Exceptionalism of Mina Loy and the gender politics of canon formation

Karin Schalm

The University of Montana

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd

Recommended Citation


https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/2288

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.
Permission is granted by the author to reproduce this material in its entirety, provided that this material is used for scholarly purposes and is properly cited in published works and reports.

** Please check "Yes" or "No" and provide signature **

Yes, I grant permission  
No, I do not grant permission

Author's Signature  
Date  

Any copying for commercial purposes or financial gain may be undertaken only with the author's explicit consent.
THE EXCEPTIONALISM OF MINA LOY
AND THE GENDER POLITICS OF CANON FORMATION

by

Karin Schalm
B.A., Wesleyan University, 1987

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts in English (Literature)
The University of Montana
1998

Approved by:

Chair, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School
Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein and William Carlos Williams all recognized Mina Loy as one of the most brilliant innovators of modern poetry. In 1918, Pound invented the term "logopoeia," or a dance of the intellect, to describe Loy's work. During her most productive years (1915-1931) Loy was well known throughout the United States and Europe as a writer, painter and inventor--and yet today her name fails to evoke much recognition among either contemporary poets or scholars. Her exclusion by the editors of *The Norton Anthology of Poetry, The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* and *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* represents a problem with the process of canonization. Although Farrar, Straus and Giroux recently published a posthumous collection of Loy's poetry, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, and a critical biography, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, Helen Vendler's negative review of Loy's poetry shows that Loy has not simply been forgotten by the process of canonization--but excluded.

My first chapter offers biographical information that places Loy and her poetic discourse within a historical perspective. British-born, Loy studied art in Paris, becoming an elected member to the Salon d’ Autumn (1906), she shared ideas with futurist artists and writers in Florence as well as befriending Gertrude Stein (1913), and she imported the word "dada" to America upon her arrival (1916). During the twenties and thirties Loy participated in the avant-garde art and writing world in Paris, with Contact Press publishing her first book *Lunar Baedeker* [sic] in 1923. After returning to the United States in 1936, Loy painted and wrote in the New York Bowery District until moving to Aspen, Colorado. Jonathon Williams with Jargon Society Press republished her work in *Lunar Baedeker & Time Tables* in 1958. Although this collection quickly went out of print, Roger Conover published an expanded collection of Loy's writings called *The Last Lunar Baedeker* in 1982, sixteen years after her death.

Chapter two explores possible reasons why Mina Loy's bright poetic career failed to flourish after the thirties, citing gender role stereotypes which influenced the development of both the male-centered modernist canon as well as the revisionary feminist modernist canon.

Chapter three continues with a close examination of Mina Loy's poetics, concentrating on her flagrantly feminist subject matter (often erotic and bitingly satiric), her intellectually exacting vocabulary, and her finely hewn technical style. I challenge the findings of Helen Vendler who claims Mina Loy's "poems do not add up...to a major body of work" ("The Truth Teller," *The New York Review of Books*, Sept. 19, 1996).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgments</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;There is no Life or Death&quot;</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: &quot;The Re-Simplification of Mina Loy&quot;</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: &quot;The Gender Politics of Canon Formation&quot;</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: &quot;Love—the Preeminent Litterateur&quot;</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Works Cited</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgments

I want to thank Carolyn Burke and Roger Conover for keeping Mina Loy’s work alive with their excellent scholarship and dedicated perseverance to publishing. On the home front, I offer acknowledgments to Veronica Stewart for getting me started, Casey Charles for keeping me going, Bob Baker for his expertise, Michel Valentin for his inspirational teaching and Patrick McCormick for his editorial (and emotional) support. I reserve my greatest appreciation, though, for Mina Loy—an exceptionally quirky and creative poet I have grown to love.
There is no Life or Death
Only activity
And in the absolute
Is no declivity.
There is no Love or Lust
Only propensity
Who would possess
Is a nonentity.
There is no First or Last
Only equality
And who would rule
Joins the majority.
There is no Space or Time
Only intensity,
And tame things
Have no immensity.

(Loy, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, 3) 1.
Introduction

"It is hard to say why she has been ignored. Perhaps it is due to her extreme exceptionalism." —Kenneth Rexroth, "Mina Loy," Circle, 1944

Always described in extreme terms by both admirers and detractors, Mina Loy's latest and most perplexing rendition of exceptionalism has been her extraordinary obscurity. For over twenty years, Loy lived, produced and published at the center of international avant-garde life: melding feminism with futurism in Florence (1913-1916), creating dadaism with Marcel Duchamp in New York and exchanging experimental aesthetics with bohemian writers in Greenwich Village (1916-1921), exploring psychology with Freud in Vienna (1922), and living as a writer/artist/inventor in Paris (1923-1936). In his memoir Being Geniuses Together, Robert McAlmon remembered Loy as a sparkling light of Montparnassus life: "When Picabia, Leger, Brancusi, Mina Loy, Marcel Duchamp were there. . .for dinner, there was brighter and more intelligent conversation than one was apt to get elsewhere in Paris" (122). Responding to "Love Songs" in Others, Harriet Monroe (editor of the relatively conservative journal Poetry) described Loy as an "extreme otherist," cursing her with the unfortunately accurate label of "one of the long-to-be-hidden-moderns" (Conover's notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, xxxiv).

Even people outside the art world knew Loy during the height of her career. In 1917, the New York Evening Sun chose her as the representative woman of the modern era, a woman who "can and does write free verse and hold the intuitional pause exactly the right length of time" (Do you Strive to
Capture the Symbols of Your Reactions? If Not You are Quite Old Fashioned. The article suggests rather flippantly, "Some people think the women are the cause of modernism, whatever that is. But, then, some people think woman is to blame for everything they don't like or don't understand." Seven decades later, with modernism an established canonical literary period, the suggestion that women might be "to blame" for its origins has a certain humor.

In the 1940's, New Critical frameworks served to almost erase women from the history of modernism, reducing the wide diversity of modern poetry to a "combat between literary titans" (Nelson, 37), mostly male. Starting in the 1970's, revisionary feminists sought to broaden the scope of modernism by recovering important women writers previously excluded from the canon --writers like Gertrude Stein who had been ignored, and H.D. who had been forgotten. Loy, a poet who radically challenged prescribed gender roles in the beginning of the twentieth century by claiming sexual, creative and intellectual freedoms, represents the ideal subject for contemporary scholars seeking to broaden and shape the modernist canon. Oddly enough, her experimental writing and unique brand of feminism have caused controversy even among revisionary feminists. As an anonymous critic recently claimed, "Mina Loy's wry, confident inquiries into the nature of men, women and sexuality are a great undiscovered treasure of modernism. . . we are perhaps only now, in the post-feminist '90's, fully equipped to handle [her work]" (Publisher's Weekly, June 3, 1996).

When I began this project, Loy's poems were out of print. I had to special order The Last Lunar Baedeker through the University library loan program, piecing together biographical information from Roger Conover's notes and the various memoirs of Loy's acquaintances. Since then a large
publishing house—Farrar, Straus and Giroux—has released Carolyn Burke's critical biography, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, and Conover's latest collection of Loy's work, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. Wider distribution and easier access to Loy's poetry could lead to her eventual canonization, but the biases which have led to her exclusion will have to change first. If Helen Vendler's and Mark Ford's reviews of *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* indicate the literary institution's willingness to change, transformation might be a long time in coming.

Proponents of Loy's work have always shown determined patience, though. As far back as 1944, the process of rediscovering Loy began with Kenneth Rexroth's theory that Loy had been excluded from the canon because of her "extreme exceptionalism." In short, Loy's very uniqueness—her intellectual writing style coupled with an erotic, woman-centered content and her "free love" lifestyle—conflicted with the conservative tastes of academics, scholars and critics who played such an influential role in creating the canon. Loy's foregrounding of female gender in a field largely dominated by men broke the cardinal rule of impersonality, as interpreted by a sexist society. In his 1919 essay "Tradition and Individual Talent," Eliot refers to authorial "self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (55) when describing the experimental methods writers use to avoid romantic representation of themselves in their texts. Many critics have used Eliot's aesthetic of impersonality to sanction their own ideological prejudices, belittling the experiences of people outside the norm—mainly women, people of color, the poor, non-Christians, handicapped people and homosexuals. Loy's earlier work defies prescribed gender roles with its focus on sexuality from a woman's perspective and an acknowledgment of homosexual love, while her later work continues to challenge the stereotypes of universality by focusing
on the poor, people of color and the disabled. Loy also highlights her half-Jewish ancestry in the long autobiographical poem, "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," precipitating further marginalization by conservative canon-makers.

Loy’s exceptionalism, linked with her exclusion from the canon, points to a bankrupt system in need of transformation. I say "transformation" because we must move beyond being "for" or "against" canonization. As Loy indicates in "There is no Life or Death," the reduction of existence to binary choices presents an over-simplification of issues. Critics who preach abolitionism of the canon seem just as ignorant of their biases as critics who continue to expound the objective nature of canonization. 4. Because universities, publishing houses and bookstores will continue to promote specific authors, canonization will never disappear completely. Perhaps by acknowledging the biases we all use when advocating or critiquing writers, we can remain open to a wider range of possibilities—groups of canons instead of one over-arching notion of excellence. Although prominent critics may admit to their personal biases, simple "likes" and "dislikes" quickly become lost during the institutional process of canonization.

Of course my own biases have influenced the construction of this thesis. My partiality toward experimental modernist poetry introduced me to and sustained my interest in Loy, even when the majority of her poems seemed beyond my reach at first. Her gender, the frank sexual content of her work, and an openness to sexual exploration in her own life piqued my curiosity, goading me into an exploration of gender-biases in canonization. Because Loy led such an unconventional life—living in various countries, having children with three different men, participating in a variety of disciplines, becoming intimately involved with and influencing many of the extreme "isms" of her day, including futurism, feminism, dadaism,
surrealism and experimentalism—I have used chapter one to provide biographical information, placing Loy and her work within a historical setting. Her exceptional life has influenced her exclusion from the canon as much as her poetry, meriting discussion. Chapter two explores the supposed objectivity of canonization, focusing primarily on the influence of gender in regard to the critical treatment of Loy's work. And, finally, chapter three presents an in-depth critical study of Loy's more controversial poems, demonstrating her exceptional skill as a writer.

2. In *Repression and Recovery*, Cary Nelson compares the over-simplification of modernist literary history (Pound vs. Eliot) to the ideology behind the Cold War which divided the world’s diverse cultures into a contest between freedom and communism, the United States vs. the Soviet Union (37).

3. This flawed notion of impersonality continues to plague our society today. Consider the debate over putting the head of a woman on a coin in the 1998 Congress. Some Republicans have argued against choosing Sacajawea (the Native American woman who guided and interpreted for Lewis and Clark) due to her lack of universality. They see her specific gender and race as impossible barriers to symbolic representation. They have proposed using the Statue of Liberty, an impersonal, man-made object with the symbol of freedom already explicitly encoded in it. The heads of individual men on coins and bills have not raised this type of controversy. George Washington, although a specific man, symbolizes courage and resistance. Similarly, if conservative lawmakers could move beyond their racism and sexism, they would see that Sacajawea symbolizes the spirit of guiding compassion and exploration.

4. See Robinson (83-98).
Chapter 1
The Re-Simplification of Mina Loy

"Can't you write about me as a hidden wrinkle—the only woman who has been decided enough to forego easy success—uninterrupted by the potency of beauty?"
--Mina Loy's letter to Carl Van Vechten, 1915

Much as Athena sprang fully formed from the head of Zeus, Mina Loy suddenly appeared as "the modern woman"—creating rumors in the 1920's that she was simply an invention, a "forged persona" or "hoax-of-critics" (Conover's notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, xviii). Loy responded to these rumors by turning up at Natalie Barney's salon in Paris, a well-known gathering place for female artists, announcing, "I assure you I am indeed a live being. But it is necessary to stay very unknown . . . To maintain my incognito the hazard I chose was—poet" (Conover's notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, xviii). Defying easy classification, Loy's artistic talent, sarcastic wit and dazzling intelligence failed to fit the stereotype of genteel womanhood. On the other hand, her irresistible beauty and coy charm attracted attention to her gender. Alfred Kreymborg, who published "Love Songs" in Others, described the dilemma critics had with Loy and her work in his 1929 survey of American poetry, Our Singing Strength:

It took a strange digestive apparatus to read Mina Loy.

Unhappily for her, the average critic had been fed on treacle and soda water over too long a Puritanical term in the jails of our daily papers. To reduce eroticism to the sty was an outrage, and to do so without verbs, sentence structure, punctuation, even more offensive . . . Had a man written these poems, the town might have viewed them with comparative comfort. But a
woman wrote them, a woman who dressed like a lady and painted charming lamp-shades. (488)

In an interview with Jonathon Williams, Robert Creeley and Paul Blackburn in 1965, one year before she died, Loy recalled how "frightfully immoral" (qtd. in Burke, Becoming Modern, 437) everyone thought her poetry was. The editors of The Little Review were "horrified" by her reputation before they met her. Loy seemed to find these reactions both surprising and amusing.

A strong believer in self-creation, Mina changed her name from "Lowy" to "Loy" in 1906, rejecting both of her husbands' surnames for her nom-de-plume. She also "wrote under an elaborate system of anagrammatically and numerologically derived pseudonyms" (Conover's notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, xvii), as in "Lion's Jaws":

These amusing men
discover in their mail
duplicate petitions
to be the lurid mother of "their" flabbergast child
from Nima Lyo, alias Anim Yol, alias
Imna Oly

(secret service buffoon to the Woman's Cause).

Loy chastised her daughter Joella for having a dreary and conventional imagination—claiming she should make up stories about herself. "She might, for instance, say Papini [one of the "amusing" men alluded to in "Lion's Jaws"] was her father" (Burke, 276). Often blurring the boundary between imagination and reality, Loy seemed to invent herself as much as her poetry.

The "real" Mina Loy had a mother and a father, of course, and an extremely constraining, bourgeois childhood. Born in London in 1882, Loy grew up as the eldest of three girls in a middle class family. Her father,
Sigmund Lowy, was a successful Jewish tailor who emigrated to Britain from Hungary. Her mother, Julia Bryan, was a prim, Evangelical woman from a working class British family. Julia disliked her husband's religion, accent and profession, but she married him because she found herself in the awkward position of being seven months pregnant. As Mina grew up, Julia simply denied her daughter's womanhood, dressing her "in childish flat yokes, scolding her as she pinned the offending bodice: 'How can I fit you? You nasty girl. Do you think at your age it is decent to have a figure?'" (qtd. in Burke, 33). With such a repressed upbringing, it comes as no surprise that Loy's poetry took a heady turn. Even with her intensely intellectual style, though, Loy manages to unite the cerebral and sensual parts of herself.

In her Feminist Manifesto 1. of 1914, Loy argues for "the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity throughout the female population at puberty." Loy's hyperbolic "surgical" solution to the social constraints of virginity emphasizes an extreme need for conceptual changes in gender roles. This grounding of abstract ideas in a bodily reality becomes one of Loy's major poetic tactics. In "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots" (1915), Loy explores the links between virginity, female repression and economics. The mothers in the poem (much like Loy's own mother) keep their poor daughters hidden. They must stay inside behind curtains to protect their only valuable asset—virginity. The girls become commodities: "Nobody shouts/ Virgins for sale," but men are encouraged to "Spread it with gold/And carry it home." Because the girls have no control over their financial destiny, they lose the right to chose a husband for love. Loy's substitution of the pronoun "it" for "her" signifies the girl's loss of humanity in this exchange.

While growing up, Mina rarely escaped her mother's constant criticism. When she complained to her father, he insisted, "No daughter
should ever leave her mother’s side. . . It’s so beautiful, the bud beside the rose; men like it” (Burke, 33). Loy’s image of the English Rose (representing her mother) in the autobiographical poem “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” (1923) resonates with her father’s words. She describes the Rose as removed from its own desire, unavailable to men who are not rich:

an impenetrable pink curtain
hangs between it and itself
and in metaphysical vagrance
it passes beyond the ken
of men unless
possessed
of exorbitant incomes
And Then--
merely indicating its presence
by an exotic fragrance.

The English Rose remains virginal and hidden behind its “impenetrable pink curtain” until it finds a suitable mate, attracting him with a sweet smell. When the Rose gives birth to the Anglo-Mongrel (representing Mina), Loy describes this process in a cold and scientific manner—decidedly human in contrast to the floral mother:

They pull
A clotty bulk of bifurcated fat
out of her loins
to lie
for a period while performing hands
pour lactoid liquids through
and then mop up beneath it
their golden residue.

With characteristic Loy irony, only the baby’s urine appears beautiful with its lovely "golden" quality. The sudden rhyme of "through" and "residue" in an otherwise unrhyming, free verse section turns the simple act of urination into a heightened event, signaling an ironic return to the more genteel values represented by the English Rose. Meanwhile, Loy deflates any romanticization of the birth process by substituting scientific terms like "clotty bulk of bifurcated fat" for baby and "lactoid liquids" for milk. Any supposedly natural connection between mother and daughter deteriorates as the birth attendees "pull" the baby out and "performing hands" feed the newborn. The mother does not push, and the baby does not suck from her mother's breast. The lack of connection between the two undercuts the metaphorized "bud beside the rose" her father thought "so beautiful."

At seventeen Mina made her escape from home by successfully appealing to her father to send her to art school. Although Sigmund Lowy did not believe in formal education for girls, he recognized Mina's talents and allowed her to travel to Munich and Paris to study painting. In Paris she had an affair with Stephen Haweis, another British art student attending the Academie Colarossi. Becoming pregnant, Loy married (like her mother before her) to avoid a scandal. Never very fond of Stephen, Mina described her marriage as a compromise made with a "dark-haired dwarf" to gain independence from her "horrible parents" (qtd. in Burke, 86). Mina's father, afraid his twenty-one year old daughter would become an old maid, happily agreed to the marriage. He offered financial support only as long as the couple stayed together. Mina's and Stephen's child Oda Janet died within a year of her birth, beginning a series of tragedies in Loy's life.
Loy enjoyed some recognition for her paintings in Paris and gained acceptance to the Autumn Salon in 1906 under her new, chosen name "Loy," but Stephen (who was not accepted) insisted they move to Florence. After hobnobbing with intellectuals and artists like Guillaume Apollinaire and Pablo Picasso in Paris, Loy viewed Florence as a hermitage—except for the occasional visits with her new friend Mabel Dodge. A rich eccentric, Dodge attracted interesting visitors like Carl Van Vechten and Gertrude Stein to her home. Florence became bearable for Loy, but her marriage to Stephen completely deteriorated. With both of them having affairs, Stephen only claimed Loy's second child, Joella, because of his unwillingness to part with Sigmund Lowy's money. Suffering from neurasthenia, Loy inherited her mother's nervous disposition and stayed in bed much of the time. Joella developed polio in 1909, and Loy turned to Christian Science for solace. Although Joella survived, Loy remained committed to her own personal version of Christian Science for the rest of her life, seeing sin and illness as illusions to be overcome by the mind.

In 1913, after the birth of their son (Giles), Stephen left for the South Seas—leaving Loy to support the children. Loy regained her spirits by becoming involved in futurism, a radical new movement which encouraged her propensity for self-invention. The now thirty-one year old Loy wrote to Dodge who had moved to New York, "Everybody I know at present is trying to forget what a complicated affair life has been mistaken for. We are all busy re-simplifying ourselves—I am 29—next year I shall be 28" (qtd. in Burke, 158). In "Aphorisms on Futurism" she urges readers to "LET the Universe flow into your consciousness, there is no limit to its capacity, nothing that it shall not re-create." Loy believed in changing the world through transforming consciousness. She attributed much of her new way of thinking to the
exuberant effects of Filippo Marinetti, the leader of futurism whom she had a brief affair with. Although Marinetti gave Loy an erotic and intellectual charge—pulling her out of her current depression—she rebelled against his pro-war and anti-woman philosophies. In her letter to Dodge, Loy wrote, "I am in the throes of conversion to Futurism, but I shall never convince myself. There is no hope in any system that 'combat le mal avec le mal, & that is really Marinetti's philosophy—though he is one of the most satisfying personalities I have ever come in contact with" (qtd. in Burke, 157).

Energized by Marinetti's assault on language, Loy turned from painting to writing—using Marinetti's favorite genre, the manifesto, to voice her own concerns about gender relations. When Marinetti claimed, "Woman is a wonderful animal" (qtd. in Burke, 166), Loy responded with the poem "One O'Clock at Night" in which a female narrator sarcastically describes herself as, "The animal woman/ Understanding nothing of man/ But mastery and the security of imparted physical heat." Loy's choice of sophisticated language undercuts the notion of the "animal woman" without intelligence, or as Marinetti claimed women to be, "wholly without usefulness" (qtd. in Conover's notes, The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 180). Ironically, the man who represents Marinetti in this poem roars in an animal-like manner. When the female speaker criticizes his "theories of plastic velocity," demonstrating her ability to understand and argue effectively on her own, the man ignores her. He responds to the third character (another man) with, "Let us go she is tired and wants to go to bed." Although the Marinetti-character wakes up the female speaker with his dynamic argument, this same man wants her to go back to sleep when she begins to assert herself as his intellectual equal.

Marinetti publicly supported the suffragist movement, but his support was qualified by his belief that women are "inferior in respect to character and
intelligence and can therefore be only . . . mediocre legislative instrument[s]” (qtd. in Conover’s notes, The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 180). In her Feminist Manifesto, Loy responds to such logic by calling for "an absolute resystemization of the feminist question” (qtd in Burke, 179). She asserts that women must undergo an actual psychic change instead of simply striving for the illusion of social reform. Although manifestos may exaggerate ideas for effect, Loy boldly argues against women's desire for "equality," claiming it keeps men as the measuring stick of women's worth:

be **Brave** & deny at the outset—that pathetic clap-trap war cry **Woman is the equal of man**—

for

She is **NOT**!

By turning inward for change, Loy claims women must define themselves according to their own intrinsic values instead of according to their relationships with men. She also advocates removing sex and child birth from the moral realm of marriage, arguing that "love must be reduced to its initial element" without honor, grief, sentimentality, pride or jealousy. With her use of dynamic typesetting (different-sized font and bold-faced letters), Loy’s revolutionary words jump off the page. The strident tone of her manifesto portrays a level of confidence, though, that she found difficult to enact in real life. Loy avoided the trap of "sentimentality" with Marinetti, but she fell deeply in love with his futurist rival, Giovanni Papini. More of a quiet, spiritual revolutionary than Marinetti, Papini did not boast about himself or chase after her. Extremely shy, he claimed, "my own ugliness pleases me" (Burke, 162). Loy wooed Papini as if he were a timid animal—asking him to return to her studio again and again to sit for his portrait. In
time they became lovers, but Papini, unable to sustain their intimacy, ended the affair.

Mixing all she learned about futurism from Marinetti and Papini with a self-intuned feminist awareness, Loy developed a new type of poetry that addressed the crisis in consciousness of the early twentieth century. In 1914 Loy sent these powerful new poems to New York via Dodge and Van Vechten. Acting as Loy’s agent, Van Vechten forwarded "Café du Néant" to *The International*, where her work debuted alongside poems by the Indian mystic Tagore. As the new editor of *Trend*, Van Vechten featured "The Costa San Giorgio" and "Parturition" in the 1914 editions of his journal. Dodge sent "Aphorisms on Futurism" and an untitled poem "There is no Life or Death" to Stieglitz’ journal *Camera Work*. Meanwhile, five of her strong, satirical poems referring to her relationship with the futurists—"Three Moments in Paris," "Sketch of a Man on a Platform," "Giovanni Franchi," "Lion's Jaws" and "The Effectual Marriage"—appeared in *Rogue, The Little Review* and *Others*.

When Alfred Kreymborg formed *Others* in 1915 in opposition to Harriet Monroe’s mainstream *Poetry*, he targeted Loy and Stevens as the two poets to give his new journal its unique flavor. Cummings later said he developed much of his style from pouring over the early issues of *Others*. His short line length with frequent pauses, free-flowing punctuation and collage techniques can be attributed to Loy's influence. The first issue of *Others* included four sections of Loy's long poem "Songs to Joannes" (later called "Love Songs"), opening with the lines:

Spawn of Fantasies
Silting the appraisable
Pig Cupid his rosy snout
Rooting erotic garbage
"Once upon a time"
Pulls a weed white star-topped
Among wild oats sown in mucous-membrane.

Although blatantly sexual, this poem refuses to offer up a concrete narrative. The "Pig Cupid" with his nose pushing around in some "erotic garbage" appears to be performing oral sex. Or, the pig's "rosy snout" could symbolize a woman's vagina. During the process of "rooting," digging for food, the Pig Cupid "Pulls a weed...sown in mucous-membrane." This "white star-topped" weed suggests the pig's sexual partner's ejaculation after orgasm--whether male or female remains ambiguous. Loy's use of sentence fragments and white spaces contributes to the impressionistic feel of the poem. She conflates notions of romanticized love ("Fantasies," "Once upon a time" and "star-topped") with barnyard descriptions of eroticism. By coupling revolutionary ideas of love with the experimental style of free verse, Loy caused a "small-sized riot" (Kreyemborg, qtd. in Conover's notes to The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 188) in the American poetry world. Depending on the critic, her work was considered either pernicious or revolutionary. William Carlos Williams described the 1915 edition of Others with "Love Songs" as causing "wild enthusiasm among free-verse writers, slightly less enthusiasm among Sunday Magazine Section reporters, and really quite a stir in the country at large " (The Egoist, 137). With such strong reactions, Loy's reputation as a radical, futurist writer long preceded her arrival in America.

In 1916, Loy left her children with a nanny in Florence and moved to New York, hoping to make enough money designing clothes, magazine covers and theater sets to bring them over as soon as possible. She quickly fell in with the circle of avant-garde artists that frequented Walter Arsenberg's
gatherings, including Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Frances Picabia and the Baroness Else von Freytag-Loringhoven—artist's model, poet and dadaist performer who used her own body as her stage. 2. Loy helped Duchamp publish two issues of _The Blind Man_ after judges rejected his ready-made sculpture of a urinal from the New York Independents Exhibition of 1917. Her piece "O Marcel...Otherwise I Also Have Been to Louise's" helped set the tone of the magazine with its dislocated language and fragments of conversation that captured the feel of their salon gatherings. Loy also met regularly with writers at the Kreymborgs' home in Greenwich Village. Stevens occasionally came down from Hartford, and Williams drove up from Rutherford. In his Prologue to _Kora in Hell_, Williams divided up the psychic landscape of New York's avant-garde into the "Dionysian South of Mina Loy and the fastidious North of Marianne Moore" (qtd. in Dictionary of Literary Biography). Conover notes that Williams, "stung by Moore's barbs and annoyed by her 'mother thing,' kept his distance from her as best he could. With Loy he was infatuated" (notes to _The Last Lunar Baedeker_, xli).

Kreymborg convinced Williams to perform in his one act play, "Lima Beans," by casting Loy as the wife--and of course Williams got to kiss her.

Although many of the artists and writers in America fell in love with Loy, only Arthur Craven—poet, dadaist boxer and self-proclaimed nephew of Oscar Wilde—captured her heart. Craven had come to America from Paris where he published his own insolent journal, _Maintenant_, distributing it in a wheelbarrow. He took pride in insulting important avant-garde artists, goading Apollinaire into challenging him to a duel, which was only cancelled after Craven offered "hypocritical excuses" (qtd. in Burke, 236). In America, Craven's arrogant nerve attracted Loy. After courting for a short while, he convinced her to join him in Mexico where he planned to wait out the war.
Their happiness ended when he supposedly drowned in a home-repaired boat, leaving Loy pregnant again and penniless. Neither the boat nor his body were ever found. Heartbroken, Loy never gave up looking for her husband. When asked by The Little Review in 1929 what the happiest moment of her life had been, Loy responded, "Every moment spent with Arthur Craven"--the unhappiest being "the rest of the time" (Conover's notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, lx).

When Loy returned to Florence to give birth to her daughter Fabienne (naming the girl after her father whose real name was Fabian Avenarius Lloyd), she found that Stephen had kidnapped their son, Giles, and sold the house without her permission—pocketing the money. Sadly, Giles died in 1923 before she had a chance to see him again. Once again, Loy left the children with their nanny and set off for New York to make money and search for Craven. The once dazzlingly brilliant city seemed somehow provincial and small to Loy on her return. The Little Review trial, labelling the Gerty McDowell section of Ulysses as pornographic, had just taken place. The judge fined editors Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, ordering them to stop publishing Joyce's novel. From Loy's old circle of friends, only Duchamp and Man Ray still remained in New York, but Loy found she had little time for their antics. She became a self-promoter of her own work and sent her writing off to a number of journals. Robert McAlmon featured "O Hell" in his inaugural issue of Contact, Kreymborg included "The Dead" in his 1919 Others Anthology, The Dial published three poems, "Mexican Desert," "Perlun," and "Poe," as well as her short play "The Pamperers," and The Little Review accepted her pamphlet "Psycho-Democracy" for publication.

Depressed by her fruitless search for Craven, Loy returned to Europe in 1921 where Man Ray, Duchamp, Joyce, Picasso, Pound and Stein had already
taken up residence in Paris. After a short stint in Florence to collect her children and a summer in Austria where she met with Freud and sketched his portrait, Loy joined the group of expatriate writers in Montparnassus. Continuing her friendship with a young writer she knew from Greenwich Village, Djuna Barnes, Loy eventually rented an apartment in her building. Barnes introduced Loy to Natalie Barney's famous *Academie des femmes* salon gatherings for lesbians and female artists where Loy soon became known as the token heterosexual. Barnes characterized Loy in her satirical book about the salon, *Ladies Almanac*, as Patience Scalpel—a woman with a cutting wit who "belongs to this Almanack for one Reason only, that from Beginning to End, Top to Bottom, inside and out, she could not understand Women and their Ways" (qtd in Burke, 363). Although friends with Barnes and Barney, Loy remained aloof from their community of women artists.

The one woman Loy seemed to "understand" was Gertrude Stein. The intellectual attraction went both ways, with Stein referring to Loy in her *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* as able to understand her work "without the commas. She has always been able to understand" (162). Loy introduced Stein's lecture at the *Academie 3.*, claiming Stein "doesn't use words in order to present a subject; instead, she uses a fluid subject around which her words float" (qtd. in Burke, *Without Commas*, 48). Much like the futurists' challenge to the linearity of language with their use of dynamic type and collage techniques, Stein's new "fluid" approach to writing subverted the expectation of logic—creating a whole new sense of time and space in language. In her poem, "Gertrude Stein," Loy describes Stein as an innovator, comparing her verbal experiments to Marie Curie's ground-breaking and extremely powerful work with radioactivity:

Curie
of the laboratory
of vocabulary
she crushed
the tonnage
of consciousness
congealed to phrases
to extract
a radium of the word.

The "word," according to Stein, can only become new when separated from conventional expectations of language. "Phrases" have the "tonnage of consciousness/congealed" to them; therefore, language must be reinvented in order to subvert its burden of dead meanings. Seemingly simple, the beauty of this discovery--like the discovery of radium--had immensely powerful consequences. One led to the atom bomb and the other led to an explosion (of a much more benign nature) in consciousness.

In 1922 and 1923 Loy prospered artistically. The Dial published "Apology of Genius," a poem based on Joyce's experience with censorship, and then included "Brancusi's Golden Bird" in its Waste Land issue. The Little Review published the first two parts of Loy's long autobiographical poem, "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," which was later published in its entirety by Robert McAlmon's Contact Press. Contact also published Loy's first book, Lunar Baedecker (with a spelling error in the title), along with books by Marsden Hartley, William Carlos Williams and Ernest Hemingway. Throughout Loy's lunar travel guide she makes reference to artistic geniuses, featuring poems on James Joyce, Wyndham Lewis and Constantin Bancusi. In "Apology of Genius," she describes geniuses (herself included) as aliens among common people, "Lepers of the moon . . . innocent/of our luminous
sores." Using humorous, self-mocking language, Loy reinvigorates the clichéd notion of geniuses with such terms as "sacerdotal clowns." Opening with, "Ostracized as we are with God," Loy subverts linguistic expectations by substituting the preposition "with" for "from," offering a double meaning of being both banished away from God and separated from others with God. Loy captures both the beauty and difficulty of the genius life, elevating artists to god-like (although persecuted) status—and for good reason. Still labelled a pornographer in America from her 1915 publication of "Love Songs," Loy had over a third of her books confiscated by customs officials at the New York Harbor docks.

In his 1926 review, Yvor Winters describes Loy's poems as "images that have frozen into epigrams," suggesting they be handled like "spectacular" beads on a frayed rosary (498). Although Winters classified Loy as a "genius...one of the two living poets [Williams being the other] who have the most, perhaps, to offer the younger American writers" (499), Loy had to divide her attention between writing, mothering and making money. Having difficulties supporting her children, Loy (with the financial help of Peggy Guggenheim) opened a lampshade business--marketing inventions pieced together from materials she found at flea markets. Unable to keep up with orders and besieged by legal battles over copyright infringement, the business eventually folded. Once at the center of Paris avant-garde life, Loy became a recluse, suffering from frequent nervous breakdowns. When her eldest daughter Joella married an art dealer, Julien Levy, and moved to New York, Loy received a stipend from Levy to scout out interesting surrealist art. Having developed a deep friendship with a German surrealist painter (Richard Oelze), she wrote a novel--Insel--based on their relationship. While focusing on prose and returning to painting, Loy set poetry aside for awhile.
Between 1926 and 1931 she only published two poems: "The Widow's Jazz" and "Lady Laura in Bohemia."

In 1935, with Hitler stirring up anti-Jewish sentiments in Europe, Loy sent her daughter Fabi to live with Joella and Julien in New York, following soon after. New York seemed fast-paced and unmanageable to her. Attempting to make a living off inventions she could not sell or protect from being reproduced (ie: knitting needles with inch markings, a magnetic alphabet game and a baby doll that cried real tears), Loy eventually accepted her poverty. She moved to the Bowery district where her interactions with street people inspired new poems and a series of delicate collage portraits made out of the garbage she collected on the streets. In her long poem "Hot Cross Bum," written in 1949 and published in James Laughlin's *New Directions in Prose & Poetry* in 1950, Loy retains all of the playful wit of her earlier work:

Collecting refuse more profuse than man
the City's circulatory
sanitary apostles
a-leap to ash-cans
apply their profane ritual
to offal

Dust to dust

Even a putrescent Galaxy
could not be left where it lay
to disgust
Scrapped are remains
empty can remain.

Accentuating the material nature of language, Loy creates a new type of meaning by focusing first on sound. Loy calls street people who search in garbage cans for food "the City's circulatory/sanitary apostles/a-leap to ash-cans." The alliterative terminology offers an odd angelic view of dumpster diving. As in the urinating passage in "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose," Loy here deflates the poetic tradition of end rhyme by using it in reference to garbage: "man" and "ash-cans," "apostles" and "offal," "dust" and "disgust." Loy makes reference to the sacred and profane in each rhyme, a pattern accentuated throughout the passage above with word combinations like "sanitary apostles," "profane ritual," and "putrescent galaxy." Her biblical reference of "dust to dust" adds gravity to the poem. Although on the surface Loy describes the street people's dirty forays with humor, the tragic consequences of unsuccessfully locating food provide an emotional ballast to her cerebral word play. Loy encourages readers to work toward a serious understanding of the poem by leaving small puzzles to decipher—odd lines like "Scrapped are remains/empty can remain." The repetition of "remains"/"remain" calls attention to itself, especially when "can" seems to refer to a trash can after it has been picked clean. By using the subjunctive tense, Loy forces her readers to look beyond the physical world of trash to the internal world of the street people's hunger. Even after cleaning out a garbage can, the emptiness of hunger "can remain." The street people, who pick through society's waste, offer as much salvation as the "passing church/or social worker" who brings them "hot cross buns." With her punning title, "Hot cross Bum," the street people become christ-like figures,
both in terms of being crucified ("cross") and in terms of their comparison to food (the body of Christ during communion).

In her old age, Loy felt more in common with street people and the cast off members of society than the elite groups of artists she used to socialize with. Joella and Fabi relocated Loy when she turned seventy to their new home town of Aspen, Colorado. In 1957, Jonathon Williams with Jargon Society Press sought Loy out to ask permission to republish *Lunar Baedecker* along with newer poems. She agreed and helped correct many of the typographical errors in the 1923 text. *Lunar Baedeker & Time Tables* came out in 1958 with glowing introductions by Denise Levertov, Kenneth Rexroth and William Carlos Williams, as well as short "testimonies" from Henry Miller, Edward Dahlberg, Walter Lowenfels, Alfred Kreymborg and Louis Zukofsky. Unfortunately the re-publication of Loy's poetry attracted absolutely no critical attention at the time. When Williams complained to Loy, she wrote back with the advice to, "Change from *Persona Non Grata* to Persona Good Grinner" (qtd. in Williams, *Nation*).

At the time she had much to be thankful for: Along with the publication of *Lunar Baedeker & Time Tables*, she had her first one-woman show in New York. Joseph Cornell took interest in her "Refusees" collages made out of garbage and helped preserve them in her New York apartment (which she left in 1953 on what she then assumed was just a visit to Aspen). Her old friend Duchamp arranged for a show at the Bodley Gallery where her pieces sold for two thousand dollars each. At the age of 76, Loy received her first substantial payment for artistic work. Within a few years, more recognition came her way when two short articles about her poetry appeared in literary journals and the Copley Foundation acknowledged her with an Outstanding Achievement in Art Award.
In 1965 Jonathon Williams returned with Robert Creeley and Paul Blackburn to interview Loy a year before her death. Describing her poetics, she said, "I suppose I sounded as if I were rather pugnacious...I wasn't at all...I'd only written these things for the sake of the sounds" (qtd. in Burke, 437). Fortunately the "sounds" of Mina Loy have survived, despite the many years of neglect. Except for Kenneth Fields' 1967 Ph.D. dissertation 6., no other critics published serious work on Loy's poetry until Virginia Kouidis wrote her book-length critical study in 1980, *Mina Loy: American Modernist*. Loy's poetry appeared in four anthologies during the 1970's 7., but it was not until 1982 when Roger Conover edited a new, expanded edition of Loy's poetry and prose—including extensive biographical notes—that readers truly had access to her work. After *The Last Lunar Baedeker* went out of print with Jargon Society Press, Conover edited a shorter collection of Loy's writings for Farrar, Straus and Giroux, leaving out "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" because of space limitations. In the spirit of Loy's verbal play, Conover titled this newest edition *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. Although critics published a few strong pieces on Loy in the 1980's and early 90's prior to the 1996 Farrar, Straus and Giroux publications 7., scholarly work on Loy will no doubt flourish now that she has received recognition from a larger press. Farrar, Straus and Giroux's willingness to publish Loy suggests a capitalistic gamble on her increasing popularity—and just as Yvor Winters predicted, a whole new generation of readers will no doubt respond to Loy: "This suggested development is not a call to salvation, nor even a dogmatic prediction, but simply a speculation. If it materializes, Emily Dickinson will have been its only forerunner" (499).
Footnotes

1. Loy sent her Feminist Manifesto in a letter to her friend Mabel Dodge. It was not published during her lifetime.
2. For more information about this fascinating personality, see Nelson, 71-73.
3. Loy published an essay on Stein's poetics in the Transatlantic Review in 1924.
4. Loy's suggestion to "wear as helmet: a smile" recalls her 1919 pamphlet Auto-Facial-Construction and her Christian Science beliefs.
8. Carolyn Burke published a number of useful articles on Loy before completing her critical biography in 1996. Roger Conover's notes to The Lost Lunar Beadeker offer excellent readings of the poems. Other work on Loy has been written by Elizabeth Arnold, Jane Augustine, Maria Bennett, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Thom Gunn, Anita Plath Helle, Constance Hunting, Marisa
Chapter 2
The Gender Politics of Canonization

Her utter absence from all canonical lists is one of modern literary history's most perplexing data—Hugh Kenner, "To Be the Brancusi of Poetry," New York Times Book Review, May 16, 1982.

As the small literary journals and presses which published modernist writing disappeared in the 1930's due to the Depression and a shortage of funds for the arts, the thriving diversity of poetry declined. Mina Loy had never needed praise from more traditional journals like Monroe's Poetry because she found recognition in her own vibrant circles, but these dynamic groups of artists and their creative outlets disappeared as the capital which funded them dried up. Concurrently, much of the decision-making as to whose poems would be read and whose would not took place in academia. Professors, mostly white and male, chose the literary material to teach in their classrooms. Acting as critics, these same men wrote articles and composed anthologies, effectively narrowing the scope of modernist poetry being read. Those who had the greatest influence on this process believed they were applying objective standards of excellence, but as Paul Lauter suggests in his essay "Race and Gender in the Shaping of American Canon," decisions about the canon were shaped by the specific backgrounds and biases of critics, professors and scholars.

Revisionary feminist critics side with Lauter in claiming this sexist canonization process excluded many once well-known female modernist writers. Loy, who foregrounded her femininity with her frankly sexual subject matter and her openly provocative manners, was excluded from the male-centered canon. Oddly enough, some feminists have continued to
exclude Loy from the new woman-centered canonical lists. Loy's intellectual aesthetic and bitingly satiric style along with her self-assurance and independent thinking on issues of women's rights do not fit essentialist models of womanhood. In 1953 Margaret Anderson made the decision to leave Loy out of her retrospective *Little Review* Anthology, quoting Jane Heap's "INTELLECTUAL POETRY IS NOT POETRY!" to explain why. Avant-garde female poets with similar experimental and "intellectual" aesthetics as Loy's but who challenged the status quo of gender through their sexual orientation (such as Djuna Barnes, H.D. and Gertrude Stein) were embraced with open arms by revisionary feminist critics. Loy's heterosexuality and individuality, her choice to "[run] with the 'rough-necks'" (Odlin, 57) like Marinetti and Duchamp rather than align herself more formally with women's groups such as Barney's salon in Paris, or the suffragettes, has caused her to be over-looked by those who want to define female modernist writers in terms of "women's communities." 2.

Not only has Loy's poetry been excluded by the editors of the *Norton Anthology of Poetry* and the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* (which for all intents and purposes serve as the physical forms of canonization) 3. her radical Feminist Manifesto and writings on woman-centered topics have been neglected by the more recently compiled *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* (1985). Although editors Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar mention Loy in their introduction to Djuna Barnes, they exclude her actual work. Their omission of Loy appears to be a conscious choice, not an over-sight. As with most anthologies, Gilbert and Gubar claim in their preface that their selections were made according to "merit." Although they apologize for leaving work out, they suggest that the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women* "will, at the very least, suggest the contours of the canon into which
readers will be able to assimilate the works of many other women authors" (xxx). Giving mixed messages about canonization, Gilbert and Gubar claim objectivity in their selection process while naively suggesting their choices should not be viewed as exclusionary.

Kenneth Rexroth's suggestion that critics and scholars have ignored Loy because of her "exceptionalism" defines Loy as both an exceptional writer and an exception to the norm. Canonization puts writers and their work into categories, but Loy refuses easy classification. Critics have listed a number of reasons for her possible exclusion from the canon, almost always calling attention to her extremeness: Loy was too beautiful, too intellectual, too charming, too talented, too honest, too difficult, too versatile—or-too lazy, too temperamental, too extremely "other," too naive, too ill-behaved. I personally place emphasis on Loy's complicated challenge of prescribed gender roles (both in her life and her writing) as the primary reason for her exclusion from the modernist canon. No doubt other influences have come into play--such as where she lived, the means of production of her work, her financial status, her exploration of multiple art forms and her experimental style--but even these factors have a tangential relationship to gender, as I will show.

Loy's ambiguous nationality--English by birth, naturalized citizen of the United States, long-time resident of Italy and France--causes confusion with anthologizers. Although Pound had no problem designating Loy as an American (even before she set foot on American soil), 4. other critics of the time were more reticent to embrace her as an American. Anthologies like The New Era in American Poetry (1919) by Louis Untermeyer and The American Way of Poetry (1943) by Henry Wells excluded Loy's work. Perhaps her exclusion has more to do with stylistic reasons, though, since
Kreymborg's more experimental history of American poetry, *Our Singing Strength* (1929), extended American citizenship to Loy. The difficulty of assigning Loy a homeland, however, was certainly not a factor in her exclusion from Gilbert and Gubar's 1985 revisionary feminist canon. In their introduction, they claim to include writings by all different types of English-speaking women, regardless of nationality.

Neither could the relative "unavailability" of Loy's work have been a serious factor in Gilbert and Gubar's decision. Their Norton anthology offers a wide selection of poems by currently obscure modernist poets like Anna Wickman, Elinor Wylie and Louise Bogan. They even makes apologies for not obtaining the rights to publish Laura Riding. The limited availability of a writer, due to her publishing with small presses or currently defunct journals, seems to have had little impact on revisionary feminist critics who have shown a tenacious willingness to research marginalized writers.

Oddly enough, Loy's multiple talents also work against her in the canonization process. Instead of praising Loy as a Renaissance woman, Mark Ford, in his review of *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* and *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*, derides Loy's "dilettantish approach to the various arts that appealed to her--she was not only a poet, but a painter, a collagiste, a novelist and a commercially successful designer of lampshades--[which] makes assessing her work a hazardous business" (38). Loy's diverse abilities illuminates flaws in the canon's system of singular classification. Instead of recognizing these flaws, though, Ford blames Loy for not fitting in correctly. His description of Loy as a "dilettante," when she achieved remarkable success as both a poet and artist during her lifetime, rings of chauvinism. Even Virginia Kouidis, in her book *Mina Loy: American Modernist* (1980), claims Loy lacked "discipline" and that she saw poetry as "a handmaiden to
the business of living" (137-138). Loy's financial status seems connected to this perception that she lacked focus. As a woman, Loy did not inherit wealth; the money her father sent went directly to her husband. When Stephen Haweis sold their house in Florence, he legally pocketed the profits. Forced to support herself and her children on her own, Loy crossed her artistic talents with commercial ventures. She wrote the pamphlet "Auto-Facial-Construction" (1919) as an advertisement for classes in Christian Science methodology. Because she did not have a stable source of income, Loy creatively combined her art with money-making ventures. For this reason Helen Vendler calls her

a child-woman, unwilling or unable to assume responsibility for herself, let alone her young children, whom she left in the care of servants (going so far as not to see two of her children at all for three years). She makes an uneasy heroine for feminists, especially compared with the many women of the same period who, with far fewer resources and less education than Loy, succeeded in making lives for themselves and their children.

(57)

To criticize Loy's method of supporting herself and raising her children rather than critiquing the writing and artwork she produced at this time (some of it commercial in nature) seems, once again, gender specific. Critics deride her for mixing art with business, complaining she did not take her artistic work seriously, but they also blame her for failing to support her children adequately. Vendler falls into the trap of applying stereotypical standards of gender--looking at her actions as a mother first, artist second.

When examining Loy's experimental style, gender again plays a significant role in her exclusion from the modernist canon. Loy's intellectual
approach to writing should have fulfilled requirements for inclusion in the "male" modernist canon. Loy herself claimed she had "a fundamental masculine conceit that ascribe[d] lack of appreciation of [her] work to want of perspicacity in the observer" (told to Carl Van Vechten in 1914—Conover, notes to The Last Lunar Baedeker, xvi). In his review of the 1917 Others Anthology, Pound invented a new term to describe Loy's and Moore's work: "logopoeia" or "poetry that is akin to nothing but language, which is a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas" (The Little Review). Pound viewed Loy and Moore as having similar intellectual styles, but he claimed that "in the verse of Marianne Moore I detect traces of emotion; in that of Mina Loy I detect no emotion whatever." Pound, who had a passion for intellectual poetry, meant his remark as a compliment. He claimed Loy's and Moore's work was "a mind cry, more than a heart cry." But, even after attributing a strong degree of intelligence to their poetry and praising their style as "unsentimental," Pound refers to the female writers as "girls"—a term which not only emphasizes their gender but implies a lack of respect for their age and status as writers.

Harold Loeb, another male critic and writer who admired Loy's experimental style, treated her (and women in general) in a derogatory manner. Loeb traveled to Europe from the United States in the 1920's to solicit work for a new literary journal called Broom. In his book The Way it Was, Loeb describes a party at which he felt

impressed by the size of the women: all of them except Hadley were exceptionally tall. Jo Bennett, Zelda Fitzgerald, Mina Loy, and Duff Twitchell must have been over five foot seven; and Jo's daughter, Kate Bennett, stood at least six feet in her stockings. It was all a bit intimidating; I had another drink. (248)
For Loeb, not just female writers but "tall" women evoked feelings of intimidation. At another party, alcohol once again gave him the ability to cope with his fears: "The women momentarily became indistinguishable, regardless of my real likes and dislikes. The men were my friends, even the queer ones" (193). It appears Loeb felt uneasy with homosexual men as well as women, but when drunk he became "friends" with the "queer" men—getting to know them better—whereas the women had to lose their identity altogether for him to feel comfortable. Even with Loeb’s flagrant sexism, he considered Loy a powerful poet at the center of the modernist tradition, claiming, "No longer was there novelty in publishing T.S. Eliot or James Joyce, Mina Loy or Marianne Moore. Ezra Pound had succeeded in making the 'imagists' respectable."

Clearly the criteria for acceptance or rejection by the creators of the male-centered modernist canon cannot simply be reduced to gender. If so, Marianne Moore would never have made the list. While Moore explored her experimental style with relatively unthreatening, nongender-specific subjects, Loy wrote about child birth and erotic love from a woman’s point of view, criticizing social concepts of virginity. Loy claimed Moore wrote "amusingly" and had composed "at least one perfect poem," but her writing "suggest[ed] the soliloquies of a library clock" ("Modern Poetry," The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 16). In a letter to Moore in 1921, Pound asks: "is there anyone in America besides you, Bill [William Carlos Williams], and Mina Loy who can write anything of interest in verse?" (qtd. in Conover’s notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, xxviii). Both Pound and Eliot praised Moore’s and Loy’s poetry—with Eliot favoring Moore and Pound leaning toward Loy. The close comparison of their work often led to a comparison of their lives. Williams claimed Moore was in awe "of Mina's long-legged charms" (The
Autobiography of William Carlos Williams, 126). Moore, a reserved woman with carrot-orange hair, lived alone with her mother while Loy advocated "free love"—often practicing what she preached. Loy's actions, her looks and her poetry all called attention to her gender, whereas Moore's did not.

Time after time the memoirs of her contemporaries refer to Loy as charming and beautiful. Harriet Monroe, editor of Poetry, strongly disliked Loy's writing style, relegating her to the position of "extreme otherist," but upon meeting her in Paris in 1923 she found Loy "too beautiful for description...Poetry is in this lady whether she writes it or not" (Conover's notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, xx). Monroe, unwilling to call Loy a poet, described her as an example of living poetry. The stereotype that women could enact poetry, but not write it (unless they somehow made themselves and the content of their poems asexual like Moore had done), put Loy at the extreme margins of the male-centered modernist canon.

As John Crowe Ransom states in his 1937 essay "Poet as Woman," any woman who foregrounds her femininity "fascinates the male reviewer but at the same time horrifies him a little too. He will probably swing between attachment and antipathy, which may be the very attitudes provoked in him by generic woman in the flesh" (76-77). Ransom's description of critics fluctuating between "attachment and antipathy" suited many of Loy's reviewers who described her work in terms of extremes. Critics have found Loy to be either too ethereal and "clean" or too pornographic. Henry Miller in his testimony to Lunar Baedeker & Time Tables calls Loy "An interplanetary voice whose subtle vibrations only faintly pierce our smug-laden atmosphere." William Carlos Williams claims, "When she puts a word down on paper it is clean; that forces her fellows to shy away from it because they are not clean and will be contaminated by her cleanliness." At the
opposite extreme Louis Untemeyer in his 1923 critique of modern poetry
describes Loy's work as "eroticism gone to seed" (qtd. in Burke, 195).
Responding specifically to her poem "Joyce's Ulysses" where she uses the
words "Libido" and "phallus," Untemeyer claimed Loy was the sort of new
woman who "having studied Freud, began to exhibit [her] inhibitions and
learned to misquote Havelock Ellis at a moment's notice" (ibid). Meanwhile,
Conrad Aiken in his 1919 review of Others found Loy's poetry to be full of
"gelatinous quiverings" (qtd. in Conover's notes, The Lost Lunar Baedeker,
185), like the rolling flesh of an uncorsetted woman. He suggested that
readers "pass lightly over... Mina Loy" to the "manly metres" of Eliot and
Stevens. Whereas Eliot praised Loy's work 7., he once said in another
context, "Intellectual women are even less interesting than ordinary sluts"
(qtd. in Conover's notes, The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 205). The extreme sexism
of this remark shows Eliot's inability to accept Loy as his artistic equal,
regardless of his reactions to the content of her poems.

Although Gilbert and Gubar, the revisionary feminist canonizers, do
not call Loy's work "pornographic," they seem to agree with Vendler that Loy
is the wrong kind of feminist. "Loy's frequently appalling irresponsibility
toward her children" (Vendler, 59) and her--possibly misunderstood--anti-
suffragist/anti-equality of the sexes message make her "an uneasy heroine"
(Vendler, 57). As Loy prophesied in her Feminist Manifesto, women have
"the choice between parasitism, & prostitution--or negation." Since Loy does
not live and write according to Gilbert and Gubar's rules of womanhood, she
is negated by them.

Influential canon-makers often feel the need to protect the illusion that
canonization is an objective process, that excellence prevails independent of
individual biases. 8. Early in Vendler's review she acknowledges her
personal role in judging Loy, qualifying her judgment of Loy with the phrase, "in my view" (57). By the middle of her piece, though, Vendler speaks with the assurance of objective authority, calling Loy "an associate, hanger-on . . . part of the general ferment out of which greater Modernist poems came into being" (59). She relegates Loy to the realm of cultural history, refusing to see her work as "lasting" literature. "After all," Vendler insists, "nothing of Loy's equals 'The Waste Land' or 'An Octopus' or 'The Snow Man' or 'Home Burial'" (59). Vendler senses that if she were to acknowledge Loy's work as having literary merit, the supremacy of Eliot, Moore, Stevens and Frost would be called into question. Refusing to acknowledge her own biases against experimental, woman-centered poetry, Vendler searches for supposedly objective reasons for excluding Loy from the modernist canon. She claims, "Perhaps it does not matter whether Loy is great or not; her oeuvre is small"—contradicting her earlier statement that Loy has "a sizeable body" of poetry and prose. Also, Vendler judges the formal qualities of Loy's poetry by traditional, non-modernist values, assuming her criteria should be used as objective standards of excellence. She derides Loy for her repetition of sounds, her use of abstractions and epigrams, her "jagged rhythms," the use of short lines and her "Steinian attachment to 'naive' word arrangements" (60). By putting quotation marks around "naive," Vendler pretends the word and its built-in biases come from someone else—some unnamed, universal critic. Her critique of Loy's "jagged rhythms, affronting the expectation of regularity and musicality in utterance," suggests Vendler's discomfort with dissonance—a common modernist technique that presents language and sound in new patterns. When she notes that "Loy avoid[s] the usual English norm of tetrameter or pentameter," Vendler simply
demonstrates her preference for traditional form over experimental verse. Her confident tone, though, suggests the weight of objective authority.

Hugh Kenner, a modernist critic who has the ability to appreciate experimental poetry, seems baffled in his review of The Last Lunar Baedeker by Loy's "utter absence from all canonical lists." Like Vendler, Kenner refuses to acknowledge his own participation in the canonization process that has excluded Loy. In The Pound Era, his influential book on modernism, Kenner does not mention Loy. Two years later in his 1984 essay "The Making of the Modernist Canon," he credits himself with shaping the experimental modernist canon, yet Loy's exclusion from this canon continues to surprise him. Mark Ford, the critic reviewing The Lost Lunar Baedeker in 1997, also finds it "strange that ['Love Songs'] this tour de force of intelligence and sophistication, of sexual directness and spiraling self-consciousness, is still absent from most anthologies of modernist poetry" (39). Ford forgets that reviews influence reading trends and the process of anthologizing. Besides a fondness for "Love Songs," Ford has little positive to say about Loy. He derides her for her "capricious poetics," claiming "her relentless internal rhymes and intensive use of alliteration and assonance suggest that it is only some haphazard, ineffable acoustic pattern that holds each poem together" (38). Unfortunately, the only other critic to publish a lengthy review of Loy's latest collection was Vendler. Without more positive attention to Loy's work, The Lost Lunar Beadeker may remain "lost."

In her article on Loy, "The Truth Teller," Vendler defines Loy's primary purpose as "savage truth-telling—about family life, about sex and giving birth, about one's face in the mirror" (59). The term "savage" implies uncivilized or uncouth behavior. Offering a backhanded compliment, Vendler distinguishes Loy from sentimental women writers: "All the truth-
telling in the world doesn't make a poem, but it's certainly better to write
with the intention of blasting through genteel cliche, as Loy did, than to echo
the politeness of enervated female verse" (59). The oddest of Vendler's
complaints, though, is her disdain for Loy's "inclusion of domestic decor,"
quoting from "Parturition": "Each woman-of-the-people/Tip-toeing the red
pile of carpet/Doing hushed service"(60). With this remark, Vendler
denigrates the everyday world of women as trivial and unworthy of poetry--
certainly not "universal." Whether writing about sex or carpets, Loy's
experimental form and gender-based content does not sit well with Vendler.

Conover observes that critics who have responded positively to Loy's
work often feel she has been neglected because of her difficulty. "She wears
their label--DIFFICULT POET--like a parasalenic halo around her head. . .
Textual difficulty in fact has very little to do with Mina Loy's not being
understood" (notes to The Last Lunar Baedeker, xxxii). Instead of her
difficulty, Conover provides gender-based reasons for Loy's obscurity--
remarking upon her "seductive charm and physical beauty on the one hand
and psychological distance and indifference on the other. . . precisely the
factors . . . of the Femme Fatale Complex" (xxxii). Instead of questioning the
legitimacy of stereotypical gender-based value judgments, Conover (like so
many others) blames Loy for her own exclusion from the canon--claiming
"the major reasons for her obscurity today are self-imposed" (xxxii). Fourteen
years later, after taking a beating by post-feminist critics, 9. Conover has
altered his tune in The Lost Lunar Baedeker. Instead of blaming Loy for her
own neglect, he calls attention to the society which has judged her: "America
. . . the land of gender" (xiv).

Anointed with a variety of titles--"interplanetary voice," "child-
woman," "femme fatale," "savage truth teller," "pornographer," "rough-
Loy has been vilified and valorized by critics, but most of all she has been defined according to gender-based values. Left out of the canon by sexist males and essentialist females, Loy failed to secure a place in the writers' hall of fame before today's traditionalist critics closed the entrance, hoping to protect their fragile house. Caught in the slamming door, Loy's continued presence stains the outdated notion of objective canonization. Like the alien creature that keeps coming back to life, Mina Loy's "last," "lost," "lunar" poetry continues to haunt the critics who doom her to die.
Footnotes

1. "It's easy to fantasize those Big Male Omnivores of the modernist generation--Pound, Williams, Stevens, Joyce and Eliot--edging the women out of the picture. But only a little research makes it clear that the first three decades of the 20th century came as close to anything on record for equal participation by women and men in the innovative writing of an era. Look at the pages of The Dial, The Little Review, Poetry (and remember that these magazines were edited by women!), Transatlantic Review, Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers and transition: not only do the women appear as frequently as the men, but the whole context makes it obvious that there was nothing perfunctory or 'representative' about their presence. They were essential" (Rasula, 161).


3. See Golding, 3-40.

4. In his review of the 1917 Other's Anthology, Pound claims it "gives . . . the first adequate presentation of Mina Loy and Marianne Moore, who have, without exaggerated 'nationalism,' without waving of banners and general phrases about Columbia gem of the ocean, succeeded in, or fallen into, producing something distinctly American in quality, not merely distinguishable as Americans by reason of current national faults" (56-57).

5. It is interesting to note that Williams was not only a poet, but an amateur painter, a novelist, a literary historian, and a full-time financially successful doctor, though assessing his work has never seemed a "hazardous business."

7. More influenced by Loy than he admitted, there has been speculation that Eliot based his tarot imagery in *The Waste Land* on Loy's poem "At the Door of the House" (Conover's notes, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, 185).

8. See Golding, 17.

Chapter 3
Love—the Preeminent Litterateur

After the 1915 riot over "Love Songs," Carl Van Vechten suggested to Loy that she write "something without a sexual undercurrent." Her response was, "I know nothing but life—and that is generally reducible to sex."

Fluctuating between biting satire and vibrant cosmic verse, Loy brings the opposite views of love—romantic fantasy and disillusionment—together in her poetry. Beginning with a passage from "Lunar Baedeker," I explore Loy's meditations on love in relation to her experimental form, focusing on her foregrounding of the material nature of language and her relentless fascination with sound as methods of developing meaning. In this critical study of Loy's poetry, I valorize her radical feminist stance and her frank treatment of issues relating to gender and sexuality by exploring the collage techniques of "Parturition"; the satiric passages about futurists from the poems "Effectual Marriage," "Lion's Jaws," "Giovanni Franchi," and "Sketch of a Man on a Platform"; and the deeply romantic and ironic sequence which earned Loy the title of "pornographer": "Love Songs."

Unhappy with the world given to her, Loy created her own universe. In her first book, Lunar Baedeker [sic], Loy proposes to explore the cosmos with her "travel guide to the moon" rather than the expected tourist attractions of a famous city. Destabilizing her reader's familiarity with the English language, Loy characteristically uses difficult, latinate, archaic and foreign vocabulary. Even her publisher, Robert McAlmon, misspelled the uncommon word "baedeker" in the title of her book. Loy's unique use of alliteration and assonance, as in the following passage from "Lunar Baedeker":

Onyx-eyed Odalisques
and ornithologists
observe
the flight
of Eros obsolete

adds to the alien quality of her language. Although written in English, the passage feels as if it belongs to another world, the land of O. The very act of deciphering Loy's vocabulary alters normal expectations of space and time. After turning to the dictionary, my piecemeal translation reads: female slaves with crystal-colored eyes and the studiers of birds watch love, which no longer seems viable, fly. Loy undercuts the odd romanticism of this statement by subjecting her words to the rigors of alliteration. Meaning becomes subordinated to sound. Like Stein, her verbal play falls more on the cutting edge of satirical, self-referential post-modernism than the impersonal, high irony of modernism.

Ahead of her time, Loy's "Parturition" (1914) was the first poem to discuss the physical experience of child birth from a parturient woman's point of view (Kouidis). The female speaker encounters a world outside of space and time in the process of giving birth. Loy's stylistic devices serve to distort expected perceptions of reality, reenacting the very intensity of labor. With the opening stanzas, each break offers the reader a brief reprieve, a rhythmic rest similar to the periods between contractions:

I am the centre
Of a circle of pain
Exceeding its boundaries in every direction

The business of the bland sun
Has no affair with me
In my congested cosmos of agony
From which there is no escape
On infinitely prolonged nerve-vibrations
Or in contraction
To the pin-point nucleus of being.

Loy captures the precision of labor pain with short opening lines while demonstrating its all-encompassing power with the longer third line. Bringing opposites together, Loy links small and large elements. The "cosmos," which usually evokes a feeling of vastness, becomes conflated and "congested." Instead of referring to the universe, the cosmos signifies the speaker's own body and the intense "agony" she feels. The precision of a "pin-point nucleus" becomes amorphous when qualified with the term "of being." Perceptions of time alter as the speaker, removed from everyday reality, claims, "The business of the bland sun/Has no affair with me." The sun stereotypically symbolizes the male world of logic and order, but the speaker calls this common world "bland." Like the parturient woman of her poem, Loy feels she exists in a world of greater intensity than most people—reserving access to this heightened state of awareness for "geniuses and women" (qtd. in Burke, 329).

Vividly reenacting the sensation of giving birth,"Parturition" blasts through the expectations of acceptable content as dictated by the male-dominated aesthetic of impersonality. Stylistically Loy recreates the experience of child birth by allowing her words to fold in on themselves, much like the delivering mother's experience of her baby being both inside and outside her own body. Loy works with the words "within" and "without," letting them morph and lose their distinction by the way they are carefully placed on the page:
Locate an irritation without
It is within
Within
It is without
The sensitized area
Is identical with the extensity
Of intension.

The intense repetition of "s," "t" and "i" sounds with "sensitized," "extensity," "identical" and "intension" creates a sound groove, like a tire spinning in a rut. This relentless repetition calls attention to itself, creating an almost painful sensitivity in the reader—much as the parturient woman feels the painful repetition of her contractions. Vendler specifically highlights these lines when critiquing Loy's supposedly capricious repetition of sound, remaining deaf to the profound effect—sensorially as well as mentally—this sound pattern creates.

While the speaker experiences the intense pain of labor, another sound appears on the horizon:

The open window is full of a voice
A fashionable portrait-painter
Running up-stairs to a woman's apartment
Sings
"All the girls are tid'ly did'ly
All the girls are nice
Whether they wear their hair in curls
Or--"

The painter, a reference to Loy's husband Stephen Haweis, exists in a completely different realm. Singing a casual song, the man thinks about sex.
Any "girl," it seems, will do. Never suffering the consequences of intercourse—pregnancy, childbirth or mothering—the only effort the man puts into the procreative act is to run upstairs, while the woman in labor feels as if she is continuously "climbing a distorted mountain of agony." The speaker summarizes her exasperation with the following epigram:

At the back of the thoughts to which I permit crystallization
The conception Brute
Why?

The irresponsibility of the male
Leaves woman her superior Inferiority.

As if too busy with labor to dwell in detail upon the disparity of their situations, the parturient woman strives for simplicity. "Brute" stands out, separated by white space, and then "why?" Perhaps only between contractions does the speaker find the energy to formulate an answer. Her perception, so altered by the process of labor, causes her thoughts to crystallize. Sharply chiselled and brilliant, these words take their form under an intense pressure, carrying Loy's characteristically sarcastic sting.

At the moment of the baby's birth, when the speaker claims the baby "Is no part of myself," Loy's fluctuating line lengths and odd spacings pull together, creating a momentary unified feeling of wholeness:

There is a climax in sensibility
When pain surpassing itself
Becomes Exotic
And the ego succeeds in unifying the positive and negative poles of sensation
Uniting the opposing and resisting forces
In lascivious revelation.
Even Loy's description of child birth becomes sexualized when she describes the "climax in sensibility," the "Exotic" pain, and the "lascivious revelation" of the child finally breaking through the vagina. Vendler, in her review of *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, claims the poem "loses steam" at this point. True to the intense pain and the thankful relief of child birth, Loy portrays both the pre-birth tension and relaxed bliss afterwards:

Relaxation
Negation of myself as a unit
Vacuum interlude
I should have been emptied of life
Giving life.

The poem continues with fairly regularized short lines, as if the womb—emptied of its live cargo—has tightened back down. The emotional content ranges from the speaker's intense experience of negation as the baby, outside of herself, becomes the center of attention to a cosmic feeling of connection with all life and death through her new role of motherhood:

Mother I am
Identical
With infinite Maternity
Indivisible
Acutely
I am absorbed
Into
The was—is—ever—shall---be
Of cosmic reproductivity.

Although Vendler finds this passage "sentimental and fussily mannered," she misses the importance of Loy's use of religious terminology in comparing
motherhood to God. The Gloria Patri ("as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end, amen") informs the seemingly over-the-top sentimentality of "The was—is—ever—shall—be/Of cosmic reproductivity." The irony (or what Vendler calls the "bathos") of the ending:

I once heard in a church
--Man and woman God made them--

Thank God.

transforms the Christian God, the maker of humans, into a female deity. The final line can also be read as an irreverent exclaim. The speaker, exhausted from giving birth to just one baby, seems relieved that God made man and woman.

Mixing extremes of meaning and emotion, Loy’s idea of the "superior Inferiority" of women in "Parturition" reappears in her satirical work on the futurists. Conover states in his textual notes to The Lost Lunar Baedeker that Loy viewed "her first battle in the sex war as both a personal defeat and a moral victory" (188). Wooed by the futurists as the exception to female inferiority, Loy eventually refused this so-called honor. In "The Effectual Marriage: or the Insipid Narrative of Gina and Miovanni,"1. Loy reverses the initial letters of her and Papini’s first names, allowing the poem to serve as a satirization of their relationship. She reduces Gina (Mina) to the simplistic level where the futurists placed women:

In the mornings she dropped
Cool crystals
Through devotional fingers
Saccharine for his cup
And marketed
With a Basket
Trimmed with a red flannel flower
When she was lazy
She wrote a poem on the milk bill
The first strophe Good morning
The second Good night
Something not too difficult to
learn by heart.

In complete contrast to the self-aware narrator of "Parturition," Gina of "The Effectual Marriage" welcomes the daily world of commerce, or the "business of the bland sun," while the man, Miovanni, claims to exist "Outside time and space." The futurists, co-opting female power, fantasized about men giving birth to their own sons. In most of her work about the futurists, Loy parodies this theory of agamogenesis and the subordinate role women play in relationships with men. Divided between sacchrine-like devotion to Miovanni and marketing, Gina labels her own artistic efforts as laziness. Learning to have dinner "appropriately delectable" whenever Miovanni desires, Gina feels the constraints of time in her own life and poetry—her artistic endeavors reduced to "Good morning" and "Good night." Written on the "milk bill," she allows her poetry to be controlled by the stifling powers of the mundane world—just as her female power of lactation is replaced by commercial production. Much like Loy's psychic break from the futurists, the poem ends abruptly with the sudden realization that "the house which inspired it was the home of a mad woman"--the implication being that a person would have to be crazy to live in a world controlled so relentlessly by defined gender roles.

Although Loy critiques both Marinetti and Papini in her poetry, she reserves most of her sarcasm for Papini, calling him the man who
advertises/his ugliness as an excellent aphrodisiac" ("Lion's Jaws"). Still smarting from Papini's termination of their sexual relationship, Loy paints him as a homosexual in love with his adolescent male disciples and his rival Marinetti, or (the worst insult she can think of) an asexual being. Making a sarcastic nod towards the rules against confessional autobiography, Loy turns her work into quasi-fiction by slightly altering the spelling of her and her ex-lover's names. Calling Papini "Bapini" offers absolutely no disguise for him. The fake pseudonym—which sounds like a method for burping a baby—makes him seem ridiculous. The name "Raminetti," on the other hand, sarcastically accentuates Marinetti's virility. In "Lion's Jaws," the "erudite Bapini...kisses Raminetti/full on his oratory." Instead of having the sexual energy of a lover, though, Bapini takes on the role of "eclectic mother-in-law/to the raw menage." While Raminetti "possesses the women of two generations/except a few/who jump the train at the next stop," Bapini attempts to compete with his rival's voracious sexuality by publishing "a pretty comment/involving woman in the plumber's art." Cuckoled by Loy, Bapini's fate is to become "popular in 'Vanity Fair.'" The narrator adopts the tone of a high society woman, claiming, "As for Imna Oly/I agree with Mrs. Krar Standing Hail/She is not quite a lady." 2. By portraying Marinetti and herself as sexually vibrant beings while painting Papini as asexual, Loy casts Papini out of her socially immoral club.

In "Giovanni Franchi," Loy continues to probe the question of Papini's sexuality. Loy uses alliteration and the strong repetition of sounds to create symbolic meaning with letters. The overbearing "f" sound appears first in the "falling ferns" that are "fading" on the "flounces" of the "threewomen" character (which represents Loy). Meanwhile, the "fallacious nobility" of the "freckle[d]" Giovanni Franchi's "first pair of trousers" "flapped friezily" as he
"flicked" his wrists "Flickeringly as he flacked them. . . Infectiously." All this f-ing takes place in Firenze with the "patriotic . . . flags" and "filliping piazzas." The "f" sound connotes an unstated sexuality, as if the four letter "f" word lies beneath Loy's verbal play. "F" also represents female energy, especially in the passage:

All are in Firenze

Firenze is Florence

Some think it is a woman with flowers in her hair

But NO it is a city with stones on the streets.

Loy clarifies that Firenze is a city and not a woman by shifting away from the "f" to the "s" and "t" sounds of "city," "stones" and "street." And again, the softness of the "f" in the "fading," "falling ferns" of the female seems impotent when compared to the rigid "t" transpiring in Giovanni Franchi's "tubular trousers," his "adolescence tuned to the tops of trees." The Threewomen character feels in competition with the adolescent Giovanni Franchi (who because of his youth and adoration of Bapini seems to have feminine characteristics as well as masculine) to find out the number of toes Bapini has on his feet. In other words, who can get Bapini naked and toppled into bed first? When Threewomen finally attracts Bapini's toes, they seem "virginal" to her, "flutter[ing] to her fantasy" as they "Fell into her lap." Before she can count them, though, they leave. Feeling out-witted by Giovanni Franchi, Threewomen tries to attract Bapini with an onslaught of t's: "she tripped by him" on her way "To the trattoria/To eat/Trout that might have been trained for circuses." In the end she realizes "that Giovanni Franchi . . .Knew no more how many toes-------/Than Giovanni Bapini knew himself." It turns out that Threewomen's fears were
unwarranted, for not only is Franchi not counting Bapini's toes, Bapini does not seem know what his "toes" are even for.

Adopting the tone of a sarcastically omniscient narrator, Loy schools the reader with statements like "We have read of/Trattoria meaning eating-house" and "Now the threewomen/For pity's sake/Let us think of her as she to save time." Just as canonization puts boundaries on what can and cannot be said, Loy's narrator censors discussion, sardonically repeating the french phrase meaning old-fashioned: "Tea-table problems for insane asylums/Are démodé/Démodé." By using the haughty tone of authority, Loy pushes the reader around, demanding he or she think one way or another. Strategically turning this technique inside out, Loy's narrator declares, "Let us rely on our instincts," telling the reader to understand intuitively—without being told what to think. On this note the narrator begins to describe the character of Threewomen:

The threewomen was composed of three instincts
Each sniffing divergently directed draughts
The first instinct first again may
renascent gods save us from the enigmatic
penetralia of Firstness
Was to be faithful to a man first
The second to be loyal to herself first
She would have to find which self first
The third which might as well have been first
Was to find out how many toes the
philosopher Giovanni Bapini had first.

The conflation of the Threewomen character calls to mind the Christian mystery of three gods in one. Poking fun at the requirement to understand
the Holy Trinity intuitively, Loy creates her own triumvirate—turning herself into a god of sorts, asking her readers to understand her intuitively. By playing off the word "first," Loy creates a tonal collage that captures double meanings, enacts different emotional registers and disrupts normal perceptions of time and space. Loy's playfully omniscient narrator begins by listing the first of the three instincts which make up the Threewomen character. By using irregular spacing, Loy enacts a tonal shift, allowing the narrator to comment on the process of listing—"first again" seems to be said with a sigh of boredom. The narrator then responds with a sarcastic plea, asking to be saved from the "enigmatic/penetralia of Firstness." Turning Christian mysticism upside down, the three-in-one state now seems normal while "Firstness" appears "enigmatic." When the reader finally hears that being faithful to a man comes first, the idea already feels sexually violated by the "penetralia of Firstness." In other words, faithfulness seems doomed by the very fact that it is the first instinct. When explaining the second instinct, "to be loyal to herself first/she would have to find which self first," Loy confuses the primacy of numerological order with her line breaks. By putting "first" at the end of many of the lines, she lends a double-meaning to the word "first." The third instinct of counting Bapini's toes "might as well have been first" because if she ever got that close to the philosopher she could consider herself in a sexual relationship with him. The final "first" leads the reader into Threewomen's main problem. First she must contend with what appears in the next stanza, the disciple Giovanni Franchi.

Whereas the character representing Loy in "Giovanni Franchi" "sniffles"—"three women was composed of three instincts/Each sniffing divergently directed draughts"—the character representing Marinetti in
"Sketch of a Man on a Platform" "snuffles." Loy sarcastically reduces him to a "projectile nose" that

Has meddled in the more serious business
Of the battle-field
With the same incautious aloofness
Of intense occupation
That it snuffles the trail of the female
And the comfortable
Passing odors of love.

The image of Marinetti's huge sexual nose snuffling out females provides a concrete backdrop for the mysterious "Pig Cupid . . . rooting for erotic garbage" seen in Loy's "Songs to Joannes," which she later called "Love Songs."

Critical reactions to Loy's poetry rests more on this one image of bestial sexuality than any other element of her work, and "Love Songs," officially labelled pornography, epitomizes Loy's flagrant disregard for the gender-inscribed rules of poetry. When the first four poems appeared in the inaugural issue of Others, they created a scandal that earned the journal a "reputation bordering on infamy" (Kreymborg, qtd. in Conover's notes to The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 188). 3. Amy Lowell hated "Love Songs" so much that she insisted on boycotting Others. Although critics applauded Eliot's version of a sexual experience from a woman's point of view in The Wasteland, Loy--an actual woman--was derided for writing about erotic love. 4. Loy's choice to write in a confessional manner, implying the woman participating in the "seismic orgasm" of "Love Songs" was herself, added to the critical upheaval against her.

In a letter to Van Vechten, Loy claims "Joannes" is a conflation of all her past lovers and fantasies. Biographically he most closely resembles
Papini. "Joannes," incidentally, translates to "Giovanni" (Papini's first name) in Italian. Perhaps unable to resolve her feelings about her failed relationship with Papini in satirical poems, she turned to a more serious mode. "Love Songs" captures both the beauty and the disillusionment of love in its sequence of thirty-four poems. Opening with the line, "Spawn of Fantasies," Loy immediately links romantic imagination with its shadowy counterpart, cynical disenchantment. Whereas "Fantasies" refers to imagined desires, "Spawn" evokes an image of mass production, a fish laying eggs—mindless and mechanical. These endless fantasies seem to be "Silting," or confusing, the real "appraisable" value of love. Loy conflates a bestial vision of sexuality with social fantasies by transforming Cupid into a hungry hog eating "erotic garbage." By turning to the story book voice of "'Once upon a time,'" then back to the physical reality of "mucous membrane," the poem presents various versions of love in a fractured, collage-like manner.

Claiming she wrote "Love Songs" from her unconscious, Loy leaves holes between lines and actual blank spaces between words. Her readers must become archaeologists, sifting through dream-like shards with the desire and imagination to piece fragments together. For the sake of cohesion, I approach the thirty-four "Love Songs" in numerical order, but I do not mean to suggest these poems need to be read linearly. In fact, the fragmented aspect of this sequence encourages a shifting of attention. Images turn in on themselves, and readers quickly find themselves spiraling into their own unconscious. Finding language to illuminate this dark place remains a difficult (if not impossible) task, so I use tentative words like "it seems," "it appears," "perhaps" and "possibly" quite frequently. I find a gentle acceptance of uncertainty works best for me when exploring the elliptical field formed by an intuitive creative process.
Now, returning to the first poem, Loy introduces a first-person speaker in stanza two. Although I call this voice "the speaker" and not "Loy," it is difficult not to read some of Loy's biographical story into the poem. No doubt her past relationships (including her failed love affair with Papini) informed "Love Songs," but the poems also have their own life. The speaker imagines what love could be like by offering conditional statements: "I would an eye in a Bengal light/Eternity in a sky-rocket/Constellations in an ocean." The homonym "I"/"eye" temporarily unifies the speaker's internal self and external world--that which can be seen by looking out (a lover perhaps?). She portrays this romanticized union as both exotic ("Bengal") and timeless ("Eternity"). The "sky-rocket," representing male ejaculation, travels through the "Constellations of an ocean," into the female womb. The romanticized sexual union of cosmic forces seems sullied when compared to the actual human "trickle of saliva." The speaker remembers that her fantasies "are suspect places." Living on the opposite extreme of "Bengal light," she finds herself confined to a "lantern...virginal to the bellows/Of experience." The last line, "Coloured glass," alludes to the rosy lens she looks through to fantasize about romance as well as the protective glass society places around her to shield her from sexuality.

Shattering social restrictions, the speaker of poem II candidly refers to her sexual desires by describing a man's penis as

The skin-sack

In which a wanton duality

Packed

All the completion of my infructuous impulses

Something the shape of a man

To the casual vulgarity of the merely observant

58
More of a clock-work mechanism
Running down against time
To which I am not paced.

She has ambiguous feelings about the penis, calling it both "Something the shape of a man" (head on top of a compact body) and "a clock-work mechanism" (pendulum). Referring to her romantic notions of perfect union, the penis offers "All the completion of my infructuous impulses." She also acknowledges that sexual intercourse (if looked at from the merely "vulgar" point of view) can be simply mechanical and out of sync with her erotic needs. Although partially unsatisfied by the physical aspects of intercourse, the emotion that joins men and women together has a profound effect on the speaker. Introducing a "you" for the first time (perhaps a specific male lover?), the speaker uses the same rhythmic steadiness of sex to rub her fingers "numb" from "fretting" his hair. This gesture appears less sexual, but more intimate. The emotional intensity of the lovers' connection, like physical orgasm, leads the speaker to a spiritual awakening. Her fingers weave "A God's door-mat" out of her lover's hair "On the threshold of [his] mind." The impact of coming together in sexual intercourse--both physical and emotional--brings the lovers closer to God.

The sensation that the speaker's love affair in poem II approached (but never quite reached) its full potential, reoccurs in poem III with the tentativeness of the qualified conditional tense:

We might have coupled
In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
Or broken flesh with one another
At the profane communion table
Where wine is spill'd on promiscuous lips.
She surmises that her "profane communion"—turning the body and blood of Christ into a sexual experience—might have resulted in the beautiful and terrifying birth of a "butterfly/With the daily news/Printed in blood on its wings." This startling image represents both the fantasy of spiritual flight and the oppressive restrictions of reality. Written during World War I, "Love Songs" would have been influenced by the bloody news of battles and Loy's own experience as a nurse on the Italian front. The lovers of this poem might have found a spiritual haven together, but in a world at war no two people have the freedom of escaping unscathed. Likewise, in a world where men and women struggle for power in the relentless war of the sexes, intercourse becomes both a battlefield and a healing ground.

In poem IV, Loy transforms the story book beginning of "Once upon a time" mentioned in poem I to "Once in a mezzanino." The mezzanino, or the middle zone which seems to represent the bound existence of the domesticated middle class, quickly slips into a surrealistic nightmare. The "starry ceiling" comes alive with a family of "Bird-like abortions." Loy replaces the butterfly birth of poem II with an abortion, a termination of the results of love—or perhaps a termination of a relationship. Although the butterfly that the couple might have given birth to had blood imprinted on its wings, the "Bird-like abortions" (which I would assume would appear as bloody blobs) look like people with "human throats/And Wisdom's eyes." A member of this "unimaginable family" gives birth to

  a baby

In a padded porte-enfant

Tied with a sarsenet ribbon

To her goose's wings.
The oxymoron of an abortion giving birth suggests a fantasy of an alternate life the speaker left behind when she began her exploration of love. Preferring to return to a failing love affair than live in this familiar, sexless world "Among their fearful furniture," she decides to "[Sweep] the brood clean out." Even her revolt turns in on itself, though, because the very act of sweeping has domestic implications.

Finally, in Poem V, Loy offers her readers a level of concrete realism lacking in the earlier poems. Set in the city, "Midnight empties the street/Of all but us/Three." The three are a boy who rings people's door bells, a wandering poor person, and herself. The image of other people "snug" in their homes while these three characters wander the empty streets evokes a sense of loneliness. The speaker appears lost, unable to find her way home—both physically and emotionally. She says, "And I don't know which turning to take/Since you got home to yourself—first." Like the passage in "Giovanni Franchi" where Loy plays with the notion of "three" and "first," this poem represents different notions of self. With the street person described as a "haloed ascetic," the Holy Trinity comes to mind. The three characters represent three sides of one being, both human and holy at the same time. The boy, both an actual human and a symbolic "Bird-like" figure, has wings: "--One wing has been washed in the rain/The other will never be clean any more--" Half-saved and half-lost, the boy mirrors the speaker's sensation of either being at one with her lover or lost in her separation from him.

Poems VI and VII evolve directly out of V, adopting the same scene and characters. The fragmented style of "Love Songs" shifts from a disjunctive collagist structure to a hazy and temporary narrative structure. This transition probably occurs at this juncture because Loy wrote poems V through XXXIV after the first four poems were published. When the speaker
claims she "[knows] the Wire-Puller intimately," she seems to be referring to both the door-bell ringing boy of the previous poem and the "you," or her lover. She sees in her lover the boy that he once was, and she longs for him to look at her with the same romantic intensity: "You could look straight at me/And Time would be set back." In poem VII, the speaker continues to walk the city streets. Her feet, operating independently from her conscious thoughts, follow her heart:

My pair of feet
Smack the flag-stones
That are something left over from your walking
The wind stuffs the scum of the white streets
Into my lungs and nostrils.

The violence of "smack[ing]" and "stuff[ing]" makes the speaker's separation from her lover seem difficult, on the same emotional level as a rape. The "scum of the white streets" can be seen as a stream of ejaculation. Her lack of connection with her lover seems forced on her, oddly enough, in a sexual manner. Just as the "Fantasies" in poem I are "silting" (literally choking with dirt) her comprehension of love, the speaker's disillusionment symbolized by the "scum of the white streets" seems to be violently suffocating her view of love as well. Meanwhile, the "Exhilarated birds/Prolonging flight into night/Never reaching-----" mirror the state of cosmic union the speaker desires but does not have.

In poem VIII, the speaker claims to be "the jealous store-house of the candle-ends/That lit your adolescent learning." Wanting to keep the lover's boyhood innocence for herself, the speaker feels jealous of his knowledge and experiences that do not include her. Understanding the limiting nature of her jealousy, she alludes to a place of greater understanding: "Behind God's
eyes/There might/ Be other lights." As if in answer to her surmising, poem IX offers the cosmic union of this love. The lovers' eyes become illuminated with

A cosmos
Of coloured voices
And laughing honey

And spermatozoa
At the core of Nothing
In the milk of the Moon.

Fantasizing about the biblical land of milk and honey, the speaker imagines a place of paradise with her lover. The "coloured glass" which once confined her in poem I becomes a liberating, shifting image of "coloured voices." The violent description of white street scum choking the speaker transforms into a beautiful, life-giving river of "spermatozoa," or "milk of the moon."

With Loy's meditations on love continually shifting from one extreme to the other--the violence and loneliness of the city streets to the supposed paradise of sexual union--poem X moves beyond both disillusionment and fantasy. Loy's uncompromising combination of frank sexuality and language experimentation captures a moment of sexual interchange with exceptional clarity. The speaker melds both violence and joyful playfulness in the punning language of a badminton game: "Shuttle-cock and battle-door/
A little pink-love/And feathers are strewn." By reducing intercourse to the bandying about of sexual organs, sex becomes impersonal, animalistic and a little violent. Loy keeps this image positive, though, by framing the aggressive exchange in terms of a game. In poem XI, the speaker breaks the rules of love, allowing her partner to have infinite power over her. The
universe they create together disintegrates in his hands, and the playful interchange represented by the volleying badminton game comes to an end:

Dear one at your mercy
Our Universe
Is only
A colorless onion
You derobe
Sheath by sheath
Remaining
A disheartening odour
About your nervy hands.

The speaker responds in poems XII and XIII to her own uneven positioning of power with jealous possessiveness: "Voices break on the confines of passion/Desire Suspicion Man Woman" and "Let us be very jealous/Very suspicious/Very Conservative/Very cruel." This fluctuating between extremes of power and powerlessness represent the ego's need to remain in control. The speaker admits her fears of an equal union when she claims love "might make an end of the jostling of aspirations/Disorb inviolate egos." Just as the lover "disrobe[d]" the universe (pulling it apart with his sexual power of "disrob[ing]"), the egos of the speaker and her lover will "Disorb," or disintegrate from the inside out if they give themselves completely over to love. Like atoms being pulled off their gravitational spin, their interaction will change their elemental nature. This loss of self can be viewed as a gaining of something larger, a spiritual union: "Where two or three are welded together/They shall become god." Or, it can be seen as terrifying. The speaker responds to her lover's fears with her own fearful sarcasm:
Oh that's right
Keep away from me Please give me a push
Don't let me understand you Don't realize me
Or we might tumble together
Depersonalized
Identical
Into the terrific Nirvana
Me you -- you -- me.

Instead of creating a new molecular structure, this odd, romanticized coupling melds the speaker and her lover into "identical" versions of each other. The speaker describes the union in an overly exuberant manner as "terrific Nirvana."

In poem XIV, the speaker and her lover move beyond the fears and jealousies of their earlier disillusionment and the illusions of romanticized love to a powerful, depersonalized connection. Existing purely in the moment ("Today/Everlasting passing apparent imperceptible"), the lovers create the same type of kinetic energy as atoms bouncing off each other:

No love or the other thing
Only the impact of lighted bodies
Knocking sparks off each other
In chaos.

Like the slightly violent sexual play of poem X, poem XIV describes sexual intercourse as explosive in nature, completely free of fantasies or fear. Of course, this type of purely physical contact exists only in rare moments when the brain finally stops trying to create its own story. "Chaos," immensely powerful, cannot be controlled by the ego. Poem XV quickly retreats to the comforting power of "Fantasy," though. The speaker, stirring up the
push/pull of extremes, sees her lover as either "Superhuman" or simply a member of "drivelling humanity." Although god-like in his power over her, he seems most attractive when reduced to his weakest point.

In poems XVI through XXIV, the speaker seems overwhelmingly negative about the possibilities of love. She returns to the qualified conditional tense of what might have been, creating imaginative scenarios of impossibility: "apple stealing under the sea" or "lullaby on a tin-pan." The speaker claims to not care "Where the legs of the legs of the furniture are walking to." She seems to shun the surrealistic nightmare of the domesticated world she left behind, and yet all alone (without her lover) she finds comfort in counting "the fringe of the towel/till two tassels clinging together/Let the square room fall away." The romanticized notion of cosmic union continues to thrive in her, but she seems to have accepted it will not happen with her fantasized lover. Even the red towel fringes, described as "warm colour on the battle-field," cling together—but her lover is gone. By comparing the flowing of blood in war to the domestic world of towels, Loy conflates the vastly different realities of masculine and feminine worlds in her scenario of lost love. The speaker refers to the cynical end of her fantasies with battlefield terminology: "severing," "cleaving" and "carving." Even the bouncing light of fireflies, like the "impact" of the lovers' "lighted bodies," goes out in the rain. By letting go of the possibility of "Joy," the speaker sets it free to "go solace-winged/To flutter whom she may concern." Perhaps she believes romantic love still exists, but she will no longer experience it. The fantasy of the terrifyingly beautiful butterfly that might have been in poem III seems to have flown away. Bitter about her failure with love, the speaker says, "I store up nights against you/Heavy with shut-flower's nightmares." On a more sad note, she says, "In ways without you/I go/Gracelessly/As
things go." The special land of milk and honey in poem IX transforms into a world full of "laughter in solution," "Rot" and the moon's "pure white/Wickedness of pain." Scornful of her own grief, the speaker belittles her feelings. The sexual relationship she once described as a spiritual union becomes "Little lusts and lucidities/And prayerful lies." With this deep cynicism, the speaker blames her lover (or love itself) for seducing her "with the heinous acerbity/Of your street-corner smile." She seems to be chastising herself for allowing such an unsavory character to lure her in.

In poem XXV the speaker begins a new cycle of romanticization and disillusionment, but the movement feels pre-arranged—as if she sets up romanticization only to tear it down. The speaker's cynicism seems to undercut the romanticized image of "The little rosy/Tongue of Dawn... Licking the Arno," which both personifies and sexualizes the morning light in a socially acceptable manner. Influenced by the provocative and jarring image of "Pig Cupid[']s... rosy snout/Rooting erotic garbage," the sexualized image of dawn's tongue on the river (also described as "rosy" and "licking") seems innocuous, if not pleasant in comparison. The light lends a discreet level of sexuality to the lovers as it "Interferes with [their] eyelashes." After introducing this sentimentalized image of light, the speaker radically transforms her tone:

We twiddle to it
Round and round
Faster
And turn into machines.

The word "twiddle" reduces the significance of sexual union to trivial play, and the sexual imagery of fast, turning machines crushes the speaker's earlier prudence. Calling to task socially acceptable notions of sexuality, the speaker
describes nature as an "irate pornographist." She transforms her sentimentalized, distant view of sex into "pornography," while bringing the actual, mechanical nature of intercourse into sharper focus.

The speaker's bitterness, if not fully emphasized, remains just below the surface in all of the final poems. She refuses to acknowledge or fully experience the depth of her grief over the failure of love and the death of her fantasies. Instead she turns to disillusionment. When her bitterness seems most ugly, though, she playful pokes fun at herself. In poem XXIX the speaker wants to turn "tears" into "snowdrops or molasses/Or anything/Than human insufficiencies/Begging dorsal vertebrae." She accentuates her own melodrama by using odd verbal constructions like "dorsal vertebrae" for the clichéd symbol of internal strength—or having a spine.

In poem XXVII, the speaker describes the end-product of her "ephemeral conjunction" with love as "NOTHING." Whereas the "Nothing" created by sexual union in poem IX has positive connotations, the "NOTHING" of this poem shouts bitter cynicism. Returning to her lantern imagery, the speaker describes "Coloured conclusions/ Smelt to synthetic Whiteness." "White," like the "Nothing" of poem IX, once seemed full of possibility, evoking images of heaven. Now the speaker seems jaded by love and equates any effort to reach heaven through sexual union as "synthetic" or artificial. The lover, who seems to have retreated to his own lantern of sorts, shuts her out while he stays warm at home: "Unthinkable that white over there/-----Is smoke from your house." The speaker's loneliness reinforces the desperation of poem V, causing narrative structures to continually turn in on themselves.

Acting as the thematic kernel of the sequence, Poem XXIX describes this process of "turning" that takes place throughout "Love Songs".
Let meeting be the turning
To the antipodean
And Form a blur
Anything
Than seduce them
To the one
As simple satisfaction
For the other.

The speaker argues that "meeting" should accentuate differences—pushing lovers to the powerful extremes of opposite poles—rather than fall together into romanticized oneness. By "turning/To the antipodean," lovers create a strong attraction and come back together in an elemental manner which seems almost non-human or depersonalized. This type of sexual interaction, while slightly violent and out of control, creates a powerful connection as lovers "clash together/From their incognitoes/In seismic orgasm." The speaker, enacting this "turning" throughout the sequence by pasting one extreme of love next to another, lets her fragmented dream-like narrative spiral in on itself while "Form" becomes "a blurr." The dashes, marking holes in the text by their very presence, appear after every stanza in poem XXX. As if mocking her own elliptical style, Loy accentuates the holes between words and meaning. Almost defying meaning, poem XXX seems to express the speaker's disillusionment with fantasies which existed before she was even born: "Prenatal plagiarism/Foetal buffoons."

In poem XXXI, the speaker sees herself as crucified by her lover for attempting to break through his isolation with intimacy. Loy's difficult vocabulary and odd repetition of sound intensifies and slows down the reading experience:
Crucifixion
Of an illegal ego's
Eclosion
On your equilibrium
Caryatid of an idea.

The odd confluence of sound patterns, imagery and abstraction creates a brain sensation—as if ideas have been translated into feelings, or better yet, feelings into digitalized data. The image "caryatid of an idea" seems to represent the speaker's feelings of being trapped by her lover's resistance. Try as she might to break through his "equilibrium," the speaker feels she is simply a column in her lover's temple of isolation. The repetition of hard "c," "g," and "x" sounds trip up the tongue, turning it to stone—just as the speaker's lover transforms the speaker into a stone "caryatid." Having to piece together meaning out of difficult words slows down the pace of the poem, as if the usually fluid nature of language has turned into quicksand. With her characteristic movement towards extremes, Loy places a short poem with simple language directly after the verbal maze of XXXI. Poem XXXII directly names the speaker's lover as Joannes for the first time. Whether all of the references to "you" in "Love Songs" should now be interpreted as Joannes, or if this poem simply acts as an independent vignette in a larger collage framework, is unclear—I believe Loy offers both of these possibilities simultaneously.

Poems XXXIII and XXXIV fluctuate back to extreme bitterness. Calling herself "The prig of passion——/To your professorial paucity," the speaker cynically identifies herself as a pickpocket, stealing from a man with only a few ideas. She mocks both herself and her lover, claiming "Proto-plasm was raving mad/ Evolving us——." In the final, one line poem, she returns to the
notion of fantasy while retaining her biting sarcasm. She calls "Love—-the preeminent litterateur." Using the pejorative French term for literature-writer (or literary hack) in conjunction with the English pun "litter"-ature (or garbage), Loy ironically embraces the notion that love has been the inspiration behind her poems. The deep cynicism of this final line can only be offset by the romantic title of her sequence: "Love Songs." "Song" captures a sense of hope, joy and yearning—all of which appear to be missing from the final two poems. By constantly fluctuating between disillusionment and romanticism, Loy allows readers to register their own emotional attitudes about love.

Although Loy once called her thirty-four poem sequence "the best since Sappho" (qtd. in Conover's notes, The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 188), she also claimed in her interview with Jonathon Williams that she "was never a poet" (qtd. in Conover's notes, The Last Lunar Baedeker, xv). These radically different notions of herself parallel the conflicting duality in her poetry. By alternating between extremes, Loy creates simplicity and undecipherability at the same moment. Instead of providing answers, she presents possibilities. By leaping into the intuitional world of the unconscious, Loy's poetry assaults conventional notions of meaning while inviting new manners of perception. Chiselled out of solid blocks of sound and sharp-focus imagery, Loy's prismatic poetry presents transformative ideas about gender and sexuality while maintaining a self-mocking, satirical luster. These sensually intellectual lyrics explode the static, linear nature of words into an exceptional world beyond the usual constraints of logic, space or time.
Footnotes

1. Pound confused (or consciously altered) the name of this poem to "The Ineffectual Marriage" when he reprinted it in two anthologies. Perhaps even he felt uncomfortable with Loy's relentless sarcasm.

2. Conover interprets "Mrs Krar Standing Hail" as a "stand-in jab at Mrs. Stan Harding Krayl (a.k.a. Mrs. Gardner Hale), a friend of [Mabel Dodge Luhan] who had an affair with [Mina Loy's] husband, [Stephen Haweis], in Florence" (notes to The Lost Lunar Baedeker, 187).

3. In 1917 the complete sequence of "Love Songs" appeared in Others, taking up an entire issue.

4. Louis Untermeyer, Conrad Aiken and John Collier were a few of the critics who responded poorly to Loy's "Love Songs."
Works Cited


*Publisher's Weekly* 3 June 1996: 72.


