

Modernist Aesthetics and the Artificial Light of Paris: 1900 to 1939

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ABSTRACT

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In this project the fields of modernist studies and science converge on the topic of lighting. My research illuminates a previously neglected area of modernism: the impact of artificial lighting on American modernist literature written in Paris between 1900 and 1939. Throughout that period, Paris maintained its position as an artistic centre and emerged as a stage for innovative public lighting. For many, the streets of Paris provided the first demonstration of electricity's potential. Indeed, my research has shown that Paris was both the location of international expositions promoting electric light, as well as a city whose world-class experiments in lighting and public lighting displays were widely admired. Therefore, I have selected texts with a deep connection to Paris.

While significant scholarship exists in relation to Parisian artificial lighting in fine art, a thorough assessment of the impact of lighting on the modern movement is absent from recent critical analysis. As such, this thesis seeks to account for literary modernism in relation to developments in public and private lighting. My research analyses a comprehensive range of evocations of gas and electric light to better understand the relationship between artificial light and modernist literary aesthetics. This work is illuminating for what it reveals about the place of light in the modern imagination, its unique symbolic and metaphorical richness, as well as the modern subject's adaptability to technological change more broadly.

This account of modernism considers artificial lighting in fiction and poetry and culminates in a final chapter on electrically illuminated literary epiphanies. The implications of technologized lighting for form and content are fused in that particular device. This thesis confirms that the dissemination of artificial modes of lighting coincided with, shaped and contributed to literary experiments that span a number of modernist characteristics: fragmentation, stream of consciousness, spatial representation, literary epiphany, formal self-awareness and imagism. Tracing the history of lighting technology and its aesthetic dimensions unearths parallels between lighting and writing which justify my claim that modern lighting was a symbol for and constituent part of the direction and execution, content and form of American modernist literary innovation.

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Introduction

City of Lights

BOSWELL. “Then, Sir, what is poetry?” JOHNSON. “Why, Sir, it is much easier to say what it is not. We all *know* what light is; but it is not easy to *tell* what it is.”¹

Hello lamppost,
 What cha knowing?
 I’ve come to watch your flowers growing.
 Ain’t cha got no rhymes for me?
 - Simon and Garfunkel²

In the first epigraph Samuel Johnson voices the affinity between poetry and light. They are comparable phenomena, he implies, because both are familiar while immeasurably complex. One hundred and seventy years later Simon and Garfunkel married the elusive nature of street lights to rhymes in the second quotation. One cannot help but note the irony of the lexicographer declaring, in Johnsonian monosyllables, the futility of attempting to ‘tell’ what something is; or the irony of the songwriter’s rhyming plea for help with his craft. This shared irony implies a tacit understanding among artists across the centuries about the connectedness of light, art and human limitations. Light, words and knowledge remain entwined even in the face of dramatic changes in the materiality of light.

Neither the eighteenth century nor the 1960s are central to my study, but the epigraphs exemplify the consistency with which light functions as a serviceable and unlimited artistic metaphor. They also prompt the question at the heart of this thesis: can thinking about light help us understand writing? More specifically, how does electric lighting intersect with the modernist literature written at the time of its emergence as a distinctly twentieth-century technological form? When devising my thesis, it became apparent that this had been a hitherto overlooked area. If light, in its many natural and

¹ James Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, ed. R. W. Chapman (Oxford: Oxford World’s Classic, [1791] 1998), p. 744.

² Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, ‘The 59th Street Bridge Song’, *Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme* (Columbia Records, 1966).

artificial guises, has, and continues to have, a powerful artistic presence, why is there a paucity of critical analysis of the impact of lighting technology on modern literature?

This thesis takes a new look at modernism, illuminating a previously neglected area: the impact of artificial lighting on American modernist literature written in or about Paris between 1900 and 1939. One might anticipate that Sara Danius's *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics* (2002), which proposes that technology became a component part of art rather than just its context or the thing to which it responded, would devote space to artificial light. I agree with her contention, but the lack of reflection given to lighting is noticeable. Danius is interested in technologies which 'address, involve or interfere with the sensory apparatus', triggering questions regarding truth, knowledge, and verification.³ Her list of relevant technologies includes photography, radiography, telephony, and the automobile, but does not include mass electric lighting, which is startling since electric light does, and did, interfere with the sensory apparatus of sight. In addition, truth, knowledge, and verification, are concepts for which light has been a symbol for centuries, and therefore an assessment of modern expressions of these concepts should give consideration to light in its gas and electric forms.

Similarly, Hana Wirth-Nesher, whose book *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (1996) explores the conflation of public and private spaces, neglects the role of city lighting in that process.⁴ Yet, it seems obvious that successful public lighting brought the private out into the street. Wirth-Nesher also proposes that city dwelling ignites the imagination since the urbanite 'is faced with a never-ending series of partial visibilities', and thus the city dweller 'reconstructs the inaccessibility in his imagination'.⁵ But her fascinating consideration of occlusion versus visibility does not consider light, whose presence makes things visible and whose absence can result in missed opportunities. However, urban novels frequently use lighting to frame missed opportunities and inaccessibility. One such example is the ending of Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) (one of the texts discussed in Chapter 2) in which the protagonist is excluded from an artificially lit event. More recently, in *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (2010) Mark Goble assesses how modernist

³ Sara Danius, *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics* (New York: Cornell, 2002), p. 5.

⁴ Hana Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

fictions are shaped by ‘the material conditions of media technology’ by focussing on the telephone, telegraph, recorded music, and photography but ignoring electric light entirely.⁶

Tim Armstrong in *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (1998) identifies the need for an examination of literary treatments of electric light in the early twentieth century: ‘One metaphorical source which has received little attention is the first major application of electrical technology: electric lighting, and the development of the utilities and grids which supported it.’⁷ This thesis responds to his call for such an investigation. Armstrong’s analysis of Theodore Dreiser’s 1900 novel *Sister Carrie*, in which ‘desire and bodily energy [are] figured in electric terms’, is a move towards giving lighting the attention it deserves.⁸ However, a comprehensive study of evocations of artificial, but especially electric, lighting is required in order to understand the complex relationship between artificial light and modernist literary aesthetics. These links reveal much about the place of lighting in the modern imagination, its unique symbolic and metaphorical richness, as well as the modern subject’s adaptability to technological change more broadly.

To address this issue and bridge the gap in scholarship, this thesis makes a significant contribution to modernist studies because it commences an exposé of how the dissemination of artificial modes of lighting coincided with, and contributed to, literary experiments in modernist practice: fragmentation, stream of consciousness, spatial representation, literary epiphany, self-awareness, imagism, surrealism and the merging of forms. Tracing the history of lighting technology and its aesthetic dimensions unearths numerous parallels between lighting and writing, parallels which will justify my claim that modern lighting, above all other scientific innovations of the late nineteenth century, was a symbol for and constituent part of modernist literary innovation. In this project, the fields of modernist studies and science converge on the topic of lighting to contribute to a neglected aspect of literary history and to show that the arts are not purely a response to science and technology, but central to transforming ideas about lighting. This thesis makes a positive statement that the arts perform not

⁶ Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 62.

⁷ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

merely a sociological role, through their commentary on technological advancement, but encourage innovation and ingenuity across the fields of art and science.

While little has been written about artificial light in literature, significant scholarship on Parisian lighting and fine art exists. Foreign painters were attracted to the artificial illumination on display in the capital, whereas French impressionist painters, who were experts in natural light, were less inclined to paint nocturnal outdoor scenes. An example of work in this field is S. Hollis Clayson's research, which inspired the exhibition *Electric Paris* at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute in Massachusetts in 2013. In her lecture 'Shedding Artificial Light on Art History', given at the Chicago Humanities Festival in November 2011, Clayson stated that while French impressionists found electric arc lights too objectionable to paint, American painters living in Paris at that time, such as Frederick Childe Hassam, did paint nocturnes of the city's outdoor artificial lighting. In an environment of rapid changes in urban modernity and enthusiastic discourse related to lighting and lamps, American painters appear to have been more motivated to depict the city's street lighting than indigenous impressionists. Clayson's discovery supports the case for my investigation into the reactions of American and foreign writers to Paris' lights. This project is informed by the ways in which the visual arts sought to express the destabilising effects of modernity, in particular twentieth-century painterly techniques implying that observation and perception were fundamentally affected by artificial light. I refer to and analyse several paintings of artificial light to support my literary analysis and to reveal the extent to which lighting technology not only provided a context for experiments in aesthetics, form and content, but was also a component part of some of the dominant ideas of the avant-garde. Images of these paintings are contained in the Appendix to the thesis. However, my primary interest is the divergent literary references to artificial lighting, be they explicit or indirect, thematic or formal and this is not a study of depictions of Paris' artificial lighting in pictorial art. This thesis will evince instead that critical readings of novels and poems, which witnessed monumental alterations to Parisian lighting in the period, function as a touchstone for contemporary societal attitudes to artificial lighting and for the intricate and fundamental effects of lighting technology on modernist aesthetics and expression.

I have selected primary texts with a deep connection to Paris. Modernism reached across Europe's capitals with peaks of productivity in different metropolitan locations throughout the thirty nine year period which this project takes into account.

However, Paris maintained its position as an artistic centre until the end of the 1930s. Therefore, anchoring the study in Paris brings together canonical modernists and modern lighting and asks: how do their words interrelate with the historically specific emergence of electric lighting? The remainder of this introduction comprises three sections. The first two sections explain my interest in Paris and lighting respectively, before a third section which maps out my methodology.

I. Why Paris?

Paris is the geographical location for this thesis because from 1900 onwards it attracted large numbers of international writers and painters to whom we now apply the term modernist. Many of the aesthetic tendencies addressed in this thesis were cross-fertilised in Paris where American writers collaborated with modernists from other countries and areas of the creative arts. The writers at the centre of my thesis, with the exception of Englishman Wyndham Lewis and Irishman James Joyce, are all Americans. Several of them formed part of the legendary migration described in first-hand accounts by Malcolm Cowley, Robert McAlmon, Kay Boyle, and Ernest Hemingway. Paris appealed to Americans ‘seeking to escape the puritanism, censorship and intolerance, not to mention the prohibition back home’, both before the First World War and in the interwar period.⁹ Indeed, in the words of Brooke L. Blower, exploring Paris was ‘seen by many across the globe as a requisite life experience, essential for coming to terms with the dawning modern age.’¹⁰ Paris was world-renowned for its welcoming atmosphere for new ideas and was, at the turn of the century and for years after, home to major figures in modernism and in the smaller movements that modernism contained.

After 1919 Paris saw an influx of Americans, many of whom chose to stay for various lengths of time, but international and American ex-patriots had been travelling to Paris before the fabled interwar migration. For example, Henry James was the first of my selected writers to travel there as an adult and he spent part of the 1870s in Paris.

⁹ Simonetta Fraquelli, ‘Montparnasse and the Right Bank: Myth and Reality’, in *Paris: Capital of the Arts 1900-1968* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2002), pp. 106–117 (p. 113).

¹⁰ Brooke L. Blower, *Becoming Americans in Paris: Transatlantic Politics and Culture Between the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2011), p. 5.

Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton, and Ezra Pound were all in Paris before the beginning of the First World War. At the end of the nineteenth century, in June 1899, Arthur Symons wrote in his dedication to W. B. Yeats: ‘France is the country of movements’, supporting the contention that Paris was a crucible for radical technological and artistic experimentation.¹¹ So many influential American artists made the journey across the Atlantic (documenting in their work the technologised splendour of Paris) that one can argue for a collective American experience of the city. It was perhaps as a result of a sense of displacement and excitement that American visitors responded powerfully to French modernity and, by examining their work, we can acquire a specific insight into the place of electric lighting in the modern world. Crucially, this earlier migration occurred during the emergence of electric lighting in the capital, which leads to the second reason for my geographical focus.

In the decades leading to World War I, Paris had been a stage for groundbreaking scientific advancements. Unsurprisingly, accounts of Paris as a site of modernist achievement frequently begin with a description of the Exposition Universelle, or Paris World Fair, which took place between April and November 1900. This event showcased innovative methods of looking at the world: panoramic paintings, cineorama, films and sound recordings and, more relevant to my project, some of the most flamboyant displays of artificial lighting ever seen. The Eiffel Tower beamed out radio waves above, the Metro rumbled underfoot, at night the city glistened with its electrified arc lamp baubles, and consumerism was morphing into a leisure activity. As Martin Jay explains, in *Downcast Eyes* (1993), Paris was ‘a spectacle of incomparable variety and stimulation,’ transforming itself to embody the epoch of each of the exhibitions it hosted.¹² Vanessa R. Schwartz echoes this in her book *Early Mass Culture in Fin de Siècle Paris* (1998): ‘Paris did not merely host exhibitions, it had become one itself.’¹³ Certain innovations in technology on display at the Fair had changed the modern subject’s capacity to see; Jay asserts that ‘not only were these innovations often initiated in France, but their cultural meaning was nowhere as widely

¹¹ Arthur Symons, ‘To W. B. Yeats’, in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Archibald, Constable & Co., 1908), p. v.

¹² Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California, [1993] 1994), p. 114.

¹³ Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Early Mass Culture in Fin de Siècle Paris* (California: University of California, 1998), p. 1.

debated.’¹⁴ In fact, Jay gives such a convincing account of the ocular stimulation which Paris personified via its wide boulevards, sheet glass shop windows, public tours of the Paris morgue, public lighting, entertainment possibilities, the invention of the camera, and the public’s passion for the stereoscope, that any debate about the cultural history of seeing should acknowledge the importance of the Parisian experience.

My research into contemporary reports by French journalists and foreign visitors to the capital suggests that the ocular stimulant for which Paris was most famed was its lighting. Place de la Concorde was the first urban space to be lit by electricity in 1842 by arc lamps, following which Paris and other cities trialled electric candles in urban spaces.¹⁵ The Avenue de l’Opéra holds the record for the first ever incandescent street light invented by Pavel Yablochkov in 1878. In his recently published social history, Ernest Freeberg explains that ‘for many the streets of Paris provided the first demonstration of electricity’s potential to transform the urban night’.¹⁶ The American press reported on the brilliant illuminant. For example, an article in the *Boston Journal of Commerce*, on 21 July 1892, concluded that ‘Paris is on the point of being more completely supplied with electric-lighting facilities than any other large city in the world.’¹⁷ Seven years later *La Petite République* boasted that the city was becoming more and more the city of lights: ‘Paris deviant décidément de plus en plus la ville-Lumières.’¹⁸ Although electricity did not definitively surpass gas until the 1930s, Paris was inextricably associated with successful electric street light. Its wealthier Right Bank was soon electrified, as were its theatres and grands magasins. As such, Paris’ lighting became part of its very identity: “‘La Ville Lumière” a name deserved for material as well as intellectual reasons’ wrote R. Boutteville in *L’éclairage Public à Paris* in 1925.¹⁹ What is more, Parisians were enthusiastic about urban electric lighting. *L’éclair* wrote that its installation in 1900 caused great joy on Left Bank: ‘La rive gauche est dans la jubilation’.²⁰ The city’s passion for electricity was later captured in *Le Gaulois*, on 21 January 1915, which declared ‘aujourd’hui, c’est la fée Electricité qui fait de la

¹⁴ Jay, p. 113.

¹⁵ Gareth, H. Steel, *Chronology and Time in À la Recherche Du Temps Perdu* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1979), p. 120.

¹⁶ Ernest Freeberg, *The Age of Edison: Electric Light and the Invention of Modern America* (New York: Penguin, 2013), p. 19.

¹⁷ Anonymous, *Journal of Commerce*, Boston, 21 July 1892, np.

¹⁸ Anonymous, ‘La Ville – Lumière’, *La Petite République*, 26 October 1899, np.

¹⁹ R. Boutteville, *L’éclairage Public à Paris* (Paris: Eyrolles, 1925), p. 103.

²⁰ Anonymous, ‘Sur la Rive Gauche’, *L’éclair*, 27 Avril 1900, np.

nuit le jour’.²¹ The ability of the ‘electric fairy’ to turn night into day was most apparent at the World Fairs.

No traveller seems more thrilled by French electric beauty than Charles Augustus Stoddard. ‘Augustus’, as he was known, visited the exhibition and reported for the *New York Observer*. He describes the fantastical lighting at the Château d’Eau entrance to the Palace of Electricity, which was ‘lit by over a thousand colored lamps’.²² In ‘The Paris Exposition – V’ article, written after weeks spent exploring the Fair, Augustus reveals his unassailable delight at the ‘thousands upon thousands’ of electric lights:

though no words can describe the beauty and brilliancy and glorious effect of these wonderful combinations of light, color, fire and water. [...] I venture to believe that no displays of light and color hitherto produced have equalled in grandeur and beauty, or thrilled a vaster assembly, than these illuminated nights of the Paris Exposition of 1900.²³

Augustus’s descriptions contribute to the legacy of the union of art, science, and lighting with Parisian style which remain closely bonded today. Michael Corday, a visitor to the exposition, is quoted in a Whipple Museum guide as follows: ‘Science now appears not only to be very loveable, but very Parisian indeed. Never has the alliance of the means of theatre and the means of industry been so tight.’²⁴ On this evidence, technologised theatricality had a distinctly Parisian flavour.

Paris’ relationship with lighting was longstanding. Indeed, any serious work on the history of lighting acknowledges Paris’ contribution, not just with regard to electricity, but as far back as pre-revolution improvements in street safety such as paving slabs and lanterns. Ever since the sixteenth-century proclamation of the French Parliament, requiring all houses to hang out a lantern during winter months to minimise criminality, the city had been at the forefront of street lighting. The city’s position, during the Age of Enlightenment, as a centre of education and philosophy gave birth to

²¹ Anonymous, *Le Gaulois*, 21 January 1915, n. p.

²² Augustus, ‘The Paris Exposition – II’, *New York Observer*, 18 October 1900, p. 481.

²³ Augustus, ‘The Paris Exposition – V’, *New York Observer*, Thursday October 18, 1900, p. 578.

²⁴ J.A. Bennett, R. Brain, S. Schaffer, H. O. Sibum, R. Staley, *1900: The New Age: A Guide to the Exhibition* (Cambridge: The Whipple Museum of the History of Science, 1994), p. 34.

the epithet 'la ville lumière'. Initially the title related to the philosophical movement which dominated the world of ideas in the eighteenth century, but Paris' dedicated use of gas street light in the 1840s and 1850s confused matters. By the close of the 1900 World Fair the metaphorical 'Light' and the literal 'Lights' had become interchangeable.

Many lighting experts across the century, ranging from A. N. Halcombe's 1911 article 'The Electric Lighting System of Paris' to Maureen Dillon's 2002 book *Artificial Sunshine: A Social History of Domestic Lighting*, concur that the history of electric lighting in Paris dates from 1878, 'when a company was formed to furnish an electrical display in connection with the universal exhibition of that year'.²⁵ This was the year some streets in Paris and London were lit with Jablochkoff's 'electric candles'.²⁶ They also agree that a dramatic turning point was the 1881 Paris International Exhibition of Electricity at the Palais de l'Industrie. That Paris hosted the first serious celebration of electricity gave initial momentum, albeit with some early administrative and economic stumblings, to its own urban development. William Henry Preece, one of the period's foremost lighting experts, appreciates that Parisian improvements, if not perfect, surpassed the lights of London.²⁷ He writes of the De Mersanne lamps, suspended at intervals over the Boulevard des Italiens, as 'the true way of illuminating streets, and it is to be regretted that such an experiment is not tried in London.'²⁸ Evidently, Paris was not only the location of a major exposition promoting electric light, but it was also the city whose world-leading experiments in lighting were admired by influential commentators of the time.

Colin Jones, in *Paris: Biography of a City* (2004), makes clear the unrivalled extent to which Paris prioritised electrical power at the 1889 Exposition Universelle: 'no other state invested so heavily in this kind of event or used the event so effectively to improve urban infrastructure.'²⁹ In addition, the Eiffel Tower had an electrical beacon with a range of almost 120 miles and it was adorned with lights. Anna Jackson explains

²⁵ A. N. Halcombe, 'The Electric Lighting System of Paris', *Political Science Quarterly*, 26.1 (March 1911), pp. 122-132 (p. 122).

²⁶ Maureen Dillon, *Artificial Sunshine: A Social History of Domestic Lighting* (London: National Trust Enterprises, 2002), p. 163.

²⁷ William Henry Preece, 'Electric Lighting at the Paris Exhibition', in *Incandescent Electric Light, with particular reference to the Edison lamps at the Paris Exhibition* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1882), pp. 126-127.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Colin Jones, *Paris: Biography of a City* (London: Penguin, [2004] 2006), p. 385.

that at the crown of the Tower ‘a powerful electric beam filled the sky with the colours of the tricolour.’³⁰ Commentators like Jackson, Jones and Vanessa Schwartz agree that Paris herself, by day and now night, was the prime exhibit at its Universal Expositions. Paris embodied the late nineteenth-century cultural preoccupation with what the French call *éclairage*, alive in its illuminated shops and theatres. Artificial lighting helped define Paris as modern. Its considerable variety of street-lamps made it a city which was safe and beautiful after dark and the electric globes and chandeliers in its department stores were quintessentially chic. Schwartz explains how ‘glass technology facilitated vast window displays that were increasingly aided by better lighting (culminating in the use of electricity in the 1880s), thereby putting a premium on visibility’.³¹ Paris’ streets were as spectacular as its theatres, in which electric stage lighting was commonplace by the end of the 1870s. In 1887 the lighting in the Paris Opera was upgraded and electric incandescent bulbs were placed in the sockets of the obsolete gas burners. The effects could be either vulgar or alluringly desirable, or both. Paris illuminated was something wondrous to behold and there emerged a kind of obsession with lighting.

In 1904, M. Eugene Defrance, a contemporary commentator and expert on electric light, had no doubt that victorious electric lighting would outdo all the competition: ‘on peut bien prévoir que ce sera l’électricité qui, dans un avenir plus ou moins lointain, sortira victorieuse.’³² But in his dramatic conclusion to *Histoire de l’éclairage des rues de Paris*, he implores the reader not to assume that all of Paris, at the date of writing, is resplendent under electric light: ‘plus de deux cents rues & passages parisiens, en plein xxe siècle, ne connaissent encore que la lumière jaune projetée par les réverbères’.³³ In particular, he describes the heights of Montmartre as primitively lit. Perhaps, he conjectures, a colossal electric light will be mounted on the Eiffel Tower ‘étaiera-t-il sur Paris un formidable faisceau lumineux’ which will modernise all of Paris’ streets.³⁴ These sorts of images permeated modernist texts, such as Wyndham Lewis’s *Tarr* (discussed in detail in Chapter 2), which describes a similar light attached to a character’s eye.

³⁰ Anna Jackson, *Expo: International Expositions 1851-2010* (London: V&A, 2008), p. 86.

³¹ Schwartz, p. 21.

³² M. Eugene Defrance, *Histoire de l’éclairage des rues de Paris* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1904), p. 123. My trans: ‘We can well predict that it will be electricity, in a more or less distant future, that shall be victorious.’

³³ *Ibid.*, p.124. My trans: ‘more than two hundred Parisian streets and passages, in the twentieth century, still only know the yellow light projected by gas lamps.’

³⁴ *Ibid.* My trans: ‘spreading a great beam across Paris’.

It is necessary to place these events in an international context. Paris was not the only city to host successful World Fairs. The Manufactures Building at Chicago's World's Fair of 1893 was the largest such structure on earth and was lit with '7000 arc and 120,000 incandescent lamps'.³⁵ William Cronon quotes William T. Stead's description of the Chicago Fair: 'nothing that I have ever seen in Paris, in London, in St. Petersburg, or in Rome, could equal the effect produced by the illumination of these great white palaces in the autumn night.'³⁶ Equally, cities other than Paris can boast a long history of artificial lighting. While gas was introduced from 1817 in Paris' arcades, it already lit some towns and cities in England from as early as 1812. New York and Chicago also displayed impressive early street lighting. Lighting historian Peter C. Baldwin has explained that by 1860 gas street-lamps in New York 'were lit almost all through the night.'³⁷ On 22 October 1879, Thomas Alva Edison tested the first practical electric light bulb, which lasted 13½ hours before burning out. On 31 December that year he demonstrated incandescent lighting to the public for the first time in Menlo Park, New Jersey. According to an article in *The Times* on 24 May 1880, 'illumination by means of electricity was introduced in [London's] thoroughfares on a practical scale' in 1879.³⁸ Yet, these events did not coincide with an influx of foreign artists and an unparalleled degree of artistic productivity and experimentation. That phenomenon was unique to Paris.

To substantiate this claim, I trace the divergent ways that the City of Light was imagined by, or influenced, writers during a time when lighting technologies changed swiftly. That so many American modernists were in Paris at a time when that city's artificial street light surpassed other major cities for its copiousness and style, makes it the most appropriate fulcrum for exploring the intersection of modernist literary experiments and manufactured light.

³⁵ William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: Norton, [1991] 1992), p. 431.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 367.

³⁷ Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820–1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2012), p. 20.

³⁸ 'Coal Gas Illumination', *The Times*, 24 May 1880, section News, p. 5.

II. Why Light?

To justify the importance of this investigation I develop ideas that Arthur Zajonc set out in his 1993 book *Catching the Light*, which charts the history of the mythic, spiritual, and technical ‘imagination of light’.³⁹ Zajonc posits that historical attitudes towards light act as a cultural barometer. Each culture ‘has attempted to uncover light’s nature and meanings, and so authored a tale of light. In telling that story, the culture reveals as much about itself, about the light of its people’s minds, as about nature’s light.’⁴⁰ This thesis will argue that many of the characteristics of modernist literature can be better understood within the context of growing systems of artificial lighting. Texts which refer to such lighting are part of the ‘tale of light’, but they also inform us about the direction in which literature was moving. I identify correlations between modernist tendencies and lighting. One such dominant observation, which validates my interrogation of lighting’s contribution to twentieth-century literature, is that once man-made, light becomes a metaphor which can endorse and negate its original theological meaning. Put another way, artificial lighting in a text affixes a beam (to paraphrase a 1922 Wallace Stevens poem) onto human culpability and capability by ostensibly rejecting divine and natural forces, all the while containing and maintaining those original associations.⁴¹ Artificial light intensifies the ancient concept of the two guises of light: ‘lower and higher, functional and holy [...] lumen and lux’.⁴² As such, references to artificial light shone a spotlight on the human and mundane, without the total rejection of the divine or cosmic, raising questions about autonomy, order and uncertainty that were translated into the technical introversion of modernist execution.

In addition, critics like Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane suggest that ‘the great works of modernism’ are secular but ‘they balance on the sensibility of tradition, often holding in suspension the forces that persist from the past and those that grow from the novel present.’⁴³ In line with this claim, electric light offers ambiguous

³⁹ Arthur Zajonc, *Catching the Light: The Entwined History of Light and Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1993] 1995), p. 156.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁴¹ Wallace Stevens, ‘The Emperor of Ice Cream’, in *Harmonium* (New York: Knopf, 1923), p. 95.

⁴² Ann Wroe, *Six Facets of Light* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016), p. 94.

⁴³ Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane, ‘The Name and Nature of Modernism’, in *Modernism: a Guide to European Literature 1890-1930* (London: Penguin, [1976] 1991), pp. 19-55 (p. 49).

images balancing both past and present. For example, electric light can permit apparitions which may be spiritual, awesome and hellish and thus electric light promotes the modernist tendency towards adaptations of ancient ideas about spirituality and mythology which are equally tethered to the present. In fact, artificial lighting functions as a compelling device with which to reinforce and expose so many of the paradoxes and dichotomies of existence at the heart of modernist expression.

Zajonc's observation is pertinent, but while his interest lies in cultural narratives of nature's light, an assessment of images and tales of artificial light will be equally, if not more, revealing. The breadth of associations that images of artificial light carry is immense, incorporating mythology, divinity, epiphany, spirituality, imagination, modernity, science, war, heaven and hell, knowledge, intellectualism, spectacle, surveillance, and of course the many forms of natural light that exist. The invention of networks of artificial light presented a current and real system which writers could position in their texts in order to comment on life in the modern world, while simultaneously taking advantage of this intricate spectrum of associations. Artificial light continues to encourage artists to reconsider the way they perceive the world, but also re-form the artistic methods used to communicate that perception such that experiments in music and art are often associated with the experiential aspects of light. This eternal fascination was the subject of *Light Show*, held at the Hayward Gallery Southbank Centre in 2013, and it also motivated Dominic Harris to create *Ice Angel* (2012, 2015).⁴⁴ By analysing the ways in which changing experiences of light were expressed artistically from 1900 and throughout the period of early modernism, I interpret the broader cultural and literary developments of the period.

Richard Huelsenbeck's *dAdAIsTiC ManifestO* of 1916 states 'Art, in its execution and direction, is dependent upon the time in which it lives, and artists are creatures of their epoch', a point on which Gertrude Stein expanded, as will be discussed in Chapter 3.⁴⁵ This distinction between 'execution and direction' is central to my observations on lighting as a feature of modernist literature, since light is essential to both. An important dimension to this thesis is my argument that artificial light was a contributing factor to not just the *direction* which writing took (the matters it addressed), but also its *execution* (its style and form). Furthermore, artists and writers

⁴⁴ <<http://dominicharris.com/ice-angel>> [accessed 10 June 2016]

⁴⁵ Richard Huelsenbeck, 'dAdAIsTiC ManifestO', in Mike Jay and Michael Neve eds., *1900: A Fin-de-Siècle Reader* (London: Penguin, 1999), pp. 167-169 (p. 167).

who referenced the revolutionary lighting of the day did entrench themselves within the epoch. Allusion to modern lighting was an historically specific way for the modern movement to declare itself distinct from the age and culture that preceded it. In 'Hours in a Library' (1916) Virginia Woolf explains that new forms were required for new sensations.⁴⁶ She stressed that 'we must be generous to the people who are giving shape as best they can to the ideas within them.'⁴⁷ I argue that artificial lighting was in part responsible for the new sensations, and, at the same time, contributed to the shaping of ideas. Any theory about the scope of American modernism, in particular how one piece of art or writing fits into a comprehensive theory, risks spurious generalities. Therefore, in this thesis I focus on close readings of individual texts. I also propose that new ways of depicting life under electric light were not simply imaginative commentary, but were causative elements in both modernist aesthetics and in cultural history. I am conscious that electric light as a metaphor and as a structural model for writing are separate influences. Taken together, these influences make lighting part of the history of literary formal and stylistic innovation, but they also bring about an unprecedented artistic reclamation or vivification of technology in such a radical way as may not have been repeated since.

Formal modernist innovations in the field of pictorial art are also a strong influence on this project. Radical new modes of lighting were acknowledged by painters who altered the course of Western art. Their work was displayed in exhibitions in Paris and they debated their ideas with American expatriate writers. In just a few years the art world saw fundamental shifts in painterly attitudes to light, ranging from the impressionists from 1860 onwards, whose desire to capture the fleeting moment was inspired by scientific research into colour and light, to the pointillism of the Neo-impressionists, who strove to achieve the shimmering effect of sunlight, and to the Futurist renderings of technologised light. The Cubists' fight, from around 1907, against the idea of art as the imitation of nature, was no doubt supported by the existence of artificial alternatives to the sun. Within this context, I argue that artificial light in the world gave painters and writers greater autonomy and freedom from the conventions of their disciplines. The multiple 'points of vision' and light sources in Cubism, creating unconventional shadows and distorting traditional perspectives, correspond to the

⁴⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Hours in a Library' (1916), in *Collected Essays II* (London: Hogarth Press, 1966), pp. 34-40 (p. 39).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

introduction of moveable electric lights - Umbro Apollonio called this 'polyocular vision'.⁴⁸

By 1900 the sun alone no longer determined quotidian patterns: factory shifts were extended, workers observed, late-night entertainment prolonged, the second sleep abandoned, and increasingly city streets were illuminated all night. Decades after the introduction of widespread public lighting this last change still interested René Magritte, whose paradoxical and anachronistic combination of night and day, in his series of paintings *Empire of Light* (1953-54), depicts a weak street-lamp with an artificially idealised blue sky of broad daylight. Restrictions of time and space appeared to dissolve in life and in art. For example, in the first decade of the twentieth century Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque would shatter traditional perspectival frameworks and reject the city visions of the Impressionists. Cubists revised concepts of depth using front-facing facet planes of objects (parallel to the canvas) without bold colour contrasts. An example of this is Braque's *Still Life with Violin and Pitcher* (1910). Muted colours fill the canvas with repositioned geometrical facets of various objects. The flattening that occurs is also, in part, due to multiple perspectives, overlapping and, significantly, multiple light sources which shine down on the violin as well as lighting it from below. Electricity meant that light could be removed, repositioned and multiplied. Painters explored new ways of looking at the world, and this is relevant to my research because of the intensity of the cross-contamination of painterly and literary experimentation. For example, Gertrude Stein declared how Picasso had inspired her and Bram Dijkstra argues for the impact of modernist painting on William Carlos Williams.⁴⁹ Painters and writers collaborated (as shown at the Sonia Delaunay Exhibition at the Tate Modern in 2015 which displayed the collaboration between Blaise Cendrars and Delaunay entitled *Prose of the Trans-Siberian and of Little Jehanne of France*) and writing and painting influenced each other in the artistic communities of Montmartre and Montparnasse.

As my discussion has made clear, the new lighting methods changed how people saw and lived. In 'Framing the City', Christopher Prendergast describes the Paris that Walter Benjamin knew as 'dominated by chance encounter, fast transaction, frenetic

⁴⁸ Umbro Apollonio, 'Introduction', in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 12.

⁴⁹ Bram Dijkstra, *The Hieroglyphics of a New Speech: Cubism, Stieglitz, and the early Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1969), pp. viii-x.

circulation of money, goods and bodies.’⁵⁰ In Benjamin’s depiction, ‘lights of the city are linked to the lure of the city, the beckoning signs of what is deceptively promised by the new and fast growing leisure and pleasure culture.’⁵¹ Crowds of people were suddenly able to window shop and socialise at night, adding to the intensity of the city crowd. Consequently, the lights of the city became an intrinsic part of its identity and the life-style of its inhabitants. Prendergast states that this environment resulted in ‘the development of an art more and more committed to the registration of the sudden *aperçu*, mobile point of view and fugitive sensation.’⁵² The freneticism of modern city life filtered into the literature produced in Paris at the time via multiple perspectives, and fragmented narratives, to list but two techniques. Accordingly, this thesis will show that modernism registers instantaneous perception, continued movement and impression in images of man-made lighting and in forms which reject traditional prose and poetic conventions largely dependent on narrative sequence and metaphor. From Imagist principles to Stein’s continuous present, modernism displays a preoccupation with communicating the intensity of the lived experience, whether by isolating one significant and intense incident or by recreating the flux of sensory impressions. In satisfying that preoccupation, modernists paid great attention to the visual experience and how it was lit.

The versatility of tales of lighting allows for the communication of both the negative and positive effects of modernity. The selection of artificial light as a lens through which to look at literature reveals the range of attitudes towards technological advancement. When electric light made its first forays into the public arena, some painters found its effects unpleasant. Eric Hazan describes the unflattering effects of stage lighting as depicted by artists at this time: ‘Degas’s studies of the effects of electric light [...] accentuate the ‘ugliness’ of the café-concert singers’.⁵³ Dillon describes ‘an intense, harsh light that was prone to flicker, and it was not uncommon for the carbon rods to produce a hissing noise and a smell as they burned down.’⁵⁴ During the early days of urban lighting, some poets in different urban centres voiced their

⁵⁰ Christopher Prendergast, ‘Framing the City’, in *City Images: Perspectives from Literature, Philosophy, and Film*, ed. Mary Ann Caws (New York: Gordon and Breach, 1991), p. 183.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Eric Hazan, *The Invention of Paris: a History in Footsteps* (London: Verso, [2010] 2011), p. 355. The light in Degas’ *Café Concert Singer* (1878) is most likely arc light rather than that of an incandescent bulb, since that invention had not yet been patented.

⁵⁴ Dillon, p. 163.

suspicion of ‘unearthly’ and devilish electricity. For example, Nikolai Gogol’s criticism of street lamps in *Nevsky Prospect* (1835), Robert Louis Stevenson’s nostalgic *A Plea for Gas Lamps* (1881) and Oliver Wendell Holmes’s ‘The Broomstick Train, or The Return of the Witches’ (1890) can be compared to a subsequent acceptance and poetic internalisation of lighting technology and electrical energy. Ezra Pound and James Joyce, to take two influential expatriate writers, could conceive of electric light as spiritual rather than devilish.

However, I do not argue that there was a developmental arc over the four decades of this study of electricity, from negative to positive. Indeed, the modern movement of the inter-war period produced many texts in which electric light is used to convey negative emotions of uncertainty, unfulfillment, creative sterility, and regret. Some of the early attitudes towards artificial lighting persisted or were exploited decades later so as to communicate psychological turmoil. Andrei Toporkov’s article ‘The Devil’s Candle? Street Lighting’ describes early Russian attitudes: ‘The man-made, lifeless glare of street light [...] came to be viewed as a luminous emanation of the Apocalypse and a persistent image can be traced in Russian literature, of the city as an “electric hell”.’⁵⁵ Perhaps Russian literature voiced such conservative views (suspicious of the urbanisation and industrialisation taking place in Russia at the time) because middle class intellectuals were fearful of what the embryonic Russian industrialisation would lead to. In his article, Toporkov quotes Gogol’s *Nevsky Prospect* which articulates such fear: ‘Away, away, for God’s sake from that / Street lamp!’⁵⁶

In concert with these Russian attitudes, Robert Louis Stevenson lamented the transition to electric lighting in *A Plea for Gas Lamps* (1881). Stevenson describes the burdensome anxiety that Paris’ lamps aroused:

The word *electricity* now sounds the note of danger. In Paris [...] a new sort of urban star now shines out nightly, horrible, unearthly, obnoxious to the human eye; a lamp for a nightmare!⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Andrei Toporkov, ‘The Devil’s Candle? Street Lighting’, in *History Today*, 46.11 (November 1996), 34-36 (p. 34).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Robert Louis Stevenson, ‘A Plea for Gas Lamps’ (1881), in *Virginibus Puerisque and Across the Plains* (Oxford: The World’s Classics, 1926), pp. 169-173 (pp. 172-3).

Stevenson is suspicious of the rapid changes that might flow from such progress. This is important on two counts. First, it establishes that negative attitudes to electricity preceded and overlapped with modernist celebrations of it. Secondly, it establishes a connection between electric power and the malady of neurasthenia. It will become clear as the thesis progresses that electric light can convey anxiety, loneliness and paranoia. Furthermore, isolation is frequently represented by individual lights in the face of vast networks of lighting infrastructure.

Critics have noted the pathological effects, ‘in the age of electricity’, resulting from the perfection of clocks and the introduction of universal time.⁵⁸ A similar anxiety was experienced by the public when electric lighting was first introduced and this is evident in some of the texts central to my project. For example, some of the more monstrous displays of light in Paris created anxiety amongst the public because of their overpowering dazzle. Literature of the period identifies the psychological anxiety arising from learning to live with modernity, contributing to the sense of crisis characteristic of modernism. Similarly, there exist artistic depictions of gas-lit psychological drama prior to the establishment of electricity. Psychological anxiety is palpable in Degas’ painting *Interior* (*‘The Rape’*) (1868-9) (Figure 1). The gas lamp’s glare simultaneously reveals and conceals the unspoken horror. The lamp enforces the mechanics of a society which will cause the rape never to come to light. This thesis shows that in both art and literature, artificial light can be put to multifarious effects, which are most unlike the effects of natural light, and that those effects are rendered simultaneously. Simultaneity was a seminal concept for modernists.

Rather than a developmental arc then, this thesis encounters varied positive and negative literary responses to electric illuminations. However, it is my contention that positive or negative, electric lighting (and to a degree its precursor gas lighting, as Chapter 1 explains) contributed more to the direction and execution, style, form and techniques of American literature in the era than any other late-Victorian invention. In this way, I am seeking to reshape the field of modernist studies through the lens of a particular but ultimately ubiquitous technology. To say that futurism, orphism and cubism must be understood within the context of technology, speed, and machinery is nothing new. Frequently, and especially in the case of futurism, the work produced by these movements glorified modernity. However, lighting technology was able to spark

⁵⁸ Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space, 1880-1918: With a New Preface* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 2003), p. 15.

special levels of excitement as is clear from F. T. Marinetti's *The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism* (published in *Le Figaro* in 1909), which conjoins electric light, inspiration, and passion: 'We have been up all night, my friends and I, beneath mosque lamps whose brass cupolas are bright as our souls, because like them they were illuminated by the internal glow of electric hearts.'⁵⁹ The futurists were some of the first artists to paint the modern city by night. Lit by electricity, theirs are explosively bright nocturnes banishing the darkness. A famous example of explosive brightness is Giacomo Balla's futurist painting *Street Light* (1909), which depicts a street-lamp triumphantly outshining the moon (Figure 2). Similarly, Natalia Goncharova's vision of an electric luminaire in *Electric Light* (1913) uses techniques similar to the orphists and the Italian futurists (Figure 3). The beams of light radiating from Balla's lamp form the shape of a naked light bulb, thereby enforcing electricity's superiority over natural light. The shape of the incandescent light bulb was considered by some to be sublime and created a new design aesthetic. C.R Ashbee, a foremost member of the British Arts and Crafts movement, said its 'exquisite pear shaped lobe is final in design; like a violin or a ship, its shape appears to conform so perfectly to the union of the two wires, that nothing further in the shaping of the glass is to be done.'⁶⁰ So beautiful was it, that Ashbee thought any designer 'should in almost all cases, let it hang, and hang in repose.'⁶¹ As I will show, electric light would be adopted as a mascot, internalised and depicted across artistic disciplines.

III. Methodology

In his 1991 book *Postmodernism*, Fredric Jameson explains that to understand how art emerges out of a situation 'as a symbolic act, as praxis and as production' one needs to restore its historical and cultural context.⁶² Jameson here is discussing Vincent Van Gogh's high modernist painting 'A Pair of Boots' (1887), the historical and cultural

⁵⁹ F. T. Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism' (1909), in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. Umbro Apollonio (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), p. 19.

⁶⁰ C. R. Ashbee, 'Suggestions for Electrical Light Fittings', *The Art Journal*, 57 (1895), 91-3, (p. 91).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 7.

context of which he suggests is the ‘object world of agricultural misery’.⁶³ However, his approach can be applied to works of high modernist writing whose object world is an artificially lit Paris. Jameson suggests that the way to begin to restore that ‘initial situation to which the work is somehow a response is by stressing the raw materials, the initial content, which it confronts and reworks, transforms and appropriates.’⁶⁴ I apply Jameson’s approach to modernist texts in which the ‘raw materials’ and ‘initial content’ are lighting itself or which appear to be determined by the existence of artificial lighting. I shall stress the artificial lighting that each of my primary texts confronts and reworks, transforms and appropriates so as to assess how each text manifests itself as a product of its epoch.

The underlying principles on which this inquiry is organised are straight forward. Its research is conducted via critical readings of a selection of novels, short stories and poems by writers who lived in or visited Paris during, and in the years following, the 1900 International World Fair, through to 1939. I selected this end date for three reasons. First, modernist activity in France witnessed a ‘sloping off after about 1939’.⁶⁵ Secondly, Frank Kermode identifies ‘two phases of modernism’.⁶⁶ The first phase he says began around 1915 and is associated with several of the writers who dominate my research: Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis, T. S. Eliot and James Joyce.⁶⁷ Kermode calls the later phase ‘our own’, thereby anchoring it to the 1960s.⁶⁸ That he identifies Samuel Beckett as a ‘link between the two stages’ implies the tapering off of the first phase from the middle of the 1930s, though Kermode eschews dates.⁶⁹ I address Kermode’s distinction by identifying a correlation between what he calls the ‘language of renovation’ of the first phase and the electrical renovation of the ancient concept of light.⁷⁰ Electric light is central to the expression of early modernism’s acknowledgement of the past as ‘a source of order’.⁷¹ By continuing up to World War II, an obvious historical tipping point, I can include texts by Henry Miller and F. Scott

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Malcolm Bradbury ‘Modernism’, in *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, 2nd edn, eds. Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley (London: Fontana, [1977] 1988), p. 540.

⁶⁶ Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 103.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 104.

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 103.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 115.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 108.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 115.

Fitzgerald. My initial selection was refined into a list of texts which either explicitly refer to artificial lighting in Paris or which I deemed were influenced by it in a convincing fashion.

The following ten now-canonical writers dominate this study since their ideas and techniques were influential: T. S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Henry James, James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis, Henry Miller, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Edith Wharton and William Carlos Williams. Their diverse literary representations of artificially lit Paris, when assembled and assessed, reveal a great deal about how culture and technology interacted at the time. However, early in my research I realised that to better understand the initial ‘object world’ or situation to which the works were a response – to appreciate how Paris was illuminated and looked – I needed to supplement critical readings with scientific and social histories of lighting in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Moreover, texts which incorporate lighting are not always clear about the precise mode of that lighting and thus, at times, it has been necessary to surmise whether a scene was lit by gas or electricity. In order to better inform such conjecture, I researched the evolution of lighting in the capital so as to obtain a sense of which types of lighting certain writers would have been exposed to. I consulted archival records held, primarily, in the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris. These national archives included contemporary reports by influential lighting experts and newspaper articles about the condition of the gas and electric power supply from the 1870s onwards.⁷² They also revealed the attitudes of the media and the Parisian public to electric light and confirmed that, certainly with regard to most public spaces if not all private ones, the ‘object world’ of my primary sources was lit by electricity.

This archival work also confirmed the extent to which gas and electricity co-existed. For various reasons, gas lingered on until scientific innovation made electricity suitably competitive. This indicated the need for my first chapter investigating the nexus between gaslight and early modernist aesthetics. Chris Otter stresses that the overlapping of gas with electricity should not be ignored: ‘There was a proliferation of multiple forms of illumination technology, rather than the rise to dominance of electric light at the expense of other light forms.’⁷³ Therefore, even though this thesis is

⁷² Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Éphémères, Éclairage public (ancienne série 39 des Actualités); Éphémères, Gaz et électricité (ancienne série 124 des Actualités).

⁷³ Chris Otter, *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 174.

principally concerned with electric lighting, I chose a diachronic approach with regards to the technology itself, addressing first gaslight and early electricity in Chapter 1 and with the final three chapters weighted towards electric light.

Chapter 1 prepares our understanding of the literary treatment of electric light by providing an account of typical tropes relating to gaslight. This provides a basis for comprehending adaptations of those established tropes as electricity became more mainstream. A full understanding of the image of gas necessitated a study of some London-based poems from the 1890s. In those poems, the questionable compatibility of nature with technology is explored in images of street lights as corrupt mutations of natural objects, such as flowers (this is a trope which extends even to Simon and Garfunkel's 'I've come to watch your flowers growing' in the second epigraph). In the 1890s gaslight could function as a sinister symbol of the negative social implications of industrialisation. The artificially illuminated London night (described in Le Gallienne's work and W. E. Henley's *London Voluntaries* (1892)) evoked what Milica Banjanin describes as 'chaos, the realm of dreams, demons and ghosts, real and imagined danger, both rest and fear.'⁷⁴ Therefore, the chapter addresses novels by Edith Wharton and Henry James which reiterate the established associations of gas, and which set the scene for deception or pre-empt tragedy; in Wharton's case this mode of lighting can variously suggest romance, danger, foreboding or even translate anti-war sentiments. Wharton comments on the relationships between men and women, depicts unfulfillment and, like Le Gallienne, exploits gaslight's associations with the oppression of individual freedoms.

Returning to my first epigraph, Samuel Johnson probably had natural 'light' in mind (though he may have included the light from the oil lamps commonly used in his lifetime), whereas I do not analyse the artistic profile of natural light. However, Chapter 1 does situate the interrelation of electricity and literature within the context of the preceding system of gas in order to chart the transition. From then on, electric light is the focus of the thesis and dominates Chapters 2 and 3. They each take a form-based approach looking at novels and poetry respectively. The reason for this change in approach is the contrast between perceptual practices in fiction, in which lighting influences content, and poetic perceptual patterns and practices, where lighting shapes form. Chapter 2 addresses certain novels written by exiles in Paris and identifies a

⁷⁴ Milica Banjanin, 'Where Are the Street Lights Running to?: The Poetics of Street Lights in Russian Modernism', *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 38 (2004), pp. 71-91 (p. 72).

tendency towards associating electric lighting with negative sentiments. I will show how electric light retains some of the literary associations of gas to ghosts, grief, non-fulfilment and emotional voids, but reframes them within a context of ever intensifying modernity. The literature under examination shows that electric lighting can improve our ability to see, but also has the potential to diminish physical and mental powers, as in Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* (1934).⁷⁵ Chapter 2 advances the literary associations between electric lighting and what the influential American critic H. L. Mencken called 'the meaninglessness of life' confirmed by images of somnambulism, ennui, and automatism.⁷⁶ One such case study is F. Scott Fitzgerald *Tender is the Night* (1934) in which electric energy contributes to the protagonist's inertia. Electric lighting is shown to represent personal unfulfillment, which for the purposes of this thesis can be thought of as resulting from loss of self-hood, unrequited love, loneliness, lack of maternal feeling, professional failure, and the effects of war.

Chapter 3 deals with electric light, electricity, and the modernist aesthetics of poems which respond to lighting technology by adopting what Tim Armstrong calls a 'technology of style', rather than incorporating light through metaphor or imagery.⁷⁷ Several such poems echo Johnson's analogy in the correlation of light with all aspects of the poetic endeavour. This analogy swiftly accommodated technological developments in lighting. Mine is thus an intensive thematic exploration of light in the period, extending beyond scientific development and symbolism to the connections between light, the visible and modernist composition of content. Chapter 3 acknowledges this connection in the visual arts between electric light and space and explores representations of that link in the poetry of Pound, a selection of Imagists, and Stein. The diversity of available artificial lighting was suddenly extended in ways previously unimaginable, facilitating a multiplicity of perceptual possibilities. It is no coincidence then that the transformations of painterly conventions and the literary innovations of American avant-garde writing sought to express a new kind of diversity and communicate the tangible reality of life.

Chapter 4 then re-examines the texts at the heart of Chapters 2 and 3, but through the lens of the modern literary epiphany. I argue that examining the ways in

⁷⁵ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (London: Harper Perennial, [1934] 2005).

⁷⁶ Edmund Wilson quoting Mencken in *The Shores of Light: A Literary Chronicle of the Twenties and Thirties* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1952), p. 32.

⁷⁷ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 4.

which the properties of modern lighting flowed into this popular device can make sense of literary responses to the transitioning world. It also helps one to conceptualise, in detail, how literary innovations of the early modernist period were inspired, or even made possible, by lighting technology. Critical readings of a range of prose and poetic epiphanies show electricity to have been an effective epiphanic symbol, metaphor or environment in the early twentieth century. By comparing and contrasting electric epiphanies in the works considered, I bring the thesis to a culmination as an intervention in modernist studies by reframing literary epiphany in the period. I will argue that electric lighting enabled a necessary and timely modification of the Western tradition that maintained light and literature together as different versions of the same activity: the revelation of truth. Electric light achieved this by expanding the metaphoric potentialities of literary evocations of light to encompass ancient biblical and spiritual associations as well as modern scientific, psychological and philosophical dimensions.

By chapter 4 it will become apparent that this thesis mimics the diffusion of light from a clear centre (the technology itself) to the more abstract and subtle influence of artificial light on literature. But that is not to say that because it is more diffuse or more subtly internalised, it is not equally telling. Indeed, fuller appreciation of the complex role that lighting played in modernist experiments in form, in particular its contribution to the modernisation of the literary epiphany, gives insight into the prevailing artistic and philosophical concerns regarding the experience of the new century.

Chapter 1

Gaslight, the Light of Style Itself and the Stylisation of Light

Every street-lamp that I pass
Beats like a fatalistic drum,¹

- T. S. Eliot, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (1915) ll. 8-9

This chapter considers the literary implications of the gradual transition from gas to electric lighting in Paris. In the 1920s, the smaller streets and domestic interiors of Paris began the transition from gas to electric lighting. This specific technological transition sits within broader cultural, artistic and scientific changes in the period, the implications of which Malcolm Cowley would later illuminate by defining the 1920s exiles to Paris as 'belonging to a period of transition from values already fixed to values that had to be created.'² The 'generation', born in the years just before or after 1900, to which Cowley refers and which includes Cowley himself, had grown up with gas. However, it would be electric light that this generation would claim as its own by embracing it in a practical sense, as well as confronting and appropriating it artistically. I argue here that the symbolic associations with which artificial light was inundated altered to reflect the emergence of electric lighting but that, like the fixed values of the past, the symbolic life of gaslight was so firmly established that electric variations often perpetuated the extant imagery. The generation of writers who form the subject of this thesis inhabited a time of transition in which the literary value of images of electric light was still being determined. Eliot's 'fatalistic', in the epigraph, indicates impending transition, the implications of which are yet to be seen. Whether writers depicted it as ominous or thrilling or both, artificial lighting heralded a new world.

This investigation into literary depictions of gas and electric light, written at the time of the greatest technological developments in that field, reveals that improvements in lighting constitute both thematic and formal elements in the genesis of modernism. Electric light, for the reasons set out in the Introduction, is the conceptual focus of my

¹ T. S. Eliot, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' (1915), in *Collected Poems: 1909-1962* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), pp. 26-28.

² Malcolm Cowley, *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (New York: Viking, [1934] 1957), p. 9.

project to which this thesis will continually return. This focus justifies the selection of writers and my textual interpretations. However, a full appreciation of the relationship of electric light to modernist aesthetics is only possible once it is understood that many of the literary uses of electric lighting had their foundations in literary treatments of gaslight. Tropes relating to gas frequently evolved concurrently with the flourishing systems and networks of electric light. Therefore, it is helpful to explore literary renderings of gaslight from the close of the nineteenth century and the first few years of the twentieth.

In order to contextualize my findings on the role electric lighting played in the development of modernism, I examine literary devices which rely on gas in the novels of Edith Wharton, Henry James and some poems by T. S. Eliot. These works can be read against later modernist texts which evoke electric light, some of them by the same authors, so as to indicate how different classifications of light function as metaphors for the changing structures of daily life, perception and experience. This chapter is in three sections and uses close textual analysis to reveal how literary images of gaslight figured in shaping and emboldening modernist artistic strategies.

Evidently, the advent of dramatic developments in artificial lighting in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries changed people's daily lives and their perceptions of the world. Gas was integral to that shift. These altered lives and perceptions contributed to a reshaping of the arts, and yet care should be taken to avoid the suggestion that art is mere commentary, one step behind technology. This thesis argues that the successful manufacturing of electric light promoted and encouraged new ideas in literature about autonomy, form and freedom of subject, but that the arts can also precede or predict scientific cultural evolution rather than merely describe it. Jonathan Crary argues that 'modernism, rather than being a reaction against or transcendence of processes of scientific and economic rationalization, is inseparable from them'.³ Similarly, the curator Marc Piomonte has observed that artists have 'always accompanied if not preceded the evolution of the societies in which they lived.'⁴ Indeed, a novel by Jules Verne did precede the evolution of Parisian society. Verne's recently discovered prophetic science fiction novel *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (first published in 1994

³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: on Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1990] 1992), p. 85.

⁴ Marc Piomonte, 'Artists and Light', *Leonardo: Art Science/Forum*, 26.1 (1993), 70-72 (p.72).

but written in 1863) imagines Paris in 1960 and predicts the coexistence of gas and electricity:

luxury shops projected far out onto the sidewalks the brilliant patches of their electric light; streetlamps operated by the Way System – sending a positive electric charge through a thread of mercury – spread an incomparable radiance; they were connected by means of underground wires; at one and the same moment the hundred thousand streetlamps of Paris came on. Nonetheless a few old-fashioned shops remained faithful to the old means of hydrocarburated gas.⁵

Here, Verne contrasts the extensive and networked electrical system with the ‘old’ gas one. The narrator observes that abundant technology did not make the men of 1960 ‘any the happier’, but rendered them automatons.⁶ Consequently, Verne’s narrator favours gas, a technology deserving of loyalty. It will become apparent that Verne predicted not only the nature of future technologies, but pre-empted literary tendencies towards nostalgia (discussed in the Introduction), as well as the psychologically troubling aspects of modernity. Therefore, what Piemontese says of the physical arts applies equally to writers who articulated the sensations of living with gaslight, but also appropriated it (and newly emerging electric lighting) as a new tool with which to create meaning.

When Verne wrote *Paris in the Twentieth Century*, gaslight in Paris was widespread. Parisians feared its explosions and poisonous fumes, but when a private company illuminated the Passage des Panoramas with hydrogen gas, the idea took hold. As a result of Haussmann’s achievements, ‘streetlamps cast a light whose profusion was part of the image of Paris; they created the conditions for night life and changed the way in which people living in the great city perceived the hours of darkness.’⁷ Michael Carmona explains how Haussmann improved gas lighting, such that by 1870 abundant gaslight allowed Parisians to transcend natural rhythms of light and dark throughout the city.⁸

⁵ Jules Verne, *Paris in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Ballantine Books, [1994] 1996), p. 24.

⁶ Ibid., p. 26.

⁷ Michael Carmona, *Haussmann: His Life and Times, and the Making of Modern Paris* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2002), p. 391.

⁸ Ibid., p. 399.

Just as the electric light of the French capital were admired, so had its gaslights been. Film historian Guy Barefoot explains, in *Gaslight Melodrama* (2001), how ‘in the mid-nineteenth century Charles Dickens wrote that “London is shabby by day light and shabbier by gaslight. No Englishman knows what gaslight is, until he has seen the rue de Rivoli and the Palais Royal after dark”.’⁹ The 1869 work *Paris by Sunlight and Gaslight* by James D. McCabe, Jr. endorses this plaudit of the rue de Rivoli. McCabe uses artificial lighting to navigate his way through the city. Each new Parisian scene is described in relation to lighting and often compared with America:

The America plan of a few sickly burners, separated by wide intervals of space is discarded, and the lights are numerous and close together, and there are often as many as six or eight burners enclosed in a single lamp. In the Rue de Rivoli a lamp is hung between every arch, and the street is flooded with a perfect blaze of light.¹⁰

Such copiousness made gaslight a consistent part of a visitor’s perceptual experience of the Parisian night. The Rue de Rivoli, together with Place du Carrousel, was, in 1829, the first of Paris’ public spaces to be lit by gas and by the time of McCabe’s report, the Rue de Rivoli enjoyed generous lighting.¹¹ Gas contributed enormously to the interaction of culture and technology in Paris.

As the end of the nineteenth century approached, the elegance of these lighting networks surpassed those of London, described in 1897 by Frank Whelan-Boyle as ‘the worst lighted city in the world’.¹² Paris on the other hand exemplified urban splendour. At that moment, Paris commenced its reign as world capital of the arts. Its abundant gaslight had a dramatic impact on those who saw it. David McCullough offers a description of the glittering spectacle of mirrors, glass and light that awaited American visitors:

⁹ Guy Barefoot, *Gaslight Melodrama* (New York: Continuum, 2001), p. 30.

¹⁰ James D. McCabe, Jr., *Paris by Sunlight and Gaslight: A Work Descriptive of the Mysteries, Myseries, the Virtues, the Vices, the Splendors, and the Crimes of the City of Paris* (Philadelphia: National Publishing Company, 1869), p. 665.

¹¹ Email from Jean Jacques Le Moëllic of M.E.G.E (Mémoire de l’Electricité du Gaz et de l’Eclairage Public), dated 13 April 2014.

¹² Frank Whelan-Boyle, ‘The Lights of London’, *The Ludgate 5* (November 1897), pp. 48-54 (p. 48).

And mirrors, mirrors everywhere mirrors large and small, great gilt-framed mirrors in hotel lobbies, entire walls of mirrors in cafes and restaurants that multiplied the size of rooms, multiplied the light of day no less than the glow of gas light and candles after dark, and doubled or tripled the human presence.¹³

McCullough's description of the Parisian spectacle here highlights gaslight's literary trademark: its interference with vision. Glass and mirrors have an obfuscating effect which conceals the truth. This distorting but mesmerising illuminated opulence suggests that the style of Paris functioned, at least in part, on the basis of mediating vision. Artificial light – so crucial to the unique style of the capital – was an important medium in the mediation of the public's view of Paris. For example, a 'doubled or tripled' human presence creates an experience of place based on deception. This chapter puts forward the argument that not only was gaslight (and later electric light) essential in the creation of a Parisian nocturnal beauty, but that influential writers at the time recognised that lighting brought with it illusion and discombobulation.

Such illusions offered a commercial advantage to Parisian prostitutes who could capitalise on the gaslight to accentuate their painted features. Explanatory plaques at the the Musée d'Orsay's recent exhibition *Splendour and Misery: Pictures of Prostitution 1850-1910* clarified the association between gas and the legitimisation of prostitution: 'Soliciting was prohibited in broad daylight, but was legal for registered girls at nightfall when the streetlamps were lit.'¹⁴ Their appearance in the streets at the precise moment that the city lamps were ignited cemented a kinship between prostitutes and artificial light, which Charles Baudelaire captured in 1861 when he wrote 'La Prostitution s'allume dans les rues;' in 'Le Crépuscule du Soir'.¹⁵ Whilst it might seem counter-intuitive to suggest that lighting mediates appearances, it is a proposition that Baudelaire explored in his 1861 poem 'L'amour du Mensonge' in which livid lights reveal the embellished beauty of a woman who the narrator loves in full acceptance of

¹³ David McCullough, *The Greater Journey: Americans in Paris* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), p. 31.

¹⁴ *Splendour and Misery: Pictures of Prostitution 1850-1910*, 22 September 2015-17 January 2016, Musée d'Orsay, Paris.

¹⁵ Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Crépuscule du Soir' in 'Tableaux Parisiens', in *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1861), ed. and trans. John E. Tidball (Bristol: Bishopston, 2016), p. 306. Quotation translates as 'Prostitution lights up in the street' (my trans.) Tidball's translation fails to acknowledge the reflexive 's'allume'.

the fact that her ‘masque’ conceals her real appearance.¹⁶ For the narrator, gas-lit adornment suffices because he ‘fuit la vérité’ (flees from the truth). The writers I address in this chapter advance the idea that gaslight could create both desirable and unpleasant illusions, whereas later chapters will trace to what extent electric light also had a reputation for distorting true vision.

Throughout the nineteenth century, changes in lighting offered people material experiences of alternative ways of seeing and doing. The German social critic Walter Benjamin’s unfinished *Das Passagen-Werk* or *Arcades Project*, written between 1927 and 1940, links artificial light with Paris’ magical street life. The arcades ‘radiated through the Paris of the Empire like fairy grottoes. For someone entering the Passage des Panoramas in 1817, the sirens of gaslight would be singing to him on one side, while the oil-lamp odalisques offered enticements from the other.’¹⁷ Evidently, lighting was a notable aspect of the arcade experience, affecting the way people engaged with the space. The impact of specific types of lighting on an individual’s enjoyment of a space was appreciated early on in the history of gas lighting, as demonstrated in Anthony Trollope’s 1857 novel *Barchester Towers*, in which the wife of the new Bishop of Barchester immediately replaces the old bishop’s candles:

Large rooms when full of people and full of light look well, because they are large, and are full, and are light. [...] Mrs Proudie knew this, and made the most of it; she had therefore a huge gas lamp with a dozen burners hanging from each of the ceilings.¹⁸

In this early example of interior lighting design. Mrs Proudie exploits new domestic lighting technology to control the visual experience of her home and present it (and herself) in a better light. By the mid-nineteenth century, gaslight had the potential for illusion in both domestic and exterior spaces and that potential for illuminated deception leads to a visionary crisis endemic to populations living with mass artificial light. Jay identifies this specifically with Haussmann’s Paris, which he says resulted in ‘visual

¹⁶ Baudelaire, ‘L’amour du Mensonge’, in ‘Tableaux Parisiens’, p. 316.

¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), p. 564.

¹⁸ Anthony Trollope, *Barchester Towers* (London: Oxford World Classics, [1857] 2014), p. 70.

uncertainty and confusion'.¹⁹ Without paraphrasing Jay's thorough study of visual culture, gaslight was a contributing factor in what he terms 'ocular desire', resulting in a combination of intoxication, automatism and discontent.²⁰ These are certainly concepts which, as I will show, were expressed by modernist American writers living in Paris.

Gertrude Stein was one writer who recognised the cultural significance and mutability of the visible. In her lecture *Composition as Explanation* (1926), Stein (who lived in Paris from 1903 until close to her death in 1946) said: 'The only thing that is different from one time to another is what is seen and what is seen depends upon how everybody is doing everything.'²¹ This statement 'how everybody is doing everything' may at first appear to refer to the behaviour of the public, but Stein is also claiming that it is art which determines what people see. Similarly, William Chapman Sharpe, in his extensive study of night-time images of New York, *New York Nocturne*, notes that '[a]rtistic renderings played a vital role [...] recording the novel sights of the city after dark, but also educating their audiences in the modes of perception through which this "darkness visible" might be experienced.'²² The new types of light, together with experimental artistic and literary renderings of that light, helped people to 'see' what it meant to live in a modernised world and encouraged the principles of modernism. Light and art are, in their own ways, responsible for our mediated visions: in showing us something they intervene in what is seen and the way it is seen. Thus, I am less concerned with the practical implications of gaslight than with how its increasing presence intersects with twentieth-century literary themes and cultural forms.

The Palace of Electricity at the 1900 Exposition Universelle revealed the world predicted by Verne. However, gas was still the most common form of publically available artificial lighting at the turn of the century, widely regarded with affection. Clearly, electric lighting provided the most fascinating displays at the 1900 exhibition, but this did not guarantee the abdication of gas lamps in everyday life. The Whipple Museum publication *1900: The New Age* states that the 'new gas lighting devices built by Carl Auer von Welsbach [...] reduced the consumption of gas by 20% and became

¹⁹ Jay, p. 118.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 166.

²¹ Gertrude Stein, *Composition as Explanation* (1926), rept. in *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, ed. Joan Retallack (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), pp. 215-26 (p. 215).

²² William Chapman Sharpe, *New York Nocturne: The City After Dark in Literature, Painting, and Photography, 1850-1950* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), p. 2.

the best-selling lighting technology around the turn of the century.’²³ In many of the world’s major cities, gas and electricity plainly coexisted for a significant period.

Chris Otter confirms there ‘was nothing inevitable about electric light’s eventual salience: indeed, electric light often seemed simply to have stimulated the gas industry to vastly improve its service.’²⁴ In addition, Barefoot explains the gradual move towards electrical lighting in Britain: ‘during the 1930s gas lighting remained as common a form of streetlighting as electricity’.²⁵ In line with these two assessments, electricity took a long time to overtake gas in France. The popularity of Welsbach devices meant that while electric lighting would be the showstopper at the 1900 Exposition Universelle, it was not widely used on the smaller streets of Paris at that date. Given that gas remained a form of municipal lighting well beyond the period in which modernism was thriving, any assessment of the role of artificial light in the history of the movement must acknowledge the coexistence of electric and gaslight. There were two notable literary implications of such lengthy coexistence: first, the legacy of images and themes associated with gaslight could be recalled and juxtaposed in the later fully-electrified era and secondly, in a move towards prioritising ordinary lived experiences, gas and electricity offered two variants of the same subject matter of lighting, which poets and novelists could choose between to create very different effects.

The prolonged transition to the electric system and the resultant overlap of lighting methods justifies this contextualising chapter on gaslight in the poetry of Richard Le Gallienne, Henry James’s *The Ambassadors* (1903), T. S. Eliot’s ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* (1920), which is set in the nineteenth century, *A Son at the Front* (1923), set in 1914 and 1915, and *The Gods Arrive* (1932). These are writers who metaphorise lighting technology, specifically gas, in their work and even make it their subject. Relatively little has been written about expatriate literary representations of this dramatic improvement to Paris’ lighting, whereas images of gas lighting in fine art have received critical attention. For example, the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute hosted an exhibition entitled *Electric Paris* in 2013 exploring artistic depictions of the oil, gas and electric lighting that emerged

²³ J.A. Bennett et al., p. 57.

²⁴ Otter, p. 177.

²⁵ Barefoot, p. 25.

around the turn of the twentieth century in Paris.²⁶ We move on now to address how these systems of lighting were of the utmost importance to writers too, for whom the networks and street furniture of gaslight presented images which could be used to comment on the conditions of modern urban life.

Art, as it engaged with urban technologies, produced both positive and negative depictions of artificial street light. Sharpe suggests that the poets of the 1890s ‘took up James McNeill Whistler’s emphasis on the magical nocturnal transformation of the mundane metropolis. For them the city became a work of art’.²⁷ This idea of illumination as enchantment (in contrast to the deception and disenchantment that many modernist thinkers and writers felt towards modernity) mirrors Benjamin’s magical grottoes. Symbolist writer Arthur Symons, for one, extolled artificial light. In the preface to the second edition of ‘Silhouettes’ (1896), he declares that ‘if any one sees no beauty in the effects of artificial light, in all the variable, most human, and yet most factitious town landscape, I can only pity him and go on my way.’²⁸ However, many of his peers plundered the imagery of gaslight to critique the social structure of modern London. Negative experiences of gaslight, manifested in the execution and direction of some Decadent poetry, influenced the role of gaslight in the framing and expression of dominant early modernist themes beyond the limits of London alone.

Le Gallienne and others of his coterie were influenced by the English essayist Walter Pater, who had encouraged writers to respond to the immediacy of life and be free in their choice of subject matter. Pater claimed that only ‘experience itself’ has any ‘real claim upon us.’²⁹ In his famous ‘Conclusion’ to *The Renaissance* Pater teaches that ‘constant and eager observation’ (an approach one can justifiably identify in Gertrude Stein also) will make the most of life.³⁰ In *The Romantic ’90s* (1926), which Le Gallienne wrote while living in Paris, he acknowledges the influence Pater had on him. Pursuant to Pater’s advice, Le Gallienne sought to manifest real observations and experiences in his poetry which incorporated the gas illuminations of London. In *The Romantic ’90s* Le Gallienne quotes a letter from the imaginative realist poet Stephen

²⁶ <<http://clarkart.edu/exhibitions/electricparis/content/exhibition.cfm>> [accessed 12 September 2016]

²⁷ Sharpe, p. 108.

²⁸ Arthur Symons, quoted by R. K. R. Thornton in *Poetry of the ’Nineties* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1970), p. 57.

²⁹ Walter Pater, ‘Conclusion’, in *The Renaissance: Studies in Art and Poetry, The 1893 Text*, ed. Donald L. Hill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 188-189.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

Phillips, which reads ‘the new poetry of today must grapple with and depict the life of today’ and Le Gallienne’s ‘Ballad of London’ is an attempt to grapple with modern existence, a *raison d’être* shared by many modernists who would succeed him.³¹ Consequently, gas lighting was adopted as an artistic subject. This is relevant to my project because the images of gaslight emerging from the poetry written at the end of the nineteenth century are developed and adapted by modernists in Paris who continued to challenge aspects of modernity, including modern lighting. In that process they developed a wide variety of styles, movements and strategies with which to come to terms with technological progress. Therefore, in order to interpret attitudes to artificial lighting in modernist texts it is helpful to look at the noteworthy symbolic associations of gaslight in late nineteenth-century poetry. In the case of Le Gallienne, that poetry was inspired by London not Paris but, in spite of the differences between the lighting of the two cities, there are poetic similarities worth examining.

In terms of poetic similarities, the poem ‘A Ballad of London’ (1892) anticipates the pathological psychological and moral effects of gaslight depicted in poems about Paris by T. S. Eliot. Such effects are apparent in the opening of ‘A Ballad of London’, which at first seems celebratory, but which soon becomes sinister:

Lamp after lamp against the sky
 Opens a sudden beaming eye,
 Leaping alight on either hand,
 The iron lilies of the Strand.³²

Le Gallienne’s ‘Lamp after lamp against the sky’ foreshadows the rhythm of the street-lamps in ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, published in *Blast* in July 1915 and which I analyse in the second half of this chapter. The oxymoron ‘iron lilies’ expresses the incompatibility of nature and modernity evoked thirty years before by Charles Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*. Baudelaire criticised nineteenth-century French modernity through similar tensions such as ‘les lueurs qui tourmente le vent’ and ‘les

³¹ Richard Le Gallienne, *The Romantic '90s* (London: Robin Clark, [1926] 1993), p. 123.

³² Richard Le Gallienne, ‘Ballad of London’ [1892], in *Poetry of the 'Nineties*, p. 59, ll. 4-8.

combats de la lampe et du jour'.³³ Flowers were commonly used as metaphor for street-lamps and Wharton would later describe the lamps of the Place de la Concorde as 'great flower-clusters'.³⁴ But Le Gallienne also uses the image of an unnatural flower as a metaphor for the city itself and further proposes a tension between nature and artificiality. Le Gallienne's voyeuristic 'sudden beaming eye' recalls Baudelaire's street-lamp at dawn (which is 'comme un œil sanglant qui palpite') and would later find its echo in Henry Miller's 'artificial eye'.³⁵ Furthermore, the rapid 'leaping alight' suggests an uncontrollable and malignant force aligned to the period's increasing sense of surveillance, something that Wharton would employ in her novels to express the influence of Parisian social mores as well as the eyes of Americans on Americans in Paris. Thus we see that earlier poems about gaslight share many similarities with later literary expressions of gaslight in Paris. On this basis, gas lamps as malevolent eyes, mutations of flora and the enemies of natural forces, were images which would persist in the early twentieth century and then adapt in accordance with the material change from gas to electricity.

Gas lamps also facilitated moral statements. In 'A Ballad of London' artificial light reveals the city's latent immorality. That which was once hidden by twilight is revealed in all its sordid truth. In stanza four, street light is both brutally revealing and dangerously mesmerising:

The human moths about the light
Dash and cling closed in dazed delight,
And burn and laugh, the world and wife,
For this is London, this is life!³⁶

The juxtaposition of 'burn' and 'laugh' imply the coexistence of delight and danger in the city. As such, literary treatments of gas communicated and explored the polarities inherent in city life. Furthermore, gaslight symbolises unthinking 'dazed' behaviour,

³³ Baudelaire, 'Le Crépuscule du Soir' in 'Tableaux Parisiens', p. 306: 'gleams which torment the wind' and 'Le Crépuscule du Matin' in 'Tableaux Parisiens', p. 332: 'the combats between lamp and day.'

³⁴ Edith Wharton, *A Son at the Front* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, [1923] 1995), p. 24.

³⁵ Baudelaire, 'Le Crépuscule du Matin', p. 332. Henry Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* (London: Harper Perennial, [1934] 2005), p. 69.

³⁶ Le Gallienne, 'Ballad of London', ll. 13-16.

seduction and death, connections that Eliot and Joyce would later explore in relation to gas. Similarly, in Baudelaire's poem 'Le Jeu', dingy chandeliers illuminate gamblers who squander their blood, sweat and tears.³⁷ The association of artificial light with an absence of intellectual engagement would be developed by Wharton, Miller, and Fitzgerald as the light in question transitioned from gas to electric. As writers adopted electric light as their own quintessentially twentieth-century power, the ways in which lighting was used for moral and social commentary began to alter. On the one hand, evocations of electric light in the poetry of the 1910s and 1920s were far more positive and invigorating than the gas-lit imagery that preceded them; on the other hand, though, where gas had once been used to highlight localised and specific acts of sin, electric light facilitated images in novels of macrocosmic discontent, as shall be delineated in Chapter 2.

Modernist poets and novelists acknowledge a tradition of using images of gas to represent mystery, crime, immorality and disorientating psychology. Such connections continued into Hollywood melodramas of the 1940s. For example, Barefoot addresses the range of discourses on gaslight, specifically identifying early negative depictions of the unsettling nature of gaslight, such as Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840).³⁸ Furthermore, such symbolism should be read against positive images of nature, where the presence of gaslight increases the moral valency of natural light. This is a device evident in Wharton's fiction which she would adapt with regard to electricity. Chapter 2 will show that Wharton could confront contemporary themes by remodelling the conventional gaslight tropes to accommodate new electric lighting. Close readings of the gaslight imagery in Wharton's Paris-based fiction reveal the specificity with which she wrote about the material transition in lighting. Therefore, I now address the interplay of natural light and gaslight in three of her novels in order to lay the foundations for my argument that the manipulation of images of lighting should be considered a significant subject in the study of the history of literary style.

³⁷ Baudelaire, 'Le Jeu' in 'Tableaux Parisiens', p. 310.

³⁸ Barefoot, p. 24.

I. Edith Wharton

The Gods Arrive

Edith Wharton's novel *The Gods Arrive*, the sequel to her 1929 novel *Hudson River Bracketed*, which is also set in the 1920s, continues the story of Vance and Halo. Much of the novel takes place in Paris, but the excerpt to which I refer here is set in the south of France. Vance travels there without Halo, to work on his novel and meets his old flame Floss Delaney. She invites him to dinner in the hills of the Côte d'Azur. In the following passage, the coast's artificial lights represent Floss, while Halo is symbolised by starlight:

the early constellations pushed upward, deepening the night. But only for a moment; almost at once they paled and vanished in the spreading of artificial lights that festooned the coast, crested the headlands, flowed in golden streamers across bays and harbours, and flashed and revolved from unseen lighthouses, binding the prone landscape in a net of fire.³⁹

In 1931 fifty-two electric Art-Deco style candelabras were installed on Nice's Promenade des Anglais between Avenue des Phocéens and Boulevard Gambetta, but at the time this novel was set the 'lights that festooned the coast' were gas powered.⁴⁰ Wharton does not specify that the lights are gas, but neither does she state they are electric. Since she typically made express reference to the presence of electric light in her work, this lack of specificity suggests they were intended to be gaslights. The gaslight hypnotises Vance just as Floss has done; her presence is repeatedly signalled by reference to light: she is in 'the illuminated room', 'the lamp-hung loggia' or visible 'across the lights and flowers'.⁴¹ The abundant gaslight illuminating Floss makes her both visible and inaccessible. Wharton exploits these aspects of lighting to communicate isolation, disappointment and exclusion. In addition, abundant lighting has stopped Vance from thinking clearly: he is so full of desire for Floss that thoughts of his fiancée dissolve. The symbolism contains a warning about dangerous desire: if Vance pursues Floss he too will enter 'a net of fire'.

³⁹ Edith Wharton, *The Gods Arrive* (London: Virago, [1932] 1987), p. 219.

⁴⁰ <<http://www.amb-cotedazur.com/nice-an-unexpected-jewel/>> [accessed 13 July 2016]

⁴¹ Wharton, *Gods Arrive*, pp. 240, 241.

Wharton's imagery later aligns Floss with fireworks (an ancient but still man-made light) and, by contrast, Halo with the full moon 'going her cool way alone, yet blushing and faltering in the tangle of earth-lights'.⁴² This comparison expresses tensions between nature and modernity: natural celestial light versus varieties of artificial lighting and Halo versus Floss. The former is modest, deeply complex, independent but vulnerable. The other is a superficially beautiful 'net' or 'tangle'. Floss and gaslight are part of 'the fairy-tale' of destructive lust rendering Vance a 'human moth ... in dazed delight'.⁴³ Moreover, Floss's psychological state is described in terms of illumination: the words 'festooned', 'crested', 'flowed', 'flashed', 'revolved' and later 'tangle' depict the chaos of Floss's narcissistic existence. The gratuitous display of beauty, encapsulated in Floss and her artificially lit scenes, communicate her mental instability. In an age of increased technology, Wharton adapts the early poetic alignment of gas with immorality to a new kind of dangerous and erratic superficiality.

Vance longs to be alone with Floss 'above the world on a moon-washed height', but she declines.⁴⁴ She prefers artificial lighting. Interior gaslight and the adoration of men bathe her in yet another sort of light: 'the faces about her shone with curiosity and admiration.'⁴⁵ By manipulating images of technology, for symbolic and metaphorical purposes, Wharton comments on the relationships between men and women to show the dangers of infidelity and seduction by mere appearance. Chapter 2 will reveal the ways in which electric light would replace gaslight as a symbol for superficiality and illusion.

The practicalities of new modes of artificial lighting were useful to novelists from a plot perspective too. Gas lamps had to be switched on with some effort, but oil lamps were even more demanding on a practical level requiring a certain amount of skill to operate and clean them. *The Gods Arrive* is set in the twenties when electric lighting was not available in all domestic dwellings. Indeed, Halo and Vance's Spanish lodging at the beginning of the novel 'was without electric light, and she [Halo] was sure that Vance would not know how to light the oil-lamp she had put on his table. She was glad of the excuse for joining him.'⁴⁶ The practicalities of lighting technology give Halo a reason for going outside, but fix her to the past – she is in danger of being left behind. Furthermore, that Halo is the one responsible for cleaning the oil lamps,

⁴² Ibid., p. 225.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 218. Le Gallienne, 'Ballad of London', ll. 13-16.

⁴⁴ Wharton, *Gods Arrive*, p. 241.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 243.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 35.

reaffirms her subservience and the suppression of her intellect. Wharton's references to the changing experiences of lighting reveal broader cultural developments of the period regarding the changing position of women in this marriage, but also in society more broadly.

A Son at the Front

Illusion, superficiality, and immorality resulting in emotional pain all find their image in gas-powered light. But when writing about the early stages of the First World War, in *A Son at the Front* (1923), Wharton also chose to express the destructive energy of war through artificial lighting. In doing so, her writing increases the moral valency of natural light, in this case star light. The artificial street lighting of the Place de la Concorde is thrown into relief against dark foliage and an enfeebled firmament. It is important to stress that even though the Place de la Concorde was the location for the first experiment with electric light arc lamps in a public space back in 1842, the street lights in the time in which the novel is set were powered by gas.⁴⁷ Campton's son George enjoys the splendid view from the balcony:

Campton followed, and the two stood looking down on the festal expanse of the Place de la Concorde strewn with great flower-clusters of lights between its pearly distances. The sky was full of stars, pale, remote, half drowned in the city's vast illumination; and the foliage of the Champs Elysees and the Tuileries made masses of mysterious darkness behind the statues and the flashing fountains.⁴⁸

Natural light is depicted as weak and 'pale', a traditional technique in the face of artificial lighting. Street-lamps are depicted as peculiar flowers as in the poetry of the Decadents. This floral imagery did not extend to electric lamps with the same popularity and consistency. Wharton's combination of powerful gaslight, weak starlight and

⁴⁷ Email from Jean Jacques Le Moëllic of M.E.G.E (Mémoire de l'Electricité du Gaz et de l'Eclairage Public) dated 29 March 2014: 'En ce qui concerne la place de la Concorde dans sa totalité, hôtel de Crillon compris, elle était éclairée par des lanternes fonctionnant au gaz de la fin du 19^{ème} siècle jusqu'en 1946, donnant une lumière plutôt "jaune-oranger"'. My trans.: 'Place de la Concorde, including the Crillon Hotel, was lit by lanterns using gas from the late nineteenth century until 1946, giving a rather "yellow-orange" light.'

⁴⁸ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 24.

‘masses of’ absent light creates a sense of apprehension. The chaos of ‘strewn’ evokes both dead flowers and dead bodies as the vulnerable half-drowned stars are overwhelmed by a stronger, but haphazard, force of artificiality. Where previously images of gaslight were a metaphor for the destruction of individuality in the face of consumerism and industrialisation, Wharton adapts the device such that modern gaslight represents the machine of war. This is achieved by Campton’s vision of dark shadows, broken by flashes from the illuminated fountains, which pre-empt dark battlefields and skies lit by flashes and explosions.

Campton’s visual perceptions of lighting are imbued with his personal anxieties, which at this stage in the novel are rooted in his wish to secure his son’s safety in a military desk job. He does not experience any conscious negativity towards gaslight, nor does artificial lighting unnerve him directly; rather Wharton’s description of the gaslit scene is a narrative device revealing her character’s psychological response to a changing world. Indeed, it is clear from her biography *A Backward Glance* that the technologised appearance of Paris was not to her liking, in particular the way “the great buildings, statues and fountains [were] torn from their mystery by the vulgar intrusion of flood lighting.”⁴⁹ The words ‘torn’, ‘strewn’ and Le Gallienne’s ‘leaping alight’ all communicate the chaotic violence of gas, but it is this technologised dynamism which makes artificially illuminated spaces so alluring. Conversely, gaslight can also be passion’s sensor. Lighting, because of its power to reveal things, has the capability to act as an imaginative symbol for both sin and convention.

Much remains to be explored regarding the multifaceted implications of gas lamps as both technology and household fixtures in the literature of the period. Wharton’s work includes several examples of references to domestic gas lamps which make full use of its suggestive qualities. For example, the gaslight that illuminates the scene in *A Son at the Front* in which Mrs. Brant, Campton’s ex-wife, comes to tell him that an acquaintance, Ladislav Isador, has been killed at the front, is presented as distinctly different kind of light from the firelight which is present (his housekeeper has made up the fire.) The lamps emphasise that extent to which Mrs. Brant is physically shaken by the news: ‘The lamplight, striking up into her powdered face, puffed out her underlids and made harsh hollows in her cheeks. She looked frightened, ill and yet

⁴⁹ Edith Wharton, *A Backward Glance* (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934), p. 320.

determined.’⁵⁰ The indoor gas lamp, and not the gentle firelight, exacerbates her jaded appearance. Just as the gas in James Joyce’s *Dubliners* story ‘The Dead’ makes Lily ‘look still paler’, the particular qualities of gaslight plausibly give Mrs Brant a deathly appearance.⁵¹ Therefore, gaslight can enhance a text with ghostly theatrical and reveal transformations in relationships and characters. The interaction of various forms of light is a dramatic tool which reappears so frequently in Wharton’s writing that lighting technology is established as a causative force in her literary technique.

The Age of Innocence

In *The Age of Innocence* (1920), gaslight interrupts a crucial and intimate moment between the Europeanised Ellen Olenska and the New Yorker Newland Archer: ‘...suddenly she turned, flung her arms about him and pressed her lips to his. At the same moment the carriage began to move, and a gas-lamp at the head of the slip flashed its light into the window. She drew away, and they sat silent and motionless’.⁵² Gaslight represents social forces thwarting their relationship and result in isolation: “‘Madame Olenska—” he said; but at the name his wife raised her hand as if to silence him. As she did so the gas-light struck on the gold of her wedding-ring.’⁵³ Gaslight is frequently evoked to serve as the eyes of society, halting the progress of the couple’s love. Within the milieu of upper-class scrutiny, in which Olenska finds herself on returning to New York, Aaron Worth reads Wharton’s manipulation of communication technologies as the tools of social convention: ‘For a social world much concerned with surveillance and the enforcement of rules of propriety, the telegraph is an especially appropriate medium.’⁵⁴ This observation can be applied to artificial light in Wharton’s novels, since it frequently interrupts sexuality by reinforcing conventions.

This positioning of artificial light against love, is repeated at the end of the story. Newland Archer has accompanied his son to Paris, where the opportunity to dine with Countess Ellen Olenska arises. The two have not seen each other for twenty six years

⁵⁰ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 96.

⁵¹ James Joyce, ‘The Dead’, *Dubliners* (London: Flamingo, [1914] 1994), p. 201.

⁵² Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence* (London: Virago, [1920] 1982), p. 245.

⁵³ Wharton, *Age of Innocence*, p. 273.

⁵⁴ Aaron Worth, ‘Edith Wharton’s Poetics of telecommunication’, *Studies in American Fiction*, 36.1 (Spring 2008), 95-111 (p. 105).

and Dallas, Archer's son, is attempting to reunite them. However, Archer encourages Dallas to go to the Countess's apartment without him while he sits alone looking up at the apartment windows:

At length a light shone through the windows, and a moment later a man-servant came out of the balcony, drew up the awning, and closed the shutters.

At that, as if it had been the signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel.⁵⁵

In this moment of loss, Archer realises he cannot follow his son up to the apartment. The interior light partially indicates the activities taking place indoors at the same time as emphasising Archer's exclusion from them. It is an example of what Wirth-Nesher identifies as the distinctly urban problem of being 'faced with a never-ending series of partial visibilities'.⁵⁶ Gaslight also functions as a symbol of Archer's sense of duty and loyalty to his wife May, during her lifetime and after her death, preventing him from having a relationship with Ellen in spite of their enduring love for each other. Archer chooses to reside in his memories rather than taking the courageous step of going up to meet her. He is 'fundamentally conventional and unassertive'.⁵⁷ When the interior light comes on, Archer is reminded of what is inaccessible to him, with the closing of the shutters being the final confirmation.

As I will show to be so often the case with artificial lighting, the very opposite is also true. As the protagonist of Ernest Hemingway's expatriate novel *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises* (1926) discovers, Parisian lighting can encourage love: 'On the Boulevard Raspail, with the lights of Montparnasse in sight,' Brett asks him to kiss her.⁵⁸ In *Fiesta*, as in Wharton's novel, the love affair can be halted or escalated and the city navigated and constructed by reference to its lighting. In addition to its contribution to plot development, these examples demonstrate the complex and contradictory essence of gaslight, but also of light more broadly: its Janus-headed associations with both immorality and social judgment, secrecy and exposure, love and loneliness, exclusion and accessibility. This is a quality that Wyndham Lewis explored in his novel *Tarr*

⁵⁵ Wharton, *Age of Innocence*, p. 303.

⁵⁶ Wirth-Nesher, p. 8.

⁵⁷ Hermione Lee, *Edith Wharton* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2007), p. 563.

⁵⁸ Ernest Hemingway, *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises* (London: Arrow, [1926] 2004), p. 24.

(1918), which is discussed in Chapter 2. In the streets of Paris, Lewis's character Kreisler kisses Bertha. The half-light encourages the kiss, but they are not in any way safely concealed: 'Kreisler and Bertha were some distance from the nearest lamp and in the shade of the trees. But each of the spectators would have sworn to the identity and attitude of their two persons.'⁵⁹ Gas (and later electric lighting) offered novelists a goldmine of potentially conflicting symbols and metaphors.

Arguably, the contradictory positions listed above came about because, unlike oil lamps and candles, gas and electric lamps exist as individual objects which are manifestations of potentially vast and unseen networks. The networks and systems which make the individual lamp possible establish a real contrast between mass and singular, powerlessness and free will or between public and private. As shall be seen, this conflict is at times directly invoked, but in other texts alluded to in more subtle ways. The networked nature of electric lighting would become an irreversible and global phenomenon.

These examples describe functional lighting, but one can think of light as having generally two purposes: functional (light to see by) and aesthetic (light to be seen), with the latter increasing as a result of the acceleration of technological discoveries. However, plot development tends to exploit the functional role of lighting – to lead the eye and story – because practical and utilitarian lighting as a household fixture can facilitate a scene change or move a plot forward through revelation. For example, as Mrs Brant leaves Campton's dwelling, we are told that the bottom of the stairs is in total darkness because the concierge 'has forgotten the lamp on the stairs'.⁶⁰ Campton carries a light to guide Mrs. Brant through the darkness of the staircase and hallway. In so doing, he is led to his distraught housekeeper Mme. Lebel, whereupon he discovers that her only son has been killed at the front. This information intensifies Campton's own anxiety. Wharton exploits the narrative potentialities of lighting an unlit space to transfer a character to a new set of circumstances. Furthermore, she explores the new psychological dimensions of an indoor space which is lit or not lit by artificial lights by using lighting to both impact upon, and convey, the conscious experience of her characters. In these multiple ways, Wharton's writing interacts with the lighting technology of the day throughout her oeuvre.

⁵⁹ Wyndham Lewis, *Tarr* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, [1918] 2010), p. 122.

⁶⁰ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 100.

Another important example of functional lighting can be found towards the end of Wharton's *The Gods Arrive*. An interior lamp is responsible for revealing to Vance the fact that Halo has known about his behaviour with Floss. There shines a 'quiet circle of lamplight on the letters and the papers neatly sorted for his inspection' and so the lamp at first seems welcoming and gentle, but the newspaper-cuttings on which it shines have been neatly and deliberately sorted by Halo and at the bottom of the pile is the cutting which tells the story of his infidelity.⁶¹ Both examples link utilitarian light with revelation where a lamp is simply a plot device. But what is particular to the era of convenient interior artificial light is the way writers use it to refer to forces working against or beyond the grasp of the individual. Wharton's image activates earlier associations of Floss with artificial lighting and thereby juxtaposes the two women in order to suggest that Halo is the authentic victim of overwhelming forces. Halo, symbolised by nature throughout, stands in marked contrast to a modern woman associated with the vast unseen networks, glamour and immediacy of technologised lighting. Therefore, the seemingly inviting 'circle of lamplight' is both the harbinger of bad news and Floss's ally.

Wharton's depictions of Parisian gaslight influenced the style of the three novels examined here which, in turn, contributed to the stylisation of gaslight in the period. The gaslight era marked the beginning of the availability of a new material with which to work, for writers as well as painters and installation artists. Literary examples abound of depictions of interior and exterior gaslight in their practical role of showing something, but what was new in literature was the deployment of that lighting to reveal something about what it meant to be alive at that time. As a practical matter, improvements in lighting technology and its applications in the domestic interior meant that family members did not need to group together around the fire or candlelight, but could each enjoy separate individual light sources and make their own amusements, which could have had the effect of separation and loneliness. Baudelaire made this point as early as 1861 in 'Le Crépuscule du Soir' which laments man's inability to recall the comfort of the hearth ('La douceur du foyer').⁶² The second section of this chapter demonstrates how Henry James in *The Ambassadors* (1903), one of his final novels, shares with Wharton an interest in depicting the artificially lit interior as a psychologically troubling place that exacerbates a sense of isolation. James also depicts

⁶¹ Wharton, *Gods Arrive*, p. 333.

⁶² Baudelaire, 'Le Crépuscule du Soir', p. 308.

the psychic implications of exterior aesthetic light. Light to be seen, which increased as a result of the acceleration of technological discoveries, became an object or material in its own right which could represent knowledge and therefore truth in different ways to functional lighting. I now address the nexus of gaslight, versions of truth and psychology in *The Ambassadors*, as well as in James's novella 'The Beast in the Jungle', both first published in the same year.

II. Henry James

The Ambassadors

The Ambassadors is set in Paris, where Lambert Strether has been sent to persuade Chad Newsome to return home to Massachusetts. Strether's old friend Waymarsh accompanies him. The friends share an understanding 'on things to talk about, and on things not to [...] Waymarsh had not lived with his wife for fifteen years, and it came up vividly between them in the glare of the gas that Strether wasn't to ask about her.'⁶³ The functional gaslight colludes in, if not reaffirms, the unspoken agreement not to discuss troubling matters. Paradoxically, the intense glare ensures that such matters remain hidden. Wendy Steiner, in her book *The Colors of Rhetoric* (1982), describes the western tradition that maintained light and literature together as different versions of the same activity: the revelation of truth, rooted in 'Platonic notions of the superiority of seeing as knowing and light as knowledge'.⁶⁴ The paradox present in James's novel challenges the Platonic notion: the glare not only conceals the truth but it colludes in the burying of it. James introduces a link between artificial light and knowledge but also, importantly concealment of truth. Indeed, such traditions appear to shift as a result of the new availability of constant, controllable, indoor and outdoor artificial lighting. The relation of light to knowledge in the context of artificial modes of lighting is a dynamic central to this entire thesis. Lighting can reveal, distort or conceal truth all the while maintaining its complex association with knowledge and revelation.

In a further example of lighting obscuring the truth, an outdoor gas lamp assists Chad in making an intentionally ambiguous impression on Strether: 'Chad raised his face to the lamp, and it was one of the moments at which he had, in his extraordinary

⁶³ Henry James, *The Ambassadors* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, [1903] 1998), p. 18.

⁶⁴ Wendy Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), p. 10.

way, most his air of designedly showing himself.’⁶⁵ It is important to ascertain what kind of lighting is present. The men have just left the Opera; certainly the Avenue de l’Opéra was one of the first streets lit with electricity in 1878. However, the men ‘turned off [the Avenue] in tacit union to the quarter of Strether’s hotel’, which we have been told was on ‘the bye-street from the Rue de la Paix’.⁶⁶ James does not state whether the relevant street has gaslight or electricity, but Boutteville’s thorough lighting history of Paris, written in 1925, contains a photograph of Rue de la Paix confirming that in the mid-20s the street was still lit by gas.⁶⁷ Strether recalls the vision of Chad when he is faced with the mystery of Chad’s relationship: ‘Strether remembered again that fancy of the first impression of him. The happy young Pagan, handsome and hard but oddly indulgent whose mysterious measure he had under the street-lamp tried mentally to take.’⁶⁸ James’s atmospheric use of gaslight is aligned to an ambiguous articulation of Chad’s personality; there occurs a moment of designed luminous self-revelation.

Chad ‘presented himself’ and the effect is ‘something latent and beyond access, ominous’ even.⁶⁹ In this instance, James adopts the traditional association of gaslight with mystery and foreboding. This is a tradition which established itself in the first half of the nineteenth century in the work of Arthur Conan Doyle, Edgar Allan Poe and Charles Dickens, but also in the association of gaslight with theatrical melodramas. Barefoot’s book *Gaslight Melodrama* links gaslight to the ‘origins of the detective story’ in the nineteenth century.⁷⁰ He explains that Edgar Allan Poe’s 1840 story ‘The Man of the Crowd’ began a trend of ascribing gaslight a ‘disturbing quality’, for in it the gaslamps of London are described as throwing ‘over everything a fitful and garish lustre’.⁷¹ Gaslight performed the function of commenting on a particular kind of urban experience in which ocularity is confused.

In James’s novel, aesthetic lighting poses questions about what is seen and how people show themselves. Miss Barrace alludes to the potentially deceptive quality of ‘the light of Paris’ in which one sees not what things are but ‘what things resemble’.⁷² Whether she means natural or artificial light or a more abstract sense of the atmosphere

⁶⁵ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 110.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109, 70.

⁶⁷ R. Boutteville, *L’éclairage Public à Paris*, p. 121.

⁶⁸ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 166.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁷⁰ Barefoot, p. 23.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷² James, *Ambassadors*, p. 146.

of Paris is not stated. Therefore, the ‘light of Paris’ might comprise a sense of the spirit of place, but James makes a specific point about the ocularcentric nature of Parisian society. Strether and Miss Barrace agree that life in Paris is intensely visual and thus probably superficial.⁷³ The light of that city encourages people to present themselves in a particular fashion. In asking the question “but for what they really are?” Strether ventures that the light of Paris enables duplicitousness and causes misapprehension.⁷⁴ However, James simultaneously implies that the light of Paris exposes duplicitousness and concealed elements of character. These rich contradictions, which artificial light offered, were to prove immensely useful in the artistic expression of dominant modernist themes just a few years after the publication of James’s novel.

By contrast, the iridescent Parisian daylight provides Strether with great comfort. In a similar fashion to the novels of Edith Wharton, James contrasts technologised light with natural light to imply the moral puissance of the latter. Parisian daylight features in the sunny composition of the following passage, which critics have connected to the impressionism of Camille Pissarro:

In the Luxembourg Gardens he pulled up; here at last he found his nook, and here, on a penny chair from which terraces, alleys, vistas, fountains, little trees in green tubs, little women in white caps and shrill little girls at play all sunnily ‘composed’ together, he passed an hour in which the cup of his impressions seemed truly to overflow.⁷⁵

James’s use of the purifying nature of Parisian sunlight contrasts with the deceptive power of his gaslit scenes. Millicent Bell argues that James’s novel is impressionistic and, in particular, that it is based on ‘his way of making his novel a succession of moments, visually scenic or otherwise. It is James’s most developed experiment in the mode of narrative that submits itself flagrantly to successions of interpretation based on instant states.’⁷⁶ Light is integral to many of these moments. In this scene in the Luxembourg Gardens, rather than assessing what he has thus far learnt about Chad’s situation, Strether allows Paris to wash over him. This is emphasised by the way he

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 56.

⁷⁶ Millicent Bell, *Meaning in Henry James* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 333.

walks in the sun (it surrounds and envelops him). The scene is replete with intriguing perspectives: from his seat he takes in the linear terraces, alleys, wider and more distant vistas, and the closer fountains and little trees in the garden itself. Perspective is correlated with the source of light (the sun) in the scene because we are told it was ‘sunnily “composed”’. This impressionistic effect, together with James’s expansive list of ‘terraces, alleys, vistas, fountains, little trees’ and the unspecific little women and girls, affirms that Strether takes in the general scene rather than noting precise details. By contrast, electric light would promote poetic interest in perceptual specificity from 1910 onwards.

James’s tableau of sumptuous and natural Parisian light describes a post-Haussmann Paris where dim ruelles and old fashioned arcades, like those which form the subject of *Das Passagen-Werk*, have been replaced by open spaces; where monuments are no longer surrounded by decrepit accommodation, where circulation and hygiene have been improved and vistas carved out. The ‘light’ is spellbinding. This idea reappears when Waymarsh and Strether take a walk to meet Mr Bilham. The men are described as ‘a couple engaged that day with the sharp spell of Paris.’⁷⁷ James describes a life-enhancing Parisian glow of bright sunlight and architectural design which contrasts with nocturnal artificially lit scenes rife with uncertainty.

This creative ‘air’ of Paris cast a spell not only over James’s characters, but over James himself. In his Preface to *The American* (1877) he celebrates the way in which Paris facilitated, in December 1875, his resurrection of that early novel:

Paris had ever so promptly offered me, and with an immediate directness at which I now marvel (since I had come back there, after earlier visitations, but a few weeks before), everything that was needed to make my conception concrete. I seem again at this distant day to see it become so quickly and easily, quite as if filling itself with life in that air ... The very splendour [of that city] seemed somehow to witness and intervene.⁷⁸

In reference to concluding *The American*, he writes that Paris helped ‘unwind my tangle, with a firm hand, in the very light (that light of high, narrowish French windows

⁷⁷ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 78.

⁷⁸ Henry James, ‘Preface’ to *The American* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1877] 1999), p. 5.

in old rooms, the light somehow, as one always feels, of ‘style’, itself) that had quickened my original vision.’⁷⁹ Perhaps James is influenced by more than just Paris, but by all of France, its style and glamour. Crucially, it is light which is synonymous with this sensation. Light encourages what he describes in his Preface to *The Ambassadors* as his ‘process of vision’.⁸⁰ Natural light can feel like ‘style’ precisely because it contrasts with the artificial light of the streets or the intense glare of the domestic lamp. That light of style inspired James’s work, which itself partakes in the stylisation of light. James is suggesting that light (natural and artificial) mediates vision and the various modes of light in Paris, whether or not they actually prevent a thing from being seen immediately, certainly affect the way things are seen, where to see also means to understand.

Gaslight is not all bad. The novel contains instances where characters are positively affected by artificial aesthetic street light. In the passage below, Paris’ nocturnal glow is integral to one of the ‘instant states’ that Bell refers to:

The night was hot and heavy and the single lamp sufficient; the great flare of the lighted city, rising high, spending itself afar, played up from the Boulevard and, through the vague vistas of the successive rooms, brought objects into view and added to their dignity.⁸¹

What James is describing, in positive terms and with careful specificity, is the phenomenon of light pollution caused by the blaze of the city’s thousands of gas flares. Strether’s sensory experience of this new kind of urban lighting stirs new emotions in him. While he relishes the feeling that in scanning the city he possess ‘the style of the place’, he simultaneously feels, with a ‘pang’, ‘the youth he had long ago missed’.⁸² As he continues to take in the scene, the spirit of place (in part attributable to its lighting) crystallises Strether’s sense of loss. This loss is personified as follows:

the deep breathing of which he could positively hear. It was in the outside air as well as within; it was in the long watch, from the balcony, in the summer night,

⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸⁰ James, ‘Preface’ to *The Ambassadors*, p. xxx.

⁸¹ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 353.

⁸² Ibid., p. 354.

of the wide late life of Paris, the unceasing soft quick rumble, below, of the little lighted carriages that, in the press, always suggested the gamblers he had seen of old Monte Carlo pushing up to the tables.⁸³

That 'wide late life of Paris' and its lights are firmly associated with Strether's sense of freedom and increasing self-knowledge throughout the novel, but especially towards the end. Strether wants to delay his return to America because of how 'the hugely distributed Paris of summer, alternately dazzling and dusky, with a weight lifted for him off its columns and cornices and with shade and air in the flutter of awnings as wide as avenues', makes him feel.⁸⁴ James depicts lighting's physiological implications. In contrast to the pathological effects of artificial lighting, which James's writing sometimes alludes to, Strether's perception of the light of the city in the summer night is a positive shaping force with regard to his growing self-determination. James makes a connection between artificial light and self-knowledge.

Images of functional lighting in these works by Wharton and James advance the plot by revealing an event or object. However, aesthetic lighting tends to serve an emotional or psychological purpose. Aesthetic light, whether natural or artificial, helps James to prioritise the impact of ephemeral perceptions on his character's consciousness, what Bell calls 'merely temporary conditions of the mind'.⁸⁵ As such, Strether's perception of Paris in the following excerpt is Impressionistic:

It hung before him this morning, the vast bright Babylon, like some huge iridescent object, a jewel brilliant and hard, in which parts were not to be discriminated, nor differences comfortably marked. It twinkled and trembled and melted together, and what seems all surface one moment seems all depth the next.⁸⁶

Iridescence, twinkling, and trembling are characteristic of the fleeting effects of light and motion in Impressionist painting. Strether sees Paris, but it also becomes a brilliant and blurred projection of his sensations. Bell describes how the 'visual experience

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 354-5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 355.

⁸⁵ Bell, p. 348.

⁸⁶ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 63.

seems so insistently to represent Strether's immediate reception, before intellection, of what stands outside him.'⁸⁷ Like Newland Archer looking up at the window, light in its natural and artificial forms shows the character something of what they are a part and not a part of. Wharton and James partake in a literary tradition in which illuminated Paris represents a series of fleeting but significant sensations.

James's treatments of different kinds of light actualize intriguing connections between light, the act of seeing and Strether's experience of living. Light and vision, perception and sensation, create importunate instances in Strether's mind without analysis or commentary. Indeed, James resists 'the terrible fluidity of self-revelation'.⁸⁸ In 'The Stream of Thought', in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), Henry's elder brother the American philosopher and psychologist William James asserted that each mind 'keeps its own thoughts to itself' and, accordingly, any conclusions Strether draws from the continuous rhythms of his sensations and perceptions are internalised.⁸⁹ Chapter 4 will demonstrate that James's approach stands in marked contrast to the formal expression of literary epiphany.

James's presentation of Strether's accumulated moments recalls another central theme of William James's research. In his two-volume *The Principles of Psychology*, consciousness is said to be unbroken and subjectivity perpetual; the natural extension of this idea is that the self is always being reconstituted.⁹⁰ Strether's unbroken point of view enacts this understanding; the novel is a fictional depiction of the continuous rhythms of perception, perceptions which are frequently affected by lighting. Of consciousness, William James famously wrote: 'It is nothing jointed; it flows. A "river" or a "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.'⁹¹ Like his brother, Henry James also suggests that consciousness is unruptured, describing Strether's perceptions of Paris as 'melted together, and what seems all surface one moment seems all depth the next.'⁹² The flowing nature of consciousness in the work of Gertrude Stein, who was a student of William James's, is addressed at length in Chapter 3. The fluidity of consciousness is also unmistakable in the narrative

⁸⁷ Bell, p. 348.

⁸⁸ James, 'Preface' to *The Ambassadors*, p. xlii.

⁸⁹ William James, 'The Stream of Thought', in *The Principles of Psychology: the famous long course complete and unabridged*, 2 vols (New York: Dover, 1950), I, p. 226.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁹² James, *Ambassadors*, p. 63.

immediacy of novels which came after Stein and James, such as in Henry Miller's 1934 novel *Tropic of Cancer*.

An instructive example of a literary expression of the parallels between the workings of the mind and artificial light can be found in the novella 'The Beast In the Jungle' (1903), originally published as part of the collection *The Better Sort* and in the same year as *The Ambassadors*. James employs an image of gas lamps to convey a mental process.⁹³ John Marcher and May Bartram have just met for the second time and the memories of their first meeting return to Marcher, albeit inaccurately:

Her face and her voice, all at his service now, worked the miracle - the impression operating like the torch of a lamplighter who touches into flame, one by one, a long row of gas jets. Marcher flattered that the illumination was brilliant, yet he was really still more pleased on her showing him, with amusement, that in his haste to make everything right he had got most things rather wrong.⁹⁴

The visual effect of this sequence of illuminations enacts a stream of sensations or apprehensions, leading to alleged clarity. However, here it operates differently to William James's idea of consciousness as an unbroken and perpetual "river" or a "stream". Instead Marcher's consciousness appears to be stilted. This faulty fluidity of revelation is a 'light bulb moment' gone wrong. Therefore, by pairing gaslight with confusion, James calls into question the traditional association of light with reality and truth, associations which shall be thoroughly interrogated in Chapter 4. Images of artificial lighting occupy a space in which truth and deception, reality and illusion merge.

The inherent contradictions encapsulated in images of lighting or, put more positively, its wealth of associations, stem from its man-made quality. Unlike the sun, it relies upon human involvement and therefore it takes on the complexities and contradictions inseparable from human existence, encapsulating our abilities and our limitations. Just as the modern novel is not 'simply an enabling means of handling the content, but in some essential sense being the content' just so artificial light is light not

⁹³ Henry James, *The Better Sort* (London: Methuen & Co, 1903).

⁹⁴ Henry James, *The Beast in the Jungle* (London: Penguin Classics, [1903] 2011), p. 5.

merely to see by, but light which demands to be looked at and considered.⁹⁵ Certain similarities between writing and lighting flow from this observation: artificial light invites us to look at not only at what it illuminates, but also how it illuminates. In a similar fashion, the means by which the message was delivered would become, in the literature of the early twentieth century, as much a subject in the history of literary style as the content itself. These similarities help us to understand broader modernist trends which emerged across the creative arts (during and after James), such as exploration of form, the veneration of ingenuity and the increasingly self-referential nature of literature.

I move now from fiction to poetry as I consider how images of artificial lighting in T. S. Eliot's poetry engage with seemingly opposed concepts of truth and deception, reality and illusion. It shall be shown that Eliot is also interested in lighting's applicability to ideas about consciousness. For example, he too uses the visual effect of a row of lights being turned on to imply a stream of sensations or apprehensions leading to a significant moment, albeit one whose meaning is equivocal. T. S. Eliot is a poet for whom gaslight was a device which could communicate universal truths about what it meant to be alive in 1915, but his poem 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' operates not only on imagery and content (what is illuminated), but also on form (how it is illuminated) resulting in a powerful totality made of meaning and form.

III. T. S. Eliot

'Rhapsody on a Windy Night'

Broadly speaking, the work of T. S. Eliot marks a shift from the literary reverence for nature of mid-nineteenth century American poets, such as Walt Whitman and the Transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, to a focus on humans and technology. However, the connections are more complex than that. Paul Gilmore's 2009 book *Aesthetic Materialism: Electricity and American Romanticism* points out that Whitman's 'I Sing the Body Electric' from *Leaves of Grass* is 'probably

⁹⁵ John Fletcher and Malcom Bradbury, 'The Introverted Novel', in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature*, pp. 394-415 (p. 401).

the most famous poetic allusion to electricity in America, if not Western Literature'.⁹⁶ Whitman employs electricity to describe, among other things, the body, sex, the nervous system, and the potential of poetry.⁹⁷ Gilmore also explains that Emerson was able to use electricity to emblemize 'the relationships between the self and the world'.⁹⁸ Eliot would have been familiar with these influential poetic invocations of electrical force, which predated the invention of the electric light bulb, and which were able to stand for individualised and personal experiences within the context of new technologised unity. By contrast, Eliot's poem 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', which invokes gas and not electricity, is a portrayal of technology in sharp contrast to what Gilmore describes as Emerson's and Whitman's 'techno-Utopian discourse'.⁹⁹

Irrespective of Stevenson's affection for gas, it has been shown that the allusive history of that particular power source was broadly in opposition to Whitman's celebration of electricity. Barry J. Faulk explains that Eliot's lamps are gas powered though this poem was written well after the invention of the incandescent lamp.¹⁰⁰ Eliot's poem was completed during his 1910-11 stay in Paris and Munich. At that time, as has been explained, gas lamps were in common use in the smaller streets of Paris. Indeed, most of its domestic interiors had gaslight, but one can assume that the selection of gas was as much a stylistic choice as an historically accurate recreation of a Parisian street. Eliot's poem is structured on the specific manifestation of gas technology as lighting, rather than merely its unseen and imponderable flows and networks. Furthermore, the aural potentialities of gas lamps are crucial to the operation of the poem and so he selects an 'older' technology. In so doing, his poem 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' echoes the disparaging depictions of gaslight in the poetry of the 1890s; gaslight in Eliot's poem is tremulous and sinister.¹⁰¹

Anthony Cuda's 'Eliot's Life' describes the 'crucial year' that the poet spent in Paris, 'studying at the Sorbonne and attending lectures by the well-known, provocative French philosopher Henri Bergson at the Collège de France'.¹⁰² Eliot improved his

⁹⁶ Paul Gilmore, *Aesthetic Materialism: Electricity and American Romanticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), p.143.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 145.

⁹⁸ Gilmore, p.15.

⁹⁹ Gilmore, p. 153.

¹⁰⁰ Barry J. Faulk, 'T. S. Eliot and The Symbolist City', in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, ed. David E. Chinitz (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), pp. 27-39 (p. 33).

¹⁰¹ Eliot, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', pp. 26-28.

¹⁰² Anthony Cuda, 'Eliot's Life', in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, pp. 3-12 (p. 5).

command of French and French influences are most obvious in the French poems in *Poems* (1920), his use of French in English poems ('aucune rancune' in 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night') and in his choice of a Parisian setting. In a 1994 essay, Murray McArthur briefly points out the Parisian setting of 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', which is otherwise rarely acknowledged in Eliot scholarship.¹⁰³ Lyndall Gordon concurs that the poem is set in Paris.¹⁰⁴ Vincent Sherry tells how, in addition to practical influences, Paris had a deep intellectual impact on Eliot:

As a poet, however, he drew deeply from the Parisian scene. One of the primary sites in the poetics of urban modernity, the city offered him the spirits of Charles Baudelaire and Jules Laforgue and the legacy of a potent French Decadence.¹⁰⁵

Eliot's text does share similarities with Baudelaire's references to gaslight. In particular, Baudelaire's criticism of nineteenth-century French modernity presents itself as tensions and difference between the city's nighttime street light and daytime as well as the assigning of human senses to lamps.¹⁰⁶

In addition to the legacy of Eliot's experience of Paris, Eliot may have felt that gaslight's fixed attachments to mystery, anthropomorphism and danger, which have been documented in this chapter, could assist him in the communication of his message more powerfully than electric light, whose associations were still being solidified. Gaslight functions as a metaphor for life in subtly different ways to electric light, bringing with it implications of illusion which also serve to validate Eliot's presentation of a narrator who hears the lamps speak to him. Gaslight lends credence to the possibility of psychological confusion. At a sensory level gaslight is uniquely evocative. Therefore, Eliot's poem articulates the sensations of life lived under gas, including its flickering light and unpleasant hiss, and these sensations assists his personification of lamps which speak the time.

Not only was it a literary convention to link gas lighting with distortions of truth, but also with prostitutes and criminals; characters living on the margins of society

¹⁰³ Murray McArthur, 'Deciphering Eliot: "Rhapsody on a Windy Night" and the Dialectic of the Cypher', *American Literature*, 66. 3 (September 1994), pp. 509-524 (p. 509).

¹⁰⁴ Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's Early Years* (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 41. Gordon states that this poem is set on the 'vaguely sinister streets of Paris after midnight.'

¹⁰⁵ Vincent Sherry, "'Where are the eagles and the trumpets?': Imperial Decline and Eliot's Development", in *A Companion to T. S. Eliot*, pp. 92-104 (p. 92).

¹⁰⁶ Baudelaire, 'Le Crépuscule du Soir' and 'Le Crépuscule du Matin' in 'Tableaux Parisiens'.

feature heavily in Eliot's poem. The traditional image of gas as a companion to sin contributes to Eliot's depiction of nocturnal city life. Jay's expression 'ocular desire', resulting in intoxication and automatism, is certainly applicable to the tone of Eliot's piece.¹⁰⁷ Therefore, through Eliot's choice of gas, he partakes in a literary tradition which uses systems and objects of gas lighting to comment on emotional and psychological aspects of modern urban life.

Whether Eliot uses gas lamps for nostalgic reasons is a more complex question perhaps than whether gas offers a useful store of poetic associations and images. The poem is absolutely not a fond evocation of the era of gaslight in the face of increasing electrification. But the very latest sources of lighting did trigger sympathetic representations of alternative types of light and this was a trend which existed in later nineteenth-century poetry. For example, in the same way that Verne implied gaslight was deserving of loyalty, as electricity prevailed gaslight became increasingly longingly remembered. In the essay 'Medium light: revisiting Edisonian modernity' (2009) L. Gitleman and T. M. Collins posit that 'Familiarity with modern electric lighting – ubiquitous to the point of invisibility – has helped to make gaslight quaint at the same time that it has helped make candlelight romantic.'¹⁰⁸ The celebration, indeed religion, of electricity visible at the 1900 Exposition affected retrospective representations of gaslight, such as in Robert Louis Stevenson's *A Plea for Gas Lamps* (first published in 1881) and the children's poem 'The Lamplighter' (1885).¹⁰⁹ The latter is a comforting poem about the man who lights the lamps at teatime bringing joy and safety to the children 'For we are very lucky, with a lamp before the door'.¹¹⁰ Evidently, the success of electric light had an impact on attitudes to gas: 'It could be associated with the old-fashioned and the antiquated [...] the outmoded light of an earlier era.'¹¹¹ Clayson explains how American painters living in Paris 'especially liked to capture the city in nostalgic gaslight, even long after its streets were lit up with garish arc lamps. They

¹⁰⁷ Jay, p. 166.

¹⁰⁸ L. Gitleman and T. M. Collins, 'Medium Light: Revisiting Edisonian Modernity', *Critical Quarterly*, 51.2 (2009), 1–14.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Louis Stevenson, 'The Lamplighter', in *A Child's Garden of Verses* (London: Gollancz, [1885] 1989), p. 50.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Barefoot, p. 33.

wanted their Paris to twinkle.’¹¹² This approach was taken by Frederick Childe Hassam in his 1888 study of a woman and horses in the warm light of oil and gas *Bois de Boulogne* (Figure 4) which Sarah Lees, curator of European art at the Clark Art Institute, describes as nostalgic.¹¹³ However, the registering of such lighting transformation in literature and art was not uniformly quaint and nostalgic. Indeed, it would be wrong to suggest that in ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’ gaslight is longingly remembered.

Eliot’s use of gaslight could also imply indirectly nostalgia for the lost world of late romanticism. Such a tension exists in modernism between passion for modernity and nostalgia for the romantic, a tension manifest in the work of Ernest Hemingway. (For example, the protagonist of *Fiesta* tries to escape from urban chaos by going to rural Spain.) Whether or not this can be interpreted in this way, what Eliot does overtly explore is lighting as a complex temporal phenomenon capable of representing, in the same image, both past and present. Eliot evokes Paris in 1910 at a time when the status of gaslight technology as a modernist symbol of the immediate past was just emerging. He also demonstrates lighting’s nexus with both shared chronological time, represented by the lamps, and inner psychological time, represented by the recollection of memory. Lighting is the perfect way of transcending time because light as a concept is eternal and emotive, but as a technology it is supremely historically specific.

Such temporal flexibility makes gaslight central to the organisation of Eliot’s poem which has three essential components: light, a lived perception, and memory. The ominously rhythmical lines quoted at the beginning of this chapter show the gas lamp indicating the passing of synchronised common time. This occurs at the beginning of all but one of the six verses. Eliot contrasts the systematic passing of lived time with the free-form time of memory and mind. Light is crucial to this structure and to these contrasts. Regularly spaced gas lamps beat out a rhythm or death knell for a passer-by and dictate the timeframe of the poem (inspired by Dante’s *Divine Comedy*), while illuminating a person or thing which the narrator perceives. In the intervening spaces of darkness individual memories assert themselves without obvious correlation to the perception. Modernist patterning of artificial light followed by significant memory or

¹¹² Amy Biancolli, ‘The Clark’s ‘Electric Paris’ basks in the City of Light’, *The Times Union*, 13 March 2013 <<http://www.timesunion.com/entertainment/article/The-Clark-s-Electric-Paris-basks-in-the-City-of-4351758.php>> [Accessed on 2 April 2013]

¹¹³ Ibid.

moment is explored in depth in Chapter 4 on 'Electric Epiphanies'. Eliot's poem is a gaslight precursor to the poems explored in that chapter, but there is more than a simulacrum with what other poets were doing with electric images. Artificial light provides the trigger or setting for a recalled significant moment. In each verse (present and absent) artificial light penetrates both memories and reality. The poem embodies the Janus-headed essence of artificial lighting. Artificial light (in this case gas powered) is the quintessential modernist metaphor for communicating the gap and overlap between external and internal being.

Opening each stanza with the lamp's declaration of the chronological time, to then enter the realm of memories (which exist outside the confines of chronological time) creates a fundamental sense of disorder culminating in the absence of peace. For example, the subject goes to bed at four in the morning - an unnatural time for sleep. Artificial light is the representative therefore of anxiety resulting from the chasm between the lived life and the life of the mind, yet through lighting they overlap. Murray McArthur's essay 'Deciphering Eliot' is an intricate deconstruction of what he calls the pairs and 'oppositional suspensions' at the heart of the poem.¹¹⁴ An example McArthur gives is the Eliot's use of the word twist: 'To twist as an action is to join and separate. The twist is the cipher dialecticized in this pair, the scrap, fragment, or remnant that cannot be negated or assimilated. This pair works, like the pairs to follow, in an oppositional and suspensive logic.'¹¹⁵ McArthur argues that oppositions also in the 'inside/outside problematic' of the old woman, who is neither inside nor outside the doorway, and the eyes through lighted shutters, which could be on the inside or the outside.¹¹⁶ Light is similarly both the thing inside and outside the subject. Therefore, I agree with McArthur that the poem is comprised of numerous oppositional suspensions, but would add that the dominant voice instructing the reader about the oppositional nature of existence are the lamps themselves (or the cohesive singular voice that the four lamps become).

Gaslight is also a controlling force, calling to mind its unseen and large networks beyond the influence of individual members of society. As suggested earlier in relation to Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, artificial lighting was frequently used to represent social forces and lack of free will. As well as sounding out the passing of

¹¹⁴ Murray McArthur, 'Deciphering Eliot', pp. 509-524 (p. 516).

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 514.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

time, the street-lamps address the narrator directly and order him to look at certain things. The flickering light and noise are typical of gas and lend credence to the notion of the lamp as tyrannical other, or as authority. The lamps have eyes and a voice, collude in, direct the action, reveal and deceive so convincingly that gaslight provides another character, another coherent voice. The anthropomorphism of gas lamp as spy or secret-keeper was well established by the time Eliot wrote his poem. For example, the journalist George Augustus Sala, whose essay 'The Key of the Street' appeared in *Household Words* on 6 September 1851, describes how the gaslight witnesses the injustice and brutality of London at night: 'It has an eye – impartial gas'.¹¹⁷ In a later piece, entitled 'The Secrets of the Gas', Sala depicts the relationship between the city and its gaslights, but also between the city's inhabitants and gaslights in a way which chimes with Eliot's poetry. He writes that the gas light

speaks, actively, to men and women of what is, and of what is done and suffered by night and by day; and though it often crieth like the Wisdom in the sheets and no man regardeth it, there are, and shall be some to listen to its experiences, harketh to its counsels and profit by its lessons.¹¹⁸

Public artificial lighting was used to regulate society, but Sala's view is that it also tells us about life, about suffering and about how to go forward. This immensely positive consequence of literary interpretations of technology would intensify through the period I discuss. It shall be shown that, simultaneous with literary warnings about the psychologically troubling effects of lighting, taken as one whole, the artistic treatments of that technology in effect bring it to life and acknowledge that 'counsel' which is available to us if we better understand the technology alongside which we exist. Following the publication of 'The Key of the Street', Sala rapidly became one of 'Dickens's young men'.¹¹⁹ Given his fame, it is possible that Eliot was familiar with Sala's work. Eliot's depictions of the gas lamps of London similarly invoke a collusive eye and an 'active' voice. Eliot's line 'You have the key' is a clue that he may well have read 'The Key of the Street'.

¹¹⁷ George Augustus Sala, reprinted 'The Key of the Street' in *Gaslight and Daylight: With Some London Scenes They Shine Upon* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1859), p. 163.

¹¹⁸ Sala, *Gaslight and Daylight*, p. 156.

¹¹⁹ George Augustus Sala, <www. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography> [accessed 7 April 2014]

'Rhapsody on a Windy Night' depicts the coexistence of two types of audible night light: moonlight and gaslight. The moon is feeble and sickly, capitulating to the power of the lamp with 'aucune rancune', but she is equally sinister.¹²⁰ Her macabre winking, smiling, and quieter incantations 'dissolve' the structure of the narrator's consciousness, allowing his memories to coexist with his immediate sensory perceptions. Though they are different species of light, the two collude in revealing a dishevelled and putrid world. Unlike for Strether, artificial lighting does not offer Eliot's narrator any comfort. As in Le Gallienne's 'Ballad of London', artificial light is a power beyond the narrator's control. Urban life (of which street-lamps are totemic) appears to have an unsavoury effect on the narrator's mind, exemplifying the sense of crisis characteristic of modernism. However, the supposition that natural is good and artificial bad is banished; natural light in Eliot's poem is no more reassuring, giving credence to the thought that his view of life was disillusioned and cynical.

The poem makes innovative use of the conventional functions of images of gaslight. One such function is the ghoulish and immoral associations of artificial light in the second and last verses. In the second verse, a door opens to reveal a ragged woman, 'Who hesitates towards you in the light of the door/ Which opens on her like a grin.'¹²¹ Whether or not she is a woman of the night, the sudden illumination of a woman with an unsettling appearance and an uncertain motive explores established connections between prostitution and lighting, set out at the beginning of this chapter. The light which forms this uncharitable smile is analogous to the little lamp 'that spreads a ring on the stair' in the last verse. They are analogous because of the similarly sinister words 'opens' and 'spreads'. Sleep offers two seemingly equally desperate possibilities: the inescapable experience of yet another directionless day or death, and in communicating that cynicism Eliot deploys an innovative structure reliant upon lighting.¹²²

The absolute centrality of light and gas lighting in both the organisation of the poem and its imagery and allusions demonstrates how artificial lighting can be the 'light of style itself'. The illuminated grin and the ring on the stair are concentrated versions of the broader poetic images of gas and lunar light which flood the poem. The micro and macro lighting together form an essential element in the total meaning of the poem,

¹²⁰ Eliot, 'Rhapsody on a Windy Night', l. 51.

¹²¹ Ibid., ll. 17 -18.

¹²² Ibid., l. 74.

or to use Eliot's words: 'the illusion of a view of life'.¹²³ Light and its associations indicate that this view might be the meaninglessness of urban life in the early years of the twentieth century.

In the poem 'Every Thing' by Harold Monro, a lamp also guides the narrator to bed:

The old impetuous Gas above my head
Begins irascibly to flare and fret,
Wheezing into its epileptic jet,
Reminding me I ought to go to bed.¹²⁴

The sickly gas spells the end of day. For Monro and Eliot, talking gas lamps remind a poem's narrator of the next phase of life: the transition from wakefulness to sleep represents the transition from life to death. The trope through which sunset frames both day and life, such as W.B. Yeats's line 'day's declining beam' in the second stanza of his 1928 poem 'The Tower', is extended to gaslight.¹²⁵ Eliot achieves what Woolf declared was imperative: he uses gas lighting to 'reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its messages through the brain'.¹²⁶ Woolf also famously wrote 'life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end.'¹²⁷ On this basis, Eliot's series of street-lamps systematically arranged jars with internal imaginative time and in this way he exploits lighting's clarity and organisational qualities to highlight the complexity of the poem's psychological content.

Perhaps Eliot's most foreboding gaslight is at the end of verse I of *Preludes*: 'And then the lighting of the lamps.'¹²⁸ The lamp-lighting is more than the prelude to night: there is no trace of the heart-warming lamplighter from Robert Louis Stevenson's childrens' poems. The metre and the iamb, landing on a solid monosyllabic noun, are

¹²³ T. S. Eliot, 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca' (1927), in *Selected Essays*, (London: Faber and Faber, [1932] 1999), p. 135.

¹²⁴ Harold Monro, 'Every Thing' in *Collected Poems* (London: Duckworth, [1933] 1970), pp. 119-122.

¹²⁵ W. B. Yeats, 'The Tower' (1928), in *The Collected Poems* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions, 1994), p. 164.

¹²⁶ Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' (1919), in *Collected Essays II* (London: Hogarth, 1966), pp. 103-110, p. 107.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Eliot, 'Preludes', *Selected Poems 1909-1962*, p. 23.

consistent with the fatalistic lamps of ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’. Depicting gas as a negative force, whether diabolical, collusive, voyeuristic, portentous, or as a death knell, contrasts with Stevenson’s nostalgic celebration of the lamps and their friendly lighters. Yet, Eliot’s combination of light to see by, light to be seen and light to be heard forces the reader to pay attention to the world around, and as such Eliot takes, to my mind, a life-affirming stand. Eliot’s treatment of Parisian gaslight established certain techniques which would continue and develop. More broadly, the gaslight of Paris played a crucial role in the emergence of modernist themes which would continue for many years but also adapt as electric light replaced gaslight.

Conclusion

Paul Bogard, in *The End of Night: Searching for Natural Darkness in an Age of Artificial Light* (2013) assists us in appreciating the obsession with artificial light that manifested itself in Paris at the end of the nineteenth century:

As far back as the early eighteenth century, proposals had been made to illuminate the entire city of Paris using some kind of artificial light set high on a tower. The most famous of these was the Sun Tower proposed by Jules Bourdais for the 1889 Paris Exposition that would stand at the city’s centre near Pont Neuf and cover all of Paris with arc lights. Unfortunately for Bourdais (and fortunately for the rest of the world), his proposal was turned down in favour of one by a certain Gustave Eiffel.¹²⁹

Urban illumination, in the end, was to be far more sophisticated than one individual tower. Yet, the importance of one particular tower cannot be overplayed. The Eiffel Tower is integral to Roland Barthes’ study of modern life in our urban centres. Although Barthes’ essay ‘The Eiffel Tower’ was published in the 1970s, he uses nineteenth-century references to explain mass-culture and the myths of daily French life. Barthes’ description of the Tower enriches this study of the literary implications of artificial light in two ways. First, Barthes endorses the notion that the artificial light of

¹²⁹ Paul Bogard, *The End of Night: Searching for Natural Darkness in an Age of Artificial Light* (London: Fourth Estate, 2013), p. 21.

Paris has mythological implications. In particular, his analysis of the Eiffel Tower includes the concept that the lights at its pinnacle are the very presence of the modern phenomenon of new experiences of visibility. He explains how that landmark is seen from almost every point in the city and that there 'is virtually no Parisian glance it fails to *touch* at some time of the day [...] all this night, too, it will be there, connecting me above Paris to each of my friends that I know are seeing it.'¹³⁰ By being looked at it provides a unifying focus. In addition to its visibility, Barthes emphasises the significance of the Tower's own ocular power, which comes in the form of its electric lights: it looks out. Therefore, the Eiffel Tower, when wearing its lights (rather than illuminated from the ground), confirms its mythological status by epitomising the modern ocularcentric revolution enabled by mass electric lighting. On the basis that one aspect of the mythological status of the Tower undoubtedly stems from its lighting, I would add that this must in turn stem from both the practical and mythological qualities of light itself, determined in part by literary treatments of gaslight. This can be elaborated upon by employing Barthes' own terminology: electric light has its own value as a signifier because 'it belongs to a history', that of light.¹³¹

A second way Barthes' writing supports the findings of this thesis is with regard to oppositions. Barthes likens the lights at its top with eyes indicating its similarity with man: 'Like man himself, who is the only one not to know his own glance, the Tower is the only blind point of the total optical system of which it is the center and Paris the circumference.'¹³² Barthes' demystification of the Tower is built upon its embodiment of the resolution of several opposites. The opposition relevant here is that of seeing and being seen. In so doing he determines that:

The Tower is an object which sees, a glance which is seen; it is a complete verb, both active and passive, in which no function, no *voice* (as we say in grammar, with a piquant ambiguity) is defective. This dialectic is not in the least banal, it makes the Tower a singular monument; for the world ordinarily produces either purely functional organisms (camera or eye) intended to see things but which then afford nothing to sight, what sees being mythically linked to what remains

¹³⁰ Roland Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower' (1979), in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1990), pp. 3-17.

¹³¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (London: Paladin, [1957] 1973), p. 126.

¹³² Barthes, 'The Eiffel Tower', p. 4.

hidden (this is the theme of the voyeur), or else spectacles which themselves are blind and are left in the pure passivity of the visible. The Tower (and this is one of its mythic powers) transgresses this separation, this habitual divorce of *seeing* and *being seen*; it achieves a sovereign circulation between the two functions.¹³³

Barthes identifies an essential characteristic of artificial lighting: its fundamental duality, its active and passive quality. Lighting's simultaneously functional and aesthetic purposes have been analysed in this chapter. These observations echo Stein's acknowledgement that seeing is coexistent with being seen. Barthes expresses the oppositions inherent in life, but specifically in the psychic ramifications of technological revolution, namely human potential versus individual unfulfillment, which the meaning and form of the illuminated Eiffel Tower represents: 'One can feel oneself cut off from the world and yet the owner of the world.'¹³⁴ Barthes and Stein, and so many others, recognised that the language of lighting encompassed many philosophical oppositions at the heart of human existence.

The transition to near total electric light resulted in writers adopting and adapting some of the established characteristic associations of gaslight. Some characteristic associations such as links to control, surveillance and devices like anthropomorphism, would come into their own with the spread of electric light. The next chapter will show how the kernels of lighting's literary symbols would be more fully developed as technology improved. Let us list those symbols, characteristics and associations which have been identified in this chapter so as to make the most important observation about the fundamental duality of artificial lighting and its consequent kinship with modernism. They are illusion and reality, sin and societal control, global networks and the individual, truth and deception, psychological anxiety and self-knowledge, occlusion and revelation, love and loneliness, chronological shared time and inner imaginative time, and the past, present and future. So often the concepts signified by electric lighting encompass such oppositions. That all of these binaries, and more, could be balanced and embodied in one medium made it the perfect tool for modernists to work with in shaping their ideas about the major conflicts inherent in early twentieth-century life.

¹³³ Ibid., pp. 4-5.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p. 17.

Scientific discoveries (of which ubiquitous electric light is just one) would challenge accepted norms at the core of society and art. Harriet Monroe wrote in 1919 ‘It is for the individual soul, now as always before in the history of the race, to master all this, to see through the chaos of his time, and resolve it into forms of power and beauty.’¹³⁵ By resolving modern chaos into artistic forms art might, in equal measure to science, ‘mold the future of the world’.¹³⁶ The ‘scope and function of art’, she implies, is equal to science and this is explored in Chapter 3.¹³⁷ The thesis culminates in Chapter 4 with the observation that radical conflicts are emblematised by artificial lighting, but that the technology which seems to intensify such oppositions is mastered and resolved into forms of power and beauty.

Evidently, at the time that gas lighting was prevalent the public was receptive to depictions of modernity. Nicholas Daly, in *Literature, Technology, and Modernity: 1860-2000* (2004), writes that in melodrama in the second half of the nineteenth century:

modernity is often rendered particularly *visible*. [...] Not only did audiences want dramas of contemporary urban life, they demanded to see the very artefacts of modernity, or as close a representation as was possible. As one critic remarked [...] they “would applaud a real gas light louder and longer than they would a sea-scene painted by Stanfield”.¹³⁸

The public wanted art to reference the technological advances of the time. But Wharton, James and Eliot did more than respond to public demand. Their writing reveals the evolution of attitudes to artificial light. Direct references to artificial light assist in the communication of themes and emotions central to their stories, such as narrative images of unfulfillment. Lighting technology is their subject, but it is also integral to their style since it contributes to thematic concepts and shapes the content of their fictions. As the thesis progresses, my study will shift from the impact of electric light on content to its implications as an embodiment of its message. Gaslight marked the beginning of a phase of literary innovation in which artificial light became the light of style itself. But

¹³⁵ Harriet Monroe, ‘A Scientist’s Challenge’, *Poetry*, 15. 3 (1919) 149-152 (p. 149).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

¹³⁸ Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity: 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 13.

for now we shall continue to explore how artificial lighting contributed to narrative content as electric light became more prevalent. Therefore, Chapter 2 analyses the treatment of electric lighting, with special attention paid to its fundamental duality, in novels by Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Henry Miller.

Chapter 2

Communicating Unfulfillment Through the Medium of Electric Light

‘looking with a puzzled expression at the electric-light bulb that hung from the ceiling, or perhaps through it, to the stars above.’¹

- Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (1915)

The previous chapter identified the unique literary function of early twentieth-century artificial lighting to hold in balance, with supreme symbolic and metaphoric efficacy, certain radical polarities. Lighting technology offered a multi-faceted vessel with which writers could begin to contain the chaos of the time. In order to show how this balancing of binaries continued in conjunction with the spread of electric lighting, this chapter will scrutinise the treatments of electric lighting, in domestic and street settings, in the novels *The Custom of the Country* (1913) and *A Son at the Front* (1923) by Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel *Tender is the Night* (1934) and short story ‘Babylon Revisited’ (1931) and Henry Miller’s novel *Tropic of Cancer* (1934), with supporting evidence from Ford Madox Ford and Wyndham Lewis. I chose one Henry Miller text only because *Tropic of Cancer* is Miller’s only novel entirely set in Paris in the relevant period. *Black Spring* (1936), the novel he wrote between *Tropic of Cancer* and *Tropic of Capricorn*, does contain a short chapter set in Paris which acknowledges the city’s ‘gem-like’ electric beauty and the ‘incandescent lace and froth of the electric night’.² In both books, articulations of versions of electric light act as linguistic figures for Paris itself. Miller presents electric light as one of Paris’ dominant characteristics and he picks out the effects of electricity with a frequency that does not apply to his New York passages. But the Paris section of *Black Spring* is only part of that largely Brooklyn-based work. In contrast, *Tropic of Cancer* is richly laden with images of artificially lit Paris, which impact upon its content and style with extensive thematic consistency.

John Fletcher and Malcom Bradbury write in this vein in their claim that the ‘aesthetic concerns of the early moderns’ comprised of the tension between the

¹ Ford Madox Ford, *The Good Soldier* (London: Everyman’s Library, [1915] 1991), p. 112.

² Henry Miller, *Black Spring* (St Albans: Panther, [1936] 1974), pp. 164, 168.

celebration of form and the challenge of making an authoritative reality in fiction.³ It is in the realm of experimental writing that the dichotomy between form and content can be explored productively. Therefore, in response to an increasing lack of certainty about matters outside the self, novelists exercised an inward-looking analysis of states of consciousness. As a consequence, structures and systems of art began to replace traditional theological and moral ones. Self-analysis in the modernist novel, according to Fletcher and Bradbury, resulted in ‘an art that does not *report* the world, but *creates* it.’⁴ In this way, the modernist novel is like an electric lamp: both are modern constructs of human ingenuity which illuminate things beyond their own material/textual form, showing the world in a new kind of light. Both the modern novel and the electric lamp raise questions of similarity and difference with their forebears. Simply put, the modernist novel creates a reality in ways which mark it apart from nineteenth-century versions, but which frequently involve calculated references to its literary heritage. As Frank Kermode said about art: ‘If it is communication it is inescapably related to something older than itself.’⁵ Equally, electrical light, though radically different from its predecessors, affirms a ‘relation of complementarity with the past’, simultaneously replacing and evoking the figurative light of God and the natural light of the sun, moon and stars.⁶ This is important because of the complementarity between artificial light and modern living. As Jonathan Crary argues in *24/7*, modernity is not an utterly transformed state, but the ‘dissonant experience of living intermittently within modernized spaces and speeds, and yet simultaneously inhabiting the remnants of pre-capitalist life worlds’.⁷ Therefore, the deployment of electric light in modernist novels, I argue, functions as a highly effective way of symbolising the new world in which art both accepted and rejected past structures and systems, all the while striving to construct its own dynamic, free-flowing structures.

According to Fletcher and Bradbury, in the early twentieth century, the modern novel hung ‘on the border between the memetic and the autotelic species of literature, between an art made by imitating things outside itself, and an art that is an internally

³ Fletcher and Bradbury, ‘The Introverted Novel’, in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature*, p. 395.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 396.

⁵ Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*, p. 102.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷ Jonathan Crary, *24/7* (London: Verso, 2013), p. 66.

coherent making.’⁸ Thinking about these ‘species of literature’ helps to locate the interactions with lighting of Wharton, Fitzgerald and Miller on a sort of scale; at one end Wharton’s narrator’s references to artificial lighting contribute metaphorically to the chronicle of the lives of characters distinctly separate from the narrator, in the middle Fitzgerald’s reference to artificial lighting communicate arguably autobiographical experiences and aid the revelation of his main characters’ psychogenic dimensions, and at the other end is Miller’s autotelic novel, in which the city lights impact directly on the energy, content and form of certain scenes. I trace the journey from one literary mode to the other, beginning with Wharton and ending with Miller, to demonstrate that electric light was important not only to Fitzgerald, Miller and also Lewis (whose works operate as an internal psychoanalytic reality) but also to Wharton, who took more a traditional approach to narrative. In each of the works addressed, lighting operates on a symbolic and metaphorical level, but it also contributes to plot, characterisation, and cultural analysis. However, just as it is essential to resist a view of modernism as characterised only by irreverence for convention, I hope to show that modern electric lighting permeated a broad range of modernist literary styles making it a mobile rather than fixed trope. The breadth of my case studies does however reveal a common trend amongst novelists with contrasting styles towards using images of electric light to figure a particular range of emotional and psychological states.

In his clarion call for research into how electric light relates to early twentieth-century literature, Tim Armstrong contends that the metaphorical value of electric light lies in the associations between the utilities and grids which supported it and ‘the means through which desire and motivation are articulated and transmitted.’⁹ In response to Armstrong’s identification of parallels between the wiring that connects a house to the world and ‘the wiring of individual bodies, and the way in which states of attraction, animation, incandescence are figured’, this chapter identifies expressions of active desire present in the language of electricity.¹⁰ For instance, I identify the alliance of electrical networks to feelings of desire in memorable images of light switches, the ‘electric response’ of sexual chemistry, aspirational interior lighting design, the artificial illumination of a beautiful woman, and the attractions of Paris-by-night.¹¹ However,

⁸ Fletcher and Bradbury, ‘The Introverted Novel’, in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature*, p. 401.

⁹ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 21.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (London: Alma, 2011), p. 26.

my research also suggests an opposing trend which correlates electric lighting as much to isolation, emotional voids, death, madness and oblivion as it does to desire and compulsion. This discovery proves that electric light communicates seeming contradictions, such as the ways in which individuals are both impelled towards and isolated from others. Certainly, in novels by the six writers discussed here, electric light is as much representative of frustrated desire, inertia or loss of self, as it is of, what Armstrong identifies as, the ‘flow of desire in an electric world’.¹² One reason for this difference between my findings and Armstrong’s is that although the voids I identify are figured in electrical terms, those terms relate to light-emitting appliances such as individual lamps and burners (and their visual effects as perceived by the characters in the novels), rather than to far-reaching circuits, wiring or grids. I do not disagree that electrical networks provide a symbolic replication of human energy and desire, and yet my research indicates that modernist literary references to actual light emitting devices have a rather different impact.

Growing networks of electrical technology, to which the turn of the century bore witness, do provide a context for feelings of unfulfillment. They introduced the concept of globalisation, the corollary of which might have been experienced as a new sense of personal insignificance. As John Berger expressed in his article ‘The Moment of Cubism’ (1967), ‘during the first decade of this century a transformed world became theoretically possible and the necessary forces of change could already be recognised as existing.’¹³ The principal necessary and existing force was electricity. Grids of electrical transmission (such as the telegraph) propelled modern citizens into a world in which the social and the individual body would become intimately related. The dominant characteristic of that transformed world would be shared experiences resulting in a new kind of ‘unity’, described in 1964 by the radical media theorist Marshall McLuhan as ‘the extensions of man’ in an electrical age.¹⁴ The unifying developments of the era included shared technologies, exposure to surveillance, anxieties, changed working patterns, the contraction of distances by the telephone, and the new concept of world war, but critics agree that the turning point was electric technology. In ‘Understanding Media’ McLuhan looked back on a century of electric technology to consider the social

¹² Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 21.

¹³ John Berger, ‘The Moment of Cubism’, *New Left Review*, 1.42 (1967), 75–94 (p. 93).

¹⁴ Marshall McLuhan, ‘Understanding Media’ in *Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), pp. 149–179.

and psychic implications of these ‘extensions of man’ which position ‘our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned.’¹⁵ In his study of electrical allusions in the creation of aesthetic experiences, Paul Gilmore takes a similar stance and eloquently summarises that as a result of electricity’s links to ‘language and communication and to the socioeconomic changes of industrialisation transforming western Europe and the United States’ it was seen to ‘link the world together’.¹⁶ Wharton, Fitzgerald, and Miller acknowledge that transformed world. By deploying images of electric lighting, which they also recognize are crucial to the exchanges between the individual and the world, these writers confronted the global embrace promised by electrical innovation and represented by commercialised light with depictions of isolation, failure, and emotional unfulfillment.

In ‘Understanding Media’ McLuhan notes that electric light is a medium which ‘shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action’.¹⁷ Accordingly, this chapter argues that Wharton’s, Fitzgerald’s, and Miller’s images of electric light, used to describe death, the obstruction of romantic and familial love, the suppression of creativity and action, and excitement to the state of oblivion and loss of self, imply that these writers were sensitive to the impact of lighting on human behaviour years before McLuhan’s publication. Furthermore, the novels considered here confirm that the presence of electric light in a scene has a far from neutral impact. By contrast, McLuhan argued that ‘electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no ‘content’... For it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium.’¹⁸ While this might have been true of 1960s American society, I argue that Wharton’s, Fitzgerald’s and Miller’s works exemplify ways in which electric light was a communication medium which determined not only human associations and actions, but also communicated a specific range of emotional states. I begin by exploring what lighting signifies in Wharton’s Paris novels. In a broadly chronological fashion, section 2 then considers electric light as communication medium in a novel and short story by Fitzgerald. The last section focusses on a single text of Miller’s: his 1934 novel *Tropic of Cancer*, but with supporting evidence from *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) and *Sextet* (1977). In the

¹⁵ McLuhan, ‘Understanding Media’, p. 149.

¹⁶ Gilmore, *Aesthetic Materialism*, p. 6.

¹⁷ McLuhan, ‘Understanding Media’, p. 152.

¹⁸ Ibid.

conclusion I assess to what extent there was a parallax with regard to images of electricity as one moves deeper into the 1930s and as the novel moved further away from conventional narrative form.

I. Edith Wharton

The Custom of the Country

Chapter 1 explained how gaslight represents social forces thwarting the central relationship in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*, whereas this chapter looks at how stifled or absent romantic and maternal love corresponds to electric light in *The Custom of the Country*. However, let us first complete the analysis of light in *The Age of Innocence*. Wharton uses various modes of light at the close of the work. For example, sunlight represents Ellen and Archer's love and gas and electric light his inability to respond to that love, caused by what Hermione Lee describes as Archer's failure to take up 'a bold, sensual quest for knowledge and adventure'.¹⁹ Like the character Halo in *The Gods Arrive*, Ellen is linked to natural light. This is reaffirmed in the novel's coda in which Archer observes the natural splendid 'golden light' of Paris lighting up the quarter in which Ellen now resides and indeed 'that golden light became for him the pervading illumination in which she lived.'²⁰ In addition to these natural sources of light, Wharton employs gas (as previously discussed) and electricity to imply not the flow of desire, but rather the negation of it. Once the daylight has dissipated, the rays of the city's electric street-lamps suddenly signify Archer's lost final opportunity to rekindle the relationship: 'the day was fading into a soft sun-shot haze, pricked here and there by yellow electric light'.²¹ The streets are emptying as a spatial void makes way for an emotional one. The illumination of the electric lights coincides with Archer turning his back on Ellen's apartment as the dipping sun indicates that love is slipping away. According to Hermione Lee, 'Wharton chose unfulfillment for her lovers' and in this novel the atmosphere of loss is communicated through the manipulation of several modes of light and lighting.²²

¹⁹ Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 561.

²⁰ Wharton, *Age of Innocence*, p. 302.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Lee, *Edith Wharton*, p. 581.

The shift from golden Parisian daylight, through twilight, to electric light tells the story of love, both love lost and love denied. When only electric light illuminates the night, Archer finds himself alone. Therefore, electric light in *The Age of Innocence* is connected to loss. The literary alliance of electric light with variants of unfulfillment in American Paris writing became increasingly entrenched as comprehensive electric light developed. However, let us first go back to 1913 and investigate how Wharton's incorporation of very early forms of domestic electric light in *The Custom of the Country* contribute to her characterisation of emotionally bankrupt individuals and her communication of themes of social and cultural change.

The novel's central character, Undine Spragg, has a wealthy aristocratic French husband called Raymond who lets his most desirable property to his brother's American father in law 'on the understanding that he puts electric light and heating into the whole hôtel.'²³ The novel is set at a time when electric lighting was an 'indicator of wealth.'²⁴ Before the 1920s good-quality domestic lighting was not the norm and, certainly in 1913, different types of fuel had had different class associations with electric light being distinctly aspirational. Undine is enraged that the prestigious property, enhanced with glamorous electric lighting, will not be her own marital home. In this way electric lights do represent the flow of Undine's social desire in an electric world, for the addition of electric light to a property was the epitome of style and sophistication. However, at the same time, artificial lighting as an indicator of social aspiration and cultural change proves integral to Wharton's expression of Undine's inability to love.

Wharton witnessed a series of crucial developments in various technologies which she incorporated into her work as historical markers. For example, Raymond embraces technological improvements, while his elderly mother still uses oil lamps. We are told that 'the family grouped itself around the ground-glass of her single carcel lamp.'²⁵ That Undine detests this out-moded society reveals her ambition. Therefore, in addition to making the story current, Wharton's references are integral to character development. By the end of the story, the carcel lamp is replaced by Undine's 'illuminated ball-room' and the doting family swapped for the poignant image of her lonely son.²⁶ After her divorce from Raymond, Undine determines to procure certain

²³ Edith Wharton, *The Custom of the Country* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1913] 1995), p. 314.

²⁴ Dillon, p. 18.

²⁵ Wharton, *Custom*, p. 325.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

tapestries belonging to the Marquise (alluded to by the phrase ‘tapestried four-poster’). When Undine’s new husband manages to procure the valuable tapestries for their Paris home, she uses electric light to show them off. Even in the most affluent areas, it was unusual for a domestic property to have electric light at this time. However, Wharton makes clear that Undine and Moffatt’s new home does contain ‘pink-shaded’ electric lamps.²⁷

Gas lighting was ‘not favoured by the aristocracy, who were concerned about the damage caused to furniture and fittings from the by-products of gas lighting and the fact that its use had associations with trade.’²⁸ As such, Undine’s use of electric light might have been motivated to safeguard the tapestries. However, it is equally likely that she disliked gas for its links to commodities and to the extended hours of illumination for manual or mechanical work. Thorstein Veblen’s economic treatise *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) provides further explanation as to why the upper classes wanted to distance themselves from gaslight and its associations with the working classes: ‘Abstention from labour is the conventional evidence of wealth and is therefore the conventional mark of social standing; and this insistence on the meritoriousness of wealth leads to a more strenuous insistence on leisure.’²⁹ Until the end of the nineteenth century the overwhelming majority of consumers of gas lighting in England and France were the urban middle classes that Undine wants to distance herself from. Undine is determined to show off the tapestries in full electric glare, with scant regard for their historical value, but with a clear assertion of her new social standing.

Wharton contrasts Undine’s aspirational love of material things and electric light with her inability to love her son Paul. In the ballroom, at the end of the novel, Paul attempts to hold his mother’s hand. She ‘frees’ herself from him in spite of Moffatt saying ‘Can’t you ever give him a minute’s time, Undine?’³⁰ That Undine should give time unconditionally is anathema since she gives nothing for free. Time, in the electrified world, has distinct commercial value. Incapable of unconditional love, Undine adores electric light because of what it can do for her. For example, Wharton depicts numerous occasions where Undine relishes her appearance or reflection in

²⁷ Ibid., p. 364.

²⁸ Dillon, p. 17.

²⁹ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York: Dover, [1899] 1994), p. 26-27.

³⁰ Wharton, *Custom*, p. 369.

radiant artificial domestic lighting.³¹ Undine's love of material things finds its opposite in the absence of maternal affection. The warmth and light of the room, in which 'all the lustres are lit', contrast with the cold treatment she meets out to her loving boy: 'she made no answer, but sailed through the door with her head high, as she did when anything annoyed her; and Paul and his step-father stood alone in the illuminated ball-room.'³² The abundance of light here is the antithesis of the lack of maternal love; Paul's sense of abandonment is in palpable contrast to the room's material and technological excesses. Finally, he sobs in the arms of his step-father, whom we have strong cause to believe will be the only one to ever show the child sincere affection. Wharton seals Paul's fate in this regard by commencing the final scene of the novel with the line: 'The lamps were lit, the vases full of flowers, the footmen assembled on the landing and in the vestibule below when Undine descended to the drawing-room.'³³ Undine is in perpetual movement through the lighting, leaving behind her static son and husband. In this way, electric lighting simultaneously implies abundance and absence, inclusion (into society) and exclusion (from family). These are polarities which gaslight began to hold in balance, but which electric light can even more poignantly offer up because of its image as the ultimate form of modern lighting.

Artificial high-voltage electric light is Undine's pervading illumination. Indeed, 'no radiance was too strong' for her.³⁴ Undine is part of a transforming world to the extent that she embodies the gentrification and electric beatification of the metropolis. Wharton incorporates the cultural and scientific transformations of her time into her writing, thereby differentiating old from new, oil from electric, passé from fashionable. Furthermore, Wharton's references to lighting demonstrate the way Undine presents herself to society. Fierce electric lighting intensifies and satisfies Undine's narcissistic desire to be the cynosure of all eyes. Therefore, lighting is crucial to the exchanges between the individual and the world, whether they are exchanges through which the subject connects with or is distanced from others. The novel suggests that technological advancement runs counter to love and moral purpose. Similarly, Wharton implies a connection between technology and superficiality. The house is a creative and emotional void emphasised by the trickery of artificial light. For example, Undine's

³¹ Ibid., pp. 67, 188.

³² Wharton, *Custom*, p. 369.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 67.

Parisian bedroom is filled with ‘artful mirrors and veiled lamps’. Paul reaches for the luxuriously bound books only to find the book-cases locked because the books are ‘too valuable to be taken down’.³⁵ This is a world where appreciation of art is all surface. Surely, Wharton cannot permit these people to triumph when they read no books? Certainly not. Indeed Undine’s ‘tiny black cloud’ in the final paragraph is art’s triumph over her: it is Wharton’s revelation of Undine’s self-awareness about her inability to be satisfied.³⁶

Thus far I have detailed Wharton’s deployment of electric light to signify emotionally bankrupt individuals and to fictionalise unfulfilled love, superficiality, and absent maternal feeling. Electric lighting is also a historical marker. The following observation by Aron Worth applies to lighting just as much as to telephones. He contends that communication technologies ‘function as carefully placed historical markers, particularly in the consciously retrospective *The Age of Innocence*.’³⁷ In this respect, Wharton’s 1870s characters, with their nineteenth-century values, joke about the ‘fantastic possibility’ of ‘talking along a wire’ (which Worth’s study concentrates on), but they also envision ‘lighting by electricity’.³⁸ In *The Gods Arrive*, which depicts Paris in the 1920s, that dream has come true, but electric lamps are still so novel as to warrant identification: ‘Electric lamps dangling in uncertain garlands lit up a dinner-table’.³⁹ Wharton’s exploration of the symbolic potential of electric lighting indicates her acute awareness of its capacity to communicate so much more than mere historical detail. For example, from 1914 electric light, as metaphorical source, would begin to represent war. Wharton explores fresh associations between electric light, war and death in her 1923 novel *A Son at the Front*.

A Son at the Front

Close analysis of Wharton’s references to electric light permits exegesis of specific portions of the text but also its whole. On the surface it appears that artificial light serves the practical purpose of directing the reader to an item or event. For example, the

³⁵ Ibid., p. 363.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 372.

³⁷ Worth, p. 96.

³⁸ Wharton, *Age of Innocence*, p. 127, 242.

³⁹ Wharton, *Gods Arrive*, p. 128.

light in the rooms at the Hotel Crillon directs Campton's attention to his son's '*livret militaire*.'⁴⁰ The book acts as an omen for the death of countless boys. However, with this dramatic technique clearly established, Wharton then uses the room's lighting to highlight broader themes of powerless parental love in the face of the devastation of World War I. The light guides Campton's artistic eye to 'the young face on the pillow'.⁴¹ Campton 'began to draw, eagerly but deliberately, fascinated by the happy accident of the lighting, and of the boy's position.'⁴² He considers the scene before him:

'Like a statue of a young knight I've seen somewhere,' he said to himself [...]
What he had really thought was: 'Like the effigy of a young knight' – though he
had instinctively changed the word as it formed itself...It was the clinging sheet,
no doubt, that gave him that look . . . and the white glare of the electric burner.'⁴³

The previous chapter made clear that the lights in the Hotel Crillon were highly likely to have been gas at the time the novel is set. Interestingly, Wharton states that the interior is lit by an electric burner. Whether or not this is a deviation from the reality, it confirms Wharton's selection of a specific light emitting item for its particular effect. The quality of the white electric light from the burner evokes mortality and foreboding, but importantly it also connotes modernised combat. Wharton's words 'white glare of the electric burner' imply an unfamiliar type of intensity and pain in an electric world. The burner's glare is completely different from the reverential or spiritual atmosphere that candlelight might have created. It is also far more evocative of the present than gaslight, and so the premonition of George's death is figured in the most modern of technological terms.

Electric light appears to lend itself to the symbolising of negation and loss more than any other form of light. This might be because, unlike intimate forms of lighting such as candles and oil lamps which created a communal contemplative aura by gathering people together, electric lamps generated an impersonal brightness. The concept of impersonality is central to the effect Wharton achieves via 'the white glare of the electric burner'; the visual qualities of electric light combined with its technological

⁴⁰ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 30.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

efficiency and operational simplicity make it the appropriate light for Wharton's criticism of society in which human life is only valuable as far as it is politically useful. Further, electric light's quintessential newness evokes the threat of a new concept of *world* war, the first ever mass conflict. In turn, both these new modes – of lighting and war – create a new kind of impersonal globalisation.

Wharton constructs a precise and deathly concentration of the novel's anti-war themes in the form of an electrically illuminated omen, which neither the reader nor Campton can ignore. Wharton achieves this first by associating George with chivalry (a code which has love of one's country and the defeat of injustice at its core). This 'effigy' of George tells us that he is precisely the kind of young man who will enlist and die. George's sleeping form so typifies sculptures of the dead that he represents all soldiers defending good who are killed in battle. As Campton's pencil stops the penny drops: if it is not George who will soon be dead, many other thousands like him will. Wharton then juxtaposes medieval ideals with the technologised language of 1914. The jarring proximity of these references translates the shock of war and the sudden realisation of the dangers that technological advancement can bring. Simultaneously, 'clinging' and 'burn' foretell the horrors of trench-life and early chemical weapons. Wharton's powerful meshing together of language and imagery is illuminated by the uncomfortable glare so frequently linked to electric light. The glare symbolises the unavoidable truth of war which Campton knows he has to acknowledge. He throws down his sketch book at the moment of that unpleasant realisation; denial is now impossible. Whereas I will address the episode's epiphanic qualities in greater detail in Chapter 4, the key point here is the suggestion that electric technology is a destructive force and that the 'electric burner', symbolizing futurity and death, seals George's fate. Refusing to look at the white glare of the future any longer, Campton 'turned out the sitting room lights'.⁴⁴

Wharton was not the only novelist to connect electric light to death. In a similar fashion, electric light illuminates a suicide in Ford Madox Ford's *The Good Soldier* (1915). Florence drinks a phial of poison and arranges herself on the bed 'looking with a puzzled expression at the electric-light bulb that hung from the ceiling, or perhaps through it, to the stars above.'⁴⁵ Florence is in love with Captain Ashburnham but, seeing him in deep conversation with his young ward Nancy, she rightly suspects him of

⁴⁴ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 32.

⁴⁵ Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 112.

loving her. Florence also has reason to believe that her husband John wants a divorce. Ford lights this scene of desperation electrically. Rejected and alone Florence takes her life, but Ford suggests that in her dying moments she looks beyond the confines of the man-made environment to the stars beyond. Ford suggests that one might look through artificiality in order to better make sense of one's place in the natural world. By referring to the light bulb, Ford refuses to let electric light escape our attention; he uses it as a communication medium or an intervening image to create an effect of utter loss. Electric light's lack of 'content' is precisely why Florence can look through it, but lack of content does not mean a lack of implications. Indeed, Ford implies that the presence of electric light has in some way contributed to her destruction. This concept of looking through modern technology 'to the stars above' is present in the work of Henry Miller and so we will return to it in the third section. However, for now the point to register is that in the literature of the first years of the Great War, electric light emerges as the appropriate way to light scenes of terrible emptiness.

A physical emptying of Paris was also taking place at this time. At night, many street lamps were extinguished or painted blue. Wharton, who lived in Paris at the time and carried out charitable work at the Front, describes the throngs of pedestrians:

This mass moved slowly and vaguely, swaying this way and that, as though it awaited a portent from the heavens. In the glare of electric lamps and glittering theatre-fronts the innumerable faces stood out vividly, grave, intent, slightly bewildered.⁴⁶

This electric glare recalls the 'white glare of the electric burner' above and suggests that impersonal lighting is the correct setting for inhuman behaviour. The men move in a trance, devoid of feeling or cognition. Furthermore, the word 'grave' implies the absence of life itself. Electric light is the pervading illumination of the automaton, of the walking dead or unthinking individual.⁴⁷ Wharton's novels depict technology-induced mental stupor. Such associations between catatonia and modernity echo the associations between depression and electricity in Edward Hopper's painting *Automat* (1927) (Figure 5). In Hopper's piece, the reflection of an infinite number of interior electric

⁴⁶ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 44.

⁴⁷ This is also evident in *The Gods Arrive*, when Vance visits Le Train Bleu and sees 'a crowd of people were eating automatically in a cold glare of light', p. 112.

lamps lights the solitary figure of a young woman who has finished her meal, but is now lost to the inertia of depression. *Time* magazine used *Automat* as its cover for the 28 August 1995 edition, titled: 'Stress, anxiety, depression'.⁴⁸ Evidently, seventy years after it was painted its image of brightly lit modernity paired with psychological isolation remained relevant. On this theme, the next section will show that F. Scott Fitzgerald also set depictions of mental instability in electric light, implying that lack of self-hood is characteristic of the technologised world.

Electrical technology ostensibly brought people together enabling 'the extensions of man' that McLuhan identified. Yet, so often electric light illuminates gaps rather than connections; it contributes to depictions of vacuums, be they artistic, emotional, moral, the absence of free will or of life itself, prefiguring perhaps the disconnect at the heart of the continuous connectedness which social media makes happen. Domestic and urban lighting became scaled down emblems for these sentiments in the works of many other writers who visited Paris before and after the First World War. One such novelist, who took great care in his reference to lighting in order to express psychological fragility, was F. Scott Fitzgerald. I now look at two of his works in which electric light is central to the depictions of human experience of the world after the Great War.

II. F. Scott Fitzgerald *Tender is the Night*

The title of *Tender is the Night* (1934) is taken from 'Ode to a Nightingale' (1819) by John Keats (1795–1821). Fitzgerald also used the following lines as an epigraph:

Already with thee! tender is the night,
But here there is no light,
Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Time* (28 August 1995), <<http://content.time.com/time/covers/0,16641,19950828,00.html>> [accessed 13 October 2014]

⁴⁹ John Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*, in F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night* (London: Penguin, 1997), Epigraph, np.

In so many ways these few lines introduce important themes of ecstasy, self-destruction, dissipation, transience and instability. Through Keats's edited words, Fitzgerald introduces the idea of paring the fragile dark with the subconscious of his characters represented by light which penetrates the dark in a 'winding' and haphazard way. References to the workings of the mind are both overt and subtle in the novel. First, Fitzgerald's protagonist is a psychiatrist. In addition, the constant images of fragile darkness penetrated by various forms of light are a metaphor for the way many of Dick's subconscious anxieties manifest themselves. Keats's poem implies that night (like happiness) is restorative, but also tender and fragile because of the way it is fractured by light. For Keats this was natural light, but in the hands of Fitzgerald it can be both natural and artificial. We shall see how madness is like light blown or flashing through darkness. Keats's poem prepares the reader for Fitzgerald's themes that have strong links with electric lighting in the literature of the era. With great intricacy, Fitzgerald moves Keats's images of light into the contemporary world by incorporating the very latest lighting technology.

The novel is set in 1925, when Paris hosted the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. The exhibition, dedicated to the display of modern decorative arts, 'had an immediate and worldwide impact.'⁵⁰ By night, the city's landmarks were ablaze with light and the Eiffel Tower bore the illuminated Citroën logo. 'Two hundred thousand bulbs of six different colours were attached to wooden panels with six hundred kilometres of electric wire, spelling out CITROËN in letters thirty meters high.'⁵¹ The Tower was transformed into a giant advertisement for twentieth-century consumerism. The spectacle of Citroën's advertising, which marked the opening of the exhibition, will be fully described in the third section of this chapter. However, for now it is necessary to appreciate that Fitzgerald sets his novel against this backdrop of Paris at its most modern and most illuminated.

The 300-metre high advertisement glorified the unification of electric light and consumerism. Conversely, the novel is not a celebration of materialism and wealth, nor does it offer a hopeful vision of an electrified future. With the First World War fresh in the characters' memories, the novel is weighed down by that universal loss. The future

⁵⁰ 'Art Deco: 1910-1939', V&A, <<http://www.vam.ac.uk/content/articles/a/the-1925-paris-exhibition/>> [accessed 16 September 2014]

⁵¹ Vincent Cronin, *Paris City of Light: 1900 – 1939* (London: Harper Collins, 1994), p. 158.

does not hold much promise either. A vision of the future appears when Dick and his young admirer Rosemary attend a party in a Parisian house. Fitzgerald manipulates the language of the exhibitions to criticize a self-consciously modern crowd. The tea party, which Dick and Rosemary attend reluctantly, is held in a house which has nothing of the past or present in it, but which ‘seemed rather to enclose the future so that it was an electric-like shock, a definite nervous experience [...] to cross that threshold’.⁵² Fitzgerald invokes electricity as a form of torture or psychiatric treatment to convey the characters’ discomfort in this futuristic environment. This shocking exposition-version of the future, makes Dick anxious thereby implying that he will struggle to adjust to the changing world.

Fitzgerald evokes electrical current rather than light in the passages above. His description of the room calls up an image from the Exhibition of 1900: ‘to exist in it was as difficult as walking on a highly polished moving stairway’.⁵³ The 1900 exhibition had boasted a ground-breaking electric *trottoir roulant*. That electric walkway was not a dangerous polished moving stairway but, nonetheless, Fitzgerald uses an established image of progress to express the couple’s instability. This destabilizing effect is enhanced with images of motion in which physical movement is tied to time travel: ‘They left immediately, moving over the brief threshold of the future to the sudden past of the stone façade without.’⁵⁴ In this world technology is consistently threatening. Dick and Rosemary are only free to be lovers in the fleeting privacy of a taxi journey: ‘lovers now, they fell ravenously on the quick seconds while outside the taxi windows the green-and-cream twilight faded, and the fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs began to shine smokily through the tranquil rain.’⁵⁵ These electrically-powered neon advertising signs are warnings, rich in metaphorical value. They signify a technologised present full of potential, since in 1925 they represented up-to-date technology (red-and-blue neon lighting had graced the entrance of the Paris Opera House since 1919 and many colours were achievable with specialist coatings), but they also signify danger (‘fire’), toxicity (‘gas’), and death (‘ghost’). These images enact semiotics by using signs as symbols to communicate Dick’s psyche. The signs are less a warning that this relationship is doomed, than an indicator to the reader rather that

⁵² F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, p. 66.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Dick's 'youthful sense of life's infinite possibilities' is fading.⁵⁶ Throughout the novel, electricity and electric light gradually confirm their kinship with depression and hopelessness. Dick's isolation from people and progress, his encounters with death, and the increasing meaninglessness of his actions comprise an intricate depiction of an existential breakdown. The literary presentation of each of these strands of existential depression is facilitated, to some extent, by reference to electric light or electrification. In 'The Moralism of the Later Fitzgerald' Kent and Gretchen Kreuter describe one of the main thrusts in the last decade of Fitzgerald's writing as 'failure and non-fulfillment'.⁵⁷ In *Tender is the Night* Fitzgerald manipulates electricity as a literary trope for precisely that.

Interestingly, the above passage from *Tender is the Night* employs, almost verbatim, a phrase from the short Parisian story 'Babylon Revisited' (1931): 'Outside, the fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green signs shone smokily through the tranquil rain. It was late afternoon and the streets were in movement; the bistros gleamed'.⁵⁸ Fitzgerald was accustomed to revisiting things. Through this combination of romanticism and realism, Fitzgerald's illuminated signs imply the enticing allures of modernity together with the haunting quality of the past, which is alive in the reader's and the recovering alcoholic Charlie's imaginations. Tracing presentments of artificial light reveals Fitzgerald's spheres of realism and romanticism. For example, references to lighting and signs are indicators of social transformation and historical markers. At the same time, displays of modernity are ominously beautiful. John Kuehl is of the view that *Tender is the Night* is typical of American novels of the period, which concern themselves with 'man's relation to his environment'.⁵⁹ In both texts the protagonist's interaction with the world follows a tragic patterning of hope, limitation and ultimately unfulfillment. Fitzgerald's references to lighting support his depiction of that relation raising questions about the degree to which technology affects our well-being. Is it culpable in our dissipation and failure, neutral, or merely decorative (both in literary and literal terms)? These are

⁵⁶ William Brevda, *Signs of the Signs: The Literary Lights of Incandescence and Neon* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2011), p. 37.

⁵⁷ Kent and Gretchen Kreuter, 'The Moralism of the Later Fitzgerald', in *Tender is the Night: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Marvin J. LaHood (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1969), pp. 4–60 (p. 49).

⁵⁸ F. Scott Fitzgerald, 'Babylon Revisited', in *The Collected Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 205–223 (p. 206).

⁵⁹ John Kuehl, 'Scott Fitzgerald: Romantic and Realist', in *Tender is the Night: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Marvin J. LaHood, pp. 1–19 (p. 8).

questions raised but not answered by Fitzgerald's novel. Taking 'fire-red, gas-blue, ghost-green' as a starting point, illustrates that for Fitzgerald, the medium is the message: the light from the illegible signs, like McLuhan's electric light without content, communicates the message that these are psychological texts connected firmly to reality and human experience in the modern landscape. Pursuant to the conclusion to Chapter 1, electric light is the perfect trope for the contradictions and tensions characteristic of the period in which Fitzgerald is writing. The lighting effects of electricity fuel the imagination, they stimulate creativity, enhance beauty, and stir one's emotions. However, electric light, as one of the greatest achievements of the scientific age, also represents scientific rationalisation, order and the 'extensions of man' discussed at the beginning of this chapter.

This contrast between excitement and order is one of the many contradictions that literature and lighting manage to bring together in one holding space in which to contain the chaos of the time. Further contradictions abound in *Tender is the Night* in which electric light signifies both beauty and mental illness. Dick's schizophrenic wife Nicole is as fractured by light as she is by illness: 'Miss Warren emerged first in glimpses and then sharply when she saw him; as she crossed the threshold her face caught the room's light and brought it outside with her.'⁶⁰ Later in time, though earlier on in the novel, she exits a scene by disappearing 'between the intersecting planes made by lobby lights of the glass doors'.⁶¹ She is the breeze of heaven blowing in light, but this light is quite different from Keats's natural star and moonlight. Nicole appears in glimpses, emerges fully between shadows and light and then possesses the light. In the gleam of an electric arc lamp, Nicole is undoubtedly beautiful:

her face lighting up like an angel's when they came into the range of a roadside arc. [...] Her hair drawn back off her ears brushed her shoulders in such a way that the face seemed to have just emerged from it, as if this were the exact moment when she was coming from a wood into clear moonlight.⁶²

⁶⁰ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, p. 123.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁶² Ibid., p. 124. The roadside arc was an electric carbon lamp first invented in 1876 by Pavel Yablochkov and later improved in 1893.

Dick's relation to his environment, in particular his attraction to Nicole, is affected by lighting. In his chapter on 'Signlight and Moonlight' in *Signs of the Signs*, William Brevda identifies the importance of the way sign-light turns into moonlight on the canvas of Gloria's face in *The Beautiful and the Damned*: 'the urban pastoral created by signlight represents the beauty of illusion, the swan song of fatal desire.'⁶³ In this typical Fitzgerald gesture, the illusion of Nicole's beauty is so powerful that it transforms electric light into moonlight, when it is in fact man-made. Nicole's beauty is a form of sorcery and Dick's love for her is fatal because her mental instability will destroy their marriage and Dick's hopes for the future.

One can identify parallels between the electric world in which Fitzgerald's characters exist and Tim Armstrong's identification of the 'flow of desire in an electric world'. As we have seen above, Fitzgerald manipulates the metaphorical potency of street lamps; they are the accomplice to 'fatal desire'. There exists a symbolic relation between electric light and lack of control and judgment in *Tender is the Night*. It is as though the flow of electrical energy illuminating the lamps escalates catastrophe or is, at the very least, symbiotic with the flow of human desire. Therefore, Fitzgerald appears to imply that, with regard to human tragedy, technology is culpable.

The figurative references to searchlights represent another type of void in the novel. When their marriage is collapsing, Nicole checks on Dick in bed: 'Upstairs again she looked into his room – the blue eyes, like searchlights, played on a dark sky.'⁶⁴ It is unclear whose eyes these are, but we assume they are Dick's. Searchlights, not having the power of sight, render him strangely blind. Similarities can be drawn with *The Good Soldier*. In both novels, searchlights embody lack of understanding and hope. Dick's sense of emptiness and unfulfillment is palpable. While searchlights should extend our abilities of sight, Dick's search for understanding is futile. There are several examples of 1930s fiction in which searchlights denote anxiety. For example, Hemingway's *Farewell to Arms* implies a tension between sleep and artificial light which will be further explored in Section III. It is interesting to note also that Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) describes the prosthetic quality of searchlights and the paradox that they embody, to which I return in the Conclusion.⁶⁵ These similarities between *The Good Soldier*, *Farewell to Arms*, *Nightwood* and *Tender is the Night* show the

⁶³ Brevda, *Signs of the Signs*, p. 51.

⁶⁴ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, p. 255.

⁶⁵ Djuna Barnes, *Nightwood* (London: Faber and Faber, [1936] 2007), p. 83.

consistency with which electric lighting devices are depicted as the impersonal illuminant of hopelessness in the work of a wide range of writers across the early modernist movement.

Just as searchlights serve an aesthetic purpose in the literature of, and just after, the First World War, the figurative use of electric light switches also deserves attention. As Dick's marriage crumbles, he starts hearing internal ironic laughter, particularly when he encounters stupidity or the immorality of the wealthy. The internal laughter implies madness. In the following excerpt he can still control his thoughts and mania, and he does so as if with a light switch:

His glance fell soft and kind upon hers, suggesting an emotion underneath; their glances married suddenly, bedded, strained together. Then, as the laughter inside of him became so loud that it seemed as if Mary must hear it, Dick switched off the light and they were back in the Riviera sun.⁶⁶

The effect is synesthesia because, as the laughter intensifies, Fitzgerald suggests a visual experience for Dick. Fitzgerald employs artificial light to question reality from a psychoanalytical perspective. Dick can just about manage his internal reality, lit by a figurative electric light, while the Riviera sun represents the relative sanctity of his external reality. This passage exemplifies Armstrong's description of modernist texts as 'electrical, plugging into a scientific rhetoric which channels flows of energy and information.'⁶⁷ For now at least, Dick still has his hand on the switch.

Remarkably similar electric rhetoric can be found in the earlier novel *Tarr* (1918) by Wyndham Lewis. While trying to end his relationship with Bertha, Tarr breaks into a fit of illogical laughter during their discussion and cannot stem his 'reluctant mirth'.⁶⁸ Tarr is disgusted at the 'electric rush' of his own 'clattering sound'.⁶⁹ Dick's psychic electric light and Tarr's 'electric rush' are examples of the ways new technologies flowed into the language of novels of the time. The combination of excitement and anxiety those new technologies stimulated in people are present in Dick and Tarr's manic behaviour. Both Lewis and Fitzgerald therefore exemplify the

⁶⁶ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, p. 288.

⁶⁷ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 19.

⁶⁸ Lewis, *Tarr*, p. 56.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

correlation between electricity and human energy that Armstrong identifies. In *Tarr and Tender is the Night* that energy can be dangerously manic, in fact electrification is established as a literary metaphor for mental imbalance. Taking a comparative perspective here reveals how, in their exploration of mental conditions, both writers use electric imagery to depict conflicting impulses. In summary, electrified illumination in *Tender is the Night* emerges as a literary device for expressing two things: loss of selfhood and the contradictions inherent in human existence. Thus, lighting functions as an intensifier of certain psychological conditions ranging from depression to excitement, inertia to frenzy, all the while implying cultural commentary on the impact of modernisation on the human psyche.

‘Babylon Revisited’

The oppositional states of pleasure and anxiety are combined in Fitzgerald’s short story ‘Babylon Revisited’. The story, first published in the *Saturday Evening Post* in 1931, concerns a recovering alcoholic who returns to Paris after the start of the depression. The past haunts Charlie, whose sister-in-law is looking after his daughter Honoria following the death of his wife. Charlie habitually seeks out his past, recalling the city’s sensual pleasures by taking a drink at the Ritz. Ignoring the implicit warnings in ‘fire’, ‘gas’ and ‘ghost’ discussed above, Charlie ‘wanted to see the blue hour spread over the magnificent façade’ of l’Opéra.⁷⁰ Paris’ haunting appeal (exemplified by its lighting) and the story’s message of loss and regret are bound together. This is clear from Charlie’s wish ‘to see Paris by night with clearer and more judicious eyes than those of other days.’⁷¹ Such curiosity is dangerous.

Lighted doors inform Charlie which bars are still open. Even if the reader does not recall T. S. Eliot’s ‘Rhapsody on a Windy Night’, which linked illuminated doorways with devious grins, the sense that Charlie is taking risks is clear. Fitzgerald gradually intensifies the artificial light which pulls Charlie towards inescapable self-destruction. First, a single lighted door reminds him harmlessly of nights at Bricktop’s;

⁷⁰ F. Scott Fitzgerald, ‘Babylon Revisited’, in *The Collected Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 205-223 (p. 206). It should be noted that l’Opéra was one of the first streets lit with electricity in 1878.

⁷¹ Fitzgerald, ‘Babylon Revisited’, p. 208.

‘then there was more light’ and he passes the ‘two great mouths of the Café of Heaven and the Café of Hell’.⁷² Intense glamorous lighting in its beautiful abundance appears to threaten Charlie’s stability and self-hood to the extent that he understands now what the word ‘dissipate’ means.⁷³ This sense of dissipation in an electrified world was not the sole domain of writers, but interested 1930s painters also. For instance, English painter Edward Burra’s *Izzy Orts* (1937) painted six years after the publication of this short story, is an electrically-lit depiction of a bar in Boston (Figure 6). In the foreground, a sailor’s iris-less white eyes suggest zombie-like detachment. In Burra’s painting powerful electric ceiling lamps light up a bizarre blend of social activity and impersonality, similar to that of Charlie’s former social life. Charlie admits to being drawn to the promise of a void where nothing matters: ‘as an offering to destiny that he might not remember the things most worth remembering, the things that now he would always remember – his child taken from his control, his wife escaped to a grave in Vermont.’⁷⁴ With this in mind, the artificial light is suddenly no longer enticing and he flees from it. Like the gas and electric lights which are the eyes of society in Wharton’s novels, a bright glare forces him to address his poor decisions. Artificial light can therefore evoke both immorality and moral judgement. Light is metaphorically rich; it is a multi-layered, multi-faceted tool which can metaphorize opposites simultaneously or in quick succession.

Charlie does not have custody of his daughter. Artificial domestic light reinforces the painful separation: ‘three children moved intimately about, playing through the yellow oblongs that led to other rooms;’ and while the room is comfortable and cheery, the oblongs of light separate Charlie from the children.⁷⁵ They move away from him to rooms into which he is not invited. The children’s intimacy contrasts with his isolation. This dramatic device indicates separation like a stage direction: his daughter Honoria, the subject of the discussions centre stage, is cleverly lit on the periphery – a visible reminder of the unobtainable. Hana Wirth-Nesher is correct in pointing out that the urban novel frequently includes the observation of an artificially lit event where the observer is in the dark or on the outside of it.⁷⁶ Wirth-Nesher attributes

⁷² Ibid., p. 209.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 207.

⁷⁶ Wirth-Nesher, *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 9.

this to the nature of city living, but I wish to attribute it directly to sophisticated artificial lighting. Artificial light has the ability to show us something we are not a party to and the lighting in this short story intensifies suffering, loss and solitude by making visible that which is unattainable.

Even when the city lights appear reenergising or hopeful, such positivity is mere illusion. Charlie's reaction to street lighting is described using language which might just as well tell of an alcoholic's reaction to his first drink of the day: Charlie 'was still trembling when he reached the street, but a walk down the Rue Bonapart to the *quais* set him up, and as he crossed the Seine, fresh and new by the *quai* lamps, he felt exultant.'⁷⁷ Charlie's exultation is misplaced for the lamps provide false hope; they give him the false confidence of intoxication. In reality Charlie is anxious since he knows his future with his child hangs in the balance. The story ends with familial unfulfillment, which is a characteristic sentiment of Fitzgerald's stories. His narrator does not however blame the lamps, in the end the fault lies with Charlie, who is morally culpable and endeavours to do better. I would like to bring in Ernest Hemingway's Paris text *A Moveable Feast* at this point to show the consistency across the period with which writers tied lighting to loss. The electric lights of Paris and the social amusements and love-making they facilitated were thrilling to visitors to the city. An example of such a visitor is the narrator to Hemingway's novel, but he also observes 'there were always much nicer-looking people that I did not know that, in the evening with the lights just coming on, were hurrying to some place to drink together, to eat together and then to make love.'⁷⁸ The illuminations substantiate his loneliness. Therefore, both Hemingway and Fitzgerald exploit the power of electric lighting to foretell and confirm a character's exclusion.

Fitzgerald mined the metaphorical source of electric lighting to provide thematic continuity and subtle symbolism in *Tender is the Night* and 'Babylon Revisited'. In those stories traditional binary divisions of dark as evil and light as good are manipulated. Lights do not always correspond to glamour and wealth; they also represent death, horror, haunting, shame, and the immorality of wealth. Important observations made by the photographer Brassäi, and quoted by Joachim Schlör, help to contextualise Fitzgerald's short story:

⁷⁷ Fitzgerald, 'Babylon Revisited', p. 217.

⁷⁸ Ernest Hemingway *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1964), p.100.

‘The external appearance of Paris in 1930’, Brassai goes on to say, ‘was no longer at all the same as it had been in 1928...In these two years the atmosphere in Paris had changed.’ He refers to the worldwide economic crises, which had also affected France and ended the period of ‘affluence and carefreeness’. It was not only the external appearance but also the imagery of the Parisian night that had changed.⁷⁹

Charlie observes this change on his return to Paris and as such the images of Paris at night are negative and threatening. As day ends and electric lighting makes its presence felt, it illuminates a world of ephemeral realities, of intoxication and deceitful beauty. Similarly, Ford Madox Ford in *The Good Soldier*, shows electric light to be unreliable: ‘my recollection of that night is only the sort of pinkish effulgence from the electric-lamps in the hotel lounge.’⁸⁰ I make this comparison here to show that modernists demonstrated a shared belief that the fragmented and illusory world could be represented by reference to electric lighting. Fitzgerald and many of his contemporaries suggest that artificial lights, which come on like ‘spasms’ in Fitzgerald’s work, had pathological implications.⁸¹ This is true of Henry Miller’s *Tropic of Cancer*, a novel in which artificial light inveigles to the point of frenzy and even madness, and it is the text to which I turn now.

III. Henry Miller *Tropic of Cancer*

Henry Miller’s description of a writer’s life in Paris is comprised of things seen and ways of seeing, frequently affected by lighting. The narrator’s responses to things seen are habitually conflicted, and often simultaneously comprise anxiety and pleasure. The ability of artificial lighting to hold opposites in balance with supreme symbolic and metaphoric efficacy is one of the major findings of this study. As such I analyse the presence of artificial light in Miller’s text to reveal his conflicting responses to life in

⁷⁹ Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City: Paris, Berlin, London 1840-1930* (London: Reaktion, 1988), p. 276.

⁸⁰ Ford, *The Good Soldier*, p. 101.

⁸¹ Fitzgerald, *Tender is the Night*, p. 235.

the modern city. William Solomon's recognition of 'a contrary impulse that can be traced through Miller's thirties writing' is affirmed in *Tropic of Cancer* and played out in Miller's fluctuating responses to the interaction between technology and the individual.⁸² In particular, both anxiety and euphoria are conveyed through images of artificial light. Nocturnal scenes of Parisian electric lighting, specifically along the banks of the Seine, thrill Miller such that, in a plausibly autobiographical passage, he claims to never want to leave the city. However, electric light also symbolises the narrator's dissatisfaction with a technologised world. Using light as a cultural platform to explore the novel, one can access Miller's ambivalent attitude towards technological advancement in a changing world.

For Miller, *Tropic of Cancer* was first and foremost 'the Paris book'.⁸³ Miller had been gathering his Paris experiences for some time. The scene-setting of those real experiences naturally includes a truthful record of Paris' lighting topography. As *Tropic of Cancer* was being written, the Eiffel Tower, visible to all of Paris, glowed with Citroën's advertising lettering and remained Citroën's billboard for nine years. Its luminous decor marked the debut of neon light, powered by electricity, to advertise on the Eiffel Tower itself. Displaying a sensitivity to changes in the way his generation lived, Miller refers to the electrically-powered neon advertising signs blossoming around him. The advertising capabilities of electric light, described by Henry Urbach, in his essay 'Dark lights, contagious space', had been explored during the previous twenty five years when 'the first electrically illuminated advertising sign in Paris appeared on a balcony above the Place de l'Opéra.'⁸⁴ The world's first neon sign hung above a barber's shop at 14 Boulevard Montmartre in 1912 and the first neon advertisement also appeared in Paris 1912.⁸⁵ Contemporary developments in illuminated advertising infiltrate Miller's story. As Kevin M. Gallagher has observed, Miller is able to 'shift between his real life and a fictional persona that could be termed a supraself' and, as such, his account of lighting is an historical record of real life.⁸⁶ For example, when frustrated with his friends Van Norden and Sylvester, the narrator declares: 'Nor will

⁸² William Solomon, *Literature, Amusement, and Technology in the Great Depression* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 76.

⁸³ Robert Ferguson, *Henry Miller: A Life* (New York: Norton, 1991), p. 186.

⁸⁴ Henry Urbach, 'Dark Lights, Contagious Space', in *InterSections: Architectural Histories and Critical Theories*, ed. Iain Borden and Jane Rendell (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 150-160.

⁸⁵ Ian Harrison, *The Book of Firsts* (London: Cassell Illustrated, 2003), pp. 78-79.

⁸⁶ Kevin M. Gallagher, 'Henry Miller: A Study', *Nexus: the International Henry Miller Journal* 19 (2013), 165.

Sylvester ever be a writer, though his name blaze in 50,000-candle-power red lights.’⁸⁷ Miller implies that the new media represents empty promises and crass mis-selling. Urbach explains that ‘[t]he emergence and spread of neon lights figures prominently in historical accounts of the period – their brashness, their phatic intensity often symbolizing the fervour with which pleasures were pursued and anxiety discharged.’⁸⁸ Lights in literature often speak with insidious voices which contribute to anxiety, as in Eliot’s poetry for example. However, the sociable connotations of ‘phatic’ concur with the pleasures of Parisian nightlife. The ‘brashness’ and ‘phatic intensity’, which Urbach identifies, emphasise the pursuit of ‘pleasure’ depicted in the novel. But Miller demonstrates how gratification can lead to depression; the pursuit of pleasure culminates in an unsatisfying cycle of consumption of the kind that advertising might encourage. Therefore electric light, as a branch of modern consumerism, is an essential aspect of themes of pleasure and anxiety in *Tropic of Cancer*.

Miller deploys the neon signs as a symbol for a culture with the wrong priorities, as well as artistic failure or lack of integrity. The tawdry may blaze with the coloured lights of a new metropolitan consumer culture, but real artistic worth goes unlit. He suggests that the illuminated tools of consumerism are incompatible with artists of quality. Beyond a criticism of consumerism, Miller expresses what Allison Pease calls ‘literate high culture’s anxiety about the increased production and consumption of mass cultural forms’, both in relation to advertising, but also with regard to the growing success of ‘cheap fiction’ which might devalue literature.⁸⁹ The well-publicised ‘cheap fiction’ of a man like Sylvester would never make him a real writer.

In addition to their symbolic implications in the novel, electric lights frequently illuminate a repugnant world. The beautiful lights that lace the Seine reveal a sordid city and thereby possess a uniquely dual role: on the one hand they are a component of the city’s beauty, and on the other they are the medium by which Parisian squalor is made visible. Lighting’s dual role is analogous to Miller’s ambivalent attitude towards technology. Furthermore, the lights symbolise the fine line between, or indeed the simultaneity of, pleasure pursued and anxiety discharged:

⁸⁷ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 12.

⁸⁸ Urbach, ‘Dark Lights, Contagious Space’, p. 152.

⁸⁹ Allison Pease, ‘Modernism and Mass Culture’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism: Second Edition*, ed. Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 198-99.

Or wandering along the Seine at night, wandering and wandering, and going mad with the beauty of it, the trees leaning to, the broken images in the water, the rush of the current under the bloody light of the bridges, [...] the old church surrounded with vegetables and blue arc lights, the gutters slippery with garbage and women in satin pumps staggering through the filth and vermin at the end of an all-night souse.⁹⁰

Like Hemingway, Miller references with precision the types of lights within his vision, indicating the novelty of the new lighting technology. The electric lights along the banks are coloured blood red and the streets are lit by the blue glow of arc lamps. Miller's specificity informs the tone: the unnatural effects of such light enhance the juxtaposition of pleasure and anxiety. Miller also implies a tension between nature and technology in this section. This cosmopolitan artistic vision is a mutation of English Romanticism's spiritual connection between man and nature. However, the narrator experiences a primal correspondence with an urban scene comprised of beauty and filth, nature and technology. Interestingly, Miller's evocation of the Romantic artist does not place technology 'in stark contrast to everything human and corporeal.'⁹¹ Rather, in Miller's version of Romanticism, the 'bloody' and 'blue' lights are profoundly moving. All aspects of life fall within Miller's vision and the narrator is both repulsed and attracted at various moments. Therefore, this passage is emblematic of the novel's central paradox: that the filth of bohemian Paris is life-enhancing for Miller's protagonist.

In his 1971 essay 'The 'Aesthetics' of Henry Miller', Edward Mitchell addresses Miller's belief that it is necessary for the artist to 'adapt himself to 'reality'', and 'the 'reality' that Miller means here is what he considers the insane reality of the unartistic everyday world', also described by Miller as 'the static, synthetic whole'.⁹² We can place Miller's depictions of electric lighting within the context of this opinion: electric light forms part of the everyday synthetic world and thus part of Miller's vision. Therefore, the total vision of this first-person narrator of heightened awareness includes artificial light and its simultaneously beautifying and horrifying effects. Miller's work

⁹⁰ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 23.

⁹¹ Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*, p. 36.

⁹² Edward Mitchell, 'The 'Aesthetics' of Henry Miller', in *Henry Miller: Three Decades of Criticism* (New York: New York University Press, 1971), pp. 155-172 (p. 160).

takes everything of which he is aware and gives 'back to us a vital, singing universe, alive in all its parts'.⁹³ Miller's expression of uncensored reality must include the city's electric light. But lighting not only contributes to the facts of the story; Miller would seem to be indicating something more complex. He appears to suggest that light is like literature for we see it twice: we see the light source, just as we read words, and we see how it lights everything else, just as writing leaves us with an impression. Electric light, a facet of the everyday, affects how other aspects of the everyday (and every night) are seen in a comparable way to how art affects our consideration of the world. We shall now consider the intricate ways in which lighting is a constituent part of Miller's modernist aesthetic.

For Miller electric lighting is not simply a metaphor for sentiment and emotion, but its material qualities inform and shape his style. For example, the effects of artificial light are recreated by Miller's use of lists, which present the reader with a series of flashing images. Miller's lists marry content with form because these flashing images flare and fade to create a pattern of associations between the city, light, women, and prostitution. Such lists of the impressions which register in the narrator's consciousness obscure the distinction between disgust and allure. The narrator does not like or dislike the scene. He simply sees it all, and yet his tone acknowledges the suspicion aroused by early manifestations of electric street lighting. Urbach uncovers how, in the 1920s and 1930s, architectural discourse displayed a fear 'of the aggressive look of luminous facades [...] along with considerable fascination and wonder, symptoms of photophobia, an irrational and persistent fear of light.'⁹⁴ Miller's construction of a narrator balances 'fascination and wonder' with, perhaps nothing as strong as photophobia, but certainly an implied suggestion that electric light is disturbing and unrelenting. He achieves this with the adjective 'bloody' and the horror which the street lamps reveal, but he also alludes to the fact that artificial street light permits a souse to last 'all-night'.⁹⁵ In passages like this one, the reader sees the squalid reality of Miller's Paris while also gaining an appreciation of the psychological impact that the lighting itself has on the narrator.

Artificial lighting contributes to the narrator's sensory overload in an early scene along the Seine. In the 1930s the banks of the river were lit with both gas lamps and

⁹³ Mitchell, 'The 'Aesthetics' of Henry Miller', p. 160.

⁹⁴ Urbach, 'Dark Lights, Contagious Space', pp. 156-157.

⁹⁵ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 23.

lamps which had been converted to electricity equipped with incandescent bulbs.⁹⁶ The river would have been copiously illuminated with a gleaming right bank stretching out behind it. As he leaves that frenzied part of the city and crosses to the Rive Gauche, the narrator embraces natural and gentle light – namely the ‘indigo sky’, and the Parisian trees ‘pale as cigar ash’ and without glimmer.⁹⁷ The river is a mirror, but a tarnished one. Light is dull, old, ashen and in that setting the weeping trees personify the narrator’s pain to such an extent that he becomes one with Paris. However, even these gentle lights eventually overwhelm him. His sensory perceptions of artificial lights, combined with the reflections of gentler twilights, cause a crushing assimilation of beauty and history which he finds incommunicable. The tone changes once he reaches the Left Bank:

I wonder if style, style in the grand manner, is done for. I say that my mind is occupied with these thoughts, but it is not true; it is only later, after I have crossed the Seine, after I have put behind me the carnival of lights, that I allow my mind to play with these ideas.⁹⁸

The glut of artificial light causes intellectual bedazzlement, but the darkness promotes intellectual thought. The linguistic and visual copiousness of Miller’s lists also translate a kind of nervous exhaustion. Armstrong states that ‘neurasthenia permeates the literature of the period’ and that the person most responsible for neurasthenia was Thomas Edison.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Solomon argues that Miller observed ‘the spread of neurasthenia due to the assault of external forces on bodies and minds, due to mass over-stimulation’.¹⁰⁰ Certainly, the passage above suggests that the stimulating carnival of lights affects the narrator psychologically. Electric light, when it suits Miller’s mood, is a totem for cultural dissolution and the anxiety he feels in the face of it. Yet, if we set

⁹⁶ In an email dated April 13, 2014 from Jean-Jacques Le Moëllec of M.E.G.E (Memoire d’électricité du gas, et de l’éclairage public <http://megedoudeau.free.fr/MEGE/Accueil.html>) explained: ‘Sur les bords de seine en 1930, il y avait encore des lanternes à gaz mais aussi selon les endroits des lanternes reconverties à l’électricité, équipées de lampes incandescentes.’ There were gas lamps along the banks of the Seine in 1930 but, in areas where lamps had been converted to electricity, there were incandescent lamps. (My trans.)

⁹⁷ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 14.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 18.

¹⁰⁰ Solomon, *Literature, Amusement, and Technology*, p. 79.

this passage in the context of celebrations of electric light in the novel (examples of which I address later), it becomes apparent that *Tropic of Cancer* presents simultaneously a utopian and dystopian vision of the modern city.

At times, Miller uses electric light to indicate a crumbling civilisation. The demonic nature of certain streets is signalled by their artificial light: 'I know what a devil's street is the Faubourg Montmartre with its brass plates and rubber goods, the lights twinkling all night and sex running through the street like a sewer.'¹⁰¹ The lights of the red light district, which legitimised prostitution, adorn the novel's theme of Paris as whore.¹⁰² As was powerfully shown at the Musée d'Orsay's exhibition, discussed in the previous chapter, lighting played a central role in the cultural splendour and misery (or alternatively pleasure and anxiety) of the city, especially in connection with prostitution between 1850 and 1910. Peter C. Baldwin's analysis of the American fear that debauchery might explode as a result of better street lighting, taps into the language of allure, arousal and corruption. He asks, did 'lurid illumination heightened the moral danger' and were young people 'drawn to the electric glow, their desires morbidly stimulated'?¹⁰³ Miller exploits the connections between electric light and 'the arousal of lascivious thoughts'.¹⁰⁴ However, he is not critical of those impulses, for they are unavoidable facets of his life.

Platonic concepts of light as a symbol for understanding and truth fed into a Romantic strain that can be detected in early twentieth-century aesthetics, despite the modernist turn from natural to urban imagery. Wendy Steiner, in her book *The Colors of Rhetoric* (1982), describes 'Platonic notions of the superiority of seeing as knowing and light as knowledge'.¹⁰⁵ In the face of newly available constant, controllable, man-made light, how do such associations change? Miller's artistic attitude to light acknowledges technological changes which might be seen to oppose the principle of light as truth and seeing as knowing. For example, the narrator is scornful of the way neon advertising promotes falsehood and he is temporarily intellectually incapacitated by the city's gratuitous artificial lighting. Unlike celestial and natural light, artificial light does not necessarily equate to truth and knowledge. However, in 1934 its

¹⁰¹ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 162.

¹⁰² 'Paris is like a whore', Miller's *Cancer*, p. 211.

¹⁰³ Peter C. Baldwin, *In the Watches of the Night: Life in the Nocturnal City, 1820–1930* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 2012), p. 161.

¹⁰⁴ Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, p. 44.

¹⁰⁵ Steiner, *The Colors of Rhetoric*, p. 10.

associations with deception and reality were still being formulated and still flexible. It was this flexibility that enabled artists and writers to invest images of artificial light with their own spirit, their personal interpretation of the world, and (on a textual level) wield such imagery to evoke mood and atmosphere in complex variations. Just as 'artificial light frequently and significantly affects the appearance of architecture', it also affects the tone of a scene in a literary text.¹⁰⁶ Miller's images of electric lighting connect that technology with immorality, psycho sexual trauma, the growing power of advertising, and psychological anxiety. Miller would seem to predict McLuhan's warning not to disregard electric light and its implications merely because of its apparent lack of 'content'. Like Ford Madox Ford and Fitzgerald, Miller's writing implies that the presence of electric light contributes to human unfulfillment and the potential destruction of the self.

Miller, together with other writers and artists, also continued an established association of electric light with surveillance. Certainly, a loss of self-hood might well be engendered by a sense of a loss of privacy and independence. Mass electric light accelerated mass production, increased working hours and could light populations (at work and in the streets) continuously. The great advantage of electric street lights was that they 'could fill a city block with light instead of just the circle around the lamppost. Shadows shrank back, revealing facial expressions and house numbers.'¹⁰⁷ It is unsurprising, therefore, that artists expressed a connection between electric light and being watched. In Pablo Picasso's *Guernica* (1937) (Figure 7) a light bulb blazes in the shape of an eye over the suffering horse's head, in a composition not dissimilar to Burra's. Picasso's light bulb represents technological advancement and, although he specifically critiques the destructive effect of technology in warfare, the light bulb discloses more than just technology. It is an image which prefigures the concept of a surveillance society, depicted by George Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty Four* (1949). It is an image which Miller uses before Picasso's painting was created. A scene in which the narrator and Eugene visit a cinema acquires a sinister and hallucinatory quality:

At midnight, after the spectators have saturated the hall with perspiration and foul breaths, I return to sleep on a bench. The exit light, swimming

¹⁰⁶ Urbach, 'Dark lights, contagious space', p. 158.

¹⁰⁷ Baldwin, p. 155.

in a halo of tobacco smoke, sheds a faint light on the lower corner of the asbestos curtain; I close my eyes every night on an artificial eye....¹⁰⁸

From Robert Ferguson's biography *Henry Miller: A Life* (1991), we know that for a short while Miller found refuge in the manager's office at a cinema.¹⁰⁹ The experience is a real one, but the allusions are ambiguous. Is the 'artificial eye' the exit light itself, or is it the network of artificial lights across the city which regulate and 'observe' society, or the new triumph of design that hangs from the ceiling above his bed, or is it simply the glass eye he removes and polishes in the following paragraph? It could be all of these things. All allude to, if not quite the photophobia which Urbach associates with the period, at least Miller's own anxiety with regard to artificiality. Miller's image is also strikingly similar to Ford's description of the light bulb as the last real thing seen by a suicide victim, whose imagination looks through to the stars above, thereby liberating her from the man-made confines represented by the bulb. The quality of the 'man-made' is palpable in Miller's passage, since the clients have saturated the fabric with sweat, the curtain is asbestos, and the smoke lingers stubbornly. Miller's cypher, haunted by the lingering presence of human bodies, is therefore not alone in the room. Technology and modern urban living prevent real solitude and thus perhaps inhibit true freedom.

Miller presents an ambivalent attitude towards technological enhancement, articulated in his references to artificial light, optical technology and surveillance. Similarly, in the following passage of *A Farewell To Arms*, Hemingway provides an example of what Ryan Bishop and John Philips, in their book *Modernist Avant-Garde Aesthetics and Contemporary Military Technology* (2010), call 'the non-productive aspects of life lived under technological domination'.¹¹⁰ Lieutenant Frederic Henry cannot sleep soundly under the artificial eye of the wartime search-lights:

I could see the beams of the search-lights moving in the sky. [...] I woke for good long before it was light and heard roosters crowing and stayed

¹⁰⁸ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁹ Ferguson, *Henry Miller*, p. 171.

¹¹⁰ Ryan Bishop and John Philips, *Modernist Avant-Garde Aesthetics and Contemporary Military Technology* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), p. 7.

on awake until it began to be light. I was tired and once it was really light
I went back to sleep again.¹¹¹

Search-lights watch over a sleep of nightmares. Therefore, Henry waits until it is 'really' naturally light in order to enjoy a peaceful sleep. The character's anxiety is rooted in his fear of war and Hemingway uses the military lighting technology of surveillance to convey this anxiety. The search-lights penetrate not only the sky, but also Henry's dreams. Indeed, search-lights epitomise the concept of lights as eyes.

The 'artificial eye' to which Miller refers in the cinema scene alludes to the electric lights at the top of the Eiffel Tower, to which I now briefly return. The plan to build a tower high above Paris had been in existence for many years. Paul Bogard's *The End of Night: Searching for Natural Darkness in an Age of Artificial Light* describes 'the Sun Tower proposed by Jules Bourdais for the 1889 Paris Exposition'.¹¹² It was to be a tower that would cover all of Paris with arc lights. Bourdais' proposal was defeated by that of Gustave Eiffel, but Bogard contends that 'even Eiffel's tower now has spotlights on the top, to the delight of some and the disgust of others.'¹¹³ The Eiffel Tower was lit as early as 1889. Its outward looking spotlights were subsumed into the literature of Wyndham Lewis, who moved to Paris in 1903 and who was greatly admired by Miller.¹¹⁴ The opening of Part II 'Doomed, Evidently – The "Frac"' of Lewis's *Tarr* (1918) compares the eye of the character Kreisler with the Eiffel Tower itself:

Kreisler was shaving himself, one eye fixed upon Paris. It beat upon this wall of Paris drearily. Had it been endowed with properties of illumination and had it been directed there earlier in the day, it would have provided a desolate halo for Tarr's ratiocination.¹¹⁵

The narrator imagines a halo-producing beam emanating from Kreisler. As such, it functions as a literary device emphasising the interconnectedness of the lives of Tarr

¹¹¹ Ernest Hemingway, 'A Farewell To Arms' (1929), in *Three Novels By Ernest Hemingway* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 88.

¹¹² Bogard, *The End of Night*, p. 21.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ferguson, *Henry Miller*, p. 273.

¹¹⁵ Lewis, *Tarr*, p. 64.

and Kreisler, as well as the sheer coincidence with which lives collide in a city. The image of Kreisler, from his elevated position above the city, emitting a light from his eye onto the city below, could well have been inspired by the lights on the Eiffel Tower. Lewis adds altitude to enhanced vision to enrich Kreisler with a version of what Barthes would later describe ‘an incomparable power of intellection [...] which gives us the world to *read* and not only to perceive.’¹¹⁶ But Lewis’s literary image of vision and Kreisler’s intellection rely upon the added phenomenon of illumination. If Kreisler’s eye was endowed with light he would not only see Tarr, but somehow partake in his process of reasoning. Therefore, Lewis adapts ideas about height and vision, previously ‘represented by our romantic writers’ and which make it possible to ‘see things *in their structure*’, by adding illumination in a fashion which alludes to both its technologised and divine versions.¹¹⁷ This infiltration of lighting into literary images of perception and reasoning reveal the influence that changes to lighting had on writers and their contribution to the history of attitudes towards consciousness.

The Tower’s lights have triggered multiple artistic and philosophical responses. Lewis’s image prefigures Roland Barthes’s observations in the lead essay in *The Eiffel Tower and Other Mythologies* as explored in Chapter 1. The image of one of Kreisler’s eyes turning into a light is not dissimilar to the Barthes’s description of the Tower as ‘an object which sees, a glance which is seen.’¹¹⁸ According to Barthes, the lights of the Eiffel Tower, ‘winking gently as they revolve at its very tip’ give it the power of sight.¹¹⁹ Sixty years before Barthes wrote this, Lewis described Kreisler as a solitary consciousness looking out from a dark room. Kreisler imagines that his eye radiates a light which could illuminate and thereby survey Tarr. The road below him is flooded with light, but his room is ‘shallow ill-lighted’. In this way Kreisler replicates the top of the Eiffel Tower: located in an elevated position, emitting a beam of light, but surrounded by darkness. Of course, unlike Barthes’s Tower and Lewis’s creation, human beings inhabit the ‘habitual divorce of *seeing* and *being seen*’, but the mass artificial lighting of the early twentieth-century did result in people being seen more than ever before. This was a fact of modern life acknowledged by Gertrude Stein, as I discuss in Chapter 4. By appropriating the image of the Eiffel Tower’s ‘eye’ (whether

¹¹⁶ Roland Barthes, ‘The Eiffel Tower’, p. 9.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Barthes, ‘The Eiffel Tower’, p. 3.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

implicitly or explicitly), artists, writers, and philosophers have communicated the cultural significance of the changing landscape of urban lighting and its connections with being observed.

Miller implies these cultural shifts in the statement 'I close my eyes every night on an artificial eye'. In Miller's prequel to *Tropic of Cancer*, *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939), the narrator, who is himself the eye, reveals the repercussions of not only being seen too much, but also of seeing too much. The book, which Solomon calls an 'autobiographical text', describes Miller's life in New York working for the Cosmodemonic Telegraph Company.¹²⁰ In *Tropic of Capricorn*, lights still represent eyes, but this time Miller employs the image of a lighthouse rather than the Eiffel Tower. At first Miller is 'like a man sitting in a lighthouse', looking down on a stormy coastline of shipwreck and devastation.¹²¹ He then becomes 'like the lighthouse itself – secure in the midst of the most turbulent sea.'¹²² Eventually, this simile becomes a sustained metaphor for Miller's relationship with the chaotic meaninglessness of his life in New York: 'Above all I was an eye, a huge searchlight which scoured far and wide [...] all my powers were used up in the effort to see, to take in the drama of the world.'¹²³ This searching 'eye' parallels the remorseless illumination of modern artificial lighting. Miller's senses are always 'on', like the electric city, and it is overwhelming:

I wanted that eye extinguished so that I might have a chance to know my own body, my own desires. I wanted to be alone for a thousand years in order to reflect on what I had seen and heard - and in order to forget. I wanted something of the earth which was not of man's doing, something absolutely divorced from the human of which I was surfeited [...] I wanted to shake the stone and the light out of my system.¹²⁴

The desire for 'something absolutely divorced from the human' recalls Ford's image of looking through the electric-light bulb but, in place of a yearning for the stars above, the image of an extinguished eye correlates to a non-visual emotional response to the world.

¹²⁰ Solomon, *Literature, Amusement, and Technology*, p. 103.

¹²¹ Henry Miller, *Tropic of Capricorn* (1939) (New York: Grove Press, 1961), p. 75.

¹²² Miller, *Capricorn*, p. 76.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Miller suffers from excessive exposure to ‘man’s doing’, implying that he wishes to escape from the man-made by destroying his outward looking eye.

A surreal passage in *Tropic of Cancer*, set out below, translates a similar sense of being overwhelmed by urban stimuli. Miller describes with ambivalence the artificial illumination of Paris. On the one hand, the refulgent Tower is weirdly beautiful, if implicitly debauched, and the vulnerable street lamps (emblems of sophisticated Paris) sink into the mire of the city’s darker side. On the other hand, the view revealed to him by that artificial light ignites Miller’s surrealist exploration of his subconscious, resulting in the following monstrous imagery:

the Eiffel Tower is fizzing champagne; it is built entirely of numbers and shrouded in black lace...I can feel the city palpitating, as if it were a heart just removed from a warm body. The windows of my hotel are festering and there is a thick, acrid stench as of chemicals burning. Looking into the Seine I see mud and desolation, street lamps drowning, men and women choking to death, the bridges covered with houses, slaughter houses of love.¹²⁵

This artificially-lit nocturnal scene moves with disturbing kinetic energy. For example, the Tower fizzes, the city palpates, the windows are festering, and the street lamps drown. This degenerate energy expresses what Joachim Schlör describes, in *Nights in the Big City*, as ‘a conflict in the metropolitan experience of these years’ arising from a sense of being overwhelmed whilst simultaneously thrilled at the possibilities on offer.¹²⁶ Once again, electric light encapsulates and contributes to these opposing sensations. While ‘champagne’ and ‘lace’ evoke glamour, Miller’s description of the city at night becomes increasingly apocalyptic. Electric light, with its dual role of beautiful object and revealer of horrors is a perfect metaphor for, but also a cause of, the conflicting nature of the experience of Paris described by Miller. Schlör also charts how texts of the city at night contain ‘concepts and metaphors [...] of decadence, decay, degeneration, disease and death’ and that the effect of such concepts is to create texts in which ‘individuals can experience only alienation, rejection and psychological

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 70.

¹²⁶ Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*, p. 206.

homelessness.’¹²⁷ Miller adopts a surrealist aesthetic in this passage, suggesting that the artificially lit Parisian night stimulates in him a literary exploration of hidden areas of the human psyche. The narrative immediacy is part of a hallucinatory ‘self-projection’ in the style of artists such as Salvador Dalí, who moved to Paris in 1929.¹²⁸ Miller’s ambivalence towards a life simultaneously enhanced and corrupted by technology was shared by many writers and artists in the early decades of the twentieth century such as Surrealists and American Expressionists.

Despite the surrealist tone, there are clear autobiographical elements in this description. Miller’s surrealism is founded on an entirely plausible description of what he might have seen leaning out the window. The references to fizzing and lace evoke Man Ray’s ‘La Ville’ of 1931. Miller lived in Paris at the time Man Ray made the image, composed of layering photographs of Paris’ illuminated signs over a nocturnal image of the Eiffel Tower decorated by Citroën. Man Ray’s image is fizzing with light; the bulbs like bubbles create a champagne-coloured display. Furthermore, Miller’s description of the Eiffel Tower as numbers and lace communicates its simultaneously solid and open structure. Guillaume Apollinaire’s avant-garde calligramme ‘La Tour Eiffel’ of 1916, reenacts the Tower’s physical properties and iconic status. In Apollinaire’s poem, the Tower is a defiant tongue poking out of the earth composed, not of numbers, but of an anti-German statement. Yet the calligramme itself has the appearance of black lace. For Apollinaire, ‘who coined the word ‘surrealist’ in 1917’, the material reality of the Eiffel Tower determines the form and content of his poem.¹²⁹ Similarly, Miller’s surrealism and symbolism coexist with, or even emerge from, an accurate documenting of the appearance of Paris at that time. Therefore, Miller’s technique draws inspiration from French Surrealism but operate in a hybrid form, at times mixing realism and lyricism. As Stein teaches, the aesthetic movements which dominated Paris in the early twentieth century had at their core ‘the things seen’ and the primacy of vision.¹³⁰ How things were seen was affected by artificial lighting. But artificial lighting also became something to be seen and something to be compared against more familiar forms of light.

¹²⁷ Ibid., p. 207.

¹²⁸ Alan Bullock, Oliver Stallybrass and Stephen Trombley, eds., *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought: 2nd edn.* (London: Fontana Press, [1977] 1988), p. 833.

¹²⁹ Ian Chivers, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 15.

¹³⁰ Gertrude Stein, *Picasso* (New York: Dover, [1938] 1984), p. 10.

New forms of public lighting and of illuminated signs imbued alternative and natural forms of light with fresh symbolism. For example, in contrast with Sylvester's artificial blaze, Miller implies that the sensitive artist burns with a pure and human light: 'the only writers about me for whom I have any respect, at present, are Carl and Boris. They are possessed. They glow inwardly with a white flame.'¹³¹ The narrator refers to a similarly internalised white light of artistic appreciation in a later passage, when his senses are heightened at a concert:

It's as though I had no clothes on and every pore of my body was a window and all the windows open and the light flooding my gizzards. I can feel the light curving under the vault of my ribs and my ribs hang there over a hollow nave trembling with reverberations. How long this lasts I have no idea; I have lost all sense of time and place.¹³²

A flowing, surreal and anatomical light represents the coming together of the music and the narrator's own artistic energy.

This concept of artistic light develops into a *leitmotif* associated with sensitive artists, which is fully explored in an extensive scene in which the narrator visits a Matisse exhibition at an art gallery on the Rue de Sèze. The walls are described as being 'ablaze' with Matisse's work.¹³³ The narrator's profound appreciation of Matisse's skill is conveyed by a light which floods his body:

Only those who can admit the light into their gizzards can translate what is there in the heart. Vividly now I recall how the glint and sparkle of light caroming from the massive chandeliers splintered and ran blood, flecking the tips of the waves that beat monotonously on the dull gold outside the windows.¹³⁴

In this quotation, Matisse's internal light of artistic genius abuts an almost Rayonist description of light 'caroming from the massive chandeliers', emphasising the contrast

¹³¹ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 12.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 81.

¹³³ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 167.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

between natural artistic genius and splintered, bloody, monotonous artificiality.¹³⁵ It is a contrast which underscores the eternal quality of genius in the face of a technologically advanced, but culturally barren, society. Similarly, Wharton and Fitzgerald imply that artificiality and modernity (as symbolised by electric lamps) run counter to individual freedom and success.

The light in Miller's gizzards and the passage from Lewis's *Tarr*, quoted above, evoke the work of the ancient philosopher Empedocles who, whilst recognising the existence of the sun's light, 'considered sunlight as only part of the whole process, and recognising that something more was required for vision, something essential provided by man: *the light of the body*.'¹³⁶ Similarly, Plato argued that the eye gave out a light which, joined with daylight, enabled sight. Kreisler, Miller's narrator and the Eiffel Tower are associated with an inner light. The light Miller writes about, which penetrates the narrator's gizzards, is a light from within the body representing artistic genius. Arguably, Miller considers himself one who 'admits the light' and is thus 'capable of transforming the negative reality of life into the substantial and significant outlines of art.'¹³⁷ This is indicated by the narrator's internal vision of a spinning light at the concert: 'Finally there is only light turning, and how does light turn, I ask myself.'¹³⁸ The only sustaining and valid light for Miller is this internal artistic one.¹³⁹ Miller's most powerful and sensual experience of light, in the end, is not a holy or natural light, nor is it technologised light, but creative enlightenment.

Miller felt that technological advances accelerate the breaking apart of culture. In 'On Turning Eighty' (1972), from *Sextet*, he writes: 'Today the dissolution of our *Kultur* is proceeding even more rapidly, thanks to our improved technic and efficiency [...] But no one is happier, have you noticed?'¹⁴⁰ However, I have argued that Miller does not uphold obvious binaries of natural light as good and artificial light as bad. Indeed, artificially lit Paris stimulates his explorations into surrealism. Furthermore, artificial light exposes all aspects of the 'insane reality of the unartistic everyday world' which Miller tasks himself with representing 'alive in all its parts'.¹⁴¹ In *Henry Miller*:

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Zajonc, *Catching the Light*, p. 21.

¹³⁷ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 167.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 82-83.

¹³⁹ The theme of internal artistic light reappears in Miller's essay 'The Waters Reglitterized', in *Sextet* (New York: New Directions, [1977] 2010), p. 95.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Miller, 'On Turning Eighty', in *Sextet*, p. 17.

¹⁴¹ Miller, *Sextet*, p. 17.

A Life, Ferguson explains that one of the reasons Miller did not take to London was that he felt it was too dark. Ferguson quotes Miller's letter to Emil Schnellock about that capital: 'You said the gloom was rich [...] It was. You could cut it with an axe.'¹⁴² Miller appreciates the beauty of the artificially-lit French capital. His appreciation is expressed in the image of artificial light at the end of the chapter in which the narrator attends the classical music concert. Whilst falling asleep and listening to the music, the lights of the Seine are the last image he sees and the last thought he can communicate: 'the river lights...the...'.¹⁴³ Further more, his emotional and psychological attachment to this vision of Paris is declared in the passage below:

The river is still swollen, muddy, streaked with lights. I don't know what it is rushes up in me at the sight of this dark, swift moving current, but a great exultation lifts me up, affirms the deep wish that is in me never to leave this land.¹⁴⁴

One can draw a connection here with Henry James. Both men spent a good deal of time in Paris and for both men artificial light enriched their experience of the city. There are instances in *Tropic of Cancer* and in Henry James's *The Ambassadors* (1903) where characters are powerfully affected by artificial street light. A positive experience of Paris' artificial nocturnal glow is contained in the passage from *The Ambassadors* discussed in Chapter 1 and which details 'the great flare of the lighted city'.¹⁴⁵ Strether's sense of freedom, his increasing self-knowledge, and personal development towards the end of the novel are encouraged by light. Strether's perception of the light of the city in the summer night is a positive shaping force with regard to his growing self-determination. Both Miller and James portray artificial light to actualize intriguing connections between light, the act of seeing and their characters' experiences of living.

Miller's lover Anaïs Nin was also able to acknowledge some positive effects of electric light. For example, in *Henry and June*, a series of extracts from Nin's diary focussing on her relationship with Miller (1990), the red light of a hotel sign seductively joins in with Miller and Nin's lovemaking. Nin associates artificial light with love: 'At

¹⁴² Ferguson, *Henry Miller*, p. 168.

¹⁴³ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 84.

¹⁴⁴ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 73.

¹⁴⁵ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 353.

the hotel Anjou we lie like lesbians, sucking. Again, hours and hours of voluptuousness. The hotel sign, in red lights, shines into the room. The warmth heaves in.’¹⁴⁶ Literary celebrations of artificial light do exist. However, Miller chooses to end *Tropic of Cancer* with his narrator’s phenomenological response to Paris’ natural elements: the fading light of sunset and an image of the Seine: ‘The sun is setting. I feel this river flowing through me- its past, its ancient soil, the changing climate, the hills gently girdle it about: its course is fixed.’¹⁴⁷ The Seine is, throughout the novel, described by its lighting and yet here, at the point at which that river becomes an internal river, symbolising Miller’s fulfilment of his artistic potential, there is no mention of artificial lighting of any kind. As the references to electric lights cease and as the natural light sets, we are left only with the light of Miller himself.

Conclusion

This chapter has addressed the ways in which the properties of modern lighting flowed from Paris’ streets and interiors into a selection of modernist novels. The novels selected provide broadly negative depictions of electric lighting, irrespective of the extent to which their narrative conforms to traditional techniques. However, the negative sentiments electric lighting represents are so successfully rendered that they confirm a modernist appreciation of the aesthetic value of electric light, which contrasts with the Victorian reluctance to accept ‘a viable aesthetic of the machine’ as identified by Herbert L. Sussman.¹⁴⁸ Modernist novels are not suspended in neutral light. Rather, the effects of artificial lighting function as consistent signifiers in modernist prose texts, offering potent images in the articulation of their dominant themes. The effects of electric lighting express themes of emotional and psychological unfulfilment in the face of modernisation, globalisation, commercialism and war. Electric light offered a communication medium with which writers could spell out these negative sentiments,

¹⁴⁶ Anaïs Nin, *Henry and June: From the Unexpurgated Diary of Anaïs Nin* (London: Penguin, [1986] 1990), pp. 191-2.

¹⁴⁷ Miller, *Cancer*, p. 318.

¹⁴⁸ Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorians and the Machine: A Literary Response to Technology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard, 1968), p. 228.

while attributing their source to the new kind of ‘unity’ created by what McLuhan described as ‘the extensions of man’ in an electrical age.¹⁴⁹

We might ask why the century’s new unity resulted in problems of identity and lack of contentment? ‘The Dynamo and the Virgin’, written by Henry Adams in 1900 and later published in *The Education of Henry Adams* (1907), helps to answer this. Adams describes man’s obligation to translate ‘himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old.’¹⁵⁰ Adams explains the necessity, but also the challenge of reconfiguring one’s purpose in a world which was altering in rapid and irreversible ways. For Wharton, Fitzgerald and Miller, electric light epitomises this strange new universe without negating the past, and it provides a setting in which to explore isolation, emotional voids, death, insanity, ambivalence, superficiality, inertia and lack of hope. Their Paris writing also implies that electric light is, to some extent, the cause of those feelings. For example, Fitzgerald’s heavily autobiographical novel is laced with a sense of discontent, but what is central to this study is that he considered electrical light a suitable metaphor for that emotion. As Miller wrote, in his 1933 celebration of Brassai’s attention to common-place items, ‘the most fantastic inventions of other men often leave us with a sense of unfulfillment’.¹⁵¹ We have seen how the remarkable invention of the incandescent light bulb, with its global and social implications, was used by novelists to translate the chagrin of emotionally unfulfilled characters who might well do better to look at the stars above or within themselves. It has been shown that electric light consistently stood for the oppositional states of pleasure and anxiety, unity and isolation, public and private, nature and technology, and past and present from the time of Wharton through to Miller. Therefore, it appears there was no obvious parallax with regard to prose images of electric lighting between those of the nineteenth hundreds and those of the 1930s.

Notwithstanding the evidence put forward that novelists writing in Paris between the 1910s and 1930s were giving voice to a sense of anxiety and isolation in the face of totalities normalised by electricity, there exists a body of evidence to suggest that a rather different approach was being taken by experimental poets working in Paris at the same time. The ‘new universe’ demanded artistic experimentation and Tim

¹⁴⁹ McLuhan, ‘Understanding Media’, pp. 149–179.

¹⁵⁰ Henry Adams, ‘The Dynamo and the Virgin’, in *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, [1907] 1971), p. 381.

¹⁵¹ Miller, ‘The Eye of Paris’ (1937), in *Brassai: The Monograph*, ed. Alain Sayag and Annick Lionel-Marie (Boston Mass: Bulfinch Press, 2000) pp. 173–175 (p. 174).

Armstrong explains that for many writers electrification provided inspiration for such experimentation and symbolised modernity in the natural sciences but also literature. He identifies Ezra Pound specifically as a poet who in deploying ‘electromagnetism in his theories of the ‘vortex’, noted that ‘the electric current gives light where it meets resistance’ – literary production is incandescence.’¹⁵² This identification of the celebratory attitude of certain modernists towards electricity and light provides an interesting point of comparison with contemporaneous prose texts. Therefore, Armstrong’s observations are the starting point for the following investigation in Chapter 3 into man-made lighting and its contribution to an early twentieth-century poetic aesthetic.

In the early 1950s Edmund Wilson wrote ‘the disreputable adventures of Mr. Miller’s rogues are varied from time to time with phosphorescent flights of reverie devoted to the ecstasies of art or the doomed European civilization.’¹⁵³ Miller disagreed with much of what Wilson wrote in this review, but interestingly the flights of reverie in this quotation are said to glow, not with sunlight or electric light, but with the light of an element – a chemical light. That good writing possesses the qualities of light is something writers and critics appear to agree on regardless of period. In order to show that artificial light, specifically electric light, is included in this concept, I now explore the nascent internalisation of the effects of electric light on the form and structure of modernist poetry. Once it became apparent that electric light was unavoidable and ubiquitous, some twentieth-century writers responded with the enthusiastic internalisation of the ‘technology of style’, as identified by Tim Armstrong.¹⁵⁴ This technology of style is the subject of Chapter 3, in which I identify an enthusiasm for technology resulting in an electrified aesthetic affecting poetic form. We have seen how electric light is a signifier of many meanings, but we now turn to its implication for specific kinds of form, defined by fluid ambiguity, immediacy and shock, a stripped down aesthetic, and poetic attention to surface. If modernist novels expose artificial lighting as complicit in human unfulfilment and isolation, then, by way of counterpoint, the next chapter will test the hypothesis that modernist poetry was able to embrace the technology as enriching and inspirational.

¹⁵² Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 19.

¹⁵³ Wilson, *The Shores of Light*, p. 710.

¹⁵⁴ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 4.

Chapter 3

The Nexus of Sight, Electric Lighting, and Poetic Form

‘nothing changes in people from one generation to another except the way of seeing and being seen’.¹

- Gertrude Stein, *Composition as Explanation* (1926)

The previous chapter analysed the motifs of electric lighting in novels and short stories written by Edith Wharton, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Henry Miller between 1913 and 1934. The iconographic use of electric lamps and lighting in the Paris fiction of these writers signifies unfulfillment. In addition, the rhetoric of electricity communicates extremes of human energy inclusive of lust, mania and sybaritic ruthlessness. It was not my intention for Chapter 2 to catalogue the personal attitudes of individual artists toward modernisation during those twenty years. Rather, I intended to demonstrate that lighting technology provided writers with an historical and aesthetic context and a resource of symbols and narrative tools. I now consider the relation between artificial lighting and modernist poetry written in Paris in the same period. The plurality of ways in which that relation emerges ranges from rather obvious and self-evident references which comprise content, to more subtle internalisations influencing form.

Because modern technology is central to modernism, and since modernist poetry so often turns on things seen, this chapter investigates how the aesthetics of perception, specifically sight, in the modernist period bear witness to and are reconfigured by artificial lighting. It will show how lighting contributed to the creation and shaping of modernist poetic form by building on the references to electric lighting in Chapter 2. However, contemporaneously with this phase of modernist prose, poets produced work in which the presence of electric light is *assumed*, or which took inspiration from the science of lighting, or which appears to be energised by the existence of lighting technology in the world. My purpose is therefore to demonstrate how certain early modernist poems exemplify the internalisation of lighting technology. By realising more clearly the relationship between major modernist poetic works by Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, H. D., and Gertrude Stein and artificial (but mainly electric)

¹ Stein, *Composition as Explanation*, p. 495.

lighting – especially how the evocation of light in the work becomes a unique formal, and occasionally thematic, element – we attain a richer appreciation of the complex role of that technology in the expression of the poetic modernist aesthetic.

This chapter will consider a selection of poems written during the creatively potent early decades of the twentieth century, by poets who lived in Paris for some or (in the case of Stein) much of their careers. To these poems I apply a version of the principal question in Sara Danius's 2002 book *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception and Aesthetics*: 'what are the relations of technological change and aesthetics, and how may they be conceptualized?'² I am indebted to Danius's question and her wider examination of 'the nexus of perception, technological change, and literary form' because it encouraged my study of an even more specific range of connections between the nexus of sight, electric lighting technology, and poetic form, with specific attention given to Pound's literary criticism in the years 1912 to 1915, a selection of Imagist poems, and Stein's *Tender Buttons*.³

By analysing the work of Marcel Proust, Thomas Mann and James Joyce, Danius charts 'how the question of perception, notably sight and hearing, is configured in the modernist period' and demonstrates 'the ever-closer relationship between the sensuous and the technological.'⁴ My particular interest lies in sight perception, which was the genesis of Pound's and Stein's aesthetic endeavours, and Pound and Stein are the two writers to whom I will devote most space in this chapter. Tracing the motif of vision in Stein's *Tender Buttons* reveals the interconnectedness of her observations, her literary form, and those changing technologies which enhanced human ability to see. Furthermore, *Tender Buttons* reflects Stein's sensitivity to the continuous rhythms of perception and how these rhythms constitute the self. The other figure who dominates this chapter is Ezra Pound. He was the principal proponent of Imagism, a movement driven to represent 'things' and often things seen. This chapter asks how modernism configures things seen in a technologised or, more pointedly, an electric environment and, to this end, it begins with commentary on Pound's application of electrification to the poetic principles governing his work during his Imagist and Vorticist phases. As I will show, he applies a scientific methodology to writing poetry which communicates an image perceived by, or affecting the senses of the poet. I aim to evince that, not only

² Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*, p. 1.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., p. 2.

is the broader phenomenon of technology ‘in a specific sense *constitutive* of high-modernist aesthetics’, but that lighting technology specifically had a precise role to play.⁵

Danius chose her texts (Mann’s *The Magic Mountain*, Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*, and Joyce’s *Ulysses*) because ‘they describe a general transition from technological *prosthesis* to technological *aesthesis*, thus moving from externalization to internalization.’⁶ In this chapter I observe a difference between the externalisation of artificial light in the prose discussed in Chapter 2 and a contrasting tendency in a body of modernist poetry towards internalising lighting technology into the composition of a poem. We shall see how this internalising might constitute an assumption of the presence of artificial light, an adoption of electric light as a metaphor for poetic craft and even the electrified rhythm or charge of a poem. I do not dispute Danius’s proposition that technology became a component part of art rather than just its context or the thing to which it responded, nor that the penetration of technology into literature increased over time. However, my observations show that from 1900 to 1939, electric light contributed to different literary genres in very different ways. Therefore, I do not seek to prove a general or chronological progression. I rather suggest that radically varying artistic responses to lighting technology occurred simultaneously, even in the early part of the twentieth century. The varied ways in which writers confronted the new modes of illumination, in order to serve their literary requirements, exemplify the diverse and frequently conflicting associations which images of electric light carried.

Danius is interested in those technologies which ‘address, involve or interfere with the sensory apparatus in more immediate ways than do, for example, production technologies, and ultimately raise questions having to do with truth, knowledge, and verification.’⁷ Her list includes photography, radiography, telephony, and the automobile to name but a few. I too am interested in the relation between technology and truth, knowledge, and verification - concepts which for centuries have had light as their symbol. It is important to reiterate that Danius’s technologies of perception do not include mass electric lighting, which is surprising given that electric light does, and did, interfere with the sensory apparatus. However, hers is not the only criticism of modernism which neglects electric lighting. In the Preface to his book *Modernism: A*

⁵ Ibid., pp. 2-3.

⁶ Ibid., p. 3.

⁷ Ibid., p. 5.

Cultural History, Tim Armstrong contextualises his focus on ‘the linkages between the aesthetic and wider culture.’⁸ Armstrong addresses modernism via temporal dislocation, the politics of nation, and economics, listing the most shocking changes that followed the turn of the century such as World War I, ‘the Russian revolution; the re-arrangement of Europe [...] Einstein’s demolition of the Newtonian world-view; the aeroplane, cinema, television; the *Titanic*.’⁹ He also discusses the implications of electro-vitalism and electromagnetism, but where is electric light in this list of changes? In response to this surprising omission, the lens through which I observe modernist poetry is strictly that of artificial lighting since, as the previous chapter showed, it is a crucial component of modern culture.

This thesis has already established some of the social and artistic implications of electric light and questioned why early modernism has not yet been accounted for in relation to it. Accordingly, I explore this neglected area to understand how electric lighting filters into the poetic treatment of sight and mediates the forms of a range of poems. I argue that Pound is able to relate every level of the poetic endeavour (be it the idea, poetic charge, epiphany, experience, final poetic product) to some form of light. One can assume, from the ways his critical work connects all aspects of the poetic process to electricity, chemistry and light, that Pound had an intellectual interest in artificial light because it was resonant of the modern. Electric light, in particular, registers an historical shift from the nineteenth century and, therefore, from its poetic practice. This deliberate shift is assisted by the presence of electric light, the specific qualities of which can inspire and contribute to the formal elements of a poem. By addressing the ways a range of Imagist poems reflect and adapt artificial lighting’s roles as a metaphor for understanding, it is possible to form a concept of the relationship between urban lighting technology and modernist aesthetics.

I. Ezra Pound

In 1908, at the age of twenty-two and financed by his father, Pound set sail for Europe to become a poet. He visited the United States for six months in 1910, but returned to Europe, first to London and then Paris in 1911, and he finally settled in the City of Light

⁸ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), p. x.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

in 1921. At that time technology was progressing at a rapid rate. A stream of life-changing inventions (among them the telephone, the motorcar, the phonograph, the airplane, and cinema) intrigued Pound and his contemporaries. Indeed, these changes are entwined in his early modernist literary theory and prose. On this level, Armstrong opines that ‘modernist texts are electrical, plugging into a scientific rhetoric which channels flows of energy and information.’¹⁰ Pound’s prose writing certainly is electrical, resorting to scientific rhetoric to explain poetic energy and the transference of information to the reader.

One such example is Pound’s *The Spirit of Romance*, completed in 1910 and comprised of two sets of lectures on medieval literature. In this work, Pound looks to physics to explain how the ‘living conditions of Provence gave the necessary restraint, produced the tension sufficient for great writing: “electric current gives light where it meets resistance”.’¹¹ Pound’s interests lie in medieval Provence, not modern Paris. However, this pronouncement marks an interest in technologised or chemical light (as distinct from sun or moon light) which he later expanded on concerning Imagism and Vorticism. Electricity provides Pound with an analogy for poetic energy; electric light is analogous to good writing. Two years later in *The Wisdom of Poetry* (1912), which was influenced by recent scientific discoveries, Pound presents a chemical formula for poetry. The first ingredient is thought itself, which Pound calls ‘radium’, and the second is ‘that melody of words which shall most draw the emotions of the hearer toward accord with their import’.¹² The iridescent chemical element radium (discovered by the Curies in Paris fourteen years before *The Wisdom of Poetry*), glows with radioluminescence as it decays. Thus poetic thoughts or, as he puts it, ‘these dynamic particles’, are described as a form of light. Armstrong explains that Pound was not alone among his contemporaries because for many writers, ‘electro-vitalism provides the energies of modernity; a science both of the body and, following Whitman, of literary transmission’.¹³ Pound displayed an especially positive response to electrical and literary light by deploying ‘electromagnetism in his theories of the “vortex” and, as Armstrong so accurately describes, declaring ‘literary production is incandescence.’¹⁴

¹⁰ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 19.

¹¹ Pound, ‘Psychology and Troubadours’, in *Ezra Pound Early Writings: Poems and Prose*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (London: Penguin, 2005), p. 204.

¹² Pound, ‘The Wisdom of Poetry’, in *Ezra Pound Early Writings*, p. 192.

¹³ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 19.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

In his introduction to *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars*, David Trotter explains this preoccupation with energy, but points out that ‘scholarship has not yet quite established electrical energy as the formula for Modernism’.¹⁵ Scientific discoveries, such as radioactivity and x-ray amongst others, pushed energy to the forefront of artistic imaginations. It was not just Pound whose self-explanations were framed by the ‘scientific and technological discourse of energy’.¹⁶ Indeed, Trotter explains that scientific rhetoric pervaded the manifestos ‘broadcast by avant-garde writers and artists of the period.’¹⁷ For Pound, electric and chemical light are metaphors for poetic genius. On the one hand, metaphorical lighting discourse helps to explain the artistic process of rendering an idea, apprehension or image; on the other hand (or at the same time) the finished piece of literature itself ‘shd. be a ball of light in one’s hand’.¹⁸ Artificial light, unlike sunlight, is the product, the poem, or the commodity, but for Pound it is also akin to the process, the craft, and the medium. In other words, it is two things at once. Artificial light embodies a particular kind of duality as it is both enabler and result: we see the artificial light itself and we see other things by it. In addition, we are all the while, on some level, conscious of the role human beings play in creating it. Naturally, a comparison with poetry emerges: we read the poem, by our involvement with it we see something beyond the words themselves, and we appreciate the human ingenuity which the poem embodies. Arguably, it is these qualities which make artificial light such a helpful metaphor for the literary critic, as we shall see via this discussion of the work of Pound as critic.

Technological advancements may have motivated Pound to bring poetry into the modern age via ‘Imagism’. In 1912 he began to promote that new school of poetry and in ‘A Retrospect’, under the heading “A Few Don’ts by an Imagist” (1913), he famously outlined the set of principles governing the treatment of an image, which itself was the presentation of ‘an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’.¹⁹ F. S. Flint set out the following three principles in ‘Imagisme’ published in *Poetry* in 1913:

¹⁵ David Trotter, *Literature in the First Media Age: Britain Between the Wars* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), p. 23.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kulchur* (London: Peter Owen, [1938] 1952), p. 55.

¹⁹ Pound, ‘A Retrospect’, in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber, 1954), p. 4.

1. Direct treatment of the “thing” whether subjective or objective.
2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.
3. As regarding rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome.²⁰

Imagism was Pound’s ‘drive towards precision in contrast to abstraction’ and although these principles make no reference to artificial light or electricity, points 1 and 2 do demand the kind of scrutiny assisted by a spotlight.²¹ Sophisticated electric lighting offered new ways of looking at things with precision. Vorticism succeeded Imagism and posited the image not as an idea, but as ‘a radiant node or cluster’ emitting energy and light.²² Thus we see in *Vorticism*, Pound’s essay published in 1914, the consistent centrality of light.²³ Curiously, the precision demanded by the Imagist aesthetic is counter to the general intellectual interest in light expressed in Pound’s critical writing, but the two are separate disciplines. Clearly, one of the most effective ways for Pound to write about contemporary poetry was to deploy the science of light because literary production is incandescence – it lights up the reader.

Pound consistently affirms the link between art and physics in *The Serious Artist*: ‘We might come to believe that the thing that matters in art is a sort of energy, something more or less like electricity or radioactivity, a force transfusing, welding, and unifying.’²⁴ In Pound’s mind, the skill of the poet is to control this electric artistic energy, for ‘good writing is writing that is perfectly controlled, the writer says just what he means. He says it with complete clarity and simplicity.’²⁵ This argument about energy is elaborated upon in *Vorticism* in which Pound clarifies the tenet of Vorticism originally set out in the first issue of *Blast*.²⁶ When the image is intense, the poet experiences maximum energy (like electricity), which he has to control. The good writing is the electric light emitted, but it seems that the original image is itself also

²⁰ F. S. Flint, ‘Imagisme’, in *Imagist Poetry*, ed. Peter Jones (London: Penguin Classics, [1972] 2001), p. 129.

²¹ Ira B. Nadel, ‘Introduction’ to *Ezra Pound Early Writings*, p. xiii.

²² Pound, ‘Vorticism’, in *Ezra Pound Early Writings*, p. 289.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Pound, ‘The Serious Artist’, in *Ezra Pound Early Writings*, p. 242.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 243.

²⁶ Pound, ‘Vorticism’, pp. 278–91.

radiant/radium. It therefore appears that, for all aspects of the poetic process, Pound finds an objective connection to science – especially electricity, chemistry and light.

As already mentioned, Armstrong claims a modernist text ‘channels flows of energy and information.’²⁷ In ‘How to Read’, Pound confirms this by writing that ‘Great literature is simply language charged with meaning to the utmost possible degree.’²⁸ The word ‘charged’ means intense or capable of producing violent emotion arousing controversy. However, it also calls to mind electricity: pertaining to a particle, body, or system possessing a net amount of positive or negative electric charge. Pound declares the ‘language of prose is much less highly charged, that is perhaps the only availing distinction between prose and poetry.’²⁹ Therefore, one of the defining characteristics of poetry is the level of charge in its language. Indeed, I shall later claim that an alternating current exists in a poem by H. D., in which a charge is internal to her language and generative of an inbuilt energy or glare. Pound considers that a piece of prose or poetry has a ‘total charge’, as if the works emit a wattage or light, thereby substantiating Armstrong’s contention that texts are electrical in the way they channel flows of energy and information.³⁰ Thus, electrical energy is for Pound a metaphor for poetic power and his critical writing entrenches artificial illumination as a modern symbol for the communication and apprehension of intellectual and emotional truths. Pound invoked electricity to metaphorise his methodology as early as 1912, no doubt influenced by the poetic use of electricity from the mid-eighteenth century onwards to express emotion, physical excitement and artistic energy. For example, Gilmore’s study of Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s references to the science of electricity illustrates how, beyond mere metaphor, Coleridge’s interest in electricity was ‘anchored in understandings of electricity as a force permeating the universe, as the life force itself, and as the nervous fluid’.³¹ In the early nineteenth century electricity was widely thought of as a life force. For example, the German romantic theory of ‘electricity as a part of a philosophy of nature’, which recognised human nervous and emotional reactions as electric, is compatible with Whitman’s presentation (discussed in Chapter

²⁷ Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*, p. 19.

²⁸ Ezra Pound, ‘How to Read’, in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p. 23.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

³¹ Gilmore, p. 26.

1) of the body, sex, the nervous system, and the potential of poetry, as electric.³² Twentieth-century poetic adaptations of these ideas about the total integration of electricity in mind, body and the universe emerge in Pound's writing.

Even Pound's practical example of language free from ornamentation concerns electric light. An image of electric light within a poem can facilitate the emotional or intellectual understanding of the thing, but it can also communicate the purpose of Pound's school of modernist poetry. Both are types of literary epiphany, to which Chapter 4 of this project is devoted, but for now let us direct our attention to how technologised lighting functions as a pedagogical tool in the assertion of Pound's literary theory. In his explication of the importance of the image, he writes:

The point of Imagism is that it does not use images *as ornaments*. The image is itself the speech. The image is the word beyond formulated language.

I once saw a small child go to an electric light switch and say "Mamma, can I *open* the light?" [...] It was a sort of metaphor but she was not using it as ornamentation.³³

That Pound has selected an example concerned with electric light affirms its centrality to his professional methodology, within his own personal set of significant images, and as a pedagogical tool for clarifying his literary tenets.

Pound was such an influential figure that his conceptualisation of poetic craft can help our assessment of historic poetic impulses.³⁴ Thus, even though electric light is rarely an explicit feature or metaphor to be found within Pound's poems (there is a palpable absence of the iconographic use of modern lamps and lights in his poetic works), what he says about electricity and light in his prose criticism influenced the poets working alongside him. Further, Eliot argues that Pound's criticism and poetry are closely bound. Therefore, even though there is this divergence between Imagist precision and Pound's prevailing interest in light as a metaphor, the ideas about electricity and light he shares in his criticism are subtly present in his poetry.

³² Christoph Asendorf, *Batteries of Life: On the History of Things and Their Perception in Modernity*, trans. Don Reneau (Berkeley: University of California, 1993), p. 131.

³³ Pound, 'Vorticism', p. 285.

³⁴ T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p. xi.

the universe, at once acknowledging his historical influences and implying the flowing universal forces of love and truth.

The second example is from 'Medallion' at the end of *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley*. It is worth introducing this stanza by explaining that *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* is broadly critical of materialistic London and warring modernity. For example, in section XII Fleet Street is presented as an emblem for consumerism. In this environment Mauberley becomes incapable of the 'Refinement of medium, elimination of superfluities, / August attraction or concentration' that Pound argues poetry ought to embody, resulting in his 'Exclusion from the world of letters.'³⁸ As a result Mauberley abandons poetry and the transition that the poem narrates parallels Pound's own distancing from the confines of Imagism towards the *Cantos*.

However, the concluding 'Medallion' is still Imagistic in its adoption of technology into poetry's future:

The face-oval beneath the glaze,
Bright in its suave bounding-line, as,
Beneath half-watt rays,
The eyes turn topaz.³⁹

Just as in stanza VI of 'Und Drang', artificial light reveals an image. The reference to wattage implies that Mauberley is looking at this image, perhaps of Venus, under the weak light of a modern desk lamp. In spite of the gentle half-watt rays, the image is not impressionistic or obscured. In fact, Nadel states that the poem's 'hard, ornamental imagism replaces the mimetic' and heralds the new kind of poetry that Pound had been calling for.⁴⁰ Even more intriguing, is the technologizing of the woman's face: it has a 'glaze', evoking a bulb's glass shell, it is bright and it has a 'bounding-line', like the iconic shape of the invention that changed the world. The shape of the incandescent light bulb was widely praised and created a new design aesthetic for electric lighting that was used by a number of leading designers. These included C.R. Ashbee, who considered the bulb's shape to 'conform so perfectly to the union of the two wires, that

³⁸ Pound, 'Hugh Selwyn Mauberley' (1920), *Ezra Pound Early Writings*, p. 140.

³⁹ Pound, 'Medallion', *Ezra Pound Early Writings*, p. 142.

⁴⁰ Ira B. Nadel, 'Understanding Pound', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. Ira B. Nadel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 3.

nothing further in the shaping of the glass is to be done.’⁴¹ Sharing Pound’s resistance to ornamentation, Ashbee felt that a designer ‘should in almost all cases, let it hang, and hang in repose.’⁴² Like Pound’s rejection of any ‘word that does not contribute to the presentation’, the beauty of the bulb and the woman’s face are final. Clearly Pound, together with Ashbee, Balla, Picasso, and others, felt drawn to the bulb in its naked form. Furthermore, the eyes turn topaz beneath the ‘half-watt’ lamp light. This leads Robert Eisenhauer to claim that: ‘the eyes are not topaz, a bauble pregnant with otherworldly symbolism; they turn topaz under the illuminative effects of low-level electricity [...] suggesting a process of secular conversion from one kind of energy into another’.⁴³ This is a forceful and sophisticated argument. In addition, the role of women, identified by Asendorf, ‘in the allegorical representation of electricity around 1900’ may underlie Pound’s adaptation of that historical representation of electricity as female eroticism into a specifically technologised image of electricity, in which the woman’s face and the light bulb are overlaid.⁴⁴ However, on a simpler level, Pound is suggesting that ideals of beauty, which are essential to art, can accommodate and flex with technological developments.

Modernism configures things seen in an electric environment and shows that technology and beauty are not mutually exclusive. Beauty is not expunged by modernity. Indeed, Pound presents truth and beauty under electric light. Arguably, beauty is Pound’s ultimate goal and in ‘Medallion’ the fictive poet leaves behind him an example of artistic perfection embracing technology. Hugh Witemeyer, writing about Pound’s early poetry, describes ‘In a Station of the Metro’ (1913) as ‘an epiphany of beauty in a crowded Paris underground-railway station.’⁴⁵ I have reserved a detailed exploration of this epiphany for Chapter 4, which addresses the adoption of electric light as an effective epiphanic symbol and trigger. However, I would now like to emphasise Pound’s internalisation of electric lighting in this famous Imagist piece.

⁴¹ Ashbee, ‘Suggestions for Electrical Light Fittings’, 91-3 (p. 91).

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Robert Eisenhauer, ‘Paradox and Perspicacity’, in *Studies on Themes and Motifs in Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 232.

⁴⁴ Asendorf, *Batteries of Life*, p. 165.

⁴⁵ Witemeyer, ‘Early Poetry 1908 – 1920’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, p. 49.

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.⁴⁶

Strikingly, although the poem makes no mention of lighting, Witemeyer states the poet makes a ‘metaphoric leap from *luminescent* faces to “Petals on a wet, black bough”.’⁴⁷ The famous beveled white tiles on the walls of Metro stations (made of Gien earthenware) were chosen for their effective reflection of the electric lighting which had a strength of only 5 lux. In 1913, when the poem was published, the Metro stations were lit by this weak electric light. Pound does not tell us this, but because the faces appear in stark contrast to the black depths, the poem relies upon and implicitly refers to the underground electric lighting. We have seen how for Pound literary production is incandescence. Artistic energy for him is something more or less like electricity and electric light asserts itself as an analogy in Pound’s teachings and methodology. Again here, in this example of quintessential Imagism, Pound exploits the reader’s barely conscious familiarity, as early as 1913, with electric light. The ‘epiphany of beauty’ is achieved with extreme efficiency. Not only is absolutely no word used that does not contribute to the presentation, but words are not even required to contribute the dimension of lighting to the presentation as a result, surely, of society’s adaptability towards and acceptance of innovation. To return to the nexus of sight, lighting technology and poetic form, Pound achieves poetic beauty, through expediency, by exploiting the fact that sight (in the Metro environment) is only possible because of electric light. This is played out in the concision of this Imagist poem.

Pound illuminates of every aspect of the poetic endeavour (be it the idea, poetic charge, experience, final poetic product) by reference to some form of scientific rather than natural light. As this section has shown, he internalises lighting technology into his poetic methodology, but the centrality of light is also apparent from the presence (sometimes unspoken) of lighting in his poems ‘Medallion’, ‘In a Station of the Metro’, and ‘Und Drang’. These references, be they explicit or implicit, are expressions of Pound’s acceptance of the relationship between technological change and aesthetics. The interpretation of sight in these three poems is unquestionably configured in

⁴⁶ Ezra Pound, ‘In a Station of the Metro’ [1913], in *Selected Poems: 1908-1969* (London: Faber and Faber, [1975] 1977), p. 53.

⁴⁷ Whitmeyer, ‘Early Poetry 1908 – 1920’, p. 49. (Italics are mine.)

response to artificial lighting. To return to Sara Danus's argument, Pound's critical and poetic works endorse her claim that technology became a central component part of art. But I would argue that we can be even more specific than that and say that Pound's writing, in the phase of his career which occurred during the most dramatic developments in human experiences of lighting, bears witness to the shift from the externalisation to the internalisation of, not simply technology, but of the technology of artificial lighting. With this in mind, I will now look for evidence of how electric light penetrated the work of other poets connected with the Imagist school.

II. William Carlos Williams and H. D.

Chapter 2 discussed the appropriation of images of electric lighting, which writers acknowledged as crucial to the exchanges between the individual and the modern world, to confront globalised uncertainties with depictions of isolation, superficiality, and emotional unfulfillment. Ryan Bishop and John Phillips, in *Modernist Avant-Garde Aesthetics and Contemporary Military Technology* (2010) share this observation:

Themes identified with modernism have, significantly, been those of alienation, exile, loss [...] symptoms of mourning or melancholia in response to the perceived disappearance of an always mythical or at least partisan (and thus already severely divided) milieu of untroubled relations, of communities and continuity, of governed bodies and spiritual certainties.⁴⁸

Bishop and Phillips go on to explain that in texts with these themes the human relation is presented in terms of 'breakdown or at least its diminished possibility' and Chapter 2 argues that such breakdown or diminished possibility is frequently presented under electric light.⁴⁹ However, the themes of certain modernist poets and painters opposed the melancholia, alienation and loss that is often associated with the clash between American and European cultures. One such example is the painter Sonia Delaunay (1885-1975). The Tate Modern presented the first UK retrospective of her work in 2015

⁴⁸ Bishop and Phillips, *Modernist Avant-Garde Aesthetics and Contemporary Military Technology*, p. 69.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

and described her early paintings as ‘celebrating the birth of electric street lighting’.⁵⁰ In her memoirs, she wrote: ‘Public lighting was a novelty. At night, during our walk, we entered the era of light, arm-in-arm’.⁵¹ Delaunay, together with other painters and writers, responded to what became a kind of cult of light with great positivity. This attitude, apparent in many Imagist poems, contrasted to the pejorative associations of lighting in some novels. For the purpose of better understanding the specific appeal of electric lighting to modernists, it is useful to consider Delaunay’s colourful celebration of it within the context of Pound and other Imagist poems.

Delaunay was inspired by the radiating circular pattern from the glow of Paris’ new electric lights. However, rather than depicting those lights or bulbs as objects (as Giacomo Balla does) she took broader inspiration from the existence of electric lighting, paralleling the influence of science on Pound’s artistic methodologies. Delaunay’s painting *Electric Prisms* (1914) (Figure 8) reflects her fascination with the street lamps of Paris without iconographic reference to the lamps themselves. She wrote in ‘Rugs and Textiles’ (1925) in *The New Art of Colour* that: ‘Style is the synthesis of practical necessities and the spiritual condition of an epoch.’⁵² She goes on to explain: ‘Our era is above all mechanical, dynamic, and visual. The mechanical and the dynamic are the essential elements of the practical dimension of our time. The visual element is the spiritual characteristic of it.’⁵³ The spiritual condition of the epoch (what is seen) is represented by Delaunay as having been forged by the presence of electric light. Light is therefore key to her artistic language. She wrote this in 1925 but was evidently assured of it in 1913 when she painted *Electric Prisms*. That painting is concerned with the experience of urban electric lighting, even though the source of the light is not identifiable. Consideration of this piece assists my investigation into the connections between sight, lighting technology, and poetic form.

Delaunay argued the painterly aesthetics of an era are born out of the interaction of practical and spiritual needs. We have seen how Pound appropriated the era’s practical needs and developments in chemistry, physics, and mechanisation. These developments include electric light, which impacts upon the visual and therefore

⁵⁰ Tate, <<http://www.tate.org.uk/about/press-office/press-releases/ey-exhibition-sonia-delaunay>> [accessed 2 May 2015]

⁵¹ Sonia Delaunay, *Nous irons jusqu’au soleil* (Paris: Laffont, 1980), p. 43.

⁵² Sonia Delaunay, ‘Rugs and Textiles’ (1925), in Robert and Sonia Delaunay, *The New Art of Colour*, ed. Arthur A. Cohen and trans. David Shapiro and Arthur A. Cohen (New York: Viking Press, 1978), pp. 199-201 (p. 199).

⁵³ Ibid.

Delaunay's spiritual element of perception. In this way, electric light holds a unique status as a technology that straddles practical (scientific) and spiritual (visual) categories. Both Pound and Delaunay seem to appreciate this because their artistic treatment of the perception of sight was electrified. This is evident in the way that Delaunay places colours together to maximise their energy and create light. Delaunay's interest in the expressive power of colour prompted her new way of painting. According to painter and art critic Matthew Collings, Delaunay followed a 'painterly evocation of the emotional lift of light' and created an 'optical vibration'.⁵⁴ Meticulous arrangement of colour increases the vibrations of the painting, just as the adjunction of specific words which 'contribute to the presentation' of the 'thing' increase the 'charge' of the poem.⁵⁵ Pound described the literary version of this as 'the art of "charging" language with meaning.'⁵⁶ Pound's words might remind us of charging one's brush with paint, but more importantly his and Delaunay's methodologies underscore just how well recognised the nexus of sight, electric light, and artistic form was.

In his 2014 BBC programme on abstract art Collings observes that Delaunay's 'Electric Prisms' invented a compression of colour and form, by which form means overall structure, but also includes each individual formal element within the whole.⁵⁷ Applied to Imagism, one could argue that Imagism compressed image and form to make readers consider the structure of the entire poem as well as its individual formal elements. Perhaps this is what Pound does in *In a Station of the Metro*, in which the title of the poem could easily be its first line. We are made to ask: what is the form of this poem? Where do its component parts begin and end? Fernand Léger can help us to understand where the impulse to condense and compress art came from. In 'Current Pictorial Realisations', from *Les Soirées de Paris* (1914), Léger wrote that the formal transgressions of art, its 'variety and broken forms', and its new condensed style came about because 'Modern man registers a hundred times more impressions than the artist of the 18th century.'⁵⁸ Density is a modernist trait which will be discussed later with regard to Gertrude Stein. Pound's and Delaunay's work share certain similarities in their drive to depict the world they perceive in ways which displace and upset the

⁵⁴ Matthew Collings, *The Rules of Abstraction with Matthew Collings* (BBC, 2014).

⁵⁵ F. S. Flint, 'Imagisme', in *Imagist Poetry*, p. 129.

⁵⁶ Pound, 'How to Read', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, p. 29.

⁵⁷ Collings, *The Rules of Abstraction*.

⁵⁸ Fernand Léger, quoted by Penelope Curtis in 'The Dynamism of Modern Life', in *Dynamism: The Art of Modern Life Before the Great War* (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1991), pp. 6-21 (p. 14).

conventions of their genre. *Electric Prisms* displays the first Imagist principle of ‘direct treatment of the “thing” whether subjective or objective.’ In this painting the thing is electric light (not *an* electric light, but the light *from* an electric light) and Delaunay responds to the light directly, not via any other thing. In fact, light fills the canvas entirely. She also satisfies a painterly adaptation of the second principle of Imagism: ‘to use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation.’ A painterly version might read ‘to use absolutely no mark that does not contribute to the presentation.’ Certainly, Delaunay uses nothing other than her perception of the colours of electric light to contribute to the presentation.

The following Imagist poems exemplify the interpenetration of electric light within literary discourse. At this point it is important to acknowledge the three phases of Imagism using the helpful breakdown provided by J. B. Harmer: ‘one fostered by T. E. Hulme in 1909; a second led by Ezra Pound from 1912 to 1914; a third organized by Amy Lowell from 1914 to 1917.’⁵⁹ However, other critics extend Imagism beyond 1917 to include in anthologies of the movement poems like ‘The Great Figure’ by William Carlos Williams, which I address below. The poem was published in Williams’s 1921 collection *Sour Grapes* and describes an abstract painted figure 5. It is an example of how Williams dealt with the contemporary and local images which registered on his consciousness. Although the figure is painted rather than illuminated, electric lighting is firmly present in his direct and objective description of an urban moment:

Among the rain
 And lights
 I saw the figure 5
 In gold
 On a red firetruck
 Moving
 With the weight and urgency
 Tense
 Unheeded
 To gong clangs
 Siren howls

⁵⁹ J. B. Harmer, *Victory in Limbo: Imagism 1908–1917* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1975), p. 17.

And wheels rumbling
Through the dark city.⁶⁰

This poem collates the light, movement, sound and dynamism of the city in a new arrangement. They are built into the logic of the poem's form as the number 5 rushes towards the narrator and reader. Even if Williams's 5 is not illuminated, the complete image emits a sheen resulting from the combination of lights and the reflective wet cityscape, which enhance the red and gold of the painted fire truck, ironically evoking flames. Williams's poem rejects traditional symbolism. It is not drawn on metaphorical terms, nor does it allude to an encoded meaning, but rather describes various common features of the modern city. In so doing, the poem becomes itself a great figure, powering forwards as text re-enacts sense impression. Therefore, though not the central object of the poem, street lighting is undeniably present.

Light opens the piece and dark closes it. We have been told that the city is lit and so 'dark' in the final line is suggestive of the unseen corners of the city or the unknown conclusion of the truck's journey. However, this lexical opacity might be explained simply by assuming that the truck moves off into a poorly lit area. Arguably, improvements in lighting constitute both thematic and formal elements in the genesis of modernism, demonstrated by Williams's choice of image and poetic structure. The poem is concerned with the intersection of myriad energies, but one which really stands out is lighting. The American painter Charles Henry Demuth's *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold* (1928) is an abstract portrait of William Carlos Williams depicting an accumulation of images associated with both the poet and the poem (Figure 9). Demuth's painting is not an exact illustration of the poem. However, he has identified the significant part played by artificial light in the meaning and form of the poem by depicting four large street lamps, among diagonal bars of rain, framing the number 5. The vividness of William's description links the poet directly to the painter.

Peter Halter in *The Revolution in the Visual Arts and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams* has explained that the 'golden figure is suddenly much more than a mere number; it becomes one of the new heraldic signs that are part of the specific

⁶⁰ William Carlos Williams, 'The Great Figure' [1921], in *Imagist Poetry: An Anthology*, ed. Bob Blaisdell (New York: Dover, 1999), p. 146.

beauty of the modern age.’⁶¹ These heraldic signs included electrically illuminated advertising signs, the first of which appeared in Paris in 1899, announcing ‘a new spectacle of advertising light in the Ville Lumière.’⁶² A dominant aspect of a modern city’s nocturnal beauty became its ideographs of artificially lit signs like Kodak’s K, and so it is unsurprising that such figures found their way into the poetry of the time. Williams invites us to think about the wide range of city signs and lights by evoking the radiant image of signs reflecting off rainy streets, but most significantly the majestic and vital figure 5 functions as a symbolic analogue for the poet himself. The corollary of this celebration of the power of the motor engine is the proposition that poet’s own creative energy equals that technologised power. The electric energy of the street lights is treated rather differently. The lights (and their absence) form part of the chaotic urban landscape with which the poem begins and ends and so they are at once used to frame the content and to create movement. As Henry M. Sayre has explained in *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams*, ‘the figure 5’ ‘organizes the chaotic world around itself’.⁶³ Therefore, the poem suggests that the clarity of the figure 5 replicates the organising ability of the poet to make sense of the modern world. Furthermore, city lighting at once contributes to the chaos and provides one of the poet’s organisational tools.

Imagists expressed values opposite to the Symbolists, who had ‘notions of indefiniteness and musicality and aimed at the art of suggestion.’⁶⁴ Imagists, complying with their principles, would not have used electric light for suggestion, symbol, metaphor or allusion. Instead, light features as an inherent part of the image. In contrast, light as a symbol in critical writing and theory is rife, which is perhaps unsurprising given Pound’s Symbolist antecedence. Scott Hamilton identifies that ‘potential symbolist influences were enshrined in modernist prehistory’, thereby affecting Pound’s turns of phrase in his prose.⁶⁵ However, as Hamilton clarifies, the ‘official version of modernism’ is grounded in a rejection of Symbolism and certainly Imagism would seem

⁶¹ Peter Halter, *The Revolution in the Visual Arts and the Poetry of William Carlos Williams* (Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 98.

⁶² Urbach, ‘Dark lights, contagious space’, p. 150.

⁶³ Henry M. Sayre, *The Visual Text of William Carlos Williams* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), p. 64.

⁶⁴ Harner, ‘The Mountain and the Cloud’, in *Victory in Limbo*, p. 173.

⁶⁵ Scott Hamilton, *Ezra Pound and the Symbolist Inheritance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 4.

to support that.⁶⁶ So there are two ways in which electric light is present in Imagism: as the actual image perceived and as a key to the creative process. If artificial light is not part of the subject of the poem then, according to Imagist principles, it ought not to form part of the poem's referential language. However, the work of poets collectively termed 'Imagist' varied greatly. H. D.'s use of signification in her poems is at odds with orthodox Imagism and yet H.D. might by some be considered one of the purist Imagists. As David Ayers rightly points out 'there are few Imagist poems which really fulfil the criteria of Imagism.'⁶⁷ This is true of a poem by H. D., in which communication of the image does demand the metronome over the musical phrase in order to create an alternating current.

H.D.'s poem 'Song' from *Hymen* (1921) is one such example in which sections of the poem are metronomic: a system is in equilibrium when it is static, but as a system is displaced it gains momentum which keeps it moving beyond equilibrium, establishing a new restoring force in the opposite direction. This repetitive variation is oscillation, exemplified in a swinging pendulum, but also in alternating current (the flow of electric charge which periodically reverses direction). Furthermore, audio and radio signals carried on electrical wires are examples of alternating current in which the aim is the recovery of information encoded in to the A/C signal. 'Song' has a palpably oscillating momentum and communicates information via a rhythmically alternating current. The oscillation is only suggested, not conventionally regular, in concordance with Imagist respect for French vers libre. However, the first four lines swing between the imagistic contrast of gold/white and the tight end rhyme of grain/again/rain, sounding a poetic beat which H. D. acknowledges in the very next line:

You are as gold
As the half-ripe grain
That merges to gold again,
As white as the white rain
That beats through
The half-opened flowers
Of the great flower tufts

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶⁷ David Ayers, 'H. D., Ezra Pound and Imagism' in *Modernism: A Short Introduction* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, [2004] 2005), pp. 1-23 (p. 4-5).

Thick on the black limbs
Of an Illyrian apple bough.⁶⁸

Overall the rhythm of these lines is flexible rather than mechanical because it becomes increasingly irregular, but the opening does imply a metronome or an alternating current. The poem's rhythmic momentum conveys the admirer's growing strength of feeling and the voice appears to address the object of desire. The language of the first five lines above is charged with a rising passion and 'life force', which call to mind both the pulse of the heart and electric systems.⁶⁹ However, the subject/object relationship in the work is ambiguous, for it is unknown whether the narrator admires from afar or if there is intimacy. The images of merging and beating through do imply intimacy and action, and yet H.D.'s methods (which are evocative of Stein's sexual poetry), namely her choice of imagery, the movement away from the metronome and her use of near repetition, result in fluid suggestiveness. 'Song' is language charged with meaning since its purpose seems to be the communication of ambiguity, played out through the experimentation with rhythm. Both 'Song' and 'The Great Figure' transmit an energy which can be described as electrified.

When considering the nexus of perception, artificial lighting, and artistic form we can compare H. D.'s emphasis on perception in 'Song' with Sonia Delaunay's treatment of the perception of sight. Both women maximise artistic energy and create light in their works via the arrangement of colours or words. An example of this is Delaunay's 'painterly evocation of the emotional lift of light' which creates an 'optical vibration'.⁷⁰ Arguably H.D. achieves a literary equivalent by placing together so many radiant images that the entire poem speaks of an 'emotional lift of light' without any actual reference to the sun:

Can honey distil such fragrance
As your bright hair? –
For your face is as fair as rain,
Yet as rain that lies clear
On white honey-comb

⁶⁸ *Imagist Poetry: An Anthology*, p. 35.

⁶⁹ Gilmore, p. 26.

⁷⁰ Matthew Collings, *The Rules of Abstraction*.

Lends radiance to the white wax,
 So your hair on your brow
 Casts light for a shadow.⁷¹

There is no direct reference to electric or artificial light in the poem either; quite the opposite. The poem's gleam derives from the inherent radiance of gold and white in the natural world. But there is an intrinsic intensity to H. D.'s objectification of human passion which suggests that the poem is charged, both erotically and electrically. The subject is so alluring that she (we assume) emits light, but not the natural light of the sun. Just like the grain and the rain, she emanates an internal energy. The hair on the brow generates light, just as it generates passion: 'So your hair on your brow/Casts light'. Simultaneously, the poem itself – in which language plus image create meaning – glows with bright clarity, powered by its alternating current indicative of electrical charge. Therefore, in the second half of her poem, H. D. generates an internal and artificially created light. In conclusion, neither Delaunay nor H. D. depict artificial lighting in strict representational terms, but the form of their work internalizes characteristics of manufactured energy, displaying some of the subtlest manifestations of the union of sight, technology and artistic form.

We have, in this chapter, so far considered several explicit references to artificial light, such as Pound's 'half-watt rays' and 'little light', and the affirmatory lights in 'The Great Figure'. We also encountered the adoption, or internalisation, of electric light as a metaphoric scheme in Pound's critical writing. The chapter then progressed on to a discussion of less discernible artificial light in poems, such as Pound's assumed and indirect references to it and inbuilt poetic 'charge'. Evidently, the field of influence of lighting technology mirrors the field of light of an incandescent bulb, or indeed a contemporary aerial view of Paris at night: unequivocal literary references are the bright centre, but delicate or implied references are represented by the dispersal of light at the edges of the field. These less discernible references offer up the possibility that modern technology may have had a shaping influence on the modernist aesthetic. These observations indicate a trend in the modernist configuration of lighting technology: whether artificial light performs a central or an understated role in a text, its presence nearly always asserts the present. It can do this by rooting a text in a cultural and

⁷¹ *Imagist Poetry: An Anthology*, p. 35.

historical present (as in ‘Medallion’, ‘The Great Figure’ and ‘In a Station of the Metro’) or by jolting a narrator from reverie back into the now (as in VI of ‘Und Drang’). Where artificial light, and electric light in particular, are clear features of a poem, then that poem enjoys a temporal immediacy.

Gertrude Stein promoted the idea of a continuous present in her work, a concept not dissimilar to temporal immediacy. She is the focus of the next section of this chapter, which addresses the importance of the present for Stein and the immediacy of her vision in *Tender Buttons*. Stein was conscious of the symbiosis of artistic creation and changes to daily life resulting from the dramatic technological developments of the nineteenth century. The multiple impressions Fernand Léger referred to arose from technological developments but, surely of all technological developments, electric light was instrumental to the nature of impressions as they were registered by an artist. Therefore, the lighting under which the impression registered might plausibly become integral to the artistic expression of which the impression is the rudiment. In Stein’s writing, a multiplicity of continuous impressions are continuously registered, which is part of her process of writing in the present. Electric lighting was responsible for a continuous electric connectedness or exposure in which impressions were more numerous and simultaneous than ever before. In Jonathan Crary’s polemic *24/7* he states that one of the goals of world-dominating social media organisations is to normalize ‘the idea of continuous interface – not literally seamless, but a relatively unbroken engagement with illuminated screens’.⁷² Stein’s *Tender Buttons* predicts this most recent phenomenon because it is a continuous interface with her surroundings – not seamless of course, but a relatively unbroken surface of illuminated objects. I shall now address the extent to which *Tender Buttons* supports the notion that the increasing presence of electric light contributed to modernist aesthetics and the realisation of fresh artistic possibilities.

III. Gertrude Stein

I began this chapter by narrowing the terms of Sara Danius’s examination of ‘the nexus of perception, technological change, and literary form’ into this specific examination of

⁷² Crary, *24/7*, p. 75.

the nexus of sight, lighting technology, and poetic form. If the process of mapping that nexus, by which I mean to include not just one identifiable link or connection but many varied links and connections, in the first twenty years of the twentieth century replicates the diffusion of light itself from a clear centre (the technology) outwards, so as to embrace more abstract and subtly internalised effects of that technology on modernist literature, then we now move even further outward to the subtlest manifestations of the nexus in the writing of Gertrude Stein. I will show that Stein's *Tender Buttons*, which like much modernist poetry turns on things seen, bears witness to the presence of modern forms of lighting, but in an understated manner. The interconnectedness of art and technology is implicit in Stein's indefinite and partial allusions to it.

Stein's writing challenges the reader. It frequently negates narrative outlines and renounces traditional perspectives, its incoherent grammar can empty recognisable sense units of obvious meaning, and all usual reading guidelines are undermined. Therefore, Stein's response to the increasing use of electric light is somewhat occluded; she does not present a fully formed opinion about it. So, it is more productive not to search 'darkest Stein' for one meaning, but to perceive the several impulses infusing her writing and its form.⁷³ There are similarities between H.D. and Stein, but *Tender Buttons* offers a substantial and long piece of self-contained innovative work which allows critics to trace the subtlest references and continuities to artificial light throughout it. My close reading of this work will reveal a near imperceptible surge of energy paralleling invisible currents of energy, the remarkable revelation of which marks out Stein as a unique modernist innovator. Specifically, I ask whether Stein's transformation of her subject matter might have been infused by the existence of lighting technology. For example, does the fluid, if puzzling, linking of one item to another in the text occur because improved lighting makes us see so much more at once? Is it, to use Joan Retallak's term, an 'analogical enactment' of intense sense perceptions in the modern world?⁷⁴ I will suggest that Stein's acknowledgement of the interconnectivity of the modernisation of daily life and art emerges in four specific ways. I will explore each of these in turn and in the following order. First, I address her acknowledgement of what she calls the 'changes in the way each generation is living', in order to establish her personal and general appreciation of modernisation, both

⁷³ F. W. Dupee, 'General Introduction', in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Random House, 1962), p. xiii.

⁷⁴ Joan Retallack, 'Introduction', in *Gertrude Stein: Selections*, p. 46.

cultural and scientific.⁷⁵ Secondly, I focus on Stein's attitude towards her optic perception of the external world. By concentrating on observation we can narrow the focus of the study to lighting technology. Phase three of the sequence considers elements of *Tender Buttons* which translate a Cubist aesthetic into avant-garde poetry. This brings us even closer to the modernisation of lighting by considering Cubist engagement with lighting as a modern phenomenon that liberated the percipient artist from the traditional formal techniques required by sunlight, which radiates from a single source. Finally, I will explore Stein's presentation of the relation of the external world to the mind, which can produce a style akin to lighting technology. This trajectory is helpful because it gradually shifts the debate from Stein's broad recognition of the interaction of technology and art towards a nuanced reading of her work thereby revealing how an artificial force provides her with the matter to communicate the most primal aspects of our psychological relation to the world.

Gertrude Stein lived at 27 rue de Fleurus in the 6th arrondissement on Paris' Rive Gauche for nearly forty years. Given that electrification of the capital began in 1889 on the Right Bank of the Seine, and did not accelerate until the 1920s, it would not have reached Stein's address in the 6th arrondissement by the time she published *Tender Buttons* in 1914.⁷⁶ Some public spaces on the Rive Gauche benefitted from electric lighting very early on, but the benefits of 'l'incandescence' were not widely felt until the period 'entre les deux guerres'.⁷⁷ The research I carried out in December 2015 at the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, indicates that the intention was for electric light to arrive on the Left Bank soon after 1900. However, the newspaper *L'éclair* shows that it only graced the area's major thoroughfares: 'La rive gauche est dans la jubilation: après le boulevard et la place Saint-Michel, voici qu'on va éclairer a l'électricité le boulevard Saint-Germain, dans toute sa longueur, et la rue de Rennes.'⁷⁸ These streets are not far from Gertrude Stein's address. The rue de Fleurus runs off rue Norte Dame, which itself comes off rue de Rennes. However, lighting domestic houses took a while longer. Given the slow pace of electrification throughout Paris' Rive Gauche, the domestic lamps depicted in *Tender Buttons* are highly likely to be gas

⁷⁵ Stein, *Composition as Explanation*, p. 495.

⁷⁶ Email from Frédéric Jiménez (L'équipe Messages des Parisiens at Mairie de Paris) at paris.fr on 3 October 2014.

⁷⁷ 'Histoire de l'éclairage public en France', *Phozagora: site web francais sur l'eclairage public* <<http://www.phozagora.free.fr>> [accessed 3 December 2014]

⁷⁸ Anonymous, 'Sur la Rive Gauche', *L'éclair*, 27 Avril 1900, np.

lamps. Alain Beltran, leading expert in the history of Paris' lighting, explains that 'Pourtant, en 1925, seulement la moitié des immeubles parisiens recevait l'électricité et les usages domestiques laissent espérer un autre essor.'⁷⁹ Therefore, Stein did not have electric lighting in her home when she completed *Tender Buttons*. In fact, she began writing *Tender Buttons* on a trip to Spain and so we cannot know how real spaces and artificial lighting converged to alter the perceptions she documents in that work. However, Stein would have been familiar with the electric light of Paris' streets, theatres, shops, and galleries because electric lighting was unavoidable on Paris' Right Bank.

Tender Buttons describes things observed in an interior domestic setting. However, Stein was acutely aware of how cultural and scientific developments outside her four walls determined artistic expression and form. This is powerfully expressed in 'A Long Dress' in the 'Objects' section of *Tender Buttons*.⁸⁰ That passage shows that technological advancements, including the popularisation of networked electric light, are a constitutive power in the formation of popular ideas, culture, and fashion. Stein blends fashion with electricity in the following: 'What is the current that makes machinery, that makes it crackle, what is the current that presents a long line and a necessary waist. What is the current.'⁸¹ 'Current' is wonderfully Steinian: as an adjective it means present, popular, public, prevalent, but as a noun it can mean electricity as well as something flowing, as in a stream. This one word encapsulates the intersection of Stein's interests in technology, popular culture and the psychology of her Harvard mentor William James. We return to James later in this chapter, but for now let us consider that Paris fashion had a strong association with electric light ever since 1888, when the Grand Magasin Printemps was the first to use electric light. Similarly, the new fact of public visibility and illuminated social activity entwined fashion, discernibility and technology. However, Stein is not only referring to fashion by implying the 'line' of a dress. In addition to that meaning, the 'current that presents a long line' means the contemporary culture which shapes the execution of literary output, in particular Stein's long sentences, reprises and repetitions which in *Tender*

⁷⁹ Alain Beltran, 'Creations et développement du réseau électrique parisien 1878–1939', in *Paris et ses Réseaux: Naissance d'un Mode de Vie Urbain XIXe–XXe Siècles*, eds. François Caron, Jean Dérens, Luc Passion et Philippe Cebon de Lisle (Paris: Hotel d'Angoulême–Lamoignon, 1990), pp. 241–257 (p. 251). My trans.: 'Nevertheless, in 1925, only half of the buildings in Paris received electricity and the domestic dwellings were left waiting for further investment.'

⁸⁰ Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons* (Mineola NY: Dover, [1914] 1997), p. 8.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Buttons are most evident in 'Rooms'. Her long lines represent the flowing current of perceptions, overhauling language to represent the continuous reconstitution of the self as it responds to those perceptions. In this way, allusions to electric networks and electrified devices delicately affirm the relation of literary form to an increasingly technological culture. This brings us to *Composition as Explanation*, the lecture she delivered to students at Cambridge and Oxford in the summer of 1926. Stein said 'each generation has something different at which they are looking' and 'the thing seen [...] makes a composition'.⁸² Of course, each generation looks upon new things: new fashions, new urban vistas, new architecture, and new inventions (which include artificial lighting) but, crucially, the writing of *Tender Buttons* coincided with the crest of a lighting revolution which resulted in all of those things being seen with the aid of electric light.

Stein's lecture asserts the relevance of modernity to the creative process. However, Danius shows that the study of modernisms has 'commonly been situated in isolation from modernity' and that this is part of the process of insisting upon 'aesthetic autonomy'.⁸³ Challenging this approach, Danius proposes that 'high-modernist aesthetics is not exempt from a certain logic of technologization'.⁸⁴ The arguments put forward in the first two sections of this chapter support that proposal. I would argue further that aesthetic autonomy is inevitably compromised by ubiquitous electric light. In the first decades of the century one could avoid the telephone, the motorcar, the phonograph, and the spectacle of cinema, yet one could not escape new types of lighting. Thus, even if lighting technology is not expressly referred to in a modernist text, it arguably infused the writing of the time because its pervasive quality changed the way things were seen. Danius explains that this 'logic of technologization' is 'frequently associated with mass-cultural artifacts'.⁸⁵ This combination of mass-culture and a new way of seeing is precisely what Stein encapsulates in *Composition as Explanation*, in which she assigns special significance to the act of seeing:

nothing changes from one generation to another except the things seen and the things seen make that generation, that is to say nothing changes in people from

⁸² Stein, *Composition as Explanation*, p. 495.

⁸³ Danius, p. 7.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

one generation to another except the way of seeing and being seen, the streets change, the way of being driven in the streets changes, the buildings change, the comforts in the houses change, but the people from one generation to another do not change. The creator in the arts is like all the rest of the people living, he is sensitive to the changes in the way each generation is living, the way each generation is being educated and the way they move about, all this creates the composition of that generation.⁸⁶

Here Stein admits the relationship between the artist and change. The artistic output of a generation is shaped by changes assimilated via the sense of sight. While she does not list lighting explicitly in her description above, we have already seen how electric light in certain environments, such as the Paris Metro, was taken for granted. So pervasive was widespread public electric lighting in the city's public spaces that it must have affected the 'way of seeing' of Parisians and visitors, and therefore changed the way each generation was living, in an immediate fashion.

German social critic, Walter Benjamin, commented on literary and sociological phenomena at the turn of the century and he, like Stein, responded to the century's innovations. In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1992) Jonathan Crary underscores Benjamin's sensitivity to the changes in the way his generation was living, changes which included advances in public lighting. The observer in Benjamin's writings is:

shaped by a convergence of new urban spaces, technologies, and new economic and symbolic functions of images and products – forms of artificial lighting, new use of mirrors, glass and steel architecture, railroads, museums, gardens, photography, fashion, crowds.⁸⁷

From this shaping of observers we can infer that writers were also shaped by such a convergence of stimuli. Crary identifies in Benjamin's writings the experience which Stein describes in her discourse on modernity in *Composition as Explanation*: the artist responding to the changes occurring outside of the self. The convergence of myriad impressions and experiences, which Crary identifies in Benjamin, is also present in the

⁸⁶ Stein, *Composition as Explanation*, p. 495.

⁸⁷ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, pp. 19–20.

way Stein's observations of interior scenes result in a glut of sound indicative of an overwhelming flood of sensory impressions.

An example of this is 'Apple', quoted below, in which repetition, reducing punctuation, consonant-heavy monosyllables and accelerating rhythm re-enact Stein's and Benjamin's busy streets, as well as the exponential acceleration of technological development itself:

Apple plum, carpet steak, seed clam, colored wine, calm seen, cold cream,
best shake, potato, potato and no no gold work with pet, a green seen is
called bake and change sweet is bready, a little piece a little piece please.⁸⁸

This example of Stein's technical experimentation, in attempting to capture all that she sees, reproduces the fluctuating essence of multiple objects as they share space. The reality of Stein's unmediated sensations overrules grammatical convention. The awkward syntax or synoptic incompleteness denote Stein's loyalty to the linguistic expression of her lived experiences. One is reminded of what Fernand Léger wrote about his exposure to a 'hundred times more impressions than the artist of the 18th century'.⁸⁹ Léger argued that the impact of modern living on the senses resulted in the modern painting being condensed. Stein also represented her vision of the visible in compressed paragraphs or units, dense with colour, sound and information. We have seen how Imagists also put into practice a modernist inclination towards compression in order to intensify the charge or meaning of a text and communicate maximum information with maximum efficiency.

The similarities between Léger and Stein are worth stressing. Léger's extensive series of paintings, *Contrast of Forms* (1913), which he began the year before *Tender Buttons* was published, can be appreciated, like *Tender Buttons*, without having to interpret an obvious narrative or meaning (Figure 10). Furthermore, the painter was influenced by the chaos of urban spaces and he expressed the noise and dynamism of new technology and machinery. In spite of the frequent absence of an evident narrative, Léger did use recognizable subject matter in his experiments in non-representation. Therefore, like Stein he synchronised the quotidian and the abstract. Stein defamiliarises objects through grammatical and rhythmical freedom, thereby replicating the impact of

⁸⁸ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 30.

⁸⁹ Léger, quoted by Curtis in 'The Dynamism of Modern Life', p. 14.

modern living on the senses. She may have adapted this emphasis on experience from William James's work on sensorial and psychic blindness, where 'sensorial blindness is absolute insensibility to light; psychic blindness is inability to recognise the *meaning* of optical impressions'.⁹⁰ Many passages in *Tender Buttons* result in the latter: an ostensible loss of associations between the optical sensations described and what they signify. What is more, this reassessment of the mundane is the practical process individuals must engage in to adapt to new technology. As a result, life is perpetually and simultaneously familiar and strange. Innovation may at first be an ugly shock, but it is swiftly accepted.

In *Contrast of Forms*, Léger sought to express what has been described as 'the greatest possible dissonance and "intensity" by means of contrasting shapes and colors. The amplified effect of contrast would create in painting an "equivalent" to the experience of modern life.'⁹¹ The many overlapping curvilinear and tubular forms in Léger's work can be compared to the photography of Brassai. The Hungarian photographer's night-time images of Paris frequently scrutinise one subject or object. Focussing his lens on near-repeated patterns like the leaves of chestnut trees or cobblestones he ensured the leaves or stones dominated the frame.⁹² (It is pleasing to note that the early modernist Paul Morand described Brassai's photograph of chestnut trees in spring (Figure 11) as 'd'extraordinaires candelabres.'⁹³) His photographs, *Contrast of Forms*, and *Tender Buttons* are all compacted compositions without the perspectives of deep space. Like Pound and Brassai, Benjamin's literary style was infused with a similar kind of compression, leading Crary to note that 'there is never a pure access to a single object; vision is always multiple, adjacent to and overlapping with other objects, desires, and vectors.'⁹⁴ This description also lends itself to *Tender Buttons* and to the section titled 'Apple' in particular. Benjamin and Stein express an interest in the visible innovations present in the streets and homes of their time, and in whose writings objects converge and space is valued, so as to suggest that there is no such thing as a 'space' in one's vision. Clement Greenberg has explained this in relation to pictorial art: 'All space became one, neither "positive" or "negative", insofar as

⁹⁰ James, 'Functions of the Brain', *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. I, p. 41.

⁹¹ Philadelphia Museum of Art,

<<http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51039.html>> [accessed 15 June 2015]

⁹² Halász Brassai, *Paris la Nuit* (Paris: Flammarion, [1933] 1987), p. 54.

⁹³ Paul Morand, 'Légendes des Photographies', in *Paris la Nuit*, p. 75.

⁹⁴ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 20.

occupied space was no longer clearly differentiated from unoccupied.’⁹⁵ The negation of space will be further explored in the discussion of ‘A Feather’ later in this chapter.

We now come to Stein’s optic perception of the external world. Stein’s appreciation of the interconnectivity of scientific and cultural changes with artistic output emerges through the emphasis she places on observing the world around her. This is relevant to *Tender Buttons*, since that text is a sustained exercise in converting to language that which is perceived by the sense of sight. The faculty of sight provided Stein with her subject matter since Stein is a sensorium, for what she saw and how she saw it were inspirational. Stein was not alone in this. In his introduction to *The Translations of Ezra Pound*, Hugh Kenner explains that Pound’s approach to translation was to treat it just as any other ‘poetic job; as the poet begins by seeing, so the translator by reading; but his reading must be a kind of seeing.’⁹⁶ At a fundamental level, Pound and Stein begin with seeing. The motif of vision in Stein’s *Tender Buttons* is undeniable, as a text composed entirely of her own immediate sensations resulting from her observations of three categories of physical items – ‘Objects. Food. Rooms.’ Some years later, she writes in *Picasso* (1938) that she was ‘expressing the same thing in literature’ as Picasso and that thing was the representation of her vision, not in a way which concurred with the way the rest of the world saw or understood it, but as a true representation of what *she* saw.⁹⁷ Further evidence of the importance of seeing and vision for Stein can be found in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933) which operates as a platform for Stein’s artistic, literary, personal, and psychological systems and concerns. For example, it contains several assertions that her eyes, ‘were more important than ears’.⁹⁸ Through her companion Alice Toklas’s apparent reportage, Stein articulates how her artistic concerns are consistently tied to looking: ‘Actually it is her eyes and mind that are active and important and concerned in choosing.’⁹⁹ The maxim

⁹⁵ Clement Greenberg, ‘Master Léger’, in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Francis Frascina and Charles Harrison (London: Harper & Row, 1982), pp. 109-114 (p. 111).

⁹⁶ Hugh Kenner, ‘Introduction’, in *The Translations of Ezra Pound* (London: Faber and Faber, 1953), p. 10.

⁹⁷ Stein, *Picasso*, p. 16.

⁹⁸ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (London: Penguin Classics, [1933] 2001), pp. 82-83.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

‘observation and construction make imagination’ was a lesson which ‘she taught many young writers’.¹⁰⁰

As such, Stein’s work is generated out of her experience of the visible. Stein attempts to describe what she sees exactly as it was when she saw it. Her writing aspires to be current for it belongs to the time actually passing, which was a time in which the experience of the observer had changed radically. In a few moments we shall see how she makes her writing contemporary by alluding to the fact that her immediate perceptions are not affected by memory or convention, but first it is important to note how she also connects her works to their historical moment in time. In particular, the form of *Tender Buttons* indirectly recreates the specific qualities of the world in which the objects she describes are being seen, and that world is one in which large amounts of information are registered by the eyes, it is a world in which the lighting is so even and consistently powerful that shadows are minimal and where all objects achieve equal conspicuousness. In short, it is an environment of electric illumination.

‘Orange In’, in the Food section of *Tender Buttons*, suggests that, besides deploying painterly techniques, Stein fought against what Frederick J. Hoffman describes as ‘the intrusions of the past and of extra-situational meaning’.¹⁰¹ In order to translate the immediacy of her vision Stein creates an innovative form liberated from the literary conventions of the past. ‘Orange In’ sounds like ‘origin’, but the repetition of ‘no since’ at the end of the section problematizes the notion of origins, anteriority, and associations. The only reality is the immediate reality of Stein’s perceptions: ‘real is only, only excreate, only excreate a no since’.¹⁰² The suggestion here is that art should be without a ‘since’, representing a set of equivalent sensations like the list at the beginning of ‘Orange In’: ‘cocoa and clear soup and oranges and oat-meal’. This is not a rejection of artistic influences, but a profound statement about how to represent what one sees in the present and the atmosphere in which one sees it, not what one believes is there, has learnt to see, or has been trained to represent in accordance with convention. Personal visual perception as experienced in the moment lies at the heart of the passage. The immediacy of Stein’s lists and the abstract nature of the connections she makes achieve that ‘importunate present moment’ that she later called the ‘continuous

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

¹⁰¹ Frederick J. Hoffman, *Pamphlets on American Writers Number 10: Gertrude Stein* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1961), p. 15.

¹⁰² Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 38.

present'.¹⁰³ This methodology – of connecting the visual with its place in time – together with Stein's impulse to enact and advance that methodology, is the theme of 'Orange In'. Stein's focus on the present is tied to her awareness of the contemporary scientific and cultural environment, but also to contemporary pictorial art, specifically Cubism. It is widely accepted that Stein's *Tender Buttons* translates a painterly aesthetic with particular focus on Cubist concepts.

This brings us to the third way that Stein's work acknowledges the interconnectivity of the modernisation of daily life and art. Similarities between Stein and Picasso manifest themselves in Stein's literary equivalents of Picasso's Cubist experiments. Stein was thought to be expressing the same concerns in literature as the Cubists in painting. For example, '[a]fter the publication of *Tender Buttons*, the *New York Times* dubbed Gertrude a Cubist of Letters'.¹⁰⁴ Cubists treated light in a manner which reveals a great deal about the influence of artificial lighting on painters (and writers) in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Douglas Cooper has explained that 'while they were concentrating on the representation of objects and elaborating the spatial notation of Cubism, Braque and Picasso limited the role of light'.¹⁰⁵ The absence of an overtly natural light source in many Cubist works, or the presence of multiple light sources, invites questions about whether the new availability of controllable and easily locatable lights influenced new approaches to the internal lighting of pictorial art. Christoph Asendorf argues that 'spatial volumes offered to the eye in the play of light and shadow are obliterated in the uniform brightness' of electric light which results in a flattening of objects.¹⁰⁶ The absence of natural light resulted in innovative and contradictory shadow placements and new approaches to depth, flatness and dimension.

Flatness and surface became important in theatre, photography, film, and architecture as well as painting. Anne Anlin Cheng emphasises this in her book *Second Skin: Josephine Baker and the Modern Surface* (2011). Cheng addresses modernist aesthetic practices via her interest in changing techniques of seeing and argues for a 'modernist immersion in the primacy of surface'.¹⁰⁷ The choice of the word 'immersion' here is dynamically non-linear in a way which works against the point she

¹⁰³ Stein, *Composition as Explanation*, p. 498.

¹⁰⁴ Humphrey Carpenter, *Geniuses Together* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1987), p. 31.

¹⁰⁵ Douglas Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch* (London: Phaidon, 1971), p. 46.

¹⁰⁶ Asendorf, *Batteries of Life*, p. 162.

¹⁰⁷ Anne Anlin Cheng, *Second Skin: Josephine Baker & the Modern Surface* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 10.

is trying to make. In spite of this – and of the fact that Cheng’s inquiry is about the visible surfaces of the American cabaret performer Josephine Baker’s skin and costumes – her idea might well be applied to a wide range of modernist literary concepts ranging from Stein’s ‘continuous present’ to Hemingway’s ‘theory of omission’.¹⁰⁸ For example, Stein attends to how objects appear to her and register on her consciousness from moment to moment. She describes a plane of impressions, so compacted with connected items, sensations and linguistic intricacy that the reader is immersed in the front-facing surface vision of what Stein sees and the words she uses to describe what she sees. As is characteristic of the avant-garde, she represents the mundane with a purposeful lack of philosophical depth. Her fluid and continuous style leaves no room for alternate perspectives or dimensions. In particular, no time is given to self-assessment, the adequacy of the descriptions, the semantics, or the level of accessibility. Neither does the writing offer a fully formed thesis, or even smaller conclusive sense units, which might give a reader pause for thought and self-reflection. That is not to say *Tender Buttons* does not deliberately raise questions about literary theory or formalism, but Stein is not musing on her ability to record the data of her sense impressions, she is rather doing it in the moment. This contributed to her innovative surface style also typical, as observed by Cheng, of many other creative disciplines at the time.

Cheng describes photographs which emphasise Baker’s flawless skin, hair, and clothing and ‘minimalize the three-dimensional materiality of the body’.¹⁰⁹ Minimal three-dimensional materiality is one of the defining characteristics of authentic modernist painting, according to the mid-twentieth-century art critic Clement Greenberg in ‘Modernist Painting’ (1960), in *Modern Art and Modernism: A Critical Anthology*: ‘Where the Old Masters created an illusion of space into which one could imagine oneself walking, the illusion created by a Modernist is one into which one can only look, can travel through only with the eye.’¹¹⁰ Stein also achieves flatness in her writing by resisting the depth psychology of memory, association and emotion. In the still life from ‘Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia’ (1912), for example, the narrator does not indicate any emotional response to the image nor guide the reader’s

¹⁰⁸ Paul Smith, ‘Hemingway’s Early Manuscripts: The Theory and Practice of Omission’, *Journal of Modern Literature*, 10.2 (June 1983), pp. 268-288 (p. 271).

¹⁰⁹ Cheng, *Second Skin*, p. 111.

¹¹⁰ Greenberg, ‘Modernist Painting’, in *Modern Art and Modernism*, p.8.

interpretation.¹¹¹ Emotional dimensions are occasionally shallow and, more often than not, completely denied. However, this is not a failing because the very collocation of words forces a re-viewing of those words. Just as the Cubists brought us close to the paint surface, so Stein brings us close to individual words in the 'White Section' containing 'Milk', 'Milk', 'Eggs', and 'Apple'.¹¹² Like the Cubist's front-facing facet object planes, Stein lists individual aspects of the objects using one premodification of the noun, if that. That premodification is not conventionally helpful because the word pairings are unexpected as in 'carpet steak, seed clam'. Selecting one side only of a fuller description is a kind of linguistic faceting. Stein renounces traditional perspectives by offering only one aspect of an intriguing idea to which we cannot add depth from the store of our own knowledge and associations or from any insight into either the narrator's responses to the words or her motivations in selecting them. Therefore, it is hard to perceive any narrative three-dimensionality or meaning, even though we strive to find it. Stein does not entirely reject associations. For example, further on in 'Apple', 'bake' relates to 'bready', 'sweet', and 'piece by piece'. Therefore, Stein shows that certain words pull together; rather than violating the integrity of words, she experiments with how the cakey words listed above can be distanced from each other and how facets of a complete image can be fractured and repositioned. In this way, she is self-referentially aligning herself with the Cubists. The modernist objectification of form is evident across a range of artistic disciplines whether in the reader's enhanced awareness of the materiality of Stein's words or in the shimmer of artificial light across the surface of Josephine Baker's body.

Let us consider how this attention to surface connects with artificial light. In his book *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe 1900-1916*, Christopher Butler writes that Braque and Picasso 'go beyond their predecessors in treating these planes in a deliberately contradictory manner, because they completely banish any naturally conceived light source, which would confer a unified sense of perspective.'¹¹³ Similarly, Cheng selects images of Baker's poses and performances in which radically contrasting surfaces flow into each other under artificial light. Similarly, instead of looking deep into an image Stein encourages us to look across it. In the

¹¹¹ Gertrude Stein, 'Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia', in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. by Carl Van Vechten (New York: Random House, 1962).

¹¹² Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 30.

¹¹³ Christopher Butler, *Early Modernism: Literature, Music, and Painting in Europe 1900-1916* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 60.

‘Roastbeef’ section of ‘Food’ also she stresses there are no shadows and therefore no alternative or distant surfaces: ‘room to search a light that is simpler, all the room has no shadow.’¹¹⁴ The visible is presented as one layer only, denoting the immediacy and flow (or current) of sensuous perception, where the perception is inbuilt into the form and writing. One must assume that the invention of artificial light aided the development of this approach in painting and writing, posing the question: can you only banish a naturally conceived light source once you have an artificial light source which is completely controllable, position-able? Certainly, reading Cheng’s work along-side *Tender Buttons* and *Composition as Explanation*, reveals a cross-cultural modernity where technology and aesthetics are inseparably meshed together.

In *The Cubist Epoch* (1971), art historian Douglas Cooper’s conclusion as to why Picasso took a sculptural approach in 1907-8 as part of his advance towards Cubism is acutely relevant to this concept. He concludes that ‘instead of wrestling with natural effects of light which – as Impressionist painting showed – eat into form and involve the painter in problems of tonal modulation, Picasso could use local colour and handle light like a display electrician, directing it wherever needed.’¹¹⁵ Like Picasso’s sculptural phase, the natural effects of light play little part in the observations that comprise *Tender Buttons* and, if indeed they are mentioned, they are frequently distorted. We have seen how the Rooms section describes rooms without any shadow, implying either darkness or a form of light which behaves abnormally. It also contains shadows which exist for reasons other than light, such as ‘why is there a shadow in a kitchen, there is a shadow in a kitchen because every little thing is bigger.’¹¹⁶ Later in ‘Eggs’: ‘all shadows are singular they are singular and procured and relieved.’¹¹⁷ Stein implies that shadows can be handled, acquired, controlled and therefore extinguished. Herein lies the connection with Cooper’s idea that Picasso handles light. Like Picasso, Stein’s shadows are not created by the natural light of the sun or the moon, but by her perception. Using an approach which is not dissimilar to the Imagists, Stein’s shadows are described exactly as she sees them as a result of intense engagement with her own observations rather than a description of what is habitually seen. Hers is a direct treatment of the ‘thing’, that thing being her subjective perception of the world around

¹¹⁴ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 22.

¹¹⁵ Cooper, *The Cubist Epoch*, p. 34.

¹¹⁶ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 23.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

her. She takes the same approach to artificial light: 'lights are not ponderous and incalculable.'¹¹⁸ This implies that the lights are not too great to be estimated and are therefore within our control. As Danius rightly states, as a result of electric light's ubiquity, 'a different matrix of perceptual possibilities has been put in place'.¹¹⁹ New possibilities for lighting freed both painters and writers from the natural effects of light and shadow, and thus equally from conventional requirements of form.

There is a consistent suggestion throughout *Tender Buttons* that natural light plays very little part in the way Stein's observations of the external world register in her consciousness. This may have to do with a tendency at the time to disassociate perception from conventional modes of dimension and depth evident in the painting of Cezanne and through to the Cubists. The negation of natural light continues in the final Rooms section in which Stein asserts that:

a plain hill makes no sunshine, it shows that without a disturber. So the shape is there and the color and the outline and the miserable centre, it is not very likely that there is a centre, a hill is a hill and no hill is contained in a pink tender descender.¹²⁰

We can read this descender as a sunset, with the implication that the hill is not determined by the setting sun. The hill is an object in its own right irrespective of the way light affects its appearance. In that way, sunshine is a kind of disturber of reality whose light and shade alter what is seen. Rather than rely on sunshine or sunset ('pink tender descender') to illuminate the object, in this case a hill, Stein's own description brings the object to life or to light. Her perception of it is the only truth that is required. In contrast to this, let us consider the final reference to lamps in the work, which appears near the end of Rooms: 'Left over to be a lamp light, left over in victory, left over in saving'.¹²¹ The close proximity of 'lamp light' and 'victory' and 'saving' indicate a positive experience of artificial lighting for Stein. Perhaps this is because, like Picasso, Stein is handling light like a display electrician, directing it wherever it is needed rather than being at the mercy of one source of natural light and its

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 49.

¹¹⁹ Danius, *The Senses of Modernism*, p. 10.

¹²⁰ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 46.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 50.

corresponding shadows. Interpreting Stein is a challenge and we can be certain of nothing, but we can draw these conclusions regarding light from the formal arrangement of her very carefully selected words.

Tender Buttons is a continuous plane of interconnected and overlapping objects, which prioritises surface. Stein's exploration of the limits of form recalls a central concern of Cubism, identified by Greenberg, of 'how to pass from the contours of an object to what lay behind or next to it'.¹²² This is a concern rooted in the physicality of painting within a taut rectangle and demonstrated by the simultaneous flatness and illusionary three-dimensionality of Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1907) (Figure 12).¹²³ The visual and spatial concerns of painting cannot easily be superimposed over the aural and temporal concerns of writing. However, Stein certainly tests the fundamental elements of her medium and she may well have taken Cubism as her inspiration in this regard. The absence of a natural and single source of light in Cubist painting and an equal absence of depth in Stein's *Tender Buttons* results in the proliferation of the idea that Stein was doing the same thing as the Cubists, albeit in a different medium, replacing paint with words.

It is necessary to situate *Tender Buttons* in the context of Stein's visual world – in which she aspires for language to be like art – as inflected by her interests in modernist European art, but also in the context of her training in modern transatlantic philosophical ideas. We move now to the fourth stage in the sequence of this investigation: Stein's understanding of the relation of the external world to the mind. Judith Ryan proposes that empiricist psychology, derived from William James's *The Principles of Psychology*, is the crucial impulse infusing Stein's writing:

Tender Buttons is in fact a carefully constructed illustration of William James's ideas about how we perceive and attend to objects [...] First, that what we see is not a set of different things but essentially "one complex 'object'" [...]; second, that a goodly part of what we see comes "out of our own head" [...] and finally, that the distinctions we make between

¹²² Greenberg, 'Master Léger', p. 110.

¹²³ Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger*, 1907, oil, 96 x 92 in.

individual things are the result of a constant alternation between
 “discrimination and comparison”.¹²⁴

Ryan’s observations apply particularly to *Tender Buttons*. For example, Stein perceives ‘one complex “object”’ in ‘A Feather’: ‘A Feather is trimmed, it is trimmed by the light and the bug and the post, it is trimmed by little leaning and by all sorts of mounted reserves and loud volumes. It is surely cohesive.’¹²⁵ There is no concept of the gap between objects here. The current of Stein’s observations flows in a manner evocative of William James’s description of consciousness: ‘It is nothing jointed; it flows. A “river” or a “stream” are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described. In talking of it hereafter, let us call it the stream of thought, of consciousness, or of subjective life.’¹²⁶ Stein experiments with the ways literature can communicate the ‘stream’ of consciousness and an important part of this effect is the reference to light. The feather connects the surrounding objects, which it is in relationship with and not hierarchical to. Its shape is altered by its surroundings, even by the light. The section denies three-dimensionality because the light does not cast a shadow over the feather; nor are the bug and the post in front of it, rather the feather’s form is reduced by the objects connected to it. Instead of going ‘beyond synthetic cubism’, the ‘one complex “object”’ in ‘A Feather’ suggests that James and the cubists shared a common approach to perception, even though James’s brief training as an artist was in a form of French realism that was nowhere near as radical as the Cubists. In Stein’s compact composition the ‘little leaning’ may refer to the angle of the feather or the angle of Stein’s face, echoing James’s notion that what we see comes ‘out of our own head’. In this case – and many others – Stein prioritises seeing, while acknowledging cross-modality. This increase in optical and sensory experiences, which Stein was witness to at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth, demonstrate what Crary has described as ‘increasingly a question of equivalent sensations and stimuli that have no reference to a spatial location’.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Judith Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject: Early Psychology and Literary Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), p. 94.

¹²⁵ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 14.

¹²⁶ James, ‘The Stream of Thought’, in *The Principles of Psychology*, p. 239.

¹²⁷ Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, p. 24.

Stein confirmed her sensitivity to the continuous rhythms of perception and how they, in turn, constitute the self when she said ‘I feel with my eyes’.¹²⁸ I have set out in this chapter the ways in which vision was ingrained in Stein’s relationship with the world, her art and herself as a creator. In *The Vanishing Subject*, Judith Ryan explains that developments in philosophy and psychology in the 1870s and 1880s, proposed that ‘no longer did I exist because I thought (the *cognito* of the Cartesians), but I was the one who saw, and I was identical with what I saw’.¹²⁹ Stein’s ‘I feel with my eyes’ confirms that she is indivisible from what she sees. Similarly, the interest among late nineteenth-century European psychologists in sensory perception anchored the self not in the body, ‘but in consciousness itself’, where consciousness ‘included everything that was within the individual field of perception’.¹³⁰ Stein’s field includes the technological changes she witnessed, thereby resulting in a literary and personal internalisation of technology. This is evident in the following quotation: ‘A lamp is not the only sign of glass. The lamp and the cake are not the only sign of stone. The lamp and the cake and the cover are not the only necessity together.’¹³¹ This lamp has no elected symbolic meaning. It simply falls within Stein’s sight line and it is in close proximity with a cake. The lamp and cake are associated with glass and stone in Stein’s mind. The reader does not have to decode their presence to achieve the profound insight that the Symbolists and Imagists tried to provoke. Stein creates a very different aesthetic which operates on her personal associations – disassociations to be more precise. Though it is intriguing to note that in her ‘desire to express the rhythm of the visible world’, in this instance her form re-enacts the light: the lamp is the primary object and the subsequent words progress or radiate from it.¹³²

Tracing the motif of vision in Stein’s *Tender Buttons* reveals the interconnectedness of Stein’s observations, her literary form, and lighting technology. Her curiosity about currents alludes to electricity and its unseen networks. Irrespective of what kind of artificial light actually existed in her home, she creates a world in which powerful and consistent illumination minimises shadows and reveals all objects equally. *Tender Buttons* enacts the continuous rhythms of perception and how they, in turn, constitute the self. We foresee today’s immersive electronic culture ‘of continuous

¹²⁸ Stein, *Autobiography*, pp. 77-78.

¹²⁹ Ryan, *The Vanishing Subject*, p. 9.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Stein, *Tender Buttons*, p. 7.

¹³² Stein, *Autobiography*, p. 130.

interface' in Stein's stylistic continuity, her presentation of surface, and movement from object to object.¹³³ In this way, Stein compiled an oeuvre whose form offered the subtlest manifestations of the nexus of sight, lighting technology, and poetic form not via explicit figures of lighting but by embodying the transformational relation between new ways of seeing and literary aesthetics. As such her work became one of the foundation stones of modernism.

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with the role of lighting technology in the expression of the poetic modernist aesthetic. It has been shown that the evocation of artificial light in poetry, during the period of its popularisation, could be both thematic and formal. Electric light at times seems to be a key component of, or indeed be, the actual image perceived, and at other times it informs the creative process. I have shown how the evocation of artificial light could be subtly formal, such as in Pound's assumed and indirect references. Whether overt and central or subtle and understated, the modernist configuration of lighting technology nearly always asserts the present and signals a movement away from the past. In both formal and thematic instances, lighting technology plays a complex role in the expression of the poetic modernist aesthetic, one aspect of which is the strong suggestion that an environment of manufactured energy does not negate beauty. In fact, quite the opposite: poetry which embraces contemporary lighting technology implies a new concept of real beauty in artificial conditions.

It has not been my aim to write a comprehensive theory of references to electric light in the poetry written by those living in Paris during the high modernist period, but rather to demonstrate the connections between poetry and mass electric light during the period of early modernism. This selection of literature, from the early decades of the twentieth century, shows not only the compatibility of aesthetic and scientific modes, but indicates ways in which electricity and electric light occupy a central place in the making of modernist literature and theory. The nexus of sight, emergent lighting technology, and poetic form in Stein's *Tender Buttons* confirms Danius's proposal that

¹³³ Crary, 24/7, p. 75.

modernist works exhibit a ‘logic of technologization’. In response to this claim, I make a more specific assertion about lighting: that the invention of artificial light aided the development of new approaches in poetic form after the turn of the century. In other words, art could ignore naturally conceived light sources by virtue of the fact that a completely controllable artificial light source – electric light – came into existence at a pivotal time in the development of modernist poetic techniques. Therefore, as I have discussed, pictorial art and poetry exhibit a logic of electric lighting. Certainly, reading Pound, the Imagists, and Stein’s *Tender Buttons* and *Composition as Explanation* together reveals the nexus of lighting technology and early-modernist poetic modes.

Through my readings we have witnessed this logic as a kind of internalisation by some writers of artificial light into the language of their methodology and the logic of their poetic forms. In *Modernism: A Cultural History* Tim Armstrong makes a broader statement about literature in the new scientific culture. He suggests that ‘three interpenetrating categories can be deployed: texts which register shock; texts which incorporate the new science into their depiction of the world; and texts which deploy science at the level of poetics.’¹³⁴ If we replace Armstrong’s ‘science’ with ‘electric light’ then we can apply his assessment directly to the findings of this thesis. Specifically, Chapter 2 focussed on the novelistic incorporation of electric lighting into depictions of the world and presented evidence of the influence of electric light on literary content. Following which, this chapter considered poems which deploy electric light at the level of poetics, amassing examples of electric lighting’s relationship to literary form. Both categories can register shock. The multifarious cadences and valences of electric illumination served different purposes for different writers, in part presumably because of the relativism of human perceptions of that technological phenomenon.

The fourth chapter of this thesis will now home in on one specific literary device in which the implications of electric lighting for content and form are united. That device is the modern literary epiphany. Literary evocations of electric light had the power to register an historical shift from the nineteenth century, place a text in the present day, and translate the immediacy of psychological development through a moment of knowing, all the while being enhanced by ancient associations of celestial and natural light with truth, understanding and revelation. As the next chapter discusses,

¹³⁴ Armstrong, *Modernism: A Cultural History*, p. 117.

electrified versions of the modern literary epiphany reflect and adapt light's role as a metaphor for understanding – although, in the case of Stein, this is not based on model depth psychology but on the play of linguistic and visual surfaces which prompt a reconsideration of one's relationship to objects, language, and therefore to the world. No other technological development in the period carried such rich and quintessentially modern and ancient meanings, connected to truth and understanding. Pursuing the structure of what I call the electric epiphany will justify my contention that Parisian images of light contribute to a comprehensive theory of modernism. The parallel between lights and moments of personal significance is undeniable. In modernism, an aesthetic experience, or epiphany, resembles the instant illumination of a light source, whereas the recollection, to adopt a Wordsworthian term, of that moment resembles the revelatory capabilities of light emanating from the source.¹³⁵ Therefore, as a way of bringing the strands of the thesis together, I now turn to the relationship between electric light, content, form, and the modern literary epiphany.

¹³⁵ William Wordsworth, 'Preface to Lyrical Ballads, with Pastoral and Other Poems (1802)', in *William Wordsworth: A critical Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 595-615 (p. 611).

Chapter 4

Electric Epiphanies

(Then first beginning in my thoughts to mark
That sense of dim similitude which links
Our moral feelings with external forms)

- William Wordsworth, *1799 Prelude*, II. ll. 163-165¹

The previous two chapters have shown how an aesthetic of electric lighting emerged in both modernist prose and poetry and that modernist writers recognised the aesthetic value of Paris' electric luminaires. To a significant degree, that value lay in the signification of electric lighting to oppositional states of pleasure and anxiety, unity and isolation, public and private, nature and technology, and past and present. For certain modernist poets and experimental novelists, its aesthetic value also lay in its similarities with innovative literary techniques, apparent in the nascent internalisation of the effects of electric light in the form and structure of modernist poetry and innovative modern novels. I now concentrate on one specific literary device, present in both poetry and prose, which permits a focussed assessment of the aesthetic function of the artificial lighting of Paris in the modernist era. The device in question is the modern literary epiphany and there are several reasons for its selection, elucidated below. However, my essential justification is that the prehistory of the epiphany establishes its involved relationship with, if not aesthetic reliance upon, light.

The epigraph to this chapter is a famous example of that relationship. The lines quoted follow Wordsworth's description of the radiance of the setting sun, which instigates both an active decision to record that sight to his memory, as well as his fresh awareness of the interconnectivity of subject and object. The Wordsworthian epiphany emphasises the power of the sensitive imagination to respond to the ordinary and process it to show something about the nature of experience. The starting point, or spark, for this epiphany is sunlight. I should like to emphasise that it is because the literary epiphany is homologous with light, and because artificial light between 1900

¹ William Wordsworth, 'The Two-Part Prelude' (1799), in William Wordsworth, *The Pedlar, Tintern Abbey, The Two-Part Prelude*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 63.

and 1939 is homologous with electrified Paris, that the device of what I am calling the 'electric epiphany' is the culmination of my thesis. As such, the first part of this chapter is devoted to literary epiphany and its relationship with light.

In the modern literary epiphany light, in its artificial guise, does continue to be a metonymical figure for understanding. However, it also works to amplify the importance of literary forms shaped by self-conscious autonomy, in which the structure of the telling or presentation of the epiphany is autotelic rather than governed by established modes. Put another way, if the light which is present at the significant moment is modern and manufactured but also, and very significantly, not reliant upon systems beyond the control of human beings (such as a romanticised version of Nature or God) it follows that the presentation of the moment will be liberated from established systems. Artificial lighting satisfied seemingly contradictory modernist impulses: its mimetic resemblance to the sun acknowledged nature, yet its modernity resembled the artist's skill and independence of nature. We shall also see how properties inhering in electric light lend themselves perfectly to assisting the form and structure of modernist moments of knowing, such as its flashes, power, beauty, and instantaneousness. Section I of this chapter illustrates this pairing of epiphany with light and sets up my investigation into literary epiphanies in which the light in question is not ancient and natural, but an artificial nineteenth-century form of lighting.

To say that an epiphany is an experience, somehow transcendent of time, which enriches a person with a new awareness is an over simplification. But simplification is, to an extent, unavoidable with regard to the concept because literary epiphany embraces many forms and styles. To use a botanical image, the rhizome of the modern literary epiphany is the poetry of the nineteenth century, but its lower roots lie in mystical and biblical accounts of the apparition of a redeemer or god. We can at least assert with some confidence that a modern literary epiphany occurs because an individual has perceived something ordinary. This can happen at any time, for it does not take special circumstances, but it does need to begin with a powerful sense perception. As Ashton Nichols, author of *The Poetics of Epiphany* (1987), has pointed out in 'traditional religious inspiration certain experiences are interpreted as external influence of the divine on the mundane. In the literary epiphany ushered in by the Romantics, this traditional order is reversed; the ordinary is rendered remarkable by an imaginative

transformation of experience.’² The ordinary is consequently impressed upon the individual through a heightened sense of awareness, but the moment ascends to a literary epiphany when the artistic mind recognizes that the otherwise ordinary experience has epiphanic implications, potentially for both writer and reader. Putting the moment into words can bring about a similar experience in the reader, but how this process might be enacted can take many forms.

It is precisely the flexibility of literary epiphany and the popularity of the device, across genres and forms, which makes it a propitious basis for investigating the aesthetic impact of gas and electric lighting in both poetry and prose. As such, this chapter demonstrates the many forms of the modern literary epiphany as they appear in the literature which has already been discussed in this thesis, as well works which I will consider for the first time. It will become apparent that writers frame epiphanies within widely differing temporal structures and genres and exploit a spectrum of techniques. As well as being an important formal technique in the poetry of the nineteenth century, literary epiphany is accepted to be a device whose relevance continued during the period in which lighting underwent its most dramatic improvements. For example, Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane demonstrate how scholars of Romanticism have proposed ‘a continuity into Modernism of the primary Romantic concerns with consciousness, with self-object relationships, and with intensified experience.’³ In keeping with Frank Kermode’s assertion that modernism was inspired by the poetry of the 1890s, Morris Beja and Ashton Nichols, who have produced indispensable studies of literary epiphanies, both identify the concept’s Romantic associations via William Wordsworth’s ‘spots of time’.⁴ Nichols’s study focusses on the poetics of epiphany in contrast with Beja’s work (written sixteen years earlier) which addresses prose epiphanies. However, both acknowledge that the echoes of Wordsworth’s words and ideas are reflected in modernist texts. Even though the nationalised nature of Romanticism meant that Whitman may have been more of a touchstone for Pound than Wordsworth, Robert Langbaum, in ‘The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature’, suggests the epiphanic mode is ‘a dominant modern convention’ which,

² Ashton Nichols, *The Poetics of Epiphany: Nineteenth-Century Origins of the Modern Literary Moment* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1987), p. 21.

³ Bradbury and McFarlane, ‘The Name and Nature of Modernism’, pp. 19-55 (p. 47).

⁴ Frank Kermode, *Romantic Image* (London: Routledge Classics, [1957] 2002), Morris Beja, *Epiphany in the Modern Novel* (London: Peter Owen, 1971), and Nichols, *The Poetics of Epiphany*, p. 21.

since Wordsworth, has pervaded poetry's structure and 'determines such Modernist forms as Imagism and Symbolism.'⁵ With regard to fiction he argues that with 'few exceptions the epiphanic mode does not appear [...] until the turn of the century.'⁶ Therefore, another reason for my selection is the critical assertion that the concept remained influential and relevant to poetry, and made its instrumental debut in prose, during the period that this thesis spans. The literary device of epiphany therefore becomes a litmus test paper for artistic ideas, concepts and forms. Based on this assessment of its value, analysis of the modern literary epiphany is central to the methodology of my assessment of literary modernism's engagement with the modern lighting of Paris. The modern literary epiphanies addressed in this chapter, in the prose works of James Joyce, Edith Wharton, and Henry James and the poetry of Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, and William Carlos Williams are built upon the internalisation and operation of characteristics of manufactured lighting with implications for both form and content.

I. Light and Epiphany

The link between light and epiphany provides the foundation for my investigation into literary epiphany and modern lighting. Broadly, "epiphany", from the Greek *phainein*, means "manifestation" or "showing", but Nichols's meticulous explanation of the word reveals its links to light: 'Phainein can also be translated as "to bring to light" or "cause to appear."' ⁷ Epiphany is a celebration held on 6 January to commemorate Christ's manifestation to the Magi.⁸ Epiphany originally referred to literal illumination and, of course, the Magi were brought to Jesus by a light.⁹ This establishes the association between theophany and light, which continued into the Romantic era, but not all Romantic epiphanies were religious. Wordsworth demonstrates a Romantic move towards comparing light with mental powers rather than divinity.

⁵ Robert Langbaum, 'The Epiphanic Mode in Wordsworth and Modern Literature', in *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany*, ed. Wim Tigges (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 37-60 (pp. 38, 42).

⁶ Ibid., p. 42.

⁷ Nichols, p. 5.

⁸ Matthew 2. 10-11.

⁹ Matthew 2. 9.

Wordsworth's imaginative power elevates the perceptual experience of a sunset to something even more remarkable. That psychological involvement is described in the 1805 *Prelude* as a secondary light beaming out from within him:

An auxiliary light
 Came from my mind, which on the setting sun
 Bestowed new splendour;¹⁰

The light from the poet's mind renders this sunset exceptional. Wordsworth's poetry helps to establish the link between light and epiphany because it draws connections between natural physical light and mental process, in particular the creative process enjoyed by an imaginative artist. It is a link which has remained in many ways surprisingly unchanged in spite of technological developments in lighting. For example, James Joyce's explanation of epiphany as a moment where the 'soul' of an object 'seems to us radiant' is so expanded in *Portrait* that it is hard to separate the 'radiance of the object from the luminousness of the mind that beholds it.'¹¹ This intermingling of poetic light with material light directly resembles Wordsworth's auxiliary light. I will return to this shortly, but Robert Langbaum's view that 'the object's radiance is its inwardness, which is to say the beholder's inwardness projected onto it' highlights the similarities between Romantic and Joycean epiphany in relation to the fact that both hint at the ancient theory of extramission (that light rays emanate from the eye).¹² Dante and Coleridge explored this reciprocity of light between object and eye, but Wordsworth and Joyce adapt the theory so that it is the imagination (light emanating from not the eye but the mind) which makes epiphany possible.¹³

The frequency with which natural light sparks a Wordsworthian epiphany (and combines with imaginative light) is noteworthy. For example, in the final spot of time in *The Prelude*, an epiphanic moment, which is not anticipated by any particularly increased perceptual sensitivity, is suddenly triggered by moonlight falling on

¹⁰ William Wordsworth, 'Prelude', Book 2. ll. 387–89 (1805), in *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 402.

¹¹ James Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, ed. Theodore Spencer (London: Four Square, [1944] 1966), p. 216. Langbaum, p. 46.

¹² Langbaum, p. 46.

¹³ Ann Wroe, referring to Dante's *Paradiso I* and Coleridge's 'Lines Written at Shurton Bars', in *Six Facets of Light* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2016), p. 108.

Snowdon's turf 'like a flash'.¹⁴ Wordsworth is so startled by the light that he becomes keenly aware of the objects around him. The flash of moonlight indicates an instant change in the state of mind of the narrator. In this altered psychological state, the poet's mind transforms the real world into an imagined one. The magnificent and transformative power of the imagination lies at the heart of Wordsworth's ideas about the sublime, indicating a possible overlap between the concepts of the sublime and epiphany. For example, Philip Shaw's *The Sublime* explains that 'nature itself could not be perceived as sublime without the operation of mental processes.'¹⁵ Therefore, both the sublime and literary epiphany require a contribution from the mind of the percipient: nature enhanced by the 'auxiliary light from the mind'. Yet one must be careful not to confuse the two concepts. There are crucial differences between them, not least in respect of their tone, which in the sublime has been described as awe, astonishment, or ecstasy, but in an epiphany is often a calm sentiment of loss or fear, acceptance or resignation.¹⁶ In both concepts the mental process is more powerful than nature itself. Tracing this idea to its logical conclusion supports the modernist position that it matters not whether the perceived object is great or mundane, because it is the operation of a powerful imagination, in responding, which is revelatory or sublime, thereby allowing that the thing perceived might be 'trivial' like James Joyce's moments, or unnatural like manufactured lighting.

A move away from lights in epiphanies which are divine or natural to those which are manufactured coincided with the emergence of literary epiphanies lacking an obvious religious dimension. The undeniable roots of literary epiphany in a pre-electrified era make literary epiphany's collision with artificial light all the more fascinating. Indeed, biblical correlations between physical light and divine light are the starting point for exploring a tradition of associating light with knowledge which has flexed to accommodate changing literary forms, changing ideas and changes in lighting technology. Light and things visible have continued to be typical facets of the literary epiphany, but the presence of a once integral theological dimension has diminished. The privileging of superior religious lumen over an inferior lux was reversed by the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, that transition from sacred to secular is marked by a superior lumen, which is not tied to God but rather to the imagination and the self.

¹⁴ Wordsworth, 'Prelude', Book XII . l. 40, p. 579.

¹⁵ Nichols, p. 31.

¹⁶ Philip Shaw, *The Sublime* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 14.

Wordsworth's literary epiphanies, or spots of time, initiated a rejection of traditional associations with religion. Critics, like Nichols, have identified this important change: 'While Puritan conversion produces intellectual satisfaction in the sudden discovery of a hitherto unrealized coherence – usually by means of Scripture – the Romantic epiphany seeks only the self-validating awareness of experience.'¹⁷ In a similar way to the Romantic poets, modernists did not link epiphanic meaning to God. For example, James Joyce's appropriation of epiphany into his own literary theory leaves out the apparition of a divine power.¹⁸ In fact, Nichols goes so far as to say that 'Joyce's definition suggests a return to the original, literal meaning of the Greek term that referred to appearances, illuminations based on actual light, and physical objects suddenly revealed.'¹⁹ In place of a divine revelation, the Joycean epiphany originates in a historically locatable experience. Understandably, critics have tended to begin their explanation of the modern literary epiphany with Joyce, whose abandoned manuscript *Stephen Hero* provides the most famous definition of it.

The Eccles Street section from that manuscript describes a trivial incident in which Stephen overhears snippets of a sexual conversation between a young lady and a young gentleman:

Stephen as he passed on his quest heard the following fragment of colloquy out of which he received an impression keen enough to afflict his sensitiveness very severely. [...]

The triviality made him think of collecting many such moments together in a book of epiphanies. By an epiphany he meant a sudden spiritual manifestation, whether in the vulgarity of speech or of gesture or in a memorable phase of the mind itself. He believed that it was for the man of letters to record these epiphanies with extreme care, seeing that they themselves are the most delicate and evanescent of moments.²⁰

Stephen contemplates a complete system for recording his epiphanies. What Theodore Spencer describes as Joyce's 'epiphanic view of human life as a whole' echoes that of

¹⁷ Nichols, pp. 16-17.

¹⁸ Nichols, p 8.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, p. 215.

Walter Pater, in particular with regard to what they both say about the temporality of significant but evanescent moments in which experience is briefly ‘perfect’, ‘real’, or ‘dramatic’, to use Pater’s words.²¹ They also share the view that there exists the potential in life to experience numerous epiphanies by being ‘present always at the focus where the greatest number of vital forces unite in their purest energy’.²² In the Conclusion to *The Renaissance*, Pater teaches that being present through ‘constant and eager observation’ (an approach we can justifiably identify in Gertrude Stein’s oeuvre also) ‘is success in life.’²³ Pater argues for the need to remain alert to the potential for such moments by burning ‘always with this hard, gem like flame, to maintain this ecstasy’.²⁴ This requires a consistent openness to the potential for significant moments and, thus, a particular approach to life. That Paris might be the perfect venue for such alertness is implied by many of the writers at the centre of this thesis. For example, the link between lighting, Paris and the potential for vital insight was asserted by Henry Miller in *Black Spring* (1936) in which he describes Paris as ‘gem-like’.²⁵ Such alertness for Pater is itself akin to a flame, confirming that the symbolism of light suffuses theories about the interaction of the individual with art and the world. Joyce’s and Pater’s suggestion that there are epiphanies to be had at any given moment, but that they require of us a particular way of being, might be thought of as a macro epiphany.

The critic Jean-Michel Rabaté pointed out that Joyce’s attitudes towards the term epiphany developed over time.²⁶ His early theory still provides an apposite starting point for this examination of literary epiphany, since *Stephen Hero* emphasises the role played by the commonest trivialities – chance happenings or overhearings, in urban and technologised settings – in significant perceptual experiences. Therefore, in order to achieve my specific purpose of analysing artificial light in literary epiphanies written by modernists connected with Paris, I use the language of the Joycean epiphany to identify instances of seeming triviality, which are in fact delicate and evanescent moments

²¹ Theodore Spencer, ‘Introduction’, in Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, p. 19. Pater, ‘Conclusion’, in *The Renaissance*, p. 188.

²² Pater, ‘Conclusion’, in *The Renaissance*, p. 188.

²³ Ibid., pp. 188-189.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 189.

²⁵ Miller, *Black Spring*, p. 164.

²⁶ Jean-Michel Rabaté, ‘James Joyce: Theories of Literature’, in *Modern British and Irish Criticism and Theory: A Critical Guide*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), p. 33.

leading to spiritual manifestations that men and women of letters have recorded with extreme care.

Let us begin with the famous passage in which Stephen tells Cranly that epiphany is the moment when he perceives an object or situation and all at once knows what it is:

First we recognise that the object is one integral thing, then we recognise that it is an organised composite structure, a thing in fact: finally, when the relations of the parts is exquisite, when the parts are adjusted to the special point, we recognise that it is that thing which it is. Its soul, its whatness, leaps to us from the vestment of its appearance. The soul of the commonest object, the structure of which is so adjusted, seems to us radiant. The object achieves its epiphany.²⁷

This definition is very specific. In *Stephen Hero* an epiphany centres on the full appreciation of one thing. But, as Peter Mahon rightly avers, Joyce's definition does not 'mesh very well with the 'epiphanies' that occur in the stories of *Dubliners*, which more often than not, resist any such clear recognition and provoke a whole host of questions on the part of the reader'.²⁸ Intriguingly, there are several instances in which Joyce communicates that lack of certainty by means of his treatment of artificial light. Indeed, this chapter will reveal how artificial light enables just such ambiguity; the physical properties and potentialities of lighting actually align closely with modernist open-ended and far reaching literary epiphanies. However, for now I address the extent to which some Joycean epiphanies deal with artificial lighting.

Dubliners, though on the surface realistic in style, is rife with unknowables, a fact Joyce indicates by removing artificial lighting from a scene. At the point of understanding something (we are not sure what) the characters are often plunged into darkness. This emphasises the incompleteness of human knowledge and thus the incompleteness of epiphany, as well as the gap between text and reality. In 'The Dead' (a story set around the time of Epiphany) Gabriel says 'We don't want any light.'²⁹ He later turns his back to the street light and 'in the partial light he imagined he saw the

²⁷ Joyce, *Stephen Hero*, p. 215.

²⁸ Peter Mahon, 'Introducing Joyce: Realism and Epiphany in *Dubliners*', in *Joyce: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2009), pp. 1-8 (p. 4).

²⁹ Joyce, 'The Dead', *Dubliners* (London: Flamingo, [1914] 1994), p. 247.

form of a young man standing under a dripping tree.’³⁰ Minimising artificial light re-enacts Gabriel’s altered, but occluded, view of his marriage. Thus we see that across Joyce’s oeuvre, the device works in divergent ways ranging from complete recognition of something to total darkness. Consequently, the writer most closely associated with the definition of modern literary epiphany corroborates the device’s operational affinity with light.

The epiphanies in *Dubliners* are unexplained and partial. Mahon suggests that partial epiphanies, together with the ellipses and things not said, reveal the limitations of ‘realism’ and that – as such – *Dubliners* is a self-reflexive text through which Joyce paves the way for the intricate self-reflexivity of *Ulysses*. Mahon’s line of argument is convincing with respect to Joyce’s interest in the narrative effect of artificial light and how, by careful deployment of a real technology, he can supplement the ostensible but incomplete realism and partial epiphanies to assist the reader’s interpretation. In ‘The Dead’ Joyce chose a mode of lighting which is both modern and real, but the significant moment is artfully located in its absence. As Mahon points out, ‘the “faithful” depiction of “reality” is in fact self-consciously artistic.’³¹ Nevertheless, Joycean epiphanies are not always located in absent artificial light. Indeed, when we turn to the development of this moment in the fifth part of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the moment of inspiration is lit. A seemingly trivial conversation, involving Stephen’s ‘beloved’, causes an overwhelming moment of inspiration which ‘flashed forth like a point of light and now from cloud on cloud of vague circumstances confused form was veiling softly its afterglow.’³² This light is aligned to natural light, through allusion to clouds and the rose glow of a sunset, but an electric dimension is subtly present in Stephen’s ‘enchantment of the heart’ This dimension is explained a few pages earlier when Stephen explains quidditas to Lynch. He says:

The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous silent stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the

³⁰ Joyce, ‘The Dead’, p. 255.

³¹ Mahon, ‘Introducing Joyce’, p. 3.

³² James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (Richmond: Alma, [1916] 2014), pp. 182, 184.

Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley's, called the enchantment of the heart.³³

The annotations of Marc A. Mamigonian and John Turner explain that Galvani's work in electrophysiology was concerned with the electrical properties of the heart of frogs. The luminous esthetic Stephen experiences is an electrified and involuntary incantesimo, or imaginative reaction, after he sees and hears the girl he loves talking with her friends and this gives birth to his own artistic endeavour. So we see that light is repeatedly a component part of epiphany, whether biblical, Romantic, modern or scientific.

In the early modernist phase, artificial light serves to highlight the indiscriminate randomness and surface ordinariness of the initial perception which can trigger a literary epiphany. Electric light in particular does this because it does not rely on individuals manipulating a mechanism, it does not wait for a lamp lighter to start his shift, and very swiftly it lost its associations with luxury; once established it had the potential to be commonplace – just like the initial epiphanic moment. Electric light, in its democratic ubiquity, underscores this aspect of the modern literary epiphany. My expression 'democratic ubiquity' encompasses a multiplicity of characteristics, such as electric light's ability to be enjoyed by all (especially in the streets), but also its widely felt benefits ranging from the far-reaching light of an individual bulb to its pervasiveness as an inexpensive lighting system. In its earliest days, outdoor lighting was limited to the boulevards of Paris' right bank, but its rays fell on both the mundane and the ideal, on the rich and poor who walked those streets. At least outdoors, its benefits were not limited to the wealthy. Its lighting effects were and can still be both spectacular and utilitarian, either way its presence does not guarantee an epiphany. Something beautiful might fail to instigate an epiphany whereas the impression of a plain object might register with intensity on the percipient (and the reader). This recalls Pater's and Joyce's arguments that the potential for a special but evanescent moment may occur anywhere. That electric light removed some of the mystery of lighting locates the epiphanic value less in the experience and even more firmly in language. It also marks modern lighting apart from the lighting of theophany and from certain attitudes to the sublime. For example, early eighteenth-century theorists like John

³³ Joyce, *Portrait*, p. 180.

Dennis and Joseph Addison argued that ‘the sublime emerges at the point where the grand or terrifying object is converted into an idea.’³⁴ Literary epiphany is also reliant upon conversion of the perception, but the concepts of epiphany and sublime differ because for Dennis and Addison the initial sublime object must be great. Modern and non-theistic epiphanies, by contrast, center on ordinary objects not ideal ones. Electric light offered modernist writers a signifier which managed to be both special and ordinary.

The longstanding association between imagination and light, specifically with regard to how poetic craft makes an experience radiate with meaning, justifies a study of how that association has flexed to accommodate artificial light. In particular, I investigate how the qualities of electricity create a certain kind of epiphanic moment in which the instantly illuminatory and extinguishable capabilities of modern lighting are symbiotic with a fleetingly short-lived epiphany. I will trace the ways in which Paris’ artificial light may have contributed to identifiable types of epiphanic moments and ask whether light in some epiphanies tapers off as the impact of the epiphany itself endures or whether the epiphany is delineated by a sharp cut off reminiscent of a modern light switch? To carry out this investigation fully the chapter moves away from author-based sections to an organisation based on form in order both to cover further modernist writers and to show a variance in the treatment and tone of literary epiphany. The second and third sections analyse artificial light in prose and poetic epiphanies respectively. The large number of writers who feature in this chapter indicates that epiphanies work as a common modernist device, though of course not all writers were using them. However, it is because of the effectiveness of epiphany as a touchstone that I have devoted this chapter to the concept and as the culmination of my study. Through the changing use of light in the literary epiphany we can test attitudes to light more broadly and interrogate evidence about the adaptability of prose and poetic forms in the face of cultural modernisation. To this end, the following section will indicate the role played by Parisian technologies of light in epiphany in the modern novel.

³⁴ Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 38.

II. Lighting in Prose Epiphanies

There are many visions of truth or epiphanies in the novels already examined in this thesis which announce the feelings of a character as he or she achieves a burst of fresh awareness. The lighting in which those epiphanies are set can correlate to the truth apprehended or inform the reader about that character's apprehension of the truth. For example, the uncomfortable glare of an electric lamp transmits the realities of the World War I battlefield more accurately than a lamp of a bygone era, such as an oil lamp. This is true not only because of its modernity, but also because its characteristics of brightness, intensity and shocking instantaneousness describe both modern warfare and the psychological experience of a terrifying realisation about the inevitability of war. Certainly, in both prose and poetry the features of types of lighting can act as a metaphor for the complexity of the mind's relation to the world. However, for now let us address prose fiction.

In addition to its contribution to characterisation, specific lighting can also provide the conditions for an epiphany in fiction. For example, lighting (natural or manufactured) can be emotive and exhilarating, providing an atmosphere in which the senses are receptive to a powerful perceptual experience. This is the case in Edith Wharton's *A Son at the Front*, which was discussed at length in Chapter 2. Campton and his son George 'stood looking down on the festal expanse of the Place de la Concorde strewn with great flower-clusters of lights between its pearly distances.'³⁵ This perceptual experience of vast gas-lit beauty generates sensations in Campton which prime him for an epiphany:

The sky was full of stars, pale, remote, half drowned in the city's vast illumination; and the foliage of the Champs Elysees and the Tuileries made masses of mysterious darkness behind the statues and the flashing fountains.³⁶

Unlike Romantic presentations of sublime nature, Campton looks down on a technologised landscape. As such, Paris' artificial street light creates a specific kind of epiphanic moment resulting from both the modernity of the city and its proximity to the battlefields of the First World War. The lighting of Place de la Concorde is thrown into

³⁵ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 24.

³⁶ Ibid.

relief against dark foliage and an enfeebled firmament thereby connecting artificial light with war. Wharton's combination of powerful gaslight, weak starlight and 'masses of' absent light creates an atmosphere of apprehension. The vulnerable half-dead stars (like young men sent to war) are overwhelmed by a stronger, but haphazard, force of artificiality. The image is a metaphor for the destruction of individuality in the face of the machine of war. In the distance, dark shadows are broken by flashes from the illuminated fountains. These descriptions foster irresistible links with battle-scenes of dark fields and skies lit by explosions. Accordingly, Wharton's narrative technique successfully clusters together divergent associations concerning fear of war and the potential scale of destruction. She also shows how Campton's visual perceptions are imbued with his specific and personal anxieties rooted in his desperation to secure his son a military desk job. As he watches the 'night widen above Paris' he realises that a 'horrible world-catastrophe' threatens.³⁷ He does not experience any conscious negativity towards gaslight, but the moment, aesthetically reliant on artificial light, provides 'a negative epiphany – insights into the abyss.'³⁸ Wharton's incorporation of technology shows her characters responding to a changing world. Artificial light provides a channel for considering specific and abstract political themes, but it also deepens our understanding of Campton's character.

The bright illuminations coexist with a contrasting physical darkness symbolising Campton's negative emotions. This narrative technique relies upon a real characteristic of urban artificial light: people felt that it made the unlit areas seem even darker and more threatening. This is a quality of artificial lighting which is acknowledged not just in literature, but also in painting. For example, in René Magritte's deliberately anachronistic group of paintings *Empire of Light* (1953–54) (Figure 13) the artificial light of the city intensifies its dark spaces. Similarly, Campton's view of illuminated Paris initiates a subjective process in his mind incorporating a range of dark thoughts: the reader is aware of a father's anxiety about his son going to war. Wharton's methods are evocative of the psychological journey we see in Romantic poetry in which an individual's perception of reality gains symbolic power. Until the epiphany, quoted below, Campton believes his son will not go to war:

³⁷ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 25.

³⁸ Langbaum, p. 42.

“Like a statue of a young knight I’ve seen somewhere,” he said to himself, vexed and surprised that he, whose plastic memories were always so precise, should not remember where; and then his pencil stopped. What he had really thought was: “Like the effigy of a young knight” – though he had instinctively changed the word as it formed itself...It was the clinging sheet, no doubt, that gave him that look . . . and the white glare of the electric burner.³⁹

As discussed in Chapter 2, the ‘white glare of the electric burner’ is symbolic of his fear of an unfamiliar type of intensity and pain made possible in an electric world. Relevant to this discussion however, is the presentation of a significant moment of understanding on the part of the father that the death of his son on the battlefield is a very real possibility. This epiphany or moment of reason comes about because of what Campton sees. Wharton’s text therefore partakes in the foregrounding of visibility, which modernist aesthetics are traditionally defined by. Martin Jay identifies this as modernism’s ‘fetishism of sight’.⁴⁰ It is important to be aware as we proceed though, that inconclusive epiphanies instigated by a visual perception under electric light might suggest that technical improvements in our ability to see do not necessarily result in greater rationality.

The analysis of moments of literal and psychological illumination helps us to understand the concerns and techniques of modern fiction, but also to understand contemporary attitudes to lighting technology. For example, it is clear from her autobiography *A Backward Glance* (1934) that Wharton had misgivings about electric signage and the ‘vulgar intrusion of flood lighting’, and yet Campton considers Paris’ gaslight to be beautiful.⁴¹ Indeed, irrespective of her personal misgivings, artificial light provides Wharton with a plenitude of symbols and suggestions. Wharton’s novel exemplifies how the qualities of artificial, but especially electric, light were able to create a certain kind of epiphanic moment and push the aesthetic towards an anti-war sentiment or, put more broadly, an electrified epiphany effectively transmits an anxious and increasingly globalised imagination. That global scale is represented by the urban gas lighting of Paris that Wharton described. That light is hazy, far-reaching, and tapers off as is the nature of light pollution, but crucially it has the symbolic richness to

³⁹ Wharton, *A Son at the Front*, p. 32.

⁴⁰ Jay, p. 164

⁴¹ Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 320.

represent several other aspects of the novel. First, its gradual dispersion from an extremely bright centre mirrors the widespread impact of the war. Secondly, the quality of Paris' street light viewed from above is analogous to the quality of Campton's understanding: his epiphany is a gradual acceptance of the danger he most fears, which is equivalent to the bright centre. The epiphany Wharton describes does not have the quality of sudden perception or the sharp cut-off of a modern light switch. However, the general global fear of war is concentrated into Campton's personal fear represented by the intense and solitary electric burner.

For Wharton electric light offers a way of signifying negative emotion. At the end of *The Age of Innocence* Wharton places electric light, rather than gas, at the centre of her protagonist's perceptive experience and subsequent epiphany. As if to indicate the passing of his final chance at love the daylight fades 'into a soft sun-shot haze, pricked here and there by yellow electric light, and passers were rare in the little square into which they had turned.'⁴² Electric light on the right bank was comprised of an attractive system of urban street lighting which was widely respected for complimenting the city's architecture. Indeed, Wharton writes of the glorious architecture of Les Invalides, the quarter in which Countess Ellen Olenska lives, and its beautification by means of illumination. But it is precisely that fantastic lighting which gives Newland a new awareness that he cannot see Ellen again. Therefore, while Wharton's writing acknowledges the beauty of the city, Paris' artificial lighting consistently signifies loss or the potential for loss:

At length a light shone through the windows, and a moment later a man-servant came out of the balcony, drew up the awning, and closed the shutters.

At that, as if it had been the signal he waited for, Newland Archer got up slowly and walked back alone to his hotel.⁴³

The crystallisation of his epiphany is prefigured a couple of pages earlier when Newland aligns the afternoon sunlight in Les Invalides with the sphere of existence in which Ellen has moved while they have been apart. He will not allow himself to bask in that golden natural light and accordingly Wharton changes the lighting imagery from afternoon sun to dusk paired with artificial illumination. As the natural light fades we

⁴² Wharton, *Age of Innocence*, p. 302.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 303.

understand the two will not be reunited, a truth confirmed moments later when something mundane brings together a pre-established system of symbolic images of electric light. The ordinary event of switching on a light constitutes an epiphanic juncture for Newland from which there is no going back and there the novel ends. For both Newland and Campton, a specific electric light is linked to the epiphanic climax of an understanding which previously they only held vaguely. In spite of the author's personal distrust of electric light, such conclusive epiphanies subscribe to the ocularcentrism characteristic of the period.

These examples show that, in the modern literary epiphany, sight is integral to both the initial experience and the ensuing knowledge. Martin Jay in *Downcast Eyes* explains that a bias towards visuality dominated 'that remarkable Greek invention called philosophy.'⁴⁴ Jay quotes Bruno Snell's work *The Discovery of the Mind; The Greek Origins of European Thought* (1953): 'Knowledge (eidenai) is the state of having seen'.⁴⁵ Indeed, epiphanies have always tended to be ocularcentric, but what altered in the twentieth century was the light by which something was seen. Yet many writers did not detail precisely the mode of lighting. However, when the presence of artificial light is described, it forms part of the symbolic transformation of the narrated perception; this indicates a tendency in the narrative fiction of the time to exploit modern lighting across its range of scientific and aesthetic associations.

In all the literary examples in this chapter, the object perceived will somehow relate to lighting in the following three ways: 1. the very thing may be a lamp, or 2. the thing might be light itself emanating from a lamp, or 3. the thing might be made visible because of a type of lighting. However, there is a fourth method of using lighting in which it does not form part of the scene perceived, but the psychological process of epiphany is compared to light. In Henry James's 1903 novella, 'The Beast In the Jungle', for example, an image of gas lamps conveys just such a mental process. John Marcher and May Bartram have just met for the second time and the memories of their first meeting return to Marcher, albeit inaccurately. This episode, discussed in Chapter 1, is a remembering rather than an epiphany, but it is a helpful example of the efficiency with which an idea about ideas can be communicated using an image of lighting.

⁴⁴ Jay, p. 24.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Her face and her voice, all at his service now, worked the miracle - the impression operating like the torch of a lamplighter who touches into flame, one by one, a long row of gas jets. Marcher flattered that the illumination was brilliant, yet he was really still more pleased on her showing him, with amusement, that in his haste to make everything right he had got most things rather wrong.⁴⁶

The memory returns slowly (which is why gas is more appropriate than the instant flash of a closed electrical circuit). We might think of the electric version – the so-called ‘light bulb moment’ – where an epiphany is represented by the flicking of a switch. The epiphany functions as a kind of psychological and or literal light, which is a technique considered in the poetry section of this chapter.

Of course, *The Beast in the Jungle* is neither set in Paris nor electrified. By contrast, the following epiphany in James’s *The Ambassadors*, which is set in Paris, combines all of the first three methods set out above (using lamp, light and illuminated object). At the end of the passage, we realise that James has also used this fourth method and linked the way light leads the eye, and can itself appear to move, with his character’s psychological journey. The very thing which prompts a spiritual manifestation in the passage quoted below could be an actual table lamp, but it might equally be the light emanating from the street lamps of Paris, or indeed the domestic objects brought into view by the light from the table lamp conjoining with the outdoor lighting. In any case, two forms of light, an interior lamp (probably gas given that in 1903 private residences rarely had electric light in Paris though James does not specify) and Paris’ nocturnal electric glow, are integral to the episode below which we are told the protagonist Strether would recall as one of his experiences in Paris ‘that most had counted’.⁴⁷ Once again, Paris’ artificial lighting communicates the city’s cultural influence, with James presenting its glow as a dynamic force enhancing everything it illuminates. Its effect on Strether’s senses prepares his mind for one of the ‘instant states’ that Millicent Bell refers to in *Meaning in Henry James*.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Henry James, *The Beast in the Jungle*, p. 5.

⁴⁷ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 353.

⁴⁸ Bell, p. 333.

The night was hot and heavy and the single lamp sufficient; the great flare of the lighted city, rising high, spending itself afar, played up from the Boulevard and, through the vague vistas of the successive rooms, brought objects into view and added to their dignity.⁴⁹

The accumulation of minor impressions, which frequently refer to light, conclude in this major moment, which relies upon the symbolic and emotive effects of artificial lighting. First, the comfortable intimacy of a soft circle of light from a single interior lamp affects Strether deeply, putting him in the frame of mind to receive a major 'spiritual manifestation' about the 'main truth' of his life. Then, looking out over the balcony he relishes the feeling that he possesses 'the style of the place', but he simultaneously feels 'the youth he had long ago missed'.⁵⁰ Chapter 2 has already mentioned how the spirit of place (in part attributable to urban lighting) crystallises the 'queer concrete presence' of Strether's sense of loss, but the passage is especially revealing with regard to the way light is constitutive of the structure of a modern prose literary epiphany. James compiles a strata of impressions and memories in parallel with the layering of light-forms. Thus, lighting enacts the way in which Strether's self-knowledge builds throughout the novel as his experiences in Paris are compounded. Consequently, the epiphany manifests itself as part of James's impressionism and not as a sudden flash, a device used by other writers.⁵¹ The epiphany is a gentle one, subtly indicated by the comforting nature of the artificial light. Finally it is also indicative of a progression; it is psychologically dynamic for the light leads us 'rising high', 'afar', playing up, moving 'through', and bringing objects into focus as if to recreate the workings of Strether's mind as the moment of realisation occurs. Therefore, James ensures that the lighting of Paris assists his aesthetic purpose on several levels.

One such level is as a visual representation of the function of memory, which is central to Strether's epiphany. This fact is reinforced by the coalescence of modes of lighting in the novel which replicate the merging of his memories. For example, memories of voices 'crowded on him as he moved about' and the sound of them make him feel something which he is able to connect to his youth of missed opportunity.⁵²

⁴⁹ James, *Ambassadors*, p. 353.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

⁵¹ Henry Miller writes that 'Dostoevski first flashed across my horizon' to indicate his sudden intellectual coming of age in *Black Spring*, p. 18.

⁵² *Ibid.*

Therefore, lighting simulates memory as part of its broader simulation of psychological operations: individual lights equate to individual memories, while light pollution represents the accumulation of experiences or sense impressions, advancing Strether's sense of personal identity. Lighting is particularly effective in representing imaginative time in which memories are recalled and endure. Nichols summarizes Frank Kermode's two 'senses of time': '*chronos*, or chronological time, and *kairos*, or imaginative time. The former describes the time in which experience occurs, while the latter refers to time as it is conceived in the mind, with emphasis given to moments of significance.'⁵³ The optical effect created by the artificial lights results in a focus on *kairos*, since it encourages Strether's reverie and places narrative emphasis on moments of significance re-experienced in the present. Such timelessness, a quality of the intense moment which resists chronological time, is a common factor in epiphanies. James draws out linear time through the acute tracing of light from the single lamp to the expansive light from the city, onto the rising artificial glow which reaches from distant vistas into rooms and onto objects. This movement represents a progression in the character's mind that operates outside of chronological time.

Modernists, like Stein, wanted to do justice to imaginative time and 'to make language embody essential truths of human existence'.⁵⁴ For example, Stein's 'continuous present' connects the visual with its place in *kairotic* time.⁵⁵ Jayne L. Walker identifies Stein's belief that the majority of her writings reflected her 'uniform immersion in present-tense experience'.⁵⁶ Stein was a forerunner in a field in which new ideas about narrative time and psychology affected prose form. Representational qualities of artificial light proved useful in formal experiments which queried the temporal ramifications of moments of magnitude. Let us compare modernist epiphanies with biblical ones. The effect of a theophany, or religious conversion, is long-lasting, probably life-changing. Similarly, the narrative voice in Romantic poetry will be deeply affected by the epiphany described. However, one single modernist epiphany may not alter the course of that narrator's life. He or she may have multiple epiphanies and reflect on them only briefly, or may feel the magnitude, but not intellectualize it. It is

⁵³ Nichols, p. 24.

⁵⁴ Jayne L. Walker, 'Introduction', in *The Making of a Modernist: Gertrude Stein from Three Lives to Tender Buttons* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984), p. xv.

⁵⁵ Stein, *Composition as Explanation*, p. 498.

⁵⁶ Walker, p. xv.

the immediate experience itself which is special. This is what Stein conveys through her emphasis on the present.

In the modernist poetic epiphany the meaning of the epiphanic image is left unnarrated, in spite of a corresponding emphasis on words themselves. Martin Jay has described this as ‘the denarrativization of the ocular’ central to the ‘larger shift from reading the world as an intelligible text (the “book of nature”) to looking at it as an observable but meaningless object.’⁵⁷ This ‘denarrativization’ was fully achieved in twentieth century abstract art in which ‘images were increasingly liberated from their storytelling function.’⁵⁸ As abstract painters brought home the importance of the paint/material itself, so did many modernist poets as prefigured in Walter Pater’s advocacy of experience as an end in itself.⁵⁹ The job of a creative genius is to articulate the fact that a moment has value rather than assign it specific meaning. The residue of each significant moment may not be sustained or entirely clear, but what must be life-long is an openness to epiphany which enriches life, a perpetual readiness. The third section of this chapter discusses poems comprising open-ended epiphanies which invite the reader to add an interpretation, but in both prose and poetry we find that the instantly illuminatory and extinguishable capabilities of modern lighting are symbiotic with fleeting, short-lived or unexplained epiphanies. In this way, it is unsurprising, then, that full meaning of Strether’s epiphany is undisclosed.

James’s technique of interfusing two different kinds of illuminations – lighting and understanding – reference established philosophy as well as contemporary developments in the field of psychology. In ‘The Stream of Thought’, in *The Principles of Psychology*, his brother William James asserts that each mind ‘keeps its own thoughts to itself’ and it is true that none of the conclusions Strether draws from the continuous rhythms of his sensations are declared or summed up.⁶⁰ He does not share his newfound self-knowledge with other characters, which is in marked contrast to the formal expression of an epiphany. This expanded individualism stresses the fundamental separateness of experiencing minds. While the artificially-lit literary epiphany emphasises certain shared phenomenological universalities, any emotional connectedness is limited. This is played out in the story by Strether’s final isolation.

⁵⁷ Jay, 51.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Pater, ‘Conclusion’, in *The Renaissance*, p. 188.

⁶⁰ James, ‘The Stream of Thought’, in *The Principles of Psychology*, I, p. 226.

Though he acquires new insight and self-assurance in Paris, Strether's lack of evaluation replicates the nature of his life as a series of impressions and perceptions that he neglects to analyse. Electric lighting increased shared experiences but arguably also encouraged, and is still encouraging, emotional disconnection.

There are several reasons why technologies of artificial light provide an appropriate environment in which to investigate the complexity of human consciousness. As Chris Otter describes in his fascinating work *The Victorian Eye: A Political History of Light and Vision in Britain, 1800–1910*, electric light required observers to habituate themselves to a new way of perceiving. For example, electric light altered the way colours were seen, which justifies Sonia Delaunay's long-lasting fascination with it. Following the universal yellow of gas, 'the whiteness of electric illumination was often an unpleasant shock, registered chromatically as bluish. For those familiar with yellow light, noted Preece, a whiter light "appeared to be blue".'⁶¹ As discussed, the passage from *The Ambassadors* does not register shock, but a kind of wave of understanding. This might be attributable in part to the fact that people quickly became used to electric light. Indeed, Otter goes on to state that 'New perceptual habits had to be slowly learned: instantaneous revolution in color perception is, perhaps, physiologically impossible since such perception is always relative and never absolute.'⁶² If Otter is right that 'electricity simply made decorative calculations more complex' its arguable that its presence made *all* perceptual calculations more complex and, in the wake of the transatlantic psychology pioneered by James's brother, it impacted on all calculations relating to individual identity. Electric light, but especially the combination of different types of artificial light, is the perfect setting for phenomenological discourse and for fictional scenes concerned with the working of the mind; or at least that seems to be the case with regard to Paris. However, Otter encourages us not to talk in abstract generalisations about types of lighting: 'Instead, we must speak with more spatial specificity about particular cities, explore their idiosyncratic networks, and listen to what contemporaries had to say about them. Only then can tentative generalizations be drawn.'⁶³ Therefore, I wish to conclude this section with a startlingly different kind of epiphany in a different city and under a different type of light.

⁶¹ Otter, p. 185.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Otter, p. 8.

The following passage from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* depicts Dublin's artificial street light and how 'After early nightfall the yellow lamps would light up, here and there, the squalid quarter of the brothels.'⁶⁴ It is a passage which prepares the ground for Stephen's loss of virginity, itself, a moment of biblical knowing but also a moment of awakening to the world of sexuality. It is a world and an experience entirely lit by gas:

The yellow gasflames arose before his troubled vision against the vapoury sky, burning as if before an altar. Before the doors and in the lighted halls groups were gathered arrayed as for some rite. He was in another world: he had awakened from a slumber of centuries.⁶⁵

Joyce was fastidious about urban details such as the predominant colour of perceptions under gas. That it is gas not electricity here contributes to the efficacy of images of hell, thereby emphasising Stephen's feelings of guilt. Joyce also evokes gas's associations with noise, smell, and melodrama, and raises questions about truth and autobiography: is Stephen's state of mind attributable to his surroundings such that his identity is in part governed by the city (since we assume Joyce was true to the type of street light in place at that time) or is it controlled by the selective image-making of the author? Since the early nineteenth century gaslight had been linked by both writers and social commentators to immorality, gin palaces and even hellfire.⁶⁶ However, in contrast to such images, Stephen then loses his virginity to a prostitute in a scene which is well lit and comfortable. Therefore, Otter is correct about the importance of spatial, not to mention modal, specificity. We cannot make generalisations about electricity being viewed positively and gas negatively. Each mode has multifarious qualities explored by novelists to emphasise the significance of a perception. What does seem common to modernist works is that artificial light, in all its guises, assists the depiction of a character's state of mind. Parisian lighting, especially, functions as a preparation for or justification of a character's epiphany. For example, significantly Paris' light is frequently viewed from on high or widely along the horizon and that copious beauty elevates the senses of Wharton's and James's characters provoking epiphanies of loss

⁶⁴ Joyce, *Portrait*, p. 84.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 82-83.

⁶⁶ Barefoot, p. 29.

and death which contrast the bounty of the illumination itself. By contrast, Joyce often details Dublin's light at ground level establishing a perspective in which Stephen is made small, forced to look up or immersed in the lights. This sense of immediacy contrasts with the calm survey of a Parisian scene.

However, there is an example in *Portrait* of Dublin's light viewed from above which provides a point of contrast with literary depictions of Paris because Dublin's light provokes comforting theological thoughts, whereas Paris' light, though beautiful, does not offer salvation. The example in question follows the loss of Stephen's virginity at the end of Chapter 2. Sex and light are conjoined when Stephen suffers a nightmare of monsters and excrement and then has a vomiting fit:

When the fit had spent itself he walked weakly to the window and, lifting the sash, sat in a corner of the embrasure and leaned his elbow upon the sill. The rain had drawn off; amid the moving vapours from point to point of light the city was spinning about herself a soft cocoon of yellowish haze. Heaven was still and faintly luminous and the air sweet to breathe, as in a thicket drenched with showers: and amid peace and shimmering lights and quiet fragrance he made a covenant with his heart.

He prayed.⁶⁷

Dublin provides religious solace as its gaslights blend with celestial glow. Consequently, Joyce suggests that artificial light is compatible with beneficent nature and heaven. Stephen's prayer is full of images of bedimmed divine light and 'lustre suited to our state' with artificial light enveloping and protective and proving to be morally cleansing in this chapter.⁶⁸ As if to underscore that suggestion, the chapter ends with the sentence: 'The green square of paper pinned round the lamp cast down a tender shade.'⁶⁹ Stephen has cleansed himself and artificial lighting offers comfort.

Lighting is one of the key materials with which Joyce works. At its most straight forward, it assists plot. This is the case in the first story in *Dubliners*, in which the narrator differentiates the luminaire beam patterns of candles from other lights to

⁶⁷ Joyce, *Portrait*, p. 115.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

determine whether Rev. Flynn has died.⁷⁰ At an expressive level, artificial street light in 'Araby' symbolises the love that the narrator has for Mangan's sister. When desire is strong the light is bright. The lamp's falling beam embraces the girl from neck to petticoat hem, just as the narrator wishes to. But the story of his love ends in darkness, 'anguish and anger', as the narrator realises that she will not love him.⁷¹ It is a realisation represented by the extinguishing of outdoor lighting: 'I heard a voice call from one end of the gallery that the light was out.'⁷² This total darkness represents the loss of an already tenuous hope for reciprocation, which is signified earlier in the story by the 'distant lamp'.⁷³ Therefore, throughout the story light fades in accordance with the boy's growing realisation and self-awareness. The harsh antipodes of love and loss (or to use Joyce's vocabulary *drive* and *derision*) are symbolised by the opposites of light and dark. Joyce tells us that in the darkness the boy sees himself and his eyes burn. He experiences a painful, but intuitive perception of the reality of his situation represented by the sudden lack of artificial light. Control of such revelatory instances in Joyce's short stories makes them masterful depictions of an inner world, and the frequency with which revelations are associated with artificial light is fundamental to their efficacy. This is demonstrated by the symbolic use of light throughout 'Araby', climaxing in a dark epiphany which achieves 'the unity of effect or impression' that Edgar Allan Poe required from the short story genre.⁷⁴

Linking an epiphany with an absence of artificial light is a technique which Joyce also uses at the end of 'A Little Cloud', another *Dubliners* tale: 'Little Chandler felt his cheeks suffused with shame and he stood back out of the lamplight.'⁷⁵ In Joyce's hands, modern narrative prose is advanced by the existence of artificial light in the following two ways. First, lighting technology roots the text in a modern and realistic context. Secondly, its allusive and symbolic potentialities suit the modernist style, distinct from nineteenth-century fiction. For example, Joyce does not moralise or explain the heightened experiences of the men in these two stories; indeed he emphasises the significance of a moment of perception through the speech and actions of his characters. However, his decision to coincide each epiphany with the negation of

⁷⁰ Joyce, 'The Sisters', in *Dubliners*, p. 7.

⁷¹ Joyce, 'Araby', in *Dubliners*, pp. 36.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Joyce, 'Araby', p. 31.

⁷⁴ Edgar Allan Poe, 'A Review: Twice-Told Tales by Nathaniel Hawthorne', *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, XX (May 1842), 298-300 (p. 298).

⁷⁵ Joyce, 'Little Cloud', in *Dubliners*, p. 94.

artificial light enhances the drama of the moment and affirms that each character's experience is a negative one. The symbolic power of artificial light (with instantaneous on and off) is such that it does not impede Joyce's earlier 'realistic' style; quite the opposite: it helps to tell the truth of the experience described. In this way, James, Wharton and Joyce, in their varying degrees of narrative experimentalism, embraced the symbolic qualities of artificial lighting.

One cannot conclude this section with a convenient hegemonic simplification of the way artificial light is used in modern prose literary epiphanies. Not all novelists mentioned in this chapter adopt the same attitudes to lighting or to epiphany for that matter. The light of Joyce's Dublin, for example, seems to proffer greater spirituality than that of Paris. However, certain trends have been observed which are worth summarising here. For example, where the Romantics bound natural light up with intellectual light the modernist replaced it with the manufactured version. We can also conclude that, while Wharton's treatment of artificial lighting frequently acknowledges its beauty, it usually conveys sentiments of loss and fear. Wharton describes the general environment of artificial urban lighting (which equates to globalised anxiety and/or the store of personal memory) as a context for individual lamps or flashes. James and Wharton both chart the transition to modernity in their novels, and in so doing their techniques regarding lighting share similarities. For example, James also details the general environmental light, which contextualises and contrasts with an individual light. However, James, perhaps more than Wharton, was sensitive to the correlation between the workings of the mind and the physical properties of artificial light using light to represents intellectual illumination. In addition, the lighting of Paris was a personal source of inspiration to him.

In her autobiography, Wharton says James's *The Velvet Glove* (1909) was inspired by the unique nature of Paris' lighting. During a post-prandial walk 'high above the moonlit lamplit city and the gleaming curves of the Seine, he suddenly "held" his setting, as the painters say, and, though I [Wharton] knew nothing of it till long afterwards, "The Velvet Glove" took shape that night.'⁷⁶ Actually, it is likely that the dominant inspiration for the short story was James's reluctance to write a preface for Wharton's *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907). However, *The Velvet Glove* does contain a

⁷⁶ Wharton, *A Backward Glance*, p. 309.

description of Paris in which the city is likened to a ‘story’ being read from a glorious vantage point:

That was knowing Paris, of a wondrous bland April night; that was hanging over it from vague consecrated lamp-studded heights and taking in, spread below and afar, the great scroll of all its irresistible story, pricked out across river and bridge and radiant place, and along quays and boulevard and avenues, and around monumental circles and squares, in syllables of fire, and sketched and summarized, further and further in the dim fire-dust of endless avenues.⁷⁷

Not only does this support Wharton’s suggestion that Paris inspired the text, but it indicates a special relationship between illuminated nocturnal Paris viewed from on high and literature. Paris is a ‘scroll’ and its ‘syllables’ are its lamps. Therefore, the artificially lit metropolis resembles a novel with both a pervasive mood and crucial details: ‘vague’, ‘afar’, ‘further and further’, and ‘dim fire-dust’ express the general mood-creating glow, but through the haze of artificial light individual details are ‘pricked out’. James accentuates this similarity between illuminated Paris and literary form at the end of *The Velvet Glove*, in which Paris envelopes the Princess’s disappearing car. Paris itself, described as ‘the great floridly-framed aperture whose wings at once came together behind her’ ends the story.⁷⁸ It might be counterfactual to ask whether instead of being inspired by Paris, that in seeking to express preconceived ideas Wharton and James chose Paris as a setting, since no other city shared its qualities of lighting (a truth evidenced by two collections of Ephemera at the Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris).⁷⁹ Either way, the unique illuminated appearance of that city is central to many of the epiphanies created by those novelists.

Artificial light gave novelists a way of referring to the end of what they conceived as a pre-modern way of life and, by incorporating technology of lighting into epiphany, of introducing modernist alterations to representational traditions. Gerald Gillespie acknowledges the significance of new technologies including the ‘inroads of electric lights’ and believes that in the modernist era the ‘search for the special purpose

⁷⁷ Henry James, *The Velvet Glove* (Redditch: Read Books Ltd, [1909] 2012), p. 35.

⁷⁸ James, *The Velvet Glove*, p. 45.

⁷⁹ Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Éphémères, Éclairage public (ancienne série 39 des Actualités); Éphémères, Gaz et électricité (ancienne série 124 des Actualités).

of art – its capacity to open our eyes and minds – appears in new configurations of epiphany, privileged moments characteristic of modernist prose.’⁸⁰ As I have discussed, at the heart of some of those configurations of epiphany lies artificial lighting. In addition to this, the release of epiphany from religious connotation is signified by its relationship with technology. Modern literary epiphanies assist us in recognising the value of the mind in interpreting an experience or perception rather than recognising the presence of God. The onus is on human capabilities and it makes sense that the inclusion of science and technology (rather than just the aesthetics of lighting) would bolster this new world outlook. However, Nichols suggests that poetry is capable of a higher aspect than prose, in particular the perceptual event and its emotional importance, when they are expressed in poetry, become ‘a new way of meaning.’⁸¹ He suggests that the greatest coalescence in language of feeling, thought and perception is reserved for poetry, especially in abstract forms. The following section will interpret lighting in new configurations of epiphany in modernist poetry and how the artificially lit poetic epiphany differs from its prose counterpart.

III. Illuminating the Poetic Epiphany

As I have shown, epiphany unites literary texts and forms that describe instances of altered consciousness whether in poetry or prose and is a touchstone for artistic attitudes to lighting. By analysing modern prose epiphanies, and especially the treatment of lighting in those epiphanies, one can learn a great deal about early twentieth-century developments in prose form. Such developments include Joyce’s version of realism, James’s impressionism, the characteristically twentieth-century absence of explanation or moralisation, the representation of psychological process, and the literary embodiment of new ideas about time. This section considers what can be learnt about both poetic form and attitudes to lighting from the modern poetic epiphany. In the nineteenth century, the organising structure of poetry centred on the epiphany.⁸² This centrality, together with its entrenched relationship with light, makes it an appropriate

⁸⁰ Gerald Gillespie, ‘Introduction’, in *Proust, Mann, Joyce in the Modernist Context* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2003), pp. 19-20.

⁸¹ Nichols, p. 5.

⁸² Nichols, p. 5.

tool with which to probe the ways lighting technology influenced some early twentieth century poems. In prose works, that relationship between light and the significant moment is extended to encompass modern versions of lighting. For example, Chapter 2 asked how Henry Miller's work exemplifies the ways Platonic concepts of light, as a symbol for understanding and truth, altered in the face of newly available controllable and man-made light. In addition, the first section of this chapter illuminated the role of novels in the cultural history of lighting that goes back to a time before manufactured light. I now ask how the modern poetic epiphany reflects and exploits developments in lighting technology. In seeking to answer this question I anchor my selection of texts, once again, in Paris with reference to Ezra Pound, D. H. Lawrence, and William Carlos Williams.

One of the quintessentially modernist poems about Paris is Ezra Pound's Imagist piece *In a Station of the Metro* (1913). There is some critical disagreement as to the poem's status as an epiphany. Wim Tigges argues that such images in isolation do not constitute epiphanies because 'there must be a larger context to set off the triviality of the epiphanic image.'⁸³ In contrast, Hugh Witemeyer, describes it as 'an epiphany of beauty in a crowded Paris underground-railway station.'⁸⁴ However, one can defend its status as a literary epiphany on several grounds. First, its structure (the actual vision of something ordinary followed by the mind's interpretation of that vision) causes one to sense a moment of knowing in the narrator. Secondly, the triviality of the image is 'set off' by the 'larger context' of the poet's skill: artistic genius renders ordinary faces at a Metro platform into an 'apparition', evoking spiritual connotations. The apparition is a singular fusing of all those faces rather than a series of plural apparitions, which indicates the instantaneous impact of the complete scene. As in the novels examined above, something ordinary is transformed into something extraordinary as a result of the mind's role in receiving the information, organizing and communicating it. Therefore, this investigation commences with a reconsideration of Pound's poem (already studied in Chapter 3) from the point of view of epiphany. Moreover, I will disclose how electric light is constitutive of the poem's instantaneous essence.

⁸³ Wim Tigges, 'Towards a Typology of Literary Epiphanies', in *Moments of Moment: Aspects of the Literary Epiphany*, ed. Wim Tigges (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1999), p. 21.

⁸⁴ Hugh Witemeyer, in 'Early Poetry 1908–1920', in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. Ira. B. Nadel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 49.

The epiphany at the centre of *In a Station of the Metro* reveals the significance of electric light to the poem's construction. In fact, one cannot over-emphasise the skill with which Pound's poem internalizes extant electric lighting.

IN A STATION OF THE METRO

The apparition of these faces in the crowd;

Petals on a wet, black bough.⁸⁵

In 1913 the Metro had weak electric lighting. Although the poem makes no mention of lighting, its presence is assumed and felt. Indeed, so much is left unsaid by Pound. Grammatically unfinished, the poem is an open-ended epiphany which invites the reader to partake in its completion. The meaning of the epiphany is not analysed, just as the lighting method is not referenced. Yet, electric lighting is a crucial component in setting the scene, since it makes it possible for the faces to be observed, in a sudden moment. It is at that very moment that they are internalised and become meaningful, rendering analogous the rapidity of electric light and mental process. Pale faces emerge from the dark as the platform's lighting reaches them and their sudden appearance acts like a flicked switch causing the narrator/poet/reader to simultaneously see them, recognise their value, and grasp the astonishing power of the mind to interpret the vision, even though no interpretation is provided. The lighting and the object are external to the self, but together they initiate an internal psychic progression. Electric light in modernist poetry frequently facilitates some deep understanding, whether pleasing or not, by illuminating a mundane object. Pound was part of a movement (inclusive of novelists and poets) which adopted artificial light as an effective epiphanic symbol, object, and environment. In this poem, the electrified environment conspires with the experimental poetic form: the brevity of the poem enacts the instantaneous quality of both electric light and epiphany. Using this technique, Pound crafts an epiphany that is the realisation of beauty in the mundane.

The rapid movement from image to subconscious demands a degree of literary concision exemplified by the poem. It is not difficult to appreciate how the properties and effects of electric light could assist Imagists to achieve such concision. As Peter

⁸⁵ Pound, 'In a Station of the Metro', in *Selected Poems: 1908–1969*, p. 53.

Jones succinctly states ‘by its very nature Imagism could not contain narrative – and narrative was not essential to this inward progression.’⁸⁶ In the nexus of sight, lighting technology, and poetic form we can think of the moment of seeing as equivalent to the moment of knowing. For this reason, modern poetic epiphanies translate a sense of immediacy, where the psychological progression is rapid. The temporal element in Pound’s definition of ‘Image’ – as the presentation of ‘an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time’ – lends weight to the idea that an Imagist poem acts as a light switch: the process of reading the poem is the flicking on of comprehension to reveal the ‘complex’ in a sudden shift from obscurity to clarity.⁸⁷ George Bernstein writes that: ‘while “intellectual and emotional” identifies the Image as focus for a range of thoughts and feelings, the phrase “instant of time” in that definition anticipates the static quality that Pound came to see in Imagism.’⁸⁸ Certainly, the electric light switch’s binary constitution (off/on) could preclude an evolving understanding of the complex. This inertia, together with the brevity of Pound’s Imagist writings, may have led him to feel that Imagism failed to accommodate his growing political opinions, which required an endless dimmer switch rather than an instantaneous one. However, in *In a Station of the Metro* Pound, by playing on this idea of switches or flashes, is developing a technique which existed prior to the invention of the electric light switch as we have seen, for example, in Wordsworth’s *Prelude*. This links to the emphasis of Arthur Symons in *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (1899) on the central role of perceptual experience on one’s state of mind, comparing it to a “blinding light or the thrust of a flaming sword.”⁸⁹ Nichols argues that Symons influenced Joyce greatly and that his ideas also ‘underlie Ezra Pound’s dictum, in “A Retrospect,” that “Only Emotion Endures.”’⁹⁰ Certainly, the instant quality of Pound’s piece recalls Symons’s ‘blinding light’ in which an importunate moment is delineated and stands in relief to chronological time.

Wordsworth’s ‘flash upon that inward eye’, in the final stanza of ‘I wandered lonely as a Cloud’ (1807), is an example of this early technique which suggests that poetic epiphany had always possessed an instantaneous aspect. Wordsworth shows that

⁸⁶ Jones, ‘Introduction’, in *Imagist Poetry* (London: Penguin, 1972), p.40.

⁸⁷ Pound, ‘A Retrospect’, in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, pp. 3–14.

⁸⁸ George Bernstein, ‘Pound and the Making of Modernism’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Ezra Pound*, ed. Ira. B. Nadel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p 30.

⁸⁹ Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (London: Archibald Constable & Co, [1899] 1908), p. 171.

⁹⁰ Nichols, p. 182.

the imagination can recall, in an instant, an original perception.⁹¹ As Nichols and Langbaum explain, Wordsworthian memory epiphany is a proleptic recollection ‘in which the mind, in response to a present predisposition, transforms a past experience to produce a new sense of significance.’⁹² Constructing epiphany on past experiences is not a trope exclusive to poetry: we have seen how James and Wharton execute this technique in their novels. In particular, it is apparent in James’s layering of impressions, which results in Strether’s increased self-knowledge. Similarly, Wharton ensures that Campton’s memory of ‘a statue of a young knight’ is given new significance in connection with his own son. A second kind of epiphany, the ‘adelonic epiphany’, ‘refers to a non-perceptual [...] manifestation produced immediately by a powerful perceptual experience.’⁹³ This is what Stephen experiences in Eccles Street. Similarly, at the end of *The Age of Innocence* Newland’s adelonic epiphany is caused by the light through the windows and the closing of the shutters. But in early twentieth-century poetry, proleptic and adelonic forms often manifest themselves as unexpected and individual flashes of light without narrative and which occur without the contextualising mass of urban lighting (frequently viewed from above), which prefigure the epiphany in Wharton and James. That contextualising mass of lighting forms part of a narrative which Imagism rejects, focussing all the while on the specific. In this way the unique ‘flare of the lighted city’ of Paris plays a far less significant role in modern poetic epiphanies than it does in the novels of the era because a specific set of conditions for the significant moment was no longer required. That is not to say that Paris’ own lighting has no presence in modernist poetry, but individual and specific lights, irrespective of location, become more much relevant than illuminated Parisian vistas. I will return to this devaluing of narrative later.

The physical flash of a ‘little light’ in Pound’s ‘Und Drang’ coincides with a moment of knowing. Chapter 3 explored how artificial light in that poem forces an understanding in the narrator and enables a literary epiphany. The theatre lights (highly likely to have been electric) reveal an image which cuts ‘Sheer through the moment.’ This cutting sheer through a moment echoes the flash of light discussed above. It recalls the instantaneous quality that modern technologies share with mental agility. However,

⁹¹ William Wordsworth, ‘I wandered lonely as a Cloud’ (1807), in *William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill, pp. 303-4, p. 304.

⁹² Nichols, p. 74.

⁹³ Nichols, p. 75.

there is a contrast between the instantaneous flash of a modernist poetic and adelonic epiphany, the content of which is entirely fresh, and the proleptic epiphany of Romantic poetry which endures aglow or is based on a pre-existing memory. 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud' centres on the ability of the mind to recall an experience and find new value (solace even) in it, suggesting that even if the moment of knowing acts as a flash, the mind can defy chronos. The epiphany has a continuing life in the imagination of the individual; it either becomes a memory, which can be continuously relived, or it re-signifies an old one. In contrast, the modern poetic literary epiphany tends to be fleeting and transient, with its meaning only partially explained, if at all. Artists were inspired by instantaneous technologies and the rapid changes which were the prevailing characteristic of the early part of the century. Perhaps such rapid change necessitated a new kind of short-lived epiphany, best represented by the instantly illuminatory and extinguishable capabilities of modern lighting. As such electric light became a metonymical figure for limited understanding in the modern age. Whereas for the Romantics the instant aspect of literary epiphany had been the psychological moment, electric lighting now offered modernists a real and physical equivalent to the psychological flash. Thus there occurred an inevitable rejuvenation of the literary device and its longstanding links with light.

Undoubtedly, artistic and scientific changes occur in parallel. Artists across the disciplines recorded Paris' extraordinary modern energy in the 1910s and 1920s. Hope Mirrlees's highly visual *Paris: A Poem* (1919), which contains the lines 'glare of electricity. TAXIS, TAXIS, TAXIS' and George Gershwin's *An American in Paris* (1928), in which Parisian taxi horns contribute to the formal elements of the symphonic poem, are but two examples of myriad artistic representations of French modernity.⁹⁴ The importance of technology, dynamism, and simultaneity are well established pillars of futurism and orphism. Indeed, as mentioned in Chapter 3, orphism was primarily concerned with light itself as an emblem of modern life. As explained in the Introduction to this study, futurism, orphism and cubism must be understood within the context of technology, speed, and machinery. Frequently, and especially in the case of futurism, the work produced by these movements glorified modernity. Indeed, in F. T. Marinetti's *The Futurist Manifesto* (1909) he declared that futurists 'were illuminated by the internal glow of electric hearts.' Therefore, it is unsurprising that the

⁹⁴ Hope Mirrlees, *Paris: A Poem* (Richmond: Hogarth Press, 1919), p. 21.

technological phenomenon of underground train travel and its lighting system comprise the epiphany in Pound's poem.

D. H. Lawrence's 'Brooding Grief' (1916) is also replete with emblems of modern life. It contains a proleptic epiphany which combines a direct reference to lighting and a formal transition from dark to light together with the motions of an urban environment.⁹⁵ The poem is not set in Paris, but it shares some similarities with *In a Station* since urban energies are also emphatically present in its *mise en scène*. In this technologised environment, the psychological impact on the narrator of the central image of a leaf is electrifying. It is an electrified poem in so far as the leaf acts as a psychological switch or electric shock causing an instantaneous shift in the narrator's thoughts from his mother's death to his own continuing life among leaves and lamps and traffic:

A yellow leaf from the darkness
Hops like a frog before me.
Why should I start and stand still?

I was watching the woman that bore me
Stretched in the brindled darkness
Of the sick-room, rigid with will
To die –
And the quick leaf tore me
Back to this rainy swill
Of leaves and lamps and traffic mingled before me.

The dash in the middle breaks the syntactic line and graphically enacts death. This rupturing contrasts with the motion of the leaf and the monotonous existence of the narrator, implied by the final line's 'and' and 'and'. Lawrence's contrast of life and death is played out through the opposition of motion ('quick') and stasis ('rigid'), but also of light ('yellow') and 'darkness'. The adjective 'brooding' might mean being cast in subdued light so as to convey a somewhat threatening atmosphere. Grief is allied to that subdued light and 'brindled darkness', whereas the bright leaf shocks the narrator

⁹⁵ D.H. Lawrence, 'Brooding Grief', in *Imagist Poetry: An Anthology*, p. 84.

into an awareness of the street light and life and instigates a transition from mourning to acceptance. Artificial urban lighting provides a cultural context for Lawrence, but it also contributes to the formal elements of the poem. Sara Danius's observation of 'the ever-closer relationship between the sensuous and the technological' is confirmed by the role street light plays in illuminating Pound's and Lawrence's epiphanic images and in shaping the form of their poems.⁹⁶

This modernist shift from natural and divine light to technological and scientific light occurred in subtle degrees. It is present, for example, in the following advice from William Carlos Williams that in the imagination 'apprehension perforates at places, through to understanding – as white is at the intersection of blue and green and yellow and red. It is this white light that is the background of all good work.'⁹⁷ In this quotation, Williams compares understanding (which is the nexus of all our perceptions) with light and colour. This scientific specificity indicates that, although he is not referring to electricity, Williams's early twentieth-century aesthetics modernise the notion of knowledge as light by accommodating scientific discoveries going as far back as Newton's *Opticks*. Williams is concerned with emotional, psychological and poetic truths rather than scientific ones, and yet he acknowledges science in his explication of 'good work'. Williams presents poetry as science's equal, equating understanding to the intersection of dispersed light. There seems a consensus among some modernist poets that poetry *is* light. The intuitive relation between the science of refracted, intersected and electric light to the poetic task advanced by Williams and Pound indicates that light, scientifically perceived, demystified, and unnatural, retains its symbolic associations with knowledge. Therefore, I agree with Danius that science and technology proved intuitive material for these modernists such that 'in a specific sense [they are] *constitutive* of high-modernist aesthetics.'⁹⁸

One such example is William Carlos Williams's use of artificial light in *Good Night* to illuminate an epiphanic image in a poem which is an exercise in accuracy and precision. Williams had studied in Paris from 1897 to 1899 and later visited the city in 1927 when he met Stein. However, *Good Night* is from an earlier collection entitled *Al Que Quiere!* The poem begins 'In brilliant gas light'.⁹⁹ It was published in 1917 which

⁹⁶ Danius, p. 2.

⁹⁷ William Carlos Williams, *Selected Essays* (New York: Random House, 1954), p. 122.

⁹⁸ Danius, pp. 2-3.

⁹⁹ William Carlos Williams, 'Good Night', in *Al Que Quiere!* (Gloucester: Dodo Press, [1917] 2009), pp. 35-36 (p. 35).

explains why electric lighting would not have been in use in the American kitchen he describes. As the narrator stands at his kitchen sink waiting for the water to freshen, his mind oscillates between real perceptions and daydreams about French-speaking girls at the opera. The brilliant gaslight, which at the end causes the parsley and the glass to be 'still and shining', returns him not only to his apperception of the present situation, but also causes what appears to be a tranquil awareness of the power of memory: 'it is memory playing the clown'. This fresh appreciation of the mind's complexity transforms the title of the poem from a parting salutation to the assertion of a satisfying evening. Without elaboration or narrative, the poem explores the workings of the mind in such moments of non-activity. Importantly, the 'brilliant' kitchen light contributes to the intense colour and visual accuracy of the piece. Consequently, the reader shares in the moment of insight. Precisely what that insight comprises is indeterminate, but we know it has taken place because of the narrator's sudden and happy readiness for bed. Therefore, this poem shows that artificial light is not only a metaphor for understanding, it also helps the poet on a practical level to show us actual things and in so doing evoke what Philip Shaw, albeit in relation to the sublime, calls 'the ontological status or lack of status of the human mind'.¹⁰⁰

Things were all-important to Williams. The focus on things took poets away from the impressionistic flare and sparkle of Paris' nocturnal appearance, which Wharton and James deploy for specific narrative purposes, and brought attention to individual commodities and lights. Modern epiphanic poetry does not explain life or contextualise experience, but rather shows us life (and the objects in it) or is life. We can think of these poetic epiphanies as disclosures because they allow something to be seen. In Book I of Williams's *Paterson* the refrain "Say it! No ideas but in things" melds writing with thinking and seeing.¹⁰¹ Certainly, in *Good Night* precise observations of specific things in the physical world correspond to a transition in the internal world of consciousness ('brings me back'). Bill Brown's 'Thing Theory' states '[a]s they circulate through our lives, we look through objects (to see what they disclose about history, society, nature or culture – above all, what they disclose about us), but we only catch a glimpse of the things.'¹⁰² However, Williams's poems pay close attention to things, using precise descriptions of them in order to disclose meaning concerning

¹⁰⁰ Shaw, *The Sublime*, p. 47.

¹⁰¹ William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (Middlesex: Penguin, [1946] 1983), pp. 6, 9.

¹⁰² Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry*, 28:1 (2001), 1-22 (p. 4).

history, society, nature, culture or the mind. In place of elaborated ideas, *Good Night* is comprised of the narrator's external material reality. The consideration of that reality, a kitchen full of artificially-lit inanimate things, causes a consideration of the operation of the human mind. In this way Williams is a proponent of what Brown describes as modernism's 'effort to deny the distinction between subjects and objects, people and things' and part of a literary tradition which understands the links between 'our moral feelings with external forms.'¹⁰³ Indeed, the poem functions like a lamp: an object to be considered in its own right, but which at the same time shows something without explanation. Arguably, the elevation of the object in literature has shown that, above all other modern objects, a light best permits consideration of humans and consideration of literature. The modernist literary internalisation of lighting apparatuses continues the traditional understanding among artists across the centuries about the connectedness of light, art and people that I identified in my Introduction. Light, words and the operation of the human mind are facets of artistic expression which remain perpetually entwined in the face of dramatic changes to both the materiality of light and literary styles, including this increased interest in things.

Williams's suggestions that poetry *is* light makes sense in the context of individual artificial lights. By contrast, the image of an extensive system of exterior lighting does not correspond to the poetic impulses of the time to concentrate matters. What is more, the modern poetic epiphany saw that the indoors and outdoors interrelated. Therefore, even though Pound's Imagist poem, with which we began, is set in Paris it relies on interior and functional lighting rather than spectacular outdoor lighting. The narrative space given to outdoor lighting in novelistic epiphanies is appropriate to the pause for contemplation or reflection that prose epiphanies are more likely to include. The act of stopping to appreciate an illuminated skyline enables the narrative voice to contextualise or expand upon the character's new awareness. However, with regards to the modern poetic epiphany, light is less relevant in its guise as a diffuse mass, but crucial as a directed and bright centre. That lighting can serve both the aesthetic needs of prose and poetic epiphany is testimony to its versatility and symbolic richness.

We have moved away somewhat from the artificial light of Paris. Indeed, aside from *In a Station of the Metro*, the locations of the poems discussed above are not

¹⁰³ Ibid. Wordsworth, 'The Two-Part Prelude', p. 63.

obvious. A possible reason for the absence of geographically locatable street lighting in the poems produced by American poets who had lived in or visited Paris is the increasing absence of poetic narrative. We may know that a poet spent time in the French capital, we may assume that city's remarkable lighting made an impression on the poet, we may even suspect that Paris' illuminated image was subliminally integral to the poem, but what had become significant to modernist practice was the concept of immediate experience. Conveying that experience did not require the scene-setting, story-telling or characterisation that Paris' geographically specific urban lighting assisted with. In view of the poetic disinterest in narrative in the early modernist period, overtly Parisian lighting features less in modernist poetic epiphany than it does in prose versions. Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrated how artificial lighting contributed to narrative in early modernist novels. Chapter 3 indicated how electric lighting contributed to the form and execution of early modernist poetry. However, in the modern literary epiphany investigations into the impact of lighting on content and form are synchronised. This is because a poetic literary epiphany occurs as a moment in a narrative sequence, albeit one which is thoroughly stripped-down to carry minimal extra-situational meaning. (Artificial light may well form part of that minimised narrative sequence, as in *Good Night*.) At the same time, the epiphany is a moment in and of itself which resembles the instant illumination of a light source. Therefore, lighting frequently contributes to the formal representation of the aesthetic experience, as is the case in *Brooding Grief*. Artificial lighting can contribute to both the content and form of the modern poetic literary epiphany, where narrative content and geographical location are in some way condensed or obscured, but the image of the aesthetic experience is clear and bright.

In modern poetic epiphanies the moment or experience does not acquire any significance until it is given verbal form. Indeed that verbal form may in some instances also achieve visual and sensual form. The perception must be interpreted by the mind of the writer and the reader for there to be a disclosure. We have seen how modern lighting assisted poets in communicating the essence of a powerful perception or experience. The real power of the modern literary epiphany lies in language itself to bring to life the essence of an experience. In so doing the literary epiphany displays mental power through words. This chapter has shown the part played by technological lighting in the expression of the mental event across a range of different epiphanies, and especially its contribution to emphasizing the perception over the meaning which might be taken

from it. Wim Tigges, in his opening chapter to *Moments of Moment* (1999), highlights this distinction between epiphanies which are merely presented by an artist and those about which the artist theorizes. He wonders whether ‘the latter have provided us with important insights about the nature of the epiphanic experience, but that the epiphany which is both unpremeditated and unmediated is perhaps the most interesting one in the long run.’¹⁰⁴ Rather than there being a single unifying theory of manufactured light, we have seen how different manifestations of lighting assisted writers in creating both presented and theorised epiphanies, which vary in terms of duration, explanation, genre, mood, immediacy, ontological curiosity, imagery and experimentalism.

Conclusion

The previous section of Chapter 4 focused entirely on the significance of artificial lighting in poetic epiphanies at the beginning of the twentieth-century. Tracing the developing image of light in epiphanies in poetry and fiction has revealed how artificial lighting communicates, in both subtle and self-referential ways, many of the essential components of epiphany such as knowledge, time, memory, instantaneousness, sense perception, science versus nature, beauty and the mundane – as well as epiphany’s own literary traditions. Essentially, the presentation of artificial light in literary epiphany assists many typologies of epiphany in a broader cultural and philosophical context.

Yet, critics have failed to acknowledge the part played by modern lighting in literary epiphanies. For example, Tigges points out that, before electricity, writers had used the leitmotif of starlight in epiphanic passages. He gives an example from George Moore’s *Evelyn Innes* (1898) and notes the star-image ‘features magnificently in ‘Ithaca’ episode in *Ulysses*.’¹⁰⁵ He goes on to point out, quite rightly, that the star is a ‘potent epiphany raiser’ and follows with a foray into the original epiphany of the magi and a comparison of the momentary aspect with a flash of light.¹⁰⁶ But this is where his probing of links between modern literary epiphany and light stops short. Such consideration of starlight, illumination and flashes demands to be extended into the arena of technological developments in modern lighting which took place at the time

¹⁰⁴ Tigges, p. 20.

¹⁰⁵ Tigges, p. 26.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

that the literary epiphany took a fascinating turn in *Stephen Hero*. Tigges's sub-definitions of the typologies of epiphany frequently refer to its luminosity. Even the examples he chooses feature light, such as Sartre's *La nausée* (1938), which commences with an artificial light in a lighthouse. In spite of these images of illumination, Tigges does not consider how modern modes of lighting might have replaced these ideas, leitmotifs, and connections between literary epiphany and light. Similarly, Nichols's recognition of the significance of light is limited to his study of Seamus Heaney's literary epiphanies. Nichols even goes so far as to identify that 'the diction of epiphany' in Heaney's poetry comprises references to light.¹⁰⁷ Light, or 'verbal light', as Nichols put it, is characteristic of epiphanic images in poetry, but he does not then raise questions about the precise role of artificial lighting.¹⁰⁸ It is irrefutable that in view of the wealth of references to flashes, radiating significance, illumination, light, and stars that light plays a central role in the diction, structure, temporal elements, and symbolism of the literary epiphany in both poetry and prose. Where Tigges and Nichols state the centrality of light, I have explored how the lexicon of epiphany turns upon not just light, but also lighting.

Literary epiphany is a device the transformation of which over the centuries 'can increase our general understanding of modern fiction, its concerns and its techniques.'¹⁰⁹ I absolutely agree with this statement from Beja. However, the reason for my interest in epiphany over all other literary devices, and the reason I devoted my final chapter to it, is its longstanding connections with light. This chapter has shown that the device is perpetually symbolised by and associated with light of various kinds and intensities. Furthermore, in twentieth-century epiphanies, manufactured rather than divine energy is required to sustain or enable a perception. An example is Joyce's association of electric light with self-knowledge in *Portrait*. When Stephen is outside the library he hears a 'sudden swift hiss' and 'knows that the electric lamps had been switched on in the reader's room.'¹¹⁰ Stephen observes the movements of the swallows and then, once they have gone everything is silent and dark, save for one hiss from a lamp. This electric light and its accompanying sound envelopes Stephen until 'A trembling joy, lambent as a faint light, played like a fairy host around him.'¹¹¹ Here, the

¹⁰⁷ Nichols, p. 207.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Beja, p. 14.

¹¹⁰ Joyce, *Portrait*, p. 192.

¹¹¹ Joyce, *Portrait*, p. 197.

electric light combines with Stephen's own joy, which we can interpret as based on his happy realisation that he is going to leave like the swallows and become an artist. The repeated references to electric light represent his gradual realisation and liberation.

Similarly, Williams's *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* (1923) emphasises the corresponding relationship of lamps with consciousness, without any reference to the light of God. In the penultimate line of the poem, broadly about the beauty and inevitability of death, he writes 'Let the lamp affix its beam'.¹¹² The narrator teaches the reader to accept the co-existence of life and death. Noting the specific ways that modernist literature reflects and adapts artificial lighting's roles as a metaphor for understanding makes apparent the continuing validity of the ancient metaphor linking light with insight. However, that metaphor has evolved to accommodate new forms of lighting and increasing secularism. This chapter has mapped the varied and fascinating references to lighting in prose and poetic literary epiphanies of the early-century modernist period to better understand the relationship between urban lighting technology and modernist aesthetics.

The modern literary epiphany expresses, in a uniquely revealing manner, the interrelationship between electrical lighting developments and changes in the way intellectual and emotional life was written about. The main reason for this is that epiphanies have always been bound up with light. Furthermore, electric epiphanies share the properties of electric light itself. Paul Gilmore's 2009 critique of aesthetics argues that metaphors of electricity provided Romantic poets with a method of rooting an aesthetic experience in its sociohistoric moment. I agree that electric lights are a metonym for progress, but combined with that purpose, electric lights were perceived to have a complex relationship with psychic life. Their inclusion in the modern literary epiphany, be it subtle or outright, indicates that widespread electric lighting did not simply create profound shifts in intellectual and emotional life, but rather that technological progress, new cultural practices, and changes to emotional and psychological states are interdependent. Indeed, from the mid-eighteenth century to the end of the nineteenth century, electricity was used to describe manifestations of the materialities that Gilmore identifies as being central to aesthetic experience, which he writes include 'the power of language, the shocking confusion of individual boundaries ensuing from the contact [...] of human bodies, and the networks of social, political,

¹¹² Stevens, 'The Emperor of Ice Cream', in *Harmonium*, p. 95.

and economic power underlying individual experience.’¹¹³ However, Gilmore contends that electricity’s ability to represent the ‘transformative power of imagination or the shocking effect of aesthetic experience’ had expired by the end of the nineteenth century, due to the ‘demystification of electricity’.¹¹⁴ Based on the evidence presented in this chapter, I propose that the diffusion of electric technology in the form of ubiquitous lighting actually continued to endow electricity with a certain shock and mysticism, which in turn remained germane to writers in Paris after the turn of the century. Gilmore appears to dismiss the literary appeal of electric lighting to focus on the telegraph instead. By contrast, I have shown that beyond 1900, light (and then later electric lighting) was implicated in the ‘transformative power of imagination or the shocking effect of aesthetic experience’ and was and continues to be an evolving epistemological analogy, symbol, metaphor, and historical marker.¹¹⁵ Well into the twentieth century, modernist writers exploited the residual and emerging associations of lighting. To return to the observations of Wordsworth, electric light demonstrates such a multifaceted similitude with that moment in which moral feelings are linked with external forms, that it is a far more effective epiphanic figure than electricity alone.

¹¹³ Gilmore, p. 13.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Conclusion

Electric Light: a Modernist Holding Field of Oppositions

‘put those thousand eyes into one eye and you would have the night combed with the great blind searchlight of the heart.’¹

- Matthew O’Connor in Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood* (1936)

Through a series of literary case studies, this thesis has explored the intersection of literary modernism with those lighting developments which became a permanent aspect of life during the early modernist period. The purpose has been to uncover the relevance of lighting technology to the genesis and development of modernism on a broad scale, but also to specific formal innovations. By referring to paintings which bear elements sympathetic to literary evocations of artificial lighting, I have highlighted the cross-disciplinary modernist interest in the operation of lighting and its usefulness in communicating artistic impulses. And yet these sets of sympathetic evocations were wide ranging, complex and often opposed. As such, an argument based on the oversimplified identification of developing trends would offer an inaccurate history of modernist aesthetics and the artificial light of Paris. Chris Otter shares this view with regard to the political history of light and vision, which he argues is ‘the history of multiple, overlapping perceptual patterns and practices rather than singular paradigms.’² Otter’s work is a history of light and vision, whereas mine traces the impact of artificial lighting on American modernist literature between 1900 and 1939. However, his suspicion of monolithic abstractions is equally applicable to literary and painterly patterns, given the extent to which they intersected and contrasted throughout those thirty-nine years. I have shown that, considered together, those intersections and contrasts tell the intricate story of contemporary aesthetic experiences of artificial lighting far more powerfully than generalisations about a swing from rejection to acceptance, or vice versa. Indeed, the beams of light emanated outwards in all directions.

From the bright nexus where modernist aesthetics and electric light meet, multiple and overlapping practices radiate outwards. Those practices consistently

¹ Barnes, *Nightwood*, p. 83.

² Otter, p. 10.

demonstrate that the inescapable coexistence of opposites is a fundamental characteristic of modernism. In spite of their breadth and variety, taken together modernist literary practices converging on electric lighting, confirm that electric light was a modernist holding field for oppositions. I have adapted Seamus Heaney's description of a poem as 'one holding field' for all of life's oppositions because artificial light, in particular its electric forms, surpasses all other scientific developments of the era as the aesthetic embodiment of oppositions specific to life in the early years of the twentieth century.³

My opening epigraph from Samuel Johnson established the relation between light, poetry and human limitations. The thesis has shown the relevance of light to modernist literary attempts to reconcile the bundle of contradictions which characterise those limitations. Such contradictions are encapsulated by Barnes's seemingly contradictory 'blind searchlight' in the epigraph. This image includes several oppositions, namely occluded vision, the human and the inhuman, nature and science, human achievement and unfulfillment, and surveillance, which in itself comprises contrasting notions of seeing and being seen, security and war, and private and public. It is my conclusion that, for the reasons set out in this thesis, electric light was, above all visual technologies, the prime modernist holding field for that range of oppositions.

I have argued that the holding in balance of past and present is a notable characteristic of modernism. The crucial feature of electric light is that it is a technology with a considerable lineage. It has aesthetic predecessors (gas, oil, candle, fire, sun, moon, stars and holy light) with major literary personalities. In the words of Roland Barthes, electric light has its own value as a signifier because 'it belongs to a history', that of light.⁴ By contrast, other media such as the telegraph and the telephone – technologies upon which *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* by Mark Goble is based – had no such extensive lineage at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵ This lineage facilitates allusions to a range of extra-situational images and eras, even in writing which directly refers to up-to-the-minute technological lighting. At its most modern it still recalls its past, and this is a significant observation because it is a characteristic that is shared with literature itself. Malcolm Bradbury and James

³ Melvin Bragg, *The South Bank Show Originals: Seamus Heaney*, season 3, episode 11 (Sky, 2016).

⁴ Barthes, *Mythologies*, p. 126.

⁵ Mark Goble, *Beautiful Circuits: Modernism and the Mediated Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), p. 19.

McFarlane suggest that ‘the great works of modernism’ are secular but ‘they balance on the sensibility of tradition, often holding in suspension the forces that persist from the past and those that grow from the novel present.’⁶ With this in mind, the operation of electric light as a holding space for past and present makes it far more than a quintessentially modernist aesthetic device. I would argue that electric lighting is modernist literature’s birth twin.

Electric light’s exquisite enactment of the hybrid nature of modern life has been demonstrated throughout this study. For example, I examined representations of artificial lighting in which truth and illusion merge. In addition, I have evinced its capacity to hold in balance pleasure and anxiety. Specifically, images of Paris’ electrically lit boulevards balance the concepts of excitement and mental instability. Continuous pleasure-seeking - in texts such as *Tropic of Cancer*, ‘Babylon Revisited’, *Tender is the Night* and *The Gods Arrive* - results in unfulfillment, creative sterility, neurasthenia, loneliness, paranoia, and self-destruction. These texts depict an inevitable tension in the project of modernism, between modern industry and human inertia, by using electric light to reveal the harms which society can do to itself. My analysis of ‘Babylon Revisited’ revealed how modernist depictions of pleasure facilitated by modern illumination warn of such consequential dangers, sometimes even via illuminated signifiers in an appropriation of the technology itself to deliver that message. Jonathan Crary argues that electric stimulation ‘disables vision through process of homogenization, redundancy, and acceleration [...] in which a larger range of responsive capacities are frozen’ and that this is a direct consequence of the industrial revolution.⁷ Miller, Eliot, Wharton and Fitzgerald implied that the bright lights of modernity caused what Peter Nicholls terms ‘an impasse of inaction and impotence’ which obstructed the nurturing of the self.⁸ Arguably, Miller, Eliot, Wharton and Fitzgerald preempt the reduced responsiveness that Crary observes today, and yet it was in Paris’ environment of unprecedented urbanisation and electrification that modernists carried out potent and dynamic experiments.

Opposing implications of electric stimulation are explained by Joachim Schlör, in *Nights in the Big City*, as ‘a conflict in the metropolitan experience of these years’

⁶ Bradbury and McFarlane, ‘The Name and Nature of Modernism’, p. 49.

⁷ Crary, 24/7, pp. 33-34.

⁸ Peter Nicholls, ‘Ironies of the Modern’, in *Modernism: A Literary Guide* (London: Macmillan, 1995), p. 8.

arising from a sense of being overwhelmed whilst simultaneously thrilled.⁹ Once again, electric light encapsulates and contributes to these opposing sensations. Hana Wirth-Nesher, in *City Codes: Reading the Modern Urban Novel*, considers images of isolation and dissatisfaction circulating throughout the literary world during the early decades of the twentieth century. She writes that, in modern urban novels the 'urban setting is the locus for the tensions and contradictions in the novel and in the historical moments, both inscribed into the cityscape.'¹⁰ But what she could signal more clearly is that tensions and contradictions, like pleasure and anxiety, polarities of delight and danger inherent in city life, are regularly figured in electrically illuminated terms.

Electric lighting also holds in balance the mass and the individual, resulting in narratives of unfulfillment and loss. Invisible networks which power individual lamps offer a physical example of the contrast between the mass and the individual. Modernism does not reject mass culture, but integrates it into developing aesthetic methods. For example, new lighting provides a new heading under which to deal with new globalised versions of war, technology, time and altered phasic life. Novelists used lighting to show their characters adapting to the changing world and the increasingly palpable notion of globalisation, further emphasised by the many representations of transatlantic travel and communication. Crary makes the argument that the process of bringing the social and individual into line with the temporalities of capitalist production has always been connected to artificial lighting.¹¹ However, one should not overplay Crary's attribution of our current globalised condition to early artificial lighting alone; he blames the systematic destruction of the day as much as the illumination of night. Notwithstanding that caveat, his identification of electricity's culpability is supported by Fitzgerald's images of self-hood eroded in electrically lit conditions, as discussed in Chapter 2. The modernist novels examined in this project, frequently signify the increasing impact of global communication with an image of artificial light. Using lighting to represent networked and global sociohistorical conditions writers like Fitzgerald, Miller, and Wharton were also able to illuminate solitude in varying forms, as elaborated in Chapter 2.

In contrast, the poets addressed in Chapter 3 responded to the inspirational unifying potentialities of electricity. Pound's critical theory, H. D.'s in-built charge, and

⁹ Joachim Schlör, *Nights in the Big City*, p. 206.

¹⁰ Wirth-Nesher, p. 3.

¹¹ Crary, 24/7, p. 79.

Stein's continuous present are examples. Ideographic poems, but also Imagist ones with minimal narrative, enact a flash of light or the flick of a switch which result in a temporal pause or static moment. The modernist preoccupation with time is effectively played out in images of light, to such an extent that one could argue that modernist poetry grounded in a Parisian experience did something similar to electricity itself: it overcame established ideas to explore new temporalities and forms suitable for the new world conditions.

Artificial light also conceptualises the holding in balance of public and private. Conflating the public and the private lives of individuals was not something Haussman intended when he cut new rectilinear boulevards and redesigned the city. In fact as David P. Jordan points out in *Transforming Paris* (1995), 'Haussmann conceived of the city as a public, not a private, place. [...] In his urban scheme the individual house had no place. Nor did the individual.'¹² However, it is possible that the conflation was encouraged as a result of Haussmann's creation of a vast infrastructure in which individuals still existed within their own private worlds; the private was inevitably brought out into the street as people partook in public activities. When considering the reverse: the penetration of the private by the public, the answer lies in artificial light. Artificial light changed the way people observed each other and were observed, and it is this reciprocity which is fundamental to artistic expression at the time. As Stein said 'nothing changes in people from one generation to another except the way of seeing and being seen [and] all this creates the composition of that generation.'¹³ In Stein's time, electric light exacerbated inclusion and exclusion, connection and disconnection as never before. Electricity enhanced plenitude and visibility, electrified ways of seeing and being seen, altered the meanings of privacy and display and, according to Stein, changed people. The generation writing and being written about in the early part of the twentieth century could see more clearly than ever before what they could not have, obtain, or be; artificial lighting thereby reinforced otherness.

Electric lighting destabilised entrenched traditional and primal social patterns and those changes not only inspired art, but were responsible for some of the sensations and emotions at the heart of the art produced at the beginning of the twentieth century. In addition, artificial light figures significantly in the artistic ownership of technology.

¹² David P. Jordan, *Transforming Paris: The Life and Labours of Baron Haussmann* (New York: The Free Press, 1995), p. 265.

¹³ Stein, *Composition as Explanation*, p. 495.

By ‘artistic ownership’ I mean that feelings of loss or unfulfillment, in the face of plenitude and possibility, are reclaimed and understood through the modernist representation, and recreation, of the technology itself. I have observed the literary bringing to life of lighting technology, which is in line with David Trotter’s cautionary reaction to critical interpretations of aesthetic iterations of technology as manifestations of crisis only.¹⁴ What I have discovered is that in holding in balance the oppositions that lighting technologies intensified or even created, literature controls technology in both content and form. Put more positively, art brings technology to life, giving it a purpose nobler than any practical one, which is to bring us closer to better understanding ourselves.

This is best exemplified in the modern literary epiphany. Artificial light was a contributing factor to not just the *direction* which writing took (the matters it addressed), but also its *execution* (its style and form). For example, we have seen that gas and electric light in novels can establish a mood in which a character is receptive to epiphany. We have also seen the internalisation of properties of artificial light and manufactured energy into literary form as part of the communication of the immediacy of epiphany. Furthermore, psychological dynamics at the core of epiphany can be replicated and verbalised by reference to lighting. The efficiency of electric light appears to lend itself to the concision and precision characteristic of Imagism. Electric epiphanies, as explored in Chapter 4, are fragmentary because, just as our consciousness is ever evolving and grappling with our experiences, we can never totally apprehend final meaning. Electricity is useful in communicating elusive understanding, rather than conclusive finality, because it bears a certain fluidity itself: it flows. The conflicts and complexities inhering in electric light and electricity, principally its function in connecting bodies versus its ability to intensify feelings of exclusion (one’s being kept in the dark) provide instruction regarding our inability to acquire full knowledge of or intimacy with others, resulting in significant moments of heightened awareness regarding fundamental solitude. Gilmore explains that electricity for the Romantics was a ‘force for articulating the possibilities and limitations of imaginative connection with others’, but in the modernist era electric light articulates individuality in its positive and negative states within the context of connection with others.¹⁵ I have shown that electric

¹⁴ David Trotter, *Cinema and Modernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), p. 9.

¹⁵ Gilmore, p. 178.

light shares so many similarities with modernist poetry and the modern literary epiphany that, despite its modernity, it raises timeless metaphysical questions.

The identification of a technological phenomenon, rather than a natural one, through which literature can better contain life's contradictions and oppositions is part of modernism's liberation from the assumption that nature epitomises beauty. Artificial lighting served this function in both obvious and subtle ways. Chapter 3 and the poetry section of Chapter 4 are evidence of the shift from the externalisation to the internalisation of, not simply technology per se, but of the technology of artificial lighting. Examples of internalised lighting technology indicate the subtlety of its infiltration into art. The field of its influence mirrors the field of light of an incandescent bulb, or indeed a contemporary aerial view of Paris at night: unequivocal literary references are the bright centre, but less discernible references are represented by the dispersal of light at the edges of the field.

Understanding artificial lighting's containment of oppositions is so important because the contradictions it offered contributed to the artistic expression of dominant modernist themes. The spread of electric lighting enabled continuous activity, a homogenisation of time flouting natural and social patterns. This new reality impelled artists to start radically experimental movements, which embraced the creative potentialities in artificial lighting, thereby commencing a re-ownership of the time and processes that were suddenly up for grabs. One specific modernist theme is the intersection of the external world with the internal workings of the mind. This is demonstrated in T. S. Eliot's *Rhapsody on a Windy Night*. The poem embodies the dual nature, or Janus-headed essence, of artificial lighting. Artificial light (in this case gas powered) is the quintessential modernist metaphor for communicating the gap and overlap between external and internal being; the dominant voice instructing the reader about the oppositional nature of existence are the lamps themselves (or the cohesive singular voice that the four lamps become). Critical readings of literary references to the newly technologised, light-saturated Paris indicate that artificial lighting assisted writers in recording the workings of the imagination. For instance, Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* (1925) intimates that electric light restricts imagination and emotion.¹⁶ That story interrogates notions of prosthesis and the distinction between experience and truth. Barthes would later suggest that the oppositions inherent in life,

¹⁶ Sherwood Anderson, *Dark laughter* (New York: Boni & Liveright, 1925).

but specifically in the psychic ramifications of technological revolution, can be thought of as human potential in conflict with individual unfulfillment. For Barthes, the meaning and form of the illuminated Eiffel Tower represent this opposition, in part because of its lighting: ‘one can feel oneself cut off from the world and yet the owner of the world.’¹⁷ Modernist writers recognised that the language of lighting encompassed many of the philosophical oppositions at the heart of human existence.

These are just some examples of the ways in which artificial light contributed to major characteristics of the literature of the time. Perhaps the reason for the inherent contradictions encapsulated in images of lighting is that unlike the sun it relies upon human involvement and therefore assumes the complexities and contradictions inseparable from human existence. Artificial light represents human achievement and, by association, human failure thereby recasting existing notions about perception and knowledge. Certain similarities between writing and lighting flow from this observation: artificial light invites us to look at not only at what it illuminates, but also how it illuminates. The way that reality is rendered radiant by artificial light is akin to reality rendered radiant through language: language and lighting both intercept content and reader. Electric light conceptualises the operation of words. As discussed in Chapter 3, William Carlos Williams’s ‘The Great Figure’ suggests that the clarity of the figure 5 replicates the organising ability of the poet to make sense of the modern world, and city lighting is undoubtedly one of his organisational tools. Modernist writings make sense of the modern world by containing its chaos comprised of opposites. Harriet Monroe wrote in 1919 ‘it is for the individual soul, now as always before in the history of the race, to master all this, to see through the chaos of his time, and resolve it into forms of power and beauty.’¹⁸ By resolving modern chaos into artistic forms art might, in equal measure to science, ‘mould the future of the world’.¹⁹ How we withstand the push and pull of connections and disconnections, the constant reminders that we are limited by our own physical form and inevitable death, is through art. Furthermore, modern manufactured lighting is arguably more non-conceptual than other nineteenth-century inventions. This ambiguity, which is its primary artistic quality, renders it a holding field for ostensible binaries and makes it central to the meaning of many early modernist texts.

¹⁷ Barthes, ‘The Eiffel Tower’, p. 17.

¹⁸ Harriet Monroe, ‘A Scientist’s Challenge’, *Poetry*, 15.3 (1919), 149-152 (p. 149).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

This thesis has contributed to knowledge by filling a gap in the critical field of modernism. Even Paul Gilmore's in-depth focus on aesthetic electricity, which acknowledges how electricity bridges the natural and technological world and describes the unique imponderability of electricity, ignores its manifestation as lighting, prioritising its essence as a source of power. The strange omission in literary theory may result from the fact that discourse of modernism still takes place in an electrified world. In spite of the recent developments in LED lighting, we still operate under the glow of electric light and therefore still await the vantage point of nostalgia or history, which a new wave of radically different technology would offer, from which to view electric light.

The thesis does not attempt to chart a developmental arc in which the new technology increased in prevalence. Mine is not a monolithic argument proposing a sudden shift in the influence of artificial light on literature, because light is not one thing controlling cultural practice in one way only. Indeed, widely differing cultural practices were being shaped by the existence of artificial light simultaneously. Not all modernists operated on the same principles, of course. However, I have been able to identify what can be thought of as a collective American experience of Parisian lighting. Paris-based American fiction certainly spoke to both the individual and universal aspects of metropolitan life and, as part of that imperative, acts as a holding field for conflicted concepts and ambivalence. It would be fruitful to conduct a wider study of electric lighting in modernism outside the French capital so as to determine the extent to which American Paris-based modernism exemplifies a singular American experience of that city. However, together with the Paris expositions of 1889 and 1900, I would still argue that the city's renowned beauty, electric lighting, entertainments, artistic community, continuous stimulation, and involvement in World War I rendered many of the opposites discussed here more extreme than in other capital cities. To my mind, American literary visitors to the city were exposed to intense sensory experiences of electric light resulting in a unique variant of modernism.

The next step that logically follows from this study is to move beyond the geographical boundary of Paris and aim for a comprehensive study of presentments of electric light across Western literature in the period. Nevertheless, Paris is the epicentre of this thesis as 'the undisputed world capital of the arts' in the 1920s and what

Malcolm Bradbury calls ‘the fount of Bohemia, tolerance and émigré life-style’.²⁰ These opinions support my focus on Paris, as elaborated in the Introduction. However, literary case studies exploring the intersection of American literary modernism with lighting developments in a range of capital cities would enable a comparison between the American visitors’ interaction with the electric lighting of Paris and that of Berlin or London, for example.

Further study of artificial light could encompass writers who were fascinated by electricity, and to some extent its use as a source of lighting, but more so its pure energy and networks in order to better understand the differences between the literary treatments of the power source and its products. Such a study could encompass Hart Crane’s *The Bridge* (1930), which achieves a powerful visualisation of electric connectivity in ‘The River’ section. Another relevant writer is Mina Loy who had a deep connection with Paris and with electric energy. Loy’s ‘Parturition’ (1914) rejects the ‘bland sun’ and employs the semantics of electrification.²¹ A comparison of literary interest in Paris’ diurnal or pre-modern light versus its artificial light would provide another direction from which to approach lighting and modernism. Although I have had to delimit my research to artificial light, impassioned modernist responses to Paris’ natural light reveal a great deal about the way that the emergence of artificial light resulted in natural light becoming an artistic subject ripe for reassessment. Milica Banjanin argues for this in her work on Russian modernists: ‘gas and electric lights are set off, in the cultural consciousness of the beginning of the century, against each other and against the sun and moon’.²² It appears that new categories of light facilitated artistic interrogations of the coexistence of nature and artificiality and, flowing on from this, of beauty and technology.

I intended to show that the literary styles of the modernist era embodied the complex relation of writing to its cultural and historical context never more forcefully than when the content or form of that writing encompasses artificial lighting. This thesis is about a particular phase of a technological revolution. As that phase of new electric lighting came to an end or became less distinct, its impact on literature is

²⁰ Kevin Jackson, *Constellation of Genius 1922: Modernism Year One* (London: Hutchinson, 2012), p. 7. Malcolm Bradbury, ‘The Cities of Modernism’ in *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature*, p. 102.

²¹ Mina Loy, ‘Parturition’ (1914), *The Norton Anthology of American Literature D*, eighth edition, ed. Nina Baym (New York: Norton, 2012), pp. 296-99, ll.4, 24, 62.

²² Milica Banjanin, ‘Where Are the Street Lights Running to?: The Poetics of Street Lights in Russian Modernism’, *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 38 (2004), pp. 71-91 (p. 72).

perhaps not so easily discernible. This occurred towards the end of the 1930s, which is where my study terminates. By comparing and contrasting literary manifestations of that light, written at the time of the greatest technological developments in that field and with reference to relevant pictorial depictions, I observe the unique role that modern lighting played in the history of literary experimentation. In so doing, I have demonstrated the influence of artificial lighting on the history of literary style, especially its thematic and formal contribution to the genesis of modernism.

I wish to conclude with the words of Sala, quoted in Chapter 1, who wrote that artificial light ‘speaks, actively, to men and women of what is, and of what is done and suffered by night and by day [...] listen to its experiences, harketh to its counsels and profit by its lessons.’²³ I have shown that electric light is the embodiment of a literary acknowledgement, if not resolution, of opposites and, as such, it tells us about life, about suffering and about how to go forward. This immensely positive consequence of lighting technology intensified through the period considered here. Taken as a whole, the literary treatments of Parisian lighting technology reviewed in this study bring that technology to life and acknowledge the ‘counsels’ available to us if we strive to better understand ourselves in relation to the technologies with which we exist.

²³ Sala, *Gaslight and Daylight*, p. 156.

ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1

Edgar Degas, *Interior ('The Rape')* (1868-9)

Figure 2

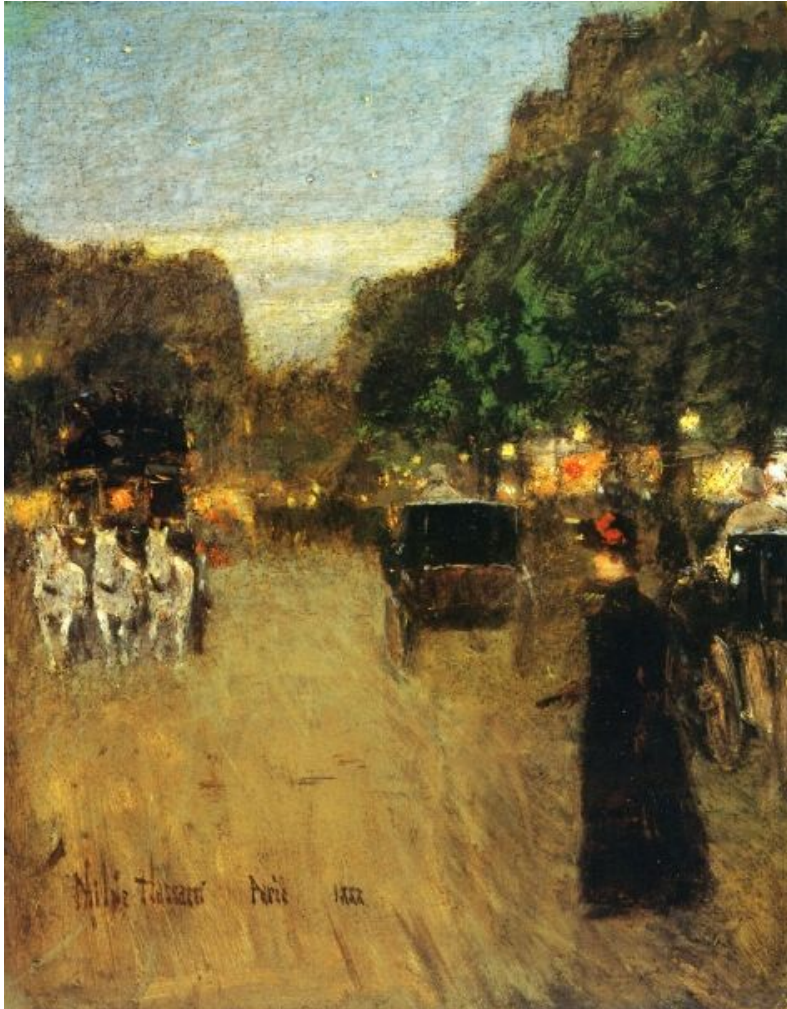
Giacomo Balla, *Street Light* (1909)

Figure 3



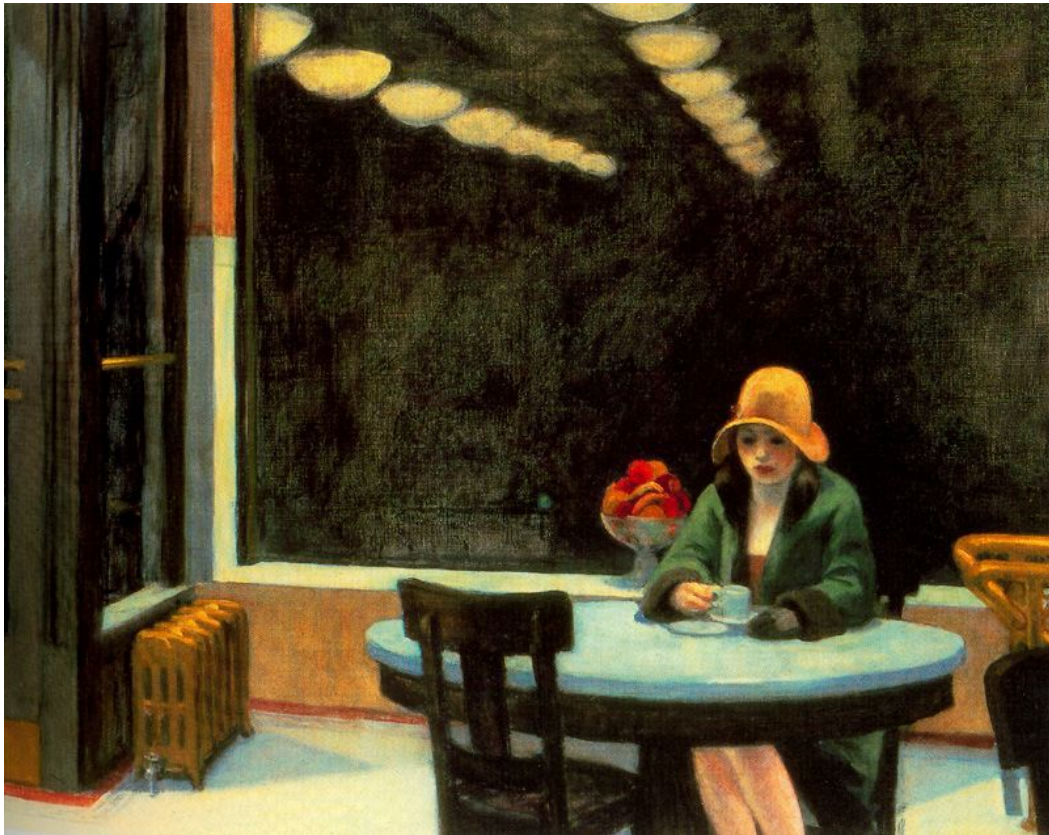
Natalia Goncharova, *Electric Light* (1913)

Figure 4



Frederick Childe Hassam, *Bois de Boulogne* (1888)

Figure 5



Edward Hopper, *Automat* (1927)

Figure 6

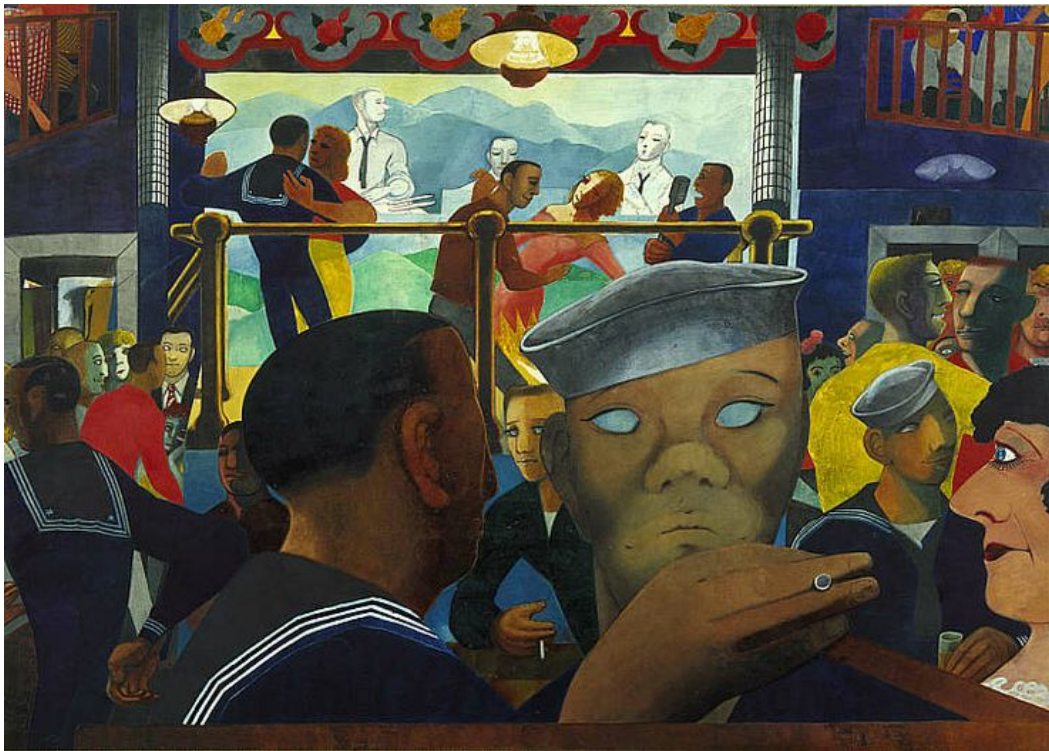
Edward Burra, *Izzy Orts* (1937)

Figure 7

Pablo Picasso, *Guernica* (1937)

Figure 8

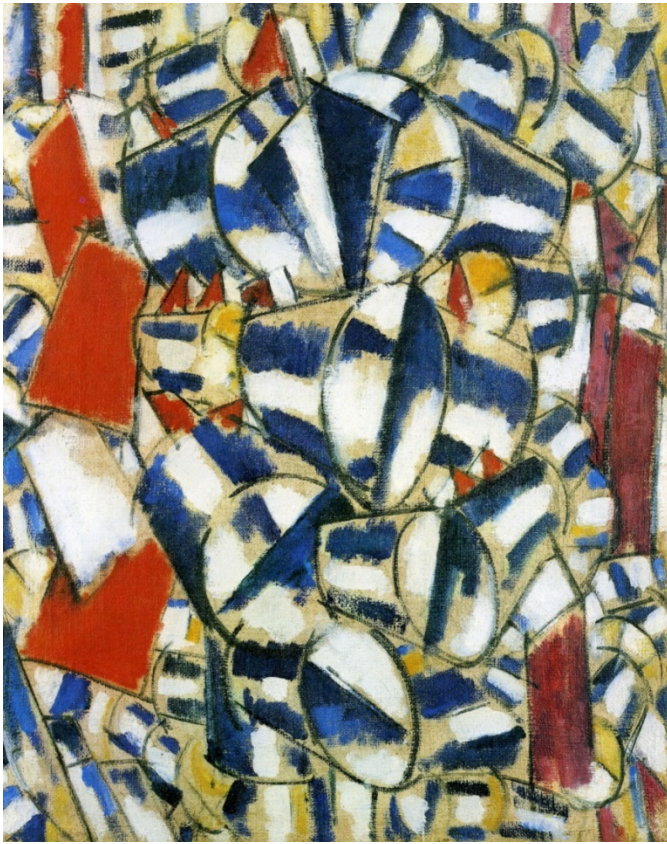
Sonia Delaunay, *Electric Prisms* (1914)

Figure 9



Charles Henry Demuth, *I Saw the Figure Five in Gold* (1928)

Figure 10



Fernand Léger, *Contrast of Forms* (1913)

Figure 11

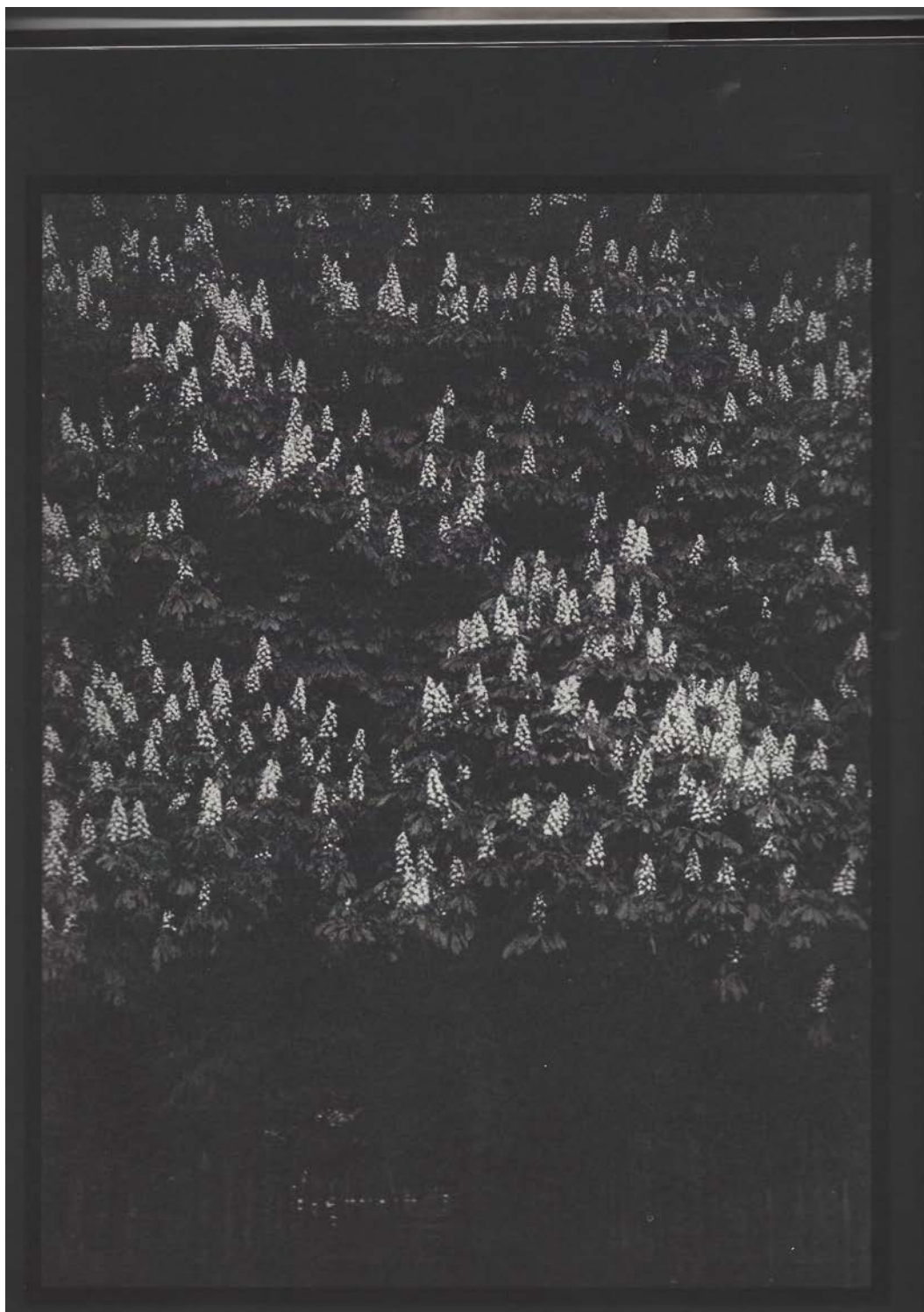
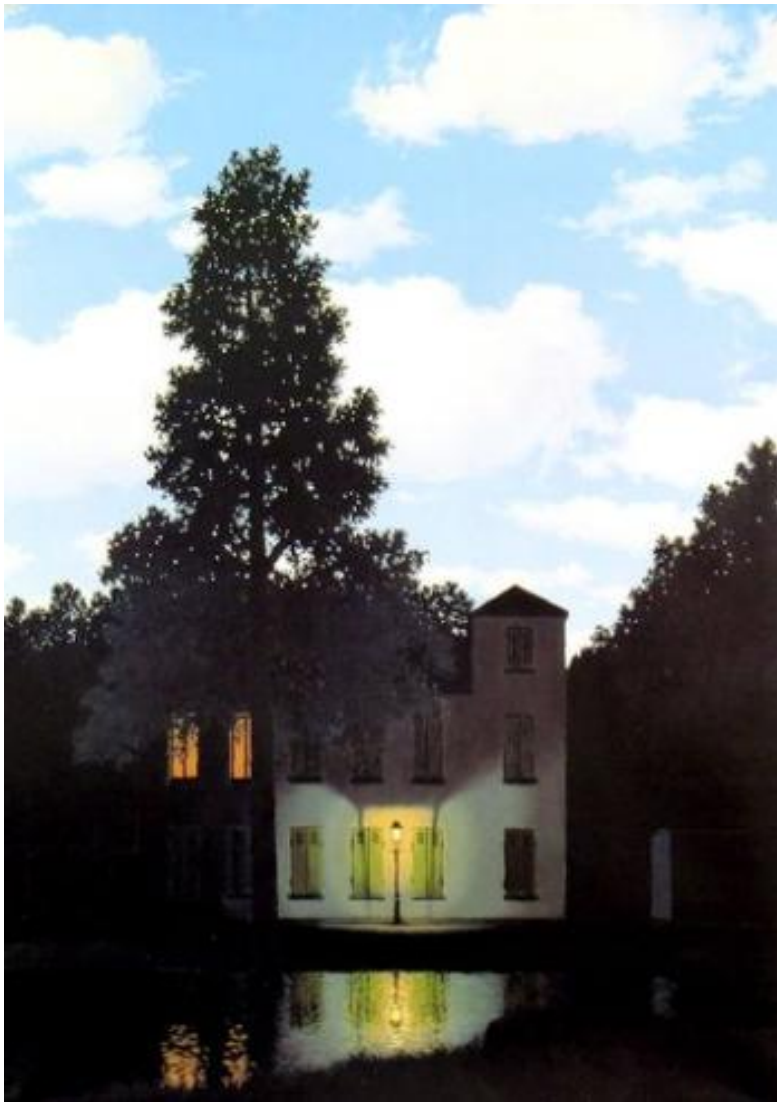
Halász Brassai, photograph 54, in *Paris la Nuit* (1933)

Figure 12

Pablo Picasso, *Les Femmes d'Alger* (1935)

Figure 13



René Magritte, *Empire of Light* (1953–54)

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