

“Face of the skies”: Ekphrastic Poetics of Mina Loy’s Late Poems

Raphael Schulte

After a lifetime engaged in “migratory modernism,” to quote a term from Rachel Blau DuPlessis (191), the seventy-year old painter and poet Mina Loy (1882-1966) moved in 1953 to Aspen, Colorado, a town with only about nine hundred residents. Loy, who had participated in most of the major art movements of the first half of the twentieth century—Symbolism, Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism—and had lived in London, Paris, Vienna, Munich, Berlin, Florence, Geneva, Buenos Aires, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro and New York City, moved to the artistic backwater world of 1950s Aspen in order to be with her daughters Joella and Fabienne and their families. The move proved to be both isolating and stimulating. In a September 26, 1955 letter to the artist Joseph Cornell, one of her friends in New York City, Loy wrote:

It’s nearly two years since they whisked me up here. I am not at my ease here, but the altitude is stimulating—sometimes surprising. When I arrived my hair stood on end and crackled with electricity, the metal utilities give electric shocks under one’s fingernails—the Radio is a volley of shots except at night— & in the streets mostly all there is to walk on are 3 cornered stones” (qtd in Burke *Becoming* 427).¹

In this new life of isolation from her friends but stimulation from the “electricity” in the mountain air, Loy looked both backward and forward. Within a year of her arrival in Aspen, in July 1954, Loy completed, probably by memory, a pencil portrait of Teri Fraenkel.² Teri may have seemed like an unlikely choice for a portrait. She was the wife of Hans Fraenkel, and Hans had been married previously to Loy’s daughter Fabienne from 1944 to 1949. When Hans and Fabienne separated in 1948, Loy had been living with them in Manhattan “in their brownstone on East Sixty-sixth Street, which included a ground-floor sitting-room apartment for her” (B402). Carolyn Burke in her biography of Loy goes on to make additional comments about Loy during this period when she lived with Fraenkel and Fabienne:

“She was quite removed from everyday life,” [Fraenkel] thought, “lost in her own mythology.” She rarely left the house and sometimes refused to open the door. She might make an appearance at their parties, looking

¹ Anyone interested in Loy’s life and work must turn to Carolyn Burke’s full-scale biography of Loy *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*. My attempts to situate Loy’s writing and painting within the context of Loy’s life are heavily indebted to Burke’s biography and her other critical discussions of Loy. Hereafter, citations to the biography in the text will be indicated with a “B” followed by the page number(s).

² I currently own this drawing and have it in Taiwan. The paper that the drawing is on has been conserved, and the drawing has been reframed. The original backing for the portrait contains the inscription: “TERI BY MINA LOY / JULY 1954 / ASPEN, COLORADO / To Alicia / With all my love / Aunt Teri.” I must thank James Jaffe for the scanned image of the portrait.

otherworldly in white face powder and flowing dark red robes. When they persuaded her to accompany them to openings at Peggy Guggenheim's, where one saw [Marcel] Duchamp, [Max] Ernst, Virgil Thomson, and, occasionally, Djuna [Barnes], Mina floated through the room as if unaware of what was happening. By the mid-forties, she seemed to inhabit another world. (402)

This otherworldliness which seems to have been a characteristic of Loy's personal life at that time also plays a key role in my understanding of the portrait of "Teri," as well as Loy's late visual and verbal texts. Even after Fabienne left New York City to move to Aspen, Loy continued to live with Fraenkel temporarily.³

Though biographical details about Loy's relationship with Hans Fraenkel and his new wife Teri are not available, the portrait is marked by a tenderness of tone.⁴ It's filled with soft curved lines and a complete absence of straight edges and abrupt angles. At first glance Teri seems to be a young woman, but after a closer inspection, her age becomes more ambiguous as she seems to display features of an older woman. The head and neck seem to be floating on air and uplifted. The head dominates the upper half of the drawing, with the mouth being at almost the exact center of the sketch. The bottom half contains Teri's pronounced jawbones and an especially elongated neck, together with Loy's interestingly positioned signature. The most notable features of the portrait itself are the eyes and the mouth. Though the lips are pressed together and form a slight smile, the eyes do not reflect that smile. The eyes are filled with a sense of sadness and even isolation. They do not look at the viewer but instead look beyond, seemingly not at a specific object but into an undefined distance. The discrepancy between the eyes and the mouth makes Teri's age unclear: the eyes suggest experience and age that the smile does not reflect. But, even with that, the two eyes themselves are not the same. Because of the angle of her head, Teri's left eye is higher and appears to be brighter than the right eye, which is partially in shadow; one eye seems to be gazing into a positive scene while the other peers into a darker world. Though her eyebrows are arched as if she has a question, her eyes seem to be gazing into the distance or the future for answers, answers that she will not speak.

It is this gap between seeing and speaking that I want to address here. Loy's works seem poised between the attraction of visual iconic images and a desire to retreat into silence. This late drawing expresses issues that are at the heart of all of Loy's poetry and painting; it also is expressive of the final ekphrastic vision that dominates Loy's poetry after World War II when her desire for silence resulted in poems that were stripped bare but insistent on a visionary gaze.⁵ Loy's late poems, written in the 1940s, express her lifelong

³ Loy seems to have remained on friendly terms with Fraenkel, even after the divorce. He was among the many guests at the opening for Loy's 1959 exhibition in New York (B434).

⁴ My understanding of this portrait has benefited from conversations with Gretchen Lee. I am very grateful that she shared with me a number of her ideas and insights about the drawing.

⁵ Burke's biography also reveals how Loy's personal life was repeatedly marked by periods of active involvement followed by at times prolonged periods of isolation and depression. Also, after Loy's move to New York City in 1937 the remainder of her life was spent avoiding participation in public events and gatherings.

concerns about the social position of women, the need for art to foster new levels of consciousness, and issues of identity and physical bodily presence. These late poems, however, also do more than that: they offer a poetics of absence that evokes a mystical and spiritual presence, that is, a visionary poetics evoking silent spaces beyond body and beyond language. Before discussing the ekphrastic poetics expressed in “Teri” and Loy’s late poems, two small digressions may be helpful. First, a brief overview of the poetic and artistic contexts in which Loy lived, wrote, and painted will help situate her work, and second, a cursory discussion of the tensions and issues explored in her earliest ekphrastic writings will help establish the radical departures present in her late verbal and visual texts.

I

Loy was an English artist, poet, dramatist, novelist, and essayist who late in her life became an American citizen.⁶ During her lifetime her creative efforts were mostly seen on two different fronts: poetry and painting. She has been depicted as a forgotten but significant modernist poet. Spirited attempts have been made to bring her poetry into the modern literary canon. During her lifetime Ezra Pound defended her work. In 1917 he coined the term “logopoeia” to describe the poetry of Loy and Marianne Moore, arguing somewhat misleadingly, as I will discuss later, that their poetry exemplifies the dance of the intellect, rather than phanopoeia (visual image) or melopoia (musical effect) (*Selected Prose* 424-5). In a letter to Marianne Moore in 1921, he asked “...is there anyone except you, Bill [William Carlos Williams] and Mina Loy who can write anything of interest in verse” (*Selected Letters* 168.) By the mid-20s Loy was a formidable presence in modern poetry. She was publishing in the most radical and avante-guard journals between 1914 and the late 1920s: her poems appeared in *Rogue*, *Others*, *The Dial*, *The Little Review*, *transatlantic*, *Camera Work*, and others.⁷ In 1923 she published her first book of poems *Lunar Baedeker* [sic] in Robert McAlmon’s Contact Press. In 1926 Yvor Winters wrote that Loy “has written seven or eight of the most brilliant and unshakably solid satirical pieces of our time, and at least two non-satirical pieces that possess for me a beauty that is unspeakably moving and profound” (qtd in Januzzi 546). Kenneth Rexroth, for years an adamant advocate of Loy’s poetry, noted in 1944, “There is no question but what she is important and should be reprinted. No one competent and familiar with verse in English in this century would dream of denying it” (np). Jerome Rothenberg referred to her poem “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” as being “comparable to, & probably not chronologically behind, Pound’s early *Cantos* & Eliot’s *Waste Land*”; that poem, he says, is “one of the lost master-poems of the 20th century” (57).

⁶ My primary concerns in this paper are with Loy’s artwork and poetry; because of that, I do not discuss her plays or novels. Anyone interested in her plays may consult *The Pamperers* and *Two Plays* presented in *Performing Arts Journal*, together with Julia Schmid’s fine introduction to them. Loy’s one published novel so far is *Insel*, a lightly veiled account of her experience with the German surrealist painter, Richard Oelze. Also, part of Loy’s novel *Colossus*—a fictionalized portrait of her second husband, the boxer and dadaist poet Arthur Craven—has been printed in Rudolf E. Kuenzil’s *New York Dada*.

⁷ For a complete bibliography of Loy’s publications, see Marissa Januzzi.

With the 1996 publication of Burke's biography and the scholarly edition of Loy's selected poems in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, followed by the 1998 collection of critical essays *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, edited by Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma, some critics have asserted that the emergence of Loy into mainstream poetic discourse has begun. Roger Conover, to give just one example, in a letter to the editors of Faber and Faber, stressed the importance of Loy's poems:

There is developing around Mina Loy a critical/feminist discourse quite unprecedented in retrospective appraisals of modernist poets. Her reputation is very much on the rise, while other modernists' currency is in decline. She is increasingly being perceived as the "missing modernist," the hidden link in the tradition of Modernist/Feminist poetics. Ten years ago, the Norton Anthology didn't include her at all; in the next Norton anthology, she is represented as fully as Emily Dickinson, Sylvia Plath, and Marianne Moore. (248-9)

With an irony that possibly only Loy herself would appreciate, she is being remembered as the forgotten modernist poet. While, at the same time, her work as a visual artist—her drawings, paintings, sculpture, frescoes, assemblages, and *objets d'art*—has gone largely unnoticed. Loy began as a visual artist (having her first one-woman exhibit in 1912 in London, eleven years before the publication of *Lunar Baedeker*), and she remained active as a painter long after she stopped writing poems. She generated more visual texts than verbal texts, and she seems to have stopped writing poems by 1950, while as late as 1965 she claimed that she was "not a poet" and that she was "more likely to be able to paint now than to write" (Interview 215). Burke states that Loy "...thought of herself as a painter who accidentally wandered into poetry. Although, briefly, she became famous (or infamous) for her poetry's frank dissection of female psycho-sexual experience, she had already shown paintings in numerous European exhibitions" before her poetry was published. So it is with some irony that Loy is being remembered as a poet and forgotten as an artist. Since the exhibit of her Bowery constructions in 1959, seven years before her death, Loy's art works have not been exhibited, and, as Burke points out, many of her works have been lost or destroyed. Her art, even more than her poetry, has suffered neglect.⁸

Loy received critical acclaim for her art, beginning even as an art student. About Loy's work as an artist Marisa Januzzi says "There were at least seven notable exhibitions of Mina Loy's work during her lifetime, besides the long-running commercial display of the lampshades in the mid-twenties" (511). If we gather together the available materials about Loy's art exhibits,⁹ we can see that Loy actively exhibited visual art from her first exhibit in the 1904 Salon d'Automne in Paris through the early 1930s, culminating in her one-woman show in the Julien Levy Gallery in New York, January 24 to February 14,

⁸ Even art history texts like Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace's *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (im)positionings* and Charles Harrison's *English Art and Modernism 1900-1939*, are silent about Loy.

⁹ I have combined the information from Burkes' biography, Roger Conover's detailed introduction to *The Last Lunar Baedeker* and Januzzi's annotated bibliography. I offer a chronological arrangement of the results in the appendix.

1933. Loy also published reproductions of some of her unexhibited artwork in *The Dial*, *Playboy*, *Art Review*, and *Arts & Decoration*. She began her artistic career by studying art in London following in the tradition of the Pre-Raphaelites. She followed this by a year as an art student in Munich (at the same time that Paul Klee and Kandinsky were there) where she studied with Angelo Jank and then had further study in Paris until 1907. After her move to Florence in 1907, she became familiar with the tenets and practices of the Futurists, and became intimately involved with two leaders of the movement, F. T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. Burke notes that until her years in Paris and Florence helped her become acquainted with contemporary issues in the art world, including the emergence of cubism and futurism, “Mina Loy could have been described as a minor Post-Impressionist painter, known chiefly for the elegance of her draughtsmanship and the delicacy of her water-colors” (“Reimagining”). That description may, though, be understated. Steven Watson says that Loy “mixed her own egg tempera and painted Symbolist images of morbid figures” (89). While living in Florence, she described in a letter to Carl van Vechten during the summer of 1915 (prior to studying drawing with Archipenko) her early training in art:

There is very little to say about Paris—all the drawing I ever learnt was with Angelo Jank in Munich—and I used to take my fantasy drawings to [Maximillian] Dasio’s class—who always proclaimed me a genius and told the other poor women to look at this “and go home and darn—[“] These appreciations I found in art-schools—used to frighten me—for I never knew how I did anything—and then I began to wonder if I could manage to do it again—and couldn’t work for a month—Prinet at Calarossis was the only master in Paris that made a fuss of my work—But Paris in those days for everyone meant just learning to love the dear old impressionists—I had Manet and Monet on the spot—but Degas frightened me for a year—and I shall always feel grateful to the day I first “saw” the early Renoirs—But the most beautiful things in Paris were the Fetes—and the Bal Bullier. (qtd in Kouidis 2-3)

Her move from Florence to New York City in 1916 marked, to quote Susan E. Dunn, “her transition from Italian Futurism to New York Dada” (“Opposed”). In New York Loy was exemplified as the “modern woman” by the *Evening Sun* newspaper. After additional moves to Mexico, Chile, Argentina, and then back to Europe (Surrey, Geneva, and Florence), she returned to New York in 1920. The following year she again made her way back to Europe, going to Paris, Florence, Austria, Berlin—where she studied with Alexander Archipenko—and then to Paris again for an extended stay where she encountered surrealism and worked as the Paris representative for the Julien Levy Gallery from 1932 to 1936. In 1937 she returned to the United States. During her years of living in New York and later Aspen, Loy worked predominantly on making constructions from the garbage and refuse that she gleaned from the streets.

In her lifetime she had friends and acquaintances in both literary and artistic circles, including Symbolists, Futurists, Dadaists, Surrealists, feminists, conceptualists,

modernists, and post-modernists.¹⁰ A list of her friends and acquaintances reads like a who's who of modernism: Bernice Abbot, Margaret Anderson, Guillaume Appolinaire, Louis Aragon, Walter Conrad and Louise Arensberg, Alexander Archipenko, Djuna Barnes, Natalie Barnes, Sylvia Beach, Paul Blackburn, Kay Boyle, Constantin Brancusi, Andre Breton, Basil Bunting, Marc Chagall, Colette, Padraic Colum, Nancy Cunnard, Joseph Cornell, Arthur Craven, Salvador Dali, Dorothy Day, Charles Demuth, Mabel Dodge, Mariel Draper, Marcell Duchamp, Isadora Duncan, Max Ernst, Ford Maddox Ford, Sigmund Freud, Baroness Elsa von Frytag-Loringhoven, Peggy Guggenheim, Marsden Hartley, Jane Heap, Ernest Hemingway, Angus John, James Joyce, Angelo Jank, Alfred Kreymborg, Julian Levy, James Laughlin, Wyndham Lewis, F. T. Marienetti, Robert McAlmon, Henry McBride, Thomas Merton, Marianne Moore, Richard Oelze, Eugene O'Neil, Jules Pascin, Giovanni Papini, Frances Picabia, Ezra Pound, John Quinn, Man Ray, John Reed, Lola Ridge, Auguste Rodin, Arthr Rubenstein, Charles Sheeler, Alfred Steiglitz, Gertrude Stein, Wallace Stevens, Scofield Thayer, Virgil Thomson, Tristen Tzara, Laurence Vail, Edgar Varese, Carl van Vechten, William Carlos Williams, and many others. Loy believed firmly that individuals, like these, had a responsibility because of their genius to use their various arts to expand human consciousness. Though Robert McAlmon facetiously titled his memoirs *Being Geniuses Together*, Loy seriously believed that she need to be with "geniuses" (this is part of what prompted her migratory life) and believed in the responsibilities they shared. In her poem "Apology of Genius" she writes:¹¹

Ostracized as we are with God –
 The watchers of the civilized wastes
 reverse their signals on our track

Lepers of the moon
 all magically diseased
 we come among you
 innocent
 of our luminous sores

¹⁰ Memoirs of writers from the early years of the twentieth century often give a prominent place to Loy. In the expatriate writings of the 1920s, Loy plays an important role. For example, see Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Robert McAlmon and Kay Boyle's *Being Geniuses Together 1920-1930*, Carl Van Vechten's *Sacred and Profane Memories*, Sylvia Beach's *Shakespeare & Company*, and Julien Levy's *Memoir of an Art Gallery*. Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, however, does not mention Loy. In a related anecdote, Burke reports that when the young writer Martie Sterling "asked her about Ernest Heminway, Martie's idol, Mina sat straight up, glared at her guest, and asked why she was wasting time on that 'pompous boor'" (B430). Mabel Dodge Luhan gives a less than flattering portrayal of Loy in *European Experiences*. Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940* presents a view of Loy in Paris. Fictional recreations of the era also include Loy's own novels, as well as Djuna Barnes' *Ladies Almanack* and Robert McAlmon's *Post-Adolescence: A Selection of Short Fiction*. Two recent novels also spotlight Loy: *The Hotel in the Jungle* by Albert J. Guerard and *Shadow-Box* by Antonia Logue.

¹¹ There is at times confusion about the publications of Loy's poetry. I will be citing poems from four different sources, all similarly titled. LB stands for *Lunar Baedeker* [sic]; LBT stands for *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables*; LLB 1982 stands for *The Last Lunar Baedeker*; and LLB stands for *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. The confusion and uncertainties surrounding Loy's publication practices invoke the issues of absence and presence that this paper explores.

unknowing
how perturbing lights
our spirit
on the passion of Man
until you turn on us your smooth fools' faces
like buttocks bared in aboriginal mockeries

We are the sacerdotal clowns
who feed upon the wind and stars
and pulverous pastures of poverty

Our wills are formed
by curious disciplines
beyond your laws

You may give birth to us
or marry us
the chances of your flesh
are not our destiny --

The cuirass of the soul
still shines --
And we are unaware
if you confuse
such brief
corrosion with possession

In the raw caverns of the Increate
we forge the dusk of Chaos
to that imperious jewelry of the Universe
--the Beautiful --

While to your eyes
A delicate crop
of criminal mystic immortelles
stands to the censor's scythe (LB3-5)

For Loy, these geniuses—the modern artists, writers, and thinkers—are the new priestly class and possessors of divine power. Even at the beginning of her career, leanings toward mysticism became clear as she came to believe that she and the other “geniuses” must learn “to trust the immediacy of conscious perception and to recognize that it was the artists’ task to record the dynamic movement of the mind as it interacted with the sensuous world” (Galvin 61). This attentiveness to the movements of the mind led Loy to pursue those sites where consciousness, language, corporeality, and identity interrelated with new forms of poetic and artistic expression. Human consciousness was

for Loy an agent for radical social change, and her role as poet and artist was to support changes in consciousness, a project that was equally important to the futurists she encountered in Florence. Mary Galvin notes, “Evidencing her own background as a painter and visual designer, as well as the early influence of futurist techniques on her work, Loy’s use of the concrete image figures prominently as both a starting point and an anchor for her explorations in consciousness” (65). In her prose poem “Aphorisms on Futurism,” Loy states:

TODAY is the crises in consciousness.

CONSCIOUSNESS cannot spontaneously accept or reject new forms, as offered by creative genius; it is the new form, for however great a period of time it may remain a mere irritant—that moulds consciousness to the necessary amplitude for holding it.

CONSCIOUSNESS has no climax.

LET the Universe flow into your consciousness, there is no limit to its capacity, nothing that it shall not re-create.

UNSCREW your capacity of absorption and graph the elements of Life--
Whole

(LLB 151)

II

Loy’s works as an artist and a poet are significant for a variety of reasons, not least because they are sites where the verbal and the visual come together. Given her encounters with visual Cubism, Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism, it is not surprising to find Loy’s poems included in various anthologies devoted to American and European cubist and dadaist poetry.¹² During her first residency in Florence, from 1907 to 1916, Loy began working in both verbal and visual mediums. I disagree with Burke’s comment that “These [Italian] poems transmit little painterly aesthetic” (“Reimagining”), and I would argue that from the beginning Loy’s poetry displays ekphrastic characteristics. Though she began writing poetry that can be characterized as being rather conservative, late Victorian poetry,¹³ her writing quickly changed and embraced experimentation, including attentiveness to the physical appearance of her poems as they were printed. As Galvin points out, Loy “drew from her knowledge of the visual arts a concrete notion of the word as medium, as a plastic entity that could be isolated and elevated for its own sake, manipulated not by the ancient associational baggage of meaning it may carry but by its placement in a new context” (56). Also Loy began to see that typography itself could be a vital part of poetic structure, since it “makes the page a spatial, visual event as well as an aural one. Capitalization, spacing within a line to set rhythm, the narrow shape,

¹² See, for example, Breunig’s *The Cubist Poets in Paris: An Anthology*, Willard Bohn’s *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*, and Jacqueline Vaught Brogan’s *Part of the Climate: American Cubist Poetry*.

¹³ See the three early poems printed in LLB 220-223. Also see note 25 below.

with its use of frequent line breaks for emphasis and timing, rather than sole reliance on punctuation and traditional meters are all techniques that she developed... (Galvin 61). Her work as an artist, plus the writings of her lover, one of the leaders of the Italian Futurist movement, F. T. Marinetti, helped Loy become increasingly aware of the iconic value of words and their pictorial presentation. In his *Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature* (1910) and again in “Destruction of syntax—imagination without strings—words in freedom” (1913), Marinetti insists on *parole-in-liberta*, the freedom of words. Following techniques suggested by Marinetti, Loy’s poetry began to employ this use of “free words” by disrupting the syntax, deleting conjunctions and punctuation marks, juxtaposing seemingly unrelated elements, emphasizing nouns and active, present-tense or infinitive verbs, and avoiding reliance on adjectives and adverbs.

Marinetti in “Destruction of syntax—imagination without strings—words in freedom” also speaks of a “multilinear lyricism.” He notes that “on several parallel lines, the poet will throw out several chains of color, sound, smell, noise, weight, thickness, analogy. One of these might, for instance, be olfactory another musical, another pictorial” (np). This poetic multilinearity appears in Loy’s poetry from 1914 to the end of her career. She constructs and follows chains of pictorial analogies through her use of rapid juxtaposition. In this way, through her contact with Marinetti’s ideas,¹⁴ even her early non-ekphrastic poems take on characteristics associated with visual arts.

Though influenced by Marinetti’s ideas, Loy did not by any means accept or put into practice all of his ideas. Her “Feminist Manifesto” is a direct refutation of what Loy says as Marinetti and futurism’s misogynistic views. Also, Marinetti in his technical manifesto and “Destruction” harshly criticizes lyric poetry that privileges the first-person speaking voice: he “opposed the obsessive I that up to now the poets have described, sung, analyzed, and vomited up.... [We] must rid ourselves of this obsessive I...” (“np”). Loy’s poetry from her years in Florence onwards defies this restriction. Loy’s “Love Songs,” for example, insist upon the experience of the first person speaking voice that is female. The proximity or distance of that speaking voice to Loy’s own life and experience is not the point; what seems most important is that Loy insists upon not silencing an individual female voice. Or, as Elizabeth Arnold points out:

Reacting to the bellicose, misogynist Futurists during the formative years of her poetic career, Loy came to value feminism and a determinate poetic; to survive as a woman poet in the midst of macho avant-gardists, she had to establish herself as an assertive, independent agent. The dissolution of the authoritative self that Marinetti proposed, and that critics such as Perloff claim as a fundamental cornerstone of Anglo-American avant-garde poetic, would only have hampered her in this effort. (84)

¹⁴ Christine Poggi has stated that “Although cautious at first about the pictorial deployment of his innovations, Marinetti eventually came to see the development of free-word poetry as leading to a synthesis of visual and verbal means of expression. In July 1914 he wrote to Severini to argue that the new effort ‘to fuse plastic dynamism with words in freedom,’ to be seen in works by Severini and Carra, be called ‘disegno o dipinto parolibero’ (free word drawing or painting). In 1919 Marinetti would designate as ‘Tavole parolibere e Poesie murali’ (Free-word pictures and poetic murals) those free-word compositions [that]...had a strong pictorial character and were meant to be viewed rather than read or declaimed” (195).

Loy found other ways of subverting and destabilizing lyrical preoccupations with self, including her use of anagrams in the 1910s and constructions of multiple selves in her late poems, a device we will discuss in more detail in part III of this paper.¹⁵

Addressing ways in which verbal and visual elements came together, Burke points out that by 1914,

...Loy was already rethinking the donnees of visual representation and the "belle matiere" of art (her phrase). Specifically, she looked to the blank page as an alternate space suitable for the examination of complex states of consciousness. The pencil line that she had learned to control with such delicate strength could be reimagined in the poetic line, carving its way sinuously through the formal arrangements of the poem. Similarly, the white spaces around and between words could join in the play of speech and silence, of shape and its shadow. Poetry provided her with a way to explore what she called (in "Aphorisms") "the fallowlands of mental spatiality." And it made possible the enactment of a female inwardness that she had hitherto depicted from without, in numerous portraits of female subjects limited by the requirements of figuration perspective. ("Reimagining")

In her early ekphrastic poems written in the 1920s, especially "Brancusi's Golden Bird" and "'The Starry Sky' of Wyndham Lewis," Loy learned from futurism and cubism.¹⁶ Her visual sense informed the poems. At the same time that she was writing these ekphrastic poems, she was also constructing verbal descriptions/appreciations of other writers, including James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, and Edgar Allan Poe. To further extend this spectrum of interart activity, Loy also did both a pencil drawing and an ekphrastic poem about Jules Pascin, and she wrote an analysis of Stein's writing as well as completed a portrait of Stein (at a time when Stein was herself doing verbal portraits of Mabel Dodge, Picasso, and Matisse). Loy also completed a portrait of Joyce and wrote the poem "Joyce's Ulysses." Furthermore, she did visual portraits of other visual artists, including Man Ray and her first husband the English painter Stephen Haweis. Burke points out that Loy also "made a series of line drawings of women artists (actually weavers), as if the vision of a woman absorbed in the task of revitalizing her craft could be expressed as well in either kind of line, poetic or painterly" ("Reimagining").

Amid this flurry of writing and drawing across the arts, Loy repeatedly expressed her concerns about the role that art and artists play in constructions of new forms of consciousness and self. Loy's ekphrastic poetry reveals ways in which the verbal and the visual collude. The two sister arts are not necessarily in conflict in Loy's oeuvre. Loy herself said, in the same interview mentioned above, "And it is extraordinary that I had

¹⁵ For a helpful discussion of Loy's subversive use of anagrams, see Susan Gilmore's "Imna, Ova, Mongrel, Spy: Anagram and Imposture in the Work of Mina Loy."

¹⁶ I am currently engaged in a detailed study of Loy's early ekphrastic poems, including "Brancusi's Golden Bird," "'The Starry Sky' of Wyndham Lewis," "Jules Pascin," and "Summer Night in a Florentine Slum." Two graduate students have already published online their own analyses of Loy's ekphrastic poems. These can be found at http://www.eng.fju.edu.tw/English_Literature/ekphrasis/ekphratic_paper.html

the same (bent) of doing things suddenly, then stopping and then doing it again, both in writing and painting” (214). But I maintain that Loy’s ekphrastic writings repeatedly display an attraction to visual representations and iconic images together with a longing for their silence. My concern here is in the ways her ekphrastic poems are torn between their contradictory desire for iconic representations and silence. Critics addressing issues of ekphrasis have often commented, as Katy Aisenberg does, on “the fundamental struggle between word and image to claim clarity and truth” (2). W. J. T. Mitchell, for example, asserts that “The modern image as pure form or structure ... a kind of unmediated window on reality, a fulfillment of the seventeenth century dream of a perfectly transparent language that could give us direct access to thought and ideas” (24, 26).

In “Brancusi’s Golden Bird,” Loy begins with a description of the artist’s sculpture:

The toy
become the aesthetic archetype

As if
some patient peasant God
had rubbed and rubbed
the Alpha and Omega
of Form
into a lump of metal

A naked orientation
unwinged unplumed
the ultimate rhythm
has lopped the extremities
of crest and claw
from
the nucleus of flight

The absolute act
of art
conformed
to continent sculpture
-- bare as the brow of Osiris --
this breast of revelation

an incandescent curve
licked by chromatic flames
in labyrinths of reflections

This gong
of polished hyperaesthesia
shrills with brass as the aggressive light
strikes

its significance

The immaculate
conception
of the inaudible bird
occurs
in gorgeous reticence . . . (LLB79-80)

But the poem ends by praising this visual toy (in which the artist becomes a godlike figure). It is “the inaudible bird” that “shrills with brass” “in gorgeous reticence.” The verbal text, on one hand, privileges the iconic image, including its silence. On the other hand, it reflects a careful attentiveness to sounds and the claims for silence. Ellen Keck Stauder has noted “The effect of Loy’s consonance and assonance is a web of interlocking sounds and resonances that gives the poem a surface texture much like the polished brass of Brancusi’s surface” (367). Loy draws attention to her words *as* words and as visual icons that can attempt to mimetically duplicate the sculpture’s shining surface. Loy’s poem sounds like a “gong” with “shrills.” But at the same time Loy wants the poem to reach toward the goal of silence that the sculpture embodies. Loy is drawn to the visual, physicality of the sculpture, even as she stands in fear of silence. She wants the sculpture to shrill and gong. Over and over again in her poetry Loy expresses anxiety about silence. In “Stravinski’s Flute,” for example, she mentions “swamps of silence”; the poem “Ignoramus” begins, “Shut it up // Sing silence,” as if it was possible to have both silence and singing. In “Surfeit of Controversy,” Loy again points to the value and limitation of words:

Wounding our world with words
Shrunken in sense
Swollen with censure

A panic pandemonium
Of opposed opinions
Flies blind
On pinions of publicity
Into the echoing ears
Of humanity.

Words embodying no substitute
For our compromised certitude
Are no mainstay for the furtherance
Of our future. (LLB 232)

Similar tensions between visual and verbal and between voice and silence exist in “The Starry Sky” of Wyndham Lewis.” The poem concludes with the following stanzas:

The airy eyes of angels
the sublime
experiment in pointillism

faded away

The celestial conservatories
blooming with light
are all blown out

Enviably immigrants
into the pure dimension
immune serene
devourers of the morning stars of Job

Jehovah's seven days
err in your silent entrails
of geometric Chimeras

The Nirvanic snows
drift -----
to sky worn images (LLB 91-2)

Again, the artist and work of art have completed and replaced divine action. The poem ends by pointing to the “silent entrails” of the painting that seem able to swallow even God’s errors, even as the poem emulates the “sky worn images.” Yet this poem, too, is caught between its own attempts to verbalize the visual and to silence the verbal. As she celebrates the silent and spiritual dimension of Lewis’ painting, Loy’s evocation of the mute painting betrays her awareness of the contradictions inherent in such poetry: “its aesthetic inevitability leads to the abandonment of writing.... Loy hovered on the brink of a mystic’s quiescence in her attempt to reformulate the old idea of artistic creation as a spiritual act” (Burke “Aloofness” 76).

Loy attempted to resolve this conflict by stripping down words. She hopes to achieve the “gorgeous reticence” of Brancusi’s sculpture by dismantling verbal structures in an attempt to arrive at the essence. Burke notes

[Loy’s] skepticism about the efficacy of language compared with the visual arts’ modes of signification. Given the multiple connotations of language, not to mention its linearity and syntactic logic, words could never free themselves from the excrescencies that covered over pure significance... in layers of meaning. The sculptural quality of her own poems, their thin columns of words (noted by T.S. Eliot and Yvor Winters), express her awareness of the ambiguities underlying the use of language to evoke the mystery of artistic creation. The modernist wager of increasing purification as a means to convey the energies of the sensory world led her to an impasse as far as poetry was concerned. When *Lunar Baedeker* was published, it contained only eight of her poems from 1914-15 and eleven from the 1921-22: Loy had omitted as many as she included. Paradoxically, during the 1920s, when she was recognized as one of the

most original contemporary poets, she wrote little and returned instead to her quasispiritual exploration of the visual arts.

(“Aloofness” 75-6)

Loy’s view of the successful use of language to generate modern consciousness found its best exemplar in Gertrude Stein’s work. In a poem entitled “Gertrude Stein” Loy compares Stein’s writing with Madame Curie’s groundbreaking research in radioactivity:

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

Loy admires Stein’s efforts to strip away verbiage in order to reveal “the radium of the word.” In the early ekphrastic poems the tension between silence and speech seeks resolution in stripping language of superfluous meanings to find the “gorgeous reticence” of the visual icons. But the allure of the visual image still pulled Loy away from this “radium of the word.”

III

Loy’s 1906 painting called “L’Amour dorloté par les belles dames” (also referred to as “Love Among the Ladies” or “The Bachelor Stripped Bare”) was one of her most popular paintings. It appeared in at least three of her exhibits (the 1906 Salon d’Automne exhibit—after which Loy was invited to become a permanent member of the Salon—her one-woman exhibit at the Carfax Gallery in London in 1912, and then again in the 1914 exhibit at the New York Architectural League). The painting explores ideas about birth, death, sexuality, and presence/absence that Loy would explore in much more detail late in her life. The central figure in the painting, a naked male, is surrounded by five fully dressed women. The figure is Love, a stripped Cupid, with his feathers still intact. Though the work is reminiscent of various Madonna and Infant Jesus paintings, as well as traditional pietas, with the dead Christ being cradled in his mother’s arms, the positioning of these figures also resembles Edouard Manet’s “Dejeunder sur l’herbe” in the way it juxtaposes clothed figures with a nude, as well as the sketchiness of its delivery. But whereas Manet’s figures are surrounded by a forest, Loy’s characters are in an open space, with only a decorative fence behind them. Also, Manet’s nude woman, the object of the two men’s sexual attraction, looks defiantly at the viewer, while Loy’s male nude seems powerless. The women in their full-length gowns seem substantial and healthy compared to the almost emaciated body of the man. Besides being stripped of his clothes, he also seems stripped of any sense of his masculinity. If Love is a fallen angel,

Cupid captured, the women around him offer both safety and threats. As Burke has pointed out, the painting presents an interesting “reversal of sexual roles” (B101), with the male being supported by a woman and serving as the object of women’s gaze.

I am, however, interested in three other features of this painting. First, this painting presents one of the earliest of Loy’s fallen characters: the man, with very clear adult male genitalia, is Cupid. The angel is a man. The supernatural, though weak and vulnerable, is among us. Second, the painting characterizes the process of stripping down, the process that we see begun in the early ekphrastic poems and a process that would interest Loy in her work for the next sixty years. The angel/man stripped to his essence is weak but glowing. The eyes of a viewer are drawn to his pale white figure. Finally, the woman in the foreground presents a foreshadowing of yet another concern present in Loy’s later work. The woman, with her back to the man and the women holding and watching him, is looking forward, not at the man and not at the viewer, but into the distance. She holds a ball or decorative circular pattern under one hand, as if her interest in that globe or work of art had faded, and now her interests are elsewhere. The painting presents a focus on Love and also diverts our attention away from it. All three of these aspects in the painting will be developed in much greater detail in Loy’s late visual and verbal works.

Most criticism of Loy’s work focuses on her early works, especially the sexually charged early poem “Love Songs to Johannes,” the autobiographical “Anglo-Mongrols and the Rose,” and the poems published in *Lunar Baedeker*.¹⁷ Her artwork is largely ignored, except for brief comments on early paintings like “La Maison en papier.” Though I am concerned about the lack of attention given to Loy’s visual work, my focus in the final part of this paper is not exclusively on her art works. I am more concerned about that point where her visual and verbal arts coalesce. I would like to suggest that in spite of the controversy and critical discussions surrounding her early works, the poems and visual art works from late in her career equally deserve critical attention. Susan Dunn claims even that the period in the 1940s, when Loy was living in the Bowery area of New York City “after her active involvement in major modernist movements such as Futurism, Dadaism, and Surrealism,” may be the time of “Loy’s most radical literary and visual production” (“Fashion”)

Her late poetry—including the non-ekphrastic writings—is effective, in part, because of the exchange and tension between her writing and painting. This interchange fostered an ekphrastic poetics that can be seen in her late writings. The poetics expressed there is ekphrastic in the sense that the poems construct a site linking her experiences as an artist and poet.. Loy’s poetry from the 1940s suggests a poetics of visionary seeing, of spiritualized simplicity, of abstractness and concreteness, of absence and presence, and of desires to express spiritual essences and silence. It is a poetics that simultaneously

¹⁷ See, for example, Rachel Blau DuPlessis’ “‘Seismic Orgasm: Sexual Intercourse, Gender Narratives, and Lyric Ideology in Mina Loy,” Linda A. Kinnahan’s *Poetics of the Feminine*, Carolyn Burke’s “The New Poetry and the New Woman: Mina Loy,” Carolyn Burke’s “Mina Loy,” Marjorie Perloff’s “English as a ‘Second Language: Mina Loy’s ‘Anglo-Mongrols and the Rose,’” and Keith Tuma’s “Mina Loy’s ‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose.’”

presents lack and abundance. William Carlos Williams referred to Loy's late poems as being "contemplative" (np). The poems and visual works from late in her life reveal her ongoing concern with the role of art in altering consciousness. In those late works, however, she expands on the mystical, metaphysical, and religious concerns expressed in the earlier works. She insists on a convergence of the sacred and the profane. This mystical view alters Loy's representation of self and subjectivity.

As Loy's friendship with Joseph Cornell, a surrealist artist who constructed collages and boxed assemblages, developed in the 1930s, Loy became increasingly involved in her own constructions that allowed her to express her ongoing exploration of spiritual and physical absence/presence. Dunn notes, "Through her contact with Joseph Cornell, surrealism also provided Loy with an aesthetic intersection between materiality and spirituality through mystical investments in everyday objects" ("Opposed"); elsewhere Dunn refers to the Bowery constructions as being "ephemeral" ("Fashion").¹⁸ When some of those constructions were shown in a 1959 one-woman exhibit at the Bodley Gallery, one reviewer noted that Loy's constructions "reinvent the dead life of her derelect neighbors in terms of heaven and hell" and

Bums Sleeping, curled figures of stiffened folds of cloth, with arms clasped between their legs as though fettered, with painted, flat paper faces appealing directly upward (directly at *you*), plead to be released from the squared gray cement. In another invention, banana peels become licking flames around a trash can, out which rises a butterfly whose wings are a flattened, pleated paper cup and whose body the spiral around a used vacuum-can key. That image, the plea of discarded life to be reanimated, inspires all of these works, in which the common becomes triumphant through a spiritual effort. (qtd in Kouidis 24)

Loy's Bowery constructions reveal the same impulse toward presence/absence mentioned already, but rather than focussing on these constructions or her constructions with Western themes completed later in Aspen, I would like to return now to Loy's late pencil portrait called "Teri." Loy throughout her life did portraits of Marinetti, Papini, Freud, Arthur Craven and numerous others; she also had completed a wide variety of visual works representing women. This pencil sketch could be interestingly analyzed within the context of Loy's many portraits of women and visual explorations of women's experience, for example "Consider your Grandmother's Stays," the series on women weavers, "Women Dancing," and a number of other missing female portraits.¹⁹ Among

¹⁸ Dunn states, "Most of these works were ephemeral, made from found materials that have disintegrated or were never saved. A few photographs survive..." ("Fashion" n17).

¹⁹ I have not seen the following works; many of them may be lost or even destroyed. But Burke mentions titles of artworks depicting women, including a watercolor called "The Mother" (B97), a painting called "The Wooden Madonna" (B98-9), a portrait called "Jemima" (B126), a series of works called "Ladies at Tea" (B128-9), a series called "Ladies Watching a Ballet" (B128), a drawing which Burke describes as "young ladies dispos[ing] of the hearts they have captured" (B128), a portrait called "Woman's Head" (B159), a portrait called "Maria con Bruno" (B159), a painting called "Woman with Child" (B190), and a portrait of Gertrude Stein (B339). Januzzi also includes the following: "Drawing of Mrs. Flossie Williams" (526) and "Woman in a Carriage" (538).

the portraits of women is a series of sketches of women weavers with an almost medieval and Pre-Raphaelite aura.

In her portraits Loy sought to depict particular features of an individual's appearance. Djuna Barnes, for example, thought that Loy's drawing of Joyce captured him at his "most characteristic...turned farther away than disgust and not so far as death" (qtd in B310). The sketch of Loy's first husband, Stephen Haweis, satirizes his appearance; he is represented with a prolonged, raven-like nose. Loy's portrait of Marianne Moore is more of a caricature than a portrayal of character. Wide-eyed Moore pressed under her broad-brimmed hat seems feeble, except for her black wide eyes. In the same vein, Loy's pencil portraits of Brancusi, Man Ray, Pascin, and Van Vechten seem like attempts to mimetically mirror (or mock) certain characteristics of the sitters. All of these drawings, apparently completed before 1930, focus primarily on one visual quality of the person drawn.

Among Loy's early portraits, only her pencil self-portrait (c.1905) strives to express more than physical likeness. Something is hidden in and behind the face: the angle of the head and the direct gaze back at the viewers suggest defiance, an unwillingness to be captured on paper. The pulled-back and somewhat disheveled hair suggests a nervous tautness, reserve, and studied sense of carelessness. The intricately shaded and shadowed face and hair contrast with the white blankness of the hat, an open expanse suggesting the very undefined and unexpressed complexity that the face refuses to give up. The cluster of flowers in her hat seem open, shallow, and blurred juxtaposed to the depth of the face and half-closed eyes. This early self-portrait reveals as much as it conceals, and it suggests that Loy's self-presentation is a studied attempt to present one view of her as well as to resist revealing too much.²⁰

The portrait of Teri Fraenkel, completed almost fifty years after the self-portrait, is similarly vexing in its presentation and suggestiveness. Simpler in feeling, less stylized and less postured than early works, this portrait has both an airy depth inviting speculation and a beguiling flatness that defies penetration. Whereas the earlier drawings seem almost like caricatures or attempts at parody, this portrait invokes a real and subtle presence. At the same time, this dreamy woman is spiritualized, etherial, ghost-like, floating in air, and herself filled with space. This is a "Face of the skies," an image from a poem we will discuss later. The drawing consists mostly of white space. There is no jewelry, clothing, and headgear—no artifice or decoration. This drawing and Teri herself are stripped down in much the same way that Brancusi's "Golden Bird" is stripped down—an aesthetic that Loy knew and celebrated. Similarly, the face itself is trimmed and cropped: parts of the nose, jaw, and ears are absent. There are no shoulders or throat. The top of the hair is missing, even as the bottom of the portrait consists only of the neck and Loy's signature. This sparse atmospheric surface attempts to capture an inner quality of Teri's face—an otherworldliness, as if she is in a different dimension of consciousness;

²⁰In her biography of Loy Burke suggests that this self-portrait may not have been done by Loy but by her first husband, Stephen Haweis, also an artist: "A sketch of her drawn at this time (perhaps a self-portrait but more likely done by Stephen) shows a confident woman facing straight ahead, her eyes wide open: at that moment she seemed to know where she was going" (98).

yet the eyes, filled with holes of blank space, are wells of sadness.²¹ The eyes do not fit with the smile. The portrait offers a slow but unceasing movement between the eyes and the smile, a movement that begins with the base of the neck and moves upward. The elongated neck and space-filled eyes push and pull a viewer's eyes across the surface of the face, coiled hair, forehead, pursed lips—then into the tree-knotted, tangled-wire eyes. The only escape is back down the tree trunk neck—not back to a body, but back to the long neck that leads a viewer up to the lips again, back into the eyes, and down again to the closed lips.²² The strokes of the hair are a mad dash of movement. The averted eyes separate Teri from the viewer in such a way that Teri seems to be looking beyond the viewer, into the distance. The portrait distances viewers in other ways as well. The face lacks a distinct lineation of the ears. All that is visible of the right ear is a lower portion of the earlobe, and the left ear is at best a barely sketched outline that is all but indistinguishable from her wisps of hair. While Teri's eyes are wide open, she seems not prepared to listen. Moreover, her pursed lips seem disinclined to open. She smiles but does not seem prepared to speak. Though her eyebrows are arched as if she has a question, her eyes seem to be gazing into the distance or the future for answers, answers that she will not speak. Walter Benjamin has written, "With the [First] World War a process began to become apparent which has not halted since then. Was it not noticeable at the end of the war that men returned from the battlefield grown silent—not richer, but poorer in communicable experience" (84). Teri, too, has grown silent with some experience that is still rooted in her eyes.

Regardless of the movement (or possibly because of it), the discrepancy between the sad eyes and the smiling closed mouth does not lessen. Michael Herr, as a journalist reporting on the soldiers at the front lines in the Vietnam War, described one soldier at length:

He was a tall blond from Michigan, probably about twenty, although it was never easy to guess the ages of Marines at Khe Sanh since nothing like youth ever lasted in their faces for very long. It was the eyes: because they were always either strained or blazed-out or simply blank, they never had anything to do with what the rest of the face was doing, and it gave

²¹ Keeping in mind Fraenkel's description of Loy, quoted earlier, this otherworldiness of the portrait invites speculation about whether it could be a disguised late self-portrait of Loy herself. The fact that the portrait was done by memory without Teri being present adds to this possibility. When compared with the earlier self-portrait there are a number of similarities. Does the portrait of Teri also suggest the divided contradictory facets of Loy herself? Or was this portrait of Teri Loy's farewell to New York City?

²² The position of Loy's signature seems, in part, to counter the movement. It parallels the movement and angle of the head. But it also runs counter to the movement of the neck. Yet, viewed together with the neck, the signature almost forms a stand or platform holding up the head. As Loy looks to and at Teri (who looks beyond Loy) Loy also "sees" herself, even as what lies "beyond" is brought into the portrait by its very absence.

Also the signature resembles Loy's early signature (seen for example on the manuscript copy of "Love Songs"). Susan Gilmore has commented on the box-like signature that Loy used in the 20s and was still using in her Bowery constructions in the 40s (305). In the portrait of Teri Loy has discarded that form of signature. There is a new openness to this signature: it too suggests an upward movement (out of the former box). Gilmore states, "Clearly, for Loy, any new undertaking can authorize the production of a new signature..." (305). This drawing may suggest a new and more radical vision for Loy. Interestingly, it may be a vision that brings Loy back into contact with her earlier sense of self/selves.

everyone the look of extreme fatigue or even a glancing madness. (And Age. If you take one of those platoon photographs from the Civil War and cover everything but the eyes, there is no difference between a man of fifty and a boy of thirteen.) This Marine, for example, was always smiling. It was the kind of smile that verged on the high giggles, but his eyes showed neither amusement nor embarrassment nor nervousness. It was a little insane, but it was mostly esoteric in the way that so many Marines under twenty-five became esoterics after a few months in I Corps. On that young nondescript face the smile seemed to come out of some old knowledge, and it said, I'll tell you why I'm smiling, but it will make you crazy. (92)

There is a similar tension between Teri's smile and the sad depths of her eyes. Teri is not a soldier, not fronting on the front lines, but this portrait was completed as tensions leading up to the Korean Crisis were mounting and the cold war was underway. To talk of this drawing in terms of WWI and II is possibly not as preposterous as it seems. Loy experienced directly the influence of this century of war.²³ Both wars influenced her personal life. While living in Florence, Loy was intensely aware of the developments in Europe before and during WWI. Her involvement with Marinetti and Papini included knowledge of their support for Italy's entrance into the war. After her move to New York, Loy met her second husband, Arthur Craven, who had been fleeing from various countries so as not to have to fight in the war. Later, as Craven fled the United States for Mexico to again resist the war, Loy followed him. Her poetry also shows the pervasiveness of war. "Der Blinde Junge" reveals the effect of the "dam Bellona." Her poetry from the 40s shows over and over again a concern about war; to name just a few titles, "Photo after Pogrom," "Omen of Victory," and "Aviator Eyes."

In the late works, Loy rejects many of the tenets essential to the modern art movements that she participated in, even as she keeps and returns to others of those tenets. She maintains her interest in female experience, as well as questions of identity and consciousness. But she develops her interest in outcasts and mysticism. The late works also reveal a further step in the process of stripping down. Where the early ekphrastic poems see artists like Brancusi and Lewis as models of expanded consciousness and transcendence, the late poems offer the possibilities of vision beyond that of artists; the visionaries include bums, street people, and the marginalized. In the final selection of poems in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, "Compensations of Poverty (Poems 1942-1949)," there is a notable absence of an "I," a first person speaking voice. This seems to be a late reworking of Marinetti's futurist maxim against "I." The late poems posit possibilities for vision that extend beyond the domain of any one individual speaker. The "Later Poems" section of *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables* includes only one poem which offers a first person speaker, "Transformation Scene." That speaker is present as a prophetic voice who repeats twice: "I see the seed of Adam." The "Later Poems: 1930-1950" section of poems in *The Last Lunar Baedeker* contains poems that are also notable for the absence of an "I" voice, with the exception of "Transformation Scene," "a similarly visionary "Revelation," and the poem "Show me a Saint who Suffered."

²³ For a time she even worked as a nurse during WWI.

Roger Conover has noted that among Loy's manuscripts at Yale University is a file labeled "Compensations of Poverty." Conover suggests that Loy in the 1940s and 50s may have hoped to publish a collection of poetry with that title. The title itself comes from the poem called "On Third Avenue." Dunn asserts that for Loy poverty offered two compensations: beauty and movement. I would like to add a third: vision. Loy begins the second part of the poem by observing, "Such are the compensations of poverty, / to see-----." Loy's late poems are filled with issues of seeing, but Loy does not focus on only the physical dynamics of vision. Instead, her late poems offer the prospect of looking at what is impermanent, fragmented, or not visible; there are poems with titles like "I almost saw God." Each of the poems is like "Teri," immediately present but peering into an unspecified distance. Modernists, such as Eliot and Pound, view fragmentation as being a symptom of the illness and fallen state of the modern world; fragmentation points to their desire for wholeness. For Loy, however, this fragmentation is an essential element in her visionary poetics: lives are marked by imperfections and fragments that cannot ever become whole. Nevertheless, Loy insists that a nontraditional but nonetheless very real holiness results from the vision and acceptance of our lack of wholeness. "On Third Avenue" concludes with comments that can be read beside Pound's "In a Station of the Metro." The visionary speaker sees:

Transient in the dust,
the brilliancy
of a trolley
loaded with luminous busts;

lovely in anonymity
they vanish
with the mirage
of their passage. (LLB 110)

"The compensation for poverty" here is the very transience of the dust: the people on the public transport are "luminous" and "brilliant" even as they are associated with death and mortality. Their beauty results from their mutability. Pound's haiku-like poem uses similar imagery and also points to the mirage-like quality of the people at the metro stop, but Pound's poem sees the failings of modern life: the people have become fragmented, separated from their source of life: they are "petals" that have fallen and are no longer part of the tree in a garden of Eden. And they have landed on a "wet black bough" that suggests the barrenness and bleakness of the modern urban landscape. Loy's poem does the opposite: it celebrates the disappearance and temporal lives of the passengers, knowing full well that they will vanish. Loy sees loveliness in exactly those facets of urban life that Pound bewailed.

In "The Wasteland" Eliot presents the fragmented vision of Teresius the prophet who cannot die but who sees a fallen world that continues to fall around him. Loy, too, offers a prophetic vision. Hers, though, is the vision of a woman who finds (w)holeness. In "Chiffon Velours," Loy begins: "She is sere." The woman is presented as a prophet, a

seer, and an individual—distinct from the world around her—grown old and withered. Loy's poem is almost an ekphrastic representation of Edward Munch's "The Scream," with its anguished skull-like figure crossing a bridge, open mouthed and emitting a silent scream. Loy's withered prophet is presented as all but exploding with age:

Her features,
verging on a shriek
reviling age,

flee from death in odd directions
somehow retained by a web of wrinkles. (LLB 119)

But this explosion provoked by age is held in check by physical, bodily signs of age: her wrinkles. Her body is also the site for her maternal presence. The front of her dress held together by a safety pin externalizes her past child-rearing days, diapers, and child-safe products: "The site of vanished breasts / is marked by a safety-pin." It's also a sign of her rejuvenation and her potential to become again what she seems to have lost: her own younger self. She has become a aged child clad in diapers.

Rigid
at rest against the corner-stone
of a department store.

Hers alone to model
the last creation.

Clothed in memorial scraps
skimpy even for a skeleton. (LLB 119)

The possibility for the woman to be reborn is immediately juxtaposed with her present closeness to death. She is rigid, death-like, leaning against her own death memorial. With an irony that is typical of Loy, that memorial of the woman as she waits outside a department store is also a "corner-stone," a foundation. This woman and the many other women and lower class individuals like her are the foundation for the consumerist society that the woman "sees" in the store window. That consumerism has consumed her life. But with irony built upon and subverting earlier ironies Loy also implies that this fallen individual and social life offers and contains the possibility for renewal. It is the foundation for the religious vision that the poem rises toward. The woman looking into the shop window daydreaming about herself clothed in the fashions she sees there, unexpectedly takes on religious terminology as she appears to be "the last creation" and "original design / of destitution. She is the fallen, final Eve who experiences transcendence together with her fall:

Trimmed with one sudden burst
of flowery cotton
half her black skirt

glows as a soiled mirror;
reflects the gutter—
a yard of chiffon velours. (LLB 119)

Her black skirt “glows” with the same luminosity that illuminated the passengers on the trolley in “On Third Avenue.” Her reflection mirrored in the store window becomes the site where her “black” clothes coalesce with a “burst / of flowery” possibilities. It is here that the gutter becomes a garden, a yard (a lawn) blossoming with “chiffon velours.” The pun on yard creates the possibility for pastoral imagery even as it refers to the length of material that clothes her, a very limited length—only one yard. Also this reflection superimposes decorative chiffon on her course woolen wear. The gutter life is “trimmed” with its own transcendence. But, as always with Loy, this transcendence is rooted in the fallen world; it is not an escape from this world. Only “half” of the woman’s skirt glows in the new reflection. The other half remains firmly part of the current social and political fabric. Loy’s visionary poetics is rooted in this conflation of absence and presence, transcendence and rootedness. This fusion is based on how and what a person “sees.” The poem, like the portrait of “Teri,” looks away. Though firmly rooted in the here and now, it also presents an upward movement.

Loy offers another example of absence/presence and multilinear versions and visions of a woman in the poem “An Aged Woman.” Like “Chiffon Velours,” this poem presents the possibilities that an old woman envisions. She experiences a dual vision of herself. Like Yeats’s vision of growing old in poems like “Sailing to Byzantium” and his apocalyptic vision in “The Second Coming,” “An Aged Woman” introduces the woman in the context of social and physical breakdown:

The past has come apart
events are vaguing
the future is inexplotable

the present pain.

Not even pain has that precision
with which it struck in youth-time

More like moth
eroding internal organs
hanging or falling down
in a spoiled closet (LLB 145)

The poem’s opening posits a conflict between past and present, with an emphasis on the present, and the old woman’s fallen state and erosion. Hers is a life left to hang in a “spoiled closet.” But, like “Chiffon Velours,” the old woman in this poem sees not only physical self in a mirror. Again, Loy uses a pun. The mirror is described as “bedevilling.” It seems to be a beveled mirror that offers multiple views of the self, one seen in the large central space of the mirror; others seen in the different angles of the

beveled edge. It is this confusing, bedeviling simultaneity of multiple selves that confronts the speaker. At the same time, the term “bedevil” raises the possibility that these multiple selves are “evil” and devilish—not what is sanctioned and orthodox. In her reflection the woman can see what is physically present and what is physically absent, though spiritually present.

Does your mirror Bedevil you
Or is the impossible
Possible to senility
Enabling the erstwhile agile
Narrow silhouette of self
To hold in huge reserve
This excessive incognito
Of a Bulbous stranger
Only to be exorcised by death (LLB 145)

This surrealistic juxtapositioning of two senses of self informs the poem. The speaker seems to see her former, younger self in the mirror. The reflection brings together those two selves, the current older self with the younger self—the “Bulbous stranger.” “Bulbous” is another word rich with meaning, typical of Loy’s best poetry. It suggests both the bulb of a plant root, that source from which all selves proceed, as well as the concentric, onion-like layers that constitute individual subjectivity. Moreover, the poem suggests that this ability to “see” multiple selves is made possible by the very aging process that has been described in the opening lines. Aging, too, it seems, has its compensations. This bedeviling is only “exorcised” by death. The final two lines of the poem challenge the orthodoxy of this sense of devilishness and the need for exorcism. Instead, the lines state that “Dilation has entirely eliminated / your long reality.” The narrowing of the sense of self destroys and eliminates the “reality” of multiple selves. This narrowing is hailed as destructive, as opposed to the “Exceeding” of boundaries celebrated in the early poem about childbirth “Parturition.” The poem challenges the very orthodoxy of exorcism and traditional constructions of self that it had seemed to postulate earlier. This undermining and deconstruction of the previous views is pushed further by Loy’s signature and date at the bottom of the poem:

Mina Loy
July 12th
1984 (LLB 145)

Though as Conover points out, the “composition date [is] unknown” (LLB 214), Loy died in 1966 and stopped writing poems by the beginning of the 1950s. Loy has postdated the poem, just as she had earlier predated some of her paintings.²⁴ By positing that the speaker is looking in the mirror in 1984, the poem constructs a future self, and it is this future older self looking back on her current self that is being

²⁴ Burke states in a note describing Loy’s 1937 one-woman exhibit at the Julien Levy gallery that Levy may have “told Mina to backdate her 1933 paintings (several are misdated 1902 and 1903), to enhance their value” (B379).

presented in the poem. Unlike what was suggested in the poem's opening lines, it is the woman's present and future selves that are brought together. She sees in the mirror not her past, younger self, but instead a future, older self. The selves of the past, present, and future are all envisioned in the mirror. The poem celebrates this possibility of seeing: the individual's capacity to bring the physically present together with what is absent, the possibilities of the self. It is this "huge reserve" of the individual self to construct and contain multiple selves simultaneously that the speaker envisions. Interestingly, the poem does not suggest that death ends the multiple selves. Instead, ironically, the speaking voice from the future, from the world of death, exorcises the view of death as a silencing agent.

Like "Letters from the Unliving," a poem about rereading the letters from her presumed dead second husband, Arthur Craven, "An Aged Woman" expresses a poetics that conflates what is present with what is absent. The words of both poems refuse to be engulfed in "swamps of silence" (to quote "Stravinski's Flute" again). In "Letters" the speaker confronts words as icons ("calligraphy of recollection") that bring the voiced past into a voiceless present, a present that is filled with the writer's absence: "The hoarseness of the past / creaks / from creased leaves/ covered with unwritten writing / since death's erasure/ of the writer---." The speaker is torn between the words from the past that linger "with the horror of echo / out of void" and the void that engulfs her now. As is typical with Loy, confronted with this iconic presence, the speaker wants to retreat into silence: "I am become / dumb." As she attempts to strip away the superfluous meanings, she feels the desire to withdraw into silence. Though she strips away layers from the "dead language of amor," the presence of what is absent cannot be completely silenced, and she cannot silence herself. She is afloat in a world between presence and absence. The poem ends with her conflicted desire: "my preference / to drift in lenient coma / an older Ophelia / on Lethe." But no matter how long she drifts on the river of forgetfulness, she will never forget. The letters preserve the site that will continue to keep her afloat between worlds.

It's fitting that the last poem in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* is the late, undated poem "Moreover, the Moon--." The poem continues the moon imagery present in Loy's earlier work, especially those poems in *Lunar Baedeker* where the moon is symbolic of illumination, love, and human possibility. But the title of this poem suggests even more, with a typical Loy pun. It may mean, "in addition, consider the moon," but it also may suggest that there is some life, something above, that there is "more over the moon." It is this "more" that the poem explores: a world beyond our physical, emotional selves. The poem is a paean to both the full moon and the new moon, or—to be more precise—the moon that can be both full of presence and full in its absence. It begins by addressing the now invisible new moon. Even though the moon is gone (actually it's not gone; it's only invisible), the speaker feels its presence by its very absence. The personified moon is the "Face of the skies." Just as Loy has demonstrated in "An Aged Woman" that an individual can be the site of multiple selves, here the world itself is multiple, consisting of more than what is immediately and physically seen. There is not just one sky, there are many. But the moon is the face of them all. And the speaker wants to be aligned and in tune with all of these worlds

Face of the skies
preside
over our wonder.

Fluorescent
truant of heaven
draw us under. (LLB 146)

The speaker invites or commands that face to preside over us and induce a sense of wonder, to govern and awe us. The speaker is voluntarily submissive. In this late poem Loy seems to almost be returning to the use of rhyme that dominated her earliest poems.²⁵ Many of Loy's final poems celebrate marginalized figures like bums and the homeless. The speaker in this poem greets the moon as being a truant, but here—as in other late poems—is a messenger that brings a distant, other world to our immediate physical existence. Just as the passengers on the trolley glow and are luminous, here the moon is filled with and gives off light: it is “fluorescent.” The marginalized and the truant glow. Loy also evokes a world of magic and the supernatural. She asks the moon to entice and pull us into a world of truancy and light. Interestingly, the moon is not herself the source of light; like the mirrors we have seen in “Chiffon Velours” and “An Aged Woman,” this poem focuses on a reflection. The moon reflects the light from the sun; there is “more over.”

In this apostrophe to the moon, Loy characteristically does not simply evoke a desire for transcendence. The speaker does not invoke the sun. The moon, too, is fallen: it is a “Silver, circular corpse.” The transcendent urge is placed within the context of physicality. Loy's moon is a fallen, postlapsarian body. It is a truant body displaced from the realms above us. It is dead but not dead. The speaker invokes this living-dead, this absent-present that is whole in itself, self-contained (“circular”) and valuable (“silver”), but now absent, truant.

your decease
infects us with unendurable ease,

touching nerve-terminals
to thermal icicles (LLB 146)

The corporeality of the moon is stressed by mentioning its “decease,” a word that is connected by sound to both “decrease” and “disease.” And this possibility of disease is

²⁵ The first two stanzas of Loy's early poem from 1914 “The Beneficent Garland” state:

To hang about the knees of the gods,
The first-fruits of the awful odds
'Gainst which man till'd the soil.

What are then these first fruits, I pray
Swelling at night to ripen by day
Such sorrows of their toil?

stressed in the subsequent line that talks of being infected. This decease and disease are also joined by sound to the speaker's discomfort and feeling of "unendurable ease." The death/decease of the moon is juxtaposed with the ease of the living. Death and life coalesce. The "unendurable ease" is in part the result of the cold, death-like quality of the speaker herself. Inside, she is "thermal icicles": her inner life is dead and cold. Not only that, she protects, encases, and lines her frozen self to keep herself protected and separate from the outside world. Yet even as she wants to be secure, she wants to be free: she want the moon to destroy her self-imposed isolation. The moon connects "nerve-terminals" to her inner icicles. Again, it is the emphasis on the physicality that concerns me. Even in its absence and death, the moon is as bodily present and "touching" as the speaker is. These nerve-terminals take on meaning from the slippage and multiplicity of denotations and connotations available. They are "terminal" because they are deadly and death-like, but they are also "terminals," centers of transit systems. They are points of transfer, places of exchange and connection. Again, for Loy, these points of physicality and death are the sites where a transfer to the light that is "more over" the moon—the light of the sun—is possible. In the final stanza Loy foregrounds these various contradictions:

Coercive as coma, frail as bloom
 innuendoes of your inverse dawn
 suffuse the self;
 our every corpuscle become an elf. (LLB 146)

The moon is as forceful and domineering as a coma, but it is a coma that the speaker has asked for in the first stanza. The moon can lull speakers into a false death-like sense of themselves, a death in life, a coma. At the same time, the moon is a force that speaks, forces, and beckons the subconscious; it addresses those parts of us that live in a coma. The power of the moon to induce wonder is not necessarily conscious. Also, it is both forceful and frail. Its subconscious bloom can be as temporary as a flower blossom or a sunrise. Its power to preside is subtle. It evokes through "innuendoes" and subtle hints or signs and only speaks to those who carefully listen. Its "inverse dawn" is the rising that it presents inside the "thermal icicles." And, ironically, its innuendoes can be heard during its disappearance, by the emergence of the new moon, the "inverse dawn." These innuendoes spread throughout the speaker, they "suffuse the self" and transform her. Her bodily presence is altered, magically, supernaturally to "become an elf." The self, linked by rhyme to "elf," remains body—with corpuscles, nerves, disease, and death—but it "moreover" also becomes something else. It has been altered into something magical, mystical that serves the moon with a new, altered life empowered by that "face of the skies." The moon invokes the speaker as both body and not-body. And by following the moonlight, the speaker comes to a new elfish life even as she continues her physical life. The speaker is reanimated by the moonlight, and the moon itself is animated by that power that is "more over the moon," the light from the sun.

In these three late poems by Mina Loy examined here, "Chiffon Velours," "An Aged Woman," and "Moreover, the Moon---," we see how Loy's involvement in the verbal and visual arts generates a new ekphrastic poetics. This late poetics, centered on the body but

refusing to be limited by the body, reflects the central issues presented in the portrait of Teri. Just as the portrait draws attention to Teri's eyes, that are averted and looking elsewhere, beyond the viewer, these final poems raise the possibility of visionary seeing. They present, like the drawing, a sense of what is immediately present, even as they invoke and superimpose what is absent, distant, and beyond. The portrait is almost an oxymoron in being a light-lead sketch; yet a similar paradox is present in the poems with their mystical fusion of physical sensory detail and non-physical realities. Just as the portrait is cropped and stripped down, the final poems tear away layers of physical decay, absence, and age to suggest a transcendent presence. The sketch constructs tension between the eyes and the mouth, between what is seen and what is spoken, between the visual and the verbal. A similar tension exists in the late poems: they invoke the presence of what can be seen but they also imply other realities that cannot be fully articulated nor fully seen. Loy's late poetics embody yet another contradiction by being both iconic and gesturing towards silence. It may be fitting to end with a quote from a poem I mentioned briefly earlier. The poem "Transformation Scene," exemplifying Marinetti's sense of multilinearity, invokes the sun and the possibility of rebirth in a world that is both pre- and postlapsarian. Its puns and wordplay on sun/son/unison and face/surface point us back to the pencil sketch "Teri" with its "Face of the skies." Teri's face and Loy's late ekphrastic poetics become sites where the physical and the spiritual, the immediate and the transcendent, the voiced and the silent, the manifest and the invisible, the present and the absent are juxtaposed in a futurist "chain of analogies."

Even as the sun
dances on their faces
Adam's race
dances on the earth's surface

in unison.

Fu Jen University
Taipei, Taiwan

Appendix:

Mina Loy's Exhibitions

- 1904 Salon d' Automne: 6 watercolors
- 1905 Salon des Beaux-Arts: 2 watercolors
- 1905 Salon d' Automne: 4 drawings / all portraits of women [exhibit also included Matisse, Derain, Rouault, Vlaminck]
- 1906 Salon des Beaux-Arts
- 1906 Salon d' Automne: watercolors, including *Love among the Ladies* and *La Maison en papier* [Loy becomes a member of the Salon]
- 1910 New English Art Club: 1 portrait called *Jemima*
- 1912 Carfax Gallery, London: exhibit of "drawings" that included *Love among the Ladies* [Loy's first one woman show, on the way to London she stopped in Paris to help select the 1912 Salon d' Automne]
- 1913 Salon d' Automne: one oil painting and three drawings
- 1914 Friday Club (which had connections to the Bloomsbury group): two portraits (*Woman's Head* and *Maria con Bruno*)
- 1914 Esposizione Libera Futurista Internazionale (First Free Exhibition of International Futurist Art) in Rome. Loy represents England: three portraits of Marinetti and a "dynamism of the subconscious"
- 1914 An exhibit at the New York Architectural League: two designs for wall decorations and *Love among the Ladies*
- 1916 Annual Florence exhibit, including *Woman with Child*
- 1917 Society of Independent Artists at Grand Central Palace in New York City: one work
- 1921 Belmanson Gallery: "several" of Loy's drawings, including a portrait with two gypsies and a young girl, as well "a series of heads inspired by Joella" (B303)
- 1923 Salon d'Automne: one painting [*Lunar Baedeker* published]
- 1925 Exhibit of six "Jaded Blossoms" and paintings, including portraits of Freud, Marinetti, Papini, and Stein at Little Gallery
- 1925 Macy's Gallery, Namm Gallery, Cargoes Gallery, Little Gallery: exhibit of paper cutouts and flower arrangements known as "Jaded Blossoms"]
- 1925(?) Loy opens Galleries Mina Loy in Paris, selling her lamps
- 1932-36 Loy is Paris representative for Julian Levy Gallery
- 1933 "Exhibition of Literature and Poetry in Painting since 1850" Wadsworth Athenaeum, included Loy's "Faces"
- 1933 "Paintings of Mina Loy" at Julien Levy Gallery
- [*Lunar Baedeker and Timetables* published in 1958]
- 1959 "Constructions" at Bodley Gallery
- 1959 Loy received Copley Foundation Award for Outstanding Achievement in Art