

THE ARTIST AS A MONGREL GIRL: MINA LOY'S "ANGLO- MONGRELS AND THE ROSE"

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Mina Loy wrote the long poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" between 1923 and 1925. It is among the oddest of all modernist long poems, a strange combination of satire, didactic commentary and lyrical mysticism. Loy offers a pseudo-autobiographical chronicle of her family and of her own birth and childhood. The poem is made up of three sections of different length, "Exodus", "English Rose", and "Mongrel Rose." It is in this last part of the poem where the author narrates the birth of Ova, who is a representation of Mina Loy as a child, a rather ironic and sceptic version of herself. My aim in the present paper is to show that the mongrel identity Loy creates for Ova is enriching and protests patriarchal definitions of the feminine, however, Ova seems unable to overcome the conflicts derived from her mother's restrictive manifestation and practice of gender conventions. Consequently, as Ova's creativity and artistic aspirations will be seriously limited, she is not able to offer a strong alternative for female expression and power.

Key words: mongrel, identity, gender, poetry, parody

I. INTRODUCTION

Mina Loy (London, 1882-Aspen, Colorado, 1966) wanted to become the most original woman of her generation.¹ During her lifetime, Loy engaged in a

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very wide range of occupations such as those of painter, writer, fashion designer, actress and art dealer. The diversity of her life experience can also be appreciated in her literary work, as Loy was reluctant to devote herself to just one genre. She wrote poems, novels, plays and manifestos. These diverse interests reflect Mina Loy's effort to survive artistically and economically in the twentieth century. Painting and poetry were her most enduring interests and achievements and poetry her most substantial claim to modernity (Kouidis 1980:1).

In her biography of Mina Loy, Carolyn Burke points out that, for the modernists, Loy was the first to articulate the sensibility of the "new woman." Ezra Pound praised her intellect and her lack of sentimentalism, and William Carlos Williams, Hart Crane, and E.E. Cummings admired her work. In her many years abroad, Loy befriended Gertrude Stein, Djuna Barnes, James Joyce, Brancusi, Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray, among others. However, by the mid-thirties, she had disappeared and her poems were out of print (1997:v). Her book, *Lunar Baedeker* (published by Contact Press in 1923) was not reprinted until 1958. Her individual poems were rarely anthologized, and Loy's place in the development of modernism and feminism nearly forgotten (Ress 1993:115). Her work is currently slowly becoming more recognizable, if not celebrated. In *Mina Loy: American Modernist Poet* (1980), Virginia Kouidis introduces Loy's poetry as meriting rediscovery because of its contributions to feminist thought and art and to an understanding of the origins, practice, and aims of American poetic modernism. But, most importantly, her poetry deserves attention because of its daring attempt to make language reflect the movement of consciousness in a world of constant change and vague purpose (1980:1-2). Kouidis's book places Loy's earlier work within aesthetic and intellectual contexts. The biographical prologue to the book was the first of its kind, and the bibliography of published writings by Loy has been an integral starting point for researchers since 1980.

Roger Conover edited *The Last Lunar Baedeker* in 1982, which was the most complete collection of Loy's work to date. It contains poetry, prose and reproductions of drawings, sculpture, paintings, constructions, a wall mural, and one lampshade by Mina Loy. Lisa Ress, in her essay "From Futurism to Feminism: The Poetry of Mina Loy" (1993), notes the curtailment of Loy's influence on a generation of poets because of the relative unavailability of her work. For this critic, a woman who was so radical in form and in content deserves consideration in the history of modernism, and a place in the history of feminist thought. Ress praises Loy's subversive approach to poetic language, appropriating for herself and for all women the vocabulary until then used only by classically educated men (1993:116, 26). Carolyn Burke's long-awaited

biography of Loy came out in 1997. For Maera Shreiber and Keith Tuma, editors of *Mina Loy: Woman and Poet* (1998), the first substantial collection of criticism devoted to this author, Loy's work and biography suggest her centrality to the history of the avant-garde in poetry, prose, and the visual arts. The essays in this volume try to situate Mina Loy's work in the many contexts it speaks to (1998:12-13).

The poem "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" was written in Paris between 1923 and 1925. The first two instalments of the poem came out in the "Exile" issue (1923) of *The Little Review*, and the third in Robert McAlmon's *Contact Collection of Contemporary Verse* (1925). It was not published in its entirety until 1982 in the volume *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, edited by Roger L. Conover. The poem has three sections of different length. The first one, "EXODUS", focuses on Loy's father, Sigmund Löwy, a Hungarian Jew who emigrated to London at the end of the 19th century. In "ENGLISH ROSE", Loy writes about her mother, Julia Bryan, who is called both Ada and Alice. The third section, "MONGREL ROSE", is devoted to Ova, daughter of Exodus and Ada. Ova is a representation of Mina Loy as a child, an ironic and sceptic version of herself.

My aim in the present paper is to show that the mongrel identity Loy creates for Ova is enriching and protests patriarchal definitions of the feminine, however, Ova seems unable to overcome the conflicts derived from her mother's restrictive manifestation and practice of gender conventions. Consequently, as Ova's creativity and artistic aspirations will be seriously limited, she is not able to offer a strong alternative for female expression and power. Initially, as Loy ridiculizes Ova's parents' stereotypical identities as a Jew and as a prudish Victorian lady, we could think that she is proposing a positive image of Ova's mongrel identity as a source of success in life. However, being a girl limits her personal and intellectual development. Ova lacks female models to identify with and she turns to the symbolic world in order to let her creativity run free. This foray into the domain of language leads Ova to experience her parents' betrayal which seems to anticipate her future artistic failure.

For Loy as well as for other modernist female writers, self-naming constitutes both an assertion of linguistic agency and an opportunity for identity performance. The poetic voice was constructed, not discovered or given and identity was historical and determined but also to some degree, a matter of performance. Although in "Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose" Loy intends to write a roughly autobiographical chronicle of her family and her own birth, she invents new names for her parents and for herself. Name changes may provide psychological escape from rigid familial circumstances, and greater freedom of expression. By naming herself Ova (the reproductive egg) instead of Mina, Loy

is trying to generate at least the potential for new subject formation (Miller 2005:52, 65).

“Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” can be considered a modernist poem because of its exploration of a new literary language that escapes conventional definitions of high and low art. Also, it questions the bourgeois subject and reflects upon the emotional conflicts of psychic life. The poem is also avant-garde in its non-traditional structure and its radicalized correlations of form and content, and offers a rather curious selection of autobiographical events. Without additional biographical information about Mina Loy, the reader will encounter difficulties in understanding some sections which introduce characters that are not especially integrated into this cryptic personal mythology. For example, Loy’s husbands Stephen Haweis and Arthur Cravan are part of the poem as children under the names of Esau Penfold and Colossus. The entire poem represents Loy’s attempt to showcase her specific talent as a poet able to write poetry on aspects of life not considered poetic, that is to say, on the mundane, the fleshy and even the excremental (Tuma 1998:188).

I agree with Keith Tuma’s classification of the poem as a unique modernist lyric sequence because of its reliance on narrative. For him, this poem is a lyric sequence because of the extreme condensation of the narrative and the emphasis placed upon the witty and often embittered commentary surrounding key events in the fragments of family history Loy is narrating. These events include a portrait of Ova’s (Loy’s) father, her parents’ courtship, Ova’s birth, one of Ova’s earliest efforts at understanding both the empowering and alienating effects of entering into the symbolic domain of language, a trip with a governess to a poor Jewish neighbourhood, an epiphany in a garden, and a final portrait of Ova’s father. The use of the third person is more a technique for increasing a critical and ironic distance between Loy as author of an autobiographical poem and Loy as its subject, or one of its subjects, than an opportunity for Loy to remove herself from the poem (Tuma 1998:187).

The linguistic strategies of Loy’s parody are polisemy, alliteration, inflated diction, puns, and ironic rhyme. Phrases and individual words are isolated in short lines, often containing line-internal white space and irregular indentations and lacking punctuation. Earlier than her peers, Loy uses the visual resources of the page (Miller 2005:114). What holds her stanzas together is not a larger rhythmic contour or consistent image pattern but a network of elaborate rhyming, chiming, chanting and punning (Perloff 1998:136). Some critics have considered that these linguistic strategies are clumsy, but what Loy hopes to question is a misogynistic and class-bound society through language itself. By using parody and satire against the entrenched traditions of English culture, this poem criticises racial and gender stereotypes (Frost 1998:150-152).

II. PORTRAIT GALLERY: EXODUS AND ADA

The clash of Judaism with Protestantism through the figures of Exodus and Ada dominates the first half of the poem, whereas the social and psychological instability of the mongrel Ova dominates the second half (Miller 2005:169). The section “EXODUS” portrays Ova’s father in a comical and ironic way: his childhood in “Buda Pest,” his arrival in Victorian London at the end of the 19th century, his job as a tailor, his lonely moments in a boarding house, his sexual fantasies, and his, according to the impersonal narrator, ill-fated meeting with the “English Rose” who is to be Ova’s mother. Loy seems to accept many of the anti-Semitic stereotypes of her time when describing Exodus. For the author, Exodus is starved for affection as a child and prematurely old because of his Jewish family’s pressure to push and make his way in life:

Exodus lay under an oak tree
bordering on Buda Pest he had lain
him down to overnight under the lofty rain
of starlight
having leapt from the womb
eighteen years ago and grown
neglected along the shores of the Danube (1985:111)

The intellectual eagerness of Exodus’s ancestors is ridiculed because it leads to emotional deprivation: “Sinister foster parents/who lashed the boy/to that paralysis of the spiritual apparatus”, (1985:112), and to early aging. An enormous interest in money is also part of Exodus’s culture:

The arid gravid
intellect of Jewish ancestors
the senile juvenile
calculating prodigies of Jehová
crushed by the Occident ox
they scraped
the gold gold golden
muck from off its hoofs (1985:112)

Other stereotypes in the description of Exodus are the Jewish artistic bent and the powerful sexuality of dark Eastern males: “He/loaded with

Mosaic/passions that amass/like money” (1985:124), “Exodus/Oriental/mad to melt/with something softer than himself” (1985:126). Loy ironizes about Exodus’s longing for integration in his new country, described as the “paradise of the pound-sterling” (1985:112). “Business English” and the language of finance: “jibbering stock exchange quotations/and conundrums of finance” (1985:115) quickly supplanted the languages that were part of his cultural identity, such as German, Hungarian or Biblical Hebrew. The Hebrew chants have become “A wave/‘out of tide’ with the surrounding/ocean ...” (1985:117) to which Exodus has become insensitive. The final portrait of the Jewish father is that of a selfish person who is willing to do whatever is necessary to achieve economic success in his new country even at the expense of disowning his ancestry and suffering from a certain psychic deprivation. Loy persists in her anti-Semitic satire when describing Exodus’s interest in Ada. Exodus lacks a noble pedigree but he possesses a high purchasing power. Therefore his union with the perfect embodiment of the British essences would be the culmination of his economic and social success. Exodus perceives Ada through an aroma which is more lyrical than physical. This lyrical aroma refers to the conventions that preside over Loy’s parents’ relationship:

While through
 stock quotations
 and Latin prescriptions
 for physic
 filters the lyric
 aroma of the rose (1985:120)

In the section “ENGLISH ROSE”, Loy presents Ada (Ova’s/Loy’s mother) as a rose grown in an English garden where Exodus gazes at her. Her domesticated femininity personifies the Victorian woman in an ironic way, a woman who is alienated from her own body. Loy’s literary techniques are an example of over-writing, with overwhelming examples of assonance and alliteration. She uses verbal inflation, including hyperbole and extravagant figures for satiric effect:

Early English everlasting
 quadrate Rose
 paradox-Imperial
 trimmed with some travestied flesh
 tinted with bloodless duties dewed

with Lipton's teas
 and grimed with crack-packed
 herd-housing
 petalling
 the prim gilt
 penitralia
 of a luster-scioned
 core-crown (1985:121)

The assonance of "Early English everlasting" mocks the pompous presumption of the "everlasting" hegemony of the empire. In "trimmed with some travestied flesh," alliteration underlines the idea that "flesh" itself is travestied in women who do not value the body. We also find neologism and hyphenation such as "paradox-Imperial", "cracked-packed", "prim-gilt/penitralia", "luster-scioned/core-crown" (Frost 1998:160-161).

Exodus and Ada or Israel and Albion "unite their variance/in marriage" (1985:126), a union which is criticized by Loy, who ridicules Exodus again by portraying him as a traitor to his faith who averts other Jewish women's gazes and is in search of the social and economic benefit that his marrying Ada can bring to him. Ada's ideas on love seem based on romantic books where heroes and heroines repress and sublimate their sexual desire:

Maiden emotions
 breed
 on leaves of novels
 where anatomical man
 has no notion
 of offering other than the bended knee
 to femininity (1985:124)

For Ada, a gentleman is devoid of sexual instincts, and that is why she can't accept her husband's sexual advances. Her resistance is presented by Loy in geological terms: "... adamsite/opposition/of nerves like stalactites" (1985:127). Loy thus satirizes Ada's Victorian education because it made her develop an aversion for everything physical and trivialized her mind. This part of the poem devoted to Ada ends with some satiric lines on the consequences of this marriage between two persons with such different personalities. Loy refers to the impossible complicity between Exodus and the English Rose, who is

always sheltered by an “impenetrable pink curtain” (1985:128) and always willing to domesticate her husband “to the apparent impeccability/of the English” (1985:129). Exodus’s religion and culture will not infect the essence of the English Rose, whose petals will cling to Exodus at the expense of a permanent disharmony between both. Their different tongues do not embody the plurality of cultures or identities but the scarcely harmonic meeting of two opposite ways of approaching the world:

Its petals hung
with tongues
that under the supervision
of the Board of Education
may never sing in concert
for some
singing h
flat and some
h sharp ‘The Arch
angels sing H’ (1985:129-130)

Exodus and Ada will breed Ova, the “Mongrel Rose”, in contraposition to her mother, the “English Rose.” The eugenetical ideology of the age will consider Ova’s birth as disgraceful due to her “mongrel” or “hybrid” condition. However, as we will see later, Ova will try to take full advantage of this situation, which does not appear to be very favourable for her.

III. SELF-PORTRAIT OF MINA LOY: OVA

The third section, “MONGREL ROSE”, is divided into several subsections. The first one, “Ada Gives Birth to Ova”, recreates Ova’s birth. Her coming to this world anticipates her unconventional existence. Ada suffers from intense pain when giving birth to Ova, who is not a beautiful baby but “A clotty bulk of bifurcate fat” (1985:130). Loy insists on Ova’s exceptionality when describing her as “A breathing baby/mystero-chemico Nemesis/of obscure attractions” (1985:131), and mentioning her “isolate consciousness” (1985:131). Ova is an Anglo-Israelite mixture of Jesus of Nazareth and Judas Iscariot, but blessed with a Jewish intellect. Her mongrel heart and intelligent eyes cast a

determined spirit among clumsy maternal caresses (1985:132). Ova's birth contrasts with Esau Penfold's childhood. This is the name chosen by Loy in the subsection "Enter Esau Penfold" to refer to her first husband, Stephen Haweis. Esau belongs to a traditional English family who embodies the essence of British culture, according to Loy, and who is completely alien to cultural hybridity. Loy describes Esau's social environment as well as the physical objects one could find in the house of a high-class family. Thus, "There is a portrait of him in that pose/labelled 'Esau holding an orb'" (1985:132), and fifteenth-century andirons, statues of Buda, pieces of Ming porcelain. Esau is exposed to the conversations on scientific and African topics of his parents' friends. At the beginning of the twentieth-century Africa was being explored and colonized and the United Kingdom was an Empire with colonies in Asia and Africa. Scientific disciplines also reached an extraordinary development at this time:

One takes the little Esau on his knee
to listen to his watch
and absentmindedly
discourses on the differential calculus
while an African explorer
explains how easily
he might catch lions if he wished
"It only needs kindness and a turn of the wrist" (1985:133-134)

Ova's physical and social environment is vulgar in comparison to Esau's. Her house is not a residence, like the Penfold's, but a terraced house in a neighbourhood called Kilburn, which has no prestige. Nobody cultivates Ova's intellect, nor flatters her ego with portraits. Her house's furniture is ordinary, without pieces of Ming porcelain or statues of Buda, but chairs "of chestnut cretonne/printed with maroon/acanthus leaves and big buff water-lilies" (1985:135). Instead of talking to her, Ova is told to be quiet and to behave herself:

and told to "hush"
while thrust
into her baby-pelisse
of ruby plush (1985:135)

The title of the following subsection, "Ova Begins to Take Notice", recreates Ova's curiosity and evokes her pre-linguistic physical sensations when exploring her environment. Ova's intense gaze and her interest in new

experiences are included in expressions such as “the curious glare” (1985:135), “The staring baby”, “The suctional soul” (1985:136). Ova discovers a world of lights, colours, shadows and reflections she wishes to melt with: “the vari-pinct universe” (1985:136), “a crimson ball”, “The prismatic sun show”, “... the light of day” (1985:137).

If in the previous section the child Esau Penfold was physically and intellectually stimulated by his family and social environment, the women in Ova’s family try to restrict her imagination. In her explorations, Ova always finds female figures with “claws of dominion” (1985:136) that stand in her way and take her “in a receding/prison/of muscular authority (1985:136). Loy represents Ada with spy eyes and an asexual body similar to a piece of Victorian furniture:

two little spy holes
 eyeing
 and arms like signals
 flapping and cuffing
 the heavy upholstered
 stuffing
 of these
 two women’s netherbodies (1985:139)

Ova gets bored in the limited world of the real and becomes interested in the world of symbols, of language. In her mind of wordless thoughts, Ova is attracted by the mystery of words, the only elements that can take her away from a boring objective reality. Loy describes with her incisive irony Ova’s fascination for one word and her wish to see it materialize in something physical:

Sometimes a new word comes to her
 she looks before her
 and watches
 for its materialization
 “iarrhea” (1985:139)

This is a tragicomic situation because, first of all, Ova perceives a truncated word, and secondly, she searches in her physical environment for something that possesses one of the features attributed to “iarrhea”, such as the colour green. Ova poetically thinks of a ball that she saw near the ivy in the

garden or remembers the light reflected by a brooch “pinned to a bended bust” (1985:141). For her, “iarrhea” can also be found “in an orb of verdigris” (1985:141) or in “An unreal/globe terrestrial/of olive-jewel” (1985:142). Ova rushes to look for these things, but then someone pulls her out and interrupts her search. This passage anticipates that the magic of the word “iarrhea” will vanish once Ova adds the missing “d” to it and understands its real meaning. Loy suggests that there is nothing pure and least of all language. The author also foresees Ova’s difficulties in entering the symbolic domain without being overwhelmed by the burden of a masculine tradition in the creative use of language. We should not forget that the word that fascinates Ova is detested by her mother and the other women of the house (“the armored towers”), who feel disgusted by the waste Ova’s baby sister has produced:

Over the new-born
 in the bassinet
 the armored towers
 are bending
 in iron busks
 of curved corsets
 consulting
 An in her ear
 a half inaudible an
 iridescent hush
 forms “iarrhea” (1985:140)

Ada is not Ova’s ally in the physical and symbolic exploration of the world and is unable to laugh at her daughter’s imaginative interpretation of the word “iarrhea”. The feminine is a prison from which Ova must escape.

The subsection “Opposed Aesthetics” again explores the differences in the perception of beauty between Ova and Esau Penfold, due to their differing background and upbringing. Ova, the “mongrel-girl”, who occupies the position of “Noman’s land” of the female body, feels compelled to create beauty out of excrements and from round physical things. Esau, who has been surrounded by beautiful objects and intellectually overstimulated since he was born, considers that the common manifestations of human creativity look similar: “...flatten/before his/eyes/to one vast monopattern” (1985:143).

In “Marriage Boxes”, Loy reintroduces the theme of the marriage between Exodus and Ada. Ada seems unable to accept her husband Exodus’s culture and

identity. She still dreams of shaping Exodus according to the masculine stereotypes she has learnt from literature:

only she had gathered from her literature
 that men ought to be fair
 and as all women
 who have not got the world to choose from
 marry in an hallucinatory
 conviction
 that the best man they can get
 will yet
 redye his soul in the matrimonial
 vats of constant suasion
 to the requisite tint (1985:145-146)

“Psychic Larva” alludes to the devastating influence some of Ada’s attitudes exert over Ova’s mind, mainly the maternal obsession about her daughter’s “vile origin” (1985:147) because Ova’s father is a Jew. Ada feels that Ova embodies the sin of those who killed Christ, thus contradicting the most basic maternal instinct. Ova is mostly hurt by her mother’s silent rejection because it deprives her of the tools to understand herself and her mother’s attitude.

In “Enter Colossus”, Loy introduces a character based on his second husband, Arthur Cravan. Unlike Ova, Colossus quickly understands that “All words are lies” (1985:150). Colossus is a rebellious and disrespectful child who is constantly making fun of women and priests. Loy carries out Ova’s fantasies of rebellion through this masculine character. As Colossus does not experience internal disharmony due to his sex, Loy seems to be suggesting that the artistic transgressive voice will always come from a masculine figure. Thus, the author anticipates Ova’s artistic failure (Frost 1998:172-173). The subsection “Ova, Among the Neighbors” reflects some of the reasons that limit Ova’s personal development. According to Loy, family, nation and tradition restrict Ova’s freedom and creativity:

New Life
 when it inserts itself into continuity
 is disciplined

by the family
 reflection
 of national construction
 to a proportionate posture
 in the civilized scheme
 deriving
 definite contours
 from tradition
 personality
 being mostly
 a microcosmic
 replica
 of institutions (1985:153)

The fundamental maternal link is replaced by the link with the motherland: "Suburban children/of middle-class Britain/ejected from the home/are still connected/with the inseverable/navel-cord of the motherland" (1985:154). This is just another proof of the rejection of the feminine and of women's internalization of a masculine perception of the world that separates them from their daughters, as Ova has showed since she was born. Loy ironically mocks at the national myths that British children are taught, which for her are just "... a lunacy/of flippant fallacy/for innocence" (1985:155). The last stanzas in this section articulate a fake prayer that begs for these lies to last forever: "O may it muddle through/bright with its bland taboo/from the nursery to the cemetery/ Amen" (1985:156).

In "Ova Has Governesses", Loy contrasts again Ova's vitality with the dull environment of her childhood, marked by her mother's vagaries and the rigid supervision of repressive governesses lacking any imagination. Her London surroundings are perceived as oppressive, "... spoiled wit soot" and with "ghoulish clouds" (1985:159). The following subsection, "Jews and Ragamuffins of Kilburn", opens with Ova's shopping tour in her own neighbourhood, Kilburn, where shopkeepers tell her strange stories and streets are full of shouting children at play. Ova's fascination for this atmosphere is criticised by her governess's negative comments about the large Jewish community who live there. The woman overlooks the fact that Ova's father is also Jewish and links the number of Jews with the presence of ragamuffins in the streets, urging her not to resemble those children: "Hold up your chin'/nurse says 'you begin/to walk like a horrid ragamuffin'"(1985:160). Loy

uses a pun in the last lines to make fun of the governess's attitude: "The common children/have the best of her/Though dressed in rags/they feed on muffin" (1985:160).

IV. A FINAL PORTRAIT OF EXODUS

The subsection "The Surprise" deals with Ova's father linguistic betrayal. Exodus allows Ova to peep in a basket brought by a governess. She agrees to it, taking delight in the secret link she has just established with her father. However, Exodus gives Ova away and turns her into a liar. Ova feels humiliated and completely isolated from her family:

Her head expands
 there is nothing
 she knows how to expect from these big bodies
 who hustle her through demeaning duties (1985:162)

She wants to be far from this place and people but a strong hand holds her and returns her to the safe confines of her house, a symbol of authority where language is an oppressive tool. In "The Gift" we find again the motif of the father's betrayal. The figure of the mother evokes here one of the most hated characters in fairy tales: the stepmother. Loy speaks of the mother's "entrained anger" (1985:165) whereas the father is presented as a king, a sovereign who can give Ova everything she wants, provided that she obey him:

He tells her
 he is a good Father
 his child must obey him
 should he choose to do so
 he can bestow
 upon her whatever she pray him
 He seems a sovereign
 The maximum
 of money
 A golden octopus

grasping
 She is asking
 for a sovereign
 to buy a circus universe (1985:165-166)

Loy constructs this part of the poem by punning with the word “sovereign”, which means king, autonomous agent and unit of money. Unfortunately, sovereigns can only provide a material dream, not a magical one. Ova’s dream of obtaining a “circus universe” does not last long as she quickly learns that the sovereign her father has given her is no such thing but a farthing, which is a quarter of a penny. Exodus has deceived Ova, and becomes the destroyer of her illusions once again. This episode marks Ova’s initiation into the social rules of her time, which establish that social and economic power resides in men. Ova learns a cruel lesson about her linguistic and financial powerlessness. The section ends with an image of the father as an evil figure, which emphasizes the fairy tale quality of this section:

How evil a Father must be
 to burst a universe by getting
 so far into a sovereign (1985:167)

The last subsection of the poem is devoted to Exodus and his social isolation due to his being a Jew and to his “all too feminine” (1985:175) occupation as a tailor. “The Social Status of Exodus” points out that dressing people, paying attention to their external appearance may be frivolous, but, inevitably, it is the sign of the times. Despised by “The gently born ... (1985:175)”, Exodus manages to succeed economically in his society, although he will always be an outsider. Exodus represents the new artist who intends to shape old materials in an original or novel way. The invocation to the feminine side of Exodus’s job suggests Loy’s artistic ideal, which combines the feminine and the masculine (Frost 1998:177):

The gently born
 they turn away
 from the tailor
 Who knows?
 “Man that is born of woman”
 Perhaps he chose
 an occupation all too feminine (1985:175)

The tailor/artist/writer is a conjurer who manipulates, alters, cuts and rewrites his/her fabrics, materials and words. He/She reinvents people by altering their external look or he/she reelaborates his/her literary heritage. Recreation replaces creation as an artistic concept:

And man with his amorphous nature
 who defied
 the protoform of Who made him
 but has not denied
 Him obeyed
 the tailor who remade him
 and denies him (1985:175)

Recutting fabrics, reinterpreting language are not easy tasks. They involve a certain social rejection. But this is the best Ova/Mina can offer as an artist fighting an established male tradition. Mina Loy feels powerless to create a completely new language, and, besides, that is far from her intention. The best she can do is rewrite what is given (Frost 1998:177).

Loy chose everyday life as the main topic of her works and was a pioneer in the exploration of the female self in a quite unsentimental manner. Although “Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose” is autobiographical, it transcends this aspect to deal with a number of subjects such as English ideology, gender roles, sexuality, and family relationships. The figure of the mongrel Ova protests patriarchal definitions of the feminine, but fails to construct alternative possibilities for female expression and power. As a child, Ova does not find women she can consider a personal or cultural model for her. In the final portrait of Exodus, we learn about a man who has been clever enough to adapt himself to a society that initially rejected him but that is now buying his creations. The key to his success has been Exodus’s all too feminine occupation, that of tailor. As the central fact of Ova’s mongrel status is that she inherits a “masculine” intellect in a female body, the father figure emerges then as a model Ova could accept due to his hybridity, which includes a masculine and a feminine side to it.

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