The Half of Art: On Some Motifs in Baudelaire, Marinetti, and Loy

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Sasha Colby
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[redacted]

Dr. Luke Carson, Supervisor (Department of English)

[redacted]

Dr. Jamie Dopp, Departmental Member (Department of English)

[redacted]

Prof. Christopher Butterfield, Outside Member (Department of Music)

[redacted]

Dr. Marc Lapprand, External Examiner (Department of French)

Supervisor: Dr. Luke Carson

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the ways in which Charles Baudelaire's theory of modern beauty has been adapted by succeeding movements of the avant-garde. As such, Baudelaire's definition of modernity: "The ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent – the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" serves as a reference point for an examination of the modernities of F.T. Marinetti and Mina Loy. Central to these discussions are Walter Benjamin's writings. By tracing Benjamin's theories of tradition, fascism, and Surrealism through the aesthetics of Baudelaire, Marinetti, and Loy, this thesis aims to investigate the ways in which the modern "experience" is construed by each.

Examiners:

[redacted]

Dr. Luke Carson, Supervisor (Department of English)

[redacted]

Dr. Jamie Dopp, Departmental Member (Department of English)

[redacted]

Prof. Christopher Butterfield, Outside Member (Department of Music)

[redacted]

Dr. Marc Lapprand, External Examiner (Department of French)

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Introduction

"By modernity I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable." With these words, Baudelaire established a definition of modern beauty that would be assumed, rejected, or permutated by almost all succeeding movements of the avant-garde. But when Baudelaire first published this proposition in "Le Figaro," in 1863, it was with what appears to be a rather innocuous idea of "the beautiful" in mind – an aesthetic theory articulated by Stendhal, but in popular currency at the time, suggesting that art was constituted of an "an eternal, invariable element, whose quantity it is excessively difficult to determine," and of "a relative, circumstantial element … whether severally or all at once, the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions" ("The Painter of Modern Life" 3).

It is Baudelaire's understanding of the beauty specific to modernity that has been of particular critical interest. The "ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent" is one of the earliest voicings of an aesthetic drawn from the fleeting and chaotic sense of the modern metropolis. But this perspective also reveals Baudelaire's definition to be something of a paradox. How can immutability endure the radical changes of modern society? How can tradition be joined with the very forces that threaten to erode it? Interestingly, Baudelaire's poetry poses these very questions. The difference in tone and formulation between Baudelaire's theory of modern art and *The Flowers of Evil*, theoretical parameters and artistic praxis is, therefore, a primary concern of chapter one.

The tension between the authority of tradition and the secular forces of modernization is one that Walter Benjamin dwells upon at length. Central to these

discussions is the concept of aura, a slippery and distinctively Benjaminian term referring to a kind of aesthetic power assumed by an art object imbedded in ritual. For Benjamin, much of the beauty of Baudelaire's poetry is drawn from its documentation of modernity's shattering of aura. According to Benjamin, however, aura was not something irretrievably lost. In modernity, it resurfaces in altered form as the mark of totalitarian political myth or, more positively, as a new valuation of everyday experience.

In the "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin cites Marinetti and the Italian Futurist movement as an example of the political appropriation of aura. By glorifying the secular forces of production and war, the Futurists sought to institute a technological Utopia. Working within the terms laid out by Baudelaire, Marinetti *opposes* the "imperishable, the immortal" with the liberating forces of the "becoming, the perishable, the transitory, and the ephemeral." In other words, Futurism seeks to appropriate the most unstable elements of Baudelaire's aesthetic theory to institute a new mythological stability of political domination.

"Profane illumination" is Benjamin's term for the positive transformations that aura can undergo outside of ritual. It is secular experience imbued with ritualistic authority. Benjamin's most eloquent meditation on this sort of experience is found in the essay "Surrealism." Mina Loy, consecutively a Futurist, Dadaist, Surrealist (and feminist throughout) is the subject of chapter three, as her poetry accords very much with the kind of phenomenological resuscitation that Benjamin discusses. For Loy, however, illumination of any kind is fleeting, uneven, and jammed between moments of ideological breakdown – all of which can be summed up by her take on Baudelaire's definition of

modern beauty: "The Eternal is sustained by serial metamorphosis, / even so Beauty is / metamorphosis surprises!"

Rather than a study of a particular figure or theoretical construct, then, these chapters are a contained survey of variations on a theme: variations on Baudelaire's theory of urban aesthetics and themes of modern experience articulated by Benjamin. By tracing the concepts of the "ephemeral the fugitive and the contingent" and the auratic power of the "eternal and the immutable" through selected works of Baudelaire, Marinetti, and Loy, I was looking to find both connections and discontinuities, but most specifically to trace the evolution of the historical avant-garde's approach to these issues, if only in a very limited way.

On a more technical note (which Marinetti would undoubtedly approve as an apt way to conclude an introduction) I have included the original French poetry of *The Flowers of Evil*, where, as Bersani writes, "the French is indispensable" (1). All English renderings of Baudelaire's verse are from The Oxford World's Classic translation by James McGowen, except for "À Une Passante," where I preferred the version in Benjamin's "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire." For Baudelaire's prose poems and essays I chose what I considered to be the best English translations. The onomatopoeic quality of the Futurist poetry did not seem to require "translation" from Italian. All of the Loy poetry included was originally written in English, though, as Roger Conover points out, when reading Loy, a good dictionary always comes in handy.

CHAPTER 1

"The Half of Art": Baudelaire's Modern Beauty

In much of Baudelaire's work, the "invariable" element of beauty is correlated with myth, particularly with its reconciliatory capacity. The "ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent," the beauty particular to the modern age, is more difficult to place, but is closely associated with fragmentation and the fleetingness of experience in the modern metropolis. Yet, even while Baudelaire binds these elements in his criticism, the poetry of *The Flowers of Evil* belies his faith in the enduring. In essence, the complexity of the modern seems to overwhelm the bonds of mythic resolution, the modern subject the limits of the authoritative "I."

The seemingly irreconcilable nature of the eternal and the fugitive has caused many critics to question why Baudelaire would attempt to bind them at all. In this chapter, I argue that the complex and "ephemeral" nature of Baudelaire's poetry depends on the decline of the eternal. "Contingency" suggests a certain relativity, and the innumerable tonal variations often cited as Baudelaire's most significant contribution to modern poetry depend on a seeming impossibility – the shattering of the immutable. In addition, I also consider the ways in which Baudelaire construes the eternal as both place and person – antiquarian paradise and ideal woman – and the "fallen" condition of modernity in its depictions as underworld and prostitute. This chapter, then, is meant to suggest some of the ways in which one of the earliest advocates of an aesthetic of the urban and the mundane addressed the issues of personal and cultural disintegration that seemed inevitable to the rapidly approaching modern moment.

I.

According to fashion guides, 1840 to 1870 was the Age of the Crinoline, and in 1860, the year after Baudelaire began work on "The Painter of Modern Life," crinolines "reached the limit of backward extension" (Waugh 141). The pagoda sleeve had been forsaken for the bishop sleeve, and "all skirts were now long and trained." Mme. Carette, an attendant to the Empress Eugènie, wrote that the business of getting around in skirts that could exceed five feet in width required the "height of female skill":

> To walk with so immense a paraphernalia around one was not very easy; and the narrow bust, placed in the center of this volume of material, appeared to be detached from the rest of the body altogether. To be able to sit so as not to cause the rebellious springs to fly open, required a miracle of precision. To ascend a carriage without rumpling such light textures, at a time when the evening toilettes were made of tulle and lace, required a great deal of time, much quietness on the part of the horses, and much patience on the part of fathers and husbands whose complaisance was put to an enormous test, compelled as they were to remain motionless in the midst of these 'nuages fragiles.'
>
> (quoted in Waugh 218)

The crinoline was the most voluminous manifestation of mid-century extravagance. But for perhaps the first time in history it was an excess that was not reserved for the aristocracy. The invention of the sewing machine, the rise of ready-made clothing, and cheap work room labour made haute couture available to the new affluence of the bourgeoisie. As men remained committed to a uniform dark suit – "l'habit noir" – that was perceived to project both austerity and equality among the upper classes, it was "wives and daughters who were charged with the task of demonstrating the family's wealth and power through their dress" (Burton 13). In their "immense paraphernalia,"

these "nuages fragiles" were the ornament of bourgeois ascendancy, their flowing gowns a powerful symbol of mobilized capital.

The competitive aspect of these outward displays begged for increasingly ornate fashion. In 1840, the journalist Delphine de Girardin wrote: "Aujourd'hui, la fureur des ornaments est poussée jusqu'a la démence. Ce sont des volants sans nombre est hors de toutes proportions; ce sont des flots de dentelle, des nuages de marabouts, des bosquets de fleurs, des inondations de diamants." ("Today the passion for ornament has been pushed to insanity; it is sheaves without number and out of all proportion; it is streams of lace, clouds of flounces, bushels of flowers, floods of diamonds") (quoted in Burton 14). But "out of all proportion" was the mark of the times. Dresses were made of "plain silks, watered silks, gros grains, satins, cashmere, merino, lightweight woolens, cottons, piques, patterned muslins, gauze, tulle, and tarlatan" (Waugh 141). Shawls were "loose or semi-fitting – shawl-mantle, pelisse, mantle, burmouse, sortie de bal." And the trimmings of evening gowns, those "lace flounces, gauze kiltings, pleatings of paper thin ribbons, [and] flowers" were kept light so that "the thin silk and gauze skirts should float out unhampered by their multitudinous but fragile ornamentation" (142).

The magnitude of women's dress at this time was equally a source of humour and fascination. "Well-nigh as many accidents will be met with by these trains as by those upon our railways," wrote the editors of Punch, "and we really hardly know which of them may prove more dangerous" (quoted in Waugh 221). However, for Théopile de Gautier, poet, journalist and the "Perfect Magician of French Letters" to whom Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil* is dedicated, crinoline was the under-painting of a new art:

> Women are right to wear the crinoline in spite of all the jokes, the caricatures, the songs and the insults. They are right to prefer these wide skirts, with their extravagant volume of material spreading over the ground, to the straight tubes which their mothers and grandmothers used to wear … Erudition and pleasantry apart, a young woman with a low necked dress and bare arms, her hair beautifully arranged, her skirts billowing out behind in waves of antique moiré, satin or silk, could never appear more beautiful nor be better attired, and we see no reason why art should disapprove.
>
> (quoted in Waugh 217–218)

Art, in "The Painter of Modern Life," did not disapprove in the slightest. "Having taken it upon himself the task of seeking out and expounding the beauty of *modernity*," Baudelaire writes of *the* painter of modern life, Constantin Guys, "Monsieur G. is thus particularly given to portraying women who are elaborately dressed and embellished by all the rites of artifice" (34). "The beauty of *modernity*," which plays itself out on the bodies of women, is, therefore, the art of disguise and ostentation. In addition to its symbolic status as the excess of decadence, however, the crinoline, in its billowing folds, also captures the essence of modernity – "the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent," – "the half of art," Baudelaire qualifies, "whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (13).

Certainly Guys' portraits do capture the sense of movement that is central to Baudelaire's understanding of the modern metropolis. Lines are light, darting, and blurred. Drapery figures prominently – coat tails, parasols, capes, and, of course, dresses floating over layers upon layers of crinoline. The frivolity of these scenes cause many critics to wonder why Baudelaire would choose Guys, a relatively minor draughtsman, as the painter of the epoch. Why not Manet or Courbet, both of whom Baudelaire knew well – and who were, it is implied, "serious" artists? Yet in Guys, Baudelaire found a

figure who reflected the "particular" beauty of the age, the whimsy of the leisure classed dressed up to visit the height of international display, the *Exposition Universelle*. Moreover, in the restless energy that approaches impressionism, Guys catches hold of the sensual experience of modernity – the ceaseless motion, blurred visages and teeming detail that characterize the quintessential modern experience of walking down a crowded city street.

In contrast with the contested "academic theory of unique and absolute beauty" (3) Guys' historically specific representations of the fashions of the Parisian boulevards are, indeed, "street art." The crowd, the clothes, the characters – soldiers, and society women, prostitutes and dandies – all amount to a grand parade, the "pageantry of military life, of fashion and of love" (24). The artist is himself a "passionate spectator" for whom it is "an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude" (9). When, in 1913, Blaise Cendrars wrote: "Ma poésie est grand ouvert sur les boulevards" ("My poetry is wide open to the boulevards") (quoted in Perloff xvii), he was borrowing from this Baudelairean perspective that finds beauty in the daily rush of the quotidian. Moreover, Cendars' "boulevards" were the creation of Baudelaire's Paris, the focal point of Haussmann's radical urban renovation. These streets were specifically designed to attract the upper middle class clientele of Guys' drawings, existing as a "stage for elegant living, promenading, and socializing in outdoor cafes and restaurants, and also as connecting corridors between … key points of the city" (Saalman 14). These "connecting corridors" would wipe out the heart of the old town, while the construction of the boulevards required the demolition of several low-income communities. In other writing, Baudelaire is intimately concerned with both the socio-economic and psychic displacements incurred

by Haussmannization. Here, however, he, like the painter of modern life, "delights in the fine carriages and proud horses, the dazzling smartness of the grooms, the expertness of the footmen, the sinuous gait of the women, the beauty of the children, happy to be alive and nicely dressed – in a word, he delights in universal life" (11).

If, as Marshall Berman writes, "universal life" appears as "a great fashion show," then the boulevard is the runway, with spectator seating in the newly created shops and cafés. The precision of Berman's equivalence of modernity and fashion, however, lies not only in its summary of the overall tone of "The Painter of Modern Life," but also in the way it points to the kind of time that Baudelaire seems to be advocating, or at any rate, the pace he perceives as the dominant one in mid-century Paris.

Fashion is, after all, the art of perpetual metamorphoses. The idioms we use to describe it (or that the fashion world uses to describe itself) – "cutting edge" "fresh" "up-to-date" – denote the utmost proximity to the line where present meets future. Because individual incarnations of the fashionable live on the oxygen of the present, they are perpetually dying rapid, successive deaths. And because of the turnover rate, changes are often a matter of trivial variations. Hence, the artist who notices if "the cut of a garment has been slightly modified, if bows and curls have been supplanted by cockades, if *bavolets* have been enlarged and *chignons* have dropped a fraction towards the nape of the neck, if waists have been raised and skirts have become fuller" (11) is the artist inescapably attuned to the present instant.

An instant, needless to say, that is quickly replaced by the next. Guys' drawings, therefore, appear as series of infinitesimal moments, one falling on the heels of the next: "Sketches pile up, one on top of the other – in their tens, hundreds, thousands" (18).

Concomitantly, the artist is in "frenzy," chasing what threatens to disappear: "the attitude and the gesture of living beings, whether solemn or grotesque, and their luminous *explosion* in space" (18). This kinetic energy would become the driving aesthetic impulse of the machine age, realized, as Berman writes, "in cubist painting, collage and montage, the cinema, the stream of consciousness in the novel, the free verse of Eliot and Pound and Apollinaire, futurism, vorticism, constructivism, dada, poems that accelerate like cars, paintings that explode like bombs" (145). In 1860, this energy is still defined as a *human* quality, the "movement prescribed" by "charming fashion," enacted by the "living gestures" of the crowd. However, Baudelaire's ebullient (if uneven) enthusiasm for the tumultuous energy of the modern age would re-appear in the utopic visions of the avant-gardes to come. The pace of modern life, its flamboyant style, and more than this, its constant novelty seemed to offer a wealth of glamorous possibilities – "Beauty, Fashion, and Happiness," proclaims the first section-heading of "The Painter of Modern Life." It is an optimism common to almost every prosperous age and may remind us, closer to our time, of the buoyancy of 1950's America and the gilded promises of the American Dream.

For Baudelaire, however, uncomplicated faith in the promises of Parisian pageantry was unsustainable. In the essay itself, there are hints of uneasiness underlying the general breeziness and wit – a glimmer of instability when speaking of Guys as an "I with an insatiable appetite for the non-I" (9), a tension in the face of the "rising tide of democracy which invades and levels everything" (29), and in the final paragraph, a reconfiguration of modernity's beauty as that which is "often weird, violent, and excessive" (40). Indeed, it is these elements that take precedence in Baudelaire's poem

"Parisian Dream," which is dedicated to Guys. "Weighty waterfalls" and "bright cascades" (207) – reminiscent of Gautier's "waves of antique moiré, satin or silk" – are the most prominent images in the early stanzas and set a tone similar to the "Painter of Modern Life." But these images quickly become the property of the "architect of my magic show" – we can assume Guys – unmasked as a cheap conjurer. In this moment of revelation, the "ocean I had first subdued" floods the confines of illusion. Baudelaire sees the squalor of his own dwelling, hears the "brutal" "accents" of the clock. But most significant is the specter that hangs over the crowd:

> Et sur ces mouvantes merveilles
> Planait (terrible nouveauté!
> Tout pour l'œil, rien pour les oreilles!)
> Un silence d'éternité
>
> Over the pageantry appears
> To hover (awful novelty!
> For eyes, but nothing for the ear!)
> A silence of eternity.
>
> (*Flowers of Evil* 205–9)

II.

Eternity was something Baudelaire heard very clearly in the music of Richard Wagner. "When I heard it for the first time, with my eyes closed, feeling as though transported from the earth ..." (*Richard Wagner and Tannhauser in Paris* 330) – thus begins Baudelaire's extended account of his impressions while listening to *Tannhauser* at the Paris Opera in March of 1860. In essence, the essay is a defense of Wagner, whose "total work of art" was ill received by the Parisian public. The essay is also the expression of an ardent admiration that remained constant until Baudelaire's death in 1867. According to Thomas Mann: "The joy of rediscovering himself in the artistic intentions of another, such as Wagner's music afforded him, was something he only ever knew on one other occasion, when he made the literary acquaintance of Edgar Allan Poe. These two, Wagner and Poe, were Baudelaire's gods – a strange sounding combination to German ears!" (*Thomas Mann Pro and Contra Wagner* 145). And Nietzsche, somewhat less descriptively, writes: "There is a lot of Wagner in Baudelaire" (quoted in Mann 145).

But what was the root of this artistic empathy, a depth of feeling that would cause Baudelaire to listen to Wagner on his deathbed and to state that in his poetry he sought to recreate Wagner's music in words? Some clues are found in the body of the Tannhauser essay, where Baudelaire's citation of *Opera and Drama* suggests a common fascination with the ageless quality of art, which emerges in Wagner's discussion of myth:

> I saw that I was inevitably being led to point to the *myth* as the ideal material of the poet. The myth is the primitive and anonymous poetry of the people, and we find it taken up again in every age, remodeled constantly by the great poets of cultivated ages. In the myth, indeed, human relations discard almost completely their conventional form, intelligible only to abstract reason; they show what is really human in life, what can be understood in any age, and show it in that concrete form

> exclusive of all imitation, that confers upon all true myths their individual character, which is recognizable at the first glance.
>
> (Wagner in *Richard Wagner and Tannhauser in Paris* 339)

Myth, as Wagner here presents it, is enduring, a permanent element of civilization, "remodeled" by the "great poets of cultivated ages." In this, "myth" closely resembles Baudelaire's understanding of "the eternal and the immutable" – that half of modern beauty that persists from age to age, tying one epoch to the next, yet always presenting itself the particular guise of the period. Baudelaire dwells on the mythic theme at some length, elaborating Wagner's definition by submitting that myth owes its timelessness to its encompassing the two equally ubiquitous elements, "sin" and "redemption" (348). *Tannhauser*, based on the Teutonic folk legend of a young minstrel torn between the sensual pleasures of the magical mountain abode of Venus and heavenly salvation, is thus interchangeably "mythic" and "eternal" as it represents "the struggle between the two principles that have chosen the human heart as their main battle-ground, the flesh and the spirit, hell and heaven, Satan and God" (341).

The word "myth" is derived from the Greek "mythos," meaning "utterance" or "authoritative speech." While there are several dissenting theories of its origin and function, most guides agree on three particular qualities of myth: its "universality," as Baudelaire observes, its singularity of plot and purpose, rising from the Greek tradition of outstanding individualism, and its "power to integrate polar opposites" (Harris and Platzner, 6). From an Aristotelian point of view, myth is the literary structuring of a conflict between forces or characters, which is then resolved through some kind of "accommodation or reconciliation" (11).

True to its mythic capacity, *Tannhauser* reconciles the tension between extremes. At the end of the story, the minstrel seeks salvation in Rome, but is rejected for the time he spent on the mountain with Venus and the Bacchants. He is, however, saved by the chaste love of Elizabeth, who sacrifices herself to the Virgin Mary. On returning to Germany, Tannhauser finds Elizabeth dead at the altar and collapses, dying at her bier. For Baudelaire, this ending signifies the triumph of good, a crescendo from "the satanic titillations of a vague love, soon followed by enticements, swoonings, cries of victory, groans of gratitude," to a height where "the religious theme, launching a renewed attack on sin let loose, gradually brings back order and gains ascendancy " (343). It is this well shaped arc that gives rise to cathartic release and spiritual rejuvenation: "the whole soul feels refreshed and uplifted in redemptive beatitude" (343).

In the pursuit of ecstatic heights and hellish depths, Baudelaire and Wagner do share the same "artistic intention" of sublime grandeur. In *The Flowers of Evil*, Baudelaire lays out the battle between spiritual elevation and erotic desire as the struggle between "spleen and ideal." Walter Benjamin writes: "Baudelaire wanted to be read like an classical poet" and throughout his career as a critic, Baudelaire encouraged artists to seek out an "epic quality." Eric Auerbach speaks of the tragic elements of Baudelaire, his "hopeless horror" and "grand style." But the "epic quality" Baudelaire espoused was that of "modern life" ("Salon of 1846" 106), and his style marked accounts of "paralyzing anxiety, panic, at the hopeless entanglements of our lives" (Auerbach 154). And in moving from Wagner's legendary context to the *streets* of the modern metropolis, something is lost. Despite the prevalence of mythic imagery in *The Flowers of Evil* – moral suffering galore, prostitutes as Bacchants, lovers as Venus – the mythic qualities of

resolution, self-containment, and singularity fall by the wayside. In the end, the mythic vessel is insufficient before the infinite variety of the crowd. The "liquid" contained by ("Parisian Dream" 209) Guys' "*legendary* translation" ("The Painter of Modern Life" 16) exceeds "the solid crystal beam" ("Parisian Dream" 209). Eternity perishes in the face of modern complexity.

"The idea of eternity," writes Walter Benjamin in *The Storyteller*, "has ever had its strongest source in death" (93). By this, Benjamin is referring to the sanction of the ending, the power of death to validate, enliven, even structure lived experience. While the storyteller "borrow[s] his authority from death," (94) his providence is "memory," which "creates a chain of tradition which passes a happening on from generation to generation" (98). From these descriptions emerges the dual function of the myth-teller: his ability to "contain" experience with an ending, and his role as the agent of continuity, relaying experience on to the following age.

With the rise of information, factories, cities, and the corresponding breakdown of the listening community, the "storyteller," Benjamin writes, has "already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant" (83). The disappearance of the storyteller marks the absence of death – the death of resolution, of reconciliation and the delivering force that "brings back order and gains ascendancy." The experience of modernity is thus unredeemed. But the death of the storyteller also signals a break in stories that have been told and retold – the chain of tradition that stems back to antiquity. The loss of the mythic "utterance" is the "silence of eternity."

This silence, brought about by a complexity that the mythic frame can neither encompass or penetrate is compounded by modernity's compulsive desire for the "new."

In its mania for fashion and fashion-time (the series of disconnected moments witnessed in Guys), modernity seals itself from tradition, only quoting from the past to heighten its own sense of novelty. Thus, in "The Eyes of the Poor," Baudelaire situates the subordination of tradition in a trendy urban café:

> The café was dazzling. Even the gas burned with all the ardor of a début, and lighted with all its might the blinding whiteness of the walls, the expanse of mirrors, the gold cornices and moldings, fat-checked pages, dragged along by hounds on leash, laughing ladies with falcons on their wrists, nymphs and goddesses bearing on their heads pile of fruits, plates and game, Hebes and Ganymede holding out little amphoras of syrups or parti-colored ices: all history and all mythology pandering to gluttony.
>
> (*Twenty Prose Poems* 29)

Here, the gas burning lights, a new installation of Haussmann's Paris, light up the café with the glow of a "début." "Classic," writes Habermas, "is henceforth the 'flash' at the dawning of the new world – which will of course have no duration, for its collapse is already sealed with its appearance" (9). It is this flash that lights the café with the false aura of eternality. In the foreground, Hebes and Ganymede, stripped of divinity, appear as cardboard Cupids. "All history and all mythology" assumes a garish ornamental role in the modern parade.

III.

But to return, for a moment, to Baudelaire's original principle – "By modernity I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (104). How is it that Baudelaire would semi-constitute modernity out of that which he himself perceived to no longer persist? This paradox is not simply a matter of one particular reference. In the "Salon of 1846," seventeen years before "The Painter of Modern Life" appeared in the *Figaro*, Baudelaire writes: "It is true that the great tradition is lost and the new one is as yet unformed" (104). Nor was Baudelaire's formulation of modernity entirely unique. In an 1867 article for the *Moniteur*, Gautier provides the following definition for readers who might not yet be acquainted with the term:

> Modernité (mo-der-ni-té), s.f. Néologisme. Qualité de ce qui est moderne. D'un cote, la modernité la plus extrème; de l'autre, l'amour austère de l'antique.
>
> Modernity (mo-der-ni-ty), s.f. Neologism. Quality of that which is modern. On one side, the most extreme modernity; on the other, an austere love of antiquity.
>
> (quoted in Lehman 10)

The inclusion of a historical component in defining the "new" would prove exceedingly unpopular in later years. The Futurists, as we will see, adopt the "ephemeral, the contingent, and the fleeting" as a mantra of experience – and blow up the past. But in our own age, Baudelaire's appeal to tradition has been almost equally, if less dramatically, lamented: "Baudelaire defeats the radical nature of his own modernism,"

writes Leo Bersani, "by insisting on its being complemented by an esthetic which it has already replaced" (21). In a similar vein, Habermas calls Baudelaire's artistic locus a "strange place at the intersection of the axes of the actual and the eternal" (8), and suggests that in fusing the modern with the historical, Baudelaire sought to "rescue" modernity from "triviality." The strength of these claims lies in their recognition of the crisis involved in a departure from history. Yet the companion claim, that in joining the "immutable" with the "fleeting" Baudelaire stagnates his own art, is disputable. For in marrying "la modernité la plus extreme" – the "as yet unformed" – with "l'amour extrème de l'antique" – the "great tradition," Gautier and Baudelaire are, by implication, prescribing an enormously versatile aesthetic: the beauty of loss.

Almost unvaryingly, Baudelaire situates modernity at sunset. The horizon, dividing line between past and present, is the sharp edge of the modern, where the monolithic "white light" of Western thought breaks into "varied colours" ("Further Notes on Edgar Poe,"189). Much of the mobility of Baudelaire's aesthetic rises from the variegated nature of the ensuing pluralism. But an equal share of its complexity is derived from the modern's eminently dynamic relationship with the source of this disintegration – the collapse of history. The mobility that is at stake is the diversity of *response*, which reflectively illustrates the unevenness of the modern moment. Beginning with the extreme and contradictory states of grief – rage, guilt, ecstatic recollection, apathy, fear, and building toward a more mutinous aspect, Baudelaire constructs an aesthetic of the modern through a deliberate inconsistency of tone that plays off the death of the "eternal and the immutable."

But what, properly speaking, is the eternal and the immutable? As we have seen, its defining characteristic is the ability to contain experience through resolution. The ancient world, with its emphasis on a free-standing ideal of harmony, balance, and unity, comes, in Baudelaire, to itself be the most frequent signifier of this kind of self-containment. Yet the unity of the aesthetic also has ramifications for the subject. As the poems of *The Flowers of Evil* testify, the complexity of the modern causes the psyche to fragment into multiple and contradictory states of being. The appeal to the ancient world is a yearning for a transcendent state of cohesiveness, both psychological and cultural, which cannot exist within the realm of the modern and the actual. Though "yearning" is only one of the attitudes Baudelaire adopts, it is the tone that pervades the opening section of *The Flowers of Evil*, and is, therefore, the best place to begin.

IV.

In his essay on Baudelaire, Proust cites many examples of Leconte de Lisle's images of sunset before commenting: "All those suns drag after them reminiscences of ancient theogonies. The horizon is always 'divine'" (130). The same, Proust implies, can be said of Baudelaire. The modern poet's status as the survivor of a collapsing history offers him a unique perspective. He is witness to the death throes of the antiquarian ideal, which in its passing glows with a heretofore unseen intensity. The images of dying roses, autumn, and the fading notes of the waltz that pervade the first section of *The Flowers of Evil* borrow their effect from the inevitable, which is to say that their impact is of a breathless intensity *because* of the catastrophe that is taking place. The "new beauty in what is vanishing" (Benjamin, "The Storyteller" 87)) is, therefore, not simply a heightened appreciation for what once existed, but a beauty made visible by the prospect of death.

On the cusp of the obsolete, the image of the antique also haunts the periphery of the modern, which is, by contrast, a degraded splendor. Terror, disgust, anguish – the aesthetic potential of these elements combine in Baudelaire's conception of "spleen." These twin impulses – the exalted and the debased – compete in "J'aime le Souvenir" ("I Love the Thought"), which begins with a nostalgic description of the golden age of ancient Rome:

> J'aime le souvenir de ces époques nues,
> Dont Phoebus se plaisait à dorer les statues.
> Alors l'homme et la femme en leur agilité
> Jouissaient sans mensonge et sans anxiété

> I love the thought of ancient, naked days
> When Phoebus gilded statues with his rays
> Then women, men in their agility
> Played without guile, without anxiety
>
> (*The Flowers of Evil* 18–19)

As incarnations of formal perfection, Baudelaire's representations of antiquity are highly reminiscent of Plato's forms. This comparison is useful because it also brings out the aspect of "pure mind" that dominates Baudelaire's understanding of ideality. On the one hand, the ideal is a state that is infinitely accessible through the occult recess of "memory." On the other, in its resemblance to forms, perfection is entirely remote from human experience.

The isolated nature of ideal beauty brings into focus the second element of the appeal to Platonism. True beauty, ideal beauty, in Baudelaire, is always chaste. As a result, while the "ancient" days are "naked," men and women are without "guile" or "anxiety" – in effect, sexless, or at least without shame, a moral virtue which translates into physical robustness. Yet, the last few lines of the first section brings temptation into play, casting the scene in an Edenic pattern:

> L'homme, élégant, robuste et fort, avait le droit
> D'être fier des beautés qui le nommaient leur roi;
> Fruits purs de tout outrage et vierges de gerçures,
> Dont la chair lisse et ferme appelait les morsures!
>
> Man had the right, robust and flourishing,
> Of pride of beauties who proclaimed him king;
> Pure fruit unsullied, lovely to the sight,
> Whose smooth, firm flesh went asking for the bite!

The "bite" into forbidden fruit marks a sharp transition into the fallen state of modernity:

> La Poëte aujourd'hui, quand il veut concevoir
> Ces natives grandeurs, aux lieux où se font voir
> La nudité de l'homme et celle de la femme,

Sent un froid ténébreux envelopper son âme
Devant ce noir tableau plein d'épouvantement.
Ô monstruosités pleurant leur vêtement!
Ô ridicules troncs ! torses dignes des masques!

Today, the poet, when he would conceive
These native grandeurs, where can not be seen
Women and men in all their nakedness,
Feels in his soul the chill of hopelessness
Before this terrible and bleak tableau.
Monstrosities that cry out to be clothed
Bodies grotesque and fit for masques!

(20–1)

Baudelaire frequently proposes this commonality between modernity and original sin, witnessed here by "chill of hopelessness" and the new shame of "nakedness." In his lust for new knowledge and a desanctified art of the streets, the poet is exiled from the atemporal state of Edenic splendour. The aesthetic of the modern is, therefore, a fallen one, where the poet is obliged to conspire in the "bleak tableau" of the "grotesque." In contrast with the firm flesh of the chaste ideal, the modern poet contents himself with depicting the consequences of carnal knowledge – "visages gnawed by sores of syphilis. " The fall from antiquity to modernity, Eden to earth, can be equally seen as the descent from mind to body, and from memory to consciousness. The point is that the art of modernity is one of decline, which, nonetheless, "N'empêcheront jamais les races maladives / De rendre à la jeunesse un hommage profond" ("Never avert the sickly modern crew/ From rendering to youth its deepest bow [homage]") (20–1).

Yet Baudelaire's "loss" is much more complex than the one rising from Gautier's "austere love of antiquity." As often as he assumes the role of the bereaved, Baudelaire takes on the guise of the assassin. "On some occasions," writes Benjamin, "Baudelaire

tried to recognize the image of the modern hero in the conspirator as well. 'No more tragedies!' he wrote in the *Salut public* during the February days. 'No more history of ancient Rome! Are we today not greater than Brutus?'" ("Paris of the Second Empire of Baudelaire" 101). The "conspirator" in Baudelaire delights in the sordid pleasures of the modern aesthetic:

> – Insatiablement avide
> De l'obscur et de l'incertain
> Je ne gendrai pas comme Ovide
> Chassé du paradis latin
>
> – Voracious in my appetite
> For the uncertain and unknown,
> I do not whine for paradise
> As Ovid did, expelled from Rome.
>
> ("Horreur sympathique" ["Congenial Horror"] 154–5)

"Vos vastes nuages en deuil" ("Your mourning clouds, so black and wide") the poem continues, "Sont les corbillards de mes rêves" ("Are hearses that my dreams command"). Here, Baudelaire projects the lament of "J'aime le Souvenir" on to the reader, while he assumes the role of the grave-digger; the moral decay that was before symptomatic of the age has now invaded the soul of the poet, rendering him a demonic agent of the city's underworld. In addition to the threat that this poses to ideal art, however, it is also a determined challenge to bourgeois morality and the gospel of progress. In this way, Baudelaire sets the notion of "ideal" afloat; throughout the rest of *The Flowers of Evil* "paradise" is a vision of wholeness associated most often with ancient Rome and the modern Orient, but also with revolutionary hopes and bourgeois dreams of urban grandeur – visions, in other words, that subvert the very notion of an existence that transcends the historical moment.

At the same time, "Congenial Horror," follows "J'aime le Souvenir," and readers will be well aware that not only does Baudelaire "whine for paradise / As Ovid did," all through the first section, but that "J'aime le Souvenir" imitates the movement of Ovid's "The Four Ages." Compare, for example, Ovid's days when "People were unaggressive and unanxious" ("Metamorphosis" 943) to Baudelaire's golden age where men and women "played without guile, without anxiety" or Ovid's birth of humans "[c]ontemptuous of gods, and murder-hungry / And violent " to Baudelaire's inception of the "sickly modern crew" ("J'aime le Souvenir" 20–1) It is this simultaneous assumption and rejection of tradition, the play of echoes between the Edenic, the Platonic and the epic that truly defines the modern aesthetic. For in this constant undercutting of quotation and emotion, Baudelaire creates what Peter Nicholls calls the "defense of the modern" – an unrelenting irony that precludes the possibility of stable ground.

In this, we could say that Baudelaire sounds a good deal more like Mahler than Wagner. Both Baudelaire and Mahler are considered pioneers of the modern and in Mahler's "Funeral March" we hear the simultaneous lament and celebration of the death of the old world. Also in "Funeral March" is the cross-cutting of tradition and modernity – the pace of the marching band combined with lugubrious sorrow, hints of folk songs exploded by radical variation – that resonate with Baudelaire's ironic poetic. In Mahler, too, we find the element of pastiche that characterizes a poem like "L'Harmonie du Soir" ("The Harmony of Evening") where Baudelaire takes the aesthetic of lament to an extreme that we could now only define as "camp":

Chaque fleur s'évapore ainsi qu'un encensoir;
Le violon frémit comme un cœur qu'on afflige;
Valse mélancolique et langoureux vertige!
Le ciel est triste et bau comme un grand reposoir.

Each flower, like a censer, sprinkles out its scent;
The violin is trembling like a grieving heart,
Waltz of a mournfulness and languid vertigo!
The sad and lovely sky spreads like an altar-cloth.

(*Flowers of Evil* 96–97)

And, along with Mahler, we can hear Baudelaire, even in the midst of the most solemn meditation, ask: "Am I not a great parodist?"

But Baudelaire's ability to shed one view of the past and take on another, literally like a garment, brings us back to fashion. In the anonymity of the metropolis, identity is a matter of *style*. Emotion, like dress, becomes a function of exhibition. The layers of tone that surround the ideal are, therefore, like sheaves of crinoline that contribute to the poet's effusive display. Moreover, like the sartorial art of capitalism, the "nuages fragiles" of the Second Empire, Baudelaire's conception of the ideal plays on very specific figures: "women" – "for whom, but above all through whom, artists and poets create their most exquisite jewels" ("The Painter of Modern Life" 30).

V.

> I once knew a certain Benedicta, who filled the atmosphere with emanations of the ideal, and whose eyes inspired others with the desire for greatness, for beauty, for glory and for all those qualities that make us believe in immortality.
>
> But this miraculous girl was too beautiful to live long; indeed she died a few days after I made her acquaintance, and it was I who buried her one day when the spring was swinging its censer even into the cemeteries. It was I who buried her, well sealed in a bier made of a wood perfumed and incorruptible as the coffers of India.
>
> And as my eyes remained fixed upon the place where my treasure lay hidden, suddenly I saw a little person who bore a singular resemblance to her who was dead, and who, trampling upon the fresh soil with hysterical and fantastical violence, said, amidst a peal of loud laughter: "It is I, the true Benedicta! It is I, a fine, worthless wretch! And as your punishment for your infatuation and for your self-delusion, you shall love me as I am."
>
> But, furious, I replied: "No! No! No!" And, to add emphasis to my refusal, I struck the ground so violently with my foot that my leg sank knee-deep into the recent sepulcher, and, like a wolf caught in a trap, I remain attached, forever perhaps, to the grave of the ideal.
>
> (*Twenty Prose Poems* 38)

In this prose poem, "Which is the True One?" there are several elements we can recognize as typically Baudelaire. There is a dead ideal. There is an insufficient modern replacement. And there is the modern poet, whom we can take to be the murderer as well as the chief mourner. The mythic woman, the woman of the present, and the poet – these three are the cast of Baudelaire's modern drama.

As environment, the ideal is a languorous paradise hovering in the distant recess of the mind or in the depth of the city- labyrinth. As Woman, she is Benedicta or Beatrice or the antique statue – remote, mythic, chaste. In poems such as "La Beauté" ("Beauty"), "La Masque" ("The Mask"), and "Hymne a la Beauté" (Hymn to Beauty), the ideal is literally made of stone: "Et mon sein, où chacun s'est meurtri tour à tour, / Est fait pour inspirer au poëte un amour / Eternel et muet ainsi que la matière" ("And my breast, where you bruise yourselves all in your turn / Is made so that love will be born in the poet – / Eternal, and silent as matter is timeless") (*The Flowers of Evil* 38–9). The "ideal," here, is antiquarian, complete, and inapproachable – replete with the authority of tradition.

The same ambivalence Baudelaire feels toward the unified ideal in its spatial materialization, however, also permeates his relationship with the ideal woman. At once the image of perfection and symbol of an ideal unity, she also represents the stricture of tradition. The inflexible contour of traditional forms finds its expression in the stone edges of the antique statue. As Elaine Dalmolin writes:

> Frozen in the purity of its lines and cast in stone, woman's body assumes the dimensions of a statue that fixates the poet with its stability. Her inviolability lends the poet the reassurance of her permanence, fixed and immutable; the poet's search for ideal forms culminates in the vision of finality she embodies. Accomplishing his poetic desire, however, she kills poetry, petrifying its very movement. (84)

Like Wagner's "subjects" and "dramatic method" which Baudelaire found at once antique and "despotic," the hardened lines of the statue close off experience and artistic possibility.

If, in form and method, Baudelaire perceived Wagner to be closest to antiquity, then it was in his "passionate power of expression" that he was the "truest representative of modernity." The figure of implacable desire is implicit in Baudelaire's working title for *The Flowers of Evil*, *The Lesbians*. Within the discourses of the day, lesbianism at times signified a kind of endless foreplay, a deathless "unconsommated" ardour that through its own unfulfilled promise runs the very "limits of desire" ("Femmes damnées: Delphine et Hippolyte" / "Condemned Women: Delphine and Hippolyte" 244–5). It is this relentless passion, unstable, flammable, almost unbearable, that reflects the innumerable tonal and psychic variations in Baudelaire's poetry. In a modern context, the promise of deathless desire is the commodity spell of the prostitute, and it is she who is Baudelaire's representative figure in *The Flowers of Evil*: saltimbanque à jeun, étaler tes appas / Et ton rire trempe de pleurs qu'on ne voit pas, / Pour faire épanouir la rate du vulgaire ("Starving clown, put up your charms for sale, / Your laughter steeped in tears for no one's eyes, / To bring amusement to the vulgar crowd") ("La Muse vénale" / "The venal Muse," (26–27)

"Spleen and Ideal," the street and paradise, street-walker and antique statue: here are Baudelaire's choices of the modern. Sensing the decline of myth and collectivity, Baudelaire attempted to find a new art in the disintegrating subject and the confusion of the urban environment. Ultimately, Baudelaire was the pioneer of the avant-garde in his propagation of an aesthetic that subverts tradition. Yet despite his embrace of "l'héroisme de la vie moderne" ("the heroism of modern life"), the "ephemeral, fugitive and contingent" elements of the debauched and desiring modern world, Baudelaire would remain "attached, forever perhaps, to the grave of the ideal."

CHAPTER 2

"We Oppose in Art" – Marinetti and Italian Futurism

Italian Futurism was the first movement of the historical avant-garde. Characterized by a desire to destroy existing aesthetic categories and glorify war and technology, the Futurists embodied a "transcendental antagonism" (Poggioli) that would become integral to most of the avant-garde movements to come. Central to this antagonism was an overwhelming drive to overcome traditional notions of wholeness and ideality. To the idea of the eternal, the Futurists celebrated the fugitive and contingent elements considered to be exclusive to the modern age on.

The most dynamic years in Futurist art are the ones where the writers, sculptors, painters and poets of the new movement attempted to give new expression to the "ephemeral, fugitive and contingent." This largely consisted in exploding traditional ideas of genre and beauty and in experimenting with new arrangements and methods of technological reproduction. Bent on a blurring of art and life, the Futurists pioneered radical new expressions of life in the technological age.

Despite the early Futurist desire to overcome "mythology," however, the aspects of Futurism that glorified war, resisted dissent, and partook in fanatical nationalist rhetoric soon found common ground with Italian fascism. Indeed, Benito Mussolini, though he later dismissed the Futurist movement all together, stated that "without Futurism there would never have been a fascist revolution" (quoted in Gentile 55).

The affiliation with fascism marked an unfortunate turn in Futurist art. The fugitive and resisting elements that had been central to the Futurist campaign were subsumed by those mythological aspects latent in Futurist rhetoric: the veneration of imperialist enterprise and an even more fevered glorification of war and domination.

Indeed, it would seem that in the years after the war, the contingent aspects of modern art proved almost too volatile and unstable for a generation seeking new modes of governing radically changing subjective and urban landscapes. Futurism can therefore be seen as a prescient example of the pre-war desire to "be modern" as well as part of the post-war rush to find new visions of stability.

I.

According to Stephen Kern, 1880, a decade after Baudelaire's death, to the end of the First World War, twenty-eight years later, marked a "series of sweeping changes in technology and culture that created distinctive new modes of thinking about time and space" (1). This "series of … changes" included the invention of the x-ray, cinema, telephone, wireless telegraph, automobile and airplane. The telegraph alone succeeded not only in enabling World Standard Time, but also in condensing language as "the need for speed, clarity, and simplicity shaped a new 'telegraphic style'" (115). The five year period directly preceding the war marked a prodigious burst in this technological revolution: Wright made the first every hour-long flight in 1908, Ford introduced the assembly-line method of production in 1913, and Meissner invented the radio transmitter also in 1913 (Kurzweil 470-8). The "pace of modern life," an expression in frequent use during these years, therefore, referred not only to the accelerated rate of travel, communication, and production, but also to the astounding speed of "progress" itself.

The acceleration in time was matched by an equal reformation in notions of space. Kern writes: "The modern period had a new sense of distance, created by technology and mediated by urbanism and imperialism. Lines of communication and transportation were extended over unprecedented distances, spreading out and at the same time bringing people into closer proximity than ever before" (240). In a similar manner, the technologies of mass reproduction bridged the space between people and objects, making distant realities immanently available to mass consumption (Benjamin's thesis in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction").

The rapidity of modern existence and the ability to bring people and things into "closer proximity" electrified public optimism in both Europe and America. In 1910, the historian Herbert Casson wrote: "The slow and sluggish mood has been sloughed off … life has become more tense, alert, vivid" (quoted in Kern 91). This "sluggish mood" might well have been the artistic lament for the decline of tradition that dominated art in the latter half of the nineteenth century. By 1910, however, the seemingly limitless possibilities of the machine had eclipsed nostalgic reverence in the popular imagination. Technology, itself a well-spring of novelty, also promised cultural rebirth. And machines, the most salient symbols of the "new" were the guarantors of this change – the radical "transformation of the dimensions of life and thought" (1).

Among art groups, none welcomed this transformation more than Italian Futurism. Led by F.T. Marinetti, the so-called "caffeine of Europe," the Futurists set out on a political and artistic campaign fueled by a program of "speed" and "dynamism." Through manifestoes, public demonstrations and artistic production, the Futurists demanded the disintegration of boundaries between art and life, the destruction of the

past, and the glorification of the machine. Indeed, by harnessing the movement to the productive forces of mechanization, Marinetti sought to drag the world, particularly an industrially lagging Italy, from an outmoded history and into a glorious technicolour future. This essentially Utopic vision was marred, however, by a concomitant commitment to "our much prayed for great war" – an impulse which evolved into a totalitarian discourse that finds its closest equivalent in Italian fascism. In its most influential period (arguably, 1909 – 1914) Futurism can therefore be seen to embody an amplified version of the modern desire for the "tense, alert, [and] vivid" as well as to foreshadow one of its more disturbing incarnations.

II.

> *"To the conception of the imperishable, the immortal, we oppose, in art, that of becoming, the perishable, the transitory, and the ephemeral"*
>
> - F.T. Marinetti

Sitting on the terrace of the Café des deux Magots in 1907, Apollinaire writes a few lines about the view that presents itself to him: "Un cycliste manque d'être écrasé / Par un omnibus a bande verte/ Un vert de chemin de fer" (34)) (A cyclist misses getting crushed / By a green-line bus / A green of train tracks"). A year later, almost as self-deprecating apology for the playful stream of urban images, he writes: "Forgive my ignorance / Forgive me for no longer knowing the old game of riming" (35). These two examples are illustrative of the popular spirit of the *avant-guerre*: a visual, free-verse poetry that follows the "running, changing, penetrating line"[1] of the urban landscape and an insouciant claim to have forgotten the "old game."

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[1] "Picasso's taste for a running, changing, penetrating line produces some almost unique examples of linear drypoint, in which he has not altered the general traits of things" – from Apollinaire's remarks on Picasso's Blue and Circus Periods, quoted in Buckley, 23.

For "les jeunes de la classe de 1915," Apollinaire's name for the young avant-gardists of the cosmopolitan cities of Europe, the newly developed industrial landscape offered a wealth of aesthetic possibilities – an architecture of shining metal, streets of musical discord, and a poetry of jagged lines that echoed the riotous urban reality. In addition to intriguing and immediate subject matter, the mechanized world also proffered a whole new set of artistic techniques. Apollinaire's *Calligrammes*, for example, were printed in a variety of colours and typefaces enabled by typographical innovation. Other artists of the avant-garde experimented with film and photography. Technology, in other words, became not only the appropriate subject matter for art, but also central to the act of creation.

This feverish embrace of "new" beauty and "new" method was accompanied by a conjoint desire to overcome tradition. "On ne peut pas," wrote Apollinaire, "transporter toujours avec soi le cadavre de son père." ("One cannot carry one's father's corpse around everywhere"). In most all respects, the *avant-guerre* had no desire to "carry" anything – not the weight of a static antiquarian beauty nor the legacy of the previous generation of artists whose visions of ideality sought to transcend the urban environment : Flaubert's *Salammbo* or Delacroix' "Andromeda" and "The Women of Algiers" – works, moreover, intricately caught up in idealizations of femininity and distance. To these visions of the soft, the pastoral, and the remote, "les jeunes" responded with a hard-hitting masculinized aesthetic of urgent urban immediacy.

All of which is to say that Futurism was not an aberration, but a product of its time. Marjorie Perloff, for one, identifies the pre-war period as a "Futurist moment" of "climactic rupture" belonging to all factions of the avant-garde. The vehemence of

Futurism proper, however, has what Benjamin calls "the virtue of clarity." Combining a zealous enthusiasm for military technology, the zenith of mechanical might, with an impassioned desire to overcome the past, Marinetti literalizes the function of the "avant-garde." Futurism *is* artistic warfare. Artists are urban guerillas. And tradition, bastion of cultural passéism, is the enemy: "We will destroy history in the name of art!"

Marinetti declared his war on history in 1909, in the Parisian "jockey club journal," "*Le Figaro.*" The eleven tenets of the "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" can be distilled as follows:

> We intend to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness … We intend to exalt aggressive action … We say the world's magnificence has been enriched by a new beauty; the beauty of speed … We will glorify war – the world's only hygiene – militarism, patriotism … and scorn for women … We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind .. We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals … and the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd.
>
> (*Marinetti* 41–2)

Despite the prevalence of this revolutionary mood among the artists of the *avant-guerre*, the use of "we" at this time was misleading. At the moment of publication, "Futurism," as such, consisted only of Marinetti and his fortune; the artists who would come to be known as "Futurists" – most notably the painters Giocommo Balla and Carlo Carrà, the sculptor, Umberto Boccioni, and the writer Gionvanni Papini – would join the movement only after its inception in the popular press. This skillful manipulation of the emerging mass media was typical of Marinetti's promotional flare. Still more characteristic, however, is the populist rhetoric, the blazing desire to destroy the snobbish archives of "museums, libraries, academies of every kind" and to usher in the

"multicolored, polyphonic" revolution of an art belonging to "great crowds of modern capitals" – an art, moreover, that speaks in the urban tongue of "planes" and "propellers."

Here, then, is fevered expectation for an artistic praxis that breaks down the boundaries between word and technological world. Marinetti's long poem, "Zang Tumb Tuuum," for example, is an onomatopoeic rendering of the sounds of battle: "rrrrronrrronnant d'un **monoplan** (pla-pla-pla-pla-pla-pla) bulgare + neige lente de petits manifestes." The machine, as lyric subject, is further imprinted on the poem by typographical play – words running both horizontally and vertically, bold and italic scripts, a variety of fonts. Furthermore, "Zang Tumb Tuuum" is written in the "telegraphic style" of syntactical strings unchained from conventional structures in what Marinetti called "*Parole in Liberta*" (Words in Freedom). The desire to "bring things closer," a desire brought on by "the earth shrunk by speed" (Marinetti), here finds its aesthetic in the annihilation of linear logic as well as the obliteration of the space between signified and signifier. "Onomatopoeia," writes Marinetti, "vitalize[s] lyricism with the raw element of reality" (quoted in Drucker 128)

That historical connotation should be excluded from Marinetti's "vitalized lyricism" is not really surprising. In the war against tradition, the Futurists intended for very little of the unadulterated past to survive. Thus, in "We Abjure Our Symbolist Fathers: The Last Lovers of the Moon," Marinetti writes:

> We have sacrificed everything to the triumph of this Futurist conception of life. To such a degree that today we hate our glorious intellectual fathers, after having greatly loved them: the grand symbolist geniuses, Edgar Poe, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Verlaine. We despise them now for having swum the river of time with their heads always turned back toward the far blue spring of the past, toward the *"ciel antiérieur ou fleurit la beauté."*

(*Marinetti* 66)

Here, the rules of the "new game" become clear. Marinetti's reduction of the Symbolist aesthetic to one pose – Mallarmé's distant "former sky where flourishes beauty" – demonstrates how the past may have no other claim other than to "passéism" itself. The collapse of art and the urban modern world must be complete. The break from history must be total. Undoubtedly, the break was as sudden as it was violent. A month before the publication of the founding manifesto, Marinetti was himself writing what Perloff terms "decadent Baudelairean lyrics:" "Mon bel ange sensuel, brulant et trempé /des voluptés du ciel et de l'enfer" ("My beautiful, sensual angel, burning and bathed / in the pleasures of heaven and hell"), begins the first stanza of "Le Dompteur" ("The Vanquisher" 39). In renouncing this traditional vision of a remote and feminine beauty and the language of nuance, Marinetti describes himself as setting off on "another path," an eminently modern route "accelerated by the decisive new aesthetic of the Machine" (*Marinetti* 399). Paved with the credos of "dynamism" and "flux," the road of the "decisive new aesthetic" would begin with an attack on history and lead to a new mythology of technical imperialism.

In *opposing* the "perishable, the transitory, and the ephemeral" to the "imperishable" and "immortal" in 1909, then, Marinetti sought to mobilize the most radical elements of a Baudelairean formulation of modernity – the discontinuous, the fragmented, the discordant to explode the tradition that Baudelaire perceived to be in its death throes. Futurism, in other words, delights in the brokenness of the antiquarian sunset, annihilating the old sense of order by creating radical new juxtapositions. Paradoxically, this anarchic impulse is matched by an equal desire for a different kind of stability – a new world domination enabled by the renovating forces of technology. In art,

the replacement of *"Le ciel ancien ou fleurit la beauté"* with the "haunting vision of the future" results in a two-fold production: the destruction of the existing aesthetic and the aestheticization of the new means of mastery – politics and the machines of war. Where Baudelaire's modernism rises from "ephemeral" tones that play on the death of the traditional "eternal," then, Marinetti's first battle was to blow them apart.

III.

"We shall not have succeeded in demolishing everything unless we demolish the ruins as well," said Alfred Jarry. According to R.W. Flint, Jarry was one of Marinetti's most significant influences, and if Futurism absorbed anything from the *enfant terrible* of the Parisian theatre, it was a taste for devastation. As Antonio Gramsci observed, Futurism "destroyed, destroyed, destroyed, without worrying if the new creations produced were on the whole superior to those destroyed" (quoted in Perloff 38) – or, as Renato Poggioli writes in his definitive study of the avant-garde, Futurism embodied the nihilistic impulse, "beating down barriers, razing obstacles, destroying whatever stands in its way" (26).

Despite Marinetti's preference for bombastic rhetoric, the first proclamation of the foreclosure on history in the opening manifesto is, by Futurist standards, remarkably subtle. After four paragraphs of narrative describing a restless evening in a gothic mansion with a gang of Futurist cohorts, Marinetti writes:

> Then the silence deepened. But as we listened to the old canal muttering its feeble payers and the creaking bones of sickly palaces above their damp green beards, under the windows we suddenly heard the famished roar of automobiles.
>
> "Let's go!" I said "Friends, away! Let's go! Mythology and the Mystic ideal are defeated at last.

(*Marinetti* 39)

The "defeat" of "Mythology" signals the birth of the new aesthetic – the "becoming, the perishable, the transitory, and the ephemeral" empowered by the forces of technology and released from the chains of history. The "new beauty," the "beauty of speed," is beautiful to the extent that it tears through all confining structures, a mobile force that resists mythic closure in its constant drive toward the future.

Much of the Futurists' understanding of this liberation is caught up in the Bergsonian idea of "becoming." For Bergson, *durée* is "pure duration, of which the flow is continuous and in which we pass insensibly from one state to another" – in other words, a constant "becoming" that resists the synthetic imposition of successive minutes and hours (Bergson 243). Wyndham Lewis criticized this concept as the "glorification of the life-of-the-moment" (11) and Benjamin comments that *durée* eliminates "death," meaning closure, which "isolates it effectively from a historical (as well as a pre-historical) order" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" 185). Sensing a continuous line on the future, Marinetti seized on the idea of perpetual motion, feeling the exclusion of tradition to be perfectly suited to the campaign of cultural renewal. Moreover, Marinetti escalates Bergson's subversion of public time to rebellion against all forms of order; in the Futurists' account "becoming" is the power to crash through all aesthetic, temporal, and spatial boundaries. It is the art of perpetual newness that consistently reconstitutes itself in a fluid verging on the impending: a "continuous progress of the past into the future which swells as it advances" (Bergson, quoted in Kern 42).

The swell into the future was, for Marinetti, tantamount to a tsunami ripping through existing aesthetic categories. Thus, in the "Variety Theater" manifesto, Marinetti

advocates that traditional genres be blown up and quoted at random in what amount to a tremendous shattering of viewer expectation. The sum total of this destruction, the "Futurist marvelous," is an absurd jumble of incongruous elements:

> Here are some of the elements of this "marvelous": (a) powerful caricatures; (b) abysses of the ridiculous; (c) delicious, impalpable ironies; (d) all-embracing, definitive symbols; (e) cascades of uncontrollable hilarity; (f) profound analogies between humanity, the animal, vegetable, and mechanical worlds; (h) plots full of the wit, repartee, and conundrums that aerate the intelligence; (i) the whole gamut of stupidity, imbecility, doltishness, and absurdity, insensibility pushing the intelligence to the very border of madness; (k) all the new significations of light, sound, noise, and language, with their mysterious and inexplicable extensions into the least-explored part of our sensibility; (l) a cumulus of events unfolded at great speed, of stage characters pushed from right to left in two minutes .... (m) instructive, satirical pantomimes; (n) caricatures of suffering and nostalgia, strongly impressed on the sensibility through gestures exasperating in their spasmodic, hesitant, weary slowness; grave words made ridiculous by funny gestures, bizarre disguises, mutilated words, ugly faces, pratfalls.
>
> (*Marinetti* 117)

The piling of absurdity upon absurdity achieves its desired effect. Between "cumulus of events unfolded at great speed" and "all new significations of light, sound, noise and language," genre is impossible to distinguish. As a final gauntlet to unified ideals, Marinetti proclaims this art to be the only true reflection of a modern existence, a reality that "throbs around us, bombards us with squalls of fragments of interconnected events mortised and tenoned together, confused, mixed up, chaotic" (126).

The aesthetic of the "confused, mixed up, [and] chaotic" would characterize almost all Futurist art. In literature: "one must destroy syntax and scatter one's nouns at random" and "abolish … punctuation" (84–5). In music: "the maximum number of

interminable and combined sounds." In film: the "most varied elements … from the slice of life to the streak of color" (131). Moreover, as Cinzia Blum observes, disunity was also key to the manifesto, which, "as an artwork":

> …subverts traditional codes, obliterating the boundaries between different genres and expressive registers. It assembles a collage of disparate verbal strategies: passionate, often fervid lyric prose, wrought with metaphors, symbols, and allegorical narratives; trenchant satire, with comic hyperboles and outrageous metaphors; didactic, normative proclamations of the Futurist credo, with numerical lists of formulaic statements; the sensational, telegraphic quality, the typographic novelty of advertising; and dialogic strategies, including exhortations, aggressive apostrophes, and moments of pretended conversation with the public.
>
> (30)

Subversion through obliteration, however, would find one of its most artistically successful manifestations in collage itself. Here the Futurist penchant for surprise and juxtaposition is central to the effect of the work, for much of the power of collage springs from a curious sense of recognition as quotidian objects are defamiliarized in the context of art. Thus, in Carlo Carrà's "Interventionist Demonstration" (1914), tempera on cardboard is a chaotic mix of word and image. Fragments of "Zang Tumb Tuuum" are interspliced with articles from the Futurist newspaper "La Voce" and words picked up off the street: "strada" "PIAZZA" "Rumori." Italian flags clash with the German word "**TOT**" and shreds of classical music scores are pasted over the word "MUSIC." In the middle of what amounts to a pin-wheel of swirling image, the words "EEVVIIAAA IL REEE" ("Loong Liive the Kiing") "EVVIVAA L'ESERCITO" ("Loong Liive the Aarmy") add a smattering of traditional propaganda. The overall effect is of confusion and experiment, both of which, according to Christine Poggi, "preclude a reassuring sense of closure" (*In Defiance of Painting* ix).

Here is the furthest reach of Baudelaire's "awful novelty," a hard-hitting visual aesthetic that floods the "solid crystal beam" – one, moreover, specifically designed to "silence … eternity" with the fragments of all known "history and all mythology" pandering to a voracious appetite for the new. The subversion of traditional genres in the variety theater, the manifestoes, and collage is, in Marinetti's terms, the explosion of the static ideal in the name of "ABSOLUTE NOVELTY" and the fluid course of "becoming."

Which is, though Marinetti never says so, a direct appeal to the logic of fashion – the perpetual reconstitution of elements in the pursuit of constant "newness" which consistently presents itself in the guise of the "future." Indeed, it is this exaltation in the fragmented, the chaotic and the "chic," that has largely led to a labeling of Futurism as the most negligible of the historical avant-gardes. Yet the showmanship, hyperbolic statements and absurd, chaotic combinations amount to only the first layer of the Futurist aesthetic. In Futurist art, as in war, attack is the preliminary means to the institution of a new order. By exploding the past, the Futurists foresee the institution of a new regime – Baudelaire's stone woman replaced by a man steeled by the technological environment, a languid, antiquarian paradise overthrown by technological Utopia.

Perhaps the most cogent example of the Futurist paradox – the embodiment of both obliteration and creation, dispersion and reconstitution – is Marinetti's ideal Futurist subject. In the manifestoes, Marinetti advocates the "systematic destruction of the

literary *I* in order to scatter it into the universal vibration and reach the point of expressing the infinitely small and the vibration of molecules" (Marinetti 98). Yet, in the overriding Futurist mythos, expressed most vividly in Marinetti's 1909 novel, *Marfarka the Futurist*, it is the technological environment that fuses with modern man; Gazourmah, an early cyborg, is man "multiplied by the power of the machine" – a metallized Herculean hero "adapted to the demands of speed and violence" (Poggi, "Dreams of Metallized Flesh" 22). Devoid of longing or lack, Gazourmah is the ruler of his father's imperialist empire, the delivering ruler who "brings back order and gains ascendancy" over the disjointed modern world.

Both Baudelaire and Marinetti, in this sense, recognize the modern moment to be "between traditions." Where Baudelaire's stabilizing vision is the languid past, Marinetti understands it to be the great technological future. Where Baudelaire's "ephemeral" is the aesthetic of cultural and personal disintegration, Marinetti's is the "becoming" of a subject reintegrated through fusion with the machine. That mythology would seem to have been conquered by the advent of fragmented consciousness turns out to be the mirage of the modern; following the logic that undermines the chimeric novelty of *la mode*, enduring elements are merely reconstituted to return in altered guise. "Fashion," writes Benjamin, "has a flair for the topical, no matter where it stirs in the thickets of long ago; it is a tiger's leap into the past" ("Theses on the Philosophy of History" 261).

The most obvious difference between Baudelaire's pastoral mythology and Marinetti's technological one is, of course, one of tense. Wholeness, in Baudelaire, belongs to a dimly perceptible past that is becoming fainter still; for Marinetti, the future, mainly through its status as that "which is yet to happen," is dressed as the attainable. In

annihilating the barriers between art and the urban reality, then, the Futurists seek to close the gap between the modern moment and the Utopian tomorrow; to this end, the political and secular forces of mechanization are endowed with the luminousness of the messianic.

IV.

The most well known piece of Futurist rhetoric is Benjamin's excerpt from the manifesto on the Ethiopian Colonial War:

> For twenty seven years we Futurists have rebelled against the branding of war as antiaesthetic ... Accordingly we state: ... War is beautiful because it establishes man's dominion over the subjugated machinery by means of gas masks, terrifying megaphones, flame throwers, and small tanks. War is beautiful because it initiates the dreamt-of metalization of the human body ... War is beautiful because it combines the gunfire, the cannonades, the cease-fire, the scents, and the stench of putrefaction into symphony. War is beautiful because it creates new architecture, like that of the big tanks, the geometrical formation of flights, the smoke spirals from burning villages and many others ... Poets and artists of Futurism! ... remember these principles on an aesthetics of war so that your struggle for a new literature and a new graphic art ... may be illuminated by them!
>
> (242)

The inclusion of Marinetti's manifesto in the concluding paragraphs of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" has struck many as strange. Indeed, Marinetti's bombastic elegy is in stark contrast with Benjamin's elegant meditation on the semi-mystical phenomenon of artistic "aura" and its degeneration through mass reproduction. Benjamin was himself aware of the transition and included the manifesto in a section segregated as "Epilogue." Nonetheless, the Futurist manifesto is designed to be read as both cause and consequence of auratic decline. Integral to the essay's finale, Futurism can, therefore, be seen as the culmination of Benjamin's prophetic understanding of the

impact of the mechanization of art and the aestheticization of public life on modern existence.

Benjamin did not mean for the concept of aura to be transparently understood. Denoting inapproachability, the term is itself shrouded in an obscurity that challenges empirical understanding. What is clear, however, is that the aura is specific to the art object embedded in the realm of ritual. This object is the original, and its specificity in time imbues it with an authority that finds its spatial equivalent in the "unique manifestation of distance." In bringing the art object "closer" "humanly and spatially" technological reproduction overcomes uniqueness and eliminates this distance between subject and art object. For Benjamin, the detachment of the object from the realm of ritual – the same unhinging that brings it within greater proximity of the actual – leads to a "tremendous shattering of tradition" which is the "obverse of the contemporary crisis and renewal of mankind" (221).

Benjamin's contemplation of aura is not limited to the "Work of Art" essay. In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," Benjamin perceives the "disintegration of the aura" to be the "price for which the sensation of the modern age may be had" (194). According to Benjamin, Baudelaire "paid dearly" for this disintegration. And it is easy to see how Baudelaire did "pay" in the sense of something lost. Baudelaire's unified ideals – the antique statue or languid paradise – are steeped in Benjamin's ritualistic realm, a condition witnessed first by their remoteness, and later by their decline. In poems like "J'aime le Souvenir" and "La Vie Antérieure" (A Former Life) the aura becomes visible. It is present in Phoebus' "gilded rays," and the "thousand fires of ocean suns" and,

indeed, in the light that "bathes" "Poe's Titaness"[2] ("Edgar Allan Poe, his Life and Works" 187). It disappears at the moment where ideal becomes spleen or elsewhere at sunset, where the divine light of antiquity fragments into modern "sensation." Where Benjamin speaks of ritual, Baudelaire writes of unity, and the "aura" can, therefore, be seen as a particular manifestation of mythic cohesiveness imbedded in the chain of history.

In this context, the Futurist desire to overcome the traditional ideal can be seen as the far reach of a tendency Benjamin assigns to the "contemporary masses" – the desire to "bring things closer." On an aesthetic level, the demanded disintegration of distance results in a blurring of art and life. On a political level, the defeat of distance entails a whole-hearted embrace of technological mechanisms of proximity – high speed technology, mass distribution, imperialistic enterprise. For Benjamin, when aesthetics and politics themselves merge political violence becomes the object of aesthetic contemplation: "and through gas warfare the aura is abolished in a new way" (242).

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[2] The complete passage reads: "Poe's characters, or rather his one character, the man with heightened faculties, the man with distraught nerves, the man whose ardent yet patient will defies all obstacles, the man whose eyes are fixed with the rigidity of a sword on the objects that grow larger under his gaze, is Poe himself. And his women, bathed in light, feverish, dying of mysterious maladies, speaking in a voice like music, they also are himself, or, at least, by their strange aspirations, by their knowledge, by their incurable melancholy, they are endowed with a large share of their creator's nature. As for his ideal woman, his Titaness, she appears under different portraits, scattered in his all too few poems, portraits or rather modes of feeling beauty, which the temperament of the author brings together, and merges into a vague but perceptible unity, where dwells, in a more delicate form, perhaps, than elsewhere, that insatiable love of beauty which is his great claim, that is to say the sum total of his claims to the affection and respect of all poets."

An interesting parallel can be found in Baudelaire, where Baudelaire's characters "or rather his one character" could also be seen as Baudelaire himself, where the women "dying of mysterious maladies," "also are himself," at least to the extent that Baudelaire identifies with the figures of the "sickly modern crew," and his "ideal woman" is the "sum total of his claims to the affection and respect *for* all poets" – the gesture toward literary history, – which Benjamin refers to as the conjuring of the beautiful "(as Faust does Helen) out of the womb of time" ("On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" 187).

The abolishment of aura can well be seen as the source of the Baudelairean lament: here is the death of the immortal, the "eternal and immutable" subsumed in the darkness of "spleen." Yet, though pulled under by the chaotic flavour of the modern moment, aura, for Benjamin, is appropriated and reconstituted by the myths of the immanent: most notably, fascism and the "*Fuhrer* cult." When appropriated for political purposes, mythic containment serves to reconcile the contradictions of economic and colonial systems. It is the re-casting of wholeness in the guise of political domination. "Aura," becomes the light cast by the "megaphones, flame throwers and small tanks" of imperialistic warfare.

Indeed, it is in the realm of immanent myth that gives Futurism "common cause with fascism" (156) – for, though Benjamin conflates the two, the relationship can only be termed "difficult" (Nicholls). As Emilio Gentile observes, the points of difference are as numerous as the similarities. In 1923, Giuseppe Pressolini denied the connection between Futurism and Fascism, saying that "Futurism was anti-traditionalist, individualist, libertarian, anti-moralist, and anti-Catholic, while fascism was classicist, hierarchic, authoritarian, moralist, and Catholic" (56). Yet, Benedetto Croce notes in 1924 that "the ideal origins of fascism are to be found in Futurism" and cites the "cult of action, the disposition toward violence, the intolerance of dissent, desire for the new, disdain for culture and tradition, and the glorification of youth" as the most pressing examples. The precision of Gentile's analysis, however, is the identification of both fascism and Futurism as examples of what Marshall Berman calls "*political modernism*": "those political ideologies that arose in connection with modernization, ideologies that

seek to render human beings capable of mastering the process of modernization in order not to be overwhelmed" (58).

Which is in many ways to say that Futurism and fascism coalesce in the most enduring of human mechanism for "mastering" overwhelming processes: mythic containment. That the myth of fascism is the re-institution of ancient Rome and the myth of futurism is of technological utopia is to a large extent irrelevant. In containing the forces of modernization with overriding dreams of the nation-state and in aesthetisizing the productive means of dream fulfillment – the secular forces of mechanization and war – both Futurists and fascists derive "the power to change the world that is changing them" (Berman, in Gentile 58).

The tragedy of Futurism, then, could well be seen to be that it was subsumed by its own desire for assumption. 1909 to 1915, the most interesting years in Futurist art, were also the years where the "ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent" were given freest reign. It was during these years that the Futurists pioneered an aesthetic liberty that gave the world new ways of negotiating the lines between the static and the mobile, low and high art, life and aesthetics. It was also in this time that the Futurists developed a distinctly new way of looking at the urban landscape, finding new beauty in the sounds, noises, and smells of the modern metropolis. Bersani's claim that Baudelaire "defeats the radical nature of his own modernism" is perhaps one that is better laid against Marinetti. For in chaining Futurism's radical aesthetics to a mythos of technological domination, Futurism became a footnote to fascist history.

CHAPTER 3

"Metamorphosis Surprises" – Loy and the Feminist Critique

"I was never a poet," Mina Loy is reputed to have said, and certainly she is not in the sense of the poetic ideals considered so far. Loy's poetry is entrenched in the particular, the proximal, and the mundane. Foremost in her valuation is lived, human experience, and as such, autobiographical details figure prominently. Equally significant are the forgotten moments of everyday life in the modern metropolis. Indeed, much of Loy's poetry is crafted out of what she calls "sanitation's chaos."

Central to Loy's disavowal of transcendental ideals is her rejection of the gender subordinations they enact – the limits of Baudelaire's perfect antiquarian ideal and the misogynistic overtones of Marinetti's super-masculine mythology. This is not to say that Loy does not borrow from both Baudelaire and Futurism. But in centering her vision in the autobiographical, the fleshly, and the actual, Loy refutes totalizing aesthetics, preferring to focus her vision of modernity in the ephemeral and fugitive moments of human existence. Not typically "poetic" in an early modern sense then, Loy, nonetheless,

enacts the literary strategies of subversion, satire, and resistance central to contemporary poetics.

I.

Mina Gertrude Lowy was born in 1882 in London. Her father, Sigmund Lowy, was a Jewish-Hungarian tailor, her mother, Julia Bryant, a Christian Englishwoman of stringent late Victorian morality. At an early age, Lowy was a prodigious reader, with a fondness for Dante Gabriel and Christina Rosetti. She also drew, and her father, recognizing her talent, placed her at the St. John Wood's School. From 1899-1901, Lowy studied art in Munich and from 1903-1906 continued her training in Paris. It was here that Mina Gertrude Lowy made herself into Mina Loy, and also here that she met and married her first husband, an eccentric fellow art student named Stephen Haweis.

The marriage was largely one of necessity; the Haweis' daughter was born six months later. Loy's second child, a son, was born in Florence three years after and shortly before the death of her daughter. Loy continued to live in Florence for the next ten years, though Stephen Haweis set sail for the south Pacific "just like Gaugin" in 1913.

In Florence, Loy grew close with the artists of the avant-garde. At Mabel Dodge's Villa Curonia, she developed friendships with Gertrude Stein and her future publisher, Carl Van Vechten. While in Italy, she also met the artists of Italian Futurism, a meeting which led to visual and poetic experimentation and to romances with F.T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini, the editor of the Futurist newspaper "Lacerba."

By late 1914, however, Loy was disillusioned by Marinetti's increasing politicization of the art movement. At the end of the year, she proclaimed: "Futurism is dead" and moved on to the avant-garde art scene in America, becoming a prominent member of New York Dada and later of the Surrealist movement, friends with Marcel Duchamp, and married to the poet-boxer Arthur Craven, with whom she had two children. Loy continued to live in America and died at her daughter's home in Aspen in 1966.

This story has become a familiar one, repeated in various forms in most studies of Loy. Critics are fascinated by the cosmopolitan extraordinariness of a woman who lived in almost all of the artistic urban centers and was at the center of so many of the avant-gardes. Still more interest in Loy is derived from her romanticized status as "the lost modernist poet," whose revolutionary lyricism and flagrant sexual imagery was "too much" for her time.

Much of what we know about Loy's life, though not nearly in so neat a fashion as biographers like to present it, has been gathered from her poetry. Where Baudelaire centers his vision of modernity on female figures and the spectacle of the city, Marinetti on machines and the urban landscape, Loy "fashions" modernity out of autobiography, using her body as model and the city as backdrop. In clear opposition to reconciliatory

mythologies of past or future, Loy generates a personal and inconclusive mythos of the present.

Loy's poetic is both resistant and inventive. By emphasizing the body and the fragmentary nature of experience, she subverts the totalizing image of Woman as Beauty incarnate, the static, antiquarian symbol of mythic perfection and classical containment. Equally refuted is Marinetti's mythos of the metallized man and the defeat of sexual difference. Pound christened Loy's poetry "logopoeia" – "the dance of the intellect among words." But this is to separate Loy's vision from her commitment to the material. In its refutation of the totalizing enclosures of transcendental attainment, we might rather call Loy's poetry the dance of the body among image – the exposure of ideological limitations, the recasting of beauty in the mundane.

In this sense "Opposed Aesthetics," the title of one of Loy's early poems, would also be an appropriate title for her complete works. While Loy does absorb elements of both Baudelairean and Marinettian models – Baudelaire's sense of beauty's enormity, Marinetti's radical collage – her vision of the urban beautiful is distinctly opposed to the gender subordinations implicit in stabilizing phantasmagorias of past and future.

Among pastoral dreams of the mythic past and metallized visions of technological Utopia, Loy writes of the vulnerable and immediate human life. In this sense, as in numerous others, Loy's poetic is very much of the "merely human" – the biologically fragile and the psychologically broken. These ephemeral moments of experience are joined by only the most incontestable of continuities: "The was – is – ever – shall – be / Of cosmic reproductivity." Against the city scene of crowds and traffic, Loy presents the cycle of human experience as the richest and most vivid site of modern reflection.

In its voracity for the mundane details of everyday life, Loy's poetry can well be seen as part of a Benjaminian diagnosis of the modern's devaluation of the phenomenological realm:

> experience has fallen in value. And it looks as if it is continuing to fall into bottomlessness. Every glance at a newspaper demonstrates that it has reached a new low, that our picture, not only of the external world but of the moral world as well, overnight has undergone changes which were never thought possible.
>
> (Storyteller 84–5)

While Loy suggests that drastic changes to both external and moral worlds are desperately required, she is, nonetheless, aware that experience must be redeemed for this to occur. Like Proust, Loy reacts to Progress's depreciation of the human with stories of the self that exceed the limits of story – experiential moments of past and present passing fluidly from one to the other, demonstrating the eminent complexity of memory and existence.

In this equation, "language," as Benjamin writes, "takes precedence" – but language, to be sure, as the remote connections of the word reflecting the inner recesses of the human process. As for her Surrealist contemporaries, language, in Loy, comes:

> Not only before meaning. Also before the self … anyone who has perceived that the writings of this circle are not literature but something else – demonstration, watchwords, documents, bluffs, forgeries if you will, but any rate not literature – will also know, for the same reason, that the writings are concerned literally with experiences. (Benjamin, "Surrealism" 208)

"Concerned literally with experiences" – it is an admirable summary of Loy's poetry, where voices from the street overlap and undermine each other, where gender is present at every turn, and where actual experiences expose the ideological trappings that surround them.

II.

Beauty, gender, temporality, sexuality, and experience – Loy often seems to be suggesting a commonality among all of these terms, and in attempting to articulate a new feminine subjectivity and an aesthetic of the everyday, Loy begins with a reformulation of "the beautiful." To the extent that beauty is of indescribable value in Loy's work, she is an inheritor of Baudelaire and the Pre-Raphaelites. At the same time, Loy rejects the remote feminine ideal of Baudelaire's Benedicta or D.G. Rosetti's portraits of Lizzie Siddal. In a satire of Rosetti's mournful poetic and her own early attachment to it, she writes: "your poesy so powerful an emetic of the spirit as to relieve a middle-class visionary of her adolescence and cloy the gorgeous rubber corps of you wide-eyed women stricken with fried hair" ("Dante Gabriel Rosetti," *Last Lunar Baedeker* 315). With humour, shrill Victorian aphorisms, remote scientific detachment, bawdy sexual

imagery and an extensive vocabulary, Loy subverts the aesthetisization of the "rubber corps." In its stead, she proffers a vision of the living beauty of Woman and city.

Loy's challenge to static ideals is clearly expressed in "Ephemerid." In the opening lines, Loy begins with a reformulation of Baudelaire's definition of modern beauty:

> The Eternal is sustained by serial metamorphosis,
> even so Beauty is
>
> metamorphosis surprises!
>
> (*Lost Lunar Baedeker* 116)

The formulation is typical of Loy in its insistence that "Beauty is." But while the "Eternal sustained by serial metamorphosis" suggests sympathy to Baudelaire's idea of the immutable recurring in the guise of the age, the quotation is undercut by Loy's presentation of Beauty as metamorphosis that "surprises!"

"Surprise!" is both aesthetic and strategy. For Loy, the conflation of immutability, chastity and femininity is an ideology of denial. In opposition to the Woman imago, Loy adopts the "ephemeral, fugitive, and contingent" as the liberating force of the feminine. Unhinged from formal and cultural models, it is both parodic and subversive, employing self-conscious citations and quick reversals to undermine established genres and hegemonic constructions of femininity. Thus, in the middle section of "Ephemerid," Loy self-reflexively presents a Baudelairean portrait of Woman-eternal in the midst of urban chaos:

> some aerial, unbeknown
> eerie-form
> of dual mobility,
> ...

soars
trailing a horizontal gauze;
Nameless nostalgia through slush
Enigma among gloom.

As always, has a wisp of whiteness loveliness
To lift the eyelids;
To whisper of subvisual resources
In the uncolour of the unknown

(116)

"Nameless nostalgia through slush" is the painting of Woman as the mysterious *beauté perdue* surrounded by the sordidness of the urban landscape. She is the "unbeknown" and the "unknown," an emissary of "loveliness" bathed in auratic white light amidst the spleenish "gloom" of the city. The imitation is of a specific type of Baudelairean lyric, perhaps the most famous of which is "À une passante" ("To a Passerby"):

La rue assourdissante autour de moi hurlait.
Longue, mince, en grand deuil, douleur majestueuse,
Une femme passa, d'une main fastueuse
Soulevant, balançant le feston et l'ourlet;

Agile et noble, avec sa jambe de statue.
Moi, je buvais, crispé comme un extravagant,
Dans son oeil, ciel livide où germe l'ouragan,
La douceur qui fascine et le plaisir qui tue.

Amid the deafening traffic of the town,
Tall, slender, in deep mourning, with majesty,
A woman passed, raising, with dignity,
In her poised hand, the flounces of her gown;

Graceful, noble, with a statue's form.
And I drank, trembling as a mad man thrills,
From her eyes, ashen sky where brooded storm,
The softness that fascinates, the pleasure that kills.

(quoted in "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" 168–9)

Where Baudelaire turns the passerby into a vision of the antique "with statue's form," therefore, rendering her a lost symbol of the mythic past, Loy defeats the illusion of eternality. With an irony that surpasses even Baudelaire's she cuts through sentimental musings. Loy's "fictitious Faery, / This eccentric of traffic":

> Is only
> A little girl –
>
> – a long white muslin curtain,
> tied to her pull-over,
> afloat from her,
> she pilots an ideal load
>
> Ponder this
> Metamorphosis:
>
> Infancy's kidnap into Fantasia
>
> (117–8)

By stripping the quotidian image of its idealized status, Loy also reveals the harm in Baudelairean elevation: the unbearable weight of the "ideal load," "Infancy" kidnapped by "Fantasia."

Which is not to say that this portrait, for Loy, is not in some sense, "beautiful." The true beauty, however, is not in the myth-making of girl into "faery" but in the charm of a girl dressed up in a white muslin curtain. This is not beauty set apart from the metropolis, either spatially or temporally, but a beauty that is integral to it. While Loy illustrates the temptations of aesthetic transformation, the girl is, nonetheless, revealed as a girl, not as statue, not as "rubber corps," and most specifically not as a reconciliatory symbol of mythic containment removed from the urban milieu.

One of the more interesting (if ironic) reactions to Loy's renunciation of the Baudelairean ideal has been to view it as an extension of Baudelaire's *héroisme de la vie moderne*. As Deborah Parsons writes:

> Loy is still a walker-observer of the city, but, turning on Baudelaire's identification of artist and ragpicker, as a vagrant rather than leisured *flâneur*. The Baudelairian influence extends to the prominence of the symbolist / surrealist impulse in Loy's work, her valuing of artificial objects and the city, her depiction of the artist as an outcast figure elegaically mourning a beloved urban waste-land, and a belief in the role of the artist to create a vision of 'everyday life.'
>
> (182)

The Baudelaire that Parsons presents here is Baudelaire the critic, Baudelaire of the "Salons," and "The Painter of Modern Life," the Baudelaire who insists that the artist must "épouser la foule" (in some sense, "marry/ be one with the crowd"). Certainly, Baudelaire's poetry is much more ambivalent, lamenting not only the urban waste-land, but also the death of tradition. Tradition, for Loy, is the purveyor of feminine confluence with the eternal. To combat the concretizing forces of completion, and in heeding the call to "bring things closer," Loy creates a poetic that is closer to the city, closer to the body, and closer to the substance of things, rejecting the damaging idealizations that "kidnap" feminine agency and the unadulterated beauty of urban and bodily landscapes.

Loy's commitment to drawing beauty out of the ordinary is most evident in her visual collages, often made of urban refuse. In later years, creations like "No Parking," and poems such as "Hot Cross Bum," illustrate an obsessive interest in the aesthetic of homelessness and dispossession. The same impulse is also apparent, if in a more muted fashion, in her early poetry, where images are almost always in some sense cast offs of the mundane. In "Opposed Aesthetics," part of her long autobiographical poem, "Anglo-

Mongrels and the Rose," Loy presents her participation in the avant-garde as a direct assault on the distant and gendered nature of "high-art":

As the arrested artists
Of the masses
Whose child faces
Turned upon Beauty
The puny light
Of their immobile recognition

Made moon-flowers out of muck
And things desired
Out of their tenuous soul-stuff

...

So did the mongrel-girl
Of Noman's land
Coerce the shy
Spirit of Beauty
From excrements and physic
While Esau of Ridover Square
Absorbs the erudite idea
That Beauty IS nowhere
Except posthumously to itself
In the antique

And trains
The common manifestations
Of creation
To flatten
Before his eyes
To one vast monopattern

(*Last Lunar Baedeker* 143)

The "mongrel-girl / Of Noman's land" is Loy, who in joining the avant-garde sought to reject "man's" idealization of the feminine. That the avant-garde would find new ways, pioneered by Marinetti, of coding the past in feminine terms, emerges in Loy's later

poetry. Here, however, in "coerc[ing] the shy / Spirit of Beauty/ From excrements and physic" Loy is defining a new aesthetic by subverting the old one; Esau of Ridover Square's snobbish transcendentalism insists on the beauty of the antique statue; Loy confronts this academic pretentiousness with equal insistence that beauty can be found in the "muck" of the urban environment and uses the vocabulary of "excrements and physic"– the most bodily of the body ("The skin sack / In which wanton duality / Packed/ … Something the shape of a man) and biological posturing ("Protoplasm was raving mad / Evolving us, " "Songs to Johannes" 53) to cut through mystifying idealism. Where Esau sees "one vast monopattern" in the "common manifestations / of creation," Loy's gaze takes in the intricate possibilities of both male and female bodies, infinite diversity, and the beauty of the "banal."

Loy's critique of the lament for the Hellenistic and Roman aesthetics of completion – "the erudite ideal that Beauty IS nowhere / except posthumously to itself / In the antique" – central to the "high modernism" of Eliot and Pound – spanned her poetic career. Most often, it is not Hellenism Loy rejects, but the blindness to the possibilities of the everyday that it induces. Thus, in "Marble," Loy writes:

> Greece has thrown white shadows
> Sown
> Their eyeballs with oblivion
>
> …
>
> With spiral curves
> Of idol substance
> In the silence
>
> A colonnade
> Apollo haunts Apollo

with the shade
of a lost hand

(*Last Lunar Baedeker* 93)

The voice that rejects tradition, here, is not Baudelaire's "I do not whine / for Paradise / as Ovid did" – the demonic denial of the desperately desired. Rather, Loy voices the uselessness of lament for the mythic past. For Loy, the distant aesthetic of ancient Greece and Rome is of idol / idle substance. The circularity of tradition worship is clear in Apollos that beget still more representations of Apollo, "Phoebus' golden rays" gilding antique statues ad infinitum. When Loy reaches for visions of the antiquarian, then, it is to mock attempts that extricate mind from body, aesthetics from refuse:

As the Gods sat on Olympus
above the travail of clouds

it dominates the garbage-barge
loaded with clouds
of sanitation's chaos

("Film Face," *Lost Lunar Baedeker* 125)

The juxtaposition of Olympian gods and garbage makes its point. "Above the travail of clouds" is also above the pressing beauty of the mundane and above the more interesting artistic possibilities of "chaos."

While Loy adopts an approach to the city that might be called Baudelairean in its valuation of the fleeting beauty of the urban experience, then, she whole-heartedly rejects his poetic lament for the decline of tradition. For Loy, the "silence of eternity" is synonymous with the celebrated moment when the idealized figure of feminine

perfection claims both body and voice. In this moment, too, Beauty becomes a property of the mundane, and experience spills out in all of its multiple and conflicting states.

III.

"*I am in the throes of conversion to Futurism, but I shall never convince myself.*"

(Loy, 1913)

The call to reject the past, the eternal figure of Woman-Beauty, to replace ideals of Hellenistic unity: none of these are particular to Loy. The Futurists renounce this brand of "passéism" earlier and with more vehemence. Much of the Futurist rejection, however, fell under the rubric of "scorn for women." Strange as it sounds, the Futurist "scorn" was attractive to many women artists – not the misogynistic element that would turn out to be all too central to Marinetti's rhetoric – but the contempt Marinetti professes in "Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism": "We scorn Woman conceived as the sole ideal, the divine reservoir of *Amore*, the woman-poison, woman the tragic trinket, the fragile woman, obsessing and fatal, whose voice, heavy with destiny, and whose dreaming tresses reach out and mingle with the foliage of forests drenched in moonshine"

(Marinetti 72). Within the discourse of the New Woman, yet at a time when middle-class morality was still holding strong, Marinetti's particular evaluation seemed to offer, as Walter Adamson writes, an "exciting alternative to the suffocating constrictions of bourgeois society" (104), with "strong attraction for women anxious to escape the confines of traditional roles" (88).

For Marinetti, overcoming "the seemingly unchallengeable fusion of the two ideas Woman and Beauty" (*Marinetti* 90) signaled the advent of *la nouvelle epoch*, where the aesthetic/erotic gaze would fix itself on the "new beauty" of speed, machines, and war. For Loy, as for many other women artists affiliated with the Futurist movement, separating ideality and the feminine was the defeat of Victorian mores. In Loy's "Feminist Manifesto," one of her most notable attempts at the Futurist genre *par excellence*, she writes: "Leave off looking to men to find out what you are **not** – seek within yourselves to find out what you **are**. As conditions are at present constituted – you have the choice between **Parasitism , & Prostitution – or Negation** (*Last Lunar Baedeker* 154). Futurism, in its insistence on the eradication of the bourgeois family, the nude in painting, and Victorian models of femininity, seemed to offer a release from all three.

Loy was also drawn to Marinetti's public persona of sexual frankness. The unspoken in polite society and the site of the "immense *Amore* of the romantics" was reduced by Marinetti to "the conservation of the species, and friction of the epidermis … finally freed from all provocative mystery" (*Marinetti* 92). This sentiment would be echoed in Loy's infamous statement: "there is nothing impure in sex – except in the

mental attitude to it" ("Feminist Manifesto," *Lost Lunar Baedeker* 156) and in her consistent attack on the mystification of the body.

In "Songs to Johannes," which Virginia Kouidis calls "a Futurist collage of thirty-four perspectives on failed love" (63), Loy turns the Futurist dessentimentalization of romance on her affair with Papini, stripping "love" of cultural fantasia to expose the psychic gaps and discontinuities of sexual relationships:

> Spawn of Fantasies
> Silting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid
> Rooting erotic garbarge
> "Once upon a time"
> Pulls a weed white star-topped
> Among wild oats sown of mucous-membrane
> I would an eye in a Bengal light
> Eternity in a sky rocket
> Constellations in an ocean
> Whose rivers run no fresher than saliva
>
> These are suspect places
>
> (*Lost Lunar Baedeker* 53)

This first "song" was met with outrage in both Europe and America. Amy Lowell considered it "pure pornography" (quoted in Burke 191) and to the extent that "Love Songs" was considered indecent, it was also construed as a direct product of Italian Futurism.

Certainly, "Songs to Johannes" borrows heavily from formal Futurist innovations: collage cuts, jagged lines and erratic punctuation. But despite its accordance with the Futurist refutation of romance, the poem is distinctly anti-Futurist in its valuation of the "obsessive I," and "psychological inwardness" (*Marinetti*). Also distinctly un-Futurist is

the melodic lyricism and nuance, the intimate arabesques of longing and loss. Indeed, Loy's borrowings from the movement can be catalogued as the refutation of Woman-Beauty, technical experimentation, and the avocation of sexual candour. Overall, Loy considered Marnetti's program of violence and political domination as combating "le mal avec du mal" and her lack of conviction in Futurist ideology was evident even while she wrote under its banner. Thus, in her first manifesto, "Aphorisms on Futurism," the aims Loy expresses are almost completely opposed to the movement's founding doctrine:

> MAKING place for whatever you are brave enough, beautiful enough to draw out of the realized self.
>
> LOVE of others is the appreciation of oneself ...
>
> ACCEPT the tremendous truth of Futurism
> Leaving all those
> ---- Knick-knacks. -----
>
> (*Lost Lunar Baedeker* 150)

"The realized self" is an echo of Bergsonian metaphysics. Where Marinetti interprets "becoming" as continuous movement into the future, however, Loy adopts a more Proustian (not to mention Bergsonian) version where past and present are fluid states of mind. For the Futurists, "Realization," another Bergsonian term, signals the moment where present becomes future, and where man becomes one with the machine. Loy, on the other hand, interprets self-realization as the most intimate of bodily experiences – sexual climax ("Don't realize me / Or we might tumble together /

Depersonalized / Identical") ["Songs to Johannes 58]) and child birth ("A moment / Being realization / Can / Vitalized by cosmic initiation / Furnish an adequate apology / For the objective / Agglomeration of activities / Of a life / LIFE" ["Parturition," *Lost Lunar Baedeker* 6). "Love of others is the appreciation of oneself" was never a part of the Futurist campaign, which might more accurately be summarized as the "annihilation of others is the aggrandizement of oneself." Only in the last aphorism, then – the rejection of the accoutrements of genteel Victorian existence – do Loy and Marinetti converge.

The meeting point between Futurism and feminism, and by the same token, between Futurism and Loy, was short lived. While Marinetti expressed support for the suffragettes, for political reasons, his belief in women's right to vote was tempered by contempt for the democratic process. Futurism advocated accessible divorce, yet only because the "family of marriage without divorce" was considered "absurd, harmful, and prehistoric … a Bedouin tent covering a lurid mix of old invalids, women, babies, pigs, asses, camels, hens and filth" (77) – a combination of dirt, weakness, and animality that would impede acts of clean-cut masculine heroism. Moreover, Marinetti perceived sexual equality to be an interim if necessary measure to promote the "futurism of the species;" in the technological age, human reproduction would be replaced by male parthenogenesis. According to the Futurist mythology of the metallized man, lack would be conquered by fusion with the mechanical environment, sexual desire by violent political conquest. Gender would be deleted, over-ridden by the "dream of supermasculinity" (Nicholls 201).

Much of Loy's later poetry satirizes the Futurist ideal of mechanical completion and Marinetti's discourse of domination. In poems, Loy refers to Marinetti as "the ruling bluff," and in a short autobiographical play, *Futurist Diaolgue*, Marinetti's character is a buffoonish caricature alternating between militaristic rhetoric and sentimental waxing. Again turning to satire, in *CittaBapini* (an Italianized play on "city" and "Papini"), Loy imitates the brevity of the Futurists' "synthetic theater," as well as their attempts to abbreviate gender to one:

> Noon.
>
> A greenish man stares blankly at the city – the city stares back at him –
>
> Evening.
>
> He smiles at the city – the city roars with laughter –
>
> Morning.
>
> He makes grimaces at the city – the city puts out its tongue, a dawn-reflecting tape of river, at the greenish man –
>
> The greenish man – battling – "You are too big – I must eat you – "
>
> The city swallows him –
>
> The greenish man – stifling – "I am not at home in you – "
>
> The city spits him up –
>
> The greenish man – execrating a passing woman – "You are not a man – "
>
> (*Last Lunar Baedeker* 79)

"You are not a man" – here, Loy felt, was the Futurist summation of women, and to this she responds with an even more adamant commitment to biological difference: "Evolution fall foul of / Sexual equality / Prettily miscalculate / Similitude" ("Songs to Johannes" 65).

In essence, Loy combats the Futurist mythology of the super-man with the same weapons used against the idea of Woman-eternal: irony, satire, and a valuation of the body. In contrast with the Futurist desire to transcend the "merely human," Loy presents beauty as a moment of pure physicality: "Beautiful half hour of being a mere woman / The animal woman" (15). To Marinetti's misogynistic desire to create offspring "without stinking complicity of a woman's womb" (*Mafarka the Futurist* 169) Loy writes of childbirth as the "Stir of life / Precipitating into me / The contents of the universe" ("Parturition," 4) . And to the predicted conflation of gender, Loy forecasts a future of "far further differentiation," where men and women will:

> … clash together
> From their incognitos
> In seismic orgasm
>
> ("Songs to Johannes" 66)

IV.

Subversion – satire – refutation: they are central to Loy's poetry. In poems like "Ephemerid," she resists the vision of an idealized and feminine Eternal. In "Songs to Johannes," "Parturition," and the plays, Loy defies the Futurist ideal of a metallized masculine monopoly. Unlike the Futurists, who sought to "blow up" the past, however, Loy sees personal and cultural history as inextricable. At the same time, myth, for Loy, is tantamount to ideological enclosure, unrealistic idealization, totemistic reductions. The tension between Loy's valuation of the human experience and her refutation of the human desire to *reconcile* experience runs throughout her poetry. The strategy she presents is, as always, drawn from her own life.

Nowhere is Loy's satirical take on enclosure more acerbic than in "Anglo Mongrels and the Rose," a "mock-epic" of Loy's family and childhood in turn-of-the-century London. In tracing her parentage, Loy's father is Exodus, "the jovian Hebrew 'all dressed up and nowhere to go' … deploring the anomolous legs / of Zion's sons / with the subconscious / irritant of superiority / left in an aristocracy out of currency" (116). Her mother, the "English Rose," is "paradox-Imperial / trimmed with some travestied flesh / tinted with bloodless duties dewed / with Lipton's teas" (121). The disastrous marriage begets "Ova," (Loy), her inauspicious birth the pulling of "a clotty bulk of bifurcate fat / out of her loins" (130). Here, again, is Loy making fun of convention, of social respectability, of the sanctity of family union and, indeed, of unified ideals in any form.

Despite Loy's caustic view of illusory "boxes," however, the title of the poem is itself suggestive of Loy's poetic strategy: mongrelization. In what she perceived to be her own "racial" make-up, Loy saw disparate unities disintegrating and melding into divergent new amalgams:

> So is the mystic absolute
> the rose
> that grows
> from the red flowing
> from the flank of Christ
> throned with the computations
> of the old
> Jehovah's gender
> Where Jesus of Nazareth
> Becomes one piece
> With Judas Iscariot
> In this composite
> Anglo-Israelite

(*Last Lunar Baedeker* 132)

The key word here is "composite," which is the consistent "surprise" of Loy's work as she draws on various genres, tones, and vocabularies to undermine the traditionally totalizing nature of the aesthetic "beautiful." Here are the "demonstrations, watchwords, documents, bluffs and forgeries" that Benjamin apprehends in a Surrealist literature concerned so literally with "experience." It is in the play of language and ideological dialects, in Loy's pressing of a myriad of aesthetic butterflies into a collector's paste-book. In this hybrid form, Loy finds the capacity both to create and subvert, suggest and resist. While an inconclusive mythos, Loy's valuation of the fleeting, and her juxtaposition of language, hence culture, permits something that the aesthetic of completion does not: pluralism.

Even while she refutes unified ideals, however, Loy is not insensitive to the moments of completion that occur in every day life. These fleeting instances are never far from the mundane, and the immensity Baudelaire assigns to tradition, and Marinetti to war, appears in Loy's poetry in the most intimate experiences of the body. These moments carry an auratic power, but one that exceeds ritual and belies the political. They are, what Benjamin calls, *profane illumination*, the "materialistic, anthropological inspiration[s]" ("Surrealism" 209) of which love is one. Thus, in "Songs to Johannes, the fleshly achieves the pre-eminence of sacred, the quotidian of the divine:

> We might have coupled
> In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment
> Or broken flesh with one another
> At the profane communion table
> Where the wine is spill'd on promiscuous lips
>
> We might have given birth to a butterfly

With the daily news
Printed in blood on its wings

(54)

And, amid stanzas of failure, there are moments of connection:

When we lifted
Our eye-lids on Love
A cosmos
Of coloured voices
And laughing honey

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

Here, sex, the moment of cosmic communion, the ephemeral moment of completion, is, nonetheless, inseparable from the day to day of newspaper routine. By positioning eternal moments in the midst of quotidian and fleshly existence, Loy refutes the intellectualized ideological forces that "bring back order and gain ascendancy." In Loy, there is little that is conclusive, and still less to suggest that this is to be desired. Immutability is reduced to " The was – is – ever – shall – be / Of cosmic reproductivity;" the rest is the free play of shattered ideals, subversion, satire, irony, and language – which brings us very close, indeed, to the ever shifting forces of post-modernity.

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