

2017

"That Irate Pornographer": Gender and Nature in Mina Loy's "Songs to Joannes"

Margaret Konkol
Old Dominion University, mkonkol@odu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.odu.edu/english_fac_pubs



Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#), [Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Original Publication Citation

Konkol, M. (2017). "That irate pornographer": Gender and nature in Mina Loy's "Songs to Joannes". *Paideuma*, 44(1), 225-258.

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at ODU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in English Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of ODU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@odu.edu.

PAIDEVMA

VOLUME 44 / 2017



Jrnl
PS
3531
.O82
Z7855
v. 44 (2017)

MARGARET KONKOL

“THAT IRATE PORNOGRAPHER”:
GENDER AND NATURE IN MINA LOY’S
“SONGS TO JOANNES”

Writing from Florence in what was probably late summer of 1916, Mina Loy confided to Carl Van Vechten regarding her enclosed series of poems:

I send herewith—the second part of “Songs to Joannes”—the best since SAPPHO—they are interesting—all of the first were in red hot agony—the first of the second part in the traditional recuperation in the country—& the rest—settled [“more” cancelled] cerebral¹

In this letter, Loy guides Van Vechten through “Songs to Joannes,” describing it as a “book of love songs” and a narrative or “progression of realisations” (n.d. [1915–16?]). She emphasizes that the process of recovery in the Italian countryside, the circumstances in which the poem was composed, is central to understanding the text itself. Because these framing remarks were not widely known, Anglo-American readers have tended to understand “Songs to Joannes” as a collation of “frozen . . . epigrams” (Winters 498) or fragments meditating on modern urban love or as a cynical urban poem about a failed love affair.² However, “Songs to Joannes” is as much a country poem as it is an urban one and its collaged fragments constitute a narrative of socio-political awakening. The speaker of the poem experiences a revolutionary psychosexual transformation in the countryside, during which she combines forms of knowledge (evolutionary, biological, feminist) that are quintessentially modern. She does so to reject Italian Futurism’s debasement of women to establish a new vision of nature that borrows equally from pre-modern

notions of an animated, creative nature and post-Darwinian science. This essay resituates Loy's "Songs to Joannes" in the context of Italian Futurist manifestos and the gendering of nature and naturalizing of woman as fecund or inert materiality (nature), thereby questioning the established understanding of the poem as an extended metonym for a heterosexual affair in which woman is cast as object to the male subject's reason, as is nature. Bringing the early twentieth-century gendering of nature and current ecocritical re-valuations of sight and critiques of ocularcentrism to bear on this poem, this essay will demonstrate that Loy establishes alternate possibilities for female response to heterosexual romance through a new vision of nature departing from Enlightenment alienation of the subject in an unthinking world as object. Using Futurism's own tropes, Loy overthrows Marinettian Futurism and establishes a modernist-naturalist-feminist nature as a force always in excess of the language that seeks to contain it.

Paradoxically, the modern discourses that Loy combines in the poem produce an ecstatic response to green nature.³ I invoke the term "ecstatic" to indicate the quasi-mystical state of extension beyond the self that the speaker undergoes peripatetically in sections XVIII–XXXI. In the course of these sections, which may be thought of as the country sections, the speaker experiences an autoerotic moment of understanding. I self-consciously use the term "green nature" in deference to Loy's own emphasis on the color green, though her dynamic, imagined natural world of force, animation, and freedom certainly would be in sympathy with Jeffrey Jerome Cohen's call to rethink ecology as prismatic.⁴ Loy associates the non-human natural world with vegetal spaces. "Prismatic ecology" is a way of thinking about interruptions, disruptions, and heterogeneous forces that figure the earth as a vibrantly colored "muddy river" in flux and flow through city as well as countryside (Cohen xxiv). Loy's country may be green, but it is not a languid Virgilian pastoral. Rather, it is a place hot with energy.

Loy experiences nature as an evolutionary wild but, rather than registering modern alienation or detachment in the face of such immense forces, she experiences interference, static, noise, interruption, blindness—a sensory reorientation that displaces scopic or visual modes of knowing with those derived from sound, smell, and

touch. In this state, the speaker enters into contact with nature through a series of synaesthesias that establish new forms of self-knowledge. In doing so, the poem implicitly critiques the Enlightenment hierarchy of the senses and encourages identification with the nonhuman world. In the process of this transformation, Loy also strips away an Enlightenment idea of an instrumentalized, inert nature to imagine nature as a wild, autopoietic (self-maintaining) force. This vision of nature rejects post-Enlightenment pastoral modes in favor of a new mimesis—a representation of nature as an animated, unsentimental entity that does not yield to conventional modes of verbal-visual description. Returning to a quasi-mystical animated nature, for Loy, offers the opportunity to rework modern women's roles.

Although "Songs to Joannes" offers satiric jabs against romantic sentiment as it parodies Loy's former lover Giovanni Papini, it also envisions an optimistic alternative to conventional romance. Voicing a common conclusion, but with an unusual attention to nature, Eric Murphy Selinger, in the course of a discussion of melancholy in "Songs to Joannes," surmises Loy loses faith in Whitman's "eternal decency of the amativeness of Nature" (qtd. in Selinger 27).⁵ If loss were all the poem contained it would be a "negative" vision of "psychosexual relations" (Burke, "Getting Spliced" 107). In recent years, however, scholars have begun to assess the poem for its generative possibilities. Cristanne Miller observes the combination of "wild and compressed elements" (114) and Alex Goody reads the poem as an articulation of modernist becoming (27–57). In the introduction to their edited volume on Loy, Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson join Miller in agreeing that the supersensible world is not "incommensurate with [Loy's] 'modern' commitments" (9).⁶ Although Goody, Hobson, Miller, and Potter do not go so far as to address the role of nonhuman nature in Loy, they seed the ground for my focus on a feminist-nature discourse in "Songs to Joannes." The poem's wild green ecstasy establishes the ground for Loy's recognition of poetic production as a means of "eclosion" or autonomous transformation modeled in the natural world (*Lost* 67). Even Loy's use of the term eclosion, a biological term for describing the emergence of an insect from its pupal case, signals her strategic use of a technical-biological lexicon to supplant Futurism.

To give some context, Loy wrote her first version of "Songs" while living in Florence in 1915. While rural Italy held significance for English and American writers who delighted in expressing their modernity in the seemingly premodern landscape of evergreens, cypress, quaint Albergos, terraced olive-groves, and cream-stucco villas, Loy's reference would have triggered for Van Vechten particular rather than generic pastoral images. He, Mabel Dodge, and Leo Stein had joined Loy in Florence during the summer of 1914 as war broke out across Europe.⁷ However, the geography of "Songs to Joannes" would have been an entirely new territory for Van Vechten in that here nature functions in a number of nontraditional forms. Although Loy did not discuss her poems as responses to specific texts, in another letter to Van Vechten she indicates that she was exploring ways of countering the misogynistic, biological determinism of the proto-fascist Futurists (n.d. [1914]).⁸ Her short story "Pazarella," most likely written in 1913, experiments with a long literary tradition that gendered nature as female, a space of retreat only for men, casting her male figure Geronimo as antithesis to the bird-like Pazarella, who confronts these conventions when she seeks out and asks Nature for advice. Importantly, Loy was an English woman abroad living in the very countryside celebrated by English tourists, artists, and writers as the epitome of a picturesque earlier epoch.

Moreover, with the war, the "harmonious antiquity" Dodge conjured from the Tuscan hillsides had entirely evaporated (James 83). In the months after Van Vechten and Dodge fled Italy, the countryside around Florence was radicalized by a budding *Strapaese* (literally, supercountry), a back to the soil, or palingenetic, movement based on *Toscanita*, a religious identification with the land. This palingenetic movement celebrated rustic Italy as the authentic Italy and sought to "reconcile aspects of modern technology and avant-gardism with adherence to tradition" (Antliff 158). Social Darwinism and the *Strapaese's* valorization of rural traditions further circumscribed women's roles. The city itself had already earned a reputation for its authoritarian politics with the 1910 Nationalist Convention, but now it was the seat of both back-to-the-land revolutionaries and Futurist politics-aesthetics. In "War, the Sole Cleanser of the World," Marinetti imagined the cleansing power of destruction to be a form of natural selection from which a new machinist, Italian race of men

would emerge. In "The Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," he gleefully imagined crashing his car into a ditch of industrial sludge, then, through a process of palingenesis, emerging "covered in . . . metallic flakes" to live better on the earth (13).

Through Marinetti and Papini, who avidly subscribed to scientism and biological determinism, Loy read widely in post-Darwinian theory, including Remy de Gourmont's *Physique de l'Amour* (1904, translated by Pound in 1922 as *The Natural Philosophy of Love*). Loy's letters to Dodge in the 1920s indicate that Papini, who had been reading *Physique* in 1913–1914, had shared the original French text with Loy.⁹ Debates about what role women might take in a modern Italian society ran between arguments for celebrating sexual difference and more strident rebukes that difference represented inferiority. Gourmont claimed that the purpose of life was the continuation of life, i.e. sex—an unsentimental appraisal of men's and women's roles, which he based on his readings in entomology. Gourmont argued that there was no morality in nature, meaning that any kind of sexual proclivity that could be observed (many of which he enumerates) was permissible and natural. Despite such revisionism, he held firmly to a dualistic and hierarchical gender system. Loy's Futurist phase was thus also an education in the politics of nature.

Although Loy had previously lived in London, Munich, and Paris, her feminism was honed in the context of Italian prescriptions for a natural womanhood. Whereas in the U.S. and Britain women asserted the validity of their experience against a nationalist, masculine wilderness ideology or equally nationalist pastoral tradition, in Florence Loy found that mainstream culture and Italian Futurism defined a woman's role solely as wife, lover, or mother.¹⁰ Her 1914–1915 poems reflect on the limitations of the rhetoric of Italian republican womanhood. In "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots" (1914), unmarried women can only "look out" from "behind curtains" waiting for "love" to unlock the door to the world (*Lost* 21–23), but marriage is no solution to this problem, as "At the Door of the House" (1915) points out, since a wife is as likely to be imprisoned in her home as a virgin.

Loy would have been reading alongside and observing Papini and Marinetti drawing on similar nature tropes and evolutionary rhetoric to articulate Futurism's aesthetics. Despite Futurists's early support

of women's suffrage, Marinetti demanded "ardent men and impregnated women" (55) or even to be free of "the stinking complicity and help of the female womb" (Orban 57).¹¹ Marinetti's vitriolic dismissal of woman is as much discussed as his and other Futurists' treatment of nature is elided. Valentine de Saint-Point's "Manifesto of Futurist Woman" (1912), written as a direct response to the ninth proposition of the "Foundation and Manifesto of Futurism," which called for the glorification of war and "scorn for woman" (Marinetti 14), in many ways capitulated to Marinetti's assessment, stating that the majority of men and women were equally to be scorned because they had too much "femininity" and not enough "virility" (Saint-Point 214). Saint-Point explained, "we have to take the brute animal for a model" (214). Saint-Point urged that to revive woman's "fecundating power," "let woman find once more her cruelty and her violence" (215). Saint-Point appealed not to man as exemplar but to nature as a model of cruelty: "Woman, become sublimely unjust once more, like all the forces of nature!" (215). With nature rather than man as the origin of virility, Saint-Point could argue that women, like nature, could also be free of sentiment. But Papini's obscenity-infused satire "The Massacre of Women" (1914), published two years later, was, as Matthew Hofer writes, directed at Loy (232). In "Massacre," Papini calls for similarly sweeping reforms as Saint-Point, though his evolutionary-essentialist argument identifies women, or "the female animal" (unlike Saint-Point, who located the problem in culturally constructed femininity), as the root of men's enslavement (253). Likening the massacre of women to "destroying the lives of small animals en masse," Papini explains that the bloody deed could be done relatively easily (254).

Given her intimacy with Marinetti and Papini, it is little wonder that shortly before she began writing "Songs" Loy responded to their work by drafting a "Feminist Manifesto" as an "absolute resubstantiation of the feminist question," taking biology and naturalness as central concerns (Letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, n.d.).¹² Understanding Loy's representation of a capitalized Nature in this unpublished 1914 manifesto and in other early poems precludes understanding her more radical reconstruction of nature in "Songs." Loy argued that women should develop economic and emotional

independence, asserting that "Woman must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved" (*Lost* 155). Like Gourmont, Loy considered the sexual embrace to be the only mutually shared interest of both sexes. She viewed sexuality as an essential element of identity, but rejected conventional narratives of marriage and family, which are preserved by bonds of love. Nature, she believed (and here she departs from Gourmont), establishes an intellectual, creative, and sexual imperative: "Nature has endowed the complete woman with a faculty for expressing herself through all her functions" (154). Of course, Loy carries her point further to propose a eugenic solution in which "superior" women fulfill their "race-responsibility" by producing children with their superior gene stock (155). Loy sent the manifesto to Dodge in New York, but Loy's own ambivalence about it is recorded in subsequent letters to Dodge. In those letters she dismisses the manifesto as a "tirade" about feminism that could "be proved fallacious," then exasperatedly acknowledges, "There is no truth—anywhere" (Letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan). Loy's "Aphorisms on Futurism," published earlier that year in *Camera Work*, also calls for self-individualization and independence. Unlike "Feminist Manifesto," it does not broach the subject of feminism, remaining focused primarily on her Futurist ideas about speed and consciousness and her disregard for quaint moralities. By their genre, "Aphorisms" and "Feminist Manifesto"'s explosive syntax impose limits. Loy may have felt that poetry could absorb a more exploratory socio-political stance than a "tirade" and hence come closer to some truths about, as she put it in a letter to Carl Van Vechten, "modern humanity" (December 1934).

In her early poems Loy questions the association of women with nature but depicts nature itself conventionally—as land and as woman. In "July in Vallombrosa," the first section of "Italian Pictures" (1914), "Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots" (1914), and "Babies in Hospital" (1915), Loy invokes nature as a rhetorical trope in a social, urban context. Loy personifies nature (as did Darwin in *Origin of Species* and Remy de Gourmont in *The Natural Philosophy of Love*), but seems unsure what role this figure should assume.¹³ Nature is a capitalized proper noun—but Nature is not entirely manifest as a character, as she is the possessor of whims and tendencies

but does not possess agency or desire. She has volition without aim, experiments without hypotheses. In "Babies in Hospital," nature is a woman "in her laboratory," producing babies who thoughtlessly mimic rigid gender roles, and in "Italian Pictures" the forest is a passive feminine "consecration" "to the uneventful" (*Lost* 24, 9). In "July in Vallombrosa," a wry depiction of "moribund," convalescing English women takes on a measure of self-parody when one knows that, suffering from what was diagnosed as neurasthenia or nervous exhaustion, Loy herself had sought out the restorative cures of rural Italian villages.¹⁴ Chastened women imbue the landscape with their passionless lives. Perhaps, like Darwin, Loy found these personifications helpful but still imperfect means of describing extra-human phenomena. "Human Cylinders" tests modernist aesthetics' anti-nature topos by imagining a world unfettered by antediluvian myths of paradise. Finding the Futurist conceit of a masculine modernity too limiting, Loy would in "Songs to Joannes" reject this machinist aesthetic in favor of one that incorporates a world where "the communion" with nature can permit "pretty" miscalculations and allow her the scope to reconceive provincial womanhood (*Lost* 54, 65). Loy understands that nature signifies differently as a fantasy according to one's gender affiliations. Hence, by mid 1915, as Loy drafted "Songs to Joannes," she was no longer depicting nature in typical Anglo-American landscape modes.

In her 1916 letter to Van Vechten, Loy emphasizes the importance of the "traditional recuperation in the country" to the development of the poem (n.d. [1915-1916?]). This "country" conjures images of green pastures and cultivated fields, per Raymond Williams's sense of the inception of what we now commonly recognize as "nature poetry" (20).¹⁵ The eighteenth-century pastoral celebrated natural beauty by visual observation and disinterested reflection. It was this kind of writing, as Ezra Pound summed it up, that he and other modernists largely rejected.¹⁶ In a review of *Others Anthology*, Pound praised the "arid clarity" of Marianne Moore and Mina Loy and their renunciation of the "stupidity beloved by the . . . 'lyric' enthusiast who, "unable to cope with the human," takes "refuge in scenery description of nature" (57-58). Yet Loy, as exemplar of the new "arid clarity" of the "cosmopolite" (to borrow a term from Marjorie Perloff [194]), has a more complex relationship with nature than has been

acknowledged. The first stanza of "Songs to Joannes" establishes an insipid pastoral in which women's bodies are rendered as metaphorical landscapes weighted with "erotic garbage," weeds, and wild oats:

Spawn of Fantasies
 Silting the appraisable
 Pig Cupid his rosy snout
 Rooting erotic garbage
 "Once upon a time"
 Pulls a weed white star-topped
 Among wild oats sown in mucous-membrane
 (Lost 53)

This is a scene of a comic, unsatisfying attempt at intercourse. First, it is cunnilingus, not associated with the language of romance; then, even with intercourse, the rivers "run no fresher / Than a trickle of saliva" (53). The conventions of storytelling, initiated with "Once upon a time," fail to initiate further narrative. Isolated, the clause remains an orphaned fragment. The compound failure of the pastoral mode and traditional narrative to depict profane sex, here, at the outset of the poem, establishes the representational modes the poem rejects. These modes can only sentimentalize and euphemistically refer; they are inadequate to the task of representing the energetic, the erotic, and the unelevated realities of sex.

Following this envoy, the first half of "Songs to Joannes," written in "red hot agony" (Letter to Carl Van Vechten, n.d. [1915–1916?]), depicts "the suspect places" of a world in which there is no firm ground (*Lost* 53), in which natural images are scrutinized by a metropolitan gaze. In a collage of urban spaces described by their unyielding surfaces, like the flag-stones of the streets that lead from one enclosure to another, the poem alludes with euphemism and ecclesiastical rhetoric to a possible abortion or miscarriage. In this maze of modernity—mezzanines, streets, doorbells, newspapers, and crowds—the "I" is reduced to a machine, "a clock-work mechanism," which, in anxious distraction, is "fretting your hair" (54).

Midway through the poem however, the urban world disappears and the speaker is repositioned:

Out of the severing
 Of hill from hill
 The interim
 Of star from star
 The nascent
 Static
 Of night (60)

Section xvii, the previous section, describes the urban world as a “round vacuum” and a “battlefield” encumbered by incidental domestic paraphernalia: “two tassels” and “the fringe of the towel” (60). In xviii, for the first time, the poem focuses on aspects of non-human nature: “hill” and “star.” The preposition “out,” which begins section xviii, also suggests a dynamic process in which countryside is severed from city as well as “hill from hill.” This section is arguably the fulcrum of the poem. Section xix then completes the speaker’s quasi-mystical passage to a green wild through its “cool cleaving” (60), echoing the previous section’s “severing.” The speaker finds herself in “Breath-giving / Pollen-smelling / Space” (60). “Severing” and “cleaving” rupture time and open up an “interim” world. “Pollen-smelling / Space” replaces the claustrophobic dimensions of furniture legs, closed rooms, and city streets. This “Space” opens the possibility for agency and identity to be absorbed by a psychogeographic landscape that is and is not a material place. The combined effect of the speaker’s relocation to the country and her heightened perception enable her to experience matter, materiality, and mind as non-egoistic extension into space. A space/time separation allows the speaker to continue to exist in a material place of green nature but also to perceive the energy and force that animate that space. From this she learns that energies flow through all spaces—metropolitan and so-called pastoral. The dual meaning “cleave” marks the emergence of a green wild that both separates the speaker from and superimposes itself onto the metropolitan world.¹⁷ The green wild is an additional materiality perceptible from heightened sensitivity rather than through empirical measurement.

A quasi-mystical state of extension beyond the self emerges in section xviii when, for twenty-nine lines continuing into section xix, there are no pronouns, no “you,” no “I,” as character and setting,

foreground and background, self and not-self, dissolve. The color palette also shifts as the narrative of a love affair that fails to bear fruit disintegrates. Green acts as modifier and as a phenomenon in its own right. Consequently, when the speaker returns to address the errant lover in section XIX, chiding him, almost fondly, it is only to distance him from the "Pollen-smelling / Space":

You too
 Had something
 At that time
 Of a green-lit glow-worm
 — — — — —
 Yet slowly drenched
 To raylessness
 In rain. (61)

As the speaker charts her experience, she relegates her lover to the urban world she has left behind. Though he once "Had something / at that time," he has lost it. Once "green-lit," the lover was "slowly drenched / To raylessness." In a series of alliterative strokes, the natural elements ("rain") cancel the lover's figure in ways the speaker's earlier logic, will power, and social circumstances could not. By enlisting nature, Loy casts out her disappointing lover. With "You" now "rayless," the natural sun can break out: "Green things grow / Salads / For the cerebral / Forager's revival" (61–62). Gaining momentum and growing as she makes contact with fecund forces, the speaker in "Songs to Joannes" productively absorbs this energy, reviving herself for a return to the fray of what Loy elsewhere called the "sex war."¹⁸

Like Remy de Gourmont's *Natural Philosophy of Love*, which rewrote Darwin's "religiose pudibundery" with plain speech about the "actual facts of sex," Loy's "Songs to Joannes" confronts the psychic and physical dimensions of sexual liaisons both in plain terms and through juxtaposed abstractions (Gourmont 12). Loy, similar to Gourmont, confronts the graphic elements of sexual relationships. However, unlike the *Natural Philosophy of Love*—which Loy first encountered because of Papini's fascination with Gourmont—and which justified gender roles by referencing sexual dimorphism as a biological imperative—the post-Darwinian wild of "Songs to

Joannes" ignores culturally inflected biological essentialisms as it decouples sex from romantic love and breaks down the gendered poles of address into molecular energy.¹⁹ Twitchell-Waas rightly understands Loy's interest in evolution as the desire for a "mutation of consciousness" (124). Favoring "miscalculation," Loy takes up the processual Darwinian wild, but rejects the teleological narratives that often accompany theories of evolution. Darwin naturalizes male superiority in his theory of sexual selection. Gourmont explicitly debunks notions of human superiority and evolutionary teleology, stating that, "man is not the culmination of nature," adding, "[h]e is *in Nature*" (12) because so-called higher abstract feelings of love are "profoundly animal" (16); love is just the instinctual drive for "copulation, fecundation, eggs" (15). However, Gourmont relishes the cruel means by which male and females of all species are variously destroyed by the reproductive imperative. He describes the male Oak Bombyx which, having only "a rudimentary proboscis and a fake digestive apparatus" lives long enough for "fecundation" of a female and dies immediately afterward "without one egoistic act" (19). Likewise the females often fare worse. Gourmont describes the male sitarus dragging the newly hatched female from her egg, "hurl[ing]" himself on the "extremity of the abdomen," then promptly dying while she "lays on the very spot where she has been fecundated, dies, having known nothing but the maternal function" (20). In rebuttal to Gourmont's oversimplification that every male is essentially a compulsive "besieger" and every female a mindless "fortress" (127), Loy calls for "Unnatural selection," in which males and females participate in mutual selection (*Lost* 65).

Daring "Evolution" to "fall foul of / Sexual equality," the poem describes an asymmetrical intimacy of increasing differentiation:

Prettily miscalculate
Similitude

Unnatural selection
Breed such sons and daughters
As shall jibber at each other
Uninterpretable cryptonyms
Under the moon

(*Lost Lunar Baedeker* 65)

Imagining "Unnatural selection," the speaker describes rather than proscribes an evolution in which the sexes are comingled by their mutual unintelligibility. It signals a new understanding of how nature has been operating all along. In *Origin of Species*, Darwin proposed two principles shaping evolution: natural selection and sexual selection. *Descent of Man* elaborated how sexual selection accounts for the differences between sexes of the same species. For Darwin, natural selection is a struggle for existence, but sexual selection is a "struggle between the males for the possession of the female" (259). This homosocial contest, according to Darwin, makes males stronger and more intelligent than females, who simply exercise choice (Darwin admits that there are highly intelligent women, but maintained that this was a relatively insignificant number). Whereas Loy's manifesto undercuts Futurism's masculinist univocality by refusing to define women in terms of their relation to men, addressing women to declare, "Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not—seek within yourselves to find out what you are" (*Lost Lunar Baedeker* 154), the country sections of "Songs to Joannes" reject woman's definition and categorization entirely. A state of becoming is signaled by "sons and daughters" who join in verbal cacophony. Voices become pathways between bodies. But as these sounds remain "cryptonyms" and as pure "Uninterpretable" voices without song, each retains its animality or otherness.

Calling on "sons and daughters" to "clash together" in "seismic orgasm," free of their "Own-self distortion," Loy's poem maps out in nonhuman nature a redistribution of human identity (66). As interested as she may have been in the leveling effects of Gourmont's proposition that intelligence is a form of instinct and love is reducible to sexual drive, Loy does not wholesale adopt his reduction. She encourages women's self-determination. Now that the lover has been banished, the poem becomes a song of herself. As if going through her own cellular division, she begins at the "nascent virginity of myself" then asserts her personhood by freeing herself of narcissistic ego: "In ways without you / I go / Gracelessly / As things go" (62). The new I-you relation here is a self-reflexive dialogue with the self: "without you" being without her former lover but also becoming a thing rather than a subject. As Elizabeth Grosz points

out, too often "questions of biology, nature, and matter" are divided from "questions of culture, subjectivity, and desire." According to Grosz, feminist theory's effort to move beyond biology as fate can yield an equally unhelpful social constructivist framework that prefers to consider "*representations* of biology rather than biology itself" (77). Just as in "Parturition," where the physical act of childbirth becomes an expansion of consciousness, so in "Songs to Joannes" the speaker experiences an autoerotic crystallization of understanding through a release of energy once the speaker is positioned in a nonhuman nature.²⁰

In Loy's "Breath-giving / Pollen smelling / Space," the human possesses no special or particular sovereignty or dominion over nature, but reinscribes the desires and antagonisms of nature into his or her own person. Fireflies and human agents are subject to the same "Little lusts and lucidities"; humans "go / Gracelessly / As things go" in this place of open permission, in which the distinctions between gender, race, class, human, and animal subside (*Lost* 62). The green wild in "Songs to Joannes" reaches its most dynamic state in section XIX, where Loy sketches an energetic and intimate nature, not a world of sublime and sweeping vistas or pastoral calm. Loy's nature is hot with energies, "drenched"; it is inundated with fireflies in "Aerial quadrille / Bouncing / Off one another / Again conjoining / In recaptured pulses / Of light" (61). This nature is not an occasion for scenery description but for action. The section offers a series of commands: "Evolution fall foul of / Sexual equality"; "Unnatural selection / Breed such sons and daughters"; "Give them some way of braying brassily"; "Transpose the laugh / Let them suppose that tears / Are snowdrops or molasses"; "Let meeting be the turning / To the antipodean"; ". . . seduce them," and "Let them clash together" (65-66). The speaker calls for a series of shifts and displacements that muddle conventional sensory perception. In a series of transpositions tears now taste like candy or molasses. Sweetness rather than saltiness is associated with fruit, flowering, and growth. But this sweetened and thickened form of self-expression is not the only expression of fecundity.

Sexual energy finds productive release in the green wild, which is neither locus of terror nor space of refuge (Loy, *Lost* 61). Loy's wild thus is emphatically an extension of modernity. That is, if capitalism

requires a black market, modernity needs a space for the release and circulation of the energies of play, festival, violence, and love. In other words, unlike the pastoral mode, which depicts a geographical space unsullied by metropolitan life, the feminist wild of "Songs to Joannes" is not interested in escaping modernity. The wild is not so much contained to a physical place as a modern psychological reorientation to green nature.

To reach this ecstatic state the poem critiques the Enlightenment hierarchy of the senses, which privileges vision as the primary form in knowledge production. According to Susan Stewart, who has traced the history of the senses in aesthetics from the Renaissance to the modern, it was during the Renaissance that touch, taste, and smell were relegated to "a domain of beasts" and vision was elevated, effectively establishing "a subjectivity separated from nature" (19). This reasoning subject takes unthinking nature as the object of its exercise. "From slit eyes" (63), "we" are able to see amidst "the impact of lighted bodies" (59) that "Behind God's eyes / There might / Be other lights" (56), those of an animated creative nature, that return our own gaze. These "other lights" suggest a terrestrial enchantment or soul. Yet demonic and godly forces are at work in a nature possessed of its own *animus*. In such wilds, knowledge does not require sight:

For the blind eyes
That Nature knows us with
And the most of Nature is green
— — — — — — — — — — (66)

Nature, with those "other lights," has "blind eyes," both a classical reference to blind justice and a traditional trope for the deprivation of moral sight, which in the modern era often refers to a lover's distorted perceptions: love is blind. Here one may find justice, but not morality.

In "Songs to Joannes," however, nature is not blind in either of these senses. As a means of elevating the agency of other modes of perception such as touch and smell, the poem deposes the eye as a technology of domination. The word *eye* recurs upward of a dozen times, but in each instance vision turns away from the world and

realist representation and establishes sight instead as a means of embodied or ambient knowledge. For example, through a series of figures of synaesthesia, the speaker begins to perceive that knowledge and power may be oriented differently—something heard in the eyes and seen in the ears. Ocular sight does not yield the secrets of nature, but rather a distortion, an “archetypal pantomime” (66). The speaker at this point has not yet entered the “Static / Of night” (60) and is therefore unable to decipher fully the “Something taking shape”:

It is ambient.	And it is in your eyes
Something shiny	Something only for you
	Something that I must not see
It is in my ears	Something very resonant
Something that you must not hear	
	Something only for me

(58)

The repetition of “Something,” six times in seven lines, draws attention to this new form of vision’s ability to absorb without objectifying the objects seen. Indeed, the speaker’s eyes become a cryptic site or depository of unrepresentable knowledge, the opposite of those of the lyric poet of scenery scorned by Pound in his review. The ear, similarly to the eye, is a possessor of inner hearing: “Something that you must not hear.” Both vision and audition are absorptive.

The repetition of *eye* or reference to looking and sight subverts a tradition of English scenic tourism dating back to the 1780s in which the tourist was a property-owning gentleman of education and means, out on a picturesque tour, who sought views for their pictorial qualities.²¹ In the nineteenth century, the mass commodification of tourism enabled women to enter into what had been primarily a male-identified practice. In observing what was foreign, the tourist confronted what was indelibly other. In pursuit of pastoral landscapes at home or abroad, every tourist was an amateur naturalist seeking personal development through disinterested observation. However, the tourist’s act of looking maintained distance between the subject and object, upholding the kind of subject/object relations Val Plumwood attributes to the economic rationalism justifying exploitation of the land (22). “Songs to Joannes” registers distrust of

tourism's framing practices by refusing to give realistic description, instead describing the mountains as covered in an incongruous "flowered flummery" (*Lost* 62) and blurring the foliage into "Green things" (61). The power-structure of the touristic gaze is entirely obliterated as the lovers dissolve into "raving mad" protoplasm (67).

Sensory perception as well as energy enjoys new forms of circulation in the country sections of the poem. Just as "Green things grow" (*Lost* 61) the "cerebral / Forager," with an embodied rather than conceptual brain is "reviv[ed]" (62). Loy's term "cerebral" offers a reintegration of mind and body by drawing sight together equally with other forms of corporeal apprehension. Stewart points out that, although "touching, seeing, and hearing are central to the encounter with the presence of others, the encounter of recognition between persons," Aristotle and Pliny solidified a hierarchization of knowledge in relation to the senses which places taste and touch, which immediately make contact with the world, as lowest and sight and hearing as highest since they are associated with abstract thought (19–21). Sight leads to a "partitioning of the body itself" from the mind (Stewart 21). This vision-privileging historical orientation of the self to the world leads, as Stewart concludes, to an assumption that "our human relation to the animal is a metaphorical, allegorical one and not a metonymic, contiguous one" (21).

Like a naturalist, nature looks on as "fireflies" "Bounc[e]" and "conjoin[]" (61). In the "Pollen smelling / Space" of "Grass haulms" (61), the sun warms and "Melts" gendered subjectivities into "abysmal pigeon-holes" (63). Previously gendered bodies are resolved into non-gendered elements like "steel eyes" (63). In the green "warmth" of section xxvi, the speaker can shed "petty pruderies" and apprehend animal and vegetal "Nature" in a semi-metaphysical form from which she learns the power of unsentimental creativity (63). Section xxvi reads:

Shedding our petty pruderies
From slit eyes

We sidle up
To Nature
— — — that irate pornographer (63)

Since histories of modernism have largely lacked a way of folding discourses of nature into formal experimentations, this stanza has evaded lucid interpretation. Numerous modernist texts explore sexuality, the erotic, and transgressions of moral order, but Loy's representation of nature as pornographer does not conform to typical rubrics. Nor does it fit our contemporary usage: visual depictions of "bodies as objects of excitement, pleasure, or domination" (Dean 91).

Characterized as a pornographer, nature is not associated with the old paradigms of a healing, benign, or calm femininity.²² The pornographer of "Songs to Joannes" exposes the to-be-looked-at-ness of the woman and the to-be-looked-at-ness of landscape. In the encounter, the pornographer, red in tooth and claw, is "irate" or inflamed with anger. In the 1900s, the term *pornographer* was used by Max Nordau and others to brand science, naturalism, and evolutionary theory as pornographic. Naturalists' frank depiction of reproduction in the natural world was credited with enabling the representation of sexualized human bodies; generally, the popularization of Darwinian theory unsettled moral and social expectations. The term *pornographer*, however, first surfaced in the mid-nineteenth century from the Greek *pornographos*, writing about prostitutes, from *pornē* (prostitute) and *graphein* (write). It names a graphic practice: pornographers write about persons who sell their bodies in exchange for money. Such a definition could identify a sub-class of writers who are prostitutes themselves, writing imaginative works intended to stimulate sexual excitement. Here, Loy's formulation of nature as an "irate pornographer" suggests her identification both with the woman/worker and writer in search of emancipation and with the naturalist's unsentimental attitude toward sex.²³

Loy imagines nature as neither demure nor good, but willful, amoral, and ungendered. As an "irate pornographer," nature records the prostitutions of itself and others; it is the chronicler of its own sexual but not immoral activities, those culturally judged obscene (63). In section xxvi, Loy approaches nature as an embodied presence: one can swagger or "sidle up / To Nature" and know it on its own terms (63). "[S]idle" establishes a relational rather than subject/object orientation, thereby establishing connection through metonymic

rather than metaphorical gesture. Loy's corporeal nature does not fit the rationalist/empiricist model of knowledge that repressed what Plumwood calls "earlier respectful and organic models of nature," but instead engenders the mechanistic model in which nature is "a purely material world empty of agency, mind and purpose, the 'object' or 'clockwork' background to the master element of human consciousness and endeavor" (48). According to Enlightenment thought, knowledge, power, and agency reside in the human subject and nature is the object from which meaning may be derived. With "sidle," Loy's speaker rejects the Victorian view of nature as possessing a moral imperative: it is no benevolent and benign presence that humanity might visit as a means of passive recuperation. In fact, it is nature that does the most gazing. The "blind eyes" of Loy's nature enable the speaker to see that failure is not judged morally or otherwise (66). It is simply another aspect of life. Although her particular relationship was a failure, the failure is not her fault, nor is it a woman's burden to carry the blame for failed romance.

Once nature has been aroused in section XVIII, "Songs to Joannes" begins in earnest to remap the social in order to activate intimacies that spread beyond you-me relations and take on communal proportions. In the new mimetic space of multiple proximal relations, *us*, *we*, and *our* replace the former antagonisms between *you* and *I*. The social subsumes the individual and, in so doing, reconstitutes itself as not collective identity but impersonality. Loy's use of the collective pronoun *we* in "Songs to Joannes," as in her prose compositions of 1914, "Aphorisms on Futurism" and "The Feminist Manifesto," reimagine the social. In her overtly political tracts, however, Loy states her gender politics, whereas in the more autobiographically oriented "Songs to Joannes" she avoids manifestic imperatives. She creates instead an alternative epistemology of power and identity, a contiguous collective identity that extends female personhood into nature. In identifying herself as an extension of nonhuman nature, the speaker enjoys a previously unknown level of self-reflection in relation to a larger community.

Collective pronouns that emerge toward the end of the poem do not signify a dissolution of the self into the will of the many. Self persists, but it is newly articulated, "Smelt to synthetic / Whiteness"

(64), a subject that is made up of a “flood of entities” (Latour 208), and which acknowledges itself as composed provisionally. Section XXVII portrays a frisson or flow of self into many and back again; the “contents” or interiority of the self “Flowed to approachment of — — — / NOTHING” (64). “NOTHING” is an inexact plentitude, what the poem describes as the “contents / Of our ephemeral conjunction,” the “Much,” the “Irresolvable,” and, of course, the experience that no one can recount, “our daily deaths” (64). In other words, “NOTHING” stands for the unrepresentable and uncontainable rather than for absence or negation. This interest in articulating experience without encapsulating or fully knowing the self is an important tension the poem does not seek to resolve.

At the center of the newly conscious self is an eccentric malleability, an inviolate or “Immodifiable plastic”—a kind of molten core that cannot be permanently stabilized, which we can reread through the green wild’s latent evolutionary potential (64). To be constituted of “Immodifiable plastic” is to recognize the self’s original organic and continuing plasticity. The speaker discovers “The procreative truth of Me / Petered out / In pestilent / Tear drops,” an erasure of the old self that was bounded by sharp corporeal boundaries (62). The new self wanders freely in

Nucleus Nothing
 Inconceivable concept
 Insentient repose
 The hands of races
 Drop off from
 Immodifiable plastic (63–64)

This “Nucleus Nothing” is the self remade free of its gendered ego. The scientific vocabulary of “Nucleus” undermines the sense of the modern self as irrevocably lonely as it dissolves and resolves itself in nonegoistic—hence incapable of experiencing loneliness—forms. The confluence of these discourses of mind and matter in section XXVII as “NOTHING” is a distinct swerve away from the Cartesian sense of a self as separate from the world of matter.²⁴ To be constituted of “immodifiable plastic” is a state of dynamic equilibrium or infinite adaptability. Under the reflective powers of the moon,

"pubescent consummations / . . . / Bleach / To the pure white / Wickedness of pain" (62). The green spaces cool to a leveling whiteness. Consequently, although the poem records a failed attempt at personal, sexual communion and acknowledges the pain of this failure, the speaker emerges self-consciously strengthened with cool fortitude.

Recalibrated by the psychogeographic experience of the green wild, the final third of the poem is permeated by different visions of white: irradiated plants, dust, and moonscapes. The white wash to which the world is subject functions as fusion and synthesis.²⁵ In the first third of the poem, the few white objects, the "weed white star-topped" (53) and "the scum of the white street" (55) mingle with a varied array of "Coloured glass" (53), "coloured voices" (56), wine, blood, honey, "pink-love" (56) and red dresses, in a dialectic between white as embodiment and white as abstraction. In the second third of the poem, the color green recurs in increasing frequency as the green wild absorbs the speaker. In the final third of the poem, as the speaker emerges from the green wild and as white replaces green as the dominant tone, the poem enters a state of extension in "cerebral" (62) space:

The steps go up for ever
 And they are white
 And the first step is the last white
 Forever
 Coloured conclusions
 Smelt to synthetic
 Whiteness
 Of my
 Emergence
 And I am burnt quite white
 In the climacteric
 Withdrawal of your sun
 And wills and words all white
 Suffuse
 Illimitable monotone (64)

Subjective judgment or "Coloured conclusions" are "Smelt to synthetic / Whiteness." The "Withdrawal" of the lover's attention does not precipitate darkness and night but instead "Suffuse[s]" the

“wills and words all white,” creating a fusion, a blending together of simultaneous sensations and a leveling of human, vegetable, and mineral.²⁶ United in synthetic “Whiteness,” spirit and matter, self, other, and nonhuman other, exist along the same hierarchical plane. Like ambient blindness, the “Illimitable monotone” produced in the “climacteric / Withdrawal of your sun,” a kind of dulled aurality burns the speaker “quite white,” yet another aftereffect of the hot, energetic space of release permissible in the unromanticized, non-pastoral, and implicitly Darwinian wild. So too, the heavily alliterative and repetitive passage (white/where/white/wipes/white/white) connects whiteness to images of ecstasy, pain, birth, and loss. The collision of bodies drives off the lover but leaves the speaker with the healed scars of her own “souvenir ethics” (67). She bears the memory of the failed romance, the “drivelling humanity” she found when “Trying for Love” (59), but the irate pornographer’s mutual gaze has cleared away vision’s earlier obfuscations. With nature’s own “Impossible eyes” (64), the speaker arrives at a new political consciousness that knows that identity and gender, these “alien ego[s]” (66), are always played upon a stage “where all the men and women are merely players” (Shakespeare 124). In the synthetic whiteness or union of all colors, the speaker finds herself in a new affinity—a sense of self that is inclusive of men, women, animals, plants, and minerals.

It has been a critical commonplace to accept that this “Pig Cupid” of the poem’s opening section functions exclusively to further the psychosexual narrative (53). Following from the common assumption that this Pig Cupid represents an “outrageous metonymy for the male sexual organ” (Altieri 83), such critics as Charles Altieri, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, and Paul Peppis have equated the growing frequency of white in section XXVIII with a build-up and release of semen that prepares for the seismic orgasm recorded in section XXIX. Indeed, the climax of the poem’s narrative of romantic/sexual encounter occurs at the point of seismic orgasm.²⁷ If there had been no country sections, the seismic orgasm might have been the only connection in which the sexes possess a mutual investment. In a feminist critique of narrative progression, DuPlessis writes,

[t]hese metaphors of chaos or annihilation in sexual bliss show the dangerous loss of identity, perhaps reversion to a "femininity" of dissolution and passivity, defined by stereotypical gender ideas which Loy has staked herself upon resisting. . . . (66)

That is, DuPlessis queries the sexual politics of female ecstasy as a loss of self when caused by proximity with the more coherent self of the male sexual partner. Following from this conclusion, DuPlessis considers section xxxii the point at which "Songs to Joannes" loses its energetic effusions and retreats into a frigid, emotionally gutted meditation. According to DuPlessis's reading, the speaker's enunciation, "The moon is cold / Joannes" (*Lost* 67), is an expression of inconsolable grief.

Yet in nature survival of the individual and perpetuation of the species are in constant tension. The poem's narrative registers ambivalence, distrust, spirited rejection, and, finally, cool fortitude against the existing social political order represented by the failure of the initial heterosexual romance. I have identified Loy's ecstatic autoerotic crystallization of understanding as a political and social counter to the overbearing narrative of marriage and family that Loy similarly rejects in her "Feminist Manifesto." If we reconsider the speaker's narrative of "ephemeral conjunction" (*Lost* 64), and Loy's description of her relationship's "round vacuum" (60) of the possible abortion/miscarriage as an act of political negativity, one can read the poem's denouement as ambivalently affirmative. Six sections from the end, Loy writes:

White where there is nothing to see
 But a white towel
 Wipes the cymphanous sweat
 — Mist rise of living—
 From your
 Etiolate body
 And the white dawn
 Of your New Day
 Shuts down on me

Unthinkable that white over there
 — — — Is smoke from your house (64-65)

In section xxviii, in the state of white-hot fusion, the speaker witnesses her own "Emergence," a counter force to rival the supposed power of the lover's willful, perhaps premature, act of "Withdrawal" (64). In section xxviii, as a consequence, the speaker's perceptions are burnt into a total vision whereas her lover, metonymically depicted as Pig Cupid, suffers etiolation or bleaching. In biological terms, etiolation describes the process whereby a plant deprived of sunlight cannot manufacture chlorophyll, and looks white rather than green. The word "Etiolate" converts the lover, in the way alliteration and rain had inundated him earlier, into a bleached plant, devoid of chlorophyll, weak from malnutrition. She chooses not his "New Day" but night and the cold moon. This choice might look like deprivation but marks independence.

"Songs to Joannes" lays bare the implicit cultural rules of intimacy and, through this act of exposure, the rules lose their authority. Rather than losing her self, the speaker gains poetic authority through her exchange of energies in a green wild free of culturally prescribed gender roles; the poem's final meditations are tuned to a new synthetic vision. The speaker recognizes the "paucity" (67) of traditional narratives of loss in love as too dependent on the singular event, male orgasm or the heterosexual marriage plot, and oblivious to the equally powerful shaping force of the cyclic occurrence, the female orgasm (as Loy puts it in her "Feminist Manifesto") or a series of "definite period[s] of psychic development" (155). Rather than desiring only to produce offspring, the speaker now understands her "ephemeral conjunction" (64) as a facet of nature's "new dimension" (57) of "Prenatal plagiarism" (66), which allows her to reconcile the singular event of copulation with her new understanding of psychosexual relations. "Prenatal plagiarism" or cellular division through meiosis is akin to the extension of self she experiences in the final section of the poem. Biopolitical awakening is the result of her "Own-self distortion" (66) in which the speaker's individual life "clash[es]" (66), "interfere[s]" (67), expands into "extremities" (67), and loses specificity in the "insolent isolation" of nature (67). Emboldened by her quasi-mystical state of ambient knowing, the speaker elevates the "fumble" (66), "the unbroken fall" (67), and acknowledges nature's "raving mad" (67) protoplasm that has no need of narrative. Neutralizing the beloved, the speaker has gained in her absent lover a lyric

muse. Forced out of the heterosexual absorption in an other, she finds creative energy in cool green and the cold illumination of the moon—so muse is both his absence and the presence of non-gendered, untraditional, or post-Darwinian nature.

The quiet admission "The moon is cold / Joannes" (67) is not a capitulation to despair. The bittersweet confidence of the communication balances its enunciation. Precisely in its lack of "Grass haulms" (60) and life sustaining properties, the speaker finds in the moon a poetic fecundity. The moon becomes a rich imaginative resource, albeit a cold one. The fecundity of the moon for Loy's poetic—it appears in upward of a dozen poems during this period and in the titles of two volumes of poetry during her lifetime—further suggests that Loy invested the moon with a special lyric significance. In "Lunar Baedeker" (1922), the moon maintains its independence from the world. In a reference to Artemis, goddess of the woodland, the moon, as a "fossil virgin of the skies," "Pocked with personification," remains, cool, hard, and remote (82).

When Loy republished "Songs to Joannes" in 1923 as "Love Songs," she excised large portions of the poem, reducing it from thirty-four sections to thirteen and removing the entire narrative of the possible abortion/miscarriage and coupling scenes. Loy jettisoned the penultimate section of "Songs to Joannes" in which the speaker's thoughts return to dwell on the insufficiencies of her lover who is a "prig of passion" suffering from "professorial paucity" before reaching a more abstract image of this relationship as "raving mad" "Proto-plasm" (67). In the later "Love Songs," there is a sense of paring down. The changes in "Love Songs" reflect Loy's rapid absorption of her material conditions during those pivotal emigration years from New York (1921), to Vienna, to Berlin (1922) and, finally, to Paris (1923). The poem shrinks markedly; there is a loss of place-specificity, no scenes near the Arno, and no New York iconography, London scenery, or American wilderness ideology, almost as if Loy had taken herself at her own word and "Let meeting be the turning / To the antipodean / And Form a blurr" (65). The blurriness of "Love Songs" is created through condensation and poetic smoothing, including increased frequencies of alliteration, and through the excision of both time as a fragmenting force and the rupture moments of explicit sexual contact. The effect is a bowdlerized poem of blurred

ironies. The gains in simplicity come at the expense of the more profound narrative.

In sum, "Songs to Joannes" does not proffer a vision of a better future; rather, futurity plays itself out in a new idiom, that of the unregulated and open plenitude of socialized biological and evolutionary struggles. As Loy breaks down the nature/culture and woman/culture split in the green wild she finds a way through evolutionary theory to activate a purposive nature-agent ("irate pornographer") who is politically visible and socially animated. Through temporary absorption in this natural world the speaker becomes better prepared to cope with the failure of relationship in the world of normative gender relationships. Some few of us

Grow to the level of cool plains
Cutting our foot-hold
With steel eyes (63)

The we Loy envisions here is a particularly modern post-Darwinian community with a perspective in which infinite variation both affirms and extinguishes desires for individuality and personhood. In section xxxi, the third to last section of the poem, the speaker refers to the anguishing aftermath of the failed relationship as "Crucifixion," a hyperbole she offers for parodic effect (67). In other words, by the end of the poem the speaker can jestingly absolve herself of blame for failed romance.

In "Modern Poetry," her only published critical statement on poetry (it appeared in *Charm*, 1925), Loy claims that American nature is cosmopolitan, creative, and sexually aggressive: the United States affords an unprecedented opportunity. Natural space, which America had long been imagined as offering in abundance, constitutes a heterogeneous geography of forests, rivers, and mountains. When a poet "has come into independent contact with nature: to each she must show herself in a new manner, for each has a different organic personality for perceiving her" (*Lost* 160). According to Loy's "Modern Poetry," nature is emergent, dynamic, and the instigator of an intimacy that goes beyond conventional notions of social interaction or organization.

In the course of developing the 1915 "Love Songs" into a long poem, "Songs to Joannes" (1917), Loy argued that freeing oneself of a conventional and failed love affair necessitates reanimating nature, that is to say, reimagining nature as a model for new social relations through a counterpastoral kaleidoscope in which sensory disorientation enables new forms of knowledge. Envisioning a modern gendered subject position for women entailed rearticulating nature through nonrepresentational forms—the hypermodern post-Darwinian naturalist and futurist feminist—thereby transforming the current conceptions of nature as passive and inert into nature as a willful and active force. Reconsidering "Songs to Joannes" as a narrative journey to the country or green wild we see that the poem holds out a promising alternative to the intractable differences of a dualistically gendered world. The elliptical, figuratively and grammatically complex thirty-four section poem of "suspect places" carries an account of biocultural advancement, if we can only take up its challenge (*Lost* 53).

NOTES

1. I am grateful for Marissa Januzzi's dissertation, which first brought this letter to my attention and prompted my archival work at the Beinecke. For further commentary on this letter, see Januzzi 278.
2. Virginia Koudis has called the poem a "collage of love's failure that rewrites [Emerson's] 'Experience' in flamboyantly sexual imagery" ("Prison" 130). Maeera Shreiber described the poem as cynical (159). The first four sections of the poem were originally published as "Love Songs" in the inaugural issue of *Others* (1915). In this essay, I focus on the expanded, 34-section version published as "Songs to Joannes" in a special *Others* pamphlet (April 3, 1917). In 1923, Loy published a condensed, 13-section version of the poem titled "Love Songs." This appeared in *Lunar Baedeker*.
3. On a related theme, see Marshall.
4. The poem states "And the most of Nature is green." For Loy the adjective "green" represents a plant-saturated, feminized, and energetic landscape. For critiques of the dominance of "green" in ecological thinking as a stand in for peaceful, passive, empty, and unpopulated landscape, see Cohen's edited collection *Prismatic Ecology*.
5. In contrast, I find it difficult to situate "Songs to Joannes" within a U.S. nature writing tradition because the image of nature it depicts is a product of cosmopolitan, European, biopolitical, Futurist, and feminist debates.

6. See also the individual essays by Hobson and Potter. Maera Shreiber concludes that, "There is no salvation to be gained or earned since Loy's ontology does not include a transcendent disembodied version of the self" (154). For Shreiber, Loy's feminism is socially contingent and anchored in embodied experience. Joining her in this assessment, Miller writes, "[T]here is little sense of fulfilling relationship in these poems. Instead, they protest patriarchal definitions of the feminine without constructing alternate possibilities for female expression and power—perhaps because, to Loy's knowledge, no such cultural models existed" (73).

7. According to Carolyn Burke's reconstruction of the summer of 1914, the party had travelled into the countryside to avoid the Florentine heat and planned to shelter in the relative calm of the mountain hamlets. Dodge and Van Vechten stayed at the bourgeois Albergo Paradisino while Loy rented a cottage in Saltino to which Van Vechten had objected because its piecemeal construction was aesthetically reprehensible: the cottage was "entirely out of harmony with the landscape" (qtd. in Burke, *Becoming Modern* 172).

8. Like Sandeep Parmar, I read Loy's letter to Van Vechten (in which she explains her "feminine politics," as she put it) as informed by her close association with Marinetti and Papini (qtd. in Parmar 76).

9. The comparisons between "Songs to Joannes" and Remy de Gourmont's *Natural Philosophy of Love* are remarked on by Burke in "Getting Spliced." Burke explains that Papini idolized the philosopher and wrote about the admiration in his autobiography, *Un Uomo finito* (162). See also O'Driscoll for discussion of Gourmont's far-reaching importance to Pound, Eliot, Laurence Durrell, and Richard Aldington. Papini had first introduced Loy to Gourmont. In a letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan, Loy mentions Gourmont's work in the original French. Gourmont and Loy were both published in the 1921 *Dial*, but Loy would have known Gourmont's work in 1913 and 1914 through Papini at which point she may have also read it. Certainly "Songs to Joannes" contains many similar insect images as *The Natural Philosophy*. Virginia Kouidis comes to this conclusion as well, writing that before writing "Songs to Joannes," "Mina Loy had undoubtedly read . . . *The Natural Philosophy of Love*" (*Mina Loy: American Modernist* 71).

10. See Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land* and *The Land Before Her*.

11. The Futurists' early support of women's rights paralleled the position taken by early Italian fascism, which actually supported women's suffrage. Orban concludes that "Marinetti's chief concern is not for women's social advancement, but for their continued desirability as organs of reproduction" (57). On November 22, 1925 Mussolini granted women who were over 25 years of age and whose "actions benefit the nation as mothers and wives" the right to vote in local elections. However, the law was repealed a year later. According to de Grazia, fascist women writers internalized the maternal prerogative and largely settled for a sexual difference argument that all but entirely removed them from political activity.

12. For further discussion of Loy's engagement with Futurism, see Harris. My work benefits here from what Hofer established, that Loy's manifesto seems to be in direct response to Papini's 1914 manifesto "The Massacre of Women."

13. In personifying nature, Loy follows in a long tradition extending past Darwin. Darwin represents the first modern attempt to reconcile the Cartesian formulation of nature as inert material with recognition of a more dynamic agential nature. For Darwin, personification of nature was a necessary rhetorical gesture that allowed for its inscrutable (like the feminine) agency and therefore he did not need to directly disavow a divine order:

Nature (if I may be allowed thus to personify the natural preservation of varying and favored individuals during the struggle for existence), cares nothing for appearances, except in so far as they are useful to any being. She can act on every internal organ, on every shade of constitutional difference, on the whole machinery of life. Man selects only for his own good: Nature only for that being which she tends. (*Origin of Species* 87)

Richard Levine points out that Darwin personified not only Nature but also Natural Selection. In his 1844 draft of *Origin*, Darwin described natural selection as a "Being with penetration sufficient to perceive differences in the outer and innermost organization quite imperceptible to man" (132). Levine surmises that this personification allowed Darwin to propose design without attributing it to a divine being.

14. Italy was a destination for European ladies suffering from minor to severe depression, anxiety disorders, and physical distempers. In letters to Mabel Dodge Luhan (10 March 19__?) and Carl Van Vechten, Loy reported her illnesses, sometimes directly referring to neurasthenia. Italy as spa destination followed a general trend of northern Europeans seeking southern nature cures. Medical books for general practitioners recommended Italy and its sub-thermal waters for the treatment of lumbago, sciatica, and dyspepsia. For further information, see Latham and English.

15. Other English depictions of nature developed alongside the early pastoral. These narratives date from before the seventeenth century when, historians agree, nature lost its "soul." For discussion of how the authority of nature and the categories of the non-natural were transformed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Daston and Foucault.

16. Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound's influential but short-lived masculinist magazine *Blast* had gone so far as to pit itself explicitly against a complex of nature, aesthetics, and art inspired by "wild nature." The fight against seductive "wildness" and a matronly "Mother Nature" was part and parcel of the reassignment of artistic production to the cult of virility.

17. In fact, this superpositioning of multiple spaces recurs in Loy's later work, evidence of the importance of psychogeography for her. I use the word psychogeography intentionally to underscore the affinity between Loy's access to wild modernity and Guy Debord's liberating practice of the *dérive* or meander that gives the urban walker a means of creatively remapping her experience of the city according to her habits of thought. Psychogeographical mapping is also evident in "Illumination," part of *Anglo Mongrels and the Rose* (1923–25). Ova goes out to the green space of a garden and becomes "conscious / not through her body but through space" (*Last* 164). This scene describes a similar extension of the self into nonhuman nature.

18. This phrase comes from Loy's reference in "Brontolivido" to her "constant obsession [with] the sex war" (qtd. in Januzzi 277).
19. Gourmont writes, "A young girl, before the slightest love affair, will, if she is healthy, confess naively that she 'wants to marry to have children'" as proof that human love masks the greater desire for reproduction with sentimentalism (18).
20. Janet Lyon summarizes the philosophical issues at the heart of Loy's early poem "Parturition" (1914) as that of western metaphysics' "problematic of God, Universe and Nature" (388). This "problematic" could also be the impetus behind "Songs to Joannes," where Loy resolves the problem she confronted in "Parturition" by developing a space in which the Cartesian dualisms and the triumvirate God-Universe-Nature do not hold sway.
21. Susan Lamb's study of eighteenth-century travel pinpoints the emergence of the terms *tourist* and *tourism* to 1780 and 1811, respectively. The development of the Baedeker guides to Europe and America marks a landmark in the evolution of tourism, a widely used manual whose significance was not lost on Loy, who named both her volumes of poetry *Lunar Baedeker* (*Lunar Baedeker* [sic] [1923] and *Lunar Baedeker & Time-Tables* [1958]).
22. Carolyn Dean points out that in the early 1900s,
 [p]ornography became a pervasive metaphor for moral decline and national emasculation, and its emergence was concurrent with the threat posed to elites by workers militating for rights and women demanding the vote in a period of increasing wealth, consumption, and literacy. (113)
- Anger and outrage are important political feelings that enabled workers and women to agitate for improved conditions and emancipation. The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives the most basic definition of pornography as "printed or visual material containing" the "explicit description or exhibition of sexual subjects or activity . . . intended to stimulate erotic . . . feelings" ("Pornography").
23. Of the printed matter indexed by Google N-Gram the word "pornographer" occurs with the most frequency when in close semantic relation to "naturalist."
24. In Neil Evernden's terms, the individual is not something "distinct" from "the rest of the environment" (97). Like the cichlid he observes, the self is "no longer as an organism bounded by skin—it is an organism plus-environment bounded by an imaginary integument" (97).
25. Andrew Michael Roberts credits Loy's use of white as a feminist response, the "white light of a female symbol," written to counter contemporary guides geared toward men for enjoying the pleasures of the ladies of the Parisian red-light district (133). I find it unlikely, however, that Loy would deploy colors, even the color white, in such a programmatic or binary fashion.
26. Darwin posited that humans are not fundamentally different from animals. Rather, we are not different in kind so much as separated by degrees of complexity.
27. Working under this assumption, Selinger concludes that the Pig Cupid is "a displaced and comical phallus" (26). DuPlessis identifies an anapestic pattern of climaxes and withdrawals throughout the poem. See also Peppis.

WORKS CITED

- Altieri, Charles. *The Art of Twentieth-Century American Poetry: Modernism and After*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2006. Print.
- Antliff, Mark. "Fascism, Modernism, and Modernity." *The Art Bulletin* 84.1 (2002): 148–69. Print.
- Burke, Carolyn. *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1997. Print.
- . "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference." *American Quarterly* 39.1 (Spring 1987): 98–121. Print.
- Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome. "Introduction: Ecology's Rainbow." *Prismatic Ecology: Ecotheory Beyond Green*. Ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2013. xv–xxxv. Print.
- Darwin, C. R. *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life*. 5th ed. London: John Murray, 1869. Print.
- . *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. 5th ed. London: John Murray, 1871. Print.
- Daston, Lorraine. "The Nature of Nature in Early Modern Europe." *Configurations* 6.2 (1998): 149–72. Print.
- Dean, Carolyn. "Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering." *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14.1 (2003): 88–124. Print.
- DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Genders, Races, and Religious Cultures in Modern American Poetries, 1908–1934*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2001. Print.
- Evernden, Neil. "Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, and the Pathetic Fallacy." *The Eco-criticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1996. 92–104. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- Goody, Alex. *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy, and Gertrude Stein*. Houndmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007. Print.
- Gourmont, Remy de. *The Natural Philosophy of Love*. Trans. Ezra Pound. Boston: Boni and Liveright, 1922. Print.
- Grosz, Elizabeth. *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power*. Durham: Duke UP, 2005. Print.
- Harris, Rowan. "Futurism, Fashion, and the Feminine: Forms of Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy." *Hobson and Potter* 17–46.
- Hobson, Suzanne. "Mina Loy's 'Conversion' and the Profane Religion of her Poetry." *Hobson and Potter* 248–65.
- Hobson, Suzanne, and Rachel Potter, eds. *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*. Cambridge, UK: Salt P, 2010. Print.
- Hofer, Matthew. "Loy, Papini, and the Aesthetic of Irritation." *Paideuma* 38 (2011): 219–58. Print.
- James, Henry. *Italian Hours*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1909. Print.

- Januzzi, Marissa. "Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]': Mina Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics." Diss. Columbia U, 1997. Print.
- Kolodny, Annette. *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters*. Durham: U of North Carolina P, 1975. Print.
- . *The Land Before Her: Fantasy and Experience of the American Frontiers, 1630–1860*. Durham: U of North Carolina P, 1984. Print.
- Kouidis, Virginia. "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual difference." *American Quarterly* 39.1 (Spring 1987): 98–121. Print.
- . *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1980. Print.
- . "Prison to Prism: Emerson's 'Many-Colored Lenses' and the Woman Writer of Early Modernism." *The Green American Tradition: Essays and Poems for Sherman Paul*. Ed. H. Daniel Peck. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1989. 115–34. Print.
- Lamb, Susan. *Bringing Travel Home to England: Tourism, Gender, and Imaginative Literature in the Eighteenth Century*. Newark: U of Delaware P, 2009. Print.
- Latham, Arthur, and T. Crisp English, eds. *A System of Treatment by Many Writers in Four Volumes*. Vol. 3. New York: MacMillian Company, 1914. Archive.org. Web. 3 Feb. 2017.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- Levine, George. *Darwin and the Novelists: Patterns of Science in Victorian Fiction*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992. Print.
- Loy, Mina. *The Last Lunar Baedeker*. Ed. Roger L. Conover. Highlands, NC: The Jargon Society, 1982. Print.
- . Letter to Carl Van Vechten. N.d. [1914?]. MS. Carl Van Vechten Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- . Letter to Carl Van Vechten. N.d. [1915–16?]. MS. Carl Van Vechten Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- . Letter to Carl Van Vechten. December 1934. MS. Carl Van Vechten Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- . Letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan. N.d. MS. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- . Letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan. [10 March 19__?] MS. Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.
- . *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. Ed. Roger L. Conover. New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1996. Print.
- . "Love Songs." *Others* 1.6 (July 1915): 6–8. Modernist Journals Project. Web. 8 March 2017.

- . "Pazarella." *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*. Ed. Sara Crangle. Champagne: Dalkey Archive P, 2011. 65–97. Print.
- . "Songs to Joannes." *Others* 3.6 (April 1917): 3–20. Modernist Journals Project. Web. 8 March 2017.
- Lyon, Janet. "Mina Loy's Pregnant Pauses: The Space of Possibility in the Florence Writings." Shreiber and Tuma 379–401.
- Marinetti, F. T. *Critical Writings*. Ed. Günter Berghaus. Trans. Doug Thompson. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006. Print.
- Marshall, Alan. "The Ecstasy of Mina Loy." Hobson and Potter 166–87.
- Miller, Cristanne. *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, and Else Lasker-Schuler*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2005. Print.
- O'Driscoll, Michael. "Entoporn, Remy de Gourmont, and the Limits of Posthuman Sexuality." *Modernism/Modernity* 20.4 (2013): 627–43. Print.
- Orban, Clara. "Women, Futurism, and Fascism." *Mothers of Invention: Women, Italian Fascism, and Culture*. Ed. Robin Pickering-Iazzi. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1995. 52–75. Print.
- Papini, Giovanni. "The Massacre of Women." Trans. David Wray. *Paideuma* 38 (2011): 252–56. Print.
- . *Un Uomo Finito: E Altri Scritti Inediti*. Trans. Virginia Pope. Cabin John, MD: Wildside P, 2011. Print.
- Parmar, Sandeep. *Reading Mina Loy's Autobiographies: Myth of the Modern Woman*. London: Bloomsbury P, 2013. Print.
- Peppis, Paul. "Rewriting Sex: Mina Loy, Marie Stopes, and Sexology." *Modernism/modernity* 9.4 (2002): 561–79. Print.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *Poetry on & off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions*. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 2004. Print.
- Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.
- "Pornography." OED Online. Oxford University Press. 2017. Web. 11 April 2017.
- Potter, Rachel. "Obscene Modernism and the Wondering Jew: Mina Loy's 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose.'" Hobson and Potter 47–70.
- Pound, Ezra. "Others." *The Little Review* 4.11 (1918): 56–58. Modernist Journals Project. library.brown.edu/pdfs/1297803957765625.pdf.
- Roberts, Andrew Michael. "'How To Be Happy in Paris': Mina Loy and the Transvaluation of the Body." *Cambridge Quarterly* 27.2 (1998): 129–47. Print.
- Saint-Point, Valentine de. "Manifesto of Futurist Woman (Response to F. T. Marinetti), 1912." *Manifesto: A Century of Isms*. Trans. and ed. Mary Ann Caws. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2001. 213–16. Print.
- Selinger, Eric Murphy. "Love in the Time of Melancholia." Shreiber and Tuma 19–43.
- Shakespeare, William. *As You Like It*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000. Print.
- Shreiber, Maera. "'Love Is a Lyric / of Bodies': The Negative Aesthetics of Mina Loy's Love Songs to Joannes." *Genre* 27.1–2 (Spring/Summer 1994): 143–64. Print.

-
- Schreiber, Maera, and Keith Tuma, eds. *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*. Orono, ME: National Poetry Foundation, 1998. Print.
- Stewart, Susan. *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2002. Print.
- Twitchell-Waas, Jeffrey. "'Little Lusts and Lucidities': Reading Mina Loy's Love Songs." Schreiber and Tuma 111-29.
- Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1976. Print.
- Winters, Yvor. "Mina Loy." *The Dial* 80.6 (1926): 496-99. Print.