"AND IS SHE A COM-PAT-RIOT?": THE EXILE OF MINA LOY

Mary Jane Leach-Rudawski
University of Minnesota

ABSTRACT

In this paper I question the long-standing tradition which has unambiguously assigned the phrase "American modernist poet" to Mina Loy. Loy's nomadic biographical narrative and her poetry belie such an ascription to American letters, notwithstanding her status in later life as an American citizen. Analyzing a few of her best-known poems (from the "Pound Era"), and highlighting the cultural critique underlying those poems, I suggest that the space in which Loy wrote and lived is ultimately the unclassifiable space of self-exile. In this paper I argue that the marginalized position that Loy's poetry has been accorded, even in the American literary canon, may be attributed not only to the experimental nature of her poetry, and her detachment from literary circles, but also to her work of mapping feminist, rather than nationalist poetic boundaries.

After all everybody, that is everybody who writes is interested in living inside themselves in order to tell what is inside themselves. That is why writers have two countries, the one where they belong and the one in which they live really.
—Gertrude Stein, *Paris, France*

So did the mongrel-girl
of Noman's land
coerce the shy
Spirit of Beauty
from excrements and physic...
—Mina Loy, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*

Ezra Pound's famous and oft-quoted tripartite division of poetry into melopoeia, phanopoeia, and logopoeia was originally triggered by his uncharacteristically strong response to what he called "the first adequate representation of Mina Loy and Marianne Moore," in the *Others Anthology* of 1917 ("List" 56). The linking of these two poets was later to become a commonplace among the writers, critics, and chroniclers of the period: William Carlos Williams dubs these two women "polar opposites" within New York avant garde circles (7); Yvor Winters situates the pair next to Stevens and Williams as members of a "set" exhibiting "the most interesting single group manifestation that has yet occurred in American verse" (498); T.S. Eliot marks his "preference" for Moore over Loy while asserting the "unconscious" influence of the French symbolists on both of them (70). Pound, in coupling the names of Moore and Loy in his first notice of them, appears to have set in stone the parameters within which later critics could view them. What is remarkable, yet rarely noted, about Pound's first published commentary upon these poets is his unequivocal ascription of Loy to the realm of American letters, and the unquestioned acceptance of this categorization by successive critics. Pound's language is unabashedly assured:

> Mina Loy and Marianne Moore, ...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 American by reason of current national faults...The arid clarity, not without its own beauty, of *le tempérament de l'Americaine*, is [found] in [these] poems ... [W]ithout any pretenses and without clamors about nationality, these girls (sic) have written something which would not have come out of any other country..." (57-58)

There is, of course, no question about Moore's national affiliations; she, like William Carlos Williams, resisted the modernist move toward European culture in the first decades of the twentieth century and, with the exception of a short trip to England and Paris with her mother in 1911, remained firmly planted in America. When asked by an interviewer whether she considered herself a "regionalist or a nationalist" poet, or "a poet simply, dissociated from nationality," Moore coined a characteristically vivid image for herself as a poet: "an American chameleon on an American leaf" (675). Loy's nationality, on the other hand, is neither so easily defined, nor is her poetry, Pound's assurance notwithstanding, so easily classified. Instead, as I will argue in this paper, Mina Loy occupies the ultimately unclassifiable space of self-exile, which interestingly parallels, as if in a reversing mirror, the self-exile of her contemporary, T.S. Eliot. He once stated about the nationalism of his own body of work: "It wouldn't be what it is... if I'd been born in England, and it wouldn't be what it is if I'd stayed in America... in its sources, in its emotional springs, it comes from America" (Hall 69-70). Loy's biography inverts the pattern of Eliot's birth and expatriation, and complicates any invocation of a national muse. As Roger Conover describes it in his introduction to *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, from the moment Loy "stormed out of her parents' London home [at the age of seventeen] and walked into the international artistic salons of Europe," she became a "chronic itinerant," the "Modern Woman... belonging to no country," yet ultimately she settled in America, became an American citizen,

and lived the last thirty years of her life there (xvii, xl). Some of the poetry written in the later part of her life, especially the "Bowery" poems, and the highly patriotic "America-A Miracle," reflect a specifically American locale and a concern with national identity, but it is her earlier poetry which brought her fame, critical acclaim, and the title "American modernist poet." It is the purpose of this paper to examine closely these early poems in order to define the "national" boundaries of the space in which Loy wrote and lived.

In her biography of Loy, Carolyn Burke chronicles the restrictive British middle-class childhood out of which Loy "stormed." Her escape from London to Paris in 1903 and surname change from Lowy to Loy symbolizes this break, as her poem "O Hell" encapsulates her future poetic vision:

> To clear the drifts of spring
> Of our forebears' excrements
> And bury the subconscious archives
> Under unaffected flowers
>
> Indeed —
> Our person is a covered entrance to infinity
> Choked with the tatters of tradition
>
> Goddesses and Young Gods
> Caress the sanctity of Adolescence
> In the shaft to the sun[.] [1]

For some of the artists and writers of the fin de siècle, the path of "silence, exile, and cunning" appeared to be the path of least resistance for writing one's way out of a dying century, but for Loy, as Thom Gunn notes, the rejection of the "excrements" of the past is done with a "stylish defiance":

> The careful condensation of her language [in "O Hell"] qualifies what might appear to us a childish iconoclasm. To us, perhaps, but hardly to the reader of the 1920s, for even the steadiest among that generation seem to have felt unbearably hampered by the sheer weight of the Victorian inheritance and showed an almost hysterical impatience to throw it out into the street. (46)

Loy's poetry from this period is the work for which she is best known, and for which Pound ascribed her to the American modernist canon. It is also the poetry in which she begins to address the themes which will occupy her pen for the next few years: the construction of a Whitmanesque, particularly female "self" as a "covered entrance to infinity"; the rupture, both in poetic style and content, from the "tatters of tradition"; and the utterance of a graphic female sexual psychology.[2] Many of these poems, although written prior to her autobiographical epic, *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, carry a comparable critique of the English mentality from which Loy was in flight, but they are set in specifically European contexts in which sexist Victorian attitudes are replaced by equally confining masculine "Old World" behaviors, and by the misogyny

of the avant-garde futurist movement. These poems are arranged by Roger Conover in *The Last Lunar Baedeker* under the heading "Satires: 1914-1923," and Loy's satirical pen cuts across the European map; she takes on Italian culture, the Italian futurists, and the Parisian economy which trades in female flesh.

In the first of her three-poem sequence, "Three Italian Pictures," a poem subtitled "July in Vallombrosa," Loy portrays the sterility of "Britishness" by juxtaposing the quiescence of an elderly, death-obsessed British invalid against the animation of "wanton Italian matrons / discuss[ing] the better business of bed linen" (24-25). The British matron, like Poe's "true daughter of Old Time," Science, is culpable for "Oust[ing] the Dryad" (4) from the forest, and is doubly blamed for passing on her "moribund stuff" (36) to her daughter

> Who has been spent
> In chasing moments from one room to another
> When the essence of an hour
> Was in its passing
> With the passionate breath
> Of the bronchitis kettle
> And her last little list
> Lost itself in a saucer of gruel[.] (28-35)

Loy allies the Italian women with "Nature" and its "expensive upkeep" in the form of "the loves / of head waiters" (38, 40-42); the last lines of this section of the trilogy privileges the life-force of the Italians over the still-life of the British mother and daughter, but not unequivocally —the triviality and ephemeral quality of these "loves" is suggested, just as the headwaiters are heretofore nameless and faceless entities. In the second poem, "The Costa San Giorgio," Loy again parallels the British with the Italians, and underscores her feelings about Italian culture which she once expressed in a letter written to Carl Van Vechten in 1914: "the Anglo-Saxon covered-upness goes hand in hand with a reduction of the spontaneous creative quality —there's nothing covered up in Italy" (Arnold 105). This highly experimental poem is significant because Loy allies herself (as writer and speaker) with the "tepid blot" that "We English" make upon the "messiness / of the passionate Italian life-traffic" (1-3). As Elizabeth Arnold has noted,

> Of the three [this poem] is the most completely given over to Italian vitality, but still manages to establish a critical attitude toward the Italians who are so extremely out of control as to throw "OUT / Onto the middle of the street" anything that "might have contaminated intimacy [possibly including a consumptive who has been left outside in a broken chair]." (107)

The "wanton Italian matrons" have been transformed into "bits of bodies" lazily leaning out of windows, joining the lively scene only with their eyes (50). The frenzied activity below them, the "messiness" of "crawling children," "marching men," and the "BROKEN HEADS" of the market-place, is "angled" not only by the sun but by Loy's use of white space within lines, and her borrowing of the futurist practice of capitalizing words conveys the cacophony of the scene (2, 9, 11, 16). Sights, smells,

and sounds coalesce into an energetic cubist word-picture in the sixth stanza, but the momentum stops abruptly when we reach the "matrimonial" chambers, the bedrooms above the street scene (57). There is a sense of stasis in these bedrooms; the women, disconnected from the "life-traffic," are frozen within their sexual-domestic sphere, in which "there is little to do" (3, 53). The "false pillow-spreads" (or shams) have been, we surmise, "adjusted" countless times, as the "china virgin," forever unconsummated, has been dusted; the "huge initials" are not those of the brides, but rather those of the "bandy-legg[ed]" men out in the street (54-58, 45). For the poet, there is a "contaminated" quality to both the exterior and interior of this world; she must "walk very quickly" to avoid the "messiness" and cruelty of the street, but she also resists the enforced "intimacy" of the bedrooms (30). The poet is alternately intrigued and repulsed by this life, but, ultimately, it is flawed like the "stained fresco of the dragon slayer," Saint George, patron saint of England (7). Arnold argues that it is Loy's valuation of "British decorum" and control that serves her in managing the subject matter of this poem, and in her critique of Italian life (109), but I think that Loy is in the position of the "mongrel-girl / of Noman's land." In writing these poems, Loy is creating a space for herself that is neither too "covered-up" nor too abandoned. She is neither the repressed, "tepid" Englishwoman nor the "wanton Italian" woman of the Costa San Giorgio, but a perceptive woman artist acutely aware of the precarious nature of women's roles in the early years of the new century.

Loy's critique of gender roles within Italian culture is carried to a specifically feminist level in her poem, "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots." As Kouidis points out, in this poem, "the Italian virgin is so specifically the subject of [this poem] that Mina Loy insisted to Van Vechten on the subtitle "Latin Borghese" (31). (The "dots" refer to the French word for "dowries," and the word is a pun in American slang for money: "dough.") By the time this poem was published, Loy had already written her "Feminist Manifesto," patterned after Marinetti's "Futurist Manifesto," but this is one of the first of her writings in which she inserts herself into the consciousness of her female subjects. No longer is she the outsider, the Englishwoman unsure of her place on the streets of Italy, but she has entered the interior of the Italian virgins' world. Again, we are given a view of women at the windows, but no longer do we see "bits of bodies"; we are locked inside the house, looking out through curtains. The image of these closeted virgins is far from the "Anglo-Saxon phenomenon / of Virginity / delightfully / on its own defensive" of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* (2.137-140). The cultural system most familiar to Loy is one in which such drastic measures as imprisoning virgins is unnecessary. Kouidis, in her analysis of the cultural critique implicit in these poems of "female selfhood," states,

> The characters of the poems are Italian and English women and girls, oppressed by Latin (and Futurist) machismo or Loy's own English middle-class Victorian heritage. Both cultures doom women to dependence on men and sexual repression, but Loy's critique implies cultural differences in regard to the means of repression. Italian girls are physically guarded —locked up— against uncontracted assaults on their personhood, whereas English girls are so thoroughly educated in their culture's sexual mores that they are allowed to wander at large, protected from sexual enjoyment by their own fears and prejudices. (31)

Like the "BROKEN HEADS" of the "oranges half-rotten... sold at a reduction" of the Costa San Giorgio these virgins too are for sale, but no "hoarse" voice hawks their wares in the street (14-16). They lack what the middle-class English virgins have to offer —"dots"— and without dowries, they are "reduced" to looking, staring, gazing; even this action is mediated by the offending, blinding curtains. All agency is awarded to the hatted men, who not only "may look everywhere," and "into things," but who also "are going somewhere" (10-12). Loy portrays the effect of such freedom upon the men with a metaphoric comparison of their sexuality to plant life exposed to sunlight: "Fleshes like weeds / sprout in the light / So much flesh in the world / Wanders at will" (48-51). Against this is juxtaposed the constricted lusts of female flesh in sunless rooms: "Some behind curtains / Throb to the night / Bait to the stars" (52-54). This is not the "self-pruned" sexual repression of an English "Rose" who has internalized the dogma of Victorian ladyhood, but the acknowledgment of undeniable female sexual desire thwarted by cultural restrictions. The "we" of the poem aligns Loy with the Italian women and thus articulates, perhaps, a nascent transcendence of her English heritage. Her new allegiance with the Italian women appears again in another of her poems from this period, "At the Door of the House," but in this poem the women no longer remain nameless:

> Those eyes
>
> Of Petronilla Lucia Letizia
> Felicita
> Filomena Amalia
> Orsola Geltrude Caterina Delfina
> Zita Bibiana Tarsilla
> Eufemia,
> Looking for the little love-tale
> That never came true
> At the door of the house[.] (59-67)

In this poem the women again are located within a domestic space, and female vision is emphasized, although with a slanted view: "A thousand women's eyes/ Riveted to the unrealizable," stare fixedly at the Tarot cards of the cardteller, which become "Color picture maps of destiny" for the hopeful women (1-2, 6). This Tarot-driven cartography becomes the psychic geography of their lives, and it is no more fulfilling, finally, than the view from the curtained windows of the Italian virgins. For Loy, the list of lilting Italian names, the "thousand women," and the "nude woman" Tarot card which "Stands for the world" are evolving into symbols for all women, regardless of nationality or culture (55-56).

It is within the city of Paris that Loy's cultural critique reaches its most universal, and concurrently, most personal level yet in her poetry. In her second three-poem sequence, "Three Moments in Paris," she expands the "thousand women's eyes" into "All the virgin eyes in the world," and continues her judgment of the economic and sexual oppression of women ("Magasins" 1). Loy's setting is again a market-place; the streets of "Costa San Giorgio" and the locked house with "VIRGINS FOR SALE" has

been replaced by the magasins of Paris, and on display are not only the "composite" bodies of "Beckoning/Smiling" dolls, but the women passing by, the living costumed counterparts to the lifeless, infantilized toys of the store (9-10). The "profound silence" in which the dolls sit, "Propped against banisters," "Huddled on shelves," echoes the empty stillness of the bedrooms of the "Costa San Giorgio" (11, 4-6) The thwarted sight and sexuality of "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots" is carried to its ultimate end in this poem —these dolls are blind. The possibility of sexual potency, suggested by the phrases, "star[ing], seeing... between parted fringes," is belied by the visual result of looking "through the human soul" into "nothing" (16-19). The exchange of looks between the passing "cocottes" (their place in this economy already assured by the noun used to identify them), is frighteningly close to Lacan's description of the "mirror stage" in psychoanalytic theory; the moment when both women see themselves —their "imago"— in the dolls, Loy describes as a "flicker of elements unconditionally primeval" (28). Such a "*Thou art that*" experience, Lacan posits, should be an "ecstatic... cipher of [one's] moral destiny," but for these women, and for Loy as narrator and participant in this exchange, this moment is filled with shame, disbelief, and aversion (900). As readers, we are invited to view this epiphany of self-recognition, of unmitigated seeing, as a castigation of the culture in which such denigration exists, and the repeated line at the end of the poem carries that criticism beyond the borders of the city of Paris.

In "One O'Clock at Night," the first of the "Three Moments in Paris" trilogy, Loy creates a new psychic space for the narrator of the poem. The "I" of this poem can be linked directly to Loy herself, based on her relationships with the Futurist leaders, Filippo Marinetti and Giovanni Papini, from 1913 to 1915. As Loy herself admitted, she was strongly influenced by the Futurist movement, and her poetry reflected that influence for a few years, but her nascent feminist consciousness made it impossible to accept the movement wholeheartedly. She wrote to Mabel Dodge in 1914: "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'... and that is really Marinetti's philosophy" (Kouidis 7-8). Loy was troubled by her position as a woman artist even peripherally involved in a male-dominated, aggressive misogynistic movement, and her afore-mentioned "Feminist Manifesto" was the first indication that she was trying to write her way out of it. There is some evidence from another letter written at this time that Loy once again was experiencing feelings of alienation: she wrote to Carl Van Vechten that "what I feel now are feminist politics —but in a cosmic way that may not fit in anywhere" (Burke 41). But that "cosmic" sense of feminism telescopes dramatically into a particular scene in a Paris cafe, at "One O'Clock at Night, "where a "misfit" woman sits, letting a masculinist, presumably "Futurist" argument wash over her. The poem opens with a statement of female resistance: this culture, indeed, she might argue, all cultures "since the beginning of time," assume male ownership of women, but ownership does not constitute complete possession (2). The interior world of this woman is not under the control of the "indisputable male" whose "careless arm" and loud voice prove his claim to her brain and body (5). Yet at first, the narrator of this poem is so passive, so sublimated, that she "understand[s] nothing" of this intellectual pugilism; her desire to remain distanced, locked in past time and the proper woman's sphere, places her in a drugged, soporific state (9). That

desire is thwarted by the men's insistent, "deafening... cerebral gymnastics," and she finally, almost grudgingly awakens and "catch[es] the thread of the argument" (18, 28, 19). In letters to Mabel Dodge, Loy wrote of her "indebted[ness] to M. [Marinetti] for twenty years added to [her] life from mere contact with his exuberant vitality," and of her gratitude for his forcing her out of the "solitude-induced static of her mind" (Arnold 84). In other words, Loy underwent an "awakening" experience as this poem describes, but such a transformation came at a price. Within the poem, the narrator undergoes a kind of psychic split; the moment she understands the male dialogue, she "cease[s] to be a woman" and immediately becomes nostalgic for the "Beautiful halfhour of being a mere woman," blissfully either unaware or "indifferent" to the "self-indulgent/play of children/Or the thunder of alien gods" (23, 28-31). The delicate irony Loy exhibits in this poem prefigures the rapier-like satiric irony that she will use in later poems attacking the Futurists for their blatant misogyny, chauvinism and brutality. Here, however, we are given the first stirrings of feminist discontent, tinged with faint regret that the "ease" of feminine passivity must disappear, yet resolved that the "beautiful halfhour" can never be relived once woman is fully awakened. As Adrienne Rich once stated, referring to her own burgeoning feminist consciousness: "It's exhilarating to be alive in a time of awakening consciousness; it can also be confusing, disorienting, and painful" (34).

Although we are given Paris as the titular setting for "One O'Clock at Night," it is significant that there are no particular Parisian references within the text of the poem. This is not the specific critique of Italian culture and the castigation of British "covered-upness" which "Three Italian Pictures" offered, nor the exposé of British Victorianism of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*. Loy's writing of "female self-hood" from this moment on became increasingly universal; it is less easy to assign national affiliations to the women who people the poems which followed. Loy was no longer content to dissect the cultures out of which the "battle of the sexes" continued, but instead began to expand the boundaries of the dilemma by writing about such ubiquitously female themes as the institution of marriage ("The Effectual Marriage"), active female sexual desire ("Love Songs"), and the formerly taboo subject of childbirth ("Parturition"). As she begins to write "everywoman," if you will, into her poetry, Loy does not lose the autobiographical characteristic of her writing.[3] She draws on her own marriage to Haweis and her relationship with Papini for "The Effectual Marriage," her sexual relationships with Papini and Marinetti for "Love Songs," and her own childbearing experiences for "Parturition." The "I" of "One O'Clock at Night" is Mina, just as is the thinly disguised "Gina" of "The Effectual Marriage":

> Gina being a female
> But she was more than that
> Being an incipience a correlative
> An instigation of the reaction of man
> From the palpable to the transcendent
> Mollescent irritant of his fantasy [.] (21-26)

Loy's diction becomes more abstract, more "logopoeiac," and more experimental as her poetics of female experience evolve. Her most famous passages, probably, are

the beginning lines of "Love Songs," which juxtaposes a graphic description of male sexuality and female sexual gratification:

> Spawn of fantasies
> Sifting 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
>
> I would
> An eye in a Bengal light
> Eternity in a skyrocket
> Constellations in an ocean
> Whose rivers run no fresher
> Than a trickle of saliva[.] (1-16)

However, Loy is at her most "cosmic," and concurrently, most rooted in "Noman's land" in the throes of labor, that uniquely female province of experience:

> I am the centre
> Of a circle of pain
> Exceeding its boundaries in every direction...
>
> Warmth   moisture
> Stir of incipient life
> Precipitating into me
> The contents of the universe
> Mother I am
> Identical
> With infinite Maternity
> Indivisible
> Acutely
> I am absorbed
> Into
> The was-is-ever-shall-be
> Of cosmic reproductivity[.] ("Parturition" 1-3, 94-106)

Kouidis has classified this poem as "significant among Loy's explorations of female self-hood because it details an area of femaleness rarely thought suitable for literature, and because it unites the spiritual and intellectual life with the physical"(40). For the first time in her poetry, Loy presents a woman who is wholly realized from

within, unfettered by cultural restraints, and freed from masculine definitions of femaleness. This fulfillment comes through an experience which is alien to men, and Loy emphasizes the separation of the sexes by including this scene:

> Pain is no stronger than the resisting force
> Pain calls up in me
> The struggle is equal
>
> The open window is full of a voice
> A fashionable portrait painter
> Running upstairs 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—"
> 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. (23-38)

It is the subject matter of these poems, and others equally graphic, satiric, and honest, which has prompted some critics to explain the erasure, until very recently, of Mina Loy from the modernist canon. Certainly, poems like "Parturition" and "Love Songs" prompted more than one reader, such as Harriet Monroe, to assign to Loy the status of "one of the long-to-be-hidden moderns" (Conover xxxiv). However, T.S. Eliot praised "The Effectual Marriage" as " extremely good," and Pound reprinted it twice (although not without his trademark cut-and-slash editing) and called it "one of the poems of the last thirty years which by virtue of its 'individual character' remained in his memory" (Kouidis 34). Shari Benstock, in *Women of the Left Bank*, meticulously chronicles Loy's publishing history with the little American magazines, and speculates that the limited resources of the smaller publishing houses weakened Loy's chances of being read by later audiences. She also suggests that

> the combination of a feminist subject matter and technical experimentation may have proved fatal to Loy's efforts to find a receptive reading audience... Loy's publication record may suggest that the avant-garde effort to overturn the bourgeois and conventional may not have included an overturning of conventional male attitudes to female sexuality or have been comfortable with a woman poet who so persistently held up the contradictions of patriarchal sexual practices to inspection. (387)

I would like to add to the conjecture about Loy's marginalization the theory that her own expatriation, not only from *fin de siècle* England, but also from the Anglo-American, male-centered world of avant-garde modernism, accounts in a partial way

for her de-centered status. Pound, *the* defining modernist of the age, distracted by his "driving [of] any new idea into the great passive vulva of London" (Burke, "Spliced" 104), was too busy to "detect [any] emotion whatever" in the verses of Mina Loy (Pound, *Instigations* 233). As Carolyn Burke points out, Pound also seemed unaware that both Loy and Moore, his two favorite practitioners of logopoeia, were women:

> Because of Pound's self-imposed limitations of thought about the links between gender and creativity, he could not see that logopoeia in the hands of a female poet might produce a different kind of cultural critique, one that focused on issues of gender. (100)

What he *did* detect was American nationalism, from a poet who had not yet set foot on American soil, and who was busy herself mapping new feminist, not national boundaries. (Perhaps Pound was trapped within the same kind of cultural essentialism which Nina Baym asserts, in her "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," limited the traditional chroniclers of American fiction.) When Loy finally did come to America, her hopes were to find a modernist Mecca; as she told a reporter for the *New York Evening Sun* shortly after her arrival, "No one who has not lived in New York has lived in the Modern world" (10). Her enthusiasm was short-lived; Roger Conover notes that, a few years later, Loy "insinuat[ed] that a rampant disease called provincialism infected the American literary scene *entre les deux gerres*," and that her "move from total involvement [with the New York literati] to a position of detachment earned her the indifference of her colleagues and did damage to her reputation" (xvii). Even the one event which brought Loy some of her greatest moments of happiness in America —meeting and marrying Arthur Cravan— was shadowed by her feelings of alienation; she wrote in *Colossus*, her only *roman à clef*, that she considered herself and Cravan "the most dislocated members" of the American literary scene (Conover, "Colossus" 106). Loy's tragic loss of Cravan, and her later fascination with the "misfits" of American society, the Bowery bums, contributed to her increased "capacity for isolation," as she herself termed her "strongest characteristic" (Burke, *Loy* 305). Her poetry began to suffer as a result, and her artistic interests turned to a collage-type of artwork in which she collected odd bits of garbage and "discarded remnants" and turned them into "montages of street scenes" and Bowery creches (Conover lxxvi). When approached by interested scholars over the years, she would respond to queries with the remark: "But, why do you waste your time on these thoughts of mine? I was never a poet" (xv).

Hugh Kenner relates a rather haunting story in his "Ghosts and Benedictions" chapter of *The Pound Era* involving that most famous of American expatriates, Henry James. He was out for a walk with his niece in the streets of Chelsea, when, according to Kenner, he chanced upon Ezra Pound with his new bride, Dorothy Shakespear. As Kenner imagines the scene,

> The young women strolled and talked; their talk is forgotten. After 50 years, though, one scrap of the master's survived. For James's fierce need to "place" and categorize spurred root curiosities, and Dorothy heard from behind her, addressed to her husband of two months, in the slow implacable voice the great expatriate's overwhelming question, as who should ask, animal, vegetable, or

> mineral: "And is she a com-pat-riot?": the syllables spaced, the accented vowel short. (5)

If we were to rephrase the question to signify Mina Loy, Pound's answer would have been an immediate and unequivocal "yes." But so easy an assignation of Loy to any such "imagined community" is misleading. The image with which she has been immortalized in Alice B. Toklas's memoirs is more fitting. In the art-bedecked rooms of Gertrude Stein's 27 Rue de Fleurus, often filled with women bonded together by strong homosexual ties, Mina Loy danced, alone, arms akimbo for her imaginary partner (77).

Notes

[1] Mina Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. Roger L. Conover (Highlands: Jargon Society, 1982) 3. All other references to works by Loy refer to this text, and hereafter will be cited either by page number or line number.

[2] See Virginia Kouidis, *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1980) for her short but compelling analysis of the possible influence of Whitman upon Loy's poetry. She argues that Loy's female self —the "covered entrance to infinity," may be a feminist version of Whitman's "deified self" (26). Loy wrote in a 1915 letter to Carl Van Vechten," I believe we'll get more 'wholesome' sex in American art —than English after all— though you are considered so suburban —but that is to be expected— we haven't had a Whitman" (Kouidis, 27). Kouidis, in the first book-length study of Loy, presents her argument for accepting Loy into the American canon, but it is interesting to note the language Loy uses in this letter to refer to herself; her "we" appears to occupy a space somewhere between England and America.

[3] I feel compelled to mention that "everywoman," in this context, is admittedly a limited term. Loy is a Western-educated, white, middle-class heterosexual woman who gave birth to four children.

Works Cited

Arnold, Elizabeth. "Mina Loy and the Futurists." *Sagetrieb: A Journal Devoted to Poets in the Imagist/Objectivist Tradition* 8 (1989): 83-117.

Benstock, Shari. *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940*. Austin: U of Texas P, 1986.

Burke, Carolyn. *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*. New York: Farrar, 1996.

— "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference." *American Quarterly* 39 (1987): 99-121.

— "The New Poetry and the New Woman." *Coming to Light: American Women Poets in the Twentieth Century*. Ed. Diane Wood Middlebrook and Marilyn Yalom. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1985. 37-57.

Conover, Roger L. "Introduction." *The Last Lunar Baedeker*. Mina Loy. Highlands: Jargon Society, 1982. xv-lxiii.

— "Mina Loy's 'Colossus': Arthur Cravan Undressed." *New York Dada*. Ed. Rudolf E. Kuenzli. New York: Willis, 1986. 103-123.

Eliot, T. S. (Apteryx) "Observations." *The Egoist* 5 (1918): 70.

— "The Art of Poetry I: An Interview with T. S. Eliot." By Donald Hall. *Paris Review* 21 (1951): 65-70.

Gunn, Thom. "Three Hard Women: H.D., Marianne Moore, Mina Loy." *On Modern Poetry: Essays Presented to Donald Davie*. Eds. Vereen Bell and Laurence Lerner. Nashville: Vanderbilt UP, 1988. 37-52.

Kenner, Hugh. *The Pound Era*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1971.

Kouidis, Virginia. *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1980.

Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Critical Theory Since Plato*. Ed. Hazard Adams. Rev. ed. Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1992. 900-903.

Moore, Marianne. *The Complete Prose of Marianne Moore*. Ed. Patricia C. Willis. New York: Viking, 1986.

Loy, Mina. *The Last Lunar Baedeker*. Ed. Roger L. Conover. Highlands: Jargon Society, 1982.

Pound, Ezra. "A List of Books." *The Little Review* 4 (March 1918): 54-59.

— *Instigations of Ezra Pound*. New York: Boni, 1920.

Rich, Adrienne. *On Lies, Secrets, and Silence: Selected Prose 1966-1978*. New York: Norton, 1979.

Toklas, Alice B. *What Is Remembered*. New York: Holt, 1963.

Williams, William Carlos. *Selected Essays of William Carlos Williams*. New York: New Directions, 1954.

Winters, Yvor. "Mina Loy." *The Dial* June 1926: 496-99.