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## Lola Ridge : poet and renegade modernist

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# **Lola Ridge: Poet and Renegade Modernist**

Thesis by Anna Hueppauff (Bachelor of Arts)

Bachelor of Arts Honours

School of Communications and Arts

November 23, 2012

## Abstract

This thesis examines the poetry of Lola Ridge as a form of alternative Modernism. Poet, editor, anarchist, Lola Ridge is largely an unknown identity in Modernist discourses. Primarily recognised as a social justice poet, her work has been viewed through a traditional Modernist lens and excluded to the periphery as 'sentimental'. This thesis argues that Ridge personally and professionally exceeds these categories. She modelled a practice of engagement in her personal life by actively participating in rallies and protests against injustice, and living in poverty in solidarity with the poor, giving her work an authenticity worth investigating. Her poetry provides a literary montage of underclass life in an industrial capitalist society and operates as a social critique of ideals in practice, measuring progress through the effect of social and public policy on the body. I contend that her work represents an alternative Modernism which would include an exposition of power relations at work in society and on the body. Chapter One contextualises Ridge's life and work within the domain of High Modernism and the divide between American and European versions, establishing the grounds for her marginalisation. Chapter Two contextualises both the sentimental and Georgian poetics, laying the foundation for analysing Ridge's poetry. Chapter Three demonstrates through close reading of selected poems how Ridge's aesthetic fuses the sentimental concern for the body with a style that resonates with Georgian trench practice to implicate the bystander - and thus the reader - as complicit in the suffering of the others. I argue that these practices establish Ridge as a renegade Modernist, strategically integrating a range of forms to engage the reader in an ethical conversation, to confront their own complicity, an ethical practice she sought to model throughout her life.

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
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- iii. contain any defamatory material.

Signed

Date: 23 November 2012

Anna Hueppauff

## Acknowledgements

This thesis is the product of engagement with remarkable people.

Foremost, I wish to thank Dr Susan Ash, my supervisor, mentor, and role model, for setting the bar high and then providing the support I needed to reach it. Her supervision extended my practice in ways I thought beyond my potential. This thesis would be far less complete without her immeasurable insight, generosity, encouragement and patience. I would also like to thank Travis Kelleher, whose teaching practice and research work continues to inspire me. His support and encouragement has been invaluable. Thanks also to Ann Beveridge, Bethany Andersson, Bill and Marisa Tsoutsoulis, and Sharon Kostopolous for their goodwill, patient assistance, support and friendship.

Deepest thanks to my infinitely supportive husband, Alan Hueppauff, who kept my world turning while I completed this thesis, and to my patient and loving family, who share this turning point with me.

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# Chapter One

## Lola Ridge: Obscure Modernist

### [i] Contextualising Ridge

*'Anything that burns you should come to light.'*

Ridge, on writing poetry (cited in Berke, 2001, vii)

Lola Ridge is a relatively unknown, arguably Modernist poet who carved out an identity of her choosing. According to the chronology provided by Leggott (2006, n.p.), she maintained her maiden name through two marriages; altered her original date of birth from December 19, 1873 to December 12, 1873; altered her birth name from Rose Emily to Lola; deducted a decade from her age; and declared herself Australian even though she lived in Dublin to the age of seven, and New Zealand to the age of 30. She married in 1895 and had two children, her first child dying shortly after birth. In 1903 she left her husband and New Zealand, and with her child moved to Sydney where she studied art at the Julian Ashton Academy at Trinity College. In 1907 she sailed to America, eventually settling in Greenwich Village, New York, where she joined the anarchist Ferrer Association, became a labour activist, and immersed herself in the literary art scene. In New York, Ridge worked as both poet and editor, and is best known for her long poem set in that city, 'The Ghetto' (1918a), which presents the experiences of exiled Jewish immigrants rebuilding their lives in Hester Street, redefined by their racial presence as 'the ghetto'. In 1919 she married David Lawson, her de facto partner of ten years, and in the same year presented a series of lectures throughout the American Midwest. These talks, entitled 'Woman and the Creative Will', link the failure to develop female potential with the lack of

opportunity and social support over ten years before Woolf's similar famous 1929 treatise, *A Room of One's Own* (1974). By the time of her death in 1941 she had published five books of poetry, received a Guggenheim Poetry Fellowship, and was twice awarded the Shelley Memorial Award for Poetry (Leggott, 2006, n.p.). In addition, she also edited several 'little magazines' which contributed to the formation of 'the nation's cultural and political landscape' (Churchill & McKible, 2005, p. 3-4). However, despite these achievements, Ridge has remained an obscure identity in the field of Modernist poetry.

Although Ridge's work is rarely acknowledged now, the literary circles of her time were familiar with her on a personal and professional level. According to Tobin, she held a weekly salon for writers at her residence that included '[Kay] Boyle, John Dos Passos, Mina Loy, Glenway Wescott, Jean Toomer, Edward Arlington Robinson, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams [who] would read their work and discuss literary trends' (2004, p. 69). Ideas were hotly debated; according to William Carlos Williams, the group "'had arguments over cubism that would fill an afternoon'" (cited in Tobin, 2004, p. 69). Boyle suggests that Ridge's fervent 'commitment to the arts and the working class' incited as much division in these groups as the trends, observing that 'people felt the necessity of either defending or abusing her whenever her name came up' (cited in Tobin, 2004, p. 69). Her work as American editor for *Broom: An International Magazine of the Arts* [*Broom Magazine*] was significant in that her selections were instrumental in developing a uniquely continental American aesthetic in a cultural period dominated by Eliot and Pound. Notably, she refused to publish Gertrude Stein's work on the grounds that it was 'mostly blah', and, living by her political principles and aesthetic ideals, resigned her editorship of *Broom Magazine* when the European

based editors (Harold Loeb and Matthew Josephson) overruled her decision (Josephson, 1962, p. 231).

Although Ridge was not enthralled by the Machine Age (Josephson, 1962, p. 231), she did not advocate an overthrow of the system. Instead, she made the machine her 'magnificent slave' (Josephson, 1962, p. 188) by using it to support her interests, soliciting funds from wealthy industrialists to maintain the production of *Broom Magazine*, which then published work critiquing the capitalist system (Ridge, 1922/2012, p. 287). Financing *Broom Magazine* was an ongoing issue even though Loeb, its founder, was the son of a Guggenheim, 'the family which at the time of his birth controlled almost all the mineral wealth in the western hemisphere' (Kondritzer, 1984, p. 1). Within the first month of taking up the position as American editor of *Broom Magazine*, Ridge informed Loeb that she had succeeded in lobbying his mother, Rose Guggenheim, for a \$5000 contribution to support the magazine, an interesting outcome considering Loeb had been unable to persuade his mother to finance his project (Ridge, 1922/2012, p. 287). In fact, Loeb's family appeared to support Ridge's editorial vision more than he did. During her time as editor Ridge secured the free use of a printing facility through Loeb's brother and produced 10,000 letters offering subscriptions to *Broom Magazine* (Ridge, 1922/2012, p. 287), a campaign that according to Wheeler increased 'Broom's circulation from a thousand a month to four thousand a month' (2012, p. 284). Ridge also received assistance from Loeb's first wife, Marjorie Content, 'a member of one of the oldest of the "old guard" Jewish New York families...[whose family] seem always to have been a bit mad, but they were decidedly touched by cultural genius' (Kondritzer, 1984, p. 3). Marjorie not only allowed Ridge to live rent free in the basement rooms of an apartment she owned, but also to use the space to run and operate the New York branch of *Broom Magazine* (Boyle, cited in Kondritzer, 1984, p.

11). Marjorie's graciousness in allowing the use of her rooms did not extend to her ex-husband nor Josephson, who, on arriving at the New York office to take over from Ridge, found himself 'confronted by two long faces: those of the former Mrs. Loeb and of Lola Ridge' (Josephson, 1962, p. 244). Although Marjorie 'made it plain that she wanted me [Josephson] to clear out at once, together with *Broom*', Ridge was permitted to stay on (Josephson, 1962, p. 244).

These events show that for whatever reason, these upper class families dominating the world of industrial capitalism in America chose to invest in Ridge and her socially conscious aesthetic as opposed to their own family relative, who promoted surface styles without an accessible 'message' (Josephson, 1962, p. 238). Perhaps appealing was that Ridge not only invested in her beliefs but in her relationships with others, recognising the value of an embodied presence. Her approach contrasts with Loeb; rather than petition his uncles Solomon and Simon Guggenheim to support *Broom Magazine* in person during a trip to America, he sent a letter along with copies of the magazine instead, which they rejected. This act was an error of judgement according to Josephson, who speculated 'that if Harold [Loeb] had gone to see his Uncle Simon in person the situation might have been saved' (1962, p. 238). Josephson believed Loeb's presence was necessary because (in his opinion) Solomon and Simon Guggenheim were aesthetically illiterate and 'could neither understand neither the pictures nor the printed matter in *Broom*' and needed "'efficiency experts'" to advise them on taste and value, a service Loeb could have provided (Josephson, 1962, p. 238). For Josephson and Loeb, this lost opportunity was heightened by the knowledge that Solomon Guggenheim filled the Guggenheim Museum of Non-Objective Art in New York 'with pictures by the very same avant-garde artists whose works were reproduced in *Broom* from 1921 to 1924' and that Simon

Guggenheim donated 'some eighteen millions (now grown to fifty millions<sup>1</sup>) to the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation which provided fellowships to hundreds of artists and writers' (Josephson, 1962, p. 238-239), one of which was awarded to Ridge (Leggott, 2006, n.p.). In dismissing the importance of developing and maintaining relations as 'sentimental' and unnecessary, Loeb shut down avenues of opportunity. Instead, the capital followed Ridge, whose investment in personal relationships with Loeb's industrial capitalist family was rewarded with financial support for her interests.

Ridge's own work provides a literary montage of underclass life in an industrial capitalist society, with social justice a common thread throughout. In each of her books of poetry, Ridge directs attention to the injustice and inequality that facilitates privilege, and to the experiences of real people, in particular the activists who objected to the suppression of individual liberty by the state and economic system. Ridge wrote about actual events such as the sanctioned murders of people who were either lynched by private citizens hired by corporations, or electrocuted by the state. For example, her poem 'Frank Little in Calvary' (1918b) focuses on the 1917 lynching of Frank Little, a labour and anti-war activist 'punished' by the Anaconda Copper Company for supporting a strike by their employees for safer working conditions. Her book *Firehead* (1929) and poem 'Three Men Die' (1935a) are allegories of the state sanctioned murder by electrocution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927, who were innocent of their alleged crimes, but, according to Judge Thayer, nevertheless guilty of being 'anarchist bastards' (Berke, 2001, p. 56).

Ridge's work influenced others to actively engage in protesting against injustice. Her poem 'Stone Face' (1935b) addressed the 'legal lynching' of Tom Mooney, who was falsely convicted of the 1916 bombing

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<sup>1</sup> at the time of Josephson's publication in 1962.

of a rally in San Francisco (Berke, 2001, p.60). This poem was published on a poster featuring a photo of Mooney in prison uniform and displayed throughout America on 'facades of buildings and steel girders of bridges... decorat[ing] union halls and night school classrooms, all in hopes of raising money on Mooney's behalf' (Berke, 2001, p. 61).

According to Berke the poem inspired further acts of public support: the Young Communist League protested in the stadium at the 1932 Olympic Games wearing 'track and field outfits with "Free Tom Mooney" signs pinned to their chests and backsides', and the West Coast Socialists drove 'a hearse, equipped with a coffin' and the signage, "'Justice is Dead in California'" around the state and in Washington (2002, p. 62). This poem and the subsequent acts of support for Mooney demonstrates how language can be used to resurface and reinsert silent and invisible bodies back into a recognisable human frame, making the Other visible and their pain palpable. This is a strategy worth examining because, as Scarry argues, 'the cessation of torture depends centrally on [the] ability to communicate the reality of physical pain to those who are not themselves in pain' (1987, p. 9).

Ridge also used poetry to critique the ways that race, class and gender are implicated in real events. Her poem 'Lullaby' (1918c) is a response to the East St Louis Massacre in July 1917, where a group of white men, women and children 'deliberately murdered, by shooting, burning and hanging, between one and two hundred human beings who were black' (Du Bois and Gruening, cited in Berke, 2002, p. 46). This poem implicates white working class women in racial violence through the speaker, a white woman singing a lullaby to comfort a black infant whose mother is beaten and burned alive, climaxing when the speaker throws the infant into the fire to burn to death as well. In addressing an actual event, Ridge adds credibility to the violent potential of white women to

perpetuate hatred and undermines the assumption that nurturing is an innate quality of femininity. Thus, this work forces the reader to confront the reality that dominating the powerless can be experienced as pleasure, and that observers are also implicated in the pleasure of looking.

Ridge, in fact, pays much attention to the passive bystander who fails to act on behalf of a vulnerable other. In 'Electrocution' (1927a), Ridge refuses to absolve the executors of judicial decisions, that is, those who justify their performance of state sanction murder as 'following orders'. In 'Morning Ride' (1927b) Ridge addresses the Ku Klux Klan's 1915 lynching of Leo Frank, a Jewish man falsely convicted of rape and murder, absolved of the crime 10 years later (Berke, 2001, p. 50). These poems return the burning, collapsed, and convulsing body into view, bodies that gaze back at society and confront the policy maker, the participants and the bystander with the outcome of their choices.

Ridge followed up her critique of the passive bystander by modelling a practice of engagement in her personal and professional life, not only by commentating on social injustice through her poetry but also actively participating in labour rallies and protests against miscarriages of justice. Porter noted that at the rally protesting Sacco and Vanzetti's sentence of execution at the Charlestown Prison, Ridge stoically stood her ground 'when the police came down on her and the horse's hoofs beat over her head, she did not move, but stood with her shoulders bowed, entirely still' (cited in Berke, 2001, p. 54-55). Arguably, Ridge's ethic of involvement collapsed the boundaries between her art and life. She worked as editor and poet in the same rooms where she lived and held salons for other writers and artists (Josephson, 1962, p. 230, 246). She lived in 'deliberate poverty' in solidarity with the 'poor and oppressed' (Tobin, 2004, p. 67); attempted to keep *Broom Magazine* financially viable by refusing to draw her 'small salary' during her final six months as editor

(Ridge, 1923/2012, p. 290); and gave 'her last \$100 to the young Kay Boyle for an abortion' (Berke, 2001, p. 83). She lived alongside Jewish immigrants in New York, thus well placed to comment on their community in 'The Ghetto', even inserting her own body in amongst the characters (Tobin, 2004, p. 67). Her physical presence at protest rallies positions her observations as reports from the scene as opposed to being drawn from imagination, a claim few Modernists can make with the exception of the Georgian war poets, who wrote from their personal experience of the front lines. These actions give her work a credibility and authenticity worth investigating.

**[ii] The Snowflake School**

*'To my mind, the trouble with her and with a good many like her in America was that they still belonged to the "snowflake school" of poetry. We younger men, therefore, had a real job of modernization cut out for us.'*

Matthew Josephson, European co-editor  
of *Broom Magazine* (1962, p. 246).

Josephson's patronising categorisation of the 'wrong' kind of poetry references a conversation with Ridge who challenged him for a definition of poetry. Josephson, however, excused his inability to provide a sufficient answer by claiming that even 'the greatest of poets and men of letters have failed to provide us in the English language with a concise definition that is adequate' (Josephson, 1962, p. 246). Drawing on the status of the 'greatest poets' was an attempt to silence Ridge as he expected that she, like him, would defer to their reputations. Undeterred,



Ridge cut through Josephson's attempt to undermine her opinion by presenting her definition of poetry: "'My idea of the poem is a snowflake sparkling and melting in the sun'" (cited in Josephson, 1962, p. 246). Ridge resists intimidation by employing an image that Josephson would likely find ludicrous, recognising that Josephson viewed women writers as incapable of producing 'serious' art, their focus limited to producing pretty images of little substance. Ridge's image both embodies and mocks Josephson's prejudice, perhaps expecting that he will overlook the complexity of the snowflake which upon melting alters its form and function: the ice crystals either return to a liquid state and operate as a water source, or refreeze as ice, providing thermal insulation and forming solid ground. Josephson's scorn confirms Ridge's appraisal, his superficial focus on the delicacy of the image fails to recognise that these 'ice crystal' poems, on melting, form the moral and ethical 'ground' on which we walk.

Arguably, Ridge's analogy effectively typifies her own work: a complex of aesthetically beautiful and vivid images composed through intricate forms. Her images possess the sharpness of ice and the reflective properties of crystal, a description often applied to the early work of Hilda Doolittle, renamed 'H.D. Imagiste' by Pound, a label and identity Doolittle found limiting (1933/2002, p. 184; 1958/1979, p. vii, 3). Josephson's derision is reflective of the 'polariz[ing]... literary debates taking place on both sides of the Atlantic': the European avant-garde movements which favoured style and surface over substance, creating an elitist literature accessible mainly to themselves, in contrast to Ridge who aimed for a broader audience during her time as editor of *Broom Magazine*, encouraging an American aesthetic that experimented with form in service to a social message (Wheeler, 2012, p. 284). The strategy of applying titles such as the 'snowflake school' or 'H.D., Imagiste' contributed to a

conventional understanding of Modernism that privileged masculine styles of writing and excluded 'feminised' styles such as the sentimental, and operated as a literary straight jacket containing artists within these genres by ignoring the possibility that their work could be anything other or more than these categories (Eckelberg, 2003, p. 124).

A difference in values motivated, at least in part, the adversarial posture Modernists adopted toward styles Ridge ironically labelled the 'snowflake school'. The realities produced by industrial capitalism and World War I fostered an experimental literary culture amongst European and American artists and writers, who found their old tools of representation inadequate and sought out new forms, techniques and subjects to express their experiences. A Modernist desire to create a new Prometheus for the time extended their base to include diverse literary movements and splinter groups. Some of these listed by Pericles Lewis include: Marinetti's Futurism, which employed an aesthetic of speed and technology to celebrate the machine over the body; Pound's Imagism, which adopted a poetic dialect of free verse and concrete images; Pound and Wyndham Lewis' Vorticism, which applied futurist speed to imagist form to simulate flux as opposed to stasis; Edschmid and Kandinsky's Expressionism, which privileged primitive cultures, the body and non-conformity; Dada, which undermined reason and traditional meanings by reappropriating syntax and sourcing the unconscious for inspiration through dreams and drugs; and Breton's Surrealism, which extended the Dadaist interest in the unconscious to exclude regard for moral and aesthetic norms (2007, p.96-100). These diverse avant-garde movements held in common a rejection of traditional forms and content, attempting instead to 'escape from personality' (Eliot, 1950b, p. 58) through the use of abstraction, discontinuity, and fragmentation (Lewis, 2007, p. 8, 31, 104).

Their focus celebrated the machine age and, as I will argue, ignored the effects of progress on the underclasses.

Ridge did not reject the stylised forms created in Europe, but refused to be dominated by them as indicated in an undated letter to Loeb:

the French influence on the whole [is] bad for American art—bad that is in the sense that we pay too much for what ever surface elegance we acquire....what real growth shall we foster if we squeeze the feet of this giant child into a French shoe? (Ridge, n.d./2012, p. 289)

In this statement Ridge argued that promoting European writers in the American editions of *Broom Magazine* would have a stifling effect on the organic development of a distinctly American Modernism. Loeb finally relented to Ridge's incessant requests to publish an all American issue of *Broom Magazine*, and devoted ninety per cent of the January 1923 issue to Ridge's selections which featured:

... known and unknown writers and paired traditional and avant-garde work, containing national themes and social content, with Mayan artwork. The number...pushed its readers to forgo colonial histories of triumph, consider the authentic history of violence and loss, and ponder America's present and future. (Wheeler, 2012, p. 284)

The issue was well received, perhaps because the poems chosen presented social critique in readable text through an American context as opposed to the European forms accessible to the literary elite (Wheeler, 2012, p. 284). In Josephson's view, Ridge's criteria for publication failed to align with the

European Modernist agenda, and rather than recognising the value in this alternative Modernism, routinely 'counselled against her selections' (1961, p. 231).

The conflict between American and European Modernism is also exemplified through Ridge's attitude to Gertrude Stein's work. In a letter to Loeb she explains her reason for refusing to publish Stein:

not because of the missing substance in her work, not because she merely plays with words, but because she does not do it well enough. If you must play with words, as such, with no impetus or passion behind, then you must do it skilfully as a swordsman plays with rapiers... (1923/2012, p. 289)

This explanation suggests that for Ridge, the issue is not the play with medium, but with work that appears (in her opinion) to lack passion for a cause. Rather than recognise that privileging play with form over the message *was* Modernism, her correspondence reveals that she held her opinion against Loeb's pressure to include Stein, stating 'I stand alone and feel no necessity for any other backing' (1923/2012, p. 289). The refusal of Ridge 'and a good many like her in America' to acknowledge the superiority of European literary movements may have, to an extent, factored in their expulsion from mainstream [European] Modernism (Josephson, 1961, p. 246).

Futurist-leaning Josephson, European co-editor with Ridge of *Broom Magazine*, saw the 'new machine objects' of industrial capitalism as 'things of beauty' and asserted that 'the modern artist must learn to "compete" and live with the machine...and make of the machine "our magnificent slave"' (1962, p. 188). Voices protesting the outcomes of progress were relegated to the 'Uplift School', that is, those who 'wished

that Americans would embrace a genteel form of culture that harked back to Victorian England' (1962, p. 191). Josephson, financially placed to enjoy the products of capitalism (Kondritzer, 1984, p. 14), was disinterested in the human cost of progress (Josephson, 1962, p. 191); an attitude at odds with his American co-editor Ridge, who held that 'artists would survive only by fighting against the machine and capitalism' (Ridge, cited in Josephson, 1962, p. 231). Those foregrounding the personal and social over capitalism in America were relegated to the 'snowflake school', more widely known as the 'sentimentals'; in England they were known as the Georgian poets. Both styles of writing were maligned as 'feminine' for their attention to domestic concerns, such as the body in pain, relationships and loss (Dobson, 1997, p. 266-7; Harding, 2007, p. 179). Josephson defined himself against these interests, and through exclusion shored up Modernism as the masculine project of 'younger men', sloughing off the work of women and feminised others whose values did not reflect their priorities (Josephson, 1962, p. 246).

A close reading of selected poems from Ridge will demonstrate that she presents a different experience of Modernism to that reflected by the dominant movements largely celebrating the Machine Age before World War I deflated their optimism (Lewis, 2007, p. 109). American writers working in Europe, influenced by the Italian Futurists, were enthralled by the potential of technological innovations and the increasing speed of transport and communication, and were unconcerned by the human cost of progress and the failure to practice the ideals defining civil society, such as equality, justice and freedom (Josephson, 1962, p. 191). Rather than overlooking these issues, Ridge centres her work on the trade of ideals to capitalist interests that do not see the labouring body as human but as a resource to be exploited. Determined to redress this imbalance, Ridge presents individuals subjected to discrimination, torture, and death, and

reframes them as recognisably human by displaying their bodies as sentient life stretched to the limits of existence. In her poems, these bodies are never alone, but always connected to the gaze of the spectator, who, by virtue of the gaze, is complicit in their suffering. This reflects a common theme in Ridge's work, that to deny the humanity of the other is also to lose one's own. This theme raises further lines of enquiry such as our moral responsibility toward the Other and ethical ways of looking at the suffering body.

It is possible that Lola Ridge's absence in Modernist poetic history, a period arguably beginning around 1890 and declining following the Second World War (Lewis, 2007, p. xvii-3), is a response to her critique of human rights abuses and the social effects of capitalism - an unpopular message in a period embracing the achievements of the Machine Age (Josephson, 1962, p. 191; 231). According to Tobin, the communist flavour of her political opinions may account for her disappearance during the 1950's in McCarthyist America (2007, p. xxxi). As her poetry destabilised the 'progressive' image of capitalist society, a strategy of undermining the poet and the poetry through classification, to the margins of 'sentimental' and 'social' poetry, effectively buried her active protest. The focus on her activism in her personal and professional life also had the effect of overshadowing the artistry of the poetry which rewards close reading on aesthetic grounds as well. Therefore, this thesis attempts to re-locate Ridge in Modernist poetic history by reconsidering her message *and* her technical capacity, an element of her work which appears to have been neglected in deference to a focus on her activism.

Ridge's politics lead to her work being overlooked at the time and historically that tends to privilege a conventional understanding of Modernism that excludes sentimental writers. I will argue that Ridge's poetry exceeds the category of 'scribbling women' (Dillon, 2004, p. 495).

Through close readings of selected poems I will demonstrate that she extends the sentimental beyond domestic interests and relational loss and raises its profile to include an exposition of power relations at work. My readings will also demonstrate that she meets Pound's brief to 'make it new' (1935) by recasting the exiled and outcast as neither victims nor vagabonds, but stoic survivors, and confronts the bystander as complicit in the suffering of others by virtue of the gaze. Ultimately, I argue that Ridge's work represents an alternative Modernism that incorporates Modernist forms to express sentimental concerns; modelling an inclusive aesthetic in service to her primary focus, the care of the body. To support this assertion, Chapter Two will position the sentimental genre and the Georgian poets in relation to the dominant European Modernist movements and Eliot's concept of impersonality. Chapter Three will demonstrate through a close reading of selected poems that by integrating these styles (as opposed to their exclusion), Ridge forms a socially conscious aesthetic practice which stands as an alternative form of Modernism.

## Chapter Two

### Rethinking Sentimental and Georgian Poetry

[i] **Sentimental Style [through a Modernist lens]**

*'America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public is occupied with their trash-and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed.'*

Nathaniel Hawthorne, letter to publisher W. Ticknor,  
January 1855 (cited in Frederick, 1975, p. 231).

The sentimental style of writing foregrounds human experience and interdependent connections against the dehumanising effects of progress (Dillon, 2004, p. 495-496; Allego, 2004, p. 26-28). Established first in 18<sup>th</sup> century England, the style came to prominence in America during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and is associated with an excess of emotion contrived to induce identification, intimacy and moral persuasion (Dillon, 2004, p. 499-500; Howard, 1999, p. 65; Dobson, 1997, p. 267; Clark, 1991, p. 20). However, for the Modernists, the style was synonymous with banality; it would come to represent the abject other they would define themselves against. DuBois and Lentricchia offer a view of these 'genteel writers' through the eyes of:

...Eliot, Frost, and especially Pound, [who] saw these displaced late Victorians, this genteel cabal, filling the day's major magazines of culture, saw these fat old hens styling themselves as wise old owls . . . saw these men squatting out the inadequate eggs of the day, their boring poems. (Cited in Cohen, 2005, p. 165)



This assessment reduces poets associated with the sentimental to simple fowl with an inflated view of their talents; their process and product is feminised through the act of laying eggs. That these eggs are 'inadequate' suggests that the style is unworthy of cultural space; however, the comparison to hens may not carry the full weight of the insult intended as eggs represent the potential to create life, implying that these poems may also operate as a vehicle for the production of new identities. Men operating in this genre faced emasculation by the High Modernists such as Pound, a rugged individualist, who criticised Williams Carlos Williams for 'mimicking... "the old ladies"' (Pound, 1950, cited in DuPlessis, 2012, p. 32). Pound's desire for literary Modernism to 'make it new' (1935) undermined the work of writers lingering in 'antiquated' styles and censured the artist through its connection to women's writing and domestic concerns (Cohen, 2005, p. 165). Thus, these associations work overtly through oppositional images to define Modernist writing as masculine, urban, educated and highly intelligent in contrast to the sentimental.

The High Modernists, steeped in the early European Modernist movements, were decidedly anti-sentimental, including Pound and Eliot who both rejected the sentimental genre as a low form of art, deeming the deployment of heightened emotion manipulative, implying that their aesthetic practice, foregrounding objectivity, was superior (Cohen, 2005, p. 165). Eliot continued to differentiate and elevate the profile of poetry above domestic writing by aligning poetry's production with 'the condition of science' (Eliot, 1950b, p. 53). Stylistically, Eliot advocates for a presentation of facts as opposed to an evaluation of circumstances, and to this end argues for emotional restraint in the production of poetry: 'Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality' (Eliot, 1950b, p.

58). For Eliot, the critical task for the poet was to find the 'objective correlative', that is, equivalence between a set of circumstances and the emotion they incite:

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.  
(Eliot, 1950a, p. 100)

Eliot's concept of the objective correlative as a formula is well known now. He argues that the poem should simulate affect through a set of circumstances that sufficiently account for an emotion, a clean and clinical process leaving no overflow or residue. To find equivalence the experience must be representable in concrete terms, and the failure to produce a 'match' is attributed to the writer's failure to create a narrative that may justify the emotion expressed. Eliot famously demonstrates his argument at the expense of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* when he claims that:

Hamlet the man is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear....Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother, but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it. (Eliot, 1950a, p. 101)

Eliot claims that *Hamlet* is 'bad' art because Shakespeare has portrayed an emotion in excess of what is warranted by the situation. However it could

also be read that some emotional experiences cannot be fully explained by a chain of events or expressed in language. Eliot attempts to resolve the problem of equivalency by admonishing writers to reign in emotion, aligning this reductive practice with reality where 'the ordinary person puts these [excess] feelings to sleep, or trims down his feeling to fit the business world' (Eliot, 1950a, p. 102). Here Eliot invokes the practical necessity of suppressing surplus feelings in order to maintain relations as a remedy for the problem of circumstantial incongruence, also making the poet superior, if successful, over the ordinary person. The objective correlative then became Eliot's formula for an 'authentic' representation of an experience, and the grounds on which to discredit the sentimental; the overflow of affect indicating a failure to 'curb' emotion in line with everyday practice. However, Eliot's observation of 'the ordinary person' trimming their feelings to meet social standards implicitly acknowledges that the need to modify, deny or exclude the excess to 'fit' in fact affirms its presence and is not a fabrication. Eliot himself acknowledges the sublime nature of some emotional states that exceed representation, such as when an 'intense feeling, ecstatic or terrible, [is] without an object or exceed[s] its object' (Eliot, 1950a, p. 102). The inability to connect or contain these emotions to an external source implies that there is an element to these experiences which cannot be communicated through language, but is nevertheless real. Eliot acknowledges that he cannot formulate this excess, and dismisses this element as a domain for investigation by pathologists (1950a, p. 102). I will argue below that Ridge refuses to eliminate this excess in her poems as it reflects an experience closer to reality.

Pound supported the concept of the objective correlative, advising Modernists to 'consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising agent for a new soap' (1935, p. 339). Apart from indicating

Pound's distaste for description and rhetoric, this comment constructs Modernist identity as an elite community of experimenters as opposed to the sentimentals, whom Pound associates with salespeople peddling a repackaged product for mass consumption. The alignment with science also implies that Modernist work is directed at a select audience and not designed for mass appeal, reinforcing their exclusive status against the mass produced poetry of the sentimentals. Pound differentiates Modernist practice from the sentimental by emphasising restraint in his list of 'Don'ts', commanding poets to 'use no superfluous word, no adjective, which does not reveal something' and resist the desire to 'put in what you want to say and then fill up the remaining vacuums with slush' (1935, p. 337, 340). For Pound, writing should not 'seem forcible by rhetorical din, and luxurious riot', but rather it should be 'austere, direct, free from *emotional* slither' (emphasis added, 1918, p. 114, 108). These principles elevated linguist experiment with exclusionary effect, requiring the reader to make meaning, and also indicate Pound's preference for firm boundaries in poetry limiting the expression of meaning, emotions, and form. The contrast of scientist and salesman favours a clinical, exacting approach to language appealing to reason as opposed to the slipperiness of persuasion, which stokes the emotions instead of the intellect. That he dislikes 'superfluous' words, 'din', 'riot' and 'emotional slither' suggests a desire to exclude overwhelming sensory experiences and feelings that cannot be contained within language; that he objects to 'slush' also hints at a disgust of bodily processes, the messy, involuntary, and uncontrollable emissions of fluids, blood and excrement. Rather than confront the excess, Eliot and Pound jettison the emotional, sensory and bodily overflows from their poetics and then deride other artists operating in the spaces they refused to address.

In short, Pound, Eliot and Josephson denounced the solicitation of affect; in their view the task for poets was to embrace the Modern world and create poetry that represented the experience of high density living, mass consumerism, the contest for work and the effect of war in concrete terms reflecting the phallogentric values of rationality, objectivity, and progress (Lewis, 2007, p. xvii, 11-15). The unrestrained deployment of emotion in poetry formed one of the dividing lines between the sentimental and European Modernists in part because it collapsed the public/private binary and vividly portrayed the impact of economic, political and religious dogma on the bodies of private lives (Howard, 1999, p. 66-73). Rather than concealing the reality of lived experience by 'trimming' emotional sensitivity to events, sentimental poets delivered more uncensored responses that disregarded propriety (Simon, 1969, p. 124), Eliot's formula for external equivalency, and Pound's list of 'Don'ts'. In a sense, the sentimentals mimic Eliot's objective correlative principle in that they also select a set of external circumstances that must stand in for an emotion, but with a difference: the emotional response they construct is made large; suggesting that the impact of events on the individual and communal body may be more than society is willing to acknowledge. For these writers, human flourishing is their main concern (Dobson, 1997, p. 266-267); their focus on loss aims to generate an affective bodily response overriding intellectual distance as they advocate for social responsibility (Simon, 1969, p. 127).

For sentimental writers the message was paramount, evident in their use of 'accessible language, a clear prose style...familiar lyric and narrative patterns' which produced an easily understood and therefore inclusive style (Dobson, 1997, p. 268). Their focus, the plight of vulnerable and exploited people, is presented through the motifs of 'abandonment, orphanhood, and death' and the common tropes of 'abandoned wives,

widows, orphaned children, and separated families; deathbed and graveyard scenes; and fantasies of reunions in heaven' (Dobson, 1997, p. 272-273). In this field, consciousness is defined through community, where the self comes into being through relations with others and dissolves when meaningful connections are severed (Dobson, 1997, p. 267). The style is primarily a restoration project in that it is driven by the desire to recognise hurt, to acknowledge loss, to find value in the discarded, and to return agency to the enslaved. Thus, the sentimental idealises an imaginary space where the disconnected can reunite with their meaningful others; this psychic space is a channel facilitating the desire for reunion when rejection and death prevents satisfaction in reality (Dobson, 1997, p. 272-273). Dispersions cast on the form appear to be motivated to an extent by the perception that attending to the collateral damage of industrial capitalism arrests the ability of society to move forward, although recent work by Dillon (2004), Allego (2004), and earlier work by Howard (1999), Dobson (1997) and Clark (1991) contest this view, asserting that the sentimental genre offers a valuable measure of social progress by presenting the effects of public policy on private lives.

It would seem clear then that this kind of writing would be an anathema to Eliot and Pound, who both argued that the use of heightened emotion discredits the poetry as serious art (Eliot, 1950a, p. 100-102; Pound, 1935, p. 335-341; Pound, 1918, p. 108-114). Eliot requires the poet to practice 'a continual extinction of personality' (1950b, p. 53), meaning that the work produced should be objective in the sense of presenting facts without personal comment or agenda; enabling the reader to form their own conclusions. This view is traceable to Kant's theory of aesthetic judgement, in which Kant argues that good art should have no agenda but 'to play', and further, that rhetoric is a deceptive device that has no place in poetry, because it presumes agreement with the speaker and denies the

reader the space and freedom to make their own judgements (Kant, 2007, p. 155). He writes that 'in poetry everything is straight and above board...it does not seek to steal upon and ensnare the understanding with a sensuous presentation' (2007, p. 156). This view quarrels with Aristotle, who argued that tragedy was a critical teaching tool, and supported the use of extreme emotion, character construction and plot lines for "cathartic" purpose and 'arousing love for humanity' (trans. 2011, p. 29, 48). In *Poetics* he writes that characters should be 'either better than we are or worse'; that events should inspire 'pity and fear' in order to 'accomplish its catharsis of such emotions' (Aristotle, trans. 2011, p. 21, 36). By this he means that the actions of the characters must identify them as excessively good or excessively bad so as to incite pity for the victim. The events must culminate in an annihilation of the protagonist's self so as to incite fear and serve as warning to moderate attitudes and responses to emotional arousal. The tragic form created a safe space where the observer could examine the effect of unregulated emotion, and supports in principle the need for emotional restraint in reality.

Nussbaum claims that Kant supported the need for emotional restraint, viewing the expression of the passions, 'including aggression, as natural and precultural, and not removable from human nature' (2002, p. 19, 21). This implies that although passions may be suppressed, they cannot be permanently extinguished and may erupt from external pressures outside one's control. Although the stoics and Kant desired the same outcome (emotional restraint), the stoics viewed the experience of passion as a social construction rather than an innate quality of the human (Nussbaum, 2002, p. 19-21). Nussbaum states that 'the passions themselves-grief, fear, love, hatred, envy, jealousy, anger-all these...require learning and belief', and are embedded in judgements naturalised through narrative as 'the way things are' (2002, p. 19). She

explains that the experience of passion is an affect induced by attachment 'to things outside our will - our possessions, our reputation, our honor, our bodily good looks and health', and that these values inform our emotional performativity in that they set up an identity 'to be slighted and damaged' and therefore must be defended when these elements forming our sense of self are encroached (2002, p. 19). According to Nussbaum the premise that passion is a learned response to external events provides more agency to the subject than does the presumption of passion as instinctive because learned responses can be unlearned by altering the narratives; for example, by invoking virtue as a structuring feature of identity and by viewing 'the alien or the other, the enemy - not as objects of fear and hate, but as members of one common body with one set of purposes' (2002, p. 19-20). In this statement Nussbaum suggests that recognising the other as human rather than alien works to remap emotional pathways, reasoning that the alternative narrative interrupts the interpretation of the other as a personal threat, and thereby makes benign the judgements that would otherwise trigger the passions of fear and hate.

The sentimental style engages with both Aristotle and the stoics. Following Aristotelian principles of tragedy, the form exploits the passions to draw attention to the circumstances inciting the response, which not only facilitates an interrogation of social policy, but also supports the stoic view that emotion is produced through cues to social narratives, and can be performed differently by reasoning through the trigger points. While not necessarily opposed to the desired outcome, Kant and the Modernists objected to the vehicle, disparaging didactic art on several grounds: for attaching a moral clause to work that should have no agenda, for manipulating emotion, and for making the manipulation manifest. Perhaps a deeper concern for Modernists was that the use of tragic devices reveals the practice of manufacturing emotion, one that they



also performed in following the objective correlative principle but preferred to conceal behind the artifice of objectivity.

Rosaldo's concept of 'embodied thoughts' gives some support to the stoic idea that narrative produces affective responses in the reader and challenges the rational/emotional binary. In her discussion of the link between thought and feeling she writes:

feeling is forever given shape through thought and ...thought is laden with emotional meaning. [W]hat distinguishes thought and affect, differentiating a "cold" cognition from a 'hot,' is fundamentally a sense of the engagement of the actor's self. Emotions are thoughts somehow 'felt' in flushes, pulses, 'movements' of our livers, minds, hearts, stomachs, skin. They are embodied thoughts, thoughts seeped with the apprehension that 'I am involved.' (cited in Howard, 1999, p. 66)

Rosaldo implicates thoughts with affect in that they are performed on the body and represented through 'flushes', 'pulses', and in the 'movements' of our organs. These responses function as 'readable' signs that the body is 'feeling'. These 'signs' register that a script has been cued, and according to Nussbaum present the individual with an option to exchange the experience through the premise that changing the thought also alters the feeling (2002, p. 19-21). Both Pound and Eliot wanted to resist these 'hot' cognitions and recommended suppressing emotion, advocating instead for impersonality and disengagement in writing (Eliot, 1950a, p. 100-102; Pound, 1935, p. 335-341). However, Rosaldo contests the possibility of separating thought and feeling by alluding to their symbiotic relationship, and thereby undermining the potential for art to 'approach the condition of science', Eliot's guideline for Modernists. Despite the attempt at

impersonality, despair comes through Prufrock's<sup>2</sup> anaesthetised state; the Futurists' thrill of speed and technology is not hidden in their work; neither is Pound's pleasure in compressing energy into images.

The literary consequence of Rosaldo's concept of embodied thoughts reveals that the Modernist pursuit of objectivity through personal disconnection is an illusion. The communion of thought and feeling represents an infiltration of personality, and taints what should be objective work with the writer's subjectivity. Further, refusing to acknowledge the involuntary signs of affect on the body, for example crying, blushing, screaming, and fainting, falls short of presenting real lived experience.

A close reading of Edna St Vincent Millay's poem 'Justice Denied in Massachusetts' ['Justice'] (1927) demonstrates that the sentimental form is far from banal and irrelevant. This poem embodies a developing argument put forward by Clark (1991), Dobson (1997), Howard (1999), Allego (2004) and Dillon (2004); that is, the sentimental extends conventional understandings of Modernism by operating as a measure of social progress. Reflecting the sentimental style, this poem employs the domestic to critique ideals, specifically the ideal of justice in relation to the Sacco-Vanzetti case. Sacco and Vanzetti, the subjects of the poem, both immigrants and anarchists, were found guilty of robbery and the murder of two men despite, according to Justice Musmanno:

at least ninety-five per cent of pronouncements on the case...[including those from] Justice Frankfurter of the Supreme Court, the Governor of Massachusetts, the Speaker of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, Senator LaFollette, Albert Einstein... Mme. Curie... Edna St Vincent Millay...; [as well as]

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<sup>2</sup> The protagonist in Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (1915)

editors, philosophers, writers and analysts and scholars....[were] advancing the theme that Sacco and Vanzetti were innocent or that they were denied a fair trial and therefore proven not guilty. (1963, p. 481)

Millay, like other prominent artists and individuals, used her public prominence to draw attention to the unjust process of indictment and trial of Sacco and Vanzetti. Her popularity was such that Justice Musmanno mentions her by name in his list of eminent individuals supporting Sacco and Vanzetti, listing 'great American poet' as her qualification for inclusion (1963, p. 482). Newcomb establishes her notoriety by noting that she managed to secure an hour in person with the Governor of Massachusetts on the day before the execution, although her appeal for clemency on their behalf was to no avail (1995, n.p.). According to Newcomb, this event marked a change of tone and direction in Millay's poetry from 'immature beauty' to 'mature bitterness' (1995, n.p.), and was not received well by critics such as Cleanth Brooks, who claimed that her "'preoccupation with social and economic justice" had yielded "disappointing" results' (cited in Newcomb, 1995, n.p.). As Millay's first venture into the political realm, this assessment belies a preference for women writers to focus on domestic issues rather than the public sphere, thereby containing their work to the banal and inconsequential. Indeed, 'Justice' (1927) will demonstrate that Millay's employment of the sentimental form operates as a form of strong social critique, condemning the failure to uphold the ideal of justice by showing the effect of this choice on the natural world.

'Justice' was published in the *New York Times* on August 22, 1927, the day before Sacco and Vanzetti's execution and, as outlined by Newcomb, operated as newsprint through its full title, 'Justice Denied in

Massachusetts' (1995, n.p.). Written in accessible language, it alerted the American public of the failure of their judicial system to uphold the ideal of justice. The poem works as an allegory by reflecting this failure through the sentimentalised landscape of a once fertile 'garden' (line 1) blossoming with 'larkspur', 'corn' and 'fruitful seed' (line 3-4), now corrupted through the infiltration of 'quack and weed' (line 6). This garden represents the society envisioned by Jefferson through the Declaration of Independence (1776, n.p.) and Lazarus through "The New Colossus" (cited in Wolosky, 2010, p. 140); one that thrives through the cultivation of ideals such as justice, equality, and freedom for all individuals, including immigrants. The 'quack and weeds' (line 6) not only represents the infiltration of prejudice and bias in what should be an objective and fair judiciary, but also undermines through word play the Sacco and Vanzetti judgement and process as fraudulent 'quackery'. The failure to practice these ideals 'uproot[s]/The sun that warmed our stooping backs and withered the weed' (line 21-22). A cloud forms over the landscape, enabling the weed to take hold in the 'cold earth' (line 5); suggesting that the corruption of the judicial system has altered the landscape, rendering it infertile.

In keeping with the sentimental, Millay employs the trope of loss to inspire action. In 'Justice' she draws the reader into a romanticised, idyllic landscape:

Not in our day  
Shall the cloud go over and the sun rise as before,  
Beneficent upon us  
Out of the glittering bay,  
And the warm winds be blown inward from the sea  
Moving the blades of corn  
With a peaceful sound. (lines 10-16)

Drawing the reader into this space in nature, Millay uses a strategy that Rosaldo defines as 'embodies thought' (cited in Howard, 1999, p. 66). The aesthetically beautiful image of a 'glittering bay' and the 'peaceful sound' of 'moving blades of corn' speak to the body, inclining it toward the 'warm winds', drawing the reader into the image, and thereby intensifying its loss. That this sensory experience will not be felt again in this lifetime ('not in our day') induces a sense of despair, made large through repetition, 'we shall not feel it again/ We shall die in darkness, and be buried in the rain' (line 23-24; 29-31). By returning the reader to an inanimate, unstimulating, 'sitting-room' (line 2), Millay solicits affect in an attempt to motivate the reader into performing the acts required to return to the idealised space.

'Justice' also aligns with the sentimental through its use of landscape. The focus of the sentimental is human flourishing, and this ability depends on the landscape, both the literal ground and the cultural landscape figured through this allegory. The literal ground, once fertile and productive, reflects the potential of the cultural landscape founded on ideals of justice, equality and freedom. The infiltration of 'quack' reflects the erosion of ideals in practice, and, in the Sacco and Vanzetti case, defeats those protestors who 'marched upon' (line 6) this field demanding they receive a fair trial, but 'cannot conquer' (line 7) the bias of the judiciary. The failure of the judiciary to maintain these ideals in practice impairs access to human rights, jeopardising the development of the entire community and future generations. For this, Millay indicts the bystanders who did not protest against injustice, their legacy of inactivity leaving their 'children's children...a blighted earth to till/with a broken hoe' (lines 35; 37-38). This suggests that their failure to implant ideals and weed out corruption has altered the landscape, and that future generations, left with

inadequate tools to 'till' this 'earth', will struggle to flourish in an environment that fails to uphold human rights. Millay extends her critique to those who adopted the 'alienated' (Newcomb, 1995, n.p.) posture of the High Modernists toward society, pointing directly to Eliot by engaging with 'J. Alfred Prufrock's' despair, mimicking his refrain, 'Let us go then, you and I' throughout 'Justice':

Let us abandon then our gardens and go home  
And sit in the sitting-room...

Let us go home, and sit in the sitting room...

Let us sit here, sit still,  
Here in the sitting-room until we die. (lines 1-2; 9; 32-33)

These repetitions speak of her frustration and rage at defeat, but also force the reader to experience inertia and a vacuous state of inactivity, an unnatural stasis for the body that is a product of regenerative processes. The reader is left repeatedly returned to this 'sitting room' to contemplate the unstimulating dullness of a reality without ideals. The contrast of the 'sitting room' against the 'glittering bay' positions the retreat to the 'sitting room' waiting to die as a life not worth living, and is a sentimental strategy aimed at motivating the reader into behavioural change. For Millay, who described herself 'a candle burning at both ends' ('First Fig' 1920), passivity was a form of death.

'Justice' is typically sentimental in its concern for human flourishing, its solicitation of affect through the trope of loss, and its critique of the social system through the effects of policy on the natural world. In this, the sentimental form is similar to the Georgian poetic

practice. The Georgian poets, also socially conscious, aimed for social engagement through their work by highlighting the effects of social and public policy on nature and the body, as the next section will demonstrate. The work of the Georgian war poets in England demonstrates an alternative practice by combining realism with a sentimental focus on suffering, a method also followed by Ridge, perhaps influencing her exclusion from the Modernist centre. Indeed, a main point of difference between the Georgians and the Modernists is the willingness to confront the fragility of the body, a willingness Ridge fully embraces.

**[ii] The Georgian Poets [through a Modernist lens]**

*'A literature without any critical sense; a poetry which takes not the faintest notice of the development of French verse from Baudelaire to the present day, and which has perused English literature with only a wandering antiquarian passion, a taste for which everything is either too hot or too cold; there is no culture here.'*

Eliot on Georgian poetry, London letter, March 1921

(republished in Elliott, 2005, p. 139).

Spanning the decade from 1912-1922, and thus coinciding with the beginning of High Modernism, Georgian poetry was a prominent form in England during the rule of George V (Simon, 1969, p. 122). The Georgian poets were labelled 'men of feeling', a trope made prominent in the 18th century by the character of Harley in Mackenzie's *The Man of Feeling* (1886) and Casimir Fleetwood in *Fleetwood: Or, The New Man Of Feeling* (Godwin, 1832). Mullins defines the 'man of feeling' as 'a character whose sensibility and consequent sympathy for his fellow human beings led naturally to the

'benevolent remedying of misfortune'" (cited in van Leeuwin, 2011, p. 120-121), an identity opposed to the preferred masculinity of 19<sup>th</sup> century England, which was a combination of rugged individual and committed family head (Tosh, 2005, p. 332). As an identity, the 'man of feeling' positions men engaging in the Georgian form as an inferior feminised masculinity, furthered by Eliot who is also scathing in his review of their work, condemning them as 'incurably provincial, even "inbred"'"; and their work as 'prefabricated flutter' that substitutes for the 'expression of deep emotion' (cited in Harding, 2007, p. 179); a claim also levelled at the 'retrograde' sentimental 'snowflake school' (Josephson, 1962, p. 231, 246).

Georgian poetry intersects with the sentimental in drawing attention to anti-social human practice and invokes empathy for the afflicted; for this they face the same charge of inciting counterfeit emotions to manipulate the attitude of the reader (D'Ambrosio, 2005, p. 8; Eliot, 1950b, p. 53, 56-59; Pound, 1918, p. 108-114; Pound, 1935, p. 335-341). The sentimentals and the Georgians were both concerned with suffering; the Georgians 'reject[ing] the patriotic championing of the English social and economic systems' and focussing instead on the effect of these systems on the vulnerable (Simon, 1969, p. 127). Eliot's negative review, that their work lacked 'any critical sense' (1921/2005, p. 139), may also be influenced by the Georgian and sentimental refusal to curb excess emotion and experiences from their work to the extent that they foregrounded uncanny and sublime events that cannot be contained, explained, or represented in language. Notably, the Georgians diverged from (and expanded) the sentimental through their Romantic invocation of pastoral themes and relationships with the natural world, extending their sphere of concern to animals, often exposing the cruelty of human acts in their poetry (D'Ambrosia, 2005, p. 8). In responding to the uncertainties of industrial capitalism, the sentimentals tended to turn inward and focussed on



human relations, while the Georgians turned outward toward the natural world, grounding themselves in the reliability of seasonal change and processes of renewal (Simon, 1969, p. 132). However, this neo-Romantic concern with the natural world undermined their credibility; according to Sitwell, '[b]irds became a cult. Any mention of a singing-bird threw the community into a frenzy' (cited in D'Ambrosia, 2005, p. 8). This comment trivialises their focus and undermines the group for presenting the seemingly inconsequential (natural world) as paramount. High Modernists such as Eliot defined the Georgian neo-Romantic focus on nature as antiquated, a charge Josephson also levelled at sentimental work attending to the body and relationships (1962, p. 231). I will demonstrate the similarities and differences between the sentimental, Georgian and Modernist styles through a close reading of Walter de la Mare's 'The Listeners' (1912), a typical example of Georgian poetry that also reflects the sentimental practice of addressing experiences exceeding language.

Walter de la Mare's poem 'The Listeners' (1912/1979) employs the traditional Georgian use of formal diction and an elevated tone. These elements distinguish their work from the sentimental and Modernist preference for everyday speech; for example the Traveller's horse did not eat, but 'champed the grasses' (line 3), the Traveller did not knock, but 'smote on the door' (line 25). The use of alliteration in the 'forest's ferny floor' (line 4) draws attention to nature and points to the neo-Romantic pastoral themes despised by the Modernists. That the 'silence surged softly' (line 36) indicates that tranquillity is restored following the departure of the human Traveller, who represents an unwelcome intrusion in this natural world, reflecting the stance of the Georgian poets who did not embrace the machine and deplored the effects of industrial capitalism on the natural and civilised world (Simon, 1969, p. 127). This position is reinforced in 'The Listeners' in that nature surrounds and

overwhelms the house, the sign of man's absent presence. The house is surrounded by the 'forest' (line 4), 'the starred and leafy sky' (line 24), the 'leaf-fringed sill' (line 10), the moonlight (line 2, 15, 17), and the bird that reclaims the cultural space by locating its turret at the door (line 5). This privileging of nature over culture contrasts with the Modernists, who at least accepted the effects and embraced the opportunities provided through industrial capitalism (Josephson, 1962, p. 188; 191).

Despite these differences, Georgian and sentimental work both operate in spaces where emotional experience cannot be represented in concrete terms. For example in 'The Listeners', the Traveller registers the presence of the 'host of phantom listeners' (line 13) in his body but their 'uncanny' strangeness cannot be articulated, only 'felt in his heart' (line 21). In these lines affect is used to communicate awareness, suggesting that there are some spaces where language fails. This is further supported in that the 'Traveller' recognises that the 'listeners' answer him, but cannot connect with them because the language they speak is a bodily response - a still silence. The Traveller's failure to connect with the 'listeners' operates on the level of the sublime in that the experience resists comprehension; that he shouts, 'Tell them I came....I kept my word' implies that he was expected, and yet his return is met with a disembodied presence, an image that cannot be contained in language, leaving the imagination to fill in what language cannot retrieve. This practice of foregrounding the excess rather than 'trimming' the experience and containing it in language is also employed by the sentimentals, a strategy raising Eliot's ire, differentiating both the Georgians and the sentimentals from the Modernists.

'The Traveller' represents the epitome of Georgian poetry in its use of archaic terms, elevated diction, and formal structure, all of which point backwards to traditional poetic forms. This practice would likely have

frustrated the Modernists, who, according to Lewis, viewed traditional forms as inadequate to reproduce the realities of industrial capitalism and the First World War (Lewis, 2007, p. 11). In their collection of essays critiquing traditional forms, Pound (1935) and Eliot (1950a; 1950b) argued that to be relevant writers had to develop or adapt techniques in order to translate these experiences. In a review of traditional forms, Eliot warns that 'we are always in danger, in clinging to an old tradition, or attempting to re-establish one, of confusing the vital and the unessential, the real and the sentimental (1934, p. 18). This statement implies that these forms are limited in the type of content they can develop and are therefore redundant. The use of older forms and content does suggest the Georgians sought comfort from the monumental changes taking place in their era, but whether they failed to confront the challenges of the age is arguable. Simon defends the leaders of the Georgian movement as realists who 'wished to confront experience directly' (1969, p. 124), and who did so by presenting the effects of industrial capitalism on the landscape and nature. Simon's claim is further supported by the Georgian poets who, at the onset of the World War I, took up positions as combat soldiers, shifted their neo-Romantic focus to a sentimental concern for the body, and wrote from direct experience in a revised traditional form now identified as the 'trench lyric' (1969, p. 124). A reading of Sassoon's poem 'Suicide in the Trenches' (1918), a typical example of Georgian trench poetry, will refute Eliot's claim and demonstrate how traditional forms can deliver relevant 'vital' and 'real' experiences reflecting the realities of the era.

'Suicide in the Trenches' employs the traditional 4 line 3 stanza format of a lyric poem with an *aabb* masculine end rhyme scheme. Each couplet falls short of iambic pentameter that defines the heroic couplet, mimicking the social perception that this soldier, having committed suicide at war, is no hero either. This is also supported by the speaker

who says plainly that 'no one spoke of him again' (line 8). In the trench lyric the language is closer to everyday speech, and far more direct than earlier Georgian pastoral work. Realism is foregrounded by describing the war experience in concrete terms; for example, the 'hell' that the public 'will never know' (line 11-12) is the experience of fighting in a trench in winter, surrounded by 'crumps' (exploding shells), 'lice' and the forgone pleasure and comfort of 'rum' (line 5-6). This hell is translated through Michelle Rosaldo's concept of 'embodied thoughts' (cited in Howard, 1999, p. 66); in this case, the sound of shelling, the visual of dismembered, bleeding, festering bodies and feeling of lice crawling on one's skull indicates to an extent that the horror of the trenches is a bodily experience. The shock is intensified through the contrast of the boy's pre-war existence: a leisured life of 'empty joy', sleeping 'soundly' even 'in the lonesome dark', rising early to whistle 'with the lark' (line 1-4). These details indicate that the boy is young and naïve, absent of anxiety, and in tune with the rhythms of the natural world. The horror of his present severs him from the past, making the natural world inaccessible. Grossly unprepared for the reality of fighting in trenches he becomes 'cowed and glum' (line 5), and, overwhelmed with fear and depression, ends his own life. The soldier's suicide indicates that his experience defied processing and could not be expressed in language, which in turn heightens the reader's emotional response from horror to terror, where the mind must imagine what the facts leave out. The observations of trench poets were arguably 'vital' and relevant subject matter during the First World War, and particularly for Sassoon who wrote from direct experience as a combat soldier as opposed to Pound, who did not experience active service, and so constructed the soldier's experience through imagining in his poems 'The Return' (1912) and 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920).

In keeping with the Georgian concern for suffering and their desire to restore principles of humanity, the third stanza functions as a rebuke to society for both producing and supporting a war that takes the lives of young people. Sassoon indicts the public through the speaker who condemns the respectable 'smug faces', complacent in their safety, for cheering their young to an early death or a death in life (line 10). The speaker accuses society of cowardice, advising them to 'sneak home and pray you'll never know' (line 11) the trauma witnessed by their young people. In this poem Sassoon forces the reader to look through the eyes of the soldier and see the obliterated bodies he was forced to confront; and condemns society (through the speaker) for erasing the young man's existence while they, safe at home, refused to recognise the effects of war on the body and mind of those sent to face it directly.

Sassoon's trench lyric challenges Elliot's claim that traditional forms were inadequate to represent the reality of the time. In fact, the use of the lyric form works to shock the reader out of complacency. The meter and rhyme scheme mimic a nursery rhyme, creating an expectation of idyllic childhood which the speaker supports in the first stanza. This expectation is undone in the second stanza by detailing the boy's real experience in the trench. This contrast actually heightens the impact of the boy's lost childhood and life, for which the speaker holds society (and the interpellated reader) accountable. This poem fails Eliot's standard of objectivity (1950a, p. 100-102) by attempting to influence a change in values through the sentimental contrast of pre-war life with a frontline experience (D'Ambrosio, 2005, p. 8). It also fails Kant's standard of disinterest by evaluating social policy (Kant, 2007, p. 155-156). However, its presentation of trench life and death using a traditional lyric form works to foreground what is 'vital' and arguably extends Modernism by presenting the 'real' through the sentimental to critique and inform social

attitudes, a practice also performed by Ridge. The trench poets wrote from direct experience rather than imagination, and presented all of the experience, including the elements that escaped language, disregarding both correlative equivalency and impersonality. For the trench poets, war was personal. In recreating the terror felt by the young soldier, Sassoon aimed to stimulate affect and redirect the war narrative. Instead of promoting a sanitised ideal of heroic sacrifice in grandiose terms, he used everyday language to present the desecrated bodies and shattered minds of their youth, shaming the public for celebrating their loss and overlooking (in the case of the suicided soldier) their suffering. These strategies of confronting the audience with the effect of social policy on the body and foregrounding the inexpressible are both strategies Lola Ridge employs, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter Three.

## Chapter Three

### Lola Ridge: Renegade Modernist 'Makes It New'

#### [i] Measuring Ideals Against Real Experiences

*'Her work expressed a fiery awareness of social injustice as eloquently as Emanuel Carnevali's or Maxwell Bodenheim's, but it was always Lola's voice that spoke, a woman's savage voice, not theirs.'*

Kay Boyle on Ridge (cited in Tobin, 2004, p. xii).

Much of Lola Ridge's work follows the practice of the Georgian war poets. She inserts her own body literally and literarily into the events that inform her work. Her poetry is socially conscious and attempts to awaken the social consciousness of her readers in a similar way to both the sentimental and the Georgian trench poets, that is, by foregrounding the fragility of the body and compelling the reader to look, a strategy that simultaneously solicits affect and implicates the reader as spectator by virtue of the gaze. For Ridge, the body is a tabula rasa discursively inscribed with subjectivities that both enable and constrain the human from becoming a visible and present agentive subject. Her five books of poetry test the veracity of capitalist mythology against experience, exploring the meaning of freedom symbolised through the Statue of Liberty, made explicit through Emma Lazarus' poem "The New Colossus" in which Lady Liberty asks the world to send:

...your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me.

(lines 10-13, cited in Wolosky, 2010, p. 140)

Ridge investigates this invitation addressed to the abject of the world by taking up the cause of immigrants and raced and gendered others. Her poetry models a response that both recognises their repression and agency, and supports their transition and pursuit of equality under the law. Her poems chisel off prefabricated patriarchal constructions of identity as a sculptor would carve out an image from stone, bringing the human into being from beneath the façade of naturalised subjectivities. She envisions the process of transfiguration through the female body as a site of regeneration. Ridge does not shy away from confronting gendered oppression and intervenes in the phallogentric space; her intention is not to replace dominant male discourses, but to create space for 'othered' identities to exercise agency in the production of their own realities. Her poetry recognises the vulnerability of the body as a fragile home for the soul; and her purpose is to extend this regard to all humans, regardless of privilege or disadvantage. She measures social progress through the degree of access that minority identities have to equality and justice, and demonstrates her findings through the body, which she foregrounds as physical evidence to support her critique.

At the same time, Ridge also straddles styles associated with Modernism, using tropes such the machine and focusing on 'progress' in the production of her message. For example, in 'The Ghetto' (1918a) she combines imagist principles with futurist speed and technology to reconstruct the working body as 'A thin black piston flying, One with...[the] machine' (II, line 42-43). These lines recognise progress and the machine by giving the labouring body the strength and speed of automated steel. In 'Morning Ride' (1927b) Ridge creates a Modernist montage depicting a train journey transcending time and space,



juxtaposing advertising, newsprint, and landscape with a body lynched 10 years prior. Thus, although Ridge uses Modernist tropes to critique human rights abuses and the social effects of capitalism, she is most often defined as an anarchist and social justice poet who extended her art to life, 'performing' her poetry by actively protesting against injustice (Berke, 2010, 2001, 1999; Tobin, 2004; Miller, 2000; McKinley, 1982). These interests also position her in the sentimental sphere; however, as I will demonstrate, Ridge's work is more than the sum of these parts as her poetry constitutes an examination of power relations operating in society and on the body. Indeed, I will argue that Ridge also creates something new as she illuminates the 'electric currents of life' flowing through the human remains of marginalised and disadvantaged identities.

First, I demonstrate through a close reading of 'The Ghetto' (1918a) that although Ridge's subject is sentimental, her treatment is not. It combines Modernist forms to present a fledgling immigrant community as prevailing bodies dealing directly with life. Following this, I will analyse 'Frank Little in Calvary' (1918b), and 'Lullaby' (1918c) to demonstrate how Ridge's employment of the Georgian trench strategy of returning the mutilated body to public spectacle works to implicate the reader as bystander and complicit by virtue of the gaze, challenging, indeed compelling, the reader to investigate their own position on the issues of race, class and gender raised by these poems. I conclude with a reading of 'Morning Ride' (1927b) as this poem encapsulates Ridge's personal aesthetic and provides support for her inclusion in Modernist discourses. Combining multiple formats, Ridge fluidly plays with form to foreground her ultimate intention: to affect and engage the reader in an ethical conversation about human rights.

[ii] **Prevailing Bodies**

*'Life leaping in the shaken flesh*

*Like flame at an asbestos curtain'*

'The Ghetto' (Ridge, 1918a)

In 'The Ghetto' Ridge provides a panoramic view of immigrant experience through the Jewish community restricted to New York's Lower East Side, and more specifically, Hester Street. The title creates an image of a densely populated slum and identifies the poem's sentimental focus: the experiences of an isolated minority group working through economic and social disadvantage. The structure and subject of the poem follows the sentimental practice of drawing attention to the body, and specifically the female body, in that the poem is divided into nine sections, suggesting 'the stages of maternal gestation' (Berke, 2001, p. 68). Ridge employs the unstructured free verse form practiced by Modernists (as opposed to the sentimental use of traditional forms), which provides the space and freedom to represent the community evolving over time. The subject, the immigrant community attempting to settle in their host nation, is figuratively positioned inside the female body as a developing foetus. This is supported by conflating their life in the Ghetto with life in the womb:

Life in the cramped ova

Tearing and rending asunder its living cells...

Wars, arts, discoveries, rebellions, travails, immolations,

catacylsms, hates...

Pent in the shut flesh. (VIII, line 11-15, ellipsis in text)

In this stanza Ridge combines the Modernist trope of progress with the sentimental concern for life. Dealing directly with reality, she acknowledges that 'wars', 'rebellions' and 'immolations' are a part of life, enclosing these elements within the 'shut flesh' of the womb. This act, coupled with the inclusion of 'art' and 'discoveries', implies that she recognises that these factors are an effect of a progressive society. In this, she fits with neither the Futurists who celebrated revolution, nor with the sentimentals who decried these events, but holds a position between these groups as a kind of third space that views the 'tearing and rending asunder of living cells' as part of the process of renewal and regeneration. This metaphor does not sentimentally cling to an idealised past, but accedes to the Modernist acceptance of the current reality.

In this poem Ridge employs the sentimental strategy of soliciting affect for the purpose of producing social change. She uses the image of an embryo to instate empathy for the immigrant experience and assign mainstream society (as maternal body) with the responsibility for their survival and successful transition into their host community. The correlation of the ghetto quarter with the womb attempts to disrupt the hostile and defensive posture toward immigrant settlement by foregrounding their vulnerability and thereby soliciting sympathy for their experience. By directly and deeply embedding immigrant communities within the 'womb' of mainstream society, the 'host' society is implicated with the responsibility for their wellbeing. The womb metaphor attempts to foster a sense of ownership and stimulate the collective primal drive to support the continuation of the species, thereby instating the exiled, marginal community to the centre.

In 'The Ghetto' Ridge also employs a Modernist strategy approximating Eliot's objective correlative formula to instate empathy for the immigrant experience. Ridge introduces the reader to the 'ghetto'

through images that present an inhospitable environment where the heat is overwhelming and the access to relief is blocked off:

Cool, inaccessible air  
Is floating in velvety blackness shot with steel-blue lights,  
But no breath stirs the heat  
Leaning its ponderous bulk upon the Ghetto  
And most on Hester street...

The heat...  
Nosing in the body's overflow,  
Like a beast pressing its great steaming belly close,  
Covering all avenues of air... (I, lines 1-9, ellipsis in text)

Ridge constructs an image that produces a Modernist 'correlative' for feelings of anxiety and repulsion. The abstract sensation of heat is displaced onto the concrete image of an unpleasant beast that presses in against the inhabitants, giving a sense of entrapment and a struggle for breath, and by extension, life. The heat's 'ponderous bulk' suggests an enormity that inhibits movement; its 'nosing in the body's overflow' suggests its intrusion is unwelcome; and the proximity of 'its steaming belly' to the body is discomforting in that it is unavoidable. The element of this text that inspires terror is the awareness that there is no escape from this repulsive and suffocating environment. This 'correlative' enables the reader to invoke the experience for themselves because it 'embodies thought' (Howard, 1999), that is, it induces a bodily response: the heat is felt as repulsion toward the sweating 'steaming belly', the beast's body 'covering of all avenues of air' elevates arousal as one imagines gasping for oxygen and the panic of suffocation. The use of ellipsis holds the

reader in a static position 'on Hester Street...' and forces them to witness and share the experience. Ridge merges a Modernist 'correlative' with embodied thought to produce her message, that this constricting environment challenges the wellbeing of the body, even existence, and facilitates the recognition that all bodies are vulnerable to the elements. This image is not 'disinterested' in the Kantian sense because the construction of the heat as a communal threat invokes the sentimental as it attempts to stimulate a shared concern for survival and engage the reader in a discourse of caring for the other.

The construction of the beast is similar to the 'yellow fog' in Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' ['Prufrock'] (1915) in that both 'correlatives' work to create an impression of a discomfoting environment. In 'Prufrock' the yellow fog is also embodied:

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,  
The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes

Curled once about the house, and fell asleep. (Eliot, 1915, lines 15-16; 22)

In both 'The Ghetto' and 'Prufrock', conditions are represented in concrete terms: 'The Ghetto' transfers the suffocating environment to the image of the beast; 'Prufrock' displaces environmental decay and social 'corruption' onto the image of a domesticated feline (Saunders, 2000, p. 6). Ridge's steaming bellied beast is an aggressive and repulsive presence forcing bodies to 'dangle from the fire escapes' and infants to 'suck at the air as at empty teats' (lines 13, 15, 19-20), whereas Eliot's house pet is non-threatening, even 'comforting' to watch (Saunders, 2000, p. 7). Both images have a hypnotic effect on the body: the heat undoes the senses by blocking

access to oxygen; the soft flow of the cat's manoeuvres, rubbing its body and circling the house, also serves to lull the conscious state. While both employ the Modernist 'correlative' to represent the state of a society, Ridge's community attempts to escape their oppressive environment as their young people push through the 'heat' and convene to discuss their rights and how to gain access to them:

Converging to the forums and meeting halls  
Surging indomitable, slow  
Through the gross underbrush of heat. (I, 22-24)

Striving with infinite effort,  
Frustrate yet ever pursuing  
The great white Liberty (VII, 48-50)

This next generation tolerates this excessive 'heat', or the discomforting social conditions they experience in this 'womb', but they also meet to discuss ideas and ways of moving forward as they outgrow the confinement and restrictions of this host environment. Thus, where J. Alfred Prufrock's contentment to observe the degraded state of his reality suggests he feels overwhelmed and disempowered to effect change, Ridge's 'exiled' ghetto occupants do not languish in despair. Instead, they continue to operate as agents in the production of their reality, striving 'with infinite effort...ever pursuing' the ideals of freedom, justice and equality represented by the Statue of Liberty (and implied through Lazarus' 'New Colossus', cited in Wolosky, 2010, p. 140). These personas present an alternative response to the new world of industrial capitalism that neither aligns with the Futurist's celebration of the present nor

sentimentally mourns the past, but in Georgian trench style, deals with reality directly.

In 'The Ghetto' Ridge presents bodies that prevail despite social instability through the lens of a historically exiled people. During their search for home these 'fasting and athirst' (I, 42) bodies endure exile and exploitation. Their capacity for survival is heightened by the sublime image of the desert, where the 'molten silence' (I, 49) solidifies over the senses indefinitely 'like a stopped wheel' (I, 50), inducing a sense of paralysis through its suppression of sensory awareness, agency and escape. Despite the disorienting effects of this state of inertia, this community 'went on...and yet on...' (I, 40, 43). Ridge conflates the particular experience of Jewish banishment to include all dispersed peoples: their march 'across the centuries' (I, 46) extends the search for refuge across time and space, and the 'infinite procession of those feet' (I, 52) points to the reality that displacement and dispossession is an ongoing generational experience for disempowered people. Foregrounding the prevailing exiled body may be regarded as sentimental, but I would argue that Ridge does not solicit pity for these immigrants in advocating for social change, but respect and admiration for their endurance. Throughout the nine sections Ridge presents an image of these exiled immigrants, not as victims or vagrants, but actively integrating as they negotiate their transition into the host nation, a view that connects integration with the Modernist trope of progress.

Ridge aligns herself with the sentimentals in measuring social progress through human relations, and to this end she focuses on the immigrant's ability to integrate into the host 'maternal' body. Rigid phallogocentric traditions represent a challenge to assimilation; therefore Ridge continues to locate regeneration with the female, whose ability to accommodate new life also implies that she is equipped to accommodate

new thought. Ridge demonstrates this mental flexibility through Sadie's mother, who reclaims ownership of her body by defying Jewish tradition and wearing 'her own hair' (II, 5); a public act that defies divine and patriarchal mastery (Weiss, 2009, p. 89). Sadie's mother also reinforces her position against divine constraints in private, resisting the gender identities produced for women through religious discourse:

[Sodos] does not like Sadie's mother  
Who hides God's candles,  
That should burn always,  
Like Aaron's before the Lord. (II, 10-11, 14-15)

In this passage 'God's candles' form part of the stylised and repetitive act of entreating the divine to illuminate his will, which in turn produces both enabled and constrained identities filtered through patriarchal authority. Ridge undermines the performativity of this self-perpetuating process through an Imagist snapshot of Sadie's mother, who intervenes in this phallogentric space by 'hid[ing] God's candles'. This simple act severs the connection to the divine, which not only symbolises her conscious rejection of religious tradition, but also impedes the patriarchal authority of her husband in the domestic space. This act is effective in reclaiming her personal identity, even if silenced in the text. What speaks is that she is not identified through her husband's name or marital status; she is identified only through her maternal connection to her child as Sadie's mother. In this, Ridge does not attempt to reverse patriarchal dominance, but rather aims to reinstall female agency by 'concealing' the tools constraining feminine identity. In hiding the candles Sadie's mother clears a psychic space for herself, indicating her preparedness to engage in other ways of thinking and being, and modelling a path for integration.



Ridge does not simply engage the sentimental strategy of arousing pity for these working poor immigrants; instead, she reframes them as actively engaging in life, investing in ideas and protesting against inhumane working conditions using the vorticist principle of conversion, that is, remaking the human into a machine that supersedes the natural body, 'the weaker model' (Nadel, 2010, p. 289). When working in the sweatshop Ridge superimposes Sadie's body over a machine: 'Sped by some power within,/Sadie quivers like a rod.../A thin black piston flying,/One with her machine' (II, 40-43). The description of her body as a 'rod', a 'piston' and finally merged with her tool transforms her flesh into metal, which adds an invulnerability and 'impersonality' to her being, and is furthered by the reduction of her body to a 'fiery static atom,/held in place by the fierce pressure all about-' (II, 47-48). These Imagist snapshots give her labouring identity 'impersonality' by suggesting that she serves capitalist interests, not because she believes in capitalist ideals, but through material necessity, and further, allows for the possibility of subversion and agency in that Sadie's energy can be redirected to other pursuits of her choosing, such as reading, protesting, and celebrating:

Those books that have most unset thought,  
New-poured and malleable,  
To which her thought  
Leaps at white heat,  
Or spits her fire out in some dim manger of a hall,  
Or at a protest meeting on the Square,  
Her lit eyes kindling the mob...  
Or dances madly at a festival. (II, 53-60, ellipsis in text)

Ridge follows sentimental practice by again locating progress with the female mind and body, which merge when Sadie directs her compressed energy to personal development. Sadie's atomic energy is intensified through descriptions of embodied thought that both respond to and trigger sensory experiences. Her thought 'leaps' in response to ideas felt as 'white heat', her body 'spits' out ideas that burn inside her mind, her eyes, alight with thought, have the power to ignite the crowd. This stanza undermines the potential to affirm rugged individualism by extending the potential energy of the 'atomic' individual through their connection to other 'atoms' in halls, meetings and festivals, where successful interaction may spark nuclear chain reactions, releasing tremendous power for social change. In opposition to the sentimental practice of soliciting pity and sympathy for society's outcast, Ridge instead models through Sadie an active response that deals directly with reality, envisioning social progress through embodied thought and community engagement.

With 'The Ghetto' Ridge fulfils the Modernist mission statement to 'make it new' by locating continuity and progress with the feminine, not only through the metaphor of the maternal body, a symbol of regeneration and renewal, but also through the female characters who are active agents in the production of their realities. She also 'makes it new' by reframing exiles as prevailing bodies, thereby creating a positive identity for marginalised and fragmented communities. The act of embedding these Jewish immigrants within the maternal body of their 'host' society is sentimental in that it aims to instate empathy for disadvantaged people and some accountability to mainstream society to assist with their integration. While Ridge's focus on the individual and communal body is sentimental, her treatment of their experience is not. Reflecting the Georgian trench style, this community is presented as dealing directly with their reality. This poem exemplifies Ridge's personal practice, which

fuses Modernist, sentimental and Georgian principles to instate marginalised identities to the centre of mainstream society, and always through the trope of the body. As well as representing the living, Ridge also speaks for the dead by reinserting their bodies back into the public view, a strategy she employs to not only demonstrate a systemic failure to meet the ideals of equality and justice, but also to hold society to account.

### **[iii] Returning the Body to Speak for the Dead**

*'Heave up, river...*

*Vomit back into the darkness your spawns of light...'*

*'East River' (Ridge, 1920)*

Ridge's social justice poetry combines Georgian concerns with Modernist forms to speak for individuals whose lives were sacrificed to social interests. Using the real experiences of human rights defenders, the wrongly accused, and the powerless, she examines the extent to which liberal humanist values such as justice, equality and liberty are practiced in a capitalist society. Equality is measured against the administration of justice, and her work suggests that there are issues of access to these privileges. Ultimately, her poems observe the operation of power and resistance, reveal the space between the ideal and reality, and identify the spectator as complicit in the suffering of others by virtue of the gaze. I will demonstrate this through a reading of 'Frank Little in Calvary' ['Little'] (1918b).

Frank Little, a leader of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) labour organisation, fought for the rights of itinerant workers in labour based industries such as farming and mining (Kohl & Jiusto, 2006, p. 68).

He was often remanded and beaten for standing against company practices in different towns, but it was the owners of the Anaconda Company in Montana who finally took his life, martyring him by default. Resistance to the Anaconda Company's mining practices and employment conditions began in the late 1800's and culminated in 1917 when 15,000 mine workers went on strike following the deaths of approximately 167 workers in Granite Mountain-Speculator mine fire (Kohl & Jiusto, 2006, p. 69). The company's disregard for worker safety (reflected in their failure to install steel manholes in the mines as required by law) indicates that in the capitalist agenda, some lives are expendable and not worth the investment in protection. The miners, objecting to this devaluation of their existence, demanded safer working conditions, a minimum wage and the abolishment of the rustling card system that enabled the Anaconda Company to deny employment to anyone they suspected of being either union or socialist sympathisers (Kohl & Jiusto, 2006, p. 69).

The company's response to the miner's resistance was to lynch one of the organisers as a warning example to the rest. Kohl & Jiusto report that six armed men abducted Little 'from a North Wyoming boardinghouse at 3:00 AM on August 1; they dragged him behind their car, then brutally beat him before hanging him from a nearby roadside trestle' (2006, p. 69). Berke adds that he was castrated, his tortured body left to mediate with other agitators who would contest the capitalist project:

On his chest was pinned a note reading: "First and Last Warning—3-7-77. D-D-C-S-S-W". The numbers referred to the Montana specifications for a grave: 3 feet wide, 7 feet long, and 77 inches deep. The capital letters stood for the names of other strike leaders. (Bird et al., 1985, p. 128, cited in Berke, 2001, p. 42)

The mutilation and murder of Little was intended to dispel employee resistance to the company's conditions of employment. It did not, and although the union was later disabled through other strategies, Little's body became a symbol of resistance even in death; the sign above his grave stating: "'Slain by capitalist interests for organising and inspiring his fellow men'" (cited in Kohl & Jiusto, 2006, p. 69).

In life and death, Little's body functioned as a site of resistance to corporate power. In response, the company countered his model of resistance by displaying his gruesome death, inviting the gaze of the spectator to observe his humiliation and suffering. Rather than simply recall the event, Ridge responds more in the Georgian trench style, to return the gaze of his attackers, of capitalist interests, the state and the spectating public through Little's body. Through Little the reader sees 'where men are fed into the fires' (I, 2) at the mines and watch Little, who, 'unarmed and alone,/summoned his mates from the pit's mouth/where tools rested on the floors/and great cranes swung/unemptied, on the iron girders' (I, 2, 5-8). The 'Lords of the Hill', also watching Little, were 'seized with a great fear,/when they heard the silence of the wheels' (I, 9-11) as they face the financial implications of stalled production. Rather than recognising the striker's concerns and acknowledging their human rights, the 'Lords of the Hill' operate in the darkness: 'so they covered up their faces/and crept upon him as he slept.../and when night-that has connived at so much-/was heavy with the unborn day,/they haled him from his bed...' (I, 15-16, 21-23). Ridge returns accountability through Little's body, who, in 'turn[ing] his face wistfully to the accessory night' (I, 33-34), gazes back at his murderers and their accomplices, at the 'black bridge poised/like a giant spider motionless...' (I, 38-39), and 'at America, quiescent, with her great flanks on the globe' (I, 56-57), exposing the insidious expansion of the capitalist project across the world. The reader,

in both looking at Little and the bridge following Little's gaze, is compelled to contemplate 'all that he had spoken against/and struck against and thrust against' (I, 59-60). The bridge, reflecting the 'crossing over' of his human rights and his passage from life to death, leads back to Little's body, which works as evidence to confirm that in this case, capitalist interests outweighed human rights, thus exposing the shortfall between the ideals of justice and equality, and reality.

Ridge also holds the bystander to account as complicit in this crime, as did Siegfried Sassoon, who indicted a passive public for their lack of engagement in the suffering of others ('Suicide in the Trenches'). In 'Little', Ridge indicts the 'Lords of the Hill', referring to the Anaconda Company, the public who did not protest his murder, and members of the United States Congress for failing to intervene and uphold the ideal of justice for all. This is evident through the poem when the narrator questions, 'Who may know of that wild ride?/Only the bleak Hill — /...Dared watch them as they raced/By each blind-folded street'. The 'Hill' implicates the government by alluding to Capitol Hill, shorthand for the United States Congress, suggesting that the owners of the company have their support. That the streets are 'blind-folded' implies that the public choose not to see the injustice, as if their selective blindness absolves them of the obligation to uphold another human's rights. Ridge also critiques the repressive arm of the state by questioning the police in section II, 'Watchman, what of the track?' and the judiciary in section III, 'Watchman, what of the Hill?' (II, 68; III, 97). Little's death is not pursued by the police; their response to the event, 'All's Well!' (II, 70) suggests that justice and equality is denied to identities challenging capitalist interests. Although Ridge concedes the victory of capitalism over human rights, 'Wheels turn;/...All's Well with the Hill!' (III, 98, 102), the Biblical references in this poem elevate both Little and these issues. The title,

situating Little in Calvary, links his martyred body to Christ, raising his status from human to divine messenger and therefore implies his cause is authorised by God.

Ridge also critiques social policy through characters that expose corruption. Ridge emphasises the extent to which Little exposed exploitation by synthesising his body with light; reflecting his ability to penetrate areas hidden from the view of mainstream society:

Light over the pit mouths,

Streaming in tenuous rays down the black gullets of the

Hill...

(The copper, insensate, sleeping in the buried lode.)

Light...

Forcing the clogged windows of arsenals...

Probing with long sentient fingers in the copper chips...(III, 74-80, ellipsis in text)

In this passage light penetrates areas hidden from the view of mainstream society, such as the dark depths of the mine's 'pit mouths', the 'clogged windows' housing corporate assets, and the corporate workings in 'the black gullets of the Hill'. Little's deified body also represents the 167 men burned alive in the mine, and is hung again in the poem to represent the failure to uphold humanist values when interests are contested. Thus, in this poem Ridge unveils a contest between power and resistance, the selected application of national and capitalist ideals that deny equality for all. Ridge restores the mutilated body to visibility to make manifest these shortfalls whilst at the same time holding the reader/spectator accountable by virtue of the gaze, compelling them to act. The next section will demonstrate further that for Ridge, the bystander/reader is a crucially

important participant in her poetry, as the subject in her poems with the potential to enact change.

**[iv] Implicating the Bystander**

*'But you do not yet see me,  
Who am a torch blown along the wind,  
Flickering to a spark  
But never out.'*

*'To the Others'* (Ridge, 1918d)

Returning the body to view is a Georgian trench strategy that Ridge employs to influence the reader/spectator into interrogating how their own beliefs play out in their relationships with others. Her poem 'Lullaby' (1918c), based on the East St Louis race riots in 1917, invites the reader to think about their positions on issues of race, class and gender. McLaughlin provides some context leading up to this event, beginning with the "'Great Migration'" of 1910, when economic motivations drew African American citizens north with the hope of finding employment (2007, p. 51).

According to McLaughlin, in 1916 the racial presence of the African American community in East St Louis was politicised as a threat to white working class life to shore up votes for the local democrats (2007, p. 51-52). The African American settlement was accused of being involved in a 'vote rigging plot by the Republican party', of being 'strike-breakers' and accepting lower wages at the local factories, mines and meat packing plants, and of being 'gun-toters' (Rudwick, cited in McLaughlin, 2007, p. 52), accusations that, according to McLaughlin, troubled white working class identity (2007, p. 52). McLaughlin asserts that working class black



men were perceived as intruding in the public and private spaces appropriated by the white male, specifically in their politics, in their capacity to provide for their families, and in their homes as a threat to their family's safety (2007, p. 53). Rather than recognise African Americans as humans like themselves, with the same desires and regard for their families, white males construed black presence as a threat to their masculinity, and moved to eradicate African American residents through violence and intimidation. White men, women and even children engaged in beating, shooting and stabbing black residents, burning their homes and businesses, all with the approval of police officers and the National Guard, who, according to McLaughlin, 'deserted their posts and joined in the killing' (2007, p. 49, 50).

Rudwick details the participation of white women who in some instances led the savagery, not only by shooting black individuals as they ran for their lives, but also by making accomplices of the spectators, taking 'a key role in policing the crowds and silencing white objectors by threats and intimidation' (1964, p. 44, cited in McLaughlin 2007, p. 49; 50). The vehemence toward the black community is illustrated by the reports of the event published in the Chicago Tribune and the St Louis Globe-Democrat on July 3, 1917, which asserted that one of the female rioters 'wielding a knife was heard calling out from amongst the crowd that she "wanted to cut the heart out of a negro", a man already paralyzed from a bullet wound' (cited in McLaughlin, 2007, p. 50). The desire to remove the heart of a man already disabled points to the fear embedded in the black body, inflamed by white narratives; this fear is relieved in this case by defeating the black body, making it unrecognisable as a human being, functioning both as a reminder to the Other that they are not white and as a punishment for trying to access white entitlements.

'Lullaby' uses traditional form to invoke and disrupt traditional ideals of motherhood, gender and racial equality. The poem confirms the boundaries of race and class through the actions of a white woman who actively supports the massacre by 'singing' to the orphaned black child she comforts in her arms before throwing the infant, still alive, into the fire created by her co-conspirators. This action extends the traditional understandings around femininity and the maternal. As mercy is predominantly positioned as a feminine trait, the sinister pleasure taken in the extinguishing of a child's life (extended to eight stanzas) constructs the practice of barbarity as not gender specific within the white community. The lullaby expands the subjectivity of white working class motherhood to include both caring nurturer and heartless exterminator. Both identities are evident in the poem: the speaker comforts the infant in her arms, but with a lullaby that speaks of her murderous intention. Each line contains four strong-stressed syllables, mimicking the structure of a traditional children's nursery rhyme. Ridge builds on this expectation of a nursery rhyme by repeating the line 'Rock-a-by baby' at the beginning of the first, third and eighth stanzas, but disrupts the consistent nursery rhyme quatrain: the first two stanzas exhibit an *abab* rhyme, followed by an *aabb* rhyme scheme in stanzas three to six, disrupted again in the seventh stanza with the inward looking *abba* sequence, and returning to the *abab* scheme in the eighth. This irregular structure fails to comfort and disrupts the infant (and reader's expectations). Ultimately, the consistent rhyme between stanza three to six lulls the infant and acclimatises the reader to the violence before the shocking final conclusion.

The lullaby is more than simple lines intended to sooth an infant into sleep. It is also a deceptively powerful didactic tool in that it works to assign subjectivity in infancy. Developed to soothe pre-language infants, nursery rhymes become embedded in earliest memories, and so the format

inscribes subjectivity from birth. Thus, in mimicking traditional nursery rhyme structures, Ridge draws attention to the way power works through these forms, exposing the lullaby's capacity to work as embodied thought, storing the memory of hate and fear in the body of future generations. In adopting the enunciation of a stereotypical 'mammy' speech pattern:

'Hush, mah lil' black-bug - doan yuh weep' (line 13) the white middle class female speaker conflates her identity with that of the child's mother and inscribes the dominance of white subjectivity through the lyric:

"Han's that are wonderful, steady an' white!" (line 27). This line implies that the child's mother (and by extension, race) is 'unsteady' and therefore unable to foster the child's wellbeing, and thus encourages submission to white paternalism. The speaker furthers this impression by constructing black identity through a body defined in non-human terms, such as 'woolly and brown', 'coon', 'piccaninny', and 'honey-comb', confirming the black body as sub-human. The poem also enforces the dominance of the white race by framing the white body in discourse associated with black speakers: their 'eagah feet' and '...willin' han's' enforce submission with the support of the state through the police and military, who add their 'brave colors to the dance' (21-22). This mime act suggests that fear (expressed as hate) of the other is stoked from birth and carried by the next generation before they have had the opportunity to test these claims against reality, and gives some support to Nussbaum's claim that emotional responses are learned rather than innate.

Reflecting Georgian trench practice of returning the desecrated body into view, the eight stanzas force the reader to linger with the bystanders that look at the bodies of the beaten and burning mother and child:

An the singin' flame an' the gleeful crowd

circlin' aroun' ...won't mammy be proud!  
With a stone at her hade an' a stone on her heart,  
An' her mouth like a red plum, broken apart...

See where the blue an' khaki prance,  
Adding brave colors to the dance  
About the big bonfire white folks make -  
Such gran' doin's fo' a lil' coon's sake!

(Soun' may yuh sleep in yo' cradle o' fire!)  
Rock-a-by baby, hushed in the flame...(14-15, 17-20, 31-32, ellipsis  
in text)

Onlookers surround these tortured bodies: 'the gleeful crowd' circle the black woman while 'white folks' stoke up the bonfire to burn her body, and the child. The rhythm focusses the gaze on the atrocity and constructs the reader as a complicit spectator, consuming through the gaze the woman's pulped body, her 'red plum' mouth, 'broken apart'. This poem provides no release for the horror it inspires. The repressive arms of the state that should be upholding the ideal of equality are instead active participants in the massacre, the 'blue an' khaki' colours signify their presence, but they are engaging in the atrocity, not halting it. There are no heroes contesting the crowd or saving the child, only passive observers. In offering no discharge, the reader is forced to address their state of arousal. It is this employment of affect that Modernists like Pound and Eliot rejected as a manipulative sentimental strategy. Ridge, no bystander in her personal or professional life, makes no apology for employing affect to overcome inertia. As Scarry writes, halting the practice of torture 'depends...on communicat[ing] the reality of physical pain to those who

are not themselves in pain' (1987, p. 9). 'Lullaby' communicates the pain of the body to those who are not in pain; to not only solicit affect for the other's body, but to effect social policy. To this end Ridge examines how ideals are played out on the body, in reality. This event (and poem) undermines the 'self-evident truth' that 'all men are created equal' by demonstrating that not all have access to the 'unalienable Rights' of 'Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness' (Jefferson, 1776, n.p.). Returning the body insistently into view demonstrates that while these ideals may be practiced by individuals within a dominant race, class or gender, this privilege is not extended to others perceived to be outside their boundaries. On the contrary, Ridge demonstrates that violent brutality insures that such privileges are protected.



In conclusion, perhaps the poem that best encapsulates how Ridge's work extends traditional understandings of Modernism is 'Morning Ride' (1927b), which I reproduce here in full (font altered in text) because this text is not readily available:

Headlines chanting-  
youth  
lynched ten years ago  
cleared-  
Skyscrapers  
seeming still

whirling on their concrete  
bases,  
windows  
fanged-  
leo frank  
lynched ten  
                  say it with flowers  
wrigley's spearmint gum  
                  carter's little liver-  
lean  
to the soft blarney of the wind  
fooling with your hair,  
look  
milk-clouds oozing over the blue  
                  Step Lively Please  
                  Let 'Em Out First Let 'Em Out  
did he too feel it on his forehead,  
the gentle raillery of the wind,  
as the rope pulled taut over the tree  
in the cool dawn?

Here Ridge's aesthetic fuses the sentimental concern for the body with a style that resonates with Georgian trench practice, to implicate the bystander and by extension, the reader, as complicit in the suffering of others, and therefore morally obligated to negotiate the issues raised by real events and social policy. 'Morning Ride' relates the media announcement regarding the 1915 Ku Klux Klan lynching of Leo Frank, a Jewish man falsely accused of rape and murder, but absolved of the crime ten years later (Berke, 2001, p. 50). In line with the sentimental, the poem critiques the ideal of justice through the body of a 'youth/lynched ten

years ago' (lines 2-3). His lynching by an unsanctioned private militia points to the failure of the state to protect its citizens; that he was 'cleared' (line 4) of the alleged crime after a decade serves to heighten the injustice. In keeping with Georgian trench practice, the body is returned to public spectacle and hung again to be consumed by the gaze, forcing the reader to participate and engage with the issues. The reader is invited to inhabit his body: 'lean/to the soft blarney of the wind/fooling with your hair/look/milk-clouds oozing over the blue'(lines 16-20). These commands to 'lean' and 'look' employ Rosaldo's concept of 'embodied thoughts' (cited in Howard, 1999, p. 66) as the body instinctively carries out these commands. The reader's body, now engaged, is asked to speak for Frank's body, 'did he too feel it on his forehead,/the gentle raillery of the wind,/as the rope pulled taut over the tree' (lines 23-25). This soft interrogation both indicts the reader for consuming his body and makes the reader bear witness, or 'speak' for his body. This question creates a state of tension by constructing the reader as a complicit bystander, who must now negotiate through the issues to find release.

At the same time, the poem takes the form of a Modernist montage, juxtaposing advertising, newsprint, polyphonic voices, and landscape with a body lynched 10 years prior. Initially Ridge locates the reading persona on public transport learning of Frank's decade-late acquittal in the newspaper only to then conflate this persona with Frank Little, merging the two perspectives, inhabiting Frank's body, observing the 'skyscrapers/seeming still/whirling on their concrete/ bases' (line 5-8). This strategy of 'occupation' indicts the persona as complicit in Frank's suffering by consuming his body through the gaze, facilitated by the newspaper he reads which returns his body to public view. This is a complicated strategy that reinforces the responsibility of the bystander/observer to act. Time and space may seem to provide distance

and an alibi, excusing the bystander who is unlikely to identify with the hate-filled values of the Klu Klux Klan, thus absolving them of the ethical responsibility to engage with the issues. However, by constructing the persona as complicit in Frank's suffering through the consumptive gaze, she implicates the reader also, making them morally accountable to negotiate an ethical response to the social policies facilitating Frank's suffering and death.

My analysis of 'Morning Ride' provides a somewhat unorthodox conclusion to this investigation of Ridge and her work, to demonstrate why Lola Ridge should be included in Modernist discourses. The poem encapsulates her aesthetic appropriation of sentimental, Georgian and Modernist styles, forming a socially conscious aesthetic that represents an alternative Modernism by raising its profile to include an exposition of power relations at work in society and on the body. Other critics have begun the work of detailing alternative Modernisms specifically as sentimental and/or Georgian (Allego, 2004; Dillon, 2004; Howard, 1999; Dobson, 1997; Clark, 1991) to which I would add the work of Lola Ridge. This thesis demonstrates that Ridge is more than a social justice poet; her poetic practice establishes her as a renegade Modernist, strategically integrating forms to engage the reader in an ethical conversation, to confront their own complicity, an ethical practice she sought to model throughout her life.



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