# Women Wordsmiths of the Historical Avant-Garde

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**Declaration of Authorship**

I, Lauren Faro, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

Date: _____

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**Abstract**

Historical accounts and critical examinations of the early twentieth-century avant-garde for a long time privileged the work of male artists and writers, pushing women creatives to the margins of the movements in which they participated and eclipsing their contributions. In recent decades feminist critics have steadfastly sought to challenge these limited narratives by unearthing and championing the works of avant-garde women, questioning the obstacles facing them and scrutinizing the mechanisms behind the persistent exclusion of their works. But in feminist reappraisals of the avant-garde there has been a tendency to focus on women who worked in the plastic arts; there remains a dearth of critical literature on the works of women who expressed themselves primarily in the written word. This study attempts to redress the imbalance in the research field by shining a spotlight on the poetry of four women associated with groups belonging to the historical avant-garde. Its aim is to highlight, read, and reassess their work, and to bring out the nuances of their participation and contributions. Building on existing research by feminist scholars, it asks the following questions: what was the position of women writers within the avant-garde? What did they see as the possibilities of written expression? What contribution did they make to literary and linguistic innovations? How did they influence or interpret the avant-garde's dominant aesthetic ideas? The first chapter considers the work of the Paris-based Dada poet Céline Arnauld; chapter two explores the work of the writer and artist Mina Loy, who moved among various avant-garde groups; the third chapter takes as its focus Valentine Penrose, a French writer associated with Surrealism in Paris and England; and finally, the fourth chapter explores the work of the British Vorticist Jessica Dismorr. Through a close critical unpicking of the poetic text, which delves into the often complex fabric of experimental avant-garde writing, this study examines the ways in which women avant-garde writers sought to find new forms of expression. It argues that, far from the margins to which they have been undeservingly cast, these writers were at the forefront of the avant-garde's experiments with language. Bold adventurers in the written word who dared to express themselves in stridently experimental forms, these women not only participated in, but also drove and determined the avant-garde's radical aesthetic innovations.

**Note on Translations**

The primary sources for exploration will be texts written in or translated into English, with additional reference to original French texts. Reference made to any original French texts will be for the purposes of particular untranslatable formal qualities, such as rhyme and alliteration, and for scrutinizing the multiple semantic qualities of the text at the level of the individual word. Transcriptions of the poems examined in this study are included in the Appendix.

**Contents**

## Women on the Verge

William Roberts's painting *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel: Spring, 1915* (1961-2), depicts the members of the British avant-garde movement Vorticism gathered around the second edition of their journal *Blast*.[1] At the centre of the image sits Wyndham Lewis, whose large proportions and central positioning underscore his place as leader within the group. To his left and right sit the other male players of Vorticism: Cuthbert Hamilton, Ezra Pound, William Roberts, Fredrick Etchells, and Edward Wadsworth. Gathered around a restaurant table, drinking champagne as they celebrate their new publication, the male members of the group take up over two thirds of the image space, their torsos occupying the centre-most third of the canvas. The viewer's eye is drawn to the centre of the image by Lewis's imposing size, and by the bright white of the tablecloth around which the men gather, contrasting distinctly with the dark black and earthy browns and greens of the men's suits. Our gaze is directed towards Lewis, whose black brimmed hat marks a kind of vanishing point within the image.

In the top left corner of the canvas two female figures emerge just inside the doorway to the restaurant, one still clasping the door handle, having only just arrived at the celebration. The champagne glasses held by the waiter have yet to be filled for them. These women, it would seem, are late to the party. Situated spatially outside of the semi-circle formed by the seated men, and positioned on the periphery of the image, they stand outside of the Vorticist gathering. Admiring fans, perhaps? Wives come to celebrate their husbands' achievements? No. These late arrivals are two of the four female members of Vorticism: Jessica Dismorr and Helen Saunders.[2] Both Dismorr and Saunders were active participants in the movement, signing the Vorticist manifesto published in *Blast* in June 1914, and contributing illustrations and texts to the second edition of the journal (the 'War Number') in 1915. Despite these contributions, their placement within Roberts's painting occludes their creative roles and denies the

[1] William Roberts, *The Vorticists at the Restaurant de la Tour Eiffel: Spring, 1915*, 1961-2, oil on canvas, Tate, London.
[2] The other two female Vorticists were Dorothy Shakespeare and Kate Lechmere.

importance of their participation within the movement. Whilst the male members of the group gather at the centre of the painting, Dismorr and Saunders are granted a space that is visually parallel to the restaurant waiter. This compositional choice places the female Vorticists on a par not with the male Vorticists, but with the waiting staff tasked with serving the champagne.[3] Hovering at the edges of the group, their arrival is all but ignored by their male colleagues, whose backs are turned as they gaze attentively in the direction of the restaurant owner, Rudolph Stulik. Dismorr's raised hand and sideways glance seem intended not for her male colleagues but the waiter. Framed by the clean lines of the doorway, this space of inbetweenness calls into question Dismorr and Saunders's status as female Vorticists. This eccentric placement hints at their marginalised position within the group: not quite excluded from the celebration, yet not included in the entirely male 'inner circle'. They are tract-signing members, yet their importance as active participants in Vorticism appears to go unacknowledged by their male colleagues.

Granted a space only at the outer edges of the canvas, the relegation of Dismorr and Saunders to the margins of Roberts's composition is illustrative of the fate of female creatives throughout the early 20th century avant-garde, whose participation and creative contribution was largely ignored and all but erased in subsequent historical accounts and critical assessments of the movement(s). The avant-garde was long discussed and presented as a conversation between its male members and leaders, reinforcing the impression that women were not to be found among its ranks. It has been depicted as a creative conversation and collaboration between men: between the Surrealists André Breton and Max Ernst; the Dadaists Marcel Duchamp and Tristan Tzara; Expressionists Herwarth Walden and Franz Marc; the Vorticists Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound; and the

[3] This spatial alignment with the restaurant's waiting staff, and not the movement's male creatives, is particularly noteworthy in light of Kate Lechmere's memories of Vorticist gatherings at which the female members of the group were frequently tasked with pouring the tea (see Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 148). Roberts's compositional choice, whether consciously or unconsciously made, therefore repeats and reinforces (some forty-five years later) the actual relegation of Vorticism's female creatives to the role of server.

Futurists Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Giovanni Papini. Despite the participation of a significant number of women in almost all of the movements considered under the umbrella of the historical avant-garde – as painters, poets, sculptors, textile artists, writers, and performers, as well as editors, patrons, and distributors of some of the avant-garde's most exciting pamphlets and journals – for too long they remained markedly absent from art histories and critical analyses of the movements to which they contributed, and have attracted serious critical attention only in recent decades. Persistently placed at the periphery, both by their colleagues and by the authors of personal and critical accounts of the avant-garde, their voices have been unjustly neglected; they have been denied the recognition they deserve.

Roberts's painting – an imaginative reconstruction created over forty-five years after the peak of Vorticist activities – reinforces the notion that creative women were considered only adjuncts to the avant-garde's male core, and that such attitudes to, and misunderstanding of, their involvement in the various groups and movements prevailed throughout the twentieth century, long after the avant-garde's rebellious activities had petered out. The painting therefore underscores a twofold exclusion: women's exclusion from the (entirely male) inner circles of movements and their subsequent exclusion from, or relegation to the margins of, historical accounts and critical analyses of the avant-garde. The painting raises questions about the challenges faced by female creatives seeking to become active and duly recognised members of avant-garde groups, fully participating in all aspects of their radical activities; the extent to which they were able to penetrate the avant-garde's male core; and whether they were ever taken seriously as anything more than cheerleaders on the side-lines supporting ostensibly more serious and accomplished male artists and writers.

The term 'avant-garde', originally a French military term meaning 'vanguard' or 'advanced guard', has become synonymous with innovation, formal experiment, the new and the modern. In contemporary literary criticism the term has become useful for grouping anti-traditional movements whose aesthetic programmes are defined by revolutionary artistic practices and a rejection of the past. Yet there are continuing debates about the complexity of the term and its varied usage: is avant-garde a historical category? If so, where

does the avant-garde begin and end? By which criteria do we define an avant-garde movement, artist, or writer? Is the avant-garde synonymous with or distinct from modernism? Is it an aesthetic or political category? Does the term have specific meaning, or has it become a vague label for anything deemed even subtly experimental?

For Peter Bürger the avant-garde is already historical. He describes the original avant-garde as a radical attack upon the autonomous institution of art, which sought to subvert traditional notions of art. Avant-garde movements, Bürger argues, were reacting to the ineffectiveness of art, exemplified by Aestheticism's slogan 'l'art pour l'art', or 'art for art's sake'; they sought to bring art back into the praxis of life and make it socially relevant: 'the intention of the avant-gardiste may be defined as the attempt to direct toward the practical the aesthetic experience […] that Aestheticism developed.'[4] For Bürger, the movements belonging to the original, historical avant-garde share this ideological orientation, intent on bringing about 'the sublation of art into life'. As Bürger sees it, the unique historical conditions for the avant-garde arose once Aestheticism had separated art from life; only then could the avant-garde attack the institution of art for its autonomy. It is for this reason that he emphasises the specific historical context of the avant-garde and argues that later instances of avant-garde activity – what Bürger refers to as 'neoavant-garde' – are merely repetitions that lack the authenticity of the original: 'The Neoavant-garde, which stages for a second time the avant-gardiste break with tradition, becomes a manifestation that is void of sense and that permits the positing of any meaning whatever.'[5] Used as Bürger would have it, the term avant-garde has specific historical relevance and cannot be appropriately applied to any later developments or movements.

Whilst Bürger rightly identifies the emergence of the historical avant-garde in relation to Aestheticism, the historical specificity of his theory has been criticized as limiting. Some critics have argued against Bürger's idea of an all-embracing intention which unifies all avant-garde movements (namely the

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[4] Peter Bürger, *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, translated by Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), p. 34.
[5] Bürger, p. 61.

intention to reintegrate art into the praxis of life), claiming instead that the main driving force of avant-garde movements was the shared challenge of, and fascination with, new cultural technologies.[6] Others have challenged Bürger's failure to see the future potential of the avant-garde and post-avant-garde art. Susan Rubin Suleiman identifies a continuing thread of avant-garde consciousness in art beyond the Second World War: 'there has existed, at least since Surrealism, a strong and almost continuous current in French literary and artistic practice and thought, based on the double exigency to "be absolutely modern" (Rimbaud) and to change, if not the world (Marx), at least – as a first step – the way we think about the world.'[7] Beyond early twentieth-century movements, Suleiman includes under the umbrella of the avant-garde, in the French context, the Situationists, the *Tel Quel* group of the 1960s, and various feminist groups after 1968, claiming that they 'also constituted genuine artistic and cultural avant-gardes'.[8]

In his account of the development of the concept of an aesthetic avant-garde, Matei Calinescu explains that the term became an important instrument of twentieth-century literary criticism, that 'subsequently underwent a natural process of "historicization," but at the same time, with increased circulation, […] took on an almost uncontrollable diversity […].'[9] It has been adopted in various different ways to designate a number of radical movements spanning a broad time period, from nineteenth-century Symbolism to late twentieth-century postmodernism, spanning movements including Dada, Surrealism, Cubism, Fauvism, De Stijl, Imagism, Futurism, Vorticism, *Tel Quel*, and the feminist movement. For the purposes of this thesis, the term 'avant-garde' will be used predominantly to refer to the radical and highly experimental artistic movements that burst into life throughout Europe and in the United States (chiefly New York) in the early years of the twentieth century. It will be used to designate those movements belonging to what is often referred to as the

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[6] See for example *European Avant-Garde: New Perspectives*, ed. by Dietrich Scheunemann (Amsterdam; Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000).
[7] Susan Rubin Suleiman, *Subversive Intent: Gender, Politics, and the Avant-Garde* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press, 1990), p. 13.
[8] Ibid., p. 12.
[9] Matei Calinescu, *Five Faces of Modernity: Modernism, Avant-Garde, Decadence, Kitsch, Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), p. 117.

historical avant-garde, such as Dada in Paris, Zürich, New York, and Berlin, Futurism in Italy, Vorticism in London, and Surrealism in France. Whilst the emphasis here will be on the term's usefulness as a historical category, the future potential for avant-garde art is acknowledged and celebrated. It is intended that this study will highlight a (female) lineage for later examples of avant-garde creative practice, pointing to potential influences and comparisons.

The artists and writers that belonged to the various movements of the early twentieth-century avant-garde were radical experimentalists in search of new forms of artistic expression adequate to the changing world around them. Positioning themselves against old modes of thinking and outdated aesthetic practices, they set about exploding traditional notions of art and literature. Through aesthetic disruption they explored new expressive possibilities in a variety of forms and media, including poetry, prose, painting, sculpture, textile arts, puppet making, performance art, and theatre. Whilst the movements varied in their membership, geographical location, aesthetic aims, and artistic practices, they shared in a similar endeavour: discontent with the *status quo* and opposed to the values of contemporary culture, the avant-gardes sought to bring about cultural, social, and political change through artistic rebellion. For Suleiman,

> The hallmark of these movements was a collective project […] that linked artistic experimentation and a critique of outmoded artistic practices with an ideological critique of bourgeois thought and a desire for social change, so that the activity of writing [and creating visual artworks] could also be seen as a genuine intervention in the social, cultural, and political arena.[10]

For the avant-gardists, the creation of radically innovative art and literature was at the centre of a broader rebellion against the politics and social values of their times.

Avant-garde women's marginal position in many ways aligns them with that of avant-garde groups as a whole. As Suleiman points out: 'If […] culture is "like" a space to be mapped or a printed page, then the place of women, and of avant-garde movements, has traditionally been situated away from the center

[10] Suleiman, p. 12.

[sic], "on the fringe," in the margins.'[11] But, as Suleiman goes on to argue, unlike the avant-garde movements to which they belonged, women have not chosen this peripheral position: 'One difference is that avant-garde movements have willfully [sic] chosen their marginal position, the better to launch attacks at the center [sic], whereas women have more often than not been relegated to the margins […].'[12] Yet whilst they did not choose to occupy the margins of these already marginal spaces – to be marginalised either within the groups in which they participated (excluded from the male inner circles) or by ensuing histories and critical appraisals – many women did actively choose to position themselves within the peripheral avant-gardes. Situated on the fringes of, and counter to, mainstream culture, these movements offered a space from which women artists and writers could cultivate their artistic practice, challenge and disrupt aesthetic traditions, and criticise contemporary values; a place from which they, too, could launch attacks at the centre (the institutions of Art and Literature, the patriarchy, and mainstream bourgeois culture).

Yet, whilst the avant-garde offered women an exciting, collaborative space in which to explore and nurture their creative talents, there is evidence that, in many cases, their male colleagues did not take them seriously as talented artists and writers. Despite their radical attitudes and attacks on outmoded thought, the gender politics of the avant-garde remained, for the most part, fairly traditional.[13] While the male avant-gardists fulminated against aspects of the *status quo*, criticising contemporary attitudes, challenging outdated aesthetic traditions, and disrupting traditional artistic forms in their search for radical new possibilities for expression, it seems they nonetheless reinforced the traditional patriarchal place of woman in their treatment of their fellow female avant-gardists and in some cases (particularly in Surrealism) in their artworks. In the case of Surrealism, Whitney Chadwick argues that 'From the beginning, male Surrealists encouraged creative activity among women associated with the

[11] Ibid., p. 14.
[12] Ibid.
[13] In the case of Dada, Naomi Sawelson-Gorse argues that 'this movement of absolute rebellion was also one of repression' where 'misogyny prevailed in a consistent way.' 'Preface' to *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity*, ed. by Sawelson-Gorse (Cambridge, MA; London, England: MIT Press, 2001), pp. x-xviii (p. xii).

group and demanded the liberation of all women from the bondage of home and hearth.'[14] But, whilst they welcomed women creatives, 'they increasingly narrowed their definition of the role of the Surrealist woman to direct attention away from political [and artistic] activism and elicit little more from women active in the group than their signatures on Surrealist tracts and manifestos.'[15] At a time when the fight for gender equality and women's suffrage was being fought in Europe and the United States (British and American women would win the fight sooner, being granted suffrage by 1918 and 1920, respectively; in France, it would be another twenty-six years until women were given the vote in 1944) the attitudes of the prevailing patriarchy continued to permeate the avant-garde's gender relations, with women's socio-political and economic position impacting on their status as artists and writers. Female avant-gardists were pushed out to the peripheries by an entrenched and persistent misogyny from which even the progressive avant-gardes seemed unable, or unwilling, to break free.

In recent decades a field of scholarship has emerged which has set about the work of unearthing and re-examining women's diverse and important roles in avant-garde circles. Gloria Feman Orenstein paved the way in an article for *The Feminist Art Journal* in 1973 in which she underscored the lack of serious study of the works of women Surrealists.[16] Frustrated by the repeated analysis and documentation of the innovative works and ideas of Surrealism's male artists and writers, Orenstein called for the international study and dissemination of works by Surrealist women artists, arguing that the history of Surrealism would remain incomplete until the works of its female artists had become:

> accessible on an international scale through exhibitions, monographic studies and translations, and until their own interpretations of the spirit, themes, and techniques of Surrealism are given their rightful place

[14] Whitney Chadwick, *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) (first published 1985), p. 14.
[15] Ibid., p. 31.
[16] Gloria Orenstein, 'Women of Surrealism', *The Feminist Art Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2 (Spring 1973), 1 and 15-21.

> alongside the canons of thought that until now have been the only official version we have had of the meaning and importance of Surrealism.[17]

Ensuing work by feminist scholars has begun the important task of disinterring the works of female artists, writers, sculptors, musicians, dancers, textile artists, and performers across the avant-garde's many movements, factions, and geographical centres. In an effort to reinstate women within the histories of the avant-garde researchers have questioned the obstacles facing female creatives and scrutinized the mechanisms behind the persistent exclusion of their works; they have excavated, examined, and reappraised diverse works by a great number of creative women, retrieving their contributions from the verges of art-histories and literary canons and bringing them into full view.

Since the 1970s there have been significant developments in the research on women in Surrealism, with several influential studies making headway in redressing the imbalance perpetuated by existing narratives of the avant-garde. Chadwick's study *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, first published in 1985, foregrounds history's failure to recognize women artists as essential to the development of Surrealist theory and practice, and seeks to challenge this omission.[18] Undertaking detailed analysis of the content and meaning of works by twenty-one women Surrealists, including Léonor Fini, Meret Oppenheim, Valentine Hugo, Frida Kahlo, Eileen Agar, Leonora Carrington and Dorothea Tanning, Chadwick questions the place of woman – both real and imagined – in Surrealism, and shines a spotlight on the participation of (real) women in the movement, especially in the visual arts. Two volumes of essays followed on from Chadwick's influential first study: *Surrealism and Women*, edited by Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli, and Gwen Raaberg, and a volume edited by Chadwick, *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*.[19] Each volume has contributed to the revision of Surrealism and an expansion of existing conceptions of the movement, addressing issues including the representation of

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[17] Orenstein, p. 1.
[18] Chadwick, *Women Artists.*
[19] *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Mary Ann Caws *et al* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The MIT Press, 1991). *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, ed. by Chadwick (Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: The MIT Press, 1991).

the female subject in Surrealism, male surrealist practice, the problems experienced by women working within the surrealist context (including navigating the Surrealist concept of woman as objectified muse and the misogyny of some male Surrealists who were unable to view women as independent creators), and the extent to which women engaged with surrealist principles in their work. Gwen Raaberg asks a pivotal question concerning women's engagement with a predominantly male surrealist discourse: 'How did the women insert themselves into the male surrealist discourse and/or claim for themselves the subject position of a surrealist work?'[20] Surrealism's women artists have also been the focus of a number of exhibitions, including the 2009 show *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists & Surrealism* at Manchester Art Gallery. Curator Patricia Allmer's book, published in accompaniment to the exhibition, explores the paintings and photographs of three generations of women Surrealist artists, including Leonora Carrington, Frida Kahlo, Francesca Woodman, Eileen Agar, Penny Slinger, Dorothea Tanning and Dora Maar, amongst others.[21] In the study Allmer draws attention to the patriarchal stance of Surrealism, in which women are positioned as muses and *femme-enfants* instead of radical artists. Challenging this entrenched stance, Allmer claims for women Surrealists an anarchic position of 'inbetweenness and motion', drawing attention to the ways in which their artworks disrupt order and convention, challenge binaries, and deconstruct hierarchical patriarchal structures, 'replacing stability with flux, singularity with multiplicity, separation with transgression, and being with becoming and transformation'.[22] More recently, Chadwick's 2017 monograph *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism* documents the female friendships that shaped the lives and nurtured the work of women Surrealists, such as that of Claude Cahun, Suzanne Malherbe and Jacqueline Lamba Breton, shifting the perspective to the intimate and

[20] Gwen Raaberg, 'The Problematics of Women and Surrealism', in *Surrealism and Women*, ed. by Caws *et al*, pp. 1-10 (p. 5).
[21] Patricia Allmer, *Angels of Anarchy: Women Artists & Surrealism* (Munich: Prestel, 2009).
[22] Ibid., p. 12. Arguably, these characteristics are not unique to the works of women Surrealists but can be seen as the distinctive features of, more broadly, the rebellious avant-garde.

creative female networks within the surrealist group, and making the stories and biographies of Surrealist women more accessible to a wider public.[23]

The women of Surrealism have been the focus of much recuperative feminist investigation in recent years – due, in large part, to the great number who joined its ranks from the late 1920s onwards, and who continued to play an important role in Surrealism's 'second wave' after World War Two. But they are not the only group of women to have suffered neglect in accounts and critical explorations of the early twentieth-century avant-garde; feminist scholars have called attention to the widespread omission of women's participation across all avant-garde movements. *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism: Almost Lost to History* highlights the role of women in Futurism, examining the work of those who experimented with painting and who combined modes of expression, expressing themselves in poetry and dance, or word and image.[24] It situates women Futurists as participants who 'cooperated with the movement for the revolutionary spirit it offered them', whilst not necessarily aligning themselves with all of its 'official positions'.[25] A more recent addition to the literature on women and Futurism is Paola Sica's study *Futurist Women: Florence, Feminism and the New Sciences*.[26] Focusing on a group of women involved in the journal *L'Italia futurista* from 1916-1918, Sica identifies them as 'the first and most conspicuous group of female writers, artists and performers to elaborate Futurist ideals' and engage with mainstream Futurist discourse, who both expanded on established ideas and sought new forms of expression to challenge and revise the ideas introduced by Marinetti.[27] In the German context, Shulamith Behr's 1988 study *Women Expressionists* is the first to highlight the contributions of women artists to the Expressionist movement.[28] Showcasing the work of ten women artists – Käthe Kollwitz, Paula Modersohn-Becker, Gabriele Münter, Clara

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[23] Chadwick, *The Militant Muse: Love, War and the Women of Surrealism* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2017).
[24] Mirella Bentivoglio and Franca Zoccoli, *The Women Artists of Italian Futurism: Almost Lost to History* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 1997).
[25] Ibid., p. 4.
[26] Paola Sica, *Futurist Women: Florence, Feminism and the New Sciences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[27] Ibid., pp. 1-2.
[28] Shulamith Behr, *Women Expressionists* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1988).

Ann-Marie Nauen, Olga Oppenheimer, Marianne Werefkin, Sigrid Hjertén, Vera Nilsson, Erma Barrera-Bossi, and Jacoba van Heemakerck – Behr challenges the dominant single-gendered view of Expressionism and recognises the independence of women artists who not only took part in, but also assisted the growth of the movement.

The early years of this century have seen an increased interest in and acknowledgement of the role played by women in Dada, with scholars scrutinizing the movement's gender dynamics and bringing to the fore women's interventions as artists, writers, and performers. *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity* edited by Naomi Sawelson-Gorse brings together research into the activities of Dada women, with a focus on those who engaged with Dada in New York.[29] This diverse range of critical essays addresses crucial questions about gender roles and identities, women's contributions to Dada thought and practice, and woman as muse and trope in Dada art. The volume includes considerations of individual women Dadaists (Rudolf E. Kuenzli, 'Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven and New York Dada'), discussions of woman as the subject of Dada art (Dorothea Dietrich, 'Love as Commodity: Kurt Schwitter's Collages of Women'), and questions of feminine and masculine performativities (Amelia Jones, '"Women" in Dada: Elsa, Rrose, and Charlie'). Ruth Hemus's 2009 study *Dada's Women* shifts the perspective to the European hubs of the Dada movement, highlighting the work of five women Dadaists who intervened in Dada through a variety of media: from poetry, prose and manifestos, to collage, puppet-making, textile arts and performance.[30] Conducting extensive and detailed research on individual artists and writers – including Emmy Hennings, Sophie Taeuber, Hannah Höch, Suzanne Duchamp and Céline Arnauld – Hemus's study is an important contribution to the task of writing women back into the narratives of Dada. Most notably, Hemus's study is the first to recognise and champion the works of the Dada poet Céline Arnauld. The most recent addition to the literature on women in Dada is Paula K. Kamenish's, *Mamas of Dada:*

[29] *Women in Dada: Essays on Sex, Gender and Identity*, ed. by Sawelson-Gorse.
[30] Ruth Hemus, *Dada's Women* (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

*Women of the European Avant-Garde*, published in 2015.[31] The study illuminates the contributions of six women to Dada, including Gabrielle Buffet, Germaine Everling, and Juliette Roche. As well as considering women's involvement as artists, writers, and creators, Kamenish's study claims a space in the critical literature on Dada for those women who were not involved as creative practitioners, but who played a supporting role in the movement and made important contributions in other ways.

Unlike the women of Dada, Surrealism, and Futurism, the women artists and writers of the British avant-garde movement Vorticism have attracted far less critical attention. This is due perhaps, in part, to the fact that Vorticism itself often sits in the shadow of its better-known continental counterparts. To date, a small amount of published research has begun to address key questions about the role that women played in the British avant-garde. Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry's article 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism' considers the work of the female Vorticists Jessica Dismorr, Kate Lechmere, Helen Saunders and Dorothy Shakespear, with a particular focus on works by Dismorr and Saunders.[32] Discussing the concepts of the 'new woman' and urban mobility, the authors examine the ways in which the modern metropolis both aided and encouraged women's participation in avant-garde movements and informed their works. They convincingly argue that the work of the women artists associated with Vorticism: 'powerfully and heterogeneously addressed the project of modernity, and the intersections between sexuality, subjectivity and space.'[33] Miranda Hickman, in her chapter 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism', examines the gender identity of Vorticism and considers the appeal of such an aggressively masculinist

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[31] Paula K. Kamenish, *Mamas of Dada: Women of the European Avant-Garde* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2015).
[32] Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism', in *BLAST: Vorticism 1914 – 1918*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 59 – 72.
[33] Ibid., p. 72. See also: Beckett and Cherry, 'Modern women, modern spaces: women, metropolitan culture and Vorticism', in *Women Artists and Modernism*, ed. by Katy Deepwell (Manchester & NY: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp. 36-54; and Beckett and Cherry, 'Women Under the Banner of Vorticism', *Internationaal Centrum Voor Structuuranalyse En Constructivisme,* Cahier 8/9, (December 1988), 129-143.

movement to emergent women artists.[34] These valuable investigations shine a spotlight on Vorticism's female side, examining the position of women in Vorticism in light of early twentieth-century concepts of womanhood, interrogating the gender politics of the group, and highlighting the work of the movement's female artists and writers. Against the backdrop of the studies mentioned above on women in Surrealism, Dada, Futurism, and Expressionism, they also call attention to the gap in research on women's contributions to Vorticism and invite much-needed further research.

The successful recovery and reappraisal of a large body of work by avant-garde women has fundamentally altered perceptions of, as well as critical approaches to, the avant-garde, stimulating further reassessments of individual movements and their female contributors. It may seem, then, that the process of uncovering and championing women's interventions in the avant-garde is nearing an endpoint, yet it has only just begun. There is still much to be excavated, questioned, and researched in order to bring these women, and their works, the recognition they deserve. This is particularly the case for the avant-garde's women wordsmiths. There is no lack of avant-garde women's writing – poetry, prose, dramatic works, critical essays, manifestoes, collage novels – yet, in the re-assessment of such radical artistic movements seemingly dominated by experiments in the visual arts (including works such as Meret Oppenheim's fur-lined tea-cup, Helen Saunders's geometric paintings, Nusch Éluard's collages, Sophie Taeuber's puppets) there has been a tendency in these recuperative endeavours to focus on the works of women artists.[35] Women who undertook

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[34] Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism', in *Vorticism: New Perspectives*, ed. by Mark Antliff and Scott W. Klein (Oxford: OUP, 2013), pp. 119-136.

[35] In addition to the written research, there have in recent years been several exhibitions showcasing the works of women painters, illustrators, sculptors, textile artists and collagists, such as 'Women of the Avant-Garde 1920-1940' (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 14 February – 28 May 2012), which brought together the visual works of eight female artists, including the photographer Claude Cahun, painter Sonia Delauney, and film director Germaine Dulac. For accompanying catalogue see: *Women of the Avant-Garde 1920 – 1940*, ed. by Michael Juul Holm, Kristen Degel, Mette Marcus and Jeanne Rank (Louisiana: Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, 2012). Other exhibitions include: 'Die Dada La Dada She Dada', the first ever exhibition devoted to Dada's women, which featured the work of three artists, as well as two writers (Forum Schlossplatz, Aarau, Switzerland, 25 October 2014 – 18 January 2015); and several exhibitions devoted to individual women artists such as Hannah Höch (Whitechapel Gallery, London, 15

experimental explorations primarily in the written word have been especially neglected and remain on the verges of, or entirely excluded from, these influential reappraisals. This neglect could be attributed, at least in part, to the fact that, as Penelope Rosemont argues in the case of Surrealism, women writers in the avant-garde were a minority among visual artists.[36] Rosemont's *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology* is a notable exception to the focus on avant-garde women artists. It documents women's written contributions to Surrealism throughout the twentieth century and shows how, through many different genres of writing, women played a crucial role in the development of Surrealism's experimental theory and practice. This collection is an invaluable resource, providing access to the poems, essays, manifestoes, and literary games of the women surrealists; but there is much scope for further, more detailed research on women writers across the avant-garde, as well as critical analysis of these texts and others.

Another reason for the absence of critical work on women avant-garde writers is perhaps their thorny position. Suleiman's foundational work within feminist literary criticism focused on the avant-garde underscores the complexities of women writers' 'double allegiance' (to both the formal experiments of the historical avant-gardes and the feminist critique of sexual ideologies) and 'doubly marginal' position (relegated to the margins of culture both as an avant-gardist and as a woman).[37] The avant-garde woman writer is also, Suleiman suggests, 'doubly intolerable', because her writing conforms neither to 'the "usual revolutionary point of view"' nor to traditional (feminine, personal) forms of women's writing.[38] Examinations of avant-garde women's writing must attend to such complexities, contradictions, and contraflows,

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January – 23 March 2014), Leonora Carrington (Tate Liverpool, 6 March – 31 May 2015), Dorothea Tanning (Tate Modern, London, 27 February – 9 June 2019), and Dora Maar (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 5 June – 29 July 2019).

[36] 'Of the more than three hundred women who have participated in the Surrealist Movement, writers have been a minority.' *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (London: The Athlone Press, 1998), p. xxxvii. Suleiman contends that, in Surrealism, 'women were excluded before they even got started – and this was *especially* true of writers, who even in later years remained a very small minority among women Surrealists', p. 30.

[37] Suleiman, p. xvii and p. 11-32.

[38] Ibid., p. 15.

grappling with a body of writing that resists neat categorisation. Suleiman brings questions of gender and gender politics to the fore in her analysis of the French avant-garde, in particular drawing attention to the male subject position of Surrealism and the difficulties this posed for artistic and literary practice by Surrealist women.

In the field of Anglo-American Modernism studies more strides have been made in rectifying the gender imbalance in critical accounts of modernist writing and women writers have been in receipt of significantly more critical attention than their counterparts engaged in the European avant-garde. Elizabeth Frost's study *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* examines the work of five modern and contemporary women writers who wrote in innovative poetic forms.[39] In the work of Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy, Frost identifies a vibrant feminist avant-garde tradition and traces a matrilineage for later experimental women writers including Sonia Sanchez, Susan Howe, and Harryette Mullen. Frost brings together feminist and avant-garde theories to reveal the ways in which modern and contemporary women writers employ poetic discourses to articulate their own alternatives to existing traditions, challenging binaries of race and gender as well as delimiting literary precedents. The anthology *Modernist Women Poets* showcases work by 'the great women of Modernism' and includes poems by fourteen women writers, among them Amy Lowell, H.D., Djuna Barnes, and Marianne Moore, as well as writers who actively engaged with the avant-garde, such as Gertrude Stein, Mina Loy, and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven.[40] Mary Ann Caws's book *Glorious Eccentrics: Modernist Women Painting and Writing*, explores the impact of seven female creatives on the modernist movement, writing the lives and creative achievements of women such as Paula Modersohn-Becker, Dorothy Bussy, Dora Carrington and Judith Gautier into the history of modernism.[41] Further interrogating the issue of gender, Bonnie Kime Scott's edited collection *The Gender of Modernism*

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[39] Elizabeth Frost, *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry* (Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2003).
[40] *Modernist Women Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Robert Hass and Paul Ebenkamp (Berkeley, California: Counterpoint, 2014).
[41] Caws, *Glorious Eccentrics: Modernist Women Painting and Writing* (New York; Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

challenges the persistent gendering of modernism as masculine.[42] Bringing together texts by British and American writers, both male and female, the anthology seeks a new scope for modernism in which 'the crisis in gender identification that underlies much of modernist literature' is brought to the fore and examined.[43] The collection includes work by women writers such as Virginia Woolf, Zora Neale Hurston, Rebecca West, Mina Loy, and Dorothy Richardson, as well as the work of male modernists, including T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence, and James Joyce.

In the field of avant-garde studies there remains a dearth of critical literature on avant-garde women's writing that considers explorations in the written word by women associated with Vorticism, Dada, Surrealism, Expressionism and Futurism. To date, there is no study which undertakes a comparative analysis of texts by women associated with different groups who both participated in and drove the avant-garde's linguistic experiments and aesthetic innovations. Women who contributed poetry, prose, manifestoes, essays, pamphlets, automatic writing, and language games are still in want of the level of critical attention their male counterparts have already received. An examination of the work of the avant-garde's women writers must build on existing research on avant-garde women artists to ask fundamental questions about the roles that women writers played in these movements: what was the status of women writers in the avant-garde? How did they influence or interpret the dominant aesthetic ideas? What contributions did they make to literary and linguistic innovations? Within Dada, women were penning and performing manifestos, editing innovative avant-garde journals, writing bold and imaginative dramatic works, and re-thinking poetic form. Elsewhere, the avant-garde's women writers were drawing inspiration from the bombastic manifestos of the Futurists and the Vorticists; through poetry they were challenging the patriarchy and the avant-garde's culture of misogyny. Women in Surrealism were undertaking their own explorations of the unconscious in poetry and prose, and questioning male Surrealists' fixation with the female muse. Many of the

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[42] *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Bonnie Kime Scott (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).
[43] Ibid., p. 2.

avant-garde's women writers were creating in dialogue with developments in avant-garde visual arts, including Vorticist sculpture, Dada photography, and Cubist collage; and they were tackling diverse themes, including global conflict, childbirth and motherhood, machine technologies, existential anxiety, lesbian desire, and celestial adventure. The present study continues the dialogue initiated by those scholars who explored the visual artworks of the women who participated in these various groups, but shifts the focus to women's avant-garde literary works – in particular, their experiments in poetry.

**Give them their Voices**

As well as explorations in visual media and performance art – including painting, dance, collage, filmmaking, set design, performance, sculpture, and textiles – the avant-garde was concerned with investigating, interrogating, and experimenting with language and literary form. Arguably, the written (and spoken) word is central to the very character of the avant-garde: it was through strident, bombastic, and often eccentric, written and spoken manifestos that individual groups sought to express their radical agendas and position themselves in opposition to concepts such as logic and mental lethargy. The Futurists declared their intent 'to sing the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness'; they railed against immobility and rejected the past, celebrating instead dynamism, the 'beauty of speed', and the noisy roar of modern engines.[44] The Dadaists employed the manifesto to provoke their audience – 'You are all accused; stand up!'[45] – and to issue distinctive statements characteristic of Dada's irrational and rebellious nature:

> The labour of quixotic cakes, the fluttering hearing of the cook from automatic cellars escapes like a whistle of steam from the organ of beliefs in the hypertrophied refuge ignorant in many languages. This is why:

[44] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909', in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Umbro Apollonio (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973), pp. 19-24 (p. 21).
[45] Francis Picabia, 'Dada Cannibalistic Manifesto' (1920), in *Manifesto: A Century of isms*, ed. by Caws (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), pp. 316-317 (p. 316).

> Construction inflated with oxygen licence cheap scent of porcelain grimaces with golden braids, the diet of novices or the charity of puppets[46]

In his manifestos André Breton laid the theoretical foundations for Surrealism, introduced his method of automatic writing, and set out to define Surrealism as the antithesis to what he perceived to be the tyrannous reign of logic: 'Surrealism, such as I conceive of it, asserts our complete *nonconformism* […].'[47] Like the Dadaists and Futurists, the Vorticists utilised the manifesto to stridently denounce the *status quo*, to identify themselves as 'Primitive Mercenaries' in the war against traditional artistic expression, and to establish 'revolt' as 'the normal state'.[48]

Despite differences in their political leanings, aesthetic outlook, and creative approach, and notwithstanding intense rivalries between avant-garde groups, avant-gardists were united in their search for new forms of expression adequate to express the rapidly accelerating modern world. They were responding to the swift acceleration of technological advancements which were changing everyday life – including developments in communication, transport, and entertainment – and to the atrocities and destruction wrought by the First World War. In reaction, they sought to shake up, renew, and reinvent what they perceived to be a stagnant language inadequate to capture and convey the experiences of the world around them. The war had also awakened avant-gardists to the abuses of language, so readily used for corrupt purposes; they recognised that language was bound up with systems of power and began to question the very structures of conventional linguistic forms. Using innovative methods and techniques, they aimed at liberating the written word from staid conventions and set about developing a new way of conceiving language and literature; their experiments would take the form of poems, leaflets emblazoned

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[46] Gabrielle Buffet, 'Little Manifesto' (1919), trans. by Michelle Owoo, in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Dawn Ades (London: Tate, 2006), pp. 117-118 (p. 117).
[47] André Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. by Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1972), pp. 3-47 (p. 47).
[48] 'Manifesto II', *Blast*, no. 1 (June 1914), 30-43 (p. 30 and p. 42).

with slogans, essays, novels, automatic writing, word games, sound poetry, manifestos, and simultaneous poetry performances (in which several performers speak at once).

In their vehement rejection of traditional linguistic and literary forms, both the Futurists and Dadaists espoused a kind of verbal vandalism. The Futurists called for the brutal destruction of syntax and rejection of punctuation, embracing instead 'fistfuls of essential words in no conventional order' that would give rise to an 'unchained lyricism' of 'words-in-freedom'.[49] Through the destruction of traditional linguistic forms they sought a 'swift, brutal, and immediate lyricism', a 'telegraphic lyricism', and form of 'lyric simultaneity'.[50] Similarly, the Dadaists sought to renew language by exploding limiting linguistic conventions and reducing language to its smallest components. They constructed sound poems entirely of phonemes and revelled in anti-rational word play. In their experiments with the written word they aimed at revealing the arbitrary nature of language by cultivating irrationality and embracing the role of chance. Instructing his readers on how to make a poem from a newspaper article, Dada poet Tristan Tzara, in his work 'To Make a Dadaist Poem', underscores the privileged role of chance in the Dada creative process:

> […] cut out carefully all of the words that make up the article and put them in a bag.
> Shake gently.
> Then remove each cutting one after the other in the order in which they emerge from the bag.
> Copy conscientiously.
> The poem will be like you.
> You have now become "an infinitely original writer with a charming sensitivity, although still misunderstood by the common people".[51]

The Surrealists in Paris were also searching for new forms of expression. But unlike the Futurists and Dadaists, who sought a form of literary and

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[49] Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax – Imagination without Strings – Words-in-Freedom 1913', in *Futurist Manifestos*, ed. by Apollonio, pp. 95-106 (p. 98, p. 99).
[50] Ibid., p. 104 and p. 105.
[51] Tristan Tzara, 'To Make a Dadaist Poem', trans. by Ian Monk, in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 199-200.

linguistic demolition, the Surrealists looked to harness the fluid forms of the irrational unconscious in order to wrest the literary work from conscious control. In their experiments with *Écriture automatique* (automatic writing) they sought to tap into the unconscious mind and to transcribe its contents without the intrusions of conscious thought or the limitations of syntactic and grammatical structures. The resulting surrealist texts are characterised by irrational juxtapositions, loosened syntactical structures, and assemblage. For the Vorticists, the concept of the vortex was central to their explorations in art and literature. Described by Pound as 'the point of maximum energy', the vortex represents, 'the greatest efficiency', and encapsulates the dynamism, force, and energy of the modern industrial landscape.[52] The rapid rotatory force of the vortex, as conceived by the Vorticists, is able to draw in and distil, to channel vitalism and energy into carefully moulded forms. Within this concept the Vorticists strived for visual and literary forms that reflected the efficiency and precision achieved at the still centre of the whirling vortex. In contrast with the haphazard creative process of the Dadaists and the irrational peregrinations of the Surrealists' experiments in automatic writing, the Vorticists were searching for new expressive forms through the vitalism and stillness of the vortex.

It was in this fertile experimental context that women writers engaged with and participated in the avant-garde's quest for a new language. Despite their questionable gender politics, and their reputation as 'men's clubs', avant-garde groups provided women writers with a space in which to nurture their independent vision and develop innovative forms of expression. The avant-garde was the optimal space for women to experiment with language, to probe the limits of literary expression, and to challenge accepted ideas about literary form and content. Some women pursued new forms of expression by elaborating on those established by their male colleagues, experimenting with automatic writing and authoring bold manifestos. Others sought a different direction, often one which ran counter to the ideas of the men in the group, or to the group's dominant aesthetic direction, developing surreal poetic imagery to criticise the objectification of women in Surrealism or adopting the machismo character of

[52] Ezra Pound, 'Vortex, Pound', *Blast,* no. 1, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (June 1914), 153-154 (p. 153).

the manifesto for feminist aims. In each case, the avant-garde provided an inspiring, collaborative space in which to explore and reinvent language. Women writers took part in all aspects of this collective endeavour and, as such, are of interest not only as individual creatives but also, as Sica argues, as 'important interlocutors for their male peers'.[53] It is impossible, then, to fully understand the avant-garde 'imperative' – the quest for a new language to express a new reality – and the various forms and styles of avant-garde literature that emerged from it, without taking into account all those that contributed to the radical explorations and experiments of these groups, including the avant-garde's audacious women writers.[54]

This study foregrounds the work of four avant-garde women who expressed themselves principally in the written word. Each of the women selected chose to situate themselves within the fervent experimental moment that was the historical avant-garde and align themselves with the radical artistic agendas of the various movements. All of them were associated with avant-garde groups, taking part in group meetings and activities, contributing texts to journals and little magazines, and signing group declarations and manifestos.[55] Yet their work has not been the focus of sustained close reading and detailed critical analysis that establishes them, and examines their linguistic explorations, within the avant-garde context. Additionally, these writers have not been treated together in a comparative study. The first chapter examines the work of the poet Céline Arnauld, an important contributor to the poetic perambulations of the Paris Dada group, who remained in relative obscurity until research by Hemus reclaimed her place in Dada. The second chapter focuses on Mina Loy, who engaged with various avant-gardists and avant-garde groups, including Dada in

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[53] Sica, p. 1.
[54] Willard Bohn, *The Avant-Garde Imperative: The Visionary Quest for a New Language* (New York: Cambria, 2013).
[55] Rosemont establishes criteria for selecting women to include in her anthology *Surrealist Women*, excluding those women who did not 'identify themselves with surrealism as a collective effort, and did not take part in surrealism as an organized activity' (p. xxxvii). The emphasis in her selection is on 'active participation in surrealism as a collective adventure.' (p. xxxvii). The present study includes women on the basis of their engagement with various avant-garde groups (however tangential) and the extent to which they both drew from, and contributed to, the aesthetic endeavours of the avant-garde.

New York and Futurism in Florence, and who is recognised for her poetry and prose works. Often discussed within Modernism studies, and considered alongside Anglo-American modernist writers, Loy has been the focus of considerably more critical analysis than any other writer considered here.[56] Her original literary creations were conceived within the cross-currents of the international avant-garde, but her work is yet to receive sustained comparative analysis with the numerous women writers who participated in Dada, Surrealism, Futurism, and Vorticism. Valentine Penrose, the French Surrealist poet and collagist, is discussed in the third chapter. She was one of few women to move in Surrealist circles in France in the 1920s, and is recognised both for her written and visual works. In the 1930s she was one of the most prolific of the surrealist women wordsmiths, yet research into her work remains scant. Finally, the fourth chapter considers the work of the little-known British Vorticist writer and artist Jessica Dismorr. Dismorr was at the forefront of the Vorticist group in London, but her participation and creative output, particularly her literary contributions, have been overlooked.

Each of these writers has received varying degrees of critical recognition, and I have chosen to bring together better-known writers, such as Loy, with their lesser-known contemporaries, such as Dismorr. I have arranged the chapters in non-chronological order to limit comparative readings shaped by notions of linear chronological progression. I have wanted, rather, to focus attention on individual chapters and to emphasise connections across the breadth of the study, irrespective of chronology. I have chosen to save the work of the lesser-known Dismorr for last, and intersperse the chapters on French and English writers to encourage comparisons across geographical borders. Similarly, within each chapter, the order of the poems examined is determined by thematic discussion, with the first poem in each chapter serving to highlight the writer's participation in the avant-garde. This selection of writers is necessarily restricted due to the limitations of space and time, but leaves scope for research

[56] As well as several monographs and numerous articles, Loy has been the focus of two collections of essays: *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. by Maeera Shreiber and Keith Tuma (Orono, Maine: The National Poetry Foundation, 1998) and *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, ed. by Suzanne Hobson and Rachel Potter (London: Salt Publishing, 2010).

into numerous other women writers who chose to participate in the experiments of the historical avant-garde, including those who took part in movements not discussed here, such as German Expressionism, British Surrealism, and Russian Futurism.

The writers selected for this study offer examples of women's participation in various early twentieth-century artistic movements: they supported, promoted, engaged with, contributed to, and intervened in, variously, Dada in Paris and New York, Futurism in Italy, Surrealism in France, and Vorticism in London. In choosing writers with ties to different and at times rival artistic movements, as well as to different geographical locations and linguistic and cultural contexts, my intention is to enhance the potential for the comparison of a wider variety of textual forms, themes, styles, and influences, with an emphasis on difference and diversity as opposed to a search only for commonalities. For the women of Surrealism, Caws demands, 'Give them their voice: they had one'.[57] This study responds to Caws's call to reading and extends it to women's voices from across the avant-garde; but where Caws's choice of words seems to express indirectly (albeit unintentionally) that these women had 'one' collective voice, the emphasis throughout the present study will be on plurivocality, with the aim of highlighting the diverse voices of the avant-garde's women writers and the distinctiveness of their individual creative output. The chapters that follow reveal variety in poetic form, political agenda, and thematic concerns, from Arnauld's polemic poetics to Penrose's phantasmagoric assemblages.

Through close reading the main aim of this study is to examine and illuminate the poetic works of women active in experimental avant-garde circles internationally. With close reference to individual texts I consider the ways in which women writers sought to find new forms of expression, and ask questions about their aesthetic aims. What did they envisage as the possibilities of language? What kinds of formal techniques did they employ or develop? In what ways is their writing experimental? Or to what extent is it intertextual, drawing on established literary models and trends? What are their imaginative

[57] Caws, 'Seeing the Surrealist Woman: We Are a Problem', in *Surrealism and Women*, pp. 11- 16 (p. 12).

strategies? And what imagery, themes, and motifs did they explore? In addition to these primary questions, this thesis considers the extent to which the strategies identified interact and intersect with the aesthetic aims of the movements with which these writers engaged. Can the literary strategies of these writers be contained within the existing discourses on Surrealism, Dada, Vorticism and Futurism? Or does their writing move beyond the aesthetic ideals of a particular group? Did women writers challenge conventional writing styles and techniques in ways similar to their male contemporaries? Or does their work diverge from that of their male colleagues? Such questions encourage consideration of the ways in which women's avant-garde writing is discussed, and cast doubt on the adequacy of simply slotting women writers into the existing narratives of the avant-garde.

An accurate understanding of the avant-garde demands attention to the works of the women who were active in it, whether or not – or precisely because – these works contradict or problematize our received notions of what a particular movement expounded or achieved. The work of the four writers examined in this study pushes at the boundaries of individual movements and exposes the limitations of extant critical discussions of the avant-garde. It shows us that avant-garde literature often cannot be contained within the aesthetic categories of any one group or interpreted only in the shadow of often-cited manifestos by male avant-gardists. Arnauld's poetry is characterised by irregular sound play and disruptive typography, but also by complex meaning and emotional nuance; Loy counters the masculinist narratives of Dada and Futurism with feminist avant-garde poetics; Penrose challenges the male Surrealists' fascination with the female muse with homosexual intimacy; and Dismorr's poetry offers a new dimension of Vorticist literature in which the writer is conceived as machine. It is not my goal to position these writers squarely within any one movement, but rather to reveal their participation in and divergences from those movements. An exploration of avant-garde women's writing can help us to flesh out our understanding of the avant-garde or take us beyond the limitations of those characteristics and categories that have been defined by the works of the avant-garde's male artists and writers.

Each chapter will consider a small number of texts in detail, and whilst the selection of works considered cannot fully represent the sizeable and wide-ranging poetic output of each of the writers examined here, it serves to give an idea of their work within the avant-garde context. This small number allows more space to closely examine the text and present extended critical commentaries that scrutinize layers of language and imagery. The writers examined here were preoccupied with the fundamental structures of language and literary form; they experimented with language as a multi-faceted material formed of sounds, plural meanings, and visual characteristics. It is apt, then, that their works be subject to close reading, so that we may examine the fine details of their experimental literary practice. In addition, this methodological approach enables us to focus on the peculiarities and nuances of avant-garde women's writing beyond the broader narratives of avant-garde experimentation. In this way, close reading becomes a form of cultural re-inscription, aiding the re-writing of extant narratives of avant-garde creative practice that do not take into account the work of women. My approach to the individual text is one of close critical unpicking, with a view to opening up the text and all its possible meanings – an unravelling of the text to reveal the threads which make up its semantic fabric. The resulting readings and interpretations will be exploratory and tentative – working analyses which, whilst endeavouring to unravel the oftentimes complex web of the text, will not seek to tie up loose ends, fully resolve contradictions, or identify fixed meanings. As a researcher of the avant-garde, it is imperative not to force coherence on texts which are, by their very nature, fluid, multiple, heterogeneous, and resistant to notions of fixity and coherence. Delving into experimental literary forms and strategies, these readings will venture a way in which to navigate often-challenging, and sometimes ostensibly hostile and impenetrable texts.

The intention in this study is not to segregate women writers from their male contemporaries or to cement the division of the sexes, but to contribute to inclusive discussions of the avant-garde and to demonstrate how these women writers have enriched the avant-garde's quest for new modes and forms of expression. Women's writing offers a largely unexplored corpus through which to revisit the aesthetic innovations at the centre of avant-garde activities.

Furthermore, close comparative analysis of avant-garde women's writing gives us the unique opportunity to have a new conversation about the avant-garde, not as a distinct set of rival groups dominated by men, but as a more fluid moment of multiple, interconnecting activities and conversations around experimentation, across movements, factions, geographical and linguistic borders, and cultural contexts.

## Céline Arnauld
## (1895-1952)

At the height of Dada's Paris manifestation in the early 1920s, a female literary voice appeared frequently alongside the more recognisable (male) culprits of the anarchic movement – that of Céline Arnauld. A writer of poetry, prose, and polemics, Arnauld participated extensively in the intense, 'ephemeral florescence' that was Paris Dada, contributing from its embryonic stages through to its demise and beyond.[58] She published poetry and prose in a variety of well-known and more modest Parisian avant-garde journals, including: Tzara's *Dada*, Paul Dermée's *Z*, Francis Picabia's *Cannibale*, Paul Eluard's *Proverbe*, and Breton's *Littérature*, as well as *L'Esprit Nouveau*, *391, Action*, *Ça Ira*, and *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*.[59] She also took part in the riotous and incendiary performances which were to bring about Paris Dada's notoriety: she most likely read her manifesto 'Ombrelle Dada' at the Salon des Indépendents on 5 February 1920;[60] in the 'DADAphone' number of the journal *Dada* she is listed as playing 'la femme enceinte' (the pregnant woman) in Tzara's 'The first celestial adventure of M. Antipyrine' performed at 'Manifestation Dada' held at the Maison de L'œuvre in March 1920;[61] and her name appears in the programme for the 'Dada Festival' of May 1920, at which she read her dialogue text 'Jeu d'échecs' (Chess Game).[62] As a key player in the movement, Arnauld is among those introduced by Paul Éluard in his poetic survey of the members of the Paris Dada group published in *Cannibale*, evocatively described as, 'Céline Arnauld, hair styled as a ship and a

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[58] Michel Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, trans. by Sharmila Ganguly (Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press, 2009), p. 149. Paris Dada emerged rapidly in 1920, and would reach its peak that same year, fizzling out in 1921, and finally ending sometime between 1922 and 1924. By 1924 André Breton would take full creative charge of a new avant-garde movement in Paris: Surrealism.

[59] For a bibliography of Arnauld's published works see Hemus, *Dada's Women* and Céline Arnauld and Paul Dermée, *Œuvres complètes: Tome I – Céline Arnauld*, ed. by Victor Martin-Schmets (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013) [hereafter *OC*].

[60] The twenty-three Dada manifestos published in *Littérature*, no. 13 (May 1920) were those performed at the Grand Palais des Champs-Élysées on Thursday 5 February 1920. Arnauld's 'Ombrelle Dada' is published on page 19, suggesting that the text was part of the programme that day.

[61] *Dada*, no. 7, ed. by Tristan Tzara (March 1920).

[62] For details of this performance, including the event programme, see Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, pp. 125-128.

parrot, eyelashes of glow-worms',[63] and a photograph of her is reproduced in the pages of *DADAphone*.[64] Her name takes its rightful place in the list of Dada's 'Présidents et Présidentes' in the first Paris edition of the journal *Dada* (*Bulletin Dada*) in March 1920.[65]

Arnauld positioned herself at the centre of Dada activities in Paris, both contributing to and drawing from its raucous creative energy. At the peak of Paris Dada, her status as a Dada poet was recognised not only within the avant-garde circles of Paris, but internationally. In an article on Dada in the Chicago-based literary journal *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, Richard Aldington identifies Arnauld as one of the 'numerous and talented authors' of the Dada circle, who are 'so obscure in their poetry'.[66] Yet, despite her active participation, and contemporaneous recognition of her role within the Paris Dada group, Arnauld's name and her literary accomplishments, as with so many avant-garde women, subsequently became occluded within the annals of twentieth-century culture. This is due, in part, to scholarly examinations and historical accounts which so frequently discuss Dada with reference only to its male participants. Anna Balakian writes that the Dada 'rebels were young men, who came to Paris from all over the world',[67] and Willard Bohn provides the following exclusionary account of the movement:

> In postwar Paris, the movement coalesced about four young men who were later to found Surrealism: André Breton, Philippe Soupault, Louis Aragon, and Paul Eluard. Before long they were joined by Picabia and Duchamp, who participated joyously in the general uproar, and by several

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[63] 'Céline Arnauld, coiffée navire et perroquet, les cils en vers luisants.' Paul Eluard, 'Présentation des Dadas: Présentations de circonstance', *Cannibale*, no. 1 (25 April 1920), [unpaginated]. Translated as 'Appropriate Introductions' in Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, pp. 150-151.
[64] *Dada*, no. 7 (March 1920).
[65] Other notable female avant-gardists included in this list are: Maria d'Arezzo, Alice Bailly, Gabrielle Buffet, Marguerite Buffet, Suzanne Duchamp, Germaine Everling, Mina Loy, and Sophie Taeuber. *Bulletin Dada*, no. 6 (Paris: March 1920), p. 2.
[66] This critical review was no doubt unpopular among the Dadaists as Aldington exclusively considers their work a result of the influence of the American avant-gardist Gertrude Stein. Richard Aldington, 'The Disciples of Gertrude Stein', *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*, ed. by Harriet Monroe, vol. XVII, no. 1 (October 1920), 35-40 (p. 37, p. 40).
[67] Anna Balakian, *Surrealism: The Road to the* Absolute (New York: The Noonday Press, 1959), p. 92.

> other major figures. These included Man Ray, who arrived from New York, Arp, Ernst, and Tzara himself.[68]

As Hemus reveals, Arnauld was conscious of her exclusion from accounts of Dada long before later criticism would all but erase her voice. Writing to Tzara in 1924, Arnauld expressed disappointment that in his history of the movement he had forgotten both her poetic voice and her active participation.[69] Such omissions, contemporaneous and subsequent, remain surprising given that Arnauld produced a substantial amount of written material during the first half of the twentieth century and continued to publish up until 1948, just a few years before her death and well beyond the brief efflorescence of Paris Dada. During her lifetime she published eleven volumes of poetry, including *Poèmes à claires-voies* (1920), *Point de mire* (1921), and *Guêpier de diamants* (1923).[70] She also published a novel, *Tournevire* (1919), a dramatic text, *L'Apaisement de l'éclipse, passion en deux actes* (1925), and several other works of poetry and prose, including an anthology.[71] Of the four writers included in this study, Arnauld is the only one to have edited her own avant-garde journal, *Projecteur*, in addition to her numerous contributions to others and her independent publishing.[72]

Extensive research by Hemus has uncovered Arnauld's prolific output and ensured the preservation of her legacy, restoring the poet to her rightful place among the 'Présidents and Présidentes' of Dada.[73] More recently, Kamenish's

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[68] *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*, ed. by Willard Bohn (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), p. xiii.
[69] As documented in Hemus, *Dada's Women*, p. 1.
[70] *Poèmes à claires-voies* (Paris: Editions de l'Esprit Nouveau, 1920); *Point de mire* (Paris: Jacques Povolozky & Cie, Collections 'Z', 1921); *Guêpier de diamants* (Antwerp: Editions Ça Ira, 1923).
[71] *Tournevire* (Paris: Editions de l'Esprit Nouveau, 1919); *L'Apaisement de l'éclipse, passion en deux actes: précéde de diorama, confession lyrique* (Paris: Ecrivains Réunis, 1925). For details of other works, see Hemus, *Dada's Women*.
[72] *Projecteur*, no. 1, ed. by Céline Arnauld (Paris: 21 May 1920). The journal was a one-off edition, despite its front-page advertisement for a subscription to twelve editions. As well as Arnauld's own texts, *Projecteur* contains contributions by a number of her Dada colleagues, including Paul Éluard, Paul Dermée, Francis Picabia, Renée Dunan, Tzara, Phillipe Soupault, Breton, Louis Aragon, and Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes.
[73] Hemus, *Dada's Women*. See also: Hemus, 'Céline Arnauld: Dada Présidente?', *Nottingham French Studies*, vol. 50, no. 3 (Autumn 2011), 67-77; and Hemus, 'The Manifesto of Céline Arnauld', in *Dada and Beyond*, ed. by Elza Adamowicz *et al* (Amsterdam, New York, Etc.: Rodopi, 2011), pp. 121-131.

study has again brought Arnauld into view alongside her fellow female Dadaists, and Stephen Forcer has analysed several of her poems in light of the gender politics at play within the Dada group in his study *Dada as Text, Thought and Theory*.[74] Much of Arnauld's work remains unanalysed in published research and there is still considerable scope for further research which explores her rich contribution to avant-garde literature; she is yet to be included in a comparative study alongside female writers associated with other avant-garde movements. The recent publication of Arnauld's complete works has provided much-needed access to her works in the original French, but English translations of her works are few.[75] Dawn Ades includes a translation of 'Luna Park', originally published in Arnauld's journal *Projecteur* in 1920, in *The Dada Reader: A Critical Anthology*, and Willard Bohn includes 'Entre Voleurs' ('Among Thieves'), 'Les Ronge-Bois' ('The Wood-Gnawers'), and 'Avertisseur' ('Alarm') – both in French and English – in *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry*.[76]

This chapter takes as its focus three poems written by Arnauld at the height of Paris Dada's creative ventures. It will begin by examining the poem 'Les Ronge-Bois' ('The Wood-Gnawers'), first published in the original French in Arnauld's self-edited journal, *Projecteur*.[77] The second part of the chapter will look in depth at the poem 'Les Insensés' ('The Senseless'), from Arnauld's first collection, *Poèmes à claires-voies*.[78] Lastly, the chapter will return to *Projecteur* to consider the poem 'Luna Park'.[79] The order of the poems discussed in this chapter is determined thematically. Delving into Arnauld's fantastical poetic universe, the chapter will begin by considering the influence of her participation in Paris Dada before underscoring her unique approach to poetic composition and examining her conception of the writer as laid out in her independent journal. Through a close examination and exploration of these texts, focusing

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[74] Kamenish, *Mamas of Dada*; Stephen Forcer, *Dada as Text, Thought and Theory* (Cambridge and Leeds: Legenda, 2015).
[75] Arnauld and Dermée, *OC*.
[76] Ades, ed., *The Dada Reader*, pp. 250-251; Bohn, ed., *The Dada Market*, pp. 15-19.
[77] Arnauld, 'Les Ronge-Bois', *Projecteur*, no. 1 [unpaginated]; Arnauld, 'The Wood-Gnawers', trans. by Bohn, in *The Dada Market,* p. 17.
[78] Arnauld, 'Les Insensés', in *OC,* pp. 82-83; Arnauld, 'The Senseless,' trans. by Katherine Brook and Lauren Faro [unpublished].
[79] Arnauld, 'Luna Park', *Projecteur*, no. 1 [unpaginated]; Arnauld, 'Luna Park', trans. by Lauren Faro [unpublished].

foremost on the English translations, but with reference to the original French texts, this chapter will bring to the fore the way in which Arnauld's work is informed by, and interacts with, various currents in avant-garde thought and aesthetics, yet also diverges from these as she develops her own, autonomous style of avant-garde literature.

**Polemic Poetics: 'Me I only know how to curse'**

Deranged 'mosquitos' hover erratically close to 'anguish' and the death of a bird hangs heavy in the air around a 'lightbulb'. References to flight abound as these airborne creatures (mosquitos, a bird) are joined by a troop of clothed atoms 'flying away with the rain | dragging harmonic moldings | in a novice parade'. 'Les Ronge-Bois' ('The Wood-Gnawers') is one of two poems by Arnauld published in her self-edited journal.[80] The poem opens with a dark, mysterious scene characterised by suffering, distress, and death:

> Close by the anguish
> the crazed mosquitos
> Around the lightbulb the bird's death
> In the atmosphere the atoms in cheap finery
> flying away with the rain
> dragging harmonic moldings
> in a novice parade

The funereal imagery is disquieting and ominous. From this dark, dreary, and drizzly 'atmosphere' the poem jolts to the fields of Argentina ('Mendoza's country'), panning from the heights of hovering creatures to fields in which 'wooden horses' are chased by string instruments and 'great wheels' are 'pushed | by elephants'. Fantastical, alogical, and mystifying, the poem's nonsequential imagery and lyrical flights of fantasy transport the reader to peculiar, imaginary landscapes populated by anthropomorphous atoms adorned with rags and instruments that chase wooden horses.

From this disjunctive series of unique images there emerges no clear narrative thread which the reader might grasp. Instead, from the outset, the

[80] See Appendix, pp. 194-195.

poem implicitly invites the reader to embark on resolving an unanswered question: what are the 'wood-gnawers', and where in the poem's lines can they be found? The presence of the 'wood-gnawers' in the poem's title prompts a search for these 'Enigma-Figures.'[81] The phrase 'wood-gnawers' calls to mind rodents, such as rabbits, rats, and squirrels, which nibble and gnaw away with their sharp incisors, and other destructive creatures such as beavers and termites. The 'wood-gnawers' of the poem might be the 'crazed mosquitoes' – insanity causing them to sink their 'teeth' into wood instead of flesh. Perhaps the gnawers are the mandoras, who chase after 'wooden horses' ('les mandores chassent les chevaux de bois') – the French verb 'chasser' meaning to hunt, as well as to chase or drive out.[82] Are the 'wood-gnawers' in fact the tiny 'atoms in cheap finery', who, having nibbled away at ornate wooden 'moldings', freeing them from their original placement, now carry them in procession through the rain? The identity of the 'wood-gnawers' remains uncertain, the ambiguity of the poem's imagery allowing for a variety of readings and interpretations.

In the final lines of the poem's main stanza a new potential candidate for the moniker 'wood-gnawers' emerges: 'At the Collège de France', the speaker tells us, 'They fall asleep on the benches'. As the attendees at the Collège de France slumber, their cheeks resting on the wooden lecture theatre benches, their mouths perhaps slightly ajar, they are implicitly identified as wood-gnawing subjects. With this identification arrives a new tone to the poem, as poetic flights of imagination and fantastical explorations give way to hostility. Although the lines 'At the Collège de France | They fall asleep on the benches' are read, at first, as part of the preceding series of observations ('Around the lightbulb the bird's death'; 'in Mendoza's country | the mandoras chase the wooden horses'; 'At the Collège de France | They fall asleep on the benches'), the

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[81] 'Enigme-Personnages' ('Enigma-Figures') is the title of another poem by Arnauld, published in *Dada*, no. 7 (March 1920) [unpaginated].

[82] A mandore is a wooden string instrument belonging to the lute family. It is worth noting that 'Chevaux de bois' (wooden horse, or hobby horse) is also one definition of the word 'dada' proposed by Tzara in his 'Dada Manifesto 1918'. It is perhaps, then, Dada that is being hunted by the 'wood-gnawers' of Arnauld's poem. Reprinted in *The Dada Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Robert Motherwell, 2nd edn (Cambridge, Mass.; London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 76-82.

poem's contrasting characterisations now hint at the disparaging potential of the label 'wood-gnawers'. Whilst the mandoras speed energetically across the fields of Mendoza in pursuit of 'wooden horses', and 'great wheels' are set in forward motion by mighty 'elephants', at the Collège de France they merely 'fall asleep'. Whilst the creatures of Mendoza possess vigour and strength, in contrast the attendees of the Collège de France are reduced to nothing more than sleepy bench-chewers.[83] Ultimately, the insinuation is intended to insult. Embedded in, and concealed by, the poem's poetic escapes into the imaginary is a scornful criticism.

Such an antagonistic stance is by no means unusual in avant-garde literature and visual arts. In fact, hostility might be considered to be the avant-garde's *modus operandi* – the militaristic denotations of the very term 'avant-garde' underscoring the combative nature of its various manifestations. The manifesto was the form favoured by many avant-garde groups and individuals wishing to expound their agenda, point the finger at their opponents, or mark out their objects of scorn. The manifesto, Caws explains, 'generally proclaims what it wants to oppose, to leave, to defend, to change. Its oppositional tone is constructed of *againstness* […]';[84] as Tzara asserts in his 1918 Dada manifesto, 'to put out a manifesto you must want: ABC to fulminate against 1, 2, 3.'[85] The British Vorticists adopt such a stance of 'againstness' in their manifesto in the first number of *Blast*. Using a 'blast' or 'bless' formula, they curse (or blast) all that they seek to reject and leave behind ('SENTIMENTAL GALLIC GUSH', the 'years 1837 to 1900', 'all products of phlegmatic cold', 'SNOBBERY (disease of femininity)') and bless that which they seek to defend and celebrate ('RESTLESS MACHINES', 'the HAIRDRESSER', 'SHAKESPEARE', 'ALL SEAFARERS').[86] The manifesto is frequently, Caws indicates, constructed 'like a battlefield', 'generally posing some "we," explicit or implicit, against some other "they," with the terms

[83] In this sense, we might interpret the 'wood-gnawers' as a symbol of the Enlightenment thinking which gnaws away at and 'chasser' (drives out) the creative impulse of the wooden hobby horse representative of Dada. Rational thinking is the enemy of Dada's creative freedom.
[84] Caws, 'The Poetics of the Manifesto', in *Manifesto*, pp. xix-xxxiv (p. xxiii).
[85] Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918', p. 76.
[86] 'Manifesto I', *Blast*, no. 1 (June 1914), 11-29.

constructed in a deliberate dichotomy[…].'[87] In 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909', Marinetti repeatedly pits 'we' (the Futurists) against 'they' (the custodians of the past): 'We will destroy the museums, libraries, academies of every kind […]'; '[…] today, we establish *Futurism*, because we want to free this land from its smelly gangrene of professors, archaeologists, *ciceroni* and antiquarians.'[88] In Dada manifestos, this stance of 'againstness' often takes the form of an affront to the audience or reader, constructed as a dichotomy between 'we' (the Dadaists) and 'they' (the public). The Dadaists set out to attack the expectations of their audience, often pointing the finger at them as their opponents, with the intention being to incense and provoke them. The Dadaists rile and scorn their audience: Francis Picabia is curt, 'Let's face it, you don't understand what we're doing';[89] Philippe Soupault sets out to insult, 'You're all as blown up as fattened geese […];'[90] Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes accuses them of cowardice, 'If you weren't so cowardly […] you'd stand up straight and play the massacre game, just like we do. But you're too scared […]',[91] and begins his address 'To the Public' with a threat, 'Before I come down there among you to tear out your rotten teeth, your scab-filled ears, your canker-covered tongue.'[92] As the Dadaists conceived of them, their manifestos were formed of 'words like arrows, aimed straight at the face.'[93]

In her manifesto 'Dada Parasol', performed at the Salon des Indépendants held at the Grand Palais des Champs Elysées on 5 February 1920, Arnauld takes up a similar position: the target is her audience.[94] 'So you don't like my manifesto?', she begins, 'You've come here bursting with hostility and you're going to start whistling at me before you've even heard me out? Great! Carry on

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[87] Caws, 'The Poetics of the Manifesto', in *Manifesto,* p. xx.
[88] Marinetti, 'The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism 1909', p. 22.
[89] Francis Picabia, 'Art', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 188-189 (p. 189).
[90] Philippe Soupault, 'Literature and the Rest', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 185-186 (p. 185).
[91] Georges Ribemont-Dessaignes, 'The Pleasures of Dada', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 187-188 (p. 188).
[92] Ribemont-Dessaignes, 'To the Public', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 192-193 (p. 192).
[93] Dermée, 'First and Final Report of the Secretary of the Golden Section: The Excommunicated', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 126-129 (p. 128).
[94] Arnauld, 'Dada Parasol', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, p. 193. Originally published as 'Ombrelle Dada', *Littérature*, no. 13 (May 1920).

[…].' Arnauld has come to share her thoughts on 'Aaaart' and 'poetry': poetry, she tells them, '= toothpick, encyclopaedia, taxi or parasol-shade'. Arnauld is insistent here, and there is no reprieve for those that might disagree with her: those that are left unsatisfied by her definition are swiftly and irrevocably condemned 'TO THE NESLE TOWER', where the Queen of Navarre, according to legend, executed her lovers.[95] 'Dada Parasol' is a playful and provocative warning, perhaps to those who ignore her ideas, or those who seek to limit creative freedom and disagree with her definition of poetry as a heterogeneous jumble of odds and ends.

Though much subtler in its oppositional stance, 'The Wood-Gnawers' shares the same polemic tone as the avant-garde manifesto-style text. In the final lines of 'The Wood-Gnawers' an explicit 'we/they' stance is introduced, as Arnauld presents a clear opposition between the speaker and the sleeping bodies at the Collège de France: whilst 'They' fall asleep, the speaker remarks, 'Me I only know how to curse'. The chasm between 'us' and 'them', or in this case, 'They' and 'Me', is underscored by the blank space of the page and the typographical symmetry of the two words:

> At the Collège de France
> **They** fall asleep on the benches
>
> **Me** I only know how to curse
> and ramble on against hypotheses . . .

The speaker has separated him-/herself spatially from the opposition, utilising the space of the printed page to distantiate her comments from the main stanza in which the 'wood-gnawers' reside. But Arnauld's object of scorn in this poem is perhaps not the 'wood-gnawers' themselves ('They' who fall asleep on the benches at the Collège de France), but rather those considered responsible for precipitating boredom, sleep or mental lethargy: the Collège de France – or, rather, all that it represents.

[95] According to Kamenish, *La Tour de Nesle* (1832) is also the title of a novel by Alexandre Dumas (Kamenish, p. 83).

The rejection of formal institutions, derided as bourgeois and criticised for upholding the ideals of rationalism, was a recurring thread in Dada discourse. The Collège de France, a prestigious educational institution, was the epitome of Enlightenment thinking and ideals – of reasoned, rational thinking, logic and scientism – all of which the Dadaists distrusted. The Dadaists rejected logic, theory ('We recognize no theory'), and 'systems', which they accused of stifling mental freedom and limiting creativity.[96] Logic, for the Dadaists, is the antithesis of creativity; it is 'the dance of those impotent to create':

> Logic is complication. Logic is always wrong. It draws the threads of notions, words, in their formal exterior, toward illusory ends and centers [sic]. Its chains kill, it is an enormous centipede stifling independence.[97]

The Dadaists were also wary of rational thinking because they considered it a contributing factor to the insanity of the First World War. As Inez Hedges explains,

> If rationality and European high culture had led to such a result [the war], the dadaists argued, then the only cure for man was irrationality. So they practiced "creative irrationalism," attempting to redress the balance of sense in the chaos that surrounded them.[98]

Against what they saw as the dangers of rational thinking, they upheld the values of spontaneity, contradiction, inconsistency, irrationality, and an imagination freed from the shackles of logic.

Arnauld's poem partakes in Dada's attack on rationality and logic. Pointing the finger at the Collège de France as a metonym for reasoned, Enlightenment thinking, Arnauld warns of its harmful effects. Whilst in Mendoza string instruments and wooden horses sprint across fields, free from the shackles of logic, the attendees at the Collège de France are in a state of *ennui* – their energy sapped and their minds numbed by the restraints of reason and

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[96] Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918', p. 77, p. 79.
[97] Ibid., pp. 80-81.
[98] Inez Hedges, *Languages of Revolt: Dada and Surrealist Literature and Film* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1983), p. xii.

rational thinking.[99] As mighty 'elephants' heave 'the great' progressive 'wheels' of evolution, logic impedes such progress for the pupils of the Collège, lulling them instead into a coma of hibernation. Reasoned, rational thinking, Arnauld warns, results in mental distress and derangement ('anguish', 'crazed mosquitos'). Logic and reason are the death of creativity: around the illuminating 'lightbulb' of creative ideas, the ghost of imagination hovers, its wings clipped, its flight path intercepted ('Around the lightbulb the bird's death').[100] Stripped of their freedom and individuality, the somnolent attendees of the Collège de France march monotonously in a homogenous 'novice parade' of scientific rationality ('atoms'); unable to think independently, their minds clouded by logic, they merely follow the crowd. These students, Arnauld implies, are merely 'blockheads', as intelligent as the wooden heads in the milliner's display window. From this perspective, another possible interpretation of the 'wood-gnawers' arises: rational thinking is presented as an infestation that destroys; it feeds on the minds (wooden heads) of its (stupid) disciples, gnawing away at their expansive, creative imaginations, until, riddled with holes and disintegrating, their minds operate only through the dull, rigid formulas of logic.

It is not until the final lines of the poem that the scornful tone which shapes the entire text is made explicit, and it becomes apparent that 'The Wood-Gnawers' has been conceived as a response to a criticism or provocation. As the speaker remarks that they know only how to curse and ramble, this first-person interjection is unexpected, given that the poem has, until this point, been voiced in the third person. The text shifts abruptly from lyrical, musical meanderings across the fields of Mendoza to a statement issued in sober prose. The speaker is

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[99] Arnauld's reference to Mendoza could be read as a broad representation of the Global South, and thus her association of this region with notions of irrationality might not be without racist undertones. The Dadaists appropriated non-Western art and aesthetics as a counterpoint to what they perceived as the rationality of European culture. But this appropriation reflected their own preconceived ideas about, and misunderstanding of, non-Western cultures. In 2016 Dada's dialogue with art and culture beyond Europe (including artefacts from Africa, Asia, and Oceania) was examined in the exhibition *Dada Africa* at Berlinische Galerie, Berlin (5 August – 7 November 2016).

[100] Whilst Bohn translates 'l'ampoule' as 'lightbulb', the word also refers to a 'vial' or 'phial'. Arnauld was probably aware of these various senses of the word, drawing on the term to convey a polyvalent image: the 'bird's death' hovers around the 'lightbulb', calling to mind the way moths are attracted to the brightness of a flame; 'l'ampoule', interpreted as a vial containing poison, becomes implicated in the 'bird's death'.

perhaps not describing herself or himself, but seems rather to be repeating words spoken about him or her. Perhaps, he/she has been accused of cursing and speaking, or writing, aimlessly and incoherently – and worse, of knowing *only* how to 'curse' and 'ramble'. Analysing Arnauld's texts alongside those of Marguerite Buffet and Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Forcer identifies critical references to Dada's male players and 'prescient comments on the friction, ruptures and bad feeling that destabilized Dada […].'[101] In light of Forcer's biographical analysis, we might speculate about the source of the criticism seemingly echoed by the speaker of 'The Wood-Gnawers', and tentatively interpret the poem as a personal reaction to critical comments made by Arnauld's male colleagues. It is possible that Arnauld, aware that, on account of her gender, her work was not taken seriously by Dada's male leaders, was responding to comments on her work from within Dada. But it is important to remember the hostile and provocative atmosphere that Arnauld enjoyed jousting and sparring within as a Dada writer: the Dadaists took pleasure in irritating and infuriating their audience, and were, as a result, at the receiving end of a constant barrage of dissatisfaction and disapproval. Such accusations of rambling and incoherence, of speaking 'words without a shadow of sense', were certainly familiar to the Dada artists and writers, who dispensed with sense, linearity, and logic.[102] Here I diverge from Forcer's claim that texts by Dada's women writers contain clues or comments on the friction within the Dada group. Rather than reading Arnauld's poem through a biographical lens, as her response to personal criticisms, we might read it rather as a response to broader criticisms of Dada.

Within the context of Dada's assault on logic and the Dadaists' deliberate provocation of their audience, 'The Wood-Gnawers' is an assertion of freedom and a witty rebuttal to accusations that Dada was purely directionless and nonsensical. The poem's final lines are not merely a verbatim repetition: the tone is faintly sarcastic, with a hint of irritation. These words are spoken with a knowing irony and self-reflexivity, for whilst the speaker stands accused by

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[101] Forcer, *Dada as Text*, p. 27.
[102] M.B., 'Le Dadaïsme n'est qu'une farce inconsistante' [Dadaism is nothing but an inconsistent farce], *L'Action française* (14 February 1920), p. 40. Translation in Sanouillet, *Dada in Paris*, p. 108.

his/her critics of only rambling and cursing, that is precisely what he/she is doing in this poem. In the first two thirds of the poem the speaker's mind seems to wander as aimlessly as the 'atoms' that drift 'away with the rain' – floating from 'anguish' to a 'lightbulb', departing the 'parade' to roam the fields of Mendoza, meandering between 'mandoras', and 'wooden horses', and flitting between themes of death, speed, evolution, anxiety, distress, and sleep. Yet, within these non-sequitur, seemingly aimless, enigmatic lines, Arnauld has embedded her attack. Into these lines she has woven a rebuff to those critics that deride her (and Dada's) incoherent meanderings; she has cursed logic and rational thinking as the cause of sleepy, numb minds, closed to the expansive possibilities of the imagination unbound.[103] Whilst her rambling might be declared a failure, an inability to keep to the linear formula that logic demands, Arnauld sees in this form of expression the freedom of the imagination to sprawl, to explore, to wander without restraint or limitation. Harnessing the antagonistic tone of the Dada manifestos, Arnauld blends poetry with polemic to develop a unique visionary and lyrical 'language of revolt' against systems which limit free-thinking.[104] 'The Wood-Gnawers' is a witty, self-reflexive text that celebrates and showcases the capabilities of the imagination left free to roam, ramble, explore. To those who fail to see past Dada's seemingly directionless and nonsensical façade, Arnauld yells: 'Follow the crowd, you bunch of imbeciles'![105]

**'A poem in a sling | the wound that smiles'**

Whilst she was performing at Dada soirees, penning provocative poetic-polemic texts, and editing her own Dada journal, Arnauld was also composing poetic works that would be published together in her first surviving collection *Poèmes à*

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[103] As Breton asserts, 'Dada is artistic free-thinking.' 'Two Dada Manifestos', trans. by Ralph Manheim, in *The Dada Painters and Poets*, ed. by Motherwell, pp. 203-204 (p. 203).

[104] Hedges notes that the Dadaists 'turned their energies into transforming their instruments and techniques for producing meaning – the symbol systems or "languages" of their arts – into languages of revolt', p. xi.

[105] In Dermée's journal *Z*, Arnauld published the following text under the heading 'Réponses': 'La plus basse littérature, c'est la littérature de vengeance. A ceux qui ne sont pas mes amis: "Suivez la foule, troupeau d'imbéciles."' ['Replies': 'The lowest form of literature is revenge literature. To those who are not my friends: "Follow the crowd, you bunch of imbeciles".' 'Réponses', *Z*, no. 1 (March 1920), p. 6.

*claires-voies*.[106] Taken from this collection, the poem 'Les Insensés' ('The Senseless') pulls the reader into a tangle of absurd and incompatible realities: 'hills sink' in sand and climb a 'staircase'; 'magnetic passions nick themselves'; a church 'organ' and a 'rosette' pray.[107] Incongruous and unrelated elements are juxtaposed in a paratactic arrangement of narrative shards: 'morbid hearts', 'fairies', a 'church', 'sand', and 'a circular rhythm' intermingle, momentarily bumping up against each other, yet continuing to float independently of one another. Arnauld ventures into a bizarre, fantastical terrain where figures from Christianity ('three wise men') undertake mysterious activities alongside personified feelings ('magnetic passions') and peaceful fairies. Devoid of connectives and sequential direction, telegrammatic statements issue forth clipped images and sensations: 'Hampered gestures | fixed eyes', 'Sky in bursts | explosions of laughter'. The text conveys a fleeting series of actions which elliptically gesture towards, but never entirely disclose, a narrative thread. Instead, the poem's enigmatic shards throw up myriad questions and supply few, if any, answers.

Fragmentary, incongruous, and illogical, 'The Senseless' – published at the peak of Dada activities in Paris – bears the imprint of Arnauld's participation in Dada, and reveals an approach to literary creation that draws from Dada's core values of spontaneity and disorder. In the 'Dada Manifesto' of 1918, Tzara writes: 'Let each man proclaim: there is a great negative work of destruction to be accomplished. We must sweep and clean.'[108] Tzara's statement outlines the destructive character of Dada's endeavours – the 'urge', as Ades describes it, 'to start again at zero'.[109] Discontent with the status quo, the Dadaists set about deconstructing, disintegrating, and blowing apart structures and systems which they considered to be both corrupted and corrupting.

As a movement, Dada prescribed no formal stylistic agenda to which its participants should adhere; Dada was not 'a literary school scream', but rather

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[106] An earlier text by Arnauld, *La Lanterne Magique* (The Magic Lantern, 1914), is listed in her published works *Tournevire*, *Poèmes à claires-voies,* and *Point de mire*, though no copy of this text survives.
[107] See Appendix, pp. 196-199.
[108] Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918', p. 81.
[109] *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, p. 162.

an anti-movement that was vehemently against doctrines and systems.[110] The Dadaists persistently rejected systematic schools of thought, and their repeated resistance to categorisation can be seen in the diversity of their statements concerning the concept of Dada. Dada is described variously as 'an artichoke doorknob', 'a magic lantern',[111] 'the tail of a holy cow', a 'cube', and a 'nurse'.[112] 'Dada makes no promises about getting you to heaven',[113] 'Dada is neither madness, nor wisdom, nor irony […]', [114] and ultimately, 'Dada means nothing'.[115] Rather than upholding a new aesthetic doctrine with roots in the existing system, the Dadaists set about challenging the very notion of art and literature, and developing instead an anti-aesthetic of anti-art and anti-literature.

Privileging disorder, incongruity, and irrationality, the Dadaists launched an attack on cultural norms and conventions and, most notably, on language itself. Lacking faith in the semiotic capabilities of an outworn language, the Dada poets sought to deconstruct the existing linguistic systems, breaking apart conventional forms to revel in the free play of signifiers and their referents, often fragmenting language into its smallest components. In their literary works the Dadaists drew inspiration from a heterogeneous frame of reference, juxtaposing incompatible and incongruous ideas, objects, and images. Dada texts revel in illogicality and incompatibility. The Dada text, as the author of 'Particulars' suggests, can be made from any of the remnants of Dada's destructive activities: '*Paul Dermée* has made a rhymed parable with the iron springs of armchairs.'[116]

In its semantic content, narrative structure (or lack thereof), and typographical layout, Arnauld's poem 'The Senseless' is symptomatic of what

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[110] Tzara, 'Dada is a Virgin Germ', trans. by Ian Monk, in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, p. 66.
[111] Francis Picabia, 'Philosophical Dada', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, p. 183.
[112] Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918', p. 77.
[113] André Breton, 'Dada Skating', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 186-187 (p. 186).
[114] Tzara, 'The Manifesto of Mr Antipyrine', in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades, pp. 191-192 (p. 192).
[115] Tzara, 'Dada Manifesto 1918', p. 77.
[116] 'Particulars' is mistakenly attributed to Arnauld in *The Dada Reader*, ed. by Ades ('Particulars', trans. by Ian Monk, p. 250), but the original text, published in Arnauld's journal *Projecteur* seems to be signed 'P.D.', suggesting it was authored by either Paul Dermée (Arnauld's husband) or Paul Draule (a pseudonym for Paul Éluard). P.D., 'Signalement', *Projecteur* (21 May 1920) [unpaginated].

Anna Balakian refers to as the 'demolition work' of Dada.[117] Arnauld disintegrates the systemic features of traditional literary forms, foregoing linearity and narrative coherence in favour of fragmentary flickers of imagery and action. As Arnauld erases the connective tissue of logical, sequential narrative structures, so too does she fracture and fragment the printed surface of the poem. Arnauld's words are scattered across the printed page:

Hampered gestures
fixed eyes
a circular rhythm
that escapes words
A poem in a sling
the wound that smiles
In the sand the hills sink
and the sea swallows the sky

Fractured into enigmatic shards and telegrammatic phrases, typographically dispersed and unstable, 'The Senseless' is broken – it is perhaps the 'poem in a sling' that Arnauld refers to, a poem typographically fractured, its narrative dissolved and disintegrated in the manner of textile *devoré*.

Like her fellow Dadaist Hannah Höch's photomontages, in which fragments of ready-made photographic images cut from mass-circulation media publications are juxtaposed, offering no coherent image around a single-point perspective, but instead a scattered arrangement of mismatched visual scraps (differing in size, shape, colour, and content), the disparate elements of Arnauld's poem hang juxtaposed around an undisclosed centre, with no clear location or timeframe, offering multiple meanings and narrative possibilities in place of a fixed, coherent image.[118] In a way similar to Höch's photomontage process of cutting images from various media publications to create new assemblages, Arnauld cleaves objects and elements from their expected context and arranges them in new and unusual combinations (slings and smiling wounds sidle up to sinking hills). Beyond Dada, Arnauld's formal experiments are exemplary of the

[117] Balakian, *Literary Origins of Surrealism: A New Mysticism in French Poetry* (London: University of London Press, 1967), p. 2.
[118] See, for example, Höch, *Das Schöne Mädchen (The Beautiful Girl)*, 1919-20, collage, Private Collection.

kind that were taking place across literature and the visual arts in the early part of the twentieth century. The fractured visuals of the printed page recall the splintered images of the Cubists' collage paintings, where single-point perspectives are shattered in favour of multiple viewpoints. They also mirror the scattered typographical arrangements of Futurist poems and manifestos, where the Futurist notion of 'words-in-freedom' is realised through the liberation of words from the bindings of linear syntactical and typographical formats.[119]

Arnauld's poetic assemblages also anticipate the *exquisite corpse* creations of the Surrealists. A kind of chain game, *exquisite corpse* involved the collaborative creation of visual images or texts, requiring multiple participants in order to wrest control from the artist as individual. Each player would write a word or phrase (or draw an image) on a piece of paper, before folding it over to conceal what had been sketched or written, leaving only a word or a section of the image visible before passing it on to the next participant. The game resulted in texts and images of bizarre conjunctions and juxtapositions; as the Surrealist Simone Kahn recalls, 'It was an unfettering […]', resulting in 'images unimaginable by one brain alone – images born of the involuntary, unconscious, and unpredictable combination of three or four heterogeneous minds.'[120] Though the product of one mind, Arnauld's poetry, with its strange conjunctions and fragmentary juxtapositions, calls to mind the Surrealists' collaged creations. In its radical formal experimentation, Arnauld's poetry sits at the intersection of numerous avant-garde movements, both drawing from and contributing to the shared spirit of formal upheaval and renewal.

The incongruous nature of Arnauld's poetry is cultivated, in part, by her privileging of the material qualities of language. As Hemus notes, Arnauld frequently brings together words for their auditory or visual qualities, over and above their semantic capacities, playing with alliteration, assonance, and rhyme.[121] Arnauld brings together disparate adjectives, verbs and nouns, grouping and aligning words on account of their material qualities: 'entravés'

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[119] Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', p. 95.
[120] Simone Kahn, 'The Exquisite Corpses', trans. by Franklin Rosemont, in *Surrealist Women*, ed. by P. Rosemont, pp. 18-19 (p. 19).
[121] See Hemus, *Dada's Women*, pp. 167-176.

(hampered), is joined by 'échappe' (escapes), and then 'écharpe' (sling), forming a visibly and audibly similar trio of semantically disparate words. Arnauld tends to the smallest components of language in the creation of her literary works, exchanging and rearranging phonemes, graphemes, and sounds. The vowels of 'entravés' are mirrored in 'échappe', but the 'e' letters are reversed, the acute 'é' borrowed from the end of 'entravés' to form the beginning of 'échappe'. 'Échappe' then becomes 'écharpe', with the replacement of a single phoneme – 'p' for 'r'. Here, Arnauld plays with, and draws attention to, the discord between the words' shared material characteristics – both visual and auditory – and their distinct referents ('escapes' and 'sling').

Arnauld's appetite for the sonorous qualities of language is evident throughout the poem:

Des guinguettes fleuries
au Pavillon des cœurs morbides

Des gestes entravés
des yeux fixes
un rythme circulaire
qui s'échappe des mots

Un poème en écharpe
la blessure qui sourit
Dans le sable les collines s'enfoncent
et la mer avale le ciel

Les passions magnétiques s'ébrèchent
et un soupir bâille dans le miroir

Alors
les rosaces brûlèrent à la tombée du soir
les collines montèrent sur l'escalier
des nuages
et les fées firent la paix
entre le soleil et la lune

Mystérieusement les trois mages
traînent une boîte fleurie
vers les guinguettes lunaires

Au cœur de l'église
une lumière et un soupir
puis le silence
et le vide…

Comment voiler enfin
la fenêtre de mon cœur
Ciel en éclats
explosions de rire

L'orgue et la rosace prient
au Pavillon des cœurs morbides

In the first couplet vowel sounds are echoed as Arnauld brings together the adjective 'flowered' and the 'morbid hearts'. The vowel sounds 'eu' and 'ie' of 'fleuries' ('flowered') are transposed into the phrase 'cœurs morbides' ('morbid hearts'), creating an end rhyme which yokes the disparate words together: 'Des guinguettes fleuries | au Pavillon des cœurs morbides'. Arnauld carries these same vowel sounds 'eu' and 'ie' into the next stanza as she shapes another phrase two lines below: 'yeux fixes' ('fixed eyes'). Whilst the letters 'eu' reappear unchanged in 'fleuries', 'cœurs' and 'yeux', the vowel sound 'ie' is varied subtly with each repetition as new phonemes are introduced and old ones replaced: the 'ie' of 'fleuries' becomes 'ide' in 'morbides', and the 'd' is then replaced by 'x' in 'fixes': ie | ide | ixe. As the vowel sounds travel down the printed page, the typographical layout underscores auditory and visual interconnections, placing 'fleuries', 'cœurs morbides' and 'yeux fixes' along a vertical curve:

Des guinguettes fl**eu**r**ie**s
au Pavillon des c**œu**rs morb**ide**s

Des gestes entravés
des y**eu**x f**ixe**s

Subtle variations of sounds weave and wind their way through the poem in an intricate pattern of vowels and consonants: later 'fleurie' will appear once again, its vowel sounds transposed this time into 'cœur l'église'.

Romanian by birth, arriving in Paris only in 1915, Arnauld was a non-native speaker of French and was therefore perhaps more attuned and receptive to the sounds of the French language. Her thoughts on language and the writing process also reveal a playful approach to literary creation. In a prose-poem published in Francis Picabia's *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou* in 1921, Arnauld writes: 'A word, it runs more quickly than a running champion, you grab it and make it either into a personal story or even a piece of work.'[122] This statement conveys a comical, haphazard approach to literary creation in which creative control is abandoned in favour of chance encounters: writing as an exercise in catching and playing with words. Perhaps, then, Arnauld's creative process can be thought of as one of rapidly grasping hold of words which share similar sounds and shapes, and pinning them to the page. Arnauld's sensitivity to the auditory qualities of the French language and her playful approach to composition are evident in her utilisation of sound as both a compositional tool and structuring device within her poetry.

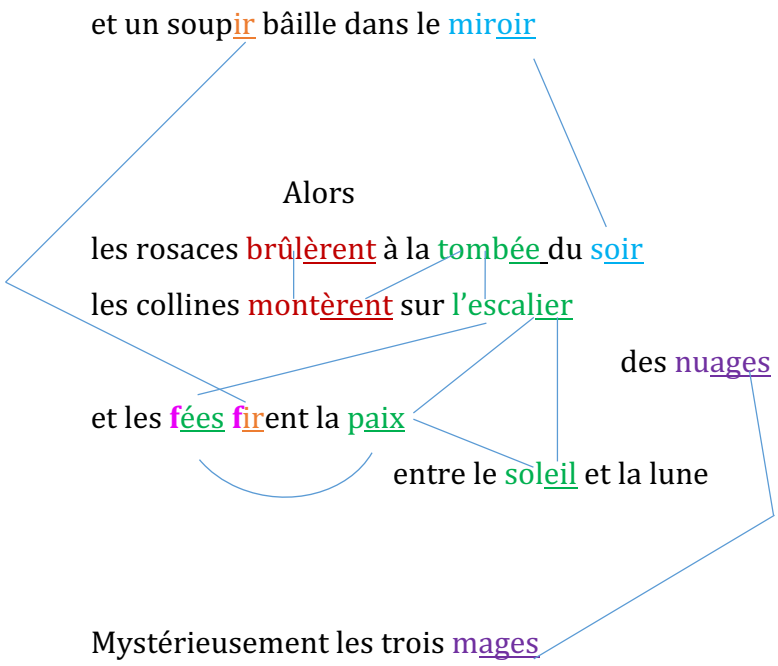
In fact, beyond the fractured semantic and typographical surface of 'The Senseless' there lies a dense web of alliteration, assonance, rhyme, repeated and rearranged phonemes, and lexical associations. The poem is saturated with linguistic correspondences as Arnauld develops and traces auditory connections within, through, and between lines and stanzas, building phrases and images around corresponding sounds. In the following stanza a plethora of echoes, lexical associations and visual correspondences are in operation simultaneously, circling and overlapping one another:

Alors
les rosaces brûlèrent à la tombée du soir
les collines montèrent sur l'escalier
des nuages
et les fées firent la paix
entre le soleil et la lune

[122] Arnauld, 'Extrait de Saturne', *Le Pilhaou-Thibaou*, ed. by Francis Picabia (10 July 1921). Translation: 'Extract from Saturn', trans. by Hemus [unpublished].

As the rosettes burn (brûlèrent) they are joined by hills which climb (montèrent), Arnauld seemingly pairing these two words both for their assonant qualities and visual similarities, and this relationship emphasised by their spatial proximity on the printed page. Assonance again brings together the words 'tombée' (fall), 'l'escalier' (staircase), 'fées' (fairies), 'paix' (peace), and 'soleil' (sun), each chiming with one another across the lines of the stanza. 'Tombée' (fall), too, has semantic associations with 'montèrent' (climbed), and 'fées' (fairies) and 'firent' (made) combine to form an alliterative phrase. Furthermore, as the echoes of assonance and alliteration bounce back and forth across the stanza, intertwining with semantic connections and visual associations, auditory connections are traced back and forth beyond the parameters of the stanza. Arnauld deliberately alters the common phrase 'tombée du jour' (nightfall), replacing 'jour' (day) with 'soir' (evening), in order to engineer an auditory connection which bounces back to the preceding stanza, whose final word is 'miroir' (mirror).[123] Additionally, 'nuages' (clouds) is mirrored audibly by 'mages' (wise men) three lines below, the corresponding vowel sounds creating a faint, delayed echo across the stanza boundary, and 'lune' (moon) later becomes 'lunaires' (lunar). A visual representation is useful for grasping the intricate web of sound patterning beneath the fragmented surface of Arnauld's poem:

[123] 'Tombée du jour' is translated literally as 'fall of day' meaning the end or close of day, and the beginning of dusk or evening; 'tombée du soir', translated literally as 'fall of night', is more closely related to the English term 'nightfall', but is uncommon in French usage.




Like a connective tissue, auditory correspondences link disparate words, fragmented lines and distant stanzas together in an intricate web of sound similarities. Rhyme, assonance, alliteration – the sound material of language – form a kind of 'sling', holding the wounded poem together ('A poem in a sling'). Supporting its otherwise fractured semantic and fragmented typographical layers, this 'sling' of sound patterning pulls the incongruous elements of the poem together and holds them (loosely) in place.

The harmonious, musical qualities which draw together the disparate elements of Arnauld's poem appear somewhat conventional in light of Dada's commitment to anti-Art and anti-Poetry. Indeed, Paula K. Kamenish has described Arnauld's poetry as 'pleasing', 'aesthetically [...] grounded', and possessing 'charm' – descriptions which are antithetical to the Dadaists' agenda of deliberate provocation and their rejection of aesthetic ideals.[124] But whilst Arnauld draws on conventional poetic devices such as rhyme and alliteration to build and structure her poetic images, she does so in unconventional ways. John Lennard describes the function of rhyme as one of order and regulation: 'rhyme is another form of punctuation closely bound to lineation and layout, helping on

[124] Kamenish writes: '[...] Arnauld's poetry remains so aesthetically and intellectually grounded that for some readers it might seem to lack the conviction and raw power of the more aggressive verse of her compatriots', p. 89.

the page and in performance audibly to organise the relations of words'; conventionally, the 'links forged by rhyme are a principle means of elaborating or ironising sense and controlling space.'[125] Far from bringing a sense of order to the words on the page, however, or elaborating their semantic content, rhyme in Arnauld's poetry works to bring words together only to revel in both semantic and rhythmic dissonance. Whilst 'tombée' (fall), 'l'escalier' (staircase), 'fées' (fairies), 'paix' (peace), and 'soleil' (sun) are brought into proximity for their assonance, the linking of these words through shared sounds reveals no elaboration of, or emphasis on, the semantic content of the words. As night 'fall[s]' and the hills climb the 'staircase', any semantic or narrative connection between these words and the 'fairies' making 'peace' between the 'sun' and the moon remains obscure. Furthermore, whilst Arnauld brings these words together for their assonance, the positioning of these words within each line offers no rhythmically regular sound pattern. Eschewing the harmonies of end rhyme, Arnauld places the words 'tombée' and 'l'escalier' typographically alongside one another, yet their position within the lineation of the poem denies us the predictable rhythm of an end rhyme. As the acute 'é' of 'tombée' chimes, its echo below in the vowel sounds of 'l'escalier', though typographically underscored, is rhythmically interrupted by the intrusion of the phrase 'du soir' which, occupying the end of the above line, disrupts the potential for harmonious end rhyme:

> Alors
> les rosaces brûlèrent à la tombée du soir
> les collines montèrent sur l'escalier

As the echo of the vowel sound 'é' reverberates through the stanza it bounces from side to side, occupying the end of a line or the middle of a syntactic unit, following no conventional rhythmic pattern. Paradoxically, as Arnauld seemingly unites words through the harmony of assonance, she gives rise to rhythmic dissonance. Utilising the pleasing harmonies of assonance and alliteration, Arnauld develops an erratic, disjointed, and unpredictable rhythm – 'a circular

[125] John Lennard, *The Poetry Handbook*, 2nd edn (Oxford: OUP, 2005), pp. 189-190.

rhythm | that escapes words'. Arnauld's is a circular rhythm of sounds which escape the semantic order prescribed by the conventional usage of words. Whilst the material aspects of language bring words and images together, Arnauld's sporadic use of rhyme simultaneously unsettles and fractures. Arnauld cultivates and emphasises dissonance between the auditory and semantic qualities of words, and between sounds which simultaneously unite and sever. Her poetry is illustrative, perhaps, of Breton and Éluard's claim in their 'Notes on Poetry' that 'In the poet: | The ear laughs'.[126]

As Bohn notes, '[the Dadaists] aesthetic strategies depend on the deliberate misuse of convention.'[127] Saturating her verses with poetic devices, Arnauld performs a kind of over-writing, or over-doing, of poetic technique, deliberately misusing them to excess. As she gathers corresponding sounds, layering separate instances of rhyme, assonance, and alliteration, she begins to undermine rather than reinforce poetic traditions. As the scattered assonance of 'tombée', 'l'escalier', 'fées', 'paix' and 'soleil' crosses the path of the rhyming 'brûlèrent' and 'montèrent', rings through the alliterative 'fées firent', and passes between the distant echoes of 'miroir' and 'soir', these varying sound combinations, none of them serving to emphasise points of salient semantic content, become entangled in their excess. In her insistence on bringing words together through sound, Arnauld creates a surplus of ornamental sound-play which contributes to the overall disorder of the poem's fractured narrative and typographical layers. Rather than dispensing entirely with poetic conventions, Arnauld seeks to destabilize them from within by using them in ways which undermine their traditional purpose and potential. In a typically Dada play of opposites, rhyme in Arnauld's poetry is, paradoxically, both the 'sling' which unites the elements of Arnauld's poem, bringing the incongruous and incompatible together, and the tool with which Arnauld launches her 'attack' on conventional literary forms, engineering an undoing that will result in traditional poetry requiring a 'sling'.

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[126] Breton and Éluard, 'Notes on Poetry', in *The Surrealism Reader: An Anthology of Ideas*, ed. by Dawn Ades and Michael Richardson (London: Tate Publishing, 2015), pp. 257-262 (p. 258). First published in *La Révolution surréaliste*, no. 12 (15 December 1929).
[127] Bohn, ed., *The Dada Market*, p. xv.

Owing to its desire to dismantle, and the seeming impenetrability of many of its texts, Dada has been viewed, and in some cases continues to be viewed, as a purely destructive endeavour.[128] But, as Richard Sheppard argues, 'Dada was not nihilistic lunacy – though nihilistic lunacy has its place in Dada'.[129] The Dadaists were searching for an alternative to traditional literary and artistic forms, in part through a refusal of coherent meaning and representation. Their position was one of non-compliance with rules and traditions they viewed as limiting and inadequate to the expression of the complex, and often unsettling, experiences of modernity. Arnauld's texts participate in Dada's dismantling of traditional literary and linguistic forms, and display a preference for the irrational, but her poetry – and, indeed, much Dada literature – is not without semantic content and coherence. Whilst, at first glance, 'The Senseless' seems only to revel in dissonance and disorder, beyond the initial impression projected by its chaotic surface we glimpse traces of semantic coherence. Whilst the surreal and disconnected images set forth by Arnauld seemingly fail to conform to any logical, linear order, they nevertheless suggest readings and connections. In place of narrative sequence Arnauld elicits mood: as 'hills sink' into obscurity, 'passions nick themselves', gestures become hampered, and a sigh 'yawns' wearily, the poem evokes an overall atmosphere of loss, emotional pain, and weariness.

The poem's natural imagery conveys a sense of all-consuming, overwhelming loss as the hills and the sky disappear from sight, swallowed and submerged ('In the sand the hills sink | and the sea swallows the sky'), and clouds descend to obscure the landscape ('the hills climbed the staircase | of clouds'). Fragmentary statements hint at wearied individuals with diseased

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[128] Charles Russell writes, 'In no avant-garde movement is the negative or nihilist impulse so radical or all-encompassing as in dada', whose 'nihilism was directed at its society's smug and myopic attachment to the purely material satisfactions of labour, production, consumption, and ownership, and was a response to the catastrophically destructive effects […] of World War I and class conflict.' *Poets, Prophets, & Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-Garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism* (Oxford: OUP, 1985), p. 97. Calinescu describes Dada's 'suicidal aesthetics of "antiart for antiart's sake"' as an example of the 'all-encompassing nihilism' to which 'diverse artistic avant-gardes' are committed (p. 96).

[129] Richard Sheppard, *Modernism – Dada – Postmodernism* (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2000), p. 206.

hearts, their communicative gestures 'hampered', unable to connect as the complexity of their emotions 'escape[s] words'. Self-destructive passions ('magnetic passions nick themselves') allude to narratives of love lost and hearts broken. A potential suspect is identified by the poem's title: 'Les Insensés', which I have translated as 'The Senseless', denotes those without logic or lacking in sense, and suggests, variously, the absence of common sense, foolishness, or an incapacity for sensation or emotional feeling. Perhaps the foolish, insensitive actions of the 'senseless' have resulted in emotional 'wound[s]' which consume and submerge, leaving behind hearts riddled with disease? Perhaps this is a case of unrequited love, or of an inability on the part of 'the senseless' to feel, or to communicate feeling? In place of emotional transparency, we are presented only with '[…] a sigh | […] silence | and nothingness'. The late appearance of a poetic 'I' in the last five lines of the poem unveils an individual narrative: the speaker's heart, once open, its 'window' transparent for all to see through, has become 'shroud[ed]' ('How to shroud at last | the window of my heart'). It becomes apparent, then, that it is not only the poem that is broken, but the speaker's heart, too. The actions of the 'senseless' have wounded the speaker, the poetry of his or her heart now lies in a 'sling'. Subsequently, the speaker has perhaps, too, become 'senseless', their shrouded heart now closed to sentiment.[130] The speaker may also be considered the 'senseless' of the title in another sense: foolishly causing self-inflicted wounds by allowing his or her 'passions' to 'nick themselves'. Is the title's charge of foolishness directed self-wards? Perhaps the speaker is chastising his- or herself for being too emotionally transparent ('the window of my heart'), or for being consumed by their own feelings? In this context the senselessness of the title is not that of lacking the capacity to feel emotion, but of perhaps being naively open and transparent.

Beneath the disintegrative edifice of Arnauld's poetry – the disruptive, fragmentary surface of the poem – lies hidden rich and complex semantic and

[130] This sentiment of sorrow and closure is echoed in Arnauld's text 'Diorama', when the narrator says: 'Je passai trois mois en costume de scaphandrier, au fond d'un lac, pour retrouver un sourire perdu. Quand la fenêtre du désir s'ouvrit enfin sur mon amour, je n'étais plus qu'une strophe de neige.' [I spent three months dressed in a diving suit, at the bottom of a lake, trying to find a lost smile. When the window of desire finally opened on my love, I was nothing more than a stanza of snow.] Reprinted in Arnauld and Dermée, *OC,* pp. 179-186 (p. 184). Translation by Hemus [unpublished].

narrative potential (for the reader willing to delve and discover). We might attribute the presence of semantic coherence to the differences, noted by David Hopkins, between the various branches of Dada. For Hopkins, Paris Dada was 'more compliant with semantic conventions' than its German and Swiss counterparts who carried out 'a more thoroughgoing anti-Romantic deconstruction of language'.[131] Whilst Zürich Dadaists such as Hugo Ball rejected the semiotic capacities of language, cleaving linguistic units from their conventional place within the system of meaning and reducing language to pure sounds in poems such as 'Karawane', where onomatopoeia is the primary locus of meaning, French Dada, Hopkins argues, was 'committed to a more lyrical poetics'.[132] It was, according to Michael Richardson, the poetic interests of the French avant-garde writers that subtly altered the character of Dada in Paris: 'When it reached Paris, the virulent anti-art rhetoric of Zurich and Berlin Dada was […] tempered by the poetic aspirations Breton, Aragon and Soupault had grown up with.'[133]

'The Senseless' also exemplifies the ways in which Dada texts, contrary to frequent misconception, are not simply destructive, irrational, and nonsensical, but also, as Forcer contends, potentially meaningful. 'Dada textuality', Forcer asserts, 'can be semantically complex and interconnected – textually "meaningful", as it were – even while it peddles and plays with meaninglessness on the surface.'[134] We can glean much from Arnauld's poem if we think through this same spatial analogy and read the poem as one of conflicting layers. Whilst the poem's surface is an irrational, chaotic jumble of severed syntactic units, incomplete images, fragmentary typography, juxtaposed words and objects,

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[131] David Hopkins, *Dada and Surrealism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 65 and p. 66.
[132] Ibid., p. 66. Hugo Ball, 'Karawane', in *The Dada Almanac*, ed. by Richard Huelsenbeck, translated by Malcolm Green *et al* (Channel Islands: The Guernsey Press, 1993), p. 61. It is worth noting that, arguably, the semantic content of Ball's poem is discernible once the dense cloak of sound is stripped away.
[133] Michael Richardson, 'Poetics', in *Surrealism: Key Concepts*, ed. by Krzysztof Fijalkowski and Michael Richardson (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2016), pp. 131-142 (p. 132).
[134] Forcer, '"Neither Parallel nor Slippers": Dada, War, and the Meaning(lessness) of Meaning(lessness)', in *Nonsense and Other Senses: Regulated Absurdity in Literature*, ed. by Elisabetta Tarantino and Carlo Caruso (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), pp. 191-206 (p. 192).

intermittent rhyme, and incongruous imagery – all born of Arnauld's seemingly haphazard approach to literary creation ('catching' runaway words and privileging their sounds) – this riotous surface layer, resistant to fixity and order, once penetrated and peeled back (by the attentive reader) reveals a meaningful, sombre, and evocative depiction of intense emotional turmoil.[135] Contrary to both Dada's and the poem's surfaces of riot, revelry, playfulness, spontaneity, and unsentimental destruction, in 'The Senseless' Arnauld has painted a sorrowful picture of heartbreak and despair. She develops not just a language of upheaval and revolt, but one which simultaneously rebels and revels, and conveys complex and meaningful content.

Rather than dispensing entirely with sense and semantics, Arnauld was clearly looking for new ways to convey ideas, images, and emotions, and a new means by which the reader might grasp hold of them. In light of this, we might read Arnauld's unusual typography and disruptive formal experimentation not only in terms of Dada's explosive 'demolition' of traditional linguistic and literary forms, but also in relation to Stéphane Mallarmé's 'simultaneous vision of the Page'.[136] Arnauld's typographical arrangements in many ways mirror the dispersed elements of Mallarmé's poetry, in poems such as 'Un Coup de Dés' ('A Throw of the Dice').[137] For Mallarmé, the scattered typography nurtures 'prismatic subdivisions' of the poem's imagery:

> The paper intervenes each time an image, of its own accord, ceases or withdraws, accepting the succession of others; and, […] it is not a question, as it usually is, of regular sound patterns or verses but rather of prismatic subdivisions […].[138]

[135] According to Kamenish 'contemporaries often remarked that Arnauld's writing seemed sensitive and human oriented when compared to the mechanical and experimental poetry of her colleagues', p. 91.
[136] Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Preface' to 'Un Coup de Dés', in *Collected Poems* ed. by Henry Weinfield (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1994), pp. 121-123 (p. 121).
[137] Mallarmé, 'Un Coup de Dés', pp. 124-145.
[138] Mallarmé, 'Preface', p. 121.

Through this typographical subdivision the reading process is altered, and the poem communicates not through linear progression but simultaneously: the distance created by the white space of the page,

> which mentally separates words or groups of words from one another, has the literary advantage […] of seeming to speed up and slow down the movement, of scanning it, and even of intimating it through a simultaneous vision of the Page […].[139]

This 'simultaneous vision', according to Mallarmé, replaces the basic unit of 'Verse or the perfect line'.[140] In a similar way, Arnauld's typographical arrangements and fragmented images alter the reading experience, encouraging us to read the dispersed elements of the page not in sequence, but simultaneously. Her fractured poetry invites us to read in multiple, non-linear directions, causing us to catch sight of 'morbid hearts', 'clouds', and 'nothingness' simultaneously, and to grasp meaning by way of (plural) associations, not lineation. The visual dispersion of the words on the page asks us to read the lines 'The magnetic passions nick themselves | and a sigh yawns in the mirror' not only from left to right as a complete unit or self-containing image, but as individual words pregnant with the potential to collide with others across the page: the word 'passions' reaches back to connect with 'hearts'; 'yawns' align with 'nightfall' and the 'moon'; the phrase 'nick themselves' points to injury, which chimes semantically with the 'sling' and the diseased ('morbid') hearts. Arnauld's prismatic images, distributed across the page, invite us to engage with the text in plural, simultaneous ways; they also mirror the distributed segments of a heart torn apart.

Whilst she experimented with the irrational, destructive aesthetic tendencies of Dada, it is apparent that Arnauld also sought to develop meaningful expression. Drawing from Mallarmé's experimental typographical arrangements, dabbling with Dada's riotous, disintegrative aesthetic tendencies, and diverging from the avant-garde's aggressive, unsentimental stance, Arnauld composes a wounded 'poem in a sling' to capture and convey the fractured

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[139] Ibid.
[140] Ibid., p. 122.

remnants of a broken heart. Contrary to Sheppard's claim that 'Dada poetry does not deal in human emotions, human contexts, the human spirit […]', and in contrast with the more aggressive stance of poems such as 'The Wood-Gnawers', in other experimental compositions Arnauld was exploring the potential for the evocation and expression of an intense inner world of human emotion.[141] At the height of Dada, she was evolving her own personal poetic style, a unique poetry that she called 'Projectivisme': 'It is a poetry that I imagine to be unique because, going within myself, I have sought out the source of my worry, love and suffering. […] This 'projection' of our profound life, in pieces of work, is poetry itself for me.'[142]

**New Technologies and the Poem as *Projecteur***

Whilst Arnauld searched within herself, seeking her innermost truths in order that they might find expression in her poetry, she also drew inspiration from the increasingly modernised world around her. The early decades of the twentieth century were a time of unprecedented upheaval and rapid technological development. The First World War had brought with it enormous destruction and casualties in their thousands. As the first modern, mechanised warfare the world had seen, with the introduction of new scientific and technological developments – including advanced military jets and tanks – the war had a significant, and lasting, impact on society. The early part of the twentieth century also saw other technological developments (driven, in part, by the war), such as advancements in cinematic technologies and modern aviation. It was also at this time that the first modern amusement parks were opened, with mechanical rides and attractions adorned with bright electric lights. Everyday life was becoming increasingly permeated and shaped by modern technology – by electricity, engines, and machines. It was in this climate of catastrophic warfare and powerful new technologies that avant-garde artists and writers were attempting

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[141] Sheppard, p. 293.

[142] 'C'est une poésie que je prétends unique parce que, rentrée en moi-même, j'ai cherché d'où me vient l'inquiétude, l'amour et la souffrance. […] Cette <<projection>> de notre vie profonde, dans des œuvres, est selon moi la poésie même.' Arnauld, 'Avertissement aux Lecteurs', from 'L'Apaisement De l'Éclipse' in Arnauld and Dermée, *OC*, pp. 177-178 (p. 177). Translated as 'Warning to Readers', trans. by Hemus [unpublished].

to create representations adequate to express the complex new experiences of the modern world. And it was in this environment that Arnauld began to shape her own poetic style.

The opening of Arnauld's poem 'Luna Park' paints an ominous and unsettling scene:

> Sinister display of that optical mirror
> stuck on my shoulder
> photophore horoscope of bad days
> tattoo of my enemies
> submerged at the bottom of sad reservoirs
> crystallised by rapid lightning[143]

A mirror mounted on the speaker's shoulder reflects an astrological formation in the sky above that portends of unhappiness and 'bad days'; the muffled beats of a military 'tattoo' resound from the depths of 'sad reservoirs', rippling through the water to bring with them visions of warfare, drowned soldiers, water-logged trenches, and defeated 'enemies'; violent flashes of 'rapid lightning' evoke threatening storm clouds and the hazards of electrical energy, and seem to fix into permanence ('crystallised') this 'horoscope of bad days'. The main impression from this first stanza is one of misery, struggle, and pessimism; reference to the 'enemies' and a cluster of negative adjectives – 'sinister', 'bad', 'submerged', and 'sad' – suggest conflict and struggle. The poem looks both forward, predicting 'bad days', and backward to 'enemies' already defeated and 'submerged'. From this vision of misfortune, the speaker reaches out in a desperate attempt to grasp at something beautiful:

> Lay hands stretch out immoderately
> to grasp the flower
> barge of rumours on the ocean
> dreamers' bagpipes

The 'flower': a stem emerged from the rubble, a symbol of life, something colourful among these grey, ominous days. But this glimmer of hope is quickly

[143] See Appendix, pp. 200-201.

exposed as an illusion, an ungraspable 'barge of rumours' floating away 'on the ocean', nothing but air in 'dreamers' bagpipes'. The third stanza hints at the futility of the speaker's attempt to grasp at the flower, as the image of 'snails' propelling the ever-spinning cogs of the universe ('In their fort the snails | turn the wheel of the universe') places universal circumstances firmly, like the flower, beyond the grasp of human control. This image calls to mind Dada artist and poet Hans (Jean) Arp's poem 'kaspar ist tot' ('kaspar is dead') and the apocalyptic pessimism its images convey: 'woe our kaspar is dead […] who will turn the coffee grinder […] no-one winds the compasses or the wheels of the barrow any more'.[144]

Beyond human comprehension and control, the 'sinister' displays and 'bad days' of Arnauld's poem are redolent of the dark days and atrocities of the recently ended First World War. The 'tattoo of my enemies | submerged at the bottom of sad reservoirs', with its military connotations, calls forth images of enemy soldiers sounding their war cry: soldiers beating their drums as they proceed into battle, intent on the destruction and defeat of the enemy. This tattoo, with its drum beats pulsating faintly from the bottom of 'sad reservoirs', might be read as a metaphor for post-war collective memory: in 1920 the First World War is over, sunken, submerged, yet its effects still ripple through the water, memories resurface, and visions of the atrocities still pulsate in the minds of many. With its dark, unsettling atmosphere, and depiction of a universe in which humans are powerless to exercise control, 'Luna Park' is marked by an existential pessimism inherited from German Expressionism.

But by the fourth and fifth stanzas the speaker seems to offer an alternative to the gloom of these dark days: 'In Luna Park one juggles | with hearts of crystal | The horoscope in tumblers | listens to the mime artists speak'. The lunar landscape depicted is a space of amusement and entertainment where, like a carnival or circus, common-sense laws are suspended in favour of freedom of imagination and uninhibited play (from 'tumblers', a horoscope 'listens' to (silent) mimes). Whilst the 'optical mirror' of the first stanza reflects a

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[144] First published under the title 'aus "die wolkenpumpe"', in *Dada*, no. 4/5 (May 1919); translation from Eric Robertson, *Arp: Painter, Poet, Sculptor* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 24.

'horoscope of bad days', Arnauld envisages a space in the night sky that offers imaginative diversions from the realities below – a space where one can juggle and be entertained by mime artists. The carnivalesque celestial space of 'Luna Park' calls to mind a poem by Loy, published three years after Arnauld's poem, entitled 'Lunar Baedeker'.[145] In Loy's poem the moon is a space of wild abandon and debauchery where 'A silver Lucifer | serves | cocaine in cornucopia':

A silver Lucifer
serves
cocaine in cornucopia

To some somnambulists
of adolescent thighs
draped
in satirical draperies

Peris in livery
prepare
Lethe
for posthumous parvenues

Delirious Avenues
lit
with the chandelier souls
of infusoria
from Pharoah's tombstones

lead
to mercurial doomsdays
Odious oasis
in furrowed phosphorous ------

the eye-white sky-light
white-light district
of lunar lusts

------ Stellectric signs

[145] Mina Loy, 'Lunar Baedeker', in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger Conover (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1997), pp. 81-82. Originally published in Loy, *Lunar Baedecker* (Paris: Contact Publishing Co., 1923).

"Wing shows on Starway"
"Zodiac carrousel"
[…][146]

In place of Arnauld's celestial acrobats and mime artists, in Loy's lunar landscape we find funfair rides and attractions with names emblazoned in 'Stellectric signs': '"Wing shows on Starway" | "Zodiac carrousel"'. This is a bright space of sensory pleasures ('the eye-white sky-light | white-light district | of lunar lusts') where, similarly to Arnauld's 'hearts of crystal', we find 'Delirious Avenues | lit | with […] chandelier souls' and a 'crystal concubine'. Envisaging these imaginary celestial landscapes, both Arnauld and Loy undoubtedly had in mind real spaces filled with bright attractions and entertainments: the Luna Park theme parks in Paris and New York.[147] The first of today's modern amusement parks, Luna Park, which opened in the first decade of the twentieth century, was a popular attraction offering rides, rollercoasters, dance halls, and other forms of entertainment. The brightly lit theme parks provided an opportunity to escape the banality of the everyday, and to divert one's attention from 'bad days' past and present; these lunar/Luna parks, both real and imagined, are spaces of escape and abandon. With its rapid succession of images Arnauld's poem might be read as a response to, and reflection of, the Luna Park in Paris. The poem's 'ephemeral flash[es]' and spontaneous impressions capture and evoke the diverse, multi-sensory experiences of the funfair or theme park: the bright lights ('rapid lightning') of rides and attractions are reflected and refracted in the surfaces of 'mirrors', 'crystal', and glass ('tumblers'); illusory flowers drift by in a daydream; jolly jugglers entertain; there are monsters of Greek mythology and dark forebodings; snails turn the wheels of the mechanical fairground rides; halls

[146] Ibid., p. 81.
[147] Forcer notes that 'Luna Park itself was current in the experiences and iconography of Parisian avant-gardists (Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia and Picabia were photographed with Guillaume Apollinaire at the park in 1912, for instance, and substantial portions of *Entr'acte* were shot at different attractions).' Forcer, *Dada as Text,* p. 28. The iconography of the moon would also have been prominent in the French cultural imagination of the time, and both Arnauld and Loy would have perhaps been familiar with works such as Jules Verne's *De la terre à la lune* (From the Earth to the Moon) (1865) and Georges Méliès's early film *Le Voyage Dans la Lune* (A Trip to the Moon) (1902).

of mirrors ('mirrors in Palaces') multiply and distort visions; the liberated, carefree atmosphere of the park is encapsulated by amusing 'twaddle'; and the sounds of the funfair are heard as pleasing 'dawn' serenades. The poem's fleeting, fragmented imagery encapsulates the multiplicity of experiences offered by the brightly lit, noisy, crowded amusement park.

The fourth stanza of Arnauld's 'Luna Park' marks a turning point in the poem. The use of the adversative 'but' ('But the spontaneity of impressions | in life…'), indicative of an opposition or change in direction, introduces a contrast to the pessimistic hopelessness of the first three stanzas. The content shifts from 'sinister' displays, gloomy days, and ungraspable dreams, to nonsensical 'twaddle', with Arnauld juxtaposing a creature from Greek Mythology, empty verbosity, racecourses, and the mirrored halls of palaces:

> But the spontaneity of impressions
> in life…
> It is the hydra sunk
> on the unrivalled twaddle of racecourses
> godsend of mirrors in Palaces

Here, Arnauld's characteristic wordplay and fondness for sound form the structural basis of this assemblage: 'C'est l'hydre sombre | sur l'unique sornette des turfs | aubaine des glaces dans les Palaces'. She brings together the alliterative 'l'hydre' (hydra) and 'l'unique' (unrivalled), 'sombre' (sunk) and 'sornette' (twaddle), words with the same ending ('l'hydre' and 'sombre'), and the assonant grouping 'aubaine' (godsend), 'glaces' (mirrors) and 'Palaces' (palaces). The stanza seems to be at once dismissing the sinister displays of the preceeding stanzas as incomprehensible (a world beyond human control, ungraspable by human minds) and pointing to the embracing of a more carefree attitude, with a 'spontaneity of impressions' and 'twaddle' as alternatives to the gloom of these 'bad days'.

Originally published in Arnauld's self-edited print journal *Projecteur* – one of two poems by the *directrice* herself (see also 'Les Ronge-Bois') – a narrow, landscape-oriented publication, 'Luna Park' was printed in two columns, each

comprised of three stanzas.[148] Seen in its original typographical format, it becomes apparent, visually, that the thematically opposing halves of the poem (the dark days on Earth below and the lunar landscape above) fall into two distinct, opposing columns – the 'but' ('Mais') of the fourth stanza therefore marking not only a shift in tone and content, but also introducing the beginning of a new column of text. Whilst the left-hand column evokes a lack of control over the 'bad days' of the universe, the right-hand column offers a more hopeful alternative. Yet even as the first stanza seems to depict the sorry state of the world below, it is referencing and reflecting the sky above, the luminous 'photophore horoscope' of the night sky. The 'optical mirror' perched on the speaker's shoulder seems to offer a reflection both of the ominous astrological formations of the night sky above, and the luminous 'Luna Park' depicted in the facing column. In fact, the mirroring inherent in the two-column layout is key to understanding the poem's prominent motifs: from the 'optical mirror' of the first line, the poem is saturated with references to reflection, light, vision, and luminosity. The luminosity contained in the poem's title – the brightness of a moon reflecting the sun's rays – is echoed throughout in both celestial references and through objects whose physical qualities are reflective or transparent: the 'optical mirror', 'photophore' (a device for transmitting or producing light), 'lightning', 'reservoirs' of water whose surfaces reflect and refract light, 'mirrors in Palaces', 'crystal', (glass) 'tumblers', and finally the 'ephemeral flash' of a 'projector'. The reflective or projective qualities of these various devices and surfaces are mirrored by the text itself as repetitions of vocabulary bounce across the two columns of the printed page: the word 'crystallised' from the first stanza is echoed in 'hearts of crystal' in the fifth; the 'optical mirror' finds its reflection in the 'mirrors in Palaces'; and the 'photophore horoscope' is transformed into 'the horoscope in tumblers'. Just as the many-headed snake (the 'hydra') finds its manifold form returned in the many mirrors of 'Palaces' ('It

[148] An original copy of *Projecteur* can be viewed via *The International Dada Archive* (The University of Iowa Libraries) <http://dada.lib.uiowa.edu/files/show/3147> [accessed 12 February 2018].

is the hydra sunk […] godsend of mirrors in Palaces') so, too, do motifs of light, reflection, and projection bounce and echo around the poem.[149]

The themes of projection and an emphasis on the visual dimension of sensory experience which abound in both 'Luna Park' and in Arnauld's journal *Projecteur* (which translates as spotlight or projector) point to an interest in the new cinematic technologies of the early twentieth century. The emphasis in *Projecteur* is on the capacity for vision bestowed by the bright lights emitted by the projector or lantern: *Projecteur*, Arnauld tells us in her 'Prospectus Projecteur' on the front page of the journal, 'is a lantern for the blind' designed to bathe 'in sunlight those who live in the cold, darkness, and ennui'.[150] The light in which this projector bathes its readers is 'produced by a madreporarian proliferation in celestial spaces'. Like the cinematic projector, *Projecteur* bathes its readers in light, opening their eyes to myriad visual possibilities. Hemus has drawn attention to the 'textual-filmic intermediality' which shapes Arnauld's texts, noting that much of her work 'is informed by, and makes reference to the moving image, both implicitly and explicitly.'[151] Arnauld's texts display a preoccupation with the visual image, and particularly with the moving image and the cinema. In 'Dangereux' (Dangerous), published in Francis Picabia's journal *Cannibale* in 1920, Arnauld writes of a 'chanson filmée' (filmed song), a 'film-fusée' (rocket-film), that is being shown at the '*Cinema Céline Arnauld*'.[152] She writes of inventing her own visual song that 'désinfecte les regards en épluchures d'oignon' (purifies onion-peel gazes), envisaging a poem that will transform the visual perceptions of those with gazes which are cloudy like the semi-translucent layers of an onion, or have become blurred as if by the chemical irritant which a cut onion releases. For Arnauld, the new visual projection technologies of the early twentieth century have the potential to revive and

[149] For Forcer, this 'many-headed beast' is representative of Dada's many leaders. *Dada as Text*, p. 28.
[150] Céline Arnauld, 'Prospectus Projecteur', *Projecteur*, no. 1 [unpaginated]. Translation by Lauren Faro [unpublished].
[151] Hemus, 'Dada's Film-Poet: Céline Arnauld', in *Across the Great Divide: Modernism's Intermedialities, from Futurism to Fluxus*, ed. by Christopher Townsend *et al* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2014), pp. 66-80 (p. 67).
[152] Arnauld, 'Dangereux', *Cannibale*, no. 2 (April 1920).

renew vision, to purify and clarify, opening the eyes as its bathes its viewers in light.

With cinematic projection an only recent technological development, many artists and writers in the early twentieth century were intrigued by its potential. In her 1926 essay 'The Cinema', Virginia Woolf expresses both her fascination with, and uncertainties about, the new art form.[153] She is enamoured with the immediacy of engagement the cinema offers – 'the eye licks it all up instantaneously' – but suspicious of the cinema's relationship with literature, particularly filmic adaptation, depicting it as a parasite which 'fell upon its prey with immense rapacity, and to this moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim.'[154] But Woolf also sees the potential of these new visual technologies to capture and convey with speed all the complex contrasts and nuances of experience, real and imagined:

> The most fantastic contrasts could be flashed before us with a speed which the writer can only toil after in vain; the dream architecture of arches and battlements, of cascades falling and fountains rising, which sometimes visits us in sleep or shapes itself in half-darkened rooms, could be realized before our waking eyes. No fantasy could be too far-fetched or insubstantial. The past could be unrolled, distances annihilated, and the gulfs which dislocate novels […] could, by the sameness of the background, by the repetition of some scene, be smoothed away.[155]

But whilst Woolf sees in cinema the potential to capture that which the writer cannot (that 'which is of no use either to painter or poet'), Arnauld sees in literature the potential to capture, illuminate, and project the fleeting nature of impressions in life, just as the visual medium of film can.[156]

Given its very visual, evocative content, 'Luna Park' can be fruitfully analysed in light of Arnauld's interest in new cinematic technologies and her philosophising about the projections of her literary 'lantern', *Projecteur*. As well as conveying the dizzying, multi-sensory delights of the fairground or

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[153] Virginia Woolf, 'The Cinema', *The Nation & Athenaeum*, vol. XXXIX, no. 13 (3 July 1926), 381-383.
[154] Ibid., p. 381 and p. 382.
[155] Ibid., p. 383.
[156] Ibid., p. 382.

amusement park, the poem can additionally be read as a series of images cast by a cinematic projector. With its rapid succession of heterogeneous, disjointed images – like the many-headed Hydra snake whose image is reflected and refracted in the hundreds of mirrors that fill the Palace of Versailles – the poem displays contrasting frames flashed speedily before us: mirror, horoscope, enemies, flower, barge, bagpipes, snails, palaces, hearts of crystal, mime artists. 'Luna Park' flicks rapidly from scene to scene, image to image. Within the first six lines we are carried swiftly from the speaker's shoulder ('Sinister display of that optical mirror | stuck on my shoulder') into the depths of the dark night sky; a vision of the future is flashed before us ('horoscope of bad days'); we are transported to bloody battle fields ('tattoo of my enemies') and shown a graveyard at the bottom of 'sad reservoirs'. In the manner of the 'éclairs fuyants' ('rapid lightning') of line six, the frames of Arnauld's 'chanson filmée' continue in quick succession, unveiling a montage of severed images: the moving image cuts from the depths of reservoirs to a hand grasping a flower; now a panning shot captures a barge floating on the ocean; rumours are overheard as layers of sound; we glimpse daydreamers dreaming; bagpipes are played. Now we see sedate snails heaving giant wheels; a many-headed monster leaps forth from the page ('It is the hydra'); some mime artists speak, and people juggle with crystal hearts in Luna Park. In a similar way to flashes on the cinema screen, each line of 'Luna Park' reveals a new slide, frame, or still – a new image cast forth by the projector.

In the final lines the source of the poem's visual elements is brought into view, as the speaker tells us: 'Do not distrust me | I am just the ephemeral flash | of the projector'. If we liken the images of Arnauld's poem to the frames of the cinematic film, then we can conceive of the poem as the vehicle for projection (the projector) and the poet as the one who operates the projector (the projectionist). In naming her journal *Projecteur* and, as Hemus suggests, choosing the title *La Lanterne Magique* (The Magic Lantern) for her first novel, Arnauld 'establishes a link between verbal and visual narratives, the reader and viewer, and the poet and projectionist.'[157] As Arnauld conceives of it, the role of

[157] Hemus, 'Dada's Film-Poet', p. 70.

the poet, and the process of poetic expression, is one of not only catching fleeting words, but transforming them into images, and casting them from the projector (the poetic text) for the reader to, in turn, take sight of and catch hold of. The projectionist of the poem 'Luna Park', Arnauld herself, captures and expresses the post-war mood in Europe after the Great War, the haunting collective memory of recent events, the senselessness of such mass destruction and the hopelessness of a post-war generation. But through her projector, Arnauld also proposes a new way of seeing, inspiring dreamers with myriads of bright, flashing images – jugglers in celestial landscapes and many-headed mythical monsters – and diverting attention away from the banality of everyday life. Arnauld's vision of the projectionist encompasses an important role for the poet: she sees in literature the potential to capture and convey all the 'impressions', good and bad, of 'cette vie profonde' (this profound life).[158] She looks to literature, like the cinema screen, to reflect the world around us, and to express an inner world of love and sorrow, but also to transport the reader from reality – to take the mind's eye on a journey through life's kaleidoscope of impressions, experiences, and encounters.

Arnauld situated herself at the centre of Dada's daring experiments with language and her poetry demonstrates her important role in the avant-garde's radical reshaping of literary form. As Kamenish suggests, her 'bold writing formed part of the assault on the commonly accepted stuffy poetry of the era, poetry that the Dadaists refused aesthetically and ideologically.'[159] In her poetry she railed against systems and institutions which she believed stifle the limitless potential of the imagination. She used language to liberate the creative mind and transport the reader to imaginary landscapes where atoms in fine clothing parade, wounds smile, and snails turn the wheels of the universe. Her work is indelibly marked by her participation in Dada, and is an important contribution to Dada's poetics of revolt, but it is the far-reaching explorations of her poetry, and her own conception of the role of the writer and literature, that is of most interest. Whilst she revelled in the irrationality characteristic of Dada, she also explored the sonorous qualities of the French language, the emotional

[158] Arnauld, 'Avertissement aux Lecteurs', in Arnauld and Dermée, *OC*, p. 177.
[159] Kamenish, p. 78.

complexity of the human condition, and literature's potential to illuminate. She developed a poetry that is at once playful and profound – that straddles the line between exuberant avant-garde experiment and a private search for the deepest aspects of being in the world. In literature, Arnauld saw the potential to capture the myriad impressions of our lives. Furthermore, she envisioned the way in which literature could express these impressions, like the ephemeral flashes of the cinematic projector, illuminated for the reader to glimpse and grasp hold of. Drawing from the avant-garde's radical reinterpretation of literary expression, Arnauld developed a unique voice. The work examined in this chapter is just a small sample of her extensive, distinctive œuvre, and just one example of the innovative, ground-breaking experiments that were being undertaken by women wordsmiths throughout the international avant-garde.

## Mina Loy
## (1882-1966)

Futurist, 'Otherist', Surrealist, American Modernist, 'English poetess', daughter of Dada, and Dada *Présidente*: the various monikers with which Mina Loy has, both accurately and inaccurately, been identified attest to her eclectic and nomadic literary and artistic career.[160] Whereas Dismorr and Arnauld were tract-signing members of Vorticism in London and Dada in Paris, respectively, Loy pledged allegiance to no single group, but moved independently among various avant-garde and modernist circles. A British expatriate, throughout the early decades of the twentieth century Loy drifted between the geographical epicentres of the historical avant-garde and came into contact with a number of its artistic and literary figures: in Florence she flirted with Futurism alongside Marinetti and Giovanni Papini; in New York she dabbled with Dada whilst part of an artistic community which included, among others, the Dadaists Marcel Duchamp, Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Francis Picabia, and the highly eccentric Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven; and in Paris she moved in a mixed group comprised of British and American writers, Dadaists, and Surrealists, at a time when Paris Dada was fizzling out and Surrealism was emerging.[161] Loy situated herself within the hubs of artistic activity in early twentieth-century New York and Paris – melting pots in which writers and artists from different groups mingled. A free-floating writer drifting amongst and orbiting the various manifestations of

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[160] In his introduction to Loy's collected texts, *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* [hereafter *LLB*], Conover writes that Loy 'was a Futurist, Dadaist, Surrealist, feminist, conceptualist, modernist, post-modernist, and none of the above', noting that 'she refused identification with many groups and causes that seemed natural for her to adopt.' p. xiii. Two texts authored by Loy ('Oh Marcel…Otherwise I Also Have Been to Louise's' [pp. 263-265] and 'Auto-Facial-Construction' [pp. 266-268]) are included in: *Surrealist Painters and Poets: An Anthology*, ed. by Caws (Cambridge, Mass; London, England: The MIT Press, 2001). An English poet, Loy was later granted American citizenship, leading Virginia M. Kouidis (and others) to refer to her as an 'American' poet in her study of the writer: *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1980). In the catalogue for an exhibition of Loy's artwork at the Bodley Gallery in 1958, Julien Levy called her 'an English poetess of a vanishing generation', as documented by Carolyn Burke in *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1996), p. 434. Loy was one of six women included in the 'Daughters of Dada' exhibition at the Francis M. Naumann Gallery, New York, June 8 – July 28 (2006), and was listed as one of the Dada *Présidentes* in the list 'Quelques Présidents et Présidentes' published in *Bulletin Dada*, no. 6 (March 1920), p. 2.

[161] For a detailed biography of Loy, see Burke, *Becoming Modern*.

modern literary and artistic culture, 'Mina flashed across the sky like an erratic meteor […].'[162] Her work is marked by her interactions with avant-garde creatives, literature, and visual arts, across numerous geographical locations.

A talented creative, Loy worked in various media, producing paintings and illustrations, designing women's clothing, and making decorative lampshades, as well as writing. She wrote a substantial amount of material throughout her lifetime, creating in a variety of literary forms, including poetry, essays, short stories, plays, manifestos, and several novels. From 1914 her literary work was published in numerous journals and little magazines in New York including, among others, *Camera Work*, *The Blind Man*, *Others*, *Rogue*, *The Dial*, *The Transatlantic Review*, *Contact*, *The Little Review* and *Trend*. Perhaps her best-known poem sequence, 'Songs to Joannes' made its debut in *Others* magazine in 1917.[163] In Paris her first collection of poetry *Lunar Baedecker* [sic] was published by Robert McAlmon in 1923 and the poem series 'The Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', a portion of which first appeared in *The Little Review* in 1923, was published in the *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* in 1925.[164] Yet despite her success as a published writer, and her notability in the avant-garde circles of Paris and New York in the 1910s and 1920s, Loy's name and her work disappeared from view until her texts were collected again in *Lunar Baedeker & Time-Tables* in 1958.[165] A further limited edition collection of her texts (and the most comprehensive to-date, though now out of print) *The Last Lunar Baedeker* was published in 1982, and another, less comprehensive edition *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* in 1997.[166] More recently, a collection of Loy's stories, dramatic texts, essays, and commentaries has been published as *Stories*

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[162] Ibid., p. 291.
[163] Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', *Others*, vol. 3, no. 6 (April 1917), 3-20. The first four poems of the sequence were originally published as 'Love Songs' in *Others*, vol. 1, no. 1 (July 1915), 6-8.
[164] Loy, *Lunar Baedecker* (Paris: Contact Publishing Co., 1923). The original publication carries the misspelling 'baedecker', instead of the correct spelling 'baedeker'. Loy, 'The Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', in *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* (Paris: Three Mountains Press, 1925), pp. 137-194.
[165] Loy, *Lunar Baedeker & Time-Tables* (Highlands: Jonathan Williams, 1958).
[166] Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger L. Conover (Highlands: The Jargon Society, 1982).

*and Essays of Mina Loy*, and her novel *Insel*, originally published posthumously in 1991, has been republished.[167]

Of the writers selected for this study, Loy is perhaps the most well-known. Since the republication of many of her works in the last twenty years her voice has been read and heard and her work has become the focus of considerable critical attention. Burke's detailed biography *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* has brought to life the woman, and there have been two volumes of collected essays on her written works, *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* and *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, as well as several monographs and numerous articles.[168] Loy has been read most frequently within the context of Anglo-American Modernism, and whilst her work has been discussed with reference to her interactions with various avant-garde movements and figures, her texts have yet to be compared with the work of her female avant-garde contemporaries in Dada, Surrealism, Expressionism, and Vorticism, owing, for the most part, to a dearth of published research on avant-garde women writers more generally. The exception to this is Cristanne Miller's comparative study of Loy, Else-Lasker-Schüler, and Marianne Moore.[169] But whilst Miller compares the impact of Loy's and Lasker-Schüler's contrasting geographical locations on their works, there are no studies which consider Loy's work alongside that of female writers involved in the avant-garde movements with which Loy came into direct contact, such as the Paris and New York branches of Dada, despite Loy moving in many of the same artistic circles, and coming into contact with the likes of Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and Nancy Cunard, among others.

This chapter will situate Loy firmly within the context of both the European and Anglo-American avant-gardes. It will look in depth at three of her early poetic texts: 'Human Cylinders', first published in *Others* in 1917; 'Parturition', first published in *Trend* in 1914; and 'Songs to Joannes', first

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[167] *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy*, ed. by Sara Crangle (Champaign; Dublin; London: Dalkey Archive Press, 2011); Loy, *Insel*, ed. by Elizabeth Arnold and Sarah Hayden (Brooklyn and London: Melville House, 2014).
[168] *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet*, ed. by Shreiber and Tuma; *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, ed. by Hobson and Potter.
[169] Cristanne Miller, *Cultures of Modernism: Marianne Moore, Mina Loy, and Else Lasker-Schüler* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007).

published in its entirety in *Others* in 1917.[170] The chosen order of the poems within the chapter highlights Loy's engagement with the avant-garde before exploring her divergent feminist poetics in more depth. The last poem draws attention to her formal innovations and considers her reflections on the written word and the role of the reader. For the sake of consistency, the analyses undertaken in this chapter will refer to the texts as they are printed in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*. Close readings will consider these texts in light of Loy's interactions with a cross-section of the avant-garde, reading the works with reference to avant-garde artists and writers with whom she came into direct creative contact, such Marcel Duchamp, and drawing comparisons with the works of other writers within this study, including Céline Arnauld and Jessica Dismorr.

**Chocolate Grinders and Human Cylinders: the Mechanomorphic and the Visual Avant-Garde**

The year following her arrival in New York, Loy's poem 'Human Cylinders' was first published in *Others: An Anthology of the New Verse*, alongside two other poems, 'At the Door of the House' and 'The Effectual Marriage'.[171] The poem is concerned with the lack-lustre existence of the title's protagonists, the 'human cylinders'. Loy evokes an abstract landscape in which the cylinders revolve and procreate, and presents a narrative of frenzied sexual encounter which results in the birth of a unique human cylinder creature. The overall impression is one of gloom and uncertainty, as the cylinders merely exist in an atmosphere of 'enervating dust'. 'Human Cylinders' is a bleak vision of a mechanical humanity:

> The human cylinders
> Revolving in the enervating dust
> That wraps each closer in the mystery
> Of singularity

[170] Loy, 'Human Cylinders', in *Others: An Anthology of the New Verse*, ed. by Alfred Kreymborg (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1917), pp. 71-72; Loy, 'Parturition', *Trend*, 8.1 (Oct. 1914), 93-94; Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', *Others*, vol. 3, no. 6 (April 1917), 3-20.
[171] 'At the Door of the House', in *Others: An Anthology*, pp. 64-66; 'The Effectual Marriage', in *Others: An Anthology*, pp. 66-70. This analysis will refer to 'Human Cylinders' as it is reprinted in *LLB*, pp. 40-41. See Appendix, pp. 202-203.

Among the litter of a sunless afternoon

The imagery and themes on which Loy draws in this poem point to her interactions both with the industrial terrain of the early twentieth century and with the work of fellow avant-gardists – in particular, with the visual creations of the New York Dadaists. Avant-garde artists and writers were both fascinated and troubled by the industrial qualities of a rapidly developing modern urban landscape, and drew on the forms of the modern machine in their visual and literary works. Responding to the mechanisation of the modern world, representations of the human body in the industrial age took on the forms, shapes and processes of the machine. The Dada poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven writes of the human body as machine and the owner as engineer: 'My machinery is built that way', 'Why should I – proud engineer – be ashamed of my | machinery [...].'[172] In visual works such as Suzanne Duchamp's *Un et une menacés* (A Menaced Male and Female, 1916) the body is reshaped and reimagined in mechanical form: male and female are depicted using clock gear and metal rings in combination with illustrations which draw on the forms of industrial cranes, pincers, and pulleys.[173] In Francis Picabia's machine portraits (c. 1915-1918), the machine again becomes an analogue of the human anatomy: his *Fille née sans mere* (Girl Born Without a Mother, 1916-1917) presents the *fille* as machine, using a diagram of a railway machine to depict a motherless offspring born of the industrial age.[174] In the years around the First World War, it was not just the body, but also erotic desire that was represented in mechanical terms. As Jennifer Mundy notes, in works made at this time, 'erotic desire was portrayed – and satirised – as an insistent mechanical impulse driving all human beings.'[175] In *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)*

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[172] Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, 'The Modest Woman', in *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*, ed. by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo (Cambridge, Mass. and London, England: The MIT Press, 2011), pp. 286-289 (p. 286).
[173] Suzanne Duchamp, *Un et une menacés* [A Menaced Male and Female], 1916, watercolour, clock gear, metal rings, plumb bob, and string on paper, 70 x 54.5 cm, Collection of Jean-Jacques Lebel, Paris.
[174] Francis Picabia, *Fille née sans mère* [Girl Born without a Mother], c. 1916-1917, gouache and metallic paint on printed paper, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art.
[175] Jennifer Mundy, *Surrealism: Desire Unbound* [exhibition catalogue] (London: Tate Publishing, 2001), p. 11.

(1915-1923), Marcel Duchamp develops a complex narrative of erotic desire and sexual interaction, drawing on analogies and metaphors from physics and engineering to bring to life bride and bachelor 'machines' formed of grinders, pistons, mill wheels, engines, sieves, and parasols.[176]

Loy's poem 'Human Cylinders' similarly presents the human body in mechanomorphic terms. The cylindrical shape of the human figures evoked calls to mind the curvilinear metal engine cylinder, or the hollow pipes and tubes of the modern machine. As they rotate and revolve, they echo the motions of mechanical components – turning, pumping, propelled into repetitive motions by force. But these machines are far from the powerful, fiery, locomotives of Futurism, and the poem does not convey the kind of fervent adoration of machinery that we find in the declarations of the Vorticist journal *Blast* or in Marinetti's Futurist manifestoes. Instead, Loy's cylinders are hollow, ineffectual components weakened and separated by an 'enervating dust' which envelopes them, wrapping each '[…] closer in the mystery | Of singularity'. Loy paints a gloomy picture of humans as 'cylinders' or 'automatons', 'revolving' amongst 'the litter of a sunless afternoon' – not complex and irregular human bodies, but homogeneous, smoothly curved containers in the likeness of metal machine parts. She draws on mechanical forms not as a means to present robust, energetic bodies, but weak and miserable beings. As Tim Armstrong suggests, for Loy the machine is not 'the desirable replacement for the body, [but] a reductive version of the body'.[177] Loy would later write in the poem 'The Oil in the Machine?' (1921) of 'We spasimal [sic] engineers' and human bodies as 'pulpy' 'engines', mocking the fervent conflation of man and machine by drawing on the same vocabulary to evoke a weak, mushy body belonging to an erratically convulsive engineer.[178]

The cylinders are numb, sensationless beings, unable to taste food, incapable of communicating, able to love only 'a very little'. Homogeneous,

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[176] Marcel Duchamp, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* [*La Mariée mise à nu par ses célibataires, même*], 1915-1923 (reconstruction by Richard Hamilton 1965-6), oil, lead, dust, and varnish on glass, Tate, London.
[177] Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), p. 115.
[178] Loy, 'The Oil in the Machine?', in *Stories and Essays*, ed. by Crangle, p. 285.

smoothly curved containers resembling metal machine parts, the human cylinders possess none of the complexity or capabilities of human bodies. They are mere 'automatons', mechanomorphic creatures that function involuntarily or mechanically: robotic, unemotional, devoid of a higher consciousness and of senses such as taste ('Having eaten without tasting'). Loy's cylinders are 'simplifications of men' – hollow, empty cylinders, lacking in substance. They are humans that have been reduced to cogs in the machine, calling to mind the Zürich Dadaist Sophie Taeuber's puppet *Wache, aus König Hirsch* (Military Guards, 1918), a homogenous amalgamation of multiple military guards whose indistinctness sees them presented as one barrel-shaped torso and cylindrical legs, painted silver to resemble metal.[179]

In addition to their shared depictions of mechanomorphic forms, there are striking points of intersection between Duchamp's *The Large Glass* and Loy's poem, suggesting not only that an awareness of the works of Duchamp and Picabia at this time influenced her choice of poetic imagery, or that Loy was drawing from the same frame of reference as the New York Dadaists, but that Loy perhaps wrote 'Human Cylinders' in direct dialogue with Duchamp's artwork.[180] On her arrival in New York in 1916 Loy was introduced to Duchamp at the apartment of Walter and Louise Arensberg.[181] During 1916 and 1917 Loy and Duchamp were frequently to be found together – conversing at the Arensbergs', working on *The Blind Man*, or drinking champagne at parties hosted by *The Blind Man* circle. During this time Duchamp was working on *The Large Glass*, which he had begun in September 1915 and would continue to work on intermittently until 1923. Given their acquaintance, it is plausible, if not probable, that Loy viewed the work in its preparatory stages, that she was privy

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[179] Sophie Taeuber, *Wache, aus König Hirsch* [Military Guards], 1918, wood and oil paint, 55.5 x 18 cm, Museum für Gestaltung, Zürich.

[180] Whilst Conover points to 'the Futurist sources from which [the poem's] lines were drawn', the text more clearly bears the marks of Loy's interactions with New York Dada, and particularly with the work of Duchamp. Conover, 'Notes on the text', in Loy, *LLB*, p. 186. Miller notes that, 'Although Loy spent less than three years of her life in New York before the mid-1930s […] these years were tremendously important to the development of her poetry.' p. 46.

[181] Burke notes that, within a few days of her arrival in New York, Frances Stevens had taken Loy to one of the Arensbergs' 'nightly gatherings', at which guests might include, amongst others, Duchamp, Albert Gleizes, Juliette Roche, Jean and Yvonne Crotti, Picabia and Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, and Man Ray. *Becoming Modern*, p. 213.

to the various ideas which informed the piece, and that she acted as an interlocutor for Duchamp; it is likely that she drew inspiration from, as well as stimulated the development of, this work and others.[182] Explicit intertextual dialogues with the work of her modernist contemporaries can be found throughout Loy's *œuvre*, including poems on Gertrude Stein and James Joyce, and an essay on William Carlos Williams. Her written works also maintain a close connection with the visual arts, most evident in those texts written in direct response to visual artworks, such as 'Brancusi's Golden Bird' and '"The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis'.[183] It is therefore not unlikely that Loy wrote 'Human Cylinders' in dialogue Duchamp's piece, or that discussions between the two stimulated the ideas behind both Loy's poem and Duchamp's glass exhibit.

Marcel Duchamp's *The Large Glass* is a free-standing artwork comprised of two glass panels, on which are painted two mechanomorphic figures: the 'Bride machine' and the 'Bachelor machine'. The bachelors, occupying the lower glass pane, are depicted as a complex contraption of multiple components, including a 'chocolate machine' formed of cylindrical, barrel-shaped grinders (based on Duchamp's previous studies of a chocolate grinder seen in a confectioner's window), a 'water wheel mill' turbine within a geometrical frame, capillary tubes, sieves and parasols.[184] The bride of the title, occupying the upper half of the work, is envisaged in shapes which correspond to the components of the modern machine – draft pistons, triple cipher, 'cylinder-breasts', 'steam engine', and a 'motor with quite feeble cylinders' with a 'reservoir of love gasoline' – all presented in a light grey colour suggestive of steel.[185]

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[182] Discussion of creative connections between the works of Duchamp and Loy has also been taken up by Alex Goody in *Modernist Articulations: A Cultural Study of Djuna Barnes, Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and by Marisa Januzzi, 'Dada Through the Looking Glass, or: Mina Loy's Objective', in *Women in Dada*, ed. by Sawelson-Gorse, pp. 578-612.

[183] The following poems are all included in Loy, *LLB*: 'Gertrude Stein' (p. 94), 'Joyce's Ulysses' (pp. 88-90), 'Brancusi's Golden Bird' (pp. 79-80) and '"The Starry Sky" of Wyndham Lewis' (pp. 91-92). Loy's essay 'William Carlos Williams' is included in *Stories and Essays*, ed. by Crangle, p. 294.

[184] Duchamp's previous studies are *Chocolate Grinder* (No. 1, 1913) and *Chocolate Grinder* (No. 2, 1914).

[185] Quotations in this paragraph are taken from Marcel Duchamp's notes on *The Large Glass*, published in translation in Duchamp, *Salt Seller*, ed. by Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson (New York: OUP, 1973), p. 22 and p. 30.

It is the 'quite feeble cylinders' of Duchamp's 'bride machine' that are the focus of Loy's poem. But where these motor cylinders form only a part of the bride machine of Duchamp's artwork, in Loy's poem they are representative of the human body as a whole – the human *as* cylinder. These cylinders share the 'quite feeble' nature of Duchamp's motor cylinders, spinning in 'the enervating dust' which weakens and separates them, and reduces them to mere automatons with the same 'very timid-power' of Duchamp's bride.[186] Loy's 'human cylinders' mirror the same revolutionary motions evoked by the drums of Duchamp's chocolate grinder and the water mill turbine. The 'gyratory' movements of the chocolate machine as it grinds chocolate, and the rotations of the water mill as water rushes through it, are echoed by Loy's cylinders as they revolve on a circuitous course. The orbital motions of Loy's mechanical beings are given shape by the poem's formal elements. As we read across the lines of the printed page, Loy's use of enjambment seems to gesture towards the revolutions of these cylinders. Short lines force the reader to abandon their expectations for syntax to arrive at a close in tandem with the line end – we must instead step over the line break in pursuit of the syntax as it rolls on:

> The human cylinders
> Revolving in the enervating dust
> That wraps each closer in the mystery
> Of singularity
> Among the litter of a sunless afternoon

The continuity of syntax across each line break is suggestive of the rolling or revolving motions of the human cylinders, and the conflicting rhythms of the line endings and a continuous forward motion of syntax seems to create a gentle stop-start motion reminiscent of a circling object completing one full revolution and pausing almost imperceptibly before commencing the next. Where line ends repeatedly interrupt the fluidity of the enjambing syntax a circular rhythm emerges.

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[186] 'The Bride basically is a motor. But before being a motor which transmits her timid-power. –she is this very timid-power—This timid-power is a sort of automobiline, love gasoline, […] distributed to the quite feeble cylinders […].' Duchamp, p. 42.

Both Loy's poem and Duchamp's artwork pivot around a tension concerning failed communication and consummation. In *The Large Glass* the bachelors and bride each occupy one half of the frame, divided by separate sheets of glass. Occupying the lower pane, the cylindrical chocolate grinders of Duchamp's elaborate love-making machine revolve as part of a complex mechanical contraption which apparently works to remove the bride's clothing. From opposing halves of the glass the bachelors and the bride attempt to communicate across the divide through a circuitous system whereby the bachelors' rotating components work to strip the Bride bare. Each stationed in their isolated corners, there is no point of contact between the 'desire motor' of the Bachelor machine and the Bride ('Far from being in direct contact with the Bride […] the desire motor is separated by an air cooler.')[187] The bachelors' attempts to communicate and consummate are hindered, the act of love-making reduced to the gyrations of detached machines.

Just as Duchamp's bride and bachelors are separated on two panes of glass, Loy's cylinders, too, are detached, surrounded by a dust which 'wraps each closer in the mystery | Of singularity'. Loy's poem similarly grapples with acts of communication and consummation between two parties; both Duchamp's mechanomorphic Bride and Bachelors, and Loy's human cylinders are engaged in the sexual act – Loy's text more explicitly so. There are veiled references to sperm and bodily fluids as 'One thin pale trail of speculation' is thrust out ('extrudes') 'beyond the tangible', and in the images of seed, core and kernel: 'Your indistinctness | Serves me the core of the kernel of you'. But as Loy's two cylinders engage in a 'lucid rush-together of automatons', they seem unable to achieve a clear channel of communication. The second stanza depicts a moment of intimacy between the speaker and the other half of the 'us' and 'we' to which the speaker refers – the two whose 'miseries' come together in the first stanza, perhaps. There is a 'frenzied reaching out of intellect to intellect' as the two lean head to head, 'brow to brow' in an act of communication. The word 'communicative' is detached typographically from the rest of the line, pointing to

[187] Duchamp, p. 39.

its significance both to the pair engaged in an attempt at communication and as a central theme of the poem:

> When in the frenzied reaching out of intellect to intellect
> Leaning brow to brow communicative
> Over the abyss of the potential

One of only three lines, and three words or phrases, to be typographically distanced and displaced within the poem, this indent seems to infer that channels of communication between these 'human cylinders' are displaced, disrupted, or unsuccessful. As the human cylinders interact, the word 'communicative' carries with it the inference of a successful exchange. But Loy's choice of the adjective 'communicative' over the verb 'communicating' should be noted: where the verb form indicates an active process, the adjective 'communicative' merely indicates a capability or readiness to converse and interact, not the actual delivery of the action. Whilst these subjects lean intently into one another, poised for the possibility of meaningful, reciprocal exchange, opening up below them is 'an abyss of the potential | Concordance of respiration'. This 'abyss' of potential, not actual, harmony signals a failure to sync. Just as the machine-beings of Duchamp's sculpture find no point of contact across the glass divide, Loy's cylinders struggle to form a bridge across the 'abyss'. Barbara Zabel notes that 'artists embraced a machine aesthetic whose attributes of efficiency, structure, and construction derived from the engineered environment, from structures like bridges, factories, and skyscrapers.'[188] But Loy's cylinders are not efficient, stable, or functional. Sex, as Loy conceives of it here, is not the structured action of efficient machines but a 'frenzy' and 'rush-together' of feeble automatons. As the intellects reach out towards one another, there is an 'absence' of correspondence between mouths (or spoken words), the physical process of conceiving, and 'expression': 'Absence of corresponding between the verbal sensory | And reciprocity of conception | And expression'. What seems to emerge from the exchange is only 'One thin pale trail of

[188] Barbara Zabel, 'The Constructed Self: Gender and Portraiture in Machine-Age America', in *Women in Dada,* ed. by Sawelson-Gorse, pp. 22-47 (p. 23).

speculation' and 'Shames': 'Over the abyss of the potential | Concordance of respiration | Shames'.

Both Duchamp and Loy draw on the mechanical as a sexual metaphor: as Duchamp's machines grind and revolve, the 'sparks of the desire-magneto' of the Bride machine signals arousal;[189] the 'frenzied' 'rush-together', or union, of Loy's 'automatons' is an equally 'lucid', spark-producing affair (and one which recalls a similar image from the poem series 'Songs to Joannes': 'Only the impact of lighted bodies | Knocking sparks off each other | In chaos').[190] But whilst Duchamp's gyrating, grinding bachelors perform the task of stripping the bride, in a sexual act by multiple males (as indicated by the plural 'bachelors' of the title) upon a single female, Loy's cylinders engage in a reciprocal exchange where the female occupies the position of power. Duchamp, in his notes on *The Large Glass*, underscores the timid sexuality of the passive, virginal Bride machine in contrast with the more virile desires of the Bachelor machine which actively strips the Bride of her clothes. The Bride machine is described by Duchamp as a 'very timid-power' possessing a 'motor with quite feeble cylinders'; the Bride is 'an apotheosis of virginity', possessing an 'ignorant' and 'blank desire' in the absence of sexual experience.[191] The Bachelor machine, with its forceful 'desire motor', serves as 'an architectonic base' for the Bride, serving to superintend and control the process of her 'electrical stripping'.[192] Loy, in contrast, subverts this sexual power dynamic. In 'Human Cylinders', Loy's (potentially) female speaker diminishes the male cylinders to merely the source of the seed by which she will procreate. These cylinders are mere 'Simplifications of men' whose 'indistinctness' serves her 'the core of [their] kernel'. Their union is a 'frenzied' process of miscommunication and mismatched intellects, devoid of all but 'a very little' love, but one in which the vital procreative 'kernel' is retrieved.

In her dialogue with *The Large Glass*, Loy counters Duchamp's masculinist imagery, constructing a feminist rebuttal which subsumes these grinding, mechanical males into one homogenous, indistinct seed-bearing group –

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[189] Duchamp, p. 44.
[190] Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', in *LLB*, p. 59.
[191] Duchamp, p. 39 and p. 42.
[192] Ibid., p. 39.

Duchamp's desiring bachelors and Loy's male cylinders are all the same, devoid of individuality. Marisa Januzzi suggests that 'Loy's […] satirical skepticism [sic] about the sexism of the most ostensibly progressive circles […]' would inevitably colour her friendship with Duchamp.[193] It also shaped her response to, and dialogue with, the artwork and ideas emerging from these circles, and her navigation of the masculine rhetoric of the avant-garde. In the masculinized industrial environment of the early twentieth century, Loy pushes against the avant-garde's machismo constructions of the virile, male machine. In 'The Oil in the Machine?' (1921), Loy quashes both the Futurists' conflation of man and machine,[194] and the New York Dadaists mechanico-sexual metaphors – writing with her trademark acerbic wit: 'Man invented the machine in order to discover himself | Yet I have heard a lady say, "*Il fait l'amour comme une machine à coudre*," with no inflection of approval'.[195] In song 'II' of 'Songs to Joannes', the speaker's lover is similarly depicted, as Alex Goody notes, as 'a dysfunctional sex-machine, "a clock-work mechanism | running down against time | To which I am not paced".'[196] In 'Human Cylinders' Loy presents conception as an instance of chaotic miscommunication in which the female succeeds in retrieving what she has come for; exploding the ideal of machine-like efficiency, she undermines male positions of agency and control in the realms of sexual desire and procreation, and makes woman the master of her own procreativity.

Whereas Duchamp's artwork is concerned predominantly with the drives and desires of these machine beings, Loy's poem takes the narrative beyond that of sexual impulses to explore narratives of procreation and existential themes. Surprisingly, and in contrast with the onanistic connotations of Duchamp's narrative ('the bachelor grinds his chocolate himself'),[197] the cylinders' perhaps unsuccessful tryst in fact results in the birth of a child: 'From among us we have sent out | Into the enervating dusk | One little whining beast'. The child in Loy's

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[193] Januzzi, p. 583.
[194] I am thinking here of Marinetti's remarks regarding 'the multiplied man who mixes himself with iron, who is fed by electricity', from 'We Abjure Our Symbolist Masters', in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. by R.W. Flint (London: Secker & Warburg, 1972), pp. 66-68 (p. 67).
[195] Loy, 'The Oil in the Machine?', p. 285.
[196] Goody, p. 99.
[197] Duchamp, p. 68.

poem is born from a 'frenzied rush-together of automatons', the product of tin tubes that do not question beforehand whether or not their 'two miseries' can 'form one opulent well-being'. As it turns out, they cannot. What emerges from this sexual encounter is a representation of the human body that is not just mechanomorphic, but a machine-animal hybrid. Between them they force out, 'beyond the tangible':

> One little whining beast
> Whose longing
> Is to slink back to antediluvian burrow
> And one elastic tentacle of intuition
> To quiver among the stars

Bestial and possessing the tentacles of an invertebrate, Loy's human cylinder child recalls, as we shall see in the final chapter of the present study, the hybrid creature of Dismorr's poem 'Monologue', with its 'chains of muscles fitted' beneath its skin, tentacular senses ('Tentacles of my senses'), and fingers 'tipped with horn'.[198] Similarly to Dismorr's sensorial descriptions, and in contrast with Duchamp's sterile, mechanical depiction of the sexual act, Loy's references to the processes of procreation are visceral and tactile: as bodies 'rush-together' the 'thin pale trail of speculation' which 'extrudes beyond the tangible' evokes post-coital bodily fluids; the womb from which the child emerges is traced in the image of the 'antediluvian burrow'; and this child that is 'sent', or rather pushed, out into the world possesses an 'elastic tentacle' with which to tangibly explore its new surroundings. Loy insists on the humanity of the cylinders over the mechanical ideals of Duchamp; drawing from the same sterile, mechanical framework as Duchamp to depict her hybrid beings, Loy evokes a tangible, corporeal presence.

Loy's preoccupation with narratives of procreation reveals what Tara Prescott describes as her 'interest in humanity as continued participants in creation.'[199] But 'Human Cylinders' reveals an uncertainty about the future of

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[198] For a detailed discussion of 'Monologue', see the chapter on Jessica Dismorr.
[199] Tara Prescott, 'Moths and Mothers: Mina Loy's "Parturition", *Women's Studies*, 39:3 (2010), 194-214 <DOI: 10.1080/00497871003595893> (p. 208).

human procreation. Loy, like both Arnauld and Dismorr, was responding to the technological developments of the early twentieth century, and to the fascination with and glorification of machine forms shared, to varying degrees, by the Vorticists, Futurists, and Dadaists. But the bestial offspring of her automatons is not the robust, electrified machine child of Futurism, but a whining creature that seeks to slip back into the burrows of the past, to 'slink' back into the safety of the womb. Rather than celebrating the machinic, Loy seems to draw on the mechanical in order to articulate fears and uncertainties about the fate of humanity. Published in 1917, during the tumultuous years of the First World War, 'Human Cylinders' bears the imprint of existential concerns commensurate with a catastrophic time of bloodshed and human suffering. Loy's human cylinders lead miserable existences in a dusty space of lack and sorrow. All that is lacking is brought into view by the use of negative descriptions: the environment is 'sunless', the cylinders eat 'without tasting' and converse 'without communion', as they live out their 'miseries'. Trapped, they rotate in the mysterious 'dust' of a hazy 'dusk'.[200] In his preparatory notes on *The Large Glass*, Duchamp planned a phase of 'dust breeding' in which he would 'raise dust on Dust-Glasses for 4 months. 6 months.'[201] In fact, it was a year long period of 'dust breeding' that was captured by Man Ray in a photograph to which he gave the same title (1920).[202] After the glass had been photographed, Duchamp wiped it clean, saving only the dust that had collected on the 'sieves', which he later permanently glued to the glass. Because Duchamp spent so long working on the glass (1915-23), it is possible that Loy may have seen it at an earlier stage of 'dust breeding' during 1916-17, or that she was simply aware of Duchamp's plans for his artwork, as per his notes. In 'Human Cylinders' this dust takes on a

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[200] There is a discrepancy between the versions of the poem published in the *Others: An Anthology* and in Loy, *LLB*. In *Others: An Anthology* the second line contains the phrase 'enervating dusk', whereas in *LLB* it reads 'enervating dust'. In the two subsequent repetitions of the phrase within the poem the word 'dusk' is used in both versions. I have chosen to refer to the version included in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* for the sake of consistency throughout this chapter, and because the words 'dusk' and 'dust' gesture towards the same senses of dimness, gloom, haze, and shadow in the context of the 'enervating' atmosphere of the poem.

[201] Duchamp, p. 53.

[202] Man Ray, *Dust Breeding*, 1920, gelatin silver print, 23.9 x 30.4 cm, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

weakening capacity, inhibiting its mechanical occupants, enveloping and separating them. Whereas the dust on Duchamp's artwork emerges as part of his conceptual creative process, the 'enervating dust' of Loy's poem gestures towards the contemporary political climate. Wrapped in mystery, languishing in the 'dust', the cylinders exist in a haze of uncertainty perhaps not dissimilar to that experienced during the First World War – a time of unprecedented loss and destruction. The gloom which hung heavy over the war years is here an enfeebling smog, in which the cylinders live out their 'miseries', a merely 'drivelling humanity'.[203]

**'Mother I am'**

Whereas New York Dadaists like Francis Picabia conceived of machine children born without mothers, and the Futurists dreamed of creating 'a mechanical son, the fruit of pure will'[204] without the need for 'the inefficient vulva',[205] Loy sought to counter the erasure of women's procreative capabilities and experiences by putting female experience at the centre of her literary explorations. 'Parturition', first published in *Trend* in 1914, takes as its focus the physiological sensations and psychological experiences of childbirth.[206] Of the writers selected for this study, Loy is the only one to portray the visceral experiences unique to the female body and to develop through her texts an explicit feminist agenda. Whereas Arnauld reaches into the realm of the fantastical, basing her poetry on what can be imagined, Loy draws frequently on her own personal experiences, and particularly on those experiences specific to women. With its emphasis on the reproductive capabilities of the female body, 'Parturition' displays some of the feminist concerns that would temper Loy's dialogue with Duchamp's artwork in 'Human Cylinders' some three years later.

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[203] The phrase, 'drivelling humanity', is taken from Loy's poem sequence 'Songs to Joannes', in *LLB*, p. 59.
[204] Marinetti, 'Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism', in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. by Flint, pp. 72-75 (p. 74).
[205] Marinetti, *Mafarka the Futurist: An African Novel*, trans. by Carol Diethe and Steve Cox (London: Middlesex University Press, 1998), p. 188.
[206] This analysis will make reference to 'Parturition' as it is reprinted in *LLB*, pp. 4-8. See Appendix, pp. 204-208.

At the 'centre | Of a circle of pain' is where we find the speaker of Loy's poem, as she struggles in the throes of labour. Trapped in a 'congested cosmos of agony', she is subjected to 'Prolonged nerve-vibrations' and contractions of such intensity that they pierce to the 'pin-point nucleus of being'. Wave after wave of contractions she surmounts, as though 'climbing a distorted mountain of agony', after which there is no rest: '[…] anticipation of | Repose | Which never comes'. This circle, of which she is the centre, is the site of an intense centripetal force that is pain, compared to which the sun's blazing and raging flames are considered only 'bland'. With its complete and never-ending circumference, this 'circle of pain' is also an enclosure – a shape which circumscribes. Searing, agonising, acute: labour is an 'agony | From which there is no escape'. The intensity of the central position occupied by the speaker is reinforced in the first stanza by alliteration and the repetition of the letter 'c' – the circular and compounding nature of the repetition almost cementing the speaker's enclosure within the 'centre' of the 'circle': 'I am the **c**entre | Of a **c**ir**c**le of pain | Ex**c**eeding its boundaries in every direction'. As the pain surges, the circle boundary becomes a space which is transgressed. Overflowing the circumference, this surge of pain is echoed by the auditory qualities of the words: the sibilant sound of the fourth repetition of the 'c' letter is extended by the double vowel 'ee' in the word 'Ex**cee**ding' – the lengthened sound mirroring the extension of the circle of pain as it pushes beyond 'its boundaries in every direction'. The speaker is imprisoned in a circle through which pain ripples and from which it overflows.

The speaker's seeming imprisonment in this 'circle of pain' calls to mind another term for labour or childbirth now little used in contemporary discourse: confinement. Literal in meaning, the term refers to the final stages of maternity in which the expectant mother is confined to the bed where she will deliver the child. Echoes of restriction and entrapment are also to be found in the Middle English phrasing 'our lady's bonds': childbirth being the 'bond' which binds, shackles, and manacles the birthing woman, restricting her range of motion. Loy is also likely to have been aware of the various meanings of the French word 'enceinte', which, in its adjectival form refers to pregnancy ('la femme enceinte' [the pregnant woman]), but in its noun form denotes an enclosure or surrounding wall. Drawing on the 'circle' motif with its capacity for encircling

and circumscribing, Loy is almost certainly indexing various historical and cultural terms for childbirth and their confining senses. The speaker's 'congested cosmos' is a space 'From which there is no escape'; the 'open window' suggests an interior location, within whose walls she is enclosed; later the speaker refers to herself in the third person as 'the circumscribed'. Woman's place is cemented: she is trapped by the agonising processes of the birthing body.

In her depiction of labour, Loy reaches not for common euphemisms or conservative pleasantries, but for the raw, visceral details of the birthing process. Taking the reader directly to 'The sensitized area', she presents the contracting muscles of the uterus and the dilation of the cervix in poetic terms: 'The sensitized area | Is identical with the extensity | Of intension'. Stretched with the 'extensity | Of intension', the cervix is extensive, expansive, widely extended as it dilates in preparation for the delivery of the foetus. But it is also subject to 'intension': depth in contrast with the breadth of extension, as well as the intensification of degree or force.[207] With these opposing qualities of extension and intension, Loy sketches the contrasting motions of delivery: dilation (expansion, widening) and contraction (tightening, narrowing). The speaker's 'sensitized area' is subject to both the widening motions of the dilating cervix, and the deep, forceful contractions of the uterine muscles. These diametrical physiological processes are underscored by Loy's typographical arrangement:

> The sensitized area
> Is identical with the extensity
> Of intension

As the cervix stretches with 'extensity', so, too, does the line stretch across the page, widening the gap between the words 'identical' and 'with'; as a contraction takes hold, the printed text retracts and snaps back to the left margin, situating

[207] Loy plays here with the plurality of senses and connotations the word 'intension' invites, signalling variously, depth, the action of stretching or straining, and intensity of force, as well as determination, strenuous exertion of the will or the mind – meanings which convey a sense of both the physical and psychological challenges and processes of childbirth.

the word 'intension' tightly in-line with the beginning of the previous two lines. Typographically, the text stretches and contracts in unison with the birthing body.

Loy identifies the female body as a site of pain, struggle, and resistance – not (as, for instance, in some Surrealist work and ideas) an object of desire or a feminine muse. The speaker of 'Parturition' is not a desirable object, but a figure writhing in pain and foaming at the mouth. In contravention of traditional lyric imagery, Loy 'pin-point[s]' and exposes the corporeal processes of labour, candidly presenting the female genitalia. As the speaker screams through her contractions Loy depicts the physical markers of this verbal expression: 'the foam on the stretched muscles of a mouth'. But the imagery here is suggestive and polyvalent, the indefinite article 'a' resisting any singular interpretation. The image could be read as depicting a vocal mouth whose muscles have been stretched from verbal screams of agony, the 'foam' a result of uncontrolled 'gurgling'; but it could equally be read as a more explicit depiction of a woman's external genitals during childbirth, stretched and dilated, the vaginal lips lined with the bodily fluids secreted during labour. Loy draws deliberately on the polysemantic possibilities of the phrase to convey simultaneously, and in detail, both the physical processes of labour and the verbal expression of these bodily sensations.

In her frank exploration of the labour experience, Loy repeatedly denies us the familiar images of bonny babies and joyous, though exhausted, mothers, choosing instead to challenge these pleasant, conservative narratives. In their place, she reaches for a vocabulary antithetical to that of birth – death – and draws on the imagery of the animal kingdom as she lays bare the actualities of woman's experience of childbirth. At the height of her labour, Loy's speaker is a 'gurgling […] crucified wild beast' whose 'delirium' allows a temporary escape ('So aiding elusion of the circumscribed'), so that she recognises the exhausted 'gurgling' not as her own, but as the cries of a distant beast, 'Com[ing] from so far away'. As well as likening the mother to a wild beast, Loy conflates the birthing body with the animal corpse: the mother becomes analogous to 'A dead white feathered moth | Laying eggs' – a creature that has been 'emptied of life | Giving

life' and that exists only to reproduce.[208] In the immediate aftermath of birth, it is an animal carcass that the speaker's subconscious draws forth:

> Impression of small animal carcass
> Covered with blue-bottles
> – Epicurean –
> And through the insects
> Waves that same undulation of living
> Death
> Life

As the child enters the world the mother is 'emptied of life': her womb is emptied of this new life ('Negation of myself as a unit | Vacuum interlude') and the physical assault on her body drains her of her own lifeblood, or energy. Just as the gluttonous 'blue-bottles' feed on the carcass, so does new life feed on the exhausted body of the mother as she becomes 'absorbed | into' the cyclical process, 'The was-is-ever-shall-be | Of cosmic reproductivity'. Crangle argues that Loy 'deliberately mired her writing in the lowest, most disregarded territory of all: the abject.'[209] In 'Parturition' the abject – corpses, sweat, bodily fluids – takes centre stage as the fleshly detail of female biology, in all its agonizing processes and involuntary excretions, is laid bare, and the birthing body is likened to the decaying corpse. By depicting the female body in this way, Loy calls attention to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century attitudes of disgust towards female biology and to the wretched position of woman in patriarchal society as abject other.

Situating her speaker within the 'circle' motif and drawing analogies with 'wild' beasts and moths, Loy seems to be – consciously or unconsciously – responding to the type of comments made by Marinetti in 'Against *Amore* and Parliamentarianism', an essay from *War, The World's Only Hygiene* (1911-1915). There he writes contemptuously of woman's 'actual state of intellectual and

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[208] With regard to this image, Prescott notes that 'Loy's discovery of the word "moth" hidden within "mother" [...] allows her to create the striking image of the soft insect corpse beside its freshly born progeny', p. 205. For a discussion of Loy's interest in the image of the corpse see Crangle, 'Mina Loy', *A History of Modernist Poetry*, ed. by Alex Davis and Lee M. Jenkins (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 275-302.
[209] Crangle, 'Mina Loy', p. 276.

erotic slavery,' and her existence within 'a closed circle' of femininity, 'as a mother, as a wife, and as a lover' – 'purely animal and wholly without usefulness'.[210] Marinetti's position here typifies the phallogocentrism of much social and political discourse of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe, when women were considered inferior (the 'weaker sex', or abject other to the male subject) because of their capacity for childbearing and were delimited by the roles of wife and mother. But whilst Loy locates the birthing woman in 'Parturition' within the same confining parameters outlined by Marinetti – as a 'circumscribed', 'wild beast' – she is not aligning herself with Marinetti here. Whilst the energetic iconoclasm and destructive formal experimentation of the Futurists enthused Loy and inspired her own literary experiments, Lucia Re suggests that, from the beginning, Loy had been 'uneasy about the misogynist rhetoric of futurism'.[211] Yet it was this interaction with the Futurists and their rambunctious misogyny, Burke argues, that 'reawakened Mina's interest in the "woman question"', and prompted her literary feminism.[212] Loy would soon part ways with the Futurists and begin to unravel and ridicule their misogynist discourse in a number texts, including the satirical works 'Lion's Jaws' and 'The Sacred Prostitute'.[213] One of Loy's first poetic writings, and her first published poem, 'Parturition' is an expression of her opposition to the Futurists' misogynist thinking and an example of her feminist poetics. Whilst Marinetti considers woman to be circumscribed by a 'closed circle' of maternity and marriage, Loy locates within this circumscription the source of woman's strength. She gestures towards various historical and contemporary conceptions and discourses of femininity and maternity (confinement, bonds, weakness) in order to break free of them and to situate woman beyond these outworn tropes.

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[210] Marinetti, 'Against *Amore*', p. 73 and p. 75.
[211] Lucia Re, 'Mina Loy and the Quest for a Futurist Feminist Woman', *The European Legacy*, 14:7 (2009), 799-819 <DOI:10.1080/10848770903363896> (p. 806). For Re, Loy's debt to Futurism has been downplayed in critical discussions of her interaction with the Futurists. She writes: 'it is clear that her restlessness, rebellion, iconoclasm, sexual explicitness, satirical wit, and especially her constant urge to change and to reinvent herself, owed a lot to the futurist "spirit" which shaped her entire approach to life and art.' (p. 801).
[212] Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 178.
[213] 'Lions' Jaws', in *LLB*, pp. 46-50; 'The Sacred Prostitute', in *Stories and Essays*, ed. by Crangle, pp. 188-215.

It is precisely woman's capacity for childbearing – her ability to prevail within a 'cosmos of agony' and withstand the pain of labour – that Loy champions in this poem.

Illuminating the uncomfortable reality of childbirth, Loy locates woman's strength within and through the imagery and sensations of pain and struggle. Through a frank delineation of the deliriously agonising experience of childbirth, Loy outlines woman's paradoxical 'superior Inferiority'. Woman is incapacitated by the birth pangs that render her bedridden and paralysed; her body assaulted by its own ability to reproduce, she is reduced to a 'gurgling' 'beast'. While the male strides freely, unencumbered, woman must battle through her confinement:

> The irresponsibility of the male
> Leaves woman her superior Inferiority
> He is running up-stairs
>
> I am climbing a distorted mountain of agony

As a member of the 'weaker sex', Loy's speaker is rendered inferior by childbirth. Yet, for Loy, it is precisely the supposedly inferior capacity for child bearing that makes woman superior. Her superior strength is to be found in her ability to traverse and conquer the agonising mountain of childbirth – to reach its summit and triumphantly stake her flag upon it: 'Mother I am'. For Loy, the physical demands of labour are both the source and the proof of woman's indomitable strength: it is the searing, agonising pain of contractions that 'calls up' in woman 'the resisting force'; the radiating waves of cervical dilation that prompt a determined 'struggle' to 'equal' the pain she is battling. The speaker of 'Parturition', as Prescott notes, 'is hardly the flustered, weak mother-to-be stereotyped in turn of the century culture [….].'[214] Defiant and determined, Loy's speaker pushes through the 'delirium of night-hours', counselling herself: 'Pain is no stronger than the resisting force | Pain calls up in me | The struggle is equal'. It is woman's ability to endure this process by which she 'should have been

[214] Prescott, p. 201.

emptied of life | Giving life' that warrants her 'superior' status. Determinedly she endures, and fearlessly she creates new 'LIFE', taking a 'leap with nature | Into the essence | Of unpredicted Maternity'. Oscillating between the two poles encapsulated in the oxymoronic phrasing 'superior Inferiority', between woman's incarceration within her birthing body and her triumphant 'leap' beyond the bounds of the 'circle of pain' and into motherhood, 'Parturition' retraces the tribulations of the birthing experience in order to underscore the strength of the maternal body. In its frank and unsavoury depictions, 'Parturition' elucidates the very challenges that Loy believes warrant woman's 'superior' status, where she has only ever been relegated to 'inferiority'.

The centrality of motherhood and maternity to Loy's particular brand of feminism and literary exploration is to be found throughout her *oeuvre*, and most explicitly in her 'Feminist Manifesto', dated November 1914, the month after 'Parturition' was published.[215] Adopting the form of the manifesto, (a genre explored by Arnauld and Dismorr, also), Loy makes her case for a new brand of feminism using the loud typography and audacious tone typified by the Futurists. 'The feminist movement as at present instituted', Loy asserts, 'is Inadequate'.[216] Dismissing the movement's demands for an equality which views men and women on relative terms, and one which calls for sexual abstinence, she calls for a feminism which privileges the unique experiences of the female sex: 'Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not – seek within yourselves to find out what you are'.[217] Privileged among these experiences, for Loy, is maternity. Rejecting the 'fictitious value' of woman's virginity, the possession of which is essential if a woman is to secure a marriage proposal (and therefore maternity), Loy demands every woman's 'right to

[215] In poems such as 'The Costa San Giorgio' ('The hips of women sway | Among the crawling children they produce') from 'Italian Pictures', in *LLB,* pp. 9-14, (p. 10); and 'Aid of the Madonna' ('Madonnas are everlasting mothers in ecstasy'), *LLB*, p. 115; and the sculpture 'Maternity', a terracotta figurine dated 1935 (Julien Levy Collection). Loy, 'Feminist Manifesto', in *LLB*, pp. 153-156. Dated November 1914, the manifesto was not published until 1982, when it was included in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*.
[216] Loy, 'Feminist Manifesto', p. 153.
[217] Ibid., p. 154.

maternity'.[218] In this manifesto we find again the idea of the 'superior woman' and a vocabulary which echoes the images of strength and resistance evoked in 'Parturition', each bound up with, and shaped by, maternity. The bearer of future generations, the mother is a 'superior woman' of 'superior intelligence'.[219] Like the speaker of 'Parturition' who surmounts the mountainous contractions and fights pain with resistance, she is a figure of 'indomitable will' and 'irreducible courage' who displays an 'unbiased bravery'. Far from the timid, feeble Bride of Duchamp's *The Large Glass*, from the pure, abstinent woman of Suffragette ideals, and from Marinetti's 'closed circle', Loy's woman is an indomitable maternal figure, capable of enduring the most excruciating physical processes as she takes a courageous leap with 'cosmic reproductivity'.[220]

Responding to Loy's insistent exploration of corporeal female experiences, the physical demands of childbirth, and woman's place in a patriarchal social structure, Kenneth Rexroth concludes that: 'Mina Loy, in her best known work, dipped her pen in the glands of Bartholin, and wrote.'[221] Indeed, Loy's privileging of female experience has prompted readings of her work within the context of later feminist theories such as *écriture féminine*. Swathi Krishna S. and Srirupa Chatterjee consider the 'linguistic radicalism' of poems such as 'Parturition' to be a prototype for the later theories of French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray.[222] Alongside its thematic concerns, they identify in the poem's formal experimentation a language which disrupts and 'confute[s] established structures of "man-made" language to represent authentic portraitures of the sensations and impulses specific to womanhood': 'phrases and sentences […] become irregular mirroring intermittent spasms of

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[218] Ibid., p. 154 and p. 155.
[219] It should be noted that Loy's theory of a 'superior woman' is also problematic in that it displays a clear eugenicist agenda. She writes: 'Every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race responsibility'.
[220] Natalya Lusty notes that Loy situates herself in opposition to both the Futurists and the Feminists, 'seemingly as irritated by feminists as she is by the Futurists.' Lusty, 'Sexing the Manifesto: Mina Loy, Feminism and Futurism', *Women: A Cultural Review*, 19:3 (2008), 245-260 <DOI: 10.1080/09574040802413834> (p. 251).
[221] Kenneth Rexroth, 'Les Lauriers Sont Coupés' (1944), in Loy, *Lunar Baedeker & Time-Tables*, pp. 12-13 (p. 12).
[222] Swathi Krishna S and Srirupa Chaterjee, 'Mina Loy's Parturition and L'écriture Féminine', *The Explicator*, 73:4, 257-261 <DOI: 10.1080/00144940.2015.1087377> (p. 257).

indefinable pain as the compressed free verse with spaces and breaks emulates the rhythmic contractions of labor [sic].'[223] Loy's celebration of the mother and foregrounding of female experience in 'Parturition' is undoubtedly a precursor to Cixous's demand that 'woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing'.[224] Yet, whilst the content of the poem can be described as anticipating the call of later feminists, such as Cixous, to write women into literature, it is problematic to align Loy's disruptive linguistics with such feminist theories as *écriture féminine*, given that radically disruptive experimentation is a hallmark of avant-garde literature by both women and men. Abigail Bray criticises Cixous's notion of a feminine writing, arguing that her 'celebration of what she argues is a specifically feminine style of writing is largely derived from male avant-garde writers. How is it […] that one can say that such a style offers a special expression of the female body and feminine sexuality when it is a style of writing largely indebted to men?'[225] Bray's criticism of Cixous's notion of a feminine style of writing also throws into relief a general lack of awareness of women's avant-garde writing, assigning Cixous's inspiration to male, and not female, avant-garde writers. It highlights a need for increased visibility for avant-garde women's writing – a visibility that has the potential to enrich the debate around the impact of gender on modes of writing.

'Parturition' ends on a thankful note: the speaker tells us, 'I once heard in a church | – Man and woman God made them – | Thank God.' But the speaker is not thankful to God for creating life. In a late interview, at the age of 82, Loy considers the final stanzas of her poem:

> The next morning
> Each woman-of-the-people
> Tip-toeing the red pile of the carpet
> Doing hushed service
> Each woman-of-the-people
> Wearing a halo

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[223] Ibid., p. 258.
[224] Hélène Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York; London; etc.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 245- 264 (p. 245).
[225] Abigail Bray, *Hélène Cixous: Writing and Sexual Difference* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 32.

She remarks: 'That's the last impression I got of the different servants coming in to make the room tidy for me [after childbirth], […] and I thought that we'd all been through this experience, and there ought to be some kind of recognition to show […] the value.'[226] Loy saw in literature an opportunity to bring women's experiences into discourse, and to assert the value of these experiences. For the speaker of 'Parturition', and for Loy, it is mothers who should be thanked for bringing new life into the world, not 'God'. It is mothers who have surmounted relentless mountains of contraction, suffered through a 'congested cosmos of agony', and been confined to the centre of a 'circle of pain'. The poem's final lines, imbued with acerbic irony, are a knowing reference to the presumed place of woman in patriarchal society, and a frustrated call for recognition of the agonising role that many women play in populating the human race. In a climate of masculinist avant-garde narratives which seemed to erase woman's role in society – with Marinetti penning manifestos 'notifying women's wombs | of Man's immediate agamogenesis' – and the seemingly ubiquitous rhetoric of machine power and virility, Loy sought to reclaim and reinscribe the importance of female experiences, and of female strength, through her poetry.[227]

**The 'cold barrier' of the Text**

In her literary explorations Loy was responding not only to social and cultural representations of women, but, like each of the writers examined in this study, to the technical and structural experimentation being practised in both literature and the visual arts throughout various creative circles in the early twentieth century. A frequent contributor to *Others* magazine, Loy was part of a group that was dedicated to creating and celebrating radical, experimental free verse texts.[228] The magazine was decidedly avant-garde in tone, rejecting formal

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[226] From 'Mina Loy Interview with Paul Blackburn and Robert Vas Dias', in *Mina Loy*, ed. by Shreiber and Tuma, pp. 205-243 (p. 219).

[227] '[…] burst in a manifesto | notifying women's wombs | of Man's immediate agamogenesis | Insurance | of his spiritual integrity | against the carnivorous courtesan'. These lines are from Loy's poem 'Lions' Jaws', p. 47.

[228] *Others* magazine was published in New York under the editorship of Alfred Kreymborg. The little magazine was dedicated to poetry and provided a place for new, mostly unknown, poets to share experimental texts. Contributors to the little magazine

conventions and promoting a 'new verse' of innovative forms.[229] An 'extreme otherist',[230] Loy's works were considered to be some of the group's '[…] most radical experiments […]', particularly by outsiders to the group who preferred more conventional forms of poetic expression (such as those who contributed to *Poetry* magazine).[231] With the avant-garde groups with whom she came into contact (the Dadaists, Futurists, and *Others* group) Loy shared a desire to sweep away fusty literary forms, and practised radical formal innovation as a means to renew and recharge literary expression. Like the Dadaists, she seems to favour an ostensibly destructive approach, declaring in her 'Feminist Manifesto' that 'NO scratching about on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about Reform, the only method is Absolute Demolition'.[232] Eschewing formal versification and lineation, Loy instead opts for 'free-rhythming in the wilderness'.[233]

'Songs to Joannes', a sprawling thirty-four poem sequence, is exemplary of Loy's free-verse experimentation and the technical and structural daring of her poetic output.[234] On its publication, initially as a four-poem sequence in

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included Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, Amy Lowell, William Carlos Williams, Helen Hoyt, and Marguerite Zorach, among others. Loy's poetry appeared in the very first edition of the magazine in 1915.

[229] *Others: An Anthology of the New Verse*, ed. by Alfred Kreymborg. As well as three poems by Loy, the *Others* anthology contained poetry by T.S. Eliot, Helen Hoyt, Kreymborg, Marianne Moore, and William Carlos Williams.

[230] Harriet Monroe, '"Others" Again', *Poetry*, vol. 17, no. 3 (Dec. 1920), 150-158 (pp. 153-154).

[231] Max Michelson, 'The Radicals', *Poetry*, vol. 8, no. 3 (June 1916), 151-155 (p. 151). In another volume of *Poetry*, Harriet Monroe and Allen Upward state their preference for conventional poetic forms over Loy's experiments: '[…] the love-songs of Miss Nina [sic] Loy, though *caviare* to such conservatives as we, are no doubt the newest of the new.' 'Our Contemporaries', *Poetry*, vol. 6, no. 6 (Sept. 1915), 315-318 (p. 316). Also note here the typical misnaming of a female poet – frustratingly, a frequent occurrence for many female avant-garde creatives.

[232] Loy, 'Feminist Manifesto', p. 153.

[233] Clement Wood, 'The Charlie Chaplins of Poetry', *New-York Tribune*, February 17 1918, p. 8.

[234] See Appendix, pp. 209-224. The first four poems of this sequence were originally published under the title 'Love Songs' in *Others* magazine in 1915. By 1917 the sequence had been expanded to thirty-four poems and was published in its entirety, as a single issue of *Others*, under the title 'Songs to Joannes'. A later revision was included in the first collection of Loy's poems *Lunar Baedecker* in 1923. Between these various publications, and the original manuscripts, multiple revisions have been made. For this reason, I will refer in this section to the version of the poem published by Conover in *LLB*, pp. 53-68. Comparing original manuscript versions, Loy's own notes and

Kreymborg's *Others* magazine, 'Songs to Joannes' provoked a hostile response, not only because of its seemingly reckless formal aberrations but also its brazen erotic content. Kreymborg recalled that '"detractors shuddered at Mina Loy's subject-matter and derided her elimination of punctuation marks and the audacious spacing of her lines" […].'[235] Worse still, for many, was that these lines had been written by a woman. Emphasising the unique nature of the sequence, Burke notes that '"Love Songs" resembled no known lyrics by female poets.'[236]

At the level of narrative, 'Songs to Joannes' depicts the turbulent trajectory of a passionate love affair; Burke describes the sequence as 'a disillusioned vision' of 'the psychic and social disconnectedness that results from a love affair come apart at the seams.'[237] But Loy dismantles any semblance of narrative sequence or linear progression, instead nurturing an elliptical arrangement of discontinuous narratives, impressions, images, and sensations. Liberated from traditional narrative structures, the mind of Loy's speaker jolts back and forth among a collage of scattered memories, potentialities, and fantasies. The poems in the sequence range in content from explicit references to sexual intercourse, bodily fluids, and male genitalia ('mucous-membrane', 'saliva', 'skin-sack' (I)), to sarcastic rage ('Oh that's right | Keep away from me | Please give me a push' (XIII)); from visions of what might have been ('We might have lived together | In the lights of the Arno', 'And talked till there were no more tongues' (XVI)) to the physical and emotional agonies of miscarriage ('Bird-like abortions | With human throats' (IV)). Each of the poems in the sequence offers a truncated glimpse of a larger narrative whose entirety will never be revealed; they are snapshots of remembered experiences or imagined sensations. Song II sketches a faint image of the speaker's lover, 'Something the shape of man' whose 'skin-sack' contains the 'completion' of her sexual 'impulses' – the fertile spawn that will initiate reproduction. Song VII describes a moment of narrative action in which the speaker runs through the street, following the path that her

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correspondence, and the 1915 and 1917 versions, Conover has made some convincing arguments as to how Loy intended the sequence to appear, which have informed the version he presents in *LLB*.

[235] Quoted in Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 196.

[236] Ibid., p. 202.

[237] Burke, 'Getting Spliced: Modernism and Sexual Difference', *American Quarterly*, vol. 39, no. 1 (Spring 1987), 98-121 (p. 107).

lover has taken ('My pair of feet | Smack the flag-stones | That are something left over from your walking'), the rough wind pushing the debris of the street into her nostrils. Song XI imagines the universe as a '[colourless] onion' in the 'nervy hands' of the lover, who peels it 'sheath by sheath'. It is this splintered, sprawling arrangement of heterogeneous images, narratives, emotions, and sensations that prompted Conrad Aiken to comment on Loy's 'tentacular quiverings'.[238] The tentacles of her verse are dispersed widely within a broad frame of reference, dipping their sensors briefly into myriad pots of sensation, their feelers tracing the sharp edges of narrative shards and throwing up glimpses of diverse experiences. Loy's literary tentacles are let loose to trace and feel their way over a varied terrain, to send back glimpses of narrative possibilities and gather the shards of visual images, corporeal sensations, and cerebral explorations.

Within the individual songs of the sequence lie further fragments of the narrative toward which the whole gestures. Just as the sequence is formed of separate shards, or songs, so too are many of the songs structured in collage-like form.

> Spawn of Fantasies
> Silting the appraisable
> Pig Cupid  his rosy snout
> Rooting erotic garbage
> "Once upon a time"
> Pulls a weed  white star-topped
> Among wild oats  sown in mucous membrane
>
> I would  an  eye in a Bengal light
> Eternity in a sky-rocket
> Constellations in an ocean
> Whose rivers run no fresher
> Than a trickle of saliva
>
> These  are suspect places
>
> I must live in my lantern

[238] Conrad Aiken, 'New Curiosity Shop – and a Poet', *The Dial*, vol. LXIV, (Jan-June 1918), 111-113 (p. 112).

Trimming subliminal flicker
Virginal to the bellows
Of Experience
Coloured glass

Cupid 'Rooting' through 'erotic garbage', the glow of 'Coloured glass', the 'mucous membrane' of 'Spawn', dribbling rivers, fairytales and 'Fantasies', suspicious places: a cluster of diverse, fragmentary images are juxtaposed to form the first poem of the 'Songs' sequence. Eschewing punctuation and foregoing linearity, Loy pulls together an eclectic array of verbal and visual fragments, creating a collage of disparate words, ideas, and images. In the first stanza a brief glimpse of jellied 'Spawn' choking 'the appraisable' is intercepted by the 'rosy snout' of a pig, 'Cupid'; his 'rooting' around in erotic muck segues swiftly into the well-known first line of many fairytales ("Once upon a time"), before shifting from echoes of romantic tales to unwanted 'weeds' and 'wild oats', and returning to a similarly spawn-like substance, a sticky 'mucuous membrane'. In Song I Loy's fragmentary images conjure all the messiness of the sexual union of the speaker and her lover from multiple perspectives – the reality of the sticky bodily emissions ('saliva', 'spawn', 'mucuous membrane') and orgasmic sensations ('eternity in a sky-rocket') that dirty the romantic notions of 'Cupid' and fairytales – with no cohesive factor which might stabilise one interpretation, one perspective, or a single moment in time (there is no indication as to whether these narrative shards relate to one encounter, or several, one lover, or multiple). The poem's sequence is one of shifting kaleidoscopic interchanges. From glutinous mucous and mucky snouts, the speaker's mind drifts to the vivid blue emissions of a Bengal light, and to a sky-rocket among the stars of a vast, unending night sky, shifting from bodily to celestial imagery, before the viscous 'spawn' and 'mucous membrane' of the first stanza seep into the second stanza as ocean rivers which 'run no fresher | Than a trickle of saliva'. Just as the sequence dispenses with linear progression, within individual songs hierarchies and logical sequence are rejected in favour of a series of images, Loy preferring to 'Let them clash together' (XXIX). In this way, Loy borrows from the Cubists, decentring perspective in favour of verbal collage

and simultaneous perspectives. Through formal experimentation, Loy nurtures entangled images in place of hierarchical, linear progression.

Like Matryoshka nesting dolls, each segment of 'Songs to Joannes' opens to reveal another fragment, another shard of coloured glass, another word or phrase floating on the page. Just as the sequence itself is splintered into numerous pieces, or songs, so too are the songs comprised of various heterogeneous shards, and there are still further fragments to be revealed even within the lines of the poems. Loy experiments not only at the level of larger structural arrangements, but with the smallest syntactic sequences. 'I would', the speaker informs us as 'Pig Cupid' roots through 'erotic garbage' (I). 'I would'. But the statement is halted as the blank space of the page protrudes, forcing a caesura into the continuity of the printed line and interrupting the preposition. The typographical arrangement fractures the line, and the remainder of the statement seems forgotten as the speaker continues hesitantly, 'an'. But there is another pause, another spatial interruption, before the line is continued:

'I would an eye in a Bengal light' (I)

The line has disintegrated. Dispensing with punctuation, conventional typographical arrangements, and clear syntactic sequence, Loy's verbal fragments float, discontinuous, juxtaposed. Desiring completion, we are left waiting for a verb: what is it that the speaker 'would' do or be? Is the phrase connected to the 'eye' in a 'Bengal light' with which it is audibly linked ('I', 'eye')? Or is it tied to the preceding stanza: is the speaker confirming that they, too, would root through 'erotic garbage', or pull a weed from among 'wild oats sown in mucous-membrane' (I)? Perhaps the speaker is hesitating, struggling to find appropriate words with which to describe the experience. Perhaps the orgasmic ripples of the 'sky-rocket' soaring through 'constellations' are an impediment to her speech, her words interspersed with gasps (I). Or perhaps the fragments indicate the interruption of one thought by another, or even the presence of more than one speaker. Loy's disintegrative writing strategies enhance indeterminacy and cultivate uncertainty. As Julie Gonnering Lein observes, 'Like electrical currents, [Loy's] lines of meaning routinely jump gaps and sometimes

risk short-circuiting the sense of a stanza altogether.'[239] Sense and determinate meaning are pushed out as the space of the page intrudes, making visible the edges of the shards of 'Coloured glass' (I) which Loy brings together, making uncertain the spatial and semantic connections between the printed words, and forcing the reader to shift back and forth between semantic possibilities.

The experimental features of Loy's text bear the imprint of the aesthetic tendencies and innovations of several avant-garde groups, including the Futurists, Cubists, and Dadaists. The formal innovations of 'Songs to Joannes' can be understood in response to Marinetti's recognition, in his 'Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', of 'a pressing need to liberate words […]', from the 'shackles of logic' by destroying syntax and abolishing punctuation.[240] For Marinetti, the new Futurist poet is an '[…] intuitive poet who can free himself from traditional, heavy, limited syntax that is stuck in the ground, armless and wingless […]'; the Futurist poet is one who liberates words, scattering them freely across the page.[241] But whilst Loy's technical experiments seem to respond, at least in part, to Marinetti's demand for 'words-in-freedom', her fragmentary 'Songs' convey none of the speed or hurried dynamism that Marinetti envisaged when he called for the heavy chains of syntax and logic to be demolished.[242] Whereas the random scattering of words was designed to convey the Futurists' dynamic vision, Loy's fragmentary verse nurtures the fissures and fractures that result in lingering pauses rejected by Marinetti as 'incompatible with [the Futurists'] dynamic vision'.[243] Instead, Loy's experimental writing strategies result in the entangled imagery and disintegrative textures that cause the reader to pause, to linger on a word or gaping space, to retrace, reread, and reimagine. Her writing slows the reading process, absorbing the reader into a web of semantic uncertainty and polyvalence, into an open-ended tangle of interpretative possibilities that demands that time be spent with the text.

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[239] Julie Gonnering Lein, 'Shades of Meaning: Mina Loy's Poetics of Luminous Opacity', *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 18, no. 3 (September 2011), 617-629 (p. 627).
[240] Marinetti, 'The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature', in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. by Flint, pp. 84-89 (p. 84 and p. 88).
[241] Ibid., p. 88.
[242] Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', p. 95.
[243] Marinetti, 'The Technical Manifesto', p. 84.

As well as bearing the traces of various avant-garde influences, the formal innovations of the 'Songs' sequence are shaped by Loy's own theorising and awareness of the ways in which the reader interacts with the modern text. Loy's experimental writing strategies often disrupt and complicate the reading process: fissures in typography, gaps in sense, truncated lines and stanzas (sometimes whole poems), disconnected bits, and obscure phrasing all frustrate the reader's desire for continuity and semantic clarity. But Loy is conscious of the challenges posed by the modern text, and the demands placed on her reader. In her 1925 essay on 'Modern Poetry', she contemplates the contrasting ways in which we respond to music and literature, underscoring the ease with which we can engage with music and the difficulties presented by the printed page: whereas 'the sound of music capturing our involuntary attention is so easy to get in touch with', 'the silent sound of poetry requires our voluntary attention to obliterate the cold barrier of print with the whole "intelligence of our senses."'[244] For Loy, modern poetry offers a silent, seemingly impenetrable surface which the reader must break through in order to 'get in touch with' any meaningful content which may lay beneath. Through formal experimentation, Loy seems to cultivate this 'cold barrier', nurturing discontinuity and incohesion, disrupting syntax, constructing circling and fragmentary narratives, and exploiting a multiplicity of semantic possibilities. Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas argues that, 'Loy […] offers the poem to the reader as an "irritant" rather than an expressionistic lyric to be sentimentally identified with.'[245] Designed to 'irritate', or we might say instead stimulate, Loy's texts are not intended to be absorbed with ease by the lazy reader who looks to be lulled and comforted by the smooth rhythms and syntactic coherence of conventional verse. Instead, her texts are created for the 'cerebral | Forager' (XXII) – the reader willing to plumb and excavate, explore and examine, plunge into the text's fissures and crevices for glimpses, echoes, and associations which they might piece together.

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[244] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', in *LLB*, pp. 157-161 (p. 157). The essay was first published in *Charm* 3:3 (April 1925), 16-17.
[245] Jeffrey Twitchell-Waas, '"Little lusts and lucidities": Reading Mina Loy's *Love Songs*', in *Mina Loy*, ed. by Shreiber and Tuma, pp. 111-128 (p. 112).

Like the speaker in song XIII, Loy writes in elliptical and allusive scraps that gesture faintly towards vague narrative and semantic possibilities, but resist completion:

> Come to me  There is something
> I have got to tell you  and I can't tell
> Something taking shape
> Something that has a new name
> A new dimension
> A new use
> A new illusion
>
> It is ambient  And it is in your eyes
> Something shiny  Something only for you
> Something that I must not see
>
> It is in my ears  Something very resonant
> Something that you must not hear
> Something only for me

Loy's emphasis throughout 'Songs to Joannes' is on the lacunae: the blank space of the page, gaps in sense, incomplete thoughts, truncated images, unidentified speakers, unknown places, and uncertain timeframes. Her disconnected writing exploits the tension between the contradictory processes of imparting and withholding information: the 'Songs' say simultaneously 'There is something | I have got to tell you' and 'I can't tell' (XIII). This tension is particularly evident in the portrayal of the lover, the enigmatic Joannes. We are offered partial glimpses of this figure to whom the sequence is addressed: an undisclosed 'you' (V), the 'Dear one' (XI), 'a green-lit glow-worm' (XIX), 'a clock-work mechanism' (II), 'Something the shape of a man' (II). We glimpse his 'nervy hands' (XI), 'skin-sack' (II) and 'street-corner smile (XXIV); his 'hair | A God's door-mat' (II), his 'insolent isolation' (XXXI), and his 'drivelling humanity' (XV).

The fifth song brings not one, but two shadowy figures into view, further complicating our attempts to grasp at some semblance of the elusive lover. The speaker tells us, 'Midnight empties the street | Of all but us | Three', but the two figures which accompany the speaker seem quickly to blur into one. To the left stands 'a boy' and 'To the right a haloed ascetic'; their positions are delineated

typographically on the page, the lines on which they sit indented so as to highlight their presence. The boy to the left is portrayed as an agitator, one who continually disrupts, 'Pulling door-bells to remind | Those that are snug'; to the right is an abstinent figure 'Threading houses', searching 'wounds for souls'. Parenthetical interjections further distance the two figures spatially on the printed page, yet these interjections seem also to bind the two figures together. A speaker tells us: 'One wing has been washed in the rain | The other will never be clean any more'. This brief interjection can be read as an isolated collage fragment, but its intrusion in close proximity to 'the boy' is suggestive: perhaps he is the fallen angel, whose wings have been sullied by his provocations, one remaining stained despite the other being 'washed in the rain'. A further parenthetical comment ('The poor can't wash in hot water') reintroduces the image of the washed wing, and seems to paint the 'haloed ascetic' with the same muddied brush, suggesting that he, too, can only be 'washed in the rain' (in poem XIX the lover, described as having 'Something […] Of a green-lit glow-worm' about him, has been 'slowly drenched | To raylessness | In rain'). Here, the figures to the left and to the right become one, both tarnished with the same brush, both washed in the same rain, and this singular presence seems to be reinforced in the poem's final lines as the speaker laments, in the singular, the lover's inward view: 'And I don't know which turning to take | Since you got home to yourself – first'.

The next poem in the sequence further complicates our understanding of the two figures, as the image of the 'Wire-Puller' (VI) whom the speaker knows 'intimately' echoes the imagery of the previous poem, both that of the 'boy' 'pulling' (V) the wires or strings of the 'door-bells' (V), and the 'haloed ascetic' 'threading' (V) his way through the houses in search of 'souls' (V). And yet, the 'Wire-Puller' of song VI remains distinct from the addressee, the 'you' who fails to see the speaker: 'I know the Wire-Puller intimately | And if it were not for the people | On whom you keep one eye | You could look straight at me | And Time would be set back' (VI). The fragmentary, elliptical features of the poem make it impossible to untangle the figures from one another and increase the polyvalence of the imagery. Perhaps the 'boy' (V) and the 'haloed ascetic' (V) represent the opposing halves of the same lover: one clean wing representing his

pure half, the other his flawed side. But does the 'boy' represent innocence, or the mischievous provocations of someone who remains childish? Is the 'haloed ascetic' to be admired for his self-discipline, or admonished for his severe abstinence? Loy repeatedly offers the reader a glimpse of the figure of Joannes, and yet irritates us with incompletion. In being unable fully to grasp the image of the lover, the reader experiences the same frustrations as the speaker who has been unable to gain the full attention of the lover: just as a barrier lies between the speaker and Joannes, Loy to an extent maintains the 'cold barrier' of her text, simultaneously imparting flashes of imagery and narrative, and fostering plurality and incompletion.

Within 'this fragmentary | simultaneity | of ideas' Loy's fractured surfaces implore us to 'forage[…]' (XXII) across and between the poems of the sequence in search of semantic elaboration and textual unity.[246] Song VII presents an ephemeral moment of narrative action: the speaker runs through the street, her feet smacking the 'flag-stones', and the poem ends with an image of birds in flight ('Exhilarated birds | Prolonging flight into the night | Never reaching ----------'). This image of flight can be read, simply, as a metaphor for escape – the speaker is fleeing into the night, perhaps escaping her lover, or perhaps in pursuit of her escaped lover, whose feet have already walked the flag-stones hers now vigorously pound. But if we read laterally, across the sequence, we find that flight is a recurrent motif throughout, but one which signals not escape, but grief and trauma. The winged creatures which haunt the pages of 'Songs to Joannes' are representative of the speaker's unborn children: in song IV there are 'Bird-like abortions | With human throats' and a baby with a 'sarsenet ribbon' tied to her 'goose's wings'; in song III the speaker mourns the child they failed to create: 'We might have given birth to a butterfly | With the daily news | Printed in blood on its wings'. This image of the butterfly is saturated with references to the carnage that was taking place across Europe in 1917, with daily reports from the bloody battlefields of the First World War inscribed on its wings.[247] But this bloodied

[246] The lines 'This fragmentary | simultaneity | of ideas' are from Loy's poem sequence, 'The Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', p. 147.
[247] For Burke 'These love songs are […] drenched in the atmosphere of World War I'. *Becoming Modern*, p. 208.

imagery is also entangled with the abortions of poem IV, the red of the printed ink becoming the 'lamp-shade red dresses' worn by the 'Bird-like abortions', and the miscarriage of song XVII, 'Red a warm colour on the battle-field | Heavy on my knees as a counterpane' (XVII). Reading back and forth across the sequence, tracing the echoes and reflections that litter the poems, we uncover further semantic possibilities for the 'Exhilarated birds' of song VII: these birds, sullied by the blood of the 'daily news' (III), their wings bound by ribbons (IV), are the same unborn children, their exhilarated flight into the night cut short as they fail to reach full term ('Never reaching -----' (VII)). The image becomes a more complex metaphor, this abortive flight calling to mind, simultaneously, those lives cut short both in the womb and on the battlefield, and the aborted relationship between the two lovers, of which remains only the 'flag-stones' of the 'white street' on which they both have walked (VII). Re-read in light of this motif, the speaker of song V now seems not to be deciding between two lovers, but between grieving for her lost child – the boy to the left with one sullied 'wing' – and a lover who has retreated inward. It is now perhaps the speaker who frustratedly pulls at door-bells 'to remind | Those that are snug' (V) that others are suffering. Loy's 'tentacular quiverings' – the sprawling, fractured surface of 'Songs to Joannes' – in turn entreat the reader to stretch their feelers across the sequence, to explore the many poems simultaneously, in search of scattered references and flashes of imagery which might allow us to connect the disparate shards.

Loy sees the 'cold barrier' of the text perhaps not as an 'irritant', as Twitchell-Waas does, but as a provocation to engagement. In her essay on 'Modern Poetry', Loy cautions against allowing the poem's surface to interfere with our reading of its depths; she writes, 'When reading modern poetry one should beware of allowing mere technical eccentricities or grammatical disturbances to turn us from the main issue which is to get at the poem's reality.'[248] For Loy the 'cold barrier' is not a cordon beyond which we cannot pass, but something to be actively obliterated with 'the whole "intelligence of our senses"'.[249] Reading poetry, for Loy, is an activity for which we should utilise

[248] Loy, 'Modern Poetry', p. 160.
[249] Ibid., p. 157.

multiple senses: 'More than to read poetry', she writes, 'we must listen to poetry. […] our attitude in reading a poem must be rather that of listening to and looking at a pictured song.'[250] She draws attention to the role of the reader not only as reader, but as listener, too. It is perhaps for this reason that Loy, like Arnauld, reaches for sound as a structuring, compositional device. Throughout 'Songs to Joannes' the sounds and rhythms of the English language give shape and emphasis to the fractured poems of the sequence. In song XXIV, recurring letters and their sounds bind the truncated lines together as the plosive 'p' and 't' sounds of 'procreative' are echoed in 'truth', 'petered out', 'pestilent' and 'tear', lending audible weight to the speaker's bitter tone as she mourns her fading 'procreative' capabilities:

> The procreative truth of Me
> Petered out
> In pestilent
> Tear drops

Alliteration continues as 'Little lusts and lucidities' are paired with 'lies', and 'prayerful' aligns with the words of previous lines ('procreative', 'petered', and 'pestilent'). End rhyme adds another dimension of sound layering as the final words of the first, fifth, and seventh lines ring in sonorous unity ('Me', 'lucidities', 'acerbity'), and near rhyme links the ends of lines six and eight ('lies', 'smile'), underscoring the 'lucidities' and 'lies' that have resulted in such an acerbic ('acerbity') 'smile'. Furthermore, the vowel sounds of 'lucidities' and 'acerbity' are visually mirrored in the words 'lies' and 'heinous':

> The procreative truth of Me
> Petered out
> In pestilent
> Tear drops
> Little lusts and lucidities
> And prayerful lies

[250] Ibid. It is interesting to note the similarity here between Loy's and Arnauld's conceptions of poetry as a visual medium. Arnauld writes in 'Dangereux' ('Dangerous') of inventing a 'chanson filmée' (filmed song), in much the same way that Loy, in 'Modern Poetry', envisages poetry as a 'pictured song' (1925).

Muddled with the heinous acerbity
Of your street-corner smile

In her poetry, Loy layers sounds for a multi-sensorial reading experience, so that the words on the page may appeal to the ear as well as the eye. In a late interview in 1965 she identifies the auditory dimension of language as playing a leading role in her compositional process, saying, 'I'd only written these things for the sake of the sounds of the words. It was like making [jewellery] or something.'[251] But here, aged 82, Loy downplays the complexity of her compositional choices. As with Arnauld's poetry, there is in Loy's text, as Shreiber notes, a marked '[…] tension between the ear and the eye […]'; between the truncated lines and fractured, fragmented typography of the text, and the pleasingly sonorous, unifying layers of rhyme, assonance, and alliteration.[252] The melodious, rhythmic qualities of song XXIV seem at once to lend weight to the mournful, bitter emotions of the speaker and sit at odds with her fragmented, frustrated outpourings.

Beneath the 'cold barrier' of Loy's textual explorations is a rich tapestry of kaleidoscopic fragments to be explored with 'all our senses'. Through her radical formal experimentation Loy creates a multidimensional, multisensory reading experience that appeals to the 'intelligence' of our various senses, not just our ability to read the cold, printed text on the page. The fractured typography, liberal sprinkling of dashes, and unusual spacing provides interest for the eye; the sounds of the words, the flow of rhyme and alliteration, appeal to the ear; the truncated lines, discontinuous writing, scattered clues, fragmented images, are fuel for the exploratory tentacles of our creative and critical minds. Whilst, on first reading, Loy seems to have erected a barrier perhaps solely to 'irritate' the reader, she is in fact deliberately nurturing and encouraging a more complex interaction between reader and text. The text's various shards and splinters appeal to the aural, visual, and intellectual capacities of the reader: where gaps and fissures occur we seek to bridge them; where there are flashes of imagery or fleeting allusions we seek to catch them; where there are incomplete fragments

[251] From 'Mina Loy Interview', in *Mina Loy*, ed. by Shreiber and Tuma, p. 214.
[252] Maeera Shreiber, '"Love is a lyric / Of bodies": The negative aesthetics of Mina Loy's Love Songs to Joannes', in *Mina Loy*, ed. by Shreiber and Tuma, pp. 87-109 (p. 90).

we seek to complete them. Loy's unique textual explorations demand that we forage across the sequence and plumb beneath the hostile surface as we piece together the fragments, linger on the lacunae, untangle and unpack the imagery, trace the direction of the irregular typography, and listen to the sounds of the words on the page. We must remain aware, however, that Loy's texts will continue to resist totalizing interpretations – we will never be able to cement the fissures or piece together the drifting fragments, and nor should we seek to.

Loy's textual explorations are an important contribution to avant-garde literature and reveal her as a 'creative conduit' of the simultaneous, and often overlapping, aesthetic investigations and experiments of various avant-garde circles.[253] Moving across geographical borders and between movements, Loy was in a unique position to both absorb and influence the literary experiments taking place throughout avant-garde groups in the U.S. and Europe. Drawing from the contemporary climate of radical aesthetic innovation Loy saw the potential of experimental literary expression to challenge not only established literary norms but also accepted perspectives on gender. Throughout her experimental œuvre Loy challenges the binary thinking that reinforces the notions of male as powerful, virile machine, and female as weak and circumscribed; she puts female experience at the centre of her poetic experiments and reclaims for women the status of powerful procreator. At every turn, Loy seeks to challenge: the stridently experimental, radically disintegrative forms of her texts demand new strategies for reading, prompting and nurturing an attentive, exploratory, and critical reading practice. Loy's poetry is exemplary of the ways in which women writers both interacted with and diverged from the avant-garde, drawing from cross-currents of experimental creative practice to develop their own unique modes of literary expression.

[253] Januzzi, p. 585.

## Valentine Penrose
## (1898-1978)

The French poet and artist Valentine Penrose moved among surrealist circles in France and England after first coming into contact with the Surrealists in Paris in the latter part of the 1920s. Unlike other avant-garde movements, such as Vorticism in England and Dada in Paris and New York, few women took part in the embryonic stages of the Surrealist movement in France; many of the earliest manifestoes and collective declarations of Surrealism do not bear the signatures of women.[254] Penrose was one of a small number of women who took part in the meetings and activities of Surrealism in France in the 1920s and early 1930s.[255] But unlike Arnauld and Dismorr (committed Dadaist and Vorticist, respectively) Penrose was never a manifesto-penning, tract-signing member of the Surrealist group. Whereas Arnauld positioned herself at the centre of Dada, shaping her identity as a radical Dada poet, Penrose, like Loy, chose to distance herself from the core of the Surrealist movement. Despite close friendships and encounters with many surrealists (including, among others, Marie-Berthe and Max Ernst, Eileen Agar, Breton, Gala and Paul Éluard, Guy Lévis Mano, and Alice Rahon Paalen) Renée Riese Hubert suggests that Penrose 'remained in relative obscurity even during her years of association with the surrealists.'[256] Nevertheless, Penrose shared in the Surrealists' fascination with the unconscious and the world of dreams, and their pursuit of a superior reality beyond the bounds of logic.

By the end of the 1920s Penrose was beginning to gain recognition for her distinctive poetic explorations. She was one of the most prolific women writers involved in surrealism in the 1930s, publishing three collections of poetry and

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[254] Given that some of Dada's male players went on to become Surrealists, it is interesting to note that none of the Paris Dada women, such as Arnauld, appear to have joined the movement's ranks.

[255] Valentine's husband, Roland, would later play a crucial role in introducing Surrealism to Britain, cofounding the Surrealist group in England.

[256] Renée Riese Hubert, 'Gender, Genre, and Partnership: A Study of Valentine Penrose', in *The Other Perspective in Gender and Culture: Rewriting Women and the Symbolic*, ed. by Juliet Flower MacCannell (New York; Oxford: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 117-142 (p. 118).

one prose work during the decade.[257] Her first three collections of poetry – *Herbe À la Lune* (1935), *Sorts de la Lueur* (1937), and *Poèmes* (1937) – were published in Paris by the Surrealist Editions GLM, as was her prose work *Le Nouveau Candide* (1936).[258] She continued to write and publish over a period spanning six decades, from 1926 up until a few years before her death in 1978. Penrose's varied œuvre reveals an interest in exploring multiple literary forms: as well as poetry, her later works include the epistolary text *Martha's Opera* (1945), the collage-novel *Dons des Féminines* (1951), and the historical novel *Erzsebet Bathory La Comtesse Sanglante* (1962; translated into English as *The Bloody Countess*).[259] Her last collection of poems, *Les Magies*, was published in 1972.[260] As well as her independent publishing, she also contributed to various journals and magazines, including *London Bulletin*, *VVV*, *Dyn*, *Free Unions*, *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* and *L'Art Vivant*. Despite this substantial body of published work, most of it now out of print, Penrose's name was mostly absent from critical examinations of the avant-garde and Surrealism until the 1990s and her writing remains largely unexplored. Whereas the work of Surrealism's women artists has been the subject of significant reappraisals in recent years, and some women – such as Meret Oppenheim and Leonora Carrington – have received international recognition as Surrealist artists, the work of the movement's women writers, such as Penrose, is still in want of sustained critical attention.

Perhaps better known as the first wife of the English Surrealist painter Roland Penrose, Valentine Penrose has been subject to the same critical oversight as many of her fellow female avant-gardists. Whilst she is granted a two-page entry in the 1977 edition of *Obliques* devoted to 'La femme surréaliste', surprisingly, the editors neglect to include any of her own work to illustrate her identity as a Surrealist writer and artist, choosing instead to accompany some

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[257] Rosemont notes that 'women surrealists brought out a total of twenty-six volumes between 1930 and the close of 1939. Seven of the women published at least two books each during that period. Penrose published four.' p. 45.
[258] Penrose, *Herbe à la Lune* (Paris: GLM, 1935); *Sorts de la Lueur* (Paris: GLM, 1937); *Poèmes* (Paris: GLM, 1937); *Le Nouveau Candide* (Paris: GLM, 1936).
[259] *Martha's Opera* (Paris: Éditions Fontaine, 1945); *Dons des Féminines* (Paris: Aux Pas Perdus, 1951); *Erzsebet Bathory la Comtesse Sanglante* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1962); *The Bloody Countess* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1970).
[260] *Les Magies* (Paris: Les Mains Libres, 1972).

bibliographical information with a portrait of Valentine painted by her husband, and a portrait of Erzsebet Bathory, the figure on whom her novel is based.[261] Elsewhere, Penrose is disparagingly described by Roland Penrose's biographer, James King, not as a talented experimental poet or highly creative individual inspired by the possibilities of a higher consciousness, but as 'a sensitive, tormented and overly self-absorbed person who wanted to achieve her destiny as a writer.'[262] King's remarks are a reminder, perhaps, that accomplished women writers are still infrequently considered as seriously as their male counterparts.

To date, Penrose's work, both written and visual, has been the focus of only a small amount of published research. Karen Humphreys has compared her collage novel *Dons des Feminines* to fellow Surrealist Max Ernst's collage novel *Une Semaine de bonté*, and has analysed her novel *Erzsebet Bathory La Comtesse Sanglante* in light of conceptualizations of transgression.[263] Riese Hubert has explored Penrose's poetry and collage works through the lens of artistic partnership, focusing on her marriage to, and subsequent separation from, Roland Penrose.[264] Georgianna M.M. Colvile has examined Penrose's poetry in relation to that of her intimate friend and fellow Surrealist, Alice Rahon Paalen, exploring the lesbian eroticism contained within their poetry and tracing a network of intertextuality between their texts.[265] Chadwick briefly analyses a small sample of Penrose's work in her wide-ranging study of Surrealism's women artists and has, more recently, brought the details of her life back into view in a biographical study which examines the networks of female friendships

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[261] *Obliques*, no. 14-15 (1977), 204-205.
[262] James King, *Roland Penrose: The Life of a Surrealist* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), p. 58.
[263] Karen Humphreys, 'Collage Communicants: Visual Representation in the Collage-Albums of Max Ernst and Valentine Penrose', *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 10:4, 377-387 <DOI: 10.1080/17409290601040379>; Humphreys, 'The Poetics of Transgression in Valentine Penrose's "La Comtesse sanglante", *The French Review*, vol. 76, no. 4 (March 2003), 740-751.
[264] Riese Hubert, *Magnifying Mirrors: Women, Surrealism, & Partnership* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1994); see also, 'Gender, Genre, and Partnership'.
[265] Georgiana M.M. Colvile, 'Through an Hour-glass Lightly: Valentine Penrose and Alice Rahon Paalen', in *Reconceptions: Reading Modern French Poetry*, ed. by Russell King and Bernard McGuirk (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 1996), pp. 81-112.

that shaped the lives and work of women Surrealists.[266] As well as documenting her relationship with Rahon Paalen, Chadwick delves into the complex friendship Penrose shared with Roland's second wife, the photographer Lee Miller.

Like Arnauld, Penrose wrote in French – although, unlike Arnauld, the French language was her mother tongue. The publication of her collected works in the original French in 2001 has reignited interest in her contribution to Surrealism and provided invaluable access to works which had long been out of print.[267] The lack of critical attention to written work by Penrose has been particularly notable in Anglophone contexts, owing, perhaps, to the fact that English translations of her poetry, prose, and dramatic texts remain few. In 1977, Roy Edwards published a bilingual volume of her texts, with English translations alongside the original French; this volume is the only comprehensive collection of English translations to date, though it is now out of print.[268] Elsewhere, a handful of Penrose's texts in translation have been included in anthologies of Surrealist art and literature. Caws includes the poem 'May – 1941' in *The Surrealist Painters and Poets*, and Rosemont includes four of Edwards's English translations (three poems and one prose excerpt) in *Surrealist Women*, alongside the poem 'The Datura the Serpent', translated by Myrna Bell Rochester, and 'To a Woman to a Path', translated by Penrose and her husband Roland.[269] There is great potential for additional translations of Penrose's written works which pay particular attention to the ambiguity and complexity of her language and imagery. New translations would increase attention in Anglophone contexts to her contribution to avant-garde literature and prompt further comparative analysis with her contemporaries, in both avant-garde and modernist circles, who wrote in English.

This chapter takes as its focus three poems penned and published by Penrose in the 1930s, the decade during which she was most prolific as an

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[266] See Chadwick, *Women Artists* and *The Militant Muse*.
[267] Penrose, *Écrits d'une Femme Surréaliste*, ed. by Georgiana M.M. Colvile (Éditions Joëlle Losfeld, 2001).
[268] Penrose, *Poems and Narrations*, trans. by Roy Edwards (Manchester: Carcanet Press & Elephant Trust, 1977) [hereafter *PN*].
[269] *Surrealist Painters and Poets*, ed. by Caws, p. 327; see Rosemont, pp. 85-88, pp. 236-238, and pp. 371-372.

independent poet and in which she continued to move in the Surrealist orbit. It will explore two untitled poems from her 1937 collection *Poèmes*, beginning 'Le cœur de tous les soirs' ('The heart of all evenings') and 'Tête de mon corps' ('Head of my body'), and a third poem, 'To a Woman to a Path', originally published in the journal *Contemporary Poetry and Prose* in 1936.[270] The order of the poems within this chapter is determined thematically. The chapter will first consider the influence of Penrose's involvement in Surrealist circles and investigate her experimentation with collage techniques, before examining her response to the work of male Surrealists. Through close examination and exploration, focusing foremost on English translations of the original French texts, this chapter will delve into Penrose's mystical poetic universe and illuminate her engagement with various aspects of avant-garde art and literature, including her own work in visual collage. Drawing comparisons with Arnauld and Loy, this chapter will underscore Penrose's distinctive contribution to avant-garde literature.

**'Here the world itself stretches': Landscapes of the Imagination**

A silken ladder hangs glittering in a darkened cave in the heights of the Himalayas; a flower dances; ships are set adrift; a beast drags dreams by the nostrils; an axe bursts into laughter; the winter sun cuts through opal; there are dances of pastry; a flaming ball rolls across the floors of a dream hotel; an enchantress nibbles at grass.[271] These are scenes from Penrose's untitled poem beginning 'Le cœur de tous les soirs' ('The heart of all evenings').[272] Inhabited by beasts and fireballs, enchantresses and singing butterflies, laughing axes and dancing flowers, the poem evokes a continually shifting fantastical landscape of

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[270] Both 'Le cœur de tous les soirs' and 'Tête de mon corps' are included in Penrose, *PN*, pp. 40-43 and pp. 45-47. 'To a Woman to a Path', translated by Roland and Valentine Penrose, *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, no. 7 (November 1936), 131-133. Reprinted in Rosemont, pp. 86-88.

[271] The subtitle quote 'Here the world itself stretches' is taken from Éluard's preface to Penrose's collection *Herbe à la Lune*, as translated by Edwards in Penrose, *PN*, p. 13. Of Penrose's 'poetically limpid' works Éluard writes: 'A transient life and, of a sudden, the elements are mortal. The blood trickles through the grass, is mingling with the dew, it evaporates and is replaced by the wind. The wind drops. The glance shifts. Here the world itself stretches.'

[272] See Appendix, pp. 225-228.

fragmentary, enigmatic images. The opening stanza depicts two creatures of flight, a bird and a butterfly, and an unidentified female figure:

> The heart of all evenings the water bird is close by water
> helpless butterfly singing only to hear himself
> helpless butterfly delicate the woman
> delicate her hands laid unaware
> upon the playthings of flame

Swiftly, a second, indented stanza shifts to the steep inclines of the Himalayan mountains, where another unidentified presence ('who'?) climbs, and a ladder made of silk is suspended inside a dark cave:

> Who ascends who ascends
> in the Himalayas
> the silken ladder
> newly flung
> glittered in the cave

In the third stanza 'The ladder the axe the fire the spark' all burst 'into deepest laughter' before 'another woman' leaves and ships are 'set adrift'; a rat squeals 'black' and 'the eyes of lanterns' become visible before glimpses of the 'nibbling' enchantress, 'statues', and 'icy breasts' are revealed. The action of the poem moves swiftly and non-sequentially, with images devoid of evident connections called forth in quick succession.

With its mystical evocations of a disjointed dream world beyond the everyday, Penrose's poem takes part in Surrealism's exploration and excavation of possibilities beyond the frontiers of (logical) reality. Like the Dadaists before them, the Surrealists were suspicious and critical of rationalist notions of reality and sought to free the mind from the shackles of logic, which they considered an enslaving force on the imagination of 'man, that inveterate dreamer'.[273] As such, they endeavoured, throughout their theorising and creative explorations, to 'demoralise the idea that the universe can be understood in realist terms.'[274] Just

[273] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), p. 3.
[274] *The Surrealism Reader*, ed. by Ades *et al*, p. 10.

as Arnauld, in her earlier poem 'The Wood-Gnawers', rails against systems which limit free-thinking, André Breton condemns the stifling effects of logic, writing in his 'Surrealist Manifesto' of 1924: 'our brains are dulled by the incurable mania of wanting to make the unknown known, classifiable'.[275] Dismissing the rationalist quest for knowledge epitomised by scientism, he heralds 'a new mode of pure expression', Surrealism, that will liberate the mind and give free rein to the subconscious.[276] The Surrealists rejected the privileging of conscious experiences over subconscious ones, arguing that a deeper exploration of 'psychic activity' was necessary for the enrichment and expansion of the creative imagination, and would lead to a greater understanding of the conscious world.[277]

Where the Surrealists differ from their Dada predecessors in their shared effort to obliterate the barriers of the rational mind is in the setting out of a methodology to counter what they saw as the tyrannical 'reign of logic'.[278] Whereas the Dadaists revelled in chaos and endeavoured to explode all systems, the Surrealists sought, Michael Richardson suggests, a more 'systematic irrationality'.[279] In an effort to bypass the restrictions imposed by logic and access new imaginative worlds beyond everyday reality they developed various methods of literary and visual production, both individual and collaborative, that they believed would provide the optimal conditions for penetrating the realms beyond conscious thought. Inspired by the work of psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who practiced various techniques for tapping into the subconscious

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[275] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', p. 3. The Surrealists shared with Arnauld and other Dadaists a desire to 'overcome the repressive apparatus of logic, common sense, faith, law, bureaucracy, obedience to authority, militarism, and all closed systems', Rosemont, p. xxxv.

[276] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', p. 24. In 1925 Breton, along with other male Surrealists including Louis Aragon, Max Ernst, and René Crevel, would sign a declaration stating, conversely, that Surrealism was, in fact, 'not a new means [of] expression' but 'a means of total liberation of the mind *and of all that resembles it*.' 'Declaration of January 27, 1925', reproduced in *The History of Surrealism*, ed. by Maurice Nadeau (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 240-241 (p. 240).

[277] Breton writes that 'the depths of our mind contain within it strange forces capable of augmenting those on the surface'. 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), p. 10.

[278] Ibid., p. 9. As Hans Richter points out, it is this 'theoretical and methodical infrastructure that distinguishes Surrealism from Dada.' *Dada: Art and Anti-Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1997), p. 195.

[279] Richardson, 'Poetics', p. 140.

minds of his patients, attempting to bring to the surface thoughts and processes free of conscious control, the Surrealists developed similar methods to nurture their own automatism, playing collaborative games such as *exquisite corpse*, experimenting with free association and dream notation, and practicing automatic writing, painting, and drawing.

In the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism' published in 1924, Breton set forth a philosophical foundation for Surrealism and communicated his methodology for automatic writing which, as he envisioned it, would open up a pathway to access 'the actual functioning of thought'.[280] The aim of automatic writing was to write as rapidly as possible, putting ink to paper without allowing the conscious mind to intervene as the contents of the subconscious poured forth onto the page; by keeping apace with the swiftness of the free-flowing subconscious Breton believed that the participant could escape the 'conscious rhythm[s]' of waking thought.[281] He writes of his own automatic writing experiments:

> I resolved to obtain from myself […] a monologue spoken as rapidly as possible without any intervention on the part of the critical faculties, a monologue consequently unencumbered by the slightest inhibition and which was, as closely as possible, akin to spoken thought.[282]

Placing themselves in a state of attentive submission, and attempting to block out all external disturbances, the participants were to 'assume […] responsibility for the reception and transmission of signals which press upon [them]',[283] to act as mere 'recording instruments' or 'receptacle[s]' for the unfiltered contents of the subconscious.[284] By creating the right conditions for this spontaneous creative practice, the Surrealists hoped, like Freud, to bring to the surface the depths of the subconscious mind and to access the 'imperceptible world of phantasms' that lay beyond the realm of logic.[285]

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[280] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', p. 26.
[281] Ibid., p. 12.
[282] Ibid., p. 23.
[283] Breton, 'The Poet's Function', in *The History of Surrealism*, ed. by Nadeau, pp. 304-305 (p. 304).
[284] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism (1924)', p. 28.
[285] Breton, 'Preface for a Reprint of the Manifesto' (1929), in *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, trans. by Seaver and Lane, pp. vii-xi (p. xi). The extent to which it was possible to bypass

The Surrealists did not set out to produce 'literature', which they rejected as a mode of expression in which perception has been processed and mediated – whittled by formal and aesthetic concerns – but to unlock the untamed recesses of the subconscious and unleash what Breton and Éluard describe in their text 'Notes on Poetry' as 'completely naked thoughts'.[286] Poetry was positioned, in surrealist discourse, as the antithesis of Literature; rejecting the restrictions of traditional literary form the Surrealists looked to the practice of automatism to revolutionise poetic expression. By liberating the mind from the shackles of logic and the writer from the restraints of literary convention, automatic writing expanded the possibilities for poetry; it was seen to augment creative potential by allowing chance to play a role in the creation of poetic imagery and texts. For the Surrealists, poetry is not moulded by conscious control or shaped by formal prescriptions, but found in the free association of words and images. In automatic writing they found fertile ground for freeing and enriching the poet's imagination.

Although Penrose found aspects of Surrealism problematic – notably the concept of the *femme-enfant* (the naïve child-woman) and the persistent misogyny of the male surrealists' and their fetishizing of woman, both real and imagined – and would later become 'disillusioned with what she saw as the surrealists' intellectualizing and […] "theorizing"', as a creative poet and artist with a deep interest in spirituality and the essence of life beyond the banality of everyday existence, she shared in their desire to liberate the mind, probe the depths of the unconscious, and to explore and harness the world of dreams.[287] We might speculate about the methods by which Penrose crafted her poetry and the extent to which she engaged with the various spontaneous processes of production prescribed and practiced by Breton and other Surrealists – giving free play to the association of words, submitting to the process of automatic writing, attempting to capture the elusive nature of dreams through dream

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conscious participation and tap into the depths of the irrational mind through the practice of automatic writing remained a contentious issue within the Surrealist group, with many unconvinced by Breton's devotion to the practice. Nevertheless, the premise of automatism underpins much surrealist work and practice.

[286] Breton and Éluard, 'Notes on Poetry', p. 257.

[287] Chadwick, *Militant Muse*, p. 22.

notation. Whether or not she engaged in such methods, at its core Penrose's poetry embraces and nurtures the underlying principles of automatism, giving free rein to the imagination and probing the depths of unconscious, exploring the world of dreams, embracing fluidity, flux, and heterogeneity, and posing a challenge to rational thought, linearity, and logic.

As it transports the reader on a voyage of discovery through the landscapes of the imagination, 'The heart of all evenings' reveals Penrose's interest in liberating and exploring the untamed recesses of the subconscious mind. The reader is swept along on a meandering dream-adventure: venturing high into the Himalayas on a 'silken ladder' we encounter singing butterflies, mysterious women ('another woman she is gone'), 'monsoon beasts' and a bewitching 'enchantress' who nibbles on 'crystal grass'. The reader dodges a flaming ball of fire ('flaring globe') and a lonely butterfly sings as Penrose calls forth palm trees, hospitals, and wind chimes. From the heights of icy, snow-capped mountains the poem plunges into the swell of ocean currents off the Coromandel Coast where treasure-laden ships are 'set adrift', taking in dancing flowers and laughing fires along the way, and drifts along rivers that signal the dream-journey's endpoint ('I am at the estuaries of my rivers').

Penrose's phantasmagoric composition offers momentary flickers: visions, figures, memories, landscapes, all spliced together, merging and overlapping. Flowing non-sequentially from image to image without exposing connective tissues which might clarify some linear trajectory or offer some semblance of traditional poetic coherence, the poem evokes the erratic rhythms and flux characteristic of the unbound subconscious. Like the fragmentary dream sequence, the images of the poem briefly emerge and swiftly recede – in the same way as the ship's cargo they are 'set adrift' with no clear direction. In place of narrative flow is abrupt dislocation and juxtaposition as, characteristic of the rapid, kaleidoscopic flashes of Arnauld's projector, the poem's truncated images intercept and interrupt one another: flashes of the Indian subcontinent ('the Himalayas', 'Bengal', 'coroma[n]dels',[288] 'Malabar') are intercepted by 'icy'

[288] This should probably be 'Coromandels', a name used to designate a type of Chinese lacquered good that was shipped via the Coromandel Coast of India en route to Europe.

statues and 'pastry' moons; we catch a glimpse of a 'delicate […] woman' and a 'rat squealing black' scuttles quickly by; the winter sun makes a brief entrance before the 'beast' grasping at the speaker's dreams appears; a flaming ball of fire rolling across the poem's lines is cut off by a 'pastry moon' as a girl is glimpsed high above the rooftops. Resembling the fragmentary subconscious, the poem is populated by fleeting shards of imagery which resist completion – we are offered glimpses, but no full view of the landscape. What is the relationship between the butterfly 'singing only to hear himself' and the enchantress? Where are the palm trees in the relation to the 'silken ladder' swinging in the mountains? Who is the queen that toils and what does she have to do with securing the ancestry of the new butterflies? How did we arrive at the 'mire of Bengal'? The truncated imagery invites many questions, but the poem provides few, if any, answers.

The poem's fluctuations are heightened as these abrupt dislocations and redirections are compounded by indented stanzas which introduce further divergent interceptions into the already discontinuous rhythms of the text:

> The heart of all evenings the water bird is close by water
> helpless butterfly singing only to hear himself
> helpless butterfly delicate the woman
> delicate her hands laid unaware
> upon the playthings of flame
>
> > Who ascends who ascends
> > in the Himalayas
> > the silken ladder
> > newly flung
> > glittered in the cave
>
> The ladder the axe the fire the spark
> all shattered into deepest laughter
> the primal flower did dance
> another woman she is gone
> the cargoes are set adrift.

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The poem's references to ships 'set adrift', a 'water bird', flags ('pavillon') and 'treasure' are also evocative of this coastal landscape.

With this indented stanza arrives the presence of another figure, someone ascending through the mountains on a silken ladder, and the tense of the poem shifts from the present ('butterfly singing', 'her hands laid unaware') to the past ('the silken ladder […] glittered in the cave'). It also introduces the possibility of an additional narrating voice –one which asks 'who ascends'? – or perhaps the plural voices of the subconscious, heightening the poem's heterogeneous, discontinuous character.

With its sparing punctuation and fluid syntax, the poem's formal characteristics are redolent of the unfiltered transcriptions of the Surrealists' automatic writing experiments, in which the multiple voices of the subconscious issue forth:

> Farewell farewell votive offering of monsoon beasts
> the rat squealing black and the eyes of lanterns
> and you enchantress nibbling
> blades of crystal grass in a faraway shade goodbye
> the feet of clay did not move far beyond your statues
> the breasts icy beyond the park. Remember then that wind
> sullen and beyond measure scorning the palms.

In the example above, the momentum of the syntax rolling across the poem's line ends evokes the continuous flow, or spontaneous outpouring, of the unhindered subconscious, free to call up images in quick succession without the limitations of rational, conscious thought or the intrusive pauses of traditional punctuation. Sequential narrative progression and semantic continuity are swept aside as incongruous images are called forth in no particular order, as in the following lines where the narrating voice (or voices) leaps swiftly from one fleeting image to the next:

> If do not issue into the gold then I shall die
> that beast dragging my dreams by the nostrils
> there the hospital and there now the chimes
> and if I must submit to her pelt striated by rains
> farewell I am at the estuaries of my rivers.

Throughout the poem the rapid juxtaposition of disparate images evokes the meandering trajectory of the subconscious poured forth onto the page.

Like Arnauld, throughout her poetry Penrose transforms the pre-existing elements of reality, cleaving them from their conventional contexts and bringing them together in unusual combinations to create irrational images and construct fantastical dreamscapes. She draws heavily on imagery from the natural world, capturing the essences of flowers, birds, butterflies, waterfalls, mountains, grass, the sun and moon, and the forces of fire, earth, wind, and water in the lines of her poetry. But she takes these familiar iconographies and decontextualizes them to create a new, imaginary landscape. Probing at the boundary between reality and dream, she juxtaposes incompatible realities, transforming them to create absurd, illogical iconographies: in Penrose's imaginative poetic world anthropomorphic flowers dance, a rat whimpers 'black', and mosquitoes track the scent of treasure-laden ships on the high seas. An enchantress nibbles at crystallised blades of grass, and destructive fireballs roll across the landings of dream hotels. In the face of logic, ladders and axes (and, perhaps, the poet too) roar with 'deepest laughter'. It is this aspect of her poetry that led Roland to affectionately describe her as 'a goddess of the irrational'.[289] In a way similar to Arnauld's musical poetics, Penrose's poem contains auditory associations, suggesting compositional choices which privilege sound over semantic sense or narrative sequence. In the lines 'L'échelle la hache le feu l'étincelle | tout a éclaté de rire de plus belle' ('The ladder the axe the fire the spark | all shattered into deepest laughter'), the words 'échelle' (ladder), 'hache' (axe), and 'étincelle' (spark) are bound together by shared sounds – 'échelle' and 'étincelle' share both an acute *é* and the ending '-elle', and 'hache' echoes the 'che' sound of 'échelle' ('-chelle'/ '-celle'/ '-che'). Drawing from the world around her, she takes familiar iconographies and defamiliarizes them, rupturing the order of reality to engender a surreal *ailleurs* (elsewhere) out of fragments of the real. In her evocative poetic explorations, Penrose 'push[es] back the frontiers of logical reality [to] reveal[…] the infinite possibilities within the scope of the concrete world.'[290]

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[289] King, p. 46.
[290] Balakian, *Surrealism*, p. 93.

Excavating the erratic depths of the free-flowing subconscious, her poetry transports the reader to the 'hôtels du rêve' (dream hotels) of the unfettered imagination – to a space of displacement and disorientation far beyond the accepted perspectives of everyday reality, where the sun splits 'milkglass', 'monsoon beasts' present sacrificial offerings, and ladders and axes laugh. Like the 'beast' that retrieves the speaker's dreams from the mind, 'dragging' them out by the nostrils, Penrose plumbs the depths of the subconscious mind and brings forth a strange, fantastical poetic world. As well as engaging in the Surrealists' investigation into the expansive potential of the subconscious mind, the poem also 'inscrib[es] [Penrose's] private quest for "other" mind spaces'.[291] Chadwick suggests that Penrose was 'spiritual and mystically inclined' and held a 'long-expressed desire to live the mystical essence of life rather than its mundane details'.[292] She had a deep interest in Eastern philosophy, mysticism, and the potential of a higher spiritual consciousness and inner psychological significance, and travelled a number of times to India to seek spirituality and study oriental philosophy. She was fascinated and inspired by the teachings of 'the strange, eremitic Spaniard Count Galarza de Santa Clara, a master of arcane studies', and took a keen interest in esoteric religious systems and the ancient scriptures of Hinduism.[293] With its evocations of sea travel ('cargoes are set adrift') and shorelines, mountain ranges ('Himalayas') and monsoon rains, 'The heart of all evenings' not only takes the reader on a journey (through the unpredictable twists and turns of the unconscious mind), but also recalls Penrose's own voyage of discovery, both physical and spiritual, across the ocean to India. The poem transports us, on foot and by boat, to the beaches of Malabar ('You shall go dance in Malabar | with copper cheeks'), the swamps of the Bengal region ('the mire of Bengal'), the foothills of the Himalayas, and across the ocean which meets the Coromandel Coast ('coroma[n]dels sniffed-out by mosquitoes'). It gestures towards Penrose's search for spirituality in Indian ashrams, and the intense journey she undertakes as she metaphorically 'ascends' the 'silken ladder' of spiritual enlightenment. Whilst Penrose's work is marked by her

[291] Colvile, 'Through an Hour-glass Lightly', p. 86.
[292] Chadwick, *Militant Muse*, p. 200, p. 201.
[293] Edwards, 'Foreword', in Penrose, *PN*, pp. 1-4 (p. 2).

involvement with Surrealism, her poetry also reflects her desire to access mind spaces unlike those of the surrealist unconscious.

Like the spiritual teachings that offered Penrose a pathway to other mind spaces, 'The heart of all evenings' invites the reader on a voyage of discovery through the 'hôtels du rêve' of the liberated subconscious, transports us to a new poetic reality, and leads us into the expansive landscape of the limitless imagination.

**Collage Configurations**

Penrose's poetry is an assemblage of diverse and disparate elements – themes, iconographies, memories – that not only evokes the shifting and heterogeneous characteristics of the unbound subconscious, but also calls to mind the fragmented visual field of pictorial collage. Though better known as a poet, like Loy and many other avant-garde creatives (including, as we shall see, Jessica Dismorr), Penrose explored the expressive potential of more than one medium, experimenting with both the written word and with visual arts such as drawing and collage. Whilst the earliest dated collages and photomontages suggest that Penrose began working with the medium in the 1930s it is possible that she began experimenting with collage when she first encountered the Surrealists in the mid-1920s. In 1951 she published a collage-novel, *Dons des Féminines* (Gifts of the Feminine), comprised of a long cycle of bilingual poems interspersed with visual collages.[294] Written from the perspective of a woman, the poems of *Dons des Féminines* are addressed to a beloved woman:

> Rubia your odour is like that of Spanish boxwood
> Of iron rusted by the tears of lovers
> Of blinds drawn down barred windows in Spanish towns,
> Of ash carnations talking about love or else love lies bleeding.
>
> Palpitant but poised she is the orphan from mountains.[295]
> […]
>
> Farewell my beloved

[294] Reprinted in Penrose, *PN*, pp. 69-99.
[295] Ibid., p. 75.

> Your clamouring woman belongs to the landscape
> Farewell Rubia.[296]

The collages that accompany these poems make use of materials from scientific journals, Victorian fashion magazines, clothing catalogues, architectural journals, and book illustrations, to compose landscapes of fragmented images. Lifted from these varied sources, seemingly paradoxical fragments are juxtaposed and distortions of time, place, and scale are exploited to create hallucinatory dreamscapes and imaginary worlds. Disparate images are placed alongside one another, turned upside-down or slanted at irregular angles, overlapped, and merged to construct irrational scenes: women in full Victorian dresses boosted with petticoats journey through vast natural landscapes alongside floating heads; a woman perches atop the architectural foundations of an industrial building, her height greater than the building itself; drifting above the clouds two women embrace as hazardous volcanic ash clouds billow; tigers sprint through urban streets alongside bolting horses. Displacements result in irrational encounters: a large severed head wearing a pointed dunce's hat rides in a carriage of the same size; a beetle with a horse's head floats across a rocky mountain landscape, and a woman's severed head, propelled by the rotary wings of a helicopter, flies through the night sky. In her pictorial collages, Penrose transforms pre-existing elements, liberating them from their conventional contexts to fashion new and unusual combinations. She harnesses the radical incongruity of collage to rupture the order of rational reality and bring to life imaginary worlds that stretch beyond the bounds of logic.

It is possible that it was Penrose's poetic explorations that sparked her interest in visual collage; as Karen Humphreys suggests, '[she] may have begun experimenting with visual collages because conceptually it was already a function of her poetic praxis.'[297] With its disjointed rhythms and fragmentary composition Penrose's poetry shares many of the characteristics of her collage images. Like her pictorial collages, her poetry is populated by clashing semantic elements, truncated images, and unusual combinations; it is fragmented,

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[296] Ibid., p. 79.
[297] Humphreys, 'Collages Communicants', p. 379.

disparate, multiple, and incongruous. In the following stanza from the poem beginning 'Tête de mon corps' ('Head of my body'), the disjointed assemblage of divergent semantic elements is suggestive of collage composition:

> The treasure's spirit the gold the thief is in the tree
> farewell passerby
> farewell for the night my beloved
> the inn of white fragrance shall keep me safe
> You are far my head from festive parasols
> my stem of prostrated silk
> and yet your bed full with blue flax remains between branches
> That was another time the darlings the doubles
> o my lovely pool
> thousand white butterflies blazing
> gone for a reason that will suffice
> over the star's shoulder
> not wide but long the furrow
> she was at the end
> with a field cricket.[298]

As in her visual collages, in her poetry diverse elements share the space on the page: a furrow in the soil is brought together with 'festive parasols'; lifted from various sources a 'lovely pool', a thief perched in a tree, and the shoulder of a star are pasted together as a 'thousand white butterflies' blaze across the page. Penrose draws from a wide frame of reference, bringing together a range of iconographies and intertextual references: the poem drifts from images of 'children tumbling in ecstasy' to 'the mango', from the 'horns' of a sacred cow in Bombay harbour to 'mistletoe', from a 'thief' to 'the inn of white fragrance', and from 'the road of return' to 'the shark's tail', and draws on imagery from Hindu faith ('god between the horns'), Christianity ('It is the day of the risen stone'), Greek mythology (Medea's 'chariot drawn by serpents'), and folklore ('the fairy tree is in the forehead').

Penrose's poetry simulates the fissures of collage and assemblage, nurturing visible breaks in semantic, syntactic, and narrative continuity, and

[298] This analysis makes reference to my own translation of the poem. See Appendix, pp. 229-232.

resisting coherence. Throughout the poem the seams of the collage tears are visible in the incongruous arrangement of disparate parts and the absence of any explicit semantic coherence. Fleeting images are brought together with unrelated phrases ('the thief is in the tree | farewell passerby'), and fragments of syntactic wholes are pasted alongside one another ('That was another time the darlings the doubles | o my lovely pool'). Devoid of connecting words which might explicitly link each line to the next, the paratactic arrangement of the poem's lines disrupts the seamless surface of continuous syntax and mirrors the fragmented features of the pictorial collage composition. It is not evident why the line 'not wide long the furrow' follows on from the lines 'thousand white butterflies blazing | gone for a reason that will suffice | over the star's shoulder' or what connects the following lines:

> It is a truth in the dove's beak
> the fairy tree is in the forehead remains there
> noble being will no longer tremble with love
> the horse-hide will tremble near the mistletoe.

Instead, each line appears as an individual fragment lifted from a different source material – a truncated image, a flickering thought, a fleeting vision.

As with Arnauld's irregular compositional choices, the paratactic placement of the poem's lines calls to mind surrealist language games such as *exquisite corpse* and the 'If/When' game, where texts and images are created in collaboration. In the game e*xquisite corpse* each line of the text is written by a different participant, with the paper folded to conceal the previous participant's contribution; in the 'If/When' game, one player writes a proposition beginning 'if' or 'when' and a second player creates a response, with neither player knowing what the other has written. These experimental games nurture paradoxical confrontations. The resulting texts – an assemblage of multiple divergent voices – are revealed as the paper is unfolded: in one example, Jeanette Ducrocq Tanguy writes: 'If there had been no guillotine' and Suzanne Muzard responds: 'Wasps would remove their corsets.'[299] Similarly to the haphazard

[299] Rosemont, p. 37.

creations brought to life through these games, Penrose's poetry revels in a tangle of unusual combinations and discontinuity. Parts of the poem read like the product of such collaborative word games, with semantic and syntactic connections between lines and phrases obscured:

> Now the monsoon wind does not play the ascetic
> and the spider hanging the most brightly of his days
> crowned with oil and gold the chariot drawn by serpents and stones
> this is my colour
> looking onto life.

What connects the forceful monsoon wind, the hanging spider, and the serpent-drawn chariot? And how do these images relate back to the 'thief' in the tree, the 'inn of white fragrance', or the 'festive parasols' of the second stanza? Throughout the poem Penrose foregrounds incongruity, bringing together images, lines, and whole stanzas without semantic coherence or syntactic continuity.

In her analysis of surrealist collage Elza Adamowicz identifies the conflicting notions of 'cutting' and 'flowing' – 'the spontaneous verbal flow […] which characterizes early automatism on the one hand, and the deliberate cutting up and assembling of disparate elements on the other hand' – as 'the two essential modes of surrealist production […].'[300] In Penrose's poem these conflicting currents are exploited simultaneously as the continuous flow of words issued, and images evoked, by the speaker is counteracted by the brevity of the poem's truncated lines and the rapid juxtaposition of the disparate images called forth. The poem moves swiftly through a succession of fleeting images, without the speaker slowing to elaborate on an image or to flesh out the links between the poem's various parts. The second stanza drifts from the bright patterns of 'festive parasols' to beds 'full with blue flax', flowing continuously into 'another time' of 'darlings' and 'doubles', through a blaze of butterflies, 'over the star's shoulder', and into the field where at the end of a long 'furrow' we find a female figure with a 'field cricket'. But this fluid forward motion is intercepted

[300] Elza Adamowicz, *Surrealist Collage in Text and Image: Dissecting the Exquisite Corpse* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), p. 5.

by the seams of the collage composition as images are curtailed by line ends and continuity halted by semantic discontinuity and juxtaposition. In the following section of the poem the absence of capitals at the beginning of each line suggests that the sentence – and with it semantic continuity – flows across the line ends. Yet with each new line arrives a new syntactic fragment adrift from the one preceding, carrying an idea or image distinct from the one before:

> That was another time the darlings the doubles
> o my lovely pool
> thousand white butterflies blazing

The poem's conflicting currents of 'cutting' and 'flowing' are characteristic of what Adamowicz describes as 'the collage effect of automatism'.[301] Whilst the Dadaists were interested in the explosive possibilities of collage to disrupt habitual modes of perception, the Surrealists saw in collage practices the potential to both channel and depict the fragmented subconscious. As well as reading the poem in light of Penrose's pictorial collage works, in which disparate fragments are selected, arranged, and assembled by the artist, we can also return to Surrealism's exploration of the unbridled unconscious and consider the poem, like 'The heart of all evenings', as a text influenced by automatic writing, in which 'the expression of the fragmented inner voice' or 'the transcription of the multiple voices of the unconscious' takes precedence over cohesion and linearity, creating a 'collage effect'.[302] In this context we might interpret the heterogeneous fragments of the poem as intrusions of the multiple voices of the unconscious mind, projecting memories ('That was another time'), visions ('where low-down the horses of earth are waiting'), hopes ('let god guard us in the dust'), and sensations ('two children tumbling in ecstasy all the time'); delivering prophesies ('noble being will no longer tremble with love'), recalling biblical stories ('It is the day of the risen stone'), mythical narratives ('the chariot drawn by serpents and stones'), and echoes of old romance tales ('farewell for the night my beloved').

[301] Ibid., p. 7.
[302] Ibid., p. 7, p. 13.

Like Loy's fragmented textual surfaces, Penrose's disjointed collage configurations challenge our navigation of the text. As Colvile argues, Penrose 'constantly deviates from arranging her chain of signifiers in any conventional, linear pattern […]', making it difficult to draw connections or trace a pathway of continuity through the text.[303] As we move through the poem, from word to word, line to line, we are forced to navigate our way across the wide gaps left open by absent connectives and distant fields of association. From the poem's first lines we must leap from the physical ('Head of my body') to the spiritual, as the line 'It is the day of the risen stone' conjures associations with the resurrection of Christ, where Christ was 'risen' from the dead and the 'stone' blocking the entrance to his tomb rolled away. We must jump the gaps from biblical narrative to the image of children playing ('two children tumbling in ecstasy'), and on to warm fires, or perhaps roaring passions, stoked by 'the good wind'. From there the line 'let god guard us in the dust and near to the mango' infers the dusty, hot climate in which mango trees grow, but also the notions of death and heaven, as bodies disintegrate (dust to dust) and the spirit ascends ('let god guard us'). Next we must hurdle the gap from dust, death, and tropical fruits, to the allure of treasure and crime ('The treasure's spirit the gold the thief is in the tree'), and leap from beloveds to sensory pleasures ('inn of white fragrance') and levelled silk stems ('my stem of prostrated silk'). In his reading of Mallarme's poetry, Malcolm Bowie observes that, 'at each word-boundary we have to re-think our previous route and make new guesses at the way ahead.'[304] Traversing Penrose's deviant chain of signifiers, we are obliged to halt at each word, each image, to reconfigure meanings, uncover new associations, and ready ourselves for the next leap.

At other turns syntactic arrangements further complicate any attempt at decoding the poem's imagery. As shards of the poem merge and overlap we must work simultaneously to both unravel the segments and piece them together. As lines are telescoped adjectives become distanced from the nouns to which they refer, and reading is reshaped into a process of pairing up clausal fragments and

[303] Colvile, 'Through an Hour-glass Lightly', p. 85.
[304] Malcolm Bowie, *Mallarmé and the Art of Being Difficult* (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 8.

deciphering the boundaries of the syntactic unit. In the following lines, taken from the third stanza, the adjectival phrase 'crowned with oil and gold' can be attached to each of the clausal units which precede and follow it:

> Now the monsoon wind does not play the ascetic
> and the spider hanging the most brightly of his days
> crowned with oil and gold the chariot drawn by serpents and stones
> this is my colour
> looking onto life.

The absence of punctuation creates enjambment between the two lines and as the syntax spills over into the line below the phrase 'crowned with oil and gold' can be read in reference to the 'spider': 'and the spider hanging the most brightly of his days | crowned with oil and with gold […]'. But where the line-break separates the adjective 'crowned' from the preceding noun phrase it signals a new syntactic unit. In this configuration, the second of the two lines is read in isolation from the first, and the adjective is instead seen to complement the noun phrase that follows, transferring the sense to suggest that the chariot is crowned: 'crowned with oil and gold the chariot drawn by serpents and stones'. Arranging words in this way, Penrose abstains from identifying their intended order and frustrates the reader's desire for unambiguous meaning.

Once the blurred and intertwined sections have been disentangled, resolving the poem's diverse parts into a coherent whole, or simply smaller cohesive segments, is still an impossible task. As we attempt to piece together the diverse parts of Penrose's poetic world, the vagueness and ambiguity of the poem's content continues to compound the discontinuity of its fractured form. How, for instance, do we begin to interpret and draw semantic threads between these highly ambiguous lines?

> Takes the flower smiles throws it
> why serve this sun
> the road of return is sinuous and black
> it receives the contrary of having loved
> the contrary of having woven
> it receives the shark's tail

Who 'takes the flower'? Does the verb 'throws' refer to the flower or to the 'smile', or to something else entirely? Who is serving the sun? To what does the 'road of return' lead back to and who is set to travel it? To what does 'it' refer – does the 'road of return' receive 'the contrary of having loved', or does 'it' refer to something else? What is the significance of the 'shark's tail' and how does it relate to the content of the preceding lines? Unlike Loy's 'Love Songs', which gesture towards a narrative whole to which the disparate parts belong, with the elusive figure of 'Joannes' serving as a unifying axis around which the fragments pivot, and the title 'Love Songs' signposting an overarching theme, Penrose's poem offers no point of reference to which the reader can return the fragments they retrieve (sparing us even a title), and no possibility of cohesion. Penrose cultivates a textual web in which, to borrow the words of Roland Barthes, 'everything is to be *disentangled*, nothing *deciphered.*'[305]

Penrose's elusive text forces the reader to surrender to the impossibility of locating fixed meanings or piecing together a coherent whole. But in so doing, it nurtures a space in which a plurality of meanings and readings may be discovered. The Surrealists, like their Dada predecessors, were intent on 'attack[ing] a facile form of communication' – that which consists of 'the totally uninspired exchange of commonplaces'; they were searching for forms of expression beyond the limitations of direct information exchange.[306] In his 'Manifesto of Surrealism' Breton criticises traditional literary forms, such as the novel, which he argues grant so little freedom to the reader:

> I am spared not even one of the character's slightest vacillations: will he be fairheaded? What will his name be? Will we first meet him during the summer? So many questions resolved once and for all […]; the only discretionary power left me is to close the book […].[307]

The Surrealists were left wanting by literature that did not encourage the reader to make full use of her imaginative capacities. Penrose, like her contemporaries

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[305] Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. by Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977), pp. 142-148 (p. 147).
[306] *An Anthology of French Surrealist Poetry*, ed. by J.H. Matthews (London: University of London Press, 1966), p. 28.
[307] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' 1924, p. 7.

in Surrealism, was exploring and cultivating a textual space in which conventional forms of communication designed for the purpose of information delivery are disregarded and freedom made paramount: the freedom of the unbound subconscious, left to range and roam about; freedom from the prescriptions of traditional modes of literary expression; the freedom of the reader to probe and explore, discover associations, ask questions, and bring their own ideas and experiences to bear upon the myriad meanings of the text. For Adamowicz, collage enables such freedom – it is 'a liberating force' which sets the reader free in an 'open semiotic space' of potentiality.[308] By exploiting collage forms, Penrose creates space within the text for the reader to participate: nurturing gaps in sense, embracing incongruity, dispensing with representational narrative, and rejecting coherence, she invites her readers to trace the seams of the assemblage, to interrogate the fissures of the text, and to flood the gaps with their own visions, memories, images, and colours. Interpretative possibilities are expanded and multiplied infinitely through Penrose's fragmentary and incongruous collage-poetry.

'Head of my body' offers numerous avenues for exploration, tentative interpretation, and the discovery of latent meanings if we approach and engage with the language associatively. We might, for instance, picture the speaker as a flower nestled in a wild woodland among a bed filled with blue flax flowers, the 'head' of her body far from the colourful 'parasols' of other, larger flowers, or perhaps sheltering under the shade provided by larger trees:

> You are far my head from festive parasols
> my stem of prostrated silk
> and yet your bed full with blue flax remains between branches

Her 'prostrated silk' stem could be interpreted as reclining, flimsy, or submissive. The bed lined with flax could be the speaker's, with the possessive 'your' echoing the 'you' above with which the speaker addresses herself ('You are far my head'). It could also belong to the 'beloved' of the preceding lines, to whom the speaker has bid 'farewell', calling forth 'another time' of intimacy between the two. We

[308] Adamowicz, p. 25, p. 194.

might interpret the poem as a series of images relating to love lost – to 'another time' in which passions stirred like 'butterflies blazing' and the fires of romance were stoked by 'the good wind'. Now the monsoon wind rages ('the monsoon wind does not play the ascetic'), and the mythical figure of Medea, a woman scorned, is evoked through the image of her 'chariot drawn by serpents and stones'. Perhaps the speaker has been scorned, her beloved ('treasure') taken by another ('the thief'): 'another heart more true draws you'?

Readers instinctively search for meaning and narrative in a text, but as Peter Stockwell reminds us, 'Surrealism is the depiction of thought rather than the communication of thoughts […].'[309] The surrealist text is not intended to convey information, it is, rather, as Breton suggests, meant to prompt the reader's imagination: 'The words and images are only so many springboards for the mind of the listener.'[310] In Penrose's mystical poetic universe, spiders become insect queens, 'crowned with oil and gold', riding serpent-drawn chariots as they reign over a wild kingdom of monsoon winds and fairy trees; distant galaxies are brought into view as butterflies blaze across the dark night sky 'over the star's shoulder', and we see from a distance 'low-down the horses of earth are waiting'; and magical inhabitants set down roots in the fairy tree of the mind's eye ('the fairy tree is in the forehead remains there'), taking the owner on a journey deep into its most magical recesses. In the open semiotic space of Penrose's poetry, words and images are presented as departure points from which the reader's unbound imagination may take flight.

**To a Woman**

As well as journeys into the unconscious and escapes into the imaginary, Penrose, in the same way as Loy, saw the potential of poetry to question traditional representations of women and, in particular, to challenge the Surrealists' heteronormative fixation with the female muse. Penrose's verbal and visual works are filled with female figures which drift in and out of view, some

[309] Peter Stockwell, 'The Surrealist Experiments with Language', in *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*, ed. by Joe Bray, Alison Gibbons, and Brian McHale (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 48-62 (p. 58).
[310] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), p. 52.

veiled and hidden, others brought into the foreground. Among them are mistresses, maids, and servant ladies, as well as mystical 'Magian women'.[311] In the pages of *Herbe à la Lune* we encounter formidable 'mountain mothers' and a 'rustling woman of foliage'; we find 'seven ogrish daughters' in the lines of the poem beginning 'The Datura the serpent'.[312] In *Poèmes* there is a 'tropic beggarwoman' and the mystical figure of the 'enchantress'.[313] In other works we are introduced to a 'daughter of the earth', a 'Woman of taciturn treasure', and Jean Rhys's 'Madwoman from over the Sargasso Sea'.[314] Among the female figures that inhabit Penrose's poems and collages we also find more recognisable mythical and religious icons, such as the Virgin Mary and Eve, the wanton demon Lilith, the fairy-woman Melusine, and the deadly Medusa. Like Loy, Penrose makes woman the subject of her poetic explorations, whether implicitly or explicitly. But whereas Loy explores the tensions and ecstasies of heterosexual relationships, and the procreative possibilities of these, throughout her work Penrose articulates and celebrates same-sex love and desire.

In the poem 'To a Woman to a Path' Penrose foregrounds lesbian desire, evocatively depicting an erotic encounter between two women in the first stanza:

> This body here feminine that hangs like a distant drop
> toward another here this time feminine
> where the hair equal across the smile
> wild shuttle
> angular bones
> who will cross the plains with her hips
> who will gather the straw not swathes it will sleep in barns
> alone for the herbs
> of whom the friend would never worry although green.
> By fate by grain by way by satin
> blades of leaves her flat eyes nails in the wood
> to the forest all her teeth
> rock soft skull of ferns
> so big I have drawn her forth this born-one

311 Penrose, *PN*, p. 169.
312 Ibid., p. 25, p. 29, p. 19.
313 Ibid., p. 53 and p. 41.
314 Ibid., p. 19, p. 173, p. 157.

like a herd of water hung down the cliffs
on the steppes when one believed her at the strawberries
with wild ribbons instead of asleep
on the total side green and red.[315]

Two female bodies are pulled towards each other, the repetition of the word 'here' ('This body here', 'toward another here') drawing them into close proximity. The sameness of their anatomies is underscored by a veiled reference to pubic hair and lips: 'where the hair equal across the smile'. As the women embrace, 'Caught by breasts by hands and by hair', 'angular bones' pressing against one another, their bodies become entangled and intertwined, the weaver's 'wild shuttle' threading and knitting them together in this moment of carnal pleasure and wild passion: 'I have turned you you have woven me'. The weaver's 'wild shuttle' evokes the intimate crossings of the warp and weft yarns in a woven fabric (the speaker remarks 'now I am knotted'), but alludes also, perhaps, to dexterous hands used for pleasuring. Penrose draws on various metaphors to convey the intensity of the desire and physical union between the two women – between the speaker ('This body here') and her lover ('The beauty the chestnut lady | my brown mouse').[316] In the following lines she conflates two images to create a powerful metaphor for unbridled passion: 'so big I have drawn her forth this born-one | like a herd of water hung down the cliffs'. Desire is drawn forth, and the intensity of the sensations felt between the two women is likened both to a torrent of water rushing over a cliff edge, and to a 'herd' of wild animals, perhaps a stampede of wildebeest, hurtling down a mountain. The body of the speaker 'hangs like a distant drop' of water, pensive and ready to release; once unleashed, the rapid force of the waterfall and the wildebeest is uncontainable. These are the 'feastings of the white weasels | of ecstasy.'

The poem portrays not only a moment of passionate embrace, but also a union that has liberated the speaker from a failing relationship. From the foot of

[315] See Appendix, pp. 233-236.
[316] Chadwick has suggested that the lines 'The beauty the chestnut lady | my brown mouse' correspond with the physical traits of the surrealist artist and writer Alice Rahon Paalen, with whom Penrose developed an intimate friendship. *Militant Muse*, p. 53.

a ‘Great face of rock and grass | revealed so black’ the ‘chestnut lady’ has retrieved her lover:

> Great face of rock and grass
> revealed so black that I no longer fear
> with a wink seeing you you have lifted me from the well
> fathomless from the lake where the sun was the same
> same the black oak of winter’s furniture
> the dark corners of the house left at the crossroads
> the arrows were false
> blue with poison lied.
> Bridge of earth
> come to be broken
> in the middle where they cross
> Tower of earth where your king does not care for you
> where the herd is swallowed up
> whilst from out of its yellow skin obscure a road
> wide like a woman feet foremost
> warming itself at the world’s end
> the most uncertain
> without velvet paws
> leading to the panthers
> whilst this path
> without men’s heads
> carried itself like a head.

The woman’s embrace has ‘lifted’ her ‘from the well’, from the ‘same | same’ of a banal everyday existence, from the passionless dark winter of a relationship whose ‘oak’ has blackened, where Cupid’s ‘arrows’ of passion have been revealed as false – blue with the ‘poison’ of lies instead of red. These arrows of passion have, it seems, been misdirected towards the opposite sex, in a heterosexual relationship lacking in love (‘where your king does not care for you’), where the surging torrent of desire, the charging ‘herd’ of wild passions, ‘is swallowed up’, ‘stifled’, and shrouded by the ‘dark corners of the house’. But out from the anaemic ‘yellow skin’ of this spent heterosexual coupling, from the ‘broken’ ‘Bridge of earth’ at the ‘crossroads’, emerges an ‘obscure road | wide like a woman feet foremost’. The ‘chestnut lady’ has opened the speaker’s eyes, and heart, to this obscure road, to a new ‘path’ of lesbianism, inviting her to leave

behind the old broken bridges of her heterosexual affair and explore new terrain – to walk a new 'path | without men's heads'. We might read this evocation of a new path which leads away from a broken relationship in light of Penrose's separation from her husband Roland. In a letter to him on October 1931 she wrote: 'It is so stupid to think that […] nervous and […] physical strength are being wasted each day to follow a path that runs counter to the one that is rightly ours. Let's get off of that path, at least.'[317]

The image of woman that emerges from the poem is one entangled not just with another female body, but also with nature. The boundary between her body and the natural world is consistently blurred: the semi-circles of her closed, 'flat eyes' are like the 'blades' of leaf edges; her 'rabbit teeth' belong to the forest and her skull is as hard as rock, yet as soft as ferns ('to the forest all her teeth | rock soft skull of ferns'). She is 'elastic like the dream fox' and the contours of her body mirror the alpine landscape:

> Your cavern mattered as the mountains
> where the slate makes its path
> where it rains it shines the devil beats his daughters

In the 'dahlia garden' she is 'masked with mauve' and anointed with plant salve; she is a 'mouse', brown like 'the chestnut', and 'like a needle in moss' she inhabits a hidden space 'under the bushes'. Penrose's woman is beautiful ('The beauty the chestnut lady') and young (from the 'drawing room of maiden love'), with 'wild ribbons' in her hair. She is attuned to the natural world and ensconced by it.

Elsewhere in the poem, the figure of woman is depicted as a *femme fatale*. She is a fearsome figure gathering 'severed heads' with the fabric of her apron, and her 'cavern' (which we could read variously as a dwelling place, or a veiled reference to female genitalia) is a place where 'the gold splitting sickle' of the Grim Reaper 'dwells and hisses', and where 'the devil beats his daughters'. The characteristic ambiguity of Penrose's text makes it difficult to ascertain the identity of this figure: carrying heads she evokes the Medusa of Greek mythology, whose gaze turned anyone who returned it to stone, and whose head of snakes

[317] King, p. 90.

was cut off by (the male) Perseus. In this context, it might be her own head of snakes which she gathers as, neck severed, she continues to 'dance like a bird | the fountain out from the skull'. Alternatively, the heads she carries might be those of men, whose necks she has severed with the 'gold splitting sickle', in order that she may walk this new path that is 'without men's heads' – like the figure of the *femme fatale*, she has enticed them into her 'cavern' to meet their end. In this interpretation she is perhaps not the fearsome Medusa, but the Grim Reaper, or Dhumavati, the Hindu Goddess associated with death.[318] The 'woman' of Penrose's poem is both beauty and beast – a figure to be both desired and feared.

In her various forms as young beauty in contact with the natural world, object of desire, and dangerous mythical figure, the image of woman in 'To a Woman to a Path' is closely linked to the iconographies of woman found in surrealist art and literature. For the Surrealists, woman is the male artist's muse; she is the object of man's desire, and the source of his inspiration – it is the image of woman that inspires male creativity. As Katharine Conley explains,

> As a muse […] Woman stretches as the ideal conductor between the male surrealist poet and his art. Woman, as a "conductor of mental electricity", generates creative sparks within the poet. At the same time she figures as a metaphor for the art he produces: she links the poet with his object of art and *is* the object of his art.[319]

According to Chadwick, the Surrealists conceived of the female muse: 'as the stimulus for the convulsive, sensuous disorientation that was to resolve polarized states of experience and awareness into a new, revolutionary surreality […]'.[320] Throughout Surrealism, the female muse is portrayed, variously, as virgin, creature of nature, *femme-enfant*, and as erotic object, bewitching sorceress, and *femme fatale*. She is at once desired (as virgin, muse,

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[318] In Penrose's later novel, *Erzsebet Bathory La Comtesse Sanglante,* the figure of the female monster would be further explored through the character of the blood-thirsty Countess, who tortured and killed hundreds of innocent girls, and bathed in their blood.
[319] Katharine Conley, *Automatic Woman: The Representation of Women in Surrealism* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), p. 27.
[320] Chadwick, *Women Artists*, p. 13.

and child of nature) and feared as the cause of man's downfall (sorceress, *femme fatale*). 'In each of these roles', Chadwick submits, 'she exists to complement and complete the male creative cycle.'[321] The figure of woman in Surrealism also symbolizes automatic writing and her body is the inspiration for it: as Katharine Conley explains, 'she represents [man's] unconscious, she is the muse of the automatic writing process who inspires him and prompts his connection to his own inner life.'[322] For the Surrealists, the subjective unconscious is characterised as female in a binary where rational, objective thought is defined as male. It is woman, perceived as having a greater capacity for automatism and holding the key to the world of irrational thought, who facilitates escapes into the (female) unconscious. In addition to her role as a doorway to the unconscious, woman in Surrealism is also considered to be man's mediator with the natural world: in surrealist art and literature her body is closely identified with nature and constantly compared with flowers, herbs, trees, mountains, and plants. She is considered to be attuned to the forces and powers of the natural world.

In many ways, the figure of woman in 'To a Woman to a Path' would seem to be that of Surrealism's female muse, or as Conley names her, 'Automatic Woman'.[323] The image of woman that emerges from the lines of the poem is one of beauty ('the chestnut lady'), and a figure of desire that slips just out of reach:

> Caught by breasts by hands and by hair
> never yielded herself whole
> so mad of lichens lost
> like a needle in moss

She is young and virginal ('in front of the drawing room full of maiden love'), a *femme-enfant* among the 'strawberries' with 'wild ribbons' in her hair, who 'at the muzzles of the mountains was playing with the donkeys'. She is a source of salvation ('with a wink seeing you you have lifted me from the well') and inspiration; she completes the speaker ('now I am all') and fills her heart ('it rolls at will this great furnished heart on the road'). Penrose's woman, like the

[321] Ibid.
[322] Conley, p. 1.
[323] Ibid., p. 2.

Surrealist muse, also sits at the core of nature: her body is identified with the forest, with 'ferns', mountains, desert, trees, and animals, and she is surrounded by 'chamomile', 'chestnuts', and cut wood which 'shines alive lace like'. She is receptive to, and in tune with, the forces of the natural world. Yet, she is also a sorceress, an erotic object, and *femme-fatale* whose body entices others into the weaver's 'wild shuttle', who wields the 'gold splitting sickle' and dances like a delirious bird. As in Man Ray's painting *Dancer ou Danger: L'Impossibilité ou l'Impossible* (Dancer or Danger: Impossibility or Impossible, 1920) which, through a visual trick, exploits the linguistic similarities of the words 'dancer' and 'danger', Penrose's woman is both dancer – an emblem of beauty and object of desire – and danger – woman cast as Lilith or Medusa.[324]

Yet whilst Penrose's female figures correspond to the representation of woman in Surrealism, the poem reflects an awareness, and criticism, of the image of woman presented by male Surrealists. Suleiman has suggested that women Surrealists were consciously responding to the model of woman presented to them by men, using mimicry as a form of critique:

> Since the women were generally younger and started producing later than the men who were associated with the movement, it is not unlikely that their version of Surrealist practice included a component of response to, as well as adaptation of, male Surrealist iconographies and mythologies – this being especially the case in the realm of sexuality. Here, Irigaray's notion of "mimicry," the playful or ironic counterpart of the masquerade, might provide a useful analytical category in approaching individual works. In mimicry, a woman "repeats" the male – in this case, the male Surrealist – version of "woman," but she does so in a self-conscious way that points up the citational, often ironic status of the repetition.[325]

In 'To a Woman to a Path' Penrose is consciously responding to male Surrealist iconographies of woman, repeating them ironically in order to challenge and undermine them. Whilst, as Riese Hubert suggests, throughout her poetry 'Penrose's women function as figures of desire, of dreams and longing', in 'To a

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[324] Man Ray, *Dancer ou Danger: L'Impossibilité ou l'Impossible*, 1920, painting on glass, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris.
[325] Suleiman, p. 27.

Woman to a Path' Penrose subverts the dominant male subject position of Surrealism and revises the role of woman as man's muse.[326] In contrast with the Surrealists' valorization of heterosexuality (Breton's homophobia is well-known), she calls attention to lesbian desire and woman's independence from man. In the poem, woman is the speaker ('This body here feminine'), and she is also the object of desire ('the chestnut lady | my brown mouse'). Woman is the artist, writer, and creator – the author of the poem – and woman is also the creative woman's muse and the subject of woman's art. This is not a relationship of sexual difference – one of activity versus passivity, as in that of the male artist and female muse – but of equality:

> This body here feminine that hangs like a distant drop
> toward the other here this time feminine
> where the hair equal across the smile

Penrose champions a vision of woman, same-sex desire, and female creativity in which, 'without men's heads', woman is the source of her own inspiration, her own subject and muse.

In particular, we might read 'To a Woman to a Path' as a response to the Surrealist Max Ernst's collage novel *La Femme 100 Têtes* (translated variously as The Woman with 100 Heads and The Hundred Headless Woman).[327] In Ernst's pictorial collages the figure of woman is frequently depicted as headless, limbless, and faceless; she is gagged, blindfolded, and lassoed; she is often reclining and submissive, and frequently naked or only partially dressed. King has indicated that Penrose found the violent and misogynistic nature of Ernst's imagery deeply offensive, and that she had been infuriated by her husband Roland's agreement to financially support the publication of another of Ernst's collage novels, *Une semaine de bonté ou les Sept Eléments Capitaux* (A Week of Goodness or the Seven Essential Elements, 1934), published a few years before

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[326] Riese Hubert, 'Gender, Genre, and Partnership', p. 130.
[327] Max Ernst, *La femme 100 têtes* (Paris: Editions du Carrefour, 1929). Translated by Dorothea Tanning as *The Hundred Headless Woman* (New York: Dover Publications, 2017). For discussion of the dialogue between Ernst's and Penrose's collage novels, see Humphreys, 'Collage Communicants'.

'To a Woman to a Path'.[328] Other critics have also suggested that Penrose was critical of surrealist ideology, and of male surrealists' sexualized images of women, and that she 'quickly grew weary of the surrealist homage to [heterosexual] sex.'[329] In 1936 she wrote to Roland to express her disapproval of the Surrealists' ideas:

> I would like to remind you what we together thought in the past of the surrealists […]: their ideas in the point of view of art and literature are very interesting. Not all of them beautiful, far from it. […] Their opinions on life and their life realizations are sometimes beneath all. They have made instincts – and especially the sexual one – into objects of worship [….].[330]

In her poem the misogynistic work of Ernst, in particular, is referenced implicitly in her depiction of man as the 'king [who] does not care for you', 'the devil who beats his daughters', who wields 'the gold splitting sickle' to deform women's bodies, and who 'stifle[s] [them] for a joke':

> where it rains it shines the devil beats his daughters
> where the gold splitting sickle dwells and hisses
> Wounded indifferent lets her head cry
> hands in tasks
> and body rejected so soft although headless
> caressed by her hands for other horizons.

In response, Penrose's poem conveys a contrasting vision of woman to that found in Ernst's collage novel. In place of woman's dismembered and decapitated body, she presents a formidable female figure who, conversely, severs the heads of men, and who revels in their decapitation:

> On an Indian air
> holding my apron
> gathered my severed heads
> Saint Germaine of Europe

[328] King, p. 81.
[329] Humphreys, p. 383.
[330] King, p. 87.

upright in the little milkwort.
Like tiles rained from the north
like cow kisses everywhere
like a rosary around the neck
    now I am all
    now I am ended
    now I am knotted
    now I am joined
    necks severed I dance like a bird[331]
the fountain out from the skull

With this act of retribution against man, woman's severed body is reconciled: 'now I am all', 'now I am joined'. Against Ernst's, and more broadly the Surrealists', objectification of woman, Penrose clears a new path for woman in Surrealism, a 'path | without men's heads'.

In its challenge to dominant representations of woman in Surrealism and its privileging of female sexuality, Penrose's poetry, alongside Loy's, might be considered a precursor of 1970s feminist theories such as Cixous's *écriture féminine*. Underscoring the hierarchized oppositions in which woman is always inscribed as passive 'other' – 'Activity/passivity', 'Sun/Moon', 'Culture/Nature', 'Superior/Inferior'[332] – Cixous turns to the concept of the *feminine* as a way to oppose, challenge, and resist male-centred, masculinist thinking, and advocates 'the writing of liberatory female discourses'.[333] She calls for a feminine writing process in which women write through their bodies to create an 'impregnable language that will wreck [the] partitions' of patriarchal hegemony.[334] Penrose's poem, with its emphasis on female sexuality – specifically lesbian desire – its narrative of women saving women ('you have lifted me from the well'), and its reclamation of woman's mutilated body from male Surrealists ('now I am

[331] We might also read this image in relation to Ernst's alter-ego, 'Loplop, Bird-Superior', as a representation of what Penrose perceives to be his revelry in creating images of decapitated and dismembered women.
[332] Cixous, 'Sorties', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York; London; etc.: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 90-98 (pp. 90-91).
[333] Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Writing the Body: Toward an Understanding of *l'Écriture féminine*', in *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature and Theory*, ed. by Elaine Showalter (London: Virago, 1986), pp. 361-377 (p. 366).
[334] Cixous, 'The Laugh of the Medusa', p. 256.

joined'), would seem to respond to Cixous's demand that, 'Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women into writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies […]. Woman must put herself into the text […].'[335] Penrose reclaims woman's body from those who would see it mutilated and subjugated; she dismantles the binary (male artist/female muse), reconfiguring the passive female muse as a powerful, active female figure who severs men's heads and finds pleasure in her own sex; she reinstates woman as her own source of inspiration and desire, and places female sexuality at the centre of her poem. Furthermore, the fluid, non-linear forms of Penrose's poetry and her rejection of reason and logic, are all characteristic of Cixous's *écriture féminine*, which seeks to undermine patriarchal hierarchies and to dismantle the dominant rationalist, masculine discourses.

Cixous's theory is in many ways problematic, and has been criticized for being essentialist, and therefore reinforcing the very system it seeks to undermine. It has also been pointed out, as mentioned previously in this study, that the free-flowing style of writing that Cixous identifies as *féminine*, is characteristic of experimental avant-garde writing more broadly, and not just writing by women. But in the context of Surrealism's representation of woman, which has been shaped by the phallogocentric discourses of early twentieth-century Western culture, and which reinforces gendered binaries, *écriture féminine* provides a useful lens through which to examine Penrose's (and other avant-garde women writers') subversive responses to the dominant misogynistic systems of representation they encountered in avant-garde art and literature by men. Furthermore, as Conley has argued, the writing of women surrealists is important for understanding later developments in feminist theory and should be read 'because it acts as a point of encounter, if not a bridge, between automatic writing and feminist writing, between *écriture automatique* and *écriture féminine* [….].'[336]

In her explorations beyond the scope of logical reality, her escapes into the fantastical landscapes of the dream, and her experiments with collage, Penrose demonstrates a desire, in common with both Arnauld and Loy, to probe

[335] Ibid., p. 245.
[336] Conley, p. 24.

and dismantle the boundaries of literary form and expression. Like Arnauld, Penrose saw poetry's potential to unleash the creative mind from the limits of rational thinking and to reach into the depths of alternative mind spaces. In poetry she found a way to access and explore life's mystical side, pushing beyond the everyday into new poetic realms of discovery, and giving form to an inner life that cannot be fully described, only evoked. She drew inspiration from Surrealism's forays into the irrational subconscious and the pursuit of higher reality, and undertook her own journeys into the world of dreams. But she took issue with Surrealism's emphasis on heterosexual intimacy and the avant-garde's misogynistic depictions of woman and, like Loy, used poetry to express her disapproval and carry out a corrective gesture. In dialogue with the work of her male contemporaries in Surrealism, Penrose challenges the movement's misogyny and subverts the heteronormative dynamic of active male artist and submissive female muse. Throughout her poetry, Penrose foregrounds the expression of female sexuality and lesbian desire, and creates a space for woman at the centre of her poetry. Her exploration of lesbian desire would find its fullest expression in later works, such as her epistolary text *Martha's Opera* and collage-novel *Dons des Feminines*. Her work is an important contribution to avant-garde literature which challenges not only traditional forms of expression but also traditional gender roles and heteronormative depictions of female sexuality.

## Jessica Dismorr
## (1885-1939)

Jessica Dismorr was a British artist and writer whose commitment to modern explorations in art and literature saw her move among numerous artistic groups in the early part of the twentieth century. Associated with the Scottish Fauves (known also as the Colourists), Dismorr contributed illustrations to the interdisciplinary periodical *Rhythm* in 1911 and 1912; as a member of the British Vorticist group, she published poetry, prose and illustrations in the Vorticist journal *Blast* in 1915.[337] She contributed critical essays and poetry to various little magazines, avant-garde journals, and literary periodicals, including British, French, and American publications such as *The Tyro*, *The Little Review*, *London Mercury*, and *SIC* (*Sons, Idées, Couleurs, Formes)*. Dismorr continued to publish literary works, and continued to paint and exhibit, right up until the final years of her life; she committed suicide in August 1939. Her engagement with, participation in, and movement among, a variety of modern artistic movements and groupings throughout her life is illustrative of, as Catherine Heathcock puts it, Dismorr's 'constant desire to operate within the arenas of the new and the modern […].'[338] Yet Dismorr, until recently, has received little serious critical attention in accounts of the British avant-garde and Modernism; where her name does appear it is often overshadowed by speculation about her mental health or her professional relationship with Wyndham Lewis.[339]

Most active as a visual artist, Dismorr exhibited paintings and illustrations both on home soil and internationally. She exhibited with the

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[337] Catherine Heathcock notes that Dismorr became absorbed into the Fauvist circle of painters, which included John Duncan Fergusson and Anne Estelle Rice – all of whom were regular contributing artists to *Rhythm* magazine. Catherine Elizabeth Heathcock, 'Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Birmingham, 1999), p. 20.

[338] Heathcock, (thesis abstract, unpaginated).

[339] For example, in his discussion of the failed attempt to bring the Vorticists back together under 'Group X', Jonathan Black notes that '[Lewis's] compulsive need to move swiftly from one amorous conquest to another had already alienated Helen Saunders […] and prompted a spurned Jessica Dismorr to have a nervous breakdown.' There is no other mention of Dismorr or her role in Vorticism in this chapter. Jonathan Black, 'Taking Heaven by Violence: Futurism and Vorticism as seen by the British Press c. 1912-20', in *Blasting the Future! Vorticism in Britain 1910-1920*, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2004), pp. 29-39 (p. 38).

Rhythmists in 1912, at the Salon d'Automne in Paris in 1913, and with the Allied Artists' Association in the years 1912, 1913, and 1914. In 1915 and 1917 she took part in the Vorticist exhibitions in London and New York, and later exhibited with Group X, The London Group, and The Seven and Five Society. She continued to exhibit her visual works right up until her death. Dismorr had one solo exhibition during her lifetime, in 1925 at the Mayor Gallery, London, and two posthumous solo exhibitions in London, again at the Mayor Gallery in 1965, and in 1974 at the Mercury Gallery.[340] Given her extensive commitment to visual arts, it is surprising that her name appears so infrequently in the critical literature concerned with early twentieth century British art. To date, there has been only one study devoted to the life and works of Jessica Dismorr: Catherine Heathcock's unpublished doctoral thesis 'Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Artist, Writer, Vorticist' documents over one-hundred visual artworks by Dismorr and attempts to piece together the little existing biographical information about the artist and writer.[341] But there remains much scope for further research into Dismorr's work, particularly close analysis of her written works.[342]

The lack of critical recognition Dismorr's written works have received is perhaps due, in part, to the fact that they are few in number and remain dispersed.[343] Dismorr never published a volume of poetry or collection of her work; instead, her written works –poetry and prose – are scattered among various journals, making a body of written work difficult to locate and requiring each text to be assessed within its individual context.[344] But the recent emergence of an unpublished handwritten manuscript of poems by Dismorr,

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[340] *Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): Paintings and Drawings*, April 28 to May 15, 1965, The Mayor Gallery, London; *Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): oils, watercolours, drawings*, April 3 – May 4, 1974, Mercury Gallery, London.

[341] In the scope of this art history thesis Heathcock also undertakes some analysis of Dismorr's poetry, though there is a tendency to equate the speaker of each poem with Dismorr herself, and Heathcock too frequently reads each poem as a reflection of Dismorr's mental state.

[342] Whilst 'June Night' and 'London Notes' have been read in the context of women's engagement with the modern metropolis, Dismorr's written works have not yet been subject to close readings which unravel the intricacies of both form and content.

[343] Dismorr contributed six poems to *Blast*, No. 2 (July, 1915), nine poems and one critical essay to *The Little Review* between 1918 and 1919, a poem to the French journal *SIC* in 1918, one review to *The Tyro*, no. 2 (1922), and two poems to *The London Mercury* in 1935, totaling only fourteen published written works.

[344] There may still be as yet untraced written works by Dismorr.

dedicated to the French writer Marguerite Storrs and her husband, the American Modernist sculptor John Storrs, and housed within the collection of documents belonging to him at the Archives of American Art, points to a more prolific role for Dismorr as an avant-garde writer than was previously thought.[345] This manuscript, a collection of fourteen poems dated 1918, eight of which are previously unpublished, is yet to be given any critical attention.[346] This addition to Dismorr's oeuvre necessitates further investigation into her literary explorations and a more thorough questioning of her position as an avant-garde writer.

This chapter will explore instances of Dismorr's writing from the period 1915-1918, the years during which her written output was most prolific. Through close analysis and exploratory readings of poems from amongst those published in *Blast*, no. 2, in 1915, those included in the newly emerged manuscript from 1918, and those published in *The Little Review*, this chapter will illuminate Dismorr's literary engagement with the avant-garde. The poems selected for analysis here have been chosen because they are illustrative of Dismorr's exploration of new expressive forms and, in particular, of her engagement with the aesthetic ideals of Vorticism. In her manuscript *Poems* from 1918, Dismorr writes a postscript dedication: 'To Strangers – all my curiosity […].'[347] It is this curiosity that has shaped her diverse and exploratory body of written works.

### *Blast*, Vorticism, the machine age and modernity

After her time amongst the Rhythmists, in 1914 Dismorr joined the Vorticist group, becoming one of the eleven signatories of the Vorticist manifesto

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[345] Jessica Dismorr, *Poems* (1918), John Henry Bradley Storrs papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. It is not yet clear what relationship Dismorr had with the Storrs family, but it is possible that they met through their mutual acquaintance Ezra Pound.

[346] Texts from the manuscript which were published elsewhere include: 'Promenade', published in both *Blast*, no. 2, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (July 1915), p. 69, and in *The Little Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (Aug 1919), p. 3; 'The Convalescent in the South', *The Little Review*, vol. 4, no. 9 (Jan 1918), 15-16; 'Spring', *The Little Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1919), p. 3; 'Matinee', *The Little Review*, vol. 4, no. 11, (March 1918), 31-32; 'Landscape', *The Little Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1919), p. 4; and 'Twilight', *The Little Review*, vol. 6, no. 4 (1919), p. 4.

[347] Dismorr, *Poems* [unpaginated].

published in the first volume of the Vorticist group journal *Blast* in June 1914, and one of only two women to sign it.[348] Based in Britain's capital, London, Vorticism was a multifarious, interdisciplinary avant-garde movement, conceived as the antithesis to Cubism, Futurism, and the Bloomsbury group. The movement emerged at a time when Italian Futurism was well underway, and the Dada groups in New York and Zürich were soon to come into being. Propelled by a break with the Bloomsbury group, in the spring of 1914 Wyndham Lewis and Kate Lechmere opened The Rebel Art Centre, a communal studio space from which the Vorticists would operate – though the group did not begin to use the term 'Vorticism' until June of that year.[349] Adopting a militant stance, and embracing the industrial qualities of the rapidly developing modern urban landscape, the Vorticists set out to establish themselves as rebel artists, as 'Primitive Mercenaries in the Modern World', intent on revolutionising British art.[350] The aims and intentions of this rebel group were laid out in the journal *Blast*, of which only two volumes were ever to materialise.[351] The first volume announced: 'Blast sets out to be an avenue for all those vivid and violent ideas that could reach the Public in no other way.'[352] Borrowing the Futurists' dialectical format, in a bold, strident typography the Vorticists set out their manifesto in a 'Blast' and 'Bless' formula, cursing a multitude of things, from 'the flabby sky that can manufacture no snow,' to the 'SENTIMENTAL GALLIC GUSH' of the French and 'all products of phlegmatic cold', whilst blessing 'ALL SEAFARERS', 'the Arabs of the Atlantic', 'the HAIRDRESSER', and 'ALL ENGLISH EYES that grow crows-feet with their FANCY and ENERGY'.[353]

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[348] *Blast,* no. 1, ed. by Wyndham Lewis (20 June 1914). The other woman was Helen Saunders, a painter and writer, whose name is printed under the manifesto as 'Sanders' (This is possibly a typographical error or a deliberate alteration made out of respect to Saunders's family). The other nine signatories were: R. Aldington, Arbuthnot, Lawrence Atkinson, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, Cuthbert Hamilton, Ezra Pound, William Roberts, Edward Wadsworth and Wyndham Lewis.

[349] Andrew Wilson notes that: 'Although the 'Vortex' metaphor had been used by Pound as early as 1908 […] in his poem 'Plotinus', its use as a means of labelling Lewis and his cohorts as 'Vorticists' occurred rather late in the day in early June 1914, shortly before *Blast*'s publication […].' In 'Rebels and Vorticists: "Our Little Gang"', in *Blast: Vorticism 1914-1918*, ed. by Paul Edwards (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), pp. 24-39 (p. 24).

[350] 'Manifesto II', in *Blast*, no. 1, 30-43 (p. 30).

[351] Issued over a year apart, in June 1914 and July 1915.

[352] *Blast*, no. 1, p. 7.

[353] 'Manifesto I', *Blast*, no. 1, 11-29.

From the various manifestos and pronouncements about Vorticism included in this first number of *Blast*, and those circulated elsewhere, no one clear aesthetic direction or identity for the Vorticists emerged; for this reason, Vorticism has always been difficult to define. But some key features of their aesthetic direction come to the fore: the concept of the 'vortex' (central to the conception of Vorticism) and a fascination with the mechanical forms of the modern industrial landscape. The vortex, as described by Ezra Pound, is 'the point of maximum energy, it represents, in mechanics, the greatest efficiency'; 'All experience rushes into this vortex.'[354] For the Vorticists, the image of the vortex encapsulated dynamism, force, and energy; the vortex represented 'a whirling force which drew all the most positive innovatory elements of the time into an energetic synthesis.'[355] Intertwined with this enthusiasm for dynamism and energy is a celebration of the changing urban landscape, which in the early decades of the twentieth century was becoming increasingly industrial: the Vorticists praise 'the direction of the modern world, [which] has reared up steel trees where the green ones were lacking; has exploded in useful growths, and found wilder intricacies than those of Nature'; they bless 'ALL PORTS […] restless machines of […] heavy insect dredgers monotonous cranes stations lighthouses' and bless 'England, industrial island machine', proclaiming: 'Machinery is the greatest Earth-medium'.[356]

It is not clear exactly when Dismorr joined the group at the Rebel Art Centre, but her signature in the first number of *Blast* in 1914 is testament to her presence in Vorticism early on. Dismorr was a committed member of the group, who participated in group meetings and exhibitions, and played an important role in helping to organise, edit, and distribute the group's journal. Her works, both written and visual, engage with multiple elements of the Vorticist aesthetic and display an interest in the aesthetic explorations of early twentieth century art and literature.[357] But, as with nearly all of the avant-garde's female members,

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[354] Ezra Pound, 'Vortex, Pound', *Blast,* no. 1, 153-154 (p. 153).
[355] Richard Cork, 'Introduction', in *Vorticism and its Allies* [exhibition catalogue] (Hayward Gallery, London, 27 March – 2 June 1974), p. 6.
[356] *Blast*, no. 1, p. 36, p. 23, and p. 39.
[357] Heathcock suggests that 'Dismorr also assumed the role of organiser and administrator within Vorticism', p. 78; Cork notes that Dismorr was involved editing the *Blast* journal. Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age,* Vol. 2: Synthesis

her participation has been overshadowed by that of her male colleagues and there is evidence to suggest that she was undervalued by her male contemporaries. The painter Frederick Etchells rather patronisingly remembers Dismorr as being 'always a bit dotty', and it is a well-documented fact that Dismorr and her colleagues Helen Saunders and Kate Lechmere were relegated to pouring the tea at Vorticist group meetings, with Lewis insisting that 'the organising of tea parties was a job for women, not artists'.[358] In later critical accounts Dismorr's role in Vorticism has remained peripheral and minor in relation to her male counterparts, and she is often cast in the role of student or admirer of ostensibly more accomplished male Vorticist colleagues. Quentin Stevenson characterises Dismorr's professional acquaintance with Lewis as that of a disciple and her master, and Richard Cork, in his comprehensive study of the Vorticist movement, notes that: 'the female members of the movement […] were only too delighted to place themselves at the disposal of Lewis's most egotistical interests'; he describes Dismorr as being 'under the spell of Lewis's personal charisma', as well as being 'stylistically indebted to him.'[359]

More recently, attempts have been made to bring Dismorr out of the shadows and to write her more fully into the narratives of Vorticism: Jane Beckett and Deborah Cherry in their chapter 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism: Women, Modernity, Modernism' consider the work, both written and visual, of the female Vorticists Dismorr, Lechmere, Saunders and Shakespear, with particular focus on Dismorr and Saunders. Suggesting that, for women, Vorticism's main appeal was its 'visual and literary engagement with metropolitan culture', Beckett and Cherry set about considering the 'sexually differentiated mappings of space and subjectivity' in London with reference to the visual artworks and written texts of the female Vorticists.[360] Discussing the

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and Decline (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), p. 232. According to Beckett and Cherry, Dismorr distributed copies of the magazine to places such as the Chenil Gallery. Beckett and Cherry, 'Women Under the Banner of Vorticism', p. 136.

[358] Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art*, p. 414, p. 148.

[359] Quentin Stevenson, 'Introduction', *Jessica Dismorr (1885-1939): oils, watercolours,* drawings [exhibition catalogue] April 3 – May 4, 1974, Mercury Gallery, 26 Cork St., London, [unpaginated]; Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract* Art, p. 414.

[360] Beckett and Cherry, 'Reconceptualizing Vorticism', p. 61. See also: Beckett and Cherry, 'Modern women, modern spaces: women, metropolitan culture and Vorticism'.

concepts of the 'new woman' and urban mobility, the authors demonstrate the ways in which the modern metropolis both aided and encouraged women's participation in avant-garde movements and informed their works. Miranda Hickman, in a chapter titled 'The Gender of Vorticism: Jessie Dismorr, Helen Saunders, and Vorticist Feminism', questions why women chose to affiliate themselves with a movement that was 'aggressively masculinist', and argues that it was precisely this 'Vorticist masculinity' that attracted them.[361] For Hickman, Dismorr and Saunders enlisted 'the semiotics and imaginative strategies of Vorticist masculinity, both in their visual art and public affiliations, in order to pursue professional advancement as "New Women artists."'[362]

Dismorr's participation in Vorticism is particularly interesting for our consideration of her as an avant-garde writer because it was in the second number of the Vorticist journal *Blast* in 1915 that Dismorr published her first written works, having previously been working, it would seem, primarily in the visual arts.[363] She contributed six texts to this second volume – the War Number – of *Blast*: 'Monologue', 'London Notes', 'June Night', 'Promenade', 'Payment', and 'Matilda'.[364] It is unclear why Dismorr turns to writing at this time; she may well have been writing long before her involvement with the Vorticist group, or she may have been inspired to write by her fellow members in the movement.

Though Vorticism, like Dada, was short-lived, its revolutionary fervour extinguished by the continuing carnage of the First World War, Dismorr's explorations in poetry and prose continued beyond her submissions to the Vorticist journal, and her engagement with the aesthetic ideas of Vorticism continued to influence her writing. This can be seen in the recently unearthed manuscript collection *Poems*. Beyond the only two editions of *Blast* to be published, Dismorr remained committed to the Vorticist endeavour: a third volume of the journal intended for November 1919 was to include several new works by Dismorr, but this third edition was never to materialise.[365] It may be,

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[361] Miranda Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', p. 119.
[362] Ibid., p. 124.
[363] Dismorr contributed only illustrations to *Rhythm* magazine in the years 1911-1912.
[364] *Blast*, no. 2.
[365] In a letter to John Quinn, dated 3rd September 1919, Lewis wrote: '[...] I am bringing out another volume of *Blast* (about Nov I expect).' In *The letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed. by W.K. Rose (London: Methuen & Co., 1963), p. 111. A 'Notice to Public' included in the

then, that some of the poems included in the manuscript *Poems* were written primarily for inclusion in this projected edition of the Vorticist journal. Whether this was the case or not, these later poems can still be read within the context of Vorticism's aesthetic intentions. Dismorr's interest in the industrial, machine forms of the modern landscape, her engagement with Vorticism's aggressive avant-garde aesthetics, and her interest in the classical, cold order of architectural and industrial forms, and formal qualities characterised by precision and control are indicative of her engagement with and exploration of the innovative forms of the British avant-garde and establish her writings as an invaluable contribution to Vorticism and, more broadly, avant-garde literature.

**A 'new machinery that wields the chains of muscles'**

In her poem 'Monologue' published in *Blast*, no. 2, in 1915, Dismorr combines the contrasting spheres of birth and war, machinery and destruction, depicting a hybrid being as it emerges from the womb.[366] Written in the first person as a soliloquy, or monologue (as the title indicates), the present tense form creates a direct and intimate exchange between Dismorr's unique speaker and the reader. Throughout the poem Dismorr brings together distinct ideas to create unusual, often surreal, images, heavily tactile and sensory, playing with alliteration in order to emphasise and heighten the sensorial nature of the imagery created.

The speaker's voice issues forth from the womb:

> My niche in nonentity still grins –
> I lay knees, elbows pinioned, my sleep mutterings blunted against a wall.
> Pushing my hard head through the hole of birth
> I squeezed out with intact body.
> I ache all over, but acrobatic, I undertake the feat of existence.

She or he is confined in their 'niche in nonentity', which is presented both as a hollow of refuge (the term 'niche' suggestive of a place of retreat) and as a space of confinement – the use of the verb 'grins' denotes the act of ensnaring, choking,

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'War Number' of *Blast* (1915) promises that two further numbers of the magazine will be published 'probably before next January [1916]', and that the next edition will contain 'Poems and Vortices by J. Dismorr', p. 7.

[366] Jessica Dismorr, 'Monologue', *Blast*, no. 2, p. 65. See Appendix, p. 237-238.

or strangling, as well as the action of forced smiling, where one pulls back the lips to reveal the teeth, often as an indication of pain or anger. The speaker, still a 'nonentity', lies 'pinioned' and 'blunted' up 'against a wall', an image which reinforces the depiction of the womb as a restrictive, limiting, and uncomfortable space. It is with great force that the speaker pushes its 'hard head through the hole of birth', squeezing itself out from the stranglehold of the womb. A change in tenses here, from the present tense of the first three lines to the past tense phrase 'I squeezed out with intact body' signals a shift forward in time as the actions of escape from the womb are placed firmly in the past and the text springs forward, along with the 'acrobatic' body of the speaker, into the open space of existence.

What emerges from the womb is a hybrid being:

> I admire my arrogant spiked tresses, the disposition of my perpetually foreshortened limbs,
> Also the new machinery that wields the chains of muscles fitted beneath my close coat of skin.
> On a pivot of contentment my balanced body moves slowly.

Anticipating the later visual *exquisite corpse* creations of the Surrealists, Dismorr brings together the industrial and the animal to imagine a body formed of a 'new machinery that wields the chains of muscles' and in-built weaponry in the form of 'spiked tresses' and fingers 'tipped with horn'. The creature's ears, projecting directly from the brain, are depicted as metal 'gongs struck by vigorous | and brutal fists of air', its eyes 'dilate and bulge', and its nostrils are described as 'scooped nets'. As its muscles bulge from beneath its tight wrapper of skin the alliterative phrase 'close coat' emphasises the proximity of skin to muscle and, along with the word 'chains', Dismorr draws a visual parallel between the natural curves of the human bicep hugged by a layer of skin and the curves of the dense, metal chain links – visually melding human and machine.

Such interest in the machine and excitement about new scientific and industrial technologies was typical in this early part of the twentieth century. It was a time of rapid technoscientific modernization, when new scientific and technological feats transformed everyday life and became central to it. Between

1870-1920 there were developments in electrification, air travel, cinema, photography, television, wireless telegraphy, and industrial typography, as well as the discovery of radioactivity, X-rays, and an understanding of atomic structure. The rapid pace of these developments was both exciting and unsettling, as new technologies and scientific understanding fundamentally transformed human experience and challenged the dominant world-view.[367]

Writers and artists across the avant-garde were intrigued by these developments and drew inspiration from them. The Vorticists shared in this excitement, praising the modern industrial landscape: in *Blast* they 'Bless all ports. […] restless machines of scooped out basins, heavy insect dredgers, monotonous cranes, stations, lighthouses […], heavy chaos of wharves, steep walls of factories […]' and bless England as an 'industrial island machine'.[368] Machinery, for the Vorticists, is 'the greatest Earth-medium' and they liken the industrial landscape of machinery, factories, vast buildings and bridges to a 'jungle' of 'dramatic tropic growths'.[369] In particular, avant-gardists were fascinated by the relationship between human bodies and machines. The Surrealists' *exquisite corpses* were often formed, in part, of industrial, mechanical parts, and Dada artists such as Suzanne Duchamp, Marcel Duchamp, and Picabia were depicting male and female machine beings using the imagery of wheels, cogs, pulleys, pistons, pincers, and engines. As mentioned earlier in this study, for the Dada poet Baroness Else Von Freytag-Loringhoven the machine served as a fitting metaphor for the strength and independence of the female mind and body. In her poem 'The Modest Woman', woman is not only the owner but the engineer of her own powerful body: 'My machinery is | built that way. […] Why should I – proud engineer – be ashamed of my machinery – part of it?'.[370] Many of the Vorticist artists also collaged and conflated human and machine characteristics in their visual compositions to create hybrid figures. One example is Jacob Epstein's sculpture *The Rock Drill*, in which an angular, robot-like figure

[367] For more on the relationship between Modernism and technological modernity see, for example, Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body*; Goody, *Technology, Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2011); and Mark S. Morrisson, *Modernism, Science, and Technology* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).
[368] *Blast*, no. 1, p. 23.
[369] Ibid., p. 39, p. 40.
[370] Freytag-Loringhoven, 'The Modest Woman' (1920), p. 286.

with armoured features sits astride an industrial miner's drill.[371] The abstracted figure is part human and part machine, with its sharp-edged limbs, visored head, and fiercely protruding neck, and its progeny sits visibly within its armoured shell. Sitting in command of the drill beneath it, Epstein's machine-like figure is a symbol of the modern industrial age in which technology has become central to everyday life, and Man has become enthralled with the machine.

Alongside Loy's human cylinders, Dismorr's hybrid automaton speaker takes its place among the many machine-beings of the avant-garde imagination and, in particular, calls to mind Marinetti's vision of 'Man multiplied by the machine'.[372] In his Futurist manifestos Marinetti glorifies a modern mechanised being – Man imbued with a 'New mechanical sense, a fusion of instinct with the efficiency of motors and conquered forces.'[373] This modern being is an indomitable force, strengthened by man-made technology. Commanding its dense metal 'chains of muscles' and wielding its bodily 'machinery' as it hurls headlong into combat with its enemies, Dismorr's speaker embodies the qualities of Marinetti's 'multiplied man', a creature 'who mixes himself with iron, who is fed by electricity and no longer understands anything except the lust for danger and daily heroism.'[374] The creature speeds into battle:

> In pursuit of shapes my eyes dilate and bulge. Finest instruments of touch they refuse to blink their pressure of objects.
> They dismember live anatomies innocently.
> They run around the polished rims of rivers.
> With risk they press against the cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles.
> Pampered appetites and curiosities become blood-drops, their hot mouths yell war.
> Sick opponents dodging behind silence, echo alone shrills an equivalent threat.
> Obsessions rear their heads. I hammer their faces into discs.
> Striped malignities spring upon me, and tattoo with incisions of wild claws.
> Speeded with whips of hurt, I hurry towards ultimate success.

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[371] Jacob Epstein, *The Rock Drill*, 1913-16, plaster and metal. A bronze cast of part of the original plaster figure is now housed at the Tate Galleries: *Torso in Metal from "The Rock Drill"*, 1913-1915, bronze, Tate Galleries, London.
[372] Marinetti, 'Destruction of Syntax', p. 97.
[373] Ibid.
[374] Marinetti, 'We Abjure Our Symbolist Masters', p. 67.

This human-machine-animal seems to thrive on danger in pursuit of 'ultimate success' and seeks, like 'multiplied man', to demonstrate 'daily heroism'; stooping to lick his wounds ('bright cups of pain') the speaker seems, as Eric White suggests, to '[derive] a curious sense [of] nourishment from the battle in process […].'[375]

What is unique about Dismorr's imaginative strategy in this poem is the use of unusual, abstracted imagery and the contrast of machine imagery with a sensorial, bodily exploration of the world. In conflict with the industrial qualities of its body, the speaker of Dismorr's poem is born into the world with all the inquisitive desire for exploration expected of a new-born animal or child: a sharp-spiked, horn-tipped figure fitted with chains of muscles, she (or he) also possesses the inquisitiveness of a 'butterfly' spinning 'with drunken invitation'. The poem is saturated with sensory, tactile imagery, as Dismorr imagines the speaker's emergence into, and physical exploration of, this new world. Physical sensations dominate from the beginning of the poem where Dismorr's choice of words – 'pinioned', 'squeezed', 'hard', 'blunted' and 'pushing' – heighten the restrictiveness of the speaker's physical enclosure in the womb. Textures and sensations are juxtaposed as the speaker pokes its horn-tipped fingers into 'the middles of | big succulent flowers' – here the hardness and smoothness of the horn, and the sharpness of its points, is contrasted with the juicy, liquid centres of the flowers. In some instances, sensations are combined: the speaker's 'stretched ears' are 'gongs struck by vigorous | and brutal fists of air', an image which conveys both the aural sensation of the gong sounding and the physical, tactile sensation of the 'fists of air' striking the ear. This combination of sensory impressions can again be found in the description of the speaker's eyes as 'finest instruments of | touch' which 'press against the cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles'; here the visual and tactile combine as the eyes press against the sharp surface of the rock edge. Further tactile depictions of bodily pain are also present as 'striped malignities […] tattoo with incisions of wild claws' and 'whips

[375] Eric White, 'Technicities of Deception: Dazzle Camouflage, Avant-Gardes and Sensory Augmentation in the First World War', *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 12, no. 1 (Spring 2017), 36-58 (p. 47).

of hurt' speed the speaker. Sharp adjectives heighten these images: 'spiked' tresses, fingers 'tipped with horn'.

Dispensing with plausible, logical imagery in favour of visual, tactile, and gustatory impressions, Dismorr utilises alliteration to enhance the sensorial qualities of her poetic imagery. In the lines 'Into scooped nets of nostrils glide slippery and salt scents, I swallow | slowly with gasps' the alliterative 'nets of nostrils' and 'slippery and salt scents' work to emphasise the unusual qualities of this hybrid creature's nostrils and their ability to scoop up the slippery scents. But, on closer inspection, it is the repetition of the sibilant 'S' sound, permeating almost every word in the line, which heightens the tactile sensation of the slippery scents sliding up the nostrils and slipping down the back of the throat, the hissing sound evoking both slipperiness and the whistling of the salt air breeze: 'Into **s**cooped net**s** of no**s**tril**s** glide **s**lippery and **s**alt **s**cents, I **s**wallow | **s**lowly with ga**s**p**s**.' Sensations are combined to create a multi-sensory image: the tactility of the slipperiness combines with the gustatory aspect of the salt and the sensation of swallowing, as well as with the olfactory nature of the salt scents which evoke the sea air.

Bringing together disparate elements, from the 'hole of birth' to 'tentacles', 'spiked tresses' and butterflies, 'gongs', a 'coat of skin' and 'fists of air', Dismorr plays with these incongruous elements and constructs unusual and abstract images. Transposing the visual capabilities of the eye with the physical actions of the body, Dismorr defies logic to imagine surreal scenes: the speaker's eyes 'dismember live anatomies innocently' and 'run around the polished rims of rivers'. Conceiving of the hybrid speaker's eyes as 'instruments of | touch', Dismorr utilises lineation to enhance the unexpected juxtaposition of these visual organs of sight and their physical actions: the line reads, '[…] my eyes dilate and bulge. Finest instruments of', but the completion of the unit of sense is suspended as a new line is begun, creating a pause before the unexpected sensation of 'touch' is revealed. The next image merges with the one before, so that the 'blood-drops' formed of 'pampered appetites and curiosities' appear to fall from the eyes of the speaker as they press them 'against the cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles':

In pursuit of shapes my eyes dilate and bulge. Finest instruments of
touch they refuse to blink their pressure of objects.
They dismember live anatomies innocently.
They run around the polished rims of rivers.
With risk they press against the cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles.
Pampered appetites and curiosities become blood-drops, their hot
mouths yell war.

In writing, as in painting, Dismorr rejects clear representational form in favour of a series of abstracted images. 'Pampered appetites and curiosities become blood-drops', 'sick opponents [dodge] behind silence', and 'obsessions rear their heads'. The speaker's wounds are depicted as 'bright cups of pain', a metaphor, perhaps, for the gaping skin of a hollow wound which cups and contains a gushing pool of bright red blood.

Like the butterfly in Loy's poem sequence 'Songs to Joannes', born with daily news from the battlefront 'Printed in blood on its wings', Dismorr's speaker, too, is birthed straight into the bloody and brutal realities of mechanised warfare.[376] The conflict is initially signalled by the use of the term 'spoils', denoting goods taken from an enemy during a time of war, as the 'tentacles' of the speaker's senses 'drop spoils into the vast | sack of [his or her] greed'. The second half of the poem is abundant with a vocabulary of brutality and violence, as Dismorr's automaton self is caught in the maelstrom of combat: she is 'struck' by 'vigorous and brutal fists'; there are 'gasps' and 'blood-drops' all around as 'live anatomies' are 'dismember[ed]'; 'whips of hurt' strike as 'incisions of wild claws' create open wounds and 'bright cups of pain', and battle cries come forcefully from 'hot mouths yell[ing] war[!]'. The exciting sensory explorations of the poem's earlier lines have been replaced by an oppressive sensory disorientation as the din of mechanical weapons and mouths screaming 'war' strikes the speaker's eardrums, sharp edges ('cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles') prick and pierce the skin, and hot blood-drops flow. The speaker is attacked ('malignities spring upon me') and attacks in return ('I hammer their faces'), engaging his or her opponents in combat with equal persistence and ruthlessness.

[376] Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', in *LLB*, p. 54.

'Monologue' was published in the special 'War Number' of *Blast* in July 1915, as the events of the First World War were still unfolding, and forms part of the Vorticists' response to the ongoing events of the catastrophic early months of the conflict. By the time of publication several key members of the Vorticist group had already lost their lives fighting on the front lines (including the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915)), and the editorial comments in this number are a reminder of the bloodshed and the bombs that were falling all around them: 'BLAST finds itself surrounded by a multitude of other Blasts of all sizes and descriptions. This puce-coloured cockleshell will, however, try and brave the waves of blood, for the serious mission it has on the other side of World-War.'[377] Whilst the Vorticists celebrated the modern industrial landscape in the first number of *Blast* in 1914, as news of the catastrophic destruction and casualties wrought by the mechanised warfare of the First World War reached them it, unsurprisingly, altered their attitude to, and artistic relationship with, the machine. Notably, Epstein, his 'ardour for machinery short-lived' on account of the conflict, dismantled his *Rock Drill* sculpture, discarding the miner's drill and reducing the robotic figure to a bust before casting it in bronze; the revised artwork, without the drill and lower body, is stripped of its mechanical power and threatening presence.[378]

Dismorr's poem captures the Vorticists' complex and conflicting attitude to mechanical technologies in the wake of world war. Her speaker's 'acrobatic' emergence into the world, 'delight' at the 'Details of equipment' in its possession, and excitement and curiosity about its new environment are all suggestive of the general enthusiasm for new technologies and the possibilities they afforded. But far from celebrating the strength and efficiency of the machine or glorifying war, as the Futurists did, Dismorr's poem draws on the materials and imagery of mechanical warfare – the chains of heavy war tanks ('chains of muscles') and the sharp edges of barbed wire ('pricking pinnacles') – to convey her criticism of the cultural and political climate that has brought about the conflict. Reading 'Monologue' against the backdrop of military technologies of deception, White

[377] 'Editorial', *Blast*, no. 2, p. 5.
[378] Jacob Epstein, *Let There Be Sculpture: The Autobiography of Jacob Epstein* (London: Readers Union Limited, 1942), p. 56.

argues that Dismorr '[…] makes explicit the connection she identifies between commercial culture and war as "pampered appetites and curiosities become blood-drops", unequivocally linking acquisitive greed and an imperialist state that "yells war".'[379] Dismorr's speaker is symbolic of a society enthralled by the machine: 'delight[ed]' by 'Details of equipment' their inquisitiveness about new technologies 'spins with drunken invitation' as they lust after the new sensations and experiences available to them. S/he is the product of a toxic culture and imperialist greed that 'drunken[ly]' explores and ruthlessly exploits its new surroundings and, like Marinetti's 'multiplied man', hurtles headlong into conflict, interested only in selfish acquisition ('drop spoils into the vast | sack of my greed') and bent on 'ultimate success' at all costs. Dismorr's surreal and highly imaginative poem is deeply critical of contemporary events and, White argues, her 'literary tactics provide a way of waging guerrilla warfare in and against [a] monologic field' of greed.[380]

Alongside this political critique, the poem suggests a bleak fate for humanity in the age of mechanised warfare. Just as Loy communicates existential concerns through the cylindrical, mechanical figures of her poem 'Human Cylinders', Dismorr also draws on machine imagery, and on the theme of birth and new life, to express concerns about the future of a world at war. A reminder of the harsh realities and brutalities of war emerges through the poem's surreal narrative, depicting the fate of a new life as it is hurled into bloody conflict. Dismorr's speaker, a new generation of machine beings freshly born into the modern world, is destined only for destruction:

> Striped malignities spring upon me, and tattoo with incisions of wild claws.
> Speeded with whips of hurt, I hurry towards ultimate success.
> I stoop to lick the bright cups of pain and drop out of activity.
> I lie a slack bag of skin. My nose hangs over the abyss of exhaustion,
> my loosened tongue laps sleep as from a bowl of milk.

Finally, its 'close coat of skin' becomes a 'slack bag of skin' as it 'hangs over the abyss of exhaustion' licking its wounds and lapping up 'sleep as from a bowl of

[379] White, p. 46.
[380] Ibid.

milk', like an animal. Writing in his autobiography about his sculpture *The Rock Drill*, Epstein described his creation as a monster:

> I made and mounted a machine-like robot, visored, menacing, and carrying within itself its progeny, protectively ensconced. Here is the armed, sinister figure of to-day [sic] and to-morrow [sic]. No humanity, only the terrible Frankenstein's monster we have made ourselves into.[381]

Dismorr was likely familiar with Epstein's sculpture, which was exhibited at The London Group exhibition in March 1915, and perhaps privy to its inception and creation. It is possible that *The Rock Drill* inspired her to write 'Monologue' and we might read the poem as a textual response to the visual work. Like the menacing figure of Epstein's sculpture, Dismorr's speaker is a 'terrible Frankenstein's monster', part human, part machine; s/he is armoured with 'new machinery', wielding heavy metal chains and armed with horn-tipped fingers; s/he is the next generation blended with the machine and fuelled by a desire for battle – ready to fight and destroy any enemy. Dismorr's speaker is the 'sinister figure' of tomorrow that Epstein refers to – the progeny 'protectively ensconced' within the armoured torso of his robot figure, 'squeezed out' 'through the hole of birth' in Dismorr's poem. Both Epstein's figure and Dismorr's speaker are symbols of a monstrous humanity pushing itself 'over the abyss', blinkered in its quest for success. The ruthless pursuit has led only to injury and exhaustion. The seemingly powerful chains of muscles ultimately keep Dismorr's creature fettered to its mechanised roots and to the world of industrial warfare it is born into. 'Monologue' is an incisive poem that conveys the complex attitudes of many avant-garde artists and writers to new technological developments and their impact in the age of modern warfare, discernibly capturing the state of a world curious and inquisitive about new technological advances, yet propelled by them headlong into catastrophe.

[381] Epstein, p. 56.

**'Your pity is a systematic mistake': the avant-garde's aggressive aesthetics**

The poem 'Matinée' is from Dismorr's handwritten collection *Poems* (1918) and was also published (as 'Matinee') in *The Little Review* in March 1918.[382] It is comprised of a series of statements. Dismorr brings together ideas about time, success, eternity and the universe, with 'efficient machinery', 'gesticulating dust', 'fruits', 'diamonds', 'atoms' and 'brocade'. There seems to be little logical progression in this phrasal prose, as the speaker leaps from one thought to another.

The speaker begins by setting the scene: it is the early morning in Cannes, France and 'The Croisette trembles in the violent matutinal light'. The speaker is, perhaps, wandering along the boulevard as his/her nerves awaken 'spring[ing] to the task of acquisitiveness'. But these concrete markers of time and place quickly become distant as the reader is immersed in the flow of the speaker's disparate thoughts. We are told: 'The secret of my success is a knowledge of the limitedness of time', though it is not made clear exactly what form the speaker's success has taken. Without further elucidation of the speaker's identity and the nature of his or her success, the poem continues: we are told, 'Within this crazy shell, an efficient machinery mints satisfactions'. From here the reader is addressed directly, 'Your pity is a systematic mistake', before the speaker's mind moves swiftly onto 'provoking | dissimulative folds' and 'the incense of personal demand'. After dwelling on clear communication, 'liaisons' and 'alliance' the speaker becomes concerned with a 'sparkling and gesticulating dust' formed of 'fruits and diamonds, superb | adolescents, fine manners' before considering how this 'pigment, disposed by the ultimate vibrations of force, paints | the universe in a contemporary mode.' Sweeping and flitting from thought to thought, without elaboration or evidence of linear progression, the speaker toys with 'pattern', despairs of 'ennui', 'thrill[s] to the microscopic', explores the 'richness of brocade', spells 'happiness out of dots and dashes', considers the 'atom' and 'the physical round world', and is nauseated by shadows before proclaiming 'life to the end a piece of artistry'.

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[382] Dismorr, 'Matinée', in *Poems* (1918) [unpaginated]. 'Matinee', *The Little Review*, vol. 4, no. 11 (March 1918) 31-32. See Appendix, pp. 239-240.

Dispensing with continuity of meaning, in this poem Dismorr seems to be playing with a 'stream of consciousness' style. In lines such as, 'The holes of my sack spill treasure. | Who but I should be accessible to the naked pressure of things?', 'Pattern is enough. I pray you do not mention the soul' and 'But I cannot stomach shadows. It is certain that the physical | round world would fit my mouth like a lollipop', links which might indicate a connection between the phrases have been erased, and this segmented form seems suggestive of a wandering mind as it lurches from one disconnected thought to another, not unlike the juxtapositions of the free-flowing unconscious captured by the Surrealists in their automatic writing experiments. Without any indication of the relationship between certain statements, the reader is left to ponder the relevance of shadows to the lollipop-sized earth, and to piece together the spheres of 'pattern' and 'the soul'. In this poem, as in others, Dismorr explores abstract imagery, as in the lines, 'Between me and apprehension no passions draw their provoking | dissimulative folds', where 'passions' are given the capacity to pull out (or draw like swords) their provocative, yet concealing, folds or enclosures. Dispensing with stanzaic structure, Dismorr forgoes the pauses that come with stanza breaks, such that the long, continuous forward motion of the whole poem suggests a continuity of thought, without stanzas which signal the conclusion of one line of thought and the beginning of another.

The plurality of images drawn from a broad frame of reference – flitting from 'efficient machinery' and a sack which spills treasure, to the 'incense of personal motive', a 'succession of fantasies', and the 'burrows of life' – is compounded by the disjointed rhythm of the poem's prose form. Unlike the Surrealists' automatic writing experiments, which eschew the restrictions of punctuation, or Penrose's fluid verse forms, Dismorr's poem is heavily punctuated and the brevity of the syntactic units stifles continuity, each brief phrase stopped haltingly by a full stop:

> The secret of my success is a knowledge of the limitedness of time.
> Economy is scientific. I understand the best outlay of attention.
> Within this crazy shell an efficient machinery mints satisfactions.
> Your pity is a systematic mistake. I may yet grow arrogant on
> the wastage of other lives. The holes of my sack spill treasure.

Furthermore, utilising both end-stopped and enjambed lines, Dismorr challenges continuous reading rhythms. As the prose stops and starts, the syntactic units sometimes ending with the line break, sometimes continuing onto the next line, regularity is abandoned as she cultivates a disjointed reading rhythm:

> The static cannot claim my approval. I live in the act of
> departure. Eternity is for those who can dispose of
> an amplitude of time.
> Pattern is enough. I pray you do not mention the soul.

Whilst choosing prose over verse form, Dismorr utilises the lineation of poetic form to experiment with unconventional rhythms.

In this poem Dismorr seems to be utilising form to grapple with philosophical questions about the nature of existence. The speaker, conscious of the 'limitedness of time', declares that he or she lives 'in the act of departure'. As 'shapes quicken and pass' and 'the day moves', the brevity of the poem's syntactic units suggests the swiftness of this passing time. As the speaker ponders his or her relationship with the universe, contemplates 'life' and proclaims it 'a piece of artistry', the discontinuity of the poem's content mirrors not only the fleeting nature of the speaker's thought processes, but also the 'ephemeral busyness' of life itself. According to Gabriel Josipovici, in conventional prose forms 'the smooth chain of the sentences gives us a sense of security, of comfort even, precisely because it denies the openness, the "trembling" of life itself'.[383] In 'Matinée', the segmented form of the phrasal prose, clipped and severely punctuated, and the discontinuity and irregularity of Dismorr's use of lineation, end-stopping and enjambment, along with the swiftness of the speaker's leaps from a sack which spills treasure to the 'fine manners' of a 'sparkling and gesticulating dust', all work to undermine a 'smooth chain' of prose and to expose the 'trembling', or rather fleeting and ungraspable, nature of existence as the shapes of life 'quicken and pass'. Dismorr utilises a form that reflects the nature of the speaker's concerns about the imminence of

[383] Gabriel Josipovici, *Whatever Happened to Modernism?* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010), p. 164.

death as he or she contemplates: 'My travelling spirit | will taste too soon of emptiness' and 'The trinkets stored within my coffin will outlast my dust'.

But there is tension between some of the poem's more incongruous aspects and Dismorr's clear and measured syntax. There are opposing forces at work within the poem. The fleeting, ephemeral nature of time and existence is expressed through the brevity of the syntactic units; the incongruity of the speaker's statements, leaping from one thought to the next, along with the inconsistent mixture of end-stopping and enjambment that compromises linearity, conveys instability and uncertainty. Yet the succinct, clear, and precise phrasal units counteract these markers of irregularity. Whilst the absence of connectives between phrases complicates understanding, each syntactic unit is composed of clear, cogent syntax and graspable vocabulary. Whereas Arnauld revels and delights in irregularity, discontinuity, and seemingly haphazard compositional techniques, and both Loy and Penrose create complex syntactical structures and often utilise obscure phrasing, there is a clarity to Dismorr's written works that suggests an exploration of expressive forms different to those developed by the other writers included in this study. On the one hand, the phrasal form of the poem and the brevity of the statements manifests a fragmentation redolent of instability, which can be compared with the Futurist's dynamic, telegraphic lyricism, with Dada's demolition of literary form, or with the serial style typical of Expressionist poetry (which attempts to convey a fragmented view of the world). But on the other hand Dismorr's exploitation of clear and grammatical syntax suggests another reading. Rather than fleeting and incongruous thoughts which escape rapidly without order, the clipped, segmented form of Dismorr's prose, crafted in a clear and precise language, points to efficiency and an economical use of words. Whereas other writers, such as Penrose, Loy, and Arnauld, dispense with, or limit, the use of punctuation in a deliberate attempt to cast off the shackles of conventional linguistic structures in order to liberate words and encourage a plurality of meanings, Dismorr makes use of the ordering aspects of punctuation. In its clipped, punctuated, and stifled rhythms Dismorr's poem appears severe and regimented, perhaps in keeping

with the 'aesthetic qualities celebrated with notable intensity within Vorticist rhetoric – hardness, tautness, severity […]':[384]

> The static cannot claim my approval. I live in the act of
> departure. Eternity is for those who can dispose of
> an amplitude of time.

Such curtailed expression would seem to correspond to the efficient, economical emissions of a speaker who prides them-self in, and puts their success down to, 'a knowledge of the limitedness of time.' Aware that his or her 'travelling spirit | will taste too soon of emptiness', the speaker wastes no time with superfluous words: 'I thrill to the microscopic.' The description of the speaker as a shell containing 'an efficient machinery' recalls the industrial, machine-like body of the hybrid speaker in 'Monologue', and suggests a continued interest in a blend of human and machine characteristics. Perhaps, then, the phrasal, intermittent prose is not just the result of an economical speaker concerned with the 'limitedness of time', but the mechanical utterings of an efficient machine that 'mints' expressions – an example of the 'detached, mechanistic intellect' favoured by the Vorticists.[385] Perhaps only the efficient machine can be successful within the constraints of time. In a less literal sense, Dismorr's rigid, punctuated form can be seen as expressive of mechanical values: as Christopher Adams suggests in his analysis of Vorticist visual arts, 'the Vorticists did not intend their work to engage with, or reflect, the industrial era through its subject matter, but rather through its employment of a specific visual vocabulary whose formal qualities – precision, hard-edged forcefulness, clean lines, geometrical severity – were expressive of mechanical values, quite independently of any figurative associations.'[386] Utilising punctuated, phrasal forms Dismorr is perhaps responding to the modern, industrial world with her own formal vocabulary of mechanical efficiency.

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[384] Hickman, *The Geometry of Modernism* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), p. 135.
[385] Wilson notes that Lewis favoured these actions, p. 26.
[386] Christopher Adams, 'Futurism and the British Avant-Garde, in *Blasting the Future!*, Estorick Collection of Modern Italian Art, pp. 9-17 (p. 14).

In fact, the tone of the poem suggests that Dismorr, like both Arnauld and Loy, was drawing on the polemic style of the various manifestos, and manifesto-style texts, that were circulated amongst and within the various avant-garde groups, including by the Futurists and Vorticists.[387] Avant-garde artists, writers, and groups used the manifesto as a form through which to express their artistic intentions and the shape or direction of their aesthetics. Typically antagonistic, aggressive and bombastic, the manifestos issued were also often playful and amusing. By setting up an oppositional stance with the reader or addressee, the antagonistic tone of the manifesto is intended to provoke: 'It is peculiar and angry […]. Always opposed to something, particular or general […]. With the terms constructed in a deliberate dichotomy, the manifesto can be set up like a battlefield.'[388] As mentioned above in the introduction to Vorticism, in the manifestos published in the first edition of the Vorticist journal, *Blast*, this deliberate dichotomy is harnessed using a 'Blast' and 'Bless' formula, in which various people, ideas, and aspects of modern life are either 'blasted' or 'blessed' by the Vorticists: 'BLAST years 1837 to 1900 […] WRING THE NECK OF all sick inventions […] DAMN all those today who have taken on that Rotten Menagerie'; 'BLESS ALL PORTS. […] BLESS ENGLAND, […] BLESS cold magnanimous delicate gauche fanciful stupid ENGLISHMEN.'[389]

The influence of the manifesto form on Dismorr's writing is apparent in the speaker's sharp and direct address to the reader, redolent of the Dada writers' attacks on their audiences: 'Your pity is a systematic mistake. I may yet grow arrogant on | the wastage of other lives. The holes of my sack spill treasure.' Aggressive in tone, and sinister in their implication (that the speaker's arrogance will be fuelled by the loss of lives), these lines create an uncomfortable atmosphere. An opposition is set up between speaker and reader, as the speaker cautions: 'Your pity is a systematic mistake.' The speaker seems to be addressing his or her adversaries – those who, perhaps not realising the speaker's sack of

[387] Caws identifies a 'ten-year period of glorious madness' of Modernist excitement from the years 1909-1919, that she calls the 'Manifesto Moment'. 'The Poetics of the Manifesto', in *Manifesto*, p. xxii.
[388] Ibid., pp. xix-xx.
[389] *Blast*, no. 1, pp. 18-19 and 23-24.

'treasure', or potential, instead take pity.[390] Although the poem begins on a neutral note, setting the scene ('The Croisette trembles in the violent matutinal light. […] | the day moves. […]'), it is in fact a sort of manifesto, concealed as a poetic monologue. The speaker, setting out his or her approach and direction, tells us: 'I have not clouded heaven with the incense of personal motive', 'I treat with respect the sparkling and gesticulating dust that | confronts me', and 'The static cannot claim my approval. I live in the act of | departure.' Defining his or her position as a successful, efficient being who lives in the now of speeding time, the speaker makes clear his or her position in opposition to those 'neophyte[s] in philosophy' who demand 'reasons | and results'. The speaker's tone, similarly to the tone of the manifesto, is confident, almost arrogant: 'I understand the best outlay of intention', 'Who but I should be accessible to the naked pressure of things?', 'It is certain that the physical | round world would fit my mouth like a lollipop.' The concluding line gives an overview of the speaker's argument: 'I proclaim life to the end a piece of artistry, essentially | idle and exquisite.'

Though less harsh and aggressive, refraining from the use of bold and strident capitals (as in the Futurist manifestos and those issued by the Vorticists in *Blast*) and without a spattering of exclamation marks for emphasis, in both form and content the poem nevertheless bears resemblance to the antagonistic avant-garde manifesto. In its brevity and directness, each economical phrase or line is a statement being issued in defence and celebration of the speaker's philosophical and aesthetic direction: 'Eternity is for those who can dispose of | an amplitude of time', 'The local has always the richness of a brocade: it is worth | while to examine the design.' Exploring new forms of expression, like Arnauld, Dismorr engaged with the characteristics of the modern manifesto, drawing from it to create a new polemic style of poetry.

Hickman's analysis of Dismorr's participation in Vorticism can further illuminate Dismorr's use of this aggressive literary form. Building on Lisa Tickner's argument that Vorticism appealed to women such as Dismorr and

[390] Here, the line 'The holes of my sack spill treasure' recalls a line from Dismorr's poem 'Monologue' which reads: 'Tentacles of my senses, […] drop spoils into the vast | sack of my greed.' Related to this image in 'Monologue' the term 'sack' could be interpreted as the speaker's body, the 'holes' perhaps signifying illness.

Saunders because it 'offered opportunities for a *feminist* repudiation of femininity', Hickman argues that both Saunders and Dismorr drew on the gestures, perspectives, and qualities associated with Vorticism's masculinity, because 'they countered effects of "Prettiness" that suggested feminine weakness and inferior artistry.'[391] At a time when the terms 'woman' and 'artist' were considered mutually exclusive (as exemplified by Lewis's remark, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that pouring tea was 'a job for women, not artists'), Hickman suggests that the 'model of Vorticist masculinity afforded Saunders and Dismorr symbolic language and conceptual strategies with which to gain critical distance on forms of femininity regarded as debilitating in their avant-garde climate, in both aesthetic and professional terms.'[392] Unlike Loy and Penrose, who embraced feminine attributes, drew inspiration from specifically female experiences, and placed women at the centre of their poetic works, Dismorr's engagement with a manifesto style of writing suggests that she was not only exploring innovative literary forms, but that she was specifically utilising the aggressive, antagonistic tone and format of the manifesto in a deliberate move to distance herself from what may have been perceived as 'feminine' literature. In this context it is also significant that Dismorr's speakers, in the three texts discussed in this chapter, remain genderless. With no markers of identity, it is impossible to distinguish the 'I' in 'Monologue', 'Matinée' and, in the next section, 'Prelude'.

In the following section Dismorr's utilisation of what can perhaps be considered 'masculine' literary forms can be seen in her literary interpretation of Vorticism's theoretical ideas and her depiction of the writing process.[393]

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[391] Lisa Tickner, 'Men's Work? Masculinity and Modernism', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, vol. 4, no. 3 (1992), 1-37 (pp. 21-22); Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', p. 122.

[392] Hickman, 'The Gender of Vorticism', p. 121.

[393] I am using the term 'masculine' here in the conventional sense pertaining to those characteristics deemed specific to men. Whilst gender theorists, such as Judith Butler, have exposed the categories of 'male' and 'female', and 'masculine' and 'feminine', as constructs, more conventional ideas about gender and gender roles in the early twentieth century would have had an impact on Dismorr's creative output, and particularly her engagement with the aesthetics of Vorticism.

**'I call the universe to order': Writing and Literary Vorticism**

In the poem 'Prelude' Dismorr utilises a phrasal prose, dispensing with linear narrative in favour of a series of statements written in the present tense: 'I call the universe to order', 'Life and experience organise a last rebellion', 'My antagonists, you are my predestined material!'.[394] Drawing on a disparate array of objects and images, with no logical connectives, the poem is a fragmentary concatenation which bears resemblance to the irrational juxtapositions of both the Dadaists and Surrealists and draws on a wide frame of reference similar to that of Arnauld: there are 'initiations', 'keen, trembling hates', 'phenomena', 'dreams', 'moulds', 'varied existences', 'atoms', 'angularities', 'veins', 'nostalgias', 'weapons', 'flashes' and 'instruments'.

The reader arrives at the optimum moment ('This is the desired moment') and is thrown into its immediacy by Dismorr's use of the present tense:

> This is the desired moment. Now activities crowd upon me. Initiations
> twist themselves into the shapes of words.
> My impulse stirs the fragments of which earth is composed: there
> is a movement towards the classic and complete.
> I call the universe to order. The irregularity of phenomena is
> no longer supportable.

Short, punctuated phrases create a measured pace, generating a rhythm that suggests both the speaker's control and the fleeting brevity of the 'desired moment'. The first few lines place the speaker in a position of passivity: activities 'crowd upon' the speaker, 'initiations twist themselves', and it is the speaker's 'impulse', rather than his or her rational, conscious faculties, that 'stirs the fragments of which earth is composed'. Creativity, Dismorr suggests, begins as an intuitive process; inspiration arrives and ideas, or 'activities', crowd the artist or writer, who lacks control over the 'initiations' that twist and shape themselves into words. Intuition is what guides the artist as their 'impulse' stirs the fragments, atoms and phenomena of the world. These first few lines depict a creative process which was prized and celebrated by many avant-garde groups, such as Dada and Surrealism, who endeavoured to bypass rational, conscious

[394] Jessica Dismorr, 'Prelude', in *Poems* (1918) [unpaginated]. See Appendix, p. 241.

thinking and liberate the subconscious mind. It also calls to mind the work of the French philosopher Henri Bergson and his concept of 'intuition' as the means through which to grasp the essential 'rhythm' of a subject – an idea that Dismorr would likely have encountered during her time among the Fauvists, who were significantly influence by Bergsonian thought.[395] But throughout 'Prelude' there is tension between the organic, irregular materials of intuition and creativity, and an active, authoritative speaker who seeks to direct them.

Perhaps the most characteristic feature of Dismorr's writing – unexpectedly for avant-garde literature – is its clarity and precision. Whereas the Surrealists experimented with automatic writing, striving to bypass the limitations of conscious thought processes, and the Dadaists revelled in disruptive (and disrupted) literary forms, Dismorr's prose-poems convey a sense of order and discipline, both formally and thematically. In the poem 'Prelude', Dismorr juxtaposes an array of incongruous elements, calling to mind Arnauld's poems 'Les Ronge-Bois', 'Les Insensés', and 'Luna Park': there is a 'jugglery' of fragments and atoms as 'weapons' collide with 'nostalgias' and 'finest flashes' and irregular angles intersect with 'dreams', 'tears', 'hereditary thirsts' and 'points that prick invisibility'. But, unlike in Arnauld's poetry, as these disparate elements collide the formal qualities of the poem direct and channel these incongruities. The succinct phrasal units that comprise the poem are the precise utterings of a confident, authoritative speaker, who states: 'I call the universe to order. The irregularity of phenomena is | no longer supportable.' Whilst the poem appears, at first, to be a chaotic concatenation of incongruous elements brought together by an equally fragmentary prose, Dismorr's clipped, phrasal prose again suggests an efficient and exact use of language. As the various incompatible fragments of the poem 'juggle' and 'twist' with 'gymnastic […] force', they are driven into the 'cold moulds of perfected form' by a sober and concise formal style.

In their desire to define themselves as unique from, and in opposition to, both the Cubists and the Futurists, the Vorticists sought a dynamism that was

[395] Hickman suggests that Dismorr's illustrations of nudes in *Rhythm* 'suggest awareness of, perhaps temporary investment in, the nude as expression of the Bergsonian *élan vital*', or vital life force. 'The Gender of Vorticism', p. 127.

opposed to the static forms of Cubism, but at the same time valued a precision and clarity which contrasted with what they deemed to be the fluid and imprecise dynamism of the Futurists. At the heart of Vorticism was the concept of the vortex, a dynamic whirlpool conceived by Pound, for whom it exemplified 'the point of maximum energy'.[396] In *Blast* Lewis wrote, 'the Vorticist is at his maximum point of energy when stillest.'.[397] In Vorticism, the values of dynamism, intense energy, and vitality, on the one hand, and control, precision and order, on the other, are expressed in visual terms in the clean lines and geometric forms of their abstract paintings. In this sense, the Vorticists were also diametrically opposed to both the Dadaists and Surrealists who embraced the role of chance in the production of art and literature, nurturing the haphazard and the free association of words, and inviting the creation of visual and written works by harnessing the irrational subconscious. In 'Vortex, Pound', Pound encapsulates the concepts of control and precision unique to the Vorticist method of artistic expression – the writer and artist directing and exerting control over the work of art, moulding its precise forms:

> You may think of man as that toward which perception moves. You may think of him as the toy of circumstance, as the plastic substance receiving impressions. Or you may think of him as directing a certain fluid force against circumstance, as conceiving instead of merely observing and reflecting.[398]

In Dismorr's poem, this contrast between the vitality and energy of the vortex, and the controlled stillness achieved by the Vorticist finds expression through both form and content, as the 'fluid force' of heterogeneous fragments and their energetic behaviour is directed, controlled, and stilled by the coolness of the poem's precise forms.[399] This shift from vital energy to stillness also reflects Dismorr's move from the Rhythmist group to Vorticism: she is now channelling

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[396] Pound, 'Vortex, Pound', p. 153.
[397] Wyndham Lewis, 'Our Vortex', *Blast,* no. 1, 147-149 (p. 148).
[398] Pound, 'Vortex, Pound', p. 153.
[399] On Dismorr's precise visual style, Cork comments that it 'comes of something of a surprise – not to say an anti-climax – to find [Dismorr] executing work as disciplined as the tiny *Design* illustrated in *Blast No. 2*', *Vorticism and Abstract Art*, p. 414.

the intuitive perceptions of Bergsonian thought into the precise mechanized moulds of Vorticist aesthetics.

A meditation on the writing process, the poem 'Prelude' provides us with an insight into Dismorr's own ideas about writing, and can perhaps be taken as evidence of her own conception of literary Vorticism. The reader arrives at the optimum moment, the 'desired moment' of inspiration: 'activities crowd upon' the speaker and 'Initiations twist themselves into the shapes of words'. This is the 'Prelude' of the title, the initial part of the creative process. The first few lines place the speaker in a position of passivity: activities 'crowd upon' the speaker, 'initiations twist *themselves*', and it is the speaker's 'impulse', rather than his or her rational, conscious faculties, that 'stirs the fragments of which earth is composed'. But quickly the speaker 'call[s] the universe to order' and claims authorial control. The excitement at the arrival of this fleeting moment of inspiration gives way to a vehement desire to structure and mould. Couched in a vocabulary of warfare and conflict, the 'pieces' of the speaker's 'game', the 'material[s]' of his or her creative process, resist and rebel, refusing to 'surrender their angularities' as they are ordered to 'fit themselves with complacency into the shape of music' and moulded into 'perfected form'. But this desire for perfected form which emerges from the content of the poem, and Dismorr's use of succinct and clear prose, differs from existing definitions of Vorticist literature.

Taking Lewis's play *The Enemy of the Stars* as exemplary of Vorticist literature, Reed Way Dasenbrock identifies the 'Vorticist sentence' as an assemblage of phrases without any of the syntactical devices which produce grammatical order; it is an ungrammatical sentence, verbless and ambiguous, with punctuation used 'to conceal syntactical relations as well as to establish them'.[400] For Dasenbrock, parataxis and juxtaposition are the key features of Vorticist literature, as exemplified by the works of Lewis and Pound. The problem with this definition of Vorticist literature is that it rests on so few examples and is based almost entirely on Lewis's mostly unreadable play. In

[400] Reed Way Dasenbrock, *The Literary Vorticism of Ezra Pound & Wyndham Lewis: Towards the Condition of Painting* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), p. 128.

contrast to the fragmented, paratactic, ungrammatical play by Lewis, which is perhaps more akin to the Dadaists' abolition of conventional language forms or the Surrealists' erosion of syntax, Dismorr's writing is defined by its precise and clear prose form, which can be likened to the clean, exact lines found in Vorticist painting, and in a desire for control and order, for a stillness at the centre of the vortex. Dismorr's approach to writing is less one in which words freely evolve from initiations (or one in which, like Arnauld, fleeting words are caught haphazardly) and more a process of organizing and disciplining the dynamism of these intuitive initiations, of channelling and structuring these energetic materials into precise and definite forms. She writes, 'The strongest aesthetic impulse needs the curb of the most exact technique.'[401]

Dismorr's poetic explorations showcase her 'curiosity' about modern experimental literary forms and demonstrate her engagement with key aspects of Vorticist aesthetics. As both an artist and a writer, Dismorr situated herself at the centre of the British avant-garde, participating in its energetic quest for innovative expressive forms. Despite her efforts, her work has rarely been included in critical analyses of Vorticism or the avant-garde more broadly, and her role as an avant-garde writer has been undervalued. But whilst her work has for too long appeared only on the periphery of Vorticism, it offers huge potential for reconsidering the literary works of the Vorticists and their conception of a Vorticist form of literature. In a movement dominated by the visual arts Dismorr's written works are an untapped resource through which we can further explore the literary manifestation of Vorticist aesthetics.

[401] Dismorr, 'Critical Suggestions', *The Little Review*, vol. 6, no. 5 (Sept 1919), 31-35 (p. 33).

## A Liberating Space of Potentiality

The avant-garde woman writer is, in a sense, triply marginal, existing in a space on the margins of the already marginal avant-gardes, writing radical experimental texts that reject traditional notions of literature. But as Crangle reminds us, 'it is not entirely disadvantageous to be the outsider: […] to exist within a margin is to occupy a space beyond need, a space of potentially exultant and liberating excess.'[402] For the woman writer, the avant-garde provided a liberating space in which they could, for the most part, shake off the shackles of patriarchy and limiting societal expectations, and pursue unconventional careers as experimentalist poets. It furnished them with an environment in which they could collaborate and experiment, demolish the foundations of Literature, play with language, and nurture their individual creativity. Their marginal position within individual groups also freed them from adherence to dominant aesthetic tendencies, and facilitated their divergence from the concerns of their male colleagues. In this way, the avant-garde enabled women to develop and pursue their own independent vision as innovative literary creators. For avant-garde women writers the margin was, in some ways, a liberating vantage point from which they could draw from the exciting experimental cross-currents of the international avant-garde. Returning to Roberts's painting, discussed in the introduction to this study, we might reinterpret – or re-imagine – Dismorr's and Saunders's relegation to the periphery of the composition as demarcating a space of inbetweenness full with potential: an inviting open doorway through which the avant-garde's women artists and writers arrived to draw inspiration from creative collaboration and, significantly, brought with them fresh, innovative perspectives.

This study has delved into the richly woven fabric of the experimental poem in order to illuminate the diverse and innovative contributions of women writers to avant-garde literature. Through close readings of individual texts it has sought to underscore women's position at the forefront of the avant-garde's experiments with language. Across the avant-garde, women writers were constructing innovative, rule-breaking œuvres; at the height of Vorticism in

[402] Crangle, 'Mina Loy', p. 275.

London, Dada in Paris and New York, Futurism in Italy, and Surrealism in France they were engaging in the radical revision of artistic and literary practices. These writers chose to situate themselves at the centre of the avant-garde's radical activities and to participate in the collective search for new forms of expression. Through their participation in international avant-garde groups, their work was both shaped by, and helped to shape, avant-garde art and literature.

Céline Arnauld was at the forefront of Paris Dada's radical reshaping of literary and linguistic expression. She wrote in innovative stanzaic and rhythmic forms; explored the possibilities of fractured typographical arrangements, incongruous assemblage, and sound play; and fused poetry and polemic to develop a unique language of revolt. Arnauld discerned in innovative literary forms the potential to awaken the reader from her sleep, to open and expand minds, and to liberate thought from the dull formulas of logic; through her lyrical language of revolt she railed against systems which stifle free-thinking. Her desire to unshackle language, and therefore thought, from conventions and limitations is evident throughout her work, both explicitly and implicitly. In her quest for expressive forms that could liberate both writer and reader, Arnauld developed a unique approach to literary composition, conceiving of the writing process as one of catching fugitive words and pinning them to the page – a process in which the poet is receptive to the aural and visual characteristics of words and attuned to the material qualities of language first and foremost. Yet whilst her poetic perambulations are playful, and her work engages with Dada's core values of spontaneity, irrationality, and disorder, Arnauld also sought meaningful expression. Her experiments in the written word resulted in musical meanderings that are both playful and provocative, rambling and profound. Arnauld saw in literature the potential to liberate thought, but also to capture and to throw into relief the profound moments of our lives. Her poetry calls into question the accuracy of assessments which repeatedly classify Dada, and more broadly avant-garde, poetry as merely rebellious and disruptive, aimless and incoherent: her work demonstrates that experimental avant-garde poetry can be meaningful, emotive, and insightful.

Mina Loy occupied a unique position as a woman writer in the avant-garde. Her nomadic interactions with French, English, Italian, and U.S. groups

meant that she was able to draw from cross-currents of avant-garde experimental thought and practice to develop and enrich her own modes of literary expression. Her body of work therefore sits at the intersections of vanguard movements, straddling some of the avant-garde's various manifestations. At its core is a focus on experimental form and a challenge to the dogmas of traditional literary composition: she eschewed the shackles of punctuation, rejected linearity, and nurtured lacunae both at the level of semantics and in the expansive white space of the page. Loy saw in experimental literature an opportunity to unravel staid forms of expression and to explore themes uncommon in traditional poetry. She saw an opportunity to challenge binary thinking and accepted perspectives on gender, dismantling the conventionally accepted notions of Woman and femininity. She thought and wrote seriously about woman's place in patriarchal society, and more than any other writer examined in this study, engaged explicitly and discernibly with the female body, female experience, and feminism. In a climate of fascination with new technologies dominated by a rhetoric of masculine machine virility, Loy foregrounded and celebrated woman's position as powerful procreator. In her experimental explorations with language she also gave serious consideration to the reception of her work and the participation of her reader. Cultivating complex compositional forms and fragmentary textual layers she sought to disrupt linear reading patterns and compel the reader to make use of all their senses to probe and unravel the text. Her work is an important contribution to the progressive experimental literature of the international avant-garde.

In France, Valentine Penrose came into contact with Surrealism at a time when few women creatives were participating in the group's activities and investigations. Her involvement with the Paris-based group was tangential, but her work is marked by a shared interest in accessing and expanding other mind spaces. In common with Arnauld, Penrose saw poetry's potential for freeing the mind from the limitations of rational thought and journeying into other realms, and she exploited poetic language to call forth a mystical universe far beyond everyday existence. Her poems transport the reader to a disorienting, yet potentially liberating, phantasmagoric space in which headless women dance, butterflies burn, and woman is intertwined irrevocably with the natural world.

She wrote in fluid, automatic forms and harnessed the fragmentary, non-linear characteristics of collage and assemblage. Penrose drew inspiration from Surrealism's elevation of the irrational subconscious, yet like all the women included in this study, she developed a unique, independent poetic vision. Like Loy, she used poetry to foreground women's experiences – in particular, those of lesbian desire. In much the same way as her work liberates the subconscious, it also creates a space beyond heteronormative social conventions in which to challenge binary representations of women (as object of desire or feared *femme fatale*) and subvert Surrealism's assumptions about the heterosexual dynamic of artist and muse. In its emphasis on the female body, female experiences, and female desire, Penrose's work, like Loy's, prefigures the feminist literary theories of Cixous and others.

In the British context, Jessica Dismorr situated herself at the centre of avant-garde activities in London as a member of the Vorticist group. Vorticism, like Dada, was short-lived, but Dismorr's written works are marked by her engagement with Vorticist thought and practice. She engaged with Vorticism's aggressive aesthetics and drew inspiration from the direct style of the avant-garde manifesto; like Arnauld, she blended poetic explorations with the combative style of the manifesto to create a distinctive form of expression. Dismorr, like many of her avant-garde contemporaries, also took a keen interest in the modern industrial landscape and used writing to explore the complex new relationship between the human body and modern machines. In the wake of the catastrophic early months of the First World War, Dismorr's writing depicts the brutal realities of mechanised warfare and conveys the Vorticists' conflicting attitudes to technological advancements. Much of Dismorr's writing from the period of her participation in Vorticism is shaped by a continued interest in the machine. She saw in literature the potential not only to depict mechanical forms and to explore the machine-human boundary, but to develop a mode of expression which echoes the efficient actions of mechanical apparatus. The precise formal qualities and clipped staccato rhythms of her poetry are redolent of the controlled actions performed by an industrial mechanism – a machine which 'mints' expressions. The discovery of unpublished written work by Dismorr calls for a revision of her peripheral position.

The primary aim of this study of four women writers has been to shine a spotlight on each individual's adventures in language in order to increase awareness and appreciation of their unique written contributions to the avant-garde. In addition, by considering the work of four women writers together, it has sought to draw out comparisons, map common paths of creative investigation, illuminate points of convergence, and identify cross-currents in avant-garde writing practices with examples from across movements and geographical centres. The women examined here intervened in individual movements; but they also participated in a much larger experimental moment in art and literature, spanning the international avant-garde. Each woman's work displays many of the formal concerns and technical daring associated with the avant-garde – radical typography, collage forms, experimentation with the material qualities of language, and the rejection of logically sequential argument, coherence, and representational narrative – situating them firmly within that particular environment of fervent experiment. Their works also display a shared interest in some of the avant-garde's key thematic concerns and demonstrate that they were grappling with many of the same issues, including the repudiation of logic and the liberation of the irrational subconscious, machines and the development of modern technology, gender roles and female sexuality, and the impact of the First World War.

One thematic concern that recurs with frequency in the work of the writers examined in this study is the privileging of the irrational subconscious. Both Arnauld and Penrose sought to unleash the mind from the shackles of rational thought and explored the depths of the imagination through their poetic practice. Arnauld attacked systems and institutions which she saw as upholding the ideals of rationalism and limiting the potential of free thinking, and she privileged irrationality as the antidote to the dullness of the perceived masculine reasoned, rational mind. Playing with linguistic and typographical structures, she used language to liberate the creative mind and transport the reader through unexplored terrain. For Penrose, poetry provided an opportunity to access alternative mind spaces, delving into the depths of the imagination and unlocking a new spiritual dimension. Her poetry harnesses the fluid torrents of the unbound subconscious and celebrates the juxtapositions of the dream-world.

Both writers sought to unshackle themselves from limiting conventions and looked to poetry as a medium through which their creative freedom could be exercised. The avant-garde's women writers embraced the irrational subconscious and nurtured a space for the imagination to sprawl, to explore, to wander without restraint or limitation.

As well as celebrating the irrational, the avant-garde's women writers drew on the aggressive aesthetics of the avant-garde and, in some cases, adopted the style and tone of the manifesto. Arnauld borrowed the antagonistic tone of the manifesto to champion the irrational and rail against logic, pitting her speaker against those that privilege rational thinking. Loy penned a manifesto outlining her unique brand of feminism, calling for the recognition of women's experiences (in particular, maternity) to counter the sexist, masculinist narratives she encountered throughout the avant-garde. Both Dismorr and Arnauld harnessed the aggressive tone of the rebellious avant-gardes, blending poetry and polemic to create a uniquely hostile form of poetic expression. Each of these writers was creating within, or adjacent to, the riotous atmosphere of the avant-garde, both absorbing the often antagonistic communications of the Dadaists, Vorticists, and Futurists, and unleashing their own rebellious voices through creative expression.

Modern technology, and in particular the relationship between humans and the machine, is another theme that recurs throughout the work examined in this study. At a time of rapid technological development which ushered in swift changes in everyday life and a fundamental shift in perspective, the avant-garde's women writers responded to new technologies and machines with a mixture of awe and uncertainty, curiosity and concern. They were both excited by, and wary of, the impact and potential of new technologies. In their poetic explorations, Dismorr and Arnauld draw on technological metaphors to think about writing, establishing a link between the machine, the text, and the writer. Arnauld conceives of the poem as a cinematic projector, with the potential to capture and illuminate, casting a series of images and ideas for the reader to see. Dismorr characterises writing as a process of minting expressions and the writer as an efficient machine, blurring the boundaries between human and machine forms. Each conveys a sense of excitement about the potential of technology or a

complimentary comparison with the efficient, machine-like human. Elsewhere, Loy and Dismorr envision poetic speakers that are machine-human hybrids, their bodies shaped like the smooth contours of cylindrical machine parts or with muscles in the likeness of dense metal chain links. Their poetry displays an interest in machine forms, but it also conveys their uncertainty about the impact of technology on humanity. Whilst Loy's hybrid beings rotate monotonously like cogs in a machine, and exist in an enveloping dust that isolates them and dulls their senses, Dismorr's machine-like figure is born into the bloody chaos of machine warfare. In each case, their humanity seems all but erased.

As well as the technological developments of modernity, the avant-garde's women writers were also grappling with the contemporaneous events and recent memories of a catastrophic mechanised global war, in which millions lost their lives or were injured – both mentally and physically. Their work is, unsurprisingly, marked by these unprecedented events and displays a desire to express their experience of it through poetry. Among the works discussed here, Dismorr's 'Monologue' is the most direct representation of war, its machine-like speaker embroiled in the throes of physical combat, struck by fists, wounded and bleeding. The poem depicts the pain and exhaustion experienced by soldiers on the battle field and the atrocities of mechanical warfare; it critiques a society enthralled with the machine and the greed of those hungry for power. Elsewhere, the impact of the war permeates poems by Loy and Arnauld, as images of drowned soldiers foreground the ripples of collective memory, and a butterfly with news from the frontline printed in blood on its wings brings into focus the bloodshed on the battlefield. Whether they chose to address it directly, or it seeped into their work unconsciously, the work of the avant-garde's women writers bears the imprint of the tumultuous decades of the twentieth century. Their writing reminds us that it was not only the (male) soldiers on the frontlines that were affected by the events of the Great War, or the (male) war poets that were recording their experiences on the battlefield. We might also look to the writing of avant-garde women to provide valuable insights into this period of history.

Each of these writers was creating at a time not only of intense technological development and unprecedented international conflict, but at a

time when questions of gender and women's rights were coming to the fore. As writers, these women looked to poetic discourse to articulate alternatives to ingrained ideas about sexuality and women. Loy's frank exploration of childbirth brings women's physical experiences to the fore and demands acknowledgement of their unique strength in the face of physical hardship. It also underlines and rebukes the circumscription of women in patriarchal society and the comparative freedom of men. Penrose paints woman as a formidable figure who does away with men's heads. She explores same-sex desire and a new path that deviates from heteronormativity and the heterosexual infatuations of the Surrealists. For these writers, experimental poetry is a site of feminist intervention, as they draw from the raw material of avant-garde experiment to counter a predominantly male avant-garde rhetoric.

**Foragers in the Free-Verse Wilderness: Reading the Avant-Garde Text**

What each of the writers examined here share is an impetus to radically rethink and stretch the limits of literary and linguistic expression. They were each driven by a desire to venture into unchartered artistic territory and to explore the possibilities of the written, and spoken, word – no map could show them which path to take. On their quest they poked and probed at language, disrupted and unravelled antiquated literary formulas, and developed innovative forms of expression – forms, to borrow a phrase from Kreymborg, which are '[…] naturally evolved from new adventuring.'[403] These extraordinary writers had the courage not only to nurture their creative talents and pursue literary careers at a time when the socio-economic status of women was circumscribed by patriarchal attitudes, but also to create audacious experimental literary works which to traditionalists often seemed, at best, bizarre and, at worst, incomprehensible nonsense. At a time when innovative female writers producing experimental literature were few, these women were pioneers.

Avant-garde women writers' daring adventures in the written word generated complex textual arrangements and labyrinthine experimental compositions which place particular demands on readers. The texts surveyed

[403] Kreymborg, 'As Others See Us', *Poetry*, vol. 12, no. 4 (July 1918), 214-224 (p. 217).

throughout this study disrupt and obliterate the unchallenging communicative forms of traditional literature: they dispense with linearity, representational narrative, conventional punctuation, and smooth syntax, in favour of exploiting non-linear composition, sound play, dissonance, juxtaposition, fragmented syntax, and dispersed typographical forms. The works of these women writers explode habitual reading patterns as they consistently deviate from expected routes, evade totalizing interpretations, and frustrate the reader's desire for representational narrative and semantic clarity. Throughout their work they cultivated indeterminacy – revelling in ambiguity, nurturing lacunae, and resisting semantic coherence. As Pound recognized in his review of Loy's contributions to *Others* magazine, such arduous texts as these have the capacity to 'drive numerous not wholly unintelligent readers into a fury of rage-out-of-puz[z]lement.'[404] Such puzzlement, and the challenging nature and ostensible impenetrability of the texts authored by the women included in this study, has perhaps been a contributing factor to their continued neglect, and one reason why the avant-garde's women visual artists have garnered far more critical attention than their literary counterparts. The complexity of experimental avant-garde poetry is an often formidable obstacle for the reader in search of the most rudimentary scraps of representational narrative or coherent meaning. Yet these are, of course, intentional difficulties. Through their adventures in language, these writers were searching for a new role for the writer and for literature – a literature which could better express the experiences of modern life and, in the case of Loy and Penrose in particular, give voice to women's experiences. As they explored experimental terrain, rejecting outmoded literary and linguistic conventions, they were also unravelling the very foundations of undemanding, habitual modes of reading, and conceiving of a new, more active and attentive role for the reader.

The avant-garde poem, with its complex layering of fragments and lacunae, is a challenge for the reader in search of information and meaning. It is also, however, an incitement to active reading – a provocation to closely engage with and break down the 'cold barrier' in order to reveal the intertwined layers

[404] Ezra Pound, 'A List of Books', *The Little Review*, vol. 4, no. 11 (March 1918), 54-58 (p. 58).

of imagery and meaning which make up the fabric of the text. Wolfgang Iser argues that it is precisely the elements of indeterminacy in a text that 'enable the text to "communicate" with the reader, in the sense that they induce [her or] him to participate both in the production and the comprehension of the work's intention.'[405] In the avant-garde poem, it is the heightened indeterminacy of both form and content that ignites the reader's desire to search and discover, to decode and determine: non-linear forms prompt a search for linearity; sound play impels us to locate aural patterns which might provide semantic clues, or to seek coherence between the material qualities of words and their referents; ambiguous language necessitates that we deliberate between possible meanings; fragments motivate us to uncover underlying coherence, and telescoped lines implore us to unravel and define syntactic units. Elements of indeterminacy generate space for the reader to delve into the text and take part in its production of meaning.

The poetry considered in this study demands intellectual effort on the part of the reader, requiring our complicity to decode and decipher, to unpick and unravel, to explore the possibilities of latent meanings, and to piece together the disparate fragments of the text. It calls for attentive, engaged reading and sustained critical reflection. Reading avant-garde women's poetry requires multiple ways of deciphering; it demands that we assume the role of Loy's 'cerebral forager', willing to plumb and excavate, explore and examine, to plunge into the text's fissures and crevices for glimpses, echoes, and associations which we might bring to the surface and use to illuminate the text, and other texts. It also requires that we remain open to each poem's web of indeterminacy and polyvalence, its open-ended tangle of interpretative possibilities, and that we are willing to continuously revise patterns of meaning, and venture only tentative interpretations: as Malcolm Bowie suggests, 'The frame of mind essential to the reader of much modern poetry is that of an experimentalist for whom speculation and hypothesis proceed continuously, *sine die*, and for whom certainty is the remotest and least practical of goals.'[406]

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[405] Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 24.
[406] Bowie, p. 4.

But, for the reader daring and persistent enough to probe and forage among the experimental words of the avant-garde's women writers, the poetic text is richly rewarding. Like the space of the pictorial collage, the avant-garde poem is a liberating space of potentiality, where meaning remains in process continuously. It is an open semiotic space in which the reader can participate in the text's meaning, filling the lacunae, discovering associations, and bringing their own ideas and experiences to bear on the text. As Barthes argues, 'The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed […]; a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination.'[407] It is in the process of reading that the text comes to life, as the reader brings imagery, associations, and potential meanings to the surface. This process is, in a sense, mutually fulfilling, for as the reader draws out latent meanings from the text, the text in turn sparks new possibilities for associations and interpretations. Like the flashes of Arnauld's projector, displaying a fleeting succession of images, the words and images of the poems examined here are 'springboards' for the reader's imagination to take flight from.[408] Loy's 'human cylinders' revolving in dust, gurgling beast, and boy with a tarnished wing; Arnauld's parading atoms, sinking hills, and 'horoscope in tumblers'; Dismorr's blood-thirsty machine-being and 'gesticulating dust'; Penrose's 'stem of prostrated silk', beast dragging dreams through nostrils, and 'gold splitting sickle' – all are prompts to spark our imaginations, to inspire us to embark on an adventurous voyage into the vast landscapes of the imaginary. Furthermore, these texts stand as a permanent invitation to further reading – a standing invitation to delve between the layers of the text. These texts will continue to resist totalizing interpretations: we will never be able to cement the fissures, piece together the drifting fragments, or settle on fixed, all-encompassing interpretations – and nor should we seek to. There remain further discoveries to be made, additional associations to be revealed, and a myriad more potential meanings to be considered, perhaps indefinitely. This study insists on continued listening, attentive reading, and limitless exploration of the unique voices of the avant-garde's ambitious and adventurous women wordsmiths.

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[407] Barthes, p. 148.
[408] Breton, 'Manifesto of Surrealism' (1924), p. 52.

## Appendix: Poems

## Poems by Céline Arnauld

**'The Wood-Gnawers'**

Close by the anguish
the crazed mosquitos
Around the lightbulb the bird's death
In the atmosphere the atoms in cheap finery
flying away with the rain
dragging harmonic moldings
in a novice parade
While in Mendoza's country
the mandoras chase the wooden horses
across the fields
and the great wheels are pushed
by elephants
At the Collège de France
They fall asleep on the benches

Me I only know how to curse
and ramble on against hypotheses . . . [409]

[409] Arnauld, 'The Wood-Gnawers', trans. by Willard Bohn, in *The Dada Market: An Anthology of Poetry* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), p. 17.

**'Les Ronge-Bois'**

Tout près de l'angoisse
les moustiques en folie
Autour de l'ampoule la mort de l'oiseau
Dans l'atmosphère les atomes en oripeaux
s'envolant avec la pluie
trainent dans une parade novice
des moulures harmoniques
Tandis qu'au pays de Mendoza
les mandores chassent les chevaux de bois
à travers champs
et les grandes roues sont poussées
par des éléphants
Au Collège de France
Ils s'endorment sur les bancs

Moi je ne sais rien que maudire
et divaguer contre l'hypothèse. . .[410]

[410] Arnauld, 'Les Ronge-Bois', *Projecteur*, no. 1 (Paris, 21 May 1920) [unpaginated].

**‘The Senseless’**

Flowered terraces
at the Pavilion of morbid hearts

Hampered gestures
fixed eyes
a circular rhythm
that escapes words

A poem in a sling
the wound that smiles
In the sand the hills sink
and the sea swallows the sky

The magnetic passions nick themselves
and a sigh yawns in the mirror

Then
the rosettes burned at nightfall
the hills climbed the staircase

of clouds
and the fairies made peace
between the sun and the moon

Mysteriously the three wise men
drag a flowered box
towards the lunar terraces

In the heart of the church
a light and a sigh
then silence
and nothingness…

How to obscure at last
the window of my heart
Sky in bursts
explosions of laughter

The organ and the rosette pray
at the Pavilion of morbid hearts[411]

[411] Arnauld, 'The Senseless,' trans. by Katherine Brook and Lauren Faro [unpublished].

**‘Les Insensés’**

Des guinguettes fleuries
au Pavillon des cœurs morbides

Des gestes entravés
des yeux fixes
un rythme circulaire
qui s’échappe des mots

Un poème en écharpe
la blessure qui sourit
Dans le sable les collines s’enfoncent
et la mer avale le ciel

Les passions magnétiques s’ébrèchent
et un soupir bâille dans le miroir

Alors
les rosaces brûlèrent à la tombée du soir
les collines montèrent sur l’escalier
des nuages
et les fées firent la paix
entre le soleil et la lune

Mystérieusement les trois mages
traînent une boîte fleurie
vers les guinguettes lunaires

Au cœur de l’église
une lumière et un soupir
puis le silence
et le vide…

Comment voiler enfin
la fenêtre de mon cœur
Ciel en éclats
explosions de rire

L'orgue et la rosace prient
au Pavillon des cœurs morbides[412]

[412] Arnauld, 'Les Insensés', in *Œuvres completes: Tome I – Céline Arnauld*, ed. by Victor Martin-Schmets (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), pp. 82-83.

**'Luna Park'**

Sinister display of that optical mirror
stuck on my shoulder
photophore horoscope of bad days
tattoo of my enemies
submerged at the bottom of sad reservoirs
crystallised by rapid lightning

Lay hands stretch out immoderately
to grasp the flower
barge of rumours on the ocean
dreamers' bagpipes

In their fort the snails
turn the wheel of the universe

But the spontaneity of impressions
in life…
It is the hydra sunk
on the unrivalled twaddle of racecourses
godsend of mirrors in Palaces

In Luna Park one juggles
with hearts of crystal
The horoscope in tumblers
listens to the mime artists speak…

Do not distrust me
I am just the ephemeral flash
of the projector
dawn serenade with a megaphone[413]

[413] Arnauld, 'Luna Park', trans. by Lauren Faro [unpublished].

**'Luna Park'**

Sinistre étalage de cette glace optique
plaquée sur mon épaule
photophore horoscope des mauvais jours
tatouage de mes ennemis
submerges au fond des tristes réservoirs
cristallisés par des éclairs fuyants

Mes mains s'allongent démesurément
pour saisir la fleur
péniche en rumeurs sur l'océan
cornemuse de rêveurs

Dans leur fort les escargots
tournent la roue de l'Universe

Mais la spontanéité des sentiments
dans la vie…
C'est l'hydre sombre
sur l'unique sornette des turfs
aubaine des glaces dans les Palaces

Au Luna Park on jongle
avec les cœurs en cristal
L'horoscope en gobelets
écoute parler les mimes…

Ne vous méfiez pas de moi
je suis que le reflet éphèmère
du projecteur
aubade à porte-voix[414]

[414] Arnauld, 'Luna Park', *Projecteur*, no. 1 (Paris: Au Sans Pareil, 1920).

**Poems by Mina Loy**

**'Human Cylinders'**

The human cylinders
Revolving in the enervating dust
That wraps each closer in the mystery
Of singularity
Among the litter of a sunless afternoon
Having eaten without tasting
Talked without communion
And at least two of us
Loved a very little
Without seeking
To know if our two miseries
In the lucid rush-together of automatons
Could form one opulent well-being

Simplifications of men
In the enervating dusk
Your indistinctness
Serves me the core of the kernel of you
When in the frenzied reaching-out of intellect to intellect
Leaning brow to brow communicative
Over the abyss of the potential
Concordance of respiration
Shames
Absence of corresponding between the verbal sensory
And reciprocity of conception
And expression
Where each extrudes beyond the tangible
One thin pale trail of speculation
From among us we have sent out
Into the enervating dusk

One little whining beast
Whose longing
Is to slink back to antediluvian burrow
And one elastic tentacle of intuition
To quiver among the stars

The impartiality of the absolute
Routs the polemic
Or which of us
Would not
Receiving the holy-ghost
Catch it and caging
Lose it
Or in the problematic
Destroy the Universe
With a solution.[415]

[415] Mina Loy, 'Human Cylinders', in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 40-41.

**'Parturition'**

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

The business of the bland sun
Has no affair with me
In my congested cosmos of agony
From which there is no escape
On infinitely prolonged nerve-vibrations
Or in contraction
To the pin-point nucleus of being

Locate an irritation without
It is within
Within
It is without
The sensitized area
Is identical with the extensity
Of intension

I am the false quantity
In the harmony of physiological potentiality
To which
Gaining self-control
I should be consonant
In time

Pain is no stronger than the resisting force
Pain calls up in me
The struggle is equal

The open window is full of a voice

A fashionable portrait-painter
Running up-stairs to a woman's apartment
Sings
"All the girls are tid'ly did'ly
All the girls are nice
Whether they wear their hair in curls
Or–"
At the back of the thoughts to which I permit crystallization
The conception Brute
Why?
The irresponsibility of the male
Leaves woman her superior Inferiority
He is running up-stairs

I am climbing a distorted mountain of agony
Incidentally with the exhaustion of control
I reach the summit
And gradually subside into anticipation of
Repose
Which never comes
For another mountain is growing up
Which goaded by the unavoidable
I must traverse
Traversing myself

Something in the delirium of night-hours
Confuses while intensifying sensibility
Blurring spatial contours
So aiding elusion of the circumscribed
That the gurgling of a crucified wild beast
Comes from so far away
And the foam on the stretched muscles of a mouth
Is no part of myself

There is a climax in sensibility
When pain surpassing itself
Becomes Exotic

And the ego succeeds in unifying the positive and negative
poles of sensation
Uniting the opposing and resisting forces
In lascivious revelation

Relaxation
Negation of myself as a unit
Vacuum interlude
I should have been emptied of life
Giving life
For consciousness in crises races
Through the subliminal deposits of evolutionary processes
Have I not
Somewhere
Scrutinized
A dead white feathered moth
Laying eggs?
A moment
Being realization
Can
Vitalized by cosmic initiation
Furnish an adequate apology
For the objective
Agglomeration of activities
Of a life.
LIFE
A leap with nature
Into the essence
Of unpredicted Maternity

Against my thigh
Touch infinitesimal motion
Scarcely perceptible
Undulation
Warmth moisture
Stir of incipient life
Precipitating into me
The contents of the universe

Mother I am
Identical
With infinite Maternity
Indivisible
Acutely
I am absorbed
Into
The was—is—ever—shall—be
Of cosmic reproductivity

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 next morning
Each woman-of-the-people
Tip-toeing the red pile of the carpet
Doing hushed service
Each woman-of-the-people
Wearing a halo
A ludicrous little halo
Of which she is sublimely unaware

I once heard in a church
—Man and woman God made them—
Thank God.[416]

[416] Loy, 'Parturition', in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 4-8.

**'Songs to Joannes'**

**I**

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

I would  an  eye in a Bengal light
Eternity in a sky-rocket
Constellations in an ocean
Whose rivers run no fresher
Than a trickle of saliva

These  are suspect places

I must live in my lantern
Trimming subliminal flicker
Virginal  to the bellows
Of Experience
Coloured  glass

**II**

The skin-sack
In which a wanton duality
Packed
All the completion of my infructuous impulses
Something the shape of a man
To the casual vulgarity of the merely observant

More of a clock-work mechanism

Running down against time
To which I am not paced
        My finger-tips are numb from fretting your hair
A God's door-mat
                On the threshold of your mind

**III**

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

We might have given birth to a butterfly
With the daily news
Printed in blood on its wings

**IV**

Once in a mezzanino
The starry ceiling
Vaulted an unimaginable family
Bird-like abortions
With human throats
And Wisdom's eyes
Who wore lamp-shade red dresses
And woolen[417] hair

One bore a baby
In a padded porte-enfant
Tied with a sarsenet ribbon
To her goose's wings

[417] Sic.

But for the abominable shadows
I would have lived
Among their fearful furniture
To teach them to tell me their secrets
Before I guessed
—Sweeping the brood clean out

**V**

Midnight empties the street
Of all but us
Three
I am undecided which way back
To the left a boy
—One wing has been washed in the rain
The other will never be clean any more—
Pulling door-bells to remind
Those that are snug
To the right a haloed ascetic
Threading houses
Probes wounds for souls
—The poor can't wash in hot water—
And I don't know which turning to take
Since you got home to yourself—first

**VI**

I know the Wire-Puller intimately
And if it were not for the people
On whom you keep one eye
You could look straight at me
And Time would be set back

**VII**

My pair of feet
Smack the flag-stones
That are something left over from your walking
The wind stuffs the scum of the white street
Into my lungs and my nostrils
Exhilarated birds
Prolonging flight into the night
Never reaching — — — — — — —

**VIII**

I am the jealous store-house of the candle-ends
That lit your adolescent learning
— — — — — — — — — — —
Behind God's eyes
There might
Be other lights

**IX**

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

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

**X**

Shuttle-cock and battle-door
A little pink-love
And feathers are strewn

**XI**

Dear one  at your mercy
Our Universe
Is only
A colorless onion
You derobe
Sheath by sheath
  Remaining
A disheartening odour
About your nervy hands

**XII**

Voices break on the confines of passion
Desire  Suspicion  Man  Woman
Solve in the humid carnage

Flesh from flesh
Draws the inseparable delight
Kissing at gasps  to catch it

Is it true
That I have set you apart
Inviolate in an utter crystallization
Of all  the jolting of the crowd
Taught me willingly to live to share

Or are you
Only the other half
Of an ego's necessity
Scourging pride with compassion
To the shallow sound of dissonance
And boom of escaping breath

**XIII**

Come to me  There is something
I have got to tell you  and I can't tell
Something taking shape
Something that has a new name
A new dimension
A new use
A new illusion

It is ambient  And it is in your eyes
Something shiny  Something only for you
Something that I must not see

It is in my ears  Something very resonant
Something that you must not hear
Something only for me

Let us be very jealous
Very suspicious
Very conservative
Very cruel
Or we might make an end of the jostling of aspirations
Disorb inviolate egos

Where two or three are welded together
They shall become god
---
Oh that's right
Keep away from me  Please give me a push
Don't let me understand you  Don't realise me
Or we might tumble together
Depersonalized
Identical

Into the terrific Nirvana
Me you — you — me

**XIV**

Today
Everlasting passing apparent imperceptible
To you
I bring the nascent virginity of
—Myself for the moment
No love or the other thing
Only the impact of lighted bodies
Knocking sparks off each other
In chaos

**XV**

Seldom Trying for Love
Fantasy dealt them out as gods
Two or three men looked only human

But you alone
Superhuman apparently
I had to be caught in the weak eddy
Of your drivelling humanity
To love you most

**XVI**

We might have lived together
In the lights of the Arno
Or gone apple stealing under the sea
Or played
Hide and seek in love and cob-webs
And a lullaby on a tin-pan

And talked till there were no more tongues
To talk with
And never have known any better

**XVII**

I don't care
Where the legs of the legs of the furniture are walking to
Or what is hidden in the shadows they stride
Or what would look at me
If the shutters were not shut
Red a warm colour on the battle-field
Heavy on my knees as a counterpane
Count counter
I counted the fringe of the towel
Till two tassels clinging together
Let the square room fall away
From a round vacuum
Dilating with my breath

**XVIII**

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

**XIX**

Nothing so conserving
As cool cleaving
Note of the Q H U
Clear carving

Breath-giving
Pollen smelling
Space

White telling
Of slaking
Drinkable
Through fingers
Running water
Grass haulms
Grow to
Leading astray
Of fireflies
Aerial Quadrille
Bouncing
Off one another
Again conjoining
In recaptured pulses
Of light

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

**XX**

Let Joy go solace-winged
To flutter whom she may concern

**XXI**

I store up nights against you
Heavy with shut-flower's nightmares
— — — — — — — — — — — —
Stack noons
Curled to the solitaire
Core of the
Sun

**XXII**

Green things grow
Salads
For the cerebral
Forager's revival
Upon bossed bellies
Of mountains
Rolling in the sun
And flowered flummery
Breaks
To my silly shoes

In ways without you
I go
Gracelessly
As things go

**XXIII**

Laughter in solution
Stars in a stare
Irredeemable pledges
Of pubescent consummations
Rot
To the recurrent moon

Bleach
To the pure white
Wickedness of pain

**XXIV**

The procreative truth of Me
Petered out
In pestilent
Tear drops
Little lusts and lucidities
And prayerful lies
Muddled with the heinous acerbity
Of your street-corner smile

**XXV**

Licking the Arno
The little rosy
Tongue of Dawn
Interferes with our eyelashes
— — — — — — — — — —
We twiddle to it
Round and round
Faster
And turn into machines

Till the sun
Subsides in shining
Melts some of us
Into abysmal pigeon-holes
Passion has bored
In warmth

Some few of us

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

**XXVI**

Shedding our petty pruderies
From slit eyes

We sidle up
To Nature
— — — that irate pornographist

**XXVII**

Nucleus  Nothing
Inconceivable concept
Insentient repose
The hands of races
Drop off from
Immodifiable plastic

The contents
Of our ephemeral conjunction
In aloofness from Much
Flowed to approachment of — — — —
NOTHING
There was a man and a woman
In the way
While the Irresolvable
Rubbed with our daily deaths
Impossible eyes

**XXVIII**

The steps go up for ever

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

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

Unthinkable  that white over there
— — — Is smoke from your house

**XXIX**

Evolution  fall foul of
Sexual equality
Prettily miscalculate
Similitude

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

Give them some way of braying brassily
For caressive calling
Or to homophonous hiccoughs
Transpose the laugh
Let them suppose that tears
Are snowdrops or molasses
Or anything
Than human insufficiencies
Begging dorsal vertebrae

Let meeting be the turning
To the antipodean
And Form  a blurr
Anything
Than seduce them
To the one
As simple satisfaction
For the other

Let them clash together
From their incognitoes
In seismic orgasm

For far further
Differentiation
Rather than watch

Own-self distortion
Wince in the alien ego

**XXX**

In some
Prenatal plagiarism
Fœtal buffoons
Caught tricks
— — — — —

From archetypal pantomime
Stringing emotions
Looped aloft
— — — —

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

What guaranty
For the proto-form
We fumble
Our souvenir ethics to
— — — — — — — —

**XXXI**

Crucifixion
Of a busy-body
Longing to interfere so
With the intimacies
Of your insolent isolation

Crucifixion
Of an illegal ego's
Eclosion
On your equilibrium
Caryatid  of an idea

Crucifixion
Wracked arms
Index extremities
In vacuum
To the unbroken fall

**XXXII**

The moon is cold
Joannes
Where the Mediterranean— — — — — — — —

**XXXIII**

The prig of passion — — — —
To your professorial paucity

Proto-plasm was raving mad
Evolving us — — —

**XXXIV**

Love — — — the preeminent litterateur[418]

[418] Loy, 'Songs to Joannes', in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, ed. by Roger Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), pp. 51-68.

## Poems by Valentine Penrose

### ‘The heart of all evenings’

The heart of all evenings the water bird is close by water
helpless butterfly singing only to hear himself
helpless butterfly delicate the woman
delicate her hands laid unaware
upon the playthings of flame

Who ascends who ascends
in the Himalayas
the silken ladder
newly flung
glittered in the cave

The ladder the axe the fire the spark
all shattered into deepest laughter
the primal flower did dance
another woman she is gone
the cargoes are set adrift.
Farewell farewell votive offering of monsoon beasts
the rat squealing black and the eyes of lanterns
and you enchantress nibbling
blades of crystal grass in a faraway shade goodbye
the feet of clay did not move far under your statues
the breasts icy beyond the park. Remember then that wind
sullen and beyond measure scorning the palms.

I did sleep in a bed
of bamboos and of nests
when the hibernal sun
splits the milkglass in two.

If I do not issue into the gold then I shall die
that beast dragging my dreams by the nostrils
there the hospital and there now the chimes
and if I must submit to her pelt striated by rains
farewell I am at the estuaries of my rivers.
In the mire of Bengal with the sweet rosebush names
and of coroma[n]dels sniffed-out by mosquitoes
I have not unleashed that ultimate barque
last royal banner and treasure both dying

Haughty haughty and dense
following the flaring globe
rolling on landings
in hotels of the dream.
There are such dances
under the pastry moon
for the girl alone way over the rooftops
the queen is toiling.

You shall go dance in Malabar
with copper cheeks
with the sun so easy
with them all
alone no more with the mosquito
the new butterflies shall be given a secure ancestry
in the fist the lights of time are tendered.

Heart of all evenings helpless butterfly water bird close by water
helpless butterfly singing only to hear himself.[419]

[419] Penrose, 'The heart of all evenings', in *Poems and Narrations*, trans. by Roy Edwards (Manchester: Carcanet Press & Elephant Trust, 1977), pp. 40-43.

**‘Le cœur de tous les soirs’**

Le cœur de tous les soirs l’oiseau d’eau est près de l’eau
faible papillon chante pour s’entendre
faible papillon petite la femme
petites ses mains posées comme ignorante
sur les jouets de la flamme

Qui monte et qui monte
aux himalayas
l’échelle de soie
à nouveau sortie
brillait dans la cave

L’échelle la hache le feu l’étincelle
tout a éclaté de rire de plus belle
la première fleur a dansé
une autre dame elle est partie
les navires sont détachés.
Adieu adieu le vœu des bêtes de mousson
le rat qui piaule noir et les yeux de lanternes
et toi magicienne qui mâche
des brins de cristal herbe à l’ombre loin au revoir
les pieds d’argile n’avançaient pas sous tes statues
les seins froids hors du parc. Souviens-toi de ce vent
boudeur et dédaignant hors mesure les palmes.

J’ai dormi dans un lit
de bambous et de nids
quand le soleil d’hiver
fend en deux l’opaline.

Si je n’en sors pas dans l’or j’en mourrai
cette bête tenant mes rêves aux narines

la voilà d'hôpital et la voilà de cloches
et si je dois subir sa peau striée de pluie
adieu je suis à l'extrémité de mes fleuves.
Dans la boue du bengale aux doux noms de rosiers
et des coromandels flairés par les moustiques
je n'ai pas décoché cet ultime navire
le dernier pavillon et le trésor expirent

Fière fière et dense
suis la boule en flammes
qui court les étages
des hôtels du rêve.
Il y a des danses
de pâte et de lune
pour la fille seule par-dessus les toits
la reine travaille

Tu iras danser au Malabar
avec des joues de cuivre
avec le soleil aisé
avec du monde
plus seule avec le moustique
les papillons nouveaux seront donnés de race sûre
sur le poing les lumières du temps offertes.

Cœur de tous les soirs faible papillon oiseau d'eau près de l'eau
faible papillon chante pour s'entendre.[420]

[420] Penrose, 'Le cœur de tous les soirs', in *Poems and Narrations*, trans. by Roy Edwards (Manchester: Carcanet Press & Elephant Trust, 1977), pp. 40-43. First published in Penrose, *Poèmes* (Paris: GLM, 1937).

**‘Head of my body’**

Head of my body
the sun is shining
It is the day of the risen stone
it is the day to pass among flowers
and two children tumbling in ecstasy all the time
Our fires in the good wind
let god guard us in the dust and near to the mango.

The treasure’s spirit the gold the thief is in the tree
farewell passerby
farewell for the night my beloved
the inn of white fragrance shall keep me safe
You are far my head from festive parasols
my stem of prostrated silk
and yet your bed full with blue flax remains between branches
That was another time the darlings the doubles
o my lovely pool
thousand white butterflies blazing
gone for a reason that will suffice
over the star’s shoulder
not wide long the furrow
she was at the end
with a field cricket.

Now the monsoon wind does not play the ascetic
and the spider hanging the most brightly of his days
crowned with oil and gold the chariot drawn by serpents and stones
this is my colour
looking onto life.

Moon between the horns
in Bombay the harbour in Bombay the flies

god between the horns
I bear this burden

It is a truth in the dove's beak
the fairy tree is in the forehead remains there
noble being will no longer tremble with love
the horse-hide will tremble near the mistletoe.

Takes the flower smiles throws it
why serve this sun
the road of return is sinuous and black
it receives the contrary of having loved
the contrary of having woven
it receives the shark's tail
Head turned away takes kisses
another heart more true draws you
there where horizons fall
where low-down the horses of earth are waiting
farewell my flower and my forest.

All is lost garden overcome by shadow
without birds without odours
head of my body my eyes the sun is shining.[421]

[421] Penrose, 'Head of my body', trans. by Lauren Faro [unpublished]. This translation is based on the translation by Edwards in Penrose, *Poems and Narrations*, trans. by Roy Edwards (Manchester: Carcanet Press & Elephant Trust, 1977), pp. 44-47.

**‘Tête de mon corps’**

Tête de mon corps
il fait soleil
C’est le jour de la pierre levée
c’est le jour de passer entre les fleurs
et deux enfants tombant d’extase tout le temps
Nos feux dans le bon vent
que dieu nous garde dans la poussière et près de la mangue.

L’esprit du trésor l’or le voleur est dans l’arbre
adieu passant
adieu pour la nuit mon aimée
l’auberge de la senteur blanche me gardera
Vous êtes loin ma tête d’ombrelles de fête
ma tige de soie prosternée
et cependant ton lit plein de lin bleu restait aux branches
C’etait autre fois les jolies les doubles
o mon bel étang
mille papillons blancs brûlant
sortaient de raison suffisante
par-dessus l’épaule d’étoile
pas large long le sillon
elle était au bout
avec un grillon.

Maintenant le vent de mousson qui ne fait pas l’ascète
et l’araignée pendant le plus clair de son temps
couronne d’huile et d’or le char tiré par les serpents et par les pierres
c’est ma couleur
de voir sur la vié.

La lune entre les cornes
à bombay de port à bombay de mouches

dieu entre les cornes
j'ai ce poids sur moi

C'est une vérité dans le bec de la colombe
l'arbre des fées est dans le front y restera
haute vivante ne tremblera plus d'amour
peau de cheval près du gui tremblera.

Prend la fleur sourit la jette
à quoi servait ce soleil
le côté du retour est gauche et noir
il reçoit le contraire d'avoir aimé
le contraire d'avoir tissé
il reçoit le queue de requin
Tête tournée prend les baisers
un autre coeur plus vrai te tire
là où tombent les horizons
où bas les chevaux de terre attendent
adieu ma fleur et ma forêt.

Tout perdu jardin gagné d'ombre
sans oiseaux sans parfums
tête de mon corps mes yeux il fait soleil.[422]

[422] Penrose, 'Tête de mon corps', in *Poems and Narrations*, trans. by Roy Edwards (Manchester: Carcanet Press & Elephant Trust, 1977), pp. 44-45. First published in Penrose, *Poèmes* (Paris: GLM, 1937).

**‘To a Woman to a Path’**

This body here feminine that hangs like a distant drop
toward the other here this time feminine
where the hair equal across the smile
    wild shuttle
    angular bones
who will cross the plains with her hips
who will gather the straw not swathes it will sleep in barns
alone for the herbs
of whom the friend would never worry although green.
By fate by grain by way by satin
blades of leaves her flat eyes nails in the wood
to the forest all her teeth
rock soft skull of ferns
so big I have drawn her forth this born-one
like a herd of water hung down the cliffs
on the steppes when one believed her at the strawberries
with wild ribbons instead of asleep
on the total side green and red.

The beauty the chestnut lady
my brown mouse how far away you are under the bushes.

Caught by breasts by hands and by hair
never yielded herself whole
so mad of lichens lost
like a needle in moss
by all the ends urgent false
I have turned you you have woven me

Your cavern mattered as the mountains
where the slate makes its path
where it rains it shines the devil beats his daughters

where the gold splitting sickle dwells and hisses
Wounded indifferent lets her head cry
hands in tasks
and body rejected so soft although headless
caressed by her hands for other horizons.

Velvet song in the breastplate
herself stifled for a joke
tiny at the muzzles of the mountains was playing with the donkeys
At present let sleep on the arms of snow
at the end of time there you lie outstretched
if I think of you hot of desert length
tress to remake under the palms
forest on your fair days
elastic like the dream fox
hard like your fist
restored to your truest expression
    of being all

Great face of rock and grass
revealed so black that I no longer fear
with a wink seeing you you have lifted me from the well
fathomless from the lake where the sun was the same
same the black oak of winter's furniture
the dark corners of the house left at the crossroads
the arrows were false
blue with poison lied.
Bridge of earth
come to be broken
in the middle where they cross
Tower of earth where your king does not care for you
where the herd is swallowed up
whilst from out of its yellow skin obscure a road

wide like a woman feet foremost
warming itself at the world's end
the most uncertain
without velvet paws
leading to the panthers
whilst this path
without men's heads
carried itself like a head.

On a bank soft and russet the chamomile
in front of the drawing room full of maiden love
in the west of chestnut cup for chestnuts
where the cut wood shines alive lace like
the mule in the forest rings like a colony
the sweet lady for ever in the dahlia garden
    masked with mauve
    plant salved
your rabbit teeth you can do no more

On an Indian air
holding my apron
gathered my severed heads
Saint Germaine of Europe
upright in the little milkwort.
Like tiles rained from the north
like cow kisses everywhere
like a rosary around the neck
    now I am all
    now I am ended
    now I am knotted
    now I am joined
    necks severed I dance like a bird
the fountain out from the skull

Gambling with the sunbeams
it rolls at will this great furnished heart on the road
sweet like nothing
bordered with empty molds
frigate of the sun
on this one retrieved
whose marrow once bow-bent on the ceiling with its shadow augured
    the feastings of the white weasels
    of ecstasy.[423]

[423] Valentine Penrose, 'To a Woman to a Path', translated from the French by Roland and Valentine Penrose, in *Surrealist Women: An International Anthology*, ed. by Penelope Rosemont (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), pp. 86-88. Originally published in *Contemporary Poetry and Prose*, no. 7 (November 1936), 131-133.

**Poems by Jessica Dismorr**

**'Monologue'**

My niche in nonentity still grins –
I lay knees, elbows pinioned, my sleep mutterings blunted against a wall.
Pushing my hard head through the hole of birth
I squeezed out with intact body.
I ache all over, but acrobatic, I undertake the feat of existence.
Details of equipment delight me.
I admire my arrogant spiked tresses, the disposition of my perpetually foreshortened limbs,
Also the new machinery that wields the chains of muscles fitted beneath my close coat of skin.
On a pivot of contentment my balanced body moves slowly.
Inquisitiveness, a butterfly, escapes.
It spins with drunken invitation. I poke my fingers into the middles of big succulent flowers.
My fingers are fortunately tipped with horn.
Tentacles of my senses, subtle and far-reaching, drop spoils into the vast sack of my greed.
Stretched ears projecting from my brain are gongs struck by vigorous and brutal fists of air.
Into scooped nets of nostrils glide slippery and salt scents, I swallow slowly with gasps.
In pursuit of shapes my eyes dilate and bulge. Finest instruments of touch they refuse to blink their pressure of objects.
They dismember live anatomies innocently.
They run around the polished rims of rivers.
With risk they press against the cut edges of rocks and pricking pinnacles.
Pampered appetites and curiosities become blood-drops, their hot mouths yell war.
Sick opponents dodging behind silence, echo alone shrills an equivalent threat.

Obsessions rear their heads.  I hammer their faces into discs.
Striped malignities spring upon me, and tattoo with incisions of wild claws.
Speeded with whips of hurt, I hurry towards ultimate success.
I stoop to lick the bright cups of pain and drop out of activity.
I lie a slack bag of skin.  My nose hangs over the abyss of exhaustion,
        my loosened tongue laps sleep as from a bowl of milk.[424]

[424] Jessica Dismorr, 'Monologue', *Blast*, no. 2, (July, 1915), p. 65.

**'Matinée'**

The Croisette trembles in the violent matutinal light. Shapes quicken and
pass: the day moves. My nerves spring to their task of
acquisitiveness.
The secret of my success is a knowledge of the limitedness of time.
Economy is scientific. I understand the best outlay of attention.
Within this crazy shell an efficient machinery mints satisfactions.
Your pity is a systematic mistake. I may yet grow arrogant on
the wastage of other lives. The holes of my sack spill treasure.
Who but I should be accessible to the naked pressure of things?
Between me and apprehension no passions draw their provoking
dissimulative folds.
I have not clouded heaven with the incense of personal motive.
Myself and the universe are two entities. Those unique terms
admit the possibility of clean intercourse.
All liaisons smell of an inferior social grade; but alliance
can dispense with fusion and touch.
I treat with respect the sparkling and gesticulating dust that
confronts me: of it are compounded fruits and diamonds,
superb adolescents, fine manners.
This pigment disposed by the ultimate vibrations of force paints
the universe in a contemporary mode.
I am glad that it is up-to-date and ephemeral, that I am
to be diverted by a succession of fantasies.
The static cannot claim my approval. I live in the act of
departure. Eternity is for those who can dispose of
an amplitude of time.
Pattern is enough. I pray you do not mention the soul.
Give me detail, and the ardent ceremonial of commonplaces that
means nothing.
Oh, the ennui of inconceivable space! My travelling spirit
will taste too soon of emptiness.
I thrill to the microscopic. I plunder the close-packed cells

and burrows of life.
The local has always the richness of a brocade: it is worth
while to examine the design.
I spell happiness out of dots and dashes: a ray, a tone, the
insignificance of a dangling leaf.
Provided it have a factual existence the least atom will
suffice my need.
But I cannot stomach shadows. It is certain that the physical
round world would fit my mouth like a lollipop.
You ask: To what end this petty and ephemeral busyness?
this last push of human sensation?
Is one then a neophyte in philosophy, demanding reasons
and results?
I proclaim life to the end a piece of artistry, essentially
idle and exquisite.
The trinkets stored within my coffin will outlast my dust.[425]

[425] Dismorr, 'Matinée', *Poems* (1918), John Henry Bradley Storrs papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution. Also published as 'Matinee', in *The Little Review*, Vol. 4, No. 11, (March 1918), pp. 31-32.

**'Prelude'**

This is the desired moment. Now activities crowd upon me. Initiations
twist themselves into the shapes of words.
My impulse stirs the fragments of which earth is composed: there
is a movement towards the classic and complete.
I call the universe to order. The irregularity of phenomena is
no longer supportable.
These individuals must surrender their angularities of character
and fit themselves with complacency into the shape of music.
Life and experience organize a last rebellion.
There is a jugglery of atoms, a sudden gymnastic of force.
My antagonists, you are my predestined material! These are
the pieces of my game:
Dreams, the icy flow of facts, hereditary thirsts stringing
varied existences upon a thread of wire.
Keen, trembling hates, weapons with sure points that prick
invisibility, nostalgias whose veins are flooded with too
rich a dye.
And those, the finest flashes, snapt short and sputtering in
ruin, and the stench that fills up the dark.
Personalities long inviolate, you are appointed instruments without degradation.
(For in secret for ages the immaculate republic sought a
tyrant to be the recipient of its tears).
Resistance is the climax of your beauty. Your moment of
perfection is alone serviceable.
What metamorphosis awaits beyond the limits of surrender?
You shall be driven into what cold moulds of perfected form?[426]

[426] Jessica Dismorr, 'Prelude', *Poems* (1918), John Henry Bradley Storrs papers, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

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