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УДК 821.111-1.09

"A BINARIAN'S NIGHTMARE": THE POETICS OF THE INCLUDED MIDDLE IN MINA LOY'S *SONGS TO JOANNES*

Key words: modernism, Mina Loy, dichotomies

Introduction

"Mina always understood." wrote Gertrude Stein about Mina Loy[1] in her 1932 novel, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, about Loy's ability to appreciate Stein's literary innovation. Yet few understood Mina—and with good reason. "She has been legitimately called a symbolist, a dadaist, a futurist, a surrealist, a conceptualist, a painter, poet, playwright, inventor, designer, model, actor. She was too much. She was too many things," said Roger Conover, her literary executor, and the editor of two compilations of her poetry (qtd. in Ihnat). Her politics were equally complicated: "she challenged the conventions of womanhood (...) [unmasked] the racial underpinnings of the avant-garde (...) [and spoke] to the complexity of motherhood in the first decades of the twentieth century and beyond", while also being fascinated with eugenics and mingling with the famously fascist Marinetti and Papini (Pozorski, 2005: 42).

Loy herself made no effort to make her work and identity easily digestible; even her name was in constant flux—"she adopted a range of semi-transparent masks, aliases, and pseudonyms, such as 'Gina' in *The Effectual Marriage*, and 'Imna Oly', 'Nima Lyo', and 'Anim Yol' in *Lion's Jaws*" (Churchill). Suzanne W. Churchill reads the name which 'stuck', Mina Loy, as "Min-aloy is Mine-alloy, im-

[1] Mina Loy (1882-1966) was a poet, painter, and part of the group that started the modernist revolution in literature. Loy had a number of friends in the European and North American literary scene; among them were Gertrude Stein, William Carlos Williams, and Ezra Pound, who considered her one of the most talented American poets (along with William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore). Her most famous work is *Songs to Joannes*, a poetry collection written after the end of her relationship with the Italian Futurist Giovanni Papini.

plying that the self is both an essential and composite substance" (Churchill), providing a key to Loy's *Songs to Joannes*, which some have called a long poem, others a poetic cycle, and Loy herself had described as a "progression of realisations" (qtd. in Konkol, 225). Presumably written in 1915 or 1916, in the aftermath of a failed relationship with the italian futurist Giovanni Papini, the most likely 'real-life' counterpart to Joannes, (*Giovanni Papini*) *Songs*… is a complex text that deals with love in many contradictory ways: with skepticism, dejection, yearning, and hope. Due perhaps to Loy's changing state of mind during its creation—"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] cerebral" (qtd. in Konkol, 225)—this variance in the text's attitude to its object constitutes only a part of its overall semantic fluidity.

Its lability is furnished by a ubiquitous layering and commingling of opposite terms: love/lust, sacred/profane, human/divine lose their dichotomous quality, enacting a fusion no longer available to the two main figures in the poem, the lyrical speaker and Joannes. This alloy-like quality has lead to *Songs*… being read in a multitude of contradictory ways. Her contemporary, Ezra Pound, claimed that she wrote "poetry that is akin to nothing but language which is a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas and modifications of ideas and characters", poetry that contained "no emotion whatever" and was "a mind cry, more than a heart cry" (qtd. in Churchill). In stark contrast to Pound's assertions, Ellen McWhorter finds in Loy's work "complicated messiness of lived experience" (McWhorter) and Churchill criticizes Pound for disregarding the "psychosexual desires (…) and matters of both the heart and mind" (Churchill) in *Songs*…. Virginia M. Kouidis claims that Loy "was attacking her Victorian heritage which calculated the marriage value of women according to their purity and ignorance" on a personal level, and "was fighting the failure of literature to treat life honestly" in her art (Kouidis, 170). Rather identifying Victorian norms as Loy's main target, Aimee L. Pozorski describes *Songs*…, along with *Parturition*—"her poems about motherhood"—as Loy's "most persuasive and heartfelt rejection of Futurist ideals, as well as her contribution to the woman question" (Pozorski, 2005: 42). My intention in foregrounding the differences of these various interpretations is not to discredit them; instead, I imply that they are compatible despite their contradictoriness, exactly due to how fluid meaning is within the text. The aim of this paper is to take a closer look at the reason behind this fluidity: a principle whose ubiquity in- and consequence to the structure of *Songs*… justifies it being labeled as a type of poetics.

I mean the already hinted at fusion of dichotomous terms, which permeates the entire poetic cycle—unsurprisingly, given Loy's unapologetic complexity and political radicalism—and provides textual proof for Conover's view of Loy as a "binarian's nightmare" (qtd. in Makowska). This principle will henceforth be referred to as a fusion (and

its various synonyms) of dichotomous terms and as Loy's poetics of the *included* middle[2]—in opposition to the excluded middle, or the necessarily empty space between the two nodes of a dichotomy ("Law of Excluded Middle"). Like the number of interpretations this principle engenders, its functions in the poems are too numerous to exhaust within one paper. I will focus on two that I find to be of special importance: its potential to subvert cultural norms (and thus, by implication, interrogate systems that rely on them for their power) and its role in characterizing the relationship between the speaker and Joannes.

For the sake of the page limit as well as to avoid tautology, I cannot consider all thirty-four poems in this paper. I have selected the first three poems, as well as the thirteenth and thirty-fourth, because they effectively showcase the different themes and their transformations in *Songs*…. The first poem is programmatic, and already contains most of the (to-be-subverted) dichotomies that will appear throughout the subsequent thirty-three: sacred/profane, human/divine, love/lust, distance/proximity. It also contains Biblical and Freudian references that are similarly subjected to fusion, a feature that will allow me to touch on the cultural subversion encoded in the text. Given its thematic richness and programmatic quality, I will spend the majority of this paper analyzing the first poem—this will give me the opportunity to interpret those that follow more briskly (avoiding a repetition of recurring motifs) and to to shift the focus from the cultural subversiveness of *Songs*… to the relationship between the speaker and Joannes. Before a complete shift takes place, though, I will consider two more important dichotomies supplemented by the second poem: man/woman and human/machine, which are also promptly subverted. The third poem situates itself most explicitly within the included middle, but it also metamorphoses it from a space where cultural norms are undermined into a lost paradise: an example of unity which could have been achieved by the speaker and Joannes, but was not. The thirteenth poem relocates this ideal unity from a lost future to a possible one and presents the poetics of the included middle as a recipe for its achievement. Finally, the thirty-fourth poem once again relocates the speaker's and Joannes' fusion from the possible future to the (very) recent past: it has already taken place, although in the realm of literature, rather than in 'real life'. Over the course of this paper, I hope to show that two major functions of the poetics of the included middle are, extratextually, to subvert cultural norms and, intratextually, to showcase the different facets of the union of the speaker and Joannes: as a lost future, as a possible future, and as *fait accompli*. Before I begin with my close reading, I want to briefly discuss Nancy Jay's essay, "Gender and Dichotomy", which undergirds my assumption of an inherent cultural subversiveness contained in Loy's poetics of the included middle.

Jay opens by shining a spotlight on the "social conditions and consequences" of the use of dichotomies, which "logicians, no doubt, can safely ignore (...), but social theorists do so at their

[2] To prevent excessive repetition.

own risk" (Jay, 1981: 38). The problem with binary terms such as male/female is that, while they do not necessarily have to be conceived as dichotomous, they are "particularly susceptible to such phrasing" (Jay,1981: 43). The dichotomy, where something is either itself or its complete opposite—two sides cleft by an excluded middle, a non-space ensuring that they cannot come into contact with each other—is "necessarily social" (Jay,1981: 43) (since biological sex is a continuum) and necessarily inaccurate: "Concepts of femaleness and maleness come into being that have nothing whatever to do with human sexual differences, but follow from the nature of contradictory dichotomy itself" (Jay, 1981: 44). In other words, dichotomous thinking imposes itself upon non-social reality, creating harmful distinctions that have no 'real', biological basis. Since something can only be itself or its opposite, and no middle ground exists, and if male/female are opposite terms, it follows that if one is sacred, the other must be profane. Thus, when the culturally preeminent man is assigned the status of sacred, woman becomes profane by necessity. This logic can be applied to other social distinctions such as White/Black, heterosexual/homosexual, etc., and the grievous consequences for the less privileged halves of these binaries constitute a major part of the Western history. Jay makes clear that not all cultures make dichotomous distinctions; however, "societies with dualist religions" do (Jay,1981: 45).

—A space where dichotomous terms come into contact and mix—in her poetry was no less political (albeit also significant in other, apolitical ways). A purely political/cultural/sociological analysis of *Songs...* lies beyond"For the Greeks," for instance, "one function of male initiation rites is to separate boys from women-and-children, to make them not-women" (Jay,1981: 45). After a detailed look at this mode of thinking in the work of Plato and Aristotle, Jay finds further examples in Judaeo-Christianity and new conservatism, showcasing both its roots and its persistence in the West. Jay indicates the immense cultural power these dichotomies wield in the creation of oppressive hierarchical structures; as a consequence, their rejection must also have some cultural impact. While it may not aim at dismantling patriarchal and religious norms in the same way as her *Feminist Manifesto*, it is undeniable that Mina Loy's transformation of the excluded middle into an included middle the scope of this paper, but an acknowledgment of its radical potential is necessary, lest the poetics of the included middle be framed as a purely intratextual, formal device. In order to avoid this impression, I will briefly mention cultural context and its interaction with the text where applicable throughout the close reading section.

A Close Reading of Selected Poems from *Songs to Joannes*

I.

The opening poem of *Songs to Joannes* already displays the layering and mixing of dichotomous terms that will recur throughout the text. Loy weighs clever allusions and wordplay against atmospheric undercurrents of wounded and irrepressible desire, creating a poem whose vacilla-

tion between acerbic disillusionment and amorous yearning ultimately remains unresolved. Both Loy's intertextual and etymological allusions reference a state of doubt and clouded judgment, a detail which further accentuates the liminality of the poem, its location between the intuitive and the cerebral.

The speaker begins with a disenchanted analogy: Cupid becomes "Pig Cupid" via the shared quality of a rosy complexion common to pigs and depictions of young children (Cupid is often portrayed as a rosy-cheeked little boy ("Cupid")), as well as a "Spawn of Fantasies", thus positioning the unbelieving speaker on the 'cerebral' side of the aforementioned dichotomy. However, line two already disturbs the speaker's skeptical veneer: Pig Cupid is "*silting* the appraisable" (emphasis added). Per Jacqueline Kari's annotations to *Songs…* (Loy and Kari)[3], "to silt" denotes "to block, fill, or choke up", usually referring to bodies of water. Cupid is blocking "the appraisable", or that which can be evaluated—in other words, Cupid blocks judgment. The poem, which is both the outcome and a representation of his exploits, cannot shield itself from his irrational influence. Cupid's metamorphosis into a pig cannot be interpreted solely as an expression of skepticism towards love: the image of a "rosy snout/ Rooting (…) Among wild oats sewn in mucous-membrane" evokes both sexual intercourse ("rosy snout" as a phallic image) and cunnilingus. Through this layering of desire and cynicism, the Cupid-as-pig image becomes a microcosmic embodiment of the entire first poem, where these two states of mind are inseparably enmeshed. This enmeshment is repeated on the sonic level via the vocalic echo of Pig Cupid—Loy's choice to have the two terms side-by-side, rather than blending them together into a neologism, seems to be her way of pointing out a union that preceded the poem's creation: 'Cupid' already contained 'pig' as a sonic trace. "[A] weed white and star-topped" is polyvalent to an even greater degree, owing to its punny description and the traces of floriography it contains.

Kari believes that the description of the "weed" is an allusion to a plant whose name bears a conspicuous resemblance to it: starrush whitetop. This perennial sedge prefers "moist… soil in… marshes, wet savannas, ditches…" ("Rhynchospora Colorata."), reinforcing its connection to female genitalia—the "mucous membrane" it originates from. More importantly, though, and per multiple sources on flora, it is often mistaken for a daisy ("Starrush Whitetop" and "Rhynchospora Colorata."). Daisies had a distinct significance in Victorian era floriography—one Loy was likely aware of, given her (insurgent) engagement with Victorian culture in her work (Walter). In Victorian floriography, the daisy symbolized "innocence, loyalty and an ability to keep things secret" (Clacy). The proximity of the starrush whitetop to a daisy sheds an ironic light on these qualities (often attached to traditional notions of romance, which are the subject of consistent derision within "Songs"). The "ability to keep things secret" is especially ironic, given that Loy's long poem is filled with pornograph-

[3] All subsequent citations from *Songs…* and references to Kari's annotations are drawn from this source.

ic details (also in opposition to "innocence") and an unconcealed rawness of emotion. In this sense, the fact that a daisy could have simply been a misrecognized starrush whitetop—a "weed"—points to a cerebral dismissal of romantic love as an illusion. Another interpretation is also possible. The hacking apart of "starrush whitetop" into "a weed white and star-topped" allows for the addition of "a weed", to emphasize the throwaway quality of the plant, forming a semantic parallel to "erotic garbage". A further effect of this choice—not using the plant's exact name—is that the misrecognition between starrush whitetops and daisies can move in both directions. The daisy itself, given its ubiquity, could be seen as a weed, and its bloom also resembles a star with a large number of rays. Thus it remains unclear whether Pig Cupid plucked a daisy or a starrush whitetop (a false daisy) from the site of lust—the mucous membrane—just as it remains unclear whether the connection between Joannes and the speaker had been utterly illusory or somewhat authentic, and whether the speaker fully rejects love or yearns for it. The following stanzas of the first poem exacerbate the entanglement of these two attitudes.

In stanza two, skepticism shifts to longing. Coming close on the heels of an image evoking a sexual encounter and genitalia—"wild oats sewn in mucous-membrane"—the first two lines of the second stanza build on the theme with their orgasmic firework imagery. These lines contain a parallelism, furnished by an assonance in its first half (eye, eternity) and a semantic correspondence (a Bengal light and a skyrocket are two kinds of fireworks) on the other. With their semantic dimension located between these two poles, these lines produce a layering of the visual/distant and the immediate, the fleeting and the eternal. "I would an eye" is immediately noticeable, with its clunky homonymous sound and two blank spaces flanking the article 'an'. The visual aspect of the blank spaces creates an equivalency between "I would" and "eye in a Bengal light": the equidistance of the two phrases from "an" invites the reader to evaluate them as though they were expressions on either side of an equation. The I/eye dichotomy is not native to *Songs…*, and its cultural presence warrants a brief discussion of its own, because it showcases the political implications of Loy's poetics of the included middle, while also bearing on my particular reading of *Songs…* However, in order to show how their cultural context supplements their significance within *Songs…*, the two terms should first be analyzed in the context of the entire second stanza.

While it is plain that "I would" marks desire, it is noteworthy that "would" is a verb often used in the context of requests and conditional sentences, and, as such, implies a desire that is as yet unfulfilled. This form of desire fits in neatly with the ambiguous semantic field of the first stanza, where the identity of the plant found by Pig Cupid (and, thus, the nature of the speaker's relationship to Joannes) remains undetermined. Desire as a possibility rather than as a reality figures even more prominently in the third poem of *Songs…*, which will be discussed later in this paper. This expression of desire is weighed against "eye in a Bengal light"—a visual, distanced center in the midst of the flashy climax of a firework. The eye requires distance to see, and one might thus expect the eye within the

Bengal light to retain its ability for dispassionate appraisal within the explosion, to be as calm as the eye of a storm. However, in a Bengal light, the "eye"is the source of the explosion, and therefore the most turbulent of its parts.

By bringing together, with her use of "eye", the images of the impassive eye of a storm and the combustible center of a Bengal light, Loy once again writes into existence the missing middle term between the dichotomous nodes of distance and desire. The second line, "Eternity in a sky rocket", accomplishes the same goal, but to a different semantic effect. Here, the (usually oppositional) terms are "eternity" and "transience" (a sky rocket, like any other firework, fizzles out after a brief ignition). Being a continuation of the sentence beginning with "I would", "Eternity in a sky rocket" serves to characterize desire and, broadly, romance as something both fleeting and enduring. "Constellations in an ocean" also brings two opposites together via visual metonymy: constellations can be visible on the surfaces of bodies of water, thus providing a realistic motivation for the fusion of sky and sea. This phrase functions analogously to "eye in a Bengal light", because it plays on the tension between distance and proximity. Stars are unreachable to humans, while the waters of the ocean can be entered and explored. When constellations appear on the water's surface, a middle term emerges, one between distance and proximity: a version of the stars (their reflection) becomes available to human touch. Yet finding oneself in this included middle is bittersweet, because the stars' presence is only partial—the sky always remains beyond reach. The ocean "Whose rivers run no fresher/ Than a trickle of saliva", evokes a kiss or, again, a sexual act, but cannot provide a complete overcoming of distance: the speaker is firmly lodged in the middle between it and proximity. While, as in the first stanza, Loy's poetics of the included middle and their attendant ambiguity are responsible for a sense of uncertainty and unfulfilled yearning on the part of the speaker, their cultural resonance produces a less melancholy effect: a disruption of dichotomies valuable to oppressive modes of thinking. Loy's treatment of the I/eye dichotomy in the poem undermines its usual ocularcentrism, which has been a touchstone of a sexist privileging of the male body within psychoanalysis.

The link between "I" and "eye", established through their homonymity and their location on either side of the article "an" (which acts as a version of the = sign) brings into question a dichotomy found in philosophy and psychoanalysis: that between visual perception and lived experience. Elizabeth Grosz's writing on the Lacanian mirror stage, while mostly outside the scope of this paper, provides a useful summary of this dichotomy. "Of all the senses," explains Grosz, "vision… most readily confirms the separation of subject from object. Vision performs a distancing function, leaving the looker unimplicated in or uncontaminated by its object. With all the other senses, there is a contiguity… if not an internalization and incorporation of the object by the subject" (Grosz, 1995: 38). The "I", whose perspective is mediated by all available senses, is necessarily contaminated by its objects; its relations to these are also informed by contact with its erotogenic zones—a proximity which precludes the cool, calculating appraisal

afforded by the "eye" alone. Loy's writing, by rejecting a dichotomous separation of I/eye, interrogates the objectivity traditionally assigned to the eye and the images it produces. This interrogation spills over from the epistemological into the political/feminist realms.

Grosz notes that "[Freud's] vision-centredness privileges the male body as (...) phallic, virile (...) and regards the female body as castrated. (...) the female can be construed as castrated, lacking a sexual organ, only on the information provided by vision. The other sensori-perceptual organs would have confirmed the presence of a female organ instead of an absence of a male organ" (Grosz 1995: 39). By placing the eye in the center of a Bengal light, Loy draws attention to the susceptibility of vision to the irrational passion of love and lust—an observation also present in the common expression "love is blind". If the clarity of vision can be muddied by love, it follows that it is generally corruptible by strong emotion, and, thus, should not be considered a privileged or "objective" mode of perception. The subversion of the primacy of vision also subverts the credibility of its products, one of which is the perceived superiority of the male body. This is one of the many moments in *Songs…* where Loy's poetics of the included middle spill over from the field of linguistic abstraction (where Pound locates them) into the political and broadly cultural. Given that Loy actively, often critically, engaged with Freud's work throughout her life (Darling), her subversion of the I/eye dichotomy likely exceeded the scope of the speaker's relationship with Joannes, and aimed at unsettling the psychoanalytic ocularcentrism which, not unlike the religious and economic systems of her time, assigned the male a privileged position. While the second stanza only alludes to Loy's feminist resistance to the norms that have been foisted upon women by various institutions, the third stanza makes it explicit. Here, the speaker interrogates the position of- and expectations towards women in the (Western-Christian) cultural space via Biblical and Freudian motifs.

Loy's choice of diction in the third stanza, "I must live in my *lantern* / *Trimming* subliminal flicker / *Virginal*" (emphasis added), alludes to the Parable of the Ten Virgins in the Gospel of Matthew (*NIV Bible*, Matth. 25), which has been interpreted as calling for "constant readiness for a [second] 'coming' [of Christ] which will be at a time no-one can predict" (qtd. in France 349). This interpretation implies a state of constant obedience secured by a Panopticon-like uncertainty about whether one is in the proximity of God. Its dramatization through an episode of virgins (or 'bridesmaids') awaiting the bridegroom transposes the relationship between God and his followers onto men and women. This transposition is not unique to this section of the Bible, with another notorious example being "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord" in Ephesians 5:22 (*NIV Bible,* Eph. 5:21-33). Interestingly, Loy transforms the lantern, from proof of obedience and a means of accessing the bridegroom/God, into a prison for the speaker. The speaker is trapped within the lantern, and the visual parallelism created by the blank spaces in the lines "Virginal to the bellows" and "Coloured glass" rein-

forces the connection between the glass walls of the lantern and forced virginity (physical and experiential/mental), for the sake of which the speaker must trim the "subliminal flicker" of desire.

The term "subliminal" instantly evokes Freud; its position in the midst of what is otherwise a Biblical reference produces yet another subversive layering. Freud's subliminal or unconscious is a repository of desires too unacceptable for the ego to acknowledge directly; however, since these can neither be jettisoned nor repressed, they return to the surface of consciousness either as neuroses or the latent content of dreams, encoded in the manifest form of seemingly meaningless images (Sugarman, 2023: 8). In other words, the subliminal houses what is seen as immoral, scandalous, and dangerous to the integrity of the conscious subject. Its insertion into a Biblical allusion characterizes the speaker's desire as simultaneously a given of the psyche and as criminal in her social/religious context. This section of the first poem situates the speaker's relationship with Joannes in a greater cultural context, one where this relationship, on one hand, liberates the speaker from convention due to its explicitly sexual nature, and, on the other, threatens to imprison her within the traditional, oppressive role assigned to women. Returning briefly to the intratextual, however, it is worth noting that the first and last stanza are two nodes of a dichotomy, between which the 'inside' of the poem plays out: in the first stanza, Pig Cupid is "rooting", unearthing the erotic, while in the last, this facet of the speaker's subjectivity is repressed. In the lines between these stanzas, rejection and affirmation are layered in an unsettling way, producing an image of desire that is both authentic and false, intimate and unreachable—an indeterminacy eliciting doubt, prompting the speaker to say that she has found herself in "suspect places". In such places, where values and meanings can be volatile, the subject experiences both the frustration of uncertainty and a liberation from hierarchy. Loy explores the latter possibility in depth in the second poem of *Songs*….

II.

The second poem begins with another Freudian theme: that of the "castrated", lacking female body, only to subvert it in its latter half. Freud argued that female children recognize their lack of a penis as a deficit, leading to "penis envy", a condition that contributes to a potential development of mental illnesses (Freud, 1925: 5). It is also, per Freud, displaced and transformed into jealousy, which "plays a far larger part in the mental life of women than of men (...) because it is enormously reinforced from the direction of displaced penis-envy" (Freud, 1925: 5). Thus, the speaker recognizes that her own "infructous impulses" can only find completion in the body of Joannes—a deficit predicated on a "wanton duality" between them. The first four lines would seem to suggest, therefore, that Joannes, as a man, is 'complete', while the speaker is 'lacking'. Yet the fifth line subverts this dynamic: instead of suggesting the opposite (that it is she, the speaker, who is complete), which would have still maintained the "wanton duality" in an inverted form, the speaker does away with it entirely. She denies Joannes the status of a man, describ-

ing him as "Something the shape of a man / To the casual vulgarity of the merely observant / More of a clock-work mechanism". Belief in the gender binary becomes a symptom of "casual vulgarity" and shallow perception of the "merely observant". Joannes—whose real-life counterpart, as mentioned before, is a futurist[4]—becomes the futurist ideal, a machine. There can be no gender binary when the two lovers belong to different species. The speaker, too, undergoes a transformation of her own: the last three lines see her performing a parallel gesture to Pig Cupid in the opening poem.

The speaker's fingertips, "numb from *fretting* [Joannes'] hair" (emphasis added), perform an action analogous to Pig Cupid whose "rosy snout" is "*Rooting* erotic garbage" (emphasis added). Both the speaker's fingers and Cupid's snout can be interpreted as phallic images; both are in the process of excavating (or attempting to excavate) some form of content. Both actions are reminiscent of a sexual act, one where the speaker and Pig Cupid perform a traditionally masculine-coded function, which further dismantles the gender binary established in the beginning of the second poem. Similarly, this parallel implies an analogy between the "wild oats sewn in mucous-membrane" and Joannes' hair, thus 'feminizing' Joannes. The speaker and Joannes are each masculine and feminine, human and inhuman simultaneously. Labeling Joannes' hair as "A God's door-mat", analogously to "constellations in an ocean", fuses distance (the divine, 'high') and proximity (the earthly, 'low'). In her annotation to 'door-mat', Kari accentuates the metaphorical meaning of the word, its ability to denote a submissive person—an etymological aspect that adds to Joannes' characterization as feminine as well as masculine and machine-like. The line "A God's door-mat" performs several subversions.

The article 'a' implies that there are multiple Gods, complicating the creation of a clear-cut sacred/profane dichotomy as it presupposes several (and possibly divergent) kinds of sacredness. Moreover, Joannes' hair being a God's door-mat suggests a God located directly outside it—a position that corresponds to that of the speaker, who is fretting his hair, making her both human and divine. Her performance of an analogous gesture to Pig Cupid (who is also a kind of God) affirms this reading. The second poem is extremely semantically dynamic, given the several layerings and transformations that take place over the course of only eight lines. That being said, one disjunction here remains unresolved, and is all the more glaring due to its being surrounded by fusions of terms and attributes.

This disjunction is the insurmountable divide between the speaker and Joannes, who is "Running down against time / To which [the speaker is] not paced". While Pig Cupid is rooting erotic garbage to find a suspect symbol of love (either daisy or

[4] Although a further commentary of this choice lies beyond the scope of this paper, it should be mentioned that one of Futurism's most prominent traits was an obsession with machines, as seen in Tommaso Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*. Marinetti was also a prominent figure in Loy and Papini's relationship, and Kari speculates that his meddling with their relationship is hinted at in the sixth poem, where he appears as the Wire-Puller (a possible pun on Marinetti, which sounds like 'marionette', as well as a reference to his status as 'leader' of the futurists).

starrush whitetop), the speaker is presumably fretting Joannes' hair in hopes to find a code that might make his mode of functioning, his mind, accessible to her. As mentioned in the introduction, the third poem further explores their disunity, the thirteenth poem describes their fusion as a possibility, and the last—thirty-fourth—poem suggests that it is an accomplished act, albeit not in physical reality. This transforming view of the speaker and Joannes' relationship, as I will attempt to show, is mediated through the poetics of the included middle.

III.

The tension between the fusion implied by the poetics of the included middle and its unreality implied by conditional syntax are so starkly visible in the third poem, that it may be used as an example to illustrate the inner workings of *Songs…* as a whole. While it lacks the thematic complexity of the first poem, which is why the latter receives greater attention in this paper, its stylistic form is a blueprint of the dynamics of the speaker's relationship with Joannes. The fusion of opposites and the attendant dissolution of dichotomies is already present in the second line: "In the bed-ridden monopoly of a moment". The adjective "bed-ridden" refers to both sex (in the context of the preceding "coupled") and illness (in its common usage), therefore merging life (sex as reproduction) and death (caused or accelerated by illness). Similarly, "broken flesh with one another / At the profane communion table" combines the image of a broken hymen with bread being broken during communion, creating an alloy of the sacred and the profane. Like in the second poem, it also synthesizes the human and the divine: communion, a fusion of human and God, is transformed into the coupling of two people. Aside from its intratextual significance, this section of the poem is bluntly political, being an affront to Catholic Christianity and its control of women's desire. Finally, the "butterfly / With the daily news / Printed in blood on its wings" is a composite of several dichotomous terms. Life and death are present in it: it is brought to life by the speaker and Joannes, while also carrying the marks of violence—the bloody writing on its wings. It is also a mixture of the high and low. The butterfly is famously linked to the human soul in ancient Greek beliefs ("Psyche"), an association which lends it proximity to the transcendent and to 'high culture', considering the longevity and centrality of ancient Greek culture in the Western canon, yet it is also marred by "the daily news", writings that lose their relevance quickly and are targeted at the masses.

The multiple syntheses of dichotomous qualities in the third poem hint at the possibility of communion between the speaker and Joannes, who, in the preceding poem, are not attuned to each other. However, the very first line of the third poem announces the unreality of their fusion: "We might have coupled", the speaker says, implying that the communion did not take place. In light of the first three poems of *Songs…*, and in light of Loy's own admission of having written the cycle "in red hot agony" (qtd. in Konkol, 225), it might seem that *Songs…* is an epitaph to a failed relationship. Nonetheless, there are moments in the cycle that hint at a future possibility of a renewed relation-

ship, such as the last two lines of the sixth poem: "You could look straight at me / And Time would be set back". In the thirteenth poem, the conditional returns once again, albeit with a changed significance. Instead of conveying a sense of loss of what could have been, it is a (coy? passive-aggressive?) warning against communion that contains a palpable invitation to it. This poem deserves a closer look both due to how it transforms the meaning of conditional desire and due to its almost overt naming of the poetics of the included middle.

XIII.

The thirteenth poem has a visual structure that precedes its content in commanding attention. Its first three stanzas all begin with lines cleft by a large blank space; the latter halves of all three lack the blank space and thus reassume their wholeness. This choice visually dramatizes the thematic level of the poem: the speaker has finally come up with a formula to achieve communion with Joannes. The formula is secret and taboo: it is "Something only for you" and "Something only for me"; "Something that I must not see" and "Something that you must not hear". Unable to be expressed in a direct way, it is "something / I have got to tell you and I can't tell". Its description in the first stanza as "A new *dimension*" (emphasis added) gives the reader a clue as to what it might be: a new, previously unavailable, part of space. What constitutes this space remains ambiguous, and it would be inaccurate to argue that the included middle is its only possible interpretation. That being said, such an interpretation is not only defensible, but also productive, because it ties together the thematic and stylistic aspects of *Songs*…. The melting together of terms on either side of a dichotomy is more than a stylistic device—it embodies the movement of the speaker and Joannes towards each other, whether in a mourned-for lost future, or a called-for possible future, or both.

Kari's annotations to the lines "It is *ambient*" and "Something very *resonant*" (emphasis added in both lines) reinforce this reading. She explains "ambient" as "encompassing" and "resonant" as "enriching of a musical tone by supplementary vibration"; both of these definitions imply an acoustic (also visual, in the case of "ambient") melting together. Interestingly, while this something is "in [Joannes'] eyes", it is something the speaker "must not see", and while it is "in [her] ears", it is something Joannes "must not hear". This formula is therefore partly accessible to the speaker and to Joannes, but to gain possession of it as a whole, they would have to combine the partial sensory input each is privy to. Once again, vision and hearing, two senses that are often counterposed[5], must fuse together. Kari foregrounds how literally synthesis is evoked in "Or we might make an end of the jostling of aspirations" by defining "jostling" as being "pushed together". Finally, the speaker names her

[5] As mentioned previously, in "Jacques Lacan…" Grosz mentions that the cultural primacy of vision compared to hearing has to do with its ability to generate totalizing images, which are often inaccurate and lend themselves to patriarchal biases. Although an interpretation of this choice lies beyond the scope of this paper, it is interesting that Loy assigns the perception of the visual half of the "something" to Joannes.

intentions outright: “Where two or three are welded together / They shall become god”.

This statement, incantation-like and oracular in its sound, prompts a break in the speaker’s manner, physically manifested as a series of dashes. The tone shifts to mock-rejection: “Keep away from me Please give me a push / Don’t let me understand you Don’t realise me” she demands, “Or we might tumble together (...) Into the terrific Nirvana / Me you — you — me”. That she does not mean to actually deter Joannes is clear: the promise of becoming God is certainly blasphemous, yet she has already proven that she does not hesitate to mix the sacred and profane together, or to conflate the divine and the human. Instead, her rebuffs appear to be an indignant reproach to Joannes for rejecting an opportunity to regain a lost ideal unity, to find Nirvana with the speaker. Is this divine unity, then, a future lost forever? Some clues in *Songs…* would seem to suggest that it is not only a possibility, but an accomplished fact, albeit not in the form of a physical relationship between the speaker and Joannes. The last, thirty-fourth poem hints that what Joannes was too weak to accept was already made real through the text; what his communion with the speaker could have been was incarnated in *Songs…* itself.

XXXIV.

The final poem of *Songs…* consists of a single line, which reads: “Love — — — the preeminent litterateur”. It would be redundant to explain once more here that, like love, literature allows for the coalescence of the dichotomous (and therefore separate): Loy spends the entirety of *Songs…* demonstrating this feature, and this paper takes a closer look at a few specific instances of such a fusion and their implications. What remains to be said, however, is that this poem punctuates love’s recuperation from being an oppressive, facile fairytale, beginning with “Once upon a time” and laden with cultural norms. This liberation is mediated through the rendering of an included middle, which eschews inauthentic, restrictive dichotomous thinking in favor of a complex, shifting image of the world. The included middle is therefore a prerequisite for a redefinition of love. This recalls and gives new meaning to the lines “A new dimension / A new use / A new illusion”. In the context of the last poem, the included middle becomes a new space for love to unfold without its old restrictions; a new use for love (achieving Godlike unity as opposed to the oppressive bonds of marriage); a new illusion—since, even divine, love is often fleeting, though no less productive of divinity because of this. It is also, beyond being a prerequisite, a function of love. This establishes an interesting link between the first and last poems of *Songs…*, and points to a reimagined holy trinity.

The final poem and the first one form yet another alloy of opposites: the first poem depicts love as an illusion and romance as pure lust, an erotic melting-together that foreshadows the other syntheses in *Songs…*. Love, over the course of the cycle, is shown to have an identical function, with its capability of creating a depersonalized meld of subjectivities (“Disorb[ing] inviolate egos”). Literature, too, can render possible such an image; together, these form a trinity, and “two or three are

welded together", implying that *Songs…*, which is a tapestry woven from the three, has a divine quality to it, "become[s] God". Containing all the fusions discussed here (and all that, for the sake of the spatial limitations, couldn't be discussed), it embodies the ideal unity and becomes the sought-for Nirvana, a heavenly space where no disjunctions occur. On a textual level, this quality is visible in the lack of punctuation: nothing separates words other than blank spaces and dashes, both of which suggest continuity rather than a break.

Conclusion

The poetics of the included middle has both intratextual and extratextual significance in relation to Mina Loy's *Songs to Joannes*, and two of its major effects are 1) subverting culturally prominent dichotomies, such as sacred/profane, male/female, human/God, etc., and 2) redefining the speaker's relationship to Joannes throughout the poem cycle, first by presenting itself as a lost future, then as a future possibility, and, finally, as a *fait accompli*. An interesting connection that follows from this reading, yet could not be explored in this paper due to spatial limitations, is the link between the dismantling of dichotomous thinking and the possibility of a profound union between men and women. The twenty-ninth poem in the cycle hints that the ravine separating the speaker and Joannes extends beyond their relationship and applies to men and women in general, who, separated by an excluded middle, can only communicate in "Uninterpretable cryptonyms". A reading of *Songs…* with a focus on its treatment of the poetics of the included middle as a communicative strategy for healing the gender divide is thus an interesting direction for further research.

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Софија Поповска

„Кошмар на бинаристот": Поетиката на вклучената средина во *Песни за Џоанес* на Мина Лој

(Резиме)

Во оваа статија испитувам некои од начините на кои Мина Лој користи текстуално форматирање и семантичка игра за да создаде флуидна врска помеѓу лирското јас и нејзиниот љубовник и да ги субвертира културно значајните дихотомии, како што се свето/профано, машко/женско, човек/Бог итн., во *Песни за Џоанес*. Овие ефекти ја сочинуваат нејзината поетика на вклучената средина (наспроти исклучената средина – празниот простор што одделува два дихотомни, бинарни термина) и ја покажуваат способноста на Лој да ги субвертира и литературните и општествените конвенции.

Клучни зборови: модернизам, Мина Лој, дихотомии