White Rose Research Online

eprints@whiterose.ac.uk
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk
Universities of Leeds, Sheffield and York

Deposited via The University of Leeds.

White Rose Research Online URL for this paper:
https://eprints.whiterose.ac.uk/id/eprint/122951/

Version: Accepted Version

Article:
Roche, H (2018) Myths, Legends, and Apparitional Lesbians: Amy Lowell's Haunting Modernism. Modernist Cultures, 13 (4). pp. 568-589. ISSN: 2041-1022

https://doi.org/10.3366/mod.2018.0230

This article is protected by copyright. All rights reserved. This is an author produced version of a paper accepted for publication in Modernist Cultures, published by the Edinburgh University Press, at: http://www.euppublishing.com/loi/mod. Uploaded in accordance with the publisher's self-archiving policy.

Reuse
Items deposited in White Rose Research Online are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved unless indicated otherwise. They may be downloaded and/or printed for private study, or other acts as permitted by national copyright laws. The publisher or other rights holders may allow further reproduction and re-use of the full text version. This is indicated by the licence information on the White Rose Research Online record for the item.

Takedown
If you consider content in White Rose Research Online to be in breach of UK law, please notify us by emailing eprints@whiterose.ac.uk including the URL of the record and the reason for the withdrawal request.

Myths, Legends, and Apparitional Lesbians: Amy Lowell's Haunting Modernism

Dr Hannah Roche

Email: h.roche@leeds.ac.uk

Affiliation: University of Leeds

Abstract

By the end of the twentieth century, Amy Lowell's poetry had been all but erased from modernism, with her name resurfacing only in relation to her dealings with Ezra Pound, her distant kinship with Robert Lowell, or her correspondence with D. H. Lawrence. The tale of how Pound rejected Lowell's Imagism, rebranding his movement as Vorticism and spurning the 'Amygism' of Lowell's *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies (1915-1917), had become something of a modernist myth. Recent critics have begun the project of re-evaluating and ultimately reinstating Lowell, but the extent of her contribution to modernist poetry and poetics – and her influence on other, more popular, twentieth-century writers – has not yet been acknowledged. This essay encourages readers to *see* the apparitional Lowell, both in the male-dominated world of modernism and in celebrated works by writers that followed. By drawing attention to the weighty impact of Lowell's poetry on Lawrence – and, later, on Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath – I provide compelling reasons not only to revisit Lowell but also to reassess those texts that are haunted by her presence.

Key words: Lowell; Lawrence; Hughes; Plath; Imagism; gender; queer; influence; appropriation.

Myths, Legends, and Apparitional Lesbians: Amy Lowell's Haunting Modernism

> A legend is something which nobody has written and everybody has written, and which anybody is at liberty to rewrite. It may be altered, it may be viewed from any angle, it may assume what the author pleases, yet it remains essentially the same because it is attached to the very fibres of the heart of man.[1]

Amy Lowell had presence. When Harriet Monroe, founder and editor of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, first encountered the 'ponderous and regal figure' in January 1913, she was in awe of how Lowell 'took possession of the occasion and the company – no one else was of any account'.[2] The poet's 'august physique', to borrow Monroe's phrasing, was as arresting as her character.[3] Melissa Bradshaw's 2004 essay on obesity and the construction of Lowell's persona cuts to the chase, with its first sentence reading 'Amy Lowell was fat'.[4] Though unkind, the nickname 'Hippopoetess' – coined by poet Witter Bynner, though often attributed to Ezra Pound[5] – is unavoidably apt: even Monroe's flattering description of Lowell's

---

[1] Amy Lowell, 'Preface', in *Legends* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), p. v.
[2] Harriet Monroe, 'Memories of Amy Lowell', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse* (July 1925), 208-14 (p. 209).
[3] Ibid.
[4] Melissa Bradshaw, 'Remembering Amy Lowell: Embodiment, Obesity, and the Construction of a Persona', in *Amy Lowell: American Modern*, ed. Adrienne Munich and Melissa Bradshaw (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), p. 167.
[5] See Jean Gould, *Amy: The World of Amy Lowell and the Imagist Movement* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Company, 1974), p. 231.

'magnetic personality [that] always commanded the crowd' adds to the impression of Lowell as a larger-than-life, crowd-pleasing curiosity – like an animal at the zoo.[6]

Yet Lowell drifted, in the decades since her death in 1925, from the realm of the spectacle into that of the spectral. It is symbolic that Lowell's personal file marked 'Autobiography' was discovered, by authorised biographer S. Foster Damon, to hold 'not a page of her project'.[7] Despite the fact that she was posthumously awarded the 1926 Pulitzer Prize for Poetry, for her last collection *What's O'Clock* (1925), Lowell and her work were all but erased from the modernist canon, with her name resurfacing only in relation to her dealings with Pound, her distant kinship with Robert Lowell, or her correspondence with D. H. Lawrence. The 'deeply gendered' tale, in Andrew Thacker's words, of how Pound rejected Lowell's Imagism, rebranding his movement as Vorticism and spurning the 'Amygism' of Lowell's *Some Imagist Poets* anthologies (1915-1917), has taken on both the weight and the malleability of a myth.[8] Damon's suitably hefty biography has largely been consigned to history, and it is only in the last fifteen years that occasional ripples of interest in a poet who suffered an 'almost total disappearance from American letters after her death' have begun to constitute something of a wave.[9] Bradshaw and Adrienne Munich saw to the publication of the *Selected Poems of Amy Lowell* in 2002 and a collection of essays, *Amy Lowell, American Modern*, in 2004; and Bradshaw's *Amy Lowell, Diva Poet* – which reads Lowell in relation to 'the classic narrative of the diva [who] rockets to stardom, exults in the excesses of her fame, and fades away as quickly as she appeared' – followed in 2011.[10] The fact that Carl Rollyson published two significant works on Lowell in the space of four years, 2009's *Amy Lowell Among Her Contemporaries* and the 2013 biography *Amy Lowell Anew*, reinforces the suggestion that Lowell invites and rewards reassessment.[11] Rollyson's inclusion of the updated version of an article entitled 'The Absence of Amy Lowell', first published in *The New Criterion*, as the introductory chapter to both texts foregrounds Lowell's curious evaporation, whilst Bradshaw's afterword, 'Whatever Happened to Amy

---

[6] Monroe, p. 211.
[7] S. Foster Damon, *Amy Lowell: A Chronicle* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1935), p. xi.
[8] Andrew Thacker, *The Imagist Poets* (Tavistock: Northcote House, 2011), p. 89. As Paul Bradley Bellew writes, 'the story of Lowell's assumption of leadership in the movement often takes on an air of scandal'. See '"At the Mercy of Editorial Selection": Amy Lowell, Ezra Pound, and the Imagist Anthologies', *Journal of Modern Literature*, 40.2 (Winter 2017), 22-40 (p. 23). See too Aaron Jaffe, *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 130.
[9] Melissa Bradshaw, *Amy Lowell, Diva Poet* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 4.
[10] Melissa Bradshaw and Adrienne Munich (eds.), *Selected Poems of Amy Lowell* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002); *Diva Poet*, p. 4.
[11] Carl Rollyson, *Amy Lowell Among Her Contemporaries* (New York: ASJA Press [iUniverse], 2009); Carl Rollyson, *Amy Lowell Anew* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013).

Lowell?', leaves readers to ponder and query the poet's 'erasure from literary history'.[12] Sarah Parker begins her 2015 essay on 'Amy Lowell's Appetites' with a discussion of 'the project of deriding and eventually forgetting Amy Lowell', opening with the observation that '[f]ew early twentieth-century writers have suffered such a dramatic fall from favour'.[13]

But if, as Bradshaw claims, what is lacking in Lowell biography and scholarship is 'a compelling reason *to* reread her', then works that focus on Lowell's influences – Margaret Homans' essay on Lowell and Keats, for instance – must be joined by work that examines who Lowell influenced.[14] By drawing attention to the weighty impact of Lowell's poetry on Lawrence and, later, on Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath, this essay provides compelling reasons not only to revisit Lowell but also to reassess texts that are haunted by her voice. Terry Castle's seminal work on *The Apparitional Lesbian* is relevant here, not simply because Lowell was publicly reticent about her long-term relationship with actress Ada Dwyer Russell. Castle's identification of the 'different kinds of denial and disembodiment with which she is usually associated, the much-ghosted yet nonetheless vital lesbian subject' relates directly to Lowell and her work.[15] Lowell's poetry, like the lesbian in history, has suffered 'a misting over, an evaporation': an oeuvre that includes such titles as *Men, Women and Ghosts* (1916) and *Pictures of the Floating World* (1919) has itself become ghostly, 'floating', or ephemeral, like the smoke from Lowell's famous cigars.[16] This essay encourages readers to *see* Amy Lowell, both in the male-dominated world of modernism – had she been born male, Lowell would surely have been counted among Wyndham Lewis's 'Men of 1914' – and in celebrated works by writers that followed.[17]

'In a Garden' and *The Rainbow*

On 15 December 1915, just over a month after Lawrence's *The Rainbow* (1915) was tried and prosecuted under the Obscene Publications Act, Lowell wrote to console 'My dear Mr. Lawrence':

---

[12] Rollyson's 'The Absence of Amy Lowell' was first published in *The New Criterion*, 26.1 (September 2007), 77-81; Bradshaw's afterword explores Lowell's contemporary significance (*Diva Poet*, p. 153).
[13] Sarah Parker, 'Amy Lowell's Appetites: Food, Consumption and Homoerotic Desire in Amy Lowell's Poetry', in *Fat Sex: New Directions in Theory and Activism*, ed. Helen Hester and Caroline Walters (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), p. 159.
[14] *American Modern*, p. 180, emphasis in the original; Margaret Homans, 'Amy Lowell, John Keats, and the "Shielded Scutcheon" of Imagist Art', in *American Modern*, pp. 90-103.
[15] Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 8.
[16] Ibid., p. 28.
[17] 'I call us [Pound, T. S. Eliot, James Joyce] here the "Men of 1914"'. Wyndham Lewis, *Blasting and Bombardiering*, 2nd edn, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), p. 249.

> I am deeply grieved by all this ruckus over 'The Rainbow', and I am annoyed with myself that my silence prevented you from sending it to me, as I am extremely anxious to read it. […] I have written Richard [Aldington] to procure me a copy by hook or by crook if he can, for you know you have no more fervent admirer in the world than I am.[18]

Lowell's letter begins with two apologies: for her 'long silence […] of the pen, not of the heart', and for the delay in sending Lawrence's royalties from sales of the first edition of *Some Imagist Poets: An Anthology* (1915).[19] But setting financial matters aside, Lawrence and *The Rainbow* were clearly in Lowell's debt. The previous year, Lawrence had been delighted to receive Lowell's gift of a (her own) used typewriter – a 'frightfully jolly' machine 'with which both myself and my wife are for the present bewitched'[20] – and, on 18 December 1914, a month after the typewriter's arrival, Lawrence set about 're-writing [the novel]. It will be called The Rainbow. When it is done, I think really it will be a fine piece of work'.[21] I do not want to suggest that Lawrence's typewriter was in some way haunted by its previous owner, who was very much alive in the Lowell family mansion in Brookline, Massachusetts, or that Lowell possessed the mysterious ability to guide Lawrence's bewitched fingers over the keys from across the Atlantic. If, as Katherine Mullin has claimed, typists may be read as 'figures of ambiguous, often troubling authorial identification', then I would argue that the typewriter itself in this instance stands as a troubling symbol of the not-yet-identified authorial ambiguity – a queer emblem of *ghost*writing – that just might cloud *The Rainbow*.[22]

As Nicola Wilson writes in her discussion of *The Rainbow*'s obscenity trial as 'a stark warning for the authors of frank and challenging fiction', the chapter entitled 'Shame' was 'pointedly picked up on by the magistrate'.[23] Yet the sizeable influence of real-life lesbian Lowell's potentially 'frank and challenging' poetry was *not* 'picked up on' by either

---

[18] Amy Lowell to D. H. Lawrence, 15 December 1915, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence and Amy Lowell, 1914-1925*, ed. E. Claire Healey and Keith Cushman (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow, 1985), p. 35. *The Rainbow* was tried on 13 November 1915 at Bow Street Magistrates' Court.

[19] Ibid., pp. 34-35. In Rollyson's account of the correspondence, it is Lawrence rather than Lowell who is 'aloof' and often elusive. 'He changed addresses so often that Amy Lowell found it difficult to keep track of his whereabouts. Books she sent him went astray, although the ever-practical Amy never sent him money unless she was sure it would arrive before the next move' (*Among Her Contemporaries*, pp. 39-40). Rollyson goes on to ask '[w]hat professional writer has not complained about publishers delaying payment?' (p. 45).

[20] D. H. Lawrence to Amy Lowell, 18 November 1914, in *Letters*, p. 26, p. 27.

[21] D. H. Lawrence to Amy Lowell, 18 December 1914, in *Letters*, pp. 30-31.

[22] Katherine Mullin, *Working Girls: Fiction, Sexuality, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 90.

[23] Nicola Wilson, 'Circulating Morals (1900-1915)', in *Prudes on the Prowl: Fiction and Obscenity in England, 1850 to the Present Day*, ed. David Bradshaw and Rachel Potter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 70, p. 69.

magistrate Sir John Dickinson or later readers of Lawrence's novel. Mark Kinkead-Weekes has established that Lawrence began writing the 'Shame' chapter in February 1915.[24] In 'Shame', Ursula Brangwen falls blissfully and eagerly in love with her 'exquisite' class-mistress, Miss Winifred Inger.[25] Ursula's desire nears its climax during the desperately-awaited swimming class, where, in the 'marble-like confines' of the pool, she is treated to the vision of Miss Inger in her bathing dress.[26] After a race, Miss Inger catches Ursula by the waist in the water. The love then 'tacitly confessed' ('I enjoyed our race, Ursula, did you?'), the women arrange to spend an evening together.[27] '[E]clipsed' by thunderclouds, Miss Inger proposes a swim:

> 'I think I shall go and bathe,' said Miss Inger, out of the cloud-black darkness.
> 'At night?' said Ursula.
> 'It is best at night. Will you come?'
> […]
> They ventured out into the darkness, feeling the soft air of night upon their skins.
> 'I can't see the path,' said Ursula.
> 'It is here,' said the voice, and the wavering, pallid figure was beside her, a hand grasping her arm. And the elder held the younger close against her, close, as they went down, and by the side of the water, she put her arms round her, and kissed her.[28]

The Rainbow's Sapphic bathing scenes do not recreate the episode in Lawrence's first novel, *The White Peacock* (1911), in which two male characters share a naked morning swim; nor do these scenes represent part of a 'process of self-knowledge' by which Lawrence attempted to come to terms with his own sexuality.[29] Indeed, to interpret the Ursula-Winifred relationship as evidence of Lawrence's 'potential homosexuality' would not only be, as Kinkead-Weekes suggests, 'a cultural poverty', but it would also be to render lesbianism, as distinct from male homosexuality, invisible or irrelevant.[30] The dream-like figure of the 'white, smooth, strong' Miss Inger, bathing beneath a dense night sky, was not dreamt up by Lawrence alone.[31] 'In a Garden', the only Lowell poem to appear in Ezra Pound's *Des*

---

[24] Mark Kinkead-Weekes, *D.H. Lawrence: Triumph to Exile, 1912-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 201.
[25] D. H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), p. 325.
[26] Ibid., p. 325.
[27] Ibid., p. 327.
[28] Ibid., p. 328.
[29] Michael Black, *D. H. Lawrence: The Early Philosophical Works* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 370.
[30] Kinkead-Weekes, p. 202.
[31] Ibid., p. 326.

Imagistes (1914), was reportedly the subject of much mockery and mirth at a soirée held in celebration of Pound's anthology.[32] Its last two stanzas read:

> And I wished for night and you.
> I wanted to see you in the swimming-pool,
> White and shining in the silver-flecked water.
> While the moon rode over the garden,
> High in the arch of night,
> And the scent of lilacs was heavy with stillness.
>
> Night, and the water, and you in your whiteness, bathing![33]

Lowell's idealised female nude may, as Bradshaw argues, be 'borrowed from fine art', but Lawrence in turn borrows his Sapphic bathers from Lowell.[34] The single image in Lowell's poem provides material for two scenes in *The Rainbow*; the speaker's wish to 'see you in the swimming-pool' is granted, twice, by Lawrence. 'Marble fountains' (10) in Lowell's poem are restructured as the 'marble-like confines' of the pool where Miss Inger takes her swimming class; and the heavy, heady atmosphere – 'It falls, the water; | And the air is throbbing with it. | With its gurgling and running' (12-14) – is broken by the rain that falls on Lawrence's entangled bathers: 'A sudden, ice-cold shower burst in a great weight upon them'.[35] When Miss Inger arrives to take the swimming class, she is dressed in 'a rust-red tunic like a Greek girl's', appearing 'firm-bodied as Diana': Ursula's Sapphic mistress has stepped directly out of the faded Grecian splendour – the marble columns are 'yellowed' (10), and the steps 'moss-tarnished' (11) – of Lowell's poem.[36]

The 'water flickering upon the white shoulders, the strong legs kicking shadowily' belong to both Miss Inger during the swimming class and Lowell's 'you'; but the moon in Lowell's poem is concealed, in *The Rainbow*, behind 'cloud-black darkness'.[37] The novel's thunderclouds prompt speculation: did Lawrence purposely set a marked contrast between his night-swimming scene and Lowell's, hoping to eclipse the fact that he had borrowed his lesbian lovers from his lesbian friend? Kinkead-Weekes has claimed that it would be

---

[32] In short, Allen Upward apparently alluded to Lowell's weight in his reading of her poem, prompting Pound to place a large tin bathtub before Lowell and declaring that 'Les Nagistes' would succeed Les Imagistes. See Rollyson, 'A Tale of a Tub: Amy Lowell and Ezra Pound', in *Among Her Contemporaries*, pp. 9-37, for various retellings of 'the bathtub scene', of which 'no account […] is entirely satisfactory' (p. 36). See too Bellew, pp. 26-27.

[33] Amy Lowell, 'In a Garden', in *Des Imagistes: An Anthology*, ed. Ezra Pound (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, 1914), p. 38, lines 16-22. Line references provided parenthetically in main body of text.

[34] *Diva Poet*, p. 116. See Bradshaw's subchapter on '"You in your whiteness bathing": Idealized Femininity', pp. 115-8.

[35] *The Rainbow*, p. 328.

[36] Ibid., p. 326.

[37] Ibid., p. 326, p. 328.

'impertinent to talk of "sources" [for *The Rainbow*]', and that 'imaginative exploration was easier because it would be a relation between females, not implicating him'; but writing about lesbianism was only 'easier' because the necessary source material was already at Lawrence's disposal.[38] The first four lines of 'In a Garden' might be read as symbolic – or prophetic – given that Lowell's stark Imagism (or Amygism) was 'spread at ease' by a rhapsodic, often florid male writer:

> Gushing from the mouths of stone men
> To spread at ease under the sky
> In granite-lipped basins,
> Where iris dabble their feet (1-4)

As moulded representations of femininity, the 'granite-lipped basins' come to embody the reshaping of Lowell's poem by a potent but passive masculine force: 'the mouths of stone men' may pour forth water, but their '[g]ushing' is idle regurgitation (and ultimately admiration) rather than creation. The iris in line four find new life in Lawrence's 1916 poem 'Scent of Irises', with exclamations in the later poem echoing the closing line of 'In a Garden': Lowell's 'Night, and the water, and you in your whiteness, bathing!' becomes 'You with your face all rich, like the sheen on a dove!' and 'Only the darkness and the scent of you!'[39]

Interestingly, a portion of *The Rainbow* was posted to Lady Ottoline Morrell on 8 April 1915, with an instruction to 'tell me very plainly what you think', but Lawrence chose not to invite the writer of 'In a Garden' to comment on 'Shame' before its publication.[40] After the trial, Lawrence had lost his copy and Lowell was unable to procure one.[41] Lawrence and Lowell were generally in the habit of sharing creative outputs with one another; and, whereas Lowell was ever keen to express her 'fervent admiration' of Lawrence, he would regularly pass comment on her writing with a critical and provocative air of superiority. *Men, Women and Ghosts*, like the typewriter, was received (along with a cheque for £60) with enthusiastic praise, but Lawrence nonetheless made it clear that 'I like this book better than "Sword Blades [and Poppy Seed]"' – the 1914 collection in which 'In a Garden'

---

[38] Kinkead-Weekes, p. 207, p. 203.
[39] D. H. Lawrence, 'Scent of Irises', in *The Complete Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. David Ellis (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), pp. 55-56, lines 18, 27.
[40] D.H. Lawrence to Lady Ottoline Morrell, 8 April 1918, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence*, ed. George J. Zytaruk and James T. Boulton, 8 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), II, p. 314.
[41] On 25 January 1916, Lawrence sent a copy to William and Sallie Hopkin, with a note to say that '[m]y *Rainbow* copy was lost, so I had to wait till I could get this' (Ibid., p. 514). On 1 February 1916, Lowell informed Lawrence that she 'asked Richard [Aldington] to send it, as I wrote you, but I suppose he could not get a copy' (*Letters*, p. 40).

was published.[42] Lawrence's sustained effort to influence Lowell – '[Rockets and Sighs] would have been a better title than Men Women and Ghosts'; 'Do write a book called Fire Rockets' – might be read, in light of his literary larceny, as an attempt either to repay his friend or to instil a sense of his own, supposedly higher, value.[43]

'I too am a rare | Pattern'

On 4 October 1918, almost three years after the trial of *The Rainbow*, Lowell wrote to Lawrence to thank him for having dedicated his *New Poems* (1918) to her. Lowell then returned to the subject of Lawrence's controversial work, offering advice that she was certain would go unheeded:

> I know there is no use in counselling you to make any concessions to public opinions in your books and, although I regret sincerely that you cut yourself off from being published by an outspokenness which the English public does not understand, I regret it not in itself, […] but simply because it keeps the world from knowing what a great novelist you are. I think that you could top them all if you would be a little more reticent on this one subject. You need not change your attitude a particle, you can simply use an Indian [sic] rubber in certain places, and then you can come into your own as it ought to be. But what is the use? You will turn from these remarks with a shrug of disgust and say, 'Another, another, they are all against me!'[44]

Lillian Faderman quotes from this letter in her essay on Ada Dwyer Russell in Lowell's life and work, pointing out that Lowell herself 'did not "change [her] attitude a particle," but she did "use an india rubber in certain places"'.[45] Indeed, with regard to sex and sexuality in her own writing, Lowell was generally vague: 'In a Garden', for instance, obscures lesbianism behind an anonymous speaker – the 'imagist "I"' – and the unidentified 'you'.[46] Faderman claims that the gaze in 'In a Garden' 'is 'erotic and focused on a female', but there is nothing to confirm that the desired bather is a woman.[47] Lawrence, as Lowell's friend, would have interpreted the sexual imagery throughout *Sword Blades* as representative of female same-sex

---

[42] D. H. Lawrence to Amy Lowell, 14 November 1916, in *Letters*, p. 49. The editors of the *Letters* have pointed out that 'often when [Lawrence] praises Lowell's writings he seems to be straining to accentuate the positive, trying to find something good to say to balance his criticisms' (E. Claire Healey and Keith Cushman, 'Introduction', in *Letters*, p. 14).

[43] Ibid., p. 50. Lowell's 'Fireworks' was published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in April 1915.

[44] Amy Lowell to D. H. Lawrence, 4 October 1918, in Damon, p. 483.

[45] Lillian Faderman, '"Which, Being Interpreted, Is as May Be, or Otherwise": Ada Dwyer Russell in Amy Lowell's Life and Work', in *American Modern*, p. 64.

[46] Helen Carr has pointed out that Lowell 'was able to exploit the gender specificity in the imagist "I"', and that, aside from H.D., attendees of the *Imagistes* soirée would probably not have recognised 'In a Garden' as a 'lesbian love poem'; any mockery was misogynistic rather than homophobic. See *The Verse Revolutionaries: Ezra Pound, H.D. and The Imagists* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2009), p. 673.

[47] Ibid., p. 68.

desire – as Rollyson has observed of the Lawrence-Lowell correspondence, Lawrence 'hardly ever wrote without some reference to Ada' – but readers unfamiliar with Lowell's personal life may not detect a lesbian theme.[48] Faderman is right to point out that Lowell's 'quite perfunctory encoding of lesbian subject matter was usually successful in throwing critics off the track'.[49] If Lawrence invited criticism, courting scandal and provoking censors, then Lowell was his antithesis, treading softly so as to minimise offence and maximise appeal. The fact that the Hallmark greetings card company compiled a 'gift book' of Lowell's love poems in 1972 stands as testament to her canny sense of the popular and packageable.[50]

Yet Lowell's lesbianism was not always so carefully coded or closeted. The oft-anthologised 1916 poem 'Patterns', one of only two Lowell poems included in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry* (the second being 'The Weather-Cock Points South' [1919]), is ostensibly about heterosexual love and loss in eighteenth-century wartime:

> In a month he would have been my husband.
> In a month, here, underneath this lime,
> We would have broke the pattern;
> He for me, and I for him,
> He as Colonel, I as Lady,
> On this shady seat.[51]

On the face of it, the poem's speaker is a heterosexual woman pining for 'the man who should loose me' (104), but lesbian desire glides, ghostlike, beneath the surface of the poem. Monroe's claim that 'Patterns' would 'survive even if someone else stood behind it' is curiously apposite, though her interpretation of the poem's subject as 'a thing close to people's lives and hearts' may not be altogether accurate.[52] The myth that phantoms only appear to those who are looking for them evidently applies to Lowell's apparitional lesbianism here.

Lowell invites a reading of the 'patterns' in her poem as rigid femininity and inevitable heterosexuality: 'Up and down the patterned paths, | In my stiff, correct brocade' (72-73). The marble fountains and 'closed-clipped lawns' (7) from 'In a Garden' are present, with 'bright blue squills' (3) as stand-ins for the earlier poem's lilacs and irises, but the

---

[48] *Among Her Contemporaries*, p. 52.
[49] Faderman, p. 65.
[50] Amy Lowell, *The Touch of You: Amy Lowell's Poems of Love and Beauty*, ed. Peter Seymour (Kansas City: Hallmark Cards Inc., 1972).
[51] Amy Lowell, 'Patterns', in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, ed. Margaret Ferguson et al, 5th edn, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), p. 1247, lines 81-86. 'Patterns' first appeared in the *Little Review* in August 1915.
[52] Harriet Monroe, 'Comment: Amy Lowell', *Poetry*, 25.1 (October 1924), 32-38 (p. 34).

'granite-lipped basin' has become a hidden 'marble basin' (33): structured grey has given way to cool, pale elegance. Images of stiffened brocade and restricted movement reoccur, with Lowell imposing an almost-pattern through repetition and the occasional employment of 'close-clipped' rhyme: 'Up and down, | In my gown' (98-99). Yet the rhyme scheme is inconsistent – Lowell's *vers libre* will not be '[b]oned and stayed' (101) – and both poet and speaker succeed in breaking the pattern:

> Underneath my stiffened gown
> Is the softness of a woman bathing in a marble basin,
> A basin in the midst of hedges grown
> So thick, she cannot see her lover hiding,
> But she guesses he is near,
> And the sliding of the water
> Seems the stroking of a dear
> Hand upon her.
> What is Summer in a fine brocaded gown!
> I should like to see it lying in a heap upon the ground.
> All the pink and silver crumpled up on the ground. (32-44)

Subjectivity in this stanza is far from straight(forward). The 'pink and silver' brocaded gown does not necessarily belong to the speaker; the woman bathing beneath the gown may not be the speaker herself but rather a desired female lover; and, whilst the male suitor is believed to be 'near', he is absent as the speaker imagines 'the stroking of a dear | Hand'. Bradshaw's supposition that '[t]he hand belongs to the bather' leads her to conclude that, 'though [Lowell's speaker] might try to imagine a different subject position, perhaps even flirting with an autoerotic sexuality, she ultimately cannot comprehend a sexuality other than [that of] object of male desire'.[53] However, coupled with the 'sliding of the water' and the discarded gown, the stroking hand points to sex between women. In the following stanza, the speaker reveals that she 'would choose | To lead him in a maze along the patterned path' (47-48): the '[b]ewildered' (45) male suitor is quite literally led up the garden path by his betrothed. Lowell, too, directs her readers into a maze of associations and blind alleys, with the 'hedges grown' and 'lover hiding' signposting the concealed desire beneath the poem's carefully manicured surface. The eye-rhyme of 'grown' and 'gown' serves as a subtle reminder that appearances can be deceptive.

One might argue that 'Patterns' simply provides evidence that Lowell was unable to write convincingly about a heterosexual relationship. But the speaker's claim in the first stanza – 'I too am a rare | Pattern' (7-8) – and the poem's final line – 'Christ! What are

[53] *Diva Poet*, p. 97, p. 99.

patterns for?' (107) – encourage readers to acknowledge the speaker's difference and deviation from the norm. With the entrance of the 'heavy-booted lover' (49), whose waistcoat 'bruised my body as he clasped me' (51), Lowell introduces heterosexual passion as a violent assault on the gentle femininity beneath the pink and silver gown. As the woman bathes, the water is 'dripping' (31); when the male lover appears, the 'waterdrops' are 'plopping' (54). Lowell deftly emasculates the man who can only 'stumble after' (44) the unattainable object of his desire: it is significant that the eventual embrace can only be achieved in a reverie. The speaker, imagining her lover catching and clasping her, is 'very like to swoon | With the weight of this brocade' (56-57) – not with sexual longing. Lowell, here, breaks the pattern by constructing a familiar wartime romance in which heterosexuality is a performance; the poem is haunted not by a fallen hero but by a stifled woman's desire for women. Jaime Hovey's work on lesbian chivalry in *Sword Blades* could easily be extended to *Men, Women and Ghosts*: the chivalrous hero of 'Patterns' is surely not the 'clasp[ing]' Lord Hartwell but rather the speaker herself, whose armoured body remains 'guarded from [a man's] embrace' (102) as she yearns for courtly love with a woman.[54]

The scene of chivalrous romance in 'Patterns', with its marble fountains and intricate gardens, is found in both 'In a Garden' and 'The Blue Scarf', another poem in *Sword Blades*. A thread of continuity reaches from 'The Blue Scarf' into 'Patterns':

> Pale, with the blue of high zeniths, shimmered over with silver, brocaded
> In smooth, running patterns, a soft stuff, with dark knotted fringes,
> it lies there,
> Warm from a woman's soft shoulders, and my fingers close on it, caressing.
> Where is she, the woman who wore it? The scent of her lingers and drugs
> me![55]

As the silver, the brocade, and the patterns appear in both poems, readers might reasonably assume that Lowell is purposely establishing a relationship between her 1914 erotic fantasy about a woman and her 1915 war poem. Like 'In a Garden', 'The Blue Scarf' and 'Patterns' are suspended in the moment of desire: their subject is longing rather than consummation. The gender of the speaker in 'The Blue Scarf' is not disclosed, but the setting – with 'columns of marble' (7) and 'the gold-bubbled water of a basin' (10) – encourages readers to recognise her voice as that of the later female speaker in 'Patterns'. Both speakers conjure

---

[54] Jaime Hovey, 'Lesbian Chivalry in Amy Lowell's *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*', in *American Modern*, pp. 77-89.

[55] Amy Lowell, 'The Blue Scarf', in *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1921), p. 236, lines 1-4.

the image of a female lover who is *not really there*: in the earlier poem, the scarf enables the speaker to envision an embrace with 'the woman who wore it', whilst the desired woman in 'Patterns' is imagined to be '[u]nderneath my stiffened gown'. In the shift from 'The Blue Scarf' to the pink and silver 'Patterns', Lowell sees an unknown and ungendered speaker materialise as a woman restricted by femininity and forced to live according to society's 'patterns'. But the ghost of lesbianism lingers, unsettling the heterosexual romance on the poem's watery surface. The deceased Lord Hartwell is not the spectre here: the real phantom is the lesbian speaker from 'The Blue Scarf', who has glided from the 1914 collection into the first poem in *Men, Women and Ghosts*.

Pikes and Mirrors

If 'Patterns' is to be understood as a muffled echo of 'The Blue Scarf', with a spectral lesbian presence threatening to break through the poem's heterosexual façade, then works that borrow from Lowell may similarly be read as haunted or even possessed by the lesbian poet. I have discussed the way in which *The Rainbow* echoes and emulates 'In a Garden', with Lowell's white bather passing silently into Lawrence's novel. Lawrence, however, was not the only heterosexual male writer to draw upon a poem from *Sword Blades*. 'The Blue Scarf' is directly preceded by 'The Pike':

> In the brown water,
> Thick and silver-sheened in the sunshine,
> Liquid and cool in the shade of the reeds,
> A pike dozed.
> Lost among the shadows of stems
> He lay unnoticed.
> Suddenly he flicked his tail,
> And a green-and-copper brightness
> Ran under the water.
>
> Out from under the reeds
> Came the olive-green light,
> And orange flashed up
> Through the sun-thickened water.
> So the fish passed across the pool,
> Green and copper,
> A darkness and a gleam,
> And the blurred reflections of the willows on the opposite bank
> Received it.[56]

[56] Amy Lowell, 'The Pike', in *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*, pp. 234-5.

If it is surprising that readers have not yet picked up on Lawrence's debt to 'In a Garden', then it is nothing short of incredible that Ted Hughes's 'Pike' (1959) has not been considered in its close relation to 'The Pike'. In Lowell's poem, 'shadows', 'green-and-copper', 'under the reeds', and 'orange' appear in sequence; in almost the same pattern, Hughes's poem gives us 'green tigering the gold' (2), 'silhouette' (6), 'under the heat-struck lily pads' (9), and an 'amber cavern' (12).[57] In an echo of the antepenultimate line of 'The Pike', the final line of Hughes's poem reads 'Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed' (43). Readers would be forgiven for mistaking Lowell's poem for a shorter draft of 'Pike', or for suggesting that Hughes confidently fished out the most appealing imagery from the earlier work. The pike as weapon also recalls Lowell's preoccupation with knightly themes and the *Sword Blades* in her collection's title.

Astoundingly (or not), Hughes wrote 'Pike' in Lowell's native Massachussetts. In 1957, Hughes and Sylvia Plath moved into an apartment in the town of Northampton, around 100 miles from Brookline; 'Pike' came to life as Hughes lay on the bed.[58] By the time of the poem's publication as a 'broadside' for Massachusetts' own Gehenna Press in 1959, Hughes and Plath had relocated to Boston and were enjoying the city's lively literary scene. Robert Lowell, who was on friendly terms with the couple and whose poetry classes Plath 'sat in on', considered Hughes's 'Pike' to be a masterpiece.[59] Did Robert detect similarities between his cousin's largely neglected forty-five-year-old work and Hughes's new 'masterpiece'? There was, unsurprisingly, no hint of an acknowledgement of the lesbian poet's influence – except, perhaps, for the fact that Hughes and Plath named their kitten Sappho in January 1959.[60] Hughes's poem is now often read as married to Plath's 'Mirror' (1961), the final lines of which are understood to be a direct response to the ending of 'Pike'.[61] Hughes's 'Darkness beneath night's darkness had freed | That rose slowly toward me, watching' (43-44) resurfaces as 'Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness. | In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman | Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.'[62]

---

[57] Ted Hughes, 'Pike', in *Lupercal* (London: Faber and Faber, 2001), p. 21.
[58] Jonathan Bate, *Ted Hughes: The Unauthorised Life* (London: William Collins, 2015), p. 145.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., p. 146. Jacqueline Rose's account of her dispute with Hughes over her reading of Plath's 'The Rabbit Catcher' points towards a certain homophobia on Hughes's part: he accuses Rose of coming up with a 'shocking fantasy' in which Plath was a 'freaky woman who was like that'. In Rose's words, Hughes 'names the lesbian as unspeakable'. See 'This is not a biography', *London Review of Books*, 24.16 (22 August 2002), 12-15.
[61] See Dianne M. Hunter, 'Family Phantoms: Fish, Watery Realms and Death in Virginia Woolf, Sylvia Plath, and Ted Hughes', *Plath Profiles: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Sylvia Plath Studies*, 2 (Summer 2009), 103-34.
[62] Sylvia Plath, 'Mirror', in *Selected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 34, lines 16-18.

Yet 'Mirror' is in dialogue not only with 'Pike' but with Lowell's work too; the 'blurred reflection' (17) that ends Lowell's 'The Pike' provides a starting point for 'Mirror'.

The structure of Plath's poem faithfully reproduces or reflects that of Lowell's 'The Pike': eighteen lines are divided into two equal nine-line stanzas. The visual effect, within each poem, is one of distorted mirroring: the penultimate line of the second stanza in both poems is longer than all other lines, thus breaking the pattern and shattering the illusion of a reflection. The colours in Plath's first stanza evoke Lowell's 'Patterns': the mirror is 'silver and exact' (1), and the opposite wall is 'pink, with speckles' (7). The first stanza is apparently spoken by a mirror, but the volta at line 10 sees a transformation: 'Now I am a lake'. On its surface, Plath's poem is about aging, decay, and the falsity of femininity and romance – 'those liars, the candles or the moon' (12) – but the unstable identity of the speaker invites alternative readings. In his analysis of Hughes's 'Pike', Raphaël Ingelbien observes that 'the mirror faces both ways: the angler's hallucinated state can also derive from the sense that *he* may be a reflection'.[63] In 'Mirror', too, the relationship between reality and reflection is more complex than it initially appears: the voice may *not* be that of a mirror or a lake, reflecting a woman's image, but rather that of the woman herself. If Plath's 'I' is a woman, then the poem becomes not about a divided or reflected self but about *two* women: in her engagement with the second woman, who 'comes and goes' (15), the 'silver and exact' speaker has lost her youth and has turned into a 'terrible fish'. I am not suggesting that 'Mirror' should be interpreted as a closeted lesbian poem; on the contrary, a reading of Plath's poem as autobiographical would likely point to the second woman as one of Hughes's students.[64] But, as in 'Patterns', what appears to be one woman – at once gazer and gazed upon – can be read as two. Alternatively, the 'I' could be a male speaker; Hughes himself fits the bill for the 'little god' (5) who is 'not cruel, only truthful' (4). Setting enchanted mirrors aside, Plath's poem is haunted by the presence of a figure behind or beneath its glassy surface. Echoes of Lowell can be heard in the pink and silver, the lake, and the fish; yet her voice has been effectively drowned out by that of Plath's husband. It is somehow symbolic that Lowell kept the mirrors in her home concealed behind black linen.[65]

---

[63] Raphaël Ingelbien, 'Imagined Communities / Imagined Solitudes: Versions of Englishness in Postwar Literature', *European Journal of English Studies*, 8.2 (2004), 159-71 (p. 167), emphasis in original.

[64] Quoting from Plath's journal, Bate reports an episode in May 1958 when Hughes had just finished teaching at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. Plath saw Ted 'coming up the road from Paradise Pond where girls take their boys to neck on weekends', gazing into the eyes of a strange girl. Bate writes: 'Suddenly, the God, the great poet, the only man she could ever want, was "a liar and a vain smiler"'. The girl was a student in Hughes's creative writing class (p. 141).

[65] Bradshaw discusses this 'melodramatic gesture' in *Diva Poet*, p. 18.

‘[T]he female should always be secret’

If Lowell’s ‘The Pike’, Hughes’s ‘Pike’, and Plath’s ‘Mirror’ can be positioned as connected points on a one-way line, with each poem informed by that or those before it, then a second line (or lines) might be established between Lowell’s *Sword Blades*, Lawrence’s *The Rainbow*, and Hughes’s *Lupercal* (1960), the collection in which ‘Pike’ appears. In the introduction to *The New Poetry* (1962), Al Alvarez reacted against the English ‘disease’ of gentility, calling for a ‘new depth poetry’ in which ‘the openness to experience, the psychological insight and integrity of D. H. Lawrence would, ideally, combine with the technical skill and formal intelligence of T. S. Eliot’.[66] For Alvarez, working-class Englishman Hughes (and American Robert Lowell) could answer that call. Alvarez found much to praise in *Lupercal*’s ‘A Dream of Horses’, despite disliking its ‘quasi-medieval trappings of the romantic realm of Gormenghast’, and wrote favourably about the poem’s dreamlike qualities.[67] He claimed that Hughes’s horses had their ‘literary antecedents: the strange, savage horses which terrorise Ursula Brangwen at the end of *The Rainbow*’.[68] Alvarez did not, of course, direct readers towards the source material for ‘Pike’. Lawrence’s (and Hughes’s) horses were not borrowed from Amy Lowell, but *The Rainbow* nonetheless acts an arc from Lowell to Hughes, casting light upon the way in which the later writer borrowed, or fished, from his forebears. Aside from their pikes and their recasting of feminine mythology (the second poem in Lowell’s collection is ‘The Captured Goddess’; *Lupercalia* is the ancient Roman festival of fertility), *Sword Blades* and *Lupercal* share a surprising attention to metrical and rhythmic convention. Lowell claimed that she ‘had not entirely abandoned the more classic English metres’, and the same might be said of *Lupercal*, most notably in the tetrameter of the ‘Lupercalia’ sequence that ends the collection.[69]

Even if Alvarez had recognised Lowell’s ‘The Pike’ as ‘literary antecedent’ of Hughes’s ‘Pike’, it is unlikely that he would have exposed the virile Yorkshireman’s debt to a moneyed lesbian from Massachusetts. Hughes, at this early point in his career, would not have welcomed the connection to Lawrence, let alone an association with Lowell. As Jonathan Bate has pointed out, Hughes saw his poetic heritage as Chaucer, Shakespeare,

---

[66] A. Alvarez, ‘The New Poetry, or Beyond the Gentility Principle’, in *The New Poetry*, ed. A. Alvarez, 2nd edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), p. 32.
[67] Ibid.
[68] Ibid, pp. 31-32.
[69] Amy Lowell, ‘Preface’, in *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*, p. xii; Ted Hughes, ‘Lupercalia’, in *Lupercal,* pp. 53-55.

Webster, Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Burns, and he was reluctant to acknowledge any connection with Lawrence:

> The name of D. H. Lawrence is strikingly absent from the genealogy outlined [in a letter from Hughes to Luke Myers, dated 19 June 1959]: perhaps out of a certain 'anxiety of influence', Ted is suppressing the name of the writer who came immediately before him as a northern, working-class voice with a sensitivity to the raw forces of nature, an interest in myth and archetype, an unashamed openness of sexual energy, and a distinctly lubricious attitude to the female body (Lawrence was the poet who compared the 'wonderful moist conductivity' of a fig to a woman's genitals).[70]

Bate, here, is referring to the poem 'Fig' or 'Figs', from Lawrence's collection *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (1923).[71] The poem's speaker credits '[t]he Italians' with the likening of the fig to female genitalia (14), but Lawrence's depiction of the 'glittering, rosy, moist, honied, heavy-petalled four-petalled flower' (3) owes as much to Lowell's 'The Weather-Cock Points South' (1919).[72] To compare:

> I put your leaves aside,
> One by one:
> The stiff, broad outer leaves;
> The smaller ones,
> Pleasant to touch, veined with purple;
> The glazed inner leaves. (Lowell, 1-6)
>
> Flower with surfaces of ice,
> With shadows faintly crimson. (Lowell, 13-14)
>
> The bud is more than the calyx (Lowell, 19)
>
> Then you throw away the skin
> Which is just like a four-sepalled calyx,
> After you have taken off the blossom with your lips. (Lawrence, 4-6)
>
> That's how the fig dies, showing her crimson through the purple slit
> Like a wound, the exposure of her secret, on the open day. (Lawrence, 50-51)

---

[70] Bate, p. 148.

[71] The popular Shearsman Classics edition, which claims to 'follow the first British edition and take no account of the many later revisions made by Lawrence when the poems were reprinted in the *Collected Poems* (1928)', lists the title as 'Fig' in the Contents (p. 5), but 'Figs' is printed above the poem (p. 23). The same is true of 'Grape'/'Grapes'. See D. H. Lawrence, *Birds, Beasts and Flowers* (Exeter: Shearsman Books, 2011).

[72] Amy Lowell, 'The Weather-Cock Points South', in *Pictures of the Floating World* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), pp. 51-52.

Lowell's poem, as Mary Galvin has argued, is a 'celebration of lesbian sexuality'.[73] Perhaps in response to its emasculating title, Lawrence begins his poem with instructions on the 'vulgar' (7) way to eat the female fruit: the careful putting aside of leaves in Lowell's poem is rejected in favour of the more immediate and powerful 'put[ting] your mouth to the crack, and tak[ing] out the flesh in one bite' (8). The object of desire in Lowell's poem is pure and chaste – 'White flower, | Flower of wax, of jade, of unstreaked agate' (11-12) – and the lovemaking is gentle, in the 'softly-swinging wind' (23). But Lawrence's poem is violent and distasteful – 'sap that curdles milk and makes ricotta, | Sap that smells strange on your fingers, that even goats won't taste it' (35-36) – and both the fig and the woman are subject to decay and death: 'Ripe figs won't keep' (78). Lowell's flower is adored, whilst Lawrence's 'bursten' fig is a 'prostitute' (52) and a tease: modern women 'have their nakedness more than ever on their mind, | And they won't let us forget it' (68-69). It is telling that 'secret' or 'secretive' occurs ten times in 'Figs':

> There was a flower that flowered inward, womb-ward;
> Now there is a fruit like a ripe womb.
>
> It was always a secret.
> That's how it should be, the female should always be secret. (23-26)

The secret female, here, is Lowell. Lines 23 and 24 can be read as a reference to the flower in Lowell's poem: Lawrence's speaker observes that there *was* a 'flower that flowered inward', but there is now a more satisfying 'ripe' fruit. Even the 'silver-pink peach' (29) recalls the femininity in Lowell's 'Patterns', and 'the inwardness of your you, that eye will never see | Till it's finished, and you're over-ripe, and you burst to give up your ghost' (43-44) serves as a reminder of the female 'ghost' – the apparitional lesbian – who haunts Lawrence's work. Whilst Paula Bennett is right to observe that 'the Language of Flowers has [long] been Western culture's language of women', Lawrence's poem does not simply follow an age-old tradition ('from the Bible to Baudelaire') of likening flowers to female genitalia.[74] In writing 'Figs', Lawrence delved into Lowell's 'leaves', plucked her fruit, and allowed it to ripen in his own hand. Lawrence's poem, like the fig, 'seems male' (12), but it has grown out of a female poet's work.

---

[73] Mary E. Galvin, *Queer Poetics: Five Modernist Women Writers* (London: Greenwood, 1999), p. 29. Parker discusses the relationship between food and lesbian eroticism in 'Amy Lowell's Appetites'.
[74] Paula Bennett, 'Critical Clitoridectomy: Female Sexual Imagery and Feminist Psychoanalytic Theory', *Signs*, 18.2 (Winter 1993), 235-59 (p. 242).

According to the editors of the Lawrence-Lowell correspondence, Lowell saw the younger Lawrence as a vehicle to success:

> Here was clearly a genius, a writer destined for greatness. By helping to foster his talent, Lowell would be advancing the cause of the new poetry, and she would also be advancing her own ambition to be leader of the cause.[75]

The (false) idea that a female American poet would require the help of a superior Englishman in 'advancing her own ambition' may sound familiar. But whilst academics and aficionados have leapt to Plath's defence, Lowell has been all but forgotten: the gender and class politics of modernist poetry have exorcised the impact of the Brahmin woman's work. Unhelpfully, 'the poet', for Lowell, was a male figure: in the preface to *Sword Blades*, for instance, she claimed that 'the poet must learn *his* trade in the same manner [as a man who makes a chair], and with the same painstaking care, as the cabinet-maker'.[76] Parker has explored ways in which Lowell's female muses – the actress Eleonora Duse, and Lowell's partner Ada Russell – allowed her to 'reconcile and voice parts of herself that she felt she had to disavow in taking up the masculine position of poet'.[77]

However, in her apparent investment in 'the poet' as male, and her seemingly boundless propensity for deference in her correspondence with Lawrence, Lowell may not have always been *entirely* sincere. In the pseudonymously published *A Critical Fable* (1922), where 'A Poker of Fun' sees 'twenty-one modern poets popped off 'twixt a laugh and a pun', Lowell's parenthetical placement of women – 'Dear Sir (or Dear Madam)' – and reference to the poet's 'wife and her friends with their "circles" and "clubs"' are not intended to be taken seriously.[78] As Elizabeth J. Donaldson has noted, 'Lowell's most scathing criticisms in *Fable* are, perhaps not surprisingly, reserved for male poets while her treatments of women poets are consistently favorable'.[79] Discussing Jean and Louis Untermeyer's 'love-songs so frank they pursue more than follow man', Lowell directs her readers towards

> Freud, D. H. Lawrence, and George Bernard Shaw.
> For woman possesses, it seems, an atomic
> Attraction for man, and his serio-comic

---

[75] *Letters*, p. 9.
[76] Amy Lowell, 'Preface', in *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed*, p. vii, my emphasis.
[77] Sarah Parker, *The Lesbian Muse and Poetic Identity, 1889-1930* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2013), p. 128.
[78] A Poker of Fun (Amy Lowell), 'Preface', in *A Critical Fable* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), p. v, p. vi.
[79] Elizabeth J. Donaldson, 'Amy Lowell and the Unknown Ladies: The Caryatides Talk Back', in *American Modern*, p. 29.

> Pretence of pursuit is a masculine blind
> To keep up with prestige within his own mind.
> If the lady appears to be fleeing, the stroke
> Is a masterly one and just her little joke.[80]

Hiding behind a pseudonym, Lowell allows herself – for once – to be the 'master' rather than the butt of a 'little joke'. By pitting Jean Untermeyer's 'best gifts of our time' against the work of her husband, whose 'ego's too eager to be egotistic' and whose 'words spout and gush like a Yellowstone geyser', Lowell places 'a housewife like Jean' in a position of poetic superiority.[81] Moreover, although Lawrence's verse escapes scrutiny in *Fable*, the speaker's humouring of the male ego and of the 'masculine blind' offers an insight into Lowell's deft handling of fellow writers' male pride. The poem's third-person references to Amy Lowell reveal that the poet did not view her gender as an impediment to future success: 'Although I'm no prophet, I'll hazard a guess | She'll be rated by time as more rather than less'.[82] Lowell may well have been conscious of men's – and younger men's – literary clout, but she was equally aware of her own talent:

> Broncho-busting with rainbows is scarcely a game
> For middle-aged persons inclined to the tame.
> […]
> Then again (for I've kept back a very great part),
> Despite her traducers, there's always a heart
> Hid away in her poems for the seeking; impassioned,
> Beneath silver surfaces cunningly fashioned
> To baffle coarse pryings, it waits for the touch
> Of a man who takes surfaces only as such.[83]

For Rollyson, this last line 'presents a paradox: [t]o recognize the brilliant surfaces of Amy Lowell's poems is also to perceive that the surfaces cover far more'.[84] But Lowell's admission here – that she 'kept back a very great part', and that the 'heart' of her poetry 'wait[ed] for the touch | Of a man' – takes on new meaning in light of Lawrence's use of her work. 'Broncho-busting with rainbows' has little to do with Lowell 'not gainsay[ing] her role as the Buffalo Bill of American poetry' and instead is an obvious allusion to Lawrence, whose bronchial health suffered as a result of stress caused by *The Rainbow*'s trial.[85] A line

---

[80] *A Critical Fable*, p. 84.
[81] Ibid., p. 85, p. 86, p. 89.
[82] Ibid., p. 47.
[83] Ibid., p. 47.
[84] *Amy Lowell Anew*, p. 159.
[85] Ibid. On 24 January 1916, Lawrence informed Lady Ottoline Morrell that 'the pain and inflammation is *referred* from the nerves, there is no organic illness at all, except the mucous in the bronchi etc are weak' (*Letters II*, pp. 511-2). In October 1916, Frieda Lawrence wrote to Lowell that '[l]ast winter practically did for him' (*Letters*, p. 130).

from Lowell's 1925 poem 'In Excelsis', written shortly before her death, might point towards either a sad awareness of Lawrence's appropriation of her love poetry or a sense of disappointment in her own reluctance to write openly about lesbianism: 'How has the rainbow fallen upon my heart?'[86] But the Amy Lowell of *Fable* expresses no regret that her younger, ostensibly bolder friend produced provocative fiction whilst her own 'cunningly fashioned' poems passed unseen by censors. Time would tell, and in the meantime it was 'lucky for her that young folk are so plenty'.[87] To borrow Castle's terminology, what was at play here – not only in *Fable*'s anonymous authorship but also in Lowell's decision to 'hide' the lesbianism at the heart of her work – was a strategic and self-protective 'sort of self-ghosting'.[88]

As to the extent of Lowell's contribution to modernist poetry and poetics, readers, like Lowell's cloth-swathed mirrors, have been kept in the dark. (Bradshaw has commented upon the 'twist both ironic and grisly' that ended the story of Lowell: on 12 May 1925, the mirror-averse poet witnessed a reflection in the glass of the stroke that would lead to her death.[89]) It is clear, however, that Lowell succeeded in shaping 'the new poetry' from beyond the grave. Reading Lowell's work against Lawrence, Hughes, and Plath not only goes some way in bringing Lowell back to life but also breathes new life into those writers who borrowed from her. In its claim that Lowell's voice can and should be heard in texts by two significant male writers, this essay has proposed a new way of reading – and of gendering – modernism and beyond. Lawrence's second-hand typewriter and Hughes's literary fishing rod stand as symbols of influence and appropriation, whilst Plath's mirror provides a 'blurred reflection' of a woman poet defined and confined by her connection to a man. If we are to subscribe to Lowell's view, cited in this essay's epigraph, of a legend as 'something which […] anybody is at liberty to rewrite', then we might call for the relocation of Lowell and her work from the realm of modernist myth to that of modernist legend.

---

[86] Amy Lowell, 'In Excelsis', in *What's O'Clock* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), p. 56, line 27.
[87] *A Critical Fable*, p. 47.
[88] Castle, p. 7.
[89] *Diva Poet*, p. 18.