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Towards A Re-Reading Of Sexual Imagery in the Poetry of Anthony Hecht

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I hereby declare that, in line with the Faculty of Arts' code of conduct for research integrity, the work submitted here is my own original work and that any additional sources of information have been duly cited.

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Abstract

This thesis works towards a re-reading of sexual imagery in the poetry of American writer Anthony Hecht. After a brief introduction to Hecht's life, I explore how World War II and Holocaust discourses alongside late-20th century debates on poetic form have radically shaped contemporary readings of his work. My aim is to reveal how these discourses ultimately restrict perceptions of Hecht to that of a "moralist" and a "formalist." To challenge these labels (without fully discarding them), I critically explore their context and introduce new frameworks for viewing Hecht's sexual imagery. In doing so, I emphasize how sexual desire is frequently associated with violence – especially as it pertains to notions of imagination and fantasy – but do not overtly rely on the poet's war experiences to justify this association. Instead, I look specifically at how sexual desire has historically been positioned as something violent *in itself* and use insights from gender and sexuality studies to help guide my analysis.

Introduction

Anthony Hecht was born in New York City on January 16, 1923, and raised in an upper-middle-class secular Jewish household. Though his family lived relatively comfortable through the Great Depression due to the wealth of his mother's family,[1] his childhood was particularly difficult. On top of having few to no real school friends, home-life was made stressful by his brother's ailing heath and father's moderate-to-severe mental health crises.[2] Nevertheless, in 1940, Hecht was able to leave this environment for Bard College and form genuine friendships with teachers and fellow students for the first time. Joining Bard as a music major, Hecht quickly realized his deep love for poetry and switched to literary studies with plans of becoming a poet.[3] Unfortunately, this was all cut short by World War II; faced with the draft, Hecht enlisted in the U.S. Army Reserve Corps on November 21, 1942, and began basic training within the next year.

Between 1943 and February of 1945, Hecht was stationed at different forts across the country while preparing for deployment to Europe. Letters sent home in these years reflect an overwhelming spirit of boredom and depression caused by the army. At Fort Leonard Wood in 1944 he wrote to his parents, "I fear that I shall once again fall into that mental slump which is so necessary to being a good soldier. After one week here, my thoughts have already become less coherent. This is liable to be the most depressing feature of army life again for me."[4] This sentiment was common during the war, and poets such as Randall Jarrell expressed similar emotions in their wartime letters. But in February of 1945, Hecht was finally deployed to the European Front and spent four dreadful months fighting across France, Czechoslovakia, and Germany. Though this experience was relatively short, it was marked by an intense violence that he would carry with him in the years to come.

Without a doubt, Hecht's time in the military impacted his life in significant ways. Though he often remained silent about his direct experiences of the war, few critical studies of him omit the horrors he witnessed at Flossenbürg Concentration Camp. "Flossenbürg was an annex of Buchenwald," Hecht told Philip Hoy in 2004, that was "both an extermination camp and a slave-labour camp, where prisoners were made to manufacture Messerschmitts at a

[1] Post, "Introduction," in *The Letters*, 25.
[2] Hoy, *Conversation with Philip Hoy*, 18-20.
[3] Ibid., 22.
[4] Hecht to his parents, late March / early April 1944, in *The Letters*, 27-28.

factory right within the perimeter of the camp. […] Prisoners were dying at the rate of 500 a day from typhus [… and their] accounts were beyond comprehension."[5] According to Hecht, this was "the greatest trauma of the war" for him and one that left him "shrieking" in the night for years.[6] Later, Hecht would read extensively on the experiences of Jewish prisoners at camps like Flossenbürg and implement some of them into his poetry. This can be seen most clearly in poems such as "'More Light! More Light!'" and "The Book of Yolek."

Upon his return from the army, Hecht was fortunate enough to continue his university education on the G.I Bill of Rights.[7] Between 1946-1950, he attended several institutions including Kenyon College, The University of Iowa, New York University and Columbia University. A common theme across Hecht's time at these schools was his desire to study under New Critical scholars including the prominent literary critics John Crowe Ransom and Allen Tate.[8] Ransom and Tate were key voices in the New Critic movement and stressed the importance of close reading over long-practiced "impressionistic and historically minded" approaches.[9] Under Tate's guidance, Hecht says he learned how "a poem's total design is modulated and given its energy not by local ingredients tastefully combined, but by the richness, toughness and density of some sustaining vision of life – sustaining, at least, throughout the world of the poem and perhaps some resonance to it after the poem is done."[10] As the influence of New Criticism faded in the late 1950s and 60s, Hecht eventually stepped away from this movement and experimented more with autobiographical and historical modes of literary creation. Nevertheless, this "vision" would continue to play a formidable role in his own approach to poetry throughout his career.

Following New Critical influences after the war was not unusual for many up-and-coming poets writing after 1945. For a specific group of poets commonly referred to as "the middle generation," encounters with New Criticism's "unavoidable presence" essentially became a defining feature.[11] The middle generation title quite literally comes from the position these poets held in literary history – they were "stuck in the middle between the daunting high

[5] Hoy, 26.
[6] Ibid., 26-27.
[7] Hecht received his B.A. from Bard *in absentia* after completing an Army Specialized Training Program in 1943 (Post, "Introduction," in *The Letters*, 12). Nevertheless, the G.I Bill allowed him to continue his education further and contributed to studies for graduate-level learning.
[8] Hecht first studied under Ransom and Tate at Kenyon College. He eventually followed Tate to New York University when the professor took up a position there (Post, *A Thickness*, 18).
[9] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 46.
[10] Hecht, "A Few Green Leaves," 569, quoted in Brown, "The Poetry of Anthony Hecht," 13.
[11] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 46.

modernists and the more vocal Beat, Black Mountain, and New York School poets."[12] Though New Criticism held a strong hold over the literary education of these poets, the "in-between" position they faced uniquely allowed each "side" to play different roles for each of them. The poetry of Hecht, Richard Wilbur, and James Merrill, for example, commonly reflects a more formal association with late modernists such as W.H. Auden, while Robert Lowell and John Berryman moved from early formalist poetry to a "confessional" mode closely associated with the "vocal" generations. Because of this, many of the middle generation poets did not necessarily see themselves as being a part of a set group. As Diederik Oostdijk notes, these poets only later became seen as "members of the same poetic generation […] because they share[d] a set of overlapping features, although not all members share[d] all features all the time."[13] Other prominent poets commonly associated with this generation include Howard Nemerov, Karl Shapiro, and Randall Jarrell.

In relation to his contemporaries, Hecht published his first volume of poetry, *A Summoning of Stones* (1954), rather late. Many middle generation poets began publishing in the late 1940s, and even James Merrill, a poet 3 years younger than Hecht, first published in 1951. Perhaps even more surprising than this is the fact that his second book of poetry, *The Hard Hours*, was not published until 1967, thirteen years after his first volume. On the one hand, Hecht was a slow writer and would remain slow for most of his career; writing poetry was an enjoyable but difficult task for him, and he would only publish seven volumes of poetry in his life.[14] But on the other hand, crises and anxieties at home often left Hecht debilitated and unable to write poetry. In 1947, for instance, Hecht was hospitalized after having a nervous breakdown at the University of Iowa which slowed his progress; then, through much of the 1950s, he dealt with a stressful and painful relationship with his wife, Patricia Harris, that ended in their divorce and a season of severe depression for the poet.[15] Nevertheless, *A Summoning* and *The Hard Hours* still established Hecht's command of formal techniques and demonstrated his skills as a poet.

Though *A Summoning* received praise for its technical accomplishments, *The Hard Hours* is Hecht's breakthrough work. While remaining in rhymed or metered verse, a variety

[12] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 6.
[13] Ibid., 9.
[14] Post, *Thickness*, 1.
[15] As Post notes, "[Hecht] would often speak of being unable to write poetry unless he felt free from duress" ("A Second Life," in *The Letters*, 132). Though gaps between publications would continue throughout his career whenever he faced stressful periods of life, a level of stability was brought to Hecht's life after marrying Helen D'Alessandro in 1971. This stability is most visible in his publications during the late-1970s where he published *Millions of Strange Shadows* (1977) and *The Venetian Vespers* (1979) within a two-year span.

of poems in this volume have confessional or autobiographical features to them, creating a more personal "modern-day book of hours," in the words of Jonathan Post, that is defined by Hecht's "brooding, shaping consciousness."[16] In one of Hecht's most praised poems in this work, "'It Out-Herods Herod. Pray You, Avoid It,'" the speaker takes on characteristics similar to the biographical Hecht by discussing the Holocaust with his own children in mind. Contemplating his heroic-like status in his children's eyes, the speaker ends the poem stuck knowing he would not have been able to save "them from the gas" during the war.[17] This is not to suggest that the speaker is identical to Hecht, but the apparent use of personal details (or at least presenting them as such) allows *The Hard Hours* to play with formal expectations in unique ways. This would not go unnoticed in the American literary scene, and in 1968 *The Hard Hours* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize of poetry.

After *A Summoning* and *The Hard Hours*, Hecht remained committed to formalist techniques and published almost exclusively in metered or rhymed verse for the rest of his career.[18] Considering free verse's dominance in the American literary scene during the mid-to-late 20th century, this staunch devotion was relatively uncommon.[19] As mentioned, Berryman, Lowell, and other middle-generation poets including W. D. Snodgrass, moved from early formalist verse towards modes of free verse in their later work.[20] Nevertheless, a small but devoted group of poets known as The New Formalists in the 1980s recognized Hecht's distinct skills and looked to him as a literary role model. These poet-critics emphasized the need for a return to the "traditional" techniques Hecht seemingly epitomized and, between the 1980s and the early 2000s, wrote extensively on him and other formalist poets. By Hecht's death in 2004, these reviews would help establish his legacy as one of America's strongest formal and moral poets of the 20th century.

War Poetry and Moral Authority

Since the beginning of his career, a significant amount of Hecht's work has been categorized as war poetry or, at least, viewed with his war experiences in mind. This may appear to be an undeniable feature of his poetry, but, in Chapter 1, I examine the inner workings and broader

[16] Post, *A Thickness*, 89.
[17] Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 68.
[18] Though Hecht implemented confessional and autobiographical features into works such as *The Hard Hours*, his regular use of rhyme and meter has generally kept him associated with Auden and other middle generation poets who used similar techniques (i.e., Richard Wilbur, James Merrill). I will come back to the politics that play a role in Hecht's "formalist" label in Chapter 2.
[19] Hoffman, "Our Common Lot," 42.
[20] Epstein, *American Poetry Since 1945*, 87.

implications of what this label entails. Criteria for war poetry have changed across history, and to assume Hecht can naturally step into "war poetry" because of his military service dismisses important discussions on war, experience, and aesthetics that circulated during and after World War II. Between 1939-1945, a growing appreciation for civilian poetry on the war gave noncombatant poets such as W.H. Auden, Wallace Stevens, and Marianne Moore a level of authority historically privileged to the male soldier-poet. In part, this was due to the war's perception as "total," which allowed these poets to slowly challenge traditional definitions of "war," war's victims, and who could join war's poetic canon.[21] Nevertheless, this reform did not last long, and *literal* war experiences defined by trauma and suffering was often looked to in the postwar years.[22] I look closer at this transformation by singling out Moore's "In Distrust of Merits" (1943). Though highly appreciated and anthologized during the war years, Moore herself would come to be embarrassed by it in the 1960s when standards for war poetry seemingly changed.

Privileging "real" war experience has influenced how the works of many middle generation poets, including Hecht, are viewed. As a military veteran, Hecht is considered an authentic voice of World War II's trauma, separate from those who were not on the battlefield or in military-based situations. From such a position, critics have generally allowed him to speak on war matters definitively, but, I argue, have also subtly endowed his work with authorities that extend beyond his war experiences. Most notably, I see a moral authority attributed to much of his poetry that transforms images of violence and suffering into meditations on the "fallen world."[23] In other words, I am arguing that Hecht's perception as an authorial voice of war has given rise to the perception that his work is naturally centered around topics such as evil, goodness, virtue, and sin. This is not to imply Hecht's work does not speak in moral terms or even that much of his poetry cannot be read through a lens of war; instead, my aim is to point out how these frameworks have shaped (and restricted) the reception of his work.

The Politicization of Poetic Form

Just as war experience has been used to reinforce an image of moral authority in Hecht's work, so has Hecht's poetic techniques. In Chapter 2, I take a closer look at what meaning has been assigned to his use of meter and rhyme and the general politicization of poetic form in the

[21] Galvin, *News of War*, 6. See also Schweik, "Writing War Poetry like a Woman," 532.
[22] Schweik, 536.
[23] Sacks, "Anthony Hecht's 'Rites and Ceremonies,'" 62.

second half of the 20th century. Following World War II, New Criticism's dominant presence in the American literary scene had a strong impact on how postwar poets were educated. Modernist notions of impersonality and tradition were codified in New Critical theory, and metrical verse was often promoted as a favorable form. However, in the late 1950s, these standards were challenged by movements that advanced more free styles of writing outside New Critical frameworks. Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959), for instance, helped establish a "confessional" style of writing that is less strict than formal verse and opens up the field of poetry to writers independent of postwar universities. With the eventual growth of the more "vocal" movements between the 1960s and 1980s, free verse became the "established mode" for writing poetry in the U.S. and was used to help develop a needed postmodern aesthetics.[24]

Nevertheless, during the 1980s, a group known as the New Formalists emerged in response to free verses' new dominance. Just as poets in the 1950s responded to the New Critics, these poets responded to changes in the U.S. literary scene by expressing their desire for a return to "traditional" poetry. Though there is nothing inherently dangerous about this, "traditional" poetry seemingly became a political opposite to certain literary movements. Styles of confessionalism exemplified by the Beat poets, for instance, were cast as literary representatives of the "the corrupt culture of the 1960s,"[25] which the New Formalists positioned themselves against. Moreover, their poetry began "to link formal prosody with conservative political ideology" that polarized each "side" from the other.[26] Regardless of Hecht's political stance in these debates, as a poet writing in metered verse across his career, I argue that these conversations have helped dictate the terms in which his work has been received.

Rereading Sexual Imagery

One "favorite subject" of Hecht's, in the words of Karl Kirchwey, that I believe has been shaped (or ignored) by the aforementioned discourses is his fascination with sex.[27] Sexual imagery is prominent in much of Hecht's work and plays a role in poems such as "Peripeteia," "The End of the Weekend," "Elders," and more. While this imagery has not gone unnoticed, critics have often stopped short of systematically analyzing it *by itself*. More commonly, Hecht's sexual imagery has been reviewed in larger discussions on trauma or morality, which

[24] Hallberg, "Poetry, Politics, and Intellectuals," 124.
[25] Ibid., 74.
[26] Ibid., 70-71.
[27] Kirchwey, "'A Policied Exile from the Human Race,'" 166-167.

are allegedly central to much of his poetry.[28] By deconstructing these frameworks, my goal is to introduce new ways to view Hecht's sexual imagery.

In Chapter 3, I critically engage with Hecht's sexual imagery by focusing on the historical condemnation of sexual desire. Rather than exploring how sexual desire may be used to reinforce themes of violence or trauma (which have been connected to Hecht's war experiences or possibly even troubles in his first marriages), I look specifically at how it has been historically seen as something violent *in itself*. From early Christian and Medieval frameworks to psychoanalytic theories on "normal" and "deviant" sexual behavior, sexual desire has often served as a negative opposite of love and reason. My aim is to show how Hecht participates in this tradition by both adhering to and reworking certain established ideas. For instance, in the poem "Elders," Hecht fundamentally emphasizes the condemnation of sexual desire by highlighting the violent nature of sexual fantasy but subverts standard approaches by questioning the reliability of the mind.

Though I deconstruct the war and morality narratives and aesthetic debates that have shaped the reception of Hecht's work, my readings are meant to be received as supplementary with and not as polemically against these frameworks. Of course, analysis of moralist tendencies and formalist techniques play a vital role in Hecht studies, and my proposal to read from a different angle should in no way be taken as an ambition to discredit these approaches. By emphasizing Hecht's sexual imagery, my goal is to help prevent too singular of an image from defining his work and life. As Oostdijk notes, "World War II poets believed that they did not have one self, but multiple selves that emerged through various social or personal stimuli and that cropped up during different phases of their lives."[29] Viewing war as an indissoluble feature of the poet runs the risk of suppressing his "other selves," and I question the sentiment that "real war poets are always war poets" or that the "war poet can never be free of the subject [of war]."[30] This is not to belittle or underestimate the horrifying experiences Hecht witnessed first-hand at places such as Flossenbürg, but rather is meant to validate other expressions, ideas, and "selves" within the poet's work that are outside war's alleged totality.

As I examine potential political motivations behind previous interpretations of Hecht's work, I do not assume this thesis to be politically neutral nor attempt to be so. By promoting an analysis of Hecht's sexual imagery, my hope is that this research will be included in more progressive discussions on sexuality studies and literature. This desire stems from my own

[28] See Spiegelman, *The Didactic Muse*, 63, as an example.
[29] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 10.
[30] Jarrell, "Poetry in War and Peace," 121-122; Post, *A Thickness*, ix.

interest in repressed sexuality and, in particular, the stigma surrounding sexual fantasy or imagination. I acknowledge that my approach to these conversations will emphasize more heteronormative historical discourses (though often in a critical manner) but also believe queer analyses of Hecht's work are just as relevant. Nonetheless, re-examining traditional frameworks for viewing Hecht's work uncovers new relationships between literature, sexuality, and historical discourse that are commonly hidden under the "moralist" and "formalist" labels. I hope this approach will reinvigorate Hecht studies and middle-generation poetry in general.

Chapter 1
Anthony Hecht and the Debate Over "Real" War Poetry

Between the First and Second World War, efforts to define war poetry have been neither self-evident nor stable. "Poetry's relation to war," as Rachel Galvin writes, "has [thematically, formally, and historically] changed over the long twentieth century."[1] With the First World War, war poetry was primarily measured according to an "authority of experience" – or at least perception of experience – based upon the poet's relationship to the literal battlefield.[2] During this time, noncombatants, civilians, and "women back home"[3] still wrote wartime lyrics, but soldiers who had encountered war from combative positions were considered to have had undergone a unique encounter with "Reality" or "an unmediated Truth" and endowed with a definitive right to speak.[4] Though this model would be standardized in universities and social clubs leading up to World War II, its control was generally challenged between 1939-1945.[5] As World War II's total mobilization of civilian and military sectors "effaced the usual distinctions between frontline and rear-line action" and high civilian causalities destabilized traditional definitions of war's greatest victims,[6] some literary critics

[1] Galvin, 11.
[2] Schweik, 533. See Schweik's discussion of Robert Graves's "The Poets of World War II." In Graves's essay, he notes there were World War I poets who 1.) did not serve but made-up war stories or 2.) served but exaggerated their war experiences. The fact that these "false" solider-poets were still received authoritatively reveals, in part, the artificiality of this model and "experience."
[3] As Campbell points out ("Combat Gnosticism," 212), the divide between soldiers and civilians is deeply bound to gender, and "the civilian population" has often been read synonymously with "the women back home." Moreover, Campbell demonstrates how civilians and women actually make up a large portion of poets writing on war between 1914-1918, though their work has not been canonized either because of their gender and/or their mediated relationship to *literal* combat.
[4] Ibid., 207.
[5] Schweik, 533.
[6] Goldstein, *Dismantling Glory*, 29. See also pages 201-202: in terms of statistics, civilian causalities in World War II (including Holocaust victims) made up roughly sixty-five percent of all war related deaths, a number drastically higher than the 15 percent in World War I. This is not to say World War I should not be considered "total," as it too is an example of industrialized warfare; but during World War I, soldiers and civilians faced different realities in a war centered primarily, though not exclusively, around the trenches. Adding to this conversation, Michael Howard writes, "The traditional distinction between solider and civilian, which had been so clear in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and which had even survived the First World War, […] disappeared [in World War II]; particularly since air warfare put civilians at just as great risk as all but a small proportion of the men in the armed forces. One was likely to be a great deal safer as a storeman in an ordnance depot or a writer in an officers' mess in a military base than as a dock worker or a shop assistant in Liverpool or Hamburg" (*War in European History*, 134). The growth of military-industrial complexes also played a strong role in the Second World War, and Oostdijk notes, "the whole economy of a nation was at the disposal of the war

began to approach war canonization differently than in the First World War.[7] Noncombatant poets including W.H. Auden, Wallace Stevens, Elizabeth Bishop, and Marianne Moore were given opportunities to take up the topic of war in authoritative ways.

Abstracting War: "In Distrust of Merits"

One of the most noteworthy civilian war poems of World War II is Moore's "In Distrust of Merits."[8] After its publication in 1943, American literary critics expected it to become "the single, paradigmatic, exemplary war poem"[9] and praised its unique engagement with the war away from the traditional battlefield. Other war poems at this time had attempted to replicate combative experiences and created, in the words of Auden, "hectic and fake emotions about fox-holes."[10] Moore was aware of the established frameworks that encouraged such approaches and, in fact, was very self-conscious of her position outside the combative tradition. But rather than attempt to hide her civilian positionality and physical distance from the battlefield, Moore explicitly announces them in "In Distrust."

Throughout the poem, the speaker distinguishes between herself and those that are "fighting, fighting, fighting," in the "deserts and caves, one by / one, in battalions and squadrons" (136). While this juxtaposition reinforces the dichotomy between civilian and soldier that is generally challenged by World War II, it simultaneously gives the noncombatant a prominent voice outside the "authority of experience." As Susan Schweik notes, "In Distrust" is not concerned with translating an unmediated experience of "Reality" for others, a duty commonly ascribed to the soldier-poet.[11] The speaker has only glimpses of battlefield experiences through an alleged photograph that lingers in the seventh stanza ("O / quiet form upon the dust, I cannot / look and yet I must" (138)) and is therefore bound to a mediated vision of combat.[12] This mediation might prevent her from having a precise understanding of what

effort [in World War II], so it did not matter much whether one contributed to the warring state in a civilian capacity or in uniform" (*Nightmare Fighters,* 165).

[7] Schweik, 533-535. Schweik mentions two 1945 war anthologies – *War and the Poet: An Anthology of Poetry Expressing Man's Attitudes to War from Ancient Times to the Present* edited by Richard Eberhart and Selden Rodman, and Oscar Williams's *The War Poets: An Anthology of the War Poetry of the Twentieth Century* – that praised "In Distrust of Merits" and civilian war poetry in general.

[8] All further refences to "In Distrust of Merits" (Moore, *The Complete Poems*) will be included with in-text page number citations.

[9] Ibid., 532.

[10] W.H. Auden, review of *Nevertheless,* quoted in Galvin, 12.

[11] Schweik, 538.

[12] In a conversation with Laurence Stapleton in 1953, Moore discusses how a photograph of a dead solider in the newspaper helped spark the creation of "In Distrust." Stapleton writes, "['In Distrust of Merits'] was born by the shaping into original form the continuous dialogue and the years of mediation and born equally of agonized response to immediate events. Marianne Moore said with utter conviction that a picture in a newspaper of a slain

soldiers experience during war, but it also allows her to broach war from new angles outside the *literal.*

A key feature of "In Distrust" is its unique use of figurative and abstract language.[13] The image of soldier's "fighting, fighting, fighting" is transposed onto an image of "inward war" that shapes much of the poem. In the end of stanza four and beginning of stanza five, the speaker promises to "fight" racism, prejudice, and hatred in response to the soldier's fighting:

> We vow, we make this promise
>
> to the fighting – it's a promise – "We'll
> never hate black, white, red, yellow, Jew,
> Gentile, Untouchable.[14]

Conceptualizations of "war" thus extend beyond traditional combat into figurative, ideological "battles." In other words, the speaker uses her fixation on a literal battlefield (that is explicitly unknown) to promote a larger discussion on the conditions that facilitate war in the first place. In the poem's final stanza, the call to keep fighting this "inward war" is reinforced:

> Hate-hardened heart, O heart of iron,
> iron is iron till it is rust.
> There never was a war that was
> not inward; I must
> fight till I have conquered in myself what
> causes war […][15]

Importantly, the speaker avoids sounding cliché by qualifying these declarations with her own self-doubt. Though she promises to "fight" hatred, she knows she is "not competent to make [her] vows" and has been unable to fully commit to the "fight" thus far ("I inwardly did nothing, / O Iscariotlike crime!"(138)). In stanza five, she even questions whether her moral and political convictions are correctly defined, asking, "Am I what / I can't believe in?" (137). Such doubt brings us back to the poem's title – whose distrust is it and what are the merits they are distrusting? Of this, Lois Bar-Yaacov writes, "Merits [in the religious, militaristic, and spiritual senses,] are [all] to be distrusted by one who looks honestly into her own heart and sees the

solider […] made her feel she must write the poem" (*The Poets Advance,* 134). Galvin considers this to be significant because it directly challenges the "authority of experience" – if a mediated image (the photograph) can provoke response, it simultaneously draws attention to the act of seeing and not seeing (i.e., the speaker seeing herself see), bringing attention to the "vision" inherently tied to "experience" (263).

[13] Schweik, 554.

[14] Moore, 137.

[15] Ibid., 138.

depths of her own depravity, her capacity to hate."[16] The speaker ultimately becomes a literary representative of this self-reflection and of the difficulty in adhering to one's convictions during wartime.

By focusing on abstractions rather than literal battlefield experiences, "In Distrust" also speaks politically, something important for many noncombatants during the war. While domestic politics became increasingly more partisan and argumentative throughout the war, Americans (across political parties) generally remained united in their commitment to support the war effort.[17] Messages of the "Good War" played a large role in this, and artists were encouraged to "express and […] prove American high culture's commitment to the war effort" through their work.[18] In this context, as Schweik notes, "a poem may be more likely to be judged uncompelling if it lacks ideological commitment and fails to appeal to a mass audience."[19] Explicit ideological statements were, however, a point of tension in the literary academy at this time. New Critics were beginning to advance theories that ignored societal contexts (including the political) and focused on finding a poem's "organic unity" through its words, images figures, symbols, and more.[20] Nevertheless, when approaching the poem with contemporary civilians in mind, "In Distrust" reveals its own noncombatant disposition and unique place in an evolving literary war canon.

Admittedly, between 1939-1945, an emphasis on soldiers' experiences was not completely abandoned for the approaches developed by civilian poets such as Moore. The self-consciousness that separates Moore from the traditional war poet simultaneously betrays her own anxiety about being "a woman at home" away from "the men at war," and the poem never explicitly de-privileges the authority associated with soldier's unmediated experiences. This is not surprising considering the male combatant's entitled position in the history of war poetry, but, nonetheless, does not negate the impact Moore had on the "authority of experience." "In Distrust" challenges whether one needs to witness a soldier's experiences in order to effectively speak on war and whether the *literal* must be central to war poetry in general. By gaining a

[16] Bar-Yaacov, "In Distrust of Whose Merits?," 21.
[17] Winkler, *Home front U.S.A.*, 75. See also page 25. Winkler discusses how Americans tended to view the U.S.'s involvement in World War II through "black and white terms" – it was a fight against "evil," and "virtue" was on their side. Such language would be used to further advance the growth of the industrial-military complex.
[18] Schweik, 536. See also Winkler, 31-37. Comic books, films, music, radio performances, and other forms of art played a huge role in the spread of propaganda during the war. While Winkler mostly discusses the war time messages produces through popular culture, Schweik mentions how civilian poets, such as Moore and Elizabeth Bishop, similarly felt the need to write messages supporting the war effort. As Bishop wrote to one of her publishers in 1945, "The fact that none of these poems deal directly with the war . . . will, I am afraid, leave me open to reproach" (Bishop qtd. in Schweik, 536).
[19] Ibid., 536. See also page 554.
[20] Beach, *Twentieth-Century American Poetry*, 138.

voice historically excluded to her, Moore destabilizes the established relationship between experience, gender, and literary authority.

War and The Literal: "Poetry in War and Peace"

"In Distrust" is vital for my discussion on Hecht precisely because it questions the frameworks of "experience" war poets are commonly viewed under and the privilege bestowed upon *literal* styles of writings. As Schweik and Galvin have demonstrated, these questions invite a larger conversation on gender and the historic belittlement of women's voices; my aims, however, are directed more towards how these questions – or the dismissal of these questions – affect the way "experienced" war poets such as Hecht are read. Insights from Schweik and Galvin can still be used for such purposes, but first, I turn to Randall Jarrell and his infamous criticism of "In Distrust."

Randall Jarrell was a poet and critic commonly associated with middle generation writers who had finished studying before the start of World War II. Known for his wit, word play, and brutal reviews (even since high school), Jarrell wrote with a "confidence," in the words of William Pritchard, "[that] seemed to have [been] built in [him] from the beginning."[21] In the late 1930s, Jarrell studied with Robert Lowell under Crowe and Tate at Vanderbilt University and Kenyon College. Just as with Hecht, the insights gained from these New Critic scholars served as an important foundation for his early education, though he too stepped away from their influence later in his career.[22] After finishing his studies in 1939, Jarrell took up a teaching position at the University of Texas and published his first book of poetry, *Blood for a Stranger* (1942). In the same year this volume was published, Jarrell's academic career was put to a halt by war. He decided to enlist in the US Army Air Corps with plans of becoming a combat pilot and would not publish poetry again till *Little Friend, Little Friend* in 1945 and *Losses* in 1948. Each of these volumes would focus heavily on World War II.

In terms of traditional military "experience," Jarrell never actually faced any combat during World War II. Though he enlisted to become a fighter pilot, he remained stationed in the States as an instructor for the entirety of the war. In some respects, this lack of direct "experience" puts him in a position similar to Moore. But while Moore uses "In Distrust" to explicitly announce the speaker's distance from soldiers, Jarrell's war poetry often still speaks from traditionally authoritative positions that were either inspired by others or imagined by the poet himself. A perfect example is "Death of the Ball Turret Gunner," a five-line poem from

[21] Pritchard, 42
[22] Longenbach, *After Modernism*, 55-56.

Little Friend considered by Robert Weisberg in 1972 as "the ultimate poem of war."[23] "Ball Turret Gunner" is narrated by the ghost of an Air Force combatant who needs to be "washed […] out of the turret with a hose" after his death in the war. Of course, no one has the "experience" to speak for the dead, but Jarrell did not have the "experience" of a combat pilot either. Another poem that Oostdijk draws attention to is "A Camp in the Prussian Forest" and its narrator – an American soldier who discovers a concentration camp – whose accounts are again at odds with Jarrell's own wartime experiences.[24] By emphasizing the autonomy of the narrator over his biographical relationship to war, Jarrell thus developed his own poetics that challenged commonly held practices for war poetry.

Importantly, not all of Jarrell's war poetry is narrated from soldiers' perspectives. In an effort to display the war's total effect – in terms of societal mobilization, global participation, and high civilian death rates – many of Jarrell's war poems also focus on noncombatant victims of war. In these poems, women, children, and Jewish Holocaust victims all play prominent roles and take on active voices through speech or narration. As mentioned, this is particularly provocative in a canon frequently defined by the soldier's autobiography (i.e., the "authority of experience") and represents, in Oostdijk's words, "a type of democratic poetry that reflected the reality of people's daily lives, mostly as victims of forces they could neither change nor fully understand, written in a language that was immediately accessible."[25] Though this practice would be received with mixed responses in the years that followed, it had an impact on the developing World War II canon at the time and serves as important context for Jarrell's review of Moore's war poetry.

Nine months before *Little Friend* was published, Jarrell reviewed Moore's *Nevertheless* in the *Partisan Review*. Titled "Poetry in War and Peace," Jarrell voices his concern with Moore's war poems and specifically singles out "In Distrust" in the process. "'In Distrust of Merits,'" Jarrell writes, "has been called the best war poem so often that it should be treated in detail."[26] Acknowledging the praise for Moore's poem reaffirms its highly admired status during the war years, but it also reveals Jarrell's patronizingly posture. He continues:

> The title is humility not understanding – she distrusts her own merits, but trusts, accepts almost as if she were afraid to question, those of the heroic soldiers in her poem. She does not understand that they are heroes in the sense that the chimney-sweeps, the

[23] Weisberg, "A Major Minor Poet."
[24] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 111.
[25] Ibid., 111. As Oostdijk notes, Whitman and Snodgrass are two poets who attempted similar techniques in their war poetry. Nevertheless, Jarrell made it his own by employing it through the context of World War II's "total" dimension.
[26] Jarrell, "Poetry in War," 121.

> factory-children in the blue books, were heroes: routine loss in the routine business of the world. She sees them (the recurring triplet is the major theme of the poem) *fighting fighting fighting;* she does not remember that most of the people in a war never fight for even a minute – though they bear for years and die forever. They do not fight, but only starve, only suffer, only die: the sum of all this passive misery is that great activity, War. […] Miss Moore thinks of the war in blindingly moral terms. […] [S]eeing what she sees, and only now, betrays an extraordinary but common lack of facts, or imagination, or *something*.[27]

On one level, Jarrell's criticism legitimizes his own approach to World War II. By focusing on the *total* effect of war and its lack of representation throughout "In Distrust" (i.e., the omitted "chimney-sweeps," "factory-children," and others who "never fight for even a minute" but "bear for years and die forever"), Jarrell lays a critical foundation for his own "democratic" poetry. According to him, Moore's distinction between soldier and civilian elevates the former over the latter ("the heroic soldiers in her poem") and therefore moralizes war to an extreme. As I have discussed, Moore uses such an approach to create an intentionally abstract depiction of "inward war," though, for Jarrell, it demonstrates an alleged unawareness of war's "true" reality. Statements such as "she does not understand" or "she does not remember" emphasize his distrust in her and simultaneously place her as an "oblivious […] civilian woman shielded from and impervious to the circumstances of war."[28] Casting Moore as uninformed is rather cruel and mistaken in my view, but it importantly reveals Jarrell's belief that war needs *literal* representation.[29]

A key question foundational to Jarrell's assessment of Moore is, how ought war be represented in poetry? Throughout his review, Jarrell suggests that language – as it relates to war – should point back to the "real world" and away from abstractions such as the ones displayed in "In Distrust."[30] As Gargaillo notes, "For Jarrell, Moore abstracted the soldiers by reducing them to their function. They ceased to be people, becoming instead abstract embodiments of war's activity."[31] Rather ironically, many of Jarrell's "literal" war poems will

[27] Jarrell, "Poetry in War," 121-122.
[28] Galvin, 269.
[29] Schweik, 553.
[30] As Schweik and Scranton point out, Jarrell will also use abstract and figurative language in some of his war poetry (especially in "Eighth Air Force"). But, I argue, Jarrell's criticism relates more to the direction of this language, if it is pointed back towards war's "true" reality or not. For Jarrell, Moore's abstract language pointed away from war's trauma and was therefore problematic. Hecht will also use figurative language in his poetry but have similar issues with "the direction" of Sylvia Plath's war imagery (See pages 19-20).
[31] Gargaillo, "Wistful Lies," 50.

be accused of reducing soldiers or victims of war in the same way;[32] but regardless of how well Jarrell executed his display of the literal, the point is that he believed war poetry should be held to a certain standard based in the "truth" of war. Importantly, this "truth" for Jarrell is defined by trauma (the starving, misery and death that make up "that great activity, War"). With this in mind, the question above becomes, is World War II so traumatic an event that some literary techniques are off limits? For Jarrell, the answer is yes.

For all his emphasis on the literal, Jarrell's understanding of representation, trauma, and war is not naïve. In other essays published around "Poetry in Peace and War," Jarrell insists that war should also be understood according to a level of "incommensurability."[33] Literary critic Roy Scranton discusses this idea in his analysis of the "myth of the trauma soldier." He writes, "The cultural work that trauma does is to mark certain kinds of human suffering as being beyond social comprehension, labeling them as 'unspeakable,' at once sacred and taboo. The realm of the unspeakable, the realm of trauma, is the realm of reality in its obdurate existence beyond all possible linguistic mediation."[34] As Scranton goes on to show, trauma and its relationship to events such as war is never politically neutral. In Jarrell's case, war's incommensurability it used to keep trauma (i.e., war's "truth") as the standard for war poetry; as a result, the experiences of authorial voices – which generally turn out to be men or combatants – become privileged. From such a framework, non-literal language that does not point back to the "Real" becomes less trustworthy as it allegedly makes light of the suffering of others.[35] Jarrell's dismissal of Moore for her abstract approach demonstrates this dynamic and, at the same time, reaffirms for him the importance of his "democratic" war poetry.

Even though Jarrell's wartime experiences do not fully align with his poetry, his emphasis on trauma and literal representation ultimately reaffirms the "authority of experience." For Jarrell, in order to properly speak on War as best as one can, one still needs to *know* the trauma that "actually" happened in it (the "facts, imagination or *something*" he

[32] According to James Dickey, Jarrell's approach to war's *literal* trauma often left characters hollow and lacking a sense of humanness (especially in his earlier works). Dickey writes, "I don't think there are really any people in [Jarrell's] war poems. There are only The Ball Turret Gunner, A Pilot from the Carrier, The Wingman, and assorted faceless types in uniform. They are just collective Objects, or Attitudes, or Killable Puppets. You care very little what happens to them, and that is terrible" (Dickey quoted in Gargaillo, 49).
[33] Schweik, 547-548.
[34] Scranton, *Total Mobilization,* 217.
[35] Earlier in his review, Jarrell established his concern for war's trauma by criticizing Moore's use of figurative language in light of Maidanek (also spelled Majdanek), a concentration camp in Poland. Concern for language that allegedly reduces war's suffering can also be seen in his wartime letters, as Goldstein has pointed out (186). In a particular letter to Mackie Jarrell during the war (April 5, 1943), Jarrell criticized Allen Tate's "Ode to Our Young Pro-Consuls of the Air" – another civilian war poem – saying, "The evil of the universe is a poor thing to be ironic about" (Jarrell, *Letters*, 81). As Oostdijk adds, this mentality will be passed onto a majority of middle generation poets (including Hecht) who rarely satirized World War II in their poetry ("War in Vietnam," 69).

accuses Moore of lacking). Throughout "Poetry in War and Peace," Jarrell situates himself as having gained this knowledge, an attitude totally different from the speaker in "In Distrust" who explicitly declares her lack of "experience." As Galvin and Schweik have noted, his gender plays a role in such thinking. When Jarrell, as a man, criticizes Moore for her use of abstract language and alleged lack of knowledge about war's "true" reality, his experiences and authority are taken for granted whereas hers are deemed suspect. Moreover, Jarrell's position as an Air Force instructor still plays a role in how he is perceived. As Campbell notes, combat is not always defined according to whether one directly served in the war they talk about or not.[36] Having combative experience in general or simply being associated with combative positions can be enough to endow noncombatant military men with a sense of authority distinct from other "civilian-oriented" roles.[37] Unsurprisingly, some critics have actually assumed Jarrell faced combat during World War II and implicitly endowed him with the responsibility of translating war's "true" and traumatic "Reality."[38]

If a war poet is one who knows how to display the "true" trauma and suffering of the world in authentic, *literal* ways, Jarrell reaffirms the total force of such an ability in the end of his discussion on Moore, stating, "the real war poets are always war poets, peace or any time."[39] For many critics after 1945, "In Distrust" came to represent the "inauthentic" war poems that "moralized" war rather than lay out its "true" trauma. By the 1960s, Moore herself would partially concede to critics like Jarrell, saying in an interview with Donald Hall, "['In Distrust of Merits' is] just a protest disjointed, exclamatory. Emotion overpowered me. First this thought and then that."[40] Considering this era was the same time Hecht was establishing his poetry career, his experiences with combat, the Holocaust, and trauma made him a perfect candidate for the position of the Jarrellian poet of war.[41]

[36] Campbell, 207. The principal example in Campbell's essay is Paul Fussell. Fussell had no combative experience as it relates to World War II, but his service in the First World War "allowed" him to write *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* with a sense of authority.
[37] See footnote 2. Jarrell is not so different from the World War I poets in Graves' essay. Jarrell's posture as an experienced voice is not used to destabilize questions of experience but to endow himself with authority.
[38] Logan, "Poetry Reloaded," 553. Logan mentions how Vernon Scannell in *Not Without Glory: Poets of the Second World War* mistakenly grouped Jarrell with combative war poets. Similarly, Catharine Savage Brosman directly associated Jarrell with "experienced" war poets in her essay "The Functions of War Literature."
[39] Jarrell, "Poetry in War," 121.
[40] Moore quoted in Bar-Yaacov, "In Distrust of Whose Merits?," 4-5.
[41] See Colm Tóibín's "Places Never Explained." Tóibín discusses Jarrell's comment and directly considers Hecht to be one of the perfect representatives of the "real war poets."

Experience Matters: Hecht's Approach to War Poetry

Though Hecht was particularly silent about his direct experiences in World War II, questions surrounding experience, trauma, and literary intention characterize much of his discussions on war poetry. On the one hand, Hecht enjoyed a degree of play within the poetic process. Like Jarrell's unique use of voices in his "democratic" war poetry, Hecht believed war poets could effectively use their imaginations to create a compelling vision. Talking with Hoy, Hecht said, "One should feel free to choose a fictive or a personal voice according to one's needs, or even one's whims. It is also legitimate to leave the reader bewildered about just how personal any given poem may be. A good poet ought to be able to write both ways at will."[42] This sentiment also applies to noncombatants writing about war, and in a letter written to the editor of *Poetry* a year before his death, Hecht acknowledged that "very good war poetry" has been published by those who never experienced battle firsthand.[43] Interestingly, though Moore's "In Distrust" is not mentioned here, Hecht elsewhere considered Moore's war poem to be "one of her finest,"[44] a display of praise that reveals a level of open-mindedness for different frameworks of war poetry.

At the same time, Hecht had another side to his view of war's representation, one, in certain ways, much stricter than Jarrell. Following his comments on noncombatant war poetry in *Poetry*, Hecht reaffirmed that some topics surrounding war should not be broached by poets who never experienced them. He writes, "Some experiences are so devastating or traumatizing that we feel they ought to be spoken of only by those who have experienced them first hand, who have earned the right to speak by the forfeiture of enormous suffering; and that anyone else is simply exploiting their horror for personal literary advantage."[45] The concern for exploitation weighed heavy on Hecht throughout his career and played a significant role in why he rarely spoke about his individual wartime experiences. "My part in World War II was a very modest one," Hecht said in one interview, "[and] I'm very tentative about writing about it, because I don't want to try to give the impression that I was a hero or played a major part."[46]

In light of this self-conscious approach, Hecht took issue with those who exaggerated their war experiences or used war imagery (especially as they pertain to the Holocaust) outside war's literal context. With the developments of confessional poetry beginning in the late 1950s

[42] Hoy, *Conversation with Philip Hoy*, 61.
[43] Hecht, "Letter to the Editor," 105
[44] Hecht, *On The Laws of The Poetic Art*, 174.
[45] Hecht, "Letter to the Editor," 105-106.
[46] Cole, "The Life of a Poet," 8.

and 60s, Hecht says he noticed "a number of poets" from this movement who allegedly "exploit[ed] the sensational aspects of their lives, and in turn came to feel that the more sensational their lives were the better, at least for their careers as poets."[47] This is not to suggest that Hecht was against confessional poetry; Hecht praised many of Robert Lowell's and W.D. Snodgrass's poems, and he even implemented some of their more autobiographical tendencies into his own writing. But when confessional techniques (or any other techniques, for that matter) were used in poetry to detract from war's "true" reality – a reality defined for Hecht by its trauma – Hecht considered them suspect.

A prime example of Hecht's issue with "sensationalist" approaches to war can be seen in his criticism of Sylvia Plath. In a handful of interviews, letters, and essays, Hecht accused Plath of allegedly appropriating the Holocaust through her poem "Daddy."[48] "Daddy" uses images of World War II and Jewish persecution to facilitate a discussion on the speaker's contentious relationship with her father. As mentioned, the fact that the poem uses personal details from Plath's life – though the extent of autobiography is questionable – was not a problem for Hecht, but rather it was *how* these details were employed that frustrated him. Since Plath's use of Holocaust imagery points away from war's "true" reality, Hecht considered her poem troublesome.

Looking back at "Poetry in Peace and War," Hecht's criticism of Plath similarly relates to Jarrell's criticism of Moore. Hecht and Jarrell both emphasized that war poetry must be pointed towards a "Reality" defined by war's trauma and, therefore, must be primarily based in "authorial" voices. But while Jarrell believed he *knew* war's "Reality" and could write war poetry authoritatively from that knowledge, Hecht's self-conscious posture made him more hesitant to write about trauma he had never experienced.[49] As Oostdijk notes, Hecht "depended more on exterior sources than on [his] imagination" in his war poetry, and he was "more anxious [than Jarrell] about the authority and sensitivities involved when assuming the voices of others."[50] Hecht's meticulous engagement with firsthand accounts of Jewish concentration camps reflects this concern. In a 1994 letter to a former student, Hecht acknowledged that in the immediate aftermath of the war he read "straight reportorial accounts" from the Holocaust

[47] Hoy, 60.
[48] See Hecht to Richard Wilbur, October 7, 1989, in *The Letters*, 233-234.
[49] In an interview in *BOMB* magazine, Hecht talks about the difficulty of discussing trauma he did not encounter. He says, "It's very difficult […] to know how much you can morally write about the war because you emerge from it comparatively smoothly. It was a horrible experience, of course. But one feels that people like Elie Wiesel have a kind of singular title to write with authority on subjects about which I can't write with the same confidence and same moral right. So I've been reluctant to write about it" (Anderson and Stephens, "Anthony Hecht," 32).
[50] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 116.

and, with few exceptions, avoided "literary" works on war. "[The] facts [of the concentration camps] themselves are so monstrous and surreal," Hecht wrote, "they not only don't need, but cannot endure, the embellishment of metaphor or artistic design."[51] Hecht's desire to engage with war through firsthand accounts (including his own) reaffirms the "authority of experience" and the "incommensurability" of war as described by Jarrell. While adherence to eyewitness accounts played a substantial role for many first-generation Holocaust writers in general,[52] Hecht used these accounts as a means to structure some of his most praised war poems including "'More Light! More Light!'" and "The Book of Yolek."

"'More Light! More Light!'" is a war poem structured according to two different scenes. The first focuses on the execution of two Martyrs who are burned at the stake, while the second discusses the murder of a Polish man and two Jewish prisoners during World War II. As Casey notes, both scenes are rooted in real events, though the second is directly inspired from a story in Eugen Kogon's *The Theory and Practice of Hell*.[53] Kogon's work tells the true story of how a Polish man was forced to bury two Jewish prisoners alive outside the Buchenwald concentration camp after being threatened by German soldiers. After burying the two prisoners, the Polish man is then killed even though he obeyed the soldiers' commands. Hecht's poem follows Kogon's narrative very closely, including even geographic details – such as the "German woods" just outside "the shrine of Weimar" – that match up with the facts of the story and give the poem its title.[54] Similarly, in "The Book of Yolek" – a sestina inspired from Hanna Mortkowicz-Olczakowa's "Yanosz Korchak's Last Walk" in the *Anthology of Holocaust Literature* – Hecht retells the true story of how a Jewish orphanage was forcibly taken to the Treblinka extermination camp.[55] The poem employs factual details such as the date of the event ("The fifth of August, 1942") and the name of a boy (Yolek) who is found in Mortkowicz-Olczakowa's work. As Yolek becomes a literary representative of the children and teacher (Yanosz Korchak) who were "commanded to leave [their] meal" and "take that terrible walk" to "a special camp," the reader is forced to engage with their murder and must be prepared to receive Yolek's haunting image "in your home some day" as "he will walk in as you're sitting down to a meal."[56]

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[51] Hecht, *Selected Letters*, 263.
[52] Franklin, *A Thousand Darknesses*, 3.
[53] Casey, 113.
[54] Ibid., 113. The "shrine of Weimar" is a reference to Goethe's home, the location of which was only a few miles from Buchenwald. In terms of the title, "'More Light! More Light!'" is said to be Goethe's final words before his death. Hecht uses the historicity of both the area and the account told by Kogon to foster a sense of authority.
[55] Post, "The Sestina, and the Tattoo," 76-77.
[56] Hecht, *Collected Later Poems*, 80.

While some of Hecht's other war poetry can be similarly grouped with the poems described above, Hecht also engaged with war in different ways. Alongside some more meditative poems on war ("An Overview" and "House Sparrows"), Hecht reported using landscapes, emotions, and situations from his *own* wartime experiences to write war poetry. "Still Life," for instance, zooms in on the profile of a soldier (the poem's speaker) who experiences moments of both peace and violence in the midst of war. Hecht admits that the poem is not derived from any singular event in his life, but the psychological profile it creates represents a specific state of mind from his time in the army. Talking with Langdon Hammer, Hecht says, "['Still Life' is] probably as near to being a direct personal account as anything that I'd written."[57] Another poem that more explicitly deals with wartime emotions is "'It Out-Herods Herod. Pray You, Avoid it.'" Situated in a postwar domestic setting, the speaker discusses how memories of dead Holocaust victims haunt him and create certain anxieties between him and his children. Without directly presuming the speaker is Hecht, Hecht's own postwar anxieties and status as a single parent during the 1960s matches up with much of the speaker's situation.[58]

"Always a War Poet": Common Approaches to Hecht's Poetry

Interestingly, though Hecht's war poems (especially the poems highlighted above) represent some of his most anthologized poetry, they make up a relatively small portion of his oeuvre. Hecht was also fascinated by music, art, translation, the Bible, and he never actually published a volume of poetry dedicated to wartime lyrics as Jarrell did with *Little Friend*. Nevertheless, this has not stopped critics from approaching Hecht's work with his combat in mind. In his essay, "The Corrupted Treasures of This World" (2011), David Yezzi implicitly distinguishes between Hecht's "war poetry" and his poetry that is *influenced by* war. Of the former, Yezzi groups poems that are centered around literal events from World War II, such as "'More Light! More Light!,'" "'It Out-Herods Herod. Pray You, Avoid It,'" "Still Life," and "The Book of Yolek." But in terms of the poems *influenced by* war, Yezzi is much less definite, stating, "there is a sense in which the war is always present [across Hecht's poetry]."[59] Yezzi uses such a distinction to acknowledge the limited amount of explicit war imagery in Hecht's poetry while, at the same time, to suggest Hecht's war imagery is limitless. The suggestion that war is always

[57] Hammer, "Efforts of Attention," 97-98.
[58] Hoy, 26-27; See also Post, "Marriage and Single Life," in *The Selected Letters*, 102.
[59] Yezzi, "The Corrupted Treasures," 27.

present importantly shapes the reception of Hecht's work and, I propose, reflects a development in war poetry that goes back to Jarrell's definition of the *real* war poet.

While, from Yezzi's perspective, the literal "Reality" of war is defined more in terms of history than trauma – limiting Hecht's "war poetry" to those centered around "actual" events from World War II – his consideration for Hecht's poetry *influenced by* war looks conspicuously similar to Jarrell's definition of the *real* war poet. Both of these paradigms work in terms of trauma, regardless of any individual poem's central imagery. Just as Jarrell's comments on *real* war poetry reflect a reaffirmation of the "authority of experience," so does Yezzi's. Though Hecht may not write much "war poetry" according to strict definitions, Yezzi still believes Hecht's combative, traumatic, and firsthand relationship to the battlefield keeps the war "always present" in his work. From such a position, critics are encouraged to learn as much as they can about the trauma Hecht endured during the war and search his poetry for glimpses of it. It is not surprising that most of Yezzi's essays thoroughly summarize Hecht's known war experiences (such as the liberation of Flossenbürg) alongside his analysis of Hecht's poetry as these experiences become the interpretative key for allegedly understanding the intimacies of his work.

A perfect example of critics searching for hidden glimpses of war's trauma in Hecht's poetry is J.D. McClatchy's interpretation of "A Hill." "A Hill" begins in an Italian city where the speaker is "with some friends, / Picking [his] way through a warm, sunlit piazza / In the early morning."[60] He is enjoying "The colors and noise" and the "flying hands" of bargaining shoppers when he suddenly has a vision which transports him away for his immediate surroundings. He says:

> And then, when [the vision] happened, the noises suddenly stopped,
> And it got darker; pushcarts and people dissolved
> And even the great Farnese Palace itself
> Was gone, for all its marble; in its place
> Was a hill, mole-colored and bare. It was very cold,
> Close to freezing, with a promise of snow.
> The trees were like old ironwork gathered for scrap
> Outside a factory wall. There was no wind,
> And the only sound for a while was the little click
> Of ice as it broke in the mud under my feet.
> I saw a piece of ribbon snagged on a hedge,
> But no other sign of life.[61]

[60] Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 2.
[61] Ibid., 2.

Towards the end of the vision, the speaker hears "What seemed the crack of a rifle," though what follows is an image of "a great branch somewhere unseen falling to earth."[62] After the crash of the branch, the speaker is restored to his friends, but he is still afraid of what he has seen. In the final stanza, the speaker reveals that this event actually happened ten years earlier, adding that, after all these years, he has finally remembered that the hill from the vision was one he had encountered as a child and "stood before" for "hours in wintertime."[63]

Though the poem includes no direct references to World War II or war in general, McClatchy focuses on how the juxtaposition between peace in the piazza and terror from the vision allegedly mimics wartime emotions Hecht has expressed in other poems, such as "Still Life." For McClatchy, the vision in "A Hill" represents, at least in part, the feelings of "utter isolation" that Hecht must have felt as a World War II soldier.[64] Moreover, the ambiguous reference to the narrator's childhood does not prevent McClatchy from emphasizing Hecht's combative experiences. Instead, McClatchy proposes that war experiences become a "landscape" Hecht can use to articulate other traumas that occurred earlier in his life. He writes, "[H]is wartime memories – of sickening fear or helplessness – serve to focus earlier, deeper memories, and the way they each recall and reinforce the other is part of the force of a Hecht poem."[65] In other words, McClatchy implies that Hecht can no longer talk freely (even in poetry, where the narrator's identity is ambiguous) on previous events or hardships in his life without passing through the totality of his war experiences. Looking back at Hecht's comments on the relationship between fiction and autobiographical in poetry, I find McClatchy exploiting hypothetical wartime trauma that is not necessarily visible in order to reaffirm Hecht's "authority of experience." While Hecht is self-conscious of what experiences he has or has not undergone in the war, McClatchy's reading ignores that very sentiment and searches for his war biography and trauma where it may not be.

Moral Authority and the "Real" War Poets

The reason I have focused so intently on the "authority of experience" is because of the strong impact it has on how Hecht's work is read. As demonstrated in J.D. McClatchy's reading of "A Hill," Hecht's poetry has often been scrutinized, regardless of how explicit the poem is about war, according to his experiences in World War II. The last point I would like to discuss is how Hecht's "always present" images of war have been taken and transformed into

[62] Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems*, 2.
[63] Ibid., 3.
[64] McClatchy, Introduction to the *Selected Poems*, ix-x.
[65] Ibid., x.

reflections on evil, goodness, virtue, or sin. In other words, how the consecration of Hecht's experiences from war has given rise to an alleged moral authority.

The relationship between moral authority and an "authority of experience" goes back to the World War I framework I briefly mentioned in the beginning of this chapter. During and after World War I, masculine literary critics generally assumed that the trench poet's interaction with battlefield combat puts him in direct contact with "an unmediated Truth" beyond the threshold of "normal" knowledge. From such a privileged position, these poets were tasked with translating their revelatory and "incommensurable" experiences for noncombatants, something Scranton says is "predicated on the idea that the subjective feeling of having undergone an experience offers a more robust claim to truth and a greater moral authority than do history, eyewitnessing, or other kinds of accounts that rely on observable evidence or reasoned argument."[66] In other words, war experiences endowed these poets with an allegedly unique level of "moral and political clout."[67] My discussion on Moore and Jarell shows how the "authority of experience" (and its relationship with moral authority) was challenged during World War II, though quickly reemphasized in 1945 and the postwar years. What has accompanied this reaffirmation of "experience" is a reaffirmation of moral authority.

Ironically, though Moore was heavily criticized for "moralizing war," Hecht's work has regularly been received within a framework of morality, especially as it relates to concepts of evil and goodness. For example, Casey writes that "'More Light! More Light!'" "is not simply a poem about a terrible event in World War II, but a meditation on the nature of evil."[68] Such a reading is not unusual after the publication of *The Hard Hours,* and, during the late 20th century, Hecht was even considered by one critic as America's "preeminent poet of evil."[69] More contemporary critics have also looked at Hecht in similar ways. For instance, William Logan wrote in 2002, "Anthony Hecht is our country's darkest, most brutal and moral, most magnificent living poet, an heir to Elizabethan manners."[70] Alongside Logan, Yezzi discusses an "abiding moral sense" that unifies Hecht's work and makes visible a hope for redemption, justice, righteousness ("the upright life") in the "fallen world" that his poems "firmly inhabit."[71]

[66] Scranton, 4.
[67] Galvin, 12.
[68] Casey, 113.
[69] Spiegelman, 57.
[70] Logan, *Desperate Measures*, 121.
[71] Yezzi, "The morality of Anthony Hecht," 28.

Moreover, in terms of the "authority of experience," Yezzi explicitly uses Hecht's time in the military and first hand "witness[ing] [of] evil" to help define his alleged moral sensibilities.[72]

Importantly, Hecht's ability to *know* evil does not pertain solely to war, though war is exactly where he "learned" of it. Instead, Hecht's poetry has been understood by some critics as something deeper than history, something that speaks to the very ontology of humanity itself. In his essay, "Anatomies of Melancholy" (1989), McClatchy writes, "Few contemporary poets have so persistently and so strikingly come to terms with evil and violence in history, or what we literally call *human nature*."[73] Implicitly central to McClatchy's statement is the belief that Hecht's encounter with trauma during World War II allows him to speak on *human nature* authoritatively (which is why McClatchy primarily focuses on biographical readings of Hecht's work in this essay). In its essence, Hecht is seen as having encountered the same Truth as the trench poets, and therefore can speak from a moral high ground, regardless of whether he is directly talking about war or not.

On the opposite side of evil, some of Hecht's love poems are read according to the knowledge of goodness and virtue Hecht has allegedly learned *against* his traumatic experiences. In Hecht's poem "Peripeteia," the speaker attends a theatrical performance of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. He is enamored by Miranda who, in the end of the poem, comes off the stage

> And leads me out of the theatre, into a night
> As luminous as noon, more deeply real,
> Simply because of her hand, than any dream
> Shakespeare or I or anyone ever dreamed.

In Brad Leithauser's analysis, Miranda represents an innocence that has "no memories of human treachery" and is united with "that archetype of Hecht's verse, the boy who has encountered some desolating trauma" (i.e., the speaker in "A Hill" who becomes synonymous with both the speaker of "Peripeteia" and the biographical Hecht).[74] In other words, Miranda embodies a freedom from trauma which Hecht, the traumatized soldier, desires and achieves through love. Similarly, in Yezzi's analysis of "Peripeteia" and "A Birthday Poem" – a poem dedicated to Hecht's second wife – he discusses how "renewed love" can help heal Hecht from his previously failed marriage and his wartime P.T.S.D.[75]

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[72] Yezzi, "The morality of Anthony Hecht," 30. Interestingly, Yezzi explicitly states that Hecht's poems make us look "inward" at our own moral failings (exactly what Moore was criticized for with "In Distrust").
[73] McClatchy, "Anatomies of Melancholy," 187.
[74] Leithauser, "Poet for a Dark Age," 8-9.
[75] Yezzi, "Trauma of War," 37.

Conclusion: Sexual Imagery in a Trauma-Focused Framework

In "Peripeteia," there is another moment in the poem when the speaker looks up at Miranda and wonders exactly who she is. Of her, he says,

> Perhaps tonight she'll figure in the cast
> I summon to my slumber and control
> In vast arenas, limitless space, and time
> That yield and sway in soft Einsteinian tides.
> Who is she? Sylvia? Amelia Earhart?
> Some creature that appears and disappears
> From life, from reverie, a fugitive of dreams?[76]

I read this imagery as directly sexual in nature and concerned with questions of fantasy, desire, and virtue. The speaker is aware of his ability to imagine this actress in his "slumber," and is rather aggressive with that knowledge, describing her as a potential "fugitive" whom he can "control." In chapter 3, I return to other instances of imagery like this, but the point I am trying to make in this chapter is that this sexual imagery is often overlooked because it exists outside the war and trauma narratives Hecht critics traditionally build upon. While Moore's "In Distrust of Merits" directly challenged the "authority of experience" and war poetry's alleged need for literal representation, Hecht has come to epitomize the Jarrellian war poet that, in the words of Pritchard, keeps "cruelty, suffering, stupidity, and death" as the subject of his poetry.[77] As I have demonstrated, this has resulted in lofty readings of his imagery that are tied to the alleged moral authority he gained from his experiences with "evil" during World War II. In the next chapter, I demonstrate how these claims of moral authority extend beyond his content directly into his use of meter and rhyme.

[76] Hecht, *Collected Later Poems*, 141.
[77] Pritchard, 111.

Chapter 2
Form, Free Verse, and the Late 20th Century "Poetry Wars"

In a 1942 essay on the legacy and future of modernist poetry, Randall Jarrell famously wrote, "It is the end of the line. Poets can go back and repeat the ride; they can settle in attractive atavistic colonies along the railroad; they can repudiate the whole system, à la Yvor Winters, for some neoclassical donkey caravan of their own. But Modernism As We Knew It – the most successful and influential body of poetry of this century – is dead."[1] Of course, as Travisano has pointed out, Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1948), Eliot's *Four Quartets* (1936-1943), and Williams's *Paterson* (1946-1958) would soon come to challenge Jarrell's pronouncement, but only slightly in terms of the timeline.[2] And besides, these late-modernist texts were hardly representative of the anti-narrative techniques developed during the early 20th century and actually made use of some premodernist features.[3] In the years after the war, it became increasingly clear that the events of 1939-1945 had fundamentally altered the way people viewed themselves and society; a new "postmodern" poetics capable of addressing one's fractured sense of identity or the political and societal questions that arose out of the World War II was needed.[4] While Jarrell and other middle generation poets such as John Berryman would be some of the first to recognize this, poets from the late 1950s and 1960s addressed these developments – especially as they relate to the Vietnam War and the Cold War – by forming new poetic movements. This importantly led to a variety of opinions on how poetry should be written in form and content, but before any of these movements were able to establish themselves, they first had to endure the New Critics that would dominate America's literary scene for much of the 1940s and 50s.

New Criticism, Metrical Verse, and the "Academic" Poets

New Criticism is a formalist methodology developed in the early-to-mid 20th century for literary analysis. It is often associated with John Ransom Crowe's *The New Criticism* (1941), though it received much attention two years earlier with Cleanth Brook's and Robert Penn

[1] Jarrell, *Kipling, Auden, & Co.*, 81.
[2] Travisano, *Midcentury Quartet*, 24.
[3] Hallberg, 57.
[4] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 34-35. See also pages 47 for a discussion on poetry and politics.

Warren's *Understanding Poetry*. During the 1930s and 1940s, New Critic scholars – who were, for the most part, professors at U.S. institutions – were deeply concerned with how literature was taught in universities. Up until this point, poetry was generally taught from historically and philologically minded approaches that looked "outside" the text at developments in society, language, or the poet's life for inspiration. When compared with the established science and social science programs that literary studies was generally competing with at this time, the New Critics believed the study of literature needed to become a more methodological academic discipline.[5] In an attempt to professionalize their field of study, the New Critics proposed strict principles for "correctly" analyzing literature. This included instruction on how to *closely* read poetry, avoid "external" ideology or personal feelings, and perceive a poem as a self-sufficient or autonomous "verbal object."[6]

While New Criticism's pedagogical concern associates it more closely with developments in critical theory than any individual body of poetry from the 20th century, modernist writings were still very influential on its development. James Longenbach points out how New Critics actively "exaggerated and codified" features from Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (1919), such as the notion of impersonal poetics.[7] This played an important role in how "good" poetry was judged during the 1940s and 50s. For instance, form that was more "literary" (metaphoric, ironic, paradoxical, figurative, etc.) and content that was more "impersonal" (distinct from the author, societal setting, and political situation) were considered necessary for a poem's success as form and content came together to define the pome's unique "organic unity." Because of this, New Critics generally promoted (though not exclusively) formal verse over free verse.[8] Formal verse clearly distinguishes itself from everyday speech through its meter or rhyme, and it, according to the New Critics, also helps strengthen the force behind a poem. Of this, William van O'Connor said in a 1949 essay, "Meter, diction, and alliteration are not only a part of [a poem's] form; they are a part of the meaning. Form in this sense is not an envelope; it is a vehicle for the emergence of the total meaning or total abstraction the writer had made available."[9]

[5] Beach, 138.
[6] Ibid., 138.
[7] Longenbach, 7.
[8] Van Hallberg, 56-57.
[9] O'Connor, "A Short View," 66-67.

The New Critics' preference for formal verse directly impacted how young middle generation poets returning to universities on the G.I. Bill began their poetry careers.[10] For poets like Hecht and James Wright who wrote in meter and rhyme during the 1950s (or, in Hecht's case, for the entirety of his career), New Critical influences can be traced back to their time studying under Tate and Crowe. For other young formalists who did not study under these critics – such as James Merrill, Richard Wilbur, and Howard Nemerov – the general dominance and admiration New Criticism held in academia between 1945 and the late 1950s still played a major role in their stylistic choices. Alongside this, popular literary magazines including the *Sewanee Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Southern Review*, and even *The New Yorker* often favored publishing metrical verse.[11] This not only had an effect on which poets received the most awards and recognition during this time, but it also demonstrates how the propagation of New Critic principles helped shape the literary tastes of many readers and poets alike.

In light of the intense postwar relationship between New Criticism, literary analysis, and university education, the middle generation's often formalist approach to poetry during the 1940s and early 50s became seen as something "academic" in nature.[12] In some respects, this label accurately relays the growing sense of authority and power university poets (i.e., the many middle generation writers who took up teaching positions after finishing their education) gained after the war. However, as standards for poetry began to change during the mid-to-late 1950s, the term was also used disparagingly in an attempt to acknowledge the "conformity, conventionality, and timidity," these poets came to represent when compared with more "experimental" movements.[13] Since meter and rhyme had been so strongly connected to this "academic" poetry, new movements positioned themselves strongly against it, frequently choosing to write in free verse instead. In other words, to be affiliated with either formal or free verse in the second half of the 20th century became something much more complex than whether the poet preferred to write according to a certain style or not.

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[10] Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 45. Even older middle generation poets who finished their education under the New Critics before the war – Robert Lowell, John Berryman, W.D. Snodgrass – showed an early inclination for metrical verse. Of course, this would change as these poets began to experiment with confessional modes of poetry. See pages 31-32 for my discussion on confessional poetry.

[11] Van Hallberg, 57. The influence of these magazines is not all that surprising considering the first three mentioned here were actively run by New Critics. In fact, the *Kenyon Review* was founded by John Ransom Crowe in 1939, and students such as Hecht would work with Crowe on it will studying under him.

[12] Ibid., 57. As Van Hallberg goes on to explain, the term "academic" fails as a unique signifier for middle generation poets since other movements would vacillate between condemning and seeking approval from academia. Nevertheless, it draws attention to a growing juxtaposition between formal and free verse techniques which is why I make use of it.

[13] Ibid., 57.

"Confessional" Poetry and the New Formalist Response

For all of the attention New Criticism received in the 1940s and 50s, some poet-critics during this time were already questioning what would come after it. As mentioned, Jarrell and Berryman were two of the earliest writers to suggest modernism and, by extension, some New Critical principles were of a past era. Another middle generation writer who could easily be grouped with them is Robert Lowell. In a 1947 review of Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), Jarrell labeled the work as "essentially a post- or anti-modernist poetry" because of the "unique fusion of modernist and traditional poetry" it offered.[14] This is one of the first articulations of the term "postmodern" in American literary history and represents an early shift towards new modes of writing.[15] At the same time, for all of the innovation *Lord Weary's Castles* and *Land of Unlikeness* (1944) – Lowell's first volume of poetry – brought to the table, these works still reflected a formalist and impersonal style of writing that the New Critics favored. It would not be until 1959, thirteen years after the success of *Lord Weary's Castle*, that Lowell would transform the U.S. literary scene with his publication of *Life Studies*.

Life Studies represents a radical break from the impersonal and metrical poetry the New Critics supported throughout the 1940s and 50s. It is split into four parts: the first, a selection of poems that look similar to Lowell's first two publications; the second, a prose piece which deals directly with Lowell's life; the third, a series of odes to professors and poets Lowell admired; and the fourth, his famous "confessional" poems that are directly political, personal, and more accessible in style and diction when compared to Lowell's allusive formal poems. Of the confessional poems, "Dunbarton," "Terminal Days at Beverly Hills," and "My Last Afternoon with Uncle Devereux Winslow" serve as prime examples – they discuss events inspired from Lowell's own life through a simple style that occasionally rhymes but generally avoids strict rhyming patterns and meter. Considering metrical verse had become associated with university "academics," Lowell's more personal and free approach suggested that poetry could be taken up by a wider range of poets than previously assumed.[16] Of course, staunch apologists for New Criticism who had built their legacies around the universities would not agree with Lowell's new approach. After reading drafts of some poems from *Life Studies* in 1957, Allen Tate wrote to Lowell, saying, "all the poems about your family, including the one

[14] Jarrell, "From the Kingdom of Necessity" (1947), quoted in Travisano, 8.
[15] Interestingly, John Ransom Crowe would be the very first American to use the term when reviewing Jarrell's poetry in 1941 (Oostdijk, *Nightmare Fighters*, 34).
[16] Van Hallberg, 124-125.

about you and Elizabeth, are definitely bad. I do not think that you ought to publish them."[17] Nevertheless, *Life Studies* was received very enthusiastically by the general public, and New Criticism's influence would begin to diminish.

According to Longenbach, in the aftermath of Lowell's shift from metrical verse in *Lord Weary's Castle* to free verse in *Life Studies*, a "breakthrough" narrative developed that defined poetic form in explicitly political ways. For Longenbach, this narrative goes something like this:

> After writing several books of highly praised New Critical well-wrought urns (objective and impersonal), Robert Lowell understood that poetry could be fragmentary, subjective, personal, and the result was *Life Studies*, a watershed in twentieth-century poetry. *Life Studies* itself tells this story; the volume begins with formal poems that recall the high-church values of Lowell's earlier works, moving on to the free verse anxieties of poems about his family and his mental collapses. Lowell sometimes spoke of this movement as a "breakthrough back into life," as if free verse were not one kind of form among many but a movement beyond the merely literary. Psychic and political health, it seems, could be achieved by breaking the pentameter.[18]

Longenbach goes on to criticize this narrative precisely because of the false juxtaposition it assumes. Not only is Lowell's eventual return to formalist verse ignored, but more progressive tendencies of some of the "academic" poets of the 1950s are hidden behind the conservative and traditional status metrical verse came to represent.[19] While I agree with his criticism, my aim in this chapter is directed more towards the consequences the "breakthrough" narrative and other politicizations of form have had on Hecht's work than exploring their artificiality. Though Longenbach's insights are effective and reveal a dimension of literary reception in second half of the 20th century, Hecht has often been associated with "traditional" poetry, something most visible when considering the emergence of the New Formalists.

To be clear, though Hecht used meter or rhyme in all seven volumes of poetry he published, his career advanced in similar ways to many of his contemporaries. The visible adherence to New Critical principles in *A Summoning of Stones* was complicated by the confessional techniques (such as more personal or historic modes of writing) he employed in "More Light! More Light!," "The Odds," "A Vow," and other poems. This is not to suggest Hecht searched for a postmodern aesthetics in the same way Jarrell or Lowell did, but rather demonstrates how he used developments in the American literary scene to craft a poetics that

[17] Tate to Robert Lowell, December 3, 1957, quoted in Buffington, "His Instrument," 170.
[18] Longenbach, 5.
[19] The most famous "academic" poet of the 1950s, Richard Wilbur, was actually investigated by the FBI for his ties to the Communist Party (Longenbach, 8).

was neither strictly New Critical nor Confessional.[20] Nevertheless, in the 1980s, Hecht became a "literary godfather" for the New Formalists who saw his work as an alternative to the free verse movements of the 1960s and 70s.[21] According to these critics, a growth of Leftist intellectuals in university literary programs – which were increasingly defined by free verse and critical theory rather than metrical verse and "close reading" – had allowed criticism to "degenerat[e] into ideology or publicity."[22] As Van Hallberg notes, the New Formalists believed it was "the political affiliations of [these] academic critics [rather than] political events themselves" that was responsible for this politization of the arts.[23] In response, these critics reemphasized the important of metrical verse in magazines such as *The New Criterion, The New Formalist* and others that were originally associated with New Criticism (*The Sewanee Review, The Hudson Review*, etc.).

Alongside their desire to re-popularize meter and rhyme in the American poetry scene, the New Formalists hoped to foster a poetics defined by less "personal" modes of writing. According to them, confessional poetry's tendency for personal disclosure had resulted in a "shameless opportunism," in the words of Ashley Brown, that focused more on publicity than "good" poetry.[24] Without fully discarding the role of autobiography or the author's emotions, New Formalists suggested there were less obvious or more "neutral" ways to go about it (i.e., through formal techniques). For instance, in his analysis of Timothy Steele, Robert McPhillips writes, "Steele reflects the New Formalist's desire to escape from the kind of extreme frantic emotions explored in the personal lyrics of the confessional poets. [… He] projects a strong personal voice that is musical as well as morally and imagistically astute."[25] In the same essay, McPhillips also commends Dana Gioia's "persistent search for a transcendent order of love or beauty existing somewhere 'behind the ordinary' world" and ability to "evoke the sensation of self-pity without succumbing to it in the manner of the confessional poets."[26] In my reading of McPhillips essay, these "appropriate" forms of personalness are hardly as neutral as the author suggests. Rather, McPhilips' comments directly tie formalist techniques with moralism by praising Steele's "moral voice" and the "transcendent" (or, in other words, objective) images of Gioia over the "subjective" language of the confessional movement. In essence, this type of

[20] Post, *A Thickness*, 53. See also page 180.
[21] McDowell, "Expansive Poetry," 124-125.
[22] Van Hallberg, 71.
[23] Ibid., 71.
[24] Brown, 25.
[25] McPhillips, "Reading the New Formalists, 73.
[26] Ibid., 93-94.

reading only contributed to the politization of poetic form and helped establish metrical verse's association with more neo-conservative movements.

Moralizing Hecht's Form

Similar approaches to the one employed by McPhillips have been used for analyzing Hecht's poetry, especially his poems surrounding war. A perfect example is Post's (brief) comparative discussion of Hecht's "'It Out-Herod's Herod. Pray You, Avoid It'" and Plath's "Daddy." As mentioned, Hecht took issue with "Daddy" because it allegedly makes light of war's suffering. In a letter to Richard Wilbur in 1989, he wrote, "[N]o one seems to be aware that the 'Daddy' poem is embarrassed enough about what it is saying to employ that 'oo' rhyme so insistently as to turn the poem nearly into doggerel verse and undermine its own seriousness."[27] In *A Thickness of Particulars*, Post directly acknowledges Hecht's letter to Wilbur and proceeds to compare "It Out-Herod's Herod" to Plath's poem, saying, "[Hecht's] poem becomes at once both a harrowing personal parable about evil, a fitting conclusion to *The Hard Hours*, and a notable comment on how to find a language suitable for expressing horrific truths without tearing a speech to tatters in the highly theatrical manner, say, of Sylvia Plath's "'Daddy.'"[28] For both Hecht and Post, discussions of war require a level of "aesthetic decorum."[29] Condemning Plath's rhyming scheme as "highly theatrical" is ultimately used to establish a definition of an "indecent" style for war poetry that Hecht's "suitable" style can stand against.

From another angle, one could argue that Hecht's war poetry is the more "theatrical" of the two precisely *because of* his formal techniques. Though written in a simple style, "It Out-Herod's Herod" plays with references to Shakespeare in its title and uses obscure rhymes ("Childermas" and "gas") in attention-grabbing ways. Similarly, "The Book of Yolek" (as a sestina) plays with a repetition of words in a hyper-specific, almost performative way. Such readings would, of course, miss much in each of these poems, and I am not advocating for this approach. Nonetheless, this angle does demonstrate how perceptions of form can strongly dictate the way in which poetry is read.

Post's reading reveals, in my view, a common tendency to conflate the moral high ground with Hecht's style of writing. Other critics, such as David Caplan, have worked within similar frameworks to explore an alleged "dignity" behind Hecht's formal techniques. In his analysis of "More Light! More Light!," Caplan writes, "the verse form [of Hecht's poem]

[27] Hecht to Richard Wilbur, October 7, 1989, in *The Letters*, 233-234.
[28] Post, *Thickness of Particulars*, 183
[29] I have applied the term "aesthetic decorum" from Schweik's discussion of Jarrell. See page 547 in "Writing War Poetry like a Woman."

bestows a certain dignity to the events and the victims he describes. If the Nazi guard methodically strips the Jews and the Polish prisoner of their humanity before killing them, Hecht's retelling of the events adds a respectful solemnity. It lessens the force of the insult."[30] Just as with Post, Caplan assumes Hecht's language takes a more serious form and is therefore "suitable" for the topic of World War II. His discussion reinforces an image of Hecht's moral sensibilities and simultaneously endows the poet with an ability to redeem events of the Holocaust, an idea I find particularly problematic.

Hecht's formal accomplishments in his non-war poetry have also been received in morally charged frameworks of analysis. Brad Leithauser, for instance, has examined how the general relationship between Hecht's violent content and its formal execution complicates the "innocence" the latter allegedly connotates. He writes, "The very innocence of so many of [Hecht's] personae gives [his] work an additional driving tension. Those same formal aspects that contrast so powerfully with his violent subject matter — the sophistication of tone and language, the intricacy of metrical and rhyme schemes — here serve to enhance innocence and render it somewhat ironic."[31] Leithauser's use of the word "innocence" invokes the New Formalist belief in the "purity" metrical verse offers the literary world.[32] Moreover, Leithauser continues his essay by suggesting that this relationship between violent content and formal technique represents a biographical reality of Hecht's own life – in other words, that Hecht's life as a "former innocent" has been complicated by interactions with violence. Such a reading only serves to highlight Hecht's virtue, and it reaffirms the alleged emphasis on moral authority in his poetry.

The last and most explicit entanglement of formal technique and moralism that I would like to analyze is Peter Sacks' reading of *The Hard Hours.*[33] According to Sacks, an adherence to formal verse fundamentally represents a submission to literary "laws" that are outside the poet's control (i.e., following established rhyming patterns, rules for meter, correct number of syllables, and more). Though the poet can play with these "laws," they still are limited by them and must renounce their "lawless instinctual expression" if they are to ever achieve "formal mastery."[34] For Sacks, Hecht's adherence to "formal bonds" allegedly mimics a human

[30] Caplan, "'At Last to a Condition of Dignity,'" 329
[31] Leithauser, 5.
[32] McPhillips, 96.
[33] Sacks reading (and Leithauser's) is part of a collection of essays titled *The Burdens of Formality: Essays on the Poetry of Anthony Hecht*, edited by Sydney Lea. The very title of this collection invokes the weight, duty, and responsibility of the formalist poet.
[34] Sacks, 65.

subjection to a "world of law and artifice" and its "bonds of gender, Races, morals, and mind."[35] In other words, Hecht's formality becomes a literary embodiment of an essentialist view of the world or, in Sacks' terminology, "fate." Without explicitly delineating why Hecht is one of the few writers whose "formal elegance […] meditate[s] upon the very conditions that give rise to its formality,"[36] Sacks perceives Hecht's formal techniques as a morally and politically authoritative style of writing. This drastically shapes Sacks' outlook on Hecht's poetry, especially his sexual imagery.

Sack's essay continues by analyzing individual poems including "The End of The Weekend." In this poem, a couple is alone in a cabin remote from the general public. The atmosphere turns sexual as the speaker's partner "rubs against [him]" and he can "feel her nails."[37] Soon, in this "cabin of loose imaginings, / Wind, lip, lake, everything awaits / The slow unloosening" of his partner's "underthings."[38] Suddenly, the sexual tension abruptly dissipates as a noise is heard in the attic. The couple climb the stairs to see what is up there and find "A great black presence beat its wings in wrath" with some "small grey fur […] pulsing in its grip."[39] In Sacks' analysis, the more violent connection Hecht draws between the creature's predatory nature and the narrator's sexual desire is acknowledged, but mainly in how it relates to the poem's formality and his discussion of a formal subjugation to "bonds of gender, Races, morals, and mind." However, in my reading of this imagery, the conflation of sex with animalistic violence alludes to a "carnality" that sexual desire allegedly possesses *in itself*. In Chapter 3, I will return to the history of viewing desire in this way and examine how Hecht adheres to it while simultaneously reworking it.

Conclusion: Sexual Imagery in a Formalist Framework

In his essay on New Formalist poetry, Thomas Byers writes, "There is no intrinsic connection between meter and conservatism, poetic or political. But in America, there is a strong historical one."[40] In the second half of the 20th century, poetic techniques were approached in overtly political ways that drastically polarized different literary movements against each other. While free verse poetry became associated with Leftists intellectuals, metrical verse became associated with neo-conservatives. Considering advocates of metrical verse, such as the New

[35] Sacks, 65.
[36] Ibid., 62.
[37] Hecht, *Collected Earlier Poems,* 6.
[38] Ibid., 6.
[39] Ibid., 6.
[40] Byers, "The Closing of the America Line," 413.

Formalists, were smaller in number than the dominate free-verse movements during the 1960s and onward, these critics saw themselves as revolutionaries who hoped to restore the American poetry scene to a former greatness. According to them, poetry had divulged into self-obsessed confessionalism, and their formal techniques could be used for more "neutral" modes of engagement. However, as I have demonstrated, these same critics conflated formalism with a level of moral authority that often elevated formal poets over their free verse peers. Regularly employing formal techniques throughout his career, Hecht became a key figure for New Formalist critics who viewed his style of writing within these morally charged frameworks of analysis. In light of this, Hecht's sexual imagery (if considered at all) has often been read secondarily to discussions of form and the connotations of moral authority that come with it.

Chapter 3
Towards A Re-Reading of Sexual Imagery in Hecht's Poetry

This chapter is dedicated to exploring new frameworks Hecht's poetry can be viewed under outside the "moralist" and "formalist" approaches I have explored. Without overtly relying on Hecht's biography, I utilize developments in gender and sexuality studies to analyze the relationship between sexual desire and violence. As I will show, sexual desire has historically been perceived as something violent or condemnable *in itself*. In Hecht's case, I argue that he participates in this tradition through his violent portrayals of sexual fantasy. Poems such as "Elders" demonstrate this by zooming in on the "depraved" profile of a man's masturbatory habits and aggressive sexual imagination. By highlighting historical discourses from early Catholic Christianity and the writings of Shakespeare to transformative events in the 20th century (including developments in Freudian psychoanalysis, the publication of the Kinsey Reports, the Sexual Revolution, and more), I show new angles Hecht's sexual imagery can be viewed under.

At the same time, my analysis will also draw attention to some of the more positive aspects vilifying desire brings about, such as Hecht's strong condemnation of the male gaze. By playing with different voices, some of Hecht's female narrators discuss the difficulties of having to live in a "world of men" that is defined by masculine objectification or even assault. In "And Can Ye Sing Baluloo When the Bairn Greets?," for instance, the speaker discusses her horrifying rape and the assailant who is driven by "the lust in which Adam sinned." This reveals a level of awareness for sexism and sexual assault that has been underappreciated in Hecht studies.

Whether Hecht experienced similar feelings to the ones displayed in his poems is of little concern for my analysis, and I privilege the autonomy of the voices within his poetry over biographical readings. Considering my earlier criticism of the "morality narratives" that I believe dictate much of Hecht's reception, I keep away from using terms such as "immoral" or "evil" in my readings and avoid passing my own moral judgements upon any individual speaker. Nevertheless, the regulation of sexual desire has often been articulated in moral frameworks, and this cannot be ignored (especially as it pertains to lust, masturbation, and fantasy). I will still make use of this history and its relationship to Hecht's poetry.

Vilifying Desire: From the Early Church to Shakespeare

In terms of Western civilization, sex has a long history of being regulated according to social, political, and religious powers. From the Code of Hammurabi in Ancient Mesopotamia to today's legal laws on sexual assault and consent, societies across history have, in their own way, dealt with what should be sexually unallowable. Though frameworks for viewing sex acts and desires radically changed between premodern and modern societies,[1] conversations from earlier eras still carry important ramifications for modern sensibilities. In the history of European and contemporary American sexual ethics, the influence of the early Catholic Christian tradition has played an instrumental role in shaping perceptions of sexual desire – in both society and the arts – and is therefore worth exploring more closely for my analysis of Hecht.[2]

After developing a basic sexual code of conduct from Old Testament laws on adultery and covetousness, the early Christian Church fundamentally separated itself from Judaic sexual customs by condemning sexual desire (also considered lust or concupiscence) *in itself*.[3] While Jewish communities had generally encouraged procreative sex in marriage, Church Fathers (of especially the 3rd and 4th centuries) wrote vigorously on sexual abstinence and used various passages from the New Testament to emphasize that a chaste life was more godly than even church-sanctioned marriages.[4] Of these writers, Augustine of Hippo was one of the strictest, proposing that concupiscence was responsible for transmitting "Original Sin" and spoiling *all* post-Fall sex acts.[5] In *Against Julian*, he writes, "I assert that [sexual intercourse] is good, because it makes good use of the evil of lust, and through this good use, human beings, a good work of God, are generated. But the action *is not performed without evil* [italics added]."[6] Some other writers at this time were slightly less severe in their approaches to sex than Augustine. Clement of Alexandria, for instance, believed that sexual intercourse in the confines of marriage could be performed without sin, though only if the participants actively avoided their

[1] See page 41 for a discussion on the development of modern "sexuality."
[2] My goal is not to suggest Hecht professed a secret support for Christianity's views on sexual morality. Instead, I demonstrate how a tradition of vilifying desire *in itself* became popular through Chrisitan frameworks and, importantly, has repercussions for how sex has traditionally been received in American society (as well as in the literary canon Hecht becomes a part of). I argue this impacts his own sexual imagery in fundamental ways.
[3] Phillips and Reay, *Sex Before Sexuality*, 19. Concupiscence has been used by these early theologians to describe all "inward-pointing" desires beyond strictly the sexual. Nevertheless, concupiscence is so strongly tied with a condemnation of sexual desire or lust that I use the three terms interchangeably throughout this section.
[4] See 1st Corinthians 7 for a discussion on marriage. Paul writes that it is better not to marry and remain abstinent, like him; but, if someone is "burning" with passion, then they should marry.
[5] van Oort, "Was Julian Right?," 7-9.
[6] Augustine, *Against Julian*, 119. See also page 203: "The evil of carnal concupiscence is so great that it is better to refrain from using it than to use it well."

desire during the act.[7] Nevertheless, Augustine's theories seemingly prevailed; during the 4th century, theologians created a thorough hierarchy of sexual sin that categorized procreative intercourse in marriage as one of the most forgivable, but still sinful sex acts (a venial sin), and lust or sexual desire as an act with mortal repercussions for the soul (one of the Seven Deadly Sins).[8]

Alongside condemning sexual desire, early Church Fathers spent much time developing Christian dogma on love. For Augustine and others, love essentially represented what sexual desire was not – a virtuous, "other-oriented" posture of affection that (for these writers) God first demonstrated in his devotion to humans.[9] This was meant to strongly contrast with the "self-oriented" pleasure of lust and its alleged disregard for "the good of the other."[10] On top of this, Augustine deeply entrenched the juxtaposition between love and lust in a body-soul framework.[11] Love became closely associated with a high-minded (and spiritual) search for knowledge, as Michael Seewald notes, and lust with the body and its "carnality."[12] As Christianity grew throughout the Middles Ages, these teachings were accepted and expanded by church officials, ultimately resulting in the formation of a tradition that would vilify sex acts, desire, and the body well into the Reformation.

Throughout the late Middle Ages and the Reformation, Catholic and Protestant teachings on (sexual) immorality had a visible impact on how literary and visual pieces of art were produced. The development of the late Medieval morality play, for instance, was specifically used to disseminate Church doctrine and "persuade […] audiences to live a more virtuous existence."[13] According to Howard Felperin, these plays were closely tied to romantic modes of writing and focused on an "errant hero" who must face "obstacles and detours thrown up by the world" until he finds "reunion" and "reclamation" through love.[14] One of the oldest

[7] Lorenzini, "The Emergence of Desire," 456.
[8] Reay and Phillips, 18. Importantly, lust, though always a moral sin, took different forms and was condemned according to its own sub-hierarchy of sin.
[9] As Phillips and Reay point out, premodern conceptions of "love" were both "flexible and multi-stranded" during the Middle Ages (43). Without delving too deeply into its intricacies, love could be valued in a number of different ways for different modes of affection. For example, *amicitia* referred to friendship, *amor* referred to romantic love, and *cupiditas* referred to a love of temporal things (See Verschoren, "The Appearance of the Concept of Concupiscentia," 203, and Phillips and Reay, 43). In all of these variations, the same idea of "other-oriented" affection applies and strongly came to juxtapose the inward or "self-oriented" focus of *concupiscence*.
[10] Cahall, "The Value of Saint Augustine's Use," 123.
[11] This can also be articulated as body-mind divide. For Augustine, the rational mind serves as the image of God in humans, and it is deeply connected with the soul.
[12] Seewald, *Theories of Doctrinal Development in the Catholic Church*, 69. See also Augustine, *Against Julian*, 229-230 for a discussion on the need for the "concupiscence of the flesh" to be restrained by one's "spirit" and "reason."
[13] Wright, "Empathy with the Devil," 181.
[14] Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance*, 14-15.

known morality plays, *The Castle of Perseverance* (1400-1425), demonstrates this dynamic through the allegorical story of Mankind, the play's hero. In the play, Mankind falls trapped to World and the Seven Deadly sins after being tempted by Bad Angel. In need of help, Shrift (Confession) and Penance are sent by God to bring Mankind to the Castle of Perseverance where the Christian Values can defend him from the attacking Vices or "Three Enemies of Man" (World, Flesh, Devil).[15] In terms of sexual imagery, Lechery was depicted as one of the chief Sins working under Flesh, serving as a strong juxtaposition to the love of God shown upon Mankind.

Considering the medieval morality plays were relatively popular during the 15th and 16th centuries,[16] critics have often wondered what role they had on famous Elizabethan dramatists, such as Shakespeare. Felperin and Potter are both adamant that the morality tradition's hero in need of "reunion" or "reclamation" fundamentally shaped Shakespeare's histories, comedies, and romances, though others disagree.[17] But regardless of the role the earlier morality plays had on how Shakespeare structured his plays, his writings similarly betray a clear and traditional juxtaposition between "sinful lust" and "virtuous love." Even though many of his plays take place in secular settings and are fairly free (even bawdy at times) in their use of language, there is a distinct moral framework in place that defines portrayals of sexual desire. Joan Lord Hall discusses this as it relates to the idea of "will," Shakespeare's poetic (and early modern) way of describing "carnal lusts."[18] In plays such as *The Rape of Lucrece*, the tension between a deplorable "will" that "wakes to stain and kill" and the rational (and loving) mind becomes one of the chief plots of the play: will the man submit to the violent, almost uncontrollable, power of his "will" or stand by the moral and spiritual virtues he knows surrounding sexual propriety? Notably, Hecht himself was particularly interested in this tension, especially as it related to Shakespeare's sonnets. In his final volume of literary criticism before his death, he published two essays on sonnet poetry that included discussion of the "traditional, even biblical, contentions and competitions between body and soul" this form of poetry relied upon.[19]

[15] Wright, 184.
[16] Potter, *The English Morality Play*, 9.
[17] See Felperin, 16; Potter, 123; and Wasson, "The Morality Play," 212.
[18] Hall, *Sexual Desire and Romantic Love in Shakespeare*, 14.
[19] Hecht, *Melodies Unheard*, 62.

Freud and the Development of Sexuality

Though religious condemnation of sex acts and desires would remain prevalent during and after the time of Shakespeare, perceptions of sexual behavior began to take on new meanings as the early modern period advanced. As Michel Foucault has most famously pointed out, a proliferation of discourse on sex during the 17th and 18th centuries slowly started to alter the frameworks in which erotic acts were made comprehensible. Sex became present in the fields of "medicine, biology, psychology, psychiatry, and pedagogy," and, by the 19th century, "individuals were encouraged – even obligated – to speak about their sexual lives" in a diverse range of productive rather than strictly repressive settings.[20] Where the premodern writers I have been discussing saw sex acts and desires as "species of sin, expressions of idealized love, […] or components of intimacies between men or women," individuals in the mid-to-late modern period began to understand them as "outworkings of an innermost self," or, in other words, dimensions of their "sexuality."[21] The development of psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud in the late 19th century represents the cumulative effect of this change as people's very identity as sexual beings (from childhood to adulthood) became analyzable.

In terms of sexuality studies, Freud's psychoanalytic approach was a monumental step forward in understanding more about desire and sexual development. Before Freud, psychiatrists and psychologists of the 19th century were already questioning human sexuality but were still very limited in their understanding. For instance, it was commonly assumed at the time that individuals could not express themselves erotically until they hit puberty.[22] Freud fundamentally challenged this approach and theorized that erotic sensations and thoughts actually developed unconsciously throughout childhood. Such insights were groundbreaking and allowed theorists to look closer at the role of repression, trauma, and the unconscious in sexual development.

At the same time, psychoanalytic principles were simultaneously used by Freud to produce strict categorizations of "normal" and "pathological" or "deviant" sexual behaviors. Having defined different stages of sexual development from childhood to adulthood, Freud evaluated different sexual thoughts and actions based upon the stage of sexual development in which they occurred. For instance, while interests in anal and oral stimulation were generally seen as admissible (even expected) during the early developmental stages, many

[20]Cook, "Foucault, Freud, and the Repressive Hypothesis," 157. This is not to suggest sex was no longer repressed. Cook works to show the double force of repression and production in the economy and discourse of power.
[21] Phillips and Reay, 10.
[22] Carr, "Freud and Sexual Ethics," 362.

psychoanalysts believed that adults who expressed strong preferences for these more "childish" interests were veering away from a path of "normal" sexual progression. For Freud, "normal" adult sexuality required one to turn away from their self-interested desires and, instead, relate their "erotic desires to other human sentiments and attitudes of an altruistic or other-regarding nature."[23] As sexologist Jack Morin notes, such a strict understanding of "normalcy" is almost impossible to achieve and leaves most people to be stigmatized one way or another for their sexual preferences.[24]

Another practice that was considered "deviant" in adulthood by Freud was sexual fantasy. In his 1908 essay "The Relation of the Poet to Day-Dreaming," Freud concluded that sexual fantasy – though admissible in childhood – represented a "blocking of the sexual instinct through the repression of one's physical desire."[25] According to him, if a fantasizer engaged too much in their fantasy life instead of directing their erotic desire onto others, their imaginations would become "over-luxuriant" or "over-powerful" and possibly cause a psychotic or neurotic breakdown.[26] Similar claims were ascribed to many other auto-erotic sexual acts, as well. In Thomas Laqueur's study of masturbation, for instance, he explores how this sexual practice has often been accused (in psychoanalytic frameworks, as well as moral ones) of weakening one's mind, crippling the body, and even making some go blind.[27] In Freud's case, he would directly consider it as the cause of neurasthenia, a medical condition characterized by "physical and mental exhaustion usually with accompanying symptoms (such as headache and irritability) [… and] often associated with depression or emotional stress."[28]

Though Freud discussed sex acts and desires in a scientific framework of analysis defined by sexuality rather than sin, his comparison between "normal" and "deviant" sexual behavior carries an important moral dimension to it and is not, in essence, that different from the pre- and early modern writers I have been discussing. For Freud, sexual desire may not have been considered sinful per se, but all "forms of human sexual conduct [… that] deviate[d] from the pattern of altruistic, heterosexual, reproductively oriented sexuality [were] regarded basically as forms of mental ill-health."[29] Moreover, the distinction between "other-oriented" and "self-oriented" desire looks conspicuously similar to the love-lust paradigm discussed by

[23] Carr, 364.
[24] Morin, *The Erotic Mind*, 5.
[25] Davidson, Sr. and Hoffman, "Sexual Fantasies and Sexual Satisfaction," 184.
[26] Freud, *Character and Culture*, 39.
[27] Laqueur, *Solitary Sex*, 13.
[28] Ibid., 259.
[29] Carr, 373.

the early Church Fathers and Medieval theologians – sexual pleasure for the sake of an individual is, again, deemed condemnable.

Postwar Sexuality and the Politics of Desire

The tie between psychoanalysis and morality would, interestingly, be expanded upon in the U.S. during the 1940s and 50s. As Katie Sutton notes, a new brand of American psychiatry that was "decidedly conservative, family-centered, Christian" and "largely [based] along Freudian principles" slowly started to dominate after the war.[30] This development was especially visible during the 1950s, an era Sutton and others consider the "golden age of psychoanalysis," when McCarthyism and its "traditional" (i.e., anti-communist and homophobic) rhetoric became a leading form of social discourse.[31] In terms of sexuality, these psychoanalysts primarily focused on the "traditional family values and normative gender roles" of the era, analyzing sex acts and desire less than their Freudian predecessors.[32] However, as the 1950s became more contentious, psychoanalysis would become "increasingly homophobic, pathologizing, and moralizing."[33]

At the same time psychoanalysis was growing in popularity, Alfred Kinsey and his team of researchers at the Institute for Sex Research (ISR) were simultaneously challenging some basic psychoanalytic theories and the conservative atmosphere they were being practiced in. In 1948, after studying the sex lives of some 11,000 Americans through in-depth questionnaires and interviews, Kinsey and his team published what would be the first of two "Reports" that focused on American male sexual behaviors (the second being published in 1953 and focusing on female sexual behaviors). The results revealed much about the sex acts and desires that were traditionally seen as "deviant" in Freudian frameworks of analysis – mainly, that they were noticeably common.[34] Moreover, Kinsey sought to fundamentally redefine how sex and desire were understood, proposing that they did not (or should not necessarily) point towards a reproductive instinct (as Freud and some late 18th century thinkers had proposed). Instead, Kinsey proposed sex "had no goal other than outlet, and thus could not be 'perverted.'"[35] Not everyone has been a fan in how Kinsey conducted his research, but his

[30] Sutton, "Kinsey and The Psychoanalysts," 127.
[31] Ibid., 127.
[32] Ibid., 127.
[33] Ibid., 132.
[34] Laqueur 74. See also Coffin, "Beauvoir, Kinsey, and Midcentury Sex," 26.
[35] Coffin, 27.

research still provided a groundbreaking step forward in U.S. perceptions on sexuality in the second-half of the 20th century.

Alongside Kinsey's developments, the U.S. slowly started to see a rise in counter-culture movements that were fed up with the country's conservative political climate. Allen Ginsburg, for instance, tested the bounds of what was socially acceptable at the time by explicitly discussing homoerotic desire in his most famous poem "Howl" (1956). Interestingly, the poem started such a stir that a large portion of the books were seized from the publishers for being "obscene material."[36] Similar bans happened for other Beat poets (such as William S. Burroughs), but this only brought more attention to countercultural movements and their freer perceptions of sexuality and desire. By the 1960s – an era commonly referred to as the Sexual Revolution – the outlook on sex would drastically change. As Morin notes, this period represented a moment where "millions […] could throw off old restraints [… and] push boundaries."[37] Sexual desire became something that could be expressed and celebrated more freely.

Nevertheless, by the 1980s, this dynamic would completely change. With the AIDS epidemic, a new fear of sexually transmitted diseases, and a revitalized conservative political climate, sex "flipped back from celebration to dread."[38] Counter-cultural movements would still continue throughout this time – such as with the sexually explicit poetry of Adrienne Rich and other women and lesbian activists – but the general political climate of the U.S. had reverted back into a religious and moral conservatism that treated sex and desire in more repressive ways.[39] In terms of Hecht's life, this renewed conservatism would dominant until his death in 2004.

"The appalling world of dreams": Sexual Desire and Fantasy

Having outlined some developments surrounding the history of sexual desire, I argue that Hecht's sexual imagery often reflects an inclination for the traditional lust versus love juxtaposition – or "self-oriented" vs. "other-oriented" definitions of desire – but with 20th century concerns in mind ("abnormal" sexual behavior, sexual fantasy, masturbation, etc.). This allows Hecht to rework certain ideas, such as the body-soul dichotomy, while still adhering to an established tradition that perceives sexual desire as something condemnable or violent *in itself*. In this section, I analyze "Elders," a poem virtually unexamined in Hecht

[36] Anderson and Herr, ed., *Encyclopedia of Activism and Social Justice*, 620-621.
[37] Morin, 5.
[38] Ibid., 7.
[39] Ibid., 52-53.

studies that is framed around the biblical story "Susanna and the Elders" from Daniel 13. I show how Hecht subverts the privileged position the mind traditionally holds by portraying it as a "depraved" center of objectification and lewd desire. In doing so, sexual fantasy is highlighted as a violent and condemnable form of lust separate from the "other-oriented" love of the "real" world.

"Susanna and the Elders" tells the story of Susanna, a young wife who is out bathing in her private garden when two Church Elders, who have previously seen her and lust for her, plot to make her have sex with them. After hiding in the garden that Susanna is bathing in, the two Elders confront her and tell her if she does not sexually surrender herself to them, they will tell their community that she was caught having sex with a young man. Susanna, a holy woman, refuses and is put on trial for false charges of adultery. Since the Elders are trusted authorities in the community, their testimony is believed without question and Susanna is ultimately condemned to death. Nevertheless, when the sentencing is brought forth, Susanna cries out to God for help. Instantaneously, the spirit of the Lord is stirred up in the voice of Daniel who challenges the testimony of the two Elders. Needing proof of their conniving plot, he asks each of the Elders individually where they saw Susanna allegedly commit her crime. When they have different answers, it becomes clear that they are lying. Susanna is freed and the two Elders are put to death instead.

While the biblical story primarily emphasizes the Elders' abuse of power and Susanna's trust in the Lord to free her from it, Hecht's poem pays particularly close attention to the Elders' lust. In diverting from the inspired story, "Elders" creates an original profile of one of the two men that is centered around the development of his sexual imagination from childhood to adulthood. The poem begins by portraying a self-interested existence that is defined by "terrible lusts," compulsive masturbation, and isolation.

> As a boy he was awkward, pimpled, unpopular,
> Disdained by girls, avoided by other boys,
> An acned solitary. But bold and spectacular
> The lubricious dreams that such a one enjoys.
>
> He wandered apart, picked at his scabs, pinned down,
> In the plush, delirious Minsky's of his mind,
> High-Breasted, long-thighed sirens who served his own
> Terrible lusts, to which they became resigned,
>
> And he thought himself masterful and accursed
> As he pumped his flesh to climax, picturing wild
> Virgins imploring him to do his worst,
> And every morning he left his bedding soiled.

In the first and second stanza, sexual fantasy is closely tied to social ostracism. The Elder's childhood is defined by a lack of connection to others as he is "disdained," "unpopular," and "avoided." Arguably, this is what leads to his engagement with "lubricious dreams," though the dreams *in themselves* are presented as something physically unhealthy through their association with his acne and "picked at" scabs. Describing the Elder's fantasies in detail, the narrator focuses on the violence that defines them – the phantoms of his imagination "resign" themselves to his self-pleasure, "implore[e] him to do his worst" to them, and cause him to "pum[p] his flesh to climax" to a point where the bedding is "soiled" every morning. As time goes on, the Elder continues to engage with sexual fantasy in similar ways.

> And so it went year by tormented year,
> His yearnings snarled in some tight, muddled sensation
> Of violence, a gout of imperiousness, fear
> And resentment yearning in ulcered incubation.

Notably, the poem has not described any engagement with others, and he is still assumedly isolated. An image of his "enslavement" to sexual fantasy (see stanza four) is developing as each year is described as being "tormented." Moreover, as he continues to engage with his sexual fantasies, they begin to collide with additional displeasing emotions ("imperiousness," "fear," and "resentment") that come together in "ulcered incubation." In other words, the Elder's sexual fantasy life is emphatically understood as something repugnant that has further consequences for his mental well-being.

Having established the Elder's profile, the narrator returns to the plot of Daniel 13, showing how the two Elders meet up to find Susanna.

> When he was old he encountered someone else
> Enslaved by similar dreams and forbidden seethings,
> Another dissatisfied, thrummed by the same pulse,
> Who brought him where they both could observe
> Bathing
>
> In innocent calm voluptuous Susanna,
> Delicate, and a quarter of his age,
> Her flesh as white and wonderful as manna,
> Exciting them both to desires engorged with rage.

Considering that the Elder's sexual fantasy life and his voyeurism in the last stanza are described in equally violent ways, the poem declares no clear distinction between the Elder's thoughts and actions, portraying them both as equally condemnable. In essence, each act represents the total (both reprehensible and violent) force of "lust," and is therefore in no need

of ethical delineation. In one way, this is sympathetic to the frameworks of "self-oriented" lust and "other-oriented" love described earlier in this chapter. Since the Elder's fantasy life and his voyeurism are both pointed towards himself, the entirety of his sexuality is portrayed as deplorable and physically unhealthy. Moreover, with the biblical story in mind, Susanna can be seen as a representative of "other-oriented" love juxtaposed against the Elder, though the Elders emphatically see her as a sexual object.

In my analysis, what I am trying to draw attention to is the poem's clear unease with the mind and its relationship to sexual desire. Hecht is clearly looking to condemn sexual desire in a similar way to some of the established frameworks I have outlined, but where sexual desire is traditionally described as a sensorial act that results in arousal, sexual desire in this poem is (for the most part) associated with the "world" of imagination. In other words, by predominately focusing on the violent and condemnable role sexual fantasy carries *in itself* as a form of ("self-oriented") sexual desire, "Elders" also betrays a level of distrust given the mind's ability to "enslave" one to its "sexual" world of dreams. This strongly contrasts with body-soul dichotomies I have introduced earlier, though it still works towards a similar cause.

Another instance where Hecht draws attention to the mind's role in sexual fantasy is Part I of "The Venetian Vespers." As the speaker announces different instances of "hell" which young boys know nothing about, he includes

> The heatless burnings of the elderly
> In memorized, imaginary lusts,
> Visions of noontide infidelities,
> Crude hallway gropings, cruel lubricities,
> A fire as old and slow as rusting metal.
> It's but a child's step, it's but an old man's totter
> From this to the appalling world of dreams.

This "appalling world of dreams" brings me back to the end of Chapter 1 where I introduced the aggressive language used in "Peripetia" to describe the speaker's imaginative potential to turn Miranda into a "fugitive of dreams" whom he can "control." While instances of sexual desire in "Elders" and this short passage from "The Venetian Vespers" do not materialize into anything past violence, "Peripeteia" shows how "reality" can save one from the violence of sexual fantasy (or, in essence, lust). In the end of this poem Miranda's "real" hand prevents him from turning her into a "fugitive" and he leaves the theatre with her.

Hecht's portrayal of sexual desire is highly negative, reflective of a traditional condemnation of sexual desire that extends back to at least the Early Church. In both "Elders"

and “Venetian Vespers”, the fantasies of the poems’ point-of-view characters are portrayed as being violent and condemnable. However, while this perspective can be seen as reductive of the complexity of sexual desire, it is accompanied by a very progressive dual phenomenon, as demonstrated in “And Can Ye Sing Baluloo When the Bairn Greets?”

“The world of men”: Highlighting Sexual Assault

“Elders” demonstrates Hecht’s inclination to display sexual desire as something violent and condemnable. While this betrays a level of Hecht’s own distrust towards the relationship between sexual fantasy and the mind, the poem also explicitly draws attention to the pervasiveness of the male gaze in powerful ways. Traditionally speaking, condemning desire has been used in some plays or dramas to draw attention to instances of sexual violence and assault. In this section, I analyze how Hecht builds off of this tradition with “And Can Ye Sing Baluloo When the Bairn Greets?” in which a female speaker retells her own sexual assault. The poem is short enough to be quoted in full.

> All these years I have known of her despair.
> “I was about to be happy when the abyss
> Opened its mouth. It was empty, except for this
> Yellowish sperm of horror that glistened there.
>
> I tried so hard not to look as the thing grew fat
> And pulsed in its bed of hair. I tried to think
> Of Sister Marie Gerald, of our swaddled link
> To the Lord of Hosts, the manger, and all of that.
>
> None of it worked. And even the whip-lash wind,
> To which I clung and begged to be blown away,
> Didn’t work. These eyes, that many have praised as gay,
> Are the stale jellies of lust in which Adam sinned.
>
> And nothing works. Sickened since God knows when,
> Since early childhood when I first saw the horror,
> I have spent hours alone before my mirror.
> There is no cure for me in the world of men.”

By opening with an unnamed speaker who immediately gives way to a second, the poem promotes a sense of hidden identity that manifests itself throughout the poem. There are no indications to who the first speaker may be, though the second is assumedly a woman based upon the use of “her” in line one. In line two, the second speaker begins retelling the events of her assault by framing the scene. It is night (“The abyss”) and “she was about to be happy,” something I read as, she was about to be asleep (a reading that is especially visible when looked

at with the poem's last line in mind). But the night is interrupted by a "yellowish sperm of horror that glistened there." On one hand, this seemingly alludes to a flame of a candle that would "open the mouth" of the night and resemble a sperm as it flickers or "glistens." But, in a more sinister way, it also refers to the sense of "horror" in knowing her assailant has come.

In the second and third stanza, the female speaker recalls the horrific events of her rape. Though she tries to escape the assault by thinking of "Sister Marie Gerald," "the manager," and other Christian imagery ("all of that"), she is mentally and physically unable to do so. By the fourth stanza, it is clear that this is not the first or only time she has been assaulted either, as she has encountered the "horror" since childhood. Realizing this makes the title of the poem – which refers to a lyric from an old Scottish lullaby "O Can Ye Sew Cushions?"[40] – all the more harrowing. In the last two lines, it is clear that the effects of the assaults have completely fractured her sense of selfhood as she spends "hours" alone in front of a mirror. In contrast to the redeeming features of the "real" for the speaker in "Peripeteia," this speaker has no hope in the "real" world which is defined by men and their sexual violence.

While Hecht himself has acknowledged the role *King Lear* plays in this poem,[41] I argue a better comparison may be *The Rape of Lucrece.* As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Shakespeare's play is centered directly around the question of "will" (sexual desire) vs. reason, and it too depicts an assault by night. While the debate between "will" and reason is not central to this poem, stanza three directly draws attention to the violent lust of the assailant. Interestingly, in Hall's discussion of Shakespeare's play, she discusses how Tarquin (the assailant of Lucrece) "fault[s]" Lucrece for her "eyes," which have "lured him into a sinful assault"[42] – an image alluded to in stanza three. Alongside this, the poem's allusion to "Adam" evokes an even earlier instance of condemning sexual desire. Adam's lust is a direct reference to Augustine's belief that concupiscence was responsible for transmitting "original sin." Of course, Augustine had even consensual sex in mind when writing about this, but Hecht uses it to draw attention to the victimization of others.

This poem demonstrates another side to Hecht's treatment of sexual desire. When focusing on the perspectives of men, as in "Elders" and "The Venetian Vespers", Hecht emphasizes a corrupting influence sexual desire has *in itself* on the characters' mental and physical well-being. In "And Can Ye Sing Baluloo When the Bairn Greets?", Hecht shows the damaging effects sexual desire can have on others, especially as it relates to the objectivation

[40] Broadwood, "Notes on 'O Can Ye Sew Cushions,'" 243.
[41] Hecht to Ashley Brown, April 18, 1978, in *The Letters*, 170-172.
[42] Hall, 46-47.

and assault of women. Without directly adhering to traditional moralistic frameworks, Hecht's sexual imagery reflects a unique engagement with a tradition that condemns sexual desire and – as in the case of *The Rape of Lucrece* – sexual assault.

Conclusion: Sexual Imagery in a Sex-Focused Framework

This section analyzes the unique relationship Hecht draws in his poetry between sexual fantasy, sexual desire, and an established tradition of condemning lust *in itself.* The analysis within this section is a first attempt at approaching Hecht's work through a new lens outside the frameworks of "morality" and "formality" discussed in the two previous chapters. Further research could continue investigating the relationship Hecht's poetry shares with these conversations complemented by a new framework of analysis based on discourses of sexuality studies.

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