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Poetry & Silence

"a sequence of disappearances"

by

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of:

Doctorate

Deakin University

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Elizabeth Parsons
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INTRODUCTION

The Re/Sounding Silence
in the Phantomime

Characters: (Jacques) Derrida, Helen (Keller), Temple (Grandin), (Dorothy) Porter,
(Susan) Howe, Olive Hopegood and (Mina) Loy.

In a deliberately theatrical gesture, the above named characters are about to
be cast onto a stage that is the margin of human discourse. Hallowed ground of
Derrida and numerous other contemporary theorists, the margin, here, forms an
approach to reading silence. The white border is the very embodiment of silence
made visible around the enunciating written text; it is an inhuman lip, one that does
not ordinarily allow words to breach its boundary. A thesis which intends to
introduce characters onto this elongated margin-stage poses questions about the
specifics of naming. For this reason the names above are consciously encoded with
parentheses. Helen, Olive and Temple belong to this discussion as people whose
lived experiences have informed theory. They are referred to by their first names,
not to devalue or trivialize their contributions, but rather to rephrase them so as to
separate the engagement with the theory of a theorist, or the poetry of a poet (both
of which are intellectual contributions consciously manipulated for a given end),
from the different kind of engagement required for reading a person’s
autobiographies, biographies, or letters, and taking these as stories which theorize in an untheoretical mode. This latter kind of reading sets out to follow the undulating connections and disconnections that these lives make with the concerns raised in the philosophy and poetry under examination.

Such acts of naming are necessarily bound up in knowing. Being 'known' for the text of their personal experience, rather than their theoretical offering, proposes that these three women be named personally. This division is nonetheless bridged by a web spun from the varying strands of personal, poetic and philosophical voices entwined in this thesis. Olive is a poet whose poetry is both lost and extant, while Helen and Temple are not merely symbolic entities, but uniquely positioned writers interested in commenting on the way that language is perceived by theoreticians. These alternate and alternating voices interweave and unravel themselves like Penelope's tapestry, or perhaps Arachne's weaving challenge to Minerva, goddess of wisdom. Arachne's tapestry was torn to shreds and the mortal maiden tried to hang herself at which point she was transformed into a spider and left dangling on her thread. The warning spoken by the myth is to avoid challenging higher powers. But it is exactly this kind of anti-hierarchical questioning that is required for a reading of silence in poetry which will be precariously inset in the field of philosophical inquiry. Three modes of discourse; philosophy, auto/biography and poetry oversee each other by turns in this reading, but, in cautious alignment with the traditional hierarchy of seriousness and truth-bearing, the reading begins in philosophy.

Derrida holds the privileged place of chief philosopher in this discussion. "The Double Session," "...That Dangerous Supplement..." and "Plato's Pharmacy" form this enquiry's entry points into Derrida's thinking. His own deconstructions unsettle the hierarchies of philosophy that came before him. They begin in the margins around canonized Western philosophical thought so as to question its tenets. His strategy involves peering into blind-spots and listening closely to the silences, to what is approached yet undisclosed. To take up a similar kind of discussion, one that reads Derrida as the canonized philosopher who can now be subjected to a similar style of scrutiny, is to parley with him. 'Parley' is not a mere cap-tipping to Derrida's nationality, but a deliberate collision with a shared aspect of the two languages. The word in English has two clearly discernible sides. In its first sense, to 'parley' is from the French 'parler,' to speak, converse, debate and argue, but in English it also incorporates the informal conference with the enemy, under truce (and truce is important in rescuing this discussion from a fruitless war of opposition), for discussing matters of
mutual agreement such as terms of armistice and the exchange of prisoners. While Derrida has, to some degree, parleyed thus between literature and philosophy, Western culture's central philosophies have long excluded the voices of personal experience in favour of listening for (or to) a universal voice which can be set down as a truth, or more specifically a style of truth, which is dependent on agreement and repeatability. Thus it is that the history of philosophy is beset by generalizations about how language functions. These glosses are based on the assumption of constants for all people using the language. Those who encounter language differently are then prisoners in the margins of these theories.

Helen and Temple have been confined by this logic. They speak from the outskirts of human experience, but do not necessarily speak in opposition to the philosophers of the central texts. In fact, both of these modes of thinking about language, the theoretical and the autobiographical, while coming from opposite directions, seem to stall at the same juncture as they grapple with similar issues. The hindrance, in both cases, is the silence of what cannot be said. It is the failure of language to encompass certain meanings that forms the core of the poetics chosen for discussion and, in this respect, the poetry has much in common with the marginalized voices of a-typical human experiences with language. To redirect channels of meaning, the poets examined here deal with aspects of silence in their poetry, seeking to find new approaches to the unsaid, perhaps the unsayable. When silence becomes central to poetry, it challenges the competence of language - as Wittgenstein famously said: "Of that which I cannot speak, therefore I must be silent" (Tractatus 27).

Language has impacted on Helen as a blind deaf-mute and on Temple as a high-functioning autistic in ways that are distinct from the commonplace of human experience. This discussion tracks their unique voices as they speak in counterpoint to the philosophic mode of universal answers. They disrupt the very nature of the questions required to produce these universals by their lived counter-examples. But, before they speak, Derrida begins this parley with a message from his essay The Double Session, a work which delineates the place of silence on the other side of language:

*In this speculum with no reality, in this mirror of a mirror, a difference or dyad does exist, since there are mimes and phantoms.*

(Derrida Acts 157)
Derrida claims that *The Double Session* is “the opening of a question about what goes (on) or doesn’t go (on) between {entre} literature and truth” (*Acts* 129), all the while knowing that this will only eventually “point to the absence” (*Acts* 129). The essay unravels the mimesis that is symptomatic of Plato’s internal scribe who writes down thoughts only when there is no listener present, and who is then followed by the painter who depicts the idea with an image. Derrida reads the extract from Plato’s *Philebus* alongside Mallarmé’s “Mimique”, a poetically wrought prose piece that divines the process of mimesis through the etymologically connected ‘mime.’ These two texts are reprinted in the shared space of a page at the beginning of Derrida’s essay. Plato’s text corners Mallarmé’s and the tension between them fills the speculum (that is empty of reality) with the phantoms and mimes who are the ‘others’ to the master discourse of language. Most importantly for this discussion, both mimes and phantoms are silent.

“Mimique” takes as its subject a Pierrot mime as an act which writes on the white page of the self in gestures, but specifically with a writing which has no referent. Because Pierrot’s mime is “imitating nothing” (*Acts* 157) that pre-exists it, the mime can call into question the process of mimesis posited by Plato (the delineation of speech as mimicking thought and writing as mimicking speech - in that order). The mime then, is a distortion of the mimetic process and thereby, Derrida contends, it opens up the “space of writing.” The mime gestures, a privileged locus of bodily inscription that he will share with Helen’s sign language because:

> here we enter a textual labyrinth panelled with mirrors. The Mime follows no preestablished script, no program obtained elsewhere. Not that he improvises or lets himself go spontaneously: he simply does not obey any verbal order. His gestures, his gestural writing [...], are not dictated by any verbal discourse or imposed by any diction. The Mime inaugurates; he breaks into a white page: “a mute soliloquy that the phantom, white as yet an unwritten page, holds in both face and gesture at full length to his soul.”

(*Acts* 144)

Silence reigns in this extra-textual mimetic space and its powers extend into language which is its binary ‘other.’ It is by opening this space that silence can be reckoned with.
As Derrida unveils the workings of this mimetic margin on the outskirts of language, it becomes potentially knowable and re-nameable. Given that the actors on this stage are silent mimes and phantoms, I propose to linguistically reconstitute this place for haunted performance as the “Phantomime.” The Phantomime refers to the other side of language – to multiple silences. It is both the manifestation of this silence, and speaks of the pressures that silence can apply to its corollary, language. Inventing such a term allows for a rephrasing of Wittgenstein’s dictum about what cannot be said which transmutes, at this point, into something like: ‘what cannot be said can begin to materialize.’

The grafted concepts within the constructed word ‘Phantomime’ form a single coherent and cohesive signifier for a new way of reading silences in poetic texts. The poetry of Dorothy Porter, Susan Howe, Olive Hopgood and Mina Loy will be read through its lens. The first two of these writers construct their own version of the silent mime, writing voices for historical figures whose history has been lost. Like Pierrot they mime without tangible reference, or as Derrida put it above, with “no program obtained elsewhere” (*Acts* 144). The poets bear witness to the white of unwritten historical pages. Porter and Howe write onto what history has deliberately erased so as to allow a privileged freedom for their palimpsestic poetry. The second two poets are practitioners of Modernism. They tamper with the white spaces inside and behind language. Their interplay with silence undertakes to find a voice for the phantom of the previously unsaid or unsayable, haunting language and lurking behind it. They too distort language’s processes of referentiality by asking their poetry to refer to what is yet to be known; the silent, unwritten space of the future. They create disjunct images which have no referent in reality, producing what is as unknowable (in any concrete reality) but as believable as a phantom. These Modernist works share the Pierrot principle of no referent. They too “do not obey any verbal order,” in league with his strategy of skirting mimesis in order to unseal new wells of meaning. This is more than fiction. These poets manipulate what is allowable in language and they rely, just as the phantom does, on the participation of the reader. The delusion of the phantom must be, if not a willing one, one which s/he who names the phantom accepts.
Each of these poets contradict their silent subject matter by the fact of their writing - making them necessarily not-silent. But this contradiction allows for an expansive and twofold world of poetic processes. This is manifestly the case with Olive, an almost totally forgotten poet whose poetry has been lost. She crosses between the categories of history’s silenced voices, and Modernist imagistic trickery, thus drawing this thesis into a self-conscious struggle with demarcation. It must simultaneously write around the silence of her lost poetry and read the silences inside her remaining poems. Olive draws these various and inconclusive silences around her lost self. She has lain undisturbed in a shadowed Phantomimic space for over 50 years.

Having set the program for these poets and theorists, their many and varied hands now pull together to raise the curtain on the Phantomime stage. The introductory discussion whose beginning we have now arrived at, can perhaps be seen as the pause in which the audience takes in the setting before the characters, in this case the poets and their poetry, enter onto the stage.
The Phantomime Gestures

The "Phantomime" enunciates simultaneously from the two elements of its definition. The 'phantom' of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) is:

1. (An) illusion, (a) delusion, (a) deception; a figment of the imagination, a lie; a falsity, an unreality. 2. A thing that appears to the sight or other sense but has no material substance.

The 'phantom' then, is useful in confusing the not-real, a 'falsity,' with what is believed (or understood as real) by the person to whom the phantom appears, as in the requirement of 'delusion.' This mixture of differences structures the phantom like the language duality between internal soliloquy and spoken communication. Internal soliloquy exists as real language for its (deluded?) owner. If the phantom can be seen as the embodiment of the internal space for silent language - necessarily a figment of the imagination - then the phantom must also be the other to what is communicated in external language. Derrida canvasses these issues with a complexity that makes it necessary to reproduce a significant portion of his text in order to utilize it effectively:

According to the reasoning of the Philebus, first there was the doxa, the opinion, feeling, or evaluation that sprang up spontaneously within me and pertained to an appearance or semblance of truth, prior to any communication or discourse. Then when I proffered that doxa aloud, addressing it to a present interlocutor, it became discourse (logos). But from the instant this logos can have been formed, when the possibility of dialogue has come into being, it might happen, through an accident of circumstance, that I wouldn't have a partner handy: alone, then, I address this discourse to myself, I converse with myself in a sort of inward commerce. What I then hold is still discourse but it is soundless, aphonic, private -
which also means deprived of its mouthpiece, its voice. Now it is in connection with this deficient logos, this blank voice, this amputated dialogue - amputated of its vocal organ as well as of its other - that Socrates resorts to the "metaphor" of the book. Our soul then resembles a book not only for the obvious reason that it is a kind of logos and dialogue (and the book is thus only a species of the genus "dialogue"), but particularly because this reduced or mumbled conversation remains a false dialogue, a minor exchange, equivalent to a loss of voice. In this dialogue that has run out of voice, the need for the book or for writing in the soul is only felt through lack of presence of the other[...].

(Acts 132)

What will come to the fore in the play of the Phantomimic (and this foreplay heralds the question of desire which lies ahead) will be whether this internal book, the other to discourse, can traverse or transgress its silent interiority and script performances on the Phantomimic stage, and whether the phantoms of language which inhabit unspoken thought are perhaps able to infiltrate poetry. These phantoms may pass through the walls of the margin to haunt external language, just as mimes circumvent the written and spoken with bodily gestures. Poetry is able to be more receptive to this kind of infiltration by otherness than more directly communicative genres. It might be argued that, since Modernism, poetry has not been as subject to the strictly communicative structure, or mimetic principles, as other writings. The complex and idiosyncratic language structures in Modern and Postmodern poetry can be read as straddling the border between what is spoken internally and what is produced for communicative export. If poetry seems incomprehensible, which was the charge made by many critics against Modern poetry (and it persists in many circles), it is perhaps because the poet's language defers to an internal logic, the phantom's internal soliloquy that is not communication, but a facet of language which the poet constructs, and requires to write her/his own equally idiosyncratic thoughts. This poetry offers a way for the internal phantom of unspeakable thought to speak in the external world - its message becoming readable in the language of the Phantomimic.

The "mime" in Phantomimic concerns the making of gestures. It is the figure who writes on the white page of her/himself a story which is untold and without referent. Derrida reads Pierrot as "the inauguration of a writing of the body" (Acts 149). While this bodily aspect of the mime would seem to contradict the immaterial nature of phantoms, this is not necessarily the case. There is a point of friction between the disembodied phantom and the body enacting the mime (both of which are, here, complications on the theme of language and communication) that calls on another face - one that is without mask or make-up, one that is human - to join (and in some sense meld together) the fictions of Pierrot and the phantom. She is a more
specific human-phantom who can illustrate the relation between language and silence from within her living frame: Helen Keller’s ‘Phantom.’

Helen was the famous blind and deaf-mute child who was taught to read and write, and even (although awkwardly) to speak. ‘Phantom’ was the name she gave her shadowy, pre-language self, the self who belonged to the dark silence of her early childhood years. She had lost her sight and hearing as a baby of 19 months, and it was not until she was almost 7 that her Teacher came bringing language. The name and third person in which Helen describes ‘Phantom’ serve partly to dissociate the silent creature she could not recognize as “I” from the language-self she knew after learning the manual alphabet. Helen, at 7 years old, stands at the threshold of the origins of language at an age when memory is more succinct than for the infant constantly exposed to language by ‘normal’ experience. Helen’s privileged place both replays, and replies to, Derrida’s critique of Rousseau and the origins of language with her personal experience of this origin. Derrida’s position is that “The expression ‘primitive times’, and all the evidence which will be used to describe them, refer to no date, no event, no chronology” (Norris126). This mapping of ‘primitive times’ as both timeless and eventless has remarkable concurrence with both Derrida’s description of the phantom and Helen’s description of hers:

Before my teacher came to me, I did not know that I am. I lived in a world that was no-world. I cannot hope to describe adequately that unconscious, yet conscious time of nothingness. I did not know that I knew aught, or that I lived or acted or desired. I had neither will nor intellect. I was carried along to objects and acts by a certain blind natural impetus. I had a mind which caused me to feel anger, satisfaction, desire. These two facts led those about me to suppose that I willed and thought. I can remember all this, not because I knew that it was so, but because I have tactual memory. It enables me to remember that I never contracted my forehead in the act of thinking. I never viewed anything beforehand or chose it. I also recall tactually the fact that never in a start of the body or a heart beat did I feel that I loved or cared for anything. My inner life, then, was a blank without past, present, or future, without hope or anticipation, without wonder or joy or faith.

(Keller, World 141-2)

Helen’s phantom-of-no-language without “past, present or future” greets Derrida’s phantom “without a past, without any death, birth or presence” (Acts 157) in
Derrida's place of language origin with "no date, no event, no chronology" (Norris 126). These two voices posited for the phantom are almost indistinguishable in their readings of the incoherent passage of time in which language-phantoms exist. Phantomimes are thus without the linear logic integral to quotidian human experience, which is equally integral to the traditional structure of specifically communicative writing. That this same minimizing of the relationship of writing to phallocentric logic is also a priority of the Modernist poetry central to this thesis, forms an important thread in the introductory tapestry. But it is one which must lie idle a while longer.

The phantom negates language by being an existence which does not require it, just as the language negates the phantom by not having the words to describe the phantom's existence except as antithetical and 'other' to language (silence). But, for Derrida, this is theory, while for Helen it belongs to her literal body of knowledge, what she calls 'tactual memory'. From the vantage point of Rousseau's autobiographical Confessions, Derrida reads the pattern of the "dangerous supplement" as it encapsulates language and sexuality within his text. Where Derrida's is an intellectual overlay, Helen's life experience allows her to speak from her own internal subject position. What she describes is physical knowledge, the sensation of words and linguistic structures awakening her consciousness. Her phantom figure is thus both known and unknown. It is remembered tactually, and the onset of language makes it a separate entity. Its tactual existence is relegated as 'other' to Helen's new-found language self. Her experience informs the psychoanalytic movement (specifically the thinking of Freud, Lacan and Kristeva) from the pre-Oedipal, Imaginary or Semiotic infancy, into the language-driven Law of the Father, or the Symbolic. More than just an imaginable embodiment of silence, darkness and absence, or of the Semiotic or Imaginary, Helen is perhaps better placed than poet, theorist, or analyst, to know the boundaries of this transition from the silence of the infant (infant meaning speechless) into a language-driven and individuated subject of the Symbolic order. But Helen's place must be qualified by a question: Is possible to speak of this transition from the place of no speech, of silence?
Helen neatly sidesteps this question because speaking for silence was not her objective in writing. She became internationally famous for her successful education that overcame extreme handicap, and from her place in the spotlight of human achievement she wrote many books about her extraordinary life. But these books were often a disappointment to many of her reading public. She wrote of her life as any person without her particular relationship to the sensorily perceived world would have written, describing the landscapes she ‘sees’ from the train, the mountains in the distance, all of which were told to her by her Teacher’s fingers spelling into her hand. Teacher describes the process in a letter to her friend:

On Helen’s return from Huntsville she told her mother what she had seen, especially during the drive to the top of a nearby mountain. “She remembers all I told her about it,” wrote Annie, “and in telling her mother repeated the very words and phrases I had used in describing it to her.” She did so with one significant difference. She asked her mother whether she too would not like to see the “very high mountain and beautiful cloud caps.” Annie had not used that expression. She had said “The clouds touch the mountain softly, like beautiful flowers.” Helen had never seen a mountain, “and I don’t know how anyone is to ever know what impression she did receive, or the cause of her pleasure in what was told her about it. All that we know certainly is that she had a good memory and imagination and the faculty of association.”

(Lash 64)

Helen’s autobiographical writing is peppered with what she “sees,” like the mountain’s cloud caps she reports to her mother. These word pictures were disconcerting to some of her readers who felt their own literal world-view to be privileged. Her reading public cast aspersions on the integrity of these kinds of descriptions, questioning blind and deaf Helen on the levels of both authenticity and truth. But Helen, from this extract, does not seem to be any more a mere vessel for language than any other child of her age. Her supplementing of Teacher’s description came from her internal manipulations of language. She (like all people) can only manipulate existing words, and learn what constitutes beauty, which is, like language, a culturally designated phenomenon. Helen was acutely aware of the criticism that she was merely teacher’s puppet. Her opinion of this is that “… most of us receive our thoughts from others in the first place and that our only originality
is in how we express them" (Keller Teacher 99). Here is another enactment of the prizing open of language. Helen knows or believes more than she has been told, she has drawn a conclusion, used a simile, made language work with its endless chain of referents and thus defied the accusation of puppetry. But her detractors read Helen as the mime for other voices. While Teacher uses the traditional mimetic function of words to capture what they stand for when she says "mountain," Helen uses an anti-mimesis, as Derrida said of Pierrot she 'doesn't obey the verbal order' when she uses the signifier 'mountain' without previous access to the signified. Her recounting is the "mirror of a mirror" which Derrida peers into. But the equation between Helen's experience and Derrida's theory is not symmetrical. Helen makes an addition to the verbal picture of the mountain, which calls the sensorily complete person into question. She has understood something of the mountain (whatever this may be) in order to invent this addition. Her process belongs to all language users, but unlike Pierrot who finishes his performance, she is not acting.

However fascinating this vacillation between metaphor and anti-mimetic process is in Helen's readings of the world and word, her view from the train was not what her public wanted. Disgruntled critics expected in Helen's first autobiography to see into her darkness and listen to her silence - perhaps unaware of the impossibility of that task when communication in a shared language levels all experience to whatever that language is able to express. They wanted Phantom's story, the impossible anti-text which must be written from the other side of language. Helen's attempt to write for Phantom gives descriptions that are necessarily only negations of what is known:

Phantom did not seek a solution for her chaos because she knew not what it was. Nor did she seek death because she had no conception of it. All she touched was a blur without wonder or anticipation, curiosity or conscience. If she stood in a crowd, she got no idea of collective humanity. Nothing was part of anything, and there blazed up in her frequent, fierce anger which I remember not by emotion but by a tactual memory of the kick or the blow she dealt to the object of that anger. In the same way I remember tears rolling down

---

1 I am here recreating the universalizing mode of philosophical argument underscored earlier as a questionable process - having noted the contradiction it will be allowed to stand as a gesture towards refuting philosophy on its own grounds.
my cheeks but not the grief. There were no words for that emotion or any other and consequently they did not register.

(Keller, Teacher 36-7)

“There were no words”: each sentence Helen constructs for Phantom’s world in this extract involves not, no, nor, or without. Her Phantom is the shadowy embodiment of the chaos and the silence that is the receptacle for all that language fails to hold.

According to Helen’s description, thought is so enveloped by language that it cannot proceed without it and the being without language is a mere phantom, a figment of the later, reflective imagination. Once Helen had mastered the formative boundary of language, she situated Phantom outside of it so that Phantom became the unreal, its memories described without Helen as their subject. There is an interesting rupture between a phantom’s connection to immateriality, in the standard definition, and the creature Helen christened Phantom - given that the being she refers to only has access to actual, tangible, material substance. However, this rupture is breached by Helen’s description of language as the requirement for making this physical world real. No pantomime of gestures like kicks and tears could be comprehensible without the language of the inner script. Helen’s tears were not one and the same with sadness. And emotions without names did not ‘register.’

What is clear from her negative description is that Phantom was without integration, a subject position that is related to Derrida’s description of a phantom as without the logical train of past, present, and future. Learning language redresses the problem that “nothing was part of anything” by drawing the user into its systemic structure. Words are only meaningful from within a language, meaning being (in the Saussurean sense) derived by a word’s arbitrary and culturally assigned relation to a referent. Both Helen’s physical world and her spiritual world are subject to this same necessity of integration. She was attracted to the spirituality of the Swedenborg “New Church” and her commentary on this mystic thinker’s reading of the Bible also exposes her personal cognitive processes for reading the external world. She writes “...we need to have a very clear, unclouded idea of God’s nature if we are to read the symbols of his Word connectedly”(Religion 94). What is implicit in this act of interpretation is that the subject of the larger text must
be previously understood to make the contents coherent. If for Phantom “nothing was part of anything” then there could be no meaning available, and it was this facet of Helen’s understanding that was completely reversed on her comprehension of language.

Helen recalls her entry into language as just such a holistic revelation. Her Teacher had been spelling many words into her hands, which she was successfully learning to imitate in the true structure of mimesis, but the moment of clarity came when the spelling of water on one hand was simultaneous with the sensation of running water on the other hand:

Some one was drawing water and my teacher placed my hand under the spout. As the cool stream gushed over one hand she spelled into the other the word water, first slowly, then rapidly. I stood still, my whole attention fixed upon the motions of her fingers. Suddenly I felt a misty consciousness as of something forgotten - a thrill of returning thought; and somehow the mystery of language was revealed to me. I knew then that “w-a-t-e-r” meant the wonderful cool something that was flowing over my hand. That living word awakened my soul, gave it light, hope, joy, set it free! There were barriers still, it is true, but barriers that could in time be swept away.

I left the well-house eager to learn. Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought. As we returned to the house every object I touched seemed to quiver with life. That was because I saw everything with a strange, new sight that had come to me.

(Keller, Story 26)

Here is the “connectedly” of her reading of Swedenborg. It is the same principle that Phantom was missing in the crowd of people without a sense of “collective humanity.” Once she found that “everything had a name” Helen believed she had grasped the central thematic for her world. Naming allows Helen to control the disparate elements in the world around her, it is the distinguishing factor allowing her to separate herself from other things and people, and thus to know herself. Like the structure of language itself, Helen’s understanding was born from these principles of naming and collation, metaphor and metonymy. This makes the world act, for her, as a text - a strategy akin to Plato’s metaphor of the book which so interested Derrida. It is unsurprising, then, that Helen takes to the book motif from traditional Christian iconography to describe her world: “It was a veritable boon for
me to turn over the pages of God's wonderbook of landscapes and wild life, of which Teacher had read countless chapters with me" (Keller, *Teacher* 219).

The book is central to these trains of thought. Helen's book runs parallel to Derrida's depiction of Mallarmé's "Mimique" that traces for a considerable distance a 'small and truly rare booklet' which redoubles the mimetic process in Derrida's text. The trail of referents is mystified by both Pierrot and the booklet that Mallarmé has before him as he writes "Mimique."2 The booklet describes Pierrot's mime inhabiting the same anti-chronology of the phantoms without past, present or future. Of its temporally bizarre genealogy Derrida writes:

> a mimodrama "takes place" as a gestural writing, preceded by no booklet; a preface is planned and then written after the "event" to precede a booklet written after the fact, reflecting the mimodrama rather than programming it. This preface is replaced four years later by a Note written by the "author" himself, a sort of floating outwork {hors-livre}.

(Derrida, *Dissemination* 199)

The subject matter of this booklet topples into its physical form with Pierrot being likewise "at once page and quill." Both Helen's books, and the booklet of the mime in Mallarmé's hands are troubled by the lack of referents behind them; both are sorts of "floating outwork" given their lack of connection to referents.

It is via Derrida's circuitous route that we can arrive at Helen's book, and her disadvantaged relationship to referents, given she is deaf and blind and reads the world second hand from the word-filled fingers of those around her. In reading her "worldbook," Helen's acts of interpretation of the visual and aural are always informed by the self-referential nature of language, especially by the refractive process of reading/learning what is unknown by analogy with the sensorily known. When Helen blushes, she knows her cheeks are red and she applies that principle to knowing colour:

> When I feel my cheeks hot, I know that I am red. I have talked so much and read so much about colours that through no will of my own I attach meanings to them, just as all people attach certain

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2 A central concern of the Derrida article on Mallarmé is this very referential set of problems reflected indefinitely between Pierrot with no referent, and the booklet that Mallarmé holds and says is the inspiration for the text. The booklet describes the mime after the event, thus the book does not proscribe the action - this is Derrida's central point, that there is no text preceding the Mime.
meanings to abstract terms like hope, idealism, monotheism, intellect, which cannot be represented truly by visible objects, but which are understood from analogies between immaterial concepts and the ideas they awaken of external things.

(Keller, World 133)

What Helen knows of “red” and distant mountains is not informed by the visual imagery, but by the structure of linguistically coded imagery like metaphor and simile. She understands the systemic interplay of language and she manipulates this without difficulty. Helen’s long time friend, Nella Braddy, writes in the introduction to one of Helen’s books:

*What she “hears” when she “listens” to music with her hand we cannot know, but she could not make it any plainer if she invented words to tell us. She has taken language as she found it and has never discovered any reason why she should not say “I see” and “I hear” when it is the simplest way to express herself.*

(Keller, Teacher 11)

When Nella implies the impossibility of Helen devising her own language to speak her thoughts, she foreshadows the calculated obscurities of Modernist poetry that are one of the destinations of this inquiry. To revision the world, as Helen presumably must given her alternative sensory input, requires a new language which of course must parley (if not war, at this point) with the notion of communication. However, the implications of this must here be set aside until the theoretical web around language is better equipped to deal with the central concern here, which is the writing of poetry.

Nella’s defense (or paraphrase of Helen’s self-defense) is apt. Helen’s process partakes of any person’s understanding of the invisible and inaudible concept of “hope.” This questions whether any concept is out of bounds to Helen, and it is daring to suggest that nothing is beyond this power of language. Helen gives a poignant example of a crucial failing in the ripple effect of ever-refracting metaphors, language relying on language, to explain her struggle to learn to speak as well as she would have liked:

*...I would say it over and over, trying to catch the “ring” and the up and down movement of her articulation. She was pleased when I put humour or earnestness into my speech, but the “ring” and the*
accent were forever eluding me. She would use all kinds of similes about the ripples of a brook, the full throated ease of a bird, or the notes of a musical instrument to suggest what she was striving for.
(Keller, Teacher 146)

Yet it was not that language exempted the idea of the "ring" for Helen (and it is interesting that she uses the quotation marks around this word as though to indicate that it is not her own), but rather that her physical movements were not able to reproduce this concept for Teacher. It is at this point in Helen's narrative that her learning of speech draws a strand across these theories of language. It is a strand that runs perpendicular to meaning and mimesis, but yet remains intricately connected to Derridean thought. Helen's difficulty in learning speech unravels the nature/culture distinction that posits speech as the natural form while writing is seen (and not heard) as the culturally imposed aberration. Her alternative experience of language learnt through manual spelling interrogates the previously accepted form of the supplementarity of writing to speech which so fascinated Derrida in his reading of Rousseau. It is this fascination which diverts this discussion, only partially, away from "The Double Session's" mimesis and toward "...that dangerous supplement..." because, as Helen found: "The supplement will always be the moving of the tongue or acting through the hands of others" (Derrida, Acts 86).
"...That Dangerous Supplement...

that "...strange vacancy..."

Wittgenstein - 504 But if you say: "How am I to know what he means, when I see nothing but the signs he gives?" then I say: "How is he to know what he means, when he has nothing but the signs either?"

(Philosophical Investigations 139e)

In an impressive sleight of hand, Wittgenstein has dematerialized the meaning behind the sign, and disrupted the economy of the supplement. For Helen, this same role of the word as supplement for the object it refers to, is complicated by her sensory disconnection from many of the objects that are nevertheless within her linguistic grasp. This is the territory of Derrida’s infamous zeugma, the “supplement.” He cross-examines this word in a way which exposes it as at cross purposes with itself and what Derrida uses it to stand for: writing as supplement for speech. He says: “The supplement adds itself, it is a surplus, a plenitude”(Acts 83) going on to unravel this as "the supplement supplements. It adds only to replace. It intervenes or insinuates itself in-the-place-of; it is as one fills a void”(Acts 83). A division is useful here, at a point where the supplement gathers its forces in questioning the slippage between speech and writing. To read Helen’s role effectively requires a disentangling of the connection between the supplementarity of presence/absence on one hand, and written/spoken on the other. While writing is necessarily the presence which exists in the absence of speech, this function will be
briefly set aside from the concrete signifier(word)/signified(object). In Helen’s case, the supplement troubles the text that lies behind her acts of writing, whether this writing is on or with her hands. Her literature professor at college criticized Helen’s essays and suggested to her: “We want more of you and less of what you have read”(Lash 264), which drove Helen to question her experiences and produced the dispirited human response: “There are moments when I experience a strange feeling of vacancy both in mind and heart”(Lash 625). She wrote in a letter to the professor:

I have always accepted other people’s experiences and observations as a matter of course. It never occurred to me that it might be worthwhile to make my own observations and describe the experiences peculiarly my own. Henceforth I am resolved to be myself, to live my own life and write my own thoughts when I have any.

(Lash 267)

In addition to these comments there comes a more poignant moment of personal doubt: “It seems as if everything one would care to say, had been said by somebody else”(Lash 267). She is, at the time of these dilemmas, a young college student, doubting her academic ability. As she becomes more staunchly self-defensive she retorts that language is a recycled phenomenon which she uses as most people do. But her mention of “the strange feeling of vacancy” worries at what lies behind the supplement of language. Whether words supplement for absent objects or constitute these objects entirely, is a question and division that is jeopardized by Helen’s fear of such transferences.

This existential crisis was probably not what the literature professor intended to engender with his comments, but another literature professor, “distinguished French savant Pierre Villey-Desmesereis,” who was blind from age 4 had this to add:

We must remember that, for Helen Keller, words have often been not only what they are for a normal individual, the sign of sensation, always associated with it and evoking it by sheer habit, but literally the substitute for sensations. Words have taken the place of the absent, the unknown, sensation. This is the case, in certain measure.

3 The "mastery of absence" worked by words over things is Derrida’s phrase for the process of speech as supplementary presence for the absent object, but it recalls the pattern of desire stipulated by Lacan’s psychoanalytic theory of language and desire. This chain of philosophical events harks back from Lacan to Freud’s vision of the child’s “Fort Da” game in which absence and presence are literally played out. There is a long ancient and modern philosophical history for this premise, which Derrida does not simply dismiss. For the purposes of this discussion it will be simpler to accept this aspect of the “mastery of absence” between the word and the object. But the speech/writing and spelling/writing dualities are not so easily agreed upon either in Derrida’s reckoning, or in this reading.
for the blind person who hears, but very much the case for the deaf-blind.

(Lash 572)

The idea that Helen could be singled out as somehow more vulnerable to the supplementary movement of language than other people, had some currency in Villey-Desmeserets's mind. He implies that Helen is immersed in, and perhaps at the mercy of, the text. If, where the professor uses “substitute,” we read Derrida’s supplement (and these two theorists seem to be using these words in a manner which makes them interchangeable here) then, according to Villey-Desmeserets, this supplementarity only pertains to Helen (or the blind or deaf-blind). Derrida’s view is that this same supplementarity is universal for language users - the word standing in for the thing itself. But this function of language seems to be totally disorganized by Helen’s view of the mountains, which involves the signifier (‘mountain’) without Helen having visual access to the signified (the actual mountain). Helen’s description of the mountain could be read as a kind of pirate copy, something stolen from its rightful owner, being she/he who sees the mountain. But language is littered with words for which people have no concrete object to stand behind the supplementing word. For example “Icelight” describes “a bright yellowish-white tint near the horizon, reflected from the snow-covered surface of ice in arctic regions, and observed before the ice itself is seen” (Webster’s Dictionary). There would be numerous people, including the present author, for whom this description is as the mountains on the distant horizon are to Helen. Which is not to say that the notion of an Icelight is incomprehensible to those who have never reached the arctic circle, but that the Icelight belongs to the same referential nature of language that allows Helen to know red through the sensation of blushing. Jean-François Lyotard considers such referentiality from the philosophy of Georgias, proposing that:

Just as for Wittgenstein, colour serves Georgias as a paradigm for the question of reality. Phrases like “To begin with, he does not say a colour but a saying” (980 b 5) or “There is neither a conceiving [...] nor a seeing of colour, no more than there is of sound, there is only hearing” (980 b 6), are to be placed next to “For looking does not teach us anything about the concept of colours.”

(Lyotard 27)
Certainly ‘looking’ does not teach Helen anything about the concept of colours; for her that is the privileged sphere of language. The same applies to “iceblink” which is a deliberate choice of example. The word is reminiscent of Helen’s experience with the wholeness of language; that is in being something recognized before it is actually seen. Where the average reader of ‘iceblink’ knows the constituent factors of yellow, ice and horizon from using their sense of sight (and touch in the case of ice), Helen is acquainted with the facets of language from other inputs, like her sense of touch combined with her ability to use metaphor to understand what is out of reach. This haptic process easily tells her red through blushing, but for the distant mountains touch can still make up constituent factors (although, in this example, on a slightly smaller scale):

Touch cannot bridge distance,- it is fit only for the contact of surface,- but thought leaps the chasm. For this reason I am able to use words descriptive of objects distant from my senses. I have felt the rondure of the infant’s tender form. I can apply this perception to the landscape and to the far-off hills.

(Keller, World 125)

Words for species now extinct, words for objects of fantasy and all abstract words must also belong to this same realm of knowing by analogy. The chain of events which encircle Helen’s ‘knowing’ seems no less credible than the use of other senses to understand what humans cannot access. For all people, these acts of analogy are fixed in the same supplementary structure, within the given terms of a language. This access to language allows Helen to construct a rich inner world, one where she can have dreams in which she sees and does not rely on anyone for help. Her internal book consists of a text born of language alone, the “each new name gave birth to a new idea” Helen reported after she had understood “water.”

Derrida’s vision of the supplement is not primarily designed to question this troubled presence/absence between words and objects that Helen skirts with her

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4 Helen understands the problematics inherent in language designed for people with different modes of connection to the world than herself. One of the few modes of input she has access to, smell, is denied power by the domination of the other senses in the construction of language. She writes: “It is difficult to put into words the thing itself, the elusive person-odour. There seems to be no adequate vocabulary of smells, and I must fall back on approximate phrase and metaphor” (Keller, World 88).
complex chains of analogy. Rather, the supplement is designed to augment his case that writing is not merely a secondary supplement for speech. To reiterate for a moment, the etymology he follows in reading the word 'supplement' means that it is available to be understood as both an addition to something that was supposedly already complete, and/or as an addition that is required or necessary for completion. This two-faced notion derides language behind its back, undermining Plato's classical chain of events in which speech supplements for thought, and writing supplements (at a further remove) for speech, a concatenation which devalues the written word against its spoken counterpart. However, if words(signifiers) can function without access to the signified (which for the incurably deaf-blind Helen was impossible in many cases) then the economy of the supplement is in disarray.

This is not to say that Helen is exempt from the question of supplementarity between speech and writing. She learns to write on paper as well as on her hands. Thus she uses the recording function of writing to defeat the absence that exists in the silence after something has been said, regardless of whether this act of saying is vocal/aural or on Helen's fingers (haptic/visual). Derrida says: "To write is indeed the only way of keeping or recapturing speech since speech denies itself as it gives itself" (Acts 79). Speech's denial of itself is implicit in the silence that follows the speaking voice. Its failure to record itself (the job of writing) is the instantaneous negation of its presence. But Helen's experience questions the foundation beneath the supplement which separates speech and writing. This has long been based on the economy of nature/culture. Philosophy has said that speech is natural and writing is its diametrically opposed cultural counterpart. While most of Derrida's work on this subject is in relation to Rousseau, the play of supplement between speech and writing is also evidenced in "The First Session." Plato's internal scribe embodies precisely this secondary response made by writing - the scribe writes when there is no one present to participate in discourse. Derrida plays on Plato's use of the metaphor of writing, suggesting that Plato is dependent on precisely the writing he derides.

Helen's experience enlists a new metaphor: inhabiting her mental interior is not Plato's internal scribe, but rather a kind of transmutation of her renounced Phantom of tactile memory. This new phantom is different from the scribe in one
significant respect - the body, and its place in the enactment of the text. Instead of a scribe, Helen’s internal Phantom is a kind of puppeteer, closer perhaps to the gesturing Pierrot, who either manipulates the two hands of the soul which are then mimicked by Helen’s actual hands, or, and this seems far more likely, her thoughts are simultaneous with the physical act of spelling on her fingers. She claims that thoughts require language and thus concurs with Derrida’s suggestion that there is nothing outside the text. Her position, then, seems to indicate that her thoughts are in fact identical with her finger-spelling. This second scenario is supported by the unconscious nature of the physical spelling that is recalled by Helen as her sin against the natural order:

This reminds me how Helen sinned in another way by spelling constantly to herself with her fingers, even after she had learned to speak with her mouth. All Teacher’s reproaches and entreaties, all her eloquence in holding up examples of other children were in vain, but about that time I read that habits, good or bad, are like a cable, made strand by strand until it becomes so strong it cannot be broken. I determined to stop spelling to myself before it became a habit I could not break, and so I asked her to tie my fingers up in paper. She did it, but she was sorrowful at the thought of my deprivation. In fact, she cried. For many hours, day and night, I ached to form the words that kept me in touch with others, but the experiment succeeded except that even now, in moments of excitement or when I wake from sleep, I occasionally catch myself spelling with my fingers.

(Teacher 44)

Helen’s writing fingers bound by paper, the traditional place of writing, seem allegorical of Derrida’s drama of the supplement. Her gesturing hands offer an uncanny depiction of the supplementary process. Plato’s internal scribe writes as a supplement for speech, but what Helen describes is her thoughts (and this includes even her unconscious dreams which will inform this discussion shortly) as existing in manual writing. That she feels that her finger-spelling is a sin recalls Derrida’s likening of Rousseau’s guilty masturbation to his sentiments about writing. Rousseau uses the same derogatory language for masturbation (the supplement for sex) and writing (the supplement for speech) which is the nexus of Derrida’s evaluation in “…That Dangerous Supplement…” . While Helen feels the physical acts made by her hands to be unnatural, they come naturally, or at least
unconsciously, as she writes her thoughts. Yet the laborious spelling of each word with its individual letters seems to belong to the cultural, rather than the natural, half of the binary. The vocal gestures that history has depicted as natural are bypassed in Helen’s experience. The traditional focus on speech disempowers the constructive structures of the written words as merely the cultural overlay onto the natural voice, but for Helen, writing on her fingers and with her pen are far less distinct. She is thinking aloud by writing silently; her gestures are the Phantomime of her linguistic existence.

What is equally fascinating in Helen’s comment is the implicit re-division of the language function. The spelling she wishes to stop is “to herself,” but her deprivation is the ache “to form the words that kept [her] in touch with others.” This is further evidence of the requirement for community which language engendered in Helen. Tying her hands in paper was not to stop her from communicating with others, but only with herself, so language produces in a self a requirement for an other, which is also the reason that the internal scribe must write. This returns the argument to the curtain raised on the Phantomimic stage at which point Derrida could be heard proposing:

...I converse with myself in a sort of inward commerce. What I then hold is still a discourse, but it is soundless, aphonic, private - which also means deprived: of its mouthpiece, its voice. Now, it is in connection with this deficient logos, this blank voice, this amputated dialogue - amputated of its vocal organ as well as of its other - that Socrates resorts to the “metaphor” of the book. Our soul then resembles a book not only for the obvious reason that it is a kind of logos and dialogue (and the book is thus only a species within the genus “dialogue”), but particularly because this reduced or mumbled conversation remains a false dialogue, equivalent to a loss of voice.

(Derrida, Acts 132)

By reprinting this passage, the territory mapped thus far reveals the circularity of the journey. It explains why the landmarks begin to look similar. How can Helen’s speech be “amputated of its vocal organ” when she has never yet known speech? The logic of the supplement is threatened precisely because Helen’s book neither adds to nor replaces. The books are comparative in that they are, as Derrida outlines, in want of other people. The final products, Plato’s internal book and
Helen’s handbook, are both supplementary for discourse with an ‘other.’ These books are central to this discussion but they cannot be read until the place of the supplement is finalized.

Doubling back (again) to the place of speech in this supplementary economy, Helen’s position is both liminal and a chiastic reversal of the supplementary movement. She states her own position:

*I cannot represent more clearly than any one else the gradual and subtle changes from first impressions to abstract ideas. But I know that my physical ideas, that is, ideas derived from material objects, appear to me first as ideas similar to those of touch. Instantly they pass into intellectual meanings. Afterward the meaning finds expression in what is called “inner speech.” When I was a child, my inner speech was inner spelling. Although I am even now frequently caught spelling to myself on my fingers, yet I talk to myself, too, with my lips, and it is true that when I first learned to speak, my mind discarded the finger-symbols and began to articulate. However, when I try to recall what someone has said to me, I am conscious of a hand spelling into mine.*

(Keller, World 146-7)

Here Helen disenfranchises the finger-spelling, that which gave her internal coherence, as the poor cousin to speech. This choice is troubling given that, by her own admission, she never fully succeeded in speech as a form of communication with more than a select few initiates of her style. But the inherent contradiction is that while she upholds the spoken words, her memory persists in using the “tactual” of the repressed Phantom to recall what has been said into her hands. These words are by no means internally translated into what she has learnt as the spoken equivalent. The Phantom maintains its grip on the place of the body in Helen’s internal world.

What is fascinating in Helen’s experience is her seamless integration into shared language - her reverse learning of writing that detoured speech does not hinder her competence with communication. It is precisely this lack of distinction between Helen’s writing style and that of someone sensorily intact which prevents her from being cast as simply the exception to the rule. Her very unexceptional writings are her most disturbing. What also she demonstrates, then, is that the structure of the hierarchy is flawed – speech and writing converge in her manual
spelling. Although it is true that Helen also writes, the distinctions that Derrida and Rousseau delineate between the spoken and written seem to collapse in Helen’s hands as she unconsciously spells her thoughts. Derrida’s interest in reconsidering this hierarchy required dealing with counter-examples posed by languages of graphic inscription such as Chinese figures and Egyptian hieroglyphs, which Hegel demoted to yet a lower form again than writing. But not so Helen, who also comments on these symbolic forms:

If one could convey his joy or his faith or his form, how much more satisfactory that would be than the many words and phrases of ordinary language! I have cried when I touched the embossed Chinese symbol which represents happiness, and no amount of description would have produced such an effect upon me. It was a picture of a man with his mouth close to a rice field. How forcibly it bought home the fact that the Chinese are utterly dependent on the rice they grow, and the crops destroyed, starvation for millions of human beings is inevitable. Many ideas crowded into one symbol gain a power which words tend to neutralize. The French say that “words are employed to conceal ideas.” Ruskin has an eloquent passage in “Sesame and Lilies,” where he speaks of words as masks which draw the mind away from the real issues to external things.

(Keller, Religion 89-90)

In denouncing the Hegelian-style prejudice, Helen’s own claims are couched uncomfortably. The approval she has for Ruskin (via paraphrase) has complex ramifications for her own position in relation to language. If the word is the mask which “draws the mind away from the real issues to external things” then much of Helen’s experience is trapped in, and perhaps falsified by, this masked performance. Helen contradicts her vision of language as being, for her, the birth of thought, a notion which seems incompatible with this new position. Can language simultaneously be the springboard for thought and also the concealer of it? Ruskin’s ‘word as deceiver’ presents words as unnatural impositions on thought while Helen has always depended on them to give shape to thought, or, in fact, to be thought.

Teacher corroborates Helen’s earlier comments that suggest her thoughts are totally encompassed by language in a way that plays into Derrida’s version of nature/culture as integral to the speech/writing dichotomy:
It has become so natural for her to use the finger language as a vehicle for the expression of her thought, that each idea, as it flashed through her busy brain, suggests the words which they should embody. Indeed she seems always to think in words. Even while she sleeps, her fingers are spelling the confused and rambling dream-thoughts.

(Lash 82)(my emphasis)

Spoken language is demonstrably “natural” in being universal to cultures. But Helen’s natural response to language, “even while she sleeps,” is consistent with the argument that her thoughts are simultaneous with her manual spelling. Presumably there can, likewise, be no delay between dream thought and sleep-talking. Helen’s experience of words shaped physically rather than aurally, and her inner speech that was inner spelling, collapses the notion of the internal soliloquy and the internal scribe into one. What is relevant to language is mimicry, be it voice or hands that speak or write according to the accepted patterns.

Helen’s existence shares a darkness like that of Plato’s other famous metaphor, the ‘cave.’ She superimposes the play of shadow onto the gestures of her hands - in a mimicry of mimesis. Plato’s cave places all humanity in a dark cavern, their backs turned to the external reality, while they watch the puppet show playing in the artificial light from the fire. This dimmed illusory world is the reason Plato gives for the impotence of poetry as mere mimicry of mimicry, twice removed from a truth that is only available in the inner sanctum of the mind. But Helen’s hands are almost the site of her mind. In a fragment of poetry, Teacher imagines them thus:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Hands that fill empty space with livable things,} \\
\text{Hands so quiet, folded on a book -} \\
\text{Hands forgetful of the words they have read all night,} \\
\text{Hands asleep on the open page,} \\
\text{Strong hands that sow and reap thought,} \\
\end{align*}
\]

(Keller, Teacher 66)

Helen’s thoughts are here depicted as one with the hands that connect her to the external world. It will not be possible to find any watertight solution. Suffice it to say that Helen’s ambiguous experience with language provokes the philosophical chains of events, agreed upon for centuries, concatenating speech and writing, while her limited sensory access to the world has an allegory in Plato’s cave and its
criticism of poetry. Her place between philosophy and lived experience is thus deeply troubled by the inconsistencies of her connections and disconnections. Here illustrating a point, there distorting a theory.

Another key point accepted by philosophy but disturbed by Helen’s experience is that she never reaches the supposedly seminal moment of individuating consciousness embedded in the moment of hearing herself speak.3 Helen can not even see her fingers as they form her own words. All her knowing is held in touch and kinaesthetic ability, and both of these senses control the words she is forming as “manual-alphabet” in the process of “finger-spelling.” It is worth pausing to investigate this terminology here. Manual is from the stem meaning ‘hands,’ it is the hands’ work, but this etymology spills over into the manual that is also the “handbook” of instructions. The internal scribe writing the psychic book, in Helen, writes the handbook, but it is first hand, not produced by thoughts that occur in speech first and are then written only as the supplement or substitute for the spoken word. The derivation of “spelling” is equally illuminating, because while the ‘ing’ denotes the sense of the written words as spelt out, one does not need to know how to spell to speak. It is a skill required for reading and writing. However, the stem, ‘spell,’ is connected intrinsically with the spoken word - the obsolete usage of the word entailing talking and telling (OED) – as in spelling out one’s argument.

The spell is also the magical incantation. In Helen words were like spells and Teacher a kind of privileged shaman in her linguistic ability. Helen describes this power in a number of places in her writing, as magical. It is here that Helen’s web of connections and disconnections with philosophy point to poetry and silence. Teacher’s finger-spelling was both consummate and unique. In Helen’s narrative Teacher takes an equivalent place to the poet in literature, as someone endowed with the ability to make language work differently, to empower language with a new potency. Helen writes:

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3 The manual alphabet was designed by monks taking vows of silence, which begs the question why they would then invent a medium for communication. Presumably there was some decadence associated with the voice to make its denunciation desirable. The system they invented must be removed in the mimetic chain of events - on a par with writing in the pathway from thought to speech which is then supplemented by writing.
Thus by all kinds of movements, exercises and games Helen was stimulated to ask the names of those different actions and pursue knowledge through the ever-springing flames of Teacher’s finger-spelling. And the witchery of that spelling was unforgettable. Teacher’s fingers positively twinkled in Helen’s hand while they played...

(Keller, Teacher 39)

It could be argued that this turn of phrase is merely employing the pun of spelling and witchery. But it is not only here that Helen makes this connection with the special powers that Teacher had with language:

In her fingers words rang, rippled, danced, buzzed, and hummed. She made every word vibrant to my mind - she would not let the silence about me be silent.

(Keller, Teacher 65)

On Teacher’s death she writes:

There was still the wonder of language which she had left in my hand, but the mysterious battery from which it had been kindled was withdrawn.

(Keller, Teacher 206)

There is evidence here of the something behind words, an unknowable force they cannot encompass in themselves. The ‘mysterious battery’ is perhaps the source of otherness that is generated and expelled into language from the Phantomimic stage behind language. Helen feels that Teacher is this battery and so she is “Deaf-blind a second time” (Keller, Journal 33) after Teacher’s death. This heavy-handed use of examples is intended to evoke the intensity of Helen’s feelings for Teacher’s gifted language:

Every hour I long for the thousand bright signals from her vital, beautiful hand. That was life! The hand that with a little word touched the darkness of my mind, and I awoke to happiness and love; a hand swift to answer every need, to disentangle skeins of dark silence for a fairer pattern; a hand radiant with the light it retrieved that I may see, sweet with the music it transmitted to my inner ear. After fifty years I continue to feel her dead, communicative hand’s warmth and urge in mine as, I am told, one maimed feels the life in a lost limb.

(Keller, Journal 91)
Here, "tactual memory" again takes hold of Helen's processes with the bodily sensation of the 'lost limb.' Teacher's words are more than instruction, to Helen they appear as condensed and deft as poetry. At this point Derrida's reading of Plato and the "pharmakon" ("Plato's Pharmacy" Dissemination 61) that is both remedy and poison, appears in the wings too early for its cue. However, allowing it a brief entrance here will enhance its metaphoric contribution. Derrida equates the double-edged notion of the pharmakon (meaning both remedy and poison) with writing - another zeugma like the supplement. Writing is a "pharmakon," the cultural or unnatural poison derided for corrupting memory and truth, while it is also remedy in its capacity to record against loss. Its natural counterpart is speech, especially rhetoric, which is the "living logos." But because speech is traditionally accorded the "spellbinding powers of enchantment, mesmerizing fascination, and alchemical transformation, which make it kin to witchcraft and magic"(Derrida, Dissemination 115), speech also suffers a shift into the poisoned aspect of the pharmakon. Powerful rhetoric makes it possible to convince the masses of an untruth - which Plato defines as evil. Helen attributes all of these magical and seductive powers to Teacher's consummate spelling into her hands. But Teacher is writing, not speaking, albeit in a way which is not a simply divisible binary. By coincidence, the example Derrida takes from Georgias tells of Helen (although she is 'of Troy') as a victim coerced by language, and excuses her on these grounds (Dissemination 116). Likewise, according to Helen Keller's description, the way that language was used was integral to the breakthrough to - perhaps even to the seduction of - her inner self. However, this dabbling in the myriad of bonds which arose between Teacher's language and Helen, and the prerogative of poetry to make similar inroads into human psyches via innovative use of language, must, like its predecessors, be staved off for a while longer.

Before the play of the supplement is complete, there is one powerful premise Derrida uses to illustrate writing as supplement in Rousseau, "in a context which is only apparently different"(Derrida, Acts 89); that of sexuality. Helen's sexuality can be mapped by the same approach Derrida applies when he equates Rousseau's masturbation with his writing. Rousseau's experience reconstructs this
Derridean supplementarity, recontextualizing, and in Helen's case more literally re-contextualizing, sexuality and writing.
Desiring the Supplement

Sexuality in Helen's sensorily deprived physical self was seen by a theorist (who was writing in Helen's lifetime) as confined to what Kristeva would later name the Abject. The following extract is contained in Gerard Harry's book on Helen, but this portion refers to Laura Bridgman, who was Helen's acquaintance and less successful predecessor. Laura was another deaf blind girl taught language and her experience was part of the theory utilized by Teacher in instructing Helen:

*Here I will introduce an episode in the life of Laura Bridgman, discreetly related by some witnesses of her evolution. In consequence of some disastrous indiscretion of her governess, or companions, Laura, at twenty years of age, became aware of the physiological attraction between the sexes. She assured herself by questioning others, and by touch, that she was pretty, and from that time she was haunted by the dream of marriage. She went so far, that one night she was discovered trying on a wedding dress, made for one of the governesses, and left, as a temporary arrangement, in the young girl's room. Very soon this aspiration towards mutual love, perhaps towards maternity, showed itself in a heart-rending incident. Her teacher, Miss Wright, was engaged to a young missionary, Mr. Bond, who, naturally in his visits to his fiancée, showed a special kindness towards her pupil. Laura misunderstood his feelings of compassion - she persuaded herself that she had inspired Mr. Bond with a passion that she returned, and that it was her hand to which he aspired. When her secret was discovered, and she had been undeceived, she turned pale, then sobbed, and her trembling fingers traced in Miss Wright's hand this touching question, "Then, am I not beautiful?" She felt all the torture of helpless love, and all the pangs of jealousy. They were obliged to tell her everything—that she was not like other women, but a creature apart, whose race must be extinguished, not perpetuated, for fear of bringing into the world other outcasts to be a menace to the human race.*
The intricate entanglement of language and sexuality is central to this disturbing episode. In this narrative, Laura’s knowing of sexuality is the result of “a disastrous indiscretion” which presumes that there is no natural desire in a deaf-blind woman, but that such desires are born of language. While it seems unlikely that the singular verbal “indiscretion” Harry posits actually produced desire in Laura, language is certainly implicated in this scenario. ‘If I am beautiful, then I will be loved’ is Laura’s logic and this is a structure not available to a non-languaged creature like Helen’s Phantom for whom nothing is loved, because nothing is understood as part of a collective interrelation. To extend Harry’s argument to its logical conclusion, Helen, by virtue of her similarity with Laura, makes such desire repulsive because of the ‘unnatural’ state of her being. As Phantom, Helen was the abject ‘other’ of humanity without access to language. This same scientist refers to her as an animal and a human ‘zero,’ linking the “unnaturalness” of her sexuality with the equally inhuman non-feelings of her language-less Phantom. It is also because her learning must skip over the natural medium of speech and go directly to unnatural writing that makes her a creature apart. Derrida describes the supplement through Rousseau, in exactly these terms:

speech being natural or at least the natural expression of thought, the most natural form of institution or convention for signifying thought, writing is added to it, is adjoined, as an image or representation. In that sense, it is not natural...not only bizarre, but dangerous[...].

(Derrida, Acts 82)

In a more playful metaphor from Helen’s narrative, she received a marriage proposal from a man who only knew of her through her books and articles, that is through her writing. Helen refused his offer, in Rousseauean reversal, on the grounds that her writing had not represented her accurately to him. She writes to

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6 Harry’s derogation of Laura’s sexuality is made more ludicrous by the fact that her deaf-blindness was contracted, as was Helen’s, as part of an illness after her birth.

7 Helen’s earlier comment “I never viewed anything beforehand or chose it. I also recall actually the fact that never in a start of the body or a heart beat did I feel that I loved or cared for anything” illustrates this notion.
him; "What I have printed gives no knowledge of my actual life..." and she refers to "the almost unthinkable difference between your life and mine" (Lash 504). Rousseau, in opposition to this, used his writing to present his better self in society, while he lived in seclusion, allowing his writing to supplement for his presence. Derrida quotes Rousseau from within the argument of Starobinski:

..."I would love society as much as any other man, were I not sure of showing myself there not only to my disadvantage, but quite other than I really am. My decision to write and hide myself was perfectly suited to me"...

(Derrida, Acts 79)

Writing and sexuality are more intrinsically bound up in human experience in Helen’s case than they are in Rousseau’s - despite the fact that Helen wishes to separate them. The pattern of the supplement exposes its strengths and weaknesses in eliciting a marriage proposal but also by being the reason for refusing it. Here the case for voice speaks again; in the most charged and complicated relationship (one that is demonstrably bound up in sexuality) in Helen’s life - her intimacy with Teacher.

Regardless of the actual physical status of this relationship, its lifelong intensity informs the discussion of language with regard to desire. In yet another metaphorlic anecdote, one that is almost as perfectly entwined with theory as Helen’s writing fingers bound by paper to halt them spelling, Teacher promises not to marry. She offers to forego her sexuality, consecrated with a husband, after watching Helen’s (mode of) public speaking:

..."I was sitting in her room, she told me how pretty and graceful I had looked standing before the audience, and announced that she would never marry. "Oh Teacher," I exclaimed, "if you love John, and let him go, I shall feel like a hideous accident!""

(Keller, Teacher 91)

Helen can not accept Teacher’s love, inherent in her promise not to marry, because it is caught in the distinction of the unnatural/natural which defines Helen’s sexuality as unavailable. The Frankensteinian "hideous accident" she attributes to

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8 An example of this desire is Helen’s journal entry: “So strongly did I feel Teacher’s nearness, it was tantalizing almost beyond endurance. Several nights before, Teacher had kissed me in a dream, and literally her face against mine breathed youth, sunshine and flower-sweet air. [...] I keep expecting to find her somewhere.” (Keller, Journal 7)
herself (if she is allowed to intervene in Teacher’s sexuality) mirrors the derision Rousseau deals himself for his similarly troubled sexuality. Barbara Johnson says of the Derridean supplement that it begins at “the rhetoric of Rousseau’s discussions of writing on one hand, and masturbation, on the other. Both activities are called supplements to natural intercourse, in the sense both of conversation and copulation,” for which Johnson then posits the logic of “the desire for presence” (Derrida, Dissemination x). Rousseau derides both supplements.

The identical collapse of sexuality and writing in Helen’s story suggests that the nature of the relationship between Helen and Teacher is also hinged on language, and not only in the original learning. Teacher maintained her grip on Helen’s love with a proverbial iron fist, one that was not to be displaced by a lettered glove. An extract from Joseph Lash’s biography of Helen and Teacher depicts how Dr Alexander Graham Bell, who facilitated worldwide communication with the telephone, tried too, to simplify it for Helen:

In June 1888 when they saw Dr. Bell in Washington, he had shown Helen how she could converse with a “glove” that he had devised that would enable her to converse with anyone. “The letters [of the alphabet] are written on a glove,” he explained. “By touching these letters as one would the keys of a piano, words may be spelled, and after a little practice this method of communication can be very rapidly used.” But Annie discouraged Helen’s use of the “glove.” “I must say, that I shrink from this easy mode of communication. I cannot bring myself to the mental state, where I can feel contented to allow irresponsible and unreasoning persons to have easy access to my darling’s pure and loving little heart. I am sure that while I stay with her she will never have occasion to feel the solitude of her life, and when I go, the glove, I doubt not, will add greatly to her enjoyment. But until them I am determined to keep my beautiful treasure pure and unspotted from the world.”

(Lash 106)

Withholding the glove serves a chastity belt function in keeping Helen “unspotted” for Teacher. In this mythopoetic episode Helen’s hands are again at the center of the struggle with communication. Teacher’s containment of Helen’s linguistic world, only available through her hands, is mimicked by Helen’s desire for this containment given the powers she believes inhabit only Teacher’s poetic words.
Interestingly, the metaphor with which Helen chooses to render their relationship belongs not to hands but to a marriage and the place of a poet in a beautifully - if unnaturally - constructed place:

In a book on China I read that a man had a small rock garden with a pool, a pavilion and bamboos. His wife was a poet, and he wished for her to have a quiet spot for meditation. He separated this retreat from the rest of the garden with a hedge of dwarf pines. It was contained within a few yards, but he so carved the flat land that he produced a perspective seemingly of many miles. The winding path went by a waterfall, climbed through mountain foliage, past a flower-sweet dell, entered a forest, came out by a lake where tall lilies bloomed, followed a slow river through a sunny green field and terminated at the door of a rustic cottage. Even so did Teacher gather into the small compass within my reach knowledge, beauty, chances of usefulness - and lo! The path we followed during fifty years has wound magnificently across the world to Nippon! Having come thus far, she will reinforce my labours with an inner power given only to those who have loved deeply and believed unwaveringly.

(Keller, Journal 363)

The “perspective seemingly of many miles” is artificially wrought by the gardener, but the outcome is as beautiful a place as that which it mimes in miniature. Language plays this role for Helen, but it is only from within her relationship with Teacher that this kind of magic can work, it is inevitably bound by the intensity between them. It is only at the end of yet another reminiscence on the beauty of Teacher’s language that Helen admits language’s entanglement in the human relationship:

What is so tragic to me on this anniversary is that I lived too long with Teacher’s scintillating, unique, stimulating personality to be content among ordinary folk. Always I shall look about, despite myself, for the sparkle with which she charmed the dullest person into a new appreciation of beauty or justice or human rights. My fingers will cry out for her descriptive touches which were nuggets of gold, her exquisite tenderness, her bright summaries of conversation or books not raised in print. Then, too, the trust I had in her from my childhood was a support not easily to be replaced...

(Keller, Journal 362)
Language is the pivot of their relationship, but the "trust" and "support" from childhood that, while postscript-like here, are not to be dismissed. Teacher, too, writes of the human connection:

...It is not in the nature of man to love so entirely and dependently as Helen. She does not merely absorb what I give, she returns my love with interest, so that every touch and act seems a caress.

(Lash 77)

Teacher's touches were most often the act of writing into Helen's fingers, and Helen's affection in return was bound by her learning language. It was only after she has grasped what Teacher was trying to give her with the finger movements in her hand, language, that she first hugs her Teacher.

Derrida read across Rousseau's philosophic, autobiographical and fictional texts to make the links between the supplement and sexuality, but for Helen these two modes seem more deeply embedded in her narrative and her existence. Teacher brought the language which simultaneously heralded the desire entailed in and by language. Desire is a consequence of language, as community is a consequence of communication, even if that community only involves two people. That Helen's autobiographies do not always offer these links with the textual clarity Derrida was able to utilize in his connection of the otherwise disconnected sexuality and writing in Rousseau, is perhaps due to the depth of involvement linking Helen and Teacher. On Teacher's death Helen felt "The wrench of separation[...] seemed to have torn away an essential part of me"(Journal 33).

Helen's experience is disquieting for philosophical reasoning. There is no comfortable chain of events, nor is there conclusive evidence for even a small facet of what is under debate. She produces a rupture in the logic that refuses to heal around her presence. Unlike Mallarmé's Pierrot, Helen is more than a symbol. More than the consciously produced mime of an actor, she lives an actual experience of language without the stage or pretense. But despite Helen's concrete realness, it does not seem possible to discern precisely which notions of the supplement Helen's experience gives evidence for, and which she refutes. Phantom-like, she passes through the carefully constructed walls of philosophical inquiry, and she cannot be faulted for her inconsistency. She has reported the events
and experience of her life. As such, she is not subject to the claims for coherent argument which haunt philosophical tradition, she is subject to another logic, that of a personal truth, a coherence of and with herself. But this mode does not sanction her exclusion from the philosophical tradition given the relevance of her experience to the accepted universal theories.

Helen and Pierrot rephrase the dichotomy of speech and writing by inserting their gesturing bodies into the silent space which divides these poles. Their mimetic strategies are likewise refigured by the disrupted chains of referents between words and objects, past and present, which, in their experiences, resist compartmentalizing. They are both phantoms haunting language’s systemic structure, and yet they are also integral to language process - both reading and read within and without language, they resist and collude alternately.

On learning language, Helen acquired an internal manual-speller. Her handbook confronts the internal scribe’s written book posited by Plato. It is at this point, where these two books begin to be superimposed upon each other, that the argument reaches full circle, returning to the mimesis of “The First Session.” What Helen learns manually is what other people might learn aurally - which is the mimicry of signs to produce a shared system by which to communicate. These strands of writing, speech, and the gesturing body, all produce decipherable words while Helen, from the center of this web, disorders the structure of hierarchy. If words do not supplement in Helen, being often without referent, then the function of the supplement is challenged. But patterns of supplementarity in the structure of language are not cast aside by Helen’s experience, what rings strangely in her autobiographical records is the use of language and the truth available in her relationship with words and externalities. Helen writes of Swedenborg that “He was an eye among the blind, an ear among the deaf, a voice crying in the wilderness with a language they could not understand” (Keller, Religion 27). Seeing hearing writers use the metaphors of blindness and deafness in their writing and Helen’s reversal is a retelling from the other side of knowing. Neither can know what it is

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9 There are many theories around the self-constructive nature of autobiography which are not canvassed here for want of space. Helen’s texts are read in the same manner as Derrida’s theories are, that is as canvassing possible modes for understanding language.
like for a blind person to see, or a seeing person to imagine their own blindness. These metaphors are in want of a presence behind their guesswork and in this Helen shares her position with any writer who has not been deaf and blind and then cured; all are devoid of the requirement for truth. All this must now be canvassed under the banner of truth - which is what comes into question when Helen uses the language of sight and sound - offering for scrutiny the truth of the books, be they internal, external or omnipresent. As she says: “I had to look between the covers of books for news of the world that lay outside my own” (Story 75).
The Truth, the Text and the Plagiarist

or

The Pharmakon in the Bitter Cup

For Helen the 'text' (of her internal and external worldbooks) was rescue from the literal chaos of the Phantom, drawing her into the shared human world. Her experience with the evasive supplement demonstrates that, both historically and philosophically, text is disturbed by the supplement roaming between speech and writing. Helen both attests to and restructures the supplementarity of language and objects. There is an unresolvable tension between the notion that Helen, like Pierrot, mimes without referent when she describes the distant mountains, which pulls against the referential work of language for all people. Referentiality allows language users to understand what they have not, or will never have, sensory access to. Does Helen avoid this binary? Or, perhaps, despite appearances, she is not in a significantly different position to the sensorily complete language users to be able to supervise a new take on these issues. Where the supplement is significantly undermined by Helen is in her ‘handbook’ which is both speech, by virtue of its immediacy of expression and instant disappearance, and writing by the nature of its actual construction. Derrida’s reliance on a number of zeugma to unravel the hierarchy between speech and writing has already been traced. The first was the “supplement” as both addition and requirement, but shares much with “différance” in language as differential and deferring, while ‘writing,’ in yet another Derridean
instance, is the "pharmakon" (also touched on briefly above) which is the Greek word for both remedy and poison.

Another vein of the mythopoeis which has been pervasive in Helen's autobiography leads to an episode in which Helen drinks a suspiciously Derridean pharmakon from the "bitter cup" of language when she is accused of plagiarism for writing a story:

To Mr. Anagnos this story went for a birthday present. Calling Helen a 'marvel' and a 'true daughter of Mnemosyne' - Mnemosyne was the goddess of memory and the mother of the nine Muses...

(Tibble 56)

Mr. Anagnos was the director of the Perkins Institute of the Blind. In calling Helen 'a daughter of Mnemosyne' he chooses a descriptor which entails within itself a positive and negative, an elixir and poison. Mr. Anagnos seems to intend the compliment inherent in being a muse, the mythological inspirations for art. He published Helen's story in the institute's report, but when it became clear that Helen had unwittingly used the gift of her memory (more than her creativity), her story was poisoned and relabeled a plagiarism. The investigation which ensued found that Helen had been read the story four years before, in the very early stages of her education, and had unknowingly committed it to memory. Like the view of the distant mountains she reported to her mother, when Helen used another person's description she embellished it with her own turns of phrase. These additions encouraged some contemporary writers to defend her work as rewriting, as Shakespeare did, old stories in new language. What perhaps differentiates Helen's revisions is the unconscious nature of her actions. When recalling this unhappy period in her autobiography she writes:

My thoughts flowed easily; I felt a sense of joy in the composition. Words and images came tripping to my finger ends, and as I thought

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10 Feminist literary scholars have been very interested in the feminine nature of the muse whose role is to inspire men to be poets. Women as muses themselves when they write are in a complicated position inside this metaphor, but these complications are too tangential to be followed here.

11 There are a variety of opinions but no conclusive evidence about the plagiarism charge leveled against Helen. Joseph Lash in his biography comes to the (to me) unlikely conclusion that Teacher encouraged the theft but that she did not understand the significance of the crime of plagiarism. In my reading of this incident I have taken as accurate Helen's own relating of the story, a choice which is consistent with my approach to reading her autobiographical descriptions of learning language.
out sentence after sentence, I wrote them on my braille slate. Now, if words and images come to me without effort, it is a pretty sure sign that they are not the offspring of my own mind, but stray waifs that I regretfully dismiss. At the time I eagerly absorbed everything I read without a thought of authorship, and even now I cannot be quite sure of the boundary between my ideas and those I find in books. I suppose that is because so many of my impressions come to me through the medium of other's eyes and ears.

(Keller, Story 49-59)

These “stray waifs,” while perhaps not phantoms, seem related to them in form as they haunt the powerful memory of the little girl. They traverse the “boundary” between the two books, one of internal thought, and the other of the external world, which seem so blurred in Helen’s experience as she reports it. Miss Canby, the author of the original story that Helen had copied in content (and sometimes in nearly exact language) wrote to Teacher: “Tell her [Helen] there are a few bitter drops in every one’s cup, and the only way is to take the bitter patiently, and the sweet thankfully” (Keller, Story 287). Helen’s recollection of these distressing events in the autobiography written many years later was that “No child ever drank deeper of the cup of bitterness than I did” (Keller, Story 50) colliding again with the words of Miss Canby. Here is the pharmakon of writing as poison; the play of mimesis becomes a dangerous game when the charge of plagiarism can be leveled at the crossroads of the internal and external boundaries. It seems that Mnemosyne is a two-faced goddess watching over these proceedings. If memory is the mother of the muses then, the myth suggests, memory is a necessary virtue in art, even necessary to produce art. Yet art and mimesis are troubled, as Derrida found in Plato, by the lesser status of the unoriginal, the simulacrum. In Derrida’s extrapolation of Plato, mimesis moves between art and truth in an indecisive, pharmakon-like manner:

*mimesis is lined up alongside truth: either it hinders the unveiling of the thing itself by substituting a copy or double for what it is, or else it works in the service of truth through the double’s resemblance.*

(Derrida, Dissemination 190)

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12 The fate of the unoriginal is of profound importance to art when it is most often the new and the innovative which are highly prized. The place of the “original” seriously devalues (in a monetary as well as qualitative sense) even a perfectly rendered copy. Although, current post-modern discourses are now championing the fake, the impossibility of originality and the pastiche as a means to undermine these notions, in either scenario the concept of originality remains troubled.
Mimesis, then, asks how truth intersects with Helen’s world book (a world that is largely constructed by the words written into her hands by others) and her internal book of thoughts (also subject to the framework made by the words that came from the external), both of which are equally dependent on the uncertain truths born of this mimetic process. For Derrida, when internal scribes are mere copyists of what comes from the external, this facet of mimesis is readable as “pretending to simulate faithfully and deceiving the eye with a simulacrum (phantasm)” (Derrida, *Dissemination* 186) shifting the shape of the simulacrum into the shadowy figure of the phantom.

The phantom persists in hovering above the discussion here, in Derrida’s parentheses, and as the ‘stray waifs’ Helen felt other people’s words to be. Given that, firstly, Helen feels the world is constructed by words (since it did not ‘properly’ exist when she was a Phantom without them); secondly, that language is what gives meaning to the world’s events by virtue of the coherence inherent in its structure; and thirdly, that there are no internal thoughts until language is learnt, then Helen’s relation to the book is omnipresent. Her relegating of all experience to text comments on the requirement for the division between psyche and reality, where the covers of the books are, where the texts begin and end, and where each plagiarizes the other. Helen gleams her notion of truth from the untrustworthy source of other people’s descriptions; the inner and outer books of her knowledge fall open at the images used here: “mountains” and “red.” The interdependence of the internal and external drives poses the integral question of post structuralism - the death of Barthes’ author. The oft-quoted maxim from Derrida speaks to Helen’s position. He writes the infamous “there is nothing outside the text” in relation to Rousseau who lived the effects of supplementarity that define writing. That is, these effects “were intimately bound up with his experience as a sexual, social and political being” (Norris 122). In Helen’s case this is more literally true than perhaps even Derrida intended it to be. According to Norris, Derrida’s response to criticisms of his maxim is as follows: “It is necessary, [Derrida] says, to interrogate those various naïve or pre-critical ideas of reference that envisage a straightforward
matching-up between language and the world 'outside' "(Norris 142). This "matching-up" is precisely what is unavailable to Helen.

But the beauty of "there is nothing outside the text" for Helen is that it seems to exonerate her from her place in the margin. She was criticized as being merely a mouthpiece for Teacher (albeit with her hands), but the concept of an all-encompassing text makes us all mouthpieces for the language in which our thoughts are enveloped. Derrida’s phrase for this notion is also read through Rousseau:

_Just as Rousseau drew upon language that was already there...in the same way we operate today within a certain network of significations..._

(Derrida, _Acts_ 105)(my emphasis)

Taking this quote required a little wrenching of Derrida's text which is less reprehensible if it is placed in relation to another version of this idea which is that:

_...the writer writes in a language and in a logic whose proper system, laws, and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely. He uses them only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system._

(Derrida, _Acts_ 101)

Derrida describes a kind of engulfing movement made by the text around the writer. In this reading then, Helen can no longer be seen as the counterfeiter who uses signs that are falsified and thus without actual value in themselves. If there is nothing outside the text, there can be no privileged position within the text which must exclude Helen and set her apart. This is because the boundaries (are they margins?) are dissolved. But, to work further into Helen’s place in language without using Derrida’s maxim, there is an inherent empowerment and disempowerment caught in the split between internal and external. This division creates the boundary between language and silence, the word and the Phantomime. The internal may not infiltrate the world (this is often out of the question), while the external discourse is subject to empirical testing by those to whom it is spoken. People choose or discard evidence, and it is this reasoning which makes mandatory the discussion of the age-old measure of worth in writing, which is truth.

Derrida and Helen both take up the question of truth in their readings of language. For Helen the impact truth has on her worldbook is paramount. Her book
is constituted by external and unverifiable truths communicated to her through words and then transmuted by analogy with what is available to her as physically known. Being unable to challenge some aspects of this knowledge with her own sensory information reorients her linguistic world view towards a requirement for external truths from which she can construct her internal truth:

There is nothing new to my experience. Daily I place implicit faith in my friends with eyes and ears, and they tell me how often their senses deceive and lead them astray. Yet out of their evidence I gather countless precious truths with which I build my world, and my soul is enabled to picture the beauty of the sky and listen to the songs of birds. All about me may be silence and darkness, yet within me, in the spirit, is music and brightness, and colour flashes through all my thoughts. So out of Swedenborg's evidence from beyond earth's frontier I construct a world that shall measure up to the high claims of my spirit when I quit this wonderful but imprisoning house of clay.

(Keller, Religion 79)

Helen feels that the silence around her can be broken by truthful language, by "evidence." Her patterns for knowing by analogy require an initial knowing, the ever elusive origin that Derrida is often tailing (alongside Rousseau). Her comprehension of the world outside the reaches of her senses is devised by the same structure as her reading of Swedenborgian spirituality. Both kinds of reading require a preexisting acceptance of, and belief in, what has been set down or spoken in words. But if the words themselves can be accepted as evidence, they are then unable to unveil anything - destroying their mimetic function as true copies of the world. When Helen uses the language of others as access to the external world, and uses this process as defense for her equally candid belief in Swedenborg's spiritual world, she takes a leap that language makes possible, but one that is also questionable. While in Western society few people would contest that the sky is beautiful (it is a generally accepted cultural aesthetic), there are a large number of this same group of people who would disagree with Swedenborg's claims to have had privileged access to God and the spiritual world. The shared nature of truth as something accepted by a group of communicants is what is at stake here. Helen believes both these truths on the same grounds, using a process devoid of empirical testing - which, of course, is mostly unavailable to her.
If the evidence of Helen's friends unveils something in Helen's mind, it may not be their shared external truth. Without access to truth as a measuring stick, the shadows cast in Helen's imagination by the words written onto her body are inaccessible. Illustrating the possibilities in a place constructed by language ("I construct a world" as Helen said above), Helen has a dream in which she sees a pearl unlike any on this side of her dark world:

*Once in a dream I held in my hand a pearl. The one I saw in my dreams must, therefore, have been a creation of my imagination. It was a smooth, exquisitely moulded crystal. As I gazed into its shimmering deeps, my soul was flooded with an ecstasy of tenderness, and I was filled with wonder as one who should for the first time look into the cool, sweet heart of a rose. My pearl was dew and fire, the velvety green of moss, the soft whiteness of lilies, and the distilled hues and sweetness of a thousand roses. It seemed to me, the soul of beauty was dissolved in its crystal bosom. This beauteous vision strengthens my conviction that the world which the mind builds up out of countless subtle experiences and suggestions is fater than the world of the senses. The splendour of the sunset my friends gaze at across the purpling hills is wonderful. But the sunset of the inner vision brings purer delight because it is the worshipful blending of all the beauty we have known and desired.*

(Keller, *World* 200-1)

This pearl is not the opaque cream or rare black orb known to the sighted. Its meaning has moved beyond any object itself. And in this same (actual printed) book Helen writes that "We cannot imagine even in our dreams an object which has no counterpart in reality" (Keller, *World* 172). Her claim is not disproved by her dream of the pearl, but rather, rephrased because the truth requirement has suffered a shifting. The qualities Helen described could exist, it is just that they are not usually associated with the label she has given the object that holds these qualities, "pearl." In Helen's reckoning, the sunset born of words in her imagination transcends mimesis - more than an unveiling or getting closer to truth, it surpasses truth. But all this is unavailable for any empirical knowing by anyone other than Helen. We must, as the (telling) saying goes, quite literally 'take her word for it,' just as she takes other people's.

Pharmakon-like herself, Helen, by virtue of her experience of language, can either be placed alongside the remainder of humanity (this makes her a fellow
symbol-mongering animal who manipulates the signs she has learnt in the appropriate contexts) or she is a kind of sham, an imposter using language in ways inappropriate to truth given her limited access to what the words represent. What Helen’s experience and practice with language have to offer when this discussion reaches poetry will be the way she subverts these problems by collecting the small and separate facets of the external which are available to her and then manipulates these, internally, into a whole - into her personal truth. But if, for Helen, words can produce images, how does this fissure between the word and picture divide itself on closer examination? For this perhaps it is better to maintain Helen’s considerations of the spiritual and look to the picture as symbol, the icon. Teacher records Helen’s musings on the soul and visual language, “But if I write what my soul thinks,” she said, ‘then it will be visible, and the words will be its body’” (Keller, Story 261).
Temple - Spectral Iconography

**icon** [L f. Gk *eikon* likeness, image, similitude.] 1. *Rhet.* A simile. 2. A portrait, a picture; esp. one of an animal or plant in a book of natural history. 3. *Eccl.* An image in traditional Byzantine style of Jesus or a holy person that is used ceremonially and venerated in the Orthodox church. 4. *Comput.* A small symbolic picture on a VDU screen, esp. one that may be selected with a cursor to exercise an option that it represents. 3. A statue. 4. A realistic description in writing. *Rare.* 5. *Philos.* A sign with some factor in common with the object it represents.

(OED)

Icons are symbolic representations. Unlike words, they require some visual coherence with what they represent. Helen can be blind to the visual formats of both represented and representative, but when the definition for icon is read from within the discourse of rhetoric as simile, the icon involves precisely Helen’s cognitive process. Simile forms the bridge between the ‘infant’s roudure’ and the hills. Thus far the place of the visual has been subjugated by Helen’s blindness and overlooked in favor of words and their refractions, but Derrida’s reading of Plato in *The Double Session* resolves with the image of the painter who comes after the inner scribe and produces the picture of the thought. While Plato suggests that this visual resolution records the silent internal soliloquy in its very essence, Derrida is not so confident. He contends that the painter’s re-presentation is yet another simulacrum, steering the image on a course that leads away from truth on one hand, but towards it on the other.

This deliberation falls on the fault-line between representation as a truthful or faithful copy or as a fraud, something wrongfully taking the place of the true and...
real via a clever trick with mirrors. It is this visual and painterly aspect of the classical structure that Helen is perhaps poorly equipped to discuss, given the translucence of her pearl. Helen’s silence on the visual calls for a new voice, one longing to unravel all of these observations, and one that cannot be left out of the equation between language and silence. The voice is like Helen’s in that it emanates from a literal body of knowledge, a lived experience of language, and it is one which is as ambivalent as Helen’s in its relationship to philosophy.

Temple Grandin is an autistic woman whose books are ostensibly about her condition, but they are also a group of writings which, like Helen’s, dramatically call the nature of language into question. Her experiences of language and thought counterpoint Helen’s contentions on these subjects. The opening passage of one of Temple’s books reads:

*I THINK IN PICTURES. Words are like a second language to me. I translate both spoken and written words into full-color movies, complete with sound, which run like a VCR tape in my head. When somebody speaks to me, his words are instantly translated into pictures.*

*(Thinking 19)*

This act of translation, albeit instantaneous, still mobilizes a theoretical gap in which language reigns - ‘the second language.’ But Temple goes on to argue that her learning of language faltered on words which had no visual counterpart she could attach to them. Even in her adult life abstract notions such as “quick” can only produce inappropriate visuals like, in this instance, a can of Nestle ‘Quik.’ Where Helen was the champion of the word, the world book and the internal and external texts, Temple curates the pictures of experience. Because she deals with icons, instead of the phantoms of language or no-language, she is better understood as haunted by another version of the phantom, the spectre.

The spectre is visual. The stem of the word also gives us ‘spectacles’ with which to examine closely the ripples and refractions made on the surfaces of language and philosophy by her commentary. Commonly an apparition or ghost, the spectre in Epicurean philosophy is an “image supposed to emanate from a corporeal

13 Which is not to say that Derrida and other theorists do not live their own experiences of language, but that they devise theories about language from the premise of universal experience rather than writing out their personal experience as Helen and Temple do.
thing" (OED). This notion is akin to Temple’s internal icons which emanate in a
like manner by being ‘video recordings’ taken of real things, given that these are
born of what she has seen in the corporeal world. The spectre, like the phantom, is
connected to mimesis as: “an image produced by reflection or other natural
cause” (OED). Temple’s images are language-like in mastering the absence of their
external realities - in her case with a visual rather than a word. By virtue of this
pattern of internal and external trespasses, Temple has the play of the mirror, the
reflection, and mimesis in common with Helen. But Temple’s view is the reverse
(the mirror image) of Helen’s. Where Helen attests that:

Everything had a name, and each name gave birth to a new thought.
As we returned to the house every object I touched seemed to quiver
with life. That was because I saw everything with a strange, new
sight that had come to me.

(Story 26)

Temple says:

My experience as a visual thinker with autism makes it clear to me
that thought does not have to be verbal or sequential to be real.

(Thinking 164)

The differences between these two women’s experiences exist in their proposed
structures for understanding the place of language. The linearity of Plato’s
traditional definition is doubly disrupted by their experiences. Plato insisted that
thought comes first and progresses naturally into speech, but if this outlet is not
available then the internal scribe will make up the second party in the dialogue and
this second party is the written. The final participant is the painter who illustrates
the thought as a picture, and, according to Plato, herein lies truth. Helen and
Temple disagree. They contest this structure, acting as leveling tools to the power
distinctions that philosophy has designated for human thought. Helen thinks out
loud, spelling on her fingers, and Temple translates all written words into her native
thought-language which circumvents words and arrives at a gallery of images which
she can manipulate, swapping and changing various elements and inventing new
machinery for her particular interest, the management of livestock. Temple contests
Plato’s notion of the internal scribe and she is right in her appraisal of philosophy’s
response to her world view which is literally that she “would be denied the ability
to think by scientists who maintain that language is essential for thinking” (Thinking 159).

Paradoxically for Temple, she is forced to explain her process in precisely the language that she denies is her own. She is made the observer of her own practices because, to belong to human society requires a shared form of communication, which overrides her natural mode of thinking. Without language, she is, as Helen’s Phantom was, otherwise entirely cut-off from the world. But for Temple’s specific autism, this is not the prison cell it would have been for Helen. The sensory overload inherent in Temple’s condition makes human relationships highly perplexing for her. From infancy she found physical contact so overwhelming as to be unbearable. To heal her contradictory repulsion and longing for this kind of affinity with others she built herself a machine based on the ‘cattle chutes’ designed to hold cattle firmly while they are vaccinated and branded. Lying in this machine she feels held and calm in a way that was unattainable with human contact:

Someone asked me how I could love cats and at the same time perform scientific experiments on them. I couldn’t answer. It was the same sort of question I’d asked myself about the origin of my cattle chute. How could a device that forced an animal to submit also be a device that generated love for fellow man?

(Grandin and Scarino 118)

Ironically for Temple’s denunciation of language, her displaced love in the cattle chute follows the same pattern of supplementarity which informed Derrida’s reading of Rousseau’s sexuality. The chute stands in for, supplements for, love and human contact while Temple lives alone and remains celibate. Her renegotiated pattern of human relationships is intrinsically connected to her need to transmute her language into one of pictures. She uses metaphors and visual symbols that she manipulates in language’s stead:

...I had to use concrete symbols to understand abstract concepts such as getting along with people and moving on to the next stages of my life, both of which were always difficult,...Personal relationships made absolutely no sense to me until I developed visual symbols of doors and windows.

(Grandin, Thinking 33)

Just as the definition of icon predicted, Temple understands this process as her use of “visual similes” (Grandin, Thinking 131). For Temple and Helen, it seems that language plays a significant role in human relationships. Temple’s dislocation of the thought-language-image progression means that relationships, both linguistic and personal, had to be approached in other ways. Her alternative mental state
required a symbolic language of doors and windows that could represent the two-way nature of human connections.

For Temple, the problematics of language are those of community communication. Rather than for people (that is, members of the community and/or recipients of communication), it is for places that Temple feels emotion. Her depiction of this preference illustrates precisely word-based language’s inability to allow for this kind of relationship to take precedence over the connections between human beings. The differences are structural, as the following indicates:

I have emotional reactions to places where I’ve stayed for a number of days or weeks while working on designing a livestock system....Places where I invest a lot of time become emotionally special. When I return to one of these spots, I am often overwhelmed with fear as I approach. I panic, thinking I will be denied entry to my special place. Even though I know it’s irrational, I always survey each place I work in to make sure I can get back in. Large meat-packing plants have security guards, but in almost every plant I have figured out how to evade security, just in case it becomes one of my special places and I need to get back in. Driving by, I will see every hole in the fence and every unlocked gate and imprint them in my memory forever. My fear of blocked passages feels very primal, as though I were an animal that has been trapped.

For me, finding these holes and gaps is similar to the way a wary animal surveys new territory to make sure it has safe escape routes and passages...Will people try to stop me? Some of the surveying is automatic and unconscious. I’ll find the unlocked gate even if I’m not looking for it. I can’t help but see it. And when I spot the opening, I get a rush of happy excitement.”

(Grandin, Thinking 93)

Like Helen spelling on her fingers, Temple’s response is “automatic and unconscious.” That it is the gaps, spaces, and entry points that are meaningful to the system Temple uses instead of language is integral to her response to English. It is precisely these fissures and portals that the all-encompassing system of language does not allow for. They are the substance of the Phantomime which is only allowed to haunt language from behind it, performing backstage to the play of words, which may have visual and aural spaces and silences between them but these provide no escape routes from the constant production of meaning. The loaded silences that belong to language’s construction enhance meaning, they
function alongside words, separating these spaces from the silence of what can not be put into words.

Temple’s desired gaps are like the re-opening of the space of writing that Derrida felt Pierrot’s mime to be. Temple’s alternative to words is her visually systematic method for coping with the external world. In this she is almost diametrically opposed to Helen’s feeling for language as an escape from the language-less Phantomime. Temple searches for ways into physical places (herself included) while Helen longs to get out of her corporeal self, an escape which requires language. Temple says in the memoir Emergence (somewhat ironically entitled given what is to follow) that her physical self was “a place where I could be alone with my inner, solitary thoughts and at peace with myself”(93). For Temple’s autism this inner world is a sanctuary she can reach through the calming ersatz hugs of the cattle chute, where for Helen to be inside her corporeal self without language was a chaotic prison. It is distinctly the body that is at the center of these ruminations. Julia Kristeva has made much of such connections:

*If language, like culture, sets up a separation and, starting with discrete elements, concatenates an order, it does so precisely by repressing maternal authority and the corporeal mapping that abuts against them.*

(72)

Kristeva suggests that language represses the body, which is one reason why both Helen’s and Temple’s lived bodily experiences of language have not informed canonized philosophic discourse. But Kristeva’s reading of language, as it undermines the “corporeal mapping” (which Helen’s Phantom was certainly subject to), resonates with Temple’s refusal to participate in this economy. For Helen, the entire system bore down upon her after her cognition of water. “Everything had a name” is a logic without these holes and spaces, one that “concatenates an order” to evade or contain these troubling gaps, one that is based on the integration it similarly produces in human relationships. Helen rejected these spaces and the disconnections they represented. She wanted intellectual human contact, and language was her key to this place. Her desire was so powerful that the bringer of the key became almost entirely part of herself. Alternatively, Temple requires these spaces which explains, perhaps, the strength of her investment in the symbol of the
door which allows her to both enter, but more importantly for Temple’s relationship with people, to escape.

If language is a human relationship, this plays into Helen’s hands. It was demonstrated earlier that soliloquy for Helen is equal to keeping in touch with others - as it is in the theatre. On the stage it involves sharing the inner thought with the audience. For Temple, soliloquy is written in pictures because it is often not for, or about, other people. It is perhaps because her strongest relationships are with places (and animals) that the system which suits her is visual.

This revisioning has large implications for Temple’s language processing:

*Autistics have problems learning things that cannot be thought about in pictures...As a child, I left out words such as ‘is’, ‘the’ and ‘it’, because they had no meaning by themselves. Similarly words like ‘of’ and ‘an’ made no sense. Eventually I learned how to use them properly, because my parents always spoke correct English and I mimicked their speech patterns. To this day certain word conjugations like “to be,” are absolutely meaningless to me.*

(Grandin, *Thinking* 29-31)

Temple’s inability to cope with “to be” is in contradistinction to Helen’s experience of language which literally allowed her “to be.” Where Temple cannot cope with what has no meaning unto itself, Helen found the whole interrelatedness of language essential. But despite these differences Temple mimics, and Helen was accused of both mimicking and plagiarism. Thus both these women are in a sense cheated of what they can glean from language by the supplementarity of the text as it is read by a misunderstanding external world.

Temple aligns herself with Helen and Derrida in the revision/derision of natural speech versus unnatural/secondary writing when she quotes an autistic study which “reports that autistics often process written language better than spoken. Even now I mix up similar sounding words such as ‘over’ and ‘other’ ”(*Emergence* 131). She goes on to say, in concordance with Helen’s haptic experience, “Some very impaired autistic children learn more easily if words are spelled out with plastic letters they can feel”(131). In accordance with the parley that began this discussion, there is no clear opposition here, it is rather a mutually beneficial exchange of and between the prisoners of the margin. Both these lived-language
theorists recognize the place they hold in relation to philosophy's standpoints. Their books sit like marginalia on the verges of philosophy, their texts the handwritten notes jotted in the margins of the typed central document.

From these outskirts Kristevan thought can again be employed to effect. Her concept of 'the abject' is particularly pertinent to the Phantomime as it performs its strategic silence behind language. To replace the Phantomime with the abject is a move her text seems to accept easily. She describes the abject as that which is

...ejected beyond the scope of the tolerable, the thinkable. It lies there, quite close, but cannot be assimilated. [it is also] ...the jettisoned object, is racially excluded and draws me towards the place where meaning collapses...And yet from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master.

(1)

Nor does the Phantomime cease challenging the master text of language for its failures. The challenge can perhaps only come from the safe distance of the margin wherein meaning has lapsed into watchful silence. The margin may be a privileged site or space made available for commentary and insertions from an/other.
Final Stages

The raised curtain should now have divulged the scene set for this thesis’ reading of poetry. Phantommimes will be enacted by these readings, working on the principals that this discussion has brought to the fore. Language is always the stage for poetry and here it has undergone some marked transformations when viewed through the lens of Helen’s and Temple’s personal experiences. These women have lived language in new ways, projecting the body and images respectively into Phantommimic space. Language has devised for Helen a life out (and outside) of silence, while it has transfigured itself into a purely silent visual for Temple. Temple’s final words in Thinking in Pictures are “No words. Just one pure moment of silence. I can picture it perfectly” (206). The implication, made possible by these wayward interpretations of text, is that poetry as a site of distilled language can be seminal in creating or recreating approaches to the external world by its manipulation of the play (partially in the sense of the theatrics this discussion has traced) of language.

History is but one defining cultural discourse which manifests the power of the word to form beliefs, and it is with history that the readings will begin. The Postmodern revisions of history wrought by Porter and Howe choose places without referents; deliberately Helen-like imaginative spaces that depend solely on language and its role in the imagination. They produce new histories with new modes of writing that have language itself, rather than mimesis of the external, at their core. Perhaps then silence is at the center of questions regarding the workings of language; this will be integral to the reading of poetry with silence at its center. Modernism follows suit (in a chronological reversal) with its attempt to re-render a
world turned to chaos by war with new structures for language. In this its
proponents seemed to hope they might allow new ideas to speak. In this sense
Temple is a Modernist poet, of the Imagist school perhaps, a poet of images who
overwrites the language left to its own devices. She allows for a language of
connections which may need to be as invalid as with Temple’s problematic pun on
‘Quik’ (a can of powdered flavouring for milk to represent the idea of ‘quick’), in
order to unleash new meanings.

This introduction is now in a position to re-enact its own beginning,
consonant with the mimesis which has driven it, with the same quote from Derrida
which began this parley:

_In this speculum with no reality, in this mirror of a mirror, a
difference or dyad does exist, since there are mimes and phantoms._

(Derrida, _Acts_ 157)

This is, as Derrida says, “to mime a starting over” (Derrida, _Psyche_ 31). Peering
again into the mirror of the mirror, it is clear that if one should crack, there will be
no way of telling which it is. That crack will indefinitely (and definitely) permeate
all the reflections. Here begins an unraveling of all that this introduction has
attempted to weave together. There can be no hierarchy between these mirrors, one
that is language, the other that is the Phantomime of silence, just as there cannot be
a display, or invention, of the Phantomime on the other side of language. The
Phantomime does not necessarily infiltrate the language that it is simultaneously
dependent on and independent of. But it is attempts at these kinds of infiltrations
that the poetry we have finally arrived at often makes. The poets’ insistence on
various silences (of a type previously confined to the Phantomime) in their poetry,
will now become visible/audible. This discussion has looked into the space between
these two mirrors, and will now proceed to read poetry from within this mimetically
infinite space. Another set of reflections lies between poetry and theory. Rather than
attempting to explicate the patterns of reflections, connections and disconnections
here, in the introduction, these are examined as this thesis approaches its own body
- a body that is made up of a group of poems by Dorothy Porter, Susan Howe, Olive
Hopegood and Mina Loy.
While the poetry is often indirectly concerned with the problematics woven through this introduction, the poems produce the cue, or perhaps the curtain call, for the definition of the Phantasmagoria. Of the mime portion, while entailing the process of mimesis “the imitative as opposed to real” (OED), it is also “the art or technique of expressing or conveying action, character or emotion without words” (OED), which is antithetical to the poetic project - even when that project encompasses many deliberate uses of silences. But the poetry does subvert words, as the mime does, and this requires an act of invention. Mimesis and invention place themselves at opposite poles and Derrida notes these poles from the vantage point, or pivot of, invention:

_An invention always presupposes some illegality, the breaking of an implicit contract; it inserts disorder into the peaceful order of things, it disregards proprieties._

(Derrida, _Psyche_ 25)

And it is this disregard for the mimetic order, so similar to Helen’s and so connected to Temple’s, that these poets enact in their poetry. Invention approaches language as a means of making it new, of looking into a yet unwritten future:

_For invention is always supplementary...; it adds on, and thus inaugurates, it is an addition that serves to complete a whole, to fill in where there is a gap and thus to carry out a program._

(Derrida, _Psyche_ 58)

It is into this gap that we are about to step, joining the poets who are already writing in it.

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14 One definition of the closely connected (both here and in etymology) “phantasmagoria” is a definition given for ‘mime.’ In a chance mimesis, one literary example given for pantomime in the OED is from Helen Keller’s own writings about none other than her phantom; “She drops the signs and pantomime she used before, as soon as she has words.”
DOROTHY PORTER
&
SUSAN HOWE

Historical (Dis)Possessions

You don’t hear voices, but yes, you’re hearing something. You’re hearing something you see. And there’s the mystery of the eye-hand connection: when it’s your work, it’s your hand writing.

[Howe on writing poetry]
(L. Keller, Interview 33)

For Herodotus fascinates: he is the father who must ever be evoked or invoked, the phantom who must be exorcised, the ghost who must be banished.

(Hartog xvi)

To speak the name of the dead is to make them live again.

[Egyptian Funerary Inscription]
(Porter, Akhenaten vi)
Howe’s poetic process emulates Helen’s hand writing. The first epigraph describes her approach to poetry as a strange duplicate of Helen’s linguistic experience. Phantoms, too, permeate the current course of this inquiry which now follows poetry into history, and through fiction in the form of narrative and play script, all the while encompassing autobiographical deliberations.

Such diverse forces are produced in three books of poetry now appearing on the Phatominic stage. Australian Dorothy Porter’s two narrative poems, Akhenaten and The Monkey’s Mask, invoke history and fiction respectively (and follow each other chronologically in publication), while American Susan Howe’s long poem “The Liberties” from the collection The Europe of Trusts, is divided into the sections:

Fragments of a Liquidation
I
THEIR/Book of Stella
WHITE FOOLSCAP/Book of Cordelia
II/God’s Spies
III

and, like Porter’s books, moves from history into fiction, changing over at “White Foolscap” - a title which signposts itself as the fresh beginning of the blank page. The subtitle of this section serves also to designate a new book, the “Book of Cordelia.” Howe merges history with fiction and allows autobiographical infringements into her poetry. She shares these thematic drives with Porter, a confluence that invites comparison between the processes used and outcomes reached by each poet. These three poems (Akhenaten and The Monkey’s Mask, although made up of numerous separate poems, are here treated as single works because they are linked by their strong narratives) all attend to voices and silences. They deal with history, authenticity and palimpsests, and incorporate silenced poet-figures inside deliberately liminal and shifting poetry.

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1 Howe’s comment also resonates with the individual signature of a text, the surety against counterfeiting. This connection is made tacit in the ‘hand writing’ which can be read across the single space dividing the two terms. It is purely coincidental that Howe’s interviewer’s name is Keller (Lynn).

2 All quotations from this poem are followed by page numbers which refer to edition of The Europe of Trusts listed in the Works Cited.
Both poets begin on the historical side of poetic equations, taking voices which have been silenced by history and resuscitating them in written poetry. But, as I shall argue, these are strange palimpsests, erasing only silences, writing on white pages. The poems are not exactly revisions of history (although they resemble them) because these poets write where there are deliberately silenced and limited remains. Unlike their literary Feminist forebears Virginia Woolf, Gilbert and Gubar, and Adrienne Rich, they validate not only that which history has forgotten, but chronicle silences which are indelibly etched in the remains themselves. They trace willful acts of silencing or destruction. This poetic practice is thus not precisely an attempt at retrieval because central to Porter and Howe’s adopted characters is the silence of the essentially irretrievable. Both poets are explicit about this project, incorporating prose introductions that outline the spaces in which they intend to write.

Porter’s subject is Akhenaten, an Egyptian pharaoh credited with initiating a “bold adventure in the arts” (Porter, *Akhenaten* xiii). Art historians point out how “severely Akhenaten led his artists to break with tradition and to experiment with what is the only genuinely new style during the many millenia of Egyptian art” (Terrace and Fisher 121). For Porter, Akhenaten is an artist and more specifically “a visionary and a poet” (*Akhenaten* xiii). She reworks one of his hymns as a poem in her text, treating it as poetry and challenging authorial authenticity by casting his ‘poem’ into her book of poetry. She writes of the pharaoh’s silence as enforced:

> On his death he was excecrated as a heretic, his name removed from the monuments, his city abandoned and used as a quarry...The Egyptians wanted to forget the heady Akhenaten years as quickly as possible.

(xiii)

The Egyptian funerary inscription Porter chooses as one of the dedications for her book (reproduced as the third epigraph beginning this chapter) reads as a retaliation to the Egyptians who had removed Akhenaten’s name. His name finds a new existence in Porter’s poem, a textual existence which serves as a kind of survival - revived and preserved by the ancient notion of immortality afforded by poetry.
Porter takes erasure as her starting point, reinscribing the pharaoh’s name in direct challenge to the Egyptians’ attempted annihilation.

Howe is equally emphatic about naming her silenced subject. She begins “The Liberties” with the abandoned baptismal name “Hester Johnson” (149), for a woman who, she tells us, preferred to be called “Esther” (149), but who is ultimately introduced to the reader with the name “she is known to history” by – “Stella” (149). Stella was the allegorical name that she of this shifting-identity had been dubbed by her poet - and here we do not know the exact nature of the relationship and so leave a blank - Jonathan Swift. Howe’s introduction pieces together various contradictory descriptions of Stella: she “was plump(Some) extremely thin(Others)” (152). This device rests Howe’s poetic argument on contradictions which cancel each other out, again leaving only silence. Howe finalizes this portion of her introduction with the sentence: “No authentic portrait exists” (152). This appraisal of Stella (or her limited written remains) must rely on negatives similar to those that were Helen’s only means of describing her phantom who existed outside language. Howe observes that: “Nothing is known of Stella’s feeling or what she suffered from” (154) and of the memoir penned by Swift, Howe says it is “remarkable for what it doesn’t say. Its brevity speaks volumes” (154).

Before Howe attempts her own ‘Stella’s Portrait,’ she is emphatic about the question of blame. The final line of her introductory recital of silences and misrepresentations is the sentence: “None of Stella’s letters have been saved” (151). By resonating with, but also displacing the more commonplace expression ‘nothing has survived,’ Howe deliberately subverts that stock phrase which avoids accusation. Her choice of words makes Swift the culprit in Stella’s silence. He was the custodian of her papers after her death and Howe delineates a number of motives for Swift’s calculated silencing of these remains. She points to Stella following Swift to Ireland at his request, and the impropriety of their unmarried relationship. In her reading, they were intimate life-long friends under the watch of two designated chaperones who figure in a Swift poem that Howe significantly places in her text:

DINGLEY and BRENT
... They would never hear,
But turn a deaf ear,
As a matter they had no concern in.

(151)

This extract suggests there was "a matter," although what it was remains unknown. Swift and Stella’s clandestine relationship is further compromised by Howe’s insinuation that incest was possibly the reason the pair did not marry; her suggestion is that the couple shared a father. She also speculates on Swift’s covert affair with another woman which was significantly left out of his correspondence with Stella. Howe intimates that the scandal which ensued after this affair’s publication lead to Stella’s death. But despite all these inferences, Howe has been clear that “nothing has been saved” - and that Swift was responsible for Stella’s papers. The poet seems to write in contradiction to herself, speaking of silences on the one hand while simultaneously infusing these spaces with her opinions, making a case from very little evidence but, nevertheless, with compelling subtlety.

It is from these two meager sets of remains, both involving a damnatio memoriae or deliberate silencing (the Egyptians’ erasure and Swift’s suppression), that Porter and Howe begin their writing. Their introductory remarks accord with Helen’s memory of her Phantom as the pure negation of all she knows after language: “nothing was part of anything” (Keller Teacher 36). Like Phantom, these protagonists are defined by what they are not; by what has been lost by history and transformed into a silence that can only be known by its negativity, its unwrittenness, its non-language – that is, its Phantomimic space. It is this very negativity that opens “the space of writing” which Derrida allocated to Pierrot’s mime without referent. Stella’s and Akhenaten’s historical lives are mimed by the poets writing poetry for them, but the impossibility of miming silences is at the core of these poems.

The poets seem to suggest that something exists behind the muteness of their protagonists that is yet to be heard, and that their own poetry can offer fertile space for such voices. This logic has long been lauded as feminist practice, for example by Annis V. Pratt who devised a ‘drowning-out theory’ to explore this overlaying process in novels. It is a theory that can turn itself adeptly to poetry. The metaphor
comes from a phenomenon in black culture: You have a little black church in the marsh and you're going to sing 'Go Down Moses' [but] Every now and then the members of the congregation want to break loose and sing 'Oh Freedom'... whenever they sing that, they've got this big old black pot in the vestibule, and as they sing they pound the pot. That way no white folks are going to hear. The drowning effect, this banging on the pot to drown out what they are actually saying about feminism, came in with the first women's novel and hasn't gone out yet.

(Gilbert and Gubar Madwoman, 659)

The kinds of poetic suppositions Porter and Howe invent for their historical characters are questionable. They share their trajectory with history's original silencing of these characters - both poetry and history reach a point of drowning-out. These poets are no less (or more) mis/representative of "mute" voices than if historical silences are allowed to remain unadulterated by poetry. In both cases, what remains or is written will be adrift from any artless reality.

There is a freedom inherent in the open relationship that, this logic suggests, lies between poetry and history. It is one that allows Porter and Howe to undergo a kind of transference with their central characters. Both choose poet protagonists through which to speak, and work their subject's poetic remains into their own contemporary texts. But, it is only Porter's contention that Akhenaten's hymn writing defines him as a poet, while the three extant poems by Stella are "attributed," a word that casts aspersions on their legitimacy. This marginalized status means that the protagonists speculate on what it is that names a poet. In addition to these dubious poet-subject identities, such appropriations made by the poet-authors challenge both the legitimacy of using another poet's poetry and the authority of presuming to write (or supplement) for history. The boundaries of authenticity thus become contested sites in these poems.

History Making Poetry

Akhenaten and Stella have their historical actuality in common. History records that they lived. It also records that their voices have been lost, and so the poets writing for them must jostle with the other discourse in which their poetry is
engaged, namely history. The so-called father of history, Herodotus, who is partly responsible for re-launching the phantom into this discussion (in the second epigraph to this chapter), forms a hinge between history and poetry, truth and fiction. He is the ideal figure through which to examine history and authenticity under the auspices of poetry. As two-faced as Mnemosyne watching over Helen's creative writing, he was famed as the first historian, but:

antiquity...fabricated a two-headed Herodotus and turned the name Herodotus, known to everyone, into a double name which designated both the father of history and also a liar - if not, indeed, the father of all liars.

(Hartog xviii)

Mnemosyne's nine daughters, the muses, each entitle the nine sections of Herodotus's history. But this editorial decision was not sanctioned by the author, who left his work (which became known as Histories) untitled. The muses appeared in his work in the second century and indicate not only the status enjoyed by the work but also the public's attitude towards it at that time; it was classed on the side of the Muses, that is, as poetry, pleasure, fiction.

(Hartog xvii)

Howe shares these sentiments when she recalls that "Somewhere Thoreau says that exaggerated history is poetry" (Birth-mark 96), while for Herodotus, history becomes poetry (or at least interpreted as such) as his book traverses real-time and re-evaluation. This altered reception, however, happens outside Herodotus's intentions. His opening passage reads:

*What Herodotus . . . has learned by inquiry [historie] is here set forth: in order that the memory of the past may not be blotted out from among men by time, and that great and marvellous things [erga] done by the Greeks and Barbarians and especially the reason why they warred against each other may not cease to be recounted.*

(Hartog xvii)

Preventing the past from being "blotted out" (and this phrase has been subject to translations from Herodotus's Greek, through Hartog's French and into Janet Lloyd's English) belongs to the same paradigm of the 'drowned out' variety of silences Porter and Howe en(or re)visioned. Their poetry questions Herodotus's
ideological stance, his belief in the notion of a truthful record that would be inherited by later historical practice.

But if Herodotus is in fact the liar who writes creatively, this is dubious paternity for the truth-bearing discourse history has traditionally posited itself to be. These two modes, history and poetry, antagonize each other on the issue of mimesis because history's appetite for the mimetic is antithetical to the inventions of creative writing. History is the act of recounting, as Derrida would say it is already re-counting, using words to mime what actually occurred, but this is complicated:

*Herodotus is the historian of the Persian Wars, and the Persian Wars are the beginning of history; therefore, Herodotus is the "model of historians." But the Persian Wars are only the beginning of history because Herodotus recounted them.*

(Hartog xx)

This passage reads remarkably like the temporally-troubled history of the mime-booklet Mallarmé handled in *The Double Session*, the question of origin inevitably haunting any notion of mimesis. Herodotus knew first hand about the Persian Wars and recorded this knowledge as a written text so that it would not be lost. But this production differs when the recounting is numbed by profound silences, when the blotting out has already taken place. This is what Porter and Howe discovered when they turned their hands to history. In this respect, the words required to fill historical silence function with the kind of troubled referentiality that temporally disoriented Pierrot's mime and inspired the criticisms of Helen's view of the mountains. These are writings without referents, mimes of what has not gone before. Helen uses history (and science) to defend her position in relation to such mutable signifiers and their signifieds:

*The bulk of the world's knowledge is an imaginary construction. History is but a mode of imagining, of making us see civilizations*

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3 This point evades much material current in the discourse of New Historicism. This theoretical position also defines itself against traditional notions of history. It problematizes the notion of history as the record of the past that claims to be unfettered by artistic forces, and questions history's attempted objectivity.

4 Derrida says "The Mime is not subject to the authority of any book..." by which he means "There is no imitation. The Mime imitates nothing. And to begin with he doesn't imitate. There is nothing prior to writing of his gestures. Nothing is prescribed for him. No present has preceded or supervised the tracing of his writing." (*Dissemination* 194-5)(my emphasis)
that no longer appear on earth. Some of the most significant
discoveries in modern science owe their origin to the imagination of
men who had neither accurate knowledge nor exact instruments to
demonstrate their beliefs.

(Keller, World 109)

Porter's and Howe's relationships to their protagonists share Helen's relationship to
the visual/aural world. The inability to audit the precision of the limited evidence
from which they write, vexes all three women in their conceptions of 'truth.' They
are abandoned to second hand material and conjecture. This is because what has
gone before is historically inaccessible – or silenced.

The significant difference for the poets lies in their ability to make this
deliberate choice. In effect they choose a Helen-like existence, one which, by
enforcing silence and darkness on a number of levels of access to the external,
produces a mode of understanding which allows for the kind of original creativity
that Helen utilized in imagining her translucent pearl. These silences then become
effectual, they are no longer lamentable losses that the poetic or historic narratives
try to weave together in opposition to silence, but are in fact an aid to creation
through concentration. The problematic scientist who read Helen and Laura
Bridgman's sexuality as abject had something perhaps more pertinent to say about
Helen's condition in regard to this profitable concentration:

_She considered that certain of her infirmities were real privileges
which made her more contented, in many ways, than most normal
individuals. These infirmities helped her, by the intense
concentration of her faculties, to educate herself more completely
than integral persons, whose sight is spread over many objects at a
time, and who learn superficially, since with their eyes and ears they
learn too fast, with too little effort, and with what one may call a
'plausible facility'._ [Harry attaches a footnote to this comment
which reads]

_From this point of view the case of Helen Keller has reminded me
more than once of the invisible chess player who, hidden in the
interior of the so-called automatic machine of Vaucanson, was able
to beat almost any one who played with him. Isolated in front of the
reflector of the chess board, he was able to concentrate and direct
all his faculties on his game, and triumph without difficulty over an
adversary who played standing outside, under the eyes of
spectators, in the midst of whispers and all the attendant noises. No
doubt only a first-rate chess player could win every time, even
behind the shelter, but his adversary, waiting outside, needed to be
infinitely his superior to beat him."

(Harry 91-2)

Perhaps the “infirmities” in the stories chosen by Porter and Howe, that is the silences available or inherent in the narratives, produce the same intense concentration in the poets. The silence in their cases, then, is not deplorable, but rather vital to creativity. The lack of “whispers” and “attendant noises” from a crowd of historical information in Stella’s and Akhenaten’s records prevents the poets from being distracted from the task at hand.

The luxury of silence in which to concentrate allows both poets to hear a different kind of voice, one that belongs to their imaginations, even to their autobiographical experiences. But it is a voice that emerges in confluence with historical remains as a kind of communing with the lost poets. If complete historical information (even if such a utopia could be realized) can be read as distraction from a kind of imaginative essence, then these poets divert their writing from this cluttered path and steer a course toward a freer expanse. In this Phantomimic space they can hear “other” voices. In response to an interview question asking Howe about her “sense that as a poet you act as a medium,” she replies: “Being a poet is a calling. You are called and you must listen”(L.Keller, Interview 33). Porter agrees with the Romantics that “in some ways the poet is quite passive; subjects and themes and voices choose you”(Digby 1). What Porter finds in Akhenaten’s silences then is “hypothetical space”(Digby 2), a silence in which to hear better. But, these voices speak from an internal place, making them also the poet’s own.

Perhaps this interpolation of the personal into the historical partly serves to make these poetic revisions mockeries of the sanctified discourse of history. The poets mimic historians in producing a vision of the past. But, by seeing themselves in these histories, they signal the same “mirror of a mirror” that Derrida envisaged in relation to the broken contract between the referent and reality. The Histories deliberate on this miming or mirroring:

The Histories are a mirror into which the historian never ceased to peer as he pondered his own identity: he was the looker looked at,
the questioner questioned, who always ended up by declaring his own status and credentials. Was he an historian or a liar?

(Hartog xxiii)

Writers of history, be they poets or historians, must ponder their own identity in this mirror. As to the question of ‘liar,’ when asked of these contemporary poets it entails a change of gender that will be explored by this reading. This vacillating dividing line between truth and fiction which began the supposition that Herodotus was in fact two people (one an historian, the other a liar) also signals a collision beneath one name that returns this discussion to the relevance of naming; naming and accurate identity being crucial to the ideology of history.

“Names creeping out everywhere”

(Howe, Europe 215)

Dorothy Porter’s surname has a significant affinity with her chosen task, the poeticizing of Akhenaten. The porter is the gatekeeper, allowing what interests her from Akhenaten’s remains into her poetry and barring entry to the extraneous. She is also the porter who must carry luggage, conveying the story from Egyptian past into Australian present. It is her role as the privileged medium for a story, one that is not her own, which has ramifications for autobiography. By implication, this has equal ramifications for the authenticity of both her name and Akhenaten’s and, more specifically, for ownership of the story being told. Porter was embroiled in her relationship with Akhenaten, saying of the pharaoh:

I found out as much about him as I could and then I trusted my own intuition. And obviously I used myself. Any book like this is clearly masked autobiographical writing.

(Digby 3)

The mask in this equation is indented on both sides. From behind it Porter can imagine herself as the decadent Egyptian who redefined the art of his time and indulged in unbridled sexual exploits that crossed between genders and traversed the incest taboo. While, from the other side of the mask, the pharaoh gains the language and experience of the Australian suburbanite, saying to his baby “give Mummy/ a big hug”(106). The finished product, the book that bears both names on
its cover - Akhenaten and Dorothy Porter - is like a poem in translation. Both poets (if we accept Porter’s reading of the pharaoh as poet) are jointly responsible for the new work, at least from the perspective of ownership over the story.

More than re-vision, this poetry requires an act of creation or invention, a convergence of the self with the lost voice to create an altogether new Akhenaten-self. Like the ‘tombeau’ which Rachel Blau DuPlessis describes in The Pink Guitar, this poetry is “the collaboration between two poets, the dead and the living, [whose] interests...do not necessarily coincide....The classical tombeau ends in a draw” (Blau DuPlessis 41). The dead and the living meet in like circumstances in Howe’s poem. She transgresses both an/other personality, and the other discourse (other to poetry) of history. Howe is, like Porter, both explicit and intentional with regard to the autobiographical connection:

_The subject of Swift. Stella and Vanessa was mythic for my mother...I grew up on it. It was another Grimm’s fairytale. But real...I was trying to get to another place, a foreign place that was home to my mother, on paper. I thought I might understand my mother that way - I might go back to my grandmother, who I am named after._

(Howe, Birth-mark 166)

In “The Liberties” naming tampers with ideology and authority. The poet names her personal investment in history by including her own name in a riddle-like construction in part III. This begins: “I am composed of nine letters,” and spells out “Susan Howe,” exposing the significance of each phoneme and the connections between them. This reading of her own name has its parallel in Howe’s use of Stella’s name to underscore the significance of labeling. The poet abides by the name that Swift chose, rather than the baptismal name Hester, or “Stella’s” preferred name Esther. But the selection of “Stella,” as well as being a means of demonstrating Swift’s power in this woman’s historical construction, has a set of resonances that are interestingly linked with the physical remains of Akhenaten’s history. A ‘stela’ is an “upright slab or pillar, usually bearing a commemorative inscription or sculptured design and often serving as a gravestone” (OED), such stelae are part of the archaeological fragments telling Akhenaten’s story. The Stella of Howe’s poetry must then stand as her own stela or gravestone, Stella/Howe’s voice refiguring the epitaph and sculpting a new record of history.

Howe is again specific about the place of her own name in a poem which began as Stella’s biography but transmutes itself into a section in which she writes:

_Across the Atlantic, I_

_inherit myself_
Namesake of her Irish grandmother, Susan, Howe infiltrates the history of Stella which has metamorphosed, by this stage in the poem, a long way from Howe’s lucid prose introduction to Stella’s life/myth. Howe’s understanding of Stella collides with her own genealogy, while, in the reverse of this transference, historical figures ‘walk in her imagination’ (*Birth-mark* 4). Her poetry relies on these integrations so that she may ask “Can any words restore me to how you felt?/ you are straying, seeking, scattering. Was it you or is it me?” (Howe, *Birth-mark* 4).

Whether integration of, or collision with, another personality, Howe’s practice agrees with Porter’s proclamation about masked autobiography, and neither poet shies from this connection when discussing their poems with interviewers. But, if Porter and Howe’s autobiographical voices drown out the silences imposed on Akhenaten and Stella, they must also subsume the actual, unattainable, historical figures. Are they in fact taking liberties, as Howe’s title implies? 5

Their poems can be read as a harmless affiliation with these silenced poet-figures, or they can be understood as being obliteratory, equivalent to the silence created by historians who fail to record, or who gloss over, certain aspects of history. Linda Reinfeld says of Howe, and the same could apply to Porter, that her:

\[
\text{capacity for appropriation is at least as great as her capacity to identify with}
\]
\[
\text{those who suffer as a consequence of having been unfairly appropriated: the}
\]
\[
\text{captivity narrative is at the heart of her personal mythology.}
\]

(Reinfeld 136)

For both Porter and Howe, this sense of identification, which involves referents shifting behind the masks devised by names, is one inextricably bound by questions of gender. This shared

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5 Howe is explicit in interview that “The Liberties” is the name of a part of Dublin where she was visiting her mother in hospital while meditating on the Stella story, but other readings remain available.
preoccupation is perhaps born of the Western tradition, to which both these poets belong, of
daughters and wives being subsumed by the surnames of their fathers and husbands.

The Gender of His/story

Porter and Howe position themselves as struggling against historically
imposed silences and claim that this struggle is integral to their poetic projects. For
Howe this redressing of silence is expressed in terms of the history held in archives.
She is optimistic about there being an outlet for truth that has been recorded:

I know that history can be falsified, has been falsified. Still, there
are archives and new ways of interpreting their uncompromising
details. I am naïve enough to hope the truth will out...[but] if you
are a woman, archives hold perpetual ironies because the gaps and
silences are where you find yourself.

(Birth-mark 158)

Howe privileges poetry’s role in countering this inequity: “If History is a record of
survivors, Poetry shelters other voices”(Birth-mark 47). That poetry’s place is
specifically gendered is another motive integral to Howe’s stratagems and outlook.
She has this in common with Porter whose contention is that “women have not
been given time, have not been given space, have not been given permission to be
creative, but only in the cracks of male creativity”(Digby 2).

Porter chooses a history riddled with such cracks. She refers to the
“enormous gaps”(Digby 2) in the Akhenaten story and describes her intellectual
meeting with Akhenaten as one which defied her expectations of her own interest in
gender:

I had come to see the famous bust of his wife, Nefertiti, but it was
the smirking, distorted, oddly beautiful face of Akhenaten that put
out tentacles to my imagination. A strange confession from a
feminist poet.

(Akhenaten xiii)

But it is not such a strange confession given Porter’s fascination with the liminal
gender Akhenaten attributes to himself. In the artistic representations he
commissioned during his reign, his likeness was variously adorned with
androgynous combinations of breasts, swollen belly, rounded thighs, and penis. In
Porter’s poem “My Ka” - Ka meaning “immortal spirit”(Akhenaten 170) according to her notes - it is this inner aspect that is to be the subject of the sculptured depiction of the pharaoh:

My ka has big breasts
that can squirt milk as far
as Kush

My ka has fat thighs
as heavy as gold.

She hides her cock
but can flash for
ceremonial occasions.

(38)

The inner self is this woman with a phalus. She shares both her gender and her fascination with power with Akhenaten’s mother who “is a politician / and a good one / she loves power”(10).

The father/King is, by comparison, completely ineffectual. He:

[…]plays
in his inoffensive way
with his health
or his harem

Mummy plays
with gods
Mummy frightens
iron.

(10)

This gender division signals Porter’s envisioning of an Irigarayan “bodily encounter with the mother”(Irigaray 25). The poet’s version of Egyptian religion seems dictated by the pulsions of the body. The father/King’s god “Amun” is on numerous occasions likened to an anal fixation, replete with ‘farts’(14) and a “dirty nappy”(18). Akhenaten feels suffocated by these compulsions that are opposed to his own, as though Amun “spread his black bum / over my eyes and mouth”(3). By contrast, Akhenaten’s God of his own design, Aten, seems to belong to the Semiotic relationship with the powerful mother. It is specifically his mother who “let Aten / loose / in my baby head”(12). The world Porter devises for Akhenaten is one which recalls the polymorphously perverse infant of the Semiotic, maternally dominated, phase of psychological development posited by Kristeva.
Writing a male figure within the logic of this feminine space, Porter re-genders power across these sexual differences. This allows her to dream up a hero whose sexuality is boundless, traversing both genders, both sexual orientations, and encompassing incest. The poetry is adorned with these illimitable aspects of her hero:

in sex and art
I'm like a Hittite army
I don't recognise borders

I heap male and female
into one silky dune
and dig in my toes

(129)

The sliding grains of sand making up this "silky dune" run between fingers and toes without being contained by the social strictures of gender. Constructing Akhenaten thus in her poetry allows Porter to imaginatively dabble in the possibilities on both sides of these boundaries, or to let the boundaries dissolve away.

Howe takes the same image of the sliding sands (which also depict the passage of time through the clichéd hourglass), and speaks of her own place, as well as her protagonist's, in the poetic/historic equation. She says "We are/ in a sandheap" in a detached phrase at the bottom of one page, the next beginning:

We are

discovered

not solid

the floor

based

on misunderstanding.

(211)

The sand beneath the poet's feet is unstable ground for making suppositions about Stella. The contradictions Howe underlined in Stella's 'Portrait' belong to exactly these slippages. It is due to the silences of these narratives that such depictions of historical information become antithetical to the claims history has traditionally made for itself as based on factual (solid) evidence. The pervasive question of gender will be reconsidered at numerous other points in this discussion, but, before
these sites are reached, what is at stake is how poetry can either counter or mirror these historical processes that are slipping like sand (or like a mask), especially given that Howe claims they are based on erroneous sounding “misunderstandings.”

"Nick and Borrow"

Porter (Digby 21)

Howe’s vision of her self as ‘discovering’ such misunderstandings shares another metaphor with Porter; both poets envisage birds fossicking among the ruins. Porter calls herself “a classic magpie; I’ll nick and borrow where I can” (Digby 21) while Howe is the “library cormorant” (Howe, Birth-mark 18) diving beneath the surface and voraciously devouring historical documents. For Porter, such acts of selection require that she make choices. Her depiction of Akhenaten asks that she devise her own version of events. In an interview, she reveals that suggesting the pharaoh had a homosexual relationship with his brother was insulting to Muslims:

The Egyptologist who showed us around Karnak said that Akhenaten is regarded as the precursor to Mohammed and that these Western decadent interpretations are deeply offensive.

(Digby 3)

But the decadent is exactly the interpretation that Porter pursued. She is selective about whose testimony to accept (ignoring that of the above mentioned Egyptologist), and it is this kind of selectivity that produces her poetry. On the other hand, it is only when facts are made uncertain by silences, that these slippages allow for the possibilities of choice.

Rendering such choices with bird metaphors make the poets’ selections appear ‘poetic,’ but historians are equally engaged in this process, although they represent it more prosaically. Aldred, one of Porter’s sources for Akhenaten, mentions the use of the ancient Egyptian historian Manetho whose lost manuscript interests historians today: “Despite the lacunae and inaccuracies of the copyists of Manetho, modern historians make selective use of his system of numbering the dynasties of the kings” (Aldred 9). The historian here is engaged in constructing a narrative across the same gaps that are filled-in by these poets. History depends on judicious selection as crucial to its interpretative acts, and it is precisely through such discrimination that both historian and poet must produce writings that construct the past. Howe poeticizes the space between these discourses in a poem that visually recreates such notions by its construction:

75
In this poem Howe positions her poet-self in relation to the historian with the 'clash.' But the poem is constructed less around the clash between, than the blurring of these two discourses.

Visually manifest in the physical structure of the poem where "rian" overlaps the notion of "connecting," this palimpsestic play of blurring and obscuring is paradoxically the means for clarifying the relatedness of these ideologies. The way that historians act in "connecting" ideas via these "verbal associations" is nearly totally obscured by their name/title "historian," or more tellingly, the part of this word that refers to the person writing the history - the "rian" - who is separate from the abstract notion of history or truth. It is the human production of history, then, that is disguised and unacknowledged by the traditional
historian. That the word is still readable moves the notion of 'blurring' away from the sense that these issues have gone out of focus. Instead, the focus is both redirected and bifocal so that the usually separated discourses are drawn together with notions of semblance. Such mirrors reinstall the place of mimicry and mimesis in this reading.

The lack of grammar aids Howe in her game of deliberate confusion. The second half of the poem, after the overlapping terms, could pertain to either poet or historian, forcing these two writers to collude over issues of verbal associations and "Almost Forced Loans" from historical remains. The "Forced" element of Howe's reading refers, perhaps, to the prevailing ideology of truth, long associated with history. This forces the historian to maintain his/her identity as a truth-bearing voice rather than as an individual partaking in acts of poeticizing, or openly enjoying the pleasure of the kinds of language associations that produce Porter's and Howe's poetic texts.

This is related to silent spaces of possibility, because such pleasures would be curtailed by the existence of one definitive conclusion. Of course, this is rarely the case, and if it was the case, then such a history would be unlikely to inspire a researcher to produce a story in the language of either the poet or historian. The words and silences that remain when there is no definite conclusion can be manipulated by discourse. But, silence alone is not enough. Some words must give evidence of the once living voice which speaks in fragments that are made available for selection to bird-like poets or historians. Interestingly, both poets highlight this perceived immortality of the words (that which remains and speaks, in opposition to the silence of the grave) with the shared motif of pages in coffins.

**Pages in Coffins**

Pages in, or on, the coffin are used by both Porter and Howe to illuminate the power of language over death's silence. Howe believes her Stella was:

- bedevilled by a printer's error
- the sight of a dead page filled her with terror
- garbled version
- page in her coffin. . . .
Do those dots mean that the speaker lapsed into silence?

(158)

The dots, rather than words, signify the silence, while the written will preserve the story whether it is true, false, or "bedevilled by a printer's error." Porter uses this same metaphor in Akhenaten when she confides to the reader that Akhenaten's poem to his brother Smenkhkare "was found on the coffin. I have reworked it from Sir Alan Gardiner's Translation (Journal of Egyptian Archaeology)'(172). The words, re-spoken or rewritten in these poems are resurrections that have been brought about by the contemporary publishings of "The Liberties" and Akhenaten. But poetry clearly makes no guarantee of posthumous fame, as the cases of both Stella and Akhenaten attest.

History is the traditional place for such guarantees because history writing is a version of mimesis, a word-wrought reenactment of events that have passed. However, mimesis, as we have seen, is troubled by truth. If history is mere guesswork, not truth, then recording it is questionable. Is it simpler to say (taking into account the skeptical climate in which these contemporary poets write) poets know that history is a dubious enterprise and, therefore, they have felt that their poetry can grapple with the records of the past in equally fruitful, equally erroneous, ways as historians faced with the same silences?

This assumption would be more feasible if there was not a subtle sense in these two poems that the poets seek some credibility from their interplay with history. Both poets have been painstaking in their research of historical remains and used accredited sources. Porter says that the poetry involved "an enormous amount of research"(Digby 2), and she includes an acknowledgment in her text:

_My primary source has been the work of the notable Egyptologist Cyril Aldred, in particular his Akhenaten (Abacus 1972) and Akhenaten (Thames and Hudson 1988). In some instances I have drawn my own conclusions from his invaluable research._

(Porter Akhenaten xi)

That final sentence, "In some instances," suggests that in most instances Porter has given accounts which attempt historical accuracy or verifiability. The same perhaps
mock-academic tone lies in wait for the reader in an innocuous parenthesis beneath the heading “Notes” at the back of the book, which reads:

CHARACTERS
(Almost all are historical)

This referenced historical information is given greater credibility when, in the introduction, Porter mentions her field work, traveling to Egypt, to further authenticate her conclusions. The signposts she leaves us illustrate her efforts and say something about her relationship to facts, and to history’s relevance in the construction of her text. But poets are in a precarious position in this equation because if history is to confer status onto poetry then history must belong to a higher plain. Yet, for poetry to infiltrate this other discourse, poets cannot treat history as sacrosanct. Howe is, like Porter, faced with this same conundrum.

Howe’s research is evidenced by the amount of detail she recounts, and the quotations she enlists in her reading across Stella’s silences. “The Liberties” begins with quotation marks around an extract from Swift’s journal, which is sourced in acceptable research format as: “Swift: Journal to Stella.” This is printed beneath the quote, although there is no bibliography to which this citation refers. Curiously, in the absence of this bibliography, there are numerous quotes and references to the names of people who made the various remarks that Howe has worked into this section. Lines of poetry are reprinted with their authors’ name cited beneath them, and other trappings of academic scholarship are nodded to, or perhaps undermined, by this mimicry of the historian in the poem. The biography at the beginning of the collection The Europe of Trusts says of Howe’s three books collected between its covers, The Liberties (1980), Pythagorean Silence (1982), and Defenestration of Prague (1983):

This work was daring in its mix of historical information, traditional narrative, and radical linguistic experimentation.

(Europe 4)

The commentary goes on to mention the work’s “acclaim” with various well known groups of avant-garde poets. The author of this sentence was keen to delineate poetry from history while simultaneously underscoring that the poetry in this collection contained (in its mix) history, as well as narrative, all written in the form
of poetry. Undoubtedly this is true, but this signaling of, or bowing to, history’s methods could be said to be unnecessary when the long-accepted ‘poetic license’ generally absolves the poet from specific truth requirements. The nature of the book of poetry in its social context anticipates that readers are not expecting or demanding truth when they read. Akhenaten and Stella could have been written as characters devised from pure fictions and still have encompassed the same characteristics. Is there a need to enforce academic research in the poetry, unless the poets hope to draw something, some power perhaps, from the resonances offered by the histories seeping into their work?

One possible reason for these calls to history is as an aid to authenticity. But, both poets must be aware that, while silence deals its own blows in obscuring these historical characters, by filling these silences with autobiographical voices the poets execute an ambiguous rescue. Stopping silences with imaginative attempts to understand these characters does not lift silence but merely overlays it with another voice. What is at question is whether Porter and Howe are destructive, reconstructive or, more probably, Herodotus-like; mystified as two figures, both historians and liars, both recorders-of-fact and poets with creative licence. Like him, they are hinges between the two discourses of history and poetry. Yet, by virtue of rewriting what has been lost, what these poets claim for their writing is foremost rescue; what Howe means when she says: “History is a record of survivors, poetry shelters other voices” (Birth-mark 47).

**Authenticating Poetry**

Recognizing the inclusiveness of this Herodotean two-sidedness, and the altruism of rescue, does not entirely absolve Porter and Howe in regard to authenticity. Porter’s diligent searches among the traditional histories of Akhenaten’s remains (signposted by textual references) are questionably positioned in her poetry. But where authenticity makes a particularly striking, figurative appearance is in the copyright details of Howe’s appropriation of Stella’s poem. The poem is cast into section II of “The Liberties,” at a point where Howe is wielding another form of writing, a play script, entitled “God’s Spies.”

It is midnight in a cathedral, the hour at which both Swift and Stella were interred, and the opening scene is the only one in the play/poem inhabited by the Ghost of Jonathan Swift. In a reversal of occult norms, the ostensibly (in the logic of the play) live figure of Stella is invisible to
the Ghost, a re-creation of her position in being the more ghost-like presence in the historical remains. The directions for Stella are:

_Slowly she puts down her book, rises, and facing the audience, arms straight at her sides, clearly recites the following poem. The Ghost remains on his knees throughout, mouthing._ (189)

That she puts the book down to speak her own poem heightens the sense of her proprietariness - she must know her own poem by heart - a sense which is in the next moment harassed by the Ghost mouthing the words, seemingly appropriating and inauthenticating the poem. After the recitation, the Ghost walks through Stella to the "sounding-board" - this portentous object being designed to reflect the speaker's voice toward the audience or congregation. Passing through Stella undermines her existence, as does Swift's destination, the sounding board - being a place where his voice is increased in its power to extend outward, as his personal fame did, while Stella's drifted into shadows and silence. These metaphors depict and enact both Swift's relationship to Stella's poetry, and also their personal relationship. Stella (from Howe's depiction) seems to have been a kind of private sounding-board for Swift, a trial audience for his writings and thoughts, making his passing through her to reach it doubly indicative.

However, Howe's vision of Swift as malefactor, in-authenticating Stella's poem by his appropriative lip-syncing, is controversial given that the copyright information for Howe's book implicates Howe in a similar act. Stella's poem is listed here, again subsumed under Swift's name by being from the collection _The Poems of Jonathan Swift_ - a further act of posthumous mouthing. But what is most curious about this section of "The Liberties" is that in using this poem in her own text Howe is also appropriating it, mouthing the words with her writing, in a fashion almost indistinguishable from that which she narratively criticizes (more than punishes) in her text. Both Swift and Howe are ventriloquists for Stella's poem, placing the poem in their own books of poetry, but Howe, while critiquing Swift, leaves herself exempt from any reproofs.

Even more disturbing is that the copyright cites the source for Stella's poem but it contains an error, it gives the page numbers in Howe's text as 53-54 when the poem is actually on 190-191. Perhaps these numbers refer to the earlier edition of
Howe's poem. Regardless, what appears is a typographical parapraxis which plays into the hands of this reading by placing between Howe's face and Stella's the kind of two-sided mask that Porter shared with Akhenaten. Howe uses Stella's poem in her poetry and, according to the erroneous copyright information, Stella also writes some of Howe's poetry, including the following section which has irresistible bearing on this reading:

Each sequent separate musician
(harmony
a passion)
across a deep divided deprivation
(enchantment  captivity
a paradise-prison)
seems to hear a voice walking in the

garden

(Howe, Europe 54)

If we trade musician for poet then both Howe and Stella, across the "deep divided deprivation" of history/time, seem to hear each other's voices, their poetry encountering the other's between the covers of one book. The "garden" entails the kind of contradictory 'natural,' yet 'cultivated' that has been omnipresent in Howe's poetics, especially in her approach to this organic melding of poetic/historical writing. Here, the boundaries made by authenticity are obscured by the play of poetic texts.

To return to a more intentional engagement with authenticity, the kinds of remains that make up the stories of Stella and Akhenaten can only work with structures of inference. These poems rely on gaps which must be crossed over with bridges of assumption that are necessarily deemed inauthentic by being guesswork. Howe writes the telling lines:

a LEAP

creates the pursuer
stained mantle

 crimson, blue, or green
SHE DIED OF SHAME
This is certain -

---

5 The two were never as separate in their original meaning. Orpheus, for example, mythologically the first poet, was known by both titles as his poetry was accompanied by playing the lyre.
That is mist -
I cannot hold -

(168)

The 'Leap' across the silent spaces in the history creates a 'pursuer' out of anyone who would know a truth. This guesswork (or leaps of faith) constitutes a deliberate move away from the territory of authenticity despite the fact that Howe's self-confessed naivety in believing that 'truth will out' from the archives makes her just such a pursuer in her guise of library cormorant. "This" and "That" in Stella's story can be either "certain" and/or "mist," or these lines can be read as suggesting 'it is certain that these leaps are only mist.' Mists of which Howe says "I cannot hold."

If the leap is a poetic step into a foreign consciousness that has been yielded up by historical fragments, then the poetic, or verbal, equivalent to these leaps over and across is perhaps best encompassed by Howe's literary metaphor of the stammer. When both Porter and Howe interpose their voices between the facts and into the silences of historical stories, Howe hears a troubled voice:

*I hear the stutter as a sounding of uncertainty. What is silenced or not quite silenced...History has happened. The narrator is disobedient. A return is necessary, a way for women to go. Because we are in the stutter. We were expelled from the Garden of Mythology of the American Frontier. The drama's done. We are the wilderness. We have come onto the stage stammering.*

(Howe, Birth-mark 181)

The stutter here is also the parapraxis, the return of the repressed from the universal unconscious of history. Perhaps this is the guilty response to the questionable authenticity of writing what is lost. Howe's rendition of this literary stuttering also reappraises gender as being partially documented by the silence of uncertainty that punctuates such stutterings.

That both these poets have used incest in their poetic motifs suggests the kind of psychological disturbance that Howe alludes to with the stutter that asserts itself by disrupting language. Autobiographical details slotted into others' histories, when silences allow these insertions, also belong to this economy of disruption. Both poets perhaps chose what was both troubled and obscured by historical narratives to illuminate equally obscured parts of themselves: acting out historical
stammerings and silences as a means of opening the way into similar spaces in their own psyches. Porter maintains the place of the mask in this schema: "Taboo territory, particularly, whether it is sexual or ideological is much easier to explore in a mask" (Digby 18), suggesting that the kinds of inhibitions exposed by the stammerer can be expressed more safely when they are incognito. Lucas and McCredden point out that Porter's "short poems...are reminiscent of fragments" (149) like the engravings on the stelae or a series of hieroglyphs. This piecemeal construction of the Akhenaten narrative via small poems which are linked by the larger narrative devises its own sense, and sound, of the stammering, stuttering voice described by Howe. But if this stuttering represents any underlying anxieties about the appropriateness of inserting autobiography into silenced remains, then these concerns regarding the authenticity of either story are left untold by the poets.

Or perhaps they manifest themselves in other ways. Howe takes Stella's personal suffering of silence, when Swift discarded her papers, from within the larger context of the more general silence, or at least hushed tones, with which history speaks for, and of, women. These silences then inveigle their way into the psyches of the characters as Howe writes them, so that they meet up with Howe's own personal sense of this silence in language/history/self. Howe holds the remains so close-up that they are subject to a kind of distortion, without wanting to draw on the negative associations of that word. She takes fragments of the story that seem disconnected from any central narrative and weaves them as ominous intertexts with what is known and what is silenced.

The final quotation in section I exemplifies this device. Howe takes another bird metaphor; where she was the cormorant, she telescopes Stella with the image of the parrot:

_As for Patrick's bird, he brought him for his tameness, and now he is grown the wildest I ever saw. His wings have been quilled thrice, and are now up again: he will be able to fly after us to Ireland, if he be willing - Yes, Mrs. Stella..._

(157)

This segment is amalgamated into the poem after the biographically narrated introduction had already taken into account Stella's following Swift to Ireland, at his request. The journey then correlates Stella and the bird in this act of following.
In another inter-textual equivalence, the parrot’s clipped wings, “quilled thrice,” resonate with the writing quill, signaling the clipped wings of any posthumous literary fame that Swift could have afforded Stella, while also toppling into the lost writings that are central to Howe’s telling of Stella’s story. Three is also a significant number in Stella’s ‘Portrait’ given that “Three poems she transcribed into a manuscript volume have been attributed to her”(152).

The parrot extract serves another purpose for Howe; it acts as a postscript to a passage from Yeats’ poetic epitaph for Swift that commemorates his service to “human liberty”(156). These two statements undermine each other, the quilled and captive bird symbolically disabling the service to liberty that Yeats praised Swift for (but this notion is itself disconcerted by the choice inherent in “If he be willing” of Patrick’s bird). These subtle complexities resist and conspire everywhere in Howe’s text, especially as the swift is also a bird. Stella matches this parrot by choosing to follow Swift to Ireland without fear of consequence. Howe is attentive to this when she writes: “There were bound to be rumors damaging to them both. Apparently it seemed worth the risk”(150). The complexities of gender are also produced in this passage. Howe reiterates it was “a bold step, highly unusual for a woman then”(150). Stella is seen as the transgressor for being a woman following both a poet and probably poetry itself. These interwoven metaphors, Stella and the parrot, have shared undertones, and it is perhaps at this deeper level of the forgotten or powerless feminine that Howe seeks to redress the authenticity of history regardless of the troubled authenticity in her own poetics.

In Akhenaten, Porter also suggests that pets, like Howe’s rendering of the parrot, are indicative of the relationship between love and captivity. Akhenaten’s daughter wants all things as pets, while the poem “Bandaged Pets”(128) traces the sacrifices of damaged pets made to Osiris in an evocation of the subservience of the people in a theocracy. The shared power structures between god and state are no accident, and the relationship of pets is one dogged by the failure inherent in inequitable love. It is precisely because pets love willingly that it is possible for them to be sacrificed. Power infects love with disabling dynamics that are reflected in the imbalance of power between genders. Such powers are particularly adept at devising the boundaries which can only be crossed by transgressiveness.
Acts of Transgression

Strangely, for both Porter and Howe, as two poets embroiled in their own transgressions (in the form of autobiographical transferences with their protagonists) their protagonists each pay a hefty price for similar transgressions. The poets are perhaps wanting to play self-reflexively with these possibilities to discover their own connection with the outcomes.

In the cases of Stella and Akhenaten the outcome of their transgression is silence, the silence that falls when nobody wants to remember such outlandish acts. Gender is integral to this pattern of events. In Akhenaten’s case this retribution is for nonconformity to his role as King. Aldred says:

...ancient Egyptians had deliberately effaced most of Akhenaten’s memorials, expunged all mention of him from their official records, and done their best to blot out of their consciousness the recollection of a pharaoh who had apparently not conformed to the centuries-old tradition of repeating the primal pattern of kingship which had come down from the gods.

(113)

To defy a divinely given patriarchy is a large-scale transgression. But, perhaps the most significant manifestation (for art) of this nonconformity was in the pharaoh’s artistically represented anatomical cross-dressing, “this pregnant man”(64), which is echoed by more conventional transvestitism in Stella. Howe, in the center of an otherwise entirely white page places this one sentence for Stella:

She must be traced through many dark paths as a boy

(162)

We can only trace her as a boy, the combination of gender and youth signifying the freedoms of play and irresponsibility that could not be hers for long.

Howe’s next page begins with a warning about any assumptions that can be made about this person. If the boy to be traced is Stella (as heralded by the poem’s introduction) then Stella’s light flickers in the rigging

86
flags charts maps
to be read by guesswork through obliteration

(163)

The flickering of Stella’s remains (visual stammerings) begins a journey by sea. This metaphor reverberates with Stella being the star which guides the seaman, as well as the other guides Howe lists between elongated silences/spaces, the: “flags charts maps.” What we see when we peer through the obliterations of history, looking through Howe’s eyes is Stella’s transgression:

and she

had a man’s dress mad e

though her feet ble d

skimming the surf ace

deep dead waves wher e

when I wende and wake

how far I writ I can not see
days trifled away

(164)

Stella is no longer a boy. Her gender disguise moves into a man’s dress, “dress” crossing between the male attire it refers to in this context, and its other specifically female form. In a later page of this sea journey, Howe’s specific consideration of gender persists when we learn that the protagonist “rowed as never a woman rowed”(168), a line which repeats itself to alliterate the repetitions of the oar

87
strokes as well as the relevance of the lines. This rowing is through the liquid which is "the whole history of her story" (168).

The spilling of the 'e' from "made" onto the next line (in the section quoted above) introduces the voice of social constraints around madness. Blau DuPlessis reads this as Howe speaking

*of her own fear of being an artist based on her apprehension that madness and breakdown were the retributive punishment for ambition. Tremendous psychic struggles are revealed in Howe's linkages of 'the bond between mad and made.'*

(Blau DuPlessis 134)

At this point the poem enacts precisely this connection for Stella. The spillage of the 'd' from the next line is more mutable in purpose than social constraint. "ble" is a recognizable word ending, and as such it lodges itself with "feet" to produce a word which recalls feeble. These word breakages are also further enactments of Howe’s ‘stutter,’ allowing a silence to speak from within the words themselves. If these two lines are read out-loud and the dropped final letters pronounced on their own, a number of new meanings surface. Bled will sound like the present tense, bleed, the ‘e,’ left open, stretches the sound until it is stopped by the hard ‘d’ on the next line. Howe links past and present with this aurally subtle device.

The bleeding feet which emerge from the sea also imply a connection to "The Little Mermaid" as another who paid the price for her trespass with the pain of knives in her feet with each step she took on the foreign element of land. Marina Warner collates this story with the folk-tale version of *King Lear*, entitled "Love Like Salt," because both encode female silences as ways to redeem others (Warner 387-97). This link heralds the entrance of Cordelia (from *King Lear*), an equivalence that Howe makes much of. Porter and Howe’s shared tracing of transgressions, and the silence that this leads to, have a strange concurrence with Hans Christian Andersen’s mermaid. She bargained with the sea-witch for legs to walk on the foreign element, land, but the price was cutting out her tongue, leaving her silent.

As Howe’s depiction of this sea journey continues (and border crossings necessitate such journeys) an 'T' infiltrates its course. It is an 'T' that could belong either to Stella, Howe or some other narratorial voice; precisely 'who' is
deliberately blurred. This blurring is readable in the final passage of the above reproduced page which could read as ‘not being able to see how far she writ.’ This last word devises a new/old past tense for write, as well as incorporating the legal sense of a written command directing a person or people to act or refrain from acting in a specified way (OED). Writing and control rub shoulders in this one revised word. The grammar free poem allows “can not” to refer to this final line, indicating that Howe/Stella can not see (or agree) that the days were “trifled away.” If the line stands alone it could equally affirm that days were trifled away. All of this conjecture is more “mist” and neither Howe, nor her readers, are able to hold it with any sense of stability.

The sea and sand-like slippages that Howe utilizes in language interplay with the grains of sand that let Akhenaten’s boundaries fall away beneath his (and our) feet. Porter’s Akhenaten undergoes his own version of the kind of transvestitism that Howe’s Stella indulged in when she was disguised as boy and man. Akhenaten’s feminized self-portrait constitutes his artistic innovation, but all that he achieved was debased by the Egyptians at the end of his reign. His transgression, and Stella’s, both resolve themselves into silence after their deaths. That both poet-protagonists transgressed by virtue of their art is also central to Porter and Howe who are themselves undertaking similar poetic innovations and transgressions in their poetry. In Stella’s case, to write poetry as a woman suggested a pretension to intelligence considered implausible, if not unseemly, in her lifetime. Writing from behind the masks of these characters, Porter and Howe are able to experiment with miscreant behaviour on two levels; themselves crossing into the psyches of these historical others, and the trespasses made by the characters they have chosen.

The necessary consequence of such infringements returns this discussion to the problem of authenticity. Acts of transgression by definition are necessarily not authentic, or not subordinate to the logic of authenticity, because they involve a violation, a disobedience antithetical to the genuine, valid or original that defines what is authentic. On the other hand, perhaps these poets seek a new mode of authenticity by their transgressions, one that parallels their personal, rather than empirical, truths as provisional to breaking silences. However, these violations and
the outcomes they manifest, are always textually punished by their poet/authors. Akhenaten begins to blame himself for the fall of his Kingdom, mentally laying out his sins: “My dead daughter / my debauched little brother”(122). Some poems later he is more lucid: “My eyes hurt as I write / It’s my own fault”(132). One of his responses to this personal anguish is directed at his wife, and is alarmingly Swift-like “I chipped out Nefertiti’s face / from her stela”(133). In accordance with this, the final obliteration for Stella is: “Nothing has been saved,” while on his death Ahkenaten knows:

the workmen of the new king
have arrived with chisels
and hammers
they have orders
to cut down my city
and cut out my name

(167)

But such retributions are reserved for the historical characters while both Porter and Howe manage to evade the silences they are examining in these transgressive poems. This is the final poem of Porter’s book, her next will be fiction. While delineation between Howe’s history and fiction is less defined, she clearly moves into a new section of her poem, and she calls this individuated ‘book’ - “book of Cordelia.” This move redirects the poetry away from the consequences of testing authenticity and opens new modes for rethinking these silences from within specifically fictionalized (rather than historicized) economies of power.
"Returned in a Fictional Direction"

events now led to a region
returned in a fictional direction
I asked where that road to the left lay
and they named the place

(Howe, Europe 169)

This inquiry is now both turned and returned in a fictional, rather than historic, direction. But, reaching the entry point into fiction also involves a return to the concerns these poets pursued in their historical re-renderings of silence. Whether these are consciously self-reflexive poetics, replying to the poets’ own earlier or preceding work, or whether they involve some critical projection, even some scape-goating, remains to be seen (if not heard, amid all this silence).

From her ending with the gaps left after removing Akhenaten’s name, the front cover of Porter’s next book, The Monkey’s Mask, shows a young woman’s face in profile, her eye obscured (masked) by a torn piece of paper on which a fragment of Porter’s poetry is written. The plot’s sacrifice of a young woman, a budding poet, scatters the poetry of clues for solving the case. As in Akhenaten, Porter (through the main character Jill) acts as an interpreter of fragments, assembling the story across silences. Yet the significant difference here is that Porter has devised this scenario, whereas in Akhenaten history, in some sense, dictated it. Porter revisits her processes, miming herself, miming the historian. The reader must also join both Porter and her protagonist and collate fragments to solve the murder, participating in Porter’s style of fossicking to break the silence of the mystery.
The plot centers on the silenced poetic voice of Mickey, whose name implies mimicry on the side of parody. Porter intimates that she is taking-the-mickey out of someone or something, just as the historical construction of Akhenaten involved a kind of parody of history writing that was perhaps taking-the-mickey out of historians. In The Monkey’s Mask, this style of cultural parody persists but it is directed not at the academic establishment of history, but of literary criticism. Porter is also caustic about the poetry scene in contemporary Australia and about the legal system. Amid these larger satires, Porter’s poem makes numerous acerbic remarks about religion, new-age thinking, vegetarianism and various other tenets of cosmopolitan Sydney in the 1990’s. The protagonist, private investigator (ex-cop), lesbian, Jill, is the main vehicle for this sarcasm, although she does not escape textual criticism via stereotype. Poetry is also central, and what comes to the fore in the narrative’s commentary on poetry is the place of the value judgment. The text is, with a few small exceptions, highly critical of Mickey’s “Mickey-Mouse” poetry.

The transition from history to fiction is made somewhat prosaically in Porter’s text by a disclaimer in the book’s copyright details which reads:

>This book is a work of fiction. The characters, incidents, dialogue and plot are the products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons or events is purely coincidental.

This statement is in direct opposition to the kind of historical acknowledgments that preceded Akhenaten. The Monkey’s Mask is a sexy verse thriller that both exists in and undermines poetry. Here are further transgressions: poetry infiltrates crime-fiction (and vice-versa) and within the hybrid verse-novel Porter casts the hard, anti-intellectual ex-cop as a reader for poetry, playing with transgressions across both literary genres and cultural stereotypes. Howe takes a like transgressive prototype when she dares to mime, perhaps to challenge, Shakespeare by re-scripting lines for Cordelia outside of his intentions. What persists in these fictions from the historical renderings of Akhenaten and Stella are the incantations of silence as central voices in these texts.
Like Porter's choice of Mickey, the name of Howe's new book (within her poem) is portentous: "WHITE FOOLSCAP/book of Cordelia." Cordelia's offer of the Shakespearean intertext also allows Howe to cross the border of another writer's poetics. Howe's poem which becomes a playscript, and Porter's verse-novel, both establish a connection with Shakespeare by signaling an era in writing when both narrative and poetry were the brickwork of plays, and when the history play was written in verse. That is, a time when these stylistically divided genres (in current mainstream literature) were entwined ventures. Where Shakespeare is the poet/playwright/historian writing history plays (among others) in verse, similar collisions designated Swift's character from the Stella part of Howe's poem. Swift is another poet enlisted by history, responsible, as he was, for the papers and archive of Sir William Temple (with whom both he and Stella had lived). Shakespeare and Swift are then both poets with double lives, engaged in historical enterprises and other modes of writing, an authorial position they share with both Howe and Porter.

Howe's text (post)modernizes the Shakespearean notion of a verse playscript in her section II, "God's spies." This title is, like Cordelia's name, taken from King Lear (Act V, Sc.III.17):

Lear. No, no, no, no! Come, let's away to prison;  
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage;  
When thou doest ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,  
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,  
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh  
At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues  
Talk of court news; and we'll talk with them too,  
Who loses and who wins; who's in, who's out:  
And take upon's the mystery of things,  
As if we were God's spies: and we'll wear out,  
In a wall'd prison, packs and sets of great ones  
That ebb and flow by the moon.

The joyous prison Lear imagines is a place as surreal as that which Howe constructs for Stella and Cordelia to traverse in a journey through the woods. The caged bird motif reappears in this speech, binding Stella and Cordelia in shared confinement and the aforementioned logic of pets. There are complex plays of meanings across numerous texts in this second half of "The Liberties." This intricacy includes the
Gaelic legend of Lir, an ocean god who, like Lear, suffers great transformations in his children when their step-mother turns them into swans. It is the labyrinthine complexity of these intertwining stories that produces the fathoms of meaning in Howe's poem. She relies on the repetition of such themes as female relationships to men in power, the images of the sea, birds, journeys, transgressions and silences; each repetition resonating with another story that is yet the same story. Her poems arrange a meeting place for the characters who belong to these abutting realms of her imagination.

The fictions of both Cordelia and Mickey run seamlessly into, and elaborate on, their historical precursors, Stella and Akhenaten, respectively. For Porter this concurrence includes stylistic devices, continuing her strategy of the 'verse-novel' which had its beginnings in Akhenaten. In the acknowledgments for The Monkey's Mask she is specific about the reinforced use of narrative in this latter book, thanking the "modest novelists, who helped me shape and edit the manuscript and made me appreciate the difficulties of narrative" (vi). Howe also models her poetics on non-poetic forms, but her play-shaped poem is virtually unperformable, at least not without taking a great deal of license with the stage directions. These seem more dedicated to the poetics of the words that construct them, while their placement on the page suggests that they are a device designed to allow the poetry a scope that is outside the dialogued voices of the characters. They characterize imaginative space, making poetry of the scene, setting and character movements, more than simply offering actual physical directions. The play-form, and the play with Shakespeare's fictional character, both serve as signifiers to the reader that Howe's poem has now moved into a fictionalized 'staging' of events in Stella's existence (in concordance with Cordelia). Both characters now inhabit a clearly unreal (non-historic) place of coexistence.

Shakespearean dialogue is also Howe's means for reassessing silence. She begins with the famous quotation from King Lear in which the King asks his daughter to speak of her love for him, to which she replies, in a mime of what we have heard from Stella, "Nothing, my Lord" (170). It is of course this "nothing."

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7 This intertext must be acknowledged to Lynn Keller. It comes from her deft reading of Howe's poetry in Forms of Expansion - Recent Long Poems by Women.
what Cordelia refuses to say, which brings about Lear’s downfall. There are two silences in this equation. Cordelia speaks the word “nothing” in what could be read as an eloquent reply to her father’s egotistical question. Hers is a languaged silence. It is not that she doesn’t say anything, she pronounces “nothing.” Stella’s silence is, on the other hand, more like the pregnant pause between words. She marks the point where the words fail to hold. Nonetheless, these two silences find a fruitful union, especially given that both women belong to narrative margins. Cordelia is subject to her father whose name presides over Shakespeare’s play from its outset. Similarly, Swift found posthumous fame, while Stella is only remembered for her relationship with the celebrated poet. Howe places these women at the center of her new text. But, before they meet under the auspices of the playscript, God’s Spies, Cordelia is treated to a personal reading, just as Stella was. The first page of Howe’s “Book of Cordelia” sees the re-emergence of the “bleeding foot” motif of The Little Mermaid. Silence tolls on this page cleverly truncated in the cliché, “S(golden)”(171). S is of course also for Stella, Swift, and to some degree for Susan (Howe).

In a fascinating reverberation between Porter and Howe, this page for Cordelia also plays directly into Porter’s book. It contains the lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{shoe fits monkey-face oh hum} \\
\text{It grows dark The shoe fits She stays a long something}
\end{align*}
\]

(171)

These lines on the first page of Cordelia’s book bear an uncanny resemblance to the final page of The Monkey’s Mask. The closing lines read:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{she’s growing dark} \\
\text{she’s wearing a monkey’s mask}
\end{align*}
\]

(256)

Whether Porter knew of Howe’s work or not, there seems to be some integral poetic genealogy between these poems and poets who share so many themes. Howe’s line: “She stays a long something,” is almost anagrammatical, and certainly assonant, of “she longs to say something.” This staying/saying is what Howe and Porter make possible for these three women, Mickey, Stella and Cordelia. Youth is
another indivisible link between them - they are all written as young women, with the connotations of innocence this age and gender represent. It is dressed as boys and in their early teens that Stella and Cordelia are characterized in Howe’s play script, while Mickey is, in the words of the newspaper story covering her death “petite, pretty and only nineteen”(52).

Porter’s Mickey is like both Stella and Cordelia in that she says ‘nothing,’ in the text, being first missing and later dead, and so she must be constructed through fragments, the descriptions of others, and most significantly through her poetry. Her poem to her killer(s) outlines her silence in life that is emboldened by her silence in death:

I can’t talk to you, my beautiful lover
I can’t talk to you, my beautiful man
I can’t talk to you, I can’t talk to you
you listen with your cock in my mouth
you listen with your knee in my throat
you listen with your beard voice
scratching me out
you tell me I’ve got nothing to say
I’m just a cunt
your cock has all the words
you pump them into me
till I can’t stand up
till I’m nothing
till I’m just dripping you
everywhere, everywhere
beautiful lover, beautiful man, let my poem do my talking
let it stand up and whisper in your heart
I love you I love you I’ll love you till you die
even if your angry cock kills me.

(110)

Mickey’s poetry is ridiculed in the narrative: “her poetry was awful/ but she was a nice kid”(191). Nonetheless the poems hold the clues to Mickey’s murder, giving her work a posthumous value as evidence. This secondary function of the poetry requires that Jill learn to play literary critic without being evaluative: “I’ll have to go on your poems/and guess work”(208). The poems also delineate aspects of Mickey’s relationship with her killer as demoralizing, victimizing and, both in life and death, silencing. Mickey’s poem deplores: “I can’t talk to you,” while Jill
speculates about her silence after the violent sex-play which led to Mickey’s death: “you weren’t there/ to say I forgive you”(147). Silences are manifold in the relationship between Mickey and her lover/killer, and in some senses her poetry is the only antidote for these silences; she pleads: “let my poem do my talking.” In this, Mickey follows in the muted footsteps of Ahkenaten and Stella. Her ultimate silence in death is only broken by scant remains, many of which have been deliberately annihilated. Amongst these remains Porter finds evidence of sexual transgressions which echo what she uncovered in the silences manifest in Akhenaten’s fragmented history.

**Sex & Transference**

What Porter is specifically not-silent about, what she is in fact loudly outspoken about, is the sexuality of all the characters in *The Monkey’s Mask*. Porter deliberately alights on the individual sexuality of each of her characters as part of her narrative focus. From the power-sex of the femme fatale Diana and her open relationship with her husband, to the “moderately married”(176) but flirtatious cop Steve, through the single lesbians Jill and Lou, including a comprehensive tracing of the extra-marital relations Mickey was having with numerous characters, right down to the “missionary position”(246) middle-class, Sydney’s North Shore marriage of Mickey’s parents - no relationship is free from Porter’s wry tongue, nor allowed any privacy from the readers’ all-seeing eyes.

The sexual intimacies that saturate the poem harbour their own set of specific silences. These silences then compound in the text to obscure the truth. The wives’ club shares the common ground of defensive silences and offensive lying to protect their husbands:

**Wives and root rats**

Barbara and Diana
have something in common
besides hating eachother

they’re loyal wives

97
Mrs Bill McDonald
ran in the same maze

you love the bastard
you cover his shit.

(227)

This ‘shit-covering’ involves either keeping quiet or acts of drowning-out.

Extra-marital sexuality yields its own brand of silence. Jill’s desire for
Diana involves sensory deprivation that goes beyond love-blindness:

her furrowed brow
over Mickey’s poems

makes me lick my lips

and I can’t hear a word
she’s saying.

(120)

It is only later that Jill concedes she has been “ignoring the evidence”(199) that she
could have gleaned from Diana. Even the unsullied lesbian relationship Jill had
with her ex was silenced by its secret nature, these two were “snuggly buggly in
our cuddly secret”(44).

Where Porter foregrounds the connection between sex and silence most
explicitly is in her investigation of the content of Mickey’s poems, and reactions to
these. The reason that these poems become infamous in, and decided by, the text is
essentially because of their sexually explicit nature. Tony’s verdict is:

‘filled books with her fucking poems’
he laughs
‘fucking poems, all right

she didn’t give a shit
about Truth and Beauty
‘just fucking’

(195)

Porter’s double play is in the phrase “all right.” Had she only wanted it to mean
‘indeed’ she could have spelt it in its alternative form ‘alright.’ Her decision, or in
fact division, allows for the sense that these “fucking poems” are perhaps all right,
as in true and accurate. But this possibility is not appreciated by characters in the book. Mickey’s mother says, “We didn’t bring her up/ to use words like that”(137). Diana thinks the poems are “crap”(137) - although she has her own reasons for her appraisal. Poet Bill McDonald’s dislike proves as physically destructive of poetic remains as the Egyptians and Swift were. He says he tore up Mickey’s poems because “They were obscene”(92). Later, when he cracks under pressure from Jill, he confesses that Mickey “made me write filth”(172). Bill’s wife continues the decimation of Mickey’s work after Bill’s death by emptying the folder that contained the incriminating poems that Mickey ghosted through Bill.

Beyond her dirty poetry, it is Mickey’s extroverted sexuality that condemns her. As Jill points out: “reckless careless sex killed Mickey”(245). Silencing and destroying both Mickey’s personage and her poetry is the narrative punishment exacted upon her - a strange stance for Porter, who has devised this punishment, given her interest in exposing sexual alternatives in her own poetry. Foucault’s history of such matters is precise about the relevance of this kind of silencing:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, nonexistence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places [herself/himself] to a certain extent outside the reach of power; [she/he] upsets established law; [she/he] somehow anticipates the coming freedom.

(Foucault 6)

The interplay Foucault reads between sex, language and power is central to a number of Porter’s concerns. The sexiest figure she has to offer (still alive) is “the lovely Dr” Diana, and Diana is certainly implicated in the destruction of Mickey’s writing. This is an interesting reversal of Porter’s sex/punishment economy because Diana gets away with it in the end while Mickey most certainly does not.

Diana uses her own body, sexually, to cover-up another physical body, Mickey’s corpse, while this corpse maintains its own existence through the other body, the corpus or body of work. The poetry Mickey left behind is another version of the page in the coffin which defies decomposition. Diana and a large cast of characters/suspects all share the fact of being sexually involved with Mickey, in a significant connection, they also all share in the destruction of Mickey’s writings.
Torn between Diana, Nick, Bill and Tony, Mickey is a latter day Orpheus becoming textually dismembered. The narrative deliberately poises sex on the brink of silence; Mickey’s sexual history is what killed both her, and her poetry.

Mickey’s brutal fate at the hands of capitalized Literary Theory (embodied by one killer/accomplice -- Diana) and Law (embodied by the other killer -- Nick), also demonstrates that it is love which makes her vulnerable. Mickey’s suffering is (for the most part), like both Stella’s and Cordelia’s, at the hands of a man whom she adores. Porter retells the age-old connection between sex, death and poetry in contemporary Australia. She is explicit about this in “Sex and Poetry”:

I never knew poetry
was about
opening your legs
one minute

opening your grave
the next

(139)

Jill is like Mickey in involving herself sexually with numerous characters in the novel and this promiscuity is part of her attempt to infiltrate a sordid poetry world. She is seduced by the femme fatale cum academic Diana; propositioned by Diana’s pretty-boy leftie-lawyer husband, whose genitalia she handles in a sexually violent struggle; she toys with the passions of her poet friend Lou with a fleeting kiss; flirts with her ex-colleague, cop Steve; in self defense against one of Mickey’s poet lovers she strikes a direct hit in his groin; and perhaps most perversely, she fantasizes about Mickey’s decaying corpse in a dream when “her breasts/ against my resisting arm/ arc sweet/ I stop struggling”(145).

Where Mickey’s exploits led to her silence, Jill’s manifold sexual desires obscure her vision of the truth; Diana seduces her in order to feed her false information. Jill’s and Mickey’s shared attraction to the sexual also extends into an attraction between them. This transference reappeals some of the poetic deliberations Porter made in Akhenaten. The Monkey’s Mask collides Mickey and Jill in the same two-sided mask that produced Ahkentaten/Porter. This is figured ‘through a glass, darkly’ with a contemporary feel:

in the dark rear view
mirror

my face looks too young

in the dark rear view
mirror

is it Mickey?

(155)

Here, Porter is explicit about the transference between Jill and Mickey. But Porter herself is not left out of this equation. It is simply that her partner is a little more obtuse. The economy of appropriation, and the refiguring of evidence by the nature of selectivity, that Porter practiced in Akhenaten, is mirrored by Diana. The Monkey’s Mask traces Jill’s searches for truth in Mickey’s poetry, while the villainous Diana distorts the contents of the poems to keep Jill on the wrong track. In line with this hegemony of silence, Diana serves her own ideological purpose in a more sinister reflection of the kind of appropriating Porter committed with the remains of the Akhenaten story. Both Porter and Diana were selective with the available information, and both introduced their personal agenda into the collation of these remains. Where the difference seems to lie between these women is that Diana aims to maintain the silence of the mystery, while Porter wanted to break the silence surrounding Akhenaten — unless we interpret her poetics as drownings-out which are equivalent to silences.

The transference between Mickey and Jill hinges partly on their shared seducers, but Mickey dies while Jill survives, and Jill’s survival depends on the resurrection, the rereading, or the un-silencing of Mickey’s poems. The relationship between them is mirrored by the shared poetic space inhabited by Cordelia and Stella in their sisterhood of silence when they meet in the imagined time and space of Howe’s poem. These transferences between characters extend further to include the poets authoring these books. Porter and Howe both infiltrate the fictional realms they devise as absolutely as they did the historical, but with radically new gestures - they insert portrayals of their own poetry-writing processes into their texts. When Porter discusses her own writing strategies, she says:

101
Normally I have earphones on when going to work, or down in my study, or wherever, and there will be a particular song - it might be rock and roll, or classical - that just starts a piercing emotional feeling in me which expresses itself in images and word.  

(Digby 14)

Her procedure infiltrates The Monkey’s Mask through Jill who asks:

Is this how poems start?

when every riff on the radio  
hooks in your throat.

(144)

Neither is this the only moment in the text when Porter examines the place of writing poetry. Jill feels keenly her displacement in the poetry world that she is forced to enter. She wonders: “How do you talk to poets?” (90), but some pages later she is contemplating a poem of her own:

I'll write you a poem, bitch

got me a pen  
got me some paper

(130)

These are also the same three lines that the poem ends on, notably without this threatened poem being written. The notion of poetry becomes a self-reflexive device in the text which Porter describes as:

a bit of a satire on writing poetry because she [Jill] talks all the time about how she doesn’t like poetry...And the joke is that it is all written in poetry - all her thoughts, desires, feelings...she often feels like writing poetry herself and stamps it down.  

(Digby 16)

This trail of projection leads back to the poet herself. Jill sees herself in Mickey: “I’m talking to your photo/I’m talking to myself” (131) and Porter wears Jill as her mask “...the touchstone for all my characters, whether it is Ahkenaten or Jill or Diana or the Twins or Carmen, is myself” (Digby 96).

This self-reflexivity that produces poems imbued with the poet’s own discourse on poetry, is likewise tangible in Howe’s poem. In the “Book of Cordelia” she writes the lines:

Cordelia dies
reclasp her hands into obscurity

(henceforth and fro)

I will go to my desk

I will sit quietly

(175)

These final two lines run in tandem with Howe's own account of her poetic process:

I sit quietly at my desk and let various things - memories, fragments, bits, pieces, scraps, sounds - let them all work into something.

(Birth-mark 164)

Howe is both in and of the poem here. She composes herself to write when she sits quietly at her desk, composing the poetry, while the poem mimes this process with its contents. The transference Porter achieves through the sexual desires of her characters, Howe pursues through mirroring Stella and Cordelia, and through naming.

Howe maneuvers her name into the text, making it a mechanism for reading herself through these explorations. The composition of her name has already been referred to, but there are other instances of this interplay of self in the poem. In response to her poetic question to Lir, "has his children brought him to this pass?"(173) Howe replies with two questions, her name, and exclamations all bound up in her invented word "Whowe"(173).8 This word breaks up into its constituent parts as 'who, how, Howe' and aurally as 'whoa!', even 'wow!'. In a selection of words patterned beneath a letter $S$ (for Susan, Stella, or Swift) there is another instance of, in Howe's own words, "names creeping out everywhere/ names creeping out everywhere"(215), she writes:

( ) aye estersnowe enclosure

(205)

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8 This constructed word was chosen by Rachel Blau DuPlessis as the title to her useful essay on Howe in The Pink Guitar.
The empty set of brackets correlates with a line on the facing (previous) page, these two lines almost matching up across the center fold of the book. This earlier line reads

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{stirring} & \quad \text{inlaid} & \quad ( & \quad \text{enclosure} \\
& \quad \text{stellar} & \end{align*}
\]

(204)

Stella incarnated as a falling star, here falling out of the marginalization of brackets (that is possibly the enclosure of history), significantly has also fallen out of the text and now lies on a line where there are no other words. This is a circuitous, but necessary, route to take to the “estersnowe” which does not on first glance speak Howe’s name. However, this word-construction is missing, on a number of levels, the letter “H” in order to form names. ‘Ester’ with an ‘h’ added becomes the correct spelling of Esther, Stella’s preferred name; with an ‘H’ it becomes Hester, her baptismal name; while the central letter ‘n’ which visually speaks of a shrunken ‘h,’ if exchanged for ‘h’ will also spell ‘howe.’ This no-nonsense, nonsense-word disarrays the language to produce a signifier so densely ascribed with meaning that it seems to be a crucible for much of Howe’s poem. Alongside the many naming facets of this word, there are also common nouns embedded in its construction. The ‘snow’ has been a recurring poetic motif and a few lines above are the almost perfectly consonant words “easter snow.” This is chaotic poetry. Howe’s play with fragments simultaneously destabilizes while clarifying numerous available meanings to the poet and her reader, imploding them into one word. But nothing can be known with any certainty. Howe refuses reader passivity in her use of these strategies. The poet’s written self translates into the poem, the characters and the events, and is evidenced everywhere by these subtleties of transference.

**Political Violence**

Howe’s manipulations of language can be seen as her form of violence against its prescriptive structure. She breaks words apart and redesigns them in order to resist systems of control. Porter’s politics are less stylistic. Her poetic transgressions involve her critique of academia, the poetry scene, and lawyers. But
these alternative strategies make for a shared trespass - the political allowed to range into the field of poetry, and vice-versa. Porter is "making whoopee with the intelligentsia" (as her Dorothy Parker quote, epigraph to The Monkey's Mask suggests), politicizing the sexual game-playing which unbuttons the narrative to expose the intercourse between stereotypically separate lives - left wing/right wing, intellectual/anti-intellectual. Porter's other epigraph is from Aristophanes, "What do you want a poet for?/To save the city, of course."

Muriel Rukeyser has a poem which illuminates the politics of this equation:

In Our Time

In our period they say there is free speech
They say there is no penalty for poets
there is no penalty for writing poetry
They say this. This is the penalty.

(438)

Akhenaten and Stella tasted the silence penalty 'in their time,' but Porter and Howe, writing in the present, know that there is no penalty for them in the contemporary Western world. This lack of penalty seriously devalues poetry. The poets' challenge to the authenticity of these historical voices (by their poetic guesswork) went unpunished and both poets duplicate these retrievals in their fictional returns, offering themselves another approach to silence. The realm of fictional characters manufactures a safety, one in which both poets can resort to physical injury to underline the kind of violence that silence can exact on poets and poetry. For Porter this is very clearly set 'in our time,' while Howe experiences the danger in a more surreal space. As Rukeyser suggests, at other times, and in other places, poets were not exempt from physically violent forms of silencing, sending them underground. The upshot of the covert writing spawned by this state of affairs was an empowerment brought about by the fact that poetry was deemed important enough to draw the attention of the powerful.

Beyond Howe's textual violence, her images take equally destructive forms. She manipulates the violence of a single gun shot, staging (literally) Stella shooting herself in the heart. This strange moment in "God's Spies" seems founded on Howe's earlier description of an autobiographical moment recounted in Stella's
Portrait: “When she was twenty-four she shot and killed a prowler after her servants had fled the house in terror”(152). This is an additional gender transgression in which Howe renders Stella’s unwomanly strength and courage. When fictionalizing Stella in “God’s Spies,” Howe rewrites history to make Stella shoot herself in the chest in a dramatic climax that comes after reading her poem. In a visually impressive moment, the red of spilt blood on the white floor is the only colour on the stage. Howe perhaps suggests that Stella’s is a self-imposed retribution for trespassing into masculinity, the same logic with which she shot the prowler for trespassing on her property – that of guarding borders. This image also exemplifies Stella’s loss of faith in Swift, who passes right through her after the gunshot. The place of the bullet is prefigured in the play’s first scene when Stella reads from her book “faith resides under the left nipple”(183). The final directions for the play, long after the scene of the shooting has concluded, have Stella moving around the stage without trace of her injury. The last words are “Darkness. Silence. Gunshot. Silence.”(199). The resounding gunshot is, in the crucial final moments, the only sound to infiltrate the twice-invoked silence.

The role of the ominous ‘bang’ has further textual repercussion later in “The Liberties” when bullets become equated with the silences in these women’s stories:

But crucial words outside the book
those words are bullets

(178)

This idea that the language itself is violent recalls Howe’s devotion to Emily Dickinson who wrote:

She dealt her pretty words like Blades -
How glittering they Shone -
And every one unbared a Nerve
or wantoned with a Bone-

(479)

Howe’s bullet, lodged where faith should lie, tells of Stella’s faith in a pattern of history which forgot her writings, blunting her poetry with deliberate neglect. Cordelia was hanged, not shot, but as Lynn Keller says:

*Both figures also point to the bind experienced by women in patriarchy who feel deep love for men; essential to the power of both roles is the depth of love they suggest, and the cost of love they reveal.*

106
There is an underlying connection between Howe’s poetry and Porter’s in this: it is love, not politics, which silences violently, although the silences remain political. Cordelia says: “we will leave the stage as prisoners” (198). She and Stella are political prisoners in a patriarchy that has marginalized their voices, but Cordelia and King Lear are imprisoned ‘according to their bond’ - which is love.

It is likewise Mickey’s love for her killers that makes her vulnerable to him/them:  

he told me he loved me  
why are his big hot hands  
around my throat?  

(146)

Jill count through the victims of “love, love/ oh poisonous love” (218) concluding that love, not poetry, nicotine, religion or sex, is the poison at work around her. This discounting of the other forces driving human behaviour has been part of her deductive process for solving Mickey’s mystery, “I used to think poetry/ was Mickey’s poison” (218), a theory which she must also finally discount in favour of the dangerous love and violent sex that nearly killed her. But numerous facets of this mystery remain beyond Porter’s poetic compass.

Theoretical Mysteries

Howe lifts a phrase from the literary theory of Pierre Macherey that is telling of both Porter and Howe’s poetics: all “coiled around an absent center which [...they] can neither conceal nor reveal” (Non-conformist’s 50). Silence is the embodiment of such mysterious absences, in the form of Porter’s classic murder mystery or Howe’s mysterious historical circumstances. The question both poets seem to pose is whether their poems, or poetry itself, can, in Macherean or Derridean terms, unveil anything. Porter specifically examines this theoretical connection in a poem called “Mystery”:

Who killed Mickey?  
Who fiddled with Bill’s car?
I don't have clues.

No evidence
just a smell
of sex and violence

and pages of Mickey's words.

Diana tells me
words are erotic
yet really mean bugger all.

'you're my beautiful secret'

Mickey was meaning
someone.

It's not all
a mystery to me.

Mystery is defined by its enigmatic status beyond human certainties. This is why the mystery story defeats itself in its closure: there is no longer a mystery once the case is solved. Porter's solving of a mystery that has been perpetrated (in part) and largely concealed by academic literary criticism plays into the politics of the poet versus the academy. Macherey says elsewhere that, for the critic:

The literal narrative is irrelevant because it serves only to hide a secret and can be cast aside once this secret is revealed. The detective story offers the best example of this disappearance of narrative. It is constructed entirely around the possibility of the prophetic reading which completes the story at the moment of its abolition. We find in such stories, so manifestly concerned with the discovery of truth, the temptation of a short cut which can lead directly to the solution of the mystery, the temptation to read the last page first.

Porter somewhat subverts this economy by solving the crime only partially, leaving the perpetrators and their actions impervious to a truth-serving conclusion. Jill's lies to Mickey's parents, her employers in her role as private investigator of this crime, subvert both knowing and solving. The reader is equally deceived. The cop Steve had the information from the coroner's report which revealed the killer was a woman, but this is forgotten by Jill at the novel's close. Porter's text evaporates the
exact nature of the acts committed, most particularly the part played by Diana in Mickey's murder. It only gives evidence of Diana's attacks on Mickey's writing - her burning of the diary, and her misreading of the poetry which the poet Lou must point out to Jill. Diana's role-playing of the strangulation orgasm with Jill suggests her physical involvement in Mickey's murder, but Jill exacts retribution not from Diana, but from Nick, with a reenactment-like strangulation of his penis.

Exactly who and how the evil two killed Mickey is never laid before the reader with any kind of clarity. But there is the sense of Jill's self-satisfaction at the close of the narrative. With Mickey's parents she feels "tonight has comfortably/cremated Mickey"(249). To herself she says "Forget the bitch / case solved"(256), skirting the notion of closure in the standard phrase 'case closed.'

The final poem has Jill mentally punishing Nick, wishing him turned to stone with her Medusa aspect, while for Diana she has the pause of three dots before she decides to turn her "... / loose"(256). Jill's final reading of Diana is thus not critically sound, even within the interpretative games of the narrative. There is no evidence to demonstrate Diana's innocence. Porter has offered us split-second glimpses of the world she has entered. In this blinking text the readers' eyes have been closed at numerous crucial moments. Crucial, that is, if the truth must out. But here, perhaps, the impermeable silence of what has not been witnessed may well be part of the point.

Howe also "coils around" this same 'absent center' - silence. In her poetry this absence extends the theoretical arc to encompass Julia Kristeva's abject. Howe nods to the philosopher with her own version of one of Kristeva's texts. Howe's page begins with

"The real plot was invisible/ everything possible"

and ends with

HALUCINATION OF THE MIRROR.

(169)
When Kristeva delineates her theory of the abject in "Powers of Horror," her discussion of the phobic object strikes many pertinent chords with Howe’s poetical stance at the edges of such absences both here and elsewhere:

*The phobic object is precisely avoidance of choice, it tries as long as possible to maintain the subject far from a decision; this is not done through a superego blocking of symbolization or through asymbolia, but to the contrary through a condensation of intense symbolic activities which results in the heterogeneous agglomeration we call phobic hallucination.*

**HALUCINATION OF NOTHING**

It is, I said it earlier, a metaphor. And yet more than that. For to the activity of condensation and displacement that oversees its formation, there is added a drive dimension (heralded by fear) that has an anaphoric, indexing value, pointing to something else, to some non-thing, to something unknowable. The phobic object is in that sense the hallucination of nothing: a metaphor that is the anaphora of nothing.⁹

(*Powers 42*)

More than the capitalized hallucinations, these texts share the Kristevan “avoidance of choice.” Howe’s “real plot was invisible/ everything possible”¹⁰(169) is playing precisely this game with Stella’s historical remains, which, in Kristevan terms serves to “maintain the subject far from a decision.” Moreover, the introduction of the textually pre-coded Cordelia belongs to Kristeva’s economy of symbolization. The hallucinatory play scenario Howe proposes is one in which these symbols are condensed further. This is graphically presented in FRIDAY of “God’s Spies” when Howe gives the direction that “the following conversation is carried on in an urgent whisper.” But far from conversation, the next 10 lines are all scripted as being spoken “TOGETHER.” This scene ends with the “Darkness. Silence.” which could be read as corroborating with Kristeva’s “non-thing...something unknowable” which is the silence both poets have been tracing historically and fictionally. The girls in the woods come to a realization that “Nothing is our own!”¹¹(197) scripting their own place in the abject. Cordelia goes on to answer her own question “How did we happen-” with “because we were written.” The girls thus reinvent themselves within the text as post-modern theorists would have them
do, making these poems at one level examinations of writing and its capacity to engage with theories about writing. For Kristeva these are feminine-centered logics, just as for Porter and Howe their questioning, in female voices, asks much of male dominated historical practice.

**Playing Games**

In one sense Porter and Howe have been toying with these critical approaches, playing them out in their poetry, watching the theory as they practice it in art. In this they seem to employ an almost carnivalesque subversion of philosophy. Howe’s hopscotch match between Stella and Cordelia involves stones that weigh heavily on the girls; carried on their eyes, heads, backs and palms, they portend the weight that these games have on the realities for women in patriarchal histories. After the game Cordelia takes off her blindfold and says “In history people are all dead./ The plot was this - the fantasy was this.”(187), suggesting the re-constructed past constructs its characters to feed the dominant ideology.

Porter is also tempted to see the machinations she invents for The Monkey’s Mask’s array of almost caricatured inhabitants as a game: “Mickey. Mickey./I chant like a game”(166). Jill’s taunting is crucial in making Bill crack and confess about his part in the Mickey affair. She must also spar wittyly with intellectuals, using anecdotes, her charm, and acerbic wit to maintain an upper hand. She commandeers her payment from Mickey’s parents by saying “nothing” but offering a racist insurance fraud joke by way of covering her tracks. These are subversive devices with which poets laugh at, and in, their textual contrivances. These games need luck, the kind of luck that haunts fame and posterity; the lucky break, the chance discovery of a box in an attic. Porter sees herself as following “luck’s slimy trail”(231) as it leads her to Mickey, and Howe knows that:

Once in awhile some tall tale crops up
great Fairly, little fairly, liar Liar
and lucky Luck

(178)
In many cases it isn’t “fairly” that tales fail to crop up about women, or that when they do they are subject to Liar Liar. But such falsehoods can, on occasions such as these, be subverted by the “lucky Luck” of archival finds.

Lucky guesses bring these fragments together into a narrative so as to solve crimes or mysteries and write histories. These poets write with the force of subreption, the obtaining of something by surprise or misrepresentation, by sneaking up on luck and invoking it in their strategies. In their legerdemain with histories and silences it seems that luck is held up the sleeve of truth. What can not be known (truthfully) is contained by the logic (or non-logic) of luck, who is always a lady. Her logic runs a different course than antimony, than fact and evidence, one that is best understood through a poetry which allows for the play of ungovernable forces. Porter and Howe have taken silences and tried to hear something else, using autobiography and guesswork, by playing medium to another voice, by inventing (or reinventing in Cordelia’s case) fictions to revisit these silences, and thinking through the politics - sexual and otherwise - of such encounters with power and silence. They may not have broken the silence of what culture has lost or loses, but they have broken through numerous divisive boundaries. They have written around a stage of silent actors, their poetic spotlights illuminating Akhenaten, Stella, Cordelia and Mickey - all dead voices, all victims of deliberate silences. Having lifted the corner of the curtain to peek at the Phantomime of such silences, they know that it lies close to poetry.
Set between chapters on Porter and Howe, and Mina Loy, Olive Hopegood is what Howe would call a "Hinge-Picture" (Frame Structures 31). Olive belongs to both the logic of historical excavations which yield up silenced voices (central to the poetry of Porter and Howe), and to the sociological, psychological and stylistic silences interplayed in Mina Loy's Feminist Modernism. In the preceding chapter, historical reconstructions were watchdogged and critically assessed for their challenges to authenticity in an exercise which now comes to a self-reflexive moment. At this point the watchdog must allow an identical transgression to enter its critical territory. Olive had a modicum of poems printed in the 1940's which were of an intensity that signaled a silence. Reading them, I felt sure there must have been more than the nominal works in journals and anthologies. The archive of the literary journal Meanjin, which had published a number of Olive's poems, held the traces of a Modernist manuscript and the clues to its existence. These prompted a large scale but ultimately unfruitful search. Sappho-like fragments survive, scattered across archives, but fame has been more elusive than it was for the Greek mistress of poetry.

Like Helen and Temple, Olive speaks through lived experience, acting-out autobiographically the play of silence. The fragments of her story are different from
the poetic constructs shaped by Porter's and Howe's revisions of silence, or the theoretically-wrought philosophies produced by Derrida. This chapter respects the distinction between the intellectual exercise of writing poetry/theory and the unselfconscious living of a life, by tracing this life with limited interference from the watchdog. The critical biography that follows intends to mine history for what has been silenced. 'Biography' suggests the plausibility of mapping a life, but no justification or disclaimer sidesteps the numerous problems inherent in such an activity. While writing I repeatedly mistyped Olive as OLive, demonstrating in a Freudian slip of the fingers my investment in this material. Significant portions of archival findings\(^1\) are reprinted below in an attempt to bypass the authorial position, which remains nonetheless dominant by virtue of acts of selection. In this I share Cixous's doubts about writing Promethea: “- Because I am not Promethea[/Olive], and I cannot bring myself to act as if I were, I am not a real liar; I cannot ascribe my words to her without feeling that this poisons and invents her”(128). At the close of this hinge picture there is a photograph of Olive (fig. 1) in what seems to be a theatrical pose, standing in a boat with a cigarette. Perhaps this is how she wanted to present herself. In a similar gesture towards what remains of Olive, at the end of this chapter those of her poems referred to in the text but not printed in full, are reproduced in their complete form. The poems, both in the chapter and the appendix, also stand as partial testimony to Olive's career, as well as illuminating the arguments made by this thesis.

These additions form something of a safety net, as Olive can only be seen through the filter of an/other's language and no apology can undo this bias. As Shosana Feldman put it to feminists in 1975: "To 'speak in the name of,' to 'speak for,' could thus mean, once again, to appropriate and silence"(Eagleton 58). This 'speaking for' is precisely the point at which Porter's and Howe's poetry made its entry. This chapter on Olive is a counterpoint to Feldman's position, belonging to

\(^1\) To facilitate further research on Olive Hopegood, included in this chapter are detailed footnotes delineating the whereabouts of the letters and documents referred to. Where available, the date and place of composition of each letter or paper is added to aid differentiation between these documents. This additional information is also useful in representing the Hopegoods' movements between countries, states and houses. The names of the principal correspondents have been abbreviated as follows: O.H. - Olive Hopegood, P.H. - Peter Hopegood, C.C. - Clem Christesen, H.M. - Hugh McCane, S.M. - Sidney Musgrove, K.M. - Kenneth MacKenzie, D.C. - Donovan Clarke and G.M. - George Mackanness.
another branch of Feminism's multifarious body of thought. Nancy K. Miller writes:

_I would argue that it is precisely through the processes of recovery, revision and 'revisionary reading' (Kolodny) which constitute the characteristic gesture of the work on women's writing, that we can learn how to challenge the false continuities ('origins' and influences) of the canon..._

(Eagleton 49)

Alongside Miller, we now need to imagine a figure lost in a chronological and culturally constrained wilderness. The process common to Virginia Woolf, Gilbert and Gubar, and Elaine Showalter, among others, of scrutinizing history for silenced women writers necessarily forms part of the backdrop for the following search. Tillie Olsen's book, _Silences_, makes another echo, mobilizing the framework of sociological thinking which underpinned many Feminist theories about what causes literary silences for women, and other marginalized groups. Perhaps Olive, like Helen and Derrida, had to contend with a phantom.

Virginia Woolf discovered:

_That if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of the famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing..._

(58).

Woolf's meditation on her phantom pertains to the difficulties for women writers of her (and Olive's) generation. Olive certainly seems to recognize the tell-tale signs of Woolf's phantom-of-domesticity in a relatively early work from 1938. She writes this poem as part of a memorial collection of works dedicated to pioneering Australian women:
Woman of the House

O, restless woman, woman of the house,
your footsteps echo
to and fro
up to the windows,
down to the door
on the naked floor...
They sound like a rosary
told fitfully
on wooden beads...
what are your needs,
O, restless woman, woman of the house?
There is a fire on the hearth, love in the house...
Hush...there is a high wind...
The brown leaves run past the door,
they sound like the feet of a child.
The night has thrust fingers of wind
beneath the closed door,
they have stolen the peace
from my heart...
I cannot be still...
There is a voice in the wind
and a soul in the night...
O, I have not the peace in my heart
to be still by the fire...

(Eldershaw 114)

We may ask with Howe, "do those dots mean that the speaker lapsed into silence?" (Europe 158). Using a deliberate, rosary-like simplicity, the poem envisions a woman safe from the rush of wind in her domestic enclosure, but this woman has no peace with such domesticity. She hears the wind as playful, producing in the leaves a "sound like the feet of a child," and it is for this reason, its desirable freedom, that the wind is intrusive and unsettling. Is it because it has a "voice" with which to live out its restlessness?

Woolf's Angel chooses discomforts, "If there was a draught," she "sat in it," but Olive's relationship with this phantom of feminine domesticity is less distinct. In one instance, after Olive has taken over the typewriter in one of her husband's letters, he has something to add which may be suggestive of the nature of gender-roles in their marriage, and the division of household labour: "I've sent that wench away to do her dishwashing. I hope you will be offended by no further
interruptions."² The letter has such a jovial tone it is difficult to judge how much jest this comment entails, although the dishes are suspiciously 'hers,' and apparently (in other letters) Olive's 'home cooking' is the only cure for her husband's ailments.

She tends him in illness, and grows her own vegetables. She embarks on a business venture, making earrings to supplement Peter's war pension on which they barely manage to subsist. How dangerous Olive's angel of domesticity was, or to what degree her gender wrought her silence, is difficult to gauge. Where Woolf's phantom seems most applicable to Olive is that the British Feminist knows "it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down and write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against"(Woolf 62). In Olive's case this seems prophetic of the silence which is all that remains of her attempt to sit down and write a book of poetry. Olive had a manuscript that she was assured would be published, but all that is left of the work is:

```plaintext
a gen
tle a
nd gradual
descent
from the pine
acle
of grass

(Howe, "Hinge Picture" Frame Structures 49)
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that publishing may have afforded her. The dying hiss of this poem fades to "ss"silence.

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Fig. 1. Olive Hopegood. Circa 1937-39. Bay of Islands, New Zealand.
“the overwhelming expectancy
of something not to be missed”³

Always my ears are tuned
to catch some fragile sound
which never comes.

-Olive Hopegood “In Exile”⁴

I have been unable to hear her voice clearly, though it was
something to be able to hear it faintly. There always seems to be
a word or two in each sentence that I can’t hear nomatter [sic]
how often repeated, and that rather destroys the sense of
anything she is trying to tell me

-Peter Hopegood.⁵

Like Peter, I have strained to hear Olive Hopegood’s voice in the records of
Australian literary history. In 1946 her poetry manuscript, tentatively titled Voyage
to Ithaca, was in the Meanjin office. It is now lost. Although Meanjin’s editor,
Clem Christesen, had agreed to publish it, the journal was financially troubled and
post-war printing was problematic. But it seems that these delays were not
explained to the poet who was worried about the slow progress of her first book.
Meanwhile, Olive was having difficulties of her own. She was in the process of
divorcing Peter Hopegood, who was also a poet and a good friend of Clem’s. Peter
had been the driving force behind Olive finally submitting her poetry which she had
long withheld, doubtful of its worth. Although the separation seemed amicable
(according to Olive’s brother-in-law Rex, Olive and Peter left the divorce court

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³ P.H. letter to H.M. 23 February 1932, 15 Clifton Crescent, Mt Lawley. La Trobe Australian
Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
⁵ P.H. letter to H.M. Undated, c/o ABC. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library
of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
with their arms linked to include Olive’s new fiancé; it produced a situation in which the manuscript became irrevocably caught between Olive, Clem and Peter. From the web of letters between them and other mutual friends, it seems the only way Olive could extricate herself from Peter was to abandon publishing the manuscript.

There were, of course, other factors in play. The delay between submission and publication was over two years, by which time Olive had despaired and wanted to be in possession of her work again—in the age before the photocopier it seems there was only one final copy. As well as the delay, Clem had continued to negotiate the progress of the publication with Peter instead of Olive, even suggesting that Peter finance the venture to speed things along if he wished. Peter refused, admitting that Olive felt he had interfered too much already. Olive was then diagnosed with “a spot on the lung” and saw her necessary removal to the drier climate of Adelaide with her new husband as providential. Her second husband, Jan Ebbinga-Wubben, was universally disliked by her family and friends, which seemed to isolate Olive from her old literary cohorts of the time of her marriage to Peter. Clem was part of this set, as were Hugh McCrae, Guy Howarth, Flora Eldershaw, John Harcourt, Donovan Clarke, Kim (Kenneth) MacKenzie, Tom Inglis-Moore and others. Olive disappeared, taking her poetry with her. None of her relatives knew exactly when or from what she died and they received nothing from her estate. It seems that the only people to have read the manuscript were: Peter Hopegood, who greatly admired the poetry but who is now dead; Clem who no longer recalls the work although in a recent letter he wrote “in those days I thought she might develop into a very important poet,” critic Sidney Musgrove (also deceased) whose appraisal of the manuscript for Meanjin was mostly negative, “it is a slight work—‘little poetry’ and therefore worth a little volume”; and, presumably, her husband, Jan, given that he wanted to set some of Olive’s

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6 Interview with Rex Ellis and Jade Riceza conducted by Elizabeth Parsons. 17 January 1998. Rivett, A.C.T.

7 P.H. letter to C.C. 1 April 1950. Meanjin Archive, University of Melbourne.


poems to music. Jan seems the most likely candidate for possession of the manuscript, but he has been untraceable.\textsuperscript{10}

So Olive drifted into literary obscurity, and her manuscript is now lost. She has one poem included in the collection \textit{The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets}, edited by Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn in 1986, but she does not appear in comprehensive new anthologies like Susan Lever's 1995 \textit{The Oxford Book of Australian Women Poets}, nor is she listed in the traditional signifiers of posterity, \textit{The Oxford Companion to Australian Literature} or Frederick T. Macartney's older \textit{Australian Literature}. She has eight listings in the \textit{Austlit} database, naming her poems which appeared in three anthologies from the 1940's and a number of single poems published in \textit{Meanjin} and \textit{Southerly} in the same period. There is also the work, "Woman of the House" reproduced above, from the collection \textit{The Peaceful Army: A Memorial to the Pioneer Women of Australia} printed in 1938 and reprinted in 1988. So although Olive was not always as unknown as she is now, it seems that after hope of her book being published disappeared, so did her desire to publish in any form. In a letter from 1952, well after this flurry of publishing in the 40's, Olive writes to her Aunt and Uncle about the poetry she is currently working on. She refers to a long poem she has "had to grow up to,"\textsuperscript{11} but there are no more records of attempts at publication after Cler returned the manuscript to her.

All that remains outside these published works is a little-disturbed box in the National Archive in Canberra labeled "Peter Hopegood." The box contains a number of Olive's earlier poems which she amateurishly bound for Peter herself. As well as being filed under Peter's name, the inscription on the small volume is disturbingly possessive, reading:

\textsuperscript{10} A search of electoral roles, telephone directories, and the memories of surviving friends and family were all unfruitful. Jan was a Dutch immigrant, but the Department of Immigration could not disclose information on his possible return to Holland, being bound by privacy legislation.

\textsuperscript{11} O.H. letter to Ernest Lucas. Undated, postmarked 1952, c/o Adelaide GPO. Private collection of Jade Rico.
but the hand is not recognizably either Olive’s or Peter’s. It is perhaps that of Peter’s subsequent wife, Mary, who was probably the donor of Peter’s papers to the archive. This is a telling inscription on Olive’s only book. It is typical of Peter’s consistent admiration for Olive’s poetry, and his belief that the poems should be published, that he kept this tatty volume. But the poems are filed under his name, and with an inscription equally illustrative of the suffocating nature of his desire to publish her work which had long set Peter and Olive at odds.

The written remains are also scattered across archives in Melbourne and Sydney that preserve Peter’s letters - he was a prodigious letter writer and knew writers well regarded enough for archives to retain their correspondences. Olive’s letters are sometimes included with these. Alternatively she adds a note to, or takes over the typewriter half way through, Peter’s letters. The archives trace Peter and Olive’s life through Perth, New Zealand, Brisbane, and various Melbourne and Sydney addresses. They were bohemians of sorts; Olive’s brother-in-law Rex Ellis recalls them as irregularly employed, sleeping at odd hours, and walking down to the shop at 10pm to share a rissole for their dinner. Their place seemed to be a quasi-salon: “the people[…]who wrote or were artists and things[…]always seemed to get together.”

The correspondences preserve a smattering of Olive’s poems. But more numerous than the poems are Peter’s promises to send some of Olive’s poems in his next letter, promises which are only very rarely fulfilled. In an early letter to Hugh McCrae, the struggle between Olive and Peter over the dispatch of Olive’s poems is actually audible:

...So although I may be hypnotised by the sound of my own lines,
I have decided to send you a nip or two of the latest vintage, and.

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13 Interview with Rex Ellis and Jade Rioza conducted by Elizabeth Parsons. 17 January 1998. Rivett, A.C.T.
as I have at long last managed to persuade Olive to let me send you some of her poems, I am taking advantage of the fact before she snatches them out of my hand and goes bush again which might happen at any moment. WHICH HAS JUST HAPPENED/ SO, AS YOU WERE/14

Peter was always a great advocate of Olive’s work, but she seems to have been very reticent about promoting her poems either with friends or publishers. However, one letter in Peter’s Canberra file, from Henrietta Drake-Brockman, gives a tantalizing clue about an earlier phase of Olive’s poetry career, a phase in which publishing was integral. Henrietta wrote:

Dear Mr Peter Hopegood

[...] would be very pleased if you would bring your wife round this evening - I should like to meet Felix Reb.15

Felix Reb was Olive’s pseudonym as a young woman writing for The Western Mail in Perth. The poems were highly Romantic and classical, which distinguishes them from Olive’s later Modernist works included in the manuscript at Meanjin. One plausible reason for this considerable stylistic divergence is that the poetry editor of The Western Mail had rather particular taste. This is borne out by the similarity between all the poems he accepted for publication at this time. Perhaps Olive wrote Romantic, 1890’s-esque poems to appeal to this taste. Certainly another contributor from the same period, Kenneth (KIM) Mackenzie, also radically transformed his early romanticism published in The Western Mail in his later poetry.

There is a cryptic remark in a letter written by Peter where he refers to some early rejections Olive suffered in Perth which shook her confidence in publishing.16 Given the substantial number of poems she had printed in The Western Mail, it could be that the poems rejected belonged to an aesthetic distinct from the rather saccharine Romanticism she wrote for publication under pseudonym. But even

14 P.H. letter to H.M. 7 March 1939, Opus, Bay of Islands. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.


within *The Western Mail* genre, Olive manages some interesting innovations. "In An Orange Grove" is a representative piece from this period.

*The Western Mail, May 5, 1932.*

IN AN ORANGE GROVE  
by “Felix Reb”

Autumn has lit among the orange trees
   A thousand lanterns glowing in the dusk
Pale incense greets a young and wistful breeze:
Touching, they cling and all the air stirs with warm, waking mysteries.
A music leaps with sudden impish cries, Strange witcheries of sound with urgent feet
Trample the breasts of Peace until she dies
To faunish piping, as the Heat, heavy with dreaming, wakes and sighs
Stretches her limbs and faints with ecstasy.

   Above the river's onyx mirror, stand
Lithe sylphs that toss their hair uneasily.
Those cream skinned saplings gracious rise in straight and slender symmetry
They spill long whisperings out upon the night
As timeless they gaze, Narcissus-wise,
Into the bright pools where fallen stars gleam
And burning as a naiad's eyes with flame -weft radiance alight,
As to her shepherd's arms she glides again.
How the young moon rises above the stark hills;
And sleep with a silver scimitar is slain,
While the ancient music sobs and showers in fountains of fantastic pain.

The strange and voluptuous personification of "heat" as a post-coital woman ripples the pastoral surface of this poem in what is probably a daring depiction for Perth in 1932. There are a number of highly sensual images in these earlier poems.
that may explain Olive’s gendered choice of alias “Felix,” and also her use of
personified seasons, elements, and mystical creatures as less confronting sites for
these depictions. Judith Wright notes the preponderance of “fairies, gnomes, elves,
centaurs, nymphs and the rest [which] seem to have populated much of the minor
verse of the early twentieth century, to the detriment of the landscape’s real
inhabitants” (*Because* 55). But Susan Lever reads the relevance of these creatures as
allowing women “poets to play with ideas foreign to the often mundane ideals of
Australian life” (xviii). The Autumn scene of this poem is populated with fantastic
creatures predominantly for their addition to the landscape of beauty and sensuality.
But they also offer a coded entry point into explorations of physical desire.

Mystical creatures in Olive’s other poems are often metaphoric shorthand
for an unnameable longing, a sense of impossibility or loss that belongs to the
condition of their inaccessibility to ordinary humanity. This metaphor is most
commonly aligned with the poet’s voice. A useful example is “Written in the Age
of the Machine” - the only ‘Felix Reb’ poem published outside *The Western Mail.*
This long poem appeared in an annual called *Jarrah Leaves - a literary and artistic
annual wholly written and illustrated by Western Australians*. Olive’s is a work
waver ing between Romantic imagery and Modernist horror at the mechanized age.
The stanza:

The tapestry of beauty has become
A sweat rag for a hurrying mechanic.
The earth is bereft of twilights and of gloom,
And shrill lights stab in ceaseless sharp affront.
The singer has grown silent now in panic
A small bewildered bird in the engine room.

aligns the voices of singer and bird, setting both in dramatic contrast to the harsh
noise of the machinery. In the final lines “With enormous, sightless strength/The
pistons smash/My songs.” Birds share their allegorical space with the mystical
figures in Olive’s poetry. Often just out of reach or only fleetingly glimpsed, they
are also congruent with songs and the voice of the poet, all of which are eventually
silenced. These interrelations are especially clear in the final lines of “Autumn
Night”\textsuperscript{17} where “Twigs snap, the light hoofs dancing pass/The song is dead; the silver bird is gone.” The nightingale in “The Flute”\textsuperscript{18} meets the same wistful fate “on quiet, enchanted wings/With all her song grown pale/Is mute.” This penchant for ending poems with the sadness of loss or the mute or ineffectual song is part of a popular pattern of the period. The Oxford History of Australian Literature aptly summarizes the 1890’s taste for “the dying fall, the somewhat pallid languor, the exquisite boredom”(Kramer 321) which seems to still be in vogue at The Western Mail in the 1930’s.

But there is another aspect to this depiction of what is “gone,” “mute,” or dead, that persists in Olive’s work after this Romantic style is left behind. The unsingable song is a poetic motif which seems connected to “the overwhelming expectancy of something not to be missed.” Peter’s phrase (which forms the title of this section, cited above) describes Olive’s feeling of longing for something just out of reach in the recurring pattern of her dreams. There are conspicuous links between Olive’s dreams, her poetry and her identification with fairy folk. Peter says Olive

\begin{center}
\textit{came out of a tree, or out of an ocean wave. For she has two rhythms in her, that of the breaking wave --- that of the dream-growth of the tree}\textsuperscript{19}
\end{center}

and Olive often attaches her poetic voice to mystical creatures and their unattainable magic. The unsingable song is also an uncanny precursor to the destiny of Olive’s public voice. In the poems kept in Peter’s box, she meditates in “At Night” that she is “frustrated silence waiting for sound” while she comprehends in “At Dawn” that “Only in silence/have I found/perfection.” This penchant for silence is made manifest in the final stages of Olive’s career.

In the 1930’s, writing in the romantic and classical fashion, and from behind the safety of her pseudonym, Olive had moderate commercial success. Probably more than with her later writing. She was in her early twenties, she had just married a poet nearly twice her age - against her family’s wishes - and within a few years

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{17} \textit{The Western Mail}, 19 January 1933.
\item \textsuperscript{18} \textit{The Western Mail}, 20 April 1933.
\item \textsuperscript{19} P.H. letter to H.M. 15 May 1933, Darlington. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
\end{footnotes}
the newlyweds left Perth for a wandering and bohemian existence in the eastern states and New Zealand. Before they left, Olive had also written the somewhat more Modernist poem “Written in the Barbaric Age of the Machine,” but it is her poetry of the 1940’s that is arresting. These later poems are fascinating for their Feminist and Modernist content in a society fairly hostile, particularly by world standards, to both of these leanings. They are also interesting for their silence - since the majority of the poems in the lost manuscript exist only in the tantalizing form of the titles listed in Musgrove’s appraisal for Clem in the Meanjin archive.

Equally tantalizing in this same bundle of yellowing papers are the two folders of correspondence between Olive and Clem, and Peter and Clem, which seem to hold some answers to the question of why Olive faded into literary obscurity. The two Hopegood folders are filed separately but next to each other, and between them the dialogue that is filtered through their mutual friend Clem makes a captivating story. Olive’s manuscript develops its own personality in this narrative of a failing marriage and abandoned poetic career. Her poems become the center of a quasi-custody battle between Olive and Peter. Although it is a well-intentioned battle that Peter instigates, it is one that nonetheless results in Olive’s literary silence. It is also a battle in which Peter’s tactics become those of a self-confessed ‘witch.’ This is what Australian author Nancy Keesing had to say about his powers:

"Peter was a sort of shaman, and a magician too. He said he had decided not to use his mystic powers because he found them terrifying. I did, and do, believe him. Once we stood in Don Clarke’s garden when a flock of migratory birds, ducks perhaps, arrowed towards us. 'Look,' said Peter. He gazed intently upwards and suddenly the flock wheeled and took a direction at right angles to their original line of flight. Maybe I am credulous, but Peter said he willed the birds and I remain convinced he did. Then he told me that, had he wished, he could have killed one of the birds in flight and caused it to drop at our feet; also that, if clouds blew up, but did not yield rain, he could will rain from them. He said he had relinquished his powers, or no longer chose to use them, after he had willed a man to die and the man died."  

(Keesing 55)

However these capacities are assessed, skeptically or credulously, some of Peter’s witchcraft is understandable on the more concrete level of a distressed husband
trying to retain a hold over his absconding wife. Peter's, Olive's and Clem's letters in these folders describe, in both conscious and unconscious language, Peter's invocations to save his marriage and possibly Clem's collusion with his friend.
‘Confessions of a Witch’
(a title which should hook readers)
- Peter Hopegood

In 1949 Peter wrote in a letter to his friend and fellow writer Don Clarke:

*I do plan to write a psychological autobiography using ordinary incidents only as illustrations of the workings of the unconscious mind. I shall call it Confessions of a Witch (a title which should hook readers). I shall try to show in it how all of us have the markings of magical control in our life pattern though some more strongly than others...I plan to include my dreams I consider important as well...I want to show they do foreshadow what the mind is plotting to bring about.*

Although Peter never wrote his “psychological autobiography,” his letters contain a plethora of material for such a project. In the same letter as these musings, Peter describes an incident which elucidates how this psychological biography would function. Even without the notions of magic, the Freudian cliché ‘there are no accidents’ makes this intelligible in terms of modern psychology:

*Take for instance that wretched pony that fell with me. I was at a loss to understand that incident for a long time afterwards. Now I see everything quite clearly. The pattern has filled itself in. My unconscious mind engineered that accident. Just before it occurred I had been making most compulsive invocations with the object of smoothing the way to us getting back the house at Wahroonga and my sharing it in a manner with Olive and Jan. My accident caused that very rapprochement, and was the main factor in bringing Jan round to consent.*

This pony incident is only one of Peter’s unconscious maneuvers to keep Olive in his life. There are other ‘accidents’ which put Peter in hospital, one happening at the beginning of their separation. Peter writes to Hugh “Olive comes in everyday.

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The accident has had its useful side. But more importantly for research on lost poetry is Peter's, perhaps unwitting, use of Olive's poems to maintain his connections with her despite their separation. This letter from Olive to Clem in the Meanjin Archive, could describe another 'accident,' or it could indicate part of Peter's scheming:

_Mrs J. Ebbinge-Wubben_
_4 Barnacleth Square_
_Elizabeth Bay, Sydney_
_Dear Clem,

Peter rang me this morning to say that he had a note for me from you which he had forgotten to forward with the copy of Meanjin I received from him. As he had not your note with him when he rang I have only a somewhat confused version of what it contained but gathered that you received my manuscript.

If, in future, you wish to contact me about this m.s. will you please write directly to the address I have given you as this present indirect system of communication assists in maintaining a situation which is extremely painful and disagreeable to me. That you should be under a misapprehension as to the situation is, more or less, understandable.

_Yours Sincerely,_
_Olive._

Peter had earlier written to Clem to say that Olive's mail was going to the box of Guy Howarth, with whom Peter was staying at this stage of the separation. But Olive had sent at least one letter before that quoted above which gave her address with Jan. Interestingly, Clem chose to send Olive's letter to Peter's address. Perhaps he was being artful for Peter's sake. Peter was certainly not above such ploys. In another letter, Peter openly asks Hugh McCrae to come to Sydney to act as a link between him and Olive. On a personal level this was because Hugh was good friends with them both. But Hugh does seem to be more Peter's friend than Olive's. There is a photograph of the three of them together (fig. 2), sent to Peter with a drawing mimicking the photo but with the addition of a bunch of men dancing around Olive (fig. 3). Both visuals come from Cathy Henderson's article: "Exploring the Intersections of Culture: A Collection of Southwest Pacificana."

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Fig. 2 (above) (from left to right) Hugh McCrae, Olive Hopegood and Peter Hopegood.

Fig. 3 (above) Hugh's cartoon rendition of the above photograph.
Along the top of his drawing Hugh has written “Don’t tell Olive I sent you this,” a shared secret that suggests his bond with Peter is stronger than with Olive. This sense is corroborated by the numerous letters these two exchange. The drawing seems to be suggestive of Olive having numerous male admirers but its meaning remains elusive.

Whatever this cartoon portends on a personal level, on a professional level, Hugh held some sway in the literary world, and Peter had earlier arranged for some of Olive’s poems to be published when they were accompanied by a letter from Hugh praising them. It is by orchestrating such deals with his literary connections, who are also his friends, that Peter is most successful in maintaining contact with Olive. But embroiling himself in the publishing deal for Olive’s manuscript backfires on Peter both with regard to the publication and to Olive.

It seems that the definitive issue between Olive and Peter over the publishing of Olive’s poetry, was control. To Peter’s credit he does much of the important early promotional legwork in 1942 and 1943. But positive as his efforts are for publishing, Olive is effectively silenced by his correspondence. The extracts from the letters speak most succinctly of the situation that arose. The following are all from Peter to Clem and are held in the Meanjin Archive:

30.xii.42.
Guy Howarth has, I believe, some verses of Olive’s also in cold storage for use as he thinks best and I understand that he is to submit some more to you. I wouldn’t like to tell you what I think of her verse. You might think I [w]as skiting or trying to sell you something. I will just say that it has a quality that is utterly original, and the more I see of it the more pleasure I get from steeping myself in her rhythm and elusive suggestions.

28.iii.43
... You, of course, are right about my wife’s work. It betrays a new approach to Life, peculiar to this age, and yet old as music, old as the human heart, itself, and like the human heart also forever young.

7.ix.43.
... I’ve given your message to my wife, but I doubt if it will have any effects so far as eliciting any interpretations is concerned. For me, of course, the black dog eating moonstones is one with the sun-devouring dragon, only the dog is closer to humanity than the
cosmic dragon, which I imagine gives a clue to the sort of eclipse indicated in the poem. I think you still have one of Olive's pieces. She thinks it was called "Feathers".

17.xii.44

... Olive is living on her own apart from me, but her mail comes to Guy's box. I saw her yesterday and asked her if she had sent you any more verses...She said no. You will have to keep her screwed up to it. If you could find time to write to her urging her to get a move on, it might do some good.

Peter here, especially in the last letter, orchestrates a paternal structure for Clem's relationship to Olive, and for the publication of her manuscript, that mirrors what his own has been. His effusiveness signals the intensity of his hopes. But Peter also makes himself the go-between: "I have given your message to my wife," and in the absence of Olive's interpretation of her poem, Peter offers his own.

These letters are by no means the end of the sequence. Once the manuscript arrives at Meanjin, Peter's efforts become more concerted. He writes again and again to Clem while the decisions regarding the if and when of publication were being made, always with recommendations that it should be published, and it should be soon. Despite Olive's request to Clem in the above letter to send mail to her, he continues to negotiate with Peter about the manuscript. Peter does ask Clem to write to Olive and let her know the situation, and he seems to be acting in her best interests, but all his efforts compound his role as the main correspondent with whom Clem confers. Clem replies consistently to Peter's letters, perhaps innocently assuming that those letters are enough and that the messages will filter through to Olive in any case, while, after the original acceptance, Olive hears little or nothing at all. Peter behaves like a literary agent in this period, making further inquiries and making these known to Clem:

25.xi.46

... Do you think you could let me know, as I believe I asked you to tell me, whether you can do anything with Olive's poems pretty soon, because, if not, I'd like to try them on a. & R. They don't promise immediate publication but I think, if acceptable to them, they might be published within the year. 22

22 P.H. letter to C.C. 25 November 1946, Meanjin Archive, University of Melbourne.
The "T" in this extract illustrates Peter's conception of his role in these negotiations.

That Olive was driven to slowly unravel her connection to Peter by eventually abandoning her manuscript, is also best articulated by Peter's letters which divulge the level of his commitment to both publishing (Olive's poems) and attempting reconciliation in the early period of their separation in 1945. All are from Peter to Clem and held in the Meanjin Archive:

14.iv.45
... Olive is hard at it and should have the stuff ready very soon. I don't see her now as I am manpowered into a paste factory in Surrey Hills...

17.vi.45
... Olive has her book finished all but a page or two. We see quite a bit of each other...

13.viii.45
... Olive has sent you her mss on Thursday, by air I think. Also a letter. She was delayed by flu and one thing and another. I kept at her to include the Gleeman or to offer it to you for separate publication, eventually she came to think I was right.

17.ix.45
... I have passed the word on to Olive... Maybe if you could get a move on with the book or anyway write to her indicating that you are about to do so, it would help...

24.xi.45
... I think you said something about Olive's book in your last. Of course she wants you to go through with it... no thought of anything else... I think also you said you'd have to cut the Gleeman. As it was on its own, as it were, I wonder if it could appear as a separate publication. If you contemplated that, I'd try to get Hewey to do a drawing for it.

undated
... thanks also for news about Olive's mss. Of course, she wishes you to carry on with it, however long it may take. We are having worse trouble over here with the printers, you know.

The extent of Peter's anxiety about maintaining his connection to Olive through her poetry is tangible here. The first two extracts directly link the progress of Olive's
manuscript to how often Peter gets to see her. It is only in response to a letter in which Clem seems to have suggested that Peter fund the publishing of Olive’s manuscript, that Peter finally demurs. When he explains to Clem that this form of interference is going too far, he also gives an indication of Olive’s stance on Peter’s brokering:

20.xii.46
Blaxland Ridge Rd
Kurrajong NSW

... Ref your suggestion ref Olive’s book, I’d like nothing better, only it can’t be done. For one thing I’m all tied up with this place now. For another there’s something queer going on in England ref my property there so I can’t sell it...For another thing, Olive would never forgive me if I interfered in that way. In fact, she is annoyed with me for having opened my mouth at all. She has been waiting for you to write to her and state the situation. So please be a good bloke and do so. Then she can decide herself what she wants done with the mss.

Olive’s opinion, as Peter understands it, is a secondary consideration to his financial difficulties with Clem’s proposal. In fact, as he readily confesses, he’d “like nothing better.”

It is unclear how much, if any, of this dialogue between Peter and Clem was reported to Olive. She and Peter are still close friends and Olive and Jan go and stay with Peter at the Blaxland Ridge property from which he wrote this letter. It also seems likely that Peter had fulfilled his wish to keep a room at his and Olive’s old house at Wahroonga while Olive and Jan are living there, ostensibly so he can visit them for spells of Olive’s home cooking to cure his asthma. But, whatever was said between Olive and Peter, Clem seems not to have written to Olive. By this stage, two years after the manuscript arrived in Clem’s office, even Peter’s enthusiasm was waning, his letters becoming fewer and farther between. Olive’s patience had reached its limit. What she eventually writes herself is a letter charged with her anger at the delay and having not heard any justification for it.

4 Barneleuth Square
Sept 19 [1947]
Dear Christesen,

As I have not heard from you for some considerable time with regard to my manuscript which has been in your hands for over two years, will you return the m.s. to me at your earliest possible convenience.

Yours Faithfully

Olive Ebbinge-Wubben.

Perhaps her pride was hurt, or perhaps she took control of the proceedings regarding her manuscript the only way she was able to. In such situations Gilbert and Gubar invoke Jane Austen’s Henry Tilley who tells us “a woman’s only power is in refusal” (Mad Woman 58).

Clem had pencilled on the letter ‘ret. 6.10.47’ as the date he returned the poems and this was the last recorded sighting of the work. A poem of Olive’s he had published five years earlier speaks to these events in a quasi prophetic way. “Letter for Summer” begins its fourth stanza just as Olive began this letter:

No word comes from you
through the bright void’s thunder
The stone of my patience
bears to dust,
white on the yellow grasses
white and unresting
on the scarred white roads.

The cicadas fray
the dark silk of the night
to a febrile surface.
The parched leaves whisper.
By Venus!
I am brought low
for my laughter.

(Meanjin Papers 1942. vol. 1 No.2, p.12)

Perhaps Olive was laughing, having regained control, even though the disintegration of her patience has left us with the whiteness of empty pages. The request for return in Olive’s typed note is a considerable change from her earlier handwritten letters which were along the lines of “Dear Clem, Your flowers were a most enchanting surprise...” (They were a house-warming present for Olive and Jan
in their new place). Olive’s new tone belies the altered relationship between poet and editor.

This letter reclaiming the manuscript is also significantly the first time that Olive signs with her new surname, Jan’s rather than Peter’s. And Ebbing-Weubben is somewhat the signifier of silence in this narrative because Olive does not publish under this name. In earlier letters to Clem, Olive often gives her address as c/o, or just, Mrs J. Ebbing-Weubben but she signs at the bottom Olive Hopegood or simply Olive. The renaming of herself via her signature coincides with the demand for return of the manuscript into Olive’s custody, and these combined developments mean that Peter’s power over Olive is abated. In the same year, 1947, the divorce which began as a separation three years earlier is finalized and Olive marries Jan. It is at this point that she refuses to be cajoled by Peter into publishing again. The flurry of activity was finally fruitless, Olive seemed to lose heart, or perhaps interest, and from this time onwards I have found no more publication attempts made by her.

Peter’s witchcraft in the matter of Olive and publishing was not nearly as powerful as Nancy Keesing found it with regard to migratory birds, although Peter seems to have been equally successful at diverting a course. Typically, Clem wrote to Peter about Olive’s request for the return of her manuscript. In this letter he is only lukewarm about the poetry, and his tone of surprise and hurt perhaps absolves him as simply an unwitting participant in negotiating with Peter over the publishing details of Olive’s manuscript:

I agree that it might do Olive a deal of good to be published. With all respect however I do not agree with your assessment of her quality. Still, I wanted to bring out the booklet, and was rather rocked when I had to get it back from the printer; he was about to begin setting I believe. ’Twas a hell of a delay I’ll admit; but that’s the way things are now. Such a curt unfriendly demand it was too.

Perhaps it is apt that the ever verbose Peter has the last word in the correspondence on this issue:

23 O.H. letter to C.C. Undated, Sevenson St North Melbourne (pencilled date on page 19457). Meanjin Archive, University of Melbourne.
... I am sorry about Olive, but that is a matter entirely out of my hands. I have said all I can say about the matter both to her and to you. I still think it would do her a lot of good to be published, but she seems to have changed her opinion about that.  

At this juncture, some commentary from Olive would have the potential to reorganize the power in this exchange between Olive, Peter and Clem. Unfortunately, Olive writes few letters, and makes no overt remarks about poetry or publishing when she does write. Perhaps it is apt to apply Howe’s phrase for Swift’s memoir of Stella to this silence: “it is remarkable for what it doesn’t say, its brevity speaks volumes” (Europe 154). Although it is inadvisable to use a poet’s poetry to comment on their life or opinions, one of Olive’s poems lends itself propitiously to this discussion and circumvents her silence. Given the absence of any other text, “The Gleeman” will have to speak on Olive’s behalf.

“The Gleeman” is an aberration in the scattered remnants of Olive’s work being her only long narrative poem and almost fairytale-like in content. It is the poem that Peter hounded her to include in Voyage to Ithaca. But it was unrelated to the other poems in the manuscript that Olive described to Clem as an integrated cycle of works. Although she bowed to Peter’s pressure and included the piece, she wrote to Clem herself later in the publishing proceedings and asked that it be omitted. The narrative of the poem portrays the Gleeman as a poet who travels the land singing his songs for the people. He is not tied to anyone or anything. When the King offers him, in payment for his song, a place in the court, a velvet cloak and a pouch full of gold, this is what the Gleeman sings in reply:

I am a travelling universe  
of songs and jests and wandering thoughts,  
within me live a hundred things,  
champions, clowns and courtiers,  
mists and sudden silver lights,  
priest and peddlers, charioteers,  
lovers, rogues and nightingales,  
beggars, fears and vagrant joys  

And I am the king of my universe

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26 O.H. letter to C.C. Undated, Ewenion St North Melbourne (pencilled date on page 1945?). Meanjin Archive, University of Melbourne.

138
A velvet cloak and a golden fee
shall buy no kingdom from a king
for a ruler in thrall is a bondsman then
and power and right are gone from him.
Conor, within my heart is set
a magic, voiceless melody
and in the clamour of thy court
I know it would cease to sing.  

Aside from the perils of reading Olive through her poetry, these lines about the inherent loss of power in the sale of songs, and the loss of art when it is subjugated to a court of power, be it a king or the world of publishing, can be read as particularly pertinent to Olive's experiences. The Gleeman goes on his way and Olive moves to Adelaide where she continued to write privately as her letter to her Aunt and Uncle implies:

Adelaide GPO
[undated]

[...] I hope to do some better work here. A long poem called 'Psyché' which has been existing in note form for some time and which I have had to grow up to. It is good to be in a fresh place as, I think, past associations of any strength have somewhat of a paralysing effect when one is trying to make a new and somewhat difficult development. So this sickness business may prove to be a very useful event.  

Both she and the Gleeman walk away from what was offered them by those in power and those who want control over their work, but both continued to sing.

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28 Private collection of Jade Ricza.
"Voyage to Ithaca"

or

"The Little Brown House"

- longing and safety in Olive Hopegood's dreams and poems

The Gleeman sang another "voiceless melody," one written in the same key as the mute songs and dying falls of the early "Felix Reb" poems. This theme persists in Olive's poetry long after she has stylistically moved beyond those earlier literary conventions. The discontentment inherent in these poetic motifs points to a sense of yearning comparable to that signaled by "the overwhelming expectancy of something not to be missed" (cited above) that is central to Olive's dreams. Perhaps there is a link between this longing and Olive's tentative choice of title for her manuscript, _Voyage to Ithaca_, which collides the poetic voice with Odysseus' longing for his native home. Poetry and dreaming become strangely consonant in Olive's biography; her personal narrative seeming to share in the poetry's sense of longing.

This facet of Olive survives her silence because Peter describes many of Olive's dreams in his letters, producing a commentary or meta-narrative of subconscious desire that simultaneously speaks of Olive's life, her relationship with Peter (which was integral to the issue of publishing) and her poetry:

...I have a young woman friend who walks in her sleep. (I am not trying to put over a cheap joke) I mean she goes to the window invariably and tries to get out. She remembers nothing of all this when awake. All that she remembers is that there has been an overwhelming expectancy of something not to be missed, just out of sight at the further end of the garden. If asked questions when
sleepwalking she invariably repulses the question with "That's not your business" or "You wouldn't understand." ²⁹

Peter’s role in this first record of Olive’s dreams foreshadows the pattern their relationship is to take. Perhaps this “something not to be missed” can be tentatively read as Olive’s vocation as a poet. The recurring motif in her dreams is uncannily like her unrealized, or abandoned, endeavour to publish. Peter is here ‘publishing’ Olive’s (perhaps private) dreams to a man neither of them have actually met (at this stage of their friendship). If Olive is unaware of the content of Peter’s letters, then this breach of confidence is more invasive than his pressuring Olive to make her poetry public.

In this first dream, Olive feels that the “something” is none of her interlocutor’s business, and that he must be repelled from interfering. This is the same saga of interference played out across the publication of her poetry over the next fifteen years. In both scenarios, Olive’s quest is interrupted by Peter’s well-meaning interventions which force her to evacuate both the dream and eventually also the literary scene to escape from her husband’s caring but stifling love. The next dream comes ten months later and is also sent to Hugh McCrae, Peter writes:

...Olive came out of a tree. In her sleep she often tries to go back to the tree-folk. Luckily I sleep lightly (touch wood). Two nights ago I woke to find her sitting up in bed, staring intently at the glooms at the far end of the verandah, where there is a twelve foot drop for we live on a sleep grade that puts us in the tree-tops opposite the higher sort of bird society. I had woken to hear her whistle like a startled dear - - - just like that - - - and say, in an excited - - - pleasurably, not startled this time - - - voice, "By Jove, look at that!"

I thought she was awake and asked "What?"
She said, "The little brown house."
I knew she was asleep then and might get up at any moment to explore the little brown house. I thought of any number of things in that instance. Of the main substance of this long verse of mine [Fay-Wife], for one thing. And of H.G. Wells’ the Green Door so I said at once, "It’s so dark I can’t see it. But can you see your old man?"
That woke another subconscious in Olive that always comes to the surface when her attention is called to me, even during her sleep. And she lay down again at once and turned towards me, though still

²⁹ P.H. letter to H.M. 23 February 1932, 15 Clifton Crescent, Mt Lawley, W.A. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
asleep, having forgotten the little house. I then got up and roughed out the verse, which I spent two hours on then, and another six hours or so the next day.  

Olive is again driven by the "expectancy of something not to be missed," but this time it is 'the little brown house.' Again Peter executes a dubious rescue, saving Olive from what is symbolically a comforting and desired place. In this same letter Peter congratulates himself: "Apparently my vigilance drags her back from all sorts of exotic dream adventures."

Particularly interesting in this account is the way Peter uses himself, and Olive's love for him, as the distraction from the desired "something," saying "It's so dark I can't see it. But can you see your old man?". This dream makes the same disturbing parallel with Olive's poetry career as the first, Peter distracting her with himself as he did with his own desire for publishing. It is unsurprising, then, that for Peter, the foremost importance of Olive's dream is that it inspires his poem, "The Fay Wife." In this exchange Peter is rather Yeats-like in using the unconscious voice of his wife as a source of metaphors for poetry. Peter includes his poem in the letter to Hugh, as well as a poem by Olive, also written after a dream, although it is a different dream to the one which he described in the letter. Her poem is "My People" and underneath it Peter writes:

This is Olive's midnight effort which I have at last coaxed out of her. She says it is purely personal and not meant to have sense for other people. However that may be, it has an atmosphere which fits with my "Fay-Wife" verses and helps explain them.

Again Peter is implicated in publishing (albeit to the small audience of Hugh) what is meant to be "purely personal." As well as reading the significance of Olive's dream as inspiring him, Peter also appropriates the meaning of her poem as merely an augmentation of the meaning in his poem. On this level at least, his approach to Olive's poetry betrays his self-absorption. Olive's poem is recognizably an early work, she is twenty-two at the time of writing. "My People" has one foot in her Felix Reb genre, but it is also not entirely of The Western Mail school although it uses some similar metaphors and devices. In the third stanza:

30 P.H. letter to H.M. 27 December 1932, Darlington. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrue Papers, MS 12831.
Voices waken, throbbing in the stillness.
Dim shapes move with a dark intangience.
I hear their fragile laughter and their muted voicing,
Calling down the silence, to a prisoner.

The poem’s voice is haunted, in this dark and silent Phantomimic place:

A grey ghost comes along the night to me
And touches my eyes to hot and hopeless tears.

“My People” caters to Olive’s metaphors of the un singable and un attainable popular in her published “Felix Reb” poems. The “muted voicing, / Calling down the silence, to a prisoner” belongs precisely to this leitmotif. The poem traces a longing to return to “my people” that resonates with the yearning for the safety of the ‘little brown house’ of Olive’s dream. Both seem to be metaphoric of her quest for a personal Ithaca.

Entitling her later manuscript Voyage to Ithaca seems to position Olive alongside Odysseus in the ancient narrative of a journey home. It is a journey that suffers many diversions and delays while the hero aims for the solace of the trustworthy wife, Penelope, in a home which offers a more sedate happiness than the glories of battle. By this logic Peter may be the Calypso who waylaid the hero. According to Nancy Keesing and Hugh McCrae, he offers charming physical attractions, and even more Calypso-like is his offer of eternal life through the fame that traditionally comes from publishing. But it is the comfort offered by both Ithaca and the ‘little brown house,’ that Olive finally chooses, and the eternal fame of poetry must, in the end, be missed in favour of the safety of obscurity. This sense is suggested in one of the last poems I have found by Olive - and again this reading involves the inevitable risks of knowing a poet through her poems, but in the absence of any other text to analyze, this is all that remains other than the silences.
The original typescript of the poem with Olive’s handwritten additions is reproduced below (fig. 4).
So still this night...  [handwritten]

So still this night
that shelters my calm heart
stormwashed and tranquil
at my journey's end.

Assured of clear hearth light
from which all phantoms,
fiends and sorrows do depart.
Ah! sure of starlit night,
so calm my heart
between the strong hands
of my gentle friend.

Kings Cross 1946

Fig. 4 Typescript of "So Still This Night" by Olive Hopegood (with handwritten additions) from the private collection of Jade Ricea.

The phantom of this poem now opposes Virginia Woolf's 'Angel of the House.' For Olive, the "hearth light" exorcises phantoms and sorrows and allows this poem to be written in a peace wherein there is no voice calling for it to be publishable or published. Interestingly, given it was written after the completion of the manuscript, this work is more stylistically coherent with Olive's earlier writing, than with her later Modernism in Voyage to Ithaca (at least, of those poems that remain of it). But these same themes and images appear in one of the published Modernist works, printed two years earlier in Meanjin:

Letter... 21st September

Dear soul, the tide moves out
towards the angels
on paths of footprints
through the twilight sea
Dear soul, the uncovered shells
whisper now
with music peacefully.
The moon is a bowstring
on the promise of the branches
the sky spreads over one
a pigeon's wing.

Pain and laughter have become
the two hands of the mother
straightening limbs
grown numbed in the bed
and love has become
the beloved and the brother
and one forgets how one
in terror fled
through the long watching darkness
of the trees
holding no memory
of star or sun,
forgets that nights were stone
against the knees
while one watched alone
the crucifix of ice
had felt the warm slow frenzy
of the falling blood.

Now in the garden
one bird sings
of crystal arrows
leaping into light.
O, my dear soul...
so gently comes this night.
There is a storm-passed stillness
in the rooms
and shadows that went
with searching hands along
the soundless glooms
of endless balconies
come laughing down the stairs
shaped by a song
take one's hands
and suddenly are friends
and so, my soul,
the grief and anger
of this winter ends.
The "storm-passed stillness" of this "gentle" rather than "still" night and the hopeful endings shared by these poems seem to connect them. But the disturbing potency of the lines describing the two hands of the mother epitomize Olive's Modernist poetries. The poem seems to hark back to Peter's description of Olive "staring intently at the glooms at the far end of the verandah", while the "endless" nature of these balconies suggests a recurring dream. But the dream has perhaps now been solved as the poem's subject is able to "come laughing" away from yearning and haunting shadows and into a gratifying relationship.

The comparison between "So Still this Night" and "Letter 21st September" suggests that the former reads as a personal piece, not driven by the concerns of art, one that is simply a truth to be communicated to Jan. The very small number of Olive's letters and her additions to Peter's letters attests to the sense that even when she writes a note to a friend, she likes to infuse it with poetic metaphor. Poetry and letter writing share these tendencies in a way that perhaps accounts for Olive's poem-as-note 'for Jan.' A letter to Hugh and Nancy McCrae on receipt of a poetry anthology for her birthday is poetically conceived around a visual metaphor:

Nov. 16th 1942
Most Beautiful Monday
Dearest Hugh and Nancy,

You have made me feel so terribly happy that I can't say "thank you" today as I would like to say it - not even at my sixth attempt - but I shall be thanking you always - loveliest of friends, loveliest of cards, loveliest of books, and I'll be even happier when I can read my book (about 10pm this night) So far I haven't been able to loosen Peter's fingers from it. Between long silences in his corner there come shouts - "Glorious book! Glorious Book!!" "Wonderful book!" And I like a cat prowling hungrily and wait for darkness.

Yours ever - hand on my heart

Olive. 31

The image of Olive as a cat, and the evocation of the scene into which the book has come, are vividly rendered for the McCraes. It is a charming example of Olive's poetizing the ordinary task of writing a thankyou note. But Olive is as reticent about letter writing as she is about mailing out her poetry. Here it is her "sixth" attempt, and even this "cannot say" what she wishes to convey. Peter's letters more often include apologies for Olive who will write later, than her actual writings. In

Olive's handwriting across the bottom of one of Peter's letters is this endearment to her friends on the birth of their first child: "My love to the Holy Trinity. When I write I want to write you a good letter. I'm too stupid to think lately."32

Not writing (or not mailing) seems to work for Olive as a safeguard against failing, just as not sending out her poems could be a shield against judgement. Perhaps part of the problem was that all their friends seem to be literary in one way or another (with the exception of Jan) making them a threatening audience. The tranquillity of "So Still this Night," written for a musician, perhaps signals the 'little brown house,' or the Ithaca, at last realised when Olive leaves Peter in favour of public silence. Peter aptly uses the domestic metaphor "Olive won't let me send any of her verses. Says, wait another year. Sits as tight as a hen on her eggs."33 And just as Peter drew Olive away from the 'little brown house,' he tried to prise her from the silence that protected her from criticism. Her phantom seems to be poetry itself, not its Woolfian 'other' - that feminine domesticity which prevents writing. In a poem called "Mirage" from Peter's handbound volume, Olive writes of a day:

    when I shall say
    within myself,
    This thing I thought
    to fashion out of wind and fire
    and unattained desire
    is nought but a mirage above the sand
    a phantom frail and blue,
    that I have overtaken[...]

Perhaps she had always known and been troubled by the unsingable songs inside her, half-conscious that her poems would eventually have to be mute/missed because her requirement for safety was incompatible with the self promotion required for recognition. In Olive's words 'not every piglet makes a Hamlet.'34


33 P.H. letter to H.M. 9 May 1935, Toxteth Flats, Gregory Terrace, Brisbane. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.

"And as it has been said (by Olive)  
'not every piglet makes a Hamlet’  

- Peter Hopegood

Of the numerous possible reasons for Olive’s final literary silence, the external forces (like Peter’s over-exertions) seem to have compounded her internal requirement for obscurity. She embodies the pivot on which Gilbert and Gubar might well have read their interplay between the production and reception of women’s literature characterized as ‘the anxiety of authorship’ (*Madwoman* 45). Olive seems also to have a tendency to perfectionism exhibited in her reluctance to write, even letters to friends, and this is more pronounced when she is obliged to expose her poetry. Peter refers to this tendency in a letter to H.M. Green who edited one of the anthologies in which Olive’s poems appeared:

7.ix.41  
*With regard to my wife’s [poems] I am still hoping to overcome her reluctance to seeing them published. However, she is firm in her resolve not to seek publication till she has had time to “finish” them. I know what she means, and I suppose you do too. Personally I oppose this delay, seeing that all activity in this life of ours is “unfinished” in the last resort. However, it is her own affair, and if she’s not satisfied with them, what further can I do about it?*

Individual personality and confidence, rather than simply talent (or lack thereof) are clearly intrinsic to what is remembered by literary history and what is lost.

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36 P.H. letter to H.M. Green. 7 September 1941, 117 Victoria Street, Potts Point. National Library of Australia, Canberra. H.M. Green Papers, MS 3925.
In Olive’s case, there are other more mundane factors at play, like jammed drawers, although these are perhaps related to unconsciously engineered falls from ponies. Olive writes to another anthology editor, George Mackaness, in 1940:

Dear Mr Mackaness,

Thankyou for your kind invitation to submit The Gleeman to you for your anthology. Hughie McCrae has instructed me several times to send the verse to you but I have been unable to do so as the drawer in which most of my papers are stored has been stuck fast and not until this afternoon have I been able to find anyone with the combined strength and cunning required to reopen it for me.

Now I have the verse I should like to revise parts of it before I send it to you and just as soon as I have made these revisions I will send it along.

Yours Sincerely

Olive Hopegood.37

Typical of Olive, this is the only letter in the file and “The Gleeman” was never published. Peter, despite his manifold efforts at networking on Olive’s behalf, was finally unsuccessful in his bids to have a significant number of Olive’s poems published. He had not the “combined strength and cunning,” otherwise such hinderances as jammed drawers would have been overcome. Neither has this research been able to loosen whatever drawer Olive’s poems are locked in. The stuck drawer, the unfulfilled promise to send the poem, and the delay due to perfectionism, have formed a consistent pattern of events mapping Olive’s career.

In Olive’s case there seems also to have been some family history of a public obscurity syndrome, perhaps a literary maternity of silence. Olive’s mother, Alice Clucas, was also a writer, but of children’s fiction. A family legend recalls a letter Alice received from the then Queen, now the Queen Mother, saying that Mrs Clucas’ books were favourites with the princesses Margaret and Elizabeth. Her two books Over the Hills and the sequel Carol in Bushland make an interesting addenda to Olive’s narrative. The magic fairyland which Carol, the heroine of these stories, visits, is hidden from most people ‘behind’ the hills’ somewhat like the little brown house and other unattainable “somethings” from Olive’s dreams and poems. Where

Alice’s stories differ from her daughter’s in resolution. Carol, by way of good deeds and magic, finds her way to the magic place this hill conceals.

Alice, like Olive after her, somehow evades the annals of that well-researched area of Australian children’s literature. She is not in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Children’s Literature*, nor have I been able to uncover anything about her in other writings on children’s literature. This silence seems to concur with the many theories regarding gender and the kind of confidence required for publishing. Tillie Olsen asks:

*How much it takes to become a writer...how much conviction as to the importance of what one has to say, one’s right to say it. And the will, the measureless store of belief in oneself to be able to come to, cleave to, find the form for one’s own life comprehensions.*

(27)

Although there seems little doubt that the socializing women receive makes them less likely to be confident and driven in the competitive area of publishing, these generalized pressures are difficult to quantify in regard to the individual. There are, instead of such suppositions, concrete and discernible issues affecting Olive’s confidence that are traceable in the Hopegood correspondences.

Peter records that Olive distrusted his appraisal of her poems, “my opinion as to their excellence being discounted in her eyes as naturally prejudiced.”

Because it was Peter who pressured Olive into publishing, if she felt that the delay in the publication after the initial acceptance of her manuscript signified a lack of quality in her work, this would confirm her earlier-held suspicions that Peter had overrated her talent. This doubt was perhaps compounded by the emotionally fraught separation and divorce proceedings during which Olive seems to be aware of Peter’s use of her poetry to stay in contact with her. These combined factors would have created a particularly unstable emotional environment for publishing. But Olive is right to be dubious about other people’s perceptions of Peter’s effusive response to her poetry. Clem is a case in point, although his opinion seems to fluctuate between this (already quoted) implied compliment referred to by Peter:

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38 P.H. letter to H.M. 21 December 1935, “Croy” Wylde St., Potts Point. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
... You, of course, are right about my wife's work. It betrays a new approach to Life, peculiar to this age, and yet old as music, old as the human heart, itself, and like the human heart also forever young.\textsuperscript{39}

and a later letter (also already quoted) in which Clem writes his own opinion of Olive's poetry: "With all respect however I do not agree with your assessment of her quality.\textsuperscript{40}

It is difficult to know just how Peter's literary friends felt about Olive's poetry and Clem is not the only such enigma. In the early days of their marriage, Peter sent some of Olive's poems to Hugh, and when a response was not forthcoming he reacted with a noticeable increase of pressure on his new friend:

... I had hoped that you would have written a word appreciative of Olive's "My People" of which I think I sent you a copy. Perhaps, viewed singularly, Olive's individual efforts do not stir the imagination. Viewed collectively however, and she has done a lot of work in the short time we have been married, I think they reveal a new method, a new outlook. I hope to send you a batch of her stuff some time. You ['will' is crossed out] may then see what I mean when I claim that she came out of a tree, or out of an ocean wave. For she has two rhythms in her, that of the breaking wave --- that of the dream-growth of the tree. She can write formal verse, and not badly either, but those conventions seem to cripple her natural rhythm, and to dull her innate iridescence and freshness. I may be prejudiced by intimacy with her. I hope and think I am not. She is something entirely new, fresh and delightful, both as a person and as a poet, and I have never met anything like her in all my experience of human beings, which has been fairly wide, and sometimes, I think, deep, as well. She feels instinctively the form for her subject as the bird of creation feels the form of its varied songs, yet there is in her work a certain repetition and distinctive limitation to the rhythms I have mentioned above, just as there is a certain recognisable quality about most bird rhythms.\textsuperscript{41}

This letter clearly makes it difficult for Hugh to be anything other than "appreciative" in his appraisal without offending Peter. However, Hugh does write

\textsuperscript{35} P.H. letter to C.C. 28 March 1943. \textit{Meanjin} Archive, University of Melbourne.

\textsuperscript{40} C.C. letter to P.H. Undated. National Library of Australia, Canberra. Peter Hopegood Correspondence, MS 8214.

\textsuperscript{41} P.H. letter to H.M. 15 May 1933, Darlington. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
about Olive's poetry in a letter to H.M. Green regarding the collection *Australian Poetry 1943* in which Olives poem "Feathers" was published:

_Olive Hopegood's "Feather Head" is up in the air and rapturous. I loved_

and the white clock's fears
are counted and thrown away
until the house is grey
with wild goose-feathers
while we who are tiger-striped
for night and day
do not care to sing...
we prey.
_(the three dots after "sing" seem better placed than after "prey")._
the murmurous stairs
declining into night
_reaches perfection._

(McCrae 151)

Because this letter is an outside correspondence, unable to offend Peter, presumably Hugh has his guard down, although, their friendship may still colour his opinion. However, the candour of his comment may be measured against his next sentence: "I am a friend of Kim Mackenzie, but, cheering his prose, I don't like his poetry."

One dubious element of Hugh's praise for Olive's poem is his addition to the title. Hugh often has joke-y names for friends and places so it may just be a pun, but "feather head" is a suggestive alteration.

In addition to Peter's exchanges with Clem and Hugh concerning Olive's poetry, writer Tom Inglis-Moore, is also drawn into Peter's search for praise of Olive. Peter writes this to Hugh about Tom:

_"Lastly but preeminently the fact that he induced my wife to surrender some of her poems for his inspection, a feat which I have never been able to bring off, ... I understand that Tom has written at length and enthusiastically about Olive's verse to you and that he proposes to hand on the selection for your appraisal before long. This is what I have been trying to engineer for the last two years but Olive has always hung tight onto all her efforts..."_ 42

But there is no letter from Tom in the McCrae archives in the relevant time frame, only this reference to Olive: "Peter Hopegood and his wife liked some of the stuff

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42 P.H. letter to H.M. 21 December 1935, "Crecy" Wylde St., Potts Point. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
[his own poems] in a way that was encouraging." For a letter written less than two months after the above cited meeting, Tom does not impart the sense that Olive made much of an impression, especially as he only refers to her as Peter's wife. There is further evidence of Tom's lack of interest in Olive's work in his selection of poems for Angus and Robertson's *Australian Poetry 1946* in which he prints two of Peter's poems and none of Olive's. In addition, his book, *Social Patterns in Australian Literature*, which was published much later, in 1971, but he claims was begun in the 1930's, has five mentions of Peter but never refers to Olive. Perhaps Tom waxed lyrical about Olive's poems for Peter's sake and never intended to write the letter and send the poems, or perhaps the letter and the poems are just lost. Whatever happened, Peter's sentiments about Olive's poetry are seldom reiterated with his level of enthusiasm by his acquaintances.

It is unclear how Olive felt about the opinion of her contemporaries, or if she felt that their views were coloured by her (and their) relationship with Peter. According to Olsen:

> Writers know the importance of being taken seriously, with respect for one's vision and integrity; of comradeship with other writers...how chancy is recognition and getting published...nearly all writers who are women are at a disadvantage here.

(41)

Peter agrees with this estimation of the necessity for support from his peers, which is perhaps why he was so adamant about Olive promoting her work. He writes this to Don Clarke after Olive has left for Adelaide:

> I don't provide myself with enough pats on the back and am therefore greatly indebted to friends like yourself who revive my self esteem. I particularly need this at the moment because I used to rely greatly on Olive's faith in me. That has not been withdrawn, but evidences of it are not available any more, also there is a disquieting thought that it might be in process of withdrawal since Jan is certain to welcome and to foster any such change and now has an open go (which doubtless he schemed to bring about, and of course cannot be blamed for planning, since jealousies are such potent factors in every connexion).  

43 Tom Inglis Moore to H.M. February 1936. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCune Papers, MS 12831.

In Peter’s opinion the falter in Olive’s career is unrelated to all these suppositions about power, confidence and the influence of outside opinions. Peter, perhaps jealous himself, feels that Olive’s dwindling career is the result of Jan’s detrimental influence. He writes to Clem stating this:

... I have passed the word on to Olive. She is in a particularly depressed state at the moment. Maybe if you could get a move on with the book or anyway write to her indicating that you are about to do so, it would help. She has cut herself off from all ordinary communications byconsorting with Jan. She is naturally that way inclined. I acted as a corrective to that. Jan is the same way himself only more so. So they freeze into a smaller and smaller compass. May be good for her work or may not. Anyway she hasn’t done any for some time. Needs a bit of outside encouragement I think. She is also depressed by the "peace" depression, if I may term it that. So, of course, are others. Only others are better able to stand it than Olive. Therefore I think a fair wind of words from you might help.\[45\]

Peter’s own agenda may be misleading him about Jan’s role in Olive’s silence. It was always Peter who pressed Olive to publish. This pattern did not begin with the manuscript, but in the first year of their marriage and perhaps even before. It continued despite Peter’s awareness that Olive did not share his own preoccupation with external approval. The following was written to Hugh in 1935:

The addenda are not ready yet. When I send them I will enclose some of Olive’s poems since you have so kindly offered to read them. I am far more concerned to see them published than she is. However firmly she may deny it, I feel that she now needs that additional encouragement which publication brings.\[46\]

The promotional work Peter did for Olive’s Modernist manuscript was the final push in a 15 year long endeavour to convince Olive to publish her work, an endeavour she had resisted from the outset. Olive’s phrase “not every piglet makes a Hamlet” foretells her own resistance to literary status. She seemed to prefer being the little piggy who didn’t want to go to market, but ran all the way home.

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\[45\] P.H. letter to C.C. 17 September 1943, c/o GuH[owarth]. Meanjin Archive, University of Melbourne.

\[46\] P.H. letter to H.M. 9 December 1935, “Crecey” Wylde St., Potts Point. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
The Hopegood Team
"so now I have crowded her out"
- Peter Hopegood

Despite all of Peter's seemingly altruistic marketing work for Olive, there remain the pitfalls of competition between a husband and wife both wanting to succeed as poets. Lynne Strahan, in her survey of Meanjin's history, lists Olive as a "notable contributor" saying her

gem-like brevity, shown in such poems as 'Ithaca,' was
unfortunately eclipsed by the anarchic proximity of her husband,
Peter Hopegood

(113)

although Strahan does not elaborate on how she came to this conclusion. The two wrote very differently. Peter's hard-like songs and ballads and his complicated mythological and etymological speculations produced poetry so esoteric that he was compelled to add long explanations, in prose, to his collections. His poems are not really comparable to Olive's on any level. However, while Peter slips further into obscurity in contemporary scholarship, he was certainly more successful in publishing than Olive was when they were alive. It is impossible to gauge the impact that marrying an already experienced writer almost twice her age had on Olive as a young woman poet. The subtitle quote, above, is taken from an extract which may at least give some sense of the complications:

Well Olive has got out of being published once more. The excuse this time is that it will prejudice my chances of help from the Literary Fund if both of us put in simultaneously. I had already thought of this but Guy Howarth had overruled the objections and persuaded me to have a go while Macaness [Mackaness] is willing. I told Olive I thought it would be expecting too much of them to publish us both at once. But she would not see it. So now I have crowded her out. There is however some sense in what she says. She
reckons they'll have less difficulty in understanding my dope which will thus act as a gatecrasher for hers. Whereas if she crowns them with some of her acrostics right at the start, it may put them off the Hopegood team altogether.\(^7\)

The power exchange between Olive and Peter over who should publish is almost incomprehensible in this letter. Olive “would not see” that both of them submitting work would jeopardize their chances, but it also seems that it was her “excuse” not to send her work on the grounds that it will prejudice Peter’s chances. However she stood in this debate, Olive eventually decided not to send her work in favour of Peter’s more “acceptable” poetry. Perhaps she felt like Anais Nin:

> The aggressive act of creation; the guilt for creating. I did not want to rival man; to steal man’s creation, his thunder. I must protect them, not outshine them.

(Olsen 30)

Conversely, of course, this may have been the outcome Olive wanted, given her usual stance on self promotion. Peter’s letter is too muddled to disentangle who was projecting their desire onto whom, but clear enough to illustrate the problem.

The archive collections did not include any actual “acrostics,” like those that Peter attributes to Olive. He may not be alluding to the notion of word puzzles in the text itself but rather the complexity in Olive’s later, disjunctively intertwined imagery, as in “This Is The Hour”:

This is the hour  
when the black dog is eating moonstones  
and on the dark river  
gipsies are singing  
of moons made of blood.

This is the hour  
when moths speak of insistence  
to a flame of white silence  
when clocks press the unwanted minutes  
into caps of metal.

This is the hour  
when Proserpina forgets  
to cup the moon

\(^7\) P.H. letter to H.M. Undated, c/o ABC. La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
in her hands
and love is a flower of paper
under glass and dust.

(Meanjin Papers 1943, vol. 2. No.2. p.12)

Julia Kristeva's comments about women's writing offer one mode of interpreting this obscure poem:

When a woman tries her hand at the architectonics of the word perfected by Mallarme or Joyce, it generally leads to one of two things: either the art of composition gets bogged down in an artificially imposed structure that smacks of word-play or crossword puzzles, a sort of candid and consequently self-invalidating pataphysics; or else - and this is the solution which seems to me the more interesting - silence, and the unspoken, riddled with repetition, weave an evanescent canvas. This is where Blanchot saw the 'poverty of language' revealed and where some women articulate, through their sparing use of words and their elliptical syntax, a lacuna that is congenital to our monological culture: the speech of non-being.

(Eagleton 303)

Kristeva's mention of word puzzles is analogous to Peter's comment on acrostics. The philosopher's solution, "the speech of non-being," is entirely consistent with the not-speaking (not-publishing) of the silence with which Olive chose to end her public career. "This is the Hour" is furnished with deliberate complications all precariously balanced on a lack of concrete holds - on a safety that is withheld from the reader. The "hour" is indecipherable, as is the setting. The poetic voice is audible but disembodied above fears that transmute into images connected by meaning, not by physical descriptions of a definable place in which the poet observes her surroundings. Olive refused to interpret the blend of images in this poem for Clem, but Peter is happy to. In an extract already cited, he says:

I have given your message to my wife, but I doubt if it will have any effects so far as eliciting any interpretations is concerned. For me, of course, the black dog eating moonstones is one with the sun-devouring dragon, only the dog is closer to humanity than the cosmic dragon which I imagine gives a clue to the sort of eclipse indicated in the poem.

As with "My People," Peter reads the poem in relation to his own research into universal symbols in mythology.
“This is the Hour” is unlike much of the writing in Australia at this time, perhaps with the exception of the disjunct images in Ern Malley’s *Darkening Ecliptic.* The dog, gipsies, moth, clock, Prosperina and the paper flower, reverberate with each other in Olive’s poem to evoke the multiple and frightening rituals with which humanity attempts to master time. Time makes the bullets which kill, and draws the seasons which inevitably send Proserpina back to the underworld. The gipsies’ pagan prayer is to time embodied in the moon, which is sullied with the horror of blood. All these images are connected to the inevitability of following time’s law like moths hopelessly drawn to the flame that kills them. It is a close-knit shorthand that Olive uses to depict these themes, one that requires the reader’s engagement – they must decipher the meaning within the poetic scheme. Perhaps this is the complexity to which Peter refers in his depiction of Olive’s poetry as “acrostic,” or perhaps some actual acrostics did exist but are now lost.

What is apparent in the letter describing Olive’s failure to send her poems to Mackaness, is that Olive and Peter share the belief that of the two of them, Olive’s poetry is the least acceptable, or the most difficult. This would suggest that the poems to which Peter refers must be of a different caliber, content and structure to the early, readily publishable, Felix Reb poems. But the time frame of the innovations and variations in Olive’s poetry is hopelessly blurred. The amateurishly bound collection in Peter’s National Archive file had examples of poems that seemed to span the gamut of Olive’s poetics. The path of her progression across various styles and thematically disparate poems has remained elusive because she rarely dates her work, and keeps old poems to revise again after leaving them dormant for years. The collection included a Felix Reb poem called “Dawn,” but also a Modernist poem, “Spring Night” that is mentioned in Musgrove’s appraisal of *Voyage to Ithaca.* These two pieces offer themselves for comparison by virtue of their far flung compositional techniques and contents:

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48 This book was the central piece in a hoax designed to debunk Modernism in Australia. It will be referred to later in this chapter, but it is important to know that the poems came from collation of deliberately disconnected images.

49 *The Western Mail*, 15 December 1932.
Dawn

Behold the night with sombre chivalry
kneels, till his dark plumes sweep the quiet trees
in silent vigil or dim reverie,
until with mirthful flutes high melodies,
his lady comes in rosy domino,
the shining mistress of his dreams and quest.
He rises as the gilded trumpets blow
along the east for him who came out of the west.
Out of the black mysteries of jewelled shores
proudly he comes who having travelled far,
has sought adventure through dark, secret doors...
He hangs between his lady's breasts a star.

She trembles...ah...the moment is too fleet!
Pallid, he dies, kissing her golden feet.

This stylistically taut, fin de siecle rendering of the metaphor of night and dawn meeting as lovers for the briefest encounter, demonstrates Olive's very capable romanticism, an almost mock-medieval structure, and her ability to write a popular formal verse. Although Peter writes that "those conventions seem to cripple her natural rhythm, and to dull her innate iridescence and freshness," the rhythm does not seem stilted or troubled here. The theme of personified day and night canceling each other when they meet as lovers is repeated with the spring and summer in "Spring Sonnet." The Spring abandons the winter when "Moth-like she comes out of the grey cocoon / The winter wove to hold her fragile wings." At the end of the poem she meets Summer and "sees the flame and feels the summer's breath/ Desires the urgent gold and flies to death." The attraction of opposites in both these poems lead to the death of one as it merges with another. It is tempting to read this theme biographically. The Meanjin file traced Olive and Peter's relationship until it eventually silenced Olive's public voice, Peter canceling, even drowning Olive out, with his excessive vocal interference.

The attractive metaphors and neat construction of "Dawn" make it an eminently publishable piece, as The Western Mail's choice demonstrated. But Olive

50 P.H. letter to HM, 15 May 1933, Darlington, La Trobe Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. McCrae Papers, MS 12831.
51 The Western Mail, 15 September 1932.
segregated this work into her other persona, Felix Reb. It is one of only few Reb poems to be reprinted in this private collection which suggests it had other merit in Olive's mind. The more Modernist "Spring Night" seems almost like the work of a different writer. It is another poem that could belong to the notion of acrostics which Peter mentioned.

Spring Night

Drip

drip

whispering rain.

A splinter of moon is in my brain.

Drip

drip

mist of rain...

Beatrice walks the earth again.

Canals were wrapped in linked mail,

quiet nights of moon and mist,
enchanted sea and inlets kissed

beneath a silver veil.

the sable channels moved and breathed,

snakes guttate with silver scales,
beneath the bridges writhed and wreathed

forlorn, remote, the Mourner's wail,

Drip

drip

mist of rain.

Scent of lilacs white and wet,
rain that drips

'forget!'

forget!'

A splinter of moon is in my brain
The mourner and Beatrice love again.
Beatrice presumably names Dante’s lover whose youthful death made her the subject of his cycle of love poems. In The Divine Comedy Dante is reunited with Beatrice in the after-life where she acts as his guide. This allusion would propose Dante as the poem’s mourner and elucidate the reinstatement of love at the poem’s close, while the strange and serpentine landscape could imply a revision of the underworld as a place of melancholic waters rather than hell-fire.

The visually informed placement of the words in Olive’s poem is an innovative (for Australia of the period) depiction of the rain, each carefully separated drop/word works to heighten the division between ‘The Mourner’ and ‘Beatrice.’ The poem works with a number of metaphors based on what is simultaneously the same but separated, taking water as the recurring motif. Rain drops metamorphose into the mist, the river joins the “sea and inlets” whose “kiss,” like the night and dawn of “Dawn,” holds within it the loss of individual identity. The moon as a splinter in the brain is a dramatic refiguring of the notions of lunacy - the moon governing madness. Musgrove praises this “small thing” (ie: the poem) as “almost perfect” in one of his only positive remarks about Olive’s poetry. This is the only poem of those mentioned by Musgrove in his appraisal of Olive’s manuscript to appear in Peter’s collection. It is difficult to guess what criteria Olive used in putting together this gift for Peter. Perhaps she chose the poems he most liked. Certainly the poem he praised most highly in the correspondence, “The Gleeman,” was included.

Collating “Dawn” and “Spring Night” beneath the same cover suggests that Olive did not consistently use any given style in her writing. This trait could be seen as at odds with artistic integrity; however, of her manuscript Voyage to Ithaca she writes to Clem that it is a cycle of poems. It is unlikely that Peter’s collection, which is all that remains, would have been accepted for publication, and it is probable that Olive never intended it to be. But this was not the case of the manuscript Voyage to Ithaca.
"I am checked by certain spasmodic mutations into modernity...and the appalling opening of "My Sister" - "My Sister let us drink methylated spirits!"

- Sidney Musgrove 52

Given Musgrove's acrimonious tone in his review of Olive's manuscript, the decision to recommend its publication is an unexpected reversal. While Olive's life and personality demonstrated themselves as powerful components in her literary silence, publishing is principally dependent on the opinions of critics and the fashions of the period. "My Sister," which Musgrove would cut from her manuscript, makes an apt beginning for a foray into an analysis of the power of the professional opinion. The poem itself mounts a convincing defense:

My Sister...  

(My sisters, let us go mad for God. - St. Teresa)

My sister, let us drink methylated spirits  
out of beautiful pliant glasses  
whispering still  
of the colour of canals.  
That will be a little shout  
beneath the plated cover.

Let us tread grapes in the street  
'till the red wine runs to the gutter  
Let us wear furs against our naked skins  
and give to the rain and wind white linen.  
Let us toss up our febrile thoughts  
against the coloured air

52 S.M Review of Voyage to Ithaca, Meanjin Archive, University of Melbourne.
and sway with laughter,
Pretending to embrace.
   Let us pretend to shout
   beneath the plated cover.

My sister, let us be epicene
and run in wooden shoes
across the splintering echoes
of erotic tiles.
My sister, let us do anything
to forget that pain
traces white patterns
on shivering glass,
that Lorca is dead
while we are full of shame
and madness sobs in the cafes
and the twisted lanes.

(Meanjin Papers 1943, vol.2. No.1 p.15)

"My Sister" brandishes the rhetorics of both Modernism and Feminism in an unbridled song of hedonism. In the poem Olive openly advocates the kind of visceral sensuality she had only gently assigned to non-human figures, and written beneath a male pseudonym, 20 years earlier. The sense of celebration of this release is almost bacchanalian. Yet, the poem closes with the death of Lorca, and this self-same lavish celebration is a means to heal the loss of the great Spanish Modernist.

Musgrove attacks the work by maintaining that it is basically the same poem as both "Feathers" and also a lost poem "Last Days." "Feathers" does revisit this metaphor of celebration, and perhaps Musgrove assumes that both works excessively celebrate the feminine - given he considers them the same. His homogenizing of the poems is interesting given his claim that the manuscript is marred by "the absence of a body of thought," thereby discounting these Feminist themes as consequential in Australian culture. It is useful to print "Feathers" for comparison, even though the third poem in the sequence "Last Days" has been untraceable.

Feathers

Let us put feathers
in our hair and dance
and touch the moon with a feather.
Let us throw back our heads and chant

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insolent phrasing
for a stately measure.
Let us pretend the moon is silver
not a grey pocked cast,
that we are white with pleasure.
Let us forget that fatigue
has stolen our days,
oblique, capricious,
with a monkey's claws.
Let us forget that terror creaks
above and below on the stairs:
that blood is old on the streets
and the white clock's fears
are counted and thrown away
until the house is grey
with wild goose feathers.

Let us put feathers in our hair
and dance
and touch the lips
with a feather:
let us rehearse our conversations
approaching briefly
with the finger-tips:

You see the moon's new silver
on the rain-washed dusk,
a wind that is bent across
a pigeon's wings.
With rapt ineptitude
the night bird sings
while we who are tiger-striped
for night and day
do not care to sing,
we prey...

Let us with all the rare
artifices of dim ceremony
embrace and descend the stair
declining into night.

Let us descend to hide
in the long wave's shadow
and bow three times
to touch the earth
with fingers of willow.
Musgrove rightly connects "Feathers" with "My Sister," the two could be described as thematically continuous, as one would expect a 'cycle' of works to be. Both extol the power of reveling, which is then undercut by the notion of charade. The Sisters "pretend" to embrace and to shout, and their dance is to "do anything to forget that pain." The totemic ceremony in "Feathers" is likewise an "artifice," its participants "pretend" and "rehearse" their conversations. But the falsified celebration in "Feathers" is nowhere assigned to women, it reads as a universal struggle with fraudulence, being as much about the potency of time, ageing, ceremonies ancient and new, and perhaps the struggle with language embodied in the failure to sing. It is like both "This is the Hour" and "My Sister" in evoking the horror of time in its destructive capacity.

A highly successful Australian poet from this era, Judith Wright, traces some similar themes, particularly capitalized Time, in the title poem from her first collection, The Moving Image. In a paragraph on Kenneth Slessor's poetry of the 30's, Wright comments that "the questions of time and death...occupy few Australians" (Because 53). In her estimation then, these preoccupations set Olive, Wright and Slessor outside the Australian mainstream. Interestingly, Olive and Wright submitted their manuscripts to Clem at Meanjin almost simultaneously. The contemporaneity of these manuscripts, coupled with the shared thematic of their poems, invites comparison between the poets and an examination of what led one to success and an illustrious career, while the other toppled into obscurity. In one of Peter's letters to Clem, he had this to say about the well-favoured Wright compared to Olive:

... Don't forget about Olive's poems. You've got a winner there also, though not so obvious a winner as Judith Wright. Will take longer to be recognised here perhaps, but if we can get a really first class book to send to England, I don't think we'll look back. Olive is another Mallarmé, make no mistake about that, a Celtic Mallarmé, and one who owes nothing to Mallarmé but is just that way in her own right.³³

Clem, as we know, did not heed Peter’s advice, while Olive was still waiting for a word from him, *The Moving Image* had been sent to the press.

One explanation for the disparate receptions of the two works could be attributed to the considerable stylistic differences between them. Wright, in her foreword to *Collected Poems*, made these comments about her poetry:

> The poems have been written out of the events, the thinking and feeling, the whole emotional climate of my own involvements of that time. [1942 to 1985] Because of that tide of change, their background and therefore part of their significance will be unfamiliar to many people. Today’s shifts in critical practice have begun to tear texts from their contexts.

(no page number)

As well as claiming the need for context, Wright illustrates the concrete hold her poems have on the external world of their time and place. Her dictum is inapplicable to Olive’s poetry which, with its fantastic dimensions and ungrounded metaphors, is less reliant on the social context to illuminate meaning. Rather than having particular clarity in the time and place in which they were written, what was “unfamiliar” in Olive’s poems remains so because it is created by word play rather than the direct engagement with the external. This is not to divorce her poetry entirely from time and place as it relies, partly, on the conventions of the Modernism born of the social upheaval caused by war, but to recognize that the need for context to decode Olive’s poetry is tempered by her stylistic choices. Where Musgrove complains of Olive’s Modernism in his appraisal of her manuscript, his review of *The Moving Image* praises Wright’s Modernism as “almost never suffer[ing] from the fault of straining after effect, of being too clever by half”(250). He likes her “naturalnesse”(250).

Where Wright depicts what is solid, and particularly what is solidly Australian, and takes these concrete starting points from which to move into a more cerebral mode of poetics, Olive’s later poems are very rarely firmly set in either a definitive landscape or a recognizable place. Her descriptive power is of the psyche, whereas Wright’s is of a physical environment which becomes representative of a psyche. When Musgrove reviewed Wright’s collection for *Meanjin*, this sense of locality is an aspect he praises, writing:
Her poetry is the true landscape poetry, in which the physical scene becomes, in Blunden's words, the 'landscape of... being' (249)

He is equally pleased by the "Australianness" of these landscapes, a topic about which A.D. Hope writes:

All the poems of The Moving Image, except 'The Company of Lovers', are set firmly in, and help in turn to set forth, the picture of New England, its landscape, its history, its daily life. (10)

Olive's alternative is to manipulate symbols in the reverse, the psyche being illuminated by physical metaphors. But, by this logic, the physical symbols are subordinated to the representation of an inner world; thus the physical images become inconsistent - by design.

"Feathers" epitomizes Olive's technique. It is a meditation on the symbols of the feather and the moon, in what is mostly a nightscape, although the speaker belongs to the "we who are tiger-striped for night and day." There is an incongruous cast of animals inhabiting this striated landscape; the tiger who, along with the monkey, the pigeon, the night bird, and the wild geese, act as the universal symbols in this essentially characterless poem. That these animals are specifically un-Australian prevents Olive's work from being associated with another popular avant-garde movement in the Australian poetry scene of this era, the Jindyworobaks. This school was interested in finding some essential Australianness with which to inflect their poetics. By these means, they hoped to move beyond the fashion for repeating European motifs which they felt were incongruous with both the Australian environment and national psyche. There is no sense of their 'Australia' in Olive's poem. The 'action' of "Feathers" seems to be situated on the stairs in the house with the clock, but the stairs' uncertain descent is a decline into a place that transforms the speaker into the ghostly image of the fingers of willow tree. This descent appears to have moved down a psychological stairway to the abyss of the "night" or the "cold wave's shadow."

Perhaps the greater stability of Wright's poetry was more pleasing to the distraught post-war psyches of modern Australians, or at least those in the decision making literary establishment. "The Moving Image," invites comparison with
"Feathers" beyond the similarity of era and gender of the poets. Thematically and symbolically, the poems share a contemplation of a clock's embodiment of Time. But Wright's is by far both more personalized and depersonalized in her depiction of time and waste. She is personal in her choice of the clock that counted through the childhood days in her family home. But the poem becomes depersonalized when madness is made concrete (and perhaps safely removed from the speaker) in the image of Tom of Bedlam, rather than in the "us" who are sent mad "again" (Collected 5). This "again" perhaps also retaining the option for returning to sanity "again." Here, in place of Olive's disconnected and unbound images, Wright describes:

Poor Tom, in whose blood's intricate channelled track,
    in the unsailed sea of his heart, in his witchball eyes,
    in his senses that spoke and mind that shaped a world,
passionate terrible love never ceased burning"

(Collected 5)

This array of images is as diverse as those Olive writes, but in Wright they are connected to, and linked around, a single, comprehensible image, that of Tom's human body; the veins, heart and eyes. They do not float in a landscape devoid of concrete holds like that in which Olive's images drift and collide. Another succinct example of Olive's planned discontinuity of images is in "This is The Hour," discussed above, in which there is no reason for the black dog to be eating moonstones, other than one divined by readers—a flexibility which allow the likes of Peter's esoteric interpretation, among innumerable others.
Of Olive and Wright’s divergent poetic strategies, Olive’s are of the brand of Modernism that is made more contentious by being less readily comprehensible. This is perhaps why they are dismissed by Musgrove as being without any linking ideology. But his claims seem unfounded given that Olive is consistent in her drive to poeticize both time and sensuality. Her structures regularly use discontinuity to fundamentally question these themes, while her poetic motifs often hinge on the nullifying play of images which negate and neutralize each other. Her characters, when she uses them, are nearly always women. Another original typescript fragment imagines a dream-like conversation with “Lilith”:

![Image of typescript]

Fig. 5. Olive Hopegood, fragment. Original typescript reproduced from Jade Ricza’s private collection.

Other female characters in Olive’s repertoire include Beatrice in “Spring Night,” who is joined by the Ophelia Musgrove mentions. There is an unpublished poem on Ariadne in the archives, as well as Proserpina in “This Is the Hour.” In this preoccupation, and her interest in bacchanalian celebrations, Olive’s poetry reads as woman centered, in contrast, perhaps, to the non-specific mix of genders through
which Wright extends her poetic voice - for example the masculine personas of her famous “Bullocky” and “The Remittance Man.”

The tolerance, in the literary establishment of the 1940’s, for such Feminist leanings as Olive’s was minimal. Vincent Buckley’s famous commentary on Wright, in which he suggests she ought to move away from “uwomanly” poetry, belongs to this time frame:

*When she [Wright] attempts to be not a woman, but a bard, commentator or prophet, she becomes a bit of a shrew – which is the worst and most unwomanly of all things that a woman can become.*

(174-5)

This sexist commentary resonates with Philip Lindsay’s remark on Wright’s “intense femininity”(37). Lindsay’s notion of femininity encompasses traits which are opposed to the Feminism for which Olive seemed to be striving.

Presumably, Wright’s tracing of Aboriginal culture would have been an equally unpopular thematic in this period. This begs a question about the confrontational approach of Olive’s Feminism being perhaps more alienating than Wright’s deploiring of the colonial destruction of Aboriginal culture. In “The Bora Ring,” for example, Wright presents Aboriginal culture as already irretrievably lost like the spear “splintered underground.” Wright’s focus on the tragedy of these losses - although an approach important for drawing attention to the savagery of the colonial practices - is perhaps a more nostalgic and therefore palatable poetic, as compared to the strident tone in which Olive sings in “My Sisters.”

Perhaps less palatable still, was Olive’s attachment to Modernism. There are conflicting opinions about the role of Modernism when it arrived, late, in Australia. By most accounts it did not flourish in the highly nationalist war-time and post-war climate. Geoffrey Dutton’s *Snow on the Saltbush* makes a comprehensive catalogue of anti-Modernist critics under the befitting chapter title “Enemies of Modernism.” Much of the evidence for Australia as a culture opposed to the intellectual movements filtering out of Europe and America came from the pinnacle of anti-Modernist attacks, the infamous Ern Malley affair. This involved two traditionalist poets collaborating on some contrived Modernist poetry which they convinced a
journal editor into publishing under false pretences. Their aim was to debunk the poetics this editor favoured.

According to Strahan’s *Meanjin* history, the despised Modernism, as it was understood in 1940’s Australia, involved:

*a blurring of distinction between form and content, outrageous imagery, weird syntax and a galling new vocabulary*

(58)

all of which are criticisms that could be leveled at Olive’s later work, or at least the poems named among those in her manuscript that are extant. Strahan goes on to describe the anti-Modernist temperament as affected by a staunchly Nationalist post-war Australia which associated Modernism with the already condemned internationalism. Of the Modernist poets of the European canon, Olive is compared by Clem to Verlaine and by Peter to Mallarmé. She herself refers to Lorca in “My Sister.” It is hard to know what her influences were, but she most probably knew Lorca’s works as Peter was somewhat of an expert on him. Peter must also have had access to Mallarmé’s works in order to compare Olive with him. In an early-sounding poem from the National archive called “On rereading Milton after the Moderns” Olive praises Milton over the new, so she was probably conscious of the world stage of writing, although both Olive and Peter complain about the difficulty of getting access to books in Australia.

As well as this internationalism, Modernism also denoted an intellectual elitism that was equally unwelcome to many Australians. These negative attitudes were, according to Strahan, particularly directed towards poetry:

*Poetry was under more exacting scrutiny, because the public’s moralistic interpretation of poetry’s role (as a cloth on the altar of civilisation) was accentuated during the war. The nationalist argument ‘I admire anyone who thinks in Australian’, was gilded by the general principle that the function of ‘art in this age of death’ was to keep man from despair.*

(60)

Olive’s poetry was unlikely to impress proponents of this opinion, and Musgrove appeared to be of them. He wrote an article for *Meanjin* called “‘Obscurantism’ in Modern Poetry” which lamented the current poetic leaning toward obscurity and ascribed this phenomenon to the equally dilapidated state of the human psyche in
the Modern world. He agreed with James Devany’s article, to which he was responding, that one outcome of the fashion for obscurity was to hide incompetence. In his review of Olive’s manuscript retained in the Meanjin Archive he criticizes the “spasmodic mutations into modernity” as being:

out of tone with the body of work: e.g. the kilowatts in 1.2 of ‘Ghosts Do Not Know’, and parallel with this, some - perhaps humourless (am I right?) - examples of curiosa which quite fail in their effect: e.g. the ‘blisters’ in ‘Ophelia Winds her hair’.

Unfortunately neither of these poems has been recovered and thus cannot mount their own defense.

Interestingly, Musgrove did not retain his anti-Modernist sentiments in relation to his own poetry. A work in his posthumously published poetry collection would fail his own anti-Modernist litmus test. The opening stanza of his poem “Ptolemaic” reads:

The caudal flexions of the verboid God
Congenitively twist
From Alpha even unto Ichabod,
And - perfect sciolist -
Involve the centre, as the centre grows
To the outer circuit of the open rose.

(Shapes in Air 40)

In his review of Wright, Musgrove mentioned his distaste for the Modernists “straining after effect, of being too clever by half”(250) which is a fate which seems to have befallen his own poetry here. Clearly his taste shifted to include the “mutations into modernity” and an interest in the “curiosa” he derided in Olive’s poetry. Reprinting his poem in this context could be construed as a cheap shot, but in the light of the destructive effect his criticisms had on Olive’s career it seemed a matter of (poetic) justice to hand Medusa a mirror. More galling in Musgrove’s review are his final remarks comparing Olive’s manuscript to another work, also written by a woman, which he had reviewed for Clem. He writes, after reiterating that it is a “slight work” in need of “pruning”:

But the whole collection is far more worthwhile printing than the Mary Listle collection which you sent me some time ago.
His reference to Mary Lisle catalogues Olive with another woman, and therefore in a separate sphere to male poets of the period, distinguishing poets and poetesses. There was a propensity for this division between genders at Meanjin in 1946. In issue No.2 Elizabeth Hamil reviewed nine female-authored collections of poetry in the minimal space of less than two pages in which she was condescending towards, and derisive of, all but Rosemary Dobson’s book. The gender divide extended even to the choice of reviewer - Hamil being the only female reviewer over the four publications of the year.

Musgrove’s anti-Modernist and anti-Feminist leanings seem to have been influential in the decline of Olive’s career, but he is not solely to blame. Precisely what caused the delay in publishing Olive’s manuscript is unknown, although presumably this lukewarm review was part of the problem, as the difficulties of the time did not prevent Judith Wright’s book from reaching the press. However, Meanjin was suffering a set of trying circumstances, and interestingly 1946 and 47, when Olive’s manuscript was in Clem’s possession, were two extremely financially difficult years. Strahan mentions a:

£280 debit for 1946 and hefty loss of £591.13.4 for 1947 . . .
Christesen put out feelers to an alternative publisher in the first half of 1946. With several promising manuscripts available, notably Hope’s first assembled poems and Louis Esson’s letter’s to Vance Palmer, he wished to ‘gradually build up prestige for the Meanjin Press.’

(89-90)

While Olive’s manuscript is not listed here, it would have been subject to these same financial and publishing problems.

This state of affairs compounded with Olive’s stylistic choices in a collusion that produced silence. By spanning both Modernism and Feminism in her poetry, Olive doubled her jeopardy. These ‘isms,’ contentious by their very nature, are further problematized by their difficult relationship not only with Australian culture, but also with each other. Gilbert and Gubar, in their article “Tradition and the Female Talent,” reprint Ernest Hemingway’s “The Lady Poets With Footnotes,” among a number of other misogynist pieces produced by men in the Modern era. Central to this article is a demonstration of the ugly manifestation of the fear felt by
male writers at the influx of women writers flourishing in the Modern climate. Some of the sentiments of this backlash seem to have infiltrated the Australian literary establishment. Meanjin was one of the few sympathetic outlets, but even this relatively avant-garde journal suffered as a result of the popular opposition to its intellectual and international pursuits. Strahan’s Meanjin history suggests that Modernism was the defining factor in Olive’s eventual silence, numbering Olive among a:

\textit{catalogue of poets rocketing to oblivion on the infernal machine of modernism named Harris, O'Dwyer, both Hopegoods, Picot, Vrepont...}

(64)

Her guess is as good as mine, and it must become the final supposition to be made about Olive’s silence.

This chapter has offered an interpretative account of the silence of literary obliteration. Olive’s experience seems to harmonize with Susan Howe’s poetic exploration of male control over publishing that resulted in Stella’s silence, both women relegated unsingable songs. Olive is dead, her manuscript lost. Her remaining relatives knew little of her life and received nothing from her estate. So comprehensively was her family excluded that they were not invited to either of her weddings or her funeral, nor did they know when or from what she died. Her cohorts from the old days like Flora Eldershaw are dead or, like Clem Christesen, can no longer recall the events. Olive’s second husband, Jan Ebbingue-Wubben, is not recorded on Australian electoral rolls or in telephone directories. Perhaps he has returned to his native Holland, or perhaps he too died. No-one contacted in this research knew anything about him except to remember that they disliked him. As for dusty boxes hidden away in attics, a boomerang-shaped house that Olive and Peter built in Wahroonga, Sydney has become a freeway, and Olive’s old family home in Perth has been revamped as a solicitor’s office. Jessica Anderson in \textit{Tirra Lirra By the River} records one house in which Peter and Olive spent a long period in Potts Point, Sydney. The house was called “Crecy” and it belonged to a group of four terraces that were popular haunts for bohemia. But, as Anderson also discovered, these have been torn down. It was here that the jammed drawer held Olive’s poems. It was in her room at Wahroonga that many were stored after she
left for Adelaide, but nothing remains of the houses, except the mythical home embodied by 'Ithaca' in Olive's title poem from her manuscript.

ITHACA

YOUR voyages move in us,
the dreams that foresaw
and the blood that formed them,
mounted and ebbed with the sea's lift
and merged with the wind-shaped
movement of the sea.

Now we hear profoundly
and without fear the song
that once we closed our ears against,
fearful to lose
a known courage and a little wisdom.
Now we rest in silence
through days in the sun,
strengthening limbs
grown unsteady, grown numb,
with the sea's rise and the sea's fall
beneath the decking
of our tireless ships.

Our movements are shaped
no longer to the lift and fall
of the sea's endless
landfalls and departures.
Our thought is shaped
no longer by the white fingers
of the climbing waves
nor by the white blades
of gulls in flight.

All day we lie strangely at peace
among the heats and mists
of a windless sun,
learning here, at home,
to understand our voyages.
Learning to understand
what we have been
in the dark-coloured violence
of our storms.

Only at the coming of evening

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when the wine loosens the tongues
and the winged truth in us
do we, who once closed
ears and hands against a song,
tell in bitter stumbling words
our tales of blessed islands
and of the fearful things
that drew wild brilliance
across foreign nights.

As we finger the unfinished web
on the warm dark wall
and smooth with our feet
the flower-scented dust
we strive, like half-blind men,
to see pale fingers weaving
through a patient dusk.

(Meanjin Papers 1946 Vo.5. No1. pp35-36)

Having been caught fingering this unfinished web of poetry, we are, like the
voice of this poem, left “half-blind…” seeing only the disembodied “pale fingers
weaving” rather than the whole poet. Half-blinded by the struggle to see through
this veil of silence what those fingers have been weaving, we are, like Helen Keller,
not only blinded but also deafened, as Peter was when he began this excavation,
being “unable to hear her voice clearly, although it was something to be able to hear
it faintly.” All the while Olive has been the epitome of Penelope’s feminine
patience, waiting silently for readers to make their way past these sensory
deprivations. Olive has known such silences well, as the “closed/ears and hands
against” songs she could not sing throughout her troubled career would suggest.
And now, after that stormy journey, it seems to have made her happiest to choose
this silence, to leave her work as she left “The Gleeman,” perpetually “unfinished”
with all the possibilities this status allows and disallows.

But we must now follow Virginia Woolf and “leave behind, shut up in their
parks, among their folios, those solitary great ladies who wrote without audience,
without criticism, for their own delight alone”(Eagleton 9) and take up the trail of
one who so nearly shared in Olive’s posthumous silences, Mina Loy.
APPENDIX

Additional Poems by Olive Hopegood

The poems printed here are those referred to in the previous chapter, when they have not been reproduced in full in the text. They are arranged as chronologically as possible given the information available.

Early Works: ‘Felix Reb’ poems

WRITTEN in the BARBARIC AGE of the MACHINE¹

Clatter and crash -
Creators of rhythmic thunder,
God-like barbarians
Clamouring over the earth
That they plunder,
Chaotic and terrible,
Where shall I hide from their thunder?

I sing of the silver cadence of the nightingale,
Of the music of the flute that is too frail
To break the slumbers
Of moths that hide their wings beneath the leaves.
I sing of the long magnificence of summer, of a night
Too beautiful for songs, too arched and white;
Of Deirdre, wandering, like a wind that grieves,
Over the emerald bogs and through the morning hills,
The magic Deirdre, sorrowful and fair.
All that I worship with unquestioning prayer
These god-barbarians have explained with numbers.

Clatter and crash -
Terrible pauseless thunder,
Destroying, destroying
The rhythm of peace,
And the infinite wonder

¹ Glascock, John D. ed., Jarrow Leaves, 41.
Of the earth that I worship.
Is there no hiding place safe from their thunder?

On the lakes of blue
The silver lotus shone
With lustrous calm,
And all the earth was silver-sweet with dew,
And the great balm
Of silence flew,
Like a broad-winged gentle bird,
In the dark groves of summer trees.
And there we heard
Exquisite songs of silent ecstasies.
Then with a white,
An infinite and poignant pain,
A voice spoke quietly in my sickened heart,
"Oh, not again
Shall you of night and silence be a part."

Clatter and crash -
Clanging with thunder,
Fed by obedient robots
Your power has created,
Fed without blunder,
Oh, demon of clangorous clamour,
Where shall I hide from your thunder?

Diane,
I come
Caressed
And possessed
With your high white magic!
My heart
Apart
From this rhythm tragic,
Diane,
This man
With his lonely song adoring cries on your lonely
magic.

Clatter and crash -
In dreadful dynamic thunder,
Oil-fumed blood streams
Flow in that body
That yells for its plunder,
Crashing in triumphs -
Where shall I hide from its thunder?

God of my faith, I pray of you
Courage
To face the flood of steel,
The dark Colossus with his ringing shield,
This roaring tide that surges out of hell,
This proud Colossus with his armoured heel,
Bringing the iron that all his men shall wield.
Gods of my faith, I pray of you
Courage.

The tapestry of beauty has become
A sweat rag for a hurrying mechanic.
The earth's bereft of twilights and of gloom,
And shrill lights stab in ceaseless sharp affront.
The singer has grown silent now in panic,
A small bewildered bird in the engine room.

Clatter and crash -
In passionless, aweless thunder,
Creating rhythms
And pulse of Tubal Cain,
Smash with your violence, and sunder
The wings of the morning!
Oh, where shall I hide from their thunder?

Under this tree,
Green fountains of melody,
Shaking out notes on the gold of the suns,
Lie with me,
Lovely one.
Lie with me here
As a lithe hour passes,
Moving with thighs
That are golden and fleet.
Lie with me here
On a bed of lush grasses
Young, gentle grasses,
Oh, sweet, my sweet.

Clatter and crash -
With enormous sightless strength
The pistons smash
My songs.
The Western Mail, December, 1931.

DAWN
by "Felix Reb".

The rose and gold,
    The mist and fire of it:
The flame and the dew
    And the swift young desire of it,
As Day laid his mouth on the mouth of
    the night

The wonder unerring,
    The rapture unshaking.
The anguish of love
    And the stillness of waking.
Dawn comes like this a kiss 'tween the Day
    and the Night;
Comes flushed as a youth
    with his passion unspoken -
    A poignant delight and the darkness
    is broken.

The Western Mail, September 15, 1932.

SPRING SONNET
by "Felix Reb".

Moth-like she comes out of the grey
    cocoon
The winter wove to hold her fragile
    wings,
Trembles upon the lip and very soon
Her fear upon the fretful wind she flings
And rises sweetly through the warming
    air
All earth, that saw her coming scarcely
    breathed;
She was so frail and delicately fair;
Green were her wings with dusty gold
    ensheathed

For you, oh, spirit of all youthful song,
Ecstatic birds in lovely shyness sing;
I kneel upon the greening earth and long
To touch the feathered softness of your wing

She sees the flame and feels the summer's breath
Desires the urgent gold and flies to death.

The Western Mail, Jan 19, 1933.

AUTUMN NIGHT
by "Felix Reb".

The golden leaves like wounded birds
Flutter and fall
While the sad winds call;
And desolate among the reeds
And the rocks where the water weeds waver and stir
A mist has risen, fragile as a blur
Of breath upon a night-dark looking-glass
Under the warm grass of the earth's heart swells
Voluptuously,
And scents mysteriously
Rise from the hollow of her gentle breast
She sighs with the urgence of her dreams oppressed.
The trees are stilled,
With their long fingers on her heart and filled
With a green fire that leaps up through their limbs.
Enchantment crouches on the bough of silence,
A silver bird;
And gloriously I heard
Her singing through the dim-lit hours,
The pale notes scattering like white flowers
In a dark grass.
Twigs snap, the light hoofs dancing pass.
The song is dead; the silver bird is gone.
The Western Mail, April 20, 1933.

THE FLUTE
by "Felix Reb".

Oh, Youth!
Oh, Pain!
A flute doth weave
Along the malechite
Of twilight trees
Patterns of silver light
Frail harmonica
Oh, sing and grieve,
Voice of young poignancies!
The silver flute
With fragile passion sings
Of love and pain,
And upward flings
Its slender melodies.
Oh, magic flute,
Subtle as rain
Slipping her fingers through
The hair of trees
Till through the green and blue
A nightingale
On quiet, enchanted wings
With all her song grown pale,
Is mute.

Early Work From Hugh McCrae's Papers

MY PEOPLE
(December, 1932)

The dew is falling
Like the tears of stars, over my eyes
I have remembered, terribly, my people.
Sleeping, they lie in shallow, jewel-like pools,
Green, golden-dappled, - - -
Sleep and awaken to new laughter,
Laughter that merges delicately with songs.

I have remembered, terribly, my people.
Their music breathes along the silver air,
A silver dragon-fly that shines and hovers, - - -
Their music frail and iridescent
As the silver rainbow quickening in the dew wet grass
So vainly calling when the moon is high.

The dew is falling like the tears of stars.
I have remembered, terribly, my people.
Voices waken, throbbing in the stillness.
Dim shapes move with a dark intangience.
I hear their fragile laughter and their muted voicing.
Calling down the silence, to a prisoner.

In this great loneliness I have remembered, terribly, my people.
They sing. They sing with such pale, slender fluting,
The wind doth mimic them among the reeds,
And the bird, lonely in the dark and silent boughs,
calls to them.
A grey ghost comes along the night to me
And touches my eyes to hot and hopeless tears.
The dew is falling like the tears of stars.
Lost, I remember, terribly, my people.

Olive's Poems kept in Peter's Box

THE GLEEMAN

The gleeman had a pointed cap
rather ragged about the brim
and adorned with a long bright pheasant's feather,
and a jerkin of green that was richly stained
with lovely tones it had got from the weather
and a pouch that swung at his waist
on a strap of leather.

The white road curved between the hedges
where a scattering of gold and scarlet leaves
were like bright coated rebels
hiding among green undergrowth,
and some had fallen in the ditches were they lay
like the slain after an ambuscade.
The reapers swarmed about the ripe warm fields like bees
in ceaseless gathering activity.
The gleeman leaned on a gate
and watched for a time the reaping
and pleasant it was with the sun on his back

---

and the smell of the wheat; and he thought,
   The sickles among the wheat
   are a lovely sight,
   with eyes half-shut it seems
   so many mad new moons
   sink from a golden sky to a golden sea
   and leap from a golden sea to a golden sky.
   the work of men is good to look upon
   as the work of God

At noon the reapers ceased their work
and came to him across the fields
for they had see the harp that was slung on his shoulder,
and with pleased smiles and eager tongues
they bade him share their food and ale with them
by the stream...

   And would be pleased to sing them a song
   when the meal was done?
   or to tell them a tale?

And after the meal with his back to a tree
he said,

   What song will ye have?
   A raid or Midir calling Etain to Faeryland?

And a girl cried out for Midir's song
so on his harp he made a frail and piercing harmony
and sang...

             Etain...Etain...
             Now fall my tears for thee
             and thou doest see
             against thy windows
             silver rain
             come back to me,
             Etain...Etain...

             Here no voice ever goes
             to frail to sing
             and in the summer of my lover
             no withering
             will steal the foxglove
             scarlet from thy cheeks
             and the years feet
             will never soil the sweet
             white snow upon thy brow
             and thou shall sleep
             beneath an apple bough
             where blossoms and ripe fruit
together blow...
From flowers, sweet lady
I could make
women as beautiful as thee
but I should never see awake
within their eyes
your smile that is a clear sunrise.
And all the power
that could endower
them with thy light is gone, Etain...
Etain...Etain...
Now fall my tears for thee
and thou dost see
against thy windows
silver rain...
Come back to me,
Etain...Etain...

The gleeman came to the gates of a town
when the dew was fresh on the summer dawn
and the shoes he had upon his feet
were pointed, dusty red and worn.
He called to a passing hucksterer
across the cobbled street,
Tell me what part of the world this is
and where I may find the King.

The man put down his bundle and gaped
till laughter set him shaking
Going to the King!
Ho! Ho! Going to see the King....
The gaze the gleeman bent on him was wondering and mild
as though he looked for the first time
upon an idiot child.

The King of Ulster said to him...
Wandering gleeman, if you bring
songs that will delight my ears
then gladly will I hear you sing.
And if your song be new and fair,
 gleeman, you will stay with me
and then for nothing you will lack
with a velvet cloak upon your back [nice, warm]
and a pouch with a golden fee.

The gleeman's eyes were green and sharp
and shone with a sly secret smile
and his fingers deftly touched his harp.
I am a travelling universe
of songs and jests and wandering thoughts,
within me live a hundred things,
champions, clowns and courtiers,
mists and sudden silver lights,
priests and peddlers, charioteers,
lovers, rogues and nightingales,
beggars, fears and vagrant joys.

And I am the king of my universe
A velvet cloak and a golden fee
shall buy no kingdom from a king
for a ruler in thrall is a bondsmen then
and power and right are gone from him.
Conor, within my heart is set
a magic, voiceless melody
and in the clamour of thy court
I know it would cease to sing...

Then Conor spoke, with twinkling eyes,
as he looked upon the gleeman kindly-wise,

    King Gleeman, you shall have your fee
    though you will not remain with me...

And pledged him with another cup of wine
and asked for another song
so the gleeman drank and sang again
before the courtly song.
He made the King and champions laugh,
He made the King and champions weep
and fine, resounding words.

Then he said,

    I ask of thee,
    two things and they shall be my fee.
First I desire to kiss the hand
of the loveliest lady I have seen
and that this homage I may give
to Ulster's queen [Munester's]
And then he said,

    A pair of shoes,
stout enough to endure all weather
and I should like it if they be
fashioned out of red leather.

The champions watched him take the road
in his ragged cap with the pheasant's feather,
their hearts moved in them restlessly
and then they knew,
quite suddenly,
that it was lovely weather...
AT DAWN

There is no sound
of wind or leaves or life,
only in silence
have I found
perfection.
Song is a clumsy thing
and all desire to sing
is gone.

Come into me,
O, loveliness of dawn,
until I am strong,
with a mute ecstasy
I long
for strength
to leave the blinding flesh,
be out of all this haggardness
and, chaste and fresh
and free,
move as the light moves
on the argent sea,
swing and dart with the pale smooth fish
enchantedly
through their soundless depths
and swim
through the diaphanous tide
on the sky's green rim
Maddened with this photism behind the dawn,
faint with desire
my senses burn and melt
in the silver fire.

Soundless and free
of torment and delight
and free of knowledge
which is meaningless
and free of desire to know,
upward into the light
above the sea
I ache to go,
to be
one[s?] sigh within the channelled air
among the fading stars,
one no
within the veiled diapason of light,
one instant, perfect and remote,
within eternity.
AT NIGHT

At night when silence like a wearied giant
leans on the house
I see
death going about the room
vibrates with a murmurous chime,
I am shut in the moon's dark shell
and time,
a dead leaf at the end of a branch,
waits for the wind.

The minutes pause
separate and cold
like sweat on the face of pain
and the flowers grow old
and droop on the rims
of crystal and warm porcelain.

Unflushed petals tumble down
in an odorous rain.
Unflushed petals tumble down
like kisses that fall
in a passionless rain.

I am leaf
deep bedded in the grass
eaten by slow worms of unmeaning grief
Consumed with the torment of a vast desire
I am frustrated silence waiting for sound,
I am the torment
of the stringless lyre.

MIRAGE

If there should ever come a day
when I shall say
within myself,

This thing I thought
to fashion out of wind and fire
and unattained desire
is nought
but a mirage above the sand,
a phantom frail and blue,
that I have overtaken.
Then shall I stand,
faint and shaken,
nothing before me but the blinding sand.
O, Christ in Heaven!
if suddenly
this day should come on me
what shall I do?

_Circa Olive's Mid to Late Career_

ARIADNE³

Ariadne, can you see
deep within your mirror's glass
the minutes pass?
Tell them, sweet, a rosary,
and, when your last ave is sung
and silence curves exquisitely,
then I shall come...

Turn and turn again
to the glass;
watch the flying minutes pass
like birds within a misted sky.
Turn and turn again
to the glass
and watch the minutes fly

Ariadne, can you hear
music like the sound of bells
in white curved shells?
A song, my sweet, for lovers sung
that in a silence you will hear
and know I come....

Turn and turn again
to the shell
of silence; hear the lover's bell
ringing like a faery thing...
O, Ariadne, know I sing...

OLIVE'S LATER, MODERNIST POETRY.

LETTER FOR SUMMER

THE trees clash
Leaves of metal
in the bright wind.
The leaves are a cry
of delicate steel
on the frail skies' powder,
The summer has taken root
in the land with hunger
to be feared in the blood

And now I know
the winter has not swept you
with floods from my senses.
Nor has the spring,
urgent of pulse,
wanton of mists and illusions,
concealed my need
for you only.

No word comes of you
through the bright void's thunder.
The stone of my patience
burns to dust,
white on the yellow grasses,
white and unresting
on the scarred white roads.

The cicadas fray
the dark silk of the night
to a febrile surface.
The parched leaves whisper.
By Venus!
I am brought low
For my laughter.

*Meanjin Papers 1942 Vol.11 No.12 p.12*
“Sing Silence
To destiny”

(Loy, Lost 44)

“Silence” was very nearly Mina Loy’s “destiny.” Like Olive Hopegood, Loy rejected her public career in favor of the silence of self-styled exile. Abandoning the artistic communities she had inhabited with much remarked upon grace in Paris, Florence and New York’s Greenwich Village, she went to live among the ‘bums’ of the Bowery in New York, eventually retiring to the then sleepy town of Aspen, Colorado. The public world responded in kind to her silence. Her work went out of print, her legacy to poetry forgotten. It has only been the dedicated scholarship of the past twenty years which has revived her work, almost to its rightful place in literary memory. The back cover of the most recent edition of her poems, Roger Conover’s (ed) Lost Lunar Baedeker, quotes Thom Gunn of The Times Literary Supplement:

Mina Loy has finally been admitted into “the company of poets,” the canon. As if she cared.

Loy certainly seemed not to care when, in response to an earlier attempt to revive her work she quipped “But, why do you waste your time on these thoughts of mine?”
I was never a poet" (Conover, *Last* xv). More than over-modest self derision, Loy's remark is both false and accurate. Writing poetry made Loy a poet by definition, but as an artist she preferred not to attach categorical labels to her wide-ranging creativity. This chapter both examines and honors her resistance to distinctions and boundaries by considering her poetry, play-scripts, novel, and polemic manifestoes, under the collective banner of Loy's "writings." Although she resisted the title 'poet,' the word's ancient Greek etymology 'maker,' is perhaps the most concise term for Loy's artistic capacities. In addition to her textual artifacts, she made lampshades and magazine covers, patented inventions and games, and designed and wore her own clothes. In coherence with these makings, in all aspects of her life Loy made and remade herself with language, objects and actions. She crosses the boundary separating art and life by doing what she proposes we all do in her manifesto for "International Psycho-Democracy," in which she demands: "make the world your salon" (*Last* 267). She existed creatively, wearing and living among her pieces of art, while living out her poetic doctrines regarding women's rights, and resisting ideological systems that confined female sexuality and imaginative freedom.

"Never a poet" can be seen as describing the variety of Loy's production - she was never just a poet, but this phrase also articulates her fraught relationship with the tools of her craft. Loy longed to make language new in order to devise uncontaminated space for her thinking, which was equally new in its challenges to tradition. In this she is like Temple Grandin who built her private symbolic language to articulate her singular response to the external world. Both these women's penchant for isolation (albeit a late blooming one in Loy's case) is telling. Where Temple invokes her video library of images, Loy, according to Harriet Zinnes, "said with cocksure mockery in 1927 that she was trying 'to make a foreign language...because English had already been used'" (29). Loy also invented a child's toy called "Build Your Own Alphabet." It is at this core level of writing that Loy

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1 Quotations from Loy's creative output will be indented but not italicized. Indented passages in italics indicate critical commentary on Loy's work.

2 For a reading of this toy as symbolic of Loy's creative output see Susan Gilmore's "Imma, Ova, Mongrel, Spy" in Shreiber & Tuma (eds.) *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*.
situates her poetic creativity. Her project involves 'makings' that tamper with and reassess the fabricating materials of her craft. As her final artistic stance, Loy made collages of social discards, both material and human. Her creativity always sought material outside the center.

This interest in redesigning language, and therefore what language can make, was also part of Gertrude Stein's project. Referring to her own writings, Stein famously said of Loy that she "was able to understand without the commas. She has always been able to understand" (C. Burke 130). While what Loy said of Stein could be equally applied to her own poetics:

Like all modern art, this art of Gertrude Stein makes a demand for a creative audience, by providing a stimulus, which although it proceeds from a complete aesthetic organization, leaves us unlimited latitude for personal response.

(Last 297)

The essence is participation. The new writing asks of the reader an immersion in, and response to, its newness. In this way Loy seeks to make thoughts new, coercing the reader by requiring their involvement. She encourages a pro-activity; that readers learn these new alphabets so they may converse with her in her realm of rebuilt social exchange. This points her writings toward the future - a new alphabet with which to write a new world (or world book as Helen would say). Loy's manifestoes belong to the same logic. She sought to re-devise not only language but society, two aims which were intricately interconnected, particularly as they existed in her awareness of self.

Loy's search for alternative modes of expression suggests that she felt those languages in her grasp (including French, Italian and German as well as her native English) were somewhat deficient for her purposes. Perhaps this is one reason for her final attraction to silence. She foreshadowed the muted close of her poetic career with these lines on "the tattle of tongueplay":

A couple of manuscriptual erasures
And here we have your deaf mute
Beseech him
He will never withhold so completely
Entitled “To You,” this piece was the dedication to Loy’s Love Songs. Conover quotes Loy’s letter describing it thus in The Last Lunar Baedeker (325). The ‘you’ to whom the poem is directed uses “the tattle of tongueplay,” the things that he/she says, in order to “withhold” him/herself from the poem’s subject. Language is the mask in this equation. It is emblematic of a silence more nullifying than that characterized by the deaf-mute who shares his status with words erased from manuscripts. This relationship to silence is perhaps one of the most fraught of the numerous relationships Loy seeks in her contact with the world. Beyond the very Modernist gesture that language can no longer encapsulate any meaning in the rapidly evolving world, in Loy, silence interpolates each sphere of the poetic process, and each stratum of the poet’s self. This silent-self is evident in her psychic make-up long before it surfaces in her late reclusiveness. In “To You” the speaker suggests that the subject’s words are his/her “incognito” and this communicates as much about Loy as about the lover to whom the poem refers.

Loy lived incognito; disguises and assumed identities surrounded her like garments of her own design. There is a famous anecdote recounted in the introduction to Conover’s first edition of Loy’s poetry, that is also used to effect by Marjorie Perloff in her analysis of Loy,3 where Conover queries:

was she deliberately camouflaging demonstrative and theatrical first-persons behind inscrutable selves? She wrote under an elaborate system of anagrammatically and numerologically derived pseudonyms. Was she impersonating herself or did she have a double? When she misdated her paintings, was she anticipating our posthumous eavesdropping and intentionally throwing us off the track? Was it her pseudonymania, perhaps, which accounts for a rumour that was circulating around Paris in the Twenties - that Mina Loy was in fact not a real person at all, but a forged persona, a hoax-of-critics. Upon hearing this, the story goes, Mina Loy turned up at Natalie Barney’s salon in order to convince guests of her existence:

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I assure you I am indeed a living being. But it is necessary to stay very unknown... To maintain my incognito that hazard I chose was - poet.

(Last xvii-xviii)

Loy, and the lover in “To You,” share their strategy of word-wrought disguises. The ‘pseudonymmania’ that Conover posits is adeptly unraveled by Susan Gilmore in her article “Imma, Ova, Mongrel, Spy: Anagram and Imposture in the work of Mina Loy.” Gilmore applies Jonathan Culler’s reading of Saussure to Loy in a way that invites another phantom to hover behind this discussion. By Gilmore’s reckoning:

Culler cites Saussure’s frustration with the anagram’s indeterminacy with the links it implies between the authorial and the phantasmagoric as the reason behind his failure to complete and publish the proliferating fragments and taxonomies that fill his notebooks... By contrast, the possibility that meaning appears everywhere and inheres nowhere serves as Loy’s point of departure; the anagram’s power to disperse as much as concentrate authority leads Loy to take up this trope as a mode of radical embodiment.

(277)

If Gilmore is accurate, then Loy embraces the shifting and backstage (to language) tendencies of the phantom, particularly its ability to evade any secured meaning or truth by passing through walls. Intriguingly, Loy’s pleasure in the phantom’s logic manifests itself not only in language, but also autobiographically - in her late escape from society to a district of shared isolation among the bums in the Bowery. In this, Loy countersigns Helen’s sign language. Where Helen vaporized her silent phantom with the language that dispelled it, Loy conjures the emissary from the outside of language by asking it to re-enter and by making herself the portal. Perhaps these counter inclinations arise because Helen sought a means of paving her way into social contact, rather than away from it. The relationship between language and silence is one that seems to intersect with the disembodied phantom of silence and isolation, and the living beings of conversation and community.

Why Phantominicry? What end does the phantom serve? Perhaps one answer lies in the play of obscurity. One of Modernism’s, and Loy’s, greatest hazards was the threat that new writings posed to language as communication. Her poetry deliberately ruptures her community by fracturing the communication that binds its members. Although many Modernist writers were criticized for meaninglessness, or deliberate obscurity, they nonetheless felt that the old forms
could no longer speak for their rapidly evolving consciousness(es) or for the equally metamorphosed modern world. Loy’s writing belonged to this daring experimentalism; her opposition to traditional forms was extreme. But there was more to her revolutionary style than the mere pleasure (or shock) of the new. She constructs a linguistic framework suitable for housing new thinking. Rather than tearing the language’s connective tissue by making it obscure, Loy’s project could be seen as inviting us in and having us share in her poetics and the processes of association available in the limitlessness of the Phantomime. Wittgenstein says that the limit of the expression of thoughts can “only be drawn in language and what lies on the other side of language will be simply, nonsense” (Tractatus 27). But perhaps ‘nonsense’ can be reassessed or translated as what was much derided as Modernist obscurity, and perhaps the Phantomimic space it seeks is one of transgressive poetics that break into new sites for the ‘expression of thoughts’ to which Wittgenstein refers.

Loy’s place on the cusp of this obscurantism/communication nexus suggests that her Modernist output is bound up with her incognito selves and her desire to invent a potential future like those she expounds in her various manifestoes for survival in the modern world. Rewriting the world in these polemics crosses paths with her rewriting of herself. Her deliberate concealment in her personal life is indebted to language’s same ability to mask or supplement reality. The ‘difficult’ language of her writings dissembled so cleverly that her poetry was commended and derided almost equally for its obliqueness in the days of its original publication. This difficulty has been diagnosed as the reason for the poetry being so long-neglected, as well as the reason for its more recent revival.

Roger Conover employs the term “difficult,” to describe Loy’s poetics but only in order to undermine his own designation. In his introduction to his first edition of her poetry he remarks:

*Moonstruck critics are largely the cause of Mina Loy’s eclipse. She wears their label - DIFFICULT POET - like a parasalenic halo around her head”*  

(*Last xxxii*).
But, as Conover suggests, ‘difficulty’ is an inconclusive rendering of Loy’s output. Perhaps if the term could be expanded so as to encode the unclassifiable nature of Loy’s style which had no adherents, and formed no school, it becomes more appropriate. William Carlos Williams’ introduction to the 1958 edition of Loy’s poetry has been much quoted as revealing a particular facet of this ‘difficulty’:

*Mina Loy was endowed from birth with a first rate intelligence and a sensibility which has plagued her all her life facing a shoddy world. When she puts a word down on paper it is clean; that forces her fellows to shy away from it because they are not clean and will be contaminated with her cleanliness. Therefore she has not been a successful writer and couldn’t care less. But it has hurt her chances of being known.*

(Conover, *Last* xvi)

The notion of poetic ‘cleanliness’ is another enigmatic phenomenon, one that targets a quality in the poetry that Williams sees as lacking in the reader. His interpretation of Loy’s silence intimates a sense of critical arrogance that privileges the readers who enjoy this poetry with a special ability. Conover locates this same bearing in Ezra Pound who remarked, “she is readable, by me that is” (*Last* p.xxxii), a comment which implies that Pound himself is more adept than others who may make the attempt.

The conclusion reached by Conover’s introductory essay is that “difficulty” and “cleanliness” have not been the only stifling qualities affecting Loy’s poetry; that perhaps opacity has been Loy’s deliberate strategy. Conover finally nominates Loy’s elected silence, a state which allowed her “the heightened perception which comes from living in artistic confinement” (*Last* xvi) as the most stifling. In Loy, it seems that the boundaries between art and life disintegrate. When she withdrew from artistic communities in her middle age, her poetry had to follow suit. Her verses had been accustomed to being escorted by Loy into artistic circles, her personal charm counteracting her poetry’s quality of resistance. Harriet Munroe said of Loy, “I may never have fallen very hard for this lady’s poetry, but her personality is quite irresistible.” After lingering for a few more lines on the caliber of Loy’s beauty and charm, she concedes, “Yes poetry is in this lady whether she writes it or not” (*Conover Last* xx). Loy’s hermitage jeopardized her poetic progeny so that they both remained virtually silent for the final thirty years of her life. The
poetry, unlike the woman who simply changed artistic direction, struggled to survive in the anaerobic culture of silence which was very nearly as fatal to Loy's poetry as Olive's silence was to her's.

Although Loy and Olive are vastly different personalities and writers, they share a partial desire for dissemination that finally gave way to a personal requirement for silence. They are twinned by their contradictory natures that hold them poised between promotion and privacy. For Olive, her marriage strained between these counterweights, where Loy seems internally rent by her own incompatible desires. Christina Rossetti's twin sisters Laura and Lizzie, in *The Goblin Market*, have been read as two sides of one woman and, as such, they form an accommodating metaphor for the two sides of both Loy and Olive. Like Laura and Lizzie's dealings with the Goblin men, the two facets of both Olive and Mina react differently to tasting what is offered to them as desirable - a place in the world of poetic fame. Both were initially 'Lauras' partaking in the otherworldly compact, the immortality of publishing, by accepting its fruits. The famous lines from Rossetti's poem where Laura:

> Sucked and sucked and sucked the more  
> Fruits which that unknown orchard bore,  
> She sucked until her lips were sore;  
> Then flung the empty rinds away.  

(16)

depict the orgiastic pleasure of this act. These are lips performing and reveling in their own performance. The other, 'good' sister, Lizzie, is by contrast, resistant to such temptations. Her mode is one of silence. When she traverses the glen in search of fruit to save Laura (or this part of herself), she approaches her task with the resolute refusal that characterized the later poetic careers of both Mina and Olive:

> Lizzie uttered not a word;  
> Would not open lip from lip  

(24)

Rossetti's rendering of the attack that provoked this silent impenetrability encodes the most seemly metaphor for this allegory. The goblins:
Coaxed and fought her,
Bullied and besought her,
Scratched her, pinched her black as ink,

(24)

and it is precisely the black ink of publishing that would be refused by these two women poets. It is as though there is a risk involved in this ink, a risk of damage like the physical damages imagined by Porter and Howe in their poetics for silenced characters. The moral of this fable, heeded by both Olive and Loy, was to abandon the pleasure of sucking at the immortality of ‘being poets’ in favour of the closed lips of private silences.

Where Olive’s split was born out by the internal pull towards privacy which opposed her husband’s push towards publication, in Loy the fissure belongs to a deeply-cut personal contradiction between introvert and extrovert, socialite and hermit. Loy’s gravitation to the world stage of artists and their ‘movements’ saw her welcomed into salons, a sought after guest and herself an active promoter and participant. From Joyce to Stein, Pound to Hemingway, Loy moved easily amongst these celebrities and was one of them. But there is no “eternity in a skyrocket”(Lost 53) as her oxymoron suggests in the first of her Love Songs, and Loy’s brilliance proved similarly fleeting.

Yet, the silence in which the canon should have boomed Loy’s success is now a mere hiatus, made accountable by new editions of Loy’s writings. These include: Roger Conover’s 1982 Last Lunar Baedeker (referred to as Last) and his 1996 Lost Lunar Baedeker (Lost); critical responses to Loy’s writings, particularly the 1998 collection of essays Mina Loy: Woman and Poet, edited by Maecra Shreiber and Keith Tuma; and Carolyn Burke’s in-depth biography Becoming Modern (1996). These books, among numerous others, articles and web-sites have diffused this earlier silence. Thus it is toward the internal logic of silence in Loy’s writings that this reading now turns its ear. Her use of silence is multifaceted and involves textual spaces, the lacunae inherent in language itself. These gaps and fissures seem to partake of the self-same silence that Loy perceived in her ego and in her relationship to the external world; a silence integral to her conception of both language and psyche. This reading shares her divided logic, earmarking what Loy
saw as the fragmentation inherent in her personality. This condition originated in her birth as the mongrel-self she names Ova in the autobiographical poem “Anglo-mongrels and the Rose.” Ova mirrors Loy’s many and varied poetic attempts to bridge fraught childhood silences by her adult choices - both poetic and lived.

To approach the body of Loy’s work will necessarily involve an approach toward their author. The three poems which impel this reading are autobiographical, each representing one of the three ages of woman. “Anglo-mongrels and the Rose” traces Loy’s ancestry and childhood (in tandem with the childhoods of the husbands she will later choose). Its focus is the ‘mongrelization’ of the poet, the point at which she first felt ‘cleft in half.’ The first remedy Loy seeks for this split self is the attempt to heal her silent center through sexual union. Her endeavors in this regard are traced by the second section in which Loy poetically encodes her trialing of sexual mergings in the epic cycle of “Love Songs,” and more pragmatically, in her Feminist Manifesto. Eventually Loy finds love, the fruitful union, with her second husband Arthur Cravan but fate cruelly deprives her of him after only 20 months.

The third section takes Loy’s final epic poem “Hot Cross Bums,” and her novel Insel both of which redesign her quest – searching for a familiar, rather than a lover, to heal her internal breach. She seeks spiritual connection with fellow outsiders or social exiles who share her psychological sense of disconnection with the world. All three of these long poems, and the novel, are autobiographical of three periods in Loy’s life and her varied responses to these stages. Although “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” was written after “Love Songs,” its subject matter comes earlier. “Love Songs” depicts Loy’s failed relationship with futurist Giovanni Bapini, a relationship forged in 1914, that falls between Loy’s two marriages. Insel was written after Loy’s marriage to Cravan ended with his mysterious disappearance. Set in Paris between 1933 and 1936, Loy is at this time acting as a gallery agent for her new son-in-law. The novel’s subject, Insel, is a ‘clochard’ or bum, but also an artist based on a real figure with whom Loy formed an intensely spiritual bond. She continued to seek the outsiders and derelicts in “Hot Cross Bums” written during her time living in New York’s Bowery, among the homeless and destitute. Roger Conover asserts that in this period Loy was
“engaged in a metaphorical quest for Christ in the Bowery” (*Last lxxvi*). Her attraction to the inhabitants of the Bowery does carry an air of the “metaphorical quest,” but rather than Christ, Loy perhaps sees in these ‘fallen angels’ a means towards self completion.

In Loy a number of enigmatic splits and hybridities provide only partial explanations of her complex psychology. She contradicts her disunity with her equally powerful drive to find a way across her divided sense of self. It is the silent chasm in Loy’s personal construction that she alternately evokes or seeks to dispel, hurdle or in other ways negotiate, that will also be the subject of this reading.
Cleft

"I was cleft in half"

(Loy, Insel 151)

Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose⁴

By Loy’s own reckoning her divided self originates from her mixed parentage; a Jewish Hungarian father and English mother, both mercilessly caricatured in “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose.” These two gave birth to a “clotty bulk of bifurcate fat”(130), Loy articulating the forked nature of “Ova” at the moment of delivery. As Helen Jaskoski notes: “Ova, the product of the union of opposites, internalizes the ideological conflict personalized in Exodus and Alice/Ada”(363). Loy poetically conceives (of) herself as the hybrid of this mismatch, sign-posting this self with the deliberately transparent pseudonym “Ova.” Of the other characters, her father is “Exodus,” her mother “Alice/Ada,” and her two husbands glimpsed in their respective childhoods are “Esau Penfold” (Stephen Haweis) and “Colossus” (Arthur Cravan).

According to Loy’s biographer, Carolyn Burke, the course the poem steers through this autobiographical territory has greater significance than the bare poetics of the work. She describes it as “chiefly of interest as one of Mina’s most polished attempts to understand her background - ‘to arrive through a patient voyage of elucidation, at the point of departure’ ”(353). Burke extrapolates that “Loy believed her hybrid status had enhanced the general tendency to think in opposites”(354). The pendulum of Loy’s poetic fascinations seems to swing between the opposite

⁴ All page numbers beside quotations from the poem refer to Conover’s 1985 Last Lunar Baedeker
poles of union and disjunction, chiming regularly on the themes of language and
sexual exchange as those sites at which she felt the poles should, but most often
failed to, meet. "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" alights on these themes from the
perspective of the poet's genealogy. Ova is the offspring of the turbulent gene pool
into which Loy gazes with acerbic lucidity. This childhood mongrel self, born from
its waters, is arguably the impetus behind Loy's later trajectories – both lived and
written.

The language of her parent's courtship (as 'Ova' re-envisages it)
foreshadows the failed communication that blights the physical, spiritual and verbal
ground of their marriage:

Alice the gentile
Exodus the Jew
after a few
feverish tiffs
and reparations
chiefly conveyed in exclamations -
a means of expression
modified by lack of experience
unite their variance
in marriage

(126)

The sexually teasing language of courtship, the "tiffs/ and reparations," are trivial
"means of expression" unlikely to be suitable modes to "unite" the "variance"
between the lovers. This inability to communicate significantly is the first of many
levels on which Ova's parents fail to navigate the divide across which they have
devised their cross-cultural marriage. It is also a space in which Ova must exist, a
space that represents only the failure of a union within which:

She is contracting
to the enveloping
spasm of uneasiness
in which she is involved with the big bodies

(164)

Ova is "contracting" into the unfathomable silence of this disconnection between
her parents, a schism that will later imbed itself in Loy's poetics and experiences.
Being born into this divide produces in the poet the sensation of being "cleft in
half" by her very make-up. Given the candidly autobiographical nature of this
poem, divorcing the subject position from Loy seems inadvisable. In the light of Burke’s comments, to allow a cautious dialogue between Loy’s and Ova’s experiences prevents a curtailing of the resonances common to the actual and imagined self. In life Loy partakes of the exiled position that she allots her father in the poem. He is the Hungarian Jew living in England and through him Loy traces the hereditary nature of exile as their shared status. In adulthood she will make herself, likewise, a foreigner, first in Austria then later in Paris, Italy and New York. The poem sees this preoccupation with displacement as an inheritance from Exodus:

and the dogged officer of Destiny
kept Exodus
and that which he begat
moving along

(115)

Before Loy’s eventual destiny in (public/poetic) silence was the destiny of exile. The incidents of the poem seem to teach the little girl lessons in betrayal as necessary precursors to such exiles.

Exodus betrays Ova in the spots-of-time-like glimpsed memories the poem shares with the reader. In the section entitled “The Surprise” Ova believes herself complicit with her father when he sanctions her peeking at an impending gift from a friend whose visits are “a level shaft of sweetness” which “cleaves/the irate thunder”(161) - even the pleasurable is punctuated by the sense of cleavage. Exodus says to Ova:

“We will not tell Miss Bunn”
says father “what we have done
peeking into the basket’”

(162)

but when little Ova is questioned about her fortitude in waiting, she looks “partakingly at her father/anxious not to do wrong”(162) and denies her crime. Her reward is her father’s betrayal and she is sent from the house branded ‘liar.’ Loy’s choice of words indicate the power of language to devise reality: “she is turned into a liar”(162). The closed door behind Ova is one of a number of such perceived deportations suffered in childhood that Loy translates into the adult realities of her
itinerant life. The poem mingles a sense of liberation in being on the other side of the door, with the degradation Ova has suffered to get there. She is soon drawn back in against her will. This episode that centers on the father's disloyalty has a heightened significance as it is with him that Ova feels some kinship. Although she describes it as the curse of a wicked fairy like the one who smote Sleeping Beauty, the gift of the "Jewish Brain"(132) is a common ground with the father. There is no comparable desired union with the mother, Alice/Ada, who is unrelentingly demonized by these reminiscences.

But it is the preferred paternal who again comes under-fire in another formative moment that engages with the untrustworthiness of language. As he did with the brand 'liar,' Exodus again makes his little girl a dupe of language's shifting referents. "The Gift" sees Ova ask her father for a sovereign "to buy a circus universe"(166), but he tricks her with a shiny new farthing. Exodus shatters the illusory truth of language as words supplementing for objects, and in this section of the poem Ova associates her father with the coin itself:

He seems a sovereign
the maximum
of money

(165)

Loy multiplies meanings with her grammar-dodging solecisms in these lines. Exodus both seems to give and seems to be the sovereign standing between Ova and her wish. The essence of 'Father' has infiltrated the desired object, the result of this transference, and the cruel trick played by Exodus when the coin is laughed at by a flower seller for what it fails to afford, is:

How evil a Father must be
to burst the universe by getting
so far into a sovereign

(167)

Ova shares these precarious linguistic foundations with Helen Keller. Both are at the mercy of truths devised by language that they are unable to verify with experiential evidence. But where Helen was protected (especially when Teacher refuses to let the alphabet glove give all people linguistic access to Helen), Loy is at the mercy of her destructive home life. Her father's sovereign power over his
daughter takes the form of a cruel trickery, one which displaces object and meaning - the coin and its value. Perhaps it is in this unstable breeding ground for language that Modernist poetic practices are born in Ova/Loy. Exodus, by wedging open the structures of language, may account for the linguistic and referential fluidity in the poet's later verse. But, more poignantly, Ova's troubled relationship with her father means that love (and its failure) and language (and its failure) become inextricable in the intellectually pliant years of the poet.

The most often quoted section of the poem flaunts the precocious Ova's early gift for language, art and poetry:

The child
  whose wordless
  thoughts
  grow like visionary plants

  finds
  nothing objective new
  and only words
  mysterious

(139)

In this sequence Ova overhears her mother discussing her new baby sister's diarrhea which is "quite green"(140). Ova fixes on the sonorous "diarrhea" and searches the greens around her for its visual correspondent. The other sovereign power, her mother, disables her search for the illusively beautiful shade of green that she supposes may be under the couch, when Ova "is pulled out by her leg"(142). Here and elsewhere the mother violates her daughter's aesthetic universe with "ineludable claws of dominion"(136).

Loy is merciless in her descriptions of maternal power. Even when Alice/Ada protects Ova from putting her hands into the brilliant colors of the fire, Loy remembers "a receding / prison / of muscular authority"(136) in which she is again "carried away"(137). Here the maternal is participating in childhood exiles, ever impeding Ova's search for beauty in color and language and using physical contact to intervene. It is perhaps at these physically defined (tactual memories as Helen called them) points of childhood development that the search for language impacts with the sensations of the body. In Loy this becomes the antecedent to
language and its relationship to the sexual contact between bodies. Interestingly it is sexual inhibition that Loy associates with maternity's 'muscular prison of authority' which is combined with Ova's sense of guilt at being the unforgiven product of her mother's defiled virginity. She is the fruit of failed union in which the sexual basely adheres to its biological drive in contradistinction to the mental and spiritual facets of the marriage which have remained resolutely separate.

This sense of being "ostracized," a term Loy attributes to her adult self as artist/genius in the poem "Apology of Genius,"(Last 77) has been integral to this poetic upbringing on the level of language, love, paternity and maternity. Ova/Loy inherits from her father the necessity for grappling with the requisite tongues required for conversation on arrival in each new repatriation, locating herself in relation to the indecipherable "tattle of tongue-play" that intervenes even in her native tongue. This is perhaps associated with the loathed mother-tongue. Exodus in England vocalizes both his and Loy's own foreigner/outsider status in the life she chooses, or perhaps the life that inevitably results from such origins:

Those foreigners
before whom the soul
of the new Motherland
stands nakedly incognito
in so many ciphers

(115)

Prior to the actual physical expatriations Loy orchestrates for herself, her childhood proxy has found the "motherland" of home, as it is envisaged by the poem, an equally treacherous and incomprehensible country of exile. Ova is displaced from each of her parents partially by the nature of her connection to the other. She exists between them, inhabiting the alternating silence of their disconnection's incommunication, or the thunder and tumult of their more vocal divisions. In one of the most lucid passages in the poem, Loy gives the reader an insight into the tone of discord:

Oh God
that men and women
having undertaken to vanquish one another
should be allowed
to shut themselves up in hot boxes and breed

(144)
this continues some stanzas later:

Exodus has nothing but his pockets
to impress
his rabid rose of the hedges
while for her redress
she can flaunt the whole of England in his foreign face

Here nationality and money are the grounds on which each stakes their claim of superiority.

Religion is no less treacherous. It is entangled in the logic of opposites that produces such “disequilibrium”(148) in Ova. The poem, in another of its explicit and simply wrought passages informs the reader that:

In mixed marriages
it is mostly the custom
for female children
to adhere to the maternal religion

(168)

How this ‘female child’ can adhere to her mother’s Christianity is problematized not only by the “ironical/commentary” from her father’s armchair about such matters, but by her fissured make-up, built, as it is, of each parent. The result is self betrayal:

Where Jesus of Nazareth
becomes one-piece
with Judas Iscariot
in the composite
Anglo-Israelite

(132)

Loy is a composite of Christ and his Jewish betrayer, implying that the inner split wrought between Christian and Jewish parents involves a self-loathing. It is telling that “one-piece” is hyphenated in a visual mimicry of the joined split self that is also made of two pieces forced to connect by the silent grammar of the hyphen. Equally adept are the signifying attachments ‘Nazareth’ and ‘Iscariot’ in which naming and belonging are readable in Ova’s internal schism. Loy’s games with her surname, changing her father’s Lowy to Loy, refusing to be Haweis, and finding the
lucky enclosure of ‘loy’ in Cravan’s real surname Lloyd all highlight her penchant for continuing this shifting identity that language incorporates. She has managed to translate these shiftings and re-namings into her existence, but for all the freedom this allows, what is sacrificed is meaning which becomes unstable and untrustworthy. This is something that Loy associates with all ideologies, but in this example it is attached to Christianity:

And Christ
  came with his light
  of toilless lilies
  to say “Fear not It is I”

(169)

Christ, who has been as ‘regrettably reticent’(148) in showing himself to Ova as the elusive green “iarrhea,” here becomes more menacing. The line breaks mean that He may be saying ‘Fear me,’ the “not” translating as ‘rather than’ or ‘instead of saying,’ “It is I.” This anxiety is readable from within the opposite sense of the comforting Christ who says, ‘Fear not, it is I,’’ building an ambivalent space for trust and meaning.

Cleaving to either of her parental religions, or their respective languages and ideologies, has been impossible for Ova. The lover Loy finally finds (short term) happiness with, ‘Colossus,’ is presented as Ova’s only familiar in the sequence. He shares her preoccupation with the elusive powers of language:

  and the first time
  he communes with himself
  he decides
  “All words are lies”

(150)

Through Colossus and Penfold the poem orchestrates another powerful dichotomy splitting Loy, one that is also centered on the theme of marriage: the juxtaposition of Loy’s first and second husbands. Loy’s first husband Esau Penfold is the infant aesthete given all the advantages but who is coolly ridiculed by Loy in the poem. This unsuitable partner is diametrically opposed to the loved Cravan who, it seems, was born a Dadaist “pissing into our reverend pastor’s hat”(151). The depiction of these opposing husbands multiplies and widens the logic of splits in the poem -
between them Loy builds another of the spaces in which she exists. These, added to the exiles and betrayals, comprehensively map the psyche and autobiography of the poet-to-be, encircled as she is by her tight genetic ‘Ova,’ a human egg already hatching her responses to these anguished beginnings, most particularly, for the budding poet, in language. Loy articulates the dismembered and elliptical style of her later verse as born from these early beginnings of being “cleft in two” which provides her with a chaotic and uncharted language from which to write:

Lacking dictionaries
of inner consciousness
unmentionable stigmata
is stamped
by the parent’s solar-plexus
in disequilibrium
on the offspring’s
intuition

(148)

Ova’s position mirrors her father’s. His was step-fathered (therefore disconnected from his father figure in a similar way to that in which Ova/Loy felt herself to be), and his multi-lingual psyche was the baggage he bought with him when he emigrated to England. But Exodus responds to his loneliness in the “incognito” and indecipherable “new motherland” by seeking to heal that which divides him from belonging. He desires union with something archetypally British and so chooses the unlikely counterpart of the English rose, Alice/Ada, Ova’s mother, because of:

...the instinctive urge of loneliness
to get to ‘the heart of something’

(116)

Exodus found in the heart of the very native English blossom of his choice that the union of opposites bears the poisoned fruit of Ova’s despair. Despite having to exist within the trope of this union’s failure, Loy seems unable to avoid repeating this same strategy; she too looks to the heart to heal the silent chasm she attributes to the mongrel-self. But her exploits prove ineffectual, empty, even abortive, like those of the father she molds into Exodus. As Loy leaves this nest of division, drawn by the same “magnetic horizon of liberty” that motivated her forebear, she takes as her inheritance:
[...]the soul's everlasting
opposition
to disintegration.

(170)

But she will find her attempt to cleave her disunited parts across this inborn divide as problematic as Exodus found his attempt to love the English rose. Neither sexual nor verbal intercourse will achieve what Loy seeks to repair.
Cleaving

"nothing so conserving as cool cleavings"

(Loy, "Love Songs" Lost 60)

"Cleavings" is one of Loy's typically enigmatic terms; like Derrida's double-edged zeugmas it encodes within itself the ideas both of severance and of adherence. In "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," this logic of internal opposites clefts Ova's psyche in twain, the necessary outcome perhaps of the mismatched cleaving together of her parents. In "Love Songs," "cleavings" also reads in both directions across a sexual union. Lovers attempt to cleave together while the language of the poem itself mimics this transaction. One of Loy's distinctive stylistic devices in the work involves concocting strange mixtures of previously unrelated words and images. The silent spaces between words and lovers thus share the task of articulating the clef in the poet's self as well as her attempts to overcome this private abyss. Autobiographical data indicate that the "Love Songs" record Loy's affair with the futurist Giovanni Bapini. The alternate title addresses them: "Songs to Joannes," Giovanni being a version of Joannes (Joannes could also suggest Juans as in Don Juans). But, before coming to this affair, it would be expedient to acknowledge the marriage that was its forerunner.

Loy's training ground in sexual union was as fraught and fractured as the childhood she remembers. Her marriage to Stephen Haweis begins the interplay between the personal and cultural in Loy's relationships as she depicts them poetically. The cultural comes to the fore in Loy's political writings which all

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5 The supplement, the pharmakon and diérérance are all such sylleptic terms.
center on themes of social change. Perhaps the work with the most succinct relationship to her endeavour to find love is her “Feminist Manifesto” that critiques relationships between the genders as its paramount concern. Written shortly after the dissolution of this union, it makes pertinent commentary on that institution and its pitfalls of which Loy had recently had first-hand knowledge. Loy recalled her first marriage as a convenience designed to elude parental control. She laughed at her interest in pitying Stephen Haweis when recalling him from the vantage of her old age:

“… we weren’t interested in each other - but for some reason or other I thought I’d better - oh, I hadn’t been doing anything discreet, but something about going - I had to go and see my people, who I don’t get on with, in England, and I arranged with this little dwarf, dark-haired dwarf, who was son of the - of the parson, that we would get married, but not be married, you know, not have any relationship. We weren’t in the least interested.

And then What happened? We got married in Paris, but in a British church. Then when I got married to him, he said if I didn’t really - belong to him, he wasn’t ready to go on with the joke about our being married, so that I wouldn’t have to stay with my terrible parents.”

(Shreiber & Tuma 240-241)

In a mirror of her parent’s relationship, this disjunction formed its own union in Loy: the tall self-consciously beautiful woman, married to an unattractive dwarf, all the result of a ruse gone wrong. This marriage produced three children; the first died within a year, a second daughter Joella, and a son, Giles, who was kidnapped by Haweis and died in his youth. Unsurprisingly, given its initial premise (if we can take Loy at her word), this marriage failed. It was followed by sexual liaisons that nod to Loy’s newly-found disregard for notions of social acceptability. She developed her own brand of Feminism, one that seems to comment on this first marriage as an archetype of the social conditions that produce numerous such ill-fated marriages. It is thus that her “Feminist Manifesto” crosses the boundary between Loy’s personal experience and the external conditions which shape such experiences according to their laws. As she says in “Anglo-mongrels and the Rose”:

- personality
- being mostly
- a microcosmic
These lines describe the pressure of the social on the individual.

_Feminist Manifesto_⁶

When her manifesto insists that:

Each child of a superior woman should be the result of a definite period of psychic development in her life - & not necessarily of a possibly irksome & outworn continuance of an alliance - spontaneously adapted for vital creation in the beginning but not necessarily harmoniously balanced as the parties to it - follow the individual lines of their personal evolution -

(155)

it is difficult to ignore Loy's relationship to her own children. This polemic perhaps underlines a sense of disconnection with the children of her farcical first marriage given that Loy began to despise their father early in the relationship, an unhappiness which may be connected to her need to leave Joella and Giles with a nanny in Italy for three years while she was in New York and then Mexico. The "Feminist Manifesto" was written circa 1914, at a time of particular marital discord and Loy's embroilment in sequential affairs with the Italian Futurist Movement's two heavyweights F.T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. This period is given the following synopsis in Conover's time-line of Loy's life:

*Letters written during these years indicate that this was a period of ill-health, depression, and neurasthenia, compounded by a troubled marriage and the trials of a motherhood she was not totally equipped to face. There is also evidence of a prolonged absence on Haweis' part, social isolation on hers, and infidelity on both sides of the marriage.*

_Last lxxv_

The need for a change in women's circumstances, one that could perhaps be brought about by writing Feminist manifestoes, affected Loy personally. Haweis

⁶ All quotations from the _Feminist Manifesto_ are taken from Conover's 1996 _Lost Lunar Badecker_ 153-156.
had control over the money they received from Loy’s father, and he was able to take their son away with him to Australia without her consent, making the need for social reform particularly obvious to Loy as a victim of the system. This was combined with Loy’s worldly experience. Her poetry began to engage with the plight of Italian virgins, whom she understood as more victimized by the patriarchy than she was. Although Conover places the poem that describes these virgins in his collection of Loy’s ‘satires,’ “Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots” (Lost 21-23) is not purely a malicious parody of the girls whom Loy teases for their “squeak[s],” “‘My dear I should faint.’” It is rather their position in the world that Loy finds abhorrent. Her distaste is directed at “Somebody who was never / a virgin” who “has bolted the door” at which the virgins scramble like domestic pets.

While the plight of disempowered women is a common theme in Loy’s poetry, her approach to the victims is often oblique. In “Three Moments in Paris” (Lost 15-18) she says that “All the virgin eyes in the world are made of glass,” doll-like and unseeing, but in the same poem Loy counters her own negative interpretation:

The woman
As usual
Is smiling as bravely
As it is given her to be brave
(Lost 16)

and then a woman (perhaps the same one) “prophetically blossoms in perfect putrefaction” (Lost 17) in this un-nourishing climate. Loy’s judgments seem to pronounce themselves less on the woman as on what “it is given her to be” by the hierarchy of power in which she must exist. What is given, in this instance, is only a place in which to rot. Loy’s somewhat sarcastic tones when describing these women seem tempered by her strikes at the culture which produces such women. But this is not to brush over Loy’s irritation at female compliance with the system that binds not only the abstract notion of “women” but specifically herself. Her drive is for personal emancipation in which she requires the support of a community. What she hopes to procure is a shared outcome.

The “Feminist Manifesto” takes this same dual pathway along the personal and social. It begins with the individual (woman’s) psychology as the key to social
change. This, according to Loy, involves women ‘realising themselves’ and realising for themselves:

Women, if you want to realise yourselves - you are on the brink of a devastating psychological upheaval - all your pet illusions must be unmasked - the lies of centuries have got to go - are you prepared for the Wrench -?

(Last 153)

It is not the powerful patriarchy who need to reassess the plight of women in Loy’s equation, it is the women themselves who must think their way out of oppression. They are, in Loy’s present, complicit and enjoying their “pet illusions.” What the poet requires of them is to “leave off looking to men to find out what you are not. Seek within yourselves to find out what you are” (154). In this Loy preempts Irigaray’s question for feminists, “Equal or Different?” in her essay of that name wherein she demands “What do women want to be equal to? Men? A Wage? A public position? Equal to what? Why not themselves?” (Irigaray 32). Loy demands equally self-directed mental engagement, and a leap of faith. As it was for Porter and Howe, leaping is the necessary gait to gain entry to the kind of future Loy imagines. In her “Aphorisms on Futurism” she shouts:

BUT the Future is only dark from the outside.

Leap into it - and it EXPLODES with Light.

(Last 149)

Leaps are the necessary means to cross the divide. Coalescent with the space that alienates the reformed Feminist future from the patriarchal present, is the great chasm of the gender divide. According to the “Feminist Manifesto”:

Men & women are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited - at present they are at the mercy of the advantage that each can take of the others sexual dependence -. The only point at which the interests of the sexes merge - is in the sexual embrace.

(Last 154)

The ideological underpinning of this philosophy culminates in the extreme conclusion that: in order to “demolish the division of women into two classes: the mistress and the mother” (154), and to prevent the control of female sexuality inherent in maintaining the virginity of women in order that they be
saleable/marriageable, the solution is "the unconditional surgical destruction of
virginity through-out the female population at puberty."(155). This extreme
document is, for Loy, the foolproof means of women rethinking their notion of
"virtue"(154). Clearly a provocative claim, her proposition is conspicuous not only
for its extremity, but also in being one of few instances in which Loy asserts a
physical action over a conscious rethinking by the powerless individual. It perhaps
attests to her fears regarding the level of resistance inscribed in this long-standing
patriarchal control.

Loy's bid to re-define "virtue" is a reinvention of the language. This is a
position she shares with her father and his false sovereign. It is specifically by
shifting meaning in language, separating the signifier from the signified, that the
kinds of reforms Loy solicits are possible. Language has constructed a category of
illusions around women which Loy aims to smash, the final one in the manifesto
being the "great illusion that woman must use all her introspective clear-
sightedness & unbiassed bravery to destroy[...]is the impurity of sex"(156). The
first faculty required in this destruction is 'introspection.' Loy's drive for change is
here located in individual consciousness. She asserts "there is nothing impure in sex
- except the mental attitude towards it"(156). It is a circle which can be thought
outside of so that, the eventual acceptance of this fact "will constitute an
incalculable & wider social regeneration than it has been possible for our
generation to acquire"(156). Foremost, Loy's language hopes to write out the
utopian future she imagines by revising and writing against the language which
circumscribes women in her present.

This kind of polemic, while recognizably belonging to the inflammatory
rhetoric of Futurism, simultaneously entails a resistance to the movement. Loy's
Feminist stance on sexuality allows her the freedom to become physically involved
with Futurism's resident geniuses. In this infusion of the sexual into the political,
Loy again skips between art and life, literally coupling with the Futurists becoming
the necessary precursor to mentally breaking away from them. Loy's encumbered
sexuality, lived and written, has been seen as so transgressive (for her time) that
Queer writer Mary Galvin made her an addition to her study on Lesbian poets.
Here, at the point of contact or conversation between the cerebral and the sexual, Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the dialectic imagination can be employed with some interesting outcomes. His theory sheds light on Loy’s process on both levels under analysis: sex and words. Bakhtin sees the sexual encounter as the microcosm of social relations:

There is one other extremely important area of human behavior in which verbal connections are put in order with great difficulty and which, therefore, is especially liable to fall out of social context, lose its ideological formulatedness, and degenerate into an aboriginal, animalian state. This is the area of the sexual. The disintegration of an official ideology is reflected first and foremost in this area of human behaviour. It becomes the center for the accumulation of asocial and antisocial forces.

This area of human private life is preeminently the one most easily made the base for social deviations. The sexual ‘pair’, as a sort of social minimum, is most easily isolated and transformed into a microcosm without the need for anything or anybody else.

All periods of social decline and disintegration are characterized by over-estimation of the sexual in life and in ideology, and what is more...The sexual aims at becoming a surrogate for the social.

(47)

Loy, presumably, would be pleased to agree with Bakhtin’s suggestion that “The disintegration of an official ideology is reflected first and foremost” in the sexual exchange, given that her “Feminist Manifesto” was equally explicit about the ideological significance of this area of human contact. The claims about what Bakhtin sees as the “social decline” can be read, alternatively, from a morally neutral position, one that does not evaluate the expression of the sexual as degenerate. What is particularly useful in Bakhtin’s reading is the idea of the “verbal connections” between the sexual pair and his theorizing about the “difficulties” inherent in the language equation. These difficulties are precisely what are described by Loy’s “Love Songs.”

By making Feminist Modernity all pervasive in her life and art, Loy seeks coherence between the social and the individual, but on her own terms. News of Loy’s multilevel Modernity, and her connections in artistic circles, preceded her arrival in New York. She was selected by an interviewer for The New York Evening
Sun as a representative of the elusive (to the general public) Modern Woman. Yet, while all this could be construed as the self-promotional tactics of a shrewd artist’s grab at fame, in Loy it seems to pertain to her personal consistency. She breaks silences on the external level of social propriety, and on the internal level of her quest to cross the silence of her divided psyche - the gap of unfulfillment around which her mongrel self developed. Where this consistency has been clearly manifest is in Loy’s political tracts, all of which are compositionally indebted to her poetic style, or perhaps vice-versa. But, what Loy says of the “Love Songs,” after their completion, exposes the level of connection between the artist and her writing:

“If this book of mine is no good it settles me - I am the book and have that esoteric sensation of creating!”

(Lost 188)

Loy becomes her book (as Helen Keller, lived in her world book) and the Love Songs sequence perfectly encompasses her lived Modernism - its subject being an affair that simultaneously lays bare one woman’s labor with love, while advocating sexual revolution for all women - by allowing women to peer into the existence of the Modern Woman.

Love Songs

Running along the fault-line between lovers, “Love Songs” dramatizes the hazardous relationship between a man and woman who can conceive only nonviable offspring. Disparate words are also spliced together across disjunctive space to produce gargoyle images with negative implications, most famously Loy’s “Pig Cupid” who will be the cynosure of this discussion. Language, as it has been traced here, is deeply implicated in the dynamics of the sexual relationship, and vice versa. This interrelation amplifies into a critique of the larger cultural dialogue around love. Eric Murphy Selinger makes this point in his article “Love in the Time of Melancholia” suggesting:

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All page numbers beside quotations from the “Love Songs” refer to Conover’s 1996 Lost Lunar Baedeker.
Indeed, what is most remarkable about the sequence to me is not its aesthetic success, but Loy’s deliberate exploration of aesthetic failure: jarring switches in diction, failed attempts at dialogic union, aborted gestures of literary or mythic allusion. These show Loy’s speaker thrown back to a crisis of individuation, a crisis in which she refuses to be comforted by signs of things that are not, to reap poetic gain from an unnecessary loss. She cannot or will not be rescued by language when she has not been rescued by love.

The final song of the sequence, the single line: “Love - the preeminent litterateur,” is an index of the adeptness of Murphy’s reading. The body of Loy’s poem depicts the relationship between love and language; but also between the human beings who enter this equation. Both sex and words share a failure to couple fruitfully across the silence of their inherent disconnectedness. The “Love Songs” seem to pivot on this unfulfilled desire for “communion” with the sexual partner. Perhaps the reason that Selingier posits a “crisis of individuation” for the poem’s speaker is because the central drive has been to cleave to, rather than away from, the lover in question, making the protagonist’s reduced state as an individual bereft of its other, indeed one of crisis. On the level of language, Maeera Shreiber argues, and she enlists Carolyn Burke’s reading to augment her position, that Loy’s collagistic strategies

enact a severing of the link between the voice and the page, thus marking an estranged relation of the subject and its body[...]. Loy wants to emphasize writing as a kind of activity which aggravates states of separation

(Shreiber, “Love” 89)

But perhaps Loy’s project is more ambiguous, or more ambivalent. She seems to respond to the gaps she experiences by writing in search of a new meaning that language can be made to yield up, just as she searches for a physical relationship and longs for it to give birth to something new - a significant thrust in the “Love Songs.” This may fail and she may record this failure, but this is not to say that she does not desire connections. Shreiber seems to argue that this breaking down is something Loy wishes to expound, where I would suggest that, on some levels at least, these cleavages are lamentable and that she represents them as such. Shreiber goes on to refigure her position slightly and remarks on the disparity between Loy’s
approach to the written which "signifies and perpetuates separation" and the "aural
manifestation" of the poetry where "there is contiguity" ("Love" 90).

If the poem is read as predicated on the split in the mongrel self, then the at
times embittered, at times shamed and agonized, voice of the "Love Songs" both
tries and fails to come to terms with the silence of the space that dissect Loy
internally and that simultaneously alienates her from others. This severed self is
embodied by the very construction of the sequence. The even number of the 34-
poem cycle makes its center the silent fissure between numbers 17 and 18. The
poem which directly follows this Phantomimic space, number 18, articulates these
vacuous dynamics thus:

Out of the severing
Of hill from hill
The interim
Of star from star
The nascent
Static
Of night

(60)

In this domain of emptiness both the poetic subject, and the poem itself, bear
witness to their cleft nature. The first lines of the song which follows this evocation
of vacancy are those already quoted as the title to this section, "Nothing so
conserving/As cool cleaving"(60). The poem has been gradually building to this
moment, both resisting and foreshadowing it across a number of images and states
of emotion. According to Virginia Kouidis, Loy had specific instructions for white
space at the center of the poem; in fact she requested that these visual silences
segregate each song from its neighbours:

if you wanted me to be a happy woman for five minutes or more, you
would get Songs to Joannes published for me - all together - printed
on one side of each page only - and a large round in the middle of
the blank reverse of each page - and one whole entirely blank page
with nothing on it between the first and the second parts.

(Shreiber, "Love" 104)

The dialogue between poetry and silence is thus crucial to the mechanics of the
poem. The logic of opposites inherent in cleavings reproduces itself within these
publishing criteria. Loy wants the poems "all together" yet each one kept separate
by the silent whiteness of blank pages. She places each song in mysterious conversation with the "large round in the middle of the blank reverse of each page." This trope of articulate silence conferring with poetry extends into the structure of many of the songs themselves. Space is visible at numerous points within the lines themselves. Specifically, the line breaks in song 13 divide the speaker from her lover in both visual and verbal ways: "Don’t let me understand you" is horizontally aligned with "Don’t realise me"(58) but the two phrases are cleft by a white space that enunciates with its own idiosyncratic grammar. The speaker also seems to lapse into silences of incompleteness for which Loy leaves many trails of dashes to lead the eye along her pauses. While not entirely trackless, these silences make for difficult reading terrain.

The first song warns us that "these are suspect places"(53) while also setting the scene for these expeditions that must hack through the polite secrecy which has surrounded the sexual act. The infamous Pig Cupid is unequivocally "rooting erotic garbage"(53), raising the curtain on the other (non-romantic) side of sexuality. This most famous of Loy’s characters shares his very construction with the intellectual transaction, rather than the physical, of cleaving across silences. He is a conjoined creature both Pig and Cupid. Linguistically and imagistically, he enacts the same union of opposites as Loy envisages in her own mongrel existence. The sheer simplicity of placing Pig next to Cupid in the poem belies the complexity of this lexical cross-pollination.

Pig Cupid exemplifies the play of cognitive dissonance; the human drive to make sense of the world by making disparities coherent. It is a drive which, psychologists suggest, is as instinctive as the satisfaction of hunger and libido (Brehm and Cohen 225). A potent collapsing of hitherto unrelated images, Pig Cupid explodes the reader’s preconceived notions about romance. The untempered proximity of these two words/images, ‘Pig’ and ‘Cupid,’ forces the reader to negotiate across silence by structuring relationships. This is not purely a battle with incongruence. These two fleshy pink creatures share facets of external appearance

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8 Brehm and Cohen give the following concise explanation: "the events that confirm expectancies are consonant, sought out, while the events that disconfirm expectancies are dissonant, to be avoided, minimized, or cognitively distorted so as to render them more consonant"(178). In this case the "events" under discussion will be linguistic/poetic ones.
which liaison between the disparate iconographies that belong to them. The result is
that the unsullied romanticism of Cupid’s metaphysical love becomes irrevocably
mingled with the pig’s coarse animal sexuality. Pig simultaneously maintains the
closest visual connection to the rounded pink baby cupid available for comparison
in the animal kingdom (especially in the common visual representations of
children’s books) while at the same time having the reputation for being arguably
the most vulgar image of animal sexuality, given his reputation for eating garbage
and taking pleasure in mud and faeces. The two lines that follow Pig Cupid’s
appearance expand these divisions and connections with the attractive “rosy snout”
found on the next line to be “rooting erotic garbage” (53) rather than perhaps gently
snuffling for truffles.

Loy confronts society with its delusions about the human attraction to what
it wishes to categorize as filth, and its farcical belief in Cupid’s saccharine version
of love. In her rendering, humanity is steeped in the pig’s sexuality while living in a
denial for which we have invented the sanitized and beautified cherub. Her
juxtaposition will not allow the reader this comfort. Pig Cupid’s image, born from
the union of two familiar images made unfamiliar by their connection, floats above
the lines of Loy’s poem. Indeed pigs might now fly as we see them through Loy’s
vision. She has implicated her readers thus, by their having to either decipher, or
disentangle (if they wish to resist) this conflation of images. In either scenario
readers must mentally engage with her ideas; cognitive dissonance will not let them
lie.

Koudis traces Loy’s aesthetic along the lines of philosopher Henri Bergson,
quoting his notion that:

_many different images, taken from a quite different order of things,
will be able, through the convergence of their action, to direct
consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition
to seize on_

(“Rediscovering” 174)

Loy offers a similar illusion of choice with her poetic/imagistic recipes given to the
reader to make for themselves. Images as tools with already encoded meanings are
tempered by traditional associations; but Loy resists traditional images, coded
patterns of association and preconceived meaning traces, by altering the contexts in which each word appears.

Linguist Roman Jakobson imagines "the communication engineer" as a person who

*most properly approaches the essence of the speech event when he assumes that in the optimal exchange of information the speaker and the listener have the same 'filing cabinet of prefabricated representations': the addresser of the verbal message selects one of these 'preconceived possibilities' and the addressee is supposed to make the identical choice from the same assembly of 'possibilities already foreseen and provided for.'*

(Jacobson 241)

But Loy understands, or tries to coerce, communication to act differently. She says of poetic words that they "make new appeal to us after the friction of an uncompromised intellect has scrubbed the meshed messes of traditional associations off them"(Last 292). What is traditional is what can be expected to be correctly filed in the shared filing cabinet, but Loy has scattered the papers. It is not, as some critics of Modernism assumed, that Modernist poetry attempted to break down communication, to smother it with contrived obscurity, but rather, Loy’s Modernity requires the operation of a number of mental processes to draw meaning from a challenging text. Her call to action is directed at the reader’s intellect. So she uses difficult vocabulary from specialist fields, abandons grammar in favour of dashes and spacing, draws on phonetic connections completely discrepant with traditional rhyme schemes and makes unheard-of concoctions of words and images by the simple act of placing them together or close on the page. Words and images conjure each other, especially within the density of poetry, and in Loy, they both set about to undermine what is known or what has been socially acceptable. Hers is literally alternative poetry.

These are the kinds of alterations made to Pig Cupid’s set of referents. Made up of opposing metaphors, he is, like many of Loy’s linguistic concoctions, virtually an oxymoron. In Jacobson’s theory "An oxymoron is characterized by the emancipation of meaning from its referent. Historical and physical facts are not important. Only a play on linguistic elements that have become autonomous is intended..."(Holenstein 84-5). The freedoms implied by “emancipation” and
“autonomy” recall Loy’s connection to F.T Marinetti and the ‘words in freedom’ of the Futurist movement, and the later ‘free verse’ with which she became associated. But perhaps rather than untrammeled freedom, Loy has reassessed the manufacture of linguistic meaning and shifted its emphasis. This recalls Loy’s childhood formation of language, the shifting meaning of her father’s sovereign, and her search for her own referent for the elusive green “iarrhea” that may be under the couch.

Such innovative linguistic modifications evolve into what Kenneth Burke calls the gargoylesque. Pig Cupid shares with the gargoyles of the Middle Ages what are, in Burke’s reading:

*typical instances of planned incongruity. The maker of gargoyles who put man’s-head on bird-body was offering combinations which were completely rational as judged by his logic of essences. In violating one order of classification, he was stressing another* (112)

Burke projects his theory onto surrealist art and the grotesques of human dreams. He writes “Dreams (and dream-art) seek to connect events by a ‘deeper’ scheme of logic than prevails in our everyday rationale of utility”(113). He calls James Joyce, a contemporary, friend and perhaps stylistic mentor of Loy’s, “one of our most striking instances of modern linguistic gargoyles”(113). Pig Cupid is just such a gargoyle of linguistic creation. He is based on the essences of Loy’s reading of the actual nature of Cupid in contemporary human (rather than divine/mythological) society. Just as the gargoyle is readable as a whole, although fantastic, creature born from the hands of the sculptor, so does Pig Cupid escape incomprehensibility. The logic necessary for welding him together provides a theoretical stronghold from which to read many of the strange images Loy devises to speak, with deliberate inconsistency, of her divided self.

The second song in the cycle eyes the male genitalia, but the “wanton duality” of Loy’s depiction also has other implications. The poetic doubled vision observes the spaces between such dualities, edges like the “threshold of your mind” that are neither inside nor outside. This is perhaps Loy’s sole maternal inheritance from “Anglo-mongrels and the Rose.” She says her Rose/mother:

[...]is certain
that an impenetrable pink curtain
hangs between it and itself

(Last 128)

This image-construction predates the Derridean hymen described in “The Double Session” as being “the visibility of nothing or of the self”(Acts 160) which is:

first of all a sign of fusion, the consummation of a marriage, the identification of two beings, the confusion between two. Between the two, there is no longer difference but identity.

(Acts 161)

So too, the rose that is simultaneously made whole and divided by the membrane that threatens to make her unknowable to herself, also strips her of her self-knowledge by making her ‘knowable’ (in the carnal sense) to another.

Song 4 is likewise set in one of these precarious border zones. The “mezzanino” is the half-story between the floor and ceiling and inhabiting this limbo-like space are abortions, the quasi-living foetal beings on the brink of human existence and non-existence. Murphy makes the plausible suggestion that the entire poem could center on a real or imagined abortion, and there is evidence to support this theory. The weed pulled from “mucous membrane” in the first song could translate into a metaphoric aborted foetus, as could the musing:

We might have given birth to a butterfly
with the daily news
printed in blood on its wings

(54)

Murphy points to the appearances of an unexplained child glimpsed through the poem as evidence, and most directly to song 17 in which he sees the scene of the abortion in the red counterpane draped over the speaker’s lap (31-32). Maceera Shreiber agrees:

[...] the speaker alludes to this traumatic loss of a child through abortion - a crisis which I will argue is the epicenter of this romance gone wrong. The relationship has failed to realize its reproductive potential, and the speaker refuses to represent the texts “born” out of this loss as adequate compensation or substitution.

(91)

The significance of this aborted, perhaps miscarried, entity is its site between the lovers - it exists in, but fails to span, the interval between them. This child
conceived in the (unsuccessful) sexual union is perhaps a fantasized cleaving, the craved bond the speaker invoked in the hope of melding with her lover. The offspring of this relationship connects the lovers by stopping the gap between them, but its aborted nature suggests failure, making it the intrinsic product of the cleft that only divides. It appears as the third party to their coupling, interjecting at numerous points in the poem. The boy in song 5 could be representative of this entity, He is described in precisely the split mode to which these fissures refer:

To the left a boy
-One wing has been washed in the rain
The other will never be clean any more-

(55)

The divisions reach their height in song 13 in which the failure of language runs in tandem with the failure of the sexual connection:

Come to me There is something
I have got to tell you and I can’t
Something taking shape
Something that has a new name

(57)

That it is “something taking shape” makes it likely that this ‘thing’ that cannot be said is the same as, or to share the logic of, that which both is, and cannot be, born from this union. It is for this reason that the lines:

Where two or three are welded together
They shall become god

(58)

make sense outside a menage-a-trois. The sexual trio seems unlikely given the rest of the poem’s insistence on the singular lover whom the speaker is trapped “To love…most”(59).

This song, 13, openly collates sexual with verbal intercourse and places both within the context of shared failure to make ‘cleaving’ encompass movement together rather than apart. It continues:

Oh that’s right
Keep away from me Please give me a push
Don’t let me understand you Don’t realise me
Or we might tumble together
Depersonalized
Identical
Into the terrific Nirvana
Me you - you - me

(58)

Peter Quartermain disentangles this last line with an apt suggestion: "‘me’ is absorbed into ‘you,’ but ‘you’ remains distinct from ‘me’ "(83). Loy’s dashes are then the breaking apart of language that reflect the breaking apart of the relationship, and what Quartermain says about the earlier lines of this song and the blank spaces that recontextualize the phrases therein, is equally useful:

_The poem plays with a series of oppositions, setting them against visible silences, gaps on the page which may on one hand indicate a change of speaker, or on the other, enact what cannot be spoken. Line two plays the illusoriness of words and of speech against the silent reality of the gap:_

I have got to tell you and I can’t tell.

(82)

Rather than apportion this play of silence across two hands, the meaning of these silent spaces can be seen in collision. What cannot be spoken may in fact constitute another change of speaker, that is, the voice of the aborted entity speaking as the emissary from the silent space dividing the lovers. Its Phantomimic language (the blank space) belongs to the other side of language. Quartermain goes on to invoke the elusive “something” repeated in the poem, as “hovering between speech and silence, between knowledge and ignorance, between the nameable and the nameless”(83) but it is given a name. The albeit unknowable “something” suggests Loy’s choice of an emptied descriptive term which resonates powerfully with the speaker’s description of herself some songs later:

_In ways without you_
_I go_
_Gracelessly_
_As things go_

(62)

Here, as in song 13, it seems that Loy chooses words that fail to describe, that are their own version of silence, but on the level of meanings rather than words. The speaker is now the ‘thing’ for which she is too listless, or unable, to find description. Whether requiring togetherness “come to me”(57), or acknowledging
separateness, "without you" (62), this emptiness is all-pervasive. It is this same lassitude that opens song 17: "I don’t care" (59). The dirge ends with the empty, speechless mouth "a round vacuum/dilating with my breath" (60).

It is this song that is imputed to be the abortion scene. But when Shreiber suggests that "[...] Loy is not interested in making abortion an occasion for querying the limits and possibilities of language" (she goes on to subsume Loy’s project into a polemic against society), she disregards the relationship between silence and language that I am arguing is central. The first reference to abortions in the fourth song calls them (in a tripartite version of Pig Cupid’s gargoylesque-image) "bird-like abortions/with human throats" (54). These human throats seem not to speak, but rather are fluttering, half-formed entities unable to articulate what they know behind their "Wisdom’s eyes" (54) in this half-way house of "mezzarino" (54). Loy’s speaker would have joined them there to learn their silent secrets "But for the abominable shadows" (55) that both portend an existence and its absence.

What is revealed by the possibility of abortion at the point just prior to the silent center of the sequence (the space between songs 17 and 18), is a (perhaps parodic) paltry cleaving together. But it is merely the "two tassels of a towel clinging together" (60). Nevertheless the pleasure in this discovery is writ large for the speaker who seems to swoon as she "let[s] the square room fall away" (60) leaving only the round vacuum "dilating with my breath" (60) suggesting the mouth or vagina. That it could be either again conflates the sexual with language, both of which have shared these meditations on the division the speaker has suffered. The poem is most articulate about this link between words and sex in song 12 when:

- Voices break on the confines of passion
- Desire Suspicion Man Woman
- Solve in humid carnage

- Flesh from flesh
- Draws the inseparable delight
- kissing at gasps to catch it

(57)

The density of the first line sees language and physical desire mutually bound in ambiguous relationship. The "voices" wash over "passion" like breaking waves, but
they also break apart in the face of these passions, perhaps signaling the breakdown of communication, or conversely the coming-to-maturity that breaking male voices signify. The voices equally break-in on passion, interrupting it with the human emotions of "Desire" and "Suspicion," as in the break-in of a burglar intent on stealing the simple pleasures of the flesh by imposing language onto them. The pleasure of the "inseparable delight" is paradoxically one of empty or unspeaking mouths, kissing at "gasps" rather than words, while the song ends in the silence at the opposite spectrum to the opening "voices," in "the shallow sound of dissonance/And boom of escaping breath"(57). The middle stanza recognizes that these strategies have been part of the speaker’s campaign to "set you apart / inviolate"(57) but also that she must finally question whether the "you" is "Only the other half/ Of an ego’s necessity"(57). In either scenario the lovers are set apart, "inviolate," by the space between them, or they are pushed together in a way that can only fracture the self, the "ego" forced to internalize the wound of silent fissure. In this there is no winning for the speaker. It is perhaps no wonder that the poem has been described as embittered given the taste this passion leaves in such emptied mouths.

This interplay of the sexual with the silent center reaches its height in the latter stages of the sequence in song 27. At this point the notion of connection is recognized by the speaker as an inconceivable concept. She is forced to accept that:

The contents
Of our ephemeral conjunction
In aloofness from Much
Flowed to approachment of - - -
NOTHING
There was a man and a woman
In the way.

(64)

In this lamentation on the failure of the sexual to provide some connection between men and women, it is their physical selves, "a man" and "a woman," that stand in the way of accessibility to such connection. As such, it is difficult to accept what Shreiber calls Loy’s "restorative impulse" and "generalized effort to repair the rupture between body and text"(92) when this seems to be what the poem explicitly

230
moves away from. Towards the close of the sequence the poem hopes that future
generations will "Breed such sons and daughters/As shall jibber at each
other/Uninterpretable cryptonymns"(65). The speaker implores: "give them some
way of braying brassily" and hopes to protect them from knowing tears are
spineless weaknesses, that is: "human insufficiencies begging dorsal
vertebrae"(65). Her final wish in song 29 is that they are allowed "far
further/Differentiation"(66) rather than the outcome of her failed attempts to cleave
together with her lover which forced her to "watch" her "Own-self distortion /
Wince in the alien ego"(66).

The voice of the "Love Songs" knows well the imperative of this warning,
having been crucified for its attempts at cleaving together:

Crucifixion
Of a busy-body
Longing to interfere so
With the intimacies
Of your insolent isolation

(67)

She has been duly punished for her attempts. Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas recognizes the
significance of these failures when he suggests that:

[...]the discontinuities and obscurities of the Songs might be seen as
an effort at a provisional reaching out that is soon withdrawn, just
after the disappearance of Arthur Cravan in 1918 Loy seems to have
given up on love and instead limited herself to relationships of
compassion, as depicted in Song V, her novel Insel and many of the
later poems and art works on society's outcasts.

(127)

Twitchell-Waas's use of "limited" is questionable in that it suggests a deficiency in
Loy's later choices. But his reading neatly connects Loy's poetics with the
autobiographical patterning of her impulses towards cleaving. Her finest attempt at
emotional and sexual communion, with Arthur Cravan, is the interval which must
be spanned before this reading reaches Insel and "Hot Cross Bums." Cravan
signifies the mythologized point at which Loy switches her mode of searching for
human connection from physical love to something other.
Arthur Cravan

In Cravan, Loy believed she found her ideal familiar, the incongruous mongrel personality of poet-boxer. His disappearing acts and incognitos all reflected her own survival strategies in life and language. Perhaps it was in reverence for his unexplained disappearance in a boat off the coast of Mexico that Loy eventually made her own equally unexplained exit, evading the avant-garde crowd to live among outcasts. Reflecting on Cravan years later, Loy answered the question “What has been the happiest moment of your life? The unhappiest? (If you care to tell),” by saying “Every moment I spent with Arthur Cravan. The rest of the time” (Last 305-6). It seems that Cravan embodied the cleaving she had long sought. According to Carolyn Burke’s biography: “If they could arrange to drop their cynicism, she and her lumbering suitor might perhaps ‘leap back over the choking sophistication into the heart of innocence’” (Burke 240). Leaping is again the step required to cross divides. But, just as in the attempted unions enacted by the “Love Songs,” there is an ambiguity, a faltering in the leap. Burke quotes her subject:

In the progression of the literary man’s love affair, ‘she[Loy] noted tartly, ‘he finds it proper, at certain moments, to expose his intellectual isolation. Colossus, with his ingrown spirit, assumed me to be...outside the radius of his creative meditation.’

(240)

But this was, perhaps, a brief aberration. As their relationship progressed, from Loy’s perspective in any case, it offered the connectedness with another she had long sought. Of him she said: “I had found the one man with whom my mind could go ‘the whole way’” (Burke 244). Their union bore a strange fruit such as when the couple arrived at the Arensbergs’s “with their imaginary children - a paper lion and tiger purchased in Chinatown and baptized ‘Gaga’ and ‘Moche’ (‘Crazy’ and ‘Ugly’)” (Burke 245). On a more serious note, Loy wrote poetically of their reunited passion when she joined Cravan in Mexico - a shared exile: “All that was left of being alive was a ferocious longing to unlock the center of oneself with the center of someone else...” (Burke 256). These words are echoes of Loy’s poetic genealogy and Exodus’s “instinctive urge of loneliness / to get to the heart of
something” (Last 166). Yet in this phrase there is the residue of a question about whether the longing was indeed fulfilled - at this point the “center” is “all that is left” to conquer. Reading Loy is never safe from such ambiguities. But, in order to reach some conclusion, when Loy recalled this love from the vantage of hindsight, she seemed to finally have achieved a solace, a healing of the rent self born of her mongrel beginnings with this fellow hybrid and “outsider” (Burke 243) whom she subsequently lost.

According to Burke, Cravan was dodging the draft by hiding in Mexico, his final evasion involving repairing a boat in which to sail away. Cravan worked on the hull while Loy sewed the sails. The narrative at this point becomes mythopoetic. The relationship Loy sought between love and language, and her longing to devise new and fertile versions of both found completion in this marriage:

As they transformed the old craft into a primitive yacht, their work became play; too far away to hear each other, they banged on their implements with whatever came to hand, hammer or wooden spoon, and soon devised “a primitive system of signals to keep in close communication”

(Burke 264)

Cravan ran a final signal up the mast to tell Loy he was ready to sail. She watched from the shore as the boat put to sea never to return. In her grief “she could neither speak nor move” (Burke 264), body and language finding consonance in their response to this agony. Back in her room she started “knocking on the bed frame to send him a message” (Burke 264). These lovers had “built their own alphabet” like the one Loy patented with her children’s game. Loy spelled from their nuptial bed, but Cravan could no longer reply. The cleavage split open once more, and Loy sailed back to Europe to give birth to their baby.

The part of herself that found wholeness with Cravan was once again castaway. Writing her “Widow’s Jazz” years later, Loy perhaps remembered watching the boat disappearing into the distance when she wrote:

[...]my desire
receded
to the distance of the dead

searches
the opaque silence
of unpeopled space.

(Lost 97)

Her "desires" kept this promise in a roundabout fashion. Loy searched "unpeople," society's outcasts, who she called variously: "shadow-bodies" (Lost 109), "irreparable dummies" (Lost 110), and "misfortune's monsters" (Lost 133). The silence these creatures exemplify is imposed upon them by the society which disregards them. It is a silence into which Loy unleashes her poetry.
"A Crony of my 'own class’"

(Loy, Insel 59)

In her play-spoof of the Futurists, The Pamperers, Loy presages a caricature of herself as she mocks the avant-garde’s predilection for elevating derelicts into geniuses. The lines from the play “I find my brother in the most secluded coward”(14) scripted her own response to the world as she moved from the circle of adored and admired outsiders - artists and geniuses - into the company of social outcasts. Like her protagonist in The Pamperers, perhaps she too cast these derogatory words over her shoulder as she left: “Your most servid conversation would lose itself as an impertinent silence among the debonaire rumble of our caste”(14).

Insel

But before Loy reaches the ‘bums’ in New York’s Bowery who populate her final poems, she segues in this direction by way of Insel, the anti-hero of her novel Insel. He is the ‘mezzanino,’ to appropriate Loy’s term, between artist and vagrant in being at the threshold of both. Both in reality and in Loy’s novel he is a celebrated but somewhat unmotivated artist, but also the clochard (the French for ‘bum’) who Loy befriends. She represents their bizarre and spiritual encounter as a cleaving on a plain beyond the physical of the “Love Songs” and that which she found with Cravan. The character Insel, read through the lens of autobiographical detail, is Richard Oelze, the German quasi-surrealist painter. But Loy’s name for him, ‘insel,’ is also the German for ‘island,’ (a self-contained entity that recalls Loy’s name for herself, ‘Ova’). Loy sails her own strange course to his foreign and isolated shores. The premise of the novel is that Mrs. Jones (Loy’s assumed name
in the text) will write Insel’s biography in return for feeding him and promising to help him get to New York. But like the insubstantial, failed entity that grew between the lovers Loy depicted in her “Love Songs,” “At last the biography aborted.” This line, however, occurs 34 pages into the novel, and the relationship built between Mrs Jones and Insel is unfinished; it ‘proceeds recedingly’\(^9\) as the novel progresses. It is perhaps not feasible to persist in a clear division between Loy and Mrs Jones given the deliberately autobiographical nature of the text. Loy’s transmutation of her quest for wholeness onto a spiritual level compels her to write of an incognito self who melds her mental states with Insel and his strange capacity for magic rays. Their bond takes Loy/Jones to the brink of achieving wholeness, of joining Insel on his island-self, but this place becomes dangerously close to death. The relationship must end for Loy/Jones to gain individuation. But Loy does not seem to depict this disunion as a form of failure – in the way that she did in the “Love Songs.”

As always, language is integral to the covenants Loy seeks with others. Her foil in the novel, Mrs. Jones, knows some German which is the only language spoken by Insel. He says to his semi-patroness: “You see, it is not so much a matter of materializing but of being able to speak. Before I found you I had never anyone I could speak to”\((55)\). As with Cravan and Loy’s tapped-out language, these private conversations lock the two in a sphere concordant with the shared linguistic privacy and intensity between Helen and Teacher. These negotiated languages between two communicants are also reminiscent of the dictionary Loy required to know herself across the inner divisions of her childhood, as well as her creation of the alphabet game. Mrs. Jones and Insel’s conversations betray the constructive nature of the connective tissue of text/language that binds them:

‘With you alone am I able to express myself. You tell me exactly what I am thinking. No one else has understood what we understand.

‘You have such marvelous ideas - ’

‘But Insel,’ I protested conscientiously, ‘I have touched on my ideas so lightly - If I knew your language well enough to convey the subtlest shades of meaning -.’

We decided to get a first-class dictionary.

Henceforth nothing was to be lost!

\(^9\) This phrase comes from Loy’s poem “Lady Laura in Bohemia”\((Lost 98)\).
Acting as an auxiliary to this close net of language from which "nothing was to be lost," is the "materializing" of selves to which Insel referred. Where the sexual body in "Love Songs" seeks a harmony between individuated selves beyond the mind-forged manacles of language, between Insel and Mrs. Jones some strange rays emanate with similar purpose:

"Being an outsider did not interfere with my participation in the ebullient calm behind Insel's eyelids, where rays of imprecision [...] were intercepted by resonant images audible to the eye, visible to the ear; where even ultimate distance was brought within reach, tangible as a caress."

This non-physical link has the sexually familiar, "tangible as a caress," but there is never any suggestion of impropriety between the two in the novel. Insel is always depicted as teetering on the verge of the physically grotesque, his inner power being his only redemption from outright repugnance. As the novel moves closer to a fulfillment of shared mental states, it is disrupted by the ambiguities that always seem to accompany Loy's desired resolutions. In the first instance Mrs. Jones' fear is overcome by pleasure:

I felt that giving in to a dislocation of my identity, which is usually perilous and demoralizing, must in this exceptional case, be finally vindicated by a revelation of what supremely lovely essence was being conveyed to me by this human wreck.

But for Mrs Jones' "everyday self" the spell is broken by Insel's profile. The magic requires "both eyes [...] fixed upon me"(69). It is an interesting logic/magic that will not function with halves, it is a unity of wholes that must be sought. Visually this bond seems to entail eclipses rather than two semi-circles neatly slotted together - a structure recalling the circles Loy wanted to print on the pages dividing the Love Songs. As Mrs. Jones finds her footing in this spiritual alliance she seems to ricochet between communing with Insel at his "invitation":

[...]a hollow invitation to my intrusion. Urged to cross the frontier of his individuality, I got in the way of that faintly electric current he
Straightway I found myself possessed of an ability to form a 'mental double' to being victim of Insel's enchantment:

Once more I found myself in the 'impossible situation' in which one cannot remain - from which there is no issue. I recognized this situation as Insel's. A maddening with desire for a thing I did not know - a thing that, while being the agent of his-my-dematerialization alone could bring him together again.

This mental conjunction results in Mrs. Jones' physical degradation that she has caught from Insel like some disease:

"Next morning my face looked 'destroyed' like Insel's.

[...] I was cleft in half. Like a witch's cat when cut apart running in opposite directions, suddenly my left leg began to dance off on its own."

Contact with Insel has caused mind to override the body in this "bisectional automatism"(151) of the divided self. He offers, like the lover to whom the "Love Songs" are addressed, a union "from which there is no issue"(150) or from which issues unlikely and deficient offspring.

As the novel ebbs and flows, the tide of power moves between the protagonists. Loy shifts Mrs. Jones into a position of psychic ascendance over Insel. She is almost mentally phallic in the line: "...I definitely penetrated (into) his mediumistic world"(66). Insel is now the bisected party:

He greeted me with the relief of an object which, having fallen apart, should chance upon its other half again.

Typically this fractured self is associated with the failure of language to encompass individual unity: "[...] I, his very means of expression, had deserted him."(81). The relationship can not survive its own intensity. It dissipates into the abyss like that which followed the absent center in the "Love Songs." In Insel Loy re-describes this "Nothingness":

Because it was only a brain that had been spilled, the blank orientation faded - the thousand directions withdrew, leaving us at our destination.
Nothingness

It was not black as night nor white as day, nor gray as death - only nonexistent irritation as to what *purposed inconsequence* had led us into the illusion of ever having come into being.

The haunted thing about this Nothingness was that we knew we were *still there* - Two unmatched arrows sprung from its meaningless center - were surrounded by a numeral halo - I *had* to leave Insel, it was ten to eight.

Interestingly, in comparison to the “Love Songs”, it is “a brain that had been spilled,” purely the site of language, rather than anything sexual or sexually conceived.

At the clock’s insistence of a reality outside the combined space between these souls, Mrs. Jones is able to leave this realm that has grown as destitute as its monarch, Insel. This is the last passage of the penultimate chapter. The final chapter celebrates the completion of Mrs. Jones’ novel which is also the completion of Loy’s novel, two fruitions which undercut these losses. Loy uses a bird metaphor for the collation of fragments from which to build poetry in a motif that recalls the poetic processes Porter and Howe both imagined for themselves as magpie and cormorant:

I had reached the stage prescribed by Colossus for creation, when all that one has collected rolls out with the facility of the song of a bird.

While the novel is complete, the quest for union remains unfulfilled. But sharing in Insel’s physically and socially dilapidated state is perhaps what sets Loy on her final course. Their relationship has given Mrs. Jones/Loy the framework for “a chart of unarrival”(176) which maps her journey to the Bowery - the site of her final epic poem, “Hot Cross Bums.”
Maeera Shreibet sees Loy’s ‘visionary poems,’ of which “Hot Cross Bums” is one, as mystic:

[...her version of mysticism is more metaphysically correct than that of her spiritual and poetic cousin, Yeats’ Crazy Jane, who takes the more conventional view of disunity as a precondition of unity: “nothing can be sole or whole / that has not been rent.” For her part, Loy maintains that brokenness is the ultimate state of being.

(“Divine” 475)

Given the ambiguous nature of the cleavings that have mapped Loy’s desire thus far, Shreibet’s idea of “brokenness as the ultimate state of being” seems to bypass Loy’s repeated craving for union. Perhaps by allowing her poetics to peter out without definitive closure, Loy conceives a defeat in the quest for wholeness. Of the later surviving poems, “An Aged Woman” holds a mirror up to Loy’s wasting body, the figure therein a stranger. As Shreibet suggests, this embodies the “brokenness” of internal from external, of past from present, as the “ultimate state of being.” If by “ultimate” Shreibet refers to final, without any sense of achievement, then she is accurate. What is contested here is whether this final stance was what Loy had been driving at, whether it is the conclusion she sought, or whether she resigned herself to this fate. The late poems of the Bowery seem to suggest the latter, as they seek familiars in the outcasts to whom Loy is attracted. This attraction she finds is not confined to their isolation, the silence that clefts them from the social world. The bums seem also to share Loy’s artistic vision:

10 All page numbers beside quotations from “Hot Cross Bums” refer to Conover’s 1996 Lost Lunar Baedeker.
indirective  
abortive ocular  
reception of the objective  

Bum-bungling of actuality  
exchanging  
an inobvious real  
for an over-obvious irreal 

(134)

They recall Loy’s language strategies, demonstrated again by the imagined green “jarrae” that Ova sought in her physical reality. Loy’s language fantasies all belong to this “over-obvious irreal” which she hopes to present as an alternative vision. The bums also share with Loy the mezzanno of existence. The Bowery becomes symbolic of the half-way house, a stairway between life and death, that is both a community and an isolation. Here the outcasts are “clutching at wobbly banisters / to Elysium”(135). They seek a level of death in alcoholic oblivion, yet they continue to live and breathe on the outskirts of this life. This is not the only oppositional strategy which frames their partial unbelongings. They are also trapped between the varied measures society offers to draw them from their social non-status:

Warfare in allure  
of church and bar  
oppositional altars  
of cross and carousel  

(140)

This splitting of alternatives recalls the two parents and the two husbands Loy polarized in “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,” between which she is equally trapped - neither offers solace or escape. The same applies to the options given to the bums. From within this no-man’s-land “lost.../ in grey dis-synthesis”(140) they are condemned, like Loy in her later life of poetic silence, to go unheard:

a prophet of Babble-on  
shouts and mutters  
to earless gutters  

(135)
Language fails to communicate, fails to connect them to the indifferent world. For Loy this disconnection was sanctioned by art at the forefront of the avant-garde, but this is not the case for the bums. Despite her commentary on fallen angels, Loy does not make the Shakespearean equation between this distressed state of madness and genius; neither does she shy from the physical realities of the bums’ degraded existence. She notes their ‘lice’ and ‘bruises.’ Embedded in the poem is the inappropriateness of social responses to this earth-bound underworld. Loy critiques the:

conditional compassion:
appreciation
of your publicity value
to the Bowery

(137)

But Loy’s response is not simply sympathetic of their plight.

The final image of the poem textually watches one of the bums “lovin’up the pavement” as Loy puts it. This image explodes the tragic with the near-comic in a crash site of emotion. As unfettered by social propriety as she was with the “Love Songs” more conventional sexual exploits, Loy here seems to unblinkingly use what she sees. Non-judgmental, she makes this act as natural as the rise and fall “of ocean / of inhalation / of coition”(144). She has gone from distorting the referentiality of Cupid, making him “Pig Cupid / rooting erotic garbage,” to here putting the image of the mythological cherub’s mother, Venus, to task. The stone statues of the both sexually and aesthetically desirable Venus usually signpost high art, but here they become one with the equally stony pavement of social despair. The “breastless slab” becomes a vessel for the same kinds of desires and adoration that Venus attracts. She is this

-interminable paramour
of horizontal stature
Venus-sans-vulva-

(144)

As the bum pounds away on her from inside the faulty vision of his own imagination, the only sounds he is finally able to make are those of breath, “inhalation” recalling the mouths, empty but of breath, that fall open in the “Love
Songs.” Language has consistently failed the bums in the poem, and the final image of failed sexual union continues to be tormented by this verbicide. Neither love nor language can be made accountable across human divides. In these late years Loy remains widowed and collects rubbish from bins to make her art; she leaves lovers and words behind, merely asking:

O leave me
my final illiteracy

(132)

the study of which seems requisite for learning to speak silences.
IN/CONCLUSION

"Your way of being alive is a sequence of disappearances."

(Loy, Insel 54)

In the course of this thesis, poetry has both conversed and remonstrated with silence past, silence present, and silence future. These manifold silences have constituted what has been termed Phantomimic space, a theoretical region mapped by a 'sequence of disappearances' that define it beyond conclusion in any conventional sense. The purpose of setting this emptied scene for the play of poetry has been to allow the outsider, the silent other of language, to be 'heard' without overbearing authorial intervention or scripted lines. Hélène Cixous argues that the theatre is the ideal mode for such investigations, because "On the stage, I, the author, am no longer there, but there is the other"(141). By virtue of this unstable authorial position, the Phantomimic other has not spoken directly, but this has not curtailed its gestural responses to the poetic silences in which it resides. Asking the Phantomime to articulate itself is disallowed by that inaccessible something which prevented Helen from succinctly speaking for her phantom-self before language.
Phantom and Phantomime can only ever belong to the negated space of the unspeakable. What has been attempted by this thesis then, is a literal process of deduction; a tending to the disappearances marked by silences. These include the points of historical erasure selected by Porter and Howe, alongside Olive’s silent legacy with which Loy had a near brush. Loy’s deductive processes have also been informed by speculations on the nature of linguistic gaps and textual fissures. ‘Phantomime,’ then, has been a species of pseudonym for a number of interrelated silences which are both homogenous and divergent; homogenous in being negations of language, but divergent in their poetic manifestations.

Shared by all the poets under discussion, is the play of silence in public records. The publicly silent aspects of Olive and Loy, and also those of the protagonists chosen by Porter and Howe, all resonate with Cixous’s *Angst* and the faltering confidence of a female voice which has no place in the competitive publishing industry: “And he left no place in his voice for doubt. It was a voice that checked me, frightened me; made me want to run away”(72). For Olive and Loy this was autobiographical as well as poetic; for Porter and Howe it was imagined and characterized in their poetry.

When Helen and Derrida began this discussion by defining their phantoms as beings without past, present or future, they unintentionally plotted the direction of this inquiry. While moving chronologically backwards in terms of the eras in which the poets write, this thesis has also moved temporally forward across subject matter. Silence found dialogue with the past in Porter and Howe’s historical revisions. These poets also found that the spaces in their poetic experiments were receptive to their own present-felt silences. They allowed the poets to interpose themselves in history, slipping into the vacancies, permeating Akhenaten and Stella with autobiographical aspects, soliciting other stories to speak personal silences. Porter and Howe went on to reconsider these historical silences in fictional returns to similarly muted subject matter. They chose the no less silent characters of Mickey and Cordelia.

Olive Hopegood and Mina Loy also used poetry as a vessel for the silences inherent in their personal lives and selves. Olive’s unsingable songs and her final silence were each embedded in the other, interplayed in her relationship to poetry and publishing. Her troubled poetic voice spoke of her resistance to her husband’s
pressure to publish. Loy shared Olive's craving for final silence, perhaps as the most succinct response to, or interaction with, the silences she had unearthed in her genealogical and psychic make-up - the cleft self. Loy, while the earliest poet in this study, is also the poet who invests most in the silence of the unknown future. Her attempts at refiguring the language by populating it with new images like Pig Cupid, and her writing of manifestoes designed to change the actual conditions of life, all point to the future. This future is another space of silent possibility - the not-yet-written which is the mirror image of the erased past that Porter and Howe took to the heart of their poetics.

Like this thesis, these poetic schema are all also anti-chronologies. They interfere in the normal passage of time which usually allows for the inventive space, inherent in the unknown future, to exist beyond the framework of mimesis, relying on something outside the mimetic equation. To disrupt this norm, Porter and Howe chose Helen-like places in which their inventions were designed to answer silences that could not be held up to the mirror of historical accuracy, using instead a mirror in which they could speculate freely. Cixous suggests that this anti-mimetic space belongs to her definition of feminine writing: "If there is somewhere else that can escape the infernal repetition, it lies in that direction, where it writes itself, where it dreams, where it invents new worlds"(xxix). Cixous's feminizing of what has here been read as Phantominic will be crucial in what follows, but before she is approached there are other issues at stake.

It was canvassed, at the close of the introduction to this thesis, that inventions like those Cixous mentions are the opposite of mimesis - a logic born out by these poetic inventions in which it is precisely 'nothing' that has been mimicked. Gaston Bachelard maintains that this imaginative capacity is a form of power. His position wants

_to consider the imagination as a major power of human nature. To be sure, there is nothing to be gained by saying that the imagination is the faculty of producing images. But this tautology has at least the virtue of putting an end to comparisons of images with memories._

_By the swiftness of its actions, the imagination separates us from the past as well as from reality; it faces the future. To the function of reality, wise in experience of the past, as it is defined by traditional psychology, should be added a function of unreality, which is equally positive, as I tried to show in certain of my earlier_
works. Any weakness in the function of unreality, will hamper the productive psyche. If we cannot imagine, we cannot foresee.

Rather than "putting an end to comparisons of images and memories" Porter and Howe have re-imagined memories. This mode of poeticizing sends imagination in the opposite direction to its usual course toward the future, opting instead to direct speculation to the palimpsestically available past. They have trespassed in this chronology by taking up silences which pose uncertain challenges to historical discourse. Their histories have become unrealities, conjectures in the "mirror of a mirror." To reapply Derrida's doubled mirror at this point reassesses and perhaps serves to align Bachelard's 'functions of reality' and 'functions of unreality' in a holistic domain. Loy's poetics, in which she imaginatively forsees a future to which she writes, are more naturally inclined to Bachelard's theory. Both past and future in the poetic cases of this thesis open the borders on silent territories and allow imagination to pass through. Loy's pseudonym in Insel, the deceptively innocuous sounding "Mrs. Jones," is aware of her relationship to time:

"I have existed before my time"
"How true," said Insel
"Whatever I have found out belongs to a future generation."

(Insel 175)

Precisely 'what' Loy has found out is uncertain, even in her own mind. "Whatever" it is, it is something that language as we have known it, fails to capture. She has tried to reweave the web of language to trap her illusive quarry, but finally she has settled on a silence. This silence does not necessarily concede defeat, but recognizes that 'other' factors are in play.

The site of this 'other' now comes to the fore. Internal and external silences collide in all of these poetics in multifarious ways, but the substratum in which they all meet is that of possible infiltration. Phantomimic silence is unbound space able to infiltrate language, knowledge and historical records. From behind the safety of its curtain (and this curtain constitutes a permeable and billowing non-boundary across a stage), it can insinuate itself into language in ways that endlessly negotiate, renegotiate and parley with the symbolic. In this appraisal, the Phantomime shares much of its theoretical territory with French Feminism's reading of language. Such
theorists have long been aware of this 'other' side which they have coded feminine. They see the known face of language as both constructive of, and constructed by, patriarchal power. This version of events has intersected with psychoanalytic theories which have likewise been dominated by phallocentrism. The place of a repressed 'other' (that also falls under the auspices of the Phantomine) is an equally feminine place, as it has been in all these poems via their characters or poetic voices. Akhenaten is included in this. His bisexuality both in his depiction of himself, and in his sexual choices, undermines any purely masculine format in favour of an unbound androgyne.

Cixous renegotiates such Akhenaten-esque bisexuality as an area of the feminine in a way that simultaneously illuminates Loy’s feeling of being trapped between the genders of her parents:

_Bisexuality - that is to say the location within oneself of the presence of both sexes_

[can be seen as]

_a fantasy of a complete being, which replaces the fear of castration and veils sexual difference insofar as it is perceived as the mark of mythical separation - the trace, therefore, of a dangerous and painful ability to be cut. Ovid’s Hermaphrodite, less bisexual than asexual, not made up of two genders but of two halves. Hence a fantasy of unity. Two within one, and not even two wholes._

(41)

Perhaps this goes some way to explain the fascination with cross-dressing in both Porter’s and Howe’s poetics, and the split across Loy’s self and writing. Loy “wore femininity as a mask, sometimes to disguise what she often called her ‘masculine side,’ sometimes to draw the masculine to her side and sometimes to make her feminism less threatening” (Conover, _Lost_ xiv). This operation of her cleft self can be seen as Cixous’s “two halves” with “a fantasy of unity.” Olive, in the non-silent manifestation of her remaining works, also calls to her sisters to be “epicene” (“My Sister”), and poetically enacts the clash of opposites that entailed this self-same fantasy. In Olive’s poems this desire for union is tempered by fears that this will neutralize individuality. These motifs were readable across the poems “Dawn” and
“Spring Night,” and they share much of Loy’s ambivalence about clefts and cleavings.

With the exception of Derrida’s theoretical position, all the Phantomimic writings under discussion here have, as well as taking feminized subject matter, been written by women. According to Cixous this is perhaps because the space in which a woman is able to share a connection with an ‘other’ is inscribed in female bodies. The reproductive capacity of women opens the way for a communication more intimate than verbiage and allows a communicative bond beyond language. The sexual openings in women, and the wombs to which these lead, all proffer an alternative sense of space and individuation to that which has been the experience of men: the masculine being that which culture has inscribed as universal. Rather than making this point one of biological essentialism, female physiology can be read as an availability of such spaces, one that is particularly open to women but optional and not exclusive to them.

Before searching these body cavities, it remains to be said that the Phantomime goes under many theoretical guises beyond the name which has been invented to speak its place in this thesis. Shifting shape between numerous contemporary theories, it is readable in the writings of the French Feminist philosophies of Cixous and Irigaray, both of whom traverse the terrain of ‘woman as other’ in the languages of analysis and patriarchy. Julia Kristeva’s theorizing of the Abjact as outside the symbolic order devises another mode of grasping (at) what the system in power rejects. These theorists all invoke a feminized version of what has here been named the Phantomime in its manifestation as a silent, but gesturing outsider to language, one that is toying with mimesis and disruption. The woman-centered poetry under discussion moves in the tide of these ideas. For this reason, Feminist philosophies will be this “Inconclusion’s” first port of call.

While this group of Feminists seek their theoretic space in (or within the logic of) the female body, two other philosophers, also interested in the outside/otherside of language, use an alternative entry point - that of an external community. Alphonso Lingis in The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common, makes productive contact with the poetics under discussion, as does Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of The Differend. These theories will be approached by this conclusion before it lapses into silence. There is a strange coherence arising
between all these thinkers, despite their differences, which is that each has identified an unknowable other, couched in silence, that has been allowed to infect the non-silence of the linguistically known. All are listening closely for the rustlings which give it away as it 'proceeds recedingly' (to reuse Loy's phrase) into and away from language.
French Feminists - the Body Cavity

Search

"feminine writing is the art of singing the abyss"
(Cixous 59)

When Irigaray delineates:

"the/a" woman as she who fulfils "a twofold function - as the mute
outside that sustains all systematicity; as a maternal and still silent
ground that nourishes all foundations

(9)

the theorist reckons the place of the feminine as the silent other of phallocentric
culture. Like the temporally incoherent phantoms described in the introduction as
being without past, present or future, Irigaray's feminine is:

Never here and now because she is that everywhere elsewhere from
whence the 'subject' continues to draw his reserves, his re-sources,
yet unable to recognize them/her.

(53)

This anti-definition begins Volume Without Contours, the essay describing the
unbound feminine of its central premise. What Irigaray has to offer the
Phantomime, as it has been defined in relation to language and silence, is the
suggestion that this domain is born of gender difference and that the 'other' is
gendered feminine.

Irigaray maps this space for women using the kinds of disguises and
incognitos that have populated the poetic interests canvassed in this research. These
are related to Cixous' female version of bisexuality, referred to above, to which
Irigaray has this to add:
“And so she is one [une], at least for the gaze, covering up her lacerations with dazzling make-up, or her mothering persona. Fragments of women, discourses, silences, or still immaculate white spaces?...Splitting apart [mises en écarts] through which the subjects seek to escape capture.”

(54)

There is uncanny consonance between Irigaray’s phrases and the poetics under discussion. Mina Loy wears her pseudonyms and costumes as this make-up, using her beauty to shield her poetry which is lacerated by silences and complexities. Both her strategies attack any simplistic or stable readings. Conover, in his article “(Re) introducing Mina Loy” says she

was not unaware that she was lovely. ’Pulchritudinous,’ she’d have us say, for while she knew that her looks attracted more attention than her poetry, she was amused that her extreme vocabulary turned readers away.

(253)

Poetic space itself, then, can be the site of both the exposure of such lacerations (as they were traced in Loy), and also part of the make-up designed to disguise them. For Olive it was the latter. Her poetics of falsified performance, like the pretended conversations, mask painful lesions in both “Feathers” and “My Sister.” This process can be tracked further into the constructive basis of language where Helen and Temple are involved in like practices. Language is fragmented by silence and disconnection for both Helen and Temple. In response, they collate images and gather pieces across these spaces. Helen refers to the qualities that are able to penetrate her senses like: warm, cold, liquid, solid, mobile, rigid, big, small, and says “what I call beauty I find in certain combinations of these”(World 8). She goes on to explain that

My fingers cannot, of course, get the impression of a large whole at a glance; but I feel the parts and my mind puts them together.

(Wold 12)

For Loy the spaces around and between language allowed for the referential shiftings that were integral to poetic constructions like Pig Cupid. For Helen, the application is more literal. On learning that a vine was called a ‘creep-er’ she announced to her teacher that she was a ‘walk-plant’(Lash 59) thereby seeing the correlative possibilities made available by such linguistic strategies.

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Temple's equivalent is to "create new images all the time by taking many little parts of images I have in the video library in my imagination and piecing them together" (Thinking 21). It is by breaking down language to its constitutive parts that Helen, Temple and these poets can devise new images, or write new histories that appropriate and refigure the known. This becomes personal for the poets, involving a mirrored breaking apart of self. They can say with Cixous, "to me my texts are elements of a whole which interweaves my own story" (xv) which also licenses their breaking into language and inserting themselves physically into textual places. For Irigaray this begins when the "immaculate white spaces" of pages make it possible. These are the same empty pages used by Howe as part of her poetic vocabulary in "White Foolscap." Such language-less spaces are also the spaces within the language that speak of its inability to contain women, particularly in relation to being the 'other' physical body. Howe and Porter seek among fragments for women or a feminine inscription on a male body. This requires the same fragmentation of their poetic landscapes - the poems reproducing the same vision as that which is imposed on their central characters by the male/other gaze. Their dissembling has been a gender mask and make-up.

Howe's Stella who "rowed as never a woman rowed"; Loy who felt her mind to be masculine; and Olive's "epicene" sisters, all represent stratagems of masculine or gender-complex disguises. The most detailed of these is worn by Akhenaten. While he is the only ostensibly male figure among these poetic protagonists, he is feminized on a number of levels beyond the physical descriptions already described. He is only able to produce female children which causes him to ponder whether this is what his god wants of him (Akhenaten 98). This capacity for reproducing only the feminine is heralded in the pharaoh's childhood. He sees his mother as the embodiment of phallic power and seems to belong to what psychoanalytic theory sees as the mother-centred, pre-Oedipal, Semiotic or Imaginary phase in which the infant exists before moving into the father's symbolic order wherein language dominates. This state persists beyond his infancy and is textually manifest in Akhenaten's fascination with the pulsional functions of the body which indicate the undirected, multifarious desires that have been attributed to this developmental phase. Particularly telling is his fascination with bowels and bladders (the 'fartings,' 'shittings' and 'pissings') and his oral
fixations (the oral is particularly embodied by his mouth that must be made
beautiful in the sculpture (31)). These fascinations pepper the text of Akhenaten’s
world view. His sense of himself without boundaries or stable gender, his
polymorphously perverse sexual drives, and his failure to ever concede to the law
of the father, embodied by the patriarchal religion of Amun, all suggest his position
in the feminine, pre-Oedipal or pre-symbolic phase.

This semiotic place has been relegated to the outside of language most fervently by
Kristeva’s ‘Imaginary.’ In all the poems under discussion this psychoanalytic state finds a language
of the body that accords with Kristeva’s theorizing. This search for a corporeal voice often
culminates in a violent struggle between flesh and language. Akhenaten arranges a trepanning
operation, to open the site within the body that holds the brain - the place of language. What follows
can be shored up against what Loy would perhaps call one of her ‘cerebral abortions’:

    tomorrow Pentu
    my Skull-Opener
    will come

    he will clean
    his instruments
    in the sacred fire

    he will give me
    poppy juice

    his knife will free
    this muck

    (164)

Will this operation find the silence “sweet / in my empty skull”(164)? This is
unknown, because it is set for a tomorrow that never textually arrives. What is
significant is the (metaphoric) implication of the body in the process, and opening
the body as a means for finding something trapped internally.

The physical cavities of Mickey’s body - both willingly unguarded and
raped - were also at the center of Porter’s poetic traversing of silences. Jill defends
Mickey’s rapacious sexuality, what she refers to as “opening your legs”(139) which
also of course points to the opening between Mickey’s legs, as “looking for
something”(116). Mickey and Akhenaten share the need to probe the body for
some secret that drives their desires. The conclusion for them both was the ultimate
silence in death. This is not only Porter’s chosen idiom. Stella’s bullet wound is the
opening that Howe carves in the physical body. Perhaps these poetics belong to Cixous’s logic of the female body:

A woman, by her opening up, is opened up to being “possessed,” which is to say dispossessed of herself.

[...]

Through the same opening that is her danger, she comes out of herself to go to the other, a traveler in unexplored places; she does not refuse, she approaches, not to do away with the space between, but to see it, to experience what she is not, what she is, what she can be.

(42-3)

Loy’s cleft self installs her among these bodily openings. She plumbed the silent center of her personal fissure, and sought to poetically fill it in the same manner that Mickey chose - with the phallus/penis. Her attempts were traced in the Love Songs. For both women the penis proved to be an ineffectual mode of self-fulfillment, one that Loy, in particular, felt could only end in the loss of individuation. The fear she expresses in Love Songs is that she and the lover “might tumble together / Depersonalized / Identical” (Last 58). It is in response to this fear that the poem’s speaker ambivalently begs “Keep away from me” and “Come to me” in the same song (No.13). Olive’s poetic subject position is the most difficult to articulate within this framework, given the limited nature of her poetic remains. However, this thesis has suggested that she left her poetics open-ended and unfinished as a textual embodiment of the kinds of external/autobiographical escape routes she sought. Her silences allow for readerly re-inventions, just as Stella’s and Akhenaten’s did. As Irigaray figures it:

Everything must be (re-)invented to avoid the vacuum. And it is in search of the lost roots of the same that the place is always being ploughed over again in this way. Because there was perhaps a distant hint of a ‘world’ so inconceivable, so other that it would be better to go back underground than to be present at or assist [assister (à)] such a vertiginous event.

(Irigaray 54)

There is a dizzying sense caused by peering into the silence (or the abyss as Cixous called it in the epigraph to this section) of Phantomimic space that affects all these poets as they search for it internally and externally, poetically and autobiographically. Olive chose to inhabit a safer ‘underground,’ receding from the publishing world’s requirement for self-promotion. This withdrawal is consistent
with the way women use language itself, according to Irigaray in her essay, *The Three Genres*, which presents her analysis of the sentences used by men and women and the place of the 'I':

*With men, the I is asserted in different ways; it is significantly more important than the you and the world. With women, the I often makes way for the you, the world, for the objectivity of words and things. From that point of view women appear to be more capable of listening to, discovering or accommodating the other[*]...* (146)

Howe agrees with this entirely when she claims “difference does affect our [women's] use of language, and we constantly confront issues of difference, distance and absence when we write” (*My Emily* 13). From this standpoint, the correlative notion that the spaces of the female physical self, designed to be shared with and inhabited by another - in the biologically coded pattern of intercourse, pregnancy and childbirth - coexists with the verbal strategies employed by women generally. These are equally malleable means of conceiving (of) the ‘other.’

By projecting these theoretical possibilities across the surface of the poetry under discussion, it becomes possible that what this thesis has termed ‘Phantomimic’ in relation to language and the writing of poetry, is also something that entwines itself around, within, and inside the mouths of women on a scale that belongs to larger social conditions of sexual difference. This is not to place an embargo on men from affiliating their writings with Phantomimic space, but women’s shared (or potentially shareable) biological spaces offer one explanation for the consonance between these four women poets’ response to silence. Women’s bodies are communal spaces; patriarchal logic dictates that rational discourse must close off these numerous avenues - especially in terms of writing. This is part of the reason that opening the body in search of the silence, the Phantomimic space, has involved painful, poetically depicted breaches of the flesh, and commonly the final silence of a death. According to Alphonso Lingis it is precisely the physical body which comes under fire when this ‘other’ language beyond the symbolic order seeks a community. His contention is that:

*The community that produces something in common, that establishes truth and that now establishes a technological universe of simulacra, excludes the savages, the mystics, the psychotics - excludes their utterances and their bodies. It excludes them in its own space: tortures.*

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These 'other' thinkers, mystics, psychotics, who alter the course of language, are punished through their bodies; a troubling logic, but one that has been re-enacted in the poetics under discussion. This mistreatment is the action of community, and it is the counterpoise between the individual and the community that is altered by these poets - most significantly by minimizing the community so as to privatize and reinvent its language.
Private Languages for Significant Others

When Lingis says "one enters into conversation in order to become an other for the other" (88), he opens the way for understanding the private conversations these poets instigate with their chosen 'others.' Such poetic connections operate strangely with the notion of community. When poets commune selectively, as they have done in the poems read here, they devise, initially, a community of two. It is the intensity of linguistic exchange between two uniquely connected parties that made the bond between Helen and Teacher rest on the cusp of desire. It is this same bond between Loy and Insel that threatens to weld them seamlessly to the exclusion of all others. Are these communities-of-two perhaps thus shrunken and curtailed by belonging to the margins of larger community? Rachel Blau DuPlessis sees Howe's writing practice through a Kristeva lens in a way that is applicable to the other poets under discussion. They are:

*close to Julia Kristeva, who evokes marginality, subversion, dissidence as anti-patriarchal motives beyond all limits. Anything marginalized by patriarchal order is, thus "feminine"; the "feminine" position (which can be held by persons of both genders) is a privileged place from which to launch an anti-authoritarian struggle.*

The margins in which this thesis began have become all-pervasive in the poetics which have been under discussion. From marginalized poetic subject matter, to the marginalized status of the poets themselves (like Olive, or even their sense of themselves as such - like Loy feeling comradeship with social outcasts), these poetics have shared Kristeva's theoretical position and scoured its anti-authoritarian territory for what it can offer them.
What such potentially barren ground has had to offer (past tense) has been silences, but these poetics have opened up 'the space of writing.' to dislodge Derrida's phrase a little from his intended context. They have sought a kind of communion with the silent space that they share as women by virtue of the social order and by virtue of their status in the field of literary production. If the two-way, two-faced relationships (inevitable to the forging of such bonds) are to become fertile poetic spaces, it is necessary to further unravel this collision between the 'other' and the self. Lingis recognises a kind of mirror, with which 'the mirror of the mirror' of mimetic writing has an intrinsic association:

*I find myself afflicted with the imperative that commands the other. I feel its weight as a force that weighs on my understanding. I find myself compelled to see his or her surfaces as ordered surfaces, exposed to me and ordering me, that is facing me.*

(27)

When Howe orchestrates her relationship to the lost and silenced voices of Stella and Cordelia this is the very mirror into which she peers, seeing the other, and seeing herself. These melded visions of other and self, the two sided masks, were central to both Howe's and Porter's readings of historical silences. By maneuvering themselves into silent spaces through historical loopholes, both poets felt themselves privy to some special knowledge of their protagonists – plumbing a depth at which they found themselves. This is about dissolving boundaries. Howe describes the process as "Not just to write a tribute, but to meet her in the tribute. And that's a kind of fusion" (*Birth-mark* 158).

These poets privilege their sense of identification in acts of poeticizing-for. They are both miming, and entreating these voices to speak in tandem with their own. But they seek to redefine the space for communication by only appropriating what had been obliterated. Because the obliterated is at liberty, it can be reinvented in the form of an intense relationship between the protagonist and the poet. What rescues these writers from a masculinist appropriation is the sense of rehabilitation for those disenfranchised either by silence or by some other marginalizing factor.

This desire for communion with an other was integral to Loy's poetics. By voyeuristically attending to Loy's clearings, this reading eavesdropped on a similarly private conversation. In all cases we have been permitted to witness from an external subject position, but not to participate. Howe, Porter and Loy each
stand between their readers and their chosen others. Closed in a room with Insel, Loy says (through Mrs. Jones):

"He shut the door, [...] So the shutting of doors is a concentration of our radiations in rectangular containers, to economize the essences of our well being we dispense to those with whom we communicate."

(50)

Although they are behind closed doors partaking of their intimate exchange, the reader's eyes and ears have followed them there by virtue of our guide – the 'Baedeker' Loy has written. This economizing of community population (reducing it to two) is partially an aid to the intensity of the intimate communication – something like the heightened intensity that language produced in Helen's relationship with Teacher. Olive's closed door was perhaps her jammed drawer, but she is more explicit on the issue of privacy. Beyond her sub-vocal refusals and silences, she describes the poem that was the first to be drawn into Peter's publicizing drive, as "purely personal and not meant to have any sense for other people."

These privacies metamorphose for each poet. Lingis goes to great lengths to redefine the communicative contract as one which "is an alliance of interlocutors who are on the same side, who are not the Other for each other but all variants of the Same"(81). This does not necessarily reduce the 'other' to a mirror, but cancels the binary division that separates individuals, allowing them to partake in positive exchanges. Partially what is enacted by the private conversations begun in the reader's presence (a position that allows us a space in which to overhear and provides us with a glass to hold to the wall at the edges of the poem) is an instructive example. As the poets call to others, they require their readers to interact with themselves at a similar level of conspiratorial secrecy, building a final stratum of private conversation. The poetry is an interactive, communicative space in which to find the self and the other. Loy makes the point: "Like all modern art, this art [...] makes a demand for a creative audience, by providing a stimulus, which although it proceeds from a complete aesthetic organization, leaves us unlimited latitude for personal response"(Last 297). The region of this unlimited latitude

1 Peter Hopegood to Hugh McCrae, Darlington 27.xii.32. State Library of Victoria MS 12831, location:3672/3(b)
encompasses on one level the poet and subject, and on another mimetic plain, the poet and reader. What is essential is interaction or what Bakhtin calls ‘the dialogic imagination,’ by which he means “language is inherently dialogic: every utterance responds to other utterances and equally shapes itself in anticipation of an addressee’s response”(62).

Once these conversations are under way, Lingis perplexes communication on another level, one which may constitute a specifically aural manifestation of Phantomimic space: “The noise in the Message”(88). What Lingis says is vital to communication is a shared project of “forcing back the tide of noise pollution”(81). This is where his theorizing abscends somewhat from the poetics at hand. It is also the same point at which the sensory deprivations lived by Helen Keller resurface. “The Noise in the Message” embodies the intervening noises that disrupt communication, but in another of the reversals popular in theoretical mechanics, Lingis also sees these same hindrances as integral to communication. This is particularly applicable to the human process of winnowing the superficial and retrieving meaning from irrelevant noises which conflict with communication. He uses the example of the sensory deprivation tank that replicates deep sea silence and renders it thus:

*But the technology that eliminates the noise also eliminates the communication. In the absence of auditory, visual, and tactual background signals, one no longer senses the boundaries between outside and inside, past and present, perception and images, and one soon hallucinates.*

(93)

Who should be relaxing in the floatation tank but the phantom without past, present or future, soaking up the unbound fluidity available to a feminized space that is not subject to the edicts of the symbolic order. The hallucination that concerns Lingis by not belonging to communication, belongs to the definition being fashioned by this thesis around Phantomimic space, a place which sanctions the hallucinations that re-imagine the past and conjure a future. The private space behind the closed door that Loy described, where levels of communing with an other which have been hitherto impossible are now poetically conceivable, belongs to the Phantomime’s construction. Interestingly, the poetic process required for deciphering, or is it encrypting, such space, the fragmentations and selectivities
which have been under investigation, are part of the human ability to succeed over the interference of the noise in the message. Lingis explains that: "Where the receptor organ can receive a wide variety of signals, perception is the active power to focus in on, isolate, segregate, shape a figure, and reduce the rest to indifferentiation" (93).

Lingis does not say this, but perhaps the silence in question here is a form of this noise. Certainly it has shared in the kinds of disruptive machinations that both trouble and create his 'noise in the message' (88). One example he gives is "white noise" which may well be the sound that has only been made decipherable by the position of its edges - where it has abutted the poetry in this thesis. The communities of two (the intimate poetic conversations with exclusive others which have been traced in these poems) set both the poets and their subjects in the margins of the larger community. Lingis calls communication an "effort to silence, not the other, the interlocutor, but the outsider, the barbarian, the prosopoeia of noise" (70). Having dealt with "the other, the interlocutor," it is through Lyotard that we need to turn now and face "the outsider, the barbarian."

Where Lingis hears the silence in the thick of the sounds that produce language, Lyotard searches the places in between. His concept of the 'Differend' is one that completes the theoretical 'bricolage' constructing the Phantomime in this thesis. As with all of these negated and linguistically disenfranchised spaces, definition poses the first of many problems. Lyotard defines his term: "The differend is the unstable state and instant of language wherein something which must be able to be put into phrases cannot yet be" (13). The differend belongs to conflict. At its most basic level it is poised between phrases. At its most concrete historical level it exists between the testimonies and silences emanating from Auschwitz. The complexities of Lyotard's thinking profit from the subtleties of his examples, and it is by way of three such examples that the central chapters of this thesis can be seen to belong to the economy of the differend.

Beginning with Porter and Howe, the debris of history can only precariously be secured to manipulated and co-opted evidence:

...the "perfect crime" does not consist in killing the victim or the witnesses (that adds new crimes to the first one and aggravates the difficulty in effacing everything), but rather in obtaining the silence of the witnesses, the deafness of the judges, and the inconsistency
Porter and Howe have refused to allow such perfect crimes to prevail. In the stories they poeticize, history had obtained the requisite silences, as outlined by Lyotard, for the crime or silence committed against such protagonists as Stella, Cordelia, Akhenaten and Mickey. But these characters have risked falling victim to the socially contrived madness of which Lyotard warns. Porter depicts Mickey as sexually crazed in her drive for poetic success, while Akhenaten’s reign ends in the mental decay that precedes the trepanning operation.

What Blau DuPlessis sees as Howe’s concern at the minimal difference (a phoneme) between “mad” and “made” in “The Liberties,” is the same fear, lucidly summarized by Lyotard’s reading. For Howe, literary tradition succumbs to madness because unearthing women writers and tracing their genealogy (marginalized by the masculinist canon) has the flipside of the mythology around ‘the madwoman in the attic.’ Blau DuPlessis points to the “ambition and achievement” necessary for “made” (referring to the making of poetry), and the socially sanctioned punishment of “mad” (134) for the challenge women pose to literary patriarchy. The space between these two established literary paradigms is where Lyotard would lay his differend.

How well the differend can flourish across this socio-economic equation, and, therefore, in the crevice between the truth and the outcome of the case, is recorded for a posterity that has been rewritten in these poetics. Mickey’s final outcome, produced by these power structures, is the requisite silence of death. Her death emancipates the truth, freeing it from the corporeal body that knew who her murderers were, and opens the space within which Jill can speculate. But Diana threatens Jill with muting and undermining her testimony in the way that Lyotard predicts:

‘You can’t make
the mud stick, Jill,
you open your mouth

(Lyotard 8)
we'll sue.'

(254)

This silence is mirrored by Olive's poetics. Her aborted artistic success was brought about by the differend that inhabits publishing. Olive's resolutely closed lips seem to represent the position for the woman in language as it has been given by Cixous: "If I have said so little, almost nothing, it is out of desperate caution: I distrust every word and every ear"(98). Given the experiences of Stella, Cordelia and Akhenaten, Olive is right to be uneasy. For Olive, Lyotard has the following example of the differend as a social construct, centering on the dynamics between language and the systems of power in publishing rather than those of criminal law (although these are intricately connected in his argument):

Can you give me, says an editor defending his or her profession, the title of a work of major importance which would have been rejected by every editor and which would therefore remain unknown? Most likely, you do not know any masterpiece of this kind because, if it does exist, it remains unknown. And if you think you know one, since it has not been made public, you cannot say that it is of major importance, except in your eyes. You do not know of any, therefore, and the editor is right. - This argument takes the same form as those in the preceding numbers. Reality is not what is given to this or that "subject," it is a state of referent (that about which one speaks) which results from the effectuation of establishment procedures defined by a unanimously agreed-upon protocol, and from the possibility offered to anyone to recommence this effectuation as often as he or she wants. The publishing industry would be one of these protocols, historical inquiry another.

(4)

The publishing industry is at the center of the poetics of historical inquiries, taken as points of departure by Porter and Howe, by virtue of its control over what is remembered. Olive's position in relation to the same power structure demonstrates again such realities when publishing and remembering are subject to a "state of referent." This makes for particularly unstable grounds to redress that which has been lost. The manuscript, in Olive's case, can not be produced as evidence, or given to anyone to refute the "except in your eyes" of the above argument. This builds the silence between language and object known to Helen, which is also integral to the lost histories/poetry signaled by Porter and Howe. By not being able to trace the referent back to an actual book - and this was the labyrinthine tracing
Derrida used to undermine the referent status of the booklet that accompanied (at numerous removes) the pantomime that was the subject of Mallarme's "Mimique" - all of these poets have shifted the economy of such referents, turning silence into a liberty.

For Mina Loy (who has been rescued from such inadmissable evidence as the silence of lost works by her recent re-prints and new editions) the differend moves from the space between systems of power and their subjects (human, poetic or otherwise), and into language, which itself upholds and reflects such structures. The differend likewise shifts between the macro and micro gaps in language and infects the space between coupled words and phrases like that embodied by the example of Pig Cupid. As Lyotard argues:

*Conjoined by and, phrases or events follow each other, but their succession does not obey a categorial order (because; if, then; in order to; although...). Joined to the preceding one by and, a phrase arises out of nothingness to link up with it. Paratax thus connotes the abyss of Not-Being which opens between phrases, it stresses the surprise that something begins when what is said is said. And is the conjunction that most allows the constitutive discontinuity (or oblivion) of time to threaten, while defying it through its equally constitutive continuity (or retention). This is also what is signaled by At least one phrase (No.99). Instead of and, and assuring the same paratactic function, there can be a comma, or nothing.*

(66)

When "a phrase arises out of nothingness" it perhaps comes from the "abyss of Not-Being" that is, according to Cixous in the above subheading, the place of a feminine writing. What Porter and Howe seek in the silences fragmenting history, Loy seeks in the same silences that split words and phrases. Significantly, Lyotard goes on to use the example of Gertrude Stein, as Loy has done, to demonstrate the movements of such poetics. These spaces that Lyotard terms 'the differend,' and that have here been co-opted to the Phantomime, are a microcosm of the division that separates individuals - the space across and in defiance of which communities are formed. It is thus that the Phantomime infiltrates the language that it is not - by making these silent spaces its message. It is a power that these poets seek to harness precisely because, as Lyotard says, it "stresses the surprise that something begins when what is said is said" (66). These new beginnings seem to offer hope for new appraisals of the space and conjunctions of language, the space and
conjunctions of history (recorded either by historians or maintained in the annals of literary history and held in place by the structures of publishing). These spaces are no longer vanishing points or vacuums into which the feminized subject position (or actual women) are subsumed. They are the possibility of a new grammar based on such paratactics. Personally and poetically entering those spaces is a movement towards the other. Cixous describes the process in this way: "[...] If I have grown distant from you by writing to you, it was to write to you. Growing distant propels me towards you. From the furthest point in me I am crying out: I am writing toward you!"(104). Writing weaves not only itself, but also the individual, the two, and the community, together across silent dislocation.

This thesis began with such metaphors about weaving which have had a long relationship with textuality, the interwoven tissue of the text. Between language and the Phantomime, between poetry and silence has lain another woven texture; a mesh or text which is both a trap, and a safety net. This perforated fabrication has admitted many transgressions. What has passed through has been a matter of exchange across and through a gauze which must remain inconclusive by virtue of its twofold, two-way nature. If we wonder what this ‘inclusion’ can leave a woman poet, perhaps it is an exit from definitives:

I think she may have chosen to enter the space of silence, a space where power is no longer an issue, gender is no longer an issue, voice is no longer an issue, where the idea of the printed book appears as a trap.

(Susan Howe, The Birth-mark 170)
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