

“MODERNISM IS A PROPHET CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS”: MINA LOY, MANIFESTOES AND
PROPHECY

BY

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ABSTRACT

This study argues that modernist poet Mina Loy's investment in the power of prophetic discourse and religious revelation is a crucial feature of her idiosyncratic appropriation of the manifesto during the 1910s. Unlike the manifestoes of the futurist movement that directly inform Loy's use of the genre, Loy's manifestoes focus on a visionary expansion of individual consciousness rather than a violent and revolutionary overthrow of institutions. Even as they reject the traditions and institutions of the past in typical futurist fashion, Loy's manifestoes posit a personal evolution of consciousness and a realization of the divine "Macro-cosmic presence" or supra-consciousness as the truer path for escaping the cultural grip of those institutions. For an intensely individual artist like Loy, the prophetic voice also offered a speaking position which did not explicitly place her in the ranks of those movements.

The present work draws on scholarship that examines Loy's relationship to revelatory religious discourse and theories of expanded consciousness, as well as the larger body of scholarship on Loy's poetry and polemic writings during the 1910s. As the examination of prophetic modalities within the form of specific manifesto texts is a complex undertaking made more complex by the facts that (1) the manifesto form is in part a descendant of earlier prophetic forms, and (2) both forms are highly variable, recent analyses of both genres are brought together to delineate as clearly as possible their rhetoric, structure, and performativity. Finally, as Loy's poetic and prosaic uses of the prophetic mode and the language of revelation also suggest compelling connections to her nineteenth-century forbears, those connections are explored in order to make a secondary case that Loy's work should be considered in the context of the tradition of the "poet-prophet," which extends from Old Testament times to nineteenth-

century poet-prophets such as Walt Whitman. From this perspective, an argument can be made that Loy shares more in common with her Romantic precursors than the standard narrative of modernism's rejection of the past generally permits.

“Modernism is a Prophet Crying in the Wilderness”: Mina Loy, Manifestoes and Prophecy

“The impartiality of the absolute

Routs the polemic”

—Mina Loy, “Human Cylinders” (1915)

“Our person is a covered entrance to infinity”

—Mina Loy, “O Hell” (ca. 1919)

“*prophecy* is misunderstood. Many suppose that it is limited to mere prediction; that is but the lesser portion of prophecy. The greater work is to reveal God. Every true religious enthusiast is a prophet.”

—Walt Whitman, “Slang in America” (1885)

1.1

As of 2013, it is safe to say that the textual legacy of Mina Loy (1882-1966), that most idiosyncratic, enigmatic and bedeviling of modernist artists, has been well if not fully recovered. When Roger Conover published *The Last Lunar Baedeker*¹ in 1982, Loy’s work was in real danger of becoming inaccessible. That collection itself quickly became difficult to obtain and until the 1990s Mina Loy’s work and her contributions to modernism and the avant-garde remained in a state of relative obscurity. While the past two decades have changed all of that—with a wider republication of her poetry, her inclusion in major anthologies of modernism, the publication of previously unavailable short stories, essays, and a novel, plus a biography and two collections of critical essays—scholarly examinations of Loy’s work still

¹ Hereafter cited as *LLB82*

struggle with the vagaries and contradictions of her *oeuvre*, and there remains much work to be done to fully elucidate Loy's unique position within modernism, feminism, and the avant-garde. Conover highlights the difficulties of assessing Loy's life and work when, in the introduction to the 1996 edition of *Lunar Baedeker*² he writes about her as a "binarian's nightmare":

...sometimes to our confusion, [Loy] refused identification with many groups and causes that seemed natural for her to adopt. She affiliated herself, instead, with those considered the "enemy" by the more "ideologically correct" of her generation. Rather than allowing herself to be fixed by an identity, she interloped, using her various identities to transform the cultures and social milieus she inhabited. Feminist and Futurist, wife and lover, militant and pacifist, actress and model, Christian Scientist and nurse, she was the binarian's nightmare. She was a Futurist Dadaist, Surrealist, feminist, conceptualist, modernist, post-modernist, and none of the above. (*LLB96* xiii)

While it cannot resolve all of the contradictions enumerated by Conover above, the present study argues that Loy's investment in the power of prophetic discourse and religious revelation is a crucial feature of her idiosyncratic appropriation of the manifesto form from the futurists during the 1910s. Unlike the manifestoes of the futurist movement that directly inform Loy's use of the genre, Loy's manifestoes focus on a visionary expansion of individual consciousness rather than a violent and revolutionary overthrow of institutions. Even as they reject the traditions and institutions of the past in typical futurist fashion, Loy's manifestoes posit a personal evolution of consciousness and a realization of the divine "Macro-cosmic presence" or supra-consciousness as the truer path for escaping the cultural grip of those institutions. For an intensely individual artist like Loy, who "refused identification" with the

² Hereafter cited as *LLB96*

various groups and movements she came into contact with, the prophetic voice also offered a speaking position which did not explicitly place her in the ranks of those movements. Her “Feminist Manifesto” (1914) is both an attack on feminism “as at present instituted” and the foregrounding of what she saw as a new, truer feminism (LLB96 153). Her manifesto-poem “Aphorisms on Futurism” (1914) lauds the renovation of consciousness incited by a futurist emphasis on dynamism, compression of time and space, and new artistic forms, but it doesn’t announce or call for any collective action against the *passatistas* of Italy or any other nation. Not surprisingly, both of these texts eschew the antagonistic we/they dichotomy set up by the typical manifesto. Furthermore, Loy’s poetry and plays from the same period work to both facilitate the kind of revelatory experience espoused in her manifestoes (such as in the poem “Parturition”) and also demonstrate her understanding of the precarious performativity of the manifesto form (“Lion’s Jaws,” *The Sacred Prostitute*). This precarious performativity is partially mitigated in her own manifestoes by a pivoting from the desperately urgent voice of the revolutionary, whose authority is tenuously constituted via the manifesto’s performance, to a voice of vatic authority legitimated by a personal revelation of divine reality.

Critics who focus on the revolutionary nature of Loy’s feminist and futurist texts (DuPlessis, Lusty, Lyon, Pozorski, Quartermain, Twitchell-Waas) typically slight the role that religious revelation plays in Loy’s work. Conversely, critics who have more recently focused on Loy’s relationship to revelation, religious mysticism, and ecstatic encounters with divinity (Cook, Hobson, Shreiber, Tuma) have generally highlighted the way such discourse operates in her unpublished notes, her long poem *Anglo-Mongrels and The Rose* or in her “Bowery” poetry from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, but they do not explore these religious writings in the context of

prophetic discourse specifically, and they do not explore the religious or revelatory dimensions of her earlier work. In fact, this division, between the revolutionary Loy and the religious Loy, has become such a critical commonplace that it is now reified as the dominant model for describing the trajectory of Loy's *oeuvre*. Between roughly 1914 and 1923, Loy's most prolific period in terms of publication, critics write about Loy the satirist and manifesto-penning participant in the "sex war" who transitioned from radical futurist to feminist revolutionary. The loss of her husband Arthur Cravan and the composition of her long poem *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* (1923-1925), critics assert, marks Loy's turn toward religion and a shift to what Maeera Shreiber terms "devotional verse" (468).

Loy's interest in revelatory discourse, however, significantly predates her later work of the 1930s-1950s. Loy became interested in Christian Science around the same time she first came into contact with the futurists (1913-1914), and by that time, along with Mary Baker Eddy's unique form of Christian idealism, Loy was already thoroughly engaging with Henri Bergson's notions of "vitalism" and "creative evolution" and Robert Assagioli's theory of "psychosynthesis"; all of these theories and doctrines engendered in Loy's work a recurring focus on the ecstatic revelation of a higher realm of consciousness. In her essay on Gertrude Stein, she describes her early years in Florence (1909-1911), noting that "Bergson was in the air, and his beads of Time [were] strung on the continuous flux of Being" (*LLB82* 289). Tim Freeborn (2006), whose work on the mystical strain in Loy's work and its relationship to satire is a central inspiration for this study, explains how these three mystically-inflected brands of religion, philosophy, and psychology informed Loy's own ideas about the nature of spirituality and consciousness:

The persistent mystical strain in Loy's work derives from...three of her mentors address[ing] the need to transcend conventional ways of perceiving reality. Robert Assagioli prescribes exercises to promote breakthroughs into the realm of superconsciousness. Such exercises in "deactualization" might include meditating on occult symbols or reading avatars of cosmic consciousness such as Walt Whitman. Similarly, Mary Baker Eddy encourages her followers to contemplate instances of Christ's healing as a revelation of the illusory nature of mechanistic conceptions of reality...Bergson also points to dreams, art, and extreme bodily exertion as examples of extra-intellectual experience that reveal the fourth dimension of intuition.

(Freeborn 6-7)

While Freeborn's dissertation examines how these various influences shape Loy's "satirical vision," which "oscillates[s] between mockery and praise," the present study diverges from his by instead exploring how that "mystical strain" informs Loy's manifestoes, which are among Loy's few early works that are not satirical in nature, and the prophetic modalities thereof (iii). Two other critics have been instrumental in pioneering the argument that a revelatory, mystical strain ought to be considered in assessments of Loy's work. Before Freeborn, Keith Tuma (1998) and Cook (1998) both discussed religious mysticism in Loy's work. Tuma writes that *Anglo-Mongrels and The Rose* "must be...read as a 'religious' poem" in which "all forms of 'orthodox' religious doctrine—Jewish and Christian—are renounced by Loy on behalf of an experience beyond intellect which she believed to be a direct sensual and intuitive apprehension of divinity" (184). Although Tuma only addresses Loy's long poem in his discussion, he makes a strong case that Loy's "Christ of the mystic" was an integral concept in

her worldview just after Loy's "sex-war phase" of the 1910s. Like Tuma, Cook draws on some of Loy's unpublished stories and notes on religion to suggest that "the rhetoric of Christian Science may offer insights into her poetry and prose" (460). Specifically, he points to a short story, "Street Sister," where Loy's narrator "offers herself as someone who has reached an enlightened sense of the boundlessness of the human mind...an 'infinitarian.'" He also refers to Loy's "Notes on Religion," where she argues for a "savage apprehension of the Macro-cosmic presence." Both Tuma and Cook were among the earliest critics to emphasize the importance of revelatory expansions of consciousness in Loy's work, and although neither of them apply this claim to specific early poetic or prose texts of Loy's, their observations make room for further exploration of Loy's revelatory discourse in such a direction. More recently, Parmar, Marshall, Armstrong, and Ayers (2010) have continued the examination of Loy's mystical proclivities, though again, none of these investigations take Loy's manifesto-texts as a site of analysis. In fact, until very recently, most Loy critics have been uneasy about engaging with Loy's idiosyncratic religiosity at all, not only because it draws from such a dizzying array of sources,³ but also because it resists easy explanation in the context of Loy's futurist and feminist writings as well as in standard narratives about a secularizing modernism in the early twentieth century (Armstrong 204).

Cook's discussion of Loy and Christian Science reflects on the wariness scholars and readers have had about considering Loy's work in religious terms: "Readers of Mina Loy's poetry eventually confront the *vexed* question of how a feminist, often radical in her ideology

³ In addition to Christian Science, vitalism, and psychosynthesis, Loy's various notes on religion draw ideas and terms from animal magnetism, alchemy, magic, and Eastern mysticisms (Ayers 228).

and daringly experimental in her writing, could also have considered Christian Science” (457, emphasis added). Although his brief article goes on to dispute the notion that Christian Science and religion more generally are anathema to avant-garde and feminist cultural production, Cook’s remark nonetheless captures the dominant view that sees religion as thoroughly antithetical to both avant-garde and feminist discourses. Responding to the prevalence of this view among Loy critics, Maeera Shreiber posits that “It may be that many who value Loy’s capacity for explosive subversions are also deeply suspicious of, not to mention discomforted by, the language of revelation, fearing perhaps the institutions from which such language typically emanates” (467).

While Susan Gilmore follows the standard model for mapping Loy’s *oeuvre*⁴ and argues that religious discourse and a “belief in revelation...come to characterize [Loy’s] work from the 1940s on” (310), Gilmore’s discussion is noteworthy here because it points out that this belief in revelation “surfaces early in her career.” Gilmore’s comment, which implies that the divide in Loy’s *oeuvre* is not as hard and fast as some critics would insist, creates the critical space necessary to investigate the role of both religious and prophetic discourse in Loy’s earlier works. Indeed, one doesn’t have to look long or hard to see the truth in Gilmore’s statement. Loy’s first poems, written early in the year 1914 or just before, reveal a preoccupation with religious devotion and revelation. In the early poem “The Prototype,” for example, Loy’s speaker compares the sight of a wax baby Jesus to a real baby, insisting that the poor, sickly, and broken baby is the one who should be worshipped:

In the Duomo at Xmas Eve, midnight,

⁴See also DiMarco, Bradley, Shreiber, Armstrong, Dunn.

There is another baby, a horrible little
 Baby—made of half warm flesh;
 Flesh that is covered with sores—carried
 By a half-broken mother.

And I who am called heretic,
 And the only follower in Christ's foot-steps
 Among this crowd adoring a wax doll
 —for I alone am worshipping the poor
 Sore baby—the child of sex igno-
 Rance & poverty. (*LLB96 221*)

None of the signature parataxis or dense irony of Loy's later poems is present yet, but already Loy's preoccupation with unexpected revelation and with religious subject matter is apparent. Loy is also, in her first poems, already yoking religious concerns to a discourse of sexual politics. Shreiber's description of Loy's late devotional verse can just as aptly be used to explicate the above poem:

This model of aesthetics implies an opposition between the secular as broken and the sacred as whole. Loy's poems counter this paradigm, proposing alternatively that holiness is necessarily a broken thing—to be found in the bodies and in the faces of society's outcasts. (Shreiber 468)

In addition to "The Prototype," Christian and mystic religious language can also be found in several other early poems, such as "Oh Hell," "The Beneficent Garland," and "There is no Life

or Death,” (LLB96 71, 221, 3). Clearly, then, Loy’s interest in the prophetic language of revelation is not simply a phase in her later life but rather an enduring theme of her writing.

While the topic of Loy and religious revelation has seen the beginnings of a truly fruitful critical exploration, Loy’s relationship to historical prophecy and to the prophetic mode of writing specifically has not received such attention. A few prominent critics have figured her as a prophetic writer in passing, which is enough to suggest that such a line of examination is viable even if it has not yet been undertaken. In 1987 Loy’s biographer Carolyn Burke claimed that, in “Aphorisms on Futurism,” “Loy speaks as a futurist prophet, proclaiming that the social and artistic conventions of the past are inadequate to address the complexity of modern life” (“Getting Spliced” 106). Eric Murhphy Selinger refers to “the manifesto-prophet of the WRENCH” while discussing Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto” (25). Danette DiMarco has highlighted the late poem “Property of Pigeons” as a site that reveals Loy’s lasting preoccupation with religious dimensions of vanishing and appearing (88). Tyrus Miller briefly mentions the prophetic role of the modernist artist more generally while discussing Loy’s novel *Insel* as a *künstlerroman*, though he does so primarily to discuss how such a conception quickly disintegrated in the face of a world war and massive social upheaval (343). Despite these scattered comments figuring Loy as a prophet, no detailed examinations of Loy’s relationship to prophecy have been carried out. We are left with a curious and provocative comment in Loy’s last and only recorded interview. When Paul Blackburn and Robert Vas Dias went to Aspen in 1965 to interview Mina Loy, age 82, she commented early in the interview that she was surprised Blackburn and Vas Dias were interested in her poetry, for her family “were never at all interested in my writing” (213). Mrs. Gertrude Bibbig, Mina Loy’s caretaker at the time,

interjects, in German, with a suggestive expression: “It’s always that way. A prophet is never at home in his fatherland” and laughs (213, translation in original).

In the following sections, this study draws on the aforementioned critical work that examines Loy’s relationship to revelatory religious discourse and theories of expanded consciousness, as well as the larger body of scholarship on Loy’s poetry and polemic writings during the 1910s. As the examination of prophetic modalities within the form of specific manifesto texts is a complex undertaking made more complex by the facts that (1) the manifesto form is in part a descendant of earlier prophetic forms, and (2) both forms are highly variable, recent analyses of both genres are brought together to delineate as clearly as possible their rhetoric, structure, and performativity. Finally, as Loy’s poetic and prosaic uses of the prophetic mode and the language of revelation also suggest compelling connections to her nineteenth-century forbears, those connections are explored in order to make a secondary case that Loy’s work should be considered in the context of the tradition of the “poet-prophet,” which extends from Old Testament times to nineteenth-century poet-prophets such as Walt Whitman. From this perspective, an argument can be made that Loy shares more in common with her Romantic precursors than the standard narrative of modernism’s rejection of the past generally permits.

1.2

Around the time Mina Loy began shifting her creative focus from painting to poetry while living in Florence, she encountered the Italian futurists. The futurists, who between 1909 and 1914 vaulted the manifesto to the status of avant-garde form *par excellence* and imported

the rhetoric and structure of the manifesto into their poetry and visual arts, had a profound impact on Loy. After writing her first poems in 1912, Loy's poetry, beginning with her first published works in 1914, begins to take on the dense, epigrammatic and confrontational style of the manifestoes and "manifesto-art" emanating from the futurist camp (Puchner, *Poetry of the Revolution* 6).⁵

Loy herself testifies in several letters to the impact futurism had on her thinking and artistic production, but also to her profound ambivalence about some of futurism's more extreme positions, such as advocating "scorn for women" and war as "the world's only hygiene," a position which she equated with combating "*le mal avec le mal*" (Marinetti 41; Burke, *Becoming Modern* 157). In 1914, around the time that her first poems were being published in small American journals like *Trend*, *Rogue*, and *Camera Work*, Loy wrote to her friend Mabel Dodge Luhan that she was "in the throes of conversion to Futurism" (LLB96 180). In a letter to Carl Van Vechten from the same year, Loy credits Filippo Tomasso Marinetti and the futurists with having awoken her artistically (188). Loy called it a "risorgimento": The futurists' focus on new and daring forms, on velocity, dynamism and a rejection of the past reinvigorated Loy's creative impulses and lifted her out of the torpor she had found herself in after leaving the art world of Paris for a sleepy and isolated villa in Florence (Burke, *Becoming Modern* 109-110).

⁵ It should be mentioned that Loy also met Gertrude Stein while living in Florence. Stein's influence on Loy's poetics can hardly be overstated, as many critics have argued. Loy's sparse deployment of punctuation and paratactic style owes much to her exposure to Stein's work as well the futurists'. For an examination of the connection between Stein and Loy see, for example, Carolyn Burke's "Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference" (1987).

While it is widely acknowledged that Loy's use of the manifesto form is directly attributable to her contact with futurism, discussions about why and how her manifesto-like texts differ from the futurists' reveal less critical consensus, and none of those discussions posit a prophetic voice or modality as part of what differentiates them. One common line of argument suggests that a feminist appropriation of the inherently masculinist manifesto form, elevated to outright misogyny by the futurists, required a substantially reworked deployment of the manifesto (Lyon, *Manifestoes* 6-7). Others point to the influence of Gertrude Stein on her thinking about poetics and aesthetics (Burke, "Getting Spliced" 98, 107; Quartermain 76). Another strain of criticism suggests that Loy's manifestoes are not in fact so different from their futurist forbears, and that Loy imports the very misogynist ideologies she claims to be combating along with the structural and rhetorical features of the futurist manifestoes (Pozorski 50-51). In "Gender, Genre, and Second Wave Resistance," Kimber Charles Pearce articulates this same argument in the wider (and later) context of second wave polemics, noting the way in which "generic appropriation constrained radical feminists' rhetoric to the prior discourse of the patriarchy to which they were opposed" (307). While it may be the case that Loy's manifesto texts, particularly "The Feminist Manifesto" (1914), which controversially calls for the "unconditional surgical destruction of virginity through-out the female population at puberty," present a problematic feminism that is entangled in the virulent eugenic and masculinist discourses of her day, they also indisputably work to critique those discourses. As Natalya Lusty observes in "Sexing the Manifesto: Mina Loy, Feminism, and Futurism" (2009), the manifesto's "unusual mix of maternalist philosophy, New Woman ideology, radical sexual politics and quasi-eugenic moralism created a highly idiosyncratic position that reveals...a

dynamic of resistance and complicity in terms of her relationship with Futurism,” and, one might add, with feminism writ large, or what Loy and other contemporaries called “The woman question” (256; qtd. In Pozorski 42). Furthermore, Loy’s adoption of a prophetic stance can be figured as part of her strategy for reiterating the manifesto in a way that allowed her to critique both mainstream feminism and the futurists from whom she appropriated it.

Loy’s critiques of both futurism and mainstream suffragist, social purity feminism are achieved in part through her insertion and augmentation of certain prophetic structures in the manifesto form, most notably through the near-complete erasure of the we/they dichotomy, but also through the refusal to performatively enact the break with history that all manifestoes strive for. However it should be noted here that distinguishing between prophetic and manifestic features is no clear-cut proposition. Janet Lyon and Martin Puchner have both demonstrated the historical and structural connection between manifestoes and prophecy in their extensive work on the manifesto genre (Lyon *Manifestoes* 13; Puchner *Poetry* 12-18). Since something *akin* to a vatic voice is already a staple of the manifesto form, one must look for ways in which Loy’s manifestoes deploy prophetic rhetoric to a degree that supersedes such deployment as is already constitutive of the manifesto genre, or in which Loy’s use of prophetic discourse replaces other common features of the manifesto. Though this presents the challenge of a rather difficult analytic process, the proclamations that issue from Loy’s manifestic/prophetic texts become more coherent when we examine the ways in which her religious thinking modifies her participation in futurist and feminist discourses. Loy’s belief, for example, in an all-encompassing entity or god, a “Macro-cosmic presence” of which all things in the universe are a part and which paradoxically inheres in every individual (meaning every

person has the potential to search within themselves and experience this “presence”), deeply informs her arguments about subjectivity and consciousness in several of her manifesto texts, including “Aphorisms on Futurism” and the “Feminist Manifesto.” But before examining those texts in-depth, first we ought to briefly address the question of whether or not Loy saw herself as occupying a prophetic role.

Several essays, letters and recently published notes reveal that, as a modernist artist, Loy did in fact see herself as assuming the prophetic role of a marginalized figure mediating a direct, revelatory experience. In her essay on Getrude Stein (1929), Loy writes:

Modernism is a prophet crying in the wilderness of stabilized nature that humanity is wasting its aesthetic time. For there is a considerable extension of time between the visits to the picture gallery, the museum, the library. It asks “what is happening to your aesthetic consciousness during the long intervals?”... Would not life be lovelier if you were constantly overjoyed by the sublimely pure concavity of your wash bowls?
(LLB82 297)

For Loy, modernist artists like herself have the prophet’s task of mediating a revelation, in this case a revelation of a broader landscape for “aesthetic consciousness” than what is simply accepted, canonical, or framed art. Additionally, in the same essay Loy describes receiving and reading a manuscript of Stein’s *Galleries Lafayette* (1911)⁶ as though Stein had communicated a divine revelation to her. Loy writes of the experience thus: “The core of ‘Being’ was revealed to me with uninterrupted insistence” (289). Telling biblical allusions also abound in the essay, as Stein’s work is compared to sections of *Ecclesiastes* and the *Book of Job*

⁶ A portion of the specific section of the Stein text to which Loy is responding, as Loy reproduced it in her essay, follows: “Each on is one. Each one is being the one each one is being. Each one is one is being one. Each one is being the one that one is being. Each one is being one each one is one” (LLB82 289).

(289, 296). The allusion in this essay to the unheeded prophet “crying in the wilderness” of Mark 3:1-3 resonates tellingly with comments made by Loy in a letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan regarding the draft of the “Feminist Manifesto” that Loy sent to her in 1914. Loy writes that she “feel[s] rather hopeless of devotion to the Woman-cause—Slaves will believe that chains are protectors” (*LLB96* 216). Loy’s comments here are suggestive of an unheeded Markian prophet when read alongside the “Feminist Manifesto,” in which she warns women: “all your pet illusions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go—are you prepared for the **WRENCH**—?” (153, emphasis in original). Loy wants women to “seek within [them]selves” to “realize themselves” but worries that her call for a renovated feminine consciousness will be of no avail.

Additionally, in Loy’s more muddled notes about religion, such as the recently published “History of Religion and Eros,”⁷ a preoccupation with the concomitants of prophetic revelation abound. “Illumination,” “ecstasy,” and “enlightenment” are keywords in these notes, which explore the origins of religion and its “scission” from sex at the hands of Western religious tradition (*Stories and Essays* 238, 240). In these notes, Loy also gives special attention to what she calls the “Asiatic mystic-scientist” (247). Loy assigns to these most ancient of spiritual practitioners a distinction that figures them as the original prophets. Those who have an “illuminated” experience, who have experienced directly the “Absolute,” “THE CREATIONAL OVERTURE,” or whatever Loy variously calls it (she calls it many things), have foisted upon them the responsibility of relaying that revelation to the unenlightened (243, emphasis in original). As Loy explains: “it [the ecstatic experience] imposed upon all illuminati an obligation: to impart

⁷Exact date of composition unknown

to others the formula for its inducement" (243). From these and other such writings, it becomes easier to see how Loy may have felt, as she began to develop an interest in "feminine politics" in response to the aggressive misogyny of the futurists, that she had such an "obligation": to share certain of her "revelations"—such as that "there is nothing impure in sex except the mental attitude to it"—with women who have not had such realizations, women who Loy refers to in her manifesto, a bit disconcertingly, as "incompletely evolved" (*LLB96* 154). Even more than "The Feminist Manifesto," the more topically futurist manifesto-poem, "Aphorisms on Futurism" is comprised of axiomatically presented "truths" more than it is of the violent exhortations one might commonly expect in a manifesto. Furthermore, it is not surprising that Loy's interest in varieties of Christian mysticism should engender an inclination toward the prophetic style, for the mystic gives primacy to a direct experience of the divine. In fact, it is possible that Loy saw the truth of the absolute as hamstringing the efficacy of the impassioned revolutionary manifesto, as one possible reading of an early poem, "Human Cylinders" indicates: "The impartiality of the absolute / Routs the polemic" (41). The immutable truth of divine reality, Loy's speaker suggests, trumps, defeats even, mortal recourse to a violent reorganization of society.

The scholarship that investigates Loy's religiously inflected works suggests that Loy had a certain affinity for revelatory discourse, and the scattered comments referring to Loy's status as a prophet, though not great in number, are equally suggestive. Before turning to a more in-depth textual analysis of the way in which Loy utilizes prophetic discourse, I offer below a brief discussion of the formal contours of and the relationship between manifestoes and prophecy in

order to better situate my reading of a prophetic Loy alongside the more standard reading of a feminist/futurist revolutionary Loy.

1.3

As Martin Puchner notes in the introduction to his 2002 essay “Manifesto = Theatre,” the word “manifesto” derives from the Latin word *manifestāre*, meaning “to bring into the open, to make manifest” and also to “reveal, clarify, or disclose” (449; “manifest” etym.). From its origins, then, the word signifies a textual or oratorical form that is inherently public, that is concerned with visibility and revelation in a broad sense. From the nineteenth century to the present, the word has stood more specifically for a declamatory genre of writing that is antagonistic and revolutionary, a genre that fashions itself, furthermore, as revolutionary act as much as thought. The revolutionary impulse of the manifesto may pertain to the realm of politics, aesthetics, or cultural production more broadly, and indeed the genre underwent a shift over the course of the early twentieth century from being a vehicle for primarily political ideas to extending its purview into the arts, largely and firstly in 1909, in the hands of Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Italian futurists, with the publication in *Le Figaro* of “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism.” Laura Winkiel captures the manifesto’s polemic and pragmatic approach with the phrase “words as weapons”; a manifesto is a verbal barrage “in which the absolute certainty of its message contains the threat of violence” (67).

A manifesto does not simply address a public, it exhorts one. Manifestoes are fundamentally hortatory documents. One could say that the manifesto is pragmatic, then, in at least a threefold sense: to compose or declaim a manifesto is to reveal that which is hidden, to

perform a revolutionary act, and to make a call for revolutionary action. Puchner, Winkiel and Lyon all see a performativity “of rupture” as one of, if not the, defining feature of the manifesto genre. As Winkiel explains, “more than anything, manifestos are documents of rupture...the manifesto’s language of rupture lifts its statements out of historical continuity and the weight of tradition, and, as such, the manifesto’s pronouncements become self-generative or performative” (67). This is another way of saying that the manifesto essentially creates, by virtue of its performance, the break with history which it announces.

According to Puchner, the manifesto’s “morphology includes such features as numbered theses; denunciations of the past; an aggressive attitude toward the audience; a collective authorship; exaggerated, shrill declarations; varied, often bold, letters; and a mass distribution in newspapers, on billboards, and as flyers” (“Manifesto=Theatre” 451). Lyon also catalogues several features of the manifesto, some of which overlap with the morphology provided by Puchner, including a “declarative, passionate voice,” the forceful “parataxis of a list,” the “refusal of mediated prose or synthesized transition,” the dramatic, “millennial...emphasis on *now*” and the fashioning of a “foreshortened, impassioned, highly selective history which chronicles the oppression leading to the present moment of crisis” (*Manifestoes* 14-15, 30 emphasis in original).

Lyon also identifies a crucial feature of the manifesto when she describes it as the genre of “rigid hierarchical binaries” (3). A manifesto is usually written from the perspective of a “we,” posited as an allied author and audience, and speaks out against the transgressions or evils of a “they,” variously constructed as “ideological tyrants, bankrupt usurpers, or corrupt

fools.”⁸ Even when a manifesto does not actually speak from the first person plural, an antagonistic dichotomy is almost always established. The *Communist Manifesto* for example, written in the third person, still draws a definitive line between bourgeois and proletarian. The result of this binary, according to Lyon, is a “liberatory genre...that narrates” the exclusion or exploitation of the “we,” but also at the same time “participates in a reduced understanding of heterogeneous social fields, creating audiences through a rhetoric of exclusivity.” In other words, the manifesto’s aggressive and uncompromising stance, combined with an inflexible we/they dichotomy, leaves no subjective room between “friend” and “enemy.” One is either bourgeoisie or proletariat, exploiter or exploited; the manifesto recognizes no neutral parties. Furthermore, for someone like Mina Loy, whose idiosyncratic metaphysics of an infinitely expanding consciousness insists on a “provisional, unfinished self,” the collective ‘we’ erases the nuances and distinctions between its multiple ‘I’s, locking them into a stultifying collective that might preclude the sort of spiritual evolution Loy deems imperative for a true “social regeneration” (LLB96 156). The prophetic voice, on the other hand, is both fully individuated and at the same time subsumed in its role of mediation.⁹ The prophetic voice is in some sense distanced from its speaker. Prophecy, can, however, deal in the same kind of “rigid hierarchical binaries,” such as chosen and not chosen, sinful and pure, or repentant and unrepentant, to name a few. The interesting thing is that, as a divine mediator, the prophet may stand somewhat outside of these binaries. In the case of Loy, who hesitated to explicitly affiliate with any movement or group, who viewed herself as “somewhat masculine” and whom Marinetti

⁸ The manifesto also depends upon a specific notion of the public as constitutive of modern, implicitly male, “universal subjects” (Lyon 4).

⁹ As Balfour explains, “in the beginning then, is the repetition of the word...as mediated immediacy or immediate mediation...even if the prophet’s words seem originary, it is always already a repetition of the divine one, a quotation with or without the quotation marks” (5, 7).

viewed as a lone “exceptional woman” who did not possess the debilitating disease of feminine “*amore*,” this lone outsider stance might have seemed quite natural for her (*LLB96* 179-180).

Like the manifesto form, prophecy is concerned with revealing or making manifest. The *OED* defines prophecy as “the action or practice of revealing or expressing the will or thought of God or a god; divinely inspired utterance or discourse” (“prophecy” def. 1). Ian Balfour, in *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy* (2002), points to a number of features of prophecy—Hebraic, classical, and modern—which highlight its affinity with the manifesto form: like the manifesto writer, the prophet is often a public declaimer or “rather like an orator” (6); the future or timeless truth which a prophet declaims is often “obscure” and unspecific, much like the future heralded in countless manifestoes (1); the prophet, like the “we” of manifestic discourse, is a marginalized figure, “crying in the wilderness” (2; Matt. 3:1-3); prophecy often contains a hortatory function such as can be found in the book of Jeremiah, where the prophet pleads with the people of Judah to turn back from their sinful ways in order to avoid God’s judgment (Jer. 3:12-13, 22 7:3); prophecies, like manifestoes, have a tendency to be labeled or heightened in power retroactively, based on a text’s correspondence to later events (Balfour 71, 73). Crucially, Balfour argues, as Lyon does for the manifesto, “the prophetic tends to emerge...at times of great social and political turbulence (2). That these form share a social and political context of unrest likely derives from the shared textual heritage of the two forms. Puchner points to prophetic texts as one branch of a “pair of lineages within the prehistory of the manifesto” (*Poetry* 12). The other branch follows the etymological origins of the word “manifesto” back to Medieval Europe, where the word denoted “a declaration of the will of a

sovereign. It is a communication, authored by those in authority, by the state, the military, or the church, to let their subjects know their sovereign intentions and laws” (11).

While a revolutionary manifesto writer attempts to reveal a history of oppression and an imminent, violent overthrow of the oppressor(s), a prophet attempts to reveal the true essence or message of God, Nature, or what Loy in another text calls the “Power Universe” (*Stories and Essays* 241). Loy’s iterations of the manifesto achieve a unique blending of these two roles, a blending that helps to articulate her view that gender inequality, “sex ignorance,” and reverence for the “rubbish heap of tradition” are rooted in an inadequate apprehension of a divine presence (*LLB96* 221, 153). In the “Feminist Manifesto,” Loy exhorts women to “leave off looking to men to find out what you are not—seek / within yourselves to find out what you are” (154). While Loy is here engaging in exhortation, a commonplace of prophetic discourse and a constitutive feature of revolutionary discourse, this particular exhortation is for women to look inward to experience a revelatory expansion of feminine consciousness; it is not the exhortation to “destroy” the oppressor that defines the revolutionary manifesto (and which does in fact appear elsewhere in Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto”).

On a more structural level, Loy also seems to have grasped the problematic tension between theatricality and performativity inherent in the manifesto form, as several of her poems and plays, such as “Lion’s Jaws” and *The Sacred Prostitute*, both of which satirize the overly theatrical antics of Marinetti, suggest. These works indicate that Loy understood the tentative way in which manifestoes generate an authorizing context for themselves, a process which Martin Puchner explicates in his 2002 essay “Manifesto=Theatre” and in more detail in

his monograph, *Poetry of the Revolution* (2007). By composing manifestoes that are as much revelatory as they are revolutionary, Loy is able to speak with an authority that is grounded in a personal, ecstatic encounter with the Absolute rather than an authority that tenuously relies on a future audience and a future outcome to be secured as a successful speech act.

Rowan Harris notes that “in all of Loy’s poetic representations of Marinetti, she presents him as some kind of performer,” and, one might also note, these representations are almost never kind to Marinetti. The performances are clownish, and they communicate an over-insistently masculine and violent theatricality that is impossible to take seriously. More tellingly, these satires of Marinetti extend to his declaiming of futurist manifestoes. The poem “Lion’s Jaws” (ca. 1919) and the play *The Sacred Prostitute* both unmask futurist misogyny as, ironically, a peacock-like display for attracting women.

In “Lion’s Jaws,” a final sabering of the futurists, Loy reveals her awareness and discomfort with the way “theatricality and performativity...describe two conflicting tendencies that inform...all manifestos” (Puchner, *Poetry* 5). In a scathing satirization of her futurist ex-lovers Marinetti and Giovanni Bapini, Loy depicts the “Manifesto / of the flabbergast movement / hurled by the leader Raminetti” (LLB96 47). Raminetti is an anagram for Marinetti, one of many anagrams that show up in the poem. Loy herself is anagrammatized in the poem variously as “Nima Lyo,” “Anim Yol,” and “Imna Oly” (49). This is a common tactic of Loy’s, which she uses, in the words of her literary executor Roger Conover, to create “demonstrative and theatrical first persons,” (LLB96 xiii). Even while Loy is perhaps being a little theatrical herself, her use of the word “flabbergast” in this poem is telling of what she thinks about the theatrical posturing of Marinetti and his manifestoes. The word flabbergast denotes

“bombast,” and, as a verb, “to astonish utterly; to confound” (“flabbergast,” n. def.1, v. def.1). Even the way Marinetti declaims, or “hurls,” the manifesto is rendered as theatrically humorous. Toward the end of the poem, Loy rechristens futurism as “flabbergastism” and turns Marinetti into the movement’s “circus-master / astride a prismatic locomotive” (48). Clearly, Loy began to see futurism as a movement whose performative efficacy had run out or somehow failed to fully manifest, a movement that found itself left with little more than Marinetti’s attention-getting antics as the rest of the *avant-garde* (and Loy herself) began to direct attention away from futurism and toward newer *-isms*. Additionally, the poem critiques Marinetti’s “scorn for women” as mere posturing to “wheedle” his “inevitable way / to the ‘excepted’ woman’s heart” (47). Futurist masculinism is presented as a ridiculous ploy, one that postulates an impossible “agomogenesis” of man and that is hypocritically deployed to cavort with women in the sort of amorous fashion which futurist dogma wholeheartedly repudiates.

Written some five years earlier than “Lion’s Jaws,” during the time when Loy composed her manifestoes “Aphorisms on Futurism” and “The Feminist Manifesto,” Loy’s one-act play *The Sacred Prostitute* (1914) takes these notions of futurist posturing and hypocrisy to even more laughable extremes. The play features, among other archetypal characters, “Futurism,” “Don Juan,” “Love,” and “Nature.” Futurism arrives on the stage early in the play among a crowd of men, including “Don Juan,” “Tea Table Man,” “A Man,” and “Idealist.” Futurism’s arrival is characteristically farcical and dramatic in fashion:

(with a loud report FUTURISM arrives on the scene)

FUTURISM Coward—pouah! Milksop! Poo-uuu-
 Aaah! Tango Tout!
 (TEA TABLE MAN *hits him in the eye with a violent potato*)

.

FUTURISM (*martially mopping his eye with a wet handkerchief*) I stand
 Alone on the pinnacle of the passing moment, turning up my
 Nose at the solar-system, hurling invective at the moon—
 Chairs at the audience! (*calming down a little*) Has anybody got
 An intellect or a dog handy? (*Stories and Essays, 193-194*)

Not only does Loy amusingly parody the language of both Marinetti's own "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" and his program of *parole-in-liberta* in this scene, but she also depicts "Futurism" as an utter buffoon whose zeal is anything but performatively efficacious. When "Futurism" goes on to announce the arrival of "the FUTURE" with typical manifestary bravado, Loy reveals the failed performativity of such an announcement by rendering the future which "Futurism" announces as literally invisible:

FUTURISM (*pulling up his cuffs and turning his hands round about for the
 audience to inspect*) You are sure there is nothing there? (*catches
 at the air with a superb gesture and holds it invisible between
 an eloquent thumb and forefinger*) Gentlemen—the FUTURE.

(*The men stare very attentively*)

ANOTHER MAN In all its sublime invisibility!

.

MEN A *prophet* has come among us!
 A MAN And I mistook him for a conjuring commercial traveller.

PROCURESS My word—the women ought to see this. (194-196)

.

The use of the word “prophet” here perhaps hints at the affinity between prophetic and manifestic discourses which we have been discussing, both of which are undercut in this scene by the hollow nature of Futurism’s declamation and the satiric nature of the responses to it. As with the previous excerpt, all of Futurism’s actions and features are highly overdetermined. Futurism “martially” wipes the “violent potato” from his eye, his gestures are “superb” and his thumb and forefinger are “eloquent.” These dramatic representations come across as purely theatrical when set against his empty demonstration of “the FUTURE.”

When “Love” enters onto the scene, Futurism’s theatrics continue unabated, as he “declaims Futurist attack on love—most dramatic” (197). Things get interesting when Love and Futurism are left on the stage alone, at which point Futurism drops his pretense of being wholly unsentimental, releases Love, whom he has dragged “*across the floor by the hair*” and begins fawning over her:

FUTURISM *(looking carefully around to see if they have all gone—lets go of LOVE’s hair)* Excuse me, I hope I didn’t hurt you. I have to do that for the sake of my reputation. *(LOVE looks shaken but intensely interested. FUTURISM places her with the gentlest care on the divan and kisses the nape of her neck.)* Never believe anything a man says about women, when there is another man present! *(looking unutterably sentimental)* I suppose you think I am a man made of iron, of absolute self sufficiency—so hard—

LOVE I don’t think anything of the kind.

FUTURISM Too hard to want to be loved—while in reality, I have an infinite need of tenderness. Will you be *very* tender to me? (197-198)

Futurism is so wrapped up in his own monologue that he talks right past Love, who doesn’t for a second seem to buy his quintessentially futurist “man made of iron” routine.

Harris' comments about the unpublished, unfinished novel *Brontolovido*, which similarly satirizes futurist denunciations of femininity, might just as easily be applied to the above passage: "In Loy's rendition of the Futurist world, aggressively proclaimed sex identities seem to literally topple over, with flabbergast male posturing persistently slipping into feminized spectacle" (32). *The Sacred Prostitute* drives home this point by placing two statements by Futurism next to each other to reveal a paradox behind Futurism's simultaneous rejection of intellect and "feminine" *amore*. Immediately after Futurism fumes that "women are so illogical," he goes on to argue that "Futurism is diametrically opposed to logic" (*Stories and Essays* 204). The play continues with a discussion between Don Juan and Futurism, wherein Don Juan congratulates Futurism on his new "amorous strategics" of insulting "the sex, to catch the demonstrated exception" (205). Futurism responds that his strategy would be new if it were "more than a bluff," and laments that "I am sacrificing myself to make things new—and only succeeding in making them *louder*" (emphasis in original). Unsurprisingly, once Futurism suspects that other men may be watching again, he resumes his attack on Love, this time in the form of a boxing match with heart-shaped gloves (208). The final lines of Don Juan and Love reflect on the bombastic character of Futurism, who has just rushed off the stage. Don Juan tells Love that Futurism is "disappointing—too primitive," and Love responds by calling Futurism "One of the most amusing creatures I've met" (214). Love's final lines reinforce the overall message of the play that Futurism is a theatrical entertainer, not to be taken seriously and wholly ineffectual in making "things new." Clearly, even as early as 1914, while Loy was still feeling invigorated by aspects of futurism's aesthetic program, she saw the precarious

performativity of the futurist message tipping into theatrical posturing, and she took the opportunity to skewer the futurists for their reductive views on gender.

Theatricality may be “the troubling underside of the manifesto’s performativity,” but this should not imply that prophetic texts cannot be in many instances similarly performative (or even theatrical) (Balfour 2). Like the manifesto, prophecy often includes a hortatory function, but not every prophet is a Jeremiah calling for his people to change their backsliding course or else face God’s wrath. Hortatory rhetoric is not an essential element of prophecy but rather a possible element of prophecy. In fact, prophecy might be said to possess a broader set of potential rhetorical or illocutionary functions than the manifesto, as Ian Balfour’s delineation of prophetic texts suggests:

[Prophecy] has the ephemerality of a topical discourse of persuasion and, ideally, the timelessness of the most fundamental truths. This tension can be ascribed in part to its mixed discursive mode, both performative and constative: the promise, threat, or warning so characteristic of Biblical prophecy, is performative and “instantaneous,” and the content of those speech-acts is supposedly constative or descriptive of a future state of affairs. (257)

As the mediation of a revelation between God and man through a prophet, whether that revelation is prognosticatory or not, prophecy can be thought of as having the potential for a more constative inflection than the manifesto, an inflection which allows a writer like Loy to avoid “the threat that [a] speech act might turn out to be nothing but stage acts” (Puchner, “Manifesto=Theatre” 463). To put this another way, the signal act of manifestation, a feature of manifestoes and prophecies alike, stands at a point of tension between what J.L. Austin

called “constative” and “performative” utterances (6-7). To reveal something is in some sense an action and a statement. If we apply Austin’s true/false test for utterances, which holds that a statement is constative if its content can be proven true or false, we could say that manifestation verges on the constative in that it is the stating or “making visible” of some fact not generated by the statement itself (as opposed to the cases of, say, the performative speech acts of naming or wedding or christening) and therefore seems at least theoretically falsifiable (3-6). But, looked at another way, statements, true or false, successfully revealed, constitute a successful performative speech act if the illocutionary goal of making what was hidden visible had the intended perlocutionary effect.¹⁰ This stretches Austin’s theory of speech acts rather severely, and it is not my intention here to embark down the road of critiquing post-Austinian theories of performativity. What I want to show here is the way in which prophetic writing or speech differs from manifesto writing or speech, in that prophecy need not necessarily concern itself with actually bringing about the realities it prophesies. The manifesto, on the other hand, is desperately invested in making the revolutionary moment it announces a reality, and the possibility of its failure haunts the manifesto.

Balfour asserts that prophecy as a genre is probably less useful as a tool for literary analysis or description than the notion of the “prophetic” as a modality that can inflect any number of forms (1). This is partly the case due to the severely narrow definition of prophecy in biblical tradition. In the strictest Biblical sense, the words “prophet” and “prophecy” refer to

¹⁰ In Austin’s terminology, the “locutionary” aspect of a speech act is the content of the speech act itself (e.g. “Gosh, what time is it?”), the “illocutionary” aspect is the action that a speaker hopes to elicit (e.g., that the dinner guests will realize its late and go home so you can go to bed), and the “perlocutionary” effect is the response which that speech act actually elicits (e.g. dinner guests going home, not going home, or telling you the time) (102, 117-118).

“The prophetic writers of the Old Testament and Hebrew Scriptures; the books containing their writings. In Jewish usage, the Prophets constitute one of the three canonical divisions of the Hebrew Scriptures” (“Prophet,” def. 2). Samuel Meier, in *Themes and Transformation in Old Testament Prophecy* (2009), points to the narrowness of this definition by highlighting “prophetic” books in the Bible, such as the *Book of Daniel*, that are not considered prophecy because they do not conform to a strict definition of a prophetic revelation as a direct verbal encounter with God (16-17). On the other hand, David Peterson notes that some Old Testament histories of the lives of prophets such as *Kings* 1 and 2 are canonically considered prophecies even though they are merely records of prophets and not the declaimed prophecies themselves (3-5). The limitations of the notion of a genre of prophecy are not confined to the problem of strict biblical terminology, either, according to Balfour, who argues that “neither in Blake nor in European Romanticism generally...there is hardly such a thing as prophecy in the sense of a clearly codified genre” (1).

The notion of “the prophetic” is certainly more useful for the purposes of this study, as it suggests a modality that might “intersect with any number of genres,” including the manifesto. Another reason that the “prophetic” is useful is it allows us to examine in more detail one of the traditions from which Loy probably adopted the prophetic mode to incorporate into her manifesto texts: the longstanding European and later American conception of the “poet as prophet” (Prickett 19).

In one of the most famous and anthologized treatises on the nature of poetry in English, Sir Philip Sydney begins his *Defence of Poesy* (1580-1581) by pointing to the Latin term for poet:

“Among the Romans a poet was called *vates*, which is as much as a diviner, foreseer, or prophet, as by his conjoined words, *vaticinium* and *vaticinari*, is manifest” (256). Shelley’s *Defence of Poetry* (1821), following nearly two and half centuries after Sydney’s defense, similarly invokes a prophetic function for poetry, claiming that “It is as it were the interpretation of a diviner nature through our own” (610). By the time of Shelley’s *Defence*, the likes of John Milton and especially William Blake had already reinforced profoundly the prophetic tradition in English poetry, though Blake had not yet arrived at his resounding posthumous acceptance. Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay “The Poet” also declares the poet the man who “announces that which no man has foretold...[he is] the foremost watchman on the peak” (622). Emerson also called for an American poet who would embody the prophetic definition of poetry he laid forth in his essay, a call which Walt Whitman would answer. Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, espousing as it does a revelatory decree of radical embodiment that posits sexual appetite and desire as fundamentally wholesome and integral to the human spirit, resonates with the kind of radical sexual politics Loy would articulate over fifty years later. As several critics have noted, Loy deeply admired and seems likely to have been influenced by the poetry of Whitman in *Song of Myself* (Kouidis 27, Januzzi 420 and Selinger 19). Loy’s discussions of the need for a social regeneration regarding attitudes toward sex and human flesh share some compelling affinities with Whitman’s proclamations, but before examining Loy’s connection to the poetry of Walt Whitman in more depth—now that the contours of prophetic and manifesto discourses have been more clearly detailed—let us move on to a detailed examination of the prophetic voice in Loy’s manifestic and poetic texts.

2.1

Two of Loy's manifestoes, "Aphorisms on Futurism" (January 1914) and the "Feminist Manifesto" (November 1914), though quite different from one another, can be read to demonstrate Loy's unique blending of revolutionary and prophetic forms and the theories of consciousness and divinity that inform it. Both of these texts adopt some of the rhetorical and structural mainstays of the manifesto form—rejections of the past, hortatory rhetoric—while at the same time employing the dual discursive mode of prophetic revelation: they present supreme truths about reality in both a constative (as statements) and a performative (as revelations) sense. More importantly, they occupy this prophetic stance to a significantly greater degree than Marinetti's manifestoes, which lean decidedly toward a revolutionary stance grounded in violent, hyper-masculine theatrics.

While spanning only a year in terms of dates of composition, these texts are often read as tracing Loy's interaction with and eventual distancing from Futurist doctrine. On the surface then, reading these texts together runs the risk of reinforcing the common critical conception of Loy's oeuvre as a trajectory from futurism to feminism (1910s) to religious mysticism (1920s and beyond). However, as it has been shown that Loy's investment in revelatory and ecstatic discourse manifests itself in her earliest poems, notes, and in her first published manifesto text (and reappears consistently throughout her career), what becomes apparent is that Loy's

engagement with futurism, feminism, and modernism is undergirded by a belief in the socially regenerative potential of an ecstatic encounter with the divine.

Loy posits that such encounters with the divine, furthermore, are achieved by looking within oneself, by plumbing the depths of one's own consciousness—and that such self-exploration may be inspired by witnessing or participating in acts of creation. I side with critics such as Cook and Freeborn who argue that Loy's fascination with futurism resulted primarily from the fact that she viewed futurism as part of a continuum of idealisms including Bergsonism and Christian Science (452; 6-7).¹¹ What such idealism, apparent in both "Aphorisms on Futurism" and "The Feminist Manifesto," suggests is that Loy has always been first and foremost concerned with a "thematics of the will," with that will or consciousness's ability to access an absolute reality or divine essence, and with the potential social benefits of such divine contact (Cook 458). While it may be the case that, as some critics have argued, the exhortations in Loy's manifesto-texts are to some degree aimed reflexively at Loy herself and thus reflect Loy's internal struggle to reconcile futurism and feminism, such explanations do not sufficiently account for the clear concern Loy displays for the larger world around her or for her demonstrated belief in the modernist artist-prophet's "obligation" to conduct and inspire new explorations of human consciousness and the divine (Burke, *Becoming Modern* 160). Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas makes a similar assertion when he argues that, "while no populist, Loy was nonetheless committed to modernism as a liberating transformation of consciousness" (113).

¹¹ While futurism is often discussed as though it were the first star in Loy's complex constellation of philosophical influences, it should be re-emphasized that Loy had already converted to Christian Science and been exposed to the works of Henri Bergson and Robert Assagioli before coming into contact with the futurists (Freeborn 6, Burke, *Becoming Modern* 105-142).

“Aphorisms on Futurism” (1914) was Mina Loy’s first published piece of writing. It appeared as the central text in the forty-fifth issue of Alfred Stieglitz’s *Camera Work*, alongside parts of a play by Gertrude Stein and art criticism by Mabel Dodge (Burke 169). Its publication marked, in the words of Rowan Harris, Loy’s “first and last open identification with the [futurist] movement in print” (24-25). While it is true that Loy never again explicitly identified with futurism after the publication of “Aphorisms,” Loy’s subsequent work continues to reveal a debt to futurist notions of dynamism, *parole in liberta*, and liberation from the past even as much of her poetry throughout the remainder of the 1910s scathingly satirizes and critiques futurist doctrines of misogyny, militarism, and bombast. On the other hand, as a putatively futurist manifesto, “Aphorisms” differs significantly from the manifestoes of Marinetti and other futurists published over the previous five years, in content, in structure, and in tone. In the editorial notes to “Aphorisms on Futurism,” Conover notes that “a printed leaf of the *CW* [*Camera Work*] at YCAL bears [Loy’s] penciled substitution of the word ‘modern’ for ‘future’ and ‘Modernism’ for ‘Futurism’ throughout” (LLB96 215). While it is likely that, as Conover speculates, these changes were made after Loy “abandoned her futurist allegiance” (to the extent that she had any), it nonetheless suggests that Loy may have seen her own discourse in “Aphorisms” as related to more than constitutive of Futurist ideology and praxis.

Composed of fifty-one discrete statements each ranging from one to five lines in length, the text opens with a startling and succinct couplet—“DIE in the Past / Live in the Future”—and continues over the next four segments to expound on the nature of aesthetic production:

THE velocity of velocities arrives in starting

IN pressing the material to derive its essence, matter becomes deformed.

AND form hurtling against itself is thrown beyond the synopsis
Of vision

THE straight line and the circle are the parents of design, form
The basis of art; there is no limit to their coherent variability. (149)

These aphorisms suggest a modern artist whose ability to “derive” a pure “essence” from matter results in a site of revelation. For a form to be thrown “beyond the synopsis of vision” suggests that it reveals something beyond itself as an immediately graspable reality, something beyond the senses. As instructive statements, paired with the opening imperative couplet, these lines seem to herald new, abstract artistic forms as indicators of a higher reality. In fact, these lines resonate tellingly with a later poem by Loy, “Brancusi’s Golden Bird” (1922), an ekphrastic work which marvels at the “nucleus [or ‘essence’] of flight” which Brancusi managed to distill in his sculpture of that name:

The toy
become aesthetic archetype
.
The absolute act
of art
conformed
to continent sculpture
—bare as the brow of Osiris—
this breast of revelation
.
This gong
Of polished hyperaesthesia

.
 The immaculate
 conception
 of the inaudible bird
 occurs
 in gorgeous reticence . . . (LLB96 79)

To experience Brancusi's sculpture is literally ecstatic and revelatory: the word "hyperaesthesia" communicates precisely the sort of heightened consciousness associated with direct and sensual apprehension of the divine. Not only does Loy explicitly identify Brancusi's sculpture as the site, the "breast" of revelation, the poem's final words, "gorgeous reticence," imply an inscrutability which evokes the mysterious nature of ecstatic experience. Additionally, in the same year that Loy composed "Aphorisms," she was also already experimenting in her own poetry with language's ability to convey and inspire similarly ecstatic states of "supersensate consciousness" (Lyon "Pregnant Pauses" 387). In "Parturition," one of Loy's most daring and original poems, she figures childbirth as a revelatory contact with the "Macro-cosmic presence," here figured as the "The was—is—ever—shall—be / Of cosmic reproductivity" (7). To see clearly the way in which Loy recreates her experience of childbirth as a direct experience of absolute or divine maternity, it is worth quoting the poem at some length:

I am the centre
 Of a circle of pain
 Exceeding its boundaries in every direction

To pin-point the nucleus of being

Locate an irritation without

her revelation of “cosmic reproductivity” unfolds.¹³ Later in the poem, a disconnected series of images “ris[ing] from the subconscious” suggests a revelation of unity with all the processes of life and death:

Rises from the subconscious
 Impression of a cat
 With blind kittens
 Among her legs
 Same undulating life-stir
 I am that cat

Rises from the sub-conscious
 Impression of small animal carcass
 Covered with blue-bottles
 —Epicurean—
 And through the insects
 Waves that same undulation of living
 Death
 Life
 I am knowing
 All about
 Unfolding

The revelatory potential of aesthetic creation which Loy posits in the opening lines of “Aphorisms” and elsewhere reflects a very different aesthetic doctrine from that proposed by Marinetti and the futurists. In the “Manifesto of Futurist Painters” (February 1910) and “Futurist Painting: Technical Manifesto” (April 1910), for example, the destruction of the past and the emphasis on speed, dynamism and violence are figured as ends in and of themselves, rather than methods for inducing an expanded consciousness, or rather, through that expanded consciousness, experiencing a higher or divine reality. This is perhaps the key distinction

¹³ For a related discussion of “Parturition” as an ecstatic poem, see Marshall, “The Ecstasy of Mina Loy,” especially p.166-178.

between Loy and the futurists' relative idealisms. In the "Manifesto of Futurist Painters," Umberto Boccioni and his fellow futurists write in their enumerated "final conclusions" that they want "To destroy the cult of the past...To disdain utterly every form of imitation...To exalt every form of originality...To render and glorify today's life" (68). If one reads all eight of the enumerated theses in their entirety, as well as the theses in the "Technical Manifesto," nothing resembling Loy's concern with the interiority of human consciousness will be found. Similarly, the notion of a reality beyond what is observable in the world is flatly denied. Burke recounts a 1914 discussion between Loy and Marinetti wherein these differences in their views come bluntly to the fore:

She must stop worrying, he told her. She was neglecting the present for what she called her inner life. "You are a busy little mystic," he scolded, pursuing "an enigma that isn't there." The unconscious, the superconscious, and the subliminal self were illusions. When Mina protested that he took everything at face value, he replied that there *was* nothing more. Any other view was a sham.

(Becoming Modern 164)

As was discussed in the first section of this article, Loy's poetry, letters, and notes attest to the fact that she sincerely believed that there was more to reality than its "face value."

The aesthetic and philosophical differences between Loy and the futurists, more than just being demonstrable within their respective manifestoes, account for some of the structural and rhetorical differences between "Aphorisms" and the various manifestoes of futurism. Loy's concern with individual human consciousness, and with a collective supraconsciousness of which it is a part, must be seen as vital components in her creation of an idiosyncratically prophetic iteration of the manifesto form.

Loy's significantly more limited use of the first person plural and her far less exclamatory statements, in "Aphorisms" and in her other manifestoes, are two cases in point that reveal how different her manifestic discourse is from the futurists'. Firstly, as revolutionaries, Marinetti and his futurist brethren must announce and performatively constitute a clear demarcation between futurist friend and *passatista* enemy if the moment of historical rupture announced in the "Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" is to truly come off. As Lyon discusses, the "rigid hierarchical binaries" which are part and parcel of the manifesto form are critical to the construction of a moment of rupture with the past. The futurist "we" in the manifestoes, as the professed agent of rupture, must be constructed and validated, must be insisted upon, especially when the reality is that the manifesto is the product of individual authorship. Additionally, the positing of an oppositional "they" (or "you all") is equally crucial, as Marinetti seems to acknowledge, without a trace of irony, when he states that "It is necessary...for the soul to launch the body in flames...against the enemy, the eternal enemy that we would have to invent if it didn't exist" (46). The formation of the we/they dichotomy is crucial, moreover, to the manifesto's creation of a "highly selective and foreshortened history" which narrates the struggle between the two groups. Without this conflict, there is nothing to spark the break with the past which every manifesto seeks to effect (Lyon, *Manifestoes* 10, 14; Puchner, "Manifesto=Theatre" 451).

In the "Founding Manifesto," written solely by Marinetti, the word "we" begins eight of the eleven theses of the manifesto proper, and only two of the other three are completely bereft of first-person pronouns (41-42). The narrative preface leading up to the manifesto is similarly written in the first person plural, as is the portion of the manifesto that comes after

the theses. By contrast, in Loy's text, out of all fifty-one aphorisms, the subject pronoun "we" is used in only one, and the possessive pronoun "our" never occurs. The speaker of Loy's "Aphorisms" operates largely in the second and third person, deploying sonorous declarative statements and comparatively calmer imperatives. Her tone and stance evoke the booming voice of God much more than they evoke the threats of a violent political revolutionary. This brings us to a second major distinction: that Loy's largely restrained aphorisms stand in stark opposition to the feverish and violent exclamations of "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," which uses no fewer than forty-six exclamation points in a relatively small amount of space. Loy, on the other hand, uses none.

Not surprisingly, aphorism forty-five, where Loy does make use of the pronoun "we" (twice), is the most futurist sounding portion of Loy's whole manifesto: "TO your blushing, we shout the obscenities, we scream the blas- / phemies, that you, being weak, whisper alone in the dark" (*LLB96* 152). As at least one critic has observed, Loy's manifestoes rarely make use of the extremely violent verbs and adjectives which pervade the futurist manifestoes (Perloff 137-138). Although, "Aphorisms" does become more polemic and antagonistic towards its end, especially in aphorisms forty through forty-six, which accuse the reader who has not embraced futurism of "stand[ing] in abject servitude" to "perceptive consciousness" and to the "mechanical re-actions of the subconsciousness, / that rubbish heap of race-tradition—" (*LLB96* 152). Whereas in "Aphorisms" the verbs "scream" and "shout," sparingly used, constitute some of Loy's most violent diction as far as verbs go, Marinetti's and other futurist texts swell with the sort of violent images and actions that threaten to spill off of the page and into reality. With "incendiaries," "canons," and "machine guns" the futurists aim to "destroy," "murder,"

“sweep away,” and “renounce” the past and its languorous disciples, the curators, professors, and antiquarians of Italy (Marinetti 41-54; Boccioni et al. 62-70). Loy’s aphorisms, while certainly commanding, are overall more encouraging than they are destructive or threatening. Take, for instance, Loy’s appeal to “FORGET that you live in houses, that you may live in your- / self—” (*LLB96* 149). Further into “Aphorisms,” Loy uses the example of a liberated “futurist” who can “live a thousand years in one poem,” to implore her audience to reject the past and live in a glorious future of possibility that “EXPLODES with light,” that is “limitless,” that allows you to “color your ambiente with your preferences” (149-151). Loy’s “EXPLOSION” is not the futurists’ explosion of bombs and guns, but of ecstatic realization of personal potential.

In short, “Aphorisms” is more concerned with the prophetic revealing of great aesthetic and metaphysical truths for the benefit of its readers¹⁴ than with announcing, let alone enacting, the violent overthrow of extant civilization. While the “rubbish heap of race-tradition” and “Humanity as it appears” are subjected to “derision” in “Aphorisms,” their actual toppling is deferred into an uncertain future, in a classically prophetic prognosticatory fashion (152). Where Marinetti represents himself and his comrades, in the present tense, in the insistent *here* and *now* of the manifesto, as the futurist horde who assaults the institutions of *passatista* Italy, who “hurl defiance at the stars,” Loy’s speaker, in her response to modernity’s “crisis in consciousness,” comes across as a largely isolated figure attempting to direct readers toward the active expansion of consciousness by illuminating the nature of that consciousness (“CONSCIOUSNESS has no climax”)—in anticipation of “man as he *shall* be,” in the indefinitely deferred future (Marinetti 44; *LLB96* 151, 152, italics added). As Burke points out about

¹⁴ Even if, as Burke and others have suggested, Loy herself is part of that readership

“Aphorisms,” “no punctuation connect[s] the successive aphorisms, which float...in the void of the page” (*Becoming Modern* 169). Each aphorism’s capitalized first word adds to the text’s sonorous tone and texture, and the seemingly more distant and isolated speaking position from which they come (with the one exception of aphorism forty-five) evokes a series of prophetic proclamations and exhortations more than a revolutionary fusillade. If Loy’s “Aphorisms on Futurism” is her most genuinely futurist work, then its glaring differences from the futurist manifestoes from which it draws should signal to us a writer with a radically different worldview and aesthetics, even if, as such a writer, Loy is sympathetic to the futurists’ attempts to rattle the foundations of Western culture.

2.2

In fact, ranked for sheer provocativeness, Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto”—composed some eleven months after “Aphorisms,” after Loy had pronounced “futurism is dead” and began distancing herself from the movement—is arguably the text in which Loy draws most heavily from the futurists’ bag of manifesto-tricks (Arnold 85). It is also, according to DuPlessis, Pozorski and others, the text where Loy seems to embrace, most unsettlingly, the futurist discourse of eugenic and masculinist hygienics (52, 63; 42). In “The Feminist Manifesto,” Loy excoriates the social purity and suffragist arms of the feminist movement for their emphasis on political victories for women at the expense of the greater victory of liberating female

consciousness from the inhibiting weight of oppressive cultural codes and ideologies.¹⁵ As DuPlessis notes, for Loy the goal of feminism was not “reform of institutions, but reform of consciousness” (51). Still, despite the fact that this text “ring[s] out with revolutionary defiance,” a strong prophetic modality inflects even this most incendiary and revolutionary of all of Loy’s manifestoes, and does so to a greater degree than any of the principal manifestoes of futurism (Gilmore 308). For Loy continues to eschew the collective “we” of the typical manifesto, choosing instead to fire her warning shot at mainstream feminism from the position of a castigating prophet who is calling not for women to besiege or protest the institutions of the patriarchy, but to shift their focus inward, to search within themselves and face “brave[ly]” the “psychological upheaval” necessary for the realization of a renovated feminine consciousness (*LLB96* 153).

Furthermore, if we examine briefly some of Loy’s own comments about the “Feminist Manifesto,” we can discern once more that Loy was keenly aware of the manifesto form’s precarious performativity, what Puchner calls the “theatricality...haunting the manifesto” as its “troubling underside” (“Manifesto=Theatre” 463). The fact that this admittedly over-the-top text is the only one which Mina Loy ever chose to actually call a manifesto indicates that she was quite cognizant, probably well more than Marinetti, of the pitfalls of penning a revolutionary manifesto, especially in cases where the possibility of constituting the manifesto as a successful speech act is dim. Loy never published or declaimed the “Feminist Manifesto,”

¹⁵ Loy seems to have held the now commonplace critical notion that ideology resides within and emanates from institutions of the state (*a la* Althusser). In the section of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* entitled “Ova, Among the Neighbors,” we read this telling passage: “New Life / when it inserts itself into continuity / is disciplined / by the family / reflection / of national construction / to a proportionate posture / in the civilized scheme // deriving / definite contours / from tradition // personality / being mostly / a microcosmic / replica / of institutions” (*LLB82* 153).

which she referred to in a follow-up letter to Mabel Dodge Luhan (the only other person known to have seen the text during her lifetime) as “that fragment of feminist tirade I sent you” (*LLB96* 216). Her choice of the word “tirade” here invokes the theatrically incendiary bombast of Marinetti’s manifestoes, which Loy was at the time satirizing in her poems and plays. Additionally, she told Mabel that “it is easily to be proved fallacious—There is no truth—anywhere.” Such a comment, while it might allay the fears of modern readers that Loy actually advocated the systematic “surgical destruction of virginity through-out the female population” makes this text, like much of Loy’s work, difficult to parse in any definitive way. One thing that becomes apparent about the “Feminist Manifesto,” though, through her letters to Mabel, is that Loy selected the violent and authoritarian proposition of enforced female genital mutilation for its shock-value as much as anything else. While Loy no doubt believed that the “man made bogey of virtue” was in fact a “principal instrument of [women’s] subjection,” her solution for circumventing this instrument of subjection was likely not proposed in earnest (154-155). As her letter to Mabel indicates, she found the idea of the destruction of virginity a spectacular and shocking suggestion: “I find the destruction of virginity—so daring don’t you think?” (216). In this text, where Loy is still nevertheless deploying the rhetoric of spiritual revelation and heightened consciousness alongside the revolutionary rhetoric of the manifesto, she seems to be consciously working within the manifesto genre’s conventions of violent and inflammatory hyperbole.

With such an awareness of the manifesto’s agonized performativity, and given Loy’s mystically religious proclivities, it is no surprise that she would have seen the role of prophet (or poet-prophet) as a more authentic subject position than that of the revolutionary.

The “Feminist Manifesto” is angry, impatient, and strident in ways that make it unmistakably distinct from “Aphorisms on Futurism.” The sonorous use of the capitalized letters in “Aphorisms” is replaced by a jarring and violent use of text sizes, underlines, and dashes of various lengths, all of which give the impression of shouting in the streets rather than booming from the heavens. The unique typography of “The Feminist Manifesto” is also more reminiscent of Marinetti’s famed *parole in liberta*, which advocates “free, expressive orthography and typography” (“Futurist Theory and Invention” 101). Obliterating diction such as “devastating...upheaval,” “absolute demolition,” and “surgical destruction” seem pulled directly from Marinetti’s lexical repertoire and are suggestive of the heroic, “hygienic masculinity” Lyon argues became integral to the revolutionary manifesto by the twentieth century (*Manifestoes* 4):

Woman must become more responsible for the child than
man—
Women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved—
The feeling that it is a personal insult when a man transfers
his attentions from her to another woman
The desire for comfortable protection instead of an intelligent
curiosity & courage in meeting & resisting the pressure of life
sex or so called love must be reduced to its initial element,
honour, grief, sentimentality, pride & consequently jealousy
must be detached from it. (*LLB96* 156)

In addition to “the unimaginably invasive and authoritarian” prescription that women should have their virginity surgically destroyed “at puberty,” we see Loy here embracing the futurist rejection of *amore* that associates females and femininity with sentimentality, impersonality, and resistance to the new (Pozorski 53; Harris 25). Harris writes that, for the futurists as well for other members of the avant-garde, woman was often “associated with all

things condemned as ‘passatista,’” and, reading this excerpt from Loy’s manifesto, one can only conclude that Loy to some degree bought into this notion (25). In the above passage, Loy presents the kinds of feelings commonly “associated with the ideology of femininity as downright toxic” (DuPlessis 52). Lyon cites these and other of the “Feminist Manifesto’s” more gynophobic moments as examples of “the obstacles for feminists who arrive at the intersection of aesthetic discourse, revolutionary discourse, and feminist polemic” (*Manifestoes* 6). While Loy “manipulates the manifesto form to challenge parochial, anti-individualist representation of ‘Woman,’” such as the division of women into either “mistresses” or “mothers,” the manifesto form’s “requirement of a political identification with masculinity” results in an unsettling diatribe that reveals a “profound antipathy to the demands made by the identity category ‘woman’ upon the individual” (Lyon, *Manifestoes* 6-7; Harris 20).¹⁶

But despite the unsettlingly futurist-inflected arguments and rhetoric of the “Feminist Manifesto,” a key difference between Loy’s manifesto and the mass of futurist manifestoes, once again, emerges: even more so than “Aphorisms on Futurism,” the “Feminist Manifesto” eschews the sort of revolutionary-movement building engendered by the use of the first-person plural subject. Loy speaks directly to women, but—interestingly—not explicitly as a member of that identity category. Where “Aphorisms” refuses to occupy a first-person plural subject position until its climactic final lines, the “Feminist Manifesto” never creates the space for the author and audience to belong to the same group and thus to take any sort of collective revolutionary action. The very last sentence of the manifesto does speak of “our generation,”

¹⁶ Harris also discusses Loy in the context of what Emily Apter calls the “feminist gynophobic subject,” about which Apter writes: “not unlike her male counterparts, a woman may equally well (though perhaps for significantly different reasons and stakes), comprehend femininity as an object of dread” (qtd. In Harris 116).

but this statement only places Loy's speaker in proximity to the audience temporally, not categorically. The "Feminist Manifesto" is in this sense more resonant with the prophetic than the revolutionary mode, especially with the role of an Old Testament prophet who speaks to people on behalf of God, but is not (usually) part of the intended audience for the message. When Isaiah speaks for God and rails against the people of Judah, the "Degenerate city...become a harlot," or when Jeremiah speaks against the backsliding ways of that same kingdom, God does not include the prophets who speak for him in his indictments (Isa. 2:21). Jeremiah is called by God and promised protection, and when he speaks through Jeremiah the words "Return, backsliding Israel," the implication is that the prophet, the dutiful servant of God, is not the object of God's exhortations (Jer 1:8, 6:12). Similarly, Loy's speaker is implicitly either a "completely evolved" woman who has already undergone the "devastating psychological upheaval" required for her to be able to communicate this revelation of an expanded feminine consciousness to the "woman who is...incompletely evolved," spiritually speaking, or, is somehow outside of gendered categories altogether.

Also like "Aphorisms," The "Feminist Manifesto" does not speak in the agitated present tense of the manifesto form. We are "on the *eve* of a devastating psychological upheaval" that "*will* constitute an incalculable and wider social regeneration that it is possible for our generation to imagine" (emphasis added). The prophesied upheaval is both deferred indefinitely and contingent upon women "leav[ing] off looking to men to find out" what they are not, and instead "seek[ing] within" themselves to find out what they are. As Twitchell-Waas puts it in his summary of Loy's manifesto-texts, "it is as if...[they] are projected sketches of what is hoped for" rather than revolutionary actions intent upon bringing those hopes to

fruition (114). Beyond being sketches, though, these manifestoes serve, or potentially serve, the purpose of revealing something of the nature of consciousness and reality (and through them divinity) to their readers. It is telling that Conover, in his editorial note to the 1982 version of “Aphorisms on Futurisms” refers to that text as “51 lessons for liberating the soul” (328). Just as Loy writes in “Aphorisms” that “MAN is a slave only to his own mental lethargy” (*LLB96* 151), Loy comments in her letter to Mabel Dodge that accompanied the “Feminist Manifesto” that “Slaves will believe that chains are protectors” (216). Loy’s goal in composing both of these manifestoes is to reveal to the “unevolved” truths about consciousness and identity that can precipitate an emancipatory transformation of consciousness.

Loy’s belief that a more “evolved” attitude about sex can serve as the basis for a wide social regeneration and a demolition of the stultifying gender and cultural codes against which she protested almost certainly owes something to the prophetic poetry of Walt Whitman. As was briefly alluded to, Loy acknowledged Whitman as an influence in her thinking about sex and credited him generally with creating a more “wholesome” attitude about sex in America. In a letter to Carl Van Vechten (July 1915), Loy writes: “I believe we’ll get more ‘wholesome sex’ in American art—than English after all—though you *are* considered so suburban—but that is to be expected—we haven’t had a Whitman” (qtd. In Kouidis 27). Kouidis (1980) was the first Loy scholar to explicitly connect Loy’s sexual politics to Whitman’s, and since then others such as Selinger (1998) and Smedley (2007) have taken up the connection between Loy and Whitman. Although there are no other explicit comments about Whitman by Loy on record, the affinities between their work are at times remarkable. Once again, Kouidis was the first to highlight a passage in Whitman’s letter to Emerson as particularly resonant with Loy’s own position that

“there is nothing impure in sex—except in the mental attitude to it” and that the realization of such a fact could induce “social regeneration”:

That what makes the manhood of a man, that sex, womanhood
maternity, desires, lusty animations, organs, acts, are unmentionable
and to be ashamed of, to be driven to skulk out of literature with
whatever belongs to them. This filthy law has to be repealed—it
stands in the way of great reforms. Of women just as much as men, it
is the interest that there should not be infidelism about sex, but
perfect faith. (360-361)

While Loy’s futurist acquaintances also credited Whitman as an inspiration, it was for very different reasons than Loy: as a poet who heralded “a word of the modern, the word En-Masse” and glorified the technological innovations of his country, Whitman stood as one of the few “great precursors of futurism,” as Marinetti put it (qtd. in Smedley 140). Like Whitman, Loy resented the whitewashing of sex from culture and its replacement with “‘this tepid wash, this diluted deferential love’ in which the body stays unspoken” (qtd. in Selinger 25). In a recently published story called “Gloria Gammage,” Loy’s diction evokes the above Whitman passage while discussing the repressed sexual nature of *fin-de-siecle* women. The story, a thinly veiled *roman-a-clef* about Mabel Dodge Luhan, whom she once referred to as “the only woman yet evolved,” discusses “Gloria’s” unabashed sexuality in comparison to the other women around her; the scene culminates in a description of Gloria’s sexual experimentation that is anything but “tepid”:

She [Gloria] was more organically conscious of the men than most women who are, under their daily ritual of complex sophistication—so rudimentary that they have failed even to get into conscious connection with their own organisms—and function in a tepid pulp—of distantly removed irritations of longings they cannot sensitize

Gloria's instinct had come to desire to stuff everything into her vulva to see what marvelous creative modification it had undergone in the process—(*Stories and Essays* 26)

Even for the author of the scandal-inducing *Songs to Joannes*, Loy's language here is particularly matter-of-fact in its discussion of sexual organs and acts. More than a simple agreement about the necessity for unabashed discussions of sex in literature, though, Loy and Whitman share a common view of a "deified self" (Kouidis 26). The rendering in *Song of Myself* of "Walt Whitman" as "a kosmos" compares tellingly with Loy's conception of the self as home to the eternal and absolute (27). Another recently published story of Loy's entitled "Incident" highlights aptly the connection:

so this was life; being a sort of magnet to a sort of universal electricity, while in some deeper stratum of consciousness there lies embedded a familiarity with eternal existence withheld from our everyday consciousness. (*Stories and Essays* 39)

The difference here, of course, is that Whitman's "kosmos" seems infinitely more accessible to him in *Song of Myself* than Loy's "eternal existence" does in the above passage. Loy describes as at times inscrutable, at times accessible, the nature of "the Macro-cosmic presence" in her various writings on religion. When she discusses the prophetic role of the artist, she often frames the creative act as a means of passing through "the covered entrance to infinity" that constitutes the self, as in her "Notes on Metaphysics": "Creative Impetus = the recognition of the individual's collective identify in God" (qtd. in Parmar 72). Another equation in the "Notes" reveals more clearly that, like Whitman, who "absorb[s] all things" to himself for his song, Loy truly saw the entirety of the universe as

comprised of one Great Being, which, paradoxically, inheres in every individual constituent thereof: “Universe=absolute presence. All dimension time space contract to hereness of one being” (71). The deification of the self, and the impulse to share as revelation the existence of such a deified self in all individuals, constitutes an indelible connection between the prophetic discourses of Loy and Whitman.

Whitman and Loy also shared a faith in the revelatory power of language itself, and particularly in the dialectically profuse English language. Take Whitman’s comment in “Slang in America,” published just after Mina Loy was born, about the English language:

View’d freely, the English language is the accretion and growth of every dialect, race, and range of time, and is both the free and compacted composition of all. From this point of view it stands for language in the largest sense. (557)

And compare it to Loy’s comments from “On Modern Poetry” (1924):

It was inevitable that renaissance of poetry should proceed out of America where latterly a thousand languages have been born, and each one, for the purposes of communication at least, English—English enriched and variegated with the grammatical structure and voice-inflection of many races...the muse of modern literature arose, and her tongue had been loosened in the melting pot (*LLB96* 159)

Both Whitman and Loy see “a novel [communicative] alloy” in the diversity of modern American English. Relevant for this discussion, in the same essay, Whitman goes on to parse the meaning of the word prophet, and his concern with revelation, rather than prognostication, as the core of prophecy points to an affinity between his and Loy’s prophetic textual production:

The Hebrew word which is translated *prophecy* meant to bubble up and pour forth as a fountain. The enthusiast bubbles up with the Spirit of God within him, and it pours forth from him like a fountain. The word *prophecy* is misunderstood. Many suppose that it is limited to mere prediction; that is but the lesser portion of prophecy. The greater work is to reveal God. Every true religious enthusiast is a prophet. (558)

Loy's use of the prophetic mode helped her to navigate the difficult dialectical space between feminist and revolutionary discourse; the rhetoric of revelation presented her with a viable subject position from which she could unite her notions of consciousness and divinity with her concerns about gender, culture, and aesthetics. As critical work continues to be done on Loy's relationship to religion and to revelatory discourse, Loy's deployment of the prophetic mode should hold a central place in the discussions of how Loy's religious beliefs affect her orientation towards futurism, feminism and modernism, for it suggests not only an under-examined alternative way in which female modernists might challenge the more misogynistic strains of the avant-garde, but it also points to modernist connections with nineteenth-century Romantic discourse that destabilize the smooth narrative of modernism as a clear-cut rejection of the past. Additionally, the conjunction of manifestic and prophetic discourse is itself under-theorized and needs be broadened in scope to examine more than just the works of Mina Loy, for the generic conjunction of manifesto and prophecy also marks a point of contact between modernity and its precursors.

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