “sometimes man; sometimes woman” (“Anon” 382), standing between the inspiration for the art and the text, the imaginary and the symbolic. Schwartz comments are relevant in that she addresses the connection between the anonymous quality of the artist in Woolf’s

“Anon” and the notion of a deeply subconscious time “before” that inspires the creation of art:

We can still become anonymous: the anonymous world “still exists in us, deep sunk, savage, primitive, remembered.” We can most readily recover anonymity through song, for song is “something very deep— primitive, not yet extinct” (“Anon” 398, 381, 377). And the “instinct of rhythm,” she argues, is “the most profound and primitive of instincts,” as deep-rooted as the “instinct of self-preservation” (“Anon” 403). (Schwartz 725)

In the choron moment we can reclaim the “original song,” the “song beneath” (“Anon” 403-4), or “the world beneath our consciousness; the anonymous world to which we can still return” (385). This is the place, Kristeva notes, that emerges in the musicalities of the voice; the song of Anon is the song of the “mother tongue,” that rapturous place of babbling interplay between mother and infant that excites a feeling of restored unity with the original self. Again, the return to the maternally connected experience is not essentially “feminine,” rather, it offers every person the opportunity to re-embrace their own pregendered, amalgamated self. Once the moment of wholeness in the self is fully embraced, then the expansion of self toward connection to others begins.

Woolf’s concern for creating connections between her characters is reflected in her early statement about form. Writing in her diary in August of 1922 while she was working on *Jacob's Room*, Woolf speculates, “Suppose one can keep the quality of a sketch in a finished & completed work.” This sketch quality begins answering the problem of how a writer might—through spare and intricate webs of relation—generate interconnectivity in various characters’ interactions of mind and body. Her solution is articulated when she

discovered in late 1923 “how to dig beautiful caves behind my characters... The idea is that the caves shall connect, & each comes to daylight at the present moment” (D2 263). As always, Woolf’s emphasis is on illuminated moments of correlation between her characters.

This deeper connection between characters is often represented by children’s voices in her novels, which in turn emulate the lost fusion with the maternal body in the symbolic order. For example, when Jacob’s brother Archer calls for him on the beach in the opening pages of *Jacob’s Room*, “the voice had an extraordinary sadness. Pure from all body, pure from all passion, going out into the world, solitary, unanswered, breaking against rocks—so it sounded” (8-9). Here, Archer’s calls take on a lament for this destroyed connection from “body” and “passion,” those elements associated with the maternal core. The choral voice is recapitulated in *Jacob’s Room*, however, in a picture of home and hearth motherhood which depicts a pair of women busy with the particulars of childcare: “The two women murmured over the spirit lamp, plotting the eternal conspiracy of hush and clean bottles while the wind raged and gave a sudden wrench at the cheap fastenings” (13). This choral moment embodies the wholeness and safety, against the danger of the outside world, created by the power of a maternal presence and its soothing vocalizations. As Mrs. Flanders and Rebecca ruminate over the sleeping children who must “shut [their] eyes, and think of the fairies, fast asleep, under the flowers” (12), their echoing, murmuring tones bathe the children in a womb-like space of restful fluidity, reconnecting them with that preexistent space of unified infancy. Here, the children’s call for nurturance is abundantly answered by a maternal figure’s encouragement and watchful care, allowing them to be utterly at peace.

However Woolf does not always show us a restoration of the mother-child bond through vocalization. The forlorn quality of Archer's voice in *Jacob's Room* anticipates the jangling sounds of the child singers who appear at the end of *The Years* (1937):

Etho passo tanno hai...That was what it sounded like. Not a word was recognisable. The distorted sounds rose and sank as if they followed a tune...the unintelligible words ran themselves together almost into a shriek. The grown-up people did not know whether to laugh or cry. Their voices were so harsh; the accent was so hideous...It was so shrill, so discordant, and so meaningless. (429-30)

In this passage, Woolf creates a curious and dramatic juxtaposition with the otherwise positively (or at least neutrally) rendered depictions of children's voices in the remainder of her fiction. These children are of a lower class than those she portrays elsewhere. Woolf may be commenting on their social status by emphasizing the way they disturb the listeners, who are surely of a higher class. Even in the case of children, those who embody the outsider in Woolf's fiction are always ever-present. She writes of *The Waves* (1931) in June of 1929 that "...this shall be Childhood; but it must not be *my* childhood; & boats on the pond; the sense of children; unreality; things oddly proportioned" (D3 236). Perhaps it is that the disparate, uneven and horrid song echoes the sorrow of that fundamental disconnect between the maternal body and our inevitable wrenching into the social order, or that sudden and disorienting "unreality...[of] things oddly proportioned" that Woolf strives to eradicate through intense moments of wholeness in her fiction.

The mother-child bond is also fully represented throughout *To the Lighthouse* (1927) in the interactions between Mrs. Ramsay and her children. As Mrs. Ramsay knits while

caressing her son James, she simultaneously creates a balm-like, supportive, life-giving energy. As she senses that her husband is “demanding sympathy” she shores up her feminine verve for the task at hand:

Mrs. Ramsay, who had been sitting loosely, folding her son in her arm, braced herself, and, half turning, seemed to raise herself with an effort, and at once to pour erect into the air a rain of energy, a column of spray, looking at the same time animated and alive as if all her energies were being fused into force, burning and illuminating (quietly though she sat, taking up her stocking again)...[with] this delicious fecundity, this fountain and spray of life. (37)

This extraordinary, fluid force is surely “her capacity to surround and protect” (38), her ability to “combine” (39) and create permanence with her supreme maternal energy.<sup>21</sup> Its associations with “rain” and the “spray” of water once again tie the expression with the associated amniotic fluid and the chamber of protection and bliss. This space is echoed in *The Waves* when Susan watches over her newborn baby: “Sleep, sleep, I croon...Sleep I sing...I sing a song by the fire like an old shell murmuring on the beach...wrapping in a cocoon made of my own blood the delicate limbs of my baby...making my own body a hollow, a warm shelter for my child to sleep in” (294-5). The image of the sheltering maternal space is an important metaphor for Woolf, who lost her own mother at the age of thirteen.<sup>22</sup>

Bernard’s “search for permanence” (Boone 636) in *The Waves* also links him with the character of Mrs. Ramsay, a maternal, artistic force that “combines” and creates moments of permanence for her family and community. Woolf’s mythical place of Elvedon



in *The Waves* offers another example of the child-like world of fantasy, as discussed by Joseph Allen Boone. Although he does not evoke Kristeva's chora, Boone argues "Woolf suggests that Bernard's story records a vestigial memory, part of his preconscious history *preceding* identity; his telling of it thus becomes a process of recovering an original status buried beneath layers of the meaning of Elvedon's memory" (633). For Bernard, the recognition of this vision can be made in the symbolic realm of written language, rather than in the choran imaginary space. Bernard finds in Elvedon "that which is *symbolic*, and thus perhaps permanent, if there is any permanence in our sleeping, eating, breathing, so animal, so spiritual and tumultuous lives" (*TW* 349; italics mine). Even though Bernard may doubt the notion of permanence in *The Waves*, Woolf continually strives to "let...her imagination sweep unchecked round every rock and cranny of the world that lies submerged in the depths of our unconscious being" ("Professions for Women" 61) in her subsequent writing, and thereby reestablishes our common subconscious world in the written word.<sup>24</sup>

The emphasis on the expansive quality of the inner psyche is evident throughout Woolf's fiction, particularly when connected with children. In *To the Lighthouse*, Mrs. Ramsay imagines a child's state of mind as she interrupts her daughter Cam daydreaming:

What was she dreaming about?...seeing her engrossed...so that she had to repeat the message twice...The words seemed to be dropped into a well, where, if the waters were clear, they were also so extraordinarily distorting that, even as they descended, one saw them twisting about to make Heaven knows what pattern on the floor of a child's mind. (54)

Mrs. Ramsey's questioning and refashioning of Cam's subconscious state shows that she is intensely interested in this child-like way of being, further connecting her with her children, as well as the fact that she understands her profound influence on them. She later worries that James "was thinking, we are not going to the lighthouse tomorrow; and she thought, he will remember that all his life" (62), evincing her concern for the effect that early experiences can have on familial relationships. The interplay between her "words...dropped into a well" and the countervision of their "twisting about" to create a new "pattern on the floor of the child's mind" also shows us that Woolf, through the character of Mrs. Ramsey, suggests that the influence may be mutual. This mutual influence once again comes out of choron moments of interconnectivity, both in body and in mind, between Woolf's characters.

Not only does Woolf, through the thoughts of Mrs. Ramsay, assert the importance of childhood experience in developing our adult sensibilities, she also expresses a kind of uterine solace in the "limitless" moments tied with Mrs. Ramsay and her children. Mrs. Ramsay feels at these moments, while James plays at cutting out magazine pictures, that "she could be herself, by herself" (62). The space we can return to enables us

To be silent; to be alone. All the being and the doing, expansive, glittering, vocal, evaporated; and one shrunk, with a sense of solemnity, to being oneself, a wedge-shaped core of darkness, something invisible to others...Beneath it all is dark, it is all spreading, it is unfathomable deep; but now and again we rise to the surface and that is what you see us by...This core of darkness could go anywhere, for no one saw it. They could not stop it, she thought, exulting. There was freedom, there was peace, there

was, most welcome of all, a summoning together, a resting on the platform of stability. (62-3)

Here the feminine power that is regenerative and creative offers limitless wholeness and a sense of absolute harmony and stable well being; our collective wedge-shaped core can be brought out from within us anywhere at any time. And it is often these moments that excite intense flashes of rhapsody; Mrs. Ramsay speaks of these “waves of pure lemon which curved and swelled and broke upon the beach and the ecstasy burst in her eyes and waves of pure delight raced over the floor of her mind and she felt, It is enough! It is enough!” (65).<sup>25</sup>

For Woolf as well, the choron moment is tied with a maternal earth that is timelessly infused with pleasure. The swell of joy associated with recovery of this consciousness is reflected in Kristeva's concept of “infantile language,” or a “telescoping of parent and child...discourse of a child (boy or girl)...where his ‘own’ language is never totally rationalized or normated...but where it always remains an ‘infantile language’” (*Desire in Language* 278). In either the unmitigated communication between parent and child, or adult self and child self, this sense of pleasure is born and a poetic voice emerges. For Maria DiBattista, “the non-sense spoken by the mad [is] no language at all, merely words languishing and dissolving into their constituent sounds—‘ee um fah um so / foo swee too eem oo’ (MD 80)—the sounds of the eternal, unreasonable world” (52). Here DiBattista evokes “the voice of no age or sex, the voice of an ancient spring spouting from the earth” (MD 80), embodied by the vagrant woman in the Regent's Park Tube station whom Peter Walsh overhears on his solitary-traveling journey in *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). In the brief instance of connection between Peter and this woman, we catch a glimpse of the

communal power of the choran moment. The woman sings of the transcendence of love “which has lasted a million years,” and her infantile, “bubbling burbling song” becomes a nurturing, reviving force that “soak[s] through the knotted roots of infinite ages...fertilising, leaving a damp stain” (81). Once again, Woolf images the fecund, womb-like space in its eternal, vibrant wetness, and here actualizes the chora through the voice of a kind of mother-earth figure who appears to enjoy that “telescoping” power of connection with her child self. The voice is that of an earth song, one that Woolf also accomplishes in *The Years* as the “sound of the eternal waltz” like the “deep murmur [that] sang in [Kitty’s] ears—the land itself, singing to itself, a chorus, alone.” This choran song awaits those who seek it, and offers the potential for a flash of happiness: “[Kitty] lay there listening. She was happy, completely. Time had ceased” (TY 129; 278).

The renewing power of the maternal space is often reflected in music and art in Woolf’s fiction, frequently evoking erotic intensity. Woolf actually wrote *The Waves* while being inspired by music, as she notes in a June 1927 diary entry: “I do a little work on it in the evening when the gramophone is playing late Beethoven sonatas. (The windows fidget at their fastenings as if we were at sea)” (D3 139), and in a letter to Bessie Trevelyan, “I always think of my books as music before I write them” (L4 426). The epigraph at the opening of this section illustrates Woolf’s chasing down of the choran space, particularly in the depiction of “some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words...” (TW 342). Indeed Virginia’s sister Vanessa Bell responded to the power of *The Waves* as follows, linking her reading experience with her feeling of giving birth: “For it is quite as real an experience of having a baby or anything else, being moved as you have succeeded in moving me...I know its only because of your art that I am so moved...if you

wouldn't think me foolish I should say that you have found the 'lullaby capable of singing him to rest'" (qtd. in Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A - Z* 296n). Vanessa even labored on a painting, eventually entitled *The Nursery*, which she hoped "would have some sort of analogous meaning to what you've done."<sup>26</sup> As Mrs. Ramsay murmurs a song to herself while she reads a book in *To the Lighthouse*, "She felt that she was climbing backwards, upwards...so that she only knew this is white, or this is red. She did not know at all first what the words meant at all" (119). Music provides a gateway to her journey back to her infantile self, the self that does not understand the meanings of words. Woolf noted in a letter to Ethel Smyth in August of 1930 that she strives to "get my sense of unity and coherency and all that makes me wish to write the *Lighthouse* etc. unless I am perpetually stimulated" (L4 200). It seems that for Woolf, music is also a constant source of inspiration that inspires and drives her quest for creating wholeness in her writing.

In *The Years*, music creates a medium of erotic connection. Kitty basks in the glory of the opera, musing that "the music made her think of herself and her own life as she seldom did. It exalted her; it cast a flattering light over herself, her past...He, she thought, looking at the handsome boy, knows exactly what music means. He is already possessed by music. She liked the look of complete absorption that had swum up on top of his immaculate respectability" (183). In *The Voyage Out* (1915), music becomes a culminating force that fosters community. As Rachel plays the piano at the early morning dance, "their feet fell in with the rhythm [and] they showed a complete lack of self-consciousness... Then they began to see themselves and their lives, and the whole of human life advancing very nobly under the direction of the music" (166-7). Through her talent for music, akin

to Clarissa Dalloway's artistic ability of bringing people together with her parties, Rachel creates a nurturing space of non self-conscious repose for all those present.

Woolf creates choral moments of jouissance between married couples in her fiction as well. Determined herself "not to look upon marriage as a profession" and earnestly hoping for "a marriage that is a tremendous and living thing, always alive, always hot, not dead and easy in parts as most marriages are" (LI 496), Woolf explores in her fiction the paradoxes marriage offers. Although the imprint of marriage as a constrictive institution is perhaps her central thesis in *The Voyage Out* (evident in her creation of a heroine who falls ill and dies while contemplating marriage), Woolf does offer a healthy alternative in the partnership between Ridley and Helen:

"Tell me if there is a white hair, then?" she replied. She laid her hair in his hand.

"There's not a white hair on your head," he exclaimed.

"Ah, Ridley, I begin to doubt," she sighed; and bowed her head under his eyes so that he might judge, but the inspection produced only a kiss where the line of parting ran, and the husband and wife then proceeded to move about the room, casually murmuring.

"What was that you were saying?" Helen remarked, after an interval of conversation no third person could have understood. (196)

Their marital space encompasses a peaceful, unspoken connection that bonds their spirits in wholeness together.

A similar although more splendidly performed unspoken moment of connection happens between the Ramsays in *To the Lighthouse*. As Mrs. Ramsay finishes her knitting

while Mr. Ramsay thinks “of Scott’s novels and Balzac’s novels,” the frustrated atmosphere begins to transform; he “wanted her to tell him that she loved him. And that, no, she could not do” (123). As she gazes out the window “...he was watching her. She knew that he was thinking, You are more beautiful than ever. And she felt herself very beautiful. Will you not tell me just for once that you love me? He was thinking that, for he was roused” (123-4). Here is a heightened moment of erotic sensitivity expressed between husband and wife. We have been told earlier that, “She had complete trust in him” (118), but here they participate in an unspoken dance of flirtation; he is expectant of her vocal declaration of love while she enjoys the fact that he watches her in anticipation, although “she could not say it” (124). The transient moment of anticipation is interrupted by her glance in his direction, becoming a flash of tacit “intercourse”:

And as she looked at him she began to smile, for though she had not said a word, he knew, of course he knew, that she loved him. He could not deny it. And smiling she looked out the window...(thinking to herself, Nothing on earth can equal this happiness)...For she had triumphed again. She had not said it: yet he knew. (124)

Although there is not any explicit sexual connection between Mr. and Mrs. Ramsay, their rapturous, unsaid communication illustrates another choral instance in Woolf’s fiction. Woolf herself, upon her 25<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, wrote in her diary of “happiness...after 25 years cant bear to be separate...It is an enormous pleasure, being wanted: a wife...in a marriage so complete” (D5 120). Even in a marriage with no sexual expression of love, Woolf offers proof here that a true partnership can do very well without.<sup>27</sup>

Clarissa Dalloway's recollection of loving partnership involves her memories of Sally Seton, her free-spirited confidante from her adolescent summer at Bourton in *Mrs. Dalloway*. The conflicted passion she feels is associated with her revelatory memory of her kiss with Sally:

Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it...And she felt she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it—a diamond, something infinitely precious, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (35-6)

This intimate, warm, lusciously choral moment is of course interrupted by Peter's "Star-gazing?"—the imaginary realm of feminine connection has been obliterated by the symbolic order of societal expectation, represented by the (supposedly) properly marriageable Peter. Although Clarissa loved both the freedom and reserve of Richard Dalloway and the overwhelming passion of Peter Walsh, the unabashed excitement of her love for Sally impressed her most. For she stood "in her bedroom at the top of the house holding the hot-water can in her hands and saying aloud, 'She is beneath this roof...She is beneath this roof!'...all because she was coming down to dinner in a white frock to meet Sally Seton!...She seemed...all light, glowing, like some bird or air ball that has flown in" (33-4). She allows herself to luxuriate in that semiotic moment revived in her memory, but will not ultimately permit herself to indulge in such a socially taboo relationship.<sup>28</sup>

There are myriad similar moments depicted in Woolf's fiction; spiritualized, life-giving occurrences appear, such as in *The Years* when "The Park was full of couples



walking together. Everything seemed fresh and full of sweetness. The air puffed soft in their faces. It was laden with murmurs; with the stir of branches...and now and again the intermittent song of a thrush" (239). These are moments of uplifted joy that intermingle with sweet song and natural tranquility. Woolf reflects her joy in writing *Mrs. Dalloway* in a December 1924 diary entry: "It seems to leave me plunged deep in the richest strata of my mind. I can write & write & write now: the happiest feeling in the world" (*Diary II* 323). She later writes about *The Years* that "the main feeling about this book is vitality, fruitfulness, energy. Never did I enjoy writing a book more, I think: only the whole mind in action: not so intensely as *The Waves*" (*D4* 361). Woolf's feelings of that lively intellectual energy are projected onto the love relationships in her fiction.

Woolf expands upon in her concept of androgyny in her depiction of lovers in *Orlando* (1928).<sup>29</sup> Here she illustrates the same kinds of chorán moments as in the novels previously discussed, but within the guise of androgynous desire. The sheer pleasure of desire for the self is realized when Orlando realizes that his body has transformed from a man's to woman's, as the trumpets outside "pealed Truth! Truth! Truth!" (137). An erotic moment occurs as Orlando stands "stark naked" in that the narrator, perhaps delving into the consciousness of the subject here, notes that "No human being, since the world began, has ever looked so ravishing. His form combined in one the strength of a man and a woman's grace" (138). Orlando, once the "garment like a towel" thrown in the chamber has rather triumphantly fallen short of its target, "looked himself up and down in a long looking-glass, without showing any signs of discomposure." Woolf's wry observation of Orlando's metamorphoses here ends with a frank assertion of androgyny: "Orlando had become a woman—there is no denying it. But in every other aspect,

Orlando remained precisely as he had been. The change of sex...did nothing whatever to alter their identity" (138). Woolf argues this point throughout the novel, claiming that "openness indeed was the soul of her nature," that "Different though the sexes were, they intermix. In every human being a vacillation from one sex to the other takes place" (189). Woolf light-heartedly continues the argument through Orlando's interactions with the social strata of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and does not concede defeat of her push for androgyny as anonymous and that which inhabits the third space.

Woolf's play with gender conventions continues to suggest an androgynous sensibility. Soon after Orlando becomes a woman and near the end of the novel as she contemplates her lover, Bonthrop, she thinks to herself,

"I am a woman...a real woman, at last." She thanked Bonthrop from the bottom of her heart for having given her this rare and unexpected gift...for they knew each other so well that they could say anything they liked, which is tantamount to saying nothing...For it has come about...that our modern spirit can almost dispense with language...the most poetic [conversation] is precisely that which cannot be written down. (253).

Woolf writes in her diary about *Orlando* that "I never got down to my depths and made shapes square up, as I did in the *Lighthouse*...I want fun. I want fantasy" (D3 203). Yet once we look beyond the obvious comic camp in this passage, the "rare and unexpected gift" (not unlike Clarissa's kiss) becomes representative of that superior, communicative relationship akin to the Ramsays. More importantly, their correlationship emerges primarily out of Orlando and Bonthrop's complete indifference to each other's sex. The comedy of Orlando's declaration of womanhood transforms that line into gender

indifference. This unconsciousness in turn allows Orlando and Bonthrop a kind of “anonymous” relationship that transcends gender with its “poetic” communion. As DiBattista argues, “Orlando’s sex-change represents an imaginative movement from repression to freedom” (122-3) and thus allows for the liberating concept of the “true self...compact of all selves we have it in us to be” (*Orlando* 310). Orlando emancipates her “true” self at this moment as a “real woman, at last,” in her reconnection with this regenerative space that we can presumably all recreate through our vivid connection to memory. Orlando muses, as does Clarissa Dalloway in their respective “middle age[s]”:

It cannot be denied that the most successful practitioners of the art of life, often unknown people by the way, somehow contrive to synchronise the sixty or seventy different times which beat simultaneously in every normal human system so that when eleven strikes, all the rest chime in unison, and the present is neither a violent disruption nor completely forgotten in the past. (305).

If Woolf claims that the essence of self has no gender in *Orlando*, that the body is merely a performative shell that encapsulates our truly multiplicitous selves which emerge at certain moments of time and in response to particular situations, then the moments between lovers here point to a more radical vision of our collective interconnection. It is in the vibrant present moment of being in “Ecstasy!” (327) that we can merge again with our past.

Lily Briscoe offers a more precise rendering of the choron space in the process of coming to her art in *To the Lighthouse*. Lily questions why she continues to paint at all; she must battle the doubts that have permeated her self-concept as an artist just as she

struggles with the “formidable” (158) space of the canvas. “Still the risk must be run; the mark made” (157). Lily reaches inside, into the core of her prelanguage and pregendered self for her artistic inspiration.<sup>30</sup> Woolf’s use of recurrent sexual imagery that ties the process of painting to a sense of erotic excitement is suddenly evident when her brush “for a moment...stayed trembling in a painful but exciting ecstasy in the air.” Finally, Lily’s overwhelming initial hesitancy breaks and “as if some juice necessary for the lubrication of her faculties were spontaneously squirted” (159), she is able “precariously” to begin painting once again. The rhythm of her artistic illumination, once again tied to waves and water and thus the fluidity of life in the womb, becomes “strong enough to bear her along with it on its current” and becomes a kind of seductive dance between creator and vision: “She attained a dancing, rhythmical movement, as if the pauses were one part of the rhythm and the strokes another...She was half unwilling, half reluctant” (158). Lily is finally able surrender to the dance; she “lose[s] consciousness of outer things” so that her mind becomes androgynous and “throws up from its depths...scenes, and names,...and memories and ideas, like a fountain spurting over that glaring, hideously difficult white space, which she modeled with greens and blues” (159). Even Lily’s painting is shaded with hues of the blue and green tones of water, reflecting the awesome power of the mind conjoined with the creative impulse; she might overflow with creative energy like the rapid water of the stream that floods over in an extreme rainstorm.

Painting parallels existence for Lily, representing reconnection with that inner world of unfathomable memory that unifies art and life and originates poetry. Lily in fact incorporates the “wedge-shaped core of darkness” (62) and the “odd-shaped triangular shadow” (201) of Mrs. Ramsay, which is here metaphorical of the uterine space in its shape

and tone, into her painting and thus her life. As with the idea of the photographic triangle of interpretation that breathes life into the photographic moment and allows collaboration between viewer, photographer and subject, this vibrant moment is represented by triangular symbols that evoke reciprocity. Life may not be the ideal she imagines for the canvas, but there are instead “little daily miracles, illuminations, matches struck unexpectedly in the dark” (161), inventing moments of perfect tranquility in the possibility of permanence and human interconnectedness. Lily exalts in the knowledge that “In the midst of chaos there is shape; this eternal passing and flowing...was struck into stability. Life stand still here, Mrs. Ramsay said.” In Woolf’s fiction, it is often the female artist who creates these instances of transcendent unity when “there is a coherence in things, a stability; something...is immune from change, and shines out...Of such moments...the thing is made that endures” (105).

Woolf’s depiction of a female artist whose ability to create and reconnect with a unifying moment reveals a feminist partiality. However, her ultimate goal for the artist is androgyny. As Maria DiBattista notes, “traces of her feminine bias remain in Woolf’s proposition that [Anon’s] song ‘fill[s] in the pauses’ between acts of labor and continu[es] the emotion produced and experienced by the common voice [a]s a lullaby” (230). Yet if we look at Woolf’s writing as postmodern, as Pamela Caughie has done, the choral moment exists at the seam between pre- and postverbal—in the realm of androgyny—because the prelanguage position is impossible to repossess once you’ve entered the symbolic: “For Woolf, the failure of language in this miracle of compression is the perpetuation of ‘dumb yearning,’ ‘the primeval voice sounding in the ear of the present’ as, perhaps, all there is to know” (Brownstein 86). I suggest again that the break between

binaries of supposed masculine and feminine artistic perspectives can best be restored by the intersection between androgyny and the choran moment in our readings of Woolf's novels today. One again, the engaged reader makes up the third space of the triangle of interpretation. Natania Rosenfeld argues that this triangular relationship provides an opening for communication: "The wedge, the triangular, might resolve a frozen dialectic by getting *underneath* the simplistic antinomies of East and West, Q and S... Though largely untouched by critics, it is perhaps the text's most powerful offering in terms of Woolf's vision of the future of gender paradigms" (131). It follows, then, that the maternally-bonded "song" that Woolf continually calls to mind in her fiction, the lull of the heartbeat we all experienced in utero that is embodied by her choran moments, smoothes over the gaps between binaries and "fill[s] in the pauses" ("Anon" 230) to recreate wholeness and interconnectivity between selves.

For Woolf, who once ruminates on her experience of reverie at her family vacation home at St. Ives, it is those memories of pure, ecstatic maternal unions that hold us together. Her choran moments evidence a form of sacred modernity, as found in interconnective encounters between her characters. The reminder of common humanity Mrs. Ramsay achieves with her dinner party, just before the community is pulled asunder by war and history, suggests a fortification against destruction and death:

Now all the candles lit up, and the faces on both sides of the table were brought nearer by the candlelight, and composed...into a party...[so] that here, inside the room, seemed to be order and dry land; there, outside, a reflection in which things wavered and vanished, waterily...[It was] their common cause against that fluidity out there. (97)

Later Mrs. Ramsay contemplates this moment and concludes that its illumination arrests time and creates permanence. She feels that all is “struck...into stability,” as in years to come the guests “would come back to this night” with a remembrance of “that community of feeling with other people” (113). Just as the dinner party scene represents a unifying moment in the light—where the aesthetic experience of looking at the artwork of the fruit arrangement rebuilds community and promises a moment of permanence—this moment reveals our interconnectedness as something that can be taken with us when we need solace in future times of despair.

### The Collective Vision of Woolf's Choran Moment

It is in the “untamed forest” of Anon's artistic, androgynous, and anonymous poetic origins, the “moist and mossy floor [that is] hidden” (“Anon” 382) resembling Lily and Mrs. Ramsay's uterine, wedge-shaped/triangular core of existence that we can reclaim the chora as a space of unmitigated, supreme expression of pleasure. Like Nat Trotman, we can, as readers, “lean through, and...occupy [our] own space, yet...simultaneously exist” (9) in Woolf's work. We merge with the anonymous, androgynous force simultaneously as we reckon with the force of Woolf's words: “I am an image/androgynous, neither of the image, nor wholly separate from it” (Trotman 9). Here the text and thus the reader's internally spoken word echoes in the mind and becomes musical, and we are “lulled into complacency, rocked quietly off into a womb of language where all [we] feel and hear is the heartbeat language surrounding, caressing [us]...” (11). I am struck by the “music” of reading Woolf's language “aloud” in my head; certainly the underlying music of Woolf's

connection to the “uncouth jargon of [our] native tongue...lcham for woring al forwake / Wery no water in wore” (“Anon” 383) can be heard throughout her work, and awaits our convergence as intent readers. As Jean Wyatt argues in her discussion of *Mrs. Dalloway*, “the novel hits us not at the level of our social selves, but at the level of our primitive oral impulses: in Clarissa’s blissful merging we experience our own desire to escape encasement in a circumscribed ego; to reinstitute our original boundless sense of a self merged” (121).<sup>34</sup> We are fortunate that Woolf has conceived these exquisite moments in her writing, and we can strive to reckon with them as we read her work.<sup>35</sup>

In giving us moments of wholeness in her work, Woolf is able to “hold up the creative, subconscious faculty” in her fiction (D4 281), and offers, then, a kind of opening up, a plurality of pleasure. She accomplishes what she fears she might lose—“But if I read as a contemporary I shall lose my child's vision and so must stop...What is the right antidote?...Writing to be a daily pleasure” (D5 347). Woolf finds the drive to create texts of pleasure from early in her career. In a November 1928 diary entry, she writes, “And this shall be written for my own pleasure. But that phrase inhibits me; for if one writes only for one's own pleasure, I don't know what it is that happens” (D3 201). She answers her own inquiry soon after in her ruminations on *The Waves* (1931): “What I want to do now is to saturate every atom. I mean to eliminate waste, deadness, superfluity: to give the moment whole; whatever it includes. Say that the moment is a combination of thought; sensation; the voice of the sea” (209).<sup>36</sup>

Virginia Woolf has given voice to the child-like “sonorous, rhythm obvious” of the “private world” (“Anon” 389) and “the primeval voice sounding loud in the ear of the present moment” (BTA 140) that creates a powerful instance of unified wholeness. She has



reconnected her readers with the idyllic place of “no tension; no direction; but always movement, as the metre flings its curve of sound, to break, like a wave on the same place, and like a wave to withdraw, to fill again” (“Anon” 389). Like young James curled up in his mother’s lap in *To the Lighthouse*, we too are “folded in this incantation [and] we drowse and sleep; yet [we] always see through the waters, something irradiate” (391). Woolf’s writing indeed irradiates the whole choral experience; as Lily Briscoe reflects,

One need not speak at all. One glided...Empty it was not, but full to the brim. She seemed to be standing up to the lips in some substance, to move and float and sink in it, yes, for these waters were unfathomably deep. Into them had spilled so many lives...some common feeling held the whole. (*TTL* 192)

Lily’s painting is intuitive rather than learned; her abstract, cubist forms strive to capture the essence of the person or thing represented in an attempt at permanence and a kind of blaze of ecstasy that brings people together in much the same way as Mrs. Ramsay’s dinner party.

Lily’s painting might also reveal wholeness by embracing both masculine and feminine modes of being. She best exemplifies this union of seeming opposites once she concludes her painting: “With a sudden intensity, as if she saw it clear for a second, she drew a line there, in the centre. It was done; it was finished. Yes, she thought...I have had my vision” (209). This flash of revelation embodies both the illuminated triangle of photographic interpretation and the wedge-shaped core of darkness that invites the viewer into this world of potential transitivity. Lily’s painted line, as many critics have pointed out,<sup>37</sup> represents not a division of sides but instead a coupling of our masculine and

feminine selves that finally renders them meaningless, and thus embodies an ultimate embracing of androgyny. In seeking balance and synthesis, she discovers how to bring together disparate things into harmony. Lily's project mirrors Woolf's writing, which synthesizes the perceptions of her many characters in order to come to a balanced and truthful portrait of the world. In our "common" response to these "intense" flashes, we might recapture a sense of maternally-connected wholeness where binaries of gender are transcended and we, too, can have our vision and moreover, as in the photographs of Gertude Käsebier, "s[ee] it clear." Woolf's reading audience need only look deeply into these choron moments in her writing to virtually relive, with our androgynous understanding, our own unified past.

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Green-Lewis, in *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*, 1996, contends that “The appetite for gathering, collecting, taking, and reading cultural signs has no purer expression in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than photography. Not only in the palace but in the police station and the court, in the hospital ward and at the site of war, images of those things taken—the domestic, the criminal, the insane, the heroic—were made to be exhibited later in the promotion of different realisms and in the service of different narratives.

<sup>3</sup> However as Laura Wexler notes, Käsebier’s images are complicit with empire building, and do much to reinscribe whiteness and Victorian motherhood as ideal.

<sup>4</sup> Humm notes, “My underlying feeling is that modernist women’s obsessions with ‘marginal’ visual texts like snapshots hints at a crisis of gender representation in their constant turn to modes of representation outside modernism’s more legitimate aesthetics” (39).

<sup>13</sup> Carol Mavor, in *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss Victorian Photography*. 1995, utilizes Louis Marin’s idea of the neutre as something not male or female, subject nor object, one side or the other (21). Julia Margaret Cameron’s images tread this borderland by revealing overt androgyny and the intersection of high and low, sacred and profane (22). Mavor claims that Cameron pictured the maternal differently. Using Kristeva’s maternal theory and Mark Taylor’s conception of alterity, as well as her own maternal experience, Mavor reads Cameron’s subversion of Victorian concepts of motherhood. She calls Cameron a great performer, entertainer and stage director.

<sup>14</sup> Modernist writing on photography frequently contained more general theory than criticism, but eventually became comfortable with formal analysis to say what constitutes a photographer’s subjective vision and style. Meaning is inherent in the photograph: “A photograph that emphasizes trace is a record; the photograph that emphasizes transformation is art” (Eisinger 6) for modernist critics, yet they eventually realized that a photograph is both trace and transformation. Pictorialists established a theory of photography as an art on the grounds that someone with an artistic vision might impose a subjective transformation on the photographic representation of nature and tame the devastating effects of

---

industrialization and materialistic values. Stieglitz, in his 1892 essay "A Plea for Art Photography," bemoaned the fact that American art photography languished behind that of the British.

<sup>15</sup> "Blessed Art Thou Among Women" (1899), "The Picture Book" (1903), and "The Heritage of Motherhood" (1904) also foreshadow and finally evidence a bitter separation through the inevitable Law of the Father.

<sup>16</sup> The introduction of the gelatin dry plate, the hand camera, and roll film in the late 1880s and 90s made photography possible for more amateurs, who responded by creating images instilled with spontaneity and informality. Hitherto unrecorded moments of everyday life by a whole new class of amateurs emerged. Yet here Käsebier, although she takes advantage of this modern photographic technology, consciously constructs artistic images that are anything but amateur.

<sup>17</sup> As Barbara L. Michaels notes,

While Käsebier's children are not retiring, neither are they rebellious. They are always attractive, well-behaved counterparts to mothers who appear to be good, kind and patient. In Käsebier's idealized world, granting independence to children seems to be part of a mother's duty...because Käsebier seems to have embodied some of the precepts of Freidrich Froebel...[,] the German founder of the kindergarten movement [who] believed that mothers...should foster children's intellectual growth and independence beginning in infancy. (82)

The choran moment differs here from socially prescriptive behavior in its insistence upon continued intimacy with the maternal body, a state of "oceanic" bliss most modernist psychologists would caution against. Freud aligns the feminine oceanic with the "primitive"; both are forces connected to the threatening infantile state that he strives to suppress.

<sup>18</sup> I use this term as Cixous defines it ("sexual pleasure," in the sense that the physical connection with the maternal body and our own feeling of wholeness encompasses ecstasy) in "Sorties" (Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron, eds., *New French Feminisms* [1975] 366-71).

<sup>19</sup> This image is similar to "The Picture Book" (1903) in that both photographs depict children who have acquired or are acquiring, through the tutelage of the nurturing mother, the necessary instruction in

reading the language and culture of the symbolic. "The Picture Book," when compared with "Blessèd Art Thou...", is another rendering of the child just out of the mirror stage, yet one whose rapt attention is held within contact with the naturalistic surroundings of a warm maternal body and a sheltering tree. Peggy has already learned her future place independent of her mother. In "The Picture Book," the Law of the Father (the symbolic text) is being inculcated. Here the young boy, Käsebier's grandson Charles O'Malley, shows some independence, yet he still enjoys a warm connection with his mother, the illustrator Beatrice Baxter-Ruyl. Although the subjects are not actually mother and child, "The Picture Book" clearly signifies a maternal relationship. The photograph implies that this child will soon experience the same watchful adoration of his mother, yet he too will step over the threshold into the next phase of existence. Although he will soon join the ranks of the older girl in "Blessèd Art Thou...", for now, he is just as blessed amongst the company of his mother as the children in "The Manger" and "Mother and Child."

<sup>20</sup> In Benjamin's "A Short History of Photography," he discusses how the optical unconscious is a metaphor for the "way in which photographs visualise 'imperceptible' moments" (qtd. in Humm, "VW's Photography" 221). Active spectators in both her fiction and her collections of photos help others gain a sense of identity through the recognition by another; while mutual image-making encourages this kind of reciprocity between viewer and sitter as well (225; *Modernist Women and Visual Culture* 50). The out-of-focus images and panoramics suggest "a longing for a confirmed familial world" (231). The albums memorialize family and friends, yet do not construct ideal versions of their lives and relationships (228).

As Humm points out, Kristeva argues that women need a specular identification with the mother in order to symbolize and mourn a lost object. Humm notes that Bracha Lichenberg Ettinger challenges Freud's specular account of Oedipal identity in favor of a matrixial source of identity, or a "joint co-emergence in difference" between mother and child (*Modernist Women* 79). This "psychic borderspace" of mother and infant can reveal the Monk's House albums as a threshold where Woolf "metamorphosed her mother. The albums are matrixial encounters giving meaning 'to a *real* which might otherwise pass by unthinkable, unnoticed, and unrecognized'" (79). Woolf's memory pictures suggest this same kind of photographic choron moment: "Like constructivist photography, Woolf de-familiarizes objects through the

---

use of an unexpected angle as a means of expanding the experience of the everyday" ("Visual Modernism" 101).

<sup>21</sup> Scholars have shown Mrs. Ramsay as in part representing Woolf's critique of the cult of motherhood. An example is Karen Phillips's designation of Mrs. Ramsay as embodying both Madonna and Queen Victorian, while Lily "is trying to frame human relationships in a new way" (*Virginia Woolf Against Empire*. Knoxville, TN: The U of TN Press, 1994: 95). I agree that this association stands in Woolf's novel, and reveals both her reverence and her difficulty with the Angel in the House her mother often represented to her. This dual placement of maternity finds itself evident in Gertrude Käsebier's images of mothers and children as well.

<sup>22</sup> In a letter to Ethel Smyth in April 1931, she writes "What you give me is protection, so far as I am capable of it. I look at you and...think if Ethel can be so downright and plainspoken and on the spot, I need not fear...It's the child crying for the nurses hand in the dark...we all cry for nurses hand" (L4 302). Although Woolf may be taking on one of her many personas in this letter—here she seems to be flirting a bit with her friend Ethel—it is still apparent throughout her writings that losing her mother at as she was on the cusp of womanhood was a traumatic event. As Humm argues, Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* "visually recreates her mother and father...and the publication of [the novel] encouraged Woolf's family to remember [both] Julia [Stephen and Cameron]" (*Modernist Women* 77). Humm also refers to Hermione Lee's claims that the "whole tonal quality of *To the Lighthouse*...is inflected by Woolf's memory of Cameron's photographs, and, I would add, Woolf's own photographs" (86).

See also Jane Marcus, "Virginia Woolf and Her Violin: Mothering, Madness, and Music" *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>24</sup> In "Reminiscences," the first of five pieces in the collection of Woolf's previously unpublished autobiographical writings *Moments of Being* (1976), she focuses on the death of her mother, "the greatest disaster that could happen," and its effect on her father, the demanding Victorian patriarch. "A Sketch of the Past" is the longest and most significant piece in this collection, and gives an account of Woolf's early years in the family household at 22 Hyde Park Gate.

---

<sup>25</sup> Rosenfeld warns us not to condemn Mrs. Ramsay as a kind of phallic mother because her knitting signals “a fertile interchange” and, with her wedge-shaped core of darkness, she “represents a dissolution of traditional polarities” (127). It is just this kind of freeing, open gift that Mrs. Ramsay offers that I am trying to posit as made available to readers of Woolf’s fiction.

<sup>26</sup> As Humm notes, “Both Vanessa and Virginia are drawn to the maternal...in 1927, [Vanessa] pleads with Virginia to ‘write a book about the maternal instinct. In all my wide reading I haven’t found it properly explored’” (*Modernist Women* 69).

<sup>27</sup> Hermione Lee argues that,

Woolf’s sexual squeamishness, which plays a part in indirections and self-censorship of the novels, is combined with a powerful, intense sensuality, an erotic susceptibility to people and landscape, language and atmosphere, and a highly charged physical life. ‘Frigid’ seems a ridiculously simplistic description of this complicated, polymorphous self. (327)

The same argument for polymorphous selves can be extended to Woolf’s fiction, particularly in the character of Mrs. Dalloway.

<sup>28</sup> Woolf connected her friendships with women in her life with her writing, as a diary entry in November of 1924 indicates: “If one could be friendly with women, what a pleasure—the relationship so secret & private compared with relations with men. Why not write about it? Truthfully? As I think, this diary writing has greatly helped my style; loosened the ligature” (*D2* 320). Even Quentin Bell, her nephew and rather reticent biographer, acknowledges the significance of Virginia’s girlhood relationship with Madge Symonds Vaughan, the oldest daughter of John Addington Symonds:

Virginia was in fact in love with her. She was the first woman—and in those early years Virginia fled altogether from anything male—the first to capture her heart, to make it beat faster, indeed to almost make it stand still as, her hand gripping the handle of the water-jug in the top room at Hyde Park Gate, she exclaimed to herself: “Madge is here; at this moment she is actually under this roof.” Virginia once declared that she had never felt more poignant emotion for anyone than she did at that moment for Madge. (60-61)

<sup>29</sup> I don't intend to suggest that lesbian desire is essentially androgynous—the particularization of same sex desire would undermine my entire thesis that choran ecstasy is available within the guise of *all* human connectedness, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. Woolf does “conflate Clarissa’s lesbian desires with androgyny” (Kaivola 248), but I asserted earlier in this chapter that these transcendent moments take place between heterosexual relationships as well. Karen Kaivola aptly states that, “Woolf develops strategies that enable her to negotiate the space between a dissembled Romantic androgyny and the hermaphroditic intermix that historically superseded it” (249). Additionally, for Lily, whose desire for Mrs. Ramsay might also incidentally be described as lesbian, androgynous (choran) transcendent vision is enacted once she reconciles both sides of herself.

For further discussion of the androgyny debate and its relation to *Mrs. Dalloway*, see Nancy Taylor, “Erasure of Definition: Androgyny in *Mrs. Dalloway*” *Women's Studies* 18.4 (1991): 367-377.

<sup>30</sup> Lisa Rado argues that in Lily’s moment of artistic inspiration, she represses “her body, her femaleness, her sexual identity” and “represents her mind as phallic” (155).

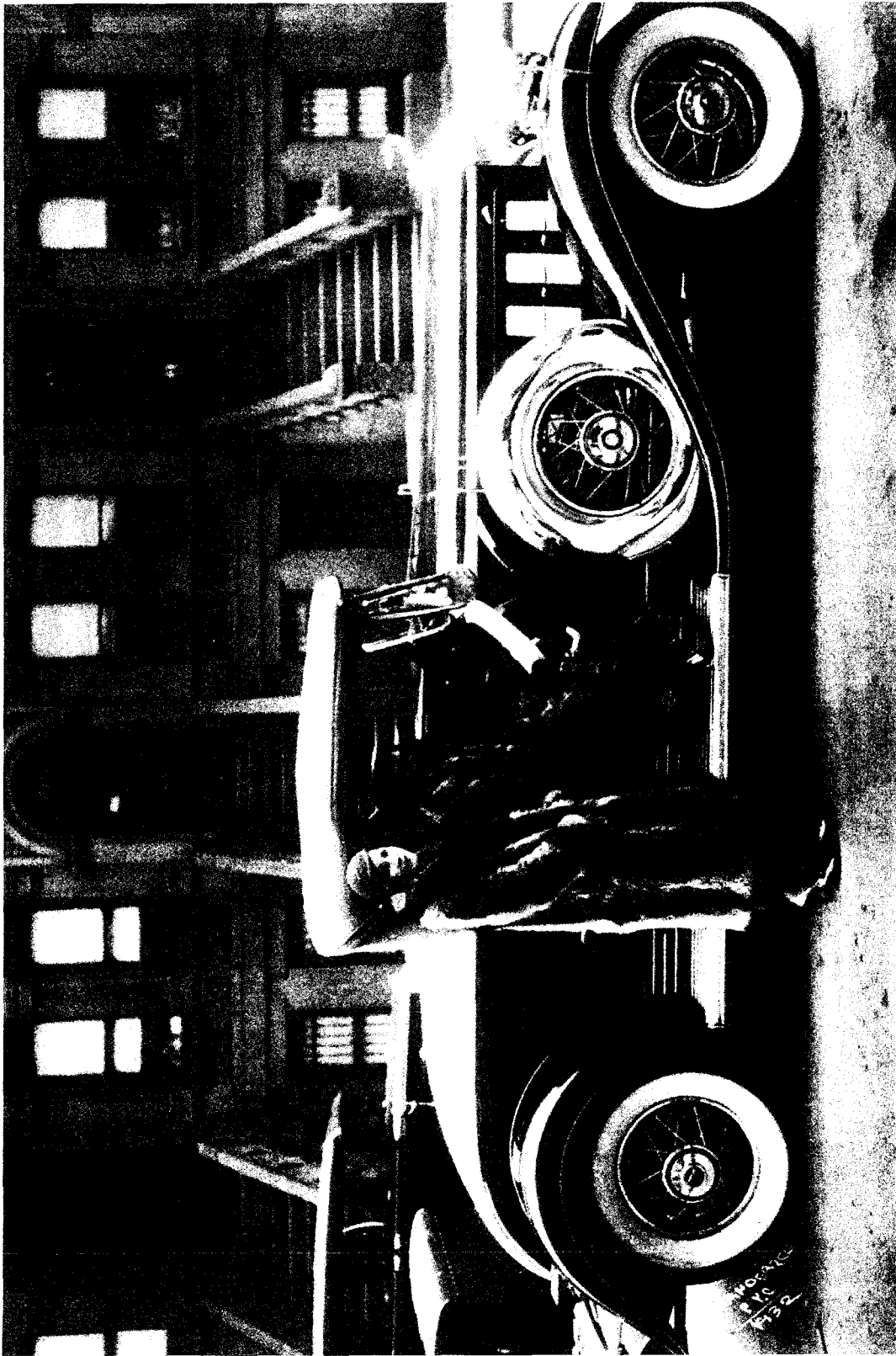
<sup>34</sup> Jean Wyatt, “Avoiding self-definition: In defense of women’s right to merge (Julia Kristeva and *Mrs Dalloway*)” *Women's Studies* 13 (1986): 115-126, argues that fusion with our childhood selves is desirable and natural in women’s fiction, as opposed to Freud or Norman Holland’s anxiety that one must defend the sense of autonomy that is lost in the state of symbiosis with the maternal body.

<sup>35</sup> While Woolf contemplates writing “Anon,” she notes, “I am a little triumphant about the book. I think it’s an interesting attempt in a new method. I think it’s more quintessential than the others...I’ve enjoyed writing almost every page” (D5 340). This is the same “new method” of creating the complete experience she has evolved throughout her writings, right up to her final work.

<sup>36</sup> Wyatt also contends that what Freud calls the “oceanic feeling” (which he deems a dangerous drowning sensation) is reclaimed by Kristeva’s perception of the semiotic self. Her intriguing article identifies these kind of “oceanic” moments in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

<sup>37</sup> For an extremely useful reference guide on critical approaches to Woolf, as well as historical and biographical information on all that is Virginia Woolf, see Mark Hussey, *Virginia Woolf A-Z: The Essential Reference to Her Life and Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).





James Van Der Zee, *A Harlem Couple Wearing Raccoon Coats Standing Next to a Cadillac on West 127th Street (1932)*



James Van Der Zee, *Memories* (1938)



## CHAPTER II

### MODERNIST VISIONS OF “SELF” WITHIN COMMUNITY:

#### Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and

#### James Van Der Zee's *Harlem Photographs*

...and now comes Courtesy and Understanding to soothe the minds of men. It is like Persephone, the daughter of Dame Ceres come back to Earth that men may have something other than [than] brute-wants in their hearts; that the behavior of love may emerge from the shell of human indifference and heal us of our grievous wounds...I don't want to lie here passively. I want to be a green thing of the color of life and grow and grow till it shadows the sun at noon.

(Hurston, Letter to Charlotte Osgood Mason, May 18, 1930, qtd. in Ed. Carla Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* 188)

The design of Jean Toomer's multi-genre patchwork narrative, *Cane* (1923), is circular, signifying a humanistic demand for nourishment from circles of community and friendship with others. Toomer also believed that, “Woman is heart and intuition whereas Man is mind and logic. An appropriate relationship of Man and Woman, therefore, fuses the separate entities into a functioning totality” (Darwin T. Turner, Introduction xiv).<sup>1</sup> In the “Fern” episode of this central Harlem Renaissance work, the traveling speaker obsesses over Fern, a woman whose eyes invite soft suggestions of her sexuality. Here Toomer treads on the slippery slope of the objectification of black women's supposedly

lascivious and uncontrollable sexuality in depicting a moment of mutuality between future lovers. Before the traveler ruminates on her gaze, he notes, "That the sexes were made to mate is the practice of the South. Particularly, black folks were made to mate" (*Cane* 13). Yet then he notices the expansive quality of Fern's looking: "they'd settle on some vague spot above the horizon, through hardly a trace of wistfulness would come to them... The whole countryside seemed to flow into her eyes" (15). Her outward gaze suggests future possibility, an arrested moment and a visual gathering in of the outer view and the inner self.

The speaker is "spellbound" by her ruminating gaze, yet this moment also represents an interconnection between them through romantic song: "But at first sight of her I felt as if I heard a Jewish cantor sing. As if his singing rose above the unheard chorus of a folk-song. And I felt bound to her. I too had my dreams." In an instance similar to Stephen Dedalus's sighting of the sea-bird girl in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and his ensuing epiphany of himself as an artist, an alluring woman creates a moment of reciprocity between seer and seen, as well as a feeling of regeneration and renewal for the male viewer. Stephen's epiphanic experience, followed by transformation of his soul and a feeling of protection by a kind of earth mother, finally connects him with his deep artistic soul. The narrator in "Fern" enjoys this interface as a snapshot moment in the midst of fast-paced modern life, and wishes he could slow it down to a crawl so that he could somehow alleviate her melancholy: "Something I must do for her. There was myself. What could I do for her? Talk, of course. Push back the fringe of pines upon new horizons." He asks the reader, "had you seen her in a quick flash, keen and intuitively... Would you have got off at the next station and come back for her to take her

where?” (16). It seems that out of this intersubjective moment might develop newer possibilities of empathy—“new horizons”—however vaguely conceived.

In this chapter, I read Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), and later, contemporary photographic images of African Americans, to explore the topic of African Americans’ modernist representations of selfhood and community. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. contends that Hurston signifies upon Toomer’s *Cane* by reversing the plot in her own novel from confined spaces to the larger physical locale of the Everglades (*The Signifying Monkey* 193). In the swamp of free, erotic love, play, and the potential chaos of the uncultivated, deep southern life, Gates states, Hurston privileges the black oral tradition while Toomer portrays its dying. Images created by African Americans and those seeking to represent them oscillate between the emphasis on needs for reforming poverty and unemployment in the black community and the embodiment of the uplifted, dignified New Negro within the context of strong family and community. Examples of both types of representation appear in photographic images by James Van Der Zee from the ‘20s and ‘30s. Modernist writers like Hurston also mediate between representations of African American characters that might invite readers to objectify them, and straight-on views that allow agency and the often unsettling “look back” from the subject. These complex concepts of vision and the intersubjective encounter contribute to the performance and realization of self in Hurston’s novel, written once many have argued that the New Negro movement had crumbled in disappointment. The inclusion of photographs from the same time period provides another template with which to examine the circulations of African American identity, both individual and communal, in modernist art and culture.<sup>2</sup>

Hurston's novel and Van Der Zee's photographs represent a supreme affirmation of the interconnective choron moment. Janie Crawford begins *Their Eyes Were Watching God* without being able to recognize herself in a photograph, and soon finds a full realization of self within community. Through the course of Hurston's novel, however, Janie moves away from her outsider status toward a heterosexual relationship of intersubjectivity with her lover Tea Cake. In their longing to coexist with each other, Janie and Tea Cake seem to experience a matrixial, spiritual and physical connection that allows Janie to fully reveal herself as complete within the context of community. Finally content in herself and her story told by novel's end, Janie gazes out at the horizon in a culminating moment of future possibility, where she finds a wholeness of self within the wide world.

Additionally, I am interested in how Hurston's self-conscious knowingness—signaling a performativity of identity—exploits the ideal of utopian wholeness as a means to poke fun at the concept of an essential self. When comparing Hurston's horizon imagery with Toomer's "Fern" episode in *Cane*, I find that both suggest, as Kate Flint argues, a new, physically embodied gazer whose outward look suggests futurity and openness to the larger world beyond the view of the horizon. Yet Toomer and Hurston negotiate W.E. B. Du Bois's legacy of African American's "double-consciousness" through the ways in which their characters' inhabit multiple roles at once while engaging with shifting interior and exterior perspectives of the self.<sup>3</sup> Edward Pavlic connects the Janus-faced process of coming to identity with Du Bois's idea of the double-consciousness, the essential "interracial anxiety of two-ness, and the intraracial communion in multiplicity" of the African American's experience (7). The African American self holds together against the forces of racism and the Veil, and "fluidly disperses through communal,

cultural forms of contestation and affirmation.” This “plural, socially constructed self provides the basis for modernist communions as well as fractures,” culminating, as I argue, in the concept of a performative and communal identity. Could Hurston, then, be intentionally staging seemingly utopian moments of intersubjectivity between self and other to reveal her ironic playing with social conventions in her text?

Gates claims that Hurston’s modernity comes out of her understanding of the ways in which she can play with the idea of the self in her double-voicing.<sup>4</sup> Yet I believe that Hurston’s emphasis on vision and the effect of its renegotiation on identity demonstrates her modernism as well. It is only through Hurston’s “visionary model” (Jacobs 144) of understanding individual and communal identity that art can transform the greater community. Through Janie’s personal and collective conversion, according to Karen Jacobs, “Hurston accomplishes a reorientation of the visual economy...Unlike her white male modernist peers, who were content to explore the varieties and limits of subjective visibility left over from the collapse of objective forms, Hurston turns to a visionary model through which she attempts to redefine and revalue her art.” Jacobs’s closing assessment of Hurston’s ability to break down barriers set up by the white male modernist establishment speaks once again to the power of future generations of readers who look at texts in retrospect to gauge their aesthetic and personal value. My understanding of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a text which unites Hurston with Woolf, Warner, and Larsen as modernists concerned with rendering choron moments would not exist without scholars’ recognition of art’s redemptive force once it gets into the hands, hearts, and minds of open readers. If we are, like Alice Walker, to go in search of our literary foremothers, or, like Woolf in *A Room of One’s Own*, to “think back through our



mothers,” then we might “learn what our mothers planted..., what they thought as they sowed, and how they survived the blighting of so many fruits. Zora Neale Hurston’s life and work present us with insights into just these concerns” (Williams 21).

As Carla Kaplan contends in her discussion of the power of what she deems “the erotics of talk”<sup>5</sup> in Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, “we need to be, ourselves, proof of Hurston’s transformational success. If the community—and by extension the reader—remains unchanged by her life in her story, after all, in what sense can Janie’s resistance (or Hurston’s) be called effective?” (121). Although Kaplan and I argue differing points about Janie’s engagement with community by the end of the novel, her work is instructive in defining how literary scholars might realize Hurston’s success:

By including oneself in Hurston’s blanket indictment, assuming that one is, for whatever reason, a different reader than Hurston’s idealized, eroticized, and romanticized projection, one can learn to listen, to listen differently, and to help, thereby, create the very conditions under which black female longing for narration and self-revelation might, someday, be satisfied. (122)

We are the literary scholars who can benefit from the potentially transformative view of modernist interconnectivity by changing our daily interfaces with difference by recognizing, through our reading practices, the organic whole that is present in our own community of readers.

The Reimagining of Self and Other in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

The significance of reimaginary vision, particularly in the context of a natural landscape, is paramount in Janie Crawford's full self-discovery and affirmation of common humanity in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. It is important that the novel begins with the nonlinear, interior dream world of women against man's wish to dominate the outer, visible world. In an image of ship on a perpetually linear horizon, "never out of sight, never landing" (1), men's "dreams [are] mocked to death by Time." On the other hand, "women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget" in their own circuitous fashion of the truthful dream that is everyday life. At first, Janie too is entrapped by this sense of outer visibility. She walks under the gaze of the community's gaze of "judgment" and "mass cruelty" (2) as an object of both lust and derision. Except for her friendship with Pheoby, Janie remains an outsider in a society that privileges outer appearances as indicators of self. As a result, Janie is "full of that oldest human longing—self-revelation" (6). In my discussion of the novel's conclusion, I will show that Hurston transforms this linear view of the horizon into an all-encompassing nexus of interconnective community.

In the photo of her family, Janie misrecognizes herself as white: "'Ah couldn't recognize dat dark chile as me. So Ah ast, 'where is me? Ah don't see me.'... 'Dat's you, Alphabet, don't you know yo' ownself?'... 'Aw, aw! Ah'm colored!... Ah thought Ah wuz just like de rest'" (9). Undoubtedly, Hurston's Janie represents the doubly positioned experience of a young African American girl in the early twentieth century southland.<sup>6</sup> In her study of the racialized gaze in Hurston and Ellison, Karen Jacobs argues that Hurston

appropriates “the spy-glass of anthropology” in striving to reclaim African American expressive forms (folklore and dialect) and to inscribe these forms within the predominant white definition of culture (40). Since, presumably, white definitions are individualistic when not fascist, Jacobs concludes that Hurston’s book, by the end, looks “toward an idealist model of an individual transcendence” (41) instead of the communal model I am positing.

Janie’s sexual awakening to an originary, interior self in the midst of the pear tree denotes her evolving consciousness of her own authenticity and a communal reconnection with her originary self:

She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from the tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. So this was marriage! She had been summoned to behold a revelation...She was seeking confirmation of the voice and vision, and everywhere she found and acknowledged answers. (Hurston 10-11)

In a postcoital revelation of wholeness, Janie becomes caught in a womb-like mode of aural fecundity and longing. But she also knows that the freedom she is seeking cannot be found under Nanny’s thumb because “Nothing on the place nor in her grandma’s house answered her...Looking, waiting, breathing short with impatience. Waiting for the world to be made” (11). Here Janie seeks confirmation of herself as complete, and she receives it in flashes of fleshly ecstasy. Again, Janie is exiled in her grandmother’s house, but her gaze remains set the future, anticipating the wholeness she will find there as much like the illuminated moment experienced under the pear tree.

When Janie longs for a joyful marriage with Logan Killicks, her first husband—"Ah wants things sweet wid mah marriage lak when you sit under a pear tree and think" (23)—Nanny responds, "Wait awhile baby. Yo' mind will change." As Janie connects her romanticized view of marriage with her choran moment under the pear tree, Nanny warns her against such a utopian vision. Later however, as Nanny gathers her thoughts, she performs an abject prayer represented in the text as merely "a depth of thought untouched by words, and deeper still a gulf of formless feelings untouched by thoughts." Here Hurston suggests that Nanny too has been in touch with this deeper part of her self, but can only leave her "infinity of conscious pain," directed through an experience of slavery and its concomitant rape of body and soul, to her God. It seems that God may not have heard her prayer, because Nanny dies a month later, never having resolved her troubled relationship with Janie. Yet their unspoken connection remains in Janie's response of "kn[owing] things that nobody had ever told her." Her reconnection with "the words of the trees and the wind" (23-24) once again reminds Janie of her true self and, although she does not share Nanny's legacy of pain, an organic connection with her grandmother. Now realizing Nanny's truth that "marriage did not make love" (24), Janie comes closer to recognizing the whole, autonomous, independent woman she always already is.

Nevertheless, immediately once Janie finds her voice with second husband Joe Starks—she declares, "women folks thinks sometimes too!" (67)—she is stifled. Joe "wanted her submission and he'd keep on fighting until he felt he had it. So, gradually she pressed her teeth together and learned to hush." As a result, their marriage disintegrates and Janie no longer has any sexual desire for her husband: "She wasn't petal-open anymore

with him.” Once Joe is displeased with her cooking, he begins to physically abuse her, and Janie retreats further into herself: “She stood there until something fell off the shelf inside her.” Janie can no longer live in the internal dream world embodied by the pear tree: “She had no more blossomy openings dusting pollen over her man...She was saving up feelings for some man she had never seen. She had an inside and an outside and suddenly knew how not to mix them” (68). Out of the need to recombine and control her total self, Janie compartmentalizes herself in a gesture of self-preservation. Further, “She learned how to talk some and leave some” (72). Yet despite the debilitation of a passionless, airless marriage, Janie does not completely lose her sense of self. Just after his death, as she looks at herself in the mirror and takes down her hair, she sees that “The young girl was gone, but a handsome woman had taken her place...the glory was there” (83). What Janie still must countenance is the fact that she does not need a man’s approval of her sexuality to create coherence of self. She will not find this kind of wholeness until the death of her third husband, Veritable “Tea Cake” Woods.

After Joe’s death, Janie’s initially intersubjective relationship with Tea Cake is associated as well with the pivotal moment under the pear tree. Tea Cake appears to Janie as a veritable forest of passion and possibility: “He looked like the love thoughts of women. He could be a bee to a blossom—a pear tree blossom in the spring...He was a glance from God” (101-2). She and Tea Cake are natural together from the beginning—“Seemed as if she had known him all her life” (94)—and as their relationship blossoms she appears self-aware. Janie resolves not to live without passion any longer, “Ah done lived Grandma’s way, now Ah means tuh live mine” (108). Tea Cake and Janie become acquainted with one another through formulation of a new kind of visceral language of

body and mind. Their playing with checkers and their flirtation seem to foretell an entirely new way of being, yet it is significant that Janie still believes she has something vital to learn not from herself, but from a man's perspective: "So in the beginnin' new thoughts had tuh be thought and new words said...He done taught me de maiden language all over."

Janie valorizes the connection she feels with Tea Cake, and, even though she might believe that her soul has been released in the process, her emotions are not entirely unproblematic. She "felt a self-crushing love. So her soul crawled out from its hiding place" (122). She may experience a brief glimpse of wholeness here, but the price for her temporary satisfaction is surely too great. Yet despite these preliminary signs of another relationship that might impede and even devastate the self, Janie rather blindly continues her liaison with the young vagabond twelve years her junior. In a moment of particularly primeval connection, her passivity to his physical charms is almost masochistic: "They were doped with their own fumes and emanations...[he] held her there melting her resistance with the heat of his body, doing things with their bodies to express the inexpressible" (132). For Janie, the overpowering narcotic of Tea Cake's passionate desire provides both a return to the purely physical part of herself and an opportunity for total intersubjectivity with another. The noteworthy element of Janie and Tea Cake's convergence, however, is the fact that he is enacting much of the aggression in "melting her resistance." Intersubjectivity without recognition and cultivation of the coequal presence of self and other can only result in a devouring struggle for power.

Soon she finds that Tea Cake is certainly not so "sweet as all dat" (93), as he begins to whip her to "show he is boss" (140). Although they do seem to share some joy living down in the "muck" of the Everglades, it is Tea Cake who maintains the upper hand. Once

in Okechobee, “Janie fussed around the shack making a home while Tea Cake planted beans” (124)—Janie fulfills her domestic role while Tea Cake works outside the home. Soon, however, they are shooting, dancing, and gathering together with the other workers to enjoy Tea Cake’s guitar playing. But even in their leisure time, Tea Cake remains king of his castle: “Tea Cake’s house was a magnet, the unauthorized center of the ‘job’” (126). Janie is quickly put in her place with Tea Cake’s demand that “you betta come git uh job uh work out dere lak de rest uh de women” (127) because she does not work as much as the other women in the community. Although “She got so she could tell big stories herself from listening to the rest” (128), Janie becomes increasingly silent as a result of her relationship with Tea Cake. He whips her for no other reason than that “it relieved that awful fear inside him. Being able to whip her reassured him in possession” (140). Tea Cake, the once warm and loving bohemian who awakened the pear tree inside of her, has become just as harshly abusive and possessive as all the other men Janie has aligned herself with. Here Hurston warns her readers about the perils of misinterpreting the intersubjective moment as too easy and utopian.

Janie’s achingly painful, final response to Tea Cake’s suffocating domination is to do something he taught her to do in fun—to shoot and kill with a rifle. Once Tea Cake contracts rabies from a stray dog in the overpowering hurricane and flood that rages through the town, he threatens her life with a pistol and ravenously bites her arm. The narrator describes this episode as “the meanest moment of eternity” and uncovers a tragic and pathetic picture of Janie’s mothering influence on Tea Cake: “Janie held his head tightly to her breast and wept and thanked him wordlessly for giving her the chance for loving service” (175). I contend that, at this moment, Hurston is staging a consciously false

moment of utopian intersubjectivity, or, an ironic choral moment; Janie's "wordless" murmuring gratitude evokes the prelinguistic babblings between mother and child. Her tears and her insistence upon rocking and holding Tea Cake to her breast simultaneously mimics the life-giving flow of milk lovingly given by mother to child and the drama of postpartum depression at the inevitable moment of separation. Yet the fact remains that Janie is often servile, blind, and delusional in her love for Tea Cake. Taking altruism and nurturing sacrifice to the level self-destructive hyperbole, Janie actually looks at her own situation of cruel domestic violence as a "chance for loving service"!

For her role in Tea Cake's death, Janie is put on trial for murder and must plead her case to an all-white, all-male jury. Hurston allows Janie's continued submission, although her performance of silence here mirrors her earlier instinctual gestures of self-preservation. Literary scholars have critiqued Janie for not having a powerful black female voice because she remains mostly silent at her murder trial.<sup>7</sup> However Alice Walker insists "passionately that women did not have to speak when men thought they should, that they would choose when and where they wish to speak because while many women *had* found their voices, they also knew when it was better not to use it" (qtd. in Washington, Foreword xii). In other words, Hurston acknowledges that to be silent in crucial places is the right, perhaps even the necessity, of every autonomous woman; she learned early on in her marriage to Joe Stark "how to talk some and leave some" (Hurston 72). Because she knows that "they were all against her" (176) in this southern courtroom located in the midst of the Jim Crow era and picnic lynchings, Janie's silence here reveals a measure of great personal power.

Carla Kaplan's reading of Janie's behavior in the courtroom scene gets at the fact



that Hurston's novel, although often claimed to be romanticized, apolitical romantic primitivism, actually has "political bite" (118). This debate over Hurston's aesthetic and political purposes has persisted in scholarly discussions of the novel since its publication. To be sure, Mary Helen Washington, in her foreword to the novel, observes that Hurston was accused of making "black southern life appear easygoing and carefree" (viii). Alain Locke, in *Opportunity* (June 1, 1938), praises Hurston's "gift for poetic phrase, for rare dialect, and folk humor" but laments,

When will the Negro novelist of maturity...come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction? Progressive southern fiction has already banished the legend of these entertaining pseudo-primitives whom the reading public still loves to laugh with, weep over and envy. Having gotten rid of condescension, let us now get over oversimplification! (18)

On the other hand, critic Sheila Hibben, in the *New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review* on September 26, 1937, more accurately writes: "That Miss Hurston can write of ["Negroes"] with simple tenderness, so that [through] her story I am filled with the ache of her own people, is, I think, due to the fact that she is not too much preoccupied with the current fetish of the primitive" (21). Hurston in no way oversimplifies the African American woman's experience. In fact, she artfully addresses the complexity of Janie's position by allowing her to withhold her voice at this moment.

I consider the courtroom scene as a metaphor for the constant cultural mediation of intersubjectivity. There is no such thing as a free social space, only a negotiation of the social order (which Janie ultimately succeeds in transcending by virtue of the fact that she is always aware of the ever-presence of cultural hegemony) by manipulating and being

consistently aware of this reality. The fact of Janie's silence is, as Carla Kaplan puts it, an enactment of the social history of the African American voice: "Janie is silent, like African Americans denied the right to testify, vote, or learn to read and write. And Janie also speaks, taking on the role of post-Reconstruction blacks who agitated and argued on their own behalf" (114). It is more important to Janie that the jury does not misunderstand her true self than the fact that they might convict her and sentence her to death. By allowing Janie a moment to be silent when it most behooves her circumstances while also demonstrating her desire to converge with her community, "Hurston is suggesting that black female voices are still constrained, although perhaps now in more covert, complex, and less absolute ways." I would also add that Janie is performing the multiple roles of black womanhood on the verge of realization at this quintessentially modern moment in history.<sup>8</sup>

Hurston's work was clearly not the bitter story social realism told by Richard Wright in *Native Son* (1940). His novel is an apt example of the reform and social conscience work of African American writers once the promise of the Harlem Renaissance had waned. Wright depicts the harsh reality of contemporary life for black men in mid-twentieth century America through a naturalistic, intensely psychological portrait of Bigger Thomas, a house servant and driver who becomes a murderer under the overwhelming pressures of racism and demoralization at the hands of the racial contract in mid-twentieth century America. Wright's "Blueprint for Negro Writing" (1937) calls "Negro writers" to their social responsibility: "a new role is devolving upon the Negro writer. He is being called upon to do no less than create values by which his race is to struggle, live and die" (49). Wright directs black writers to consider black individuals as

reflections “of history of their race as the one life time had lived themselves throughout all the long centuries” (Tate 4) and this is his task in creating Bigger Thomas as a representation of the effects of African American rage and despair.

By the end of the New Negro Renaissance of the 1920s and '30s, ambitions of black artists were further regulated by the support of white benefactors, which Hurston derisively refers to as “the cheap coin of patronage” in a letter to Countee Cullen in March of 1943 (481). As early as 1929, Hurston finds the dominance of her patron, Charlotte Osgood Mason, extremely oppressive, and feels that it even impedes her writing. She writes to Langston Hughes: “I just feel that she ought not to exert herself to supervise every little detail. It destroys my self-respect and utterly demoralizes me for weeks” (156). By the 1940s, social protest became the endorsed topic of African American literature, particularly in stories of frustrated aspirations arising from racial oppression. According to Claudia Tate, “the term ‘black modernism’ [is] and appropriate label for the African American literary works canonized during these periods because in responding to racist conventions, the endorsed social discourse in these works assume the authority of black master narratives” (11). Hurston was creating her own narrative nonetheless, but she did receive criticism for doing so. Wright, in a *New Masses* review of Hurston’s novel dated October 5, 1937, criticizes her for “voluntarily continu[ing] in her novel the tradition which was forced upon the Negro in the theater, that is, the minstrel technique that makes the ‘white folks’ laugh” (17).

Hurston was always entirely aware of the pressure to perform race in her fiction and anthropological work, and she was consistently engaged in the social protest conversation. On the one hand she is willing to play with stereotypes of primitivism, often

claiming a kind of superiority in African Americans' supposed heightened response to beauty—"We are ceremonial—lovers of color and magnificence...we strive to pile beauty on beauty, and magnificence on glory" (Letter to James Weldon Johnson, May 8, 1934, Kaplan, *A Life in Letters* 303-4)—while on the other she insists that she has no use for political debate while simultaneously making political statements. A prime example is a letter written to Countee Cullen in March of 1943:

I have always shared your approach to art. That is, you have written from within rather than to catch the eye of those who were making the loudest noise of the moment. I know that hitch-hiking on band-wagons has become the rage among Negro artists for the last ten years *at least*, but I have never thumbed a ride and can feel no admiration for those who travel that way...Now, as to segregation, I have no viewpoint on the subject particularly, other than a fierce desire for human justice. (480)

This fierce desire for human justice ironically finds its way into Hurston's novel, no matter how nonpolitical she might claim to be.

In *Their Eyes*, Hurston concentrates on political issues surrounding American racism, including conversations regarding racial uplift, Booker T. Washington and the work ethic of an African American Dream, Janie's experience of admiration for her mixed racial coloring, and even the ironical dilemma of burying the dead after the hurricane and flood—"Can't tell whether dey's white or black'...'Look lak dey think God don't know nothin' 'bout de Jim Crow law'" (Hurston 163)—to show that the politics of racist forces are inescapable in mid-twentieth century America. A case in point is a discussion of the trial by some local African American men. Once Janie is set free by the jury, she overhears

the men talking outside of her boarding house room: “‘She didn’t kill no white man, did she? Well, long as she don’t shoot no white man she kin kill jus’ as many niggers as she please... ‘Well, you know whut dey say ‘uh white man and uh nigger woman is de freest thing on earth’” (178-179). Through instances such as this, Hurston engages subversively with political debates about race and gender circulating throughout the Harlem Renaissance.

How, then, are we finally to read the relationship between Tea Cake and Janie? Even after his absolutely necessary death, Tea Cake and Janie experience spiritual and physical connection: “Of course he wasn’t dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking” (183). I agree with Carla Kaplan that “we must conclude that [Hurston’s] depiction is an exaggerated idealization, just as all objects of romantic desire and fantasy are exaggerated and idealized” (118). His death is tragic and emotionally provocative, but “Tea Cake’s death also liberates Janie to continue her quest...his death is part of what we might call this poetic novel’s erotic justice” (Kaplan 118). Indeed, Janie’s intense abjection at returning to their home after his death is palpable. The objects in their bedroom begin a kind of sympathetic call and response; they

commenced to sing a sobbing sigh out of every chair and thing.  
Commenced to sing, commenced to sob and sigh, singing and sobbing.  
Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of  
the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of the pine trees. Tea  
Cake, with the sun for a shawl. (183)

The fact that Tea Cake emerges from her imagination like some phantasmic god of the sun further implicates Janie in her own misguidance; her misrecognition leads her to view

transcendent love as that she had shared with a man who physically and emotionally abuses her.

The only thing that saves Janie from complacency is Hurston's deus ex machina of the hurricane and flood, embodied by "Havoc...there with her mouth wide open" (158). Of course it is not until later, after Tea Cake has died and she is recounting her story to Phoeby, that Janie fulfills her destiny of wholeness. Yet it seems that the overwhelming power of Nature, even in a wrathful state, carries Janie under its protection, much like the pear tree carols her softly into sexual awakening. She and Tea Cake must literally run from the storm, whose disruption results in the chaos of Tea Cake's madness and death. Nature here creates something like an "optic shock" that finally forces Janie to see her world anew. Much in the way Edward Pavlic discusses, the pattern of Janie's behavior and experience is irrevocably changed by the storm. According to Pavlic,

the syndetic cultural milieux pattern complex social dynamics from which invocations of psychological depth, like bolts of lightning, mark the momentary connections between interior and exterior realities...The invocations connect the imagined to the experienced, and diffuse back into the cultural soup to emerge again, recognizable, but with differences that defy prediction. (75)

It is the shocking and disruptive experience of reacting to the unexpected hurricane (a literal "bolt of lightning") that puts Janie's full transformation into motion. As a result she is shaken out of her somnambulance and is awakened to her full potential, connecting inner with outer identities, imagined to real experiences, and resulting in a "recognizable...differences" in her culminating realization of self within community.

Janie's voice at the end of the novel has been read as communal by critics such as Nellie McKay, Robert Hemenway, and Barbara Christian. Yet according to Mary Helen Washington, Hurston is:

Testifying to the limitations of voice and critiquing the culture that celebrates orality to the exclusion of inner growth. Her final speech to Pheoby at the end of *Their Eyes* actually casts doubt on the relevance of oral speech and supports Alice Walker's claim that women's silence can be intentional and useful. (xiii)

Other critics, such as Carla Kaplan, similarly argue that the novel's end signals Hurston's indication of "the absence of any community" (119). She writes that to read Hurston's story as a realization of redemptive community "through the positivity of love and voice occludes the ways in which Hurston's revision of the romance narrative...works to *deepen* rather than reduce the contradictions cutting across it" (121).

I do not view Hurston's reimagining of a black woman's sense of self (out of the confines of a romantic heterosexual relationship and instead in a recognition of her own inner resolve and outer organic interconnectivity with the rest of humanity) as reductive. Further, Hurston's indictment of a social system which would make it so difficult for Janie to reach this self-revelation is not entirely smoothed over by such a reading. Ultimately, however, Hurston reimagines a black woman's sense of self outside the confines of a romantic relationship. Instead, Janie recognizes her own inner resolve and her organic interconnectivity with the rest of humanity. In this reading, Janie becomes a figure of feminist resolution to reshape both self and community in ways which acknowledge readers' humanist commonality as well. It is significant that Janie returns to her

community by the end of the novel in order to regale her audience with tales of her adventures. The shared story of the novel concludes with an affirmation of communal awareness as Janie gazes at the horizon, finally content in herself in a penultimate moment of interconnection and future possibility:

The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (183-4)

The memory of her over-romanticized love for Tea Cake connects them eternally. More importantly, however, Janie has found a new mode of being, which was always her most genuine self. Drawing it inward from the outer web of interconnection, releasing its grasp around the world, and placing it over the mantle of her shoulder in a gesture of self-acceptance, Janie appears as a newly reigning queen of her own best self. We finally witness her fully integrated body, mind, and soul, encompassing all the promise of the horizon; we too are absorbed into Janie's total vision of self within a shared community of which we become part.

A number of critics have relevantly commented on the concluding image in the novel. Barbara Johnson argues that Janie triumphantly rediscovers "life in its meshes" in "a gesture of total recuperation and peace" (50), which I contend denotes a matrixial space of web-like, organic interconnectivity. Hers is, as Karla Holloway supports, "the language of community, the imagery of nature, and the symbol of the spirit" (69). Mae Gwendolyn Henderson considers the horizon as well. Janie's calling in of her soul reveals "not [just] a unity of self" but a conquering "over the division between self and other" ("Speaking in



Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition" 213). Indeed, Janie Crawford achieves a fluent interpersonal web of perspectives and voices.<sup>9</sup> She is finally capable of articulating the depths of her experience in interpersonal terms. As Cheryl A. Wall outlines, "the pear tree and the horizon...help unify the narrative. The first symbolizes organic union with another, the second, the individual experiences one must acquire to achieve selfhood" ("Zora Neale Hurston: Changing Her Own Words" 89). By novel's end, Janie goes through this process of fortification of self and unity with other selves and community.

#### The Power of African American's Modernist Vision

Janie begins the novel without being able to recognize herself in a photograph, and is soon able to occupy progressively larger spaces and find a full realization of self through sexual desire and the mastery of multiple, signifying discourses, according to Gates. Commenting on the power of vision in the novel, Kate Flint argues that for Victorians,<sup>10</sup> the image of the horizon embodies a liberating space which "marks not just the edge of the visible, but suggests futurity, the space into which the imagination and inner vision may travel: it connotes expansiveness" (285-6). Hurston is working through new, expansive understandings of vision and the seeing body, still present in the modern visual imagination, in her novel.<sup>11</sup>

Early twentieth century examples of similarly intersubjective moments revealing a mutual gaze, those which draw the reader into the narrative with "the look" that reveals the subject's essential self, are abundant in the work of James Van Der Zee in 1920's

Harlem. Carol Shloss describes twentieth century photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson's idea of the "decisive moment" as a moment of complete reciprocity, the "simultaneous recognition in a fraction of a second" (7) of the unity of photographer and subject, the congruence of self-expression and revelation of both self and other in creating meaning. Van Der Zee's images "speak of the liveliness of the community and its capacity for renewal, its constant reinvention of itself, and its growth...[they] are about the connection between self and family and self and community" (Willis-Braithwaite 25). His pictures proclaim that the black middle class has a strong, autonomous sense of self. Van Der Zee opened his studio in Harlem in 1912 and attained a local reputation that lasted for two decades. After WWII his work went into an eclipse but became known to a wider audience through a controversial exhibition "Harlem On My Mind" at the MoMA in NY in 1969.<sup>12</sup> He had a sheltered childhood in Lenox, MA, yet a provocative confrontation with the Harlem Renaissance influenced his work. Van Der Zee consistently placed his subjects within the context of family and community; his photos look at a community seen through an insider's eyes (7). In countenancing his work, "we are privy to the joys of a new life, marriage, and accomplishment as well as the pain of loss; we learn who is important, who is fashionable, and who is powerful." As a commercial and portrait photographer in the '20s and '30s, Van Der Zee created important and beautiful historical documents of and for Harlem's most distinguished residents: WWI heroes Henry Johnson and Needham Roberts, singers Mamie Smith, Hazel Scott and Florence Mills, poet Countee Cullen, and boxer Joe Lewis. Van Der Zee was also the official photographer for Marcus Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association in 1924 (Willis-Braithwaite 8).

Van Der Zee's "pictures of love and light" (Hurston 184) represent a "sweeping

survey of the most vital pre-World War II African American community existing in the United States” (Willis-Braithwaite 10), providing “an overt celebration of black middle-class life, and particularly family life.” His small photography business reflects later nineteenth century portraiture styles, but were created to value a client’s “dignity, independence and comfort.” There is always a sense of self-worth present in his images—they “define a people in the process of transformation and a culture in transition” and a growing sense of personal and national identity of African Americans. Van Der Zee helped transform stereotypical images of blackness into that of Alain Locke’s *New Negro*: educated, dignified, economically successful, tied with pride in family and race. He was a visionary and optimistic early twentieth century American photographer, depicting his people with a cosmopolitan style that suggests progress and successful establishment and expansion of modern African American identity.

Two quintessential Van Der Zee images of racial uplift are contemporary with Hurston’s novel: *A Harlem Couple Wearing Raccoon Coats Standing Next to a Cadillac on West 127<sup>th</sup> Street* (1932) and *Memories* (1938). The first image in particular reveals a feeling of dignity and success in upper middle-class black American selfhood at this time. A handsome man and woman pose triumphantly wearing their luxurious fur coats—the man is seated in the car while the woman leans beside the open door—to show off the shiny chrome finish of their luxury car, an emblem of the American Dream. They are posed in the street in front of the upper middle-class brownstones that most likely comprise their neighborhood, revealing a proud and economically healthy African American community.

The other image, *Memories*, falls in line with traditional domestic family portraiture. This photograph reveals a feeling of dignity and success in upper middle-class African

American selfhood at this time. Capturing a domestic moment of repose, it pictures three adoring and attentive children circled around their father, who shows them a picture book. The small girl gently caresses her father's chin in a loving gesture that completes the triangulation of warm physical contact created by herself, her two brothers and her father. The parlor in the background is richly decorated with flowers and tapestry-like wallpaper, suggesting the family's healthy, "Talented Tenth" economic status.<sup>13</sup> But the most telling detail of their interconnectivity is the shadow overhead of their deceased mother and wife. As with Janie's evocation of the phantasmic Tea Cake, Van Der Zee's photograph supposes that the memory of loved ones lives on in our everyday lives—even that the spirits of the dead watch over and guide us with benevolence and pride. Van Der Zee's images show a healthy, diverse, spiritual, prosperous, and productive African American community, as well as promoting African American art and culture in Harlem—they are "visual embodiments of the racial ideals promoted by...leading African American intellectuals and writers of the era" (13). In line with Hurston's novel, they celebrate the powerful connection between a sense of fortified self-identification and community.

These images, among Van Der Zee's others,

suggest the waves of African American immigration from the Caribbean and the migration from the rural South to the cities of the North forever changed the visual self-image of the people who made the journey: they have been metamorphosed into suave and aware big-city dwellers; the degradation of the past have been seemingly eliminated from their present lives. (11)

His Harlem shows a healthy, diverse, spiritual, prosperous, and productive African

American community, helping to create African American art and culture in Harlem—they are “visual embodiments of the racial ideals promoted by such leading African American intellectuals and writers of the era as W.E.B. Du Bois, Claude McKay, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston in Locke’s noted 1925 book *The New Negro*” (13).

It is interesting to note that Van Der Zee often retouched his portraits to fit this image and staged spaces where his subjects “could expand spiritually, emotionally, and symbolically.” Like Hurston, he also poked fun at stereotypical domestic situations, yet his powerful images of African American soldiers positioned them at the forefront at the struggle for democracy. Most importantly, “the loving family is central to the life of the African American community” for Van Der Zee. His positive images of Harlem celebrate a sense of fortified self-identification and racial pride.<sup>14</sup> Much like the image of Janie at the end of Hurston’s novel, Van Der Zee’s photographs “speak of the liveliness of the community and its capacity for renewal, its constant reinvention of itself, and its growth...[They] are about the connection between self and family and self and community” (25). Van Der Zee and Hurston share a concern for the communal voice of black American consciousness in the age of Jim Crow, race riots, and everyday lynchings. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. points out, Hurston’s “authentic narrative voice that echoes and aspires to impersonality, anonymity, and authority of the black vernacular tradition...[a] selfless tradition, at once collective and compelling...the unwritten text of common blackness” (*The Signifying Monkey* 183) could just as easily describe the multiple narrative registers that Van Der Zee’s images inhabit. Both modernist artists, although speaking from different class positions, were actively engaged in ways of storytelling that would

negotiate the doubly-conscious, possibly shared voice of the African American community at this time in history. In the expansive horizon of futurity and wholeness, these African American artists depict photographic and textual figures of healthy self-development within the context of human interconnection.

### Modernist Interconnectivity and Hurston's Literary Legacy

The title of Hurston's novel finally offers a clue about her concept of vision as a movement from optic vision (outer surveillance of inner life) to the power of envisioning self within community. The obvious truth is that you can't watch God, and the people in the muck only stare into the darkness of the hurricane and flood that overtake many of them. Yet, they can at one and the same time be overwhelmed by its horror and reminded of the limited constructs of culture which that dark void represents. Women like Hurston in particular know that the social order is limited, yet they are able to see beyond it and create a counternarrative to constructive ideology. Hurston's narrative voice—both limited omniscient and first person, as well as lyrical and mythical—is all-encompassing, inviting the reader into that intimate communal space enacted by the living art of her novel. Through Hurston's image of "the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon" (85), she confirms Janie's quest for wholeness of self within her community, which by now extends to the reading audience: "She had been getting ready for her great journey to the horizon in search of *people*; it was important to all the world that she should find them and they find her" (Hurston's emphasis). Janie becomes a character in her own story and the omniscient narrator of her own community, and potentially ours as well.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues that Hurston's text speaks of the search for identity and self-understanding and its connected themes of "discovery, rebirth and renewal" (*The Signifying Monkey* 185). Speaking to the full integrity Janie achieves, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson notes: "This self-willed, active, subjective synthesis is a remarkable trope of self-knowledge...[it] is the novel's sign of Janie's synthesis" (214). Edward Pavlic concurs, arguing that "Hurston imagined a communal underground space that offered new possibilities for black encounters with American modernity as well as any modernist creative process" (176). Her diasporic modernism encompasses myth, West Africanist traditions of oral culture, a multiple understanding of the self, and an awareness of the way humor disrupts hierarchical relationships. Gates writes in his Afterword to Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* that

Part of Hurston's received heritage—and perhaps the paramount notion that links the novel of manners in the Harlem Renaissance, the social realism of the thirties, and the cultural nationalism of the Black Arts movement—was the idea that racism had reduced black people to mere ciphers, to beings who only react to an omnipresent racial oppression, whose culture is 'deprived' where different, and whose psyches are in the main 'pathological'. (189)

Hurston found "this idea degrading, its propaganda a trap, and railed against it." Freedom, she wrote in *Moses, Man of the Mountain*, "was something internal...The man must make his own emancipation" (189).

Hurston indeed talks back to the notion that she, as a black American woman writer, should remain silent about issues of race and identity, or even that these

predicaments should be highlighted in supposedly more serious, socially responsible fiction, and often in a subversive way. Hurston was a vocal critic of the Du Boisian double consciousness, having grown up in a relatively autonomous black environs of Eatonville, FL; she did not fall prey to black self-loathing. In *Their Eyes*, Hurston represents an affirmative voice grounded in communal settings and folk traditions; her version of the double consciousness questions the binary of its dialectical process (Pavlic 179). John Lowe notes that Hurston claimed that she was “not tragically colored,” and as a result, she was silenced during her lifetime for her outrageous sense of humor. Lowe argues that humor is a continual component in Hurston’s work, not only to bridge the distance between author and reader, but also to create a new art form based on the Afro-American cultural tradition (284). In her use of rural black stereotypes to represent the race, she “uses comic expressions, jokes, and entire collection of humorous effects, to amplify, underline, and sharpen the points she makes. These deceptively delightful words often contain a serious meaning, just as the slave folktales did” (289).

Janie achieves full development and maturity through the cultivation of her sassy voice by the end of the novel, and reintegrates with the enriching society that gives her this wisdom. Her final story is “meant for planting in the community, which needs their laughing, loving example” (310). As Hurston herself expresses in an early letter to Charlotte Osgood Mason quoted at this chapter’s opening, she has a strong desire to write for the good of humanity, so that “the behavior of love may emerge from the shell of human indifference and heal us of our greivous wounds.” As a literary artist, Hurston “want[s] to be a green thing of the color of life and grow and grow till it shadows the sun at noon.” This fruitful narrative has indeed been planted within the community of readers,



past, present and future.

Hurston's feminist revision of the black woman on a quest for her own identity going "deeper and deeper into blackness...[and] communal life...[,] affirms black cultural traditions while revising them to empower black women" (Washington, Foreword ix-x). But this realization could not be fully recognized for feminist readers until nearly 40 years after the novel was first published. By now, as Gates points out, Hurston is an established member of the canon of American fiction, African American fiction, and feminist fiction. Yet it wasn't until a panel at the 1975 MLA convention that one of the first attempts to get the novel back into print occurred, along with Robert Hemenway's biography in 1977, followed by Alice Walker's anthology, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, in 1979. At this point, "Hurston's rediscovery is one of the most dramatic chapters in African American literary history" (Wall, *Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes* 4), leading us once again to the present moment in Hurston scholarship and reception.

Hurston's ability to play the trickster, in living and in creating characters that embrace and embody the borderland of transitivity, is surely what most encompasses her modernism. Hurston was also, unlike her white modernist contemporaries, "initially drawn to a more stable, confident model of visuality in Boas" (121), according to Karen Jacobs. In Hurston's critique of Boasian anthropology and its participant/observer method, Jacobs claims, she attempts to reassess African artforms through an "objective distance from its selected objects of study while retaining a concept of the primitive still tainted by its derivation from evolutionary biology" (113). Therefore, Hurston embodied the multiple roles of participant and observer, African American woman and writer; she was "both interloper in the world of anthropology and as an insider willing to sell out

African-American arts” (120). Although Hurston enjoyed some success as a novelist and the financial support of a wealthy white patron (Charlotte Osgood Mason had legal control over her scholarship for almost a decade), she was not exactly at the top of the literary hierarchy.<sup>15</sup> Although Janie’s image of the horizon reveals a vision of interconnectedness, it is important to remember that Hurston herself “functions...as a trespasser in Emersonian territory, her presence there works to expose the idealist limitations of a theory so blind to the situated nature of embodiment” (143).

Gates’s Afterword to the novel champions Hurston’s legend as rich, curious and dense as the black myths of her anthropological works, *Mules and Men* and *Tell My Horse*. As a graduate of Barnard who studied with anthropology with Franz Boas, “Hurston was one of the most widely acclaimed black authors for the two decades between 1925 and 1945” (Gates, Preface to *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*), but much like James Van Der Zee’s, her work was virtually ignored after the ‘50s (even during the Black Arts movement in the ‘60s) because many prominent black male writers such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison dismissed her work as apolitical. Gates emphasizes *Their Eyes* as a novel charting “Janie’s fulfillment as an autonomous imagination” (Afterword 187), revealing Hurston’s “concern with the project of finding a voice, with language as an instrument of injury and salvation, of selfhood and empowerment.” Hurston wanted to “write a black novel, and ‘not a treatise on sociology’” (190). Alice Walker calls Hurston’s depiction of Janie within her community “our prime symbol of ‘racial health—a sense of black people as complete, complex, *undiminished* human beings” (qtd. in Gates, Afterword 191). For Walker, Hurston’s use of the black idiom centers on “the quality of imagination that makes these lives whole and splendid.” Cheryl Wall claims that Hurston’s

“incorporation of folk speech and folk forms such as spirituals, gospel, and the blues is a hallmark of the Harlem Renaissance. These forms are indeed the building blocks of African-American modernism” (*Women of the Harlem Renaissance* 12).

Writing on Hurston’s negotiation of voice from a more feminist slant, Mae Gwendolyn Henderson argues that the black woman writer’s discourse is particularly matrixial, dialogic, heteroglossic—sometimes it is these things all at once in its negotiation of varied voices. In female characters’ ability to “speak in tongues,” they move toward community and commonality:

What is at once characteristic and suggestive about black women’s writing is its interlocutory, or dialogic, character, reflecting not only a relationship with the ‘other(s),’ but an internal dialogue with the plural aspects of self that constitute the matrix of black female subjectivity. The interlocutory character of black women’s writing is,...a dialogue with the aspects of ‘otherness’ within the self. (349)<sup>16</sup>

When Toni Morrison’s “dream and dreamer” are one, it seems that African American woman writers such as Hurston and Larsen are able to cross the divide between self and other, at least aesthetically.<sup>17</sup> As Henderson puts it, “What distinguishes black women’s writing, then, is the privileging (rather than repressing) of ‘the other in ourselves’” (350). As I will continue to argue, the same holds true for white British modernists like Woolf and Warner.

Hurston’s novel represents a modernism that could be shared within the literary and reading community. I want to emphasize the fact that it is Hurston’s desire and ability to create a feeling of wholeness through her fiction of interconnection and community that

offers *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as a sort of homecoming for many readers.<sup>18</sup> Like Janie, who has found a home within her own reformed sense of self within the context of a larger, complex community, black and feminist readers, in an affective response to the shared feeling of community, could find a more complete representation of self in Hurston's narrative. As Wall relevantly argues, "What makes the tone and texture of Hurston's meditation on identity so different from the others considered here is the *sense of home* that gives rise to identity that is not constructed in response to racism and sexism" (italics mine, 27). Hurston creates a mythology of her identity that is connected with her concept of home.<sup>19</sup> For Hurston, the self can only play itself out within a greater community of collaborators in identity-making. Moreover, as Wall deftly sums up, Hurston strived to "reconstruct a home in language that acknowledged but did not dwell on the history of racial oppression, counted African-American creative expression as a powerful mode of resistance, and fostered the recognition of differences without and within oneself" (32). With our vibrant and active engagement in this novel's story of interconnectivity, we might finally realize the redemptive power of Hurston's model of modernism.<sup>20</sup>

It is Hurston's continued desire for human justice which fuels much of her writing throughout the '30s and '40s. In a letter to Benjamin Botkin, the first full-time director of the Federal Writers' Project's folklore program, in October of 1944, Hurston expresses an antiwar sentiment that reflects her humanist ethic of behavior in the midst of ongoing worldwide terror:

When will people learn that you cannot quarantine hate?...I see it all around me every day. I am not talking of race hatred. Just hate. Everybody is at it. Kill, rend and tear! Women are supposed to be the softening

influence in life screaming for the kill. Once it was just Germany and Japan and Italy. Now, it is our allies as well. The people in the next county or state. The other political party. The world smells like an abattoir. It makes me very unhappy. I am all wrong in this vengeful world. I will to love. (509)

As a pacifist and humanist much like Woolf, Hurston is concerned with a myriad of modern political issues—including (as this quote suggests) the rise of fascism, the complicity of women in war, and the American problem of racial oppression. Cynthia Bond affirms my claim: “Hurston gestures to a politics of human dignity” (214). Hurston’s desire to create a utopian kind of narrative in her novel leads us to the possibility of communal narrative.<sup>21</sup> Like Hurston herself, “Janie’s sense of belonging, her integration into a community, stems from her ability to tell stories that explore and rework the relations of race and sex” (Barbeito 389). In the hybrid space afforded by the modernist aesthetic of interconnectivity, Hurston has successfully “crossed over” (Gates 195) the border between self and other into the terrain of feminist and modernist reimagining of experience, so that we might find a new kind of social order of coequal wholeness and coherence in our reading of her work and in our lives.<sup>22</sup>

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Darwin T. Turner notes in his introduction to *Cane*, (NY: Liveright, 1978). Toomer shirked the binary of race and wrote about wanting to represent a “new type of man... To my real friends of both groups, I would, at the right time, voluntarily define my position” (xiii).

<sup>2</sup> Edward Pavlič, in *Crossroads Modernism: Descent and the Emergence of African American Literacy Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: U of MN Press, 2002), demonstrates the ways in which African American artists negotiated the intersection of high modernism in Europe and American discourse to fashion their own distinctive response to American modernity. His book reenvisioned the potentials and dilemmas where the different traditions of modernism meet and firmly establishes African American modernism at this cultural crossroads. Much has been said about the generally racist use of “blackness” in constituting modernism, but *Crossroads Modernism* is the first book to expose the key role that modernism has played in the constitution of “blackness” in African-American aesthetics. In particular, he argues that the “larger ‘whole’” of Afro-Modernism “creates community,” offering James Baldwin’s ideal of an “unspoken recognition” (xviii) between and among humanity. In this modernist “‘depth of involvement,’” which represents an understanding “not fractured into subjective and objective elements,” there exist patterns of communal wholeness in black texts (xviii-xix). Yet the risk of this idea of wholeness might also encompass European modernism’s “totalized whole” and its totalitarian, essentialized, and fascist potential (xix). Pavlič’s solution is that writers’ use of “syndetic patterns” which “echo postmodern suspicion of fixed phrasings and avoid pure flux by remaining grounded in communal patterns of performance” (xix). He looks at the ways African American writers now considered to be canonical have “negotiated this complex terrain.” Pavlič contends that Afro-modernists’ “attempt to put these depersonalized depth perceptions to expansive democratic, and redemptive communal, purposes” (xx). Hurston, in particular, approaches these issues of black vernacular culture and West African cultural traditions through “diasporic modernism,” an approach that counters the depersonalized, solitary process of abstraction akin to European modernism, thereby establishing a “new media of perception” to depict “disruptive modernist modes constituted by social and cultural interaction... [and] interpersonalization” (xxi).

<sup>3</sup> Pavlič observes the available waves of selves represented in William James’ *The Principles of*

---

*Psychology* as an expansive and chaotic sense of self that is “complex, multiple and overlapping” (6). James and Pavlić conclude that, “the coherence of the modernist empirical self depends solely on one’s intention, the confrontation of multiplicity with the personal will to cohere.”

<sup>4</sup> In determining the significance of the double-consciousness in Hurston’s work, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. praises her negotiation of these multiple roles:

Hurston moves in and out of these distinct voices effortlessly, seamlessly...to chart Janie’s coming to consciousness. It is this usage of a *divided* voice, a double voice unreconciled, that strikes me as her great achievement, a verbal analogue of her double experiences as a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a nonblack world, a woman writer’s revision of W.E.B. Du Bois’s metaphor of a ‘double-consciousness’ for the hyphenated African-American. (Afterword 193)

Gates also claims, that,

Hurston’s unresolved tension between her double voices signifies her full understanding of modernism. Hurston uses the two voices in her text to celebrate the psychological fragmentation both of modernity and of the black American...the ‘real’ Zora Neale Hurston...dwells in the silence that separates these two voices: she is both, and neither; bilingual, and mute. (Afterword 195)

<sup>5</sup> See Carla Kaplan’s book, *The Erotics of Talk: Women’s Writing and Feminist Paradigms* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996), but in particular her chapter on Hurston entitled “‘That Oldest Human Longing’ in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*” (99-122).

<sup>6</sup> Hurston writes in a letter to William Stanley Hoole on March 7, 1936 that, “I am glad in a way to see my beloved southland coming into so much prominence in literature. I wish some of it was more considered...But I do feel that the south is taking a new high place in American literature” (Ed. Carla Kaplan, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters* 367).

The symbolic South creates a sense of possibility in cultural connections and the transformation of the space of modernist anxiety and disruption into one of affirmative communion (Pavlić 19). The return to the symbolic South often “represents a way of escaping abstraction and the existentially estranged and

culturally restricted qualities of the symbolic North" (21). In the recuperative narratives like those of Hurston, a character attempts to connect the communal forms of the symbolic South to underlying African cultural codes and patterns. In the communal underground space of diasporic modernism, "traditional Yorùbá [allows]...a call-and-response form of communal nihilistic affirmation...that enacts [a] kind of communally aware disruptive spirit" (25). The intersubjective patterns of communal spaces in African-American culture are outlined by Gates's *The Signifying Monkey*, and Hurston expands the underground into a communal space in patterns and rituals of black performative traditions to invoke the disruptive processes of modernist excavation in public (28).

<sup>7</sup> Mary Helen Washington, in her essay "I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands': Emergent Female Hero" Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present* (NY: Amistad, 1993): 98-109, provides a useful history of various critics' comments on Janie's silence.

<sup>8</sup> Hurston does the same with the concept of marriage as a vehicle for violence as well.

<sup>9</sup> Hurston uses an "interpersonal narration of the cool [where]...there are no resolutions or stable identities to represent" (Pavlic 198). Janie successfully attains the skill to survive the crossroads of her internal and social experience (212-13); she excavates new depths of her consciousness and "from these depths in her consciousness she examined her relationship to social space with deepened insight" (242).

<sup>10</sup> Flint is interested in the "slippery, intriguing borderline between the seen and the unseen—that which lies out of sight on the horizon, the disruption that may be introduced by the almost obscure male figure" (xiv). The act of seeing was, by the late nineteenth century, performed by individuals with their own subjectivities and different valuations given to inner and outer seeing (2). Flint investigates the powerful forces of the imagination and memory; she wants to explore the challenges to the sufficiency of the visible that erupts through literary and artistic acts of representations. Finally, Flint contends that,

Visuality was crucial to Victorian debates about the place of the individual in the world. Like the horizon, it formed a connecting line...between the material and the invisible worlds,...between the body and the mind. The essential vehicle, the mediating instrument, was the eye: something which itself partook of this dual function, both subjective and



---

objective...The eye is a means of obtaining information, a data-retrieval instrument; a way of reaching beyond the body's boundary, yet inseparable from that body. (311-12)

<sup>11</sup> Hurston herself may not have been interested particularly in contemporary photographic theories, but images taken of her suggest her ability to play with both visual perceptions of herself and the camera itself. She regularly pretended to be younger than she was, and often dressed that way. For instance, when she arrived in Baltimore at the age of 26 in 1917, she easily passed herself off as sixteen in order to qualify for free public schooling (Boyd). She also enjoyed wearing stylish coats, "chic hats, long dresses, and dramatic colors," as revealed in photographs of her during her years at Howard University. As she traveled through the south collecting folklore in 1927, she stopped to pose for a feisty shot, arms akimbo with a belt and pistol secured around her hips. A portrait of her taken by Carl Van Vechten in 1934 shows Hurston's more reserved side; here she appears like the serious writer she is, yet a slight turn of her head and a somewhat sly, side-long glance into the camera divulges her persistent playfulness. The variety of images of Hurston, available in Valerie Boyd's recent biography, *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston* (New York: Scribner, 2003), attest to the multiplicity of roles she was capable of playing, particularly as a photographic subject.

<sup>12</sup> This is according to Alan Fern, Director of the National Portrait Gallery.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed the whiteness appearing in dress and skin tone of those pictured, as well as the flowers bordering the image, suggest a kind of circle of whiteness which reveals the contemporary culture's proclivity for "whitening up" in order to rise above past indignities and violences in a racist society.

Another intriguing detail in this photograph is the cutout of the dog, which is made to look like a three-dimensional member of the family. The dog cutout adds to this image another dimension of performativity. Van Der Zee, here, consciously crafts a kind of photomontage in order to illustrate this emblem of a racially uplifted family—complete with mother, father, children, and the family dog.

<sup>14</sup> These images appear in contrast to the documentary photos of Aaron Siskind in the 30s and 40s, which depict oppression, poverty and inchoate crowds (24).

<sup>15</sup> In her letter to William Stanley Hoole dated March 7, 1936, Hurston begins, "I think I must be God's left-hand mule, because I have to work so hard" (366).

<sup>16</sup> Henderson goes on to suggest the kind of reading practice I advocate and connects that process with the terms of understanding this larger modernist aesthetic I describe. She writes, "Returning from the trope to the act of reading, perhaps we can say that speaking in tongues connotes both the semiotic, presymbolic babble (baby talk), as between mother and child—which Julia Kristeva postulates as the 'mother tongue'—as well as the diversity of voices, discourse, and languages described by Mikhail Bakhtin" (353). For Barbara Johnson, who writes on the concepts of the divided self, unity, and the possibility of universality in Hurston's novel, "The task of the writer, then, would seem to be to narrate both the appeal and the injustice of universalization, in a voice that assumes and articulates its own, ever differing self-difference" (56). Henderson concludes that,

It is this quality of speaking in tongues, that is, multivocality...that accounts in part for the current popularity and critical success of black women's writing. The engagement of multiple others broadens the audience of black women's writing...[and] speaks as much to the notion of commonality and universalism as does the sense of difference and diversity.

(362)

<sup>17</sup> As Patricia Felisa Barbeito contends in "Making Generations' in Jacobs, Larsen, and Hurston: A Genealogy of Black Women's Writing" *American Literature* 70.2 (June 1998): 365-395, "Janie realizes that identity is no so much the result of a forced internalization of the outside,...but rather is created through negotiating the meeting of the outside and the inside—a place where experience transforms, and is shaped by, language" (382).

<sup>18</sup> Wall notes that many women writers were hesitant to experiment with folklore forms, but Hurston modified them in gender-inflected ways to achieve a feminist collaborative narrative.

<sup>19</sup> According to Wall,

Racial identity...becomes merely the container that holds the multiplicity of elements out of which an individual identity is constituted. Instead of a divided self [à la Du Bois and the two-ness of the double-consciousness], Hurston images an inner space filled with...disparate pieces...both unique and interchangeable, constitut[ing] a self that is at once individual and transcendent. (29-30)

<sup>20</sup> Hurston's ethnographic writing also reveals her penchant for this modernist aesthetic of wholeness. Her only entirely interpretive ethnographic piece, "Characteristics of Negro Expression," first published in Nancy Cunard's *Negro* anthology in 1934, is a "combination of aesthetic theory and an essentialist compendium of racial features" in a "discourse of the primitive that orders cultures hierarchically" (Jacobs, *The Eye's Mind* 121). According to Hurston here, African Americans interpret the English language in terms of pictures and use a highly dramatic language to express their point of view. Once again, Hurston emphasizes the power of vision in determining reality and the self within it. For Hurston, the "Negro" lives in a perpetual blissful state of consciousness because, "No little moment passes unadorned" ("Characteristics of Negro Expression" 31). As Gates reminds us, Hurston was the first scholar to define Signifyin(g) as a means of "showing off" rhetorically, and her work attests to the splendor of African American folk life (*The Signifying Money* 196). For Hurston, the trickster figure, a cultural hero of African folklore, embodies originality through his supreme ability in "the modification of ideas" ("Characteristics" 37). Often in an exchange of meaning between two lovers characteristic of "Negro expression," language is an exchange "like money" that happens through the use of descriptive, "action words" and in terms of "pictures." The ability to reinterpret creatively, to revise with a flourish, is the fundamental measure of an angular, truly African American, and modernist, version of art (Gates 198). Most importantly for my purposes, like Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston viewed art as a collaborative act. In her discussion of "Negro dancing," she notes the difference between white and black dancers: "the white dancer attempts to express fully; the Negro is restrained, but succeeds in gripping the beholder by forcing him to finish the action the performer suggests" (61). As the spectator participates coequally with the performer, the Negro artist is able to create a collective form of modernist art.

<sup>21</sup> Hazel V. Carby puts it well:

The novel ends with the possibility that history could be brought into the community and suggests that Pheoby/the text is the means of accomplishing the transformation necessary to reconcile difference...that Janie pulls [the great fish-net] in and drapes around herself is an appropriate image for a writer who can recreate and represent a social order in her narrative. (130-1)

---

<sup>22</sup> Barbeito states that, "Hurston...depicts an active and mutually enhancing interrelation of race and sex, body and word, in order to belie their conventional polarization and incompatibility. In fact, the coherence and wholeness of Hurston's narrative result from the contrast it provides to the discomfort and 'incoherence' of Larsen's text. In effect, the novel posits itself as a narrative antidote/sermon to Larsen's inarticulate protagonist. Helga never 'belongs' anywhere" (389).

## CHAPTER III

### CONNECTING WITH THE SELF/OTHER:

#### The Problem of Primitivism and the False (?) Intersubjective Moment in

#### Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*

Stepping cautiously, they observed the women, who were squatting on the ground in triangular shapes...But when they looked had looked for a moment undiscovered, they were seen...The women took no notice of the strangers...and their long narrow eyes slid round and fixed upon them with the motionless inexpressive gaze of those removed from each other far, far beyond the plunge of speech. Their hands moved again...[T]heir stare continued...As they sauntered about, the stare followed them, passing over their legs, their bodies, their heads, curiously, not without hostility...they moved uneasily under their stare, and finally turned away, rather than stand there looking any longer...[They] felt themselves treading cumbrously like tight-coated soldiers among these soft instinctive people...Peaceful, and even beautiful at first, the sight of the women, who had given up looking at them, made them now feel very cold and melancholy. "Well," Terence sighed at length, "it makes us seem insignificant, doesn't it?" Rachel agreed. So it would go on for ever and ever, she said, those women sitting under the trees.

(Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* 284-5).

Zora Neale Hurston ends *Their Eyes Were Watching God* with Janie Crawford's whole vision of the horizon—"She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see"—to show us that literature can engender

new ways, for both protagonist and reader, of envisioning self in relationship to community. Yet Hurston also stages a false intersubjective relationship in *Their Eyes* (Tea Cake and Janie are not nearly as perfectly symbiotic as it might initially seem) to complicate the ideal of utopian unity with another as a precursor to complete selfhood. Janie comes to know herself more fully as a woman who has always possessed the self-resolve necessary to experience and tell the tale of her life thus far. She is then able to embrace the community surrounding her in a gesture of both completion and futurity. We might also consider the connection between Janie and Tea Cake inauthentic by virtue of his attempted mastery of her. Ultimately, however, Hurston allows her heroine to move beyond a misleading narrative of heterosexual romance in order to show that Janie stands whole in a relationship to herself and her community by the end of the novel.

Of course, there is always another side to the story, and Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* (1928) represents just that. While Hurston's later novel is a kind of bildungsroman, Larsen's earlier work illustrates the destructive problem of whiteness and its role in the decline of her heroine, Helga Crane. Whereas Hurston's vision for her character is expansive and interconnective, Larsen's text reveals and condemns limiting configurations of racial discrimination. How could one modernist literary narrative of an African American woman's search for selfhood close with such a positive image of communal wholeness while another ends with its heroine wholly entrapped by the hegemonic system of whiteness? Did Hurston's Janie somehow escape or merely ignore the ever-present forces of racism and sexism, as some critics of Hurston's novel have argued? Hurston was always conscious of the various conundrums of race, class, gender, and sexuality present in modern culture, and her awareness is reflected throughout her novel. Nonetheless she

equips Janie with enough self-knowledge and eventual vision to withstand and surpass the inescapable pressures of living in such a society. In her novel *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen's Helga Crane is in desperate need of a Hurstonian vision. Helga lacks any kind of self-affirming narrative, or even the ability to fully express herself through language. This fact leaves her utterly alone and defenseless against the seductive powers of primitivism and romantic love that finally reduce her to a harrowing fate. Indeed, Helga's destiny plays out as Janie's might have had Tea Cake remained alive. Janie overcomes the limitations of compulsory heterosexuality because Tea Cake dies and she carries on with her journey without him, instead relishing her female friendship with Phoeby and her bond with community.

For Helga, compulsory heterosexuality works in tandem with whiteness, and so brutally makes her into a tragic mulatto by the end of her story. A case in point is when her attraction to Dr. Robert Anderson and his refusal of her advances literally makes Helga wish for death: "Whatever outcome she had expected, it had been something else than this, this mortification, this feeling of ridicule and self-loathing, this knowledge that she had deluded herself" (109). Helga's self-delusion comes about once she is denied her white bourgeois hopes for romance, house, and home. At the end of the novel, having married a fundamentalist minister, she gives up the ghost. "She had done with soul-searching" with a man who, like Tea Cake, becomes the center of the job: "In some strange way she was able to ignore the atmosphere of self-satisfaction which poured from him" (122). Although she continually rejects primitivist narratives that depict who she should be from a white perspective, Helga cannot move beyond or envision anything other

than a romantic heterosexual fantasy to fulfill her life. Thus she is subjugated by the dominant racist and sexist structures which force her final submission.

As part of an implied reading community elicited by the choral moment and all its' promise for interconnectivity, we are saddened to witness Helga's downward spiral. Nevertheless Helga remains distanced from her community of readers by virtue of Larsen's exclusive use of omniscient narration and repeated use of the passive voice. By the end we are told, "And hardly has she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain, hardly had the children returned from the homes of the neighbors, when she began to have her fifth child" (135). Throughout the novel, then, Helga appears increasingly alienated from herself, and, ultimately, her reading audience. Larsen's *Quicksand* reveals to her contemporary and present community of readers the profound tragedy of a black woman who cannot grasp any kind of wholeness within self or community. Helga Crane's unrealizable need, and lack of language or voice for expressing a communal vision or way of imagining a balanced sense of self with regard to race and gender, insists that audiences fill in this gap through an affective kind of reading. If we can imagine convergence between self and other within a literary text—one where the African American female protagonist is unable to do this herself—then perhaps we can understand the complexities and resistances of Helga's way of (un)knowing herself. We can then view Larsen's novel as a complication of modernist narratives of gender, race, and community *and* a vital call for social justice that Hurston answers in her own novel, written a decade later in the aftermath of the Harlem Renaissance.

This chapter will continue my discussion of the arc of intersubjectivity toward the (im)possibility of unified community intrinsic with my project. I focus here on Nella



Larsen's story of an African American woman's quest for full selfhood, *Quicksand* (1928), and Sylvia Townsend Warner's satirical, anti-imperialist novel *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* (1927), as 1920s examples of how the choron moment might depend upon—and yet exceed—the aesthetics and thus the politics of modernist primitivism. As in the brief moment of contact between British vacationers and the “natives” in the jungle of South America in Virginia Woolf's first novel *The Voyage Out* (1915),<sup>1</sup> Larsen and Warner's protagonists are seduced by instances of utopian longing which may or may not lead them to lasting and deeper self-knowledge or understanding of others. The passage quoted in the epigraph speaks to the dangers of one-sided perspectives about the distance between self and other in the modern novel. The British travelers invade the primitivized environment and discover that, although they find the inhabitants there “peaceful” and “even beautiful,” the “motionless, inexpressive [although returned] gaze” of those women unsettles the white European's certainty of their superiority. The Brit's ways of knowing the indigenous people inevitably echo racist assumptions about their “squatting... triangular shape” and seeming place within what Anne McClintock would term an anachronistic sense of time in the outwardly tranquil jungle. The native women's look back at the cautious visitors subversively interrupts the imperial narrative of white European man's progress through the jungle. This moment in Woolf's text reveals that we must be aware of our place within the triangle of perception, and of how that positionality provokes a power dynamic which oppresses some and affirms others. The passage also helps me to reintroduce primitivism to consider why it is politically problematic and how its aesthetics can simultaneously redeem. Through Mary Louise Pratt's points of convergence in difference, or “contact zones,” we can begin the creation of a counternarrative to conquest in the space in

between self and other. This potentially radical aesthetic method (embodied by the choran moment) is the initial stage in an equal encounter that seeks to respect (without judgment) the experience of another.

In *Quicksand*, Larsen appropriates otherwise prejudicial and offensive primitivist ideas in order to salvage a victimized subject position through her portrayal of Helga Crane. In a move that replicates Foucauldian “reverse discourse,”<sup>2</sup> Larsen undercuts primitivist stereotypes of black women. Nella Larsen demanded absolute social equality for African Americans and thereby dispels denigrating images of black or “mulatto” womanhood in her fiction. Yet it is the devastating structures of racism that interrupt and even disengage any possibility of full connectedness with any utopian moment for her protagonist, and thus disallow Helga Crane’s engagement with whole selfhood or community. The sorrowful ending of *Quicksand*, which undermines cultural conceptions of a celebratory primitivism intrinsic with the Harlem Renaissance, illuminates Larsen’s political genius in fictional form. Instead of employing a Hurstonian joyful vision, Larsen shows us the stark reality of life—notably through Helga’s habitual silence and wordlessness—for a black woman who succumbs to the tyranny of a racist society.

I understand Warner’s novel as a potential counternarrative to conquest, and my discussion will engage *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot* to interrogate issues of modern identity formation through this working site of intersubjectivity—the choran moment—I will continually address in this project. Warner, like Larsen, calls upon primitivism in order to rewrite notions of racist ideology by employing a redefined aesthetic of interconnectivity that undercuts the hegemony of empire. Former imperialist missionary Timothy Fortune’s convergence with the island of Fanua and its most promising inhabitant, the young man

Lueli, becomes a catalyst for both personal and (possibly) collective renewal rather than exploitation, creating the potential for his conveyance of this new consciousness into his future life away from the island (even in the midst of world war).

My argument depends upon current studies in primitivism as the inextricable symbiosis of black and white culture,<sup>3</sup> which has been well-established as integral to the development of modernist aesthetics by scholars such as Nathan Irvin Huggins, Houston A. Baker, Jr.,<sup>4</sup> and Sieglinde Lemke. I turn once again to recent modernist scholars' definitions of African American expressions of literary modernism itself, and its implicit connection with primitivism. Most significantly, Toni Morrison posits a quest for the "unspeakable things unspoken";...the ways in which the presence of Afro-Americans has shaped the choices, the language, the structure—the meaning of so much American literature. A search, in other words, for the ghost in the machine" ("Unspeakable Things Unspoken" 11). Other scholars have remarked upon modernism's dependency upon primitivist ideas of race. Amritjit Singh comments that the difficulty "to rise above the major stereotype—the Negro as 'primitive'—that so strongly dominated the public mind in [the twenties]" (32) created a major challenge for black artists in particular. Singh observes as well that in retrospect, many literary scholars have felt that "the black writers of the period failed to achieve their potential as writers and did not fully grapple with the implications of Alain Locke's elaborate effort to develop a conscious 'local color' movement of Afro-American arts" in *The New Negro*. Finally, he concludes that, "black writers had 'climbed aboard the bandwagon' of exoticism and enjoyed the era when the Negro was in vogue" (34). To recall the discussion of the Harlem Renaissance in my Introduction, there could be no modernism without primitivism. Once again, I view the

choran moment as a textual device that, whether calling upon the terms of “the Angel in the House” or those of “primitivism,” uses the rather dubious terms of the times to represent more utopian possibilities for both the contemporary and current reader.

In order to address the possible problematic of these writer’s differing geographical and subject positions, and for the purposes of discussing primitivist choran moments, I reiterate my point that the choran moment and modernist interconnectivity come out of differing circumstances framed by a shared ethical value of humanism which Warner and Larsen felt compelled to envision in their writing. Despite their attempts at recovering a nostalgic sense of wholeness in their novels, Larsen and Warner must also grapple with the looming presence of primitivism, and its concomitant racism, inherent in the modernist project. As for many modernists, nostalgia for the past sometimes takes the form, as it were, of seeing “the primitive” as the reassuring reminder of lost innocence. For Warner and Larsen as well, this impulse toward nostalgia, or “the imagination’s attempt to override, neutralize, or cancel loss” (Rubenstein 33), “fuels a desire not only to retrieve emotionally resonant memories” but also to create a kind of transcendence in imagining complete selfhood and communal relationships in their fiction.

Warner’s and Larsen’s work reveals the possibly revolutionary project, when considering choran community, of oceanic novels. The idea of an oceanic paradise and its supposed bare and primordial language was enthralling for many modernist artists: “The lure of the oceanic...[where] the boundaries of self and other, subject and object dissolve in a feeling of totality, oneness, and unity” (Torgovnick 165) created many a utopian fantasy of human relations in literary modernism. Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913), in which he investigates the roots of civilization in the “primitive prehistory,” represents a distinctly

more harmful precursor to this perception of primitivism. Freud aligns the feminine oceanic with the primitive; both are forces connected with the threatening infantile state of consciousness that he strives to suppress.<sup>6</sup> Annie E. Coombes makes a related comparison in her discussion of the transculturation anxiety of the 1890s: "The deliberate focus on the transculturated or 'hybrid' material culture has also been promoted as the sign of mutually productive cultural contact—an exchange on equal terms between the Western centres and those groups of the so-called 'periphery'" (217). Creative transculturation "provide[s] productive interruptions of the West's complacent assurance of the universality of its own cultural values." What Freud did not recognize that writers like Warner and Larsen understood was the possibly regenerative power of "mutually productive cultural contact" in a space inhabited by the oceanic.

In their endeavors toward recapturing an intersubjective utopia through primitivism, Warner and Larsen employ a kind of "crosswriting" in their novels. Gay Wachman defines crosswriting as a means by which sexually radical writers transposed the otherwise unrepresentable, silenced, invisible lives of lesbians into narratives about homosexual men, and thereby sought to complicate and critique ideological constructs of race, class, gender, and sexuality.<sup>8</sup> I extend Wachman's definition to include the way in which writers stretch the parameters of ideology in order to make productive use of otherwise detrimental hegemonic systems of belief, such as with primitivism. I argue here that Warner and Larsen utilize primitivism in an attempt to rewrite notions of racist ideology through the evocation of the chorán moment in their novels. They make tangible the desire to merge the space between self and other in their fiction to help us question

whether choran unity is possible in life, and ultimately whether choran unity is the center of a white culture's primitivist imaginary structure, and thus complicit in imperial policy.

Countenancing the Divided Self in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*

The black artist in America is caught between a yearning for...nostalgia [for entertainment] and the fact of a time present which may best be called alienation or frustration. How to build a work which is balanced between nostalgia and anger, between an ideal world and the reality lived which prods the imagination is an extremely difficult chore. [Larsen] demonstrate[s] that it is possible to do so. (Victor A. Kramer, *The Harlem Renaissance Re-Examined* 6)

In her fiction, Nella Larsen (1891-1964) sought to create an entirely new kind of African American female protagonist. Her writing, which focuses on uplifted middle-class characters, falls in line with “works by writers who with equal force and terror attempted to show the black American was different from his white counterpart only in the shade of his skin...presenting middle-class characters and situations in their fictional works in order to demolish the prevailing stereotype” (37). As Thadious M. Davis argues, “Larsen grappled with the complexity of being a modern black female...she was the first of the twentieth-century black women writers whose sensibility was completely urban and whose understanding of fiction was thoroughly modern” (*The Gender of Modernism* 209).<sup>9</sup> Her two published novels, *Quicksand* (1928) and *Passing* (1929), complicate the sentimentalized tradition of the tragic “mulatta” figure in American literature<sup>10</sup> to interrogate issues of “gender identity, racial oppression, sexuality and desire, work, marriage and ambition, reproduction and motherhood, family...[,] class and social

mobility” (210). Moreover, Larsen uncovered the full inner and outer life of the modern black woman in her fiction and in her own life:

Larsen imagined fresh possibilities for her own life and new mythologies of self in her novels. Her representations were of women seeking full expression of their racial, social, and sexual identities. The texts she created replicated the searches in her private and public interactions, but they served as well, as means of Larsen’s self-referentiality, to demystify the urban, middle-class black woman. (*Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance* 3)<sup>11</sup>

A large part of this achievement in *Quicksand* results from Larsen’s investigation of the intersections between the quagmires of primitivism and her central character’s indefinable “lack somewhere,” evoking the loss of an apparently utopian past in the life of the prototypically modern African American woman.

*Quicksand* elaborates the story of Helga Crane, a cultured and refined middle-class “mulatta” woman in her early 20’s who searches for her wholeness of self in various urban locations. Beginning as a dissatisfied schoolteacher at the appropriately named Naxos (the anagram of “Saxon”), a school invested in the “social uplift” of African-Americans in the style of Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute, she abandons her post, disgusted with the academy’s stifling worship of white culture. After a brief failed venture to reconnect with family in Chicago, Helga embarks on a kind of voyage of self-discovery in Harlem—“the mecca of the exotic, the primitive” (McDowell xviii). Ambivalent about her own connections with her African American identity, Helga escapes to Copenhagen in an attempt to re-integrate herself with her Danish ancestry. She finds no comfort in being

labeled an exotic, sexualized other, so she returns to her other homeland of Harlem—this time to its erotically charged religious community. Finally, Helga deteriorates in the rural backwoods of the American south, trapped in an unrewarding marriage, perpetual pregnancy, and incapacitating motherhood. In each physical location, Helga becomes unnerved and is tormented by her quest for an ethereal inner sanctum that constantly evades her grasp. Her frequent, often debilitating engagement with “some formidable antagonist, nameless and ununderstood” (10) represents both this mixed racial modernist woman’s lack of self-awareness or clear object of fulfillment—“Helga Crane didn’t know, couldn’t tell. But there was, she knew, something else. Happiness, she supposed” (11)—and the “ruthless force” that burdens her experience of survival in a society that abhors all that she is.

Helga begins the novel by expelling herself from Naxos’ white-worshipping community in search of a place she can belong. She despises the middle-class codes of proper blackness (which apparently means behaving through codes of whiteness) embraced at the school: “These people yapped loudly of race consciousness, of race pride, and yet suppressed its most delightful manifestations, love of color, joy of rhythmic motion, spontaneous laughter. Harmony, radiance, and simplicity, all of the essentials of spiritual beauty in the race they had marked for destruction” (18). Larsen presents Helga as instead desiring the kind of pleasurable moments these elements of expression ostensibly connected with her race might allow. Here Larsen prefigures Kevin K. Gaines’s assertion that racial uplift ideology is unconscious internalized racism in that it blames blacks themselves for failing to live up to the dominant society’s bourgeois gender morality (the family romance) while they are simultaneously under constant and violent threat. The idea



of the double consciousness “captures the tragic difficulty of *racial* uplift ideology: its continuing struggle against an *intellectual* dependence on dominant ideologies of whiteness and white constructions of blackness” (9; Gaines’s italics). Helga is not aware of the irony of her situation; although she is unaware of it, it is actually her regard for white constructions of blackness that results in a lack of satisfaction in Naxos, and elsewhere. Having rejected whitewashed blackness, Helga looks instead for something more “authentically” black and familial. Other than denunciation by her uncle and his new wife, Helga’s chief obstacle to finding wholeness is that she has no self-affirming story of her own life to carry her through the trials of interfacing with a white supremacist world. The first words she utters in the novel, fatefully, are “No, forever!” (3). This two-word declaration foretells Helga’s ongoing refusal to form any meaningful relationship with the ever-distant community around her, or to create an assenting narrative of self. She is often depicted hampered by a profound silence that renders her incapable of communication. She is silent in the face of the dormitory matron once she has decided to leave Naxos, and, as her only friend Margaret comments at learning of her impending departure, “You never tell anybody anything about yourself” (13). When Helga meets with the school principal, Robert Anderson, to inform him of her resignation, she is initially silent. “At his ‘Miss Crane?’ her lips formed for speech, but no sound came” (19)—although she soon retorts with an uncouth, “I hate it!” when asked if she likes the school. Once Helga deserts Naxos and ends her engagement with fellow teacher James Vayle, whom she is apparently unable to communicate effectively with in regards to herself, her past, or their relationship—“Why, if she said so much, hadn’t she said more about herself and her mother?” (26)—she has no words to describe her discontent: “Helga Crane couldn’t

explain it, put a name to it" (24). Helga lacks the language to articulate her desires, her vision of self, and her goals for a future life of fullness. The one instance in which she attempts to tell her story, to her first employer in Chicago and then New York, the "prominent 'race' woman" Mrs. Hayes-Rore, her sole audience member exhibits no engagement or affective response, no matter how "Passionately, tearfully, incoherently, the final words tumbled out from her quivering lips" (39). Without even a sympathetic ear for her tale of woe, Helga cannot achieve any sense of wholeness within herself or convergence with another.

Much of Helga's disconnect with self and those around her arises from the abandonment of her father and the death of her mother, as well as her own self-loathing. Helga lacks the ability to connect with any of her kin: "She saw herself for an obscene sore in all their lives" (29) and feels threatened by her own feelings of "strangeness, of outsidership" (23), even as a child. This constant "sensation of estrangement and isolation" (47-8) leaves her incessantly "crouched discontent" (47) while "her need for something, something vaguely familiar, but which she could not put a name to and hold for definite examination, bec[o]me[s] almost intolerable." This deep desire might reflect a hope of rejoining with her mother.<sup>12</sup> Lisa Tyler notes that in modern women's fiction, "the mother-daughter relationship is extraordinarily powerful for women and *remains* powerful...long after the daughter reaches adulthood" (74).<sup>13</sup> But Helga is not able "to find a Demeter, a satisfactory surrogate mother to protect her from male sexuality" (79). It seems that Helga is doubly harmed by the forces of racism<sup>14</sup> which simultaneously limit her relationships with men and enable her white mother to reject a racially suspect daughter. Her mother's complicity with the destructive power of whiteness is tied with

Helga's own abjection of her blackness and/or whiteness at various times throughout the novel. George Hutchinson puts it clearly, in that, "The text, with its allusions and narrative structure, identifies the mother's and daughter's predicaments as intertwined, as products of the same race and gender system" ("Subject to Disappearance" 180). This double bind results in Helga's self-abjection, as Hutchinson also points out: "In Kristevan terms, Helga takes on the role of abjection, revealing the complex intermingling of racial guilt and shame" (181). Without a coherent language to tell the narrative of her past or to imagine her future, Helga is left without a sense of self, family, or community.

This incommunicative divide does not stop Helga, at first, from looking for community elsewhere. Her first convergence with the unspeakable things unspoken occurs when she moves to Harlem for the first time. For a luxuriant yet brief time, she feels the benefits of the recaptured sense of wholeness within her surrounding community, in that Harlem offers a kind of passageway to what Helga thinks (at this point in the novel) will reconnect her with a more integral sense of self in the "primitive jungle" of Harlem: "Again she had had that strange transforming experience, this time not so fleetingly, that magic sense of having come home. Harlem, teeming black Harlem, had welcomed her and lulled her into something that was, she was certain, peace and contentment" (43). Yet for Helga, this brief respite in integrated existence is not connected with a golden childhood past:

In the actuality of that pleasant present and delightful vision of an agreeable future she was contented, and happy. She did not analyze this contentment, this happiness, but vaguely, without putting it into words or freedom, a release from the feeling of smallness which had hedged her in, first during

her sorry, unchildlike childhood among hostile white folk in Chicago, and later during her uncomfortable sojourn among snobbish black folk in Naxos...But it didn't last, this happiness of Helga Crane's. (46-7)

Here Larsen's omniscient narrator offers our first glimpse at the constrictive elements of Helga's race that limit—within the context of a white supremacist society—her full passage into a unified sense of self: her female sexuality, her erotic desire, and the aspiration for continued middleclass uplift. Helga consistently longs for an elusive something more to fulfill her—once again "without putting it into words"—and her search often begins and ends with an attempt at reconnection with others of her African American race. Interpellated by discourses of whiteness and primitivism, she leaves aside the anxiety she feels at having no speech when she is in what she regards as a more intellectual (and hence wordy) atmosphere of racial uplift. Yet at the same time she feels an outsider to this community: "She didn't, in spite of her racial markings, belong to these dark segregated people. She was different. She felt it. It wasn't merely a matter of color. It was something broader, deeper, that made folk kin" (55). Larsen here, through Helga's ceaseless longing for a kind of familial feeling she cannot seem to achieve by reason of having no "golden past," intimates a "broader, deeper" yearning for the intersubjective experience that connects humanity. For Helga, at this juncture, that destination is still unreachable.

Throughout the novel, Larsen shows Helga's repeated attempts to re-converge with her ostensible primitivist past, even while she feels distanced and separate from it. A prime example occurs in a Harlem nightclub. Helga enters the club tentatively, "mingl[ing] in the medley that is Harlem" yet feeling "singularly apart from it all" (58). Once she

observes the "din" about her, she becomes engaged in the dancing. She is initially "oblivious of the oblivion of other gyrating pairs, oblivious of the color, the noise, and the grand distorted childishness of it all" (59). Helga becomes swept up in a choran moment Larsen constructs as primal abandon: "She was drugged, lifted, sustained, by the extraordinary music... The essence of life seemed bodily motion." This instance embodies the maternal utopian space in its floating motion, that sensation that is reminiscent of life in the womb. The relationship between desire for past wholeness and aimless present depends upon concepts of redemptive motherhood as well as on primitivism, and these concepts are conflated here through Helga's simultaneous calm and horror as she is enveloped in a choran space. Almost immediately after she has allowed herself delight in the erotics of the dance, Helga feels disgusted with "the shameful certainty that not only had she been in the jungle, but that she enjoyed it... [the realization] began to taunt her." Although I recognize the legitimacy of reading Helga's reticence as a resistance to being categorized as a typically "savage" and over-sexed black female, I also contend that Larsen suggests that the Freudian conception of the maternal body's oceanic maw disallows Helga's reintegration with her ordinary self in Harlem's nightlife. Helga's total reintegration would only reinscribe the sensationalized stereotype of the black primitive and exotic female. Larsen's own personal dilemma, as a biracial woman writer expected to answer the call of Harlem Renaissance literature, is reflected in her portrayal of Helga Crane.<sup>15</sup>

Helga's next (hopeful) geographical solution to her problem of alienation occurs when her aunt and uncle, Herr and Fru Dahl, agree to take her into their home in Copenhagen. The trajectory from brief contentment in a seemingly utopian past to horror

and revulsion is mirrored when Helga watches a minstrel show there. At first Helga appears soothed while listening to "an old ragtime song that [she] remembered hearing as a child" (82). It seems that the memory of a childhood song puts her in a similar state of stasis as she grapples with the psychological repercussions of that memory; apparently transfixed by her recollection, she is the only audience member who is "silent, motionless." Her calm rumination abruptly transforms to "fierce hatred for the cavorting Negroes on the stage. She felt shamed, betrayed, as if these pale pink and white people among whom she lived had suddenly been invited to look upon something in her which she had hidden away and wanted to forget...The incident left her profoundly disquieted" (83). Helga simultaneously despises the objectionable and primitivist play of the performers and fears that the show reveals some deep-down truth about her own position in a white world. Even though in Europe, a culture that supposedly holds more progressive views of race than America, Helga is painfully put back in her racial place. She is disturbingly reminded that her appearance, because it emulates that of the "cavorting Negroes," denotes all the primitivist stereotypes of savage exoticism imbedded in the community around her. It is certain that Helga rejects any representation of a minstrel stereotype, but this scene also elicits the omnipresent desire for wholeness that constantly evades her: "For she knew that into her plan for her life had thrust itself a suspensive conflict in which were fused doubts, rebellion, expediency, and urgent longings." Then again, Helga does often feel closeness and wholeness in the connection that "race" can provide: "The ties which bound her forever to these mysterious, these terrible, these fascinating, these lovable, dark hordes. Ties that were of the spirit. Ties only superficially entangled with mere outline of features or color of skin. Deeper. Much deeper than either of these" (95).

Although she rejects the minstrel version of her racial self, Helga still holds an appalling fascination with a spiritual connectedness somehow linked with an idea of blackness.

Helga longs for something more utopian than her community of "lovable, dark hordes" offers. Once again, however, this yearning for a deeper, perhaps maternal unity, is unmet. Helga's inarticulateness, her silences at important moments, and ultimately her intense desire to find a utopian heterosexual romance anticipating Janie and Tea Cake's early courtship, sabotages any hope for wholeness of self. More precisely, Helga struggles with her racialization as an exoticized, hyper-sexual woman—a construction produced simultaneously by (not only the white European's but also by Helga herself) the whiteness of her surveyors. As a kind of primitive exotic token for the arrogant Aryan Axel Olsen and her Danish relatives in Copenhagen, she begins to enjoy some of the attention she receives: "Helga Crane's new existence was intensely pleasant to her; it greatly augmented her sense of self-importance" (74). From the moment she arrives in Copenhagen, she acts as a "Silent, unmoving" (65) exotic museum piece: "she had only to bow and look pleasant. Herr and Fru Dahl did the talking, answered the questions" (70). At first, she relishes the freedom of expression that Denmark culture allows her, and dresses in vibrant and gaudy clothing that emphasizes her ability to "make an impression, a voluptuous impression" (74). Here she participates in the literal construction of her body as sexual, exotic, and available to men.

Helga's impending romance with the famous painter Axel Olsen is one of the series of disappointments she experiences with men, from James Vayle in Naxos to Robert Anderson in New York to the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green in southern Alabama. Helga's status as an unspeaking, captivating object in Copenhagen is further emphasized by her first

meeting with Olsen, for whom "she could think of no proper word of greeting" (71). She begins to include Olsen in her hetero-fantasies and feels flattered by his attention and desire to paint her portrait, thinking that she could at last be married, "a thing that at one time she had wanted, tried to bring about" (85). She is at once approvingly surveyed by this man and silenced by him. As a mute object of the male gaze—"Helga, who had a stripped, naked feeling under his direct glance" (86)—she becomes even less capable of speaking her mind. When her aunt questions her about a possible marriage with Olsen, she admits, "I can't tell a thing about him," and fell into a little silence. 'Not a thing,' she repeated. But the phrase, though audible, was addressed to no one" (79). Helga has neither voice nor listening or understanding audience, and is therefore left adrift, without community one again.

Silent and estranged by her position as ultimate outsider in Copenhagen, Helga continues her stint as a primitive art piece before finally finding her voice of protest. The portrait itself literalizes her status as a thing to be admired for its foreignness and its sexual appeal: "[S]he had never quite...forgiven Olsen for that portrait. It wasn't, she contended, herself at all, but some disgusting sensual creature with her features... Anyone with half an eye could see that it wasn't, at all, like her" (89). Despite her initial feelings of excitement at the acceptance of her outer appearance, Helga is profoundly disturbed by the painted portrayal that Axel unveils. Nathan Huggins aptly describes the conflicted nature of Helga's self-perception: "Through his portrait of her, Helga's sensual and 'primitive' nature [is exposed]...He senses a tiger, an animal within her which he wants to possess—to ravish and be ravished—through marriage if necessary" (*Harlem Renaissance* 158). Helga possesses enough self-awareness in this optically shocking moment to recognize that she is



not the stereotype, despite her desire for sexual agency. She cannot accept a formulaic primitivist version of her sexuality. In response to Olsen's marriage proposal, she insists that she is "not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man" (87). Unfortunately, the construction of Helga as a "sensual creature" seems the only one afforded her within a racist culture, and thereby continually obstructs her access to a positive perception of any primal, authentic, true, or whole existence.

To further illustrate the tumultuous nature of Helga's quest for that indefinable something that will finally make her feel complete, Larsen narrates Helga's brief celebrations of symbiosis with past feelings of wholeness throughout the novel. Many of these instances are connected with Helga's wish for a romantic relationship. To be sure, Helga can rarely see beyond the alluring power of heterosexual romance, although her relationship with Axel Olsen represents an exception. For instance, Helga experiences a momentary hope for completeness in the arms of Robert Anderson, who was recently married to her Harlem socialite and sometimes-friend Anne. She admits her desire for him once she returns from Copenhagen to Harlem, after rejecting the decidedly cold Olsen. Later, Helga relives in her memory the "ecstasy which had flooded her" with "riotous and colorful dreams" as she and Anderson shared a kiss (105). Once again, however, she is unable to speak about her desire—"she danced with him, always in perfect silence. She couldn't, she absolutely couldn't, speak a word to him." Helga then views her recollection of the kiss as a "mental quagmire" and completely denies her feelings once Anderson rejects her: "It had meant nothing to her" (107). After she slaps him in her unbridled fury, there remains a "deep silence" as she leaves the room "without a word of contrition or apology" (108). Later Helga admits her reliance upon the promise of this

relationship, as well as her complete devastation and dread at the prospect of a future without Anderson: "She had wanted so terribly something from him. Something special. And now she had forfeited it forever. Helga had an instantaneous shocking perception of what forever meant. And then, like a flash, it was gone, leaving an endless stretch of dreary years before her appalled vision." Here, the first words she spoke at the beginning of the novel come back to haunt Helga with ill-fated ferocity, and prove that her self-destructive behavior with men is a large part of her failed self-concept.

Conversely, however, Larsen allows Helga a few brief moments of vision throughout the novel, but these instances are not enough to suggest that Helga is capable of any Hurstonian perspective of an all-encompassing whole. The instant she makes the decision to stay in New York the first time, "she felt reborn. She began happily to paint the future in vivid colors. The world had changed to silver, and life ceased to be a struggle and become a gay adventure" (36). Once established in New York, "she lost that tantalizing oppression of loneliness and isolation which always, it seemed, had been part of her existence" (45). Here she begins to reimagine her dream of marriage and upper middleclass domestic bliss with "one of those alluring brown or yellow men...[who] could give to her the things which she had now come to desire, a home..., cars of expensive makes..., clothes and furs..., servants, and leisure." At the thought of finding a husband in Alabama, she decides, "It was a chance at stability, at permanent happiness, that she meant to take" (117). At another moment in New York she "began to make plans and to dream delightful dreams of change, of life somewhere else...With rapture almost, she let herself drop into the blissful sensation of visualizing herself in different, strange places, among approving and admiring people, where she would be appreciated, and understood" (56-7).

This short-lived moment of vision is still completely vague in its conception of where that otherworldly place might be and under what circumstances she would finally be received and understood, however dependent upon people's outward acceptance of herself she might be. In each, Helga's limited view is tied with the fulfillment of a white-washed version of uplifted middleclass marriage and its Naxos-inspired strictures of conduct.

Inevitably, Helga's struggles with finding an integrated sense of self—as a "mulatto" in early twentieth-century America—and the dominant white culture's insistence on making her feel divided and dissatisfied consistently cloud any moments of possible futurity. In an extremely revealing moment, Helga wants to utilize her sensuality as a vehicle for freedom, yet she literally wears a garment of net. Preparing for a dinner party in Harlem, she considers wearing her dress of "cobwebby black net touched with orange, which she had bought last spring in a fit of extravagance and never worn" (56). Helga recalls Anne's comment that, "There's not enough of it, and what is there gives you the air of something about to fly." In response, Helga "smiled as she decided that she would certainly wear the black net. For her it would be a symbol. She was about to fly." This statement is typical of Helga's self-sabotaging behavior. Even if she holds hope in some witchy flight of fancy, she wears the accoutrements of captivity. The dress is indicative of Helga's belief, given her level of internalized hatred, that she does not actually deserve any grander vision for her life.

The (primitivist) choron moments in the Harlem club or the Copenhagen vaudeville show, and the religious ecstasy Helga experiences later in the novel represent an unsettling amalgamation with maternally-bound wholeness. Her desire to bond with this sense of unity draws her finally from New York to the deep south. She is at first drawn

into a religious revival in an old New York storefront by the song "which she was conscious of having heard years ago... 'Showers of blessings'" (111). In this scene, music is a possible gateway to Helga's journey back to her infantile self, the self that does not understand the meanings of words. Kristeva indicates in the return to the maternal sphere of the semiotic that we are "searching for the inscriptions of language of the archaic contact with the maternal body which has never been forgotten...they are to be found in the tempo of the voice, in the rapidity of delivery...or in certain musicalities" ("A Question of Subjectivity" 135). But this song becomes ominous for Helga:

Fascinated, [she] watched until there crept upon her an indistinct horror of an unknown world...observing rites of a remote obscure origin...the horror held her. She remained motionless...foul, vile, and terrible, with its mixture of breaths, its contact of bodies, its concerted convulsions, all in wild appeal for a single soul. Her soul...she felt an echo of the weird orgy resound in her own heart; she felt herself possessed by the same madness. (Larsen 113)

This passage furthers my discussion on the primitivist oceanic, wordlessness, and not only lack but loss of self and connection with others. Once again Helga is fascinated by something horrible which inevitably draws her in because she has no words to protest its power. Helga's descent into madness is perpetrated by her fear of the destructive yet alluring oceanic, and she is soon subsumed by it: "The thing became real. A miraculous calm came upon her. Life seemed to expand and to become very easy. Helga Crane felt within her a supreme aspiration toward the regaining of simple happiness" (114). On the one hand Helga is compelled into a controlling and chaotic vortex, while on the other she

finds a sense of happiness and peace in thus being utterly possessed. Helga cannot achieve an effortless mutuality with the ordinary part of herself. The maddening struggle of giving herself over to this seductive song is at once comforting, because it seems easier to give in that to continue to fight, and, ultimately threatening, because it means that she has renounced her will to this larger influence.

The liberating sensibility afforded Helga by her sexual desire finds a fleeting outlet in the southern religious community she eventually joins at the end of the novel. Helga at first believes, much like Janie when she meets Tea Cake, that this community offers her something she seems to be searching for throughout her life. Once she finds a sense of home there, it seems that "everything contributed to her gladness in living" (120). Yet the culturally prescribed dark underside of Freudian oceanic whiteness continually haunts her because the "symbolics" of her "race" restrict her ability to fully indulge in any unified idea of herself. Tragically, her only true moment of vision comes with a total annihilation of her self: "Chaotic turmoil. With the obscuring curtain of religion rent, she was able to look about her and see with shocked eyes this thing that she had done to herself...The white man's God. And his great love for all people regardless of race! What idiotic nonsense she had allowed herself to believe...The dark eyes filled with tears" (130). Helga finally sees behind the "obscuring curtain" of the institution of religion and finds herself demolished by its power. With full understanding of the ravaging supremacy of a white, imperialist, primitivist version of religion upon her own race, Helga, in a brutal critique of fundamentalist Christianity, finally recognizes the fact that "She had ruined her life" (133). The idyllic heterosexual romance once again utterly fails to make her life complete because she is disgusted by her husband: "She hated this man" (129). Undoubtedly, there

is no convergence between self and other in their marriage: "Between them the vastness of the universe had come." Not only must Helga give up her dream of finding wholeness of self, she must also realize that the institution of marriage—something that held for her the promise of contentment—is broken.

Helga's convergence with a white, European, and undeniably Freudian sense of the oceanic ultimately prevents her reunion with any ideal of maternal wholeness. As she lies in agony near the end of the novel, a debilitated and once again pregnant mother of five, she thinks of "her mother, whom she had loved from a distance and finally scornfully blamed, who appeared as she had always remembered her, unbelievably beautiful, young, and remote" (128). For a moment it appears that she might embrace a kind of perfectly whole past—"It was refreshingly delicious, the immersion in the past" (129)—yet this place is inextricably linked with an "appalling blackness of pain" (128). Once again, the hoped-for wholeness of the past can only uncover anguish. Helga can only experience a sense of beauty in what Gloria Anzaldúa describes as a feeling of "completa" (51)—"she hovered for a long time somewhere in that delightful borderland in the edge of consciousness, and enchanted and blissful place where peace and incredible quiet encompassed her" (Larsen 128)—for an instant before she recognizes that "it was finished now. It was over" (129). Helga is for a flash full of peace and contentment in a "blissful" state of consciousness, completa. Inescapably, this feeling will not last, and her search for wholeness has ended in total despair. The very real symbolisms of racism finally impede Helga's imaginative pursuit of fullness. Helga, as a result of her oppression and confusion at the hands of racist cultural hegemony, the would-be positive elements of a fragmentary yet euphoric, maternally-bonded state of existence (often available in the choron moment) are either

made negative or are just not available to her. I contend that the fragmented nature of the chorán moment expresses not the broken nature of the modern psyche, but rather the blissful chaos of the intersubjective maternal experience, one in which the infant is euphorically unaware of any boundaries between her own body and her mother's. Helga Crane cannot recover this blissful lack of societal boundaries.

Marriage and motherhood, instead of representing a traditional kind of feminine completion, are only another link in the chain that binds Helga Crane from enjoying connectedness with a wholeness of self or community.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Helga's "recollection of her own childhood, lonely, unloved" (Larsen 135) denies her the possibility of escaping the children born of her womb. Unlike in the case of Warner's Timothy Fortune, the echo of a murmuring voice does not elicit comfort but "a tearing agony, a rending of deepest fibers": Helga's painful self-realization is that, "She felt that through all the rest of her lifetime she would be hearing their cry of 'Mummy, Mummy, Mummy' through sleepless nights." Helga cannot merge with a sense of maternal wholeness even in her own function as mother; instead, "Her womb entraps her so much that through childbearing she is left a tragic lifeless shell" (Thornton 301). Once again, Helga's speech is halted: "I'm still," she reasoned, 'too weak, too sick. By and by, when I'm really strong—'(135). Her fate could not be more different from Janie Crawford's; utterly lacking in voice, vision, or communal wholeness, Helga ends her story in a position of total extinction.<sup>17</sup> The hegemonic forces of racism absolutely interrupt and even disengage any possibility of full connectedness with the chorán state of being in this novel.<sup>18</sup>

As a kind of classically (M)odern, fragmented subject who must come to grips with the duality of her black and white origins, Helga's position in *Quicksand* is utterly complex

and eventually self-alienated. It follows that since she sees herself as both black and white, Helga's identity does not fall easily within the confines of either racial designation.<sup>19</sup> Helga is a kind of border case; she cannot seem to bridge the gap between her white self and the other racialized self projected upon her by a white supremacist society. She is caught between realization of self and the other within in a desperate clash with the unspeakable things unspoken. As Cheryl Wall puts it, Larsen's confusion "both the loss of racial identity and the denial of self required of women who conform to restrictive gender roles... As [Larsen's] characters deviate from the norm, they are defined—indeed too often define themselves—as Other" (131). Kimberly Monda contends that because Helga is denied the relational sources of connection with her mother and a shared social reality, "Larsen dramatizes her heroine's double alienation:...[Helga] lacks both...traditional sources of communal identity" (24). It is exactly these restraining symbolics of racism that deny Helga full access to what would be an Anzaldúan "delicious caving into [her]self" (51), nor can she access any communal understanding of wholeness.<sup>20</sup>

Is there then, fundamentally, no access to a choran sense of communal interconnectivity for those who are not white (or definably black or white)?<sup>21</sup> Debra Silverman helps to provide an answer:

What is suppressed is perhaps a realization that her inner life is structured by hegemonic notions of blackness, by the fiction of the 'jungle.'...[Larsen] permits an exploration of [identity] that never fully, or comfortably, sits within racist definitions...she does this by permitting Helga to seek other things in other places—to move between whiteness and blackness without fitting in either place. (612)



Helga is inevitably subsumed by a misogynist culture that is also racist; she has no chance to transcend her underclass, raced and sexed position and can become nothing more than a debilitated mother who is “used up” (Larsen 123) by her children. She must endure the squalor her life has become as a wife and overworked mother while sometimes dreaming of a lush life just out of her reach, in community represented by the “freedom and cities,...clothes and books,...the sweet mingled smell of Houbigant and cigarettes in softly lighted room filled with inconsequential chatter and laughter and sophisticated tuneless music” (135). The soulful song is obliterated by racism in America at the beginning of the twentieth century: “Life wasn’t a miracle, a wonder. It was, for Negroes at least, only a great disappointment” (130).

Nella Larsen’s female protagonist cannot experience the luxury of communal interconnectivity like that of Janie Crawford or many of the characters in Jean Toomer’s *Cane*.<sup>22</sup> Without a nostalgic sense of the past or a promise of wholeness in the future, Helga Crane represents the harsh reality of life for black women living the early twentieth-century urban experience. Following Wall, I suspect the reason for this negative portrayal of black womanhood, held against Toomer’s celebratory depiction of modern American life, is the fact that, “As a woman, Larsen was unable to romanticize the unceasing toil and continuous childbearing that was the particular oppression of rural women...Helga knows she is neither exotic nor primitive, ‘savage’ nor sharecropper”; she resists male definitions of womanhood (115-116). Larsen viewed the folk tradition with more ambivalence than Toomer.<sup>23</sup> As Monda argues, ultimately,

Larsen’s bitter, satiric vision of Helga’s entrapment in a terrifyingly literal

portrait of wifely and motherly self-sacrifice condemns the racist and sexist society that allows a woman to be murdered by her domestic role even as it highlights Helga's own contribution to this oppression: her failure to learn from the past and thus to grant herself the recognition she does not receive from the men [and more importantly, her own mother] in her life. (24)

Because Helga cannot access an "authenticated" or utopian sense of the past, and has not received recognition from her mother or from her community in any setting, she is left completely at a loss.<sup>24</sup> Yet at the same time I would argue that Helga *cannot* escape the quicksand—comprised in part of oppressive white and/or male definitions of black womanhood—that entraps her in every possible capacity.<sup>25</sup> These oppressive racist and sexist constructions are indomitably ever-present in Helga's conception of self.

During Larsen's lifetime, she was encouraged by Carl Van Vechten and Walter White, and won second prize from the Harmon Foundation for *Quicksand* in 1928. Du Bois praised this novel as "the best piece of fiction that Negro America has produced since the heyday of Chesnut" (qtd. in McDowell ix). Larsen won the Guggenheim in 1930 so that she could proceed with a third novel, but she never published it. She was accused of plagiarism<sup>26</sup> (a charge which hung over her in Harlem) after the publication of her last short story, which was ironically titled "Sanctuary," in that same year. Wall observes that Larsen ceased to be involved with activities there after her divorce. As a result, she vanished from her promising position in the Harlem Renaissance literary scene. Wall also remarks upon the intensity of Larsen's narrative and its role in determining her fate in the tradition of American black female fiction:

Nella Larsen must have been aware all along that the work she did was dangerous. Examining the intersection of race, class, and gender was a perilous business. She could derive no safe or simple truths...her novels often raise questions...about the significance of race and racial difference that Larsen does not presume to answer—an act of honesty and courage, not cowardice. (138)<sup>27</sup>

McDowell notes in her Introduction to *Quicksand* that the resurgence of formerly lost women's literature that came as a result of the gynocritical of feminist scholars in the 1970's left Larsen out. The reprinting of Larsen's novels is a significant part of the recovery project begun in the 1970's.

Thanks to the efforts of black feminist critics like Thadious Davis, the reprinting of her novels in the mid-1980's has gained Nella Larsen a new audience of feminist admirers who have begun to fully recognize her as a visionary modern novelist. In her biography, Davis claims that Larsen found her much longed for place to belong posthumously because post Civil Rights African Americans forged "familial ties" with her in an "effort to establish kinship and heritage...laying claim to Nella Larsen as one of their own" (345)—part of Davis's, and other feminist scholars', reclamation project. As Bettye J. Williams rightly states, "With an assertiveness like that of her...predecessors, Larsen articulated Afrocentric feminist thought in her fiction...She situated race, gender, and class as interlocking systems of oppression [and]...by placing African American women as subjects, she offered transformed images of African American womanhood" (170). George Hutchinson aptly speaks to Larsen's implicit connection between the treatment of race in her novel and the value of ethics: "Never embracing Jean Toomer's idea of a 'new race,'

Larsen rather exposed the violence of racialization as such—the force that had divided her from her mother—in the attempt to make it ethically insupportable, an affront to humanity” (“Nella Larsen and the Veil of Race” 345). Although Helga is ultimately barred by sexist, racist, and Anglo hetero-normative ideologies from full participation in the modernist aesthetic of interconnectivity, Nella Larsen’s depiction of that striving represents a powerfully feminist and political statement about the position of the modern African American woman. Helga’s appalling experience is indeed “an affront to humanity” and a literalization of the unspeakable things unspoken. Because Helga is unable to speak from her oppressed subject position, readers might recall that unspoken voice. Larsen, therefore, forces her readers to look within their own lives for an ethics which would have supported Helga in her process of becoming a whole self.

A Counter-reading to Conquest: “Primitivism” and Utopian Longing in Sylvia Townsend Warner’s *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot*

Sylvia Townsend Warner remembers finishing her novel *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot* (1927) “in a state of semi-hallucination...then impulsively writing the envoy, with a feeling of compunction, almost guilt, towards this guiltless man I had created in such a fix” (qtd. in Harman 69). Indeed, she comments that, “I love [Fortune] with a dreadful uneasy love which in itself denotes him a cripple” (70). Warner returns to the Timothy Fortune, who seems to haunt her psyche, in her novella *The Salutation* (1930), a sequel to *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot* recently published for the first time. She expresses her dissatisfaction with the portrayal of Fortune, for whom she feels some continual sympathy: “I wrote it out of my

heart as an *amende* to poor Timothy. Not that I could make him any happier, but to show that I did not forget him” (124). Her need to write this “envoy” suggests that Warner wrote her novel with a mixture of pity and derision for the typical English gentleman seeking to indoctrinate the “primitive Other” with the empire of religion. Warner’s ambivalent attitude resists the model of history that says white Europeans must continue doing what they have always done in inhabiting the space between self and other, even if only for ephemeral moments. Warner’s uncertainty about her protagonist, complicated by my own uneasiness with her use of primitivism to suggest socio-political change, reveals a productive rift, a threshold between empathy and distance. Here I invite the reader to enter this into “third space.”<sup>28</sup>

Primitivism, as the inextricable symbiosis of black and white culture,<sup>29</sup> has been well-established as integral to the development of modernist aesthetics by scholars such as Nathan Irvin Huggins, Houston A. Baker, Jr,<sup>30</sup> and Sieglinde Lemke. In this section, I discuss textual moments of utopian unity created by modernist woman author Sylvia Townsend Warner, who appropriates primitivism in her satirical, anti-imperialist novel *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot* by creating moments of prelinguistic unity.<sup>31</sup> Following the work of Mary Louise Pratt, we can look for points of convergence in difference; in these “contact zones” we can begin the creation of a counternarrative to conquest in the space in between self and other. This potentially radical aesthetic method (embodied by the choran moment) is the initial stage in an equal encounter that seeks to respect (without judgment) the experience of another. My aim in exploring the connections between primitivism and the choran moment in Warner’s novel is to reinvent the negative, condescending, and often violent connotations of the so-called primitive experience by absorbing it within the context of

reciprocity between self and other. Modernist interconnectivity and the phenomenon of the choran moment become, then, possible working sites between genders, cultures, races and sexualities, resulting in the reformulation of community.<sup>32</sup>

In her novel's title, Warner intends the definition of maggot as a whimsical or perverse fancy.<sup>33</sup> As *Mr. Fortune's Maggot* begins, the Reverend Timothy Fortune, ex-clerk of Lloyds Bank in London, has spent ten years as a South Seas Island missionary when a "maggot" impels him to embark on what he describes as "a sort of pious escapade"—an assignment to the even more remote island of Fanua, where a white man is a rarity. Mr. Fortune, a self-proclaimed good and humble man, wishes to bring the joys of Christianity to the innocent "heathen." But in his three years on Fanua he makes only one convert, the boy Lueli. The love between them and the sensuous freedom of the islanders produce in Mr. Fortune a shattering change in heart, and he decides to leave Fanua in the midst of a distant but impending world war.

Mr. Fortune's sexuality is unstable throughout the novel, yet he strives to keep all under control upon his arrival. He appears on the South Pacific island of Fanua as a typical English imperialist missionary man. Fortune is quick to order his new environment, but he still approaches this adventure as an excited, over-sexed adolescent might embrace the sensual abandon his new identity soon provides: "There seemed to be no end to the marvels and delights of his island, and he was thrilled as though he had been let loose into the world for the first time" (12). He is determined to live like "the natives," while simultaneously upholding his religious devotion and keeping his supposed superior morality intact. Gay Wachman argues convincingly that Warner's "apparently idyllic representation of oceanic sexuality in *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*...most explicitly draws upon

(and satirizes) the utopian evolutionist sexology” of Edward Carpenter, the nineteenth-century sexologist who declared the superiority of “the intermediate sex” (70). Carpenter states that those more primitive people would “lead humankind toward a more spiritual, natural life in which the divisions of sex and gender would be transcended” (qtd. in Wachman 66). At the very least, it seems that Fortune embraces the opportunity to “go native” soon after he arrives on the island.

The natural life afforded by Fanua (a possible anagram of flora and fauna) seems, at first, to lead Fortune toward Carpenter’s kind of sublime androgyny. Fortune extols the childlike simplicity of the island’s beauty—“this gay landscape which might have been coloured out of a child’s paint-box” (16). Yet Warner’s narrator quickly contradicts Fortune’s first response to the island’s indigenous beauty. While Fortune initially primitivizes the seemingly pure landscape, apparently he is not able to comprehend its true beauty. He closes his eyes in a reverie of prayer and the narrator goes on: “from the expression on his face one would have said that he was all the more aware of the beauty around him for having his eyes shut, for he seemed like one in an ecstasy and his clasped hands trembled as though they had hold of a joy too great for him” (17-18). Incidentally, while “gazing with wonder and admiration” (18) at what he perceives as the Lord’s handiwork, Fortune comes upon Lueli, “his first convert” (19), whom he instantly renames “Theodore, which means the gift of God.” In one prolonged gaze over the countryside, the Reverend Timothy Fortune has countenanced the power and beauty of nature laid bare solely for his personal, passionate benefit, as well as his own authority to name and thereby lay claim to the island’s people, who are, from his perspective, also given to him by the Almighty God.<sup>34</sup>

Warner allows Fortune a similar series of moments of repose in the idyllic space he has come to encounter, cultivate and claim for his own, but she also presents her character as unstable and even comic. Fortune is clearly characterized as a masculine, colonialist missionary who becomes enraptured at the idea of providing tutelage for his only convert, the kind and docile young man, Lueli. Yet, like a fastidious 1950s housewife, he tidies his surroundings into a feminized domestic space while simultaneously struggling against his oscillating desires for Lueli. Throughout their tumultuous relationship, it is true that, as one critic puts it, “Timothy [Fortune] behaves more like a spurned lover than a wrathful saver of souls” (Rigby 228). Nigel Rigby argues that it is actually Lueli who performs this desire “to break down the reductive and destructive binaries through which European civilization constructed itself” in the text, that in his “tolerant feminine qualities, [he is more] receptive to difference” than Fortune (239-40). Warner’s comic reversal, through the creation of a feminized imperial missionary, allows this Englishman to reconnect with his own untainted nature through convergence with what he believes is a more authentic place. Her political point is that what turns out to be Fortune’s self-conversion is only made available through his imperialist missionary work. Ultimately then, Warner is more radical than Rigby suggests because she posits the possibility that even the most stilted, sexually repressed, fanatically religious, British elitist can experience personal transformation, even though fraught with Fortune’s perception of Fanua as archaic in the first place.<sup>35</sup>

Even so, Warner depicts Fanua as not yet colonized, and it is abundantly evident that Mr. Fortune will not succeed in his efforts to lay claim to the island or its inhabitants. Her decision to set the novel in a place yet to be tainted with colonialism demonstrates



Warner's desire to tell a different, perhaps anti-colonial, story. The interaction between Lueli and Fortune reveals a healthy measure of the necessary kind of sympathy (from both sides) that has the potential to revolutionize relationships between otherwise would-be imperialists and the "natives" they seek to control. Mr. Timothy Fortune's connection with his natural self liberates him, and he experiences an intellectual and emotional awakening to his own role in the militant religious and colonialist machine, as well as to his homosexuality. Lueli is initially described in primitivist terms that gradually extend to homoerotic, placing Fortune's position as the white, normative gazer as suspect. Wachman, too, notes that throughout her novel, Warner "presents the colonialist discourse of the 'primitive' ironically, introducing and then immediately undercutting stereotypes of class and 'race' upon which imperialist power depends" (92). In this way, Warner carefully satirizes his self-realization. Warner constantly mocks and rewrites binaries of self and other. Indeed Warner's ambiguity about the ethics of her character results in Fortune's troubling unreliability.

Upon first meeting Lueli, Fortune describes him as a typical white European might—in animalistic terms—and intimates his desire to correct and categorize him as some kind of exotic creature:

He felt as though he were watching some entirely new kind of being, too spontaneous to be human, too artless to be a monkey, too sensitive to be a bird or squirrel or lizard; and he wished that he had been more observant of creation, so that he could find out what it was that Lueli resembled. Only some women, happy in themselves and in their love, will show to a lover or

husband this kind of special grace; but this Mr. Fortune , whose love affairs had been hasty and conventional, did not know. (21)

Almost immediately, then, Lueli is laid out for Fortune's private, inspecting gaze, as he wonders about Lueli's physical charm—and all this while Warner's narrator looks on with some derision at Fortune's own lack of self-scrutiny.<sup>36</sup> In reprehensible fashion, Fortune refers to Lueli as "the true Polynesian type, slender-boned and long-limbed" (21) while also noting that "the boy looked very refined for one who had been so recently a heathen" (22). Fortune acts as an anthropologist set out to catalog all the plant and animal species he stumbles upon in the "wild." His voyeuristic investigation of Lueli's "elegance" draws him to the conclusion that "it seemed as though he had been decorated for no better reason than the artist's pleasure" (23). The question is: whose behavior indicates hedonism here? Fortune's romanticizing gaze places him in the position of a repressed, yet overemotional, proto-Romantic artist whose appreciative response to the beauty of the physical world is just waiting to be realized in this intoxicating primitive place. Disturbingly enough, his deep connection with the primitive here comes as a result of Lueli's objectification as a kind of noble savage, an intriguing new racial type awaiting his expert, imperialist classification.

However, Warner's queering of Fortune—he is even said to have a "housewifely mind" (211)—destabilizes him as a legitimate instrument of a masculinist British Empire and calls into question whether Warner is actually being ironic in her depiction of Fanua as an especially sensual and free locale. Fortune repeatedly denies the possibility of homoerotic desire on his part, in spite of the fact that he is continuously described as effeminate—a boy who read books "secretly and rather bashfully, because [they were]

book[s] for girls" (89). Fortune literally flees the presence of the young women of the island, calling them "nymphs" (28) and "young whores" (29), and feels rather that, "he could have endured even twice as many girls as the price of being soothed by one such boy" (30). Still, he initially refuses to succumb to Lueli's oiling of his body after a bathing because he cannot submit himself to "their way...his views on oiling were inherent and unshakable. They were inherent in the very marrow of his backbone, which was a British one. Oiling, and all that sort of thing, was effeminate, unbecoming, and probably vicious" (93). On the other hand, Fortune primps himself as a supposed measure to garner respect from the natives. But for someone who, before he met the fascinating Lueli, "was rather careless about his appearance," his present behavior enacts that of a man more interested in attracting a (male) lover: "he made his toilet with extraordinary circumspection and deliberation" (38).

Fortune soon realizes "a curious sensation that...he was [a] man of stone" (38) whose rigid self-definition denotes a great deal of anxiety. Mr. Fortune strives to maintain a typically masculine, stone-like exterior self while his true, inner self bursts forth with longing, finally cracking the outer construction in eruptive homosexual panic. An anxious moment occurs just after scolding and threatening Lueli ("For I cannot allow myself to love a boy who flouts me'!) for foiling his attempts to Christianize him (40). It is in the consequent connection with Lueli's body that Fortune begins to realize the truth of Lueli's (and his own) humanity:

Now he spoke almost pleadingly...for his hand was no longer stone but flesh and blood...suddenly, and completely to his surprise, he found himself convulsed with laughter...so utterly unexpected, so perfectly natural, rapt

him into an ecstasy of appreciation...He had never been so real before...he squealed as he fetched his breath. (42-3)

Warner reveals moments of *jouissance* for Fortune, in spite of his rigid religious life, suggesting that he might actually be more like his perception of the natives than he even realizes.

Following this almost orgasmic episode, Mr. Fortune experiences a moment of repose. He releases himself against a tree to enjoy a moment in which to “look...at his thoughts” and see himself more clearly. This erotically charged instance borders on post-coital, and represents a particular example of the way in which the reconnection with the maternal utopia enacts what feminist critic Gloria Anzaldúa calls “the space in-between from which to think” (172), the moment that arrests time and offers personal (and possibly communal) transformation. In Fortune’s realization that “I do feel most extraordinarily happy. And as mild as milk—as mothers’ milk” (45), he begins to understand that “he had gone to making an irremediable fool of himself” (43). In his newfound sense of happiness, he appears as tranquil as a child at his mother’s breast. At length, “he was profoundly satisfied, and rather pleased with himself, with his new self, that is.” In this instance of (perhaps) serious alteration, Fortune fuels his contentment with his self-recognition.

At this point in the novel, we are still not sure of the validity of Fortune’s self-transformation. He still views Lueli as an object to be analyzed for his own personal benefit. Fortune begins to fear that he has finally lost Lueli’s affection to the idol he ordered the boy to destroy: “A frightful imagination took possession of him: that Lueli was become like his idol, a handsome impassive thing of brown wood, that had ears and heard not, that had no life in its heart” (118). This sense of urgency is augmented by the chaotic

arrival of an earthquake, which comically heaves his beloved “harmonium” on top of him (119). Yet even in the midst of the debilitating forces of nature, Fortune can only think regretfully of his relationship with Lueli. He laments that, “I know now he never cared for me” just before Lueli becomes his knight in shining armor by rescuing him from the heaving harmonium and the festering fire. Warner stresses the “horribly comic” (121) situation at hand in narrating Fortune’s pathetic self-indulgence and total ineffectuality in the face of disaster here, further destabilizing him as a representative of British class and gender normalcy or pre-eminence.<sup>37</sup>

It soon becomes evident that the accouterments of “civilized” culture no longer have meaning within this primitive space. The order of British empire is most explicitly undercut in the text once Fortune’s watch stops functioning: “It had stopped...his last link with European civilization had been snapped...[which] upset him horribly. He felt frightened, he felt as small and as desperate as a child lost” (142). Significantly, it is at this juncture in the novel that Fortune begins his process of metamorphoses, yet for the moment, he cannot feel comfort in the unfolding chaos. First he must reset his watch, although this gesture ultimately highlights his anxious feeling of failure: “It began to tick, innocently, obediently. It had set out on its fraudulent career” (143).

Warner also reveals, in Fortune’s panicked reaction to the earthquake and the ensuing eruption of the island volcano, his fear of a Freudian oceanic, evidencing his dread of female sexuality. In response to the shock of the earthquake, Fortune and Lueli create a haven of protection in one another’s presence, a contact zone that wards off the danger of nature unleashed: “Mr. Fortune had forgotten the sea. Now he remembered what he had read in books of adventure as a boy: how after an earthquake comes a tidal wave...[and

he and Lueli] sat side by side, holding on to one another” (122). More than the actual ocean, the volcanic vigor beneath the sea comes to represent Fortune’s terror in the prospect of a kind of traditionally feminine power<sup>38</sup>—“the foundations of the great deep, into an unimaginable hell of energy and black burning” (126)—that ironically parallels the release of his own truer self. The gaping mouth of the volcano is analogous to the fearful orifices of womanhood Fortune would surely flee, much like the “nymphs” and “whores” who live on the island.<sup>39</sup>

A case in point occurs later, when Fortune inspects the crater while “grasping for breath and cowed by the frantic beating of his heart, which did not seem to belong to him, behaving like some wild animal” (213). He remembers the story of “the woman Kapiolani, the Christian convert of Hawaii” (214) whose faith was stronger than his own. He also evokes the story of Pele the Fire-goddess whose dangerous female sexuality causes him anxiety: “Pele fell asleep...to dream; snarling to herself, and hotly, voluptuously, obscurely triumphing in a dream what her next awakening would be” (215). As he looks down at the crater, he notes that “by night the spectacle might have had a sort of Medusa’s head beauty, for ever wakeful...and dangerous” (218). Fortune seems to equate female sexual energy with the impending re-convergence with the maternal body that he cannot escape: “Everywhere in the woods was the odour of mortality; it was sweet to him, like a *home-coming*” (219; my emphasis).

Fortune simultaneously dreads and welcomes this homecoming. While he fears the inevitability of the fire, Fortune is also somehow drawn to this power, illustrating conflicting urges both to reintegrate with the maternal body and to abandon and abject that body: “Though the next moment might engulf him he was going to make the most of

this...he sat down again and relinquished himself to an entire and passive contemplation, almost lulled by the inexhaustible procession of fire and smoke, warming his mind at the lonely terrific beauty of a mountain burning by night amid an ocean" (126-7). Fortune's encounter with this wholly primal power further renders him a changed man: "It was as though the earthquake had literally shaken his wits. All his recollections were dislodged and tumbled together" (135). Bruce Knoll remarks that Warner "sets up nature as a female ethic completely outside the patriarchy" (355). At this moment in *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*, Warner uses the chaotic power of Nature as the driving force of Fortune's transformation and to create a maternally-connected, whole experience for her protagonist. Her illuminated moment reflects an awakening to a revised understanding of the self. Like the communication of Nature in her first novel (which comes in the form of a storm), Nature's call here "implies a relationship of reciprocity" (357) that enacts interplay between and among inner and outer self, self and other, and ultimately, self and community.

Fortune then, throughout the novel, intermittently embraces the utopian moment of interconnectivity. At a party to celebrate the safety of the natives after the volcanic eruption, he begins to relax for a time: "Mr. Fortune was much happier than he expected to be. He was now engaged in growing a beard, and freed from any obligation to convert his housemates he found their society very agreeable" (151). He decides to bury the "bones" of his harmonium, lamp, sewing-machine, all the signs of his former domesticity and his civilized life. He asks Lueli to remember him while wearing a floral crown for their final party because this seems to be his moment of supreme happiness: "Fortune walked home with Lueli by moonlight...A night bird was calling among the trees—a soft breathy

note like an also flute—and the roof of the hut shone in the moonlight” (244). Perhaps then the imagery of domesticity is not entirely expunged from Fortune’s association with the idyllic primitive space. Here Fortune experiences the rapture of a romantic and beautiful moment with his newfound love, and both the natural and the domestic worlds reflect the light of his joy.

Warner’s depiction of a kind of Edenic primitivism, a common blunder for modernist writers, cannot entirely escape Gay Wachman’s disapproval, even in its clever response to Robert Louis Stevenson’s life and writings.<sup>40</sup> In scenes where this intersubjective moment is represented, it is always in collusion with the primitive present. As soon as the opening passages of the novel, as Fortune remembers his English past, he thinks, “And now he scarcely knew himself for happiness. The former things were passed away...the bank...There had passed the worst days of his life...And now he was at Fanua, and at his side squatted Lueli” (54). Very soon after he settles on Fanua he contemplates the joyful power of the present moment in nature: “he went for a long rejoicing walk, a walk full of the most complicated animal ecstasy” and “he felt a violent sympathy with all the greenery that seemed to be wearing the deepened colour of intense gratification” (51). At this point he recognizes his liberated, “authentic” self, or “a secret core of delight, a sense of truancy, of freedom” (52). Once he begins to enjoy oiling with Lueli, he sees that, “It did him a great deal of good, and it improved his appearance ten-fold...he discovered that somehow his expression has changed” (95). This newfound bliss is a result of Fortune’s successful convergence with that primitive locale and all the openness it embodies for this formerly stilted English banker.



Warner's purpose is squarely placed upon examining how this British character responds to his own complicity in imperialism by narrating that encounter almost chiefly from that British subject's perspective. She does not do this without a sense of ambiguity or irony regarding that character. At times Fortune cannot seem to reconcile his own imperialist Englishness with the emerging sense of wholeness in his desire for primitive beauty and integrity. At the moment of staring into the crater of the volcano, Fortune reveals his fear of the connection between the primitive and the depraved in his realization that, "He had no thoughts, no feelings. What he had seen was something older than the earth; but vestigial, and to the horror of the sun what the lizard is to the dragon: degenerate" (218). Rigby notes that "it is also a product of Warner's modernism which presents Fanaa as a primitive and natural alternative to a rigid and all-consuming Western culture, and it can certainly be argued that the integrity of the island suffers from her conscious artistic decision not to explore the island society in any depth" (243). It is true that at no point in the novel do we receive the benefit of narration from an islander's consciousness.

Yet Warner's own critique, through her narrator's presentation of colonialism's primitivizing gaze, denotes Mr. Fortune's "increasing critical consciousness of the meanings of militant Christianity and imperialism" (Wachman 84). Fortune is consistently incapable of asserting the supposed superiority of his own culture over the more "primitive." One example is the representation of music in the text: "Mr. Fortune, in spite of his musical accomplishments, his cultivated taste, and enough grasp of musical theory to be able to transpose any hymn into its nearly related keys, was not so truly musical as Lueli" (69). He also finds that he respects the natives (although almost begrudgingly) too much to

continue in his quest to “civilize” them with religious doctrine: “Not that he loved his flock less. Rather he loved them more, and to his love was added (and here was the rub) a considerable amount of esteem” (99).

Fortune realizes, presumably as a result of his further emotional development through his reconnection with his preoriginary self in the primitive space, that imperialism underlies his religion because “it is torments, wounds, mutilation, and death. It is exile and weariness. It is strife—and endless strife—it is bewilderment and fear and trembling. It is despair” (112). The complete reevaluation of Fortune’s surroundings and his identity results in his loss of faith in an imperialist god. Just as he is about to disparage Lueli’s beloved idol, he recognizes the emptiness of that scolding, and narrates a deep criticism of empire itself: “He felt a deep reluctance in saying it. It seemed ungentlemanly to have such a superior invulnerable God, part of that European conspiracy which opposes gunboats to canoes and rifles to bows and arrows, which showers death from the mountains upon Indian villages, which rounds up the negro into an empire and tricks them of his patrimony” (140). Moreover, “the God who had walked with him upon the island was gone...Mr. Fortune no longer believed in a God” (147). He rejects that oppressive dogma and finds legitimacy in Lueli’s faith in his idol, conceding that “Lueli had lost something real” (148). Finally, Fortune compassionately carves Lueli a new idol. In Rigby’s words, “Timothy finally understands that not only does European colonisation succeed through the destruction of colonial difference, but that Europe is also destroying itself through its intolerance” (230). I would add that it is Fortune’s recognition of his own more whole self, largely through this measure of commiseration with the “native” experience, that results in his amelioration.

For Fortune, through his primitive connection to his own “authentic” state of consciousness, similar to Anzaldúa’s notion of “*mestiza* consciousness, *una concienciade mujer...of the Borderlands*” (77), Warner opens up the possibility of Fortune’s truly loving another, and even a young man at that. Fortune abandons his possessive passion for Lueli and replaces it with the open acceptance that Lueli had always shown him “because [Lueli] was incapable of feeling that sad, civilized and propriety love which is anxious and predatory and spoil-sport” (237). Again, it is this newfound sense of sympathy that allows Fortune to imagine another anti-imperial kind of future with Lueli. And it is the third person narration which allows us to see Fortune’s recognition more deeply.

Although Warner participates in the ideology of the primitivist romance, she also complicates it through the novel’s elegiac, political end. Nigel Rigby notes that, “empire was simply a part of life in in-between-the-wars Britain, whatever one’s social class, and that all writers were inevitably exposed to the wide range of imperial narrative at the time” (225). The same holds true for Warner, especially given the fact that she was an active member of the Communist party. Gay Wachman writes, “Mr. Fortune’s desolation represents mourning and loss as well as nostalgia for a prewar paradise on a tropical island” (97). The most compelling interruption of Fortune’s Edenic state is the impending war. Although the earthquake and volcano could also be read as signals of the cataclysm of war far away from the shores of Fanua, Warner’s novel incorporates more pointed references. When Fortune contemplates his legacy on the island, he regrets that “there would soon be plenty of white men to frighten the children of Fanua, to bring them galvanized iron and law-courts and commerce and industry and bicycles and patent medicines and American alarm clocks, besides the blessing of religion” (233). The

imperialist regime will continue to invade this paradise, but it seems that Fortune will have no part in that process. Once he has boarded the launch out of Fanua, the secretary on board “immediately began to tell [him] about the Great War,” to which Fortune admits, “Of course I have heard nothing of all this” and even that he “could not yet gather who was fighting who, still less what they were fighting about” (247-8). The novel concludes with an image of the fading dream of the primitive utopian state: “Meanwhile the island of Fanua was sinking deeper into the Pacific Ocean...Everything that was real, everything that was significant, had gone down with the island of Fanua and was lost for ever” (249).

Fortune must become separated from that space by the end of the novel and his restorative reconnection is short-lived, however his conversion is life-affirming and possibly transcendent. At one significant time in Fanua, soon after Lueli’s near drowning, the narrator surveys Lueli’s appearance through Fortune’s perspective: “Never before had he been so beautiful, nor moved so lithely, nor sprawled so luxuriously on the warm grass. Sleek, languid and glittering, he was like a snake that had achieved its new skin.” This image of rebirth is afforded by the primitive environs of the island of Fanua, and more accurately represents the process by which Fortune has been changed. Fortune, as if the profound reciprocal murmur of mother and child, can recall his experience “in a timeless world, listening. Then, at last, he heard and was released—for what he heard, a murmur, a wandering wreath of sound, was Lueli talking softly to his god” (229). The aural quality of the murmur occurs at the instance of Fortune’s initial assimilation with the utopian moment in the natural splendor of the island: “Though [the clouds] were silent he imagined then a voice, an enormous soft murmur, sinking and swelling as they tumbled and evolved and amassed” (51). It is this sensual interplay between present self and child self

that recreates fleeting moments of wholeness, a choran moment, that could be brought into the future.

Warner's evocation of a Fanua as a place of restoration allows it to become a catalyst for both personal and universal renewal (or a kind of spiritual, communal "fortune," as the case may be) rather than exploitation.<sup>41</sup> Warner's depiction perpetuates the primitivist stereotype of what Anne McClintock describes as "anachronistic space,"<sup>42</sup> yet Fortune's experience of these environs creates the possibility of his continuance of this new mode of being in his future life back on the island of Great Britain, as evidenced by his decision to leave his missionary post and his lack of awareness about the world war. Bruce Knoll's commentary applies to the aesthetic of interconnectivity represented in *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*:

Although Townsend Warner's answer may not be the final one, she shows up a way to approach life, which lies not in attempting to control our environment, on in passively accepting it, but rather in understanding its terms, and allowing ourselves to be transformed. (363)

Warner also presents Fortune as one who allows himself to become transformed by a new understanding of his interrelationship with a greater community. Although Warner hints that the process of building a bridge from self to other to community may be complicated by war, the (re)production of Mr. Timothy Fortune's genuine self has transpired nonetheless, and he will never be the same.

### A Coda on the Utopian Choran Moment as Counternarrative

Canon building is Empire building. Canon defense is national defense. Canon debate, whatever the terrain, nature and range (of criticism, of history, of the history of knowledge, of the definition of language, the universality of aesthetic principles, the sociology of art, the humanistic imagination), is the clash of cultures. And *all* of the interests are vested. (Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" 8)

The principle reason these matters loom large for me is that I do not have quite the same access to these traditionally useful constructs of blackness. Neither blackness nor "people of color" stimulates in me notions of excessive, limitless love, anarchy, or routine dread. I cannot rely on these metaphorical shortcuts because I am a black writer struggling with and through language that can powerfully evoke and enforce hidden signs of racial superiority, cultural hegemony, and dismissive "othering" of people and language which are by no means marginal or already and completely known and knowable in my work. The kind of work I have always wanted to do requires me to learn how to maneuver ways to free up that language from its sometimes sinister, frequently lazy, almost always predictable employment of racially informed and determined chains. (*Playing in the Dark* x-xi)

Despite the eloquent and groundbreaking work of literary scholars and writers like Toni Morrison, there remains a profound difficulty in transcending modernism's protracted views of primitivism, even in this age of postmodernism. In the process of my current work, I have continually questioned whether Kristeva's chora (which could be argued is too deeply embedded in whiteness) is a white construction in itself; I have feared that perhaps for modern non-European protagonists, it is not actually available, even to nonwhite readers. I do not want to claim here that Warner or Larsen were particularly conscious of or even completely untainted in their (perhaps coincidental) portrayals of the

choran moment and interconnectivity. The point is that we are the readers who, although not claiming either author as entirely innocent or victimized, masterful or pandering, might recognize the possibility of a counternarrative enacted in their novels. What, then, are we to do with a novel that on one hand that offers up the possibility of connecting with another, yet also uses primitivism to realize that vision, while on the other we have a novel which expresses the fact that full access to this hybrid space of interconnectivity is limited by structures of race, class, and sex?

With radical urgency, Gloria Anzaldúa notes that cultures—mostly white—“have ‘borrowed,’ copied, or otherwise extrapolated the art of tribal cultures and called it cubism, surrealism, symbolism. The music, the beat of the drum, the Black’s jive talk. All taken over” (68). Indeed the development of modernism itself depends upon this kind of appropriation. Yet her colleague, AnaLouise Keating, suggests another possibility in her introduction to *This Bridge We Call Home*: “to transform walls into bridges, into spiraling paths from self to other, from other to self” (11). I suggest that my analysis of Warner’s novel has shown that in our reading practices, we can strive to realize the potential of aesthetics to reveal the coequal presence of self and other, both in literature and in life. Warner’s Timothy Fortune begins the process by which we might, as readers, question patriarchal and racist ideological assumptions in searching for the other to instead “experience the world as unknown and unexpected and to create out of that opening-up-to the presence of another” (Shloss 14).

When I think back to the photographs of James Van Der Zee, I am reminded of an important point that Larsen makes with her novel. Dreamlike visions of the incandescent moment are experienced across divisions of race, class, and gender, but for those African

Americans whose experience of life is dismal entrapment in the complex and conspiring forces of racism, classism, and sexism, there may not finally be any sense of wholeness afforded to them. In the modernist work of Nella Larsen, a biracial American woman writer who, as both insider and outsider to the Harlem Renaissance, dared to challenge ideas of appropriate subjects for the modern novel, and Sylvia Townsend Warner, a white, lesbian, British Communist woman writer whose subject positions have also (in part) traditionally been othered, readers can catch a glimpse at the possibly redemptive choral moment of interconnectivity and thereby begin building bridges to community. As Anzaldúa states hopefully,

Perhaps we will decide to disengage from the dominant culture, write it off altogether as a lost cause, and cross the border into the wholly new and separate territory...That focal point or fulcrum, that juncture where the mestiza stands, is where phenomena tend to collide. It is where the possibility of uniting all that is separate occurs. (79)



---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Woolf's first novel investigates issues of patriotism, nationhood, and anticipates WWI. British war technology was becoming more deadly and 1914 was the most praised war. The Bloomsburys were mostly reticent pacifists; Leonard and Virginia Woolf wrote documents for peace as forerunners to The League of Nations and the UN. Woolf's references of colonialism in this novel link her version of the system of military industrial complex with empire, control of colonies, marriage, and male education. Woolf is also talking back to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; the other side of the voyage to the self is the marriage/domestic story. Marriage is paralleled with empire here, the journey into the unknown territory like the marriage plot. The English characters' transport to South America is Woolf's attempt to write herself as an artist and her character onto this imagined space, away from convention, but ultimately it fails for those trapped by social convention.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*. (New York: Pantheon, 1978), argues that the hegemonic effects of institutionally discourse can be reversed, or otherwise interrupted, by resistant counterdiscourses which redistribute the balance of power systems. Foucault uses the term in this famous passage:

There is no question that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and 'psychic hermaphroditism' made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of 'perversity'; but it also made possible the formation of a 'reverse' discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified. There is not, on the one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another,

---

opposing strategy, (102)

<sup>3</sup> Sieglinde Lemke's book, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*, strives to uncover the complex linkages between Africa, African American and Euro-American cultures in modernism through discussions of jazz, dance, modern art and literature to argue that a rich hybridity exists in the forces of primitivism and modernism.

<sup>4</sup> See Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971) and Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>6</sup> Torgovnick summarizes Freud as follows:

The 'oceanic' is identified with the infant at the breast, with 'the primitive pleasure principle,' and with the id forces: the 'oceanic' is the primitive and the conjunction of the infantile and the female, none of which conform to 'the reality principle'...with its absence of boundaries and divisions, [the oceanic] is something we need to be protected *from* if we are to take our places in the 'mature' culture of the West: we must fear it as we fear the primitive and separate from it as we separate from 'primitive' sexual or aggressive urges and from the bodies of our mothers. (207)

Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), echoes this critique of Freud in her discussion of the colonized as caught in the "Imaginary" state of consciousness. Also relevant here is Kristeva's idea of abjection, following Freud's conception that the social being is created by "The repudiation of certain pre-oedipal pleasures and incestuous attachments" (71). For Kristeva, the socially unacceptable elements of existence that are expelled as we enter the symbolic (i.e. "excrement, menstrual blood, urine, semen, tears, vomit, food, masturbation, incest, and so on") are never fully obliterated and will threaten to disrupt our seemingly secure social selves. This is the process of abjection: "the expelled object haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary" (71).

Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, also outlines a kind of Freudian oceanic in her gloss on James Snead's comments on racial divisions in the work of Faulkner: "(1) The fear of merging, or loss of identity through synergistic union with the other, leads to the wish to use racial purification as a separating strategy against difference" (66-67).

<sup>8</sup> In *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties*, Gay Wachman outlines the effects of contemporary medical theories about congenital conversion, evolutionist discourses of degeneration theory, primitivism, eugenics, and rigid class structure underpinnings of imperialist ideology on early twentieth-century culture and its literature.

<sup>9</sup> Born in Chicago in the 1890s to a black West Indian father (who died when Larsen was a young girl) and a Danish mother, Larsen spent her early life in the midst of “modern buildings and technological innovations...[and] transformations of identity [that were] possible given the fluidity of western and immigrant lives in an expanding city” (Davis, *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance* 4). She encountered the “behavioral codes and color snobbery [used] to establish class distinction” (5) in New York City, where she met and married research physicist, Dr. Elmer Samuel Imes in 1919. Larsen soon labeled herself a “mulatta,” was trained as a librarian at the New York Public Library, and became good friends with Carl Van Vechten, the white novelist and critic who became one of her most prominent literary mentors. Largely as a result of the success of her novels, Larsen was the first black female creative writer to win the Guggenheim (in 1930), but her third novel was never published. Bettye J. Williams notes Larsen’s active political stance in that she was “demanding absolute social equality, which included dispelling denigrating images of African-American womanhood” (167).

<sup>10</sup> Examples are Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Frances E.W. Harper’s *Iola Leroy* (1892), and Pauline Hopkins’s *Contending Forces* (1900). Anna Brickhouse, in “Nella Larsen and the Intertextual Geography of *Quicksand*” *African American Review* 35 (Winter 2001): 533-560, argues that “Helga’s revisionary sojourn in this literary territory explodes its often disguised but still insistent approbation of whiteness” (539).

<sup>11</sup> George Hutchinson comments explicitly, and somewhat bitterly, on Davis’s “resistance to Larsen’s sense of identity, as well as to Larsen’s interracial background and adult social preferences” and criticizes her biography as “effectively match[ing] attitudes of the black elite that caused Larsen deep pain throughout her life and that partly inspired her fiction” (“Nella Larsen and the Veil of Race” 341).

<sup>12</sup> As Bill Hardwig recounts, “Early in the novel, Helga identifies with her mother and rejects her father, calling their marriage a ‘cruel sacrifice’ of a ‘fair Scandinavian girl’” (578).

---

<sup>13</sup> The circumstances surrounding Larsen's own childhood experience are somewhat vague, as Thadious M. Davis discusses. On the one hand, it appears that her mother, Marie Larsen, denied giving birth to Nell[ie] in a census report. Davis speculates on the cause: "While a mother can wash her hands of a child, especially one gone astray, and cut off contact with that child, a mother who denies giving birth to a child may be concealing something that in all likelihood has more to do with the mother than the child,...if [her second, white husband] Peter Larsen no longer wanted the responsibility or the stigma of a stepdaughter of color" (27). Another explanation for Larsen's difficult childhood and estranged relationship with her mother "could have been the denial of Nellie's kinship with [the otherwise white] family, which from the child's perspective would have caused confusion and disorientation" (40). Perhaps Larsen's own decidedly non-idyllic childhood experience explains Helga's own difficulty in fully welcoming a consciousness of wholeness.

<sup>14</sup> Jacquelyn Y. McLendon, among others, in her essay "Self-Representation as Art in the Novels of Nella Larsen" *Redefining Autobiography in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction* Eds. Janice Morgan, et al. New York: Garland Press, 1991: 149-168, contends that Helga's tragedy comes as a result of the double alienation, of a child 'living among hostile white folks' or trying to fit in with blacks with whom 'you [had to] prove your ancestry and connections,' otherwise 'you didn't belong'" (34; 154).

<sup>15</sup> Bill Hardwig argues that it is this "split within Helga" between black and white culture that results in her disengagement with primitivism (575), while Debra B. Silverman establishes the link between Helga's sexuality and racist formations of the primitive. Silverman maintains that, "For Helga, to lose herself here is to risk the recognition of her own sexuality—a risk because to acknowledge in this place would be for her to fit a mold to which she is unwilling to conform" (609).

<sup>16</sup> As Kimberly Monda points out, "Most critics today read Helga's tragic end as a powerful criticism of the social forces that conspire against her achieving a fulfilling life" (24). Focusing on the portrayal of female sexuality in Nella Larsen's novels, Deborah McDowell argues that, "because she gave her characters sexual feelings at all, she has to be regarded as something of a pioneer, a trailblazer in the Afro-American female literary tradition" (xxxi). Monda contends that, "Racist white society's assumptions about black women's sexual availability help explain Helga Crane's sexual repression, and also remind us of Larsen's courage in attempting to portray her heroine's sexual desire" (25). Claudia Tate reads Helga Crane as "an aggressive

---

and defensive seductress, implicated in her own tragic fate" (9) where others have disregarded this perspective.

<sup>17</sup> George Hutchinson's assessment of the connections between Larsen's images of maternity in *Quicksand* and her own life as a Harlem Renaissance writer might provide us with insight into why Helga fails so desperately to reconfigure an integral understanding of self. What makes the final scene so tragic is the fact that, "the voice of Helga Crane hears is her own, crying for the Danish mother that 'race' in America has stolen from her...To *Larsen* the most unbearable effect of racist patriarchy in the United States was its power to deprive her of her mother...[which] is, in an important sense, to deny her self, her female self, her deep blues" (*The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White* 445; Hutchinson's italics). Hutchinson claims that, "One of the motives of Larsen's friendship with Van Vechten was apparently to maintain connection with her own ethnic background—with her *mother's* ethnic background. Apparently she felt close to Van Vechten also because he accepted her self-definition."

<sup>18</sup> Cheryl Wall writes of Larsen's first published short story "The Wrong Man" (January 1926 in *Young's Magazine*) that, "Fabricated, concealed, and mistaken identities are its themes" (85). She argues that Larsen was "preoccupied with exploring strategies of concealment, self-invention, and passing in her fiction" (88) and "psychic dilemma confronting certain black women...they become the means through which the author demonstrates the psychological costs of racism and sexism" (89). Both her novels

contemplate the inextricability of the racism and sexism that confront the black woman in her quest for selfhood...Larsen's protagonists attempt to fashion a sense of self—free both of suffocating restrictions of ladyhood and fantasies of the exotic female Other. They fail. The tragedy of these mulattoes is the impossibility of self-definition. (89)

Larsen wrote the truth about race and women, "presented in an intensely restrained and civilized manner, and underneath the ironic survival of a much more primitive mood" (94).

<sup>19</sup> Hardwig argues that there is no true *imago*, or sense of an integrated self, for Helga because "psychoanalysis is rooted in white, patriarchal culture and that as a result it can be detrimental to those from other racial backgrounds and to those, like Helga, who fall between or outside the conventional racial categories" (574). He goes on to state that Helga's "lack of a permanent social matrix undermines...clear

distinctions. Helga is...a subject who is splintered, decentered, and at a loss; she is...fragmented into a confounding multiplicity of identities" (575). Instead, "Larsen suggests that Helga also faces an even more important problem because she is denied these *confining* but still crucially *defining* symbolic frameworks."

<sup>20</sup> The novel confirms this with its "implicit comment on the labyrinth of race along with the patriarchal structures that support it and that it supports" (Hutchinson, "Subject to Disappearance" 190).

<sup>21</sup> Bill Hardwig argues that this self without boundaries destroys Helga's self-perception: "We can say that Helga's experience as a mulatta, as a racial 'either/or' and 'neither/nor', shatters her idealized self, her *imago*" (577).

See also Ann E. Hostetler, "The Aesthetics of Race and Gender in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*" *PMLA* 105.1 (January 1990): 35-46, and Martha J. Cutter's "Sliding Signification: Passing as a Narrative and Textual Strategy in Nella Larsen's Fiction" Ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg *Passing and the Fictions of Identity* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 1996). Hostetler claims that, "In Larsen's view, to succumb to a preexisting paradigm means to accept one pattern, one stereotype, at the expense of growth or change, cutting oneself off from identity as process and dialogue" (44). Cutter argues that *Quicksand's* Helga Crane cannot succeed in her ventures with passing because she assumes that there is one unitary identity that she must recapture, while *Passing's* Clare Kendry escapes categories with her willingness to pass in terms of race, class, and sexuality without grasping for a single, essential self or state of existence.

<sup>22</sup> Larsen's Harlem Renaissance contemporary Jean Toomer was moved by the old Negro spirituals and, like W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk*, represented them as a dying folk-spirit soon to be destroyed by city life and industry. As Wall states, "Toomer strove to create a usable past, to assert the regenerative power of the African American folk tradition—a tradition dying in the onslaught of 'civilization.' For him, western civilization was indeed the moral and spiritual 'wasteland' Eliot had pronounced it. The folk culture offered a necessary alternative" (115). The episode "Song of the Son," in *Cane*, describes the return to a scene from which the poet has long been separated, evoking the spirit of the land and the artistic expression "that flowed naturally from a unified existence" (192). In his poem emulating a nostalgic return to the land, Toomer evokes a swan song for a feeling of physical connection with the rural south. His suggestion that the speaker's soul is tied with the land—"I land and soil, red soil and sweet-gum tree, /...Now just

before an epoch's sun declines / Thy son, in time, I have returned to thee, / Thy son, I have in time returned to thee" (6-10)—and the vitality of the earth. Although "Leaving, to catch thy plaintive soul soon gone" (15), the nurturing earth will remain as "An everlasting song, a singing tree, / Caroling softly souls of slavery" (20-1) to soothe and provide solace for the wearied soul. Toomer yearns for completion and adequate expression through contact with a newly discovered black culture and its fuller life.

<sup>23</sup> Hutchinson concurs, "Never embracing...Toomer's dream of a 'new race,' neither does Larsen simply dismiss race as a 'fiction'" ("Subject to Disappearance" 190).

<sup>24</sup> Of note as well is Patricia Felisa Barbeito's statement in 'Making Generations' in Jacobs, Larsen, and Hurston: *A Genealogy of Black Women's Writing* *American Literature* 70.2 (June 1998) 365-395: "Larsen's protagonist cannot look to the South as the site of maternal ancestry, an ancestry that defines race as a maternal biological trace, for she is the child of a *white* woman" (372).

<sup>25</sup> Monda agrees: "Whether repelled by stereotypes of so-called black primitivism in New York or inspired by them in Copenhagen, Helga cannot define herself in terms free of racist constructions of blackness" (32).

<sup>26</sup> Anna Brickhouse argues that Larsen's novel represents in intertextual patchwork, dialoguing with other novelists during an intense period of American cultural nationalism: "As a librarian, a self-fashioner through literary examples, and ultimately an alleged plagiarist, Larsen was indeed a committed revisionist, and perhaps the consummate revisionist not only of the Harlem Renaissance,...but also of a cultural moment in which American writers urgently sought to recover a national literary past" (534).

<sup>27</sup> Barbeito claims that "Helga is a floating signifier of difference. Always ill in her surroundings, she lurks between the inherently opposed dualities of body and voice, black and white, never able to male these poles cohere into a 'readable' voice" (388).

<sup>28</sup> The historically racist notions of primitivism are deeply implicated in imperialism. Primarily beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, cultural ideologists polarized the ideas of the primitive and the "civilized" in order to justify an often brutal imperialism; the assumption that "savages" needed to be civilized contributed to notions of the "white man's burden." Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush argue that "Primitives never existed, only Western 'primitivism'...[which] supplied the necessary Other against whose specter

embattled Victorian society reinforced itself. This construction was the defensive expression of a specific moment of crisis – the prehistory of a future whose unsettling shadow had just crossed the horizon” (2). I would like to consider primitivism through the lens of Homi Bhabha's idea of the third space afforded by hybridity of binaries like black and white to embrace a kind of “open endedness” (Lemke 150) or a “contact zone” (Pratt, *Imperial Eyes* 4) in looking at the interplay between primitivism and utopian longing in modernist texts.

<sup>29</sup> Sieglinde Lemke's book, *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*, strives to uncover the complex linkages between Africa, African American and Euro-American cultures in modernism through discussions of jazz, dance, modern art and literature to argue that a rich hybridity exists in the forces of primitivism and modernism.

<sup>30</sup> See Nathan Irvin Huggins, *Harlem Renaissance* (New York: Oxford UP, 1971) and Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>31</sup> I evoke as well Gloria Anzaldúa's notion of the “mestiza” available in the borderland between cultures: “Perhaps here in “this radical, ideological, cultural and biological cross-pollinization, an ‘alien’ consciousness is presently in the making—a new *mestiza* (hybrid) consciousness, *una concienciade mujer* (maternal consciousness). It is a consciousness of the Borderlands” (*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* 77).

<sup>32</sup> I strive to redefine a notion that has more in common with Ann E. Kaplan's idea of “two-way looking”— looking that is mutual and relational (a process), as opposed to the gaze, which constitutes its subject as inferior and unable to look back (a one-way subjective vision). This intersubjective space creates a new set of looking relations toward hybrid subjectivities in-between and multiple subjects on the borders (Kaplan 5). Kaplan, *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*, argues for a kind of redemptive optics: “Looking will connote curiosity about the Other, a wanting to know (which can of course be oppressive but does not have to be), while the gaze I take to involve extreme anxiety—an attempt in a sense *not to know, to deny, in fact*” (xvii). It is important to remember that, as she admits, “looking is *never innocent, and is always determined by cultural systems*” (5).



<sup>33</sup> In the Woolfian (among others) tradition of “the voyage out” as a means for characters to work out complex notions of identity, Sylvia Townsend Warner wrote the fantasy novel *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot* in 1927. According to biographer Claire Harman, book reviewer Alexander Woollcott “liked to cite Sylvia’s evocation of the South Seas in *Mr. Fortune’s Maggot* as a great imaginative triumph” (85), but Harman does not mention Warner’s political impetus in her study. Brooke Allen notes that, “while she could fairly be called a feminist, her fiction is not...feminist so much as a plea for the freedom and integrity of every person, regardless of sex” (1). Although my central object here is not to claim Warner as a feminist writer, I agree with Allen’s assessment of Warner’s project as one that affirms the wholeness of humanity, which, I suggest, is the purpose of feminism.

<sup>34</sup> Similarly, McClintock examines the crossroads of class, gender and race in imperialism and designates the gendering of unknown lands as a “porno-tropics” (*Imperial Leather* 21-4) as the imperialist males’ fearful gesture of dominance in the face of the unknown maternal figure.

<sup>35</sup> This characterization is radically different from Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* in that the nature of metamorphosis in this novel is more significant than the transformative potential of colonized places in the imaginations of the colonizers.

<sup>36</sup> As Rigby states, “her narrative voices eschew the possession of the islanders’ thoughts which is typical of imperialist writing” (228).

<sup>37</sup> Warner critiques the supposed legitimacy of the marriage institution as well, not only through Fortune’s homosexuality and implicit rejection of hetero-normativity, but also in her own life. As Claire Harman notes, “To Sylvia, as to Lolly Willowes, the heroine of her first novel, ‘coming out’ was really the beginning of ‘going in’, and the process ended in marriage, an institution towards which she had no inclination whatsoever” (23).

<sup>38</sup> Marianne De Koven writes that in *Heart of Darkness*, “The maternal, ‘Nature herself’, invaded by ‘trade’, is the horrific, slimy site of emasculation and death, more powerful than it is in Europe but still entirely alienated from the masculinist subjectivity of the text” (100).

<sup>39</sup> As Elaine Showalter relevantly states, “If the rebellious New Woman—the ‘shrieking sister’—or the prostitute could be turned into a silent body to be observed, measured, and studied, her resistance to

convention could be treated as a scientific anomaly or a problem to be solved by medicine" (*Sexual Anarchy* 127-8). French doctor Récamier invented the speculum in 1845, while the American gynecologist Marion Sims "experienced himself as a 'colonizing and conquering hero' [when using the speculum for the first time, rejoicing.] "I saw everything as no man had ever seen before" (129). Timothy Fortune seems to exhibit the residual values of Victorian sexuality.

<sup>40</sup> Aside from Warner's more obvious references to Robert Louis Stevenson's adventure stories (ie. *Treasure Island*) and his own retirement on the island of Samoa, I perceive a connection between the novel's title and a comment RLS made in a letter to Henry James. Ernest Meheew notes that for the duration of his stay in Bournemouth from July 1884 to August 1887, RLS "lived the life of a chronic invalid, spending much of his time in bed plagued by colds and hemorrhages: a life that he was later to sum up in a famous phrase as that of 'a pallid brute that lived in Skerryvore like a weevil in a biscuit'" (267). If Timothy Fortune is supposed to represent Stevenson in any way, then it seems that this more well-known definition of "maggot" could be another subtle clue to that connection.

<sup>41</sup> Wachman provides a favorable final assessment of *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*: the novel "succeeds in holding politics and perverse desire, primitivism and satire, material specificity, fantasy, and elegy in a fragile, fleeting equilibrium that [allows] its representation of innocent pederasty [to] continue to delight" (71).

<sup>42</sup> McClintock discusses the central feature of nineteenth century industrial capitalism as the assumption that images of "non-European time...were systematically evoked to identify what was historically new about industrial modernity" (40). The island of Fanua, as Robin Hackett argues, embodies such a place: "[It is] marked as a primitive place by the fact that Mr. Fortune's watch...stops running shortly after his arrival" (93).

## CHAPTER IV

### VIRGINIA WOOLF'S COUNTERNARRATIVES OF COMMUNITY IN

#### *THREE GUINEAS AND BETWEEN THE ACTS*

In the aftershock of World War I, Virginia Woolf countenances the modernist point of view, writing in her essay, "How It Strikes a Contemporary" (published in *The Common Reader* in 1925) that, "It is an age of fragments" (324) for those artists who, like Woolf herself, were concerned with expressing and critiquing contemporary culture through their art. Woolf is an artist engaged in political and aesthetic projects that might change the shape of a fascist history. Expressing the shattering effect of World War I on the consciousness of all communities, but particularly the writing community, she warns, "We are sharply cut off from our predecessors. A shift in the scale—the war, the sudden slip of masses held in position for ages—has shaken the fabric from top to bottom, alienated us from the past and made us perhaps too vividly conscious of the present" (326). As a political artist, Woolf's view of history as shaken fabric—utterly disrupted, displaced, overcome by violence—shows us that the war had blinded her contemporary society to anything redemptive, or any way of being beyond the here and now of destruction. Here she suggests that if one is "too vividly" conscious of the shocking present moment, without an understanding of the ever-present underpinnings of past and future, one might become stagnant and unable to promote positive social change.

For Woolf, modern artists must participate in creating a kind of collective counter-history through their art, one that opposes the tremendous tyrannical narratives

of war and fascism. Even at this early, perhaps more optimistic stage of her continuing project to imagine alternative communities that struggle against the current age of uncertainty, she admits, "our contemporaries afflict us because they have ceased to believe" (329). Looking ahead, therefore, "it seems that it would be wise for the writers of the present to renounce for themselves the hope of creating masterpieces...It is from notebooks of the present that the masterpieces of the future are made" (331). A positive, politically-engaged aesthetic project can begin in the present moment of belief, even in the midst of a terrifying and ultimately debilitating mode of militaristic fascism that will later be recalled as a horrific time in "history." By "history" I mean personal, creative and eventually communal narratives rather than authorized versions of history as told by fascist and/or patriarchal institutions of power. Authorized histories have great and often tragic effects upon marginalized members of society, and Woolf's belief, along with other modernist artists concerned with creating communal narratives, is that the novel and the photograph allow audiences to contemplate human choices and find instances of human agency in the real world.<sup>6</sup>

In her life and work, Virginia Woolf was consistently concerned with hegemonic constructions of history that seduce us into reiterating patriarchal and fascistic institutions of power in which we become complicit. As I suggest above, Woolf as author contends that the power of art to transform the present and to formulate a new, more ethical society is a gradual process in which artists of her present day can only play a small yet significant role. Woolf defines ethics as the recognition and acceptance of the network of interconnection among humanity, as well as the behavior of empathy that comes out of this understanding. Woolf advises the novelists in particular to:

take a wider, a less personal view of modern literature, and look indeed upon the writers as if they were engaged upon some vast building which being built by common effort, the separate workmen may well remain anonymous...scan the horizon; see the past in relation to the future; and so prepare the way for the masterpieces to come. ("How It Strikes a Contemporary" 332)

This need to scan the horizon for positive prospects reveals Woolf's desire to form a collective that will use art to "create afresh" and anew a modernist vision of community, while still remaining cognizant of the interweaving strands of present, past and future narratives. Woolf's call for communities extends beyond writers or spectator-novelists toward those reading modernist texts. The anonymous, communal, common effort of artists and audiences will realize the expansive horizon of humanist possibility.

Woolf utilizes the aesthetic of interconnectivity which arrests time—the chorán moment—in order to give her characters and her readers a vital moment to think, to then reinvigorate a wholeness of self, and finally to turn that transforming gaze outward in a gesture which helps rebuild community. Her novels, in particular *The Waves* (1931) and *Between the Acts* (1941), as well as her more polemical work in *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and *Three Guineas* (1938), evidence Woolf's continuing quest to remember history as embedded both in the past and in the present moment. Woolf's work resists the ongoing epistemic violences of sexism, war, imperialism, and fascism brought on by the inherent power authorized "history" has often lent to the patriarchy. This chapter describes the role of the illuminated moments and other radical uses of narrative time in telling the stories that might reveal in the present, or produce in the future, Woolfian chorán

community. Here I will build a (somewhat) chronological picture of Woolf's developing theories and practices of chorán community in response to "history," militarism, and fascism. Woolf's later novels and essays represent "counternarratives" held against dominant modes of history-making that oppress those subjected to its power. Woolf depicts and practices chorán community historically, even if briefly, despite her growing despair regarding fascism as a dangerously seductive and oppressive conglomerate.

### Woolf as Feminist Humanist

Virginia Woolf has been touted as the foremother of British and American feminism since her rediscovery in the 1970s. I want to expand this definition of Woolf's influence to include the view of her as a humanist concerned with each individual's connection with the larger bond of community. In order to view Woolf as a humanist committed the project of rediscovering communal narrative, it is important to examine her engagement with women's history. In "Professions for Women" (read at The Women's Service League in January 1931), Woolf engages immediately with the literary legacies: "My profession is literature...the road was cut many years ago" (235). Woolf is aware, and wants her readers to understand, the struggles of women writers in the past and their effect upon literature of the present.<sup>1</sup> In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Woolf's overarching point is that women still need education, time and money to write, but contends that since her own class of women writers have no "common sense ready to use" (76), they need to take on their own voice rather than adapt themselves to the public style established in the canon by male writers. It is up to women writers in the present

moment to continue inventing their own voices, thereby preparing the way for future female artists.

Although Woolf, in these examples, appears to privilege the creative power of the female mind, thus calling for a female determination of language that can "break the sequence" (81), it is her sense of androgyny that frees the mind from societal constructions of gender that might otherwise impede the true voice of the artist in his or her work. The androgynous mind was the first to break the sequence of the common sentence and to restore the balance. In her revolutionary movement toward gynocriticism, she advocates reading back through our mothers, creating a different sort of social history to include women's everyday lives. Recently, Wai Chee Dimrock posits a similar feminist theory of intertextuality.<sup>2</sup> According to Dimrock, literary endurance is due to texts' adaptability when compared with each other, rather than through T.S. Eliot's anxiety of influence or Harold Bloom's structure of family romance. When we think back through our mothers, as Woolf would have us do, we make a choice about how we perceive of inheritance. This reciprocal movement between past, present, and future texts changes our relationship with past authors and offers instead a productive resonance between and among literary texts. For Woolf, art and literary legacy are creations of a reasonable androgynous mind that resists authorized constructions of history which oppress women in the present. A mainstay in Woolf's movement from feminism to humanism is the eradication of gender subjugation. Although her limited view of race and class relations impedes what should be her goal of equality for all outsiders, Woolf's belief is that the artist can begin this process by reinventing a history that will acknowledge both the achievements and the ongoing difficulties of women in a sexist society.

In the late 1920s, it was necessary for Woolf to first address the problems women still encountered in the home and in the newly democratized marketplace, and her purpose is to inspire her audience of educated women to change patriarchal systems of history. Woolf closes *A Room of One's Own* with a peroration on women's opportunities for progress, and a call to those working women to let Shakespeare's sister "live in you and in me, and in many women who are not here tonight, for they are washing up dishes and putting the children to bed" (113). Here she acknowledges those women who, because of class, may be excluded from feminist progress, and calls on the newly emerging twentieth-century woman with privileges to work for all women. Ultimately, Woolf foretells, "You have won rooms of your own in the house hitherto exclusively owned by men...But this freedom is only a beginning; the room is your own, but it is still bare...With whom are you going to share it, and upon what terms?" ("Professions for Women" 242). Women have intellects and abilities of their own, and Woolf's call to action demonstrates her practice of that which she preaches. By asking her audience what they might do to recreate history, she invites them do the same.

Woolf made a sharp distinction between art and propaganda, both theoretically and practically, in her critical response to the state's use of art for their own militaristic purposes. The British government promoted war through censorship and propaganda, and her fiction, as well as her essays and, of course, *Three Guineas*, show how Woolf resists such manipulations of consciousness.<sup>3</sup> Many High Modernist writers of the '20s have been accused of being complicit with fascism because their art was considered too high brow and socially aloof; the common reaction to literary modernism was that it was remote from politics and "real" life. Karen L. Levenback argues that there was a great "chasm



between the 'artist and politics" for many of Woolf's contemporaries, yet Woolf herself shows us that "no one enjoys immunity from war" (5).<sup>4</sup> Woolf was often concerned that her work would be too didactic and too propagandist to be considered art; she was apprehensive about whether propaganda is necessarily incompatible with art, as well as with the use of art for direct teaching.<sup>5</sup> Throughout "Professions for Women" and in *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf's tone remains relatively calm and collected; she is careful not to appear too didactic or polemical because that would create propaganda, an outcome of art that Woolf would despise and the opposite of her androgynous ideal. The choice that she has inspired in her listeners and readers is left completely up to them because after all, "There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of the mind" (*AROOO* 64). Significantly, for Woolf, it is the mind that will fight fascistic notions of history. Woolf sought to "criticise the social system, and to show it at work, at its most intense" (*Diary 2*, 248) in order to "reveal the social patterns that sketched such personalities [in her fiction]...to re-create the social world" (Phillips xxi). Woolf's work asks her audience to find the socially redemptive value of art.

Other modernist intellectuals valued the notion of personal perception in the construction of a humanist history as well. Woolf's contemporary literary critic Walter Benjamin speaks to the importance of small events:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.

(*Theses on the Philosophy of History* 254)

The alternate title of her novel *The Years* (1937), *Here and Now*, points out Woolf's common concern with living balanced between illuminated moments and knowledge of time.<sup>6</sup> For both Woolf and Benjamin, "history" should be written as counternarrative to canonical history, but always with full awareness of the events that undergird our personal perceptions. It is important to note here that Woolf's flashes of insight reveal what Benjamin would call "the true picture of the past" (Benjamin, *Theses* 255). The seemingly small, lived, personal moments are actually what make up the larger narrative of human history. For Benjamin, "The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and never seen again." Like Benjamin, Woolf is concerned with the cosmic pattern that transcends distinctions between the past, present, and future. In her later novels, she uses her poetics of prose to engage with political issues of her day in imagining how they might play out in the future for a still-to-be-redeemed humankind.

Woolf's writing was an assault on the authorized report of war, particularly in the '20s and '30s, and it is this political stance that makes her aesthetics redemptive. She understood the connection between war, artistic freedom, and ethical behavior—"that the discourse of ethics and aesthetics cannot be separated from the discourse of power, excess, oppression, careerism, media exploitation, genocide, capitalism, migrations, schizophrenia" (Merrill viii; qtd. in Hussey 7). Woolf's work has been reevaluated in terms of viewing her as both as a pacifist thinker and a socialist artist, not just an inspiring foremother to feminism. Woolf was not only a feminist but a humanist, and her later novels and essays illustrate counternarratives of community in action.

Reading Against Fascist History: *The Waves* and *Three Guineas* as Visions of Pacifist Humanism

Woolf's works of the 1930s, the novel *The Waves* (1931) and the phototext<sup>7</sup> *Three Guineas* (1938), show us that hegemonic, fascistic notions of history can be resisted by both writer and reading community through their engagement with narratives of unity. In *The Waves* Woolf creates a narrative structure of soliloquies as possible meditations of a character's deeper motivations. This narrative device further complicates her representation of selfhood within a militarized society. The seven "characters" of the novel are not whole in themselves, but they do experience brief moments of harmony and congruity. They create a composite character in that their multiplicity of perspectives offers a whole, complete vision, even in difference: "A single sided flower as we sat here waiting, but now a seven-sided flower, many-petalled, red, puce, purple-shaded, stiff with silver-tinted leaves—a whole flower to which every eye brings its contribution" (Woolf 263). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf argues most explicitly that the origins of fascism are not to be found in nationalism but within the patriarchal family, while the connection between male supremacy and war are rarely overt in her fiction. These texts brilliantly illustrate the waxing and waning from an individual consciousness revealed as necessarily a fragment to coherent home, to unified world.

*The Waves* predominantly asks how we can form a somewhat coherent identity or self in light of the pressures of modernity. Each character's painful process of individuation—"We suffered terribly as we became separate bodies (344)—necessitates a fragmenting; disunity from the whole is required. Personal epiphanies are often examples of separation

that reveal disconnection from the whole in order to reform the self.<sup>8</sup> The symbol of the wave itself suggests chaotic unity, fluidity of identity where the self merges back, a cyclical view of the universe. In the movement from collision to separation in the text, there is a process of psychological growth. Bernard becomes the ultimate individual at the end—he absorbs all their characteristics in an attempt to create coherence through flashes of insight: "The illusion is upon me that something adheres for a moment, has roundness, weight, depth, is completed. This, for the moment, seems to be my life" (341). Even in Bernard's absorption of the other characters, we are reminded of the fleeting quality of individual identity, especially when considered against the larger cosmic whole of time and nature.

The wave-like movement between self and unity is reflected not only in the characters' lives but also in the narrative itself. The structures of the interludes<sup>9</sup> suggest progression in age, opposites of sunrise/sunset, childhood/old age, rise/fall and break, spring/winter, movement through history, the rhythm of life, and most prominently the cosmology of time and human history vs. nature in cyclical, repetitive images. The interludes evoke a Darwinian aesthetic—rot, fear of death and decay—yet they also give life and renewal. Ultimately, however, we are all of momentary importance in this cosmos of chaos over which we have no control. The invocation of Indian mysticism, the emphasis on astronomy, and the randomness of life in the interludes contrasts with the death of white Western culture. According to Jane Marcus, "By making the sun set in the British Empire in her novel... Woolf surrounds the text of the decline and fall of the West (the transcendental self striving and struggling against death) with the text of the East, random natural recurrence" ("Britannia" 155). The lack of plot structure offers more of a

rhythmic history of these English lives, revealing the rise and fall of empire and its internalized constructs of whiteness and patriarchal supremacy.

Jane Marcus convincingly argues that the novel is an attack on colonialism. Percival's death is futile, yet it creates stability, order and unity, and his role a supreme imperialist is bitterly satirized:

Behold, Percival advances; Percival rides a flea-bitten mare, and wears a sun-helmet. By applying the standards of the West, by using the violent language that is natural to him, the bullock-cart is righted in less than five minutes. The Oriental problem is solved. He rides on; the multitudes cluster round him, regarding him as if he were—what indeed he is—a God.  
(Woolf 269)

Each character idealizes him because as a colonial administrator, he is in a position of power in modern British culture. Percival appears like a knight in Arthurian legend who finds the grail—he is an imperialist god and a colonizer central to India's rising. Percival does not speak—as an icon of British imperial identity, he is a blank slate allowing for the other characters' projection. Marcus calls this novel a "postcolonial carnivalesque" in that Percival falls from his imperial glory on a flea-bitten mare (144). He has too much power, but his untimely, rather unheroic death reminds them that there is no hierarchy—again, we are all equal specks in the universe.

In the recurring images of India, Africa, unexplored territories, and the representation of Percival as cardboard hero projection of those who don't speak, Woolf bitterly tackles the problem of colonialism and its relationship to fascism. Many of the characters see themselves in reference to the exotic or primitive Other. Susan and

Bernard appear as adventurers in an undiscovered country while the gardeners are imagined as hostile natives: "Let us take possession of our secret territory" (Woolf 189). In the English school child's imagination, imperialism is a significant part of nationhood and selfhood, revealing the psychology of Empire. Critics such as Karen Phillips have noted that, "*The Waves* condemns an English flirtation with imperial attitudes very much like fascism" (123) in presenting "a psychological cause for dominating others" (153). Phillips shows how characters such as Louis who, much like a fascist, oppress others out of a feeling of inferiority: "Woolf thus exposes the totalizing impulse of Empire as totalitarian, and, in fact, Louis resembles the fascist coming to power in Europe in the decade before *The Waves*" (161). The primitivism that exposes imperialism in Warner's novel here also reveals the intrinsic connections between imperialism, patriarchy, and fascism.

Can *The Waves*, which has very few overt didactic messages, change society's perception of the relationship between fascism and authorized history regardless? Natania Rosenfeld observes that, "If sociopolitical observation...occupies the obscurer spaces in Woolf's texts, it is precisely these spaces to which she draws our attention, illuminating the interdependence of the obscure and the 'enlightened,' the parenthetical and the supposedly essential" (7). Woolf intended to reform community with her writing, because the outsider must "in no way hinder any other human being, whether man or woman, black or white" (*Three Guineas* 66). The meandering narrative of *The Waves* itself is one of Woolf's prime examples of the literary representation of unity among humanity not based upon the hierarchical, mechanistic collective of fascism. Instead, this anti-"history" is a retelling of choron communal awareness that resists boundaries of fascism and includes everyone in its story.

In an ultimate moment of choral unity, the symphonic imagery at the end of the novel suggests the possibility of rebuilding unity out of the metaphor of art. By the end of the novel, the community of Neville, Susan, Louis, Jinny, Rhoda, Bernard "and a thousand others" creates a "symphony, with its concord and its discord and its tunes on top and its complicated bass beneath...Each played his own tune, fiddle, flute, trumpet, drum or whatever the instrument might be" (354). In the choral moment of total intersubjectivity—"I am not one person; I am many people; I do not altogether know who I am...or how to distinguish my life from theirs" (368)—Bernard, perhaps not unlike Woolf herself, defies the viciousness of colonialist history that seeks to pull us apart and away from our collective unconscious. The "unborn selves" (377) and the abjected "brute, too, the savage, the hairy man" (378) are all "contained" (379) and presumably continually restored. The multitudes of self which become one in "the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again" (383) embody the dance and the wavelike interplay between personal and cosmic time.

Woolf also explores the interplay between hegemonic history and the everyday occurrences that make up the eventual history of every person in *The Years* (1937) as well. She maintains the connection between these two versions of history to remind us that the individual and the community must strive for agency against dominance. *The Pargiters* is a novel-essay portion of *The Years* that was originally conceived of as a companion to *A Room of One's Own*, and a story of the sexual lives of women. In the novel, the initially wealthy Pargiter family represents a selected slice of humanity; they are ordinary Londoners who must come to grips with the effects of economic decline on their everyday lives. "The years" Woolf chooses to focus on are not the "high points" of times past, emphasizing the

constructedness of history and the arbitrariness of an official, "canonized" history told by those in power. Larger events should not be considered more important than daily events because what comprises human history is a question of personal perception rather than authorized ideology. Eleanor Pargiter represents the individual who has both made peace with her separation from the supposed glorious past, and has adjusted well enough in the process to take on whatever the future may hold. She has realized an open, more balanced and thus all-inclusive vision, and can therefore find her way toward a more life-affirming future. Susan Squier argues that "*The Years* ends...[with a] vision of an affirmative response to otherness and change enacted by Eleanor Pargiter's final words to her brother Morris. 'And now?' she asked, holding out her hands to him'" (Squier 234; TY 435). Eleanor can adapt to the new society; she has no education or profession, but through her travels and her open intellect, she has an aptitude for communication with humanity.<sup>10</sup> Woolf suggests that it's not enough to participate in society; you must transform that society with an awareness of the ways in which personal and social events of the past, present, and future are inextricably linked. Woolf's feminism remains based in that kind of humanist concern. The characters in Woolf's novels express, through "mutual participation, not authoritarian prohibition" (Caughie 104), an open-ended view of human narrative which allows for a revisioning of the present.

In the pacifist tract *Three Guineas*, Woolf's argument with history is perhaps more potent than in her fiction before the late 1930s. Woolf's collective of outcasts allows for a look forward "to a postpatriarchal community of Outsiders...[,] reaffirm[ing] the vital relevance of Woolf for those who work for peace in any sphere" (Hussey 12). Woolf wanted to destroy the war mindset with her work, which is surely most often connected



with patriarchal versions of history seeking to conquer the Other in the form of woman, nonwhite, and non-Westerner. The present space of the home front will reveal the origins of this brutal mode of action. In the future, through the creation a kind of social battlefield where men and women of all races and classes might acknowledge the fundamentally coequal nature of humanity, we might finally rebuild the web of community.

*Three Guineas* was primarily written for Woolf's own class and sex, the "daughters of educated men," because for Woolf, women could not accurately be called bourgeois in a repressive patriarchal society. According to Woolf, fascism is analogous with patriarchy and oppression; all lead to dictatorship. Her argument is that oppression and war begin within the family and on the level of personal human relationships. In an attitude of "complete indifference" (107), membership in the Outsider's Society necessitates a refusal to participate in the public sphere of war because the nature of male-dominated institutions is fascistic. In an embittered tone, Woolf writes a satire on the academic document, including endless footnotes and a convoluted argument. She understood that when facing the encroachment of fascism in women's daily lives, anger is both reasonable and even liberating because the patriarch's "fear and anger prevent freedom in the private house...[which] may prevent real freedom in the public world" (131). Yet if women, as outsiders, react to fascism with similar anger they may also play a part in perpetuating war: "...they may have a positive share in causing war" just like the men in power. Woolf was adamantly against war in the name of patriotism because, "as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world" (109). The pattern of alienation (and even fear) that encompasses those members of the Outsider's Society actually creates productive community. As Erica Johnson has recently

argued,<sup>11</sup> this extranational space of “the whole world” is an alternative place of belonging for those disenfranchised by reason of gender, class, and race. I would add as well that this dynamic is created out of the communal space in between, embodied in modernist art by the choron moment. Once again for Woolf, men and women must reform themselves first, and then urge those of their own class to join in the revolution. It is the recognition of a renewed and whole self, a reunion with one’s inner spirit, which precedes and even allows the restoration of greater society.

Jane Marcus expresses doubt about Woolf’s ability to include black women in her concept of the Outsider’s Society in her recent essay “A Very Fine Negress”: “Woolf saw the Negress neither as a fellow citizen of England nor as a possible member of her Society of Outsiders, one who might share the antinationalist... social pacifism of *Three Guineas*” (32).<sup>12</sup> Although Woolf was caught up in the discourse of primitivist modernism, I contend that her legacy cannot ultimately be limited by her perhaps racist point of view. If we are to take Woolf’s Outsider’s Society to its logical and expansive conclusion—without either excusing her short-sightedness or overzealously celebrating her sociopolitical vision—then, even though she would not have included anyone other than those daughters of educated men with economic independence and leisure of their own, we can reimagine the integration of the larger community of those exiled from the dominant culture as we teach and write about her ideals today. Marcus crucially notes, “What is at stake is not only my critical conscience but the passing of the torch of socialist-feminist criticism to another generation of critics, whose strategies for reading will decide how much of these techniques survives ethically and politically to pass on to their students” (19). As literary scholars in the present we might, because Woolf may have had difficulty imagining the

Outsider as nonwhite, practice what she should have preached in our interpretations of modernist narratives of community.

*Three Guineas* surveys British social institutions like the crown, the law, education, the church, the military, and the family and their complicity in war and imperialism.<sup>13</sup> Julia Duffy and Lloyd Davis skillfully assess the ways in which Woolf's phototext critiques the dominant culture by revealing it to itself in images and allusions to male authority figures. Woolf envisioned photographs as an integral part of the argument from early on; their later absence in some editions "diminish[es] connections" Woolf makes "between fascism and patriarchy, foreign and domestic politics, and dominance and hierarchy in the public and private spheres" (128). Their exclusion assumes that they are "subsidiary" and "dependent" upon the written word, while Woolf actually uses them to parody institutions of empire, as well as to reveal their connection with fascism: "Woolf focuses on 'the social work that representation can and does do,' both depicting and challenging conventions deriving from a patriarchal system" (129). Her text and the accompanying images provide counterreadings of the icons of British tradition and power, providing resistance to the ideology that their power is absolute. Woolf's choice to combine the photo and the text in *Three Guineas* exemplifies this objective.

Vital to her argument here are the photographs. Woolf substitutes images of dead children with Englishmen dressed in uniforms associated with the Church, the State and Academia in order to show that there is an implicit connection between death and what she perceives as fascist institutions of power. By omitting the photographs of bombed homes and people, she avoids exploiting their destruction and instead turns our focus to the patriarchal institutions responsible for these outcomes of war. She also disrupts the

idea of facts and evidence so relied upon by regimes of imperialism and realistic photography in general. The photos, both seen and unseen, challenge the idea of objectivity and embody a carnivalization of political discourse, undercutting and satirizing the pomposity of those men in power. Here there is a subversive interaction between the visual and verbal texts.<sup>14</sup> For as Woolf detects, "Photographs...send [their] messages in a flash through every past memory and present feeling. When we look at these photographs some fusion takes place within us" (*Three Guineas* 159). This optic shock or flash of recognition brings about a visceral reaction, but it is one that might cause us to "make room for the mystical, the emotional, in rationalist discourse" (Carlston 160). If Woolf thinks of photography as embodying optic shocks, then images hold within them the expressive power to enact political and social change by virtue of the viewer's recognition. It is those arrested moments, such as those Woolf includes as images equating patriarchal institutions with the fascist outcome of dead children, that allow us what Gloria Anzaldúa calls "the space in-between from which to think" (172), offering personal (and possibly communal) transformation. In a moment of revolutionary repose, we can resist from inside forces of dominance.

Woolf's goal in *Three Guineas* is to undermine those social systems which continually militarize the lives of women and the lower classes. The Society of Outsiders, located in the extranational borderland, will disrupt and deny the patriarchal assumptions of patriotic identity that lead to oppression and war. Woolf views discourse as political action and censorship as oppression.<sup>15</sup> Woolf's polemical writing was a necessary endeavor, enabling her to fight fascism with potent words that could possibly transcend historical rituals of death and destruction. Yet she does not want to preach or convert or

create propaganda, because "if we use art to propagate political opinions...literature will suffer the same mutilation that the mule has suffered; and there will be no more horses" (qtd. in Carlston 162; *Three Guineas* 155n30; 170n39). Instead, Woolf argues that the invigorating power of art depends upon our common, open interaction in an ethical project to create counternarratives of humanist history.

### Choran Redemption and *Between the Acts*

In *Between the Acts* (1941), I find a modernist model for effective social activism through the practice of art in Woolf's novel because not only does she portray a community, she necessitates her readers' participation in that community's interpretive process and thence in that community. The action takes place at an English country house, Pointz Hall, where the villagers are presenting their annual pageant. The ongoing play, interspersed with villagers' strolling, taking tea, and talking, depicts English history from the Renaissance to the present, which is a single day in June, 1939. The play represents the collaborative nature of art; both audience and artist must participate in mutual meaning-making as the text of the play comes alive through the performance of both actor and spectator.<sup>16</sup> Much like Dimrock's conception of a literary legacy based upon resonance, the effect of a play depends upon its reverberation with the present moment, the audience, and their relationship with what has come before it. Art opens up a multitude of possible meanings: "...to create unity, to bridge gaps, to weave scraps and fragments of history and daily life into a pattern, and to create unity...to arouse doubts about such patterns, to raise questions about the order of things, the power of illusions,

and the function of art" (Caughie 54). As Pamela Caughie reminds us, "The point of each artistic production is to change our responses to art and to show how the production of art changes in response to different audiences and different occasions" (55); it transforms our behavior in the world by reconfiguring our relations to "the various discourses [and people] that construct it," both the artwork and as audience. Jane Marcus observes that for Woolf, art is a collaborative act, but also that its resonance releases the possibility of positive change in the future:

The 'incandescent death' which Bertrand Russell found alight in her novels derives for what Lukacs called 'transcendental homelessness' in the modern novelist and from her identity as a spokeswoman for the outsiders. She was the redemptress of time, saying to her contemporaries in *Between the Acts*, with Kafka, 'there is an infinite amount of hope, but not for us.'  
(*New Feminist Essays* 4)

Although I don't find Woolf's last novel to be entirely without hope, it is true that hegemonic versions of history say that white Europeans must do what they have always done; no one is truly unique (199). Woolf ventures a resistance against this view of history, even if only for fleeting yet sacred moments.

In *Between the Acts*, pageant director Miss LaTrobe is trying to give people this kind of transformative art. As onlooker Lucy murmurs, "We've only the present" moment to try to resist the encroachment of fascism, or, "The future disturbing our present" (Woolf 82), evoking the larger threat that Hitler represents. Once again, the optic shock created by the performance might draw the audience into positive action. However, Miss LaTrobe cannot control the play or the reactions of the audience, but her efforts do at times create

seized moments of time, a gathering in that might make the audience stop to think: "Hadn't she, for twenty-five minutes, made them see? A vision imparted was relief from agony...for one moment...one moment" (98). Even if she feels she has failed in the next breath, the play has opened the possibility, through its varied imaginings of history, that the audience has agency in choosing what to remember, what to live by, what to discard or recreate. They all search for some kind of pattern or coherence or order, "some inner harmony?" (119) that might explain the whole of existence. But it is really only Nature, that uncontrollable, celestial force, that establishes unity against the fragments of war: "And the trees with their many-tongued much syllabing, their green and yellow leaves hustle and shuffle us, and bid us, like the starlings, and the rooks, come together, crowd together, to chatter and make merry while the red cow moves forward and the black cow stands still" (120). As in *The Waves*, nature's influence possibly reveals some cosmic good that is broader than the human universe, as well as human connectedness and a yearning for lost unity. The background is the splintered conversation about the play about British history, which encompasses accounts of "Dictators" and the present of "the papers" and "the Jews? The refugees...People like ourselves, beginning life again" (121). There is definitely an atmosphere of renewal afoot here. The wisps and murmurs and the syllabing of nature evoke the babblings of infant and mother in those past moments of jubilant wholeness, suggesting that a reconnection with organic sound could somehow restore us.<sup>17</sup>

At instances like this, and at the end of the novel, Woolf suggests the possibility of writing a new history if you examine the old one while also maintaining a faint hope for rebuilding civilization. There may be a possible unity formed out of the disruption of having to truly see ourselves, even in its "distorting and upsetting and utterly unfair"

reflection in "the looking glasses [as they] dart...flash...expose" (184). If the audience can rest upon this moment for an instant that allows repose, they can reveal the momentary truth about themselves: "And the audience saw themselves, not whole by any means, but at any rate sitting still" (185). They will learn to break from history by looking within to a sense of personal, inner time, as opposed to the machination of fascist controlled order: "The hands of the clock had stopped at the present moment. It was now. Ourselves" (186). The audience begins to realize that British civilization is not so mighty or totalizing as they thought—"Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, the great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization, to be built by (here the mirrors flicked and flashes) orts, scraps, and fragments like ourselves?" (Woolf's italics, 188). If history is just orts and scraps, then what have we to do but gather them up and create our own narratives of restoration rather than war?<sup>18</sup> I use "we" here to denote the community of readers since I have just pointed out how Woolf demonstrates her consciousness of audience as a plurality of readers with the potential for radical action. Even her plot demonstrates her despair at their ability to overcome history long enough to change its practices, and hence its oppressive power as practiced by patriarchal society.

Woolf was concerned with the connection between personal and universal understandings of time throughout her life and work. In *Between the Acts* she finally and deftly deconstructs both as not necessarily ameliorative or progressive. By the time she was writing this novel, Woolf was struggling to maintain some optimism within the current political situation.<sup>19</sup> As Nancy Topping Bazin notes, Woolf's later work "reflect[s]...not only [her] increased sense of the meaninglessness of life but also her horror as she observed supposedly sane individuals and nations preparing for another world war...a



normal state of psychological wholeness was by 1941 no longer possible for Virginia Woolf" (17). Nonetheless Woolf finds the possibility of unity, both through the illuminated present moment and in the recuperative future, in the midst of fragmented scraps that might represent the destructive outcomes of fascist history, leading to social transformation through Benjaminian "redemptive optics."<sup>20</sup> Indeed the ending of *Between the Acts*, with the curtain that rises on Isa and Giles, suggests a possibility for communal renewal. The couple and the crowd, through their newly democratic participation in art, may be able to recast history's fascist implications.<sup>21</sup>

*Between the Acts* is a test case in the performance of choron community, and that performance, through the shared experience of audience and actor in the text, contemporary readers, and our own current scholarly community, holds within it the prospect of reconstructing a redemptive mode of human history. As the play closes, the audience becomes "united" in the spectacle, and in their "flower gathering" they are "crashed; solved; united" (Woolf 189) through their mutual response to art. In "raising their eyes" and truly seeing themselves and each other in this common experience of art, "Each is part of the whole...We act different parts; but are the same" (192), much like the unity of characters in *The Waves* through the image of a seven-sided flower. Once the play has finished and Isa ruminates on "orts, scraps, and fragments" (215), she observes her husband Giles and their troubled marriage: "The father of my children, whom I love and hate'...Surely it was time someone invented a new plot." As Isa reads about prehistoric man rising out of the ashes of history and prepares to make love to her husband, we glimpse, although the view is complicated by "enmity" and "love" as well as the urges to "fight" and "embrace" (219), a new way of thinking that might not repeat the mistakes of

the past. In a conclusion that anticipates postmodernism, Woolf leaves her reading audience with the end of a novel that presupposes a beginning: "Then the curtain rose. They spoke." This couple is about to engage in embracing conversation, as Woolf would argue we must also do as we "invent a new plot" of choron community. Woolf had not completely lost faith in humanity's ability to form a communal ethos.

### The Future for Modernist Interconnectivity

Woolf continued her quest for peace to resist the brutality of war until the end of her life. In her essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (1940), she writes: "Unless we can think peace into existence we—not this one body in the one bed but millions of bodies yet to be born—will lie in the same darkness and hear the same death rattle overhead" (243). Peace, for present or future generations, depends upon the synergy of intellect and social activism. Once again, Woolf places the blame on patriarchal institutions of power: "The defenders are men. The attackers are men. Arms are not given to the Englishwoman to fight the enemy or to defend herself. She must lie weaponless tonight." Critiquing the cult of the mother who happily sends her sons off to be sacrificed for the love of country, she notes that some would say that, "The maternal instinct is a woman's glory" (246), while for men that glory lies in fighting.<sup>22</sup> Rather than allowing ourselves to be overcome by patriarchy or maternal militarism, Woolf instead insists that our intellects undo the impulse to fight. She has hope that we will overcome the utterly nonsensical nature of the fascistic powers that be: "There is another way of fighting for freedom without arms; we can fight with the mind. We can make ideas that help the young Englishman who is fighting

up in the sky to defeat the enemy...Mental fight means thinking against the current, not with it" (244). She insists that our minds can create communal counternarratives that will free us from militaristic oppression. She pointedly asks, "Who is Hitler? What is he?" and answers, "Aggressiveness, tyranny, the insane love of power made manifest, they reply. Destroy that, and you will be free" (245). Ultimately for Woolf, it is vital that we excavate the darkness within, the potential power-monger in all of us. We might then recreate a purity and authenticity of the self, which has been mired by histories of war and fascism most potently connected with World War II, in order to find an outlet of healthy, productive and ethical community.<sup>23</sup>

More importantly, Woolf argues that we must consciously eradicate any domineering, fascistic hostility we might harbor in the relationship between self and other. Woolf's sage words—"Let us try to drag up into consciousness the subconscious Hitlerism that holds us down. It is the desire for aggression; the desire to dominate and enslave...They are slaves who are trying to enslave"—speak to this necessity to rediscover ourselves as well as those in our wider community in order to make real progress in preventing war. She still hopes that our cooperative creativity will make a positive difference: "They would give them other openings for their creative power. That too must make part of our fight for freedom...We must create more honourable activities for those who try to conquer in themselves their fighting instinct, their subconscious Hitlerism" (247). As Natania Rosenfeld eloquently states, "We must all, [Woolf] says, become the authors of a new, truly intersubjective plot, a plot that excludes no one and accounts for the complexities of the human soul" (15). Woolf's collective intellectual project of humanism resists internalizations of a naturalized perception of self-superiority,

a subconscious fascism. Once again, the choral moment and its consequential interconnective community does not consume individual desires in order to champion worship of an ideologue ruler; nor does it depend upon mechanistic or war-mongering notions of a regenerative collective. The only fighting Virginia Woolf affirms is the fight for common emancipation from tyrannies of authorized history. It is the creative mind, body, and soul that will finally redeem humanity, and these vital elements of human life can only be excavated in our new understanding of communal wholeness.

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Woolf argues that for women to write, it is necessary to kill the Angel in the House who would insist that women's duties to home and family supercede her desire to express herself through the art of writing.

<sup>2</sup> In "Toward a Theory of Resonance," *PMLA* (1997 October 112): 1060-1071, Dimrock writes that literary endurance is due to the resonant, adaptable nature of texts.

<sup>3</sup> An ongoing myth about Woolf is her supposedly disengaged political status, but the work of scholars such as Jane Marcus show evidence of her "engagement with the Labour party, pamphleteering, and Co-operative movement activities" (Hussey 7), as well as her desire to balance feminism and pacifism. As Mark Hussey puts it, "to read Woolf as a theorist of war,...is possible only in the context shaped by those whose readings of her texts have treated her as a serious political and ethical thinker, an artist whose aesthetic practice is always informed by a clear sense of political reality" (3). Evidence of Woolf's concern for the social problems of her day abound throughout her work, from *The Voyage Out* (1915) in which she links male sexual desire with dominance and war (8), to her representation of the young male spoils of war in *Jacob's Room* (1922) and *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), in which she argues that Britain sacrificed many of its young men for the sake of proportion and conversion.

See also Marcus, *Art and Anger: Reading Like a Woman* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1988), for a comprehensive view of Woolf's politics, although Marcus contends Woolf's socialist pacifist ethic in all her criticism on Woolf. For instance, in his biography, Quentin Bell sets Woolf right in the middle of Victorian bourgeois empire, ignoring that "She was arguing for total subversion of the world of empire, class, and privilege" (195).

<sup>4</sup> According to Levenback, all of Woolf's work reveals her "engagement with ambiguities and realities that blur the lines between peace and war; civilians and combatants; survivors and victims; and, most basically, life and death" (27).

<sup>5</sup> Woolf's diary entry in 1935 warily says of *The Years* that "this fiction is dangerously near propaganda" (*Diary* 4, 300). Her essay "The Leaning Tower" (read to the Workers' Educational Association in May 1940) states, "The novel of the classless and towerless world should be a better novel...there might

---

be a common belief which he could accept, and thus shift from his shoulders the burden of didacticism, or propaganda" (151). Therefore we must read books from the library and read them critically, as common readers (153). For "Are we not commoners, outsiders?...Let us trespass at once. Literature is no one's private ground; literature is common ground. It is not cut up into nations; there are no wars there. Let us trespass freely and fearlessly and find our own way for ourselves" (154).

<sup>6</sup> Levenback agrees with this ideal of lived time and its relationship to history, arguing that, "*The Years*...becomes Woolf's own history of the war, written from a civilian vantage and out of civilian memories, a history that extends into a future that could very well repeat the threat of the past with even more frightening consequences" (120).

<sup>7</sup> I join my colleague, Freda Hauser, in the view of *Three Guineas* as a phototext rather than an essay, as is it more commonly called.

<sup>8</sup> Capturing the issues of imperialism, primitivism, how we can capture the "whatness" of language and the moment, structures of identity and social conventions, the process of becoming English, fragmentation and coherence, and finally the convergence with an authentic self, *The Waves* is one of Woolf's most innovative works.

<sup>9</sup> This is somewhat similar to those in the "Time Passes" section of *To The Lighthouse* (1927),

<sup>10</sup> Caughie suggests that Woolf uses a Kuhnian concept of knowledge (as opposed to a Cartesian cumulative and progressive version) to argue that "the past is a perspective on the present. It is not coherent, static, and self-contained but contradictory, dynamic, changing as the present changes. It is a complex of competing and conflated value systems" (102).

<sup>11</sup> Johnson's presentation was entitled "The Legacy of the 'Outsider's Society': Woolf and Postcolonial Nationhood" (MLA Convention, IVWS, 28 December 2004, Philadelphia, PA). She discussed a postcolonial point of view on the nation as an exclusive sociopolitical space in the work of Woolf, Adrienne Rich, and Diane Brand.

<sup>12</sup> In a complex and fascinating discussion of a passage on Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, in which the narrator refers to passing "a very fine negress" in the street (AROOO 52), Marcus concludes: "Perhaps some of the ambivalence we feel expressed in Woolf's spatialization of race, gender, gaze, imperialism, and

nationalism in this passage...has its sources in the conflicts between her own upbringing and the Bloomsbury socialist and liberal anti-imperialist values she shared with her friends and her husband, if not with the Negress she passed in the street" (*Hearts of Darkness* 57). I am also troubled by this passage, but am inclined to give Woolf the benefit of the doubt here because she expresses a profound belief in humanistic equality in much of her socialist-feminist critical writing.

<sup>13</sup> *Three Guineas* was written in order to question "nostalgic patriotism that emerged in Britain in response to developments in Europe" (Duffy and Davis 128).

<sup>14</sup> "Woolf extols an imaginative activity over mindless conformity...In reworking the genre of the political tract, [she] pressures a restrictive opposition between fictional and nonfictional discourse...begin[ning] through a revision of the role of photographs" (Duffy and Davis 132).

<sup>15</sup> Duffy and Davis argue that discourse was power for both Woolf and Kristeva. Specifically, Kristeva's semiotic concept of the "prepatriarchal, presymbolic" informs the "interactive, verbal-pictorial discourse that comprises *Three Guineas* [and] becomes a source of disruption to patriarchal values and meanings" (130).

<sup>16</sup> Caughie argues also that the play "reveals the extent to which art depends upon its audience and on various contingencies" (53) for its (dis)continuity.

<sup>17</sup> Erin G. Carlston, *Thinking Fascism*, shows how Woolf's "love of country, like the fascist's, is rooted in the semiotic seductiveness of archaic orality and the oceanic maternal embrace...[yet] for her, any particular motherland is at most the specific source of a nonspecific, undifferentiated love of humanity" (157).

<sup>18</sup> Karen Phillips, *Virginia Woolf Against Empire* (Knoxville, TN: The U of TN Press, 1994), argues as well that "*Between the Acts* sweepingly examines historical events and attitudes that have led to England's present role in fascism and disaster" (202). However, she concludes that Woolf suggests that no "true community ever existed" because all of society has been implicated in the crime of war. I argue conversely that Woolf continues to hope that community can be rebuilt and recreated through recognition of choron interconnectivity.

<sup>19</sup> Natania Rosenfeld, *Outsiders Together* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2001), notes: "What appalled

---

Virginia Woolf and so many of her contemporaries was the fact that the 'insane rantings' of one man could cast the world into a second great war" (170).

<sup>20</sup> Karen Jacobs argues similarly that Woolf "finds amidst the disruptive collisions of varied cultural materials the potential for spectators to experience a 'flash' of demystifying insight into their historical and political moment" (42). The emphasis on the "betweenness" reveals a "dialectic at a standstill" (220).

Phillips also observes that, "The most important technique shared by Woolf and Brecht is juxtaposition, designed to shock the audience" (xvii).

<sup>21</sup> Jacobs contends that this novel does not portray the "modernist aesthetic of fragmentation based mainly on verisimilitude," but the fragment used to comment on, "interrogate" and "demystify...both our experience of historical difference as a narrative of progress and our experience of historical sameness as a narrative of universality and transcendence" (220).

<sup>22</sup> As Phillips proposes, "Woolf does not ignore the complicity of women themselves in Empire and war. She warns that if conditions for women do not improve, they may actually solicit the cataclysm of war" (244).

The image of Mother England was especially potent during the First World War. As Jane Marcus writes, "The fearful huge matriarch who points the way to the Front...She is the Home Front, the Mother Country, the one who gives birth and also kills. It would never do to blame the old men who make war, the kings and Kaisers and their counselors" ("Corpus, Corps, Corpse"). In *Three Guineas*, Woolf points the finger directly at those men in power.

<sup>23</sup> Carlston suggests that "both the Auden Generation and Woolf were beginning in the 1930s to imagine horizons of a political community in which they might find themselves united by common commitment to the struggle against fascism in all its forms" (177).





Walker Evans, Burroughs Family Portrait, Hale County, Alabama (1936)



Walker Evans, *Bud Fields and His Family, Hale County, Alabama (1936)*

## CONCLUSION

### THE LEGACY OF CHORAN COMMUNITY:

#### A Vision of Ethical Encounter in James Agee's and Walker Evans's

##### Let Us Now Praise Famous Men

[We are drawn into] the force of 'the Past'... The further one penetrates, the more one is rewarded by the minutiae of detail suspended in the seemingly transparent emulsion. We seem to experience a loss of our own reality; a flow of light forms the picture to us and forms ourselves into the picture...

We are invited to dream in the ideological space of the photograph.

(John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* 183)

In times like these, points of view are important, they represent what you will be called upon to act from tomorrow...the writer must create...the nucleus of a new condition and relationship of the individual and society and all the problems involved in that new orientation...[while] being outside and at the same time inside...Belief is an action for the writer. The writer's action is full belief, from which follows a complete birth, not a fascistic abortion, but a creation of a new nucleus of a communal society in which at last the writer can act fully and not act equivocally. In a new and mature integrity.

(Meridel Le Sueur, "The Fetish of Being Outside" 299-303)

This final chapter concludes my structuring progression from chorán moment to chorán community, closing with the contention that for this brief yet

energizing time between the World Wars, the novel and the photograph productively came together in such texts as Virginia Woolf's *Three Guineas* (1938) and James Agee's and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1941). Both phototexts were composed, produced, and revised in the late 1930s as the Second World War was encroaching upon the lives of artists and citizens alike. These phototexts share a similar concern for creating an art both politically and aesthetically engaged in reimagining a sense of interconnectedness in a world burdened by war, poverty, racism, and overwhelming uncertainty about the future of humanity. Literary left writer Meridel Le Sueur believed in ethical political action as did Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston. Le Sueur's essay, quoted in the epigraph, achingly portrays the modernist artist's yearning to create wholeness through art, while at the same time lamenting the virtual impossibility of that quest. She<sup>1</sup> asks a profound question that remains for all of the artists I have discussed, and for those of us trying to make sense of their utopian visions today: "Why shouldn't the artist be in the vanguard in a well-integrated society, the most mature, with the greatest powers of psychic synthesis and prophecy?" (300). For others associated with the legacy of the modernist aesthetic of interconnectivity, the post-choran moment, this vital question persists.

This conclusion addresses the aftermath of the literary and photographic choran moment. In order to conclude my discussion of this strand of modernism as expressing communal narratives encompassed by both literary and photographic texts, I will read Agee's and Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* in light of the dilemmas Le Sueur raises regarding the legacy of modernist artists' capacity and responsibility to recreate wholeness in a broken world. Agee's and Evans's *LUNPFM* was a rediscovered text that

gave readers political impetus in the counterculture revolution of the 1960s,<sup>2</sup> similar to the emergence of women's studies and African American women's literature with the rediscoveries of Woolf, Warner, Larsen, and Hurston in the 70s and 80s. Le Sueur's essay gets at the tension that has been underlying my entire discussion: the conflicts between class position, race, and gender in modern artists' performance of their political beliefs through their artwork. Agee and Evans, one a writer and one a photographer, seriously consider the relationship between elitism and activism as they engage in collaborative artistic production. Their central purpose is how to literally enact one's political commitment as a bourgeois artist and member of an elite class, in the midst of the American Great Depression and the unavoidability of World War II.<sup>3</sup>

Like all the other modernist texts I have discussed, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* both engages and performs the capacity for communal awareness. This phototext was created during the last few years we associate with modernism and was published on at a time in history when the hope for humanistic correlation had all but disappeared. This work of documentary art crosses a threshold that the earlier modernists I have discussed could not; Agee and Evans show, through their ethical effort, that there is, ultimately, no solution to the dilemma of separation between self and other. Their work remains an extraordinarily vivid and painful dramatization of the philosophical impossibility of truly engaging the space between. They recognize the ultimate tragedy of how simultaneously close and far modernist artists could come to realizing their goal of communal interconnectivity. Agee and Evans instead come face to face with the impossibility of this utopian vision by living with the paradoxical nature of that desire. I argue that *LUNPFM* represents a shift in modern artists' enactment of their political,

ethical, and aesthetic concern for community in that Agee and Evans most patently recognize the paradox inherent in their struggle to create the choron moment. Through the irony inherent in setting up moments of hopeful connection between affluent, white male artists, one Harvard-educated and the other Walker Evans III, and uneducated poverty-stricken sharecroppers and their families, their phototext signals a measure of recognition amongst modernist artists that although finding choron community was no longer feasible, there is honor in the struggle, the earnest desire and attempt to build bridges between self and other.

As a later modernist experiment in making readers and viewers see anew, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* resists the conventions of the traditional photographic essay. W.J.T. Mitchell points out that “the normal structure of this kind of imagetext involves the straightforward...narrative suturing of the verbal and visual: texts explain, narrate, describe, label, speak for (or to) the photographs; photographs illustrate, exemplify, clarify, ground, and document the text” (94). Mitchell argues that the image/text problem is an unavoidable fact within the individual arts and media: “all arts are ‘composite arts’ (both text and image); all media are mixed media, combining different codes, discursive connections, channels, sensory and cognitive methods” (94-5). He insists that any kind of purity of image or text is a utopian impossibility (96), an ideology of modernism that always already “invoke[s] the metalanguage of the image/text” (97). In *LUNPFM*, the text and the photos are, as the authors intended, completely coequal in creating meaning. Representing the immediacy of the moment, the images embody an attempt to stop time in order to reveal the essence of the real, while still suggesting the limits of language and representation.

*LUNPFM* is multigenred, a pastiche of a document that, in its narrative, anticipates postmodernism. The literary narrative mirrors the fragmentation of human consciousness; Agee strives to dip in and out of time, and inside and outside of body and mind, in an attempt to see reality from all sides (much like the image of a seven-sided flower in *The Waves*). Evans creates various images of intersubjectivity between the viewer, subject, and photographer; these moments, like the textual instances in the novels I have described, often allow subjects to look back and/or resist oppression, categorization, assimilation, or aestheticization. In potentially transcendent, choral moments of interconnection—present in the recognition of selfhood and in honoring otherness—Evans's images, along with Agee's hyper-realistic prose, attempt to reveal an ethical collective of humanity much like one Woolf calls for in her more mystical prose. The difference with these phototexts is the writer's disavowal of it as a piece of high art: "...this is not a work of art or of entertainment, nor will I assume the obligations of the artist or entertainer, but is a human effort which must require human cooperation" (Agee 111). Agee's statement encapsulates the culmination of Woolf's credo of art; that each member of the human audience, along with the creator, is a co-collaborator in making meaning out of human experience.

The task of creating art that expresses human interconnection could only prove more imperative (and that much more difficult) in the wake of individual, financial, and national collapse in America by the end of the 1930s. In modernist artists', both early and late, (re)construction of imaginable selves from among multiple, shifting, and interdependent relationships between private and public identities in both literature and photography, we, as readers of this phototext today, find once again these their need to

shore up the profound fragments. Yet like literature, photography is both documentary truth and performative art in that the photographer consciously crafts their work out of a convergence of personal perspective and record of reality; *LUNPFM* is a prime example of this fusion.<sup>4</sup> William Stott tells us that this phototext “reveals the limitations, the tragic superficiality, of a way of seeing and speaking, of a perspective on life, and—in some measure, perhaps—of a time” (266).

My central question here is whether Evans’s photographic documents of sharecroppers, in collusion with Agee’s overwrought narrative, enact any kind of ethnographic theatre, or conversely, that they open up the possibility of reading against the grain of a Foucauldian version of documentary photography. Perhaps we might imagine that Agee’s and Evans’s beleaguered goal of liberating those otherwise highly disciplined bodies and souls was an honest—if failed—attempt, made possible only under the somewhat panoptic gaze of the Farm Security Administration and *Fortune* magazine. In moments of ironic narrative constructedness, the photographs and literary text help promote the utopian ideal of humanity’s interconnection while also showing us the fantasy invested in that hope. Agee’s and Evans’s phototext represents a key illustration of the modernist attempt to create aesthetic interconnectivity—just as modernism had come to a close. Agee and Evans, through their last-gasp attempt to reflect the power of the photographic chorane moment, remind us of our ability, as readers and viewers, to stop and interpret that moment as resonant and possibly generative. Whether this moment is photographic or textual, we can become more aware of mutually instructive “truths” available through a genuine desire to connect



while we also acknowledge the wishful, perhaps utopian nature that yearning oftentimes reveals.

### Agee's and Evans's Social Document of Interconnection

The value of photographs as history lies not just in what they show or how they look but in how they construct their meanings...[they are] not simple depictions but constructions...the history they show is inseparable from the history they enact: a history of photographers employing their medium to make sense of their society. It is also a history of photographers seeking to define themselves, to create a role for photography as an American art. (Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs* xvi)

Image and perspective both imply sight and vision: an act of reading...the history represented in American photographs belongs to a continuing dialogue and struggle over the future of America...The dialectical view of history gives us an American photography more richly American, more significant (this is my hope) as a past which interprets our present—past images as present history. (Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs* 290)

I am a member of the Family...one big family hugging close to the ball of earth for its life and being... There is only one man in the world and his name is All Men. There is only one woman in the world and her name is All Women. There is only one child in the world and the child's name is All Children. (Edward Steichen, *The Family of Man*)

Walker Evans's photographic vision<sup>5</sup> has been compared with epic narratives of the American experience by authors such as Melville, Twain, and Whitman: "He appropriated the potent, head-on style of naïve vernacular photography and transformed it into an instrument of conscious elegance" in a "poetic definition of the

American experience” (Fonvielle 5). For Lloyd Fonvielle, American innocence is at the core of Evans’s vision, which encompasses a “melancholy aura” and an attempt to disclose the essence of the real person or place being photographed, while always keeping a respectful distance. Evans saw himself as a “roving social historian” (8) yet strived to stay away from creating propaganda for the FSA.<sup>6</sup> Evans’s images evince the nobility and grace in the most basic, and reveal his respect and sympathy for his subjects and their honest labor. Evans admitted that he was “deeply in love with America,” but he avoided contrived photographic devices of emotional appeal. When *Fortune* writer James Agee’s request to work with Evans was granted in 1936, the two men went to Hale County, Alabama and took on the trust of three sharecropper families, the Gudgers, the Woods, and the Ricketts, spending over two weeks with them as daily company. Their masterpiece of “intensity...love, humility, anger, and guilt” (Hersey x) was eventually transformed into *LUNPFM*.<sup>7</sup> Evans’s contribution to this phototext’s eloquence is his humanistic mode of photography. In short, as Stott argues, he “records people when they are most themselves, most in command” (269) by allowing them to perform their best versions of themselves, rather than taking candid shots, which might otherwise be considered stark documentary images. Evans’s images anchor Agee’s<sup>8</sup> overabundant prose with their “devastating openness” (Fonvielle 9). In their sharply defined refinement of Evans’s own vision, they represent “the essence, the fulcrum of his life’s work.”<sup>9</sup> The project was concluded in 1939, and two years later, the published book was a complete flop. It had only sold about 600 copies at the time of its publication, perhaps because before the end of the year Japan had attacked Pearl Harbor, and “the American mind had gone off to war” (Hersey xxxii). According to

William Stott, "It is ironic that this book should now be acknowledged a great and representative work of the thirties, because it was then dispraised, misunderstood, and, above all, ignored" (261). It seems that American readers were far too concerned with the impending world war to be receptive to Agee's and Evans's message of humanity's essential interconnectedness.

Still, *LUNPFM*'s humanist vision suggests the possibility of connection, at least in its intention, despite the seeming naïve quality of that desire. Agee's and Evans's strategy was to remain ever-aware of their own positions as artists and observers of an entirely different class than their subjects, while also daring to express a hope for correlation with their subjects. John Hersey informs us that because they were "Self-conscious about the intrusiveness of their mission, Agee began to think of himself and Evans, with heavy irony, as 'spies'" (xvii). As Ivy League-educated spies in this southern culture of abject poverty and devastation, Agee and Evans actively stage an ethical encounter with otherness. At the height of the Depression, the average salary for sharecroppers was \$400 per year. Agee and Evans were paid by *Fortune* magazine to embark upon this assignment and in turn paid the Gudger family to stay in a room in their cabin for the summer. The families were not told the truth about why these "spies" were visiting, and some, including a few of the family members, felt that they were taken advantage of by everyone.<sup>10</sup>

The primitivist impulse arises when we discuss the choron moment, and modernist artists often fell into the trap of uplifting the experience of lower class working people as somehow more honest or pure while simultaneously neglecting the reality of their poverty. Although it is not their intent to engage in any kind of class

primitivism, Agee and Evans are inevitably entangled in a dynamic that always already implicates them, both artists and subjects of inspiration, in that hierarchal modernist narrative of progress where the so-called undeserving poor are ultimately disenfranchized. Yet also inherent in Agee's and Evans's consciously ironic construction is an insistence, especially on Agee's part as a passionate idealist, that they partake of these family's lives in order to show some sense of empathy for their downtrodden position. This insistence is in part what makes *LUNPFM* a counternarrative against the account of Progress and Industry associated with the New Deal era. These documentary artists show us that Progress and Industry did not come to many working families, and the fact that Agee and Evans witness their plight might be the only way we can begin to understand the reality of the sharecropper's lives at this time in American history.

The prose style of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* reflects Agee's resolve that all human experience is meshed, that even the narrative and the photos are meshed. Working from this assumption, Evans is a carver and Agee is an ultra-describer, both of human interconnection and of the intensity of the surrounding environment. One example of Agee's desire to interconnect with those around him occurs when he painstakingly describes a potential moment of contact between himself and a group of African American singers at one of the foreman's homes. He describes their song as utterly heart-wrenching: "...jagged, tortured, stony, accented as if by hammers and cold-chisels, full of a nearly paralyzing vitality and iteration of rhythm, the harmonies constantly splitting the nerves" (Agee 29). Almost immediately after this heightened moment of release, "they were abruptly silent...There was nothing to say. I looked

them in the eyes with full and open respect and said, that was fine,” for which they sang another. Agee acknowledges the intrusion of his gaze: “I had been sick in the knowledge that they felt they were here at our demand...that I could communicate nothing otherwise; and now, in a perversion of self-torture, I played my part through. I gave their leader fifty cents, trying at the same time, through my eyes, to communicate much more” (31). He knows he is caught in a triple bind as white man, bohemian bourgeois artist, and perhaps ethnographic observer, and attempts, in his painfully self-aware state of mind, to impress this knowledge upon the reader. Agee’s patent willingness to abject himself in the face of all possible offense becomes solipsistic and overstated. When he frightens a young African American woman and her male companion on the road, he is careful to narrate how “I stood and looked into their eyes and loved them, and wished to God I was dead” (42). He acknowledges in a single moment the sheer (im)possibility for art (in its simultaneous creation and reproduction) to bridge the self and the other, except by virtue of our acknowledgement of that impasse.

Nonetheless, plainspoken images of daylight and clarity are juxtaposed with lyrically charged flights of the imagination. Agee’s prose mirrors Evans’s pristine images of these families and their homes, while also revealing to us that we may “not be able to help but understand it” *and* the impossibility of us ever actually understanding any of it (51). Both artists strive to capture the essence, the immediacy of reality—to stop time to grasp the actual and its infused mystery: “such ultimate, such holiness of silence and peace that all on earth and within extremest remembrance seems suspended upon it in perfection as upon reflective water.” Agee’s prose insists that choron moments of

illumination might exist here, in the stillness of the Gudger home while the family is out working in the fields:

...a house of simple people which stands empty and silent in the vast Southern country morning sunlight, and everything which on this morning in eternal space it by chance contains, all thus left open and defenseless to a reverent and cold-laboring spy, shines quietly forth such grandeur, such sorrowful holiness of its exactitudes in existence, as no human consciousness shall ever rightly perceive, far less impart to another. (134)

The essential and tragic beauty of the Gudger home, which cannot be described in any “ordinary terms,” becomes overdetermined in Agee’s scrupulous detail and lofty, poetic musings, which are (almost ironically) reciprocated by Evans’s straightforward images.

When Agee does describe his surroundings in ordinary terms, they become hyper-real, creating moments of intersection and possibility inherent in the two conjoined media. A prime instance is his meticulously detailed list of the contents of the Gudger’s mantel—from fluted saucers to family snapshots, to scraps of advertisements and newspaper print—providing a rich narrative compendium to complement and traverse with Evans’s straight-on photograph. Both Agee and Evans strive to be simultaneous witness and communicator of the “beauty of the literal, of the world as it is” (Stott 273). This was especially true for Agee in his desire to inhabit the space between the reality of experience and his representation of it in the written text.<sup>11</sup> As Hersey puts it, “Agee would have to try in his writing to make words *become* people and things” (xxix). For Agee, as for poets Wordsworth and Whitman before him, literature should come from common incidents in life and be written in common

language heightened by the Imagination to represent “the art of commonplace reality” (Stott 276).

In a prophetic mission to change humanity’s understanding of self and community, Agee strives to give voice to the masses through his exorbitant expressions of democracy. He makes the ordinary extraordinary with his subjects of simple, humble, rustic life. For Agee, the modernist writer is a prophetic visionary who speaks to humanity as a vessel of truth, with greater knowledge of human nature, passion, the soul, and the Imagination. Stott writes, “Agee bothered to create art, then...[in order] to bring words more closely into correspondence with the truth, Nature, the world” (297). The moral impact of an often qualified yet serene mood allows Agee a kind of meditative state, which in turn helps him to reveal transcendent connectedness and unity with the world around him. He believes that he can somehow see into the life of things via his mystical interpenetration with his environment. The Preface reminds us that *LUNPFM* is “an effort in human actuality, in which the reader is no less centrally involved than the authors and those of whom they tell” (xlviii). As in Woolf’s collaborative vision of art as recreation of the web-like linkage among humanity, readers and viewers of this phototext are called upon to take action for the betterment of the wider community.<sup>12</sup> The question to consider more fully here is whether Agee and Evans could ever reveal the truth about these sharecropper’s lives;<sup>13</sup> despite Evans’s beautiful images that invite empathic viewing and Agee’s self-consciously democratic prose, their phototext remains vexed with artistic ego, class privilege, and wishful bias.

Regardless of their problematic social positionings, Agee’s and Evans’s *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is wholly “coequal in the care of execution” (Hunter 74) and

technical accomplishment. The overlap of image and language urges readers and viewers to ask how to read both “texts.” Since the photos are separated from Agee’s text, words and images are indeed mutually dependent, that neither can stand on its own. It is significant to note that our entrance into *LUNPFM* is the visual arrest of Evans’s gorgeous photographs, signifying a distrust of the written word and a preparation for the written text. Ultimately the collaborative photographs and text suggest that there is no singular, total truth, but instead the complex and poetic eloquence associated with the problem of capturing reality. In a belief that the picturesque takes refuge in words, “Verbal mastery, extravagance of style, is what Agee knows he is uniquely qualified to bring to Alabama. The restraint of Evans’s camera and its absolute, dry truth he can love only at a distance” (79). They are “radical innovators” in their refusal to conventionally link words and images, and in that innovation they invite readers and viewers to convene in making connections between visual and verbal, subject and viewer, artist and audience.

But are the texts, photographic and narrative, sentimental? The Ricketts’ fireplace section is infused with the same kind of supercharged realism that runs throughout the narrative, rendering it surreal and possibly over-romanticized. Yet this sentimentality may just be a function of recreating their reality. To begin with, Agee writes, “The Ricketts are much more actively fond of pretty things than the other families are” (199). Agee takes on an almost satirical tone about the advertisements hanging on their walls—picturing such things as “close-ups of young women bravely and purely facing the gravest problems of life in the shelter of lysol” (200). He also acknowledges that a footnote can not actually convey the entirety of the wall. Here



Agee questions how to represent the totality of experience by making language work as an image of reality: "These are in part my memory, in part composited out of other memory, in part improvised, but do not exceed what was there in abundance, variety, or kind. They are much better recorded in photographs for which there is no room in this volume" (201). This is Agee's aesthetic means of trying to impart the reality, in all its intricacies, of this family's home as an emblem of their suffering. He finds these families to be representative of the human condition, and laments the fact that they are currently sacrificed to the prevailing social disorder resulting from the Great Depression.

Agee's and Evans's collaborative work seems more honest than journalism or art of other documentaries in its commentary on the limitations and nature of language. They are ever-wary of the trace of the intimate, the animate human in their documentary work.<sup>14</sup> From a profoundly religious point of view and with a powerful elevation of the deprived, including the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, Agee begins the narrative with quotes from Shakespeare's *Lear* and the thoughts of Marx and ends with the Bible, suggesting somewhat pretentiously that the meek shall inherit the earth. In doing so Agee consistently represents himself as a kind of Whitmanesque vessel of truth. Yet he also constantly brings up questions of self-indulgence vs. self-loathing, transcendent language juxtaposed with physical reality, and episodic moments dropping in and out in the dislocation of time, place, and point of view.<sup>15</sup> Agee does not want to be dismissed or considered pretentious in his attempt to get at the impossible task of recreating reality without representation, so he often (and even embarrassingly) exposes

himself more than the subjects he “reports” on by, for instance, confessing his inappropriate sexual fantasies about Emma Woods.

One might criticize this phototext for its undoubtedly white, predominantly privileged, male, Western perspective, but I am reluctant to do so because of Agee’s and Evans’s obvious attempt to realize a humane and ethical description of the encounter between self and other.<sup>16</sup> Through Agee’s poetic reportage, he is always trying to achieve intersubjective relationship with the families. As Stott insists about both Agee and Evans, they

...sought to teach the educated thirties’ reader how to feel and respond toward the underprivileged...how should we, relatively fortunate people, behave toward the unfortunate, the crippled, the deceived? And Agee’s answer, which he puts into practice throughout the narrative, is as outrageous as it is Christian and simple: we should establish real relation; we should fall in love with them. (305)

As Julia Kristeva articulates much later, the ability to “love the other, who is not necessarily me...gives me the possibility of opening myself to something other than myself” (*New Maladies* 379). Could the difference between ethnographic exploitation and ethical encounter really just be love?

The redemptive nature of Agee’s and Evans’s vision indeed takes on a Judeo-Christian, love-thy-neighbor-as-thyself dimension, but this is not the only reason for the quality of interrelationship they sometimes accomplish in their phototext. Again, I agree that the separation of photographs and text reads against any ideal of clean linearity.<sup>17</sup> The distance Evans creates, through his empathic eye, and Agee, through his self-critical

stance (“I have no right, here, I have no real right, much as I want it, and could never earn it, and should write of it, must defend it against my kind” [Agee 410]), also reminds us that these people are not knowable through an image or a series of words. What makes Agee’s and Evans’s strategy ethical is a palpable resistance to creating photographic or literary images of their subjects that would objectify them, as well as their invitation to the audience to collaborate in countenancing the corresponding images and texts.<sup>18</sup>

Yet Agee and Evans are always aware that this task is paradoxical, that there is tragic regret in the recognition that they cannot ultimately cross over the line between self and other. Take for example one image not included in either the 1941 or 1960 edition of *LUNPFM* titled *Burroughs Family, Hale County, Alabama 1936*, what is in the phototext the Gudger family. George Gudger (a.k.a. Lloyd Burroughs) is at the center of the frame, standing in the middle with his arms around his wife Annie Mae (Allie Mae) and sister-in-law Emma (Mary) while the children stand or sit in front of them on a bench. His stance and stare suggest that, for once, here is the proud patriarch. This version of the head of the Gudger family has not been wasted by the exhausting labor that is his daily torture. Annie Mae and Emma smile somewhat confidently, as if to say that in these clothes (with corresponding ruffles), with their hair seeming clean and neatly brushed, they might find themselves to be beautiful and worthy of a life that consists of more than back-breaking domestic work. The younger children, Burt and Valley Few, stand on the bench dressed stiffly in their clean Sunday best, and appear to be in various stages of fidgeting and squinting in the harsh sunlight. The lighting, along with the literal staging of the bench and the stark backdrop of the side of their house,

suggest exposure, interrogation. The two older children, Junior and Louise, sit on the bench uncomfortably. Louise, whose visibly painful attempt at propriety, with knees squeezed together, upper and lower body pushing in opposite directions, and hands almost folded primly in her lap, belies any assumption we, as viewers, might make that this photograph could reveal any kind of truth about who this family actually is and who the members are individually.

The documentary proof here makes the fiction of the family portrait even more abundant to the viewer—even Evans's cool detachment and safe-distanced, straight-on view of the Burroughs cannot show us their essence, their humanity, as the photographer would like to have done. The family stands together in a stoic moment of solidarity in creating their family portrait, and we are not allowed to trespass into that familial space with them. The triangle of photographic interpretation slants most sharply toward the subjects of this photograph; Evans was apparently not able to control the representation of this sharecropper family as much as he might have wished. There is no chorán moment here, ironically because the image and those subjects in it are so performative, so well-crafted and staged to look like a good, clean, hardworking family on the up and up, wearing their best clothes and striving to present the best versions of themselves.<sup>19</sup> It is no wonder that this image did not appear in either edition of the phototext.

Compare this image with one family portrait included in both editions of the phototext: *Bud Woods and His Family, Hale County, Alabama 1936*. First of all, the family is more closely framed than the previous image, possibly drawing the viewer nearer to this family. The family sits, variously on the end of their medal-framed bed and on

wooden chairs, all except for the young girl, Pearl, who leans against the rail of the bed between her parents, and the youngest baby girl, Ellen, who lies sleeping in his mother's arm, in their shabby, distressed wood-paneled bedroom. One of the first details a viewer might notice, at least the punctum here for me, is the fact that the toddler, Thomas, looks back at the camera with what appears to be either a laugh or a song, and he wears no pants, and not even any underwear. He is naked and vulnerable yet relaxed and perhaps even jubilant in his laughing song. The lighting in the room is more natural and less severe than in the Burroughs family photograph. All the family members maintain natural physical connection with one another as they are clustered beside the bed and chairs next to it. Each person returns the camera's gaze with frank passivity, except perhaps for the grandmother, Miss-Molly, whose look and clenched hands reveal a certain level of suspicion. It is interesting to note also that she is the only family member not barefoot, but instead wears her sturdy, laced-up boots. The truth of this family's labor and their struggles to survive their poverty are not masked, but are profusely visible in soiled splotches on the floor, filthy feet, torn and grimy clothing, tousled and sweat-drenched hair, drooping shoulders, and tired eyes.

Miss-Molly's expression points us once again to the paradox of the photographic chorán moment. Her look of distrust shows us that, although those pictured are not torturing themselves to perform the image of proper family portrait in spite of their appalling poverty, our corner of the triangle is not deserved. The Fields family is caught off-guard and thus they are not able to arrange themselves in the way of the Gudgers. Each member of the family is profoundly present in this seemingly apathetic moment; they are together as a family unit, each one part of the organic whole that is what Agee

would probably call their familial incandescence. Yet regardless of our desire as viewers of this image today that we establish a sense of unity with them as they lay themselves bare for our inspection, and Evans's hope for bringing us closer to this family's reality, we are not welcomed by Miss-Molly's aspect and her eyes.

Agee's and Evans's phototext, and specifically the images I have just discussed, simultaneously divulges the limitations of 1930s documentary photography and literary narrative: "They commanded the full humanity of their subjects, but they did not fully disclose it" (Stott 286). Stott finds the book's main purpose to be religious (309), but argues that *LUNPFM* shows us that Agee's and Evans's call to action cannot be done on a communal level, both because of the sheer impossibility of communicating reality and the harsh actuality of American experience as a result of the empty promise of the New Deal.<sup>20</sup> Regardless of the "doom and desperate resignation" of the text (313), Agee and Evans realize a certain level of exchange and, through the cultivation of respect between self and other, whether it be photographic subject, subject of the narrative, or reader/viewer, they strive to foster communal cooperation. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* is, finally, is a testament, both to the paradoxical failure and the enduring power of the choron moment and aesthetic interconnectivity.

In Alan Trachtenberg's view, Evans has an "attitude of a historical observer," striving to bridge the gap between art and social document and inviting the reader/viewer to discover their own meaning in the montage of images (250).<sup>21</sup> Trachtenberg's assertion of the power of photographs to enable us to see history differently is important for my argument about reading Evans's photographs as emblems of the hope for recreating modernist interconnectivity:

Just as the meaning of the past is the prerogative of the present to invent and choose, the meaning of an image does not come intact and whole...Representing the past, photographs serve the present's need to understand itself and measure its future. Their history finally lies in the political visions they may help us realize. (xvii)

Reading photographs is also a way of reading the past as culture, "as ways of thinking and feeling, as experience" (289).<sup>22</sup> The coequal presence of self and other, embodied both in literary and photographic narrative, invites the reader of texts into a possibly redemptive space where we might realize future ethical political visions of community.

In a closing juxtaposition of transcendent language with the plain and physical, Agee leaves us with a definitive choran image, which I will quote at length:

His mother sits in a hickory chair with her knees relaxed and her bare feet to the floor her dress open and one broken breast exposed...and in the cradling of her arm and shoulder, she holds her child...He is nursing. His hands are blundering at her breast blindly...as if they were sobbing, ecstatic with love; his mouth is intensely absorbed at her nipple as if in rapid kisses...and now, for breath, he draws away, and lets out a sharp short whispered *ahh*...his face is beatific, the face of one at rest in paradise...and I see against her body he is so many things in one, the child in the melodies of the womb, the Madonna's son, human divinity sunken from the cross at rest against his mother, and more beside, for at the heart and leverage to that young body, gently, taken all the pulse of his being, the penis is partly erected. (442)

The modernist movement in the arts, with emphasis on this kind of evocation of the glorious, other/worldly chorán moment, reveals writers' and photographers' "alternative versions of self-consciousness," as well as the "new conditions of culture" brought on by the existence of modernity (289). Agee and Evans offer no definitive solution to the problem of the rift between self and other, yet their chorán-inspired moments were desperately needed in order to cohere in the midst of a culture of confusion, to remind us of the possibilities intrinsic in human commonality and co-relation, and finally to envision the reconstruction of a community bereft of hope.

#### Coda: Reflections on the Post-Chorán Moment

We don't get it. We can't truly imagine what it was like. We can't imagine how dreadful, how terrifying war is; and how normal it becomes. Can't understand, can't imagine. That's what every soldier, and every journalist and aid worker and independent observer who was put under fire, and had the luck to elude the death that struck down others nearby, stubbornly feels. And they are right. (Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, 126)

Agee's and Evans's phototext registers with readers the parallel notion of the struggle and the recognition of the impossibility of utopian interconnectivity. One of the last images we see is one of a primitive country grave, which tells us that ultimately, there is separation and we are inescapably alone, no matter our desire for a broader moment of faith and potential for self and communal determination. Susan Sontag suggests that Walker Evans's images in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* embodied a last attempt at Whitmanesque unity and beauty, but also that the time's "naïve" outlook



disappeared by the time this phototext was published. This somewhat hopeful stance aside, Sontag problematically concludes, in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, that photographs cannot ultimately be read as ethically redemptive. Sontag finds Woolf presumptuous when she states in *Three Guineas* that the photographs of dead children “are not an argument” but instead represent an instance of collapse between spectatorship and identification which might then give rise to ethical action. Yet Sontag herself writes the following in her *New Yorker* essay “Regarding the Torture of Others,” referring to the Abu Ghraib prisoner images: “The issue is not whether a majority or minority of Americans perform such acts but whether the nature of politics prosecuted by this administration and the hierarchies deployed to carry them out makes such acts likely...Considered in this light, the photographs are us” (26). If the photographs, in this case, are indeed “us,” how can we, as intersubjective viewers implicated in the horrors depicted, help but react from an empathic position? Although she finds her “brave” (*Regarding the Pain of Others* 3), Sontag claims that Woolf does not succeed in using photographs to imagine an ethical stance on preventing war because photographs can only bear witness to the impossibility of our bearing witness to atrocity: “For Woolf,...war is generic, and the images she describes are of anonymous, generic victims...perhaps Woolf is simply assuming that a photograph should speak for itself” (9). Sontag finds Woolf naïve—“For a long time some people believed that if the horror could be made vivid enough, most people would finally take in the outrageousness, the insanity of war” (14)—in making the “mistake of supposing that heartrending, stomach-turning pictures would simply speak for themselves” (15).

But Sontag misinterprets Woolf here. Woolf is not “simply” assuming that “generic” images of war will engender ethical response. Woolf is, like Agee and Evans and many of the artists I have discussed in this dissertation, making the choice not to be cynical and therefore stagnant in her desire to view the redemptive possibility inherent in photography, both art and document. Even when we consider the old question of photography’s dual purpose “to generate documents and to create works of visual art” (Sontag 76), we can still remain so-called “morally alert photographers and ideologues of photography...increasingly concerned with the issues of exploitation of sentiment” (80). If it is true that “Our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence” (102), then what, ultimately, is the purpose of our scholarly critiques of the language and images we encounter at all? Even if the outcome is doomed, as Agee and Evans demonstrate, the ethical value lies in the attempt to connect. These artists finally argue in favor of affirming the impossibility while still valuing the effort.

Woolf dares to assert that the encounter with otherness is not utterly futile. The function of the photograph is not necessarily to lay bare the experience of those who suffer for the viewer, or to confirm that we just don’t “get it.” Woolf does not, as Sontag contends, view photographs as simple or positive documentary proof. As an alternative, photographs offer the possibility of evoking empathy and the potential for self-positioning. The triangular, expansive interaction between viewer, image and photographer can indeed create productive unity. We are especially obliged to take ethical action, precisely when we cannot identify with the suffering subject. Even Sontag wavers about her earlier assertion in *On Photography* that “photographs shrivel sympathy” (*Regarding* 105). She admits that it is not finally necessary to be, as “Citizens

of modernity” (111), “cynical about the possibility of sincerity.” In an article commenting on Sontag’s recent passing, Joan Acocella calls her

...a public intellectual, a person with the right, even the duty to put forth ideas, as a contribution to society’s discussion of its life. She was also very earnest and emotional. When she talked, her eyes would well up with tears over such things as the Burmese government or *The Brothers Karamazov*. To her, reading and experience were not just mental events; she received them as flaming darts. (28)

Those flaming darts, similar to Benjamin’s optic shocks or Woolf’s flashes of insight engendered by the photograph, are what compel us to take ethical action. As David Levi Strauss reminds us, photographs must evoke a sense of tension in order to be compelling to the viewer, so that viewers can respond with appropriate awareness of the complexity inherent in the interaction between image and any pre-existing condition in the viewer: “Aestheticization is one of the ways that disparate peoples recognize themselves in one another” (10). Even when a photograph documents the suffering of another, it must “persistently...register the relation of photographer to subject....and this understanding is a profoundly important political process.” Photographs, like all narrative art, ideally create energetic space that helps us to better understand our interconnectedness, and that acknowledgement is a political act in itself.

Evans and Agee discovered ways to “engender parity and a harmony of purpose between the self and the Other” (Shloss 253) through their post-choran phototext. Carol Shloss’s *In Visible Light* charts a movement from artists’ solitary despair to the creation of a practice which “became more aware of the implications of using social

observation as a precondition of art” and “political action...[as] being present in the world” (255). Shloss contends that, “The personal drive to expropriate the world through vision, to be drawn into what one sees, to unite vision with fulfillment, is rarely satisfied, and that longing is even more rarely accompanied by insight about the experience of being the Other” (256). Not to despair, however, she then looks to the space between, the “looking-at and gathering-in” (262) embodied by the chorán moment practiced by the writers and artists I have discussed. Quoting Eudora Welty, she concludes: “The camera was a hand-held auxiliary of wanting-to-know” (263), a joining between selves. Although wanting to know and joining are not the same and might never actually be realized, the creation of chorán art is an ethical attempt at doing so. For Shloss, the photographer and the writer must “stand in the place of the protagonist, looking out, seeing from-the-perspective-of...[and] move into the life experience of the Other.”<sup>23</sup>

The possibility of unity and coherence of perspective between selves is the place of effective political action: “Memory, not history, is the binder of wills.” This question of art vs. activism was unified for Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Nella Larsen, Zora Neale Hurston, James Agee and Walker Evans; these concepts were mutually supportive in Woolf’s cosmic, resonant “pattern behind the wool.” For these modernist artists, the invigorating power of art depends upon our common, open, interaction in a living project of community-building. With their work in mind, I believe that the ways in which we teach, read, interpret and write about literature can effect positive change in our scholarly community, and beyond. If we can investigate and acknowledge the interconnectivity afforded by literary texts then we can recognize that

presence in our own communities of readers. Reading literature with an ethical stance—looking for the connections between self and other—can transform the way we think about ourselves, others, and the world. As vigilant scholars striving for the creation of a society where the self can be recognized in tandem with other selves, we can continue this endeavor in our own approaches to literary scholarship.

---

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Le Sueur romanticizes the figure of the artist in society, while also characterizing the proletariat as Other, who inhabit the “dark chaotic passional world...stirring, strange, and outside the calculated, expedient world of the bourgeoisie,” with which she desires to form “a complete new body” (302-3).

<sup>2</sup> William Stott notes that the second edition was published by Houghton Mifflin in 1960 “to take advantage of the cult forming around Agee” since his early death, and that the book has sold well since 1966 (268).

<sup>3</sup> Carol Shloss argues that Evans’s photographs are sparse and provocative, marking this phototext as “perhaps the central document—of art’s struggle with social responsibility during the Depression” (180).

<sup>4</sup> Straight, or pure, photographers and their critics of the ‘20s “rejected the intense subjectivity and transforming procedures of the Pictorialists on the grounds that they violated the purity of photography” and relied too much on painterly techniques (Eisinger 7). These photographers saw the medium’s science as having “natural objectivity” and at the same time “wanted to retain enough subjectivity in their work to warrant it” as art. They were part of the American rejection of European modernism and abstraction in favor of a desire to know America’s cities, industry, landscape, and soul. The Great Depression intensified this need to know America, and the FSA photographers became an extension of the governmental programs for recovery and the sustenance of the war effort. The ‘30s and ‘40s critics naively believed that documentary photographs were purely objective: Walker Evans “welcomed the documentary spirit because it promised to cleanse photography of the pretensions and distractions of art movements and dedicate the medium to clear communication of content based on reality” (103). The ‘40s and ‘50s were dominated by the popular press and picture magazines such as *Life* and *Look* and their effort to “convince a mass audience to consume photography,” as well as celebrity photo journalists like Edward Steichen and Margaret Bourke-White (8).

John Tagg insists that photographs are not in any way magical, but are entirely institutional and embedded with power relationships. In his ultra-Foucauldian analysis, he contends that later documentary photographers thought to reveal “immediacy and truth” as a strategic response to a moment of crisis on

---

Western Europe and the US: “the means of making the sense we call social experience...bound up with...[the] liberal, corporatist plan to negotiate economic, political and cultural crisis through a limited programme of structural reforms” (8). Roosevelt’s reformist New Deal measures and the FSA’s commission to document the struggling classes of workers in America signified a “paternalistic New Deal state” of centralizing government through health, housing, sanitation, education, and the prevention of crime as an attempt to “reform and reconstitute the social body in new ways” (9). For Tagg, photography was just another Ideological State Apparatus whose users shared the goal of forcing subjects of the state to internalize their panoptic controls. As my reading of Agee and Evans show, I suggest an ethical alternative in the desire to create photographic choron moments.

<sup>5</sup> Born in 1903 in St. Louis, Evans went to Phillips Academy, in Andover, Massachusetts. Evans dropped out of Williams College after a year and went to Paris in 1926 to live like a bohemian expatriate with a great admiration for modernist writers like Joyce, Eliot, and Woolf. He went back to New York in 1927 and began taking pictures, striving to capture the poetic vision of Baudelaire as a passionate flaneur, observing the rapid urbanization of modern society. Evans began with lingering painterly images in the pictorial tradition, admiring Stieglitz, but his first published photographs for Hart Crane’s *The Bridge* are forceful and brooding. Lincoln Kirstein encouraged his “visual understanding of America” and proposed a plan to survey the architecture of Boston in 1931 (7). Evans worked for the FSA in 1935 and began creating simple, straightforward images in an attempt to “analyze the physical incongruities of the American landscape.” Evans imaged a poverty which differed from Eugene Atget’s genteel picturesque (a format he admired early in his career), creating a more “persuasive cultural poverty of a newly made nation.” The clean lines and stark black and white images he creates fall in line with the emerging tradition of straight photography.

<sup>6</sup> He had a conflict with director Roy Stryker, who let him go in 1937, but his sequences for the FSA emerged nonetheless: Pennsylvania mining towns, soil erosion, and black neighborhoods in the South (Fonvielle 8).

<sup>7</sup> Fonvielle provides an informed overview of this phototext: “The text is an extended mediation on morality, perception, the limits of language, and the deceptions of art, all unified by elaborate

---

descriptions of rural poverty executed with surgical precision and lyric genius" (9).

<sup>8</sup> James Agee was born on November 27, 1909 in Knoxville, Tennessee. His Episcopalian mother, Laura Whitman Tyler Agee, enrolled him in a Catholic school for boys soon after his father, Jay Agee, was killed in a car accident. He entered Phillips Exeter Academy at the age of 15, and it was there that he became focused on writing. When Agee went on to attend Harvard, where he displayed his most bohemian rebel attributes: "a maverick, rebellious against the conventions of his habitat, too fond of the release of alcohol; a nonstop talker; a bonfire of tobacco; an amorist; and a wizard with perfectly unexpected words" (John Hersey, Introduction x). In the summer of 1932, he took a job at *Fortune* in New York City, for which he wrote a story of the Tennessee Valley Authority. After working with Bourke-White in 1934, he took some time off in Florida but then began working again with Evans on this project.

<sup>9</sup> *American Photographs* was published in 1938, and has been hailed as a classic of American art. In a decidedly unchoran series, Evans then took a series of NYC subway riders with a small Contax camera hidden in his coat that reflects Pound's poem "In a Station at the Metro." He followed this work with a series of candid portraits of pedestrians in Chicago for *Fortune*. He was later the editor for the magazine and left to become a professor of visual studies at Yale in 1965. Evans died in 1975.

<sup>10</sup> In the PBS American Experience documentary "Let Us now Praise Famous Men Revisited" (1988), some of the family members state that they resent the fact that, although the book was dedicated to them, they were never compensated for having been subjects. However other members, such as Elizabeth Tingle and Allie Mae Burroughs, say they were not bothered and that they wished they could have seen Agee again. Apparently, Agee wrote to Allie Mae and sent the family Christmas presents every year until he died in 1955.

<sup>11</sup> Of the narrative in general, Agee writes: "It is to be as exhaustive a reproduction and analysis of personal experience, including the phrases and problems of memory and recall and revisitation and the problems of writing and communication, as I am capable of...to tell everything possible as accurately as possible: and to invent nothing" (xxvii-xxviii).

<sup>12</sup> Walter Benjamin's 1936 essay "The Storyteller" laments the fact that the act of storytelling is



---

coming to an end because Europeans have lost the ability to transmit experiences: "Men have returned from the battlefields of the First World War grown silent...and accordingly helpless to transmit anything to later generations" (Hunter 66). In America, the event that marks this disconnect of experience is the Depression, which "made history incomprehensible" and left behind a legacy of profound and unexplainable change. We can see this sense of devastation in images of deserted homes, dustbowl deserts, and the migrant farmers and Okies trying to escape their "impoverished lives." In the midst of vast economic, social and emotional dislocation, the new art of the '30s was documentary: case histories, reportage, eyewitness accounts, "devoted to truth rather than fictiveness, social significance rather than formal complication, current events rather than the past, and responsible questioning rather than complacent answering" (Hunter 68).

As the new social consciousness in America,—through black and white film, "fresh from the field"—Bourke-White and Erskine Caldwell's *You Have Seen Their Faces* (1937) was acclaimed for its visual evidence of economic injustice (Hunter 69). The corresponding captions gave the images context and made them understandable. Yet Agee could not forgive Bourke-White and Caldwell for profiting off of their subjects' poverty. This phototext also "oversimplifies and misses distinctions," like other photojournalism of its time, as well as manipulating its subjects (yet does not brutalize or render them abject) (70); they do not pity, but idealize the strength of their subjects (71). They also restrict captions to the sharecropper's point of view (an original undertaking), yet sometimes demean them (especially blacks) by making them primitive exotics and "sociopolitical specimens" (73).

<sup>13</sup> The two younger sons of the Gudger family (Burroughs), Burt and Squinchy, felt that it was a violation for Agee and Evans to catalogue the contents of their home while the family was away.

<sup>14</sup> It is important here to acknowledge the differences between the original 1941 edition and the reprint in 1960. William Stott provides a provocative account of the changes Evans made in the second edition: there were less than half the original number of 31 images in the second edition; the size of most of the images was reduced to create "far less an assault" on the subjects (281); generally that the initial images represent too much "social message" propaganda.

<sup>15</sup> The collaborative text is structured like the fragmentary human consciousness in its multitudes

---

of momentary perspectives, evoking the musicality of language in its sonata structure.

<sup>16</sup> It is important, however, to remember that “Evans was not immune to the forces, aesthetic or political, working at the time” (Stott 283). Judith Fryer Davidov claims that male photographers in general view the past as a unified whole rather than fragmented or disordered by the personal, subjective, disruptive experience of those not historically represented (racial and cultural others) (23). She contends that men’s photographs strive to establish a linear history of America and a unity of American experience and identity—a nationhood of connectedness (a la Walt Whitman) through the history of that nation and the men who created it (19-23).

<sup>17</sup> For W.J.T. Mitchell, the organization of the photographs resists the straightforward collaboration of photo and text (94) and instead the “purity” of the medium is emphasized (although he divulges that the people then become aestheticized objects) (294).

<sup>18</sup> Carol Shloss claims that Evans photographed “smoothly, astutely, without intrusion” (7) while Agee struggled more with the social implications of the photographic moment and remained tortured by “the possible misuses of art.” For Agee, images could be either “offered” or “stolen” with consent or non-compliance from the subject because he viewed photography much like Sontag’s “displaced monetary transaction” (8). On the other hand, Agee’s “excruciating self-reflexiveness...made explicit the issues of seeing and power, of dispossession and cultural definition, that had been the more covert concern of his artistic precursors” (179). Agee did not want to damage, disadvantage, or humiliate his subjects, and his “struggle [was] to redefine an art that could render these conditions responsibly” (181). In straight photography the goal is to render detail in exact, unmediated experience as transparently as possible. But as Shloss reminds us, “Vision is never neutral; the transference of knowledge is not any more innocent than is the transference of power” (191). Agee burdens his narrative with this kind of photographic detail as “a way of paying homage to the superior artistry of the existing world” (192). He required himself to be “a responsible observer [;] he was the camera itself” (193). He also showed the “poverty of language” in the face of these families’ brutal existence, while “Evans...demonstrated a mode of reciprocal influence that could mitigate the guilt of using ‘materials’ gained in observing an undefended group of people...Evans...at least pointed to the possibility of art as a mode of mutual confidence” (197). Mitchell

---

concludes that Evans's and Agee's "collaboration is governed by a rhetoric of resistance rather than one of exchange and cooperation" (297).

<sup>19</sup> William Stott observes the energy of this family portrait of the Gudgers, where he finds that each family member "radiat[es] a self" that reveals both their beauty and their sadness (286-7).

<sup>20</sup> By 1930, 70% of cotton farmers worked land they did not own. When Roosevelt came to office and created the New Deal in 1933, his presidency communicated sensitivity to the plight of the poor for the first time. When the government paid cotton farmers to underplow their land in 1934, most farmers were devastated. For the sharecropper class, the American Dream of climbing the agricultural ladder to land ownership was finally lost, leaving behind an outcast generation, an underclass of destitute people with much work and little hope.

<sup>21</sup> Walker Evans's *American Photographs* (1938) also struggles to define an art of photography against the grain of FSA documentary and its measure of power, which tried to construct an ideal of liberal American culture.

<sup>22</sup> The only consistency in this narrative has been the photographer's attempts to "grasp the meaning of their social lives, to make imaginative sense of their history" (288).

<sup>23</sup> John Berger connects photography with memory and the belief that the experiences of the common inarticulate people are to be treasured (265).

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Acocella, Joan. "Postscript: Susan Sontag." *The New Yorker* (January 10, 2005): 28.
- Agee, James and Walker Evans. *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. [1941]. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.
- Albinski, Nan Bowman. *Women's Utopias in British and American Women's Fiction*. New York: Routledge, 1988.
- Alfred Stieglitz: Photographs and Writing*. Eds. Sarah Breenough and Joan Hamilton. Boston: Bulfinch Press, 1999.
- Allen, Brooke. " Sylvia Townsend Warner's 'very cultured voice'." *New Criterion* 19.7.7 (March 2001): 20-28.
- America and Lewis Hine: Photographs 1904-1940*. Foreword by Walter Rosenblum, Biographical Notes by Naomi Rosenblum, Essay by Alan Trachtenberg, Design by Martin Israel. [1973]. New York: Aperture, 1997.
- Anzieu, Didier. *The Skin Ego*. Trans. Chris Turner. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1989.
- Anderson, Amanda. *Tainted Souls and Painted Faces: The Rhetoric of Falleness in Victorian Culture*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993.
- Anzaldúa, Gloria. *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987.
- Armstrong, Nancy. *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism*. Harvard UP, Cambridge and London, 1999.
- Bahktin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Ed. Michael Holquist; Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981.

- Baker, Jr., Houston A. *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1987.
- Barbeito, Patricia Felisa. "‘Making Generations’ in Jacobs, Larsen, and Hurston: A Geneology of Black Women’s Writing." *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History* 70.2 (June 1998): 365-395.
- Barnett, Pamela E. "‘My Picture of You is, after All, the True Helga Crane’: Portraiture and Identity in Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand*." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20.3 (Spring 1995): 575-600.
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1981.
- . "The Photographic Message." *A Barthes Reader*. Ed. and Intro. by Susan Sontag. New York: Hill and Wang, 1982: 194-210.
- . *The Pleasure of the Text*. Trans. Richard Miller and Note by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1975.
- Bazin, Nancy Topping. *Virginia Woolf and the Androgynous Vision*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1973.
- Beach, Christopher. "Recuperating the Aesthetic: Contemporary Approaches and the Case of Adorno." Ed. and Intro. James Soderholm. *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in the Age of Cultural Studies*. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press: 94-112.
- Beer, Gillian. *Virginia Woolf, The Common Ground: Essays by Gillian Beer*. Ann Arbor: Michigan UP, 1996.
- Bell, Anne Olivier, Ed. and Asst. Andrew McNeillie. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. 5 vols. New

- York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- Bell, Quentin. *Virginia Woolf: A Biography*. 2 vols. New York: Harcourt, 1972.
- Bell-Villada, Gene H. *Art for Art's Sake and Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology and Culture of Aestheticism, 1790-1990*. Lincoln, Nebraska and London: U of Nebraska Press, 1996.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. *Fascist Modernities: Italy, 1922-1945*. Berkeley: U of CA Press, 2001.
- Benjamin, Walter. "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." [1936]. Eds. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings. *Selected Writings: Walter Benjamin*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1996: 675-694.
- "Theses on the Philosophy of History." *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin, Essays and Reflections*. Ed. and Intro. Hannah Arendt. New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, Inc., 1986.
- Berger, John and Jean Mohr. *Another Way of Telling*. New York: Vintage International, 1982.
- Berezin, Mabel. *Making the Fascist Self: A Political Culture of Interwar Italy*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1997.
- Bernardin, Susan, Melody Graulich, Lisa MacFarlane, and Nicole Tonkovich, eds. *Trading Gazes: Euro-American Women Photographers and Native North Americans, 1880-1940*. Afterword by Louis Owens. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers UP, 2003.
- Bhabha, Homi K. "The Commitment to Theory." *Nation and Narration*. London and New York: Routledge, 1990: 18-28.
- Bishop, E.L. "Toward the Far Side of Language: Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*."

- Twentieth Century Literature* 27.4 (Winter 1981): 343-361.
- Bond, Cynthia. "Language, Speech, and Difference in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." Eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 204-217.
- Boone, Joseph Allen. "The Meaning of Elvedon in *The Waves*: A Key to Bernard's Experience and Woolf's Vision." *Modern Fiction Studies* 27.4 (Winter 1981-2): 629-651.
- Bourke, Joanna. *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain, and the Great War*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1996.
- Boyd, Valerie. *Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*. New York: Schribner, 2003.
- Brickhouse, Anna. "Nella Larsen and the Intertextual Geography in *Quicksand*." *African American Review* (Winter 2001): 533-560.
- Brittain, Vera. *A Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900-1925*. New York: Macmillan, 1935.
- Brownstein, Marilyn L. "Silver Spoons and Knives: Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin (Some Notes on a Practical Approach to Cultural Studies)." Eds. Mark Hussey and Vara Neverow, Intro. by Jane Lilienfeld. *Virginia Woolf: Emerging Perspectives* (New York: Pace UP, 1994): 204-209.
- Bryant, Marsha, ed. *Photo-textualities: Reading Photographs and Literature*. Wilmington: U of Delaware Press, 1996.
- Buck-Morss, Susan. *Dialectics of Seeing: Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989.

- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge, 1993.
- Caldwell, Erkskine and Margaret Bourke-White. *You Have Seen Their Faces*. New York: Viking Press, 1937.
- Calinescu, Matei. *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avante-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1987.
- Carby, Hazel V. "The Politics of Fiction, Anthropology, and the Folk: Zora Neale Hurston." Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. *Zora Neale Hurston; Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2000: 117-135.
- Carlston, Erin G. *Thinking Fascism: Sapphic Modernism and Fascist Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1998.
- Caughie, Pamela L. *Virginia Woolf and Postmodernism*. Chicago: U of IL Press, 1991.
- , ed. *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Garland Publishers, 2000.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1988.
- Cohen, Debra Rae. *Remapping the Home Front; Locating Citizenship in British Women's Great War Fiction*. Boston: Northeastern UP, 2002.
- Coleman, Leon. "Carl Van Vechten Presents the New Negro." Ed. Victor A. Kramer. *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*. New York: AMS Press, 1987: 107-127.
- Cooke, Mirian and Angela Woollacott, eds. *Gendering War Talk*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1993.
- Coombes, Annie. *Reinventing Africa: Museums, Material Culture and Popular Imagination in*



- Late Victorian and Edwardian England*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1994.
- Crary, Jonathan. *Techniques of the Observer: Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990.
- Cutter, Martha J. "Sliding Signification: Passing as a Narrative and Textual Strategy in Nella Larsen's Fiction." Ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg. *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1996: 75-100.
- Davidov, Judith Fryer. *Women's Camera Work: Self/Body/Other in American Visual Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1998.
- Davis, Thadious M. *Nella Larsen: Novelist of the Harlem Renaissance: A Woman's Life Unveiled*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1994.
- De Jongh, James. *Vicious Modernism: Black Harlem and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990.
- Derrida, Jacques. *On the Name*. Ed. Thomas Dutoit. Trans. David Wood, John P. Leavy, Jr., and Ian McLeod. Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1993.
- DiBattista, Maria. *Virginia Woolf's Major Novels: The Fables of Anon*. New Haven and London: Yale UP, 1980.
- Dilworth, Leah. *Imagining Indians in the Southwest: Persistent Visions of a Primitive Past*. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996.
- Dimrock, Wai Chee. "Toward a Theory of Resonance." *PMLA* 112 (October 1997): 1060-1071.
- Douglas, Ann. *The Feminization of American Culture*. New York: Knopf, 1977.
- *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*. New York: Noonday Press, 1996.

- Dorothea Lange: American Photographs*. Eds. Therese Thau Heyman, Sandra S. Phillips, John Szarkowski. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art: Chronicle Books, 1994.
- Dorr, Nell. *Mother and Child*. New York: Harper & Brothers, Publ., 1954.
- Du Bois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. [1903]. New York: Johnson Reprint Corp, 1968.
- Duffy, Julia and Lloyd Davis. "Demythologizing Facts and Photographs in *Three Guineas*." Ed. Marsha Bryant. *Photo-textualities: Reading Photographs and Literature*. Wilmington: U of Delaware Press, 1996.
- Eisinger, Joel. *Trace and Transformation: American Criticism of Photography in the Modernist Period*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico Press, 1995.
- Eksteins, Modris. *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.
- Ellis, Havelock. "Studies in the Psychology of Sex: Sexual Inversion" in Ed. Regina Barreca. *Desire and Imagination: Classic Essays on Sexuality*. New York: Meridian, 1995.
- Evans, Walker. *Bud Fields and His Family, Hale County, Alabama [1936]. Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. James Agee and Walker Evans. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960.
- *Burroughs Family Portrait, Hale County, Alabama [1936]*. 19.1 x 2 4.1 cm. J. Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California. *Walker Evans: A Biography*. Belinda Rathbone. Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2000.
- Falasca-Zampnoi, Simonetta. *Fascist Spectacle: The Aesthetics of Power in Mussolini's Italy*. Berkeley: U of CA Press, 1997.
- Faris, James C. *Navajo and Photography: A Critical History of the Representation of An American People*. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico Press, 1996.
- Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Eds. Elizabeth Abel,

- Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen. U of CA Press, 1997.
- Flint, Kate. *Victorians and the Visual Imagination*. New York: Cambridge UP, 2000.
- Flukinger, Roy. *The Formative Decades: Photography in Great Britain, 1839-1920*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1985.
- Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Random House, 1978.
- Freud, Sigmund. *New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. Trans. W.J.H. Sprott. New York: W.W. Norton, 1933.
- Fussell, Paul. *The Great War and Modern Memory*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1975.
- Gaines, Kevin K. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: U of NC Press, 1996.
- Gallagher, Jean. *World Wars Through the Female Gaze*. Carbondale: Southern IL UP, 1998.
- Gates, Jr., Henry Louis. "Preface to Blackness: Text and Pretext" in Ed. Winston Napier. *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*. New York: NYU Press, 2000: 147-164.
- *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism*. New York: Oxford UP, 1988.
- Gilbert, Sandra M. and Sarah Gubar. *No Man's Land: The Place of the Woman Writer in the Twentieth Century, Volume I: The War of the Words*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1988.
- Gilmore, Lois J. "Virginia Woolf, Bloomsbury, and the Primitive." *Virginia Woolf and Communities: Selected Papers from the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on Virginia Woolf*. New York: Pace UP, 1999: 127-135.
- Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge UP, 1993.

- Gillespie, Diane. "‘Her Kodak at His Head’: Virginia Woolf and Photography." Ed. Diane Gillespie. *The Multiple Muses of Virginia Woolf*. Columbia: U of Missouri Press, 1993: 113-147.
- Goldberg, David Theo. *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1993.
- Grayzel, Susan R. *Women’s Identities at War; Gender, Motherhood, and Politics in Britain and France During the First World War*. Chapel Hill and London: U of NC Press, 1999.
- Green-Lewis, Jennifer. *Framing the Victorians: Photography and the Culture of Realism*. Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1996.
- Gualtieri, Elena. *Virginia Woolf’s Essays; Sketching the Past*. New York: Palgrave, 2000.
- Guimond, James. *American Photography and the American Dream*. Foreword by Alan Trachtenberg. Chapel Hill, NC: U of NC Press, 1991.
- Gullace, Nicoletta F. *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War*. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2002.
- Hackett, Robin. *Sapphic Primitivism: Productions of Race, Class, and Sexuality in Key Works of Modern Fiction*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 2004.
- Hankins, Leslie Kathleen. "Virginia Woolf and Walter Benjamin Selling Out(Siders)." *Virginia Woolf and the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (New York: Garland Publishers, 2000): 3-35.
- Hardwig, Bill. "‘A Lack Somewhere’: Lacan, Psychoanalysis, and Quicksand." *Soundings* 80.4 (Winter 1997): 573-589.
- Harman, Claire. *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*. London: Chatto and Windus, Ltd.,

1989.

*Henri Cartier-Bresson*. New York: Aperture Foundation, 1987.

Hestetler, Ann. F. "The Aesthetics of Race and Gender in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *PMLA* 105.1 (January): 35-46.

Hibben, Sheila. Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (*The New York Herald Tribune Weekly Book Review*, September 26, 1937) Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 21-22.

Higonnet, Margaret, ed. *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1987.

Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography Narrative and Postmemory*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997.

Holloway, Karla. "The Emergent Voice: The Word within Its Texts." Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 67-75.

Hooks, Margaret. *Tina Modotti: Photographer and Revolutionary*. London: Pandora, 1993.

Hostetler, Ann E. "The Aesthetics of Race and Gender in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *PMLA* 105.1 (January 1990): 35-46.

Howard, Lillie P. "'A Lack Somewhere': Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and the Harlem Renaissance" in *The Harlem Renaissance Re-Examined*. New York: AMS, 1997: 223-233.

Huggins, Nathan Irvin. *Harlem Renaissance*. New York: Oxford UP, 1971.

Hughes, Langston. "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." *African American Literary*

- Theory: A Reader*. Winston Napier, ed. New York: NYU Press, 2000.
- Humm, Maggie. *Modernist Women and Visual Cultures: Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, Photography and Cinema*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2003.
- , "Virginia Woolf's Photography and the Monk's House Albums." Ed. Pamela L. Caughie. *Virginia Woolf in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. New York: Garland Publishers, 2000.
- , "Visual Modernism: Virginia Woolf's 'Portraits' and Photography." *Woolf Studies Annual* 8 (2002): 93-106.
- Hunter, Jefferson. *Image and Word: The Interactions of Twentieth-Century Photographs and Texts*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1987.
- Hurston, Lucy Ann and The Estate of Zora Neale Hurston. *Speak, So You Can Speak Again: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston*. New York and London: Doubleday, 2004.
- Hurston, Zora Neale. "Characteristics of Negro Expression." *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*. Winston Napier, ed. New York: NYU Press, 2000: 31-44.
- , *Dust Tracks on a Road: An Autobiography*. [1942]. Ed. and Intro. By Robert Hemenway. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois Press, 1984.
- , *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. [1937]. With a Foreword by Mary Helen Washington and an Afterword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. New York: Perennial Classics, 1990.
- Hussey, Mark. *Virginia Woolf A-Z: The Essential Reference to Her Life and Writings*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1995.
- , ed. *Virginia Woolf and War: Fiction, Reality, and Myth*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1991.

Hutchinson, George. "Nella Larsen and the Veil of Race." *American Literary History* 9.2 (Summer 1997): 329-349.

-----."Subject to Disappearance: Interracial Identity in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *Temples of Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*. Ed. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana UP, 2001: 177-192.

-----.*The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1995.

Hynes, Samuel. *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. New York: Antheneum & Maxwell MacMillan International, 1991.

Jacobs, Karen. *The Eye's Mind: Literary Modernism and Visual Culture*. Cornell UP, Ithaca and London, 2001.

Johnson, Barbara. "Metaphor, Metonymy, and Voice in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." ] Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. *Zora Neale Hurston; Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2000: 41-58.

Jensen, Emily. "Clarissa Dalloway's Respectable Suicide." Ed. Jane Marcus. *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1983: 162-179.

Johnson, Erica. "The Legacy of the 'Outsider's Society': Woolf and Postcolonial Nationhood." IVWS panel "After *The Hours*," MLA Convention, 28 December, 2004, Philadelphia, PA.

Joyce, James. *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. [1916]. Ed., Intro. and Notes by Seamus Deane. New York: Penguin Books, 1993.

*Julia Margaret Cameron: Photographs from the J. Paul Getty Museum*. Los Angeles, CA: The

Museum, 1996.

Kaivola, Karen. "Revisiting Woolf's Representations of Androgyny: Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Nation." *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 18.2 (Fall 1999): 235-61.

Kaplan, Ann E. *Looking for the Other: Feminism, Film, and the Imperial Gaze*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Kaplan, Carla. *Zora Neale Hurston: A Life in Letters*. New York: Doubleday, 2002.

------. *The Erotics of Talk: Women's Writing and Feminist Paradigms*. New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996.

Käsebier, Gertrude. *Blessed Art Thou Among Women*. [1899]. Platinum Print on Japanese tissue. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Hermine M. Turner. *Gertrude Käsebier: The Photographer and Her Photographs*. Barbara L. Michaels. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1992: 50.

------. *Mother and Child (Decorative Panel)*. [1899]. Platinum Print. The Metropolitan Museum of Modern Art, New York. The Alfred Stieglitz Collection, 1933. *Gertrude Käsebier: The Photographer and Her Photographs*. Barbara L. Michaels. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1992: 80.

------. *The Manger*. [1899]. Platinum Print on Japanese vellum. Collection, The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Gift of Mrs. Hermine M. Turner. *Gertrude Käsebier: The Photographer and Her Photographs*. Barbara L. Michaels. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1992: 53.

Keating, AnaLouise. "Charting Pathways, Marking Thresholds...A Warning, An Introduction." *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*. Ed. Gloria E. Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating. New York and London: Routledge,



2002: 6-20.

Kellner, Bruce. "‘Refined Racism’: White Patronage in the Harlem Renaissance." Victor A.

Kramer, ed. *The Harlem Renaissance Re-Examined*. New York: AMS Press, 1987:

93-106.

Kent, Susan. *Making Peace: The Reconstruction of Gender in Interwar Britain*. Princeton, NJ:

Princeton UP, 1993.

Knoll, Bruce. "‘An Existence Doled Out’: Passive resistance as a dead end in Sylvia

Townsend Warner’s *Lolly Willows*." *Twentieth Century Literature* 39.3 (Fall 1993):

344-64.

Krafft-Ebing, Richard Von. "Psychopathia Sexualis." Ed. Regina Barreca. *Desire and*

*Imagination: Classic Essays on Sexuality*. New York: Meridian, 1995.

Kramer, Victor A., ed. *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*. New York: AMS Press, 1987.

Kristeva, Julia. *A Question of Subjectivity: An Interview*. Rpt. *Modern Literary Theory: A*

*Reader*. Eds. Phillip Rice and Patricia Waugh. New York: Arnold, 1996: 131-137.

-----, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*. ed. Leon S.

Roudiez, Trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez. New York:

Columbia UP, 1980.

-----, *Revolution in Poetic Language*. Trans. Margaret Waller, intro. Leon S.

Roudiez. New York: Columbia UP, 1984.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as revealed in

Psychoanalytic Experience" Alan Sheridan, Trans., *Ecrits, A Selection* (1949): 1-7.

Lackey, Michael. "Larsen’s *Quicksand*." *Explicator* 59.2 (Winter 2001): 103-107.

Larsen, Nella. *Quicksand and Passing*. [1928; 1929]. Ed. and Intro. by Deborah E. McDowell.

- New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1986.
- Lawrence, D.H. *Women in Love*. [1920; 1922]. With a Foreword by the author and an Introduction by Richard Aldington. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.
- Lee, Hermione. *Virginia Woolf*. New York: Vintage Books, 1996.
- Lemke, Sieglinde. *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- Le Sueur, Meridel. "The Fetish of Being Outside." *Writing Red: An Anthology of American Women Writers, 1930-1940*. Eds. Charlotte Nekola and Paula Rabinowitz. Foreword by Toni Morrison. New York: The Feminist Press at The City University of New York, 1987: 200-303.
- Levenback, Karen. *Virginia Woolf and the Great War*. Syracuse, New York: Syracuse UP, 1999.
- Lichtenberg Ettinger, Bracha. "Metramorphic Borderlinks and Matrixial Borderspace." *Rethinking Borders*. Ed. John C. Welchman. London: Macmillan, 1996: 125-160.
- Lilienfeld, Jane. "Where the Spear Plants Grew: the Ramsay's Marriage in *To the Lighthouse*." Ed. Jane Marcus. *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1981: 148-169.
- Lippard, Lucy, ed. *Partial Recall: Photographs of Native North Americans*. New York: The New York Press, 1992.
- Literature & Photography: Interactions, 1840-1990*. Ed. Jane M. Rabb. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico Press, 1995.
- Locke, Alain. *The New Negro: Voices of the Harlem Renaissance*. [1925]. Intro. By Arnold Rampersad. New York: Atheneum, 1992.

- Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God. Opportunity* (June 1, 1938) Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 18.
- Lowe, Sarah. *Tina Modotti Photographs*. Foreword by Anne d'Harnoncourt. Philadelphia Museum of Art: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1995.
- Lucas, John. "From Realism to Radicalism: Sylvia Townsend Warner, Patrick Hamilton and Henry Green in the 1920s." *Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900-1930*. Eds. Lynne Haggood and Nancy L. Paxton. New York: St. Martin's Press, LLC, 2000: 203-223.
- Mansfield, Katherine. *Selected Stories*. Ed. and Intro. by Angela Smith. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2002.
- Marcus, Jane. *Art and Anger: Reading Like a Woman*. Columbus, OH: Ohio State UP, 1988.
- "Britannia Rules *The Waves*." *Hearts of Darkness: What Women Write Race*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers UP, 2004: 59-85.
- "Corpus, Corps, Corpse: Writing the Body in/at War." Afterword. *Not So Quiet... Stepdaughters of War*. By Helen Zenna Smith. [1930]. New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1989: 241-300.
- *Hearts of Darkness: What Women Write Race*. New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers UP, 2004.
- , ed. *New Feminist Essays on Virginia Woolf*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1981.
- , ed. *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1983.
- , ed. *Virginia Woolf and the Languages of Patriarchy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana

UP, 1987.

Marsh, Joss Lutz Marsh. "In a Glass Darkly: Photography, the Premodern, and Victorian Horror." Eds. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush. *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995: 159-171.

Matthews, Sandra and Laura Wexler. *Pregnant Pictures*. New York: Routledge, 2000.

Mavor, Carol. *Pleasures Taken: Performances of Sexuality and Loss Victorian Photography*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1995.

Maxwell, William. *Letters: Sylvia Townsend Warner*. New York: Viking Press, 1983.

McClintock, Anne. *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

McLaughlin, Ann L. "An Uneasy Sisterhood: Virginia Woolf and Katherine Mansfield." *Virginia Woolf: A Feminist Slant*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska Press, 1983: 152-161.

McLendon, Jacquelyn Y. "Self-Representation and Art in the Novels of Nella Larsen." Eds. Janice Morgan, Coletta T. Hall, and Carol L. Hite. *Redefining Autobiography in Twentieth-Century Women's Fiction: An Essay Collection*. New York: Garland, 1991: 149-68.

Michaels, Barbara L. *Gertrude Käsebier: The Photographer and Her Photographs*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1992.

Mills, Charles. *The Racial Contract*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997.

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago and London: Chicago UP, 1994.

Monda, Kimberly. "Self-Delusion and Self-Sacrifice in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*." *African*

- American Review* 31.1 (Spring 1997): 23-39.
- Montgomery, Nick. "Colonial Rhetoric and the Maternal Voice: Deconstruction and Disengagement in Virginia Woolf's *The Voyage Out*." *Twentieth Century Literature and Culture* 46.1 (Spring 2000): 34-55.
- Morgan, Jas and Diana Trimble. "The Cocteau Twins: Obscured by Words." *Mondo Magazine* <[www.cocteutwins.com](http://www.cocteutwins.com)> 1999.
- Morrison, Toni. *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1992.
- ."Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature" *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28.1 (Winter 1989): 1-34.
- Mudimbe, V.Y. *The Idea of Africa*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1994.
- Mulvey, Laura. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1989.
- Napier, Winston, ed. *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*. New York: NYU Press, 2000.
- Nicholson, Nigel and Joanne Trautmann, eds. *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*. 4 vols. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1978.
- Noble, Andrea. *Tina Modotti: Image, Texture, Photography*. Albuquerque, NM, U of New Mexico Press, 2000.
- North, Michael. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-century Literature*. New York: Oxford UP, 1994.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technology of the Word*. Routledge: London and New York, 1982.
- Outside Modernism: In Pursuit of the English Novel, 1900-1930*. Eds. Lynne Hapgood and

- Nancy L. Paxton. New York: St. Martin's Press, LLC, 2000.
- Pankhurst, E. Sylvia. *The Home Front: A Mirror to Life in England During the First World War*. [1932]. Foreword by Shirley Williams and Introduction by Richard Pankhurst. London: The Cresset Library, 1987.
- Pavlić, Edward M. *Crossroads Modernism: Descent and the Emergence of African American Literacy Culture*. Minneapolis, MN: U of MN Press, 2002.
- Phillips, Karen J. *Virginia Woolf Against Empire*. Knoxville, TN: The U of TN Press, 1994.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*, eds. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995.
- Pryce, Marjorie. "Sex, Class, and 'Category Crisis' Reading Jewett's Transitivity" *American Literature* 70.3 (September 1988): 517-549.
- Rado, Lisa. *The Modern Androgyne Imagination: A Failed Sublime*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 2000.
- Rigby, Nigel. "'Not a Good Place for Deacons': The South Seas, Sexuality and Modernism in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*." Eds. and Intro., Howard J. Booth and Nigel Rigby. *Modernism and Empire*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000: 224-248.
- Riis, Jacob. *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. [1890] New York: Dover, 1971.
- Roberts, Pam. *F. Holland Day*. Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum, 2000.
- Rosenblum, Naomi. *A History of Women Photographers*. New York: Abbeville Press

Publishers, 1994.

Rosenfeld, Natania. *Outsiders Together: Virginia and Leonard Woolf*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000.

Rubenstein, Roberta. "Fixing the Past: Yearning and Nostalgia in Woolf and Lessing." Eds. Ruth Saxton and Jean Tobin. *Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994: 15-38.

Rubin, Susan Goldman. *Margaret Bourke-White: Her Pictures Were Her Life*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publ., 1999.

Ryan, James R. *Picturing Empire: Photography and the Visualization of the British Empire*. Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1997.

Sandwiess, Martha A. *Laura Gilpin: An Enduring Grace*. Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum, 1996.

-----, ed. *Photography in Nineteenth-century America*. With essays by Alan Trachtenberg [et al.] Fort Worth, TX: Amon Carter Museum; New York: H.N. Abrams, 1991.

Scarry, Elaine. *On Beauty and Being Just*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1999.

Scruggs, Charles. "Crab Antics and Jacob's Ladder: Aaron Douglas's Two Views of *Nigger Heaven*." Victor A. Kramer, ed. *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*. New York: AMS Press, 1987: 149-181.

Scott, Bonnie Kime, ed. *Joyce and Feminism*. Indiana UP and Harvester: Bloomington, IN and Brighton: Bloomington UP, 1989.

-----, ed. *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*. Bloomington, IN: Bloomington UP, 1990.

- , "The Word Split its Husk: Woolf's Double Vision of Modernist Language." *Modern Fiction Studies* 34.3 (Autumn 1988): 371-385.
- , *Reframing Modernism: The Women of 1928*. Vol. I. Bloomington, IN: Bloomington UP, 1995.
- Shloss, Carol. *In Visible Light: Photography and the American Writer, 1840-1940*. New York: Oxford UP, 1987.
- Showalter, Elaine. *Sexual Anarchy; Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. New York: Penguin Books, 1991.
- Silko, Leslie Marmon. *Storyteller*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1981.
- Silver, Brenda. *Virginia Woolf: Icon*. Chicago: Chicago UP, 1999.
- Silverman, Debra B. "Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*: Untangling the Webs of Exoticism" *African American Review* 27.4 (Winter 1993): 599-614.
- Soderholm, James, Ed. *Beauty and the Critic: Aesthetics in an Age of Cultural Studies*. Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama Press, 1997.
- Somerville, Siobhan B. *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2000.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977.
- , *Regarding the Pain of Others*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003.
- Spillers, Hortense J. "'All the Things You Could Be by Now if Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother': Psychoanalysis and Race." Eds. and Intro. Elizabeth Abel, Barbara Christian, and Helene Moglen,. *Female Subjects in Black and White: Race, Psychoanalysis, Feminism*. Berkeley, CA: U of California Press, 1997: 135-158.
- Squier, Susan Merrill. *Virginia Woolf and London: The Sexual Politics of the City*. U of NC Press:



- Chapel Hill, 1985.
- Stephen, Leslie. *Julia Duckworth Stephen with Virginia*. Mortimer Rare Book Room, William Allan Neilson Library, Smith College.
- Stott, William. *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973.
- Strauss, David Levi. *Between the Eyes: Essays on Photography and Politics*. New York: Aperture, 2003.
- Suciu, Peter. "The Cocteau Twins Interviewed." *AM Archive* Issue 4-2 (October 1993).
- Sussman, Herbert. *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Tagg, John. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories*. Amherst, MA: U of MA Press, 1988.
- Tate, Claudia. *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race*. New York: Oxford UP, 1998.
- Temples of Tomorrow: Looking Back at the Harlem Renaissance*. Ed. Genevieve Fabre and Michel Feith. Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana UP, 2001.
- The Family of Man; The Greatest Photographic Exhibition of All Time*. Created by Edward Steichen for the Museum of Modern Art, New York: Maco Magazine Corp., 1955.
- The Portable Kristeva*. Ed. Kelly Oliver. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Theweleit, Klaus. *Male Fantasies*. Trans. Stephen Conway with Erica Carter and Chris Turner, Foreword by Barbara Ehrenreich. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Toomer, Jean. *Cane*. [1923]. Intro. by Darwin T. Turner. New York: Liveright, 1978.
- Torgovnick, Marianna. *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*. Chicago: Chicago

UP, 1993.

Tosh, John. *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-class Home in Victorian England*.

New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans*. NY: Noonday Press, 1990.

Trotman, Nat. "The Burning Between: Androgyny/Photography/Desire." *Women's Studies* (1999): 379-403.

Turner, Darwin T. Turner. "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Theory of a Black Aesthetic." Victor A. Kramer, ed. *The Harlem Renaissance Re-examined*. New York: AMS Press, 1987: 9-30.

Tylee, Claire. *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-1964*. Iowa City: U of Iowa Press, 1990.

Tyler, Lisa. "Mother-Daughter Passion and Rapture: The Demeter Myth in the Fiction of Virginia Woolf and Doris Lessing" in Eds. Ruth Saxton and Jean Tobin. *Woolf and Lessing: Breaking the Mold*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994: 73-91.

Van Der Zee, James. *A Couple Wearing Raccoon Coats with a Cadillac, Taken on West 127<sup>th</sup> Street*. [1932]. Consolidated Freightways Collection, Palo Alto, CA. *Van Der Zee, Photographer: 1886-1983*. Deborah Willis-Braithwaite. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1993: 12.

----- *Memories*. [1938]. Collection of Dr. Regina A. Perry, Memphis Memorial Art Gallery. *Van Der Zee, Photographer: 1886-1983*. Deborah Willis-Braithwaite. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1993: 177.

*Victorian Photographs of Famous Men and Fair Women by Julia Margaret Cameron*. With

- Intros. by Virginia Woolf and Roger Fry. [1926]. Expanded and Revised Edition Ed. by Tristram Powell. New York: The Hogarth Press, 1973.
- Wachman, Gay. *Lesbian Empire: Radical Crosswriting in the Twenties*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2001.
- Walker Evans. Millerton, New York: Aperture, 1979.
- Walkowitz, Judith R. *Prostitution and Victorian Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980.
- Wall, Cheryl A. *Women of the Harlem Renaissance*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1995.
- , "Zora Neale Hurston: Changing Her Own Words." Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 76-97.
- , Ed. *Zora Neale Hurston; Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2000.
- Warner, Sylvia Townsend. *Lolly Willowes, or the Loving Huntsman*. [1926]. Intro. by Anita Miller. Chicago: Academy Chicago Limited, 1979.
- , *Mr. Fortune's Maggot*. [1927]. London: Virago Limited, 1978.
- Washington, Mary Helen. "I Love the Way Janie Crawford Left Her Husbands": Emergent Female Hero." Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 98-109.
- Waugh, Patricia. *Feminine Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern*. London and New York: Routledge, 1989.
- Webb, Virginia-Lee. "Manipulated Images: European Photographs of Pacific Peoples." Eds. Elazar Barkan and Ronald Bush. *Prehistories of the Future: The Primitivist Project and the Culture of Modernism*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1995: 175-201.

- Weil, Kari. *Androgyny and the Denial of Difference*. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1992.
- Weir Mitchell, S. "Fat and Blood." Ed. Regina Barreca. *Desire and Imagination: Classic Essays on Sexuality*. New York: Meridian, 1995: 359-365.
- Wexler, Laura. *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism*. Chapel Hill, NC: U of NC Press, 2000.
- Williams, Bettye J. "Nella Larsen: Early Twentieth-Century Novelist of Afrocentric Feminist Thought." *College Language Association Journal* (December 1995) 39.2: 165-78.
- . *Nella Larsen: Shaping African-American Female Representation in Quicksand and Passing*. Ph.D. Dissertation. Indiana U of PA 1993 246pp.
- Williams, Sherley Anne. "Encountering Zora Neale Hurston" Ed. Cheryl A. Wall. *Zora Neale Hurston; Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*. Oxford and New York: Oxford UP, 2000: 19-25.
- Willis-Braithwaite, Deborah. *Van Der Zee, Photographer: 1886-1983*. Biographical essay by Rodger C. Birt. New York: H.N. Abrams, 1993.
- Winter, Jay. *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*. Cambridge UP, 1995.
- Wolff, Maria Tai. "Listening and Living: Reading and Experience in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*." Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 218-229.
- Wollaeger, Mark. "Woolf, Postcards, and the Elision of Race: Colonizing Women in *The Voyage Out*." *Modernism/Modernity* 8.1 (2001): 43-75.
- Women Writers of the 1930s: Gender, Politics and History*. Ed. and with an Intro. by

Maroula Joannou. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 1999.

Woolf, Virginia. "Anon' and 'The Reader': Virginia Woolf's Last Essays." Ed. Brenda Silver.

*Twentieth-Century Literature* 25, 3-4 (Fall/Winter 1979): 356-437.

----- *A Room of One's Own*. [1929]. Foreword by Mary Gordon. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1989.

----- *Between the Acts*. [1941]. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1969.

----- *Freshwater: A Comedy*. Ed. and Preface by Lucio P. Ruotolo, Illustrated by Loretta Trezzo. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976.

----- *Jacob's Room* and *The Waves*. [1922 and 1931]. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959.

----- *Moments of Being: Unpublished Autobiographical Writings*. Ed. and Intro. Jeanne Schulkind. Sussex: The University Press, 1976.

----- "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" [1924]. London: The Hogarth Press, 1928.

----- *Mrs. Dalloway*. [1925]. Foreword by Maureen Howard. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1981.

----- *Orlando*. [1928]. New York: Harcourt Brace, 2000.

----- *The Common Reader: First and Second Series Combined in One Volume*. [1925; 1932]. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1948.

----- *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. [1942]. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1970.

----- *The Moment, and Other Essays*. [1947]. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1974.

----- *The Voyage Out*. [1915]. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1978.

- , *The Years*. [1937]. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1965.
- , *Three Guineas*. [1938]. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & Jovanovich, 1965.
- , *To the Lighthouse*. [1927]. Foreword by Eudora Welty. New York: Harcourt  
Brace, 1981.
- , "Women and Fiction." [1929]. *The Forum* rpt. *Granite and Rainbow*.
- Wright, Richard. *Twelve Million Black Voices*. [1941]. Photo direction by Edwin Rosskam.  
New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1988.
- , Review of *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. (*New Masses*, October  
5, 1937) Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K.A. Appiah. *Zora Neale Hurston:  
Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. New York: Amistad, 1993: 16-17.
- Wyatt, Jean. "Avoiding self-definition: in defense of women's right to merge (Julia Kristeva  
and Mrs. Dalloway)." *Women's Studies* 13 (1986): 115-126.
- Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives Past and Present*. Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and  
K.A. Appiah. New York: Amistad, 1993.