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匱乏詩學：

曼娜洛伊包厘街詩中的翻新力

The logo of National Taiwan Normal University is a circular emblem with a stylized design. It features a central character '師' (Shi) in a yellow circle, surrounded by a purple and white geometric pattern. The text 'Poetics of Poverty:' is overlaid on the logo.

Poetics of Poverty:

Fashionability in Mina Loy's Bowery Poems

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## 摘要

本論文以旻娜洛伊的包厘街詩為焦點來彰顯貫穿在其晚期作品中的匱乏詩學。學術論述已在洛伊早期詩作中針對女性主體與語言創新上的翻新著墨許多，但洛伊在晚期詩作中轉向包厘街上的貧困個體，這與整體的創作母題相去甚遠，也因而使這階段的作品失去學術興趣與展現潛值的平臺。有鑑於此，本論文檢視洛伊包厘街詩中的邊緣個體以展示匱乏詩學為一股協商理解現代性替代路徑的翻新力。



關鍵字：翻新力、匱乏詩學、包厘街、紀錄文化、原創副本、時尚受害者、百貨公司、幽默、展示櫥窗、十四街

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on Mina Loy's Bowery poetry to call for attention to the poetics of poverty that permeates in her late works. Criticism has spilled much ink on the fashionability female subjectivity and language in Loy's early poetry. Her turn to the destitute individuals in the Bowery departs greatly from her established oeuvre and loses academic interests in her late poetry. Such a loss fails to see the promise within her late works adequately. Therefore, this thesis attends to marginal individuals in Loy's Bowery poetry to demonstrate a poetics of poverty as an elevated form her fashionability that negotiates alternative trajectories in the comprehension of modernity.



Keywords: fashionability, poetics of poverty, documentary culture, Bowery, the Authentic Copy, fashion victim, department store, Surrealist fashion, humour, shop window, Fourteenth Street

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## **Introduction: Making It Fashionable**

Mina Loy's oeuvre is driven by the ability to fashion. From the salon in the terrain of high modernism to the slum on the margin of society, Loy demonstrates a spectrum not merely in subject matter but also characters of creativity in poetry. The thesis attends to the states of fashionability at play in her Bowery poems to crystalize a poetics of poverty, a creative economy that sketches and negotiates alternative trajectories in the comprehension of modernity. The scope of discussion concentrates on marginal individuals, including destitute subjects in the Bowery, an aged woman in front of a department store, and female labor and consumers on Fourteenth Street in Loy's late poetry. It works to foreground the potential of a poetics of poverty to refurbish marginality into a critical device to reassess the coordinates that contribute to an official representation and politics of modernity. Under this vein, the thesis aims to chart the making of such a poetic in order to not merely examine its scheme to negotiate both the fashion and fashioning of a rational subject but also underline the poverty of the official script of modernity.

### **Review of the Literature**

In "Mina Loy, Fashion, and the Avant-Garde," Susan Dunn contends that Loy's oeuvre is "inhabited by characters in various states of fashionability" (443). Fashionability, or the ability to fashion, permeates the criticisms on Loy. Looking into the making of persona, critics delineate her undertakings in different movements to illustrate the intricacy in her fashioning of self. Such an array of experience is a portal to study and contextualize not merely the techniques she employs but also the issues she addresses in poetry. Dunn's coinage "fashionability" is apparently seminal because multiplicity and variety are at the core of discussions that examine Loy's creative economy in which she reworks and estranges the taken-for-granted to make her materials fashionable. Therefore, attending to the exercise and degree of fashionability sheds lights on the different characters she plays and creates.

Roger Conover describes Loy as “the binarian’s nightmare” (xiii) for her curation of personal image. It encompassed a kaleidoscopic range of achievements in almost every field that made her the modernist ‘it’ girl, a controversial figure to the conservative masses. Controversies arose from the lack of trajectory within the established rubric to comprehend and categorize her as ideologically correct. Yet, this ideological block, or nightmare, made her the most original and radical woman of her generation because the range she exhibited was able to “transform the cultures and social milieus she inhabited” (xiii). Dunn traces Loy’s social engagements in detail and her impacts in “‘Travestied Flesh’: Fashion, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde.”<sup>1</sup> She played multiple roles in different fields, including an artist, a designer, a model and a poet. This spectrum in profession paved the way for her engagements in major movements in the first half of the twentieth century, such as Arts and Crafts movement, dress reform movement, Dada and Futurism. In the Arts and Crafts movement, Loy stressed the value of traditional crafts, such as textile design, to abolish the hierarchy between high and low medium in creation. Following Paul Poiret’s step of altering the woman’s silhouette from the Edwardian ‘S’-shape to that of the lean ‘A’-line in the dress reform movement, she dramatized this alteration in her poem “The Hewn Tree” in juxtaposition with the illustration entitled *Consider Your Grandmother’s Stay* to showcase how fashion worked as a way to free women from social codes. These gestures represent the playfulness and theatricality celebrated in Dadaist performance of the body (269-71). Loy’s participation in these movements demonstrates the capacity of her creativity.

Futurism in particular exerted a profound impact on Loy because it helped her validate her feminist vision and shape her techniques in poetry. In “Futurism, Fashion, and the

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<sup>1</sup> “Dunn’s “Mina Loy, Fashion, and the Avant-Garde” is derived from her chapter “‘Travestied Flesh’: Fashion, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde” in her dissertation *Opposed Aesthetics: Mina Loy, Modernism and the Avant-Garde*. I discuss them separately because of their differences in focus. Dunn coins the term “fashionability” and supplements it with highlights in Loy’s life in the former, but she focuses on charting the lineage of Loy’s social engagement in the latter.

Feminine: Forms of Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy,” Rowan Harris sees her as a “camp reader” (32) of Futurism. Though the Futurists celebrated modernity, they were in fact anxious about the emergence of new feminine identities. Seeing this contradictory position toward the new, Loy inhabited the tenet like a spy to formulate her version of feminist agenda through art and specifically poetry. She asserts selfhood of women in “Lions’ Jaws” and “One O’Clock at Night” to challenge Futurist program. Critical as they are, Loy’s poems still assimilate Futurism technically. In “The Modernist Vision,” Virginia Kouidis points out that Loy developed a pictorial means – collage – to embody the flux of life in poetry. The Futurist collage relies on the association of the mind because it juxtaposes what individuals remember and see without transitions to make different experiences present simultaneously (55). Operating in the same manner, her poetic collage juxtaposes fragments of experience to “create the dynamic complexity of life” (54). In other words, Loy’s participation in Futurism sharpened her feminist vision as well as poetic skill set. What is more, it enabled her to stage a crisis in consciousness through language and steered her toward the avant-garde.

Elizabeth Frost elucidates the fervor and tension within the twentieth-century American avant-garde in the “Introduction” of *The Feminist Avant-Garde in American Poetry*. Frost indicates that innovation is an artistic exercise with “the potential to change the world by inciting a change in consciousness” (xiv). This potential underlined a conjugation between art and society in which the former was able to reshape the latter intellectually. Such an orientation encouraged Tommaso Marinetti and Ezra Pound to engage politics through poetic innovation and establish the male-dominant avant-garde. With political advances of women, the feminist avant-garde emerged to combat essentialist conceptualization of female identity. The feminist avant-gardist instigated a shift in gender rather than social consciousness. Loy puts it into practice through poetry. For instance, in “Crisis in Consciousness: Mina Loy’s

‘Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose,’ Frost shows how Loy uses the masculine tradition of heroic form to cast her doubts of language, identity and gender as a totality. Her poetic strategy “exploits the tradition it critiques” to show that “language is a sign of culture – a potentially determining system, yet one can also be challenged” (31). Frost’s discussion demonstrates Loy’s maneuver to employ yet counter linguistic effects to voice the call for self-determination of women and it foregrounds the subversive nature in her *ars poetica*.

Loy’s poetic techniques fostered in Futurism and the avant-garde indicate an exercise to debase – travesty. Travesty is her critical instrument to address female sexuality. In “The Full of My Freed Voice: Williams and Loy, Feminism and the Feminine,” Linda Kinnahan presents how Loy proclaims and makes female sexuality a subject matter in “Love Songs to Joannes.” The poem speaks volumes of the female erotic. It minimizes the sentimentality in the convention of love poetry by allowing physical eroticism to take over and exhibit a vocabulary that focuses on sexual intercourse. The explicit diction makes the poem sensual, but it does not work solely for the sake of sensuality. Instead, the vocabulary is a medium for self-exploration to investigate how women are culturally and psychologically repressed. Loy intentionally debases love poetry to stage an “interplay between erotic sexuality and gendered authority” (55) to articulate “what woman will tell of herself” (53). It is a non-normative expression an expression of female sexuality and subjectivity. Likewise, in “The Female Self,” Kouidis confirms repressed sexuality as a motif prominent in Loy’s early poetry. The “Feminist Manifesto” stresses the importance for women to develop a complete personality rather than pursue equality to men. To be specific, it portrays women as parasites impeded by the code of virtue to be either mother or mistress with the attempt to discard the fictive value of femininity and virginity imposed by patriarchy. The manifesto compels women to be curious intelligently about the potential in life and to be fully responsible for the making of their own character.

In “Economics and Gender in Mina Loy, Lola Ridge, and Marianne Moore,” Kinnahan probes into female sexuality in Loy’s poetry in terms of economics. The rise of new economy and new woman compelled intellectual venues to reconsider the position of women within the modern economy in the beginning of the twentieth century. This reconsideration contributed to an economic rethinking of gender that undermined the division of gender stressed in “The Economic Man,” a concept that sees women as “dependents who cannot stand on their own, defined only as wives daughters, mothers” while men as independents “who make economic decisions . . . and circulate freely in the market” (Pujol 29).<sup>2</sup> Specifically, she indicates that the rethinking of gender took issues with the economy of consumption and social provisioning that garnered modern ideas of value, work and desire, a prevalent exercise in feminist poetics (144). Loy’s “Virgin Plus Curtains Minus Dots” is a case in point. The poem presents women as subjects trapped in the myth of marriage. Their sense of value is calculated by virginity and dowry to make themselves eligible candidates for the marriage market that evaluates women in monetary terms only and ignores their needs and desire completely. Kinnahan’s discussion reveals how Loy debunks the myth of marriage by showing it as a system of exchange that encoded domesticity, faithful love and femininity to the worth of women.

Fashionability clearly anchors Loy’s studies. Criticism focuses on her capacity to fashion to illustrate a vast array of experiences that encompassed not merely her keen awareness of fashions in major movements from the first half of the twentieth century but also her agile exercise of travesty. It is a maneuver that subverts the acquired techniques and programs within social and cultural milieu. It results in language experimentations as well as sharp-witted commentaries in poetry, a lexicographical prowess that indexes her poetics.

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<sup>2</sup> Michèle Pujol discusses the gender arrangements of economics in “Into the Margin!”, an introduction to *Out of the Margin: Feminist Perspectives on Economics*.

However, such a trademark disappears in Loy's late poetry which demonstrates, to borrow Kuidis' term, a "diminished luster" (106) of the fashionability prevalent in her established oeuvre. The disappearance makes a break with the recognizable index and engenders a body of scholarship that concentrates on female subjectivity within the domestic sphere predominantly in her early works prior to the 1920s.<sup>3</sup>

Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson, in the "Introduction" to *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, indicate that Loy's late works were written to manifest the divine. Her interest in the mystical dimension is a problem to the trajectory in criticism as it departs from the feminist fervor in her early works and breaks with her image as the epitome of modern women in her prime greatly (9).<sup>4</sup> Plausible as it is, such a concern fails to see her fashionability and its promise in the Bowery poems. In her pursuit of mysticism, Loy did not gravitate toward a singular branch of religion. Rather, her spiritual quest inverted categories of religious thoughts. She subverted the conventional opposition between the exoteric and esoteric in the comprehension of the divine to create a discipline where the divine may be known. It was known through the reversal of the secular as broken and the sacred as whole. In her religious discourse, the sacred is a broken thing and manifested in the bodies of social outcasts for they bear witness to how the modern world legitimizes itself. Their own marginality enabled them to realize the ideology that undergirds the official script of progress and rationality. They are the medium through which the knowledge inconsistent with the dominant discourse can be transmitted and by extension known. In other words, Loy's divinity stands for the ability to discern what is revealed and concealed.<sup>5</sup> It is an acute

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<sup>3</sup> For the date of composition, I refer to Marissa Alexandra Januzzi's dissertation '*Reconstru[ing] Scar[s]*': *Mina Loy and the Matter of Modernist Poetics* in which she provided a chronology of Loy's poems with editorial notes.

<sup>4</sup> For a complete account of the motifs in Loy's late poetry, please read Chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> Maeera Shreiber paints an overall picture of the role religion plays in modernism to delineates Loy's pursuit of the divine as well as to justify it as a preparation for her agenda to propose that divine presence lies in the poor. Please read "Divine Women, Fallen Angels: The Late Devotional Poetry on Mina Loy" in *Mina Loy: Woman and the Poet*.

awareness that sees both within and beyond the status quo. More importantly, it is an elevated exercise of fashionability that unpacks the fashioning (i.e. the concealed) of fashion (i.e. the revealed) formulated by increasing complexity of modernity.

Evidently, Loy demonstrates consistent efforts to cultivate her fashionability throughout her oeuvre. Rather than overt sharpness, an air of sophistication takes over her late Bowery poems. Shifting her focus to the oscillation between the divine and forms of poverty, she continues developing multiple facets of fashionability to demonstrate her creative force as an ability to create, a maneuver to transgress, and ultimately an awareness to see the double logic fashion and fashioning. Her Bowery poems attends to marginal individuals, such as social outcasts and aged women, to comment on the status of modernization of America since the 1920s. Loy's trajectory of thoughts at this particular juncture engenders a poetics of poverty that channels her creativity at an even fuller scale to reveal the poverty of the championed discourse of modernity. Criticisms have spilled much ink on Loy's early poetry in relation to female sexuality and language experimentations, but they have failed to tackle her late poetry on poverty and destitute subjects in a well-considered manner. The scope of the current discussion limits itself by fixating on the acknowledged route to understand states of fashionability in Loy's oeuvre. It is an oversight that undervalues her innovation and the potential to fashion entirely. What is more, it overlooks the grand scheme of fashionability integral to Loy's Bowery poetry. To remedy this insufficiency, endeavors to examine Loy's Bowery poetry must mutate and advance to amount to a critique of it. Hence, this thesis seeks to address Loy's Bowery poems to chart the genesis of a poetics of poverty, examine how it works to reassess the legitimacy of modernization, and finally investigate how it negotiates the fashion and fashioning of a rational subject under the official script of modernity.

## **Methodology**

Loy's turn to poverty engenders a poetics derived from destitution that reassesses the

script of progress and rationality in modernity. It is a poetics of poverty that negotiates the acknowledged politics that assigns meanings to aesthetics and subjectivity in its constitution. To put it more precise, it encourages a heightened awareness of the index that garners the vitality of its making – fashion. The grammatical multivalence of fashion as a verb and as a noun is exactly what makes Loy’s creative economy a complex that commands yet deflects critical attention. Her late poetry is a deflection off the common trajectory in subject matter and execution of her literary production. Discrediting this collection of poems fails to acknowledge the essence of fashion on the one hand and underestimates the promise of her poetics on the other. Instead, such a deflection ought to be viewed as an inflection of her fashionability for a new agenda.

Historically speaking, Loy’s fascination with individual brokenness in her Bowery poems at this juncture (i.e. 1942-1949) corresponds to and comments on Franklin Roosevelt’s measures taken to address the national brokenness resulted from the Great Depression in the New Deal (i.e. 1933-1938). Such a chronological linkage and overlap in subject matter exemplify an inspection on brokenness at a microcosmic and macrocosmic level, with Loy’s attention to how social outcasts come to realize and handle the making of their subjectivity and Roosevelt’s extension of governmental responsibilities to minimize the pessimism about the economic atrocities in the 1930s. The failure of large banks in the Midwest, the devastated farmlands in the South, and the financial malpractice in Wall Street unsettled the legitimacy of the American government. Roosevelt’s New Deal sought to solve these problems and ensure the economic security of citizens. These objectives constituted a script of equality that convinced the masses of the empathy to alleviate individual plight and of the determination to manage national insecurity from the authority. Such an orientation made the government non-ideological and pragmatic and marked a significant break from its established image in the past. In retrospect, radical historians in the 1960s unpacked this image

and argued that the New Deal sustained state hegemony.<sup>6</sup> Humanitarianism was an opportunity for the government to rewrite its official script to prompt the citizens to inscribe themselves into. To put it differently, the New Deal politics was a mechanism of fashion and fashioning or concealing and revealing. It revealed solutions to the broken security of the state in crisis but concealed its drive to constitute a singular framework to understand individual identity as well as the status of the state. It is exactly this mechanism that Loy's Bowery poetry attends to. It enacts a poetics of poverty that reassess the official representation of modernity and compensate for its poverty through alternative lenses.

Loy's compensations of poverty attend to the destitute subjects in the Bowery to take issues with the demarcations that constitute the making and legitimacy of modern spectacles and subjects to amount to a marginal modernity, or more specifically compensations of poverty. Judging from literary history, Loy's compensations of poverty aligned with the maneuvers of her contemporaries in the modern long poems. Owing to the problems resulted from modernization in the 1930s, the linear logic in the promise of modernity became questionable. Modernist poets composed modern long poems employing tactics of parataxis and juxtaposition in correspondence to alienation and fragmentation of modern life. This composition displays discontinuous narratives to compel the construction of meaning. In addition, they attend to marginal and destroyed places in opposition to the typical sites of modernity in order to reconsider the glory of the city and bring its otherness to the fore. For instance, T.S Eliot's *Four Quartets* on the bombing of London, William Carlos Williams' *Paterson* on the lowly New Jersey City and Langston Hughes' *Montage of a Dream Deferred* on Harlem in the late 1940s and 1950s.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Anthony J Badger details both the implementation and evaluation of the New Deal in *The New Deal: The Depression Years, 1933-40*. Read p 1-10.

<sup>7</sup> In "Mina Loy's Modern Long Poem: New York and the Compensations of Poverty," Deidre Egan reads Loy's Bowery poems collectively as a modern long poem that links different female subjects in order to address the challenges of modernization. For more on the context of modern long poems, please read p 970-71.

Loy's late poems on the Bowery in the Lower Eastside of Manhattan participated in this project that access the condition of modernity through its margin. They articulate such an agenda voluminously to addresses a range of destitute subjects and exhibits portraits of poverty to adjust the vision as well as rewrite the script of modernity. This current thesis aims to consolidate concurrent contexts, including documentary, the Authentic Copy, and the Surrealism-fashion crossover circa the 1930s, to examine how the poetics of poverty recasts destitution in the Bowery, in front of the department store, and on the thoroughfare.

### **Chapter Overview**

The first Chapter "Poverty, Destitute Subjects, and Marginal Modernity" examines the portraits of the poor exhibited in "Hot Cross Bum" to delineate the genesis of the poetic of poverty as a maneuver of negotiation and transgression that stems from the Bowery. The discussion considers it in the context of the documentary culture to illustrate how it problematizes the politics in the representation of poverty. The second chapter "Department Stores, Fashion Victims, and Aged Women" examine how the juxtaposition of an aged woman in front of the store in "Chiffon Velours" enacts a dialogue that evaluates the criteria women rely on to stay relevant to fashion trends. The analysis taps into the culture of copying in conjunction with the institution of fashion in order to navigate a line of flight for the fashion victim to claim herself as a creative agent. The third chapter "Mass-Production, Women, and Fashion Humour" analyzes "Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street" in the context of the crosscurrent between Surrealism and fashion to reconsider the representation of women in the consumerist culture. Based on this context, the analysis looks into how alternatives discourses of female labor and subjectivity formulate a fashion humour in opposition to the stratification of commerce. Finally, the conclusion consolidates the effects of poetic of poverty in these poems to chart its creative mechanism to undergird it as a critical device to map possible routes in the comprehension of modernity.

## **Chapter One: Poverty, Destitute Subjects, and Marginal Modernity**

Loy's creative economy characterizes different states of fashionability, gestures that make creative materials operate in her terms to formulate expressions unclassifiable under any criteria and unaccommodated by established disciplines. She was a prominent figure who unsettled and toyed with the taken-for-granted boundaries consistently in the modernist scene. Her turn to destitution in her late poems introduces a poetics of poverty in operation to address poverty and destitute subjects in opposition to modernization. It displays its scheme to conceptualize and aestheticize the Bowery in the Lower Eastside in Manhattan as a locus of creativity.

Loy shifted her attention to the destitute subjects stricken by poverty with the awareness of the social unrest of New York in the 1940s. Riding on the impetus to produce socially responsible art of the documentary culture at this juncture, she invested in the derelict to delve into the subjectivity of social outcasts, human fragmentation, and problems in consumer capitalism. "Hot Cross Bum" (1949) engenders a discourse derived from poverty to recast the angel-bum polarity used to consider destitute subjects and destitution in the script of modernity. It delves into the building of subjectivity in the Bowery to negotiate alternative routes to comprehend poverty. This transition from high to low modernism foregrounds a poetics of poverty that calls rationality and progress championed by modernity into question to illuminate a marginal modernity.

### **Compensations of Poverty**

Mina Loy first visited and resided in New York in 1916 and 1936 respectively. This twenty-year span underlines a shifting set of coordinates that underpinned the sentiments of modernity in the first half of the twentieth century. Loy epitomized the modernist impetus with her eclectic roles, all-encompassing achievements and especially her experimentations in poetry. Yet, her Bowery poems in the 1940s formulate a poetics of poverty that responds to

the historical condition of modernity focusing on the negative reality rather than progress and rationality.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the twentieth century, drastic changes in economy, architecture and demographics took place in New York under the advent of modernity. They epitomized the positive dimension of modernization and filled the capital with optimism and determination. Prior to her arrival, Loy's reputation as a modern woman had already been known to the American crowd. She continued expanding her creativity and commanded the attention from the art and literary scenes of New York. In 1916, she befriended Walter Arsenberg and built contacts with important figures in the canon of high modernism, such as art critic Alfred Kreymborg, photographer Man Ray and artist Marcel Duchamp. Kreymborg offered Loy the opportunity to act in *Lima Beans* and its successful reception prompted her to hone her skills as an actress and a playwright. Mesmerized by her presence, Ray invited her to pose for the iconic photograph with her wearing a large thermometer earring. Her participation in Duchamp's Society of Independent Artists enabled her to exhibit her paintings in unconventional makeup in opposition to traditional art shows. This creative alliance helped establish herself as an artist in New York to continue her legacy in visual arts.<sup>9</sup> Loy's development on these creative platforms demonstrated her vigorous force to fashion in the terrain of high modernism.

When Loy returned and came to reside in New York in 1949, she underwent a shift from high to low modernism, from the salon to the slum.<sup>10</sup> In the midst of the twentieth-century, a

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<sup>8</sup> I refer to the poems under the section "Compensations of Poverty" in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* as Bowery poems because they were composed during Loy's residence in the Bowery and they address issues, such as poverty, the social outcasts and human fragmentation, undergirding the derelict space.

<sup>9</sup> Please refer to p.211-33 of Carolyn Burke's *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* for more on Loy's artistic developments in New York from 1916 to 1917.

<sup>10</sup> Prior to 1949, there were major changes in both Loy's personal life and career in different international locations. From 1917 to 1922, she had a traumatic marriage with Arthur Cravan and lost him in Mexico. Her poem "Brancusi's Golden Bird" was published along with T.S Eliot's "The Waste Land" in *The Dial*. From 1923 to 1949, she opened up lampshade shop in Paris and returned to New York working as a purchasing agent of European artists. For more biographical account, please refer to Burke p 252-385.

moment of cultural crisis dominated New York. It was awash not with rationality but anxiety of modernity. Worries arising from overpopulation, unemployment, homelessness and the clash of people from different ethnic groups overrode the capital.<sup>11</sup> In the meantime, both Loy's daughters Joella and Fabi relocated in Aspen, Colorado. Their relocation left her unattended. Fortunately, Fabi's friend Irene Klemper agreed to let Loy live in the communal household on Second Street near the Bowery in downtown Manhattan. In the seventeenth century, the Dutch settled in the Lower East Side of Manhattan and named it *Bouwerij*, an old Dutch word meaning farm. It connected the farmlands on the outskirts and the estates in the heart of the city. Its location made it the trendiest thoroughfare in New York, with theaters, banks and mansions. Yet, from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, low-brow concert halls, brothels and pawn shops turned it into the turf of crime and vice. Ultimately, it became a place of rough edge persona heterogeneous in class, culture and aesthetic (Rueb). Even though the Bowery is undeniably an antithesis to the salons Loy used to grace, its heterogeneity motivates her to direct her creativity to poverty and the derelict space.

Such a transition contributes to Loy's compensations of poverty. The phrase "compensations of poverty" originates from "On Third Avenue" (1942). A vocabulary of disappearance permeates the first section of the poem, such as "disappeared" and "down-cast countenances" (*LLB* 109). The accusative tone of the speaker denounces the existence of the social outcasts to which it direct. The stanza illustrates the withering presence of individuals excluded from the script of modernity. On the contrary, the following section proclaims an alternative lens to see destitution:

Such are the compensations of poverty,  
to see ———

Transient in the dust,

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<sup>11</sup> To know more about the cultural anxiety at this moment in New York, please read Deirdre E. Egan's *From Bower to Bowery: Urban Spatial Re-form and the Writing of a Marginal Modernity*, p 11-16.

the brilliancy  
of a trolley  
loaded with luminous busts;

lovely in anonymity  
they vanish  
with mirage  
of their passage. (*LLB* 110)

The speaker adopts a positive vocabulary to describe the marginal subjects, a shift of paradigm in perception and conceptualization. Their disappearance is not seen as a consequence of exclusion but as the “brilliancy” with sex appeals and “lovely in anonymity” with its own range and trajectory. Such a manner of seeing enacts a drive to recast the propriety in the understanding of destitute subjects. It engenders a visual register that sees beauty in the cast-off to compensate for what the authoritative discourse of modernity overlooks in destitution. It orients toward the destitute subjects on the streets, re/aestheticizes the cast-off and makes poverty fashionable to operate as a creative force and a commentary on modernity. This new poetics is also a product of the social unrest at this juncture. Starting from the 1930s, the Great Depression resulted from World War I and the threat of World War II injected a sense of pessimism into American society. Problems, such as inflation, joblessness and homelessness, came to the fore and accelerated the emergence of socially responsible art. Documentary photography was exemplary of this art form because it raised awareness of the hardships in a common man’s life through images of destitution to achieve sociological depths and purposes. Photography thus functioned as a medium for social communication rather than mere illustration.<sup>12</sup> However, this particular visual communication was selective and exclusionary as the directives of the Farm Security

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<sup>12</sup> The 1930s was known as the documentary decade. A spectrum of media and forms, including literature, photography, radio, magazines and so on, stressed authenticity and persuasiveness of facts. They attempted to depict social issues both factually and straightforwardly. To know more, please read William Stott’s *Documentary Expressions and Thirties America*.

Administration acknowledged photographs that suggested the capacity of recovering from poverty only. This selection in the representation of the poor underlined the polarity in the understanding of the poor. The hostile view of poverty denounced the poor for their misfortune in accordance to the Protestant belief that poverty was a consequence of flaws in character, whereas the environmental view put economic and social factors into the consideration of the poor.<sup>13</sup>

Namely, Loy's endeavors in her Bowery poems was a response to socially responsible art, particularly aligned with documentary photography. Her compatriot Berenice Abbot was one of the prominent documentary photographers, including Julien Levy, Eugène Atget and among others. It was this friendship that situated her in the context of how photography came to be implemented as a discourse of social consciousness and made her keenly aware of the social climate at large.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, her fascination with the derelict in the Bowery paralleled the documentary's interest in the impoverished. Yet, Loy's poetics aimed at social outcasts, drunkards and destitute women, subjects excluded by the directives of FSA photographs. Stemming from the documentary impetus, it drew upon "other representational modes, imagery, and language to include what might be thought of as antidocumentary" (Kinnahan 150). Obviously, her late poetics was an exercise of travesty in which she posed a counter force to make the creative material fashionable to operate in her own terms. Under the influence of documentary culture, directness takes over experimentation in the language of Loy's Bowery poems to depict poverty, human fragmentation, and alienation candidly. For instance, "On Third Avenue" attends to displays of dolls, shop windows and the mannequins to illustrate how modern organization of vision dichotomizes selfhood and desire through the interpellation of such visual rhetoric designed by institutions of fashion. "An Aged Woman,"

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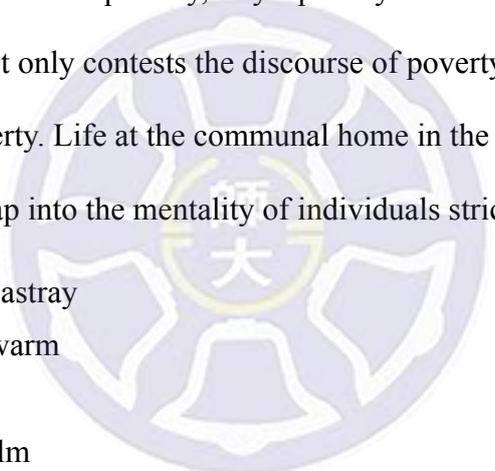
<sup>13</sup> Cara Finnegan explains the protocols the FSA imposed on the representation of poverty and the politics in the views of the poor in *Picturing the Poor: Print Culture and FSA Photographs*.

<sup>14</sup> Linda A. Kinnahan maps Loy's connection to photography and how it influences her Bowery poems in "Portraits of the Poor: The Bowery Poems and the Rise of Documentary Photography," p 123-63.

for another instance, focuses on the withering youth of an aged woman. Regardless of its pessimistic tone, the poem presents aging as an intimate experience where the female subject deals with it in her own manner to prove it a serious issue worthy of careful consideration. Therefore, compensations of poverty is not only a by-product of the documentary era but also works as compensations that amend for the overlooked as well as excluded representations of destitution. It formulates a poetics of poverty that negotiates and transgresses the official culture to offer alternative lenses to examine the status of modernity in its entirety.

### **Fashioning the Poetics of Poverty**

Aware of the documentary culture to produce socially responsible art and the selection mechanism in the representation of poverty, Loy's portrayal of the Bowery in "Hot Cross Bum" is anti-graphic as it not only contests the discourse of poverty but also serves as a portal into the immanence of poverty. Life at the communal home in the Lower Eastside of Manhattan enabled her to tap into the mentality of individuals stricken by destitution:



Impersonal as wind astray  
confluent tides of swarm  
loiter  
in non-resistance calm  
through dilatory  
night and day (*LLB* 133)

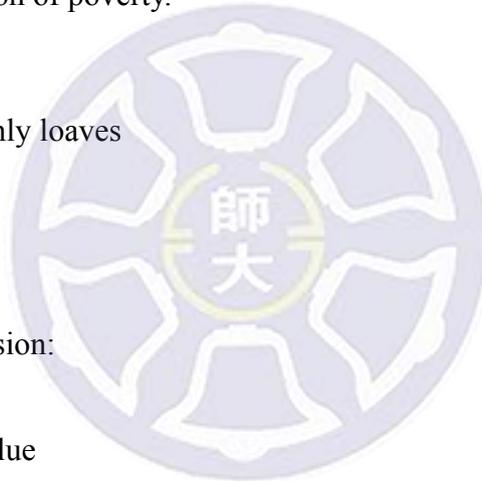
The speaker describes the Bowery as a hellish locale and passageway where the social outcasts flock. This description makes the neighborhood a dreadful habitat and injects a sense of discomfort that arrests the beginning of the poem. Yet, it does not wreak havoc on the inhabitants. They treat their surrounding impersonally and continue to be present through gathering and wandering in "non-resistance calm." The utter calmness and ease of flow in demeanor cancel the impending difficult atmosphere, and this cancelation is done without any resistance and force. It stages a state of mind in which the individuals of the Bowery are at ease with the vulnerability in their personal habits and histories. Such a stark contrast

between the description and treatment of destitution highlights a mentality that resists to be called into the discourse of poverty and reverses the rhetoric of vulnerability. It is a strategic juxtaposition that questions the assumed discomfort derived from the politics in the understanding of poverty. These inhabitants in the Bowery are the vulnerable subjects who demand neither sympathy for nor restoration of their living. They are fully conscious of their vulnerability and the mechanism of how they are received and perceived.

Clearly, the individuals on the scene are not the passive “bums” inscribed into the discourse of sympathy but perceptive beings in full possession of their vulnerability. This quality characterizes a strand of force that accounts for their own bumhood and critiques the politics in the comprehension of poverty.

an onfall  
of somewhat heavenly loaves  
for your loafing  
is the fashion

conditional compassion:  
appreciation  
of your publicity value  
to the Bowery (*LLB* 137)



The speaker claims that only in the Bowery can destitution be treated gently. In fact, such gentleness refers not as much to a source of empathy as to a sharp sense of carefulness that dissects and scorns the rhetoric of compassion. On the surface, the outside help is described as an offering from heaven, a description in line with the discourse of compassion. Yet, its diction repudiates the humanitarian sentiment implicitly. “Onfall” means falling upon and it can suggest an attack or onset, while loaves literally means bread and it can pun on loath. In this respect, the original is rewritten into a subtext that responds to the semantically present compassion hostilely in preparation for the accusation in the succeeding stanza. It discredits

compassion as it is only given under the condition that the gesture is appreciated and understood in accordance to the public value of the Bowery. Such an accusation underlines a dichotomy in the understanding of the poor, one that hints at the selection mechanism of the representation of poverty in documentary culture at large. Thus, the gentleness in the treatment of destitution is a keen awareness of the politics as well as a critical sensibility to call it into question. To be precise, the gentle handling in the Bowery constitutes a reversed discourse to dismantle the ideology that legitimizes the rhetoric of compassion and comprehension of poverty.

This argumentative tactic exhibits the vocabulary she acquired from Christian Science. Opposed to the impetus to make it new, religion seems conservative and marginal in the consideration of modernist aesthetics. Yet, in “Loy and Cornell: Christian Science and the Destruction of the World,” Tim Armstrong finds it necessary to reconsider the relation between these two different schools of thoughts due to religious innovations at the turn of the century. Christian Science was seen as a reversed discourse to traditional form of religion, with its female founder Mary Baker Eddy and understanding of Christianity as a dialectic practice in relation to a divine principle instead of an omnipotent being. This innovated belief foregrounds its central emphasis on negativity that denounces physical presence to underscore the primacy of spiritual existence. Even though Christian Science is founded on the denial of the body, its denial is not a total one as it still regards the physical as the medium to return to and testifies the existence of the divine. Such an undertaking takes issues with apprehensions about embodiment and elicits responses from modernists, including Loy.<sup>15</sup> Armstrong discerns inflections of Christian Science in “Hot Cross Bum.” Its loaded diction of neologism, such as “indecision,” “inattentively,” and “unfuture,” works to present

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<sup>15</sup> Armstrong delves into the works of Joseph Cornell and Mina Loy in conjunction with Christian Science to exemplify how they address the tension between Mind and the material and how they reconcile religion with modernism. For more, please read p 204-20 in Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson’s *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*.

the Bowery as a zone that denies the reality intelligible in the modern world (215-16). Even though its stylistic nature resonates to the negativity of Christian Science that dismisses embodiment, the poem does so with the intention to examine the subjectivity of the destitute subjects. It negates the textual body to give free reigns to the actual body of destitution. Loy's appropriation of negativity operates in the same vein as the modern long poems. It dismantles the body to make sense of its meaning and capacity. It is a practice that pushes the destitute subjects to the margin to unravel the building of their destitution.

These undertakings feature the intellectual sophistication of individuals in the Bowery. Its level of acuteness and transgressive force are incompatible with the bumhood characterized in the discourse of poverty. Rather, it is a mentality that allows them to transcend established systems of value and ascend to a new dimension of angelhood.

A universe  
to which (dead to the world)  
he is ideologically deceased

graduate of indiscipline  
post-graduate of procrastination (*LLB 135*)

These two stanzas similarly demonstrate a meticulous formulation of a reversed discourse. Judging from its exterior, the Bowery is seen as a dead universe in comparison to the outside modern world. Its death is an ideological penalty because it cannot be understood under the script of progress and rationality. It is dead in its entirety. However, the diction and punctuation used to describe the execution overrules the death sentence on the Bowery. "Universe" can be read as a combination of 'uni-' and 'verse,' suggesting a unique form of language. The parentheses that enclose "dead to the world" punctuates the preceding uniqueness unavailable in the lexical resource of modern world and the enclosure represents the limit of the status-quo that fails to understand a language beyond its capacity. The overrule inverts the initial power dynamics and legitimizes the individuals in the Bowery. The

original sentence is obliterated and rewritten into a certification of existence. It certifies the presence as well as the transcendence of bumhood to pave the way for the graduation commencement in the following stanza. The speaker addresses the bums with titles of the academic, “graduate of indiscipline” and “post-graduate of procrastination.” Orthodox as they seem, this particular designation is essentially the polar opposite, with one degree from an unidentifiable field and the other from a program of which objective is delay. These titles depart considerably from the common practice in academia and are indicative of an institution of education in reverse. Namely, the series of re-appropriation unleashes the agency in the ideologically deceased to obliterate the discourse of poverty and to distinguish the Bowery as a whole from taken-for-granted confines. Furthermore, it is an aesthetic lesson that appreciates how these inhabitants reconcile themselves with vulnerability and employ it critically to rewrite bumhood into angelhood, an aesthetic form and intellectual dimension inviting curiosity and beyond established bodies of knowledge.

Loy adopts the negativity of Christian Science negatively to unpack the making of destitution and to cultivate her compensations of poverty. In “Hot Cross Bum,” she catalogues a spectrum of social outcasts, or more specifically “angel-bums” in her parlance. This label showcases an exercise of negativity as it comprises two bipolar words – angel and bums. “Bums” characterizes the worthlessness of the deprived individuals excluded from social and economic benefits, whereas “angel” refers to the complete opposite. The manner of its production constitutes a paradigm that aestheticizes the marginalized bodies and foregrounds the threshold between the high and the low. In “Mina Loy’s ‘Conversion’ and the Profane Religion of her Poetry,” Suzanne Hobson unpacks the angel-bum model to elucidate how Loy arrives at a new dimension in the understanding of the divine in “Hot Cross Bum.” Hobson indicates that the candid portraits of the poor in the poem do not intend to conduct a moral lesson. Rather, they seek to present destitution as a new mode of angelhood. The

destitute subjects in question are angels who submit to all faculties of the body to ascend to a sacred state of being (254-56). Their submission underlines the limits of the human body and enacts the phenomenon of “pure corporeal automatism,” a condition in which the body succumbs to unruly, inexplicable and involuntary actions and expressions (Miller 64).<sup>16</sup> The angel-bum model of the poem compels the cultured eyes to look beyond the parameters of rationality stipulated by modernity to witness how the destitute subjects answer fully to the extremes of the body. It is a mechanism that demonstrates the range in the capacity of the body under destitution and aestheticizes destitution as a locus of divinity.

Through unconventional portraits of the Bowery and reversal of vulnerability, the poem is a tactful argumentation that undermines the ideology of the poor and brings a poetics of poverty into existence. It re-conceptualizes poverty to unravel its immanence:

Bum-bungling of actuality  
exchanging  
an inobvious real  
for over-obvious irreal (*LLB* 134)

The stanza highlights an exchange for an explicit falsehood at the cost of an implicit truth. An illogical and unprofitable trade semantically, it combines contrast and neologism in the parallel syntax of “inobvious real” and “over-obvious irreal” deliberately to compel a reconstruction of meaning that works to reconsider the matter-of-factness presented in the lines. In the meantime, the syntax mirrors the mechanism of the ideology that interprets poverty and unpacks it to examine the magnitude of interpretation. The politics of poverty hails the bums into its discourse and characterizes them as vulnerable subjects. Their personal worth is calculated and even manipulated by the overriding ideology to validate the script of progress and rationality. They are deprived of agency completely and regarded as the

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<sup>16</sup> In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fictions and the Arts Between the World Wars*, Tyrus Miller coins the terminology ‘pure corporeal automatism’ to frame and explain arcane phenomenon prevalent during the interwar years.

antithesis to modernization. Yet, the description re-appropriates the discourse rhetorically to magnify and comment on its fallacy. It is a metaphysical commentary that addresses poverty both within and beyond the given system of value to magnify the immanence of destitution. The destitution in question is not an antithesis to the rationale of the modern world alone. Rather, it is a carefully crafted thesis that retaliates the politics of poverty and demonstrates the extent of force from destitution.

Loy presents “Hot Cross Bum” as a spectacle that calls the legitimacy of modernity into question. In “Exceptionalism of Mina Loy and the Gender Politics of Canon Formation,” Karin Schalm attends to a sacred-profane pattern in the rhyme scheme of the poem. Compounds, such as “sanitary apostles,” and “ash-cans,” juxtapose biblical alluded words with those from the bottom of the everyday. This juxtaposition between the sacred and the profane likewise unsettles the altitude of divinity to modify the manner in the perception and comprehension of destitution (23-24). Linda A. Kinnahan, in “‘Portraits of the Poor’: The Bowery Poems and the Rise of Documentary Photography,” delves into how the poem illustrates the street as a spectacle equipped with the capacity to critique the value system. Loy presents a wide range of destitute subjects with troublesome features that categorize them as the undeserving poor, individuals erased in the politics of the representation. This presentation displays the excluded representation of the poor to question the ideology that formulates the understanding of the poor and to tailor a sensational documentary. It documents a comprehensive awareness of the mechanism that demarcates social boundaries and the reality of destitution (155-60). Both Schalm and Kinnahan’s readings of the poem highlight a rhetoric of excess. The sacred-profane pattern in rhyme scheme and the illustration of the poor on the street exhibit the poem as a spectacle that exceeds the parameters undergirding the legitimate ideology and aesthetics of modernity.

To be precise, it marks a poetics that delves into the building of poverty to reveal the

finitude in politics and the potential in destitution. Therefore, it exchanges validated falsehood for the invalidated truth to reconsolidate the trajectory in the comprehension of poverty, making destitution in the Bowery “immune to meaning” and “zest for zenith” (*LLB* 138). Loy conceptualizes destitution to arrive at a new dimension of divinity. Her conceptualization is exemplary of her compensations of poverty as it works to undercut rationality and progress that anchor modernity to see beauty in the cast off. These characteristics exemplify Loy’s awareness of the changes in response to modernization and her practice of them features the the force of her creativity. They illustrate her late turn to divinity and destitution as a praxis of the ability to fashion beyond her creative economy. In this respect, compensations of poverty only account for Loy’s undertaking partially. Apart from the re-conceptualization of destitution, her portrait of the poor in the Bowery challenges progress and rationality in their entirety. It is a direct challenge to the linear logic of modernization and a call for an impulse to initiate reconstructions of meanings behind the systems of value, ideology and aesthetic. These aims gravitate towards the margins of modernity to formulate a remark on the set of coordinates that constituted the historical moment in the 1940s. Hence, “Hot Cross Bum” articulates a poetics that exceeds the scale and vision of compensations of poverty to negotiate alternatives to the official making of a rational modern subject and modernity at large.

## Chapter Two: Copy, Department Stores, and Fashion Victims

Mina Loy's poetics of poverty recasts the politics of destitution and assesses the conditions of modernity at large from the margin. Prior to her Bowery residence in the 1940s, Loy's migration among world capitals, including Berlin, Paris and New York, imbued her with a cosmopolitan flavor and a keen awareness of fashion in relation to the building of female subjectivity. Once a model and a designer, she understood how women were perceived in the institution of fashion. This particular manner of perception takes on a different valance from a Bowery vision. "Chiffon Velours" amplifies the mechanism that disciplines how women remain relevant to fashion. The poem speaks to the culture of copying and the institution of fashion directly through an old woman dressed in skimpy clothes marveling at the new designs on display in the shop window of the department store. It exhibits an interlace of contrasts, including the old and new, originality in and duplication, and the ins and outs of fashion. The presence of the aged female subject on the corner stone of the store exposes these oscillations so significantly that it undermines the fashion institution.

Nevertheless, the overall criticism on the poem tends to see her as a representation of fragmentation dismisses her presence as a viable individual to dialogue with the fashion institution. Being one of the Bowery poems composed during the documentary era, "Chiffon Velours" (1944) is equipped with the capacity to see beauty in the cast off and to challenge the linearity in the logical trajectory of modernity.<sup>17</sup> Given this context, the poem features an aged woman in juxtaposition with the department store to formulate a dialogue that rewrites the culture of duplication and contests the in-and-out mechanism of fashion to reconstruct a marginalized female subjectivity. These are gestures of negotiation to problematize the

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<sup>17</sup> I elucidate the poetics of poverty in conjunction with the documentary culture of the 1930s in the analysis of "Hot Cross Bum." Please refer to chapter one "Poverty, Destitute Subjects, and Marginal Modernity in the Bowery."

discipline of manner women copy to stay relevant to and in fashion. “Chiffon Velours” articulates the poetics of poverty to make a fashion statement that negotiates the place and the making of a fashion victim.

### **The Culture of Copying**

Loy participated in fashion at a juncture when Coco Chanel and Elsa Schiaparelli made a sensation with *haute couture*. Her aesthetic and manipulation of fashion deviated from her contemporaries, especially Chanel. Chanel believed that mass production and standardization of products contributed to the success of business. To make customized garments available to a wider range of customers, the Authentic Copy came into existence. The Authentic Copy needed to be sanctioned by the couturier to be reproduced by department stores worldwide. Each copy recreated the meticulous design just like the original. This mode of production formulated the ethos that to be reproduced was to be successful; to be sold meant to be copied. Authenticity of products turned out to lie in its ability to be reproduced. Reproductivity heralded the marketplace in the fashion world of the 1920s. Not abiding by the common practice of copying, certain wholesalers replicated products illegally and led to the defilement of the original model. The co-existence of the Authentic Copy and the illegitimate copies provoked anxieties over the waver between originality and duplication to the extent that *Vogue* filed for a legal protection of its name in the Supreme Court to assert its distinctiveness in 1927.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the culture of copying dominated the business of fashion and left the double logic of the copy an unresolved issue in the first half of the twentieth century.

The protection of originality bothered Loy tremendously in the management of business. Financed by Peggy Guggenheim, she started a shop on 52 rue du Colisée in Paris where she

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<sup>18</sup> In “Modernism and the Little Black Dress,” Jessica Burstein historicizes the Authentic Copy. Burstein accounts for how Chanel’s dress itemized 142 was reproduced and the consequences of its reproduction comprehensively. For more, please read p 131-43.

featured lamps made from antique liquor bottles and lampshades of ethereal quality.<sup>19</sup> Her works caught the fancy of the public and were featured in the 1927 issue of *Arts and Decoration*. The exposure brought department stores, such as Lanvin, Macy's and Wannamaker's, to place orders. To cater for the demand, Loy had her own workshop in which the procedure complied with a hands-on approach to customize lampshades compatible to the style of the room they adorn. Unfortunately, her employees betrayed the mechanism of lampshade-making to others and her designs were seen in poorly made copies around Paris. Copyrighted her works immediately, she still could not compete with the level of productivity from rivalries without sufficient managerial aid and capital. In order to avoid further infringement of copyright, Loy asked notary publics to witness her works to record their origin legally or had the post office offer a form to chronical the date of creation officially (Burstein 191). Her commercial experience ultimately centered more on garnering authenticity than the sustainability of business.

In addition to taking artificial measures, Loy comes to her defense against duplication creatively. *Rouge* published her "Virgin Plus Curtains Minus Dots" (1915) with an illustration of a woman in corset. This editorial layout promoted vigorous debates on the corset and the modern reconsideration of the body. Corsetry was seen as a form of innovation as it allowed individuals to erect their bodies into different shapes, curves and lines. It polished the presentation of human body to suit different criteria of beauty. By extension, it made the body new. Being a reproducible commodity for sale, the corset was an accessible tool for the masses to augment body image and represented an innovation dependent on reproduction. Loy created a by-product derived from the corset – the corselet – which operated in a different manner. The corselet was customized for middle-age women who had allowed

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<sup>19</sup> Please refer to p 342-65 in Burke's *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* for detail description of Loy's lampshades.

unwanted curves grow at will to correct the shape of their figures. Analogous to the function of a corset, its principle of mechanism took a different route in which it triggered a part of the body to stop it from reproducing the undesired condition. It is a creation that re-oriented the line of the body to resemble its presentation in youth, and it did not enter into commercial terms.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, Loy's sartorial design gravitated toward her political more than commercial agenda. She created clothes that allowed movements for women and experimented on materials of poverty. These treatments challenged habitual use of fashion as a regulatory code of gender and the divide between high and low fashion.<sup>21</sup> Judging from a conceptual perspective, Loy's fashion designs and her business management showcase defense mechanism against mass production. They speak volumes of the anxieties of duplication.

Similarly, fiercer competition and economic crisis resulted from warfare in the 1940s compelled entrepreneurs of the department store to reassess the status of business to remain profitable and competitive. The term department store came into everyday use in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The store was a monument that stood for a new market system and narrative of selling. By taking full charge and initiative of the preparation and production of clothes originally outsourced to other shops, it developed its own procedures of mass production. Such a total coverage of duties turned the store into a factory that attended to uniformity, durability and the fashionable nature of products. Managers planned the floors carefully to create a controlled experience of shopping that ensured the flow of customers and goods in order to turn the entire store into one entity. Appearance and amenities were also integral to the management of the department store. The architecture came in eclectic styles to not only join the worldliness of international events but also to stand out from the urban

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<sup>20</sup> Burstein explains Loy's corselet and other creations in illustrated details to elaborate on the problems of duplication in "Loy, INC." Please read p 179-92.

<sup>21</sup> Susan E. Dunn details Loy's experience and vision in her artistic and sartorial designs in "Mina Loy, Fashion and the Avant-Garde" For more, please refer to p 443-53.

fabric of the streets. Elevating its agenda beyond commerce, managers used the non-selling spaces as cultural amenities to entertain and educate customers through the latest trends in art, music and dress.<sup>22</sup> These changes helped court the popularity and sustain the business of the department store. What is more, they redefined consumption as a “personalized and leisurely pursuit” (Iarocci 66).

The culture of copying legalized reproduction as an injunction for commercial success. Yet, its success was its own liability in that copying raised the cultural alarm over the building of female subjectivity and corporate body. The Authentic Copy did not sanction the reproductivity of clothes alone; it mechanized the female body through the reproduction of a fixed range of sizes, colors and trends. Likewise, the managerial modifications of the department store did not aim solely for sustainability of business. They unified the shopping experience of the masses in accordance to technologized wonders inside and outside the store. The sanction of reproduction and the renovation of the department store worked in collaboration to establish an institution that hailed consumers into a mechanism determining and evaluating their extent of relevance to fashion. Designs of lampshades and clothes speak volumes of Loy’s creativity as well as her sensibility to the cultures of fashion. Her business and design experience both point at one particular facet of fashion in which objects and clothes are reproduced to sustain not only commercial viability but also codes on female subjectivity. It is this particular culture of copying that Loy’s poetics of poverty seeks to address in her Bowery poems.

### **Making a Fashion Statement**

The fashion statement articulated in “Chiffon Velours” addresses the victimhood of the woman and her sartorial presentation to question the fashion institution as well as to

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<sup>22</sup> Louisa Iarocci details the managerial strategies of the department stores in *The Urban Department Store in America, 1850-1930*. Please read p 66-74.

foreground her potential as a creative agent. Tracing the source of oppression seems to victimize the female subject further, but it is an unavoidable route that makes an alternative possible. It is a site where the poetics of poverty enacts a reversed discourse to put the restrained fashionability back in action. Attending to how the body, agency and subjectivity is institutionalized paves the way for the female subject to demonstrate her ability to negotiate with store and claim herself as a creative agent with self-determination against the culture of copying in fashion.

The department store, as Michael B. Miller points out, represented an entrepreneurial drive to control and structure the material world for the sake of its own benefit since its birth in the nineteenth century (1). It was a business that strategized the manner in which the products were displayed to attract customers to create indulgent experience of shopping. Visibility was evidently a definitive factor that governed the management of the store and the level of consumption. It was brought to an even larger scale with the advent of glass technology. Glass converted the window display into a wonderland where commodities became “unreal in that they were images set apart from everyday things, and real in that they were there to be bought and taken home to enhance the ordinary environment” (Bowlby 2). The tension between the unreal and the real was the exact charm that kept the spectators arrested and ultimately to purchase the reified products to be better adorned. The department store visualized novelty in a technologized manner to remind the masses that the fashion they wore was already on the brink of collapse. It is this technique of visualization that hails the female subject in “Chiffon Velours” into victimhood. She stands “Rigid/at rest against the corner-stone/of a department store” (*LLB* 119). Her rigidity indicates inaction and lack of agency as it illustrates her being in awe of or overwhelmed by the products on display. It is her inability to purchase in the wonderland that makes her rigid. Standing statically marveling at the exhibited goods from the unreal realm while accepting the harsh reality in an

outdated dress is her only option.

Looking speaks great volumes of consumer culture and the victimhood in “Chiffon Velours.” To attract the spectators, the products needed to be carefully displayed and mirrors an image that invites passers-by to envision themselves putting on the look in the shop window. The charisma of window display entices a narcissistic gaze through which the consumer is “hooked on images which s/he takes for [his or her] identity, but does not recognize as *not* of [his or her] own making” (Bowlby 30). This inability to distinguish the mirrored image from the personal one accounts for the fascination of the store and underlines the unattainability of such image simultaneously. The store remained a dreamland, or more precisely a world that flaunted bourgeois culture. The narcissistic gaze is integral in the making of victimhood in “Chiffon Velours.” The rigidity of the female subject can be a consequence of her inability to make the displayed image her own or her failure to duplicate the endorsed fashion. She cannot enter the discourse that makes her in fashion but can only wear her passé dress of chiffon velours. This outfit is the “last creation” and “original design” as the fashion system does not reproduce the outdated. Her originality ironically lies in her failure to be part of the discourse of the store. She has no alternative but to model this design of destitution alone.

Sara Crangle elaborates on the destitution of the woman in “Mina Loy.” Crangle focuses on the line that describes the woman lying on the corner stone of the department store and claims that the posture poses her as “a waste product of consumerist system devoted to a productivity she neither embodies nor engenders” (293). Her destitution resulted from the institution of fashion to which she cannot assimilate and was discarded. The claim not merely cancels her presence but also categorizes her as the abject. Carol Yi-Wei Lin reads the poem in relation to abjection in “Abjection and Transgression: A Psychoanalytical Reading of Mina Loy’s Poetics.” Lin indicates that the vanished breasts of the woman is representative of

the abject and examines this feature in terms of symptom and sublimation. The symptom in question refers to her disappearing sexuality while sublimation to her awareness of the necessity to recognize her position in destitution and accept it as an integral part of herself (58). Both Crangle and Lin diminishes the agency of the female subject to stress the irreversibility of her status as an impoverished woman excluded from the institution of fashion

The shop window is a technologized wonder that determines the ins and outs of fashion. However, just looking is an alternative way to look at the window and even to establish a counter discourse in opposition to the duplication of fashion. The act just looking played an important role in shopping. It is “the conventional apology for hesitation before a purchase in the shop [expressing] also the suspended moment of contemplation before the object for sale – the pause for *reflection*” (Bowlby 32). It curbs the discourse of gazing and becoming at play in the store and plans an alternative for the female subject in “Chiffon Velours.” Seeing her as an individual who just looks at the store converts her victimhood into a locus of self-fashioning:

flee from death in odd directions . . .

Rigid at rest against the corner-stone  
of a department store.

Hers alone to model  
The last creation,

original design  
of destitution. (*LLB* 119)

The verb “flee” suggests a stride against rather than an escape from the fashion institution. Her stride appears odd in front of the store as it is outside the system. It gives her the agency to own a style against the in-store trend. Her oddity is a source of creativity and the plural

form of “directions” is indicative of the potential of such creative power. Through just looking, it is her choice to not to enter the store. The rigidity exemplifies her strength as a creative agent who refuses to submit to institutionalized fashion and the posture of being at rest exudes confidence and comfort. Regardless of the fact she models the design of destitution alone, being alone does not stand for alienation but stages her as a forerunner of a style that value variety. Destitution is not a literal portrayal of the female subject’s dress but an implicit criticism that shows the deficiency of range in fashion.

The department store displays attractions to compel customers to look into the shop window and long for material goods. Its calculated display makes commodities visible in a manner that imposes a narcissistic gaze on the spectators and encourages them to dream of making the reified objects their own. Namely, visual technique claims certain looks as new and right. It enshrines them in the window to convince people to put them on to copy fashion and even to discipline them. The female subject in “Chiffon Velours” is victimized by it. Yet, by seeing her as a considered individual who just looks, she becomes a creative agent who initiates a counter discourse to make fashion fashionable rather than duplicate it cyclically.

The sartorial dimension of the poem is the exact means that tailors the female subject as a creative agent. To understand how the sartorial is able to withdraw victimhood and enacts creativity, a look into the seam that interweaves clothes and power is essential:

‘A political anatomy,’ which was also a ‘mechanics of power,’ was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over other bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed, and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced, ‘docile’ bodies. (Foucault 138)

In *Discipline and Punish*, Michel Foucault anatomizes the sovereign power in conjunction with the body to contour how the former is able to exercise control over the latter. It is a total control that inscribes the body with ideology and dictates it to practiced the exact ideology.

Disciplinary power itself is immaterial while the body material. The difference in indicates this technology of control as a materialization of the immaterial. The body is a docile subject in full submission to ideology and the medium to make the sovereign present. The Foucauldian technology is essentially a matter of presentation. Likewise, the fashion-clothes relation operates in a similar mechanism. Fashion is intangible while clothing tangible. Clothing is the raw material to give fashion a form, and fashion itself is an abstract belief represented through clothing. Fashion and clothing are thus dialectical to each other and a model of the Foucauldian technology.

From a Foucauldian lens, the female subject in “Chiffon Velours” is a docile body inscribed with label of a victim under the discipline of the department store. Her victimhood stems from her dress of chiffon velours. It is incongruous as it is worn by a decaying body “verging on the shriek/of reviling age” (*LLB* 119) as opposed to the novelty on display. It is unpresentable due to the immiscible combination of chiffon and velours. The store categorizes her as a subject of flaw in accordance to the criteria of its discipline. Caroline Georgina Miller, in “Abstract Concrete: Experimental Poetry in Post-WWII New York City,” considers the old woman in “Chiffon Velours” a subject trapped in her body on the basis of the associations with poverty in the diction of the poem and the sartorial feature of the female subject. Miller indicates that the economic use of diction parallels the decaying body of the woman. The condensed verse strips her of her femininity to characterize a fragmented figure. The fabric chiffon velours draws attention to the materiality of the surrounding – “gutter” – described in the concluding line. The description of the woman’s dress in conjunction with the material of city connects the woman with the infrastructure of the waste. Clothed as she is, she is essentially stripped as her garment reflects the impoverished environment and turns her into a site of destitution (31). Similarly, Colbey Emmerson Reid sees the woman as a design flaw by attending to the fabric in “Mina Loy’s Design Flaw.” Reid traces the various

connotation of “sere” in the starting line to illustrate that tiers and sheerness permeate the poem and that the fabric in question is a complex metaphor. In terms of fabrication, she points out that chiffon and velours cannot go together in nature. The titular fabric chiffon velours is in fact an immiscible combination. Wearing a garment in this fabric, the woman models a juxtaposition between making and unmaking. The sartorial metaphor dismisses the presence of the female subject as it is made of parts that cannot be assembled together (134).

Yet, the diction of the poem offers an alternative consideration of the dressed body in question:

She is sere.

Her features,  
verging on a shriek  
reviling age,

flee from death in odd directions  
somehow retained by a web of wrinkles. (*LLB* 119)

In Reid’s analysis, she traces the various connotations of “sere,” including being dried and withered that characterize the female subject as a site of decay. In terms of internal rhyme, it bears a close similar sound to ‘sheer’ and adds an embedded transparent and mysterious quality. Religiously speaking, “sere” refers to prophecy. In this respect, the line “She is sere” predicts the arrival of an indistinguishable trend beyond the fashion institution. Though “Her features/verging from on shriek/reviling age” does imply an anxiety toward aging, such an anxiety can simultaneously be directed to the fashion discourse to critique on its rigidity and out-datedness to embrace the new. The “reviling age” may refer to the female subject on the brink of becoming senile, but it can also be a threshold to the new. Likewise, though “a web of wrinkles” may illustrate the aging body of the subject on the surface, it can again foreground the decay of the fashion discourse. The decay, as opposed to the “odd direction,”

renders the female subject a site for rejuvenation and fashioning. Hence, the female subject in “Chiffon Velours” still possesses agency to fashion herself in opposition to the sovereignty of the department store. Susan E. Dunn sheds positive light on the poem in “Fashion Victims: Mina Loy’s Travesties.” Dunn finds resistance in the wrinkles of the decaying woman. They represent an organic vitality of her flesh and even the potential of the grotesque body. Rather than being a sign of aging alone, her wrinkles oscillate between decay and rejuvenation. Such an oscillation implies the possibility to mediate her destitution. Dunn also pays attention to the posture of the woman and considers it a gesture to conduct a conversation between the fashion in blossom and the woman in destitution. It suggests that the female subject has the ability to make “the material that lies in the intersection between the department store and the gutter” fashionable. In this respect, she is a potential creative agent instead of a waste product in Reid’s contention.

“An Aged Woman” serves as a parallel to “Chiffon Velours” to illustrate the capacity of the aged female subject comes to terms with aging in Loy’s Bowery poems. In “An Aged Woman,” Loy examines appearance from a female subject’s experience of aging. She presents a pensive female figure who deals with her aging youth:

Not even pain has that precision  
With which it struck you in youth-time

More like moth  
eroding internal organs  
hanging or falling down  
in a spoiled closet (*LLB* 145)

The woman describes aging as an ailment much worse than other kinds of pain because it strikes not her bodily organs but precisely her most valuable asset – youth. She compares her withering youth to a moth trapped in a closet with its eroding organs hanging and falling.

Though the overall description makes aging troublesome and herself pitiful, her comparison

formulates a feminine perspective where she sees her faded youth as old clothes that can no longer fit the hanger and start falling. Such a perspective poses aging as an issue particular to women, and the female subject employs it for further examination:

Does your mirror Bedevil you  
or is the impossible  
possible to senility  
enabling the erstwhile agile  
narrow silhouette of self (*LLB* 145)

Looking at her reflection in the mirror turns aging into a case similar to the allegory of the cave. She stands in front of the mirror questioning whether the reflection is a genuine representation of herself or not and considering the possibility of restoring the previous agile youth. Aging then becomes a matter that hinges on versions of reality, a matter of how an individual comes to terms with the self. Regardless of its pessimistic tone, the poem presents aging as an intimate experience where the female subject deals with it in her own terms without conforming to any aesthetic criteria.

The agency of the docile body in “Chiffon Velours” is not only a practice of a reversed discourse but also an exercise of travesty. The female subject is able to create against norms celebrated by the fashion institution. Her stance against the department store is a gesture that demystifies the image on the pedestal in the fashion discourse. In *The Power of Image*, Annette Kuhn contends that groomed beauty is “‘made up’ in the sense that the images . . . are put together, constructed, even fabricated or falsified” (13). Kuhn’s assertion is an indication of the construction and the deception of images. The department, in the similar manner, indeed displays a constructed image to discipline the fashion discourse, and more specifically assigns an image of fashion victim to the female subject in “Chiffon Velours.” Nevertheless, her dress of chiffon velours can turn out to be a design that debases the fashion institution and crafts a creative agent beyond the duplicative and cyclical system.

Hers alone to model  
the last creation,

original design of destitution.

Clothed in memorial scraps  
skimpy even for a skeleton. (*LLB* 199)

The possessive case “Hers” exudes a sense of confident in making the dress she wears her own. It is exactly this ownership that renders it an original instead of a copied design. The memorial scraps sewn in her dress may seem to project a longing for the past and the scarcity may suggest the loss of memories. The scarcity of memory can refer to the scarcity of the codes enshrined by the fashion institution to comprehend the new, so the skimpiness can in fact become a site for inscription of alternative aesthetics. The vocabulary of design employed in the final description of the dress orchestrates the fashionability of the female subject.

Trimmed with one sudden burst  
of flowery cotton  
half her black skirt  
glows as a soiled mirror  
reflects the gutter –  
a yard of chiffon velours. (*LLB* 119)

The verbs in each line fill the dress with creativity. “Trimmed,” in particular, indicates an act of accentuating the dressed body and the “sudden burst of flowery cotton” adds a sense of surprise to the garment indicating its originality. The “soiled mirror,” according to Dunn, demonstrates that the female subject “has fashioned herself the material that lies in the intersection between the department store and the gutter” (“Fashion Victim”). The “soiled mirror” can also function as an alternative glass to the shop window of the department store. Through this mirror, the female subject is capable of renegotiating the discourse of the

fashion institution to tailor a dress of her own. Rather than being haunted and disciplined by the image projected by the department store, she looks at her own mirror that reflects “a yard of chiffon velour.” The image she sees is no longer the image that encourages her to dream and desire but that of the fabric of her dress allowing her to fashion herself. What is more, the yardage of chiffon velours epitomizes the potential of self-fashioning and self-representation.

The fashion discourse of the department store operates as a technology of power disciplining the docile body looking into the shop window. It invests the body with the knowledge at its own advantage to mold the body into a compatible subject to its ideology. An investment of this particular kind, on the other hand, underlines the fashionability of the body. The female subject of “Chiffon Velours” can establish a reversed discourse against the discipline that intend to seize upon her body. The oddity of her dress does not necessary make her a fashion victim; rather, it emphasizes her creativity. She designs an original dress beyond the aesthetics of the institution of fashion and even creates a mirror for her own re/fashioning. She is a creative agent with the yardage of fabric in her hand to fashion rather than copy the given rhetoric of fashion.

By accentuating the fashionability of Loy’s poetics, underpinning the visual dynamics of department store’ shop window, and the craftsmanship of the sartorial expression, the female subject in “Chiffon Velours” does not appear as a fashion victim anymore. Rather, she is a creative agent who renegotiates and even challenges the discipline over the female body, agency and subjectivity within the institution of fashion. The female subject uses her dress of chiffon velours to dialogue with the fashion institution where the system of fashion and self-fashioning are at odd. Her dress embodies her sartorial agency to formulate a fashion statement that asserts her creativity and ability to re-aestheticize her body beyond the norms. She is not a victim but a woman who makes a fashion statement that demonstrates her awareness of fashion as a contestable term and fashioning as a critical practice.



### **Chapter Three: Mass-Production, Women, and Fashion Humour**

Loy's "Mass-Production on 14th Street" foregrounds the robust commerce composed of series of window display and flocks of window-shoppers on Fourteenth Street. The window display was a collaborative effort between Surrealism and fashion to formulate a rhetoric that entices passers-by to consume and to long for products. Such a visual rhetoric prompts the window-shoppers to identify themselves with the mannequins and even be torn between reality and fantasy. In the meantime, the poem hints at the female labor invested in the presentation of fashion to treat it as a background for consumption and production. It is a deliberate scheme that works to activate Loy's poetics of poverty.

Loy's poetics of poverty stems from the margin of rationality and progress. Its marginal position works as an impetus to question the status-quo and ultimately as a means of negotiation to map different routes to examine rubrics that evaluate the legitimacy of a modern subject and modernity at large. Such a poetics permeates her Bowery poems. For instance, it problematizes the divide between high and low in the stratification of society and in "Hot Cross Bum" and the ins and outs of fashion "Chiffon Velours." "Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street" dramatizes a coexistence between the explicit consumerist culture and the implicit female labor put into its making. The mention of "Fashion's humour" toward the end of the poem suggests its textual drive to operate as a maneuver of negotiation, or more specifically a formulation of humour to reconsider the fashion industry in its entirety.

#### **Surrealism and Women on Fourteenth Street**

In 1923, Loy participated in the opening years of Paris Surrealism and came into close contact with prominent Surrealist artists. Her characterization of a Surrealist protagonist in *Insel* demonstrates a clear understanding of the visual techniques in Surrealism and an awareness of the anxieties of self-disintegration present in this practice of art. In the Bowery poems, such as "Three Moments in Paris" and "Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street" to name a

few, she takes issues with the problematic nature of Surrealist representation of women as an object of desire from her experience of the urban landscape in Paris. These accounts highlight Loy's strong affinity to as well as critical distance from Surrealism.

The immigration of European artists to the U.S in the 1930s exposed the American art scene to a range of artistic expressions. The fashion industry was particularly drawn to Surrealism as it found Surrealist interests in fantasies and eroticism compatible with its agenda to present consumption as a narrative of pleasure. Advertisement, window display, and clothing design were endowed with a rhetoric that adopted Surrealist motifs in service of fashion. The female body was an integral component to be molded into various presentations, cropped, dislocated, or alienated.<sup>23</sup> It is a treatment that stages the female body as a site where art and commerce converge for business purposes as well as constitutes a common vocabulary conjugating female sexuality, fashion and commerce. At the same time, it calls for a reconsideration on the representations of women in commercial settings. These devices are violent in a sense that they manipulate the female body in such a creative yet abusive manner that they prevent women from having complete presence in the visual domain. Such violence can be traced back to Surrealist theories of camera vision. Surrealists believed that the camera functioned as an alternative medium to achieve realism that departed from mimetic forms. Salvador Dalí, for instance, claims that the invention leads to an objective vision capable of seeing and questioning the artificiality of the real.<sup>24</sup> It was this belief that propelled the crossover between Surrealism and fashion to display women in segments to unsettle conventional visual registers. Innovative and transgressive as it was, the Surrealist lens failed to acknowledge the habitual gender politics involved in its own exercise. Innovation ultimately contributed to violence that formulated problematic representations of the female

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<sup>23</sup> For more on the intersection of Surrealism and fashion, please read p 217-18 in Richard Martin's *Fashion and Surrealism*.

<sup>24</sup> Dawn Ades looks into Dalí's vision of photography in "Photography and the Surrealist Text." Read p 176-79 in *L'Amour fou: Photography and Surrealism*.

body and portrayed women as objects rather than subjects of desire.<sup>25</sup>

The intersection between Surrealism and fashion was a prominent scene in the landscape of Fourteenth Street, the longest thoroughfare in the Lower East Side of Manhattan. The fabric of Fourteenth Street was rich in a variety in commerce, entertainment, employment and ethnicity. It was a locale that answered various needs of people with stores, theaters, office buildings, banks and so on. Its texture was multivalent not merely because of the robust commerce but also shifts in its roles. In the mid-nineteenth century, the neighborhood served as a heart for art and entertainment. With department stores Hearn's and Macy's founded here, it instantly became a fashionable shopping district. Nevertheless, its popularity waned as owners of stores had followed customers to newer residential areas by the late nineteenth century. Values of real estate declined and offices were converted to garment sweatshops. Fourteenth Street became a district that offered cheap source of labor and a center for workers catering for the garment industry in the north.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the role of women who resided or wandered on Fourteenth Street changed through different stages in the development of the neighborhood. In the heyday when consumption was an integral way of living, women started to have much more prominent presence in public as shoppers, office workers and salesgirls. When it came to its decline, women at a lower social footing worked as garment workers in production houses while their bourgeois contemporaries moved uptown for better opportunities in life.<sup>27</sup> In other words, Fourteenth Street is a site that stages continuous shifts in the role of the neighborhood as well as women. Its development illustrates tensions of gender vis-à-vis geography embedded in social fabric.

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<sup>25</sup> Hal Foster discussed how the female body was transformed under the Surrealist camera in "Violation and Veiling in Surrealist Photography: Woman as a Fetish, as Shattered Object, as Phallus." Read p 203-25 in *Surrealism: Desire Unbound*.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald R. Wolfe introduces the history in the development of Fourteenth Street in *New York: A Guide to the Metropolis*. Read p 170-73.

<sup>27</sup> Ellen Wiley Todd details the range of womanhood on Fourteenth Street through paintings in *The New Woman Revised: Painting and Gender Politics on Fourteenth Street*.

Clearly, the fecundity at play in “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” reflects the Surrealism-fashion cross-current in the display of products and the flows of commerce in action on Fourteenth Street. Yet, the abuse of female subjectivity lurks in the background of the celebration of consumption and production. The festive ambience of the poem in fact hinges on an oscillation between the prevalence of fashion display and the investment of female labor. Based on these textual and contextual materials, “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” can be interpreted as a negotiation between the official culture of commerce and its constituents.

### **Creating Fashion Humour**

Humour is an economy of negotiation. In *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* and “Humour,” Sigmund Freud delves into the mechanism of jokes, the comic, and humour. Jokes generally works in a triangular pattern, with the person who makes the joke, the object of joke, and the witness of it. The comic involves an individual and the target the former finds comical. These processes of laughter-making cannot be done individually, whereas humour can be employed and enjoyed alone. Freud claims that humour is a kind of pleasure that results from “an economy in the expenditure of affect” (*Jokes* 284) to be used as a psychological approach to answer painful experience. It offers an alternative to process pain, a defensive gesture to encourage the ego to see negative emotions as occasions that provide pleasure.<sup>28</sup> Apart from the Freudian accounts, the theorization of humour is three-fold. First, Aristotle considers it a way of establishing superiority in his discussion of the comedy. The pleasure of the audience relies on an identification with the superior element to stand on a position to laugh at characters lesser in society (23-4). Ulrike Erichsen continues Freud’s view of humour as a coping mechanism in terms of release/relief. The subject economizes the

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<sup>28</sup> For more on how humour works as a defensive mechanism, read p 1-6 of “Humour” in *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*.

habitual response to negative response and releases it through laughter. It deemphasizes distress brought about by difficult situations. Finally, humour can be understood as a handling of the incongruity between the expected and unexpected. Laughing at an uncomfortable circumstance transforms expected strained response to it, an adaptability to find pleasure through a clash of two frames.<sup>29</sup> As a whole, humour juxtaposes two parties, ideas, and scenarios to navigate a trajectory of pleasure.

Such an economy of negotiation shows the potential of humour to serve as a means of transgression. Employed by the powerless in particular, humour locates a dichotomy between the official presentation of authority and its actual manner. It enables the oppressed to find pleasure and even come up with a corrective to adjust the rigidity of body, mind, and character endorsed in the dominant power dynamics. Even though the effects of correction are not instantly tangible, it offers an alternative to identify with the relation in a pleasurable way. This mechanism exemplifies the extent of “elasticity and sociability” of humour (Bergson 17). Mikhail Bakhtin’s discussion of carnival speaks volumes of the sociable nature of humour. Bakhtin indicates that the carnival in medieval culture was the only occasion in which people from different social layers converged. It was a celebration that freed individuals from social ranks and put established order in suspense temporarily. He calls it a ‘folk humor’ that initiates a communication between higher and lower strata in society as well as offers a flight from this very stratification (10). Building on Bakhtin, Robert Wilson attends to the democratization central to the carnival to present it as a force to combat authoritative discourse. It brings a temporary space that acknowledges alternatives perspectives to comprehend the body, mind and character other than the singular vein presented in the official culture (78).

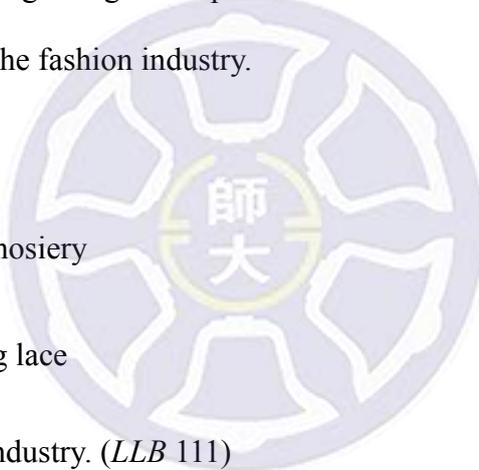
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<sup>29</sup> For more discussions on humour in terms of incongruity, consult Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* p 133 and Arthur Koestler’s *The Art of Creation* p 35-66.

Similarly, the carnival shown in “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” initiates a dialogue between authoritative and alternative discourses. Yet, the poem positions the supporting forces that contribute to the livelihood of consumerist culture in the background. This unconventional presentation of carnival encourages an impetus that puts the official culture into perspectives to attend to the constituents behind. Such a manner corresponds to the drive to appreciate the presence of the castoff and to call the taken-for-granted into question embodied in Loy’s poetics of poverty. It is a maneuver that negotiates the various strands of force under the flow of commerce to formulate a fashion humour that reevaluates the equilibrium among production, consumption and the thoroughfare accommodating these commercial activities. The beginning of the poem demonstrates the force of commerce to anchor the stratification of the fashion industry.

Pedestrian ocean  
of whose undertow,  
the rosy scissors of hosiery  
snip space  
to a triangular racing lace

in an iris circus of Industry. (*LLB* 111)



The progression in the stanza seizes on an opposition between the flows of syntactic and semantic formation to impose an official vision to perceive the fashion industry.

Syntactically, it starts with the line that uses the oceanic metaphor to describe the number of pedestrians on the street and the underneath currents composed of the knitwear worn on them. The mention of “triangular racing lace” and “rosy scissors” not merely gender the passersby as female but also indicate the endeavors put into the making of the lace. The independence of “snip space” echoes the sharpness of the scissors and cancels the presence of handiwork. These five lines function as a unit to pave the way for the appearance of the “Industry,” and the typographical space emphasizes the stratification between the former and

the latter. In the semantic respect, this portion of the poem revolves around the “iris” of the capitalized industry, a finalized vision that refers back to the previous lines to seal an authoritative discourse.

This official vision sees the production of the fashion world in a positive light at the expense of labor:

the diamond flesh of adolescence  
sloping toward perception:

flower over flower,  
corollas of complexion  
craning from hanging-gardens  
of the garment-worker. (*LLB* 111)

The speaker compares the established vision as a bee that observes the different phases in the production of fashion and focuses on the individuality in the faces of pedestrians. They are glamourized and grouped as a “diamond flesh” that gravitate toward a “perception.” These shifts in vision exhibit a top-down and bottom-up angle to see the industry of fashion, and they both touch upon efforts invested in its making. Yet, the swift adjustment of lens and the succeeding floral imageries direct the attention back to the glam on the surface. Continuing the abundance cultivated by the oceanic metaphoric, the floral imageries “flower over flower” and “corollas of complexion” create an alliterative force to keep the appearance of the industry intact and to crane the “garment-worker” from the foreground to the background. They polish the making of fashion and euphemizes the labor-driven workplace as “gardens” that hang in suspense. This euphemism works as a controlling rhetoric that reinforces the flow of production and decorates the hard labor behind as “Eros’ produce” embedded in “a foliage of mass-production” (*LLB* 111) The ensuing lines “carnations/tossed at a carnal caravan/for Carnevale” (*LLB* 112) display a series of alliteration to hone celebratory ambience to downplay the cost that undergirds the fashion industry.

Loy's "Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street" illustrates how women undergird the consumerist culture at the expense of their labor and subjectivity. Deirdre Egan, in "Mina Loy's Modern Long Poem: New York and the Compensations of Poverty," indicates that the female figures dramatized in Loy's late poems are present in public scenes in close contact with production. The "garment workers" in the poem are figures that participate in the production of the capitalist system and their personal worth is weighed in direct proportion to their labors (977). It is this mode of participation that contributes to the fecundity in the processes of commerce. The abundance of floral imageries not merely stands for the range of commodities but also euphemizes the hard efforts invested in mass production. Egan considers the presentation of the robust commerce and the floral description deliberate gestures that foreground how individuals lose their identities in the system of production and consumption (979). In "'Travestied Flesh': Fashion, Modernism, and the Avant-Garde," Susan E. Dunn sees the mass production in action as an exchange of the body. The waves of consumers who go window-shopping resembles the mannequins displayed in the store. This resemblance stages the consumers as simulacra of the displayed fashions in order to remain relevant to the institution of fashion. In this vein, mass production is a system that continues this very procession of simulacra at the cost of money and bodies of the consumers (286). In addition, Dunn points out the poem was originally composed with "On Third Avenue" under the title "Gloria Populi."<sup>30</sup> It delves into the laboring underworld where garment workers are exploited in sweatshops in stark contrast to the festivity of production in the finalized version in print (288). Yet, under both Egan and Dunn's discussions, the exploitation of labor and identity in consumption and production is still an impending danger in the carnival ambience of "Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street."

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<sup>30</sup> Dunn chronicles the edition of "Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street" and "On Third Avenue." According to Loy's manuscripts, the former was composed in 1942 and published posthumously in *The Last Lunar Baedeker* in 1982. The latter was also composed in the same year and edition. "Gloria Populi," a joint of the two works, is a draft poem in the Beinecke Manuscript Collection at Yale University.

Alex Goody unpacks the carnivalesque sentiment that overrides “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” to explain how it works to interrogate consumerist culture in “Carnival Bodies, the Grotesque, and Becoming Animal.” Gender anxiety arrested the social climate after the First World War, especially the fear of the feminine that posed threats on masculinity and the disciplinary hierarchy of gender at large.<sup>31</sup> These threats gave rise to the gothic in mass culture to join the feminine and constitute a surplus that revealed the fragility of cultural norms (151-52). Such a force is present in Loy’s poem about mass production, and her fascination with the detritus adds a grotesque dimension to it. Apart from regarding the grotesque as degradation and death in Bakhtinian terms, Goody points out it can refer to a realm where the boundary between animate and inanimate overlaps in its Renaissance root, a reversal of the logical trajectories in the comprehension of the world.<sup>32</sup> Its literary genealogy brings a force of transgression to the fore (153). The poem exhibits a carnival transgression in identification with the grotesque body in which the efforts of garment workers are manipulated in service to sustain the viability of production and consumption. It is a consumer carnival that stresses the various flows constituting the fashion institution as a modern spectacle in an explicit manner. In fact, it is a hybrid of the carnival and the grotesque body mined in the rhetoric of fashion to undercut the bourgeois culture on display (174-76). In other words, the carnivalesque in “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” is a highly intricate prevalence, a surplus of the gothic and the grotesque that aims to demonstrate the prosperity of mass production and pose it as a site of contestation simultaneously.

The following stanza illustrates the relation between the consumer and labor through “a daisy,” an accessory of the former. The consumer sees the “sempstress” as an “auxiliary

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<sup>31</sup> Andrew Smith and Jeff Wallace’s *Gothic Modernisms* compiles discussions on Virginia Woolf, Djuna Barnes and D.H Lawrence to examine the oscillation between the gothic and modernism in the terrain of gender.

<sup>32</sup> In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin considers the grotesque integral in the carnival traditions in early modern Europe to illustrate procreation, excess, consumption and degradation as seminal in its making. On the other hand, in *The Grotesque in Art and Literature*, Wolfgang Kayser traces the negative dimension of the grotesque to examine how it functions as an expression of alienation from rationality since the romantic period.

creator” who makes the accessories on her body, a perspective that deemphasizes the worth of “hand-labor” (*LLB* 112). The industry takes the full credit in the completion of a look on an individual as the main creator, whereas the workers are adjuncts whose contributions are overshadowed. This illustration is representative of the official rhetoric prevalent in the poem and hail the consumer into an abiding discourse of consumption:

long glass aisles,  
idols of style  
project a chic paralysis  
through mirrored opals  
imagining  
the cyclamen and azure  
of their mobile simulacra’s  
tidal passing (*LLB* 112)

The succession of shop windows displays mannequins adorned in style. These mannequins are put on a pedestal to be models that showcases the most current looks and sets the benchmark determining the ins and outs of fashion. They are in a superior position to announce the authoritative culture and paralyze the individuals who look into the windows through an overwhelming force of fashion. It is “a chic paralysis” that encourages an aspiration for the new and eventually produces a sovereign subject in full submission to the visual discourse in action. The glass of the window is a device of demarcation. For one thing, it draws a line between the fantasy and reality; for another, it garners the flows in the generation of simulacra to maintain the vitality of production as well as consumption.

In contrast to the fluidity and mobility of fashion, the consumers are static because of the visual display on the thoroughfare.

a windowed carousel  
of girls revolving  
idly in an unconcern  
of walking dolls

letting their little wrists from under  
the short furs of summer  
jolt to their robot turn (*LLB* 112)

Window-shopping is analogous to a carousel as it involves a process in which pedestrians visualizes themselves in the looks on display in front of the shop windows on the street. However, the carousel in question is an idle and confined one as it works to situate individuals in a designated position to formulate a narrative of pleasure in consumption in accordance to its rhetoric. It is a mechanism of interpellation that convinces them to firmly believe in the visual narrative and makes them idle dolls reacting robotically to the discourse of fashion. To put it more precise, the technology of the shop window turns passersby into docile bodies, “an unconcern/of walking dolls,” encouraged to identify with the style displayed by the mannequins. Ultimately, this identification blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality, and that of self and other. It demonstrates how the authoritative discourse of fashion hails consumers into legitimate subjects and formulates a robust body of consumerist culture.

Linda A. Kinnahan consolidates and furthers the discussion on the capitalization of labor and subjectivity in consumerist culture by reading “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” as a Surrealist tableau that represents women as objects to be violated in “Surrealism and the Female Body: Economies of Violence.” European artists immigrated to America in the 1930s, and Surrealism captivated the attention of popular culture, particularly fashion. Surrealist motifs, such as fantasies and eroticism, were incorporated into advertisements to create narratives of pleasure in clothing.<sup>33</sup> Women were a key component but partially present in narration, with the female body serving as a creative material to be cropped, dislocated and sexualized in unconventional settings. This was a common practice in the publicity for

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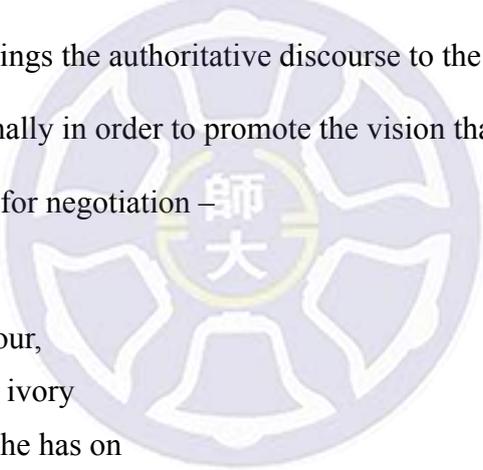
<sup>33</sup> I historicize the immigration of European artists to the U.S, the popularity of Surrealism and the politics of female representation in the succeeding section.

fashion that implicitly presented women as a site for violence (89-90). Kinnahan considers the exercise of the poem an epitome of the Surrealism-fashion crossover that downplays the economy of labor to stage a pompous system of commerce. The mannequins in the shop window and the eye of the speaker highlight an act of observation that enacts a series of negotiation on the self caught between the real and the artificial. It not merely attends to mirroring and repetition resulted from the display that cultivates the glamor of fashion but also to the figure of consumer and that of labor. The former is presented as walking dolls whose aspiration for fashion reinforces the presence of fashion institution, whereas the latter remains in the background as a mere assistance of the entire procedure. (94-99) Such a contrast in characterization parallels the treatment on the female body in fashion campaigns. The endeavors behind are portrayed as a taken-for-granted process that maintains the flow of commerce, and likewise the female body is manipulated as a visual stimulus to tailor narratives of pleasure. Contextualizing “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” in the visual practice of the cross currents between Surrealism and fashion, Kinnahan reveals the violence upstaged by the fecundity of production and consumption.

It is apparent that the overall criticism calls the vitality of the consumerist culture into question. Egan and Dunn indicate that the mass production at play cashes in on female labor and subjectivity, and Goody illustrates this exploitation as a consequence of a surplus that consists of the gothic, grotesque and the carnivalesque. Kinnahan contextualizes the poem in the collaboration between Surrealism and fashion to reveal the degree of violence in the background. These discussions account for the making of mass production and problematize it to call attention to labors, subjectivity and violence in the production and consumption of fashion. To put it more precise, they study how the institution of fashion naturalizes exploitation to generalize the existence of the industry. Such a critical trajectory unsettles the flow of commerce to show undercurrents. Yet, the manner in which these undercurrents are

examined still presents them as the repressed rather than forces capable of facilitating negotiations with the dominant system. Judging from the creative oeuvre in Loy's Bowery poems, they are the maneuver of her fashionability that recasts female labors, subjectivity and violence in fashion. These strands of force ought to be read in this respect in order to formulate a commentary on the mass production of fashion on a larger scale.

The fecundity of production and consumption overrides Loy's "Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street." On the surface, the poem is an explicit celebration of the fashion industry, with oceanic and floral descriptions standing for its degree of force and glamour. Yet, the legitimacy of the entire consumerist culture is attained at the expenditure of female labor and subjectivity. The expenditure is situated in the background and becomes an impending danger to be resolved. The poem brings the authoritative discourse to the fore while put the alternatives behind intentionally in order to promote the vision that attends to the latter as well as to foster an impetus for negotiation –



two lovers, crushed  
as to Fashion's humour,  
point at the ecru and ivory  
replica of the dress she has on  
doused in a reservoir of ruby neon (*LLB* 113)

Commercial activities terminate and the thoroughfare is occupied by "two lovers" alone. This scene marks the first instance of individuals independent from the consumption and production. The encounter of these lovers is one between a random pedestrian and a mannequin in the window, and their love comes with a sense of humour. It is a humour resulted from the mass-production of fashion as the individual crushes into someone with the exact same dress. They share the love for the same dress. Under such a circumstance, laughter is an expected response. Yet, the humour in action is a critical apparatus that negotiates the self under the influence fashion. It is a humour that juxtaposes two parties to

keep the official culture of fashion in suspense and makes the individual aware of it through such an experience to adjust the lens that reconsiders the body, mind and character.



### **Conclusion: Fashionability and Poetics of Poverty**

From the salon to the slum, Mina Loy probes into the derelict to problematize the logical trajectories that legitimize the script of rationality and progress in her late Bowery poems. It is Loy's gesture to reconceive the heart and margin of modernity through sites of modernization in dialogue with figures of destitution, a compensatory procedure that aims to see and aestheticize destitution against the criteria of official culture. To put it more precise, Loy's vision at this juncture engenders a poetics of poverty that navigates alternative perspectives to initiate shifts of paradigm in the stratification of and create nuances in the authoritative discourse. It is a means of negotiation that illustrates different characters of fashionability in the representation and rhetoric of the detritus. Its manner highlights an exercise to explicate and complicate the forces that determine the complexity of modernity.

The expression "make it new" epitomizes modernism in its entirety. Its concision makes it a decree that compelled modernists to capitalize on their creativity to showcase the value of novelty. Making it new surely anchored the literary scene in the twentieth century, and Mina Loy was a distinctive figure in its foreground. Loy championed this modernist impetus by making the world her own salon and she curated hers comprehensively.<sup>34</sup> Her social and professional engagements came in a full range. She played a prominent role in the Arts and Crafts movement, dress reform movement, Dada and Futurism; she worked as a poet, an artist, a model, an actress and even a fashion designer. When it comes to literature, Loy was particularly known for her poetry. She experimented with typography and language to demonstrate a lexicographical prowess that challenged masculinized notions of poetic authority, female subjectivity, and literary production. In art and sartorial designs, she created a corselet to maintain the aged figure and employed materials of poverty to make clothes. It is

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<sup>34</sup> Loy proclaimed "Make the world your salon" in a manifesto entitled "International Psycho-Democracy" written in 1918. This expression encouraged her modernist contemporaries to upscale their creativity and reminded the masses of the importance to value the genius of artists. For more, read *The Last Lunar Baedeker* 276-82.

evident that Loy toyed with materials continuously to make them creative throughout her body of work. Her oeuvre exemplified the modernist drive to create. Yet, making it new could not afford to describe her creativity because she formulated her own modernist expression, one that centered on fashion and fashioning. In Loy's parlance, making it *fashionable* was the index of modernism.

Beyond the force to make it new, making it fashionable has a greater capacity. It is an impetus driven by two strands of force, one to innovate and the other to further the creativity of created materials. Loy put this idiom into practice in such a thorough manner that it not merely made her unclassifiable but also led her to undergo a series of wandering that constituted a creative economy to fashion, unfashion and refashion. Born with a Hungarian Jewish tailor and an Irish English gentlewoman, she was congenitally aware of the importance of fashion and fashioning. She participated in major social movements and produced literary and art works in several international locations, including Berlin, Florence, Paris and New York to name a few. Not conforming to conventions, she made materials of different kinds creative in her terms. Her creativity staged her as the most original and radical woman in the salons of high modernism in her prime. In the final stage of her life, Loy moved to the Bowery in the Lower East Side in New York temporarily. She invested in her fascination with the derelict by working with materials of poverty to create collages and spending abundant time with social outcasts. From the salon to the slum, the modernism she embarked on was migratory and all-encompassing, a complex series of wandering in the high, low and even marginal spheres. Loy displayed a creative economy that resisted any rubrics to compartmentalize her but assisted the impetus to create. This particular nature demands a panoramic lens to consider her oeuvre and such has been the manner in criticisms of her poetry. Critics tend to discuss identity, sexuality and experimentation of language in Loy's texts in contexts of her visual arts or social engagements to pin down the textile of her

literary production. The overall scholarship has spilled much ink on her early poetry but not enough on her later works. Her Bowery poems mark a transition from high to low modernism and constitute a poetics that brings issues of poverty, the discourse of fashion victim as well as mass-production and consumption to the fore. It is a significant moment of making it fashionable where she fashions, unfashions and refashions previous motifs to come to terms with the increasing complexity of modernity.

The poetics of poverty concentrates on figures of destitution to call the legitimacy of a rational subject under the script of modernity into question. “Hot Cross Bum” exhibits portraits of the poor in abundance, a variety of characters stricken by poverty in the Bowery and on the polar opposite of modernization. The poem characterizes them in such a detail manner that it accounts for how the building of their destitution is a spectacle beyond the rubrics that legitimize the ideology in the championed discourse. Such a characterization brings a critical position that emerges from poverty to the fore. Stemming from the documentary culture in the 1930s, the poetics of poverty in action throughout the poem contests politics in the representation of the poor and re-appropriates the rhetoric of compassion. It features a marginal modernity in which subjects handle their own vulnerability and destitution with sharpness. “Hot Cross Bum” articulates the poetics of poverty by tracing its origin and presenting it as a maneuver of negotiation that obliterates the discourse of poverty and recasts the lens in the consideration of the Bowery.

“Chiffon Velours” dramatizes an aged woman dressed in an outdated dress lying on the corner stone of a department store. The juxtaposition enacts the poetics of poverty to reevaluate the mechanism that determines manners women abide by to keep themselves relevant to the institution of fashion. The emergence of the Authentic Copy cultivated the culture that claimed authenticity lied in the ability to be reproduced, whereas Loy’s endeavored to garner her originality in her business management against such cultural

climate consistently. The poem speaks to the phenomenon of replication in fashion trends through the presence of an old woman modeling her own design of destitution in stark contrast to the reproduced fashion endorsed by the store. Such a juxtaposition represents impetus of the poetics of poverty to negotiate the dynamics between the original and copy and the criteria that decides the ins and outs is of fashion. To put it differently, “Chiffon Velours” exemplifies a poetics of poverty exercised by an aged female subject to navigate a line of flight within the discourse of fashion to establish herself as a creative agent rather than a fashion victim.

The poetics of poverty in action in “Mass-Production on 14<sup>th</sup> Street” works to formulate a fashion humour that critiques consumerist culture. On the surface, the poem is filled with the festivity of commerce cultivated by consumption and production. Meanwhile, the exploitation of female labor and subjectivity hang in the background. It is a site of contestation where the celebration of commerce outweighs the expenditure put into its making. Given the context of the Surrealist-fashion collaboration in visual presentation of women, the costs of the titular mass-production appear more prominent. The power dynamic of the poem is a deliberate arrangement that poses itself as a negotiation between the authoritative and alternative discourse. The poetics of poverty at play juxtaposes strands of forces under the flow of commerce to mediate them to cultivate humour in fashion that reconsiders the mind, body, and character in the assumed balance among production, consumption and the street that houses these commercial activities.

In conclusion, the practice of the poetics of poverty in these Bowery poems is a force to negotiate. Its manner of negotiation does not acknowledge alternative discourses to bring them in harmony with the official script of modernity. Rather, it serves as a maneuver of transgression to unsettle of the benchmark that legitimizes the sovereignty of a rational modern subject. The three poems in discussions characterize figures of destitution, such as

the inhabitants of the Bowery, the aged woman in front of the store, and the female labors and consumers under the control of commerce, to navigate possible lines of resistance. Studying the poetics of poverty in Loy's Bowery poem features an exercise of un/folding that explicates the politics of destitution, the institution of fashion, and the fecundity of mass-production and complicates them through destitute subject to come to terms with authority of modernity. By extension, Loy's poetics of poverty works as a cultural device that turns the Bowery into a critical position to characterize the force to fashion, unfashion and refashion in destitution.



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