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‘Puppet of skeletal escapade’: Dance Dialogues in Mina Loy and Carl Van Vechten

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Abstract

In an undated letter, likely composed in late 1914, Mina Loy reflected on the recent aesthetic experiences that had greatly affected her, writing that the ‘things that have made [her] gasp were a few Picassos, Windham [*sic*] Lewis, Nijinski dancing – perfection is infrequent’. The letter was addressed to her American agent Carl Van Vechten, a dance and music critic at the *New York Times*, who played a highly influential role in shaping discourses around ballet and modern dance both in the US and internationally. This article conjoins Loy and Van Vechten’s modernist oeuvres – crossing genres including poetry, novels, newspaper reviews, and photography – in order to reveal the importance of dance to their shifting aesthetic commitments and shared interest in the expressive capacities of the human form. Dancing bodies, moving fluently across the work of this modernist pair, variously transcribe Futurist satires, Decadent revivals, and a primitivist fascination with the erotic aspects of dance, crystallising in Loy and Van Vechten’s responses to the Harlem Renaissance.

Keywords: modernism / dance / Mina Loy / Carl Van Vechten / decadence / machines

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‘Puppet of skeletal escapade’: Dance Dialogues in Mina Loy and Carl Van Vechten

On her peripatetic twentieth-century travels between Paris, Florence, Mexico, and New York, the British poet and artist Mina Loy moved through the currents of the musical and choreographic modernisms that were having a profound effect on her literary peers. Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, Djuna Barnes, Gertrude Stein, and W. B. Yeats all documented their engagements with the notable theatrical and dance productions of the day, from the controversial Parisian premiere of the Ballets Russes’ *Le Sacre du Printemps* in 1913, to Isadora Duncan’s revival of Ancient Greek dance and Pound’s ‘rediscovery’ of the Japanese Noh theatre in the translations of Ernest Fenollosa. Loy’s own negotiations with early twentieth-century dance cultures have so far received scant critical attention in comparison to her contemporaries, perhaps because she seemed to operate on the fringes of modernism’s most prolific networks, often slipping between the different coteries – Futurist, Dadaist – that might have claimed her as their own. ‘[A] sort of pseudo-Futurist’ was how Loy described herself in a letter of 1914 to her American agent Carl Van Vechten, though she played ironically with Futurist tropes and typographies across her early poetry, subjecting the movement’s most virulently misogynistic elements, and its controversial leaders, to scathing critique.¹

Before Loy travelled to New York from Florence in 1916, it was Van Vechten who played a crucial role in bringing her work to American readers, publishing her poem ‘Costa San Giorgio’ in his own little magazine *The Trend* (1914), and, along with their mutual friend Mabel Dodge Luhan, circulating her other works to Alfred Stieglitz, founder of the 291 gallery and editor at the journal *Camera Work* (1903-17).² Through his work as an essayist and dance critic at the *New York Times* (1906-13), Van Vechten was also instrumental in creating a public discourse around ballet and modern dance on the American East Coast,

providing his readers with illuminating profiles of Isadora Duncan, Maud Allan, Vaslav Nijinsky, Mikhail Fokine, Anna Pavlova, and other prominent dancers of the period. This aspect of Van Vechten's career, and its significance to his relationship with Loy, has often been overlooked by modernist scholars. Dance surfaces as an important recurring theme across the work of both of these writers, demonstrating how a synthesis of the arts might privilege an embodied form of modernist expression divorced from the abstract intellectualism Loy found so testing in her Futurist acquaintances.

Both Loy and Van Vechten were interested in the major choreographic trends of their day, though, as a critic at the *Times*, Van Vechten's access to dance productions was clearly more considerable than Loy's: she bemoaned the artistic provinciality of Florence, as compared to New York and Paris.³ Van Vechten, on the other hand, claimed to have attended the Parisian premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps* with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, although he later clarified in a letter to Stein that they had in fact attended the second night, when the Ballets Russes again provoked a strong response in its audience.⁴ He recalled a performance 'in which primitive emotions [were] both depicted and aroused by a dependence on barbarous rhythm', describing Nijinsky's choreography in a letter to his wife Fania Marinoff as 'the most extraordinary thing [he had] ever seen on stage [...] wildly beautiful'.⁵ Loy, who also developed a friendship with Stein after meeting her at Mabel Dodge's Villa Curonia, may have missed this momentous event attended by her friends, but it appears that she must have seen the Ballets Russes on another occasion. In a letter to Van Vechten, likely composed in late 1914, she reflected on the recent aesthetic experiences that had greatly affected her, writing that the 'things that have made [her] gasp were a few Picassos, Windham [*sic*] Lewis, Nijinski dancing – perfection is infrequent'.⁶ Nijinsky's movements clearly lingered in Loy's mind as an epitome of modernist beauty, equal to Picasso's experiments in Cubism, and Lewis's striking Vorticist *Tyro* paintings.⁷

Increasingly, the interdisciplinary outlook of the ‘new modernist studies’ has encouraged investigations into the careers of artists like Loy, who counted among her occupations: poet, novelist, polemicist, painter, lampshade-maker, and fashion designer.⁸ Although Loy was not a dancer or choreographer, dancers – both real and imagined – appear in various forms across her poetry and prose works. Among the previously unpublished texts collected in Sara Crangle’s *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy* is ‘Crystal Pantomime’, a romantic scenario for the stage that Loy hoped might receive a choreographic production.⁹ She sent what must have been an early draft of it to Van Vechten, writing: ‘I know you can tell me what to do with it – don’t you think it would be wonderful as a ballet – in a review – or even in opera – do they have opera ballet here?’¹⁰ Implicit in Loy’s appeal is an understanding that Van Vechten was the critic whose opinion mattered the most when it came to the subject of dance.

Loy and Van Vechten were far from alone in viewing dance as an art form that, like literature, might readily embody the modernist spirit. While dance has often been a marginal focus for scholars of modernism, Susan Jones’s landmark study *Literature, Modernism and Dance* has demonstrated the rich and wide-ranging crossovers between literary and choreographic disciplines in the early twentieth century, revealing little-known histories of collaboration and influence shared by dancers and writers.¹¹ Unlike Yeats and Eliot, who wrote prolifically about their interest in dance, Loy has rarely been cited as an important figure in this particular history, with critics instead reading her interest in rhythm and movement through the lens of musicology.¹² Alex Goody, however, has recently argued that dance ‘plays a key role in the articulation of [Loy’s] feminist aesthetics’, since it permits an engagement with choreography as a form of corporeal expression, as seen in poems like the unpublished ‘Biography of a Songge Byrd’ (1952), written for Isadora Duncan.¹³ Loy is unusual among her modernist contemporaries, Goody suggests, in resisting the temptation to

‘translate kinaesthetics into signs’, celebrating instead the dancer’s ability to construct meaning through the movements of her (non-textual) body.¹⁴

By focusing on the significance of dance in a selection of modernist sources – from Loy’s early Futurist-oriented poems to Van Vechten’s photographs of the Harlem Renaissance –, this article contributes to a larger critical effort to understand the relationship between literature and apparently minor kinds of artistic production. Accounts of modernism, Carrie Preston rightly contends, must expand to accommodate dance, since it underlines an important fixation with the multiple forms of movement that defined the modern creative spirit: ‘motion and rhythm in performance and other arts, bodies transported on stages and across national, racial, and ethnic borders, movement-enabling technologies and the international markets that sold them [...] and the (often imagined) new fluidity of gender, class, and other identities’.¹⁵ Loy’s poetic negotiations with dance, and their transatlantic resonances in the work of Van Vechten, indicate, as Michelle Clayton puts it, that modernism’s most intriguing ‘languages’ may ‘not be languages at all, but rather dance, film, material artifacts and traveling cultures’.¹⁶ In other words, the modernist languages of movement, and their kinetic modes of expression, remain in need of further examination.

The dancers celebrated in Van Vechten’s reviews certainly moved modernism between different historical and cultural sites, whether they were reactivating classical gestures via the *Marseillaise*, as in the case of Duncan, or, like Nijinsky, representing the rituals of orientalist paganism through a stylised, avant-garde movement vocabulary, launching Russian primitivism onto the modern French stage. The scholarly inclusion of dance in the sphere of modernist production necessarily stresses the aesthetic and political power of moving bodies, a critical approach that is bound up in a wider project seeking to unsettle what is fixed or stationary in the modernist ‘canon’. This move is also characteristic of a ‘global turn’ in modernist studies that has seen the wholesale revision of academic orthodoxies concerning

the geographies of modernity, as signalled by Susan Stanford Friedman's call to understand non-Western modernisms, like their European and Anglo-American counterparts, as 'different, not derivative [...] hybrid, evidencing signs of traveling modernisms that have transplanted and become native'.¹⁷

Itinerant dancers including Duncan and Josephine Baker, and companies like the Ballets Russes, played a central role in this history of 'traveling modernisms', while Loy's restless continental manoeuvres provide ready evidence of such modernist mobility. Her first published poetry collection, *Lunar Baedeker* (1923), announced itself to readers as a cartography or travel-guide, while *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* (1923-25) traced the poet's own ethnic hybridity, exploring tensions in her Hungarian-Jewish and English heritage. For Van Vechten, dance also offered a means of staging international cultures, though his work is very much steeped in the orientalist biases of the late nineteenth-century decadent writers he took as sources of inspiration, from Oscar Wilde to Arthur Symons. Unearthing connections between literary representations of the choreographic and this broader revival of a decadent style, this article provides new ways of reading the body of the modernist dancer, showing how Loy and Van Vechten used dance to mark shifts in their own aesthetic commitments, while focalising problematic constructions of difference through a modernist notion of bodies as moving machines.

Crystallising, for Loy, in the degenerate figure of the marionette, such concerns about automaticity and the technological augmentation of the body coincide, I argue, with an uneasy conception of the dancer as a source of primitive energies. Jones has observed the sustained 'ambivalence' of literary and choreographic modes of primitivism, which register conflicted sensations of 'wonder, awe, erotic desire, but also approbation and fear'.¹⁸ Van Vechten's account of *Le Sacre du Printemps* as 'barbarous' and 'wildly beautiful' draws on this kind of descriptive register, eulogising the 'primitive' energy of Nijinsky in terms that he

would redeploy in his portraits of black or ethnically differentiated performing bodies, reflected too in Loy's poems 'The Widow's Jazz' (1931) and 'Negro Dancer' (1961). In an essay on the Lindy Hop, a jazz dance form that originated in Harlem, Van Vechten celebrated the union of modernist ingenuity with an archaic, 'Dionysian' spirit of 'religious ecstasy'. '[It] could be danced,' he wrote, 'quite reasonably, and without alteration of tempo, to many passages in the *Sacre de Printemps* of Stravinsky'.¹⁹ This article ultimately reads such moments of affective ambivalence in dialogue with other modernist sources, including Claude McKay's sonnet 'The Harlem Dancer', in order shed new light on the kinaesthetics of modernism, foregrounding the complex racial and erotic dynamics of dance in the literary cultures of the period.

Futurist Marionettes

Loy and Van Vechten met in 1913 while the former was living in Florence and cautiously orbiting the social circle of Mabel Dodge, the owner of an enormous house built by the Medicis that she filled with literary friends, including Gertrude and Leo Stein. Van Vechten, who was sent to interview Dodge for the *Times*, would later satirise the key members of this Florentine ex-patriate scene in his successful pseudo-decadent novel *Peter Whiffle* (1922), where Dodge appears as 'Edith Dale' and Loy is affectionately recalled for giving him 'her lovely drawing of Eros being spoiled by women', a reference to her artwork *Love Among the Ladies*.²⁰ While Van Vechten had already established his career as critic, Loy's modernist sensibilities were shaped by her exposure to both this group of liberal Americans and the more radical European avant-garde movements that sought to reformulate the relationship between the human body and the new industrial and technological cultures of modernity. Outside of Dodge's exclusive group in Florence was the Futurist coterie dominated by rival

leaders F. T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini, with whom Loy became famously entangled as her marriage to Stephen Haweis disintegrated. Loy's well-documented connection to Italian Futurism provides an important lens through which to read her early creative endeavours, including those poems, like 'Sketch of a Man on a Platform', that reveal a playful fascination with dance movement and a modern language of gesture.²¹

Given their obsession with 'dynamism' and the turbulent energies of modernity, it is unsurprising that the Futurists theorized a new kind of dance to suit their vision of a sleekly mechanomorphic human body. Expressing characteristic contempt for any qualities that might be perceived as 'feminine', Marinetti's 'Manifesto of Futurist Dance' (1917) outlined his frustration with modern dancers like Isadora Duncan, whose performances centred on 'the rhythm of a woman's body that languidly rejects, languidly invokes, languidly accepts, and languidly regrets the masculine giver of erotic happiness'.²² While Van Vechten recorded his sense of being 'enthralled' by Duncan and argued for her formative influence on Diaghilev and Nijinsky,²³ Marinetti was resolutely dismissive of women's modern dance, disparaging Duncan's 'spasmodic sensuality and childishly feminine cheerfulness'.²⁴ The Ballets Russes, on the other hand, experimented with irregular, anti-harmonic movement styles that Marinetti found intriguing: like Van Vechten, he praised the 'pure geometry' of Nijinsky, describing his body as 'the muscular system elevated to divinity'.²⁵ Such passages suggest a clear imbrication of Marinetti's gender politics with his critique of dance. Duncan's soft sensuality is aligned with Impressionism in painting (a style the Futurists decried), while Nijinsky is accorded the more distinguished analogy of Cézanne's 'volumes and forms'.²⁶

Loy, by contrast, was beguiled by Duncan's graceful revival of a classical movement register: she later enrolled her daughter Joella at a Duncan School in Potsdam and described the dancer as a 'Gossip-blown songstress [...] descended from the skies / so many gods'.²⁷ In this respect, her conception of Duncan's feminist bodily praxis and creative authority was far

removed from Marinetti's theorization of an ideal 'danseuse', whom he envisaged as an extension of the shattering instruments of war. In a short scenario at the end of his 1917 manifesto titled 'dance of the aviatrix', Marinetti conjured the image of a female cyborg; her chest marked by 'a large celluloid propeller that [...] vibrate[s] with every bodily movement'.²⁸ This hybrid dancer fulfilled the Futurist dream of a technologically augmented form, with the 'jerks and weavings of her body' mimicking 'a plane trying to take off'.²⁹ Marinetti was keen, however, to bend the dancer to his creative will: her 'dead white' face and 'thoughtless' persona indicate an absence of creative agency, allowing the Futurist puppet-master to direct her movements as he chooses.

Although Loy would credit Marinetti with granting her a sense of 'vitality' – central to her feminist outlook – she also thought him a 'brute' for his flamboyant bouts of misogyny.³⁰ Certainly, Marinetti preferred to deal with his own theoretical versions of Futurist dance, rather than engage with real performers. He was scathing, for instance, about the dances created by another Futurist, the French choreographer Valentine de Saint-Point, author of the 'Manifesto of the Futurist Woman' (1912), who took her *métachorie* to the theatres of Paris and New York:

[Valentine de Saint-Point's] *métachorie* consists of poems that are mimed and danced. Unfortunately, it is passéist poetry that navigates within the old Greek and medieval sensibility: abstractions danced but static, arid, cold, and emotionless. [...] A frigid geometry of poses which have nothing to do with the great simultaneous dynamic sensibility of modern life.³¹

Marinetti may have found De Saint-Point's *métachorie* lacking in dynamism, but others drew clear associations between her work and a Futurist movement aesthetic. One 1914 article in the British periodical *The Sketch* provided its readers with four images of De Saint-Point's 'Futurist dancing' at the Poirier Theatre in Paris (*Fig. 1*), describing her decision to veil 'all parts of the body save those which are essentially muscular' as a practice designed to 'harden

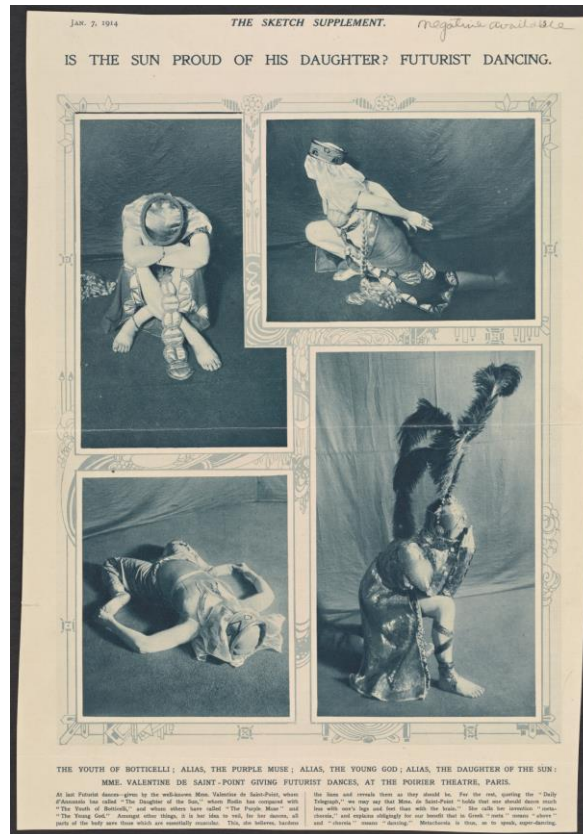


Fig 1 Jerome Robbins Dance Division, The New York Public Library. "Is the Sun proud of his daughter? Futurist dancing" *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1914-01-07.

the lines and reveal them as they should be'. De Saint-Point's desire to stress her body's musculature at the cost of any natural softness seemed to reflect Marinetti's own preference for the hardened, athletic body of Nijinsky, and the machine-like form of his 'aviatrix'. While De Saint-Point's costumes may have drawn on the sensuous orientalism of popular veiled dances, her garments were specifically placed to accentuate her 'lithe, muscular parts',³² powerfully showcasing a model of female strength that may have unsettled the more rigid gender codes of a writer like Marinetti, for whom the ideal 'danseuse' was a depersonalized machine.

In developing her concept of *métachorie*, De Saint-Point aimed to synthesise the arts, creating a cerebral choreography organised around the geometric expression of an idea: 'a union of consciousness, and a union of all the arts'.³³ Her Futurist experiments caught the

attention of Van Vechten, who saw her *métachorie* in April 1917 in New York. He gave a better account of the evening than Marinetti, writing to Gertrude Stein: ‘Valentine de Saint-Point is here too...she gave an exhibition of *métachorie* (gratis) at the Metropolitan Opera House, about which people are still talking. She has two boys and a small monkey with her...’³⁴ For this performance, De Saint-Point designed choreographic movements around a series of *Poemes d’Amour* and *Poemes Ironiques*, including two thematically interlinked works titled ‘Le Pantin et La Mort’ (*The Puppet and Death*) and ‘Les Pantins dansent’ (*The Dancing Puppets*).³⁵ One reviewer described an earlier Parisian iteration of this piece as a ‘Cubist dance’ in which ‘a half-turn and a lifted foot mean certain [poetic] lines’, expressing bemusement at De Saint-Point’s decision to have the theatre ‘impregnated with perfumes which many in her audience found almost unsupportable’.³⁶ This account creates the impression of a synaesthetic theatrical experience that drew its strange power from a vaguely ‘eastern’ symbolism, fixed around the magnetic figure of the puppet that had also taken centre-stage in the Ballets Russes’ *Petrouchka* (1911).

Beyond the ballet, marionette-like performers appeared frequently on the modernist stage, especially in productions that sought to incorporate elements of dance, such as Yeats’s *At the Hawk’s Well* (1916). While not wholly satisfying Marinetti’s vision of an ‘aviatrix’, De Saint-Point’s choreo-poem, combining poetic declamation and dance, suggests the figure of the puppet as a paradoxical emblem of grace and impersonal automaticity. Dramatists interested in co-opting the uncanny abilities of such performers often looked back to Heinrich Von Kleist’s seminal essay ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ (1810), which proposed that a mechanical dancer ‘constructed by a craftsman to his requirements could perform a dance that [...] [no human dancer] could equal’.³⁷ Like De Saint-Point, Loy too viewed the dancing puppet as illustrative of a hybrid mechanical-primal modernist aesthetic, but she used this

motif as a vessel for more directly satirical purposes in her playful representations of Futurism's perceived machine worship.

'Sketch of a Man on a Platform' was first published in *Rogue*, a fashionable, short-lived New York periodical, in 1915. It was one of several poems Van Vechten sent to the little magazine in his informal capacity as Loy's agent. Without directing naming Marinetti, the poem takes the Futurist leader as its main target:

Man of absolute physical equilibrium
 You stand so straight on your legs
 Every plank or clod you plant your feet on
 Becomes roots for those limbs³⁸

Marinetti's bombastic, unyielding public persona, along with his strongly expressed celebration of a military model of masculinity, are set forth in the 'absolute' 'straight[ness]' of his posture, conveying an archetype of male strength and individualism that Loy seeks to undercut. Words like 'plank' and 'clod' – a lumpen, earthy substance – suggest an intellectual rigidity or dullness, 'root[ing]' Marinetti in place so he is unable to move freely.

As the first line suggests, this is a poem concerned with balance and gravitational dynamics, considerations that are, of course, essential to the practice of dance. The male figure's 'equilibrium' is apparently 'perfect'; he is 'more heavy / And more light / Force being most equitably disposed / Is easiest to lift from the ground' (19). Satirising the Futurist obsession with dynamism and energy, Loy constitutes Marinetti's body in ambiguous terms, suggesting a paradoxical union between heaviness and lightness that makes him easily manoeuvrable, reflecting what she later refers to as his 'elastic' theories and concepts. Goody observes the 'ambivalently queered masculinity' of this Marinetti, who is explicitly portrayed as a dancer, linked to the 'airy-fairy of the ballet' and 'Mademoiselle Genée', a reference to the Danish ballerina Adeline Genée, who danced as part of the Empire Theatre's ballet

company in Edwardian London.³⁹ Van Vechten saw her perform there in 1907 and later recalled being ‘captivated by the verve, the vitality, the liveliness and wit of Genée’s toes’.⁴⁰

Balletic movements are coded as queer elsewhere in Loy’s work. In the undated prose piece ‘Piero & Eliza’, the ‘solitary decadent’ Piero is described ‘pirouett[ing] among the cafe tables’ wearing a ‘pistachio-coloured carnation’, an image that nods to the green carnation associated with Oscar Wilde.⁴¹ While these allusions certainly contribute to the feminization of Loy’s Marinetti, her descriptive register also presents him as a mechanical performer, possessed of an unearthly ‘force’ that allows him to be ‘lift[ed]’ up. In this respect, he takes on the qualities of a marionette, signalling perhaps, as Roger Conover suggests in his notes on the poem, a phonetic play on the poet’s name, allowing Loy the rare liberty of ‘[pulling] the strings’ (*LLB*, 181).

Loy’s depiction of Marinetti as a dancing marionette is constructed through small linguistic details, as well as a broader attention to motifs of corporeal equilibrium and suspension. This is a body that moves in curious ways; lifted from its feet, its movements are ‘Unassailable’, the ‘to-and-fro of [its] cuff-links’ suggesting a pendulum motion connected to the ‘links’ (19) around its wrists, perhaps another subtle nod to the marionette’s strings and its subjection to external control. Such verbal play is integral to Loy’s poetic style, and she would have been well aware of the modernist fascination with marionettes through her encounters with the English dramaturg Edward Gordon Craig – the partner of Isadora Duncan – who was her neighbour on the Costa San Giorgio in Florence. While working with Loy’s husband Haweis, Gordon Craig published his influential essay ‘The Actor and the Über-Marionette’ (1907) in *The Mask*, announcing, in the vein of Kleist, that actors might be replaced with manipulable mechanised bodies that would come to represent ‘the last echo of some noble and beautiful art of a past civilization’.⁴²

Speaking to a wider modernist fixation with machine-like bodies, Preston has argued that marionettes ‘stage the possibilities and limitations of dance movement’ while also transforming the human actor from an ‘exceptional presence to just another part of the material world’.⁴³ In this respect, such figures reflect the mechanised ‘danseuse’ imagined by Marinetti, demonstrating the possibilities inherent in a fusion of the human and technological, which stands both conceptually and aesthetically at the centre of the Futurist agenda. It is this hybrid figure that Loy critiques, using the Futurist vernacular to suspend Marinetti before her readers as a parodic version of the ‘mechanical son’ he envisioned as part of his anti-woman diatribe in ‘Le Futurisme’ (1911).⁴⁴ Reduced to only the ‘occasional snap / Of actual production’, Loy’s dancing Futurist stretches his ideas in unlikely directions, his inconsistent output ‘Sting[ing] the face of the public’ in the poem’s final lines (*LLB*, 120).

Dancing Decadence

While Loy was choreographing her Futurist *poseurs* in poems that would be collected – initially with Van Vechten’s help – in *Lunar Baedeker* (1923), her agent was combining his dance and music criticism with popular writing, forging, as Burke puts it, ‘his reputation as a tastemaker’ with the publication of the gossipy *Music and Bad Manners* (1916).⁴⁵ This collection signalled Van Vechten’s determination to portray himself as a dandyish purveyor of both art and anecdotes, cultivating the kind of irreverent, aphoristic style associated with late nineteenth-century public wits like Oscar Wilde – the archetypal ‘solitary decadent’ imagined as a ballet dancer in Loy’s ‘Piero & Eliza’. Reclaiming the language of decadence allowed Van Vechten, Kirsten MacLeod suggests, to formulate a ‘queer [...] resistance’ to the forms of modernism that have become dominant in subsequent criticism, although his style of writing, she reminds us, ‘wielded as much if not more cultural capital in the literary

field than those modernisms that have come to overshadow it'.⁴⁶ Although Loy's instinct was often to mock the perceived sterility of aestheticism, critics have similarly observed the residues of a decadent sensibility in her work, pointing to the 'perverse ennui' of her poetic tone, coupled with an almost hyperbolic attention to lexical ornamentation.⁴⁷

Drawing on the images of dance that were ubiquitous in decadent writing, Loy and Van Vechten each engaged in a modernist *pas-de-deux* with the previous generation and what Pound referred to as its 'decayed lily verbiage'.⁴⁸ In 'Crab-Angel', first published in *Lunar Baedeker*, Loy's morbid and overwrought verbal style breaks from the hard precision Pound sought in Imagism and the more explosive economies of Futurism. This poem foregrounds the figure of the circus performer: an 'An atomic sprite / perched on a polished / monster stallion' that 'reigns over Ringling's revolving / trinity of circus attractions' (*LLB*, 85). Loy appears to be describing an advertisement for the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, a popular American travelling circus founded in 1871. Ringling Bros. posters from the period depict such a scene, advertising the exploits of the androgynous 'Madam Castello' on the 'equine marvel, Jupiter' (*Fig. 2*), and, in a different image, a number of ballerinas balancing astride a horse's back. Loy continues:

From a squat body
pigmy arms
and bow legs
with their baroque calves
curve in a bi-circular attitude
to a ballerina's exstacy
(*LLB*, 85)

Loy stresses the alien nature of this dancing figure: terms like 'sprite,' 'crab' and 'pigmy' show her flitting between categories of race, species, and myth, creating a porous lexis that underlines the performer's errant persona and resistance to stable cultural signifiers. Bodily



Fig. 2 Ringling Bros. *World's Greatest Shows: Madam Ada Castello*. Promotional poster for Ringling Brothers by the Coach Lithographic Co., Buffalo, New York, ca. 1899.

movement is once again framed as an interplay between external prompt and involuntary response; this ‘idiot dwarf’ is ‘hooked to a wire to make him jump’, recalling the ‘wire-pulled automatons’ and ‘horrible marionette’ of Wilde’s decadent poem ‘The Harlot’s House’ (1882), which also depicts an automated mode of eroticism communicated through impersonal gestures and movements.⁴⁹ As such, the artifice-laden choreographies of ‘Crab-Angel’ expose both the performative appeal of the circus and the similarly constructed nature of sexual and racial categories, inscribed at surface-level through the body’s mechanisation.

The dancer’s gender is explicitly contested, since this particular ‘ballerina’ is also possessed of ‘manly legs’ and described at the poem’s conclusion as making ‘his bow-legged way / laboriously towards the exit/ waving a yellow farewell with his perruque’ (87). An accretion of descriptive detail queers Loy’s performer, whose ‘perruque’ or wig is only one

aspect of an intricately fashioned erotic persona, ‘christen[ed]’ as a ‘minnikin of masquerade sex’ (85). The ‘pigmy’ arms of the circus performer may be racially derogatory, denoting a Western stereotype of Asian and East African stature, but they also signal this body’s radical misalignment with formal choreographic poses: ‘bow legs’ and ‘baroque calves’ distort the ballerina’s stance, rebelling against classical models of beauty and grace. In this sense, much as the straining excess of the dancer’s ‘baroque’ body crudely mimics and destabilises the ballerina’s elegant pose, Loy’s idiosyncratic style contorts the new poetics of Pound and Eliot, playfully cleaving the over-determined stuff of decadence to the modernist skeleton of *vers libre*. The queer and the baroque thus coalesce in the dance of the ‘crab-angel,’ whose ‘yellow farewell’ might be read as a signature decadent gesture.

For Loy, Van Vechten was one of the few moderns who embodied this decadent revival. As late as 1934, she wrote to him from Paris, regretting that the ‘general sentiment’ of the city was once again ‘the end of the world’, as it had been in the *fin-du-globe* climate of the 1890s. The main purpose of Loy’s letter, however, was to tell Van Vechten how much she had enjoyed his ‘delightful book’, for which she longed to send him a ‘suitable souvenir’.⁵⁰ Loy wrote that she had been searching, in vain, for a sketch she had once drawn of ‘a fascinating youth’ in ‘peacock feathers after a Villa Curonia ball’, alluding, presumably, to an image she had composed of Van Vechten following a gathering at Mabel Dodge’s Florentine home.⁵¹ Although she was unable to retrieve this sketch, Loy’s commemorative gesture bears both personal and aesthetic resonances, using an elusive image of Van Vechten in camp, decadent style to recall the intimate modernist networks he had satirised (using comparable literary strategies) in his novel *Peter Whiffle*.

Indeed, the eponymous protagonist of *Peter Whiffle* might be read as an ironic twentieth-century version of a decadent aesthete, given his indulgent — and resoundingly unproductive — obsession with cataloguing and collecting. ‘Recall the great writers,’ Whiffle exclaims

while describing his writing practice to the fictional Van Vechten; ‘Joris Huysmans, Oscar Wilde: they all used this method, catalogues, catalogues, catalogues! All great art is a matter of cataloguing life, summing it up in a list of objects’.⁵² As portrayed in this novel, ‘Van Vechten’ is highly susceptible to the same aesthetic influences. Walking the streets of Paris, he presents the city as a seductive cartography of decadent artefacts, culminating in his ‘pilgrimage to the Luxembourg Gallery [...] [to see] Moreau’s Salome’, having previously ‘read [Joris-Karl] Huysmans’s evocation of the picture’ in his novel *À Rebours* (1884).⁵³ Loosely veiled and clad in jewels, the dancing woman in Gustave Moreau’s *Salomé dansant devant Hérode* (1876) is a hallmark image of fin-de-siècle orientalism, famously transported to the stage by Wilde to perform ‘the dance of the seven veils’ in his controversial *Salomé* (1893). Van Vechten’s ‘new decadence’ – as MacLeod coins it – thus textually recaptures a *belle époque* fixation with dance as a model for decadent poetics, epitomised by the ‘Salomania’ that continued into the early years of the twentieth century, as Van Vechten himself chronicled in his reviews of performers like Maud Allan.

Throughout *Peter Whiffle*, dancers are described as emblems of beguiling feminine grace, as well as sources of satirical pleasure. A group of female customers at a Parisian *parfumerie* is rendered as a collection of ‘delicately fashioned Tanagra statuettes in tulle and taffeta and chiffon artifices’, who remind Van Vechten of the swooning figures in Loy’s *Love Among the Ladies*.⁵⁴ Their collective movements create ‘an effect worthy of the Russian Ballet’; a ‘delicious, susurrous, rainbow swirl and billow of tulle and taffeta and chiffon [...] [as] eight pairs of white gloved arms circled rhythmically in the air’.⁵⁵ The ‘swirl and billow’ of the women’s draperies is perhaps more redolent of the fin-de-siècle vogue for skirt dancers than Nijinsky, recalling Loïe Fuller’s dextrous manipulation of diaphanous silks, illuminated with tinted electric lights, in her famous serpentine dance. The references to Loy and the Ballets Russes charge this scene (apparently set in the spring of 1907) with a curious sense of

anachronism, purposely collapsing the distance between decadence and the experimental facets of modernist performance. For Van Vechten, the image is both very ‘pleasant’ and ‘slightly ridiculous’, capturing the contradictory appeal that decadent aesthetics held for him more broadly.⁵⁶

Repurposing many of the same symbols that preoccupy the narrator of *Peter Whiffle*, Van Vechten’s second novel, *The Blind Bow-Boy* (1923), similarly captures a decadent fascination with ‘exotic’ dance forms imported from various parts of the colonised East:

The first great moment was the appearance of the Cambodian dancer, a slender, full-bosomed bayadere, clad, like Moreau’s Salome, only in jewels. Sparkling with light, her face as expressionless as a Noh mask, she stood on a small round platform in a miniature circle of illumination. Her movements were slow and insinuating; there was no abandon, no swift grace, in this dance. [...] [H]er face remaining the face of an unwrapped mummy, she suggested, irrevocably, the expiatory pain of a supreme sin.⁵⁷

With her ‘slow and insinuating’ movements, Van Vechten’s Cambodian dancer evokes the international dance troupes of the 1889 *Exposition Universelle*, depicted in Arthur Symons’s poem ‘Javanese Dancers’: ‘With lingering feet that undulate, / With sinuous fingers, spectral hands that thrill / The little amber coloured dancers move’.⁵⁸ Although ‘stealthy’ and seductive, Symons’s dancers are ultimately emptied of any rebellious political agency as their bodies become translucent and ethereal like ‘little painted figures on a screen’; a proto-cinematic display for their titillated Parisian spectators.⁵⁹ Van Vechten’s dancer, too, is ‘expressionless’, reduced to the figure of the ‘unwrapped mummy,’ a corpse unnaturally preserved and aesthetically overlaid, comparable to the jewel-encrusted tortoise that becomes a decadent fossil for Huysmans’ *Des Esseintes*. This scene in *The Blind Bow-Boy* therefore crystallises around a late nineteenth-century conception of dance as archaeological performance, offering a moving reproduction of distant — often colonised or newly ‘discovered’ — cultures for its European audiences, translated into erotic spectacle by the

dancer's body. Van Vechten's dancer thus makes legible the interplays between decadence, orientalism, and a spirit of moral and artistic endeavour formed 'against the grain' (to borrow the translated title of Huysmans's *À Rebours*) that would re-emerge in the work of modernists like Loy, who similarly experimented with the legacies of late nineteenth-century aestheticism in her poetry. As the conspicuous exoticism of this Cambodian dance scene suggests, however, the trans-national encounters made possible through choreographic performance also transcribe various racial hierarchies and forms of cultural difference, as Loy and Van Vechten would suggest more explicitly in their engagements with African American modern dance.

Harlem Rhythms

'Negro Dancer' is one of a selection of seven poems Loy submitted to Gilbert Neiman's *Between Worlds: An International Magazine*, which also boasted contributions from William Carlos Williams, Robert Creeley, and Kenneth Koch. Although its precise date of composition is unclear, the poem explicitly returns to the cultural landscape of early twentieth-century American modernism, resurrecting the motif of jazz dance that appears elsewhere in her oeuvre, most conspicuously in 'The Widow's Jazz'. Like this earlier poem, 'Negro Dancer' exposes Loy's uncomfortable primitivist tendencies, presenting the body of the black dancer as a source of 'aboriginal innocencies' steeped in ancient rhythms and a particularly carnal form of exoticism (*LLB2*, 216). 'The Widow's Jazz' deals in similar cultural stereotypes, conjuring loose notions of 'the negro soul' and revealing Loy at her most racially blunt, imitating African American patois and referring to 'black brute-angels / in their human gloves' (*LLB*, 95-6). Loy's poetic construction of the moving body of the dancer merges what is a fundamental paradox of modernist uses of primitivism: that is, the

manifestation of a deep nostalgia towards what is considered primal, base, and uncivilized, qualified by a contrary impulse to claim such energies as sources of novelty and futuristic innovation. Dance functions as a nexus for these conflicting meanings, since it professes to unite collective primal rhythms – grounded in an ancient understanding of ritual – with a twentieth-century desire to secure the body’s status as a bearer of modern movement registers, aligned with the dynamism of machines and new technologies.

Primitivism thus signals an aesthetic tendency that is both regressive and modernising; as Michael Bell avers, ‘it may have not just a backward vista [...] but a forward and utopian one’.⁶⁰ Although African American periodicals like *The Crisis*, edited by W. E. B. DuBois, made sustained efforts to challenge stereotypes of black sensuality, such primitivist attitudes were certainly present in the modernist networks Loy and Van Vechten encountered in New York. In late 1916, when Loy arrived in the city, there was an exhibition of African statuary at Alfred Stieglitz’s 291 gallery on Fifth Avenue. Stieglitz had published Loy’s ‘Aphorisms on Futurism’ (1914) in *Camera Work*, and he was also a friend of Van Vechten’s, having introduced him to Picasso’s art at their first meeting in 1912.⁶¹ In a review of the exhibition published in *Camera Work*, the critic Marius de Zayas described Picasso as the ‘discoverer’ of Negro art and held him responsible for transmitting its ‘plastic’ principles into modernism: ‘Negro art,’ de Zayas claimed, ‘has re-awakened in us a sensibility obliterated by an education, which makes us always connect what we see with what we know – our visualization with our knowledge, and makes us, in regard to form, use our intellect more than our senses’.⁶² These comments present a familiar equation of a loosely conceived ‘African’ sensibility with emotional expression, set in contrast to the intellectual underpinnings of Western aesthetic engagement.

An interest in the ‘expressive aspect’ of black cultural life can be traced through responses to dance forms like the Cakewalk, the Lindy Hop, and the Charleston, widely popularised

through the Broadway musicals *Shuffle Along* (1921) and *Runnin' Wild* (1923). On her 1925 debut at the Folies-Bergère, Josephine Baker was described as 'an unforgettable female ebony statue' by Janet Flanner, who found the rest of the 'Negro choruses' to be similarly 'alive and creative with the integral talent of their race and training'.⁶³ Such language reflects a primitivist impulse to celebrate the intuitive rhythms of black bodies, made palpable in Flanner's native US through the syncopated cadences of ragtime and Harlem's jazz clubs. As Susan Manning puts it, 'Many spectators assumed that black bodies in motion were naturally rhythmic and expressive and lacking in disciplined artistry, while white bodies in motion were artistically trained and hence intentionally expressive'.⁶⁴ Indeed, when Flanner saw Baker perform again five years later, she regretted that, while 'still magnificent,' the dancer had become 'thin, trained, almost civilized'.⁶⁵ Responses to popular dancers like Baker frequently revealed such engrained assumptions about the expressive capacities of racialised bodily performance, made newly visible through the explosion of African American modernism in the years after Loy's arrival in New York.

In 'Negro Dancer,' dance is again evoked through the figure of the marionette, with the speaker instructing this 'Puppet / of skeletal escapade' to 'pulsate!' and 'percuss!' (*LLB2*, 216). Across the poem, Loy mixes her poetic registers, combining organic and technological sources of imagery with the sight of dancing limbs 'wired' with 'tropical liana', an exotic climbing plant that replaces the electric cables of the automaton with a more primitive botanical infrastructure. While such vegetal metaphors echo familiar associations between black bodies and 'natural' or earthy concerns, Loy's specific formulation also conjures an eerily futuristic dancer, in whose body primordial and ultra-modern energies coalesce. Less nuanced, however, is her return to the racist tropes of 'ape and angel', followed by 'the ancestral smoulder / of jungle ritual' (216). Again, Loy is fixed on the sensual possibilities of dance; what she later refers to as an 'overwrought Eros'. Such over-worked eroticism is

certainly evident in the ‘satin limb’ ‘excite[d]’ to ‘excel / in posturing’ (216), perhaps marking loosely veiled evidence of sexual stimulation. Yet while this image only bolsters the assumption that this ‘negro dance’ is being used for white gratification, it may in fact be the over-eager audience members whom Loy is wryly critiquing. For Tanya Dalziell, Loy’s excessive use of synthetic and machinic descriptors in ‘Negro Dancer’ attests to her ‘critical self-awareness of the artifice of the primitive’.⁶⁶ This critique is manifest in the poem’s final lines, with the exultant ‘cosmic spasm’ of the performance set against ‘the glare of a theatre’ (216), suggesting that the artificial illumination of the spectacle has perversely obscured it.

In her reading of ‘Negro Dancer,’ Goody argues that ‘a supposed (internal) essence [is] externalized through the technological glare of this performance space [...] The dancing jazz body, by making visible the dynamics of technicity and its foundational role in producing human subjectivity, reveals the fallacy of primal origins’.⁶⁷ Dancers like Baker often evoked racial tropes in order to expose such ‘fallacies’, ‘call[ing] to mind sensuality and spectacle in order to attenuate the automatic association of blackness with primitivism’.⁶⁸ Although we might therefore read Loy’s concluding lines as a qualification of the ethnic judgments ‘Negro Dancer’ ostensibly repeats, her ambiguous engagement with primitivism nonetheless centres a privileged perspective that frames the dancing body as racialised spectacle. Claude McKay articulated his scepticism about this ‘Return to the Primitive’, observing: ‘The Futurists and Impressionists are agreed in turning everything upside down in an attempt to achieve the wisdom of the primitive Negro’.⁶⁹ McKay’s own sonnet ‘The Harlem Dancer’ seems to superficially echo some of Loy’s visual tropes – with the dancer described as ‘a proudly-swaying palm / Grown lovelier for passing through a storm’ –, yet the performance he depicts is not the same ‘jungle ritual’ that ‘excites’ Loy’s spectators.⁷⁰

McKay casts a more explicitly critical eye on the dynamics of power and desire shaping this Harlem spectacle. The ‘storm’ testing his dancer’s integrity is subtly aligned with the

threatening gaze of the audience, described as ‘applauding youths’ who sit laughing with ‘young prostitutes.’ McKay suggests a familiar overlap between the categories of performer and sex worker, a connection stressed when the speaker observes those spectators who ‘[toss] coins in praise’; their eyes lingering covetously on the dancer’s ‘swarthy neck’ and ‘black, shiny curls’.⁷¹ Such imagery casts the scene in economic terms, with the dancer construed in the exoticizing language of the white patrons who seek to subordinate her body as a site of racial otherness. Sure enough, McKay’s speaker is wary of the aroused audience members, whose keen attention is framed in cannibalizing terms: the ‘wine-flushed, bold-eyed boys, and even the girls’ who ‘Devoured her with their eager, passionate gaze’.⁷²

McKay’s work reveals a deep consciousness of the hierarchised relations that existed between black performers and white patrons in some of Harlem’s most popular venues: in *Home to Harlem* (1927), he distinguishes between such racially stratified spaces and the alternative ‘black dives’ that facilitated, Janya Brown suggests, ‘instances of pure Negro expression [...] incarnated most potently in the dancing rituals’ that played a central role in African American vernacular culture.⁷³ The setting of ‘The Harlem Dancer’ seems to inhibit any comparable moment of ‘authentic’ cultural expression, creating a hostile distance between the dancer and her audience in the final couplet: ‘But, looking at her falsely-smiling face, / I knew her self was not in that strange place’.⁷⁴ Claiming to ‘know’ this sense of estrangement, McKay’s speaker subtly implies an affinity with the dancer that sets them both apart from the ‘devouring’ patronage of visitors to Harlem, a district that, by the late 1930s, McKay regretfully saw as ‘an all-white picnic ground’.⁷⁵

One such patron, with whom McKay was personally associated, was Van Vechten, who styled himself as a ‘white insider to black culture’ as a result of his close friendships with prominent Harlem Renaissance writers.⁷⁶ The two men, as Gregory Woods has shown, also shared an important affiliation with New York’s clandestine queer networks, which included

other major black poets like Langston Hughes, Countee Cullen, and Alain Locke.⁷⁷ McKay appears beside these writers in Van Vechten's extensive catalogue of African American photographic portraits – a collection that constitutes one of the major iconographic archives of the Harlem Renaissance. Yet while Van Vechten declared it his mission to develop intimate representations of black cultural life, his body of work, Dorothy Stringer contends, 'both defers explicit political advocacy and indulges forms of humor and eroticism integrally related to racialist and racist ideologies'.⁷⁸ In a photograph of McKay taken in 1934, the poet is positioned beside a strikingly patterned backdrop, portraying half-clothed 'primitive' figures, including labouring slaves, and dancers engaged in an obscure ritual performance. Such visually charged juxtapositions are difficult to read in political terms: as Stringer puts it, these dancing figures 'could indicate primitivist theories of black creativity, an ironic critique of the same, or indeed a deep ambivalence unable to choose between these options'.⁷⁹

If not fully resolved, this 'ambivalence' might be clarified by another appearance of this particular wallpaper in a series of photographs of the black dancer-choreographer Katherine Dunham, produced by Van Vechten in 1940. In one of these portraits, Van Vechten again strategically highlights the motif of the dance, which is reproduced on either side of Dunham's head; in another image, Dunham adopts a playful pose while holding a pair of drumsticks, a gesture that visually incorporates her into the 'primitive' musical and choreographic rituals depicted on the scene behind her (*Fig. 3*). Dunham's physical stance, set askew from the photograph's midpoint, suggests a critical misalignment between these two iterations of choreographed movement: the female pioneer of African American modern dance twists and decentres the racial myth embossed on Van Vechten's backdrop. Perhaps more strongly than in the portrait of McKay, Dunham's teasing attitude – coupled with her



Fig. 3. Carl Van Vechten, *Katherine Dunham, No. XI*. May 1940.
Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

direct gaze at the camera – suggests a sardonic self-awareness, evaluating a primitivist attitude that would couple crude notions of Negro culture with modern black creative pursuits: a critique enabled, in this instance, by Van Vechten’s pointed *mise-en-scène*.

Modernist figurations of dance often hold such double implications, at once activating and dismantling the cultural assumptions they reproduce. In a letter of 1920 to Mabel Dodge, Loy claimed to have no patience for primitivist clichés, declaring that she had ‘come to look upon the word “savage” as a synonym for European imbecility in applying it’.⁸⁰ For Van Vechten, the very notion of the modern was indissociable from his effusive, albeit misplaced, identification with the various ‘indigenous’ dance forms he chronicled. After watching a traditional group dance in Nassau, he observed that the ‘tunes [...] bore some esoteric, inexplicable relation to Russian folksong. [...] The movements included wild leaps, whirls,

contortions of the body, girandoles, occasionally suggesting the barbaric Polovtsian dances in *Prince Igor*.⁸¹ Here, the rhythmic movements of the Bahamian dancers seem to combine spontaneous and choreographed gestures that, for Van Vechten, bear the spectral imprint of international dance traditions, animating the same affective impulses he found in Russian opera. Van Vechten's eagerness to translate these 'wild [...] contortions' into a decipherable choreographic language speaks to a broader twentieth-century effort, evident across the various circles in which he and Loy moved, to 'read' the dancing body as a protean emblem of global modernity. While allowing for their different stylistic traits and somewhat fluid artistic loyalties, and without attempting to recuperate their problematic engagements with race, this article has shown how this unusual modernist pair – Loy and Van Vechten – came to view dance as a trans-national bodily language that might aptly fit their idiosyncratic literary agendas. Across their varied negotiations with Futurist and decadent objectives, and their immersion in the specific artistic networks of New York, Florence, and Paris, dance recurs as an ideal means of expressing the paradoxical role of the body in the construction of modernist spectacle.

NOTES

¹ Mina Loy to Carl Van Vechten [c. 1914], Carl Van Vechten Papers, box 76, folder 1082, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

² Carolyn Burke, *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1996), pp. 177-79.

³ In another letter, Loy described how she 'stole away from civilization [Paris]' to the 'Costa San Giorgio.' Van Vechten Papers, box 76, folder 1083, BRBML.

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- ⁴ Carl Van Vechten and Gertrude Stein, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl van Vechten: 1913-1946*, edited by Edward Burns (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), p. 851.
- ⁵ Carl Van Vechten, *The Dance Writings of Carl Van Vechten*, edited by Paul Padgette, (New York: Dance Horizons, 1974), p. 108; letter to Marinoff is quoted in *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl van Vechten*, p. 851.
- ⁶ Loy to Van Vechten [undated], Van Vechten Papers, box 76, folder 1083, BRBML.
- ⁷ It is unclear which ballet Loy attended, although she escaped Florence for visits to Paris and London in the autumn of 1912, when she saw Lewis' paintings at Roger Fry's second Post-Impressionist exhibition (Burke, p. 139). That year, the Ballets Russes season at Covent Garden included *Les Sylphides* and *Le Spectre de la Rose*, in which Nijinsky executed his famous illusory leap through a window at the back of the stage. Loy's most frequent companion during her London visit, the American salon hostess Muriel Draper, recorded her impressions of the Ballets Russes in her memoir *Music at Midnight* (1929).
- ⁸ Douglas Mao and Rebecca Walkowitz, 'The New Modernist Studies', *PMLA* 123, no. 3 (May 2008): 737-748.
- ⁹ Sara Crangle ed., *Stories and Essays of Mina Loy* (Dalkey Archive, 2011), pp. 151-61.
- ¹⁰ Loy to Van Vechten [undated], Van Vechten Papers, box 76, folder 1083, BRBML.
- ¹¹ Susan Jones, *Literature, Modernism, and Dance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
- ¹² See Andrew Michael Roberts, 'Rhythm, Jazz, and Self in Mina Loy's Poetry,' in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, eds. Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (London: Salt Publishing, 2010), pp. 99-128.
- ¹³ Alex Goody, "'The Dance of the Intelligence'?: Dancing Bodies in Mina Loy', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2018): 131-56, p. 131.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 131.
- ¹⁵ Carrie Preston, 'Introduction: Modernism and Dance', *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 9, no. 1, (May 2014): 1-6, pp. 1-2.
- ¹⁶ Michelle Clayton, 'Modernism's Moving Bodies,' *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 9, no. 1, (May 2014): 27-45, p. 28.
- ¹⁷ Susan Stanford Friedman, 'Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies', *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 13, no. 3 (Nov. 2006): 425-43, p. 432.
- ¹⁸ Jones, *Literature, Modernism and Dance*, p. 153.
- ¹⁹ Van Vechten, *Dance Writings*, p. 40.
- ²⁰ Carl Van Vechten, *Peter Whiffle: His Life and Works* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1922), p. 67. The painting was retitled *L'Amour dorloté par les belles dames* and Loy gave it to Van Vechten in 1914.
- ²¹ See Aimee Pozorski, 'Eugenicist Mistress and Ethnic Mother: Mina Loy and Futurism, 1913-1917', *MELUS*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2005): 41-69; Rowan Harris, 'Futurism, Fashion, and the Feminine: Forms of

Repudiation and Affiliation in the Early Writing of Mina Loy,' in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, pp. 17-46.

²² F. T. Marinetti, 'Manifesto of Futurist Dance,' in *Futurism: An Anthology*, eds. Lawrence Rainey, Christine Poggi and Laura Wittman (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 235.

²³ Van Vechten, *Dance Writings*, p. 6.

²⁴ Marinetti, 'Manifesto of Futurist Dance,' p. 236.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

²⁷ Mina Loy, 'Songge Byrd', in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, edited by Roger Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1985), p. 238. Hereafter referred to as *LLB2*.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

³⁰ Burke, *Becoming Modern*, pp. 187-88.

³¹ Marinetti, 'Manifesto of Futurist Dance,' p. 236.

³² Leslie Satin, 'Valentine de Saint-Point', *Dance Research Journal* vol. 22, no. 1 (1990): 1-12, p. 4.

³³ Valentine de Saint-Point, quoted in Günter Berghaus, 'Dance and the Futurist Woman: The Work of Valentine de Saint-Point', *Dance Research: The Journal of the Society for Dance Research*, vol. 11, no. 2 (1993): 27-42; p. 35.

³⁴ Van Vechten to Stein [5 April 1917], in *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl van Vechten*, p. 59.

³⁵ Satin, 'Valentine de Saint-Point', p. 7.

³⁶ 'Invents a "Cubist Dance": Paris Poetess Links Geometry and Verse in Bizarre Fashion,' *New York Times* (December 28, 1913), ProQuest.

³⁷ Heinrich von Kleist, 'On the Marionette Theatre,' trans. Thomas G. Neumiller, *TDR* 16, no. 3 (1972): 22-26, p. 23.

³⁸ Mina Loy, 'Sketch of a Man on a Platform', in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, edited by Roger Conover (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p. 19. Hereafter referred to as *LLB*.

³⁹ Goody, 'Dancing Bodies in Mina Loy', p. 134.

⁴⁰ Van Vechten, *Dance Writings*, p. 5.

⁴¹ Loy, *Stories and Essays*, p. 98.

⁴² Edward Gordon Craig, 'The Actor and the Über-Marionette,' in *Craig on Theatre*, edited by J. Michael Walton (London: Methuen Drama, 1983), p. 86.

⁴³ Carrie Preston, 'Modernism's Dancing Marionettes: Oskar Schlemmer, Michel Fokine, and Michio Ito,' *Modernist Cultures*, vol. 9, no. 1 (May 2014): 115-133, p. 116.

⁴⁴ F. T. Marinetti, 'Contempt for Women', in *Futurism: An Anthology*, p. 89.

⁴⁵ Burke, *Becoming Modern*, p. 213.

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- ⁴⁶ Kirsten MacLeod, 'The Queerness of being 1890 in 1922: Carl Van Vechten and the New Decadence', in *Decadence in the Age of Modernism*, eds. Kate Hext and Alex Murray (John Hopkins University Press, 2019): 229-250, p. 230.
- ⁴⁷ Hext and Murray, 'Introduction', in *Ibid.*, p. 19.
- ⁴⁸ Ezra Pound, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 229.
- ⁴⁹ Oscar Wilde, 'The Harlot's House', in *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Merlin Holland (London: Harper Collins, 2003) p. 867.
- ⁵⁰ Loy to Van Vechten [1934], Van Vechten Papers, box 76, folder 1083, BRBML.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵² Van Vechten, *Peter Whiffle*, p. 49.
- ⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 54.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 67.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 68.
- ⁵⁷ Carl Van Vechten, *The Blind Bow-Boy* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1923), p. 144.
- ⁵⁸ Arthur Symons, *Selected Writings* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 34.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.
- ⁶⁰ Michael Bell, 'Primitivism: Modernism as Anthropology', in *The Oxford Handbook of Modernisms*, eds. Peter Brooker et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), E-Book.
- ⁶¹ Dorothy Norman, 'Three Conversations about Alfred Stieglitz after his Death', *The Yale University Library Gazette* vol. 59, no. 3/4 (1985): 168-171, p. 168.
- ⁶² Marius de Zayas, '291 Exhibitions: 1914-16 Negro Art,' *Camera Work* no. 48 (October 1916), p.
- ⁶³ Janet Flanner, *Paris Was Yesterday: 1925-1939* (London: Virago, 2003), p. xxx.
- ⁶⁴ Susan Manning, *Modern Dance, Negro Dance: Race in Motion* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 4.
- ⁶⁵ Flanner, *Paris Was Yesterday*, p. 87.
- ⁶⁶ Tanya Dalziell, 'The Sound of an Idea: Music in the Modernist Writings of Mina Loy and Gertrude Stein,' in *Music and Literary Modernism: Critical Essays and Comparative Studies*, edited by Robert P. McParland (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars, 2009), pp. 110-125, p. 117.
- ⁶⁷ Alex Goody, *Modernist Poetry, Gender and Leisure Technologies: Machine Amusements* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 183.
- ⁶⁸ Soyica Diggs Colbert, 'Changing Optics: Harlem Renaissance Theater and Performance', in *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, edited by Cherene Sherrard-Johnson (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 285-300, p. 298.
- ⁶⁹ Claude McKay, quoted in Michael North, *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language and Twentieth-Century Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1994), p. 114.

⁷⁰ Claude McKay, 'The Harlem Dancer', in *Selected Poems of Claude McKay*, edited by John Dewey (Bookman Associates, 1953), p. 61.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 61.

⁷³ Janya Brown, 'Harlem Nights: Expressive Culture, Popular Performance and the New Negro,' in *A Companion to the Harlem Renaissance*, p. 54.

⁷⁴ McKay, 'The Harlem Dancer', p. 61.

⁷⁵ Emily Bernard, *Carl Van Vechten and the Harlem Renaissance: A Portrait in Black and White* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 32.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁷⁷ Gregory Woods, 'The Harlem Renaissance', in *A History of Gay Literature: The Male Tradition* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), p. 209.

⁷⁸ Dorothy Stringer, *'Not Even Past': Race, Historical Trauma, and Subjectivity in Faulkner, Larsen, and Van Vechten* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), p. 111.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸⁰ Loy to Mabel Dodge [1920], Mabel Dodge Luhan Papers, box 24, folder 664, BRBML.

⁸¹ Van Vechten, *Dance Writings*, p. 41. Van Vechten was in Nassau in September 1915 and described seeing the 'negro religious revival' in a letter to Stein. See *Letters*, p. 48.