

# The Materialisation of “torrential languages” within the Avant-Garde: Mina Loy, James Joyce, and Aesthetic Modernism

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*Modernist literature was obsessed with a metaphysical problem regarding the word. A series of formal and material experiments started to address the word’s self-referentiality and aesthetic autonomy, against the backdrop of a new sociocultural milieu in the early twentieth century. To discover how this materialisation of language explored the interplay of literary and artistic modernisms, this paper will critically scrutinise Mina Loy’s and James Joyce’s radical reforms of writing and try to answer the following questions: how did Loy’s multifarious artisthood and poem-writing exchange, interact with, and reinforce each other? As both were closely associated with avant-garde art movements between Europe and America, how did Joyce influence Loy’s refashioning of “torrential languages” (LoLB 88) as a creative model of linguistic experimentation? How did their visual aesthetics and experimental poetics help to declare the independence of language and the shape of aesthetic modernism in a new historical epoch?*

## Keywords

Mina Loy; James Joyce; materiality; intermediality; aesthetic modernism

*In those years formalism was part of the strategy – like asbestos gloves, it allowed me to handle materials I couldn’t pick up barehanded.*

Adrienne Rich, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision”

*Well, you know, I don’t see any firm line between all the things, music, art, poetry. I don’t see it as a hierarchy, with*

*poetry on top, and the folk song way at the bottom. I think they are all expressions of things, there's no one way.*

Ciaran Carson, "Inventing Carson: An Interview"

In the early decades of the twentieth century, literary and artistic modernisms addressed order and chaos, form and contingency, and alienation and fragmentation as historical, social, and ideological phenomena. The clash between a struggle for identity and cultural fragments profoundly shaped a new generation of artishood in the increasingly complex world, not only in terms of a readership in need of alternative modes of knowing but also in relation to artists in their avant-garde responses to radical ways of creating. In that postwar society, writers experienced a recurrent process of negation and reconstruction: disrupting the conventional norms of the preceding intellectual history and establishing a new revolutionary order. This revolution, initially identified by T. S. Eliot as a "sudden mutation of form and content in literature", appeared with a new course of writing that was "not destructive but re-creative" (16). Like Eliot, Eugene Jolas, the first to have used the phrase "the revolution of language",<sup>1</sup> considers it a withdrawal from the authorial or historical authority to an independent and self-sufficient space in the text itself. Modernist literature with a characteristically aesthetic tendency challenges the notion of solitary reading with words as a physical instrument of representation; rather, it conceives of the linguistic formality as a part of the content. At this point, a new formalist thinking, as "valuable to understanding sociopolitical institutions as it is to reading literature" (Levine 2), will help us to bridge the interpretative distance between form and content by spotlighting the materiality of language as an expressive form. It could turn the structural experience into a broadly collaborative act with sight and other sensory capacities in order to better understand the political and sociocultural contexts.

Modernist formal experiments and its avant-garde aesthetics regarded the crisis of form alongside newly emerging media, such as abstract painting, cinema, photograph, and performance art, as an opportunity to resist and transcend the traditional generic definition and designation in the previous literary trajectory. Marjorie Perloff finds that "the aesthetic of early modernism has provided the seeds of the material poetic" (3). The material of various media excites literature; instead of acting as an interart exchange at the thematic or ekphrastic level, the nature of multimedial modernism asks for a revolution

of language best suited to engaging with a technologically and aesthetically dynamic form and structure. As Cara L. Lewis argues in *Dynamic Form: How Intermediality Made Modernism*, it is intermedial modernist “form’s mobility and malleability” (11) that extends beyond what Lessing termed the temporal art of literature into the inclusion of a wide range of nonliterary artefacts. Although there exists a hegemonic tendency to substitute the *text* of Roland Barthes with the notion of *medium* by medialisng both verbal and visual representations into an overarching idea of media aesthetics (5-6), it is reasonable enough to explore the modernist refashioning of language and form, accounting for the confluence between poetical and other pictorial media.<sup>2</sup> In this vein, this paper intends to reveal a distinct version of multifarious, flexible formalism that transforms textual criticism into intertextual, intermedial reconsiderations of verbal materiality.<sup>3</sup>

Concerned with the “metaphysical problem” (77) of the word raised by Jolas, modernist writers proposed varied experimental solutions to the formal crisis of realist narrative and addressed the “autonomy of language” (77) through the techniques and theories of avant-garde art movements. The autonomy or self-sufficiency of literature here refers to a significant “means of self and social liberation [even] in a commercially aestheticised and textualized world” (Waugh 60), in which literary language itself – like an impressionist painting – can provide a highly self-conscious pattern of seeing and perceiving the world, rather than a representation of social reality or an instrumental interest of knowledge. Influenced by twentieth-century visual culture, modernist poets and novelists started to associate themselves with an alliance from another field that had been regarded as the paragonal rivalry or the laocoönised other.<sup>4</sup> To discover how the materialisation of language – based on interaction or cross-fertilisation with experiments in visual art – creates a space to explore the potential for artistic renewal and multiple interpretations of the literary text, this paper will therefore examine the revolution of word and the shift of formal representation in modernist literature, mainly exemplified by poems from Mina Loy’s *Lost Lunar Baedeker*, with a complementary reading of certain chapters from James Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Through an interart or intermedial reading of their literary experiments, this paper will show how avant-garde artworks and philosophies enable modernist writers to change the basic function of language from a mode of imitating or reflecting into a mode of being and performing. It will arrive at the conclusion that the modernist reformation of word, either in poetry or in fiction, attempted to problematise the fundamental status of literary language of which a text consists. Like a futurist or cubist product,

language is transformed into a dynamic state of aesthetic autonomy and self-referentiality; instead of being a static tool for signifying or representing physical realities, it becomes an expressive discourse for articulating one's identity and experience in a variety of revolutionarily new forms.

## **Mina Loy's language as Futurist design**

From studying in Munich and Paris to working and living in Florence, Mexico, and eventually New York, Mina Loy's expatriate identity and transatlantic communication between Europe and North America exposed her to a great variety of distinctive literary and artistic circles: she encountered Filippo Tommaso Marinetti in Rome, Ezra Pound and Marcel Duchamp in Paris, etc. (Miller, "Mina Loy" 380; Crangle 275-76).<sup>5</sup> Initially interested in visual arts, Loy developed a career as a lamp designer from her intense enthusiasm for lampshade and lighting art.<sup>6</sup> This artistic intersection, in return, enabled her to innovate the poetic form and language in her experimental works as both a poet and visual artist, blending two of those "curious disciplines" (Hayden 11). Her emphases on vision, verbal design, and the energy of making destabilise the literary conventions in a linearly syntactic mode and alter the cultural identities of race, gender, and artishood through a "materialist approach" of language (Frost 33). Loy's reputation in American Parnassus was affirmed by Ezra Pound, who proclaimed her, along with William Carlos Williams and Marianne Moore, a seminal figure in the avant-garde landscape (Goody, *Modernist Articulations* 2).<sup>7</sup> As a rejector and recreator, Loy tends to be remembered for her futurist manifestos and radical feminist poems, which, inspired from both Anglo-American modernism and Continental art movements, disrupt the conventional norms of Victorianism and create new styles in a revolutionary order.

The early twentieth century witnessed new waves of cultural and artistic complexity such as Futurism and Cubism – not heterogeneous yet overlapped in many aspects, aiming for a new aesthetic means to depicting the postwar human experience across multiple media, cultures, and historical borders. In the face of a new age of what Walter Benjamin called mechanical reproducibility with the emergence of photography, little magazines, advertising, and typography design, artists started to pay simultaneous attention to both "visual and semantic dimensions of print [and] an awareness of the materiality of language" (Hampson and Montgomery 66). Loy converted to Futurism

in 1914, when she befriended and then had affairs with F. T. Marinetti and Giovanni Papini in Florence; meanwhile, she exhibited her artworks at the First Free Futurist International Exhibition in Rome, including several portraits of Marinetti and a presently lost painting titled *Dynamism of the Subconscious*.<sup>8</sup> During this period, she composed two manifestos “Aphorisms on Futurism” and “Feminist Manifesto”, aggressive proclamations of the futurist ideology and sexual selfhood.<sup>9</sup> Observed from both of her poetical and pictorial products, one can discern the typically futurist elements: the deep impatience with the past, the violent rejection of any tradition, and the strong glorification of machine, energy, and velocity. Loy consistently emphasised these points in her experimental play with typography. The concept of Futurism, for Loy, is not only a clear break with the thematic redundancy of last centuries, namely “DIE in the Past” (*The Lost Lunar Baedeker* 149) but also the means

Live in the Future.

THE velocity of velocities arrives in starting.

IN pressing the material to derive its essence, matter becomes deformed.  
AND form hurtling against itself is thrown beyond the synopsis of vision.

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

Here a strong sense of birth or rebirth is out of its opening aphorism that “Live in the Future”. Loy and futurists attempted to embrace futurity as a revised version of modernity by anomalous uses of form and language, specifically speaking, by “pressing the material” to its pure abstract essence and even deforming the existed matter into new shapes. This formal transformation relates to the perspectival power of sight, or “vision”, so that one could be provided with alternative ways of reading/seeing and interpreting the materially reformed text. In doing so, it seems imperative to the manifesto that:

THUS shall evolve the language of the Future.

THROUGH derision of Humanity as it appears –

TO arrive at respect for man as he shall be – (*LoLB* 152)

Appealing for a “language of the Future”, Loy’s declaration of a linguistic (r)evolution is apparent in her poems and manifestos. Utilising irregular

capitalisation at the beginning of each sentence, the poet designed this political manifesto by combining the dynamic composition with her visual sensibilities. Loy thus wielded a conceptual weapon to declare the urgency to the rehabilitation of one's vision and mind in an aggressive tone, e.g., "LET the Universe flow into your consciousness" and "Unscrew your capability of absorption and grasp the elements of Life – *Whole*" (*LoLB* 151). To achieve so, she used visual emphasis and manifestic authoritativeness to make the text a list of religious doctrines or a political leaflet.<sup>10</sup> As a futurist, she experimented with the material aspects of syntax to develop a new language appropriate for the celebration of the alternative configurations after the Great War. Loy's stylistic "fashioning" (Goody, "Ladies of Fashion" 267) or "overwriting" (Frost 32) – an overuse of rhetorical devices to the point of dramatic effect – can be read/seen as aesthetic activism campaigning for an enormous liberation of discourse and consciousness. Availing itself of the disruptive energy of Futurism, her intentionally capitalised and italicised words work as a visible bomb in a literary war for an awakening of the readerly response to contemporary social changes:

BUT the Future is only dark from outside.  
*Leap* into it – and it EXPLODES with *Light*.  
 FORGET that you live in houses, that you may live in yourself –  
 FOR the smallest people live in the greatest house.  
 BUT the smallest person, potentially, is as great as the Universe. (*LoLB*  
 149)

The futurist engagement, "mov[ing] beyond *vers libre* to *parole in libert *" (Hampson and Montgomery 68), from "free verse" (original in French) to "words-in-freedom" (in Italian), freed Loy from the conventionality of poetic style and diction. Her experimentation with capitals, italics, bold type, and even different font sizes of word makes itself a work of art, a *painting* with codes, eliminating the boundaries between art and life, object and environment, in order to capture the aesthetic and sensual experience of a viewer rather than solely a reader. As the founder of Futurism, Marinetti invented the "*synthetic and essential lyricism, wireless imagination, and words-in-freedom*" (95) with poetic inspiration in his technical manifesto of futurist literature. In a similar fashion to Gertrude Stein, Loy's typographical revolution, functioning more radically than the textual strategy of Emily Dickinson, played with all printed marks as

material objects on the page to give a physical shape to the uncertainty and striving spirit of artistic imagination.<sup>11</sup>

More significantly, Loy’s stylistic features within Futurism also represented her ambition to “construct a femininity that has the aggressive presence ascribed to masculinity without sacrificing an aesthetics of plenitude and fanciful flair” (Miller, “Finding ‘Only Words’ Mysterious” 589) in a tension between gender and sexuality, of which current models were still utterly inadequate. In one correspondence with Mabel Dodge Luhan in 1914, she wrote: “in the throes of a conversion to Futurism – but I shall never convince myself – There is no hope in any system that combats ‘le mal avec le mal’ ...and that is really Marinetti’s philosophy” (Loy, *The Last Lunar Baedeker* lxvii). She became more and more disillusioned with the male-fascist version of Italian Futurism that Marinetti and Papini championed for, which brought nothing but the misogynistic “scorn for woman” and the sexist repression of “feminism [as] kind of materialistic, self-serving cowardice” (Marinetti, “Foundation” 5). In her poem “Lion’s Jaw”, Loy satirically mentioned Danriel Gabrunzio (Gabriel D’Annunzio), Raminetti (Marinetti), and Bapini (Papini) by means of orthography: all pioneered European avant-gardism in masculinist terms and left an “abandoned harem” of women in “psycho-pathic wards” where they could receive “virgins riding alabaster donkeys” almost “every noon” (Loy, *LoLB* 46-47). These references highlight the irresponsibility of errant male sexuality upon the minds of women and their feminine valuation.

Instead of following their “anti-woman discourse [and] violent virilism” (Re 799), Loy absorbed some of their ideas and turned to set up a feminine or feminist Futurism, proactively concerned about gender, sexuality, and the repressive forces on females that were underpinned by a male-dominant society. Breaking with Italian futurists in both their literal and symbolic meanings, she decided to demolish the male representation of woman and womanhood in misogynistic images and disclose the dichotomy between the social structuration of gender relationships. For example, Loy’s tone dripped of a mocking irony in which she questioned and undermined the place of females within the domestic sphere, through “The Effectual Marriage” between Gina and Miovanni in fictional narrative, or Mina and Giovanni in actuality. Miovanni seems to be an enlightened intellectual who Gina anticipated possesses “a round light shining where his mind was” and cannot come for supper because he is always “Outside of time and space” (Loy, *LoLB* 37-38). However, Gina being a female:

But she was more than that  
 Being an incipience    a correlative  
 an instigation of the reaction of man  
 From the palpable to the transcendent  
 Mollescent irritant of his fantasy  
 Gina had her use    Being useful (Loy, *LoLB* 36)

This elevation of Miovanni to be “Outside of time and space” in his own library acts in an ironical manner; as Loy suggested, the husband’s inflated sense of selfhood puts himself and his work upon a pedestal with no care about his busy wife cooking in the kitchen. The textual space between words is not random but intended to represent the problematic gap between different sexes and their sexual values. In the opening stanza of the poem, the “absurd” “door” (*LoLB* 36) of the house, metaphorically as the sexual boundary of gender categories, separates not only the physical spaces of male and female, but also their social, cultural, and ideological inequalities that were formed and enacted by male artists.<sup>12</sup> Hence, in Loy’s “Feminist Manifesto”, she explicitly called for women to reject the masculine dominance and their social roles as wife, mother, or lover in the public sphere, allowing them to embrace themselves fully in a sexually and intellectually feminine and feminist capacity.

With these thematic and formal features, what Loy aggressively intended to achieve here is in line with H  l  ne Cixous’s conceptualisation of *  criture f  minine* (women’s writing), instructing female writers to employ their gender writing as a means of authority, to depolarise the masculine rhetoric form of reason and eradicate the patriarchal suppressive effect (875-76). In her political manifesto on feminism, thematically and formalistically, she emancipated women’s individuality from their oppressed situation and frees the narrative and the order of words in the meantime. The aesthetics of poetic form can attract the “eye of the style” (Churchill et al. 245) in this feminist fashion of design against the male-biased taste. Her underlined, bold, and enlarged types of words create emphasis and points of meaning based on the visual aspect of writing and the signifier in the Saussurean term, which generates meaning in the associative yet differential relations within a larger structural entity. Loy’s enlargement of the boldface – or signifiers – associates them with each other as a new frame or layer of narrative on their own, separated from the rest of the text. For instance, she started by interrogating female status in the contemporary society through a rhetorical question: “Inadequate

Women”, “Wrench”, “Reform”, “Absolute Demolition”, “Reality”. “Is that all you want?” (*LoLB* 153); and later denounced it as “Feminine [...] not [...] are [...] Parasitism, & Prostitution – or Negation” (*LoLB* 154). Analogous to Joseph Conrad’s fictional devices of a frame story in *Heart of Darkness* and Virginia Woolf’s in “The Searchlight”, Loy’s feminist statements could be read as words within the words, offering a drastic reinterpretation of the text and functioning as a secondary narrative whose voice even becomes louder and stronger than the original, through the writer’s incorporation of volume into silent written words and expressions for a holistic experience.

While Loy’s radical manifestos provide a critical point of contact between literature and visual art, her experimental poems also contain a reconstruction of a poem within a poem, compared to the unconscious or ego beneath the stream of consciousness, for example, in one of her longest poems entitled “Songs to Joannes”:

Come to me There is something  
 I have got to tell you and I can’t tell  
 [...]  
 It is ambient And it is in your eyes  
 Something shiny Something only for you  
 Something that I must not see

It is in my ears Something very resonant  
 Something that you must not hear  
 Something only for me (*LoLB* 57-58)

The internal space amid the sentence divides the entire stanza into two voices, contradictory to each other, which sound from different levels of one’s individual inner mind: one says, “Keep away from me”, the unconscious eagerly asking for a “push” or a distance; the other shouts, “Don’t let me understand you”, the ego in fact meaning “Don’t realize me” (*LoLB* 58). It differentiates the consciousness from the unconscious, an active and hostile identity from passive and defensive selfhood in an open-ended exploration of sex and sexuality. Moreover, without any pause from punctuations, its frame lines can be read as a refrain or musical accompaniment in a lyric, where the musicality of language is represented by the repetition, the rhythm of particular words, and the spontaneous flowing of emotion in a dialogic style. Another witty

usage of space can be seen in one of her late poems, “Time-Bomb”, in which she widened the between-word blanks to sketch a fragmentary scene as a result of a physically real explosion:

The present moment  
is an explosion ,  
a scission  
of past and future (*LoLB* 123)

She symbolised the uneven space as intuitional pauses, psychological hesitation, and visible “scissions” between the past and the future in order to dramatise the elapsing of the passing time. In a visibly slow-paced and heavy tone, the progress of the lost time shows an authorial attempt to retain a remembrance of the present existence in a sense of *carpe diem*.

In addition to her “formal and typographic experiments, the elimination of punctuation, and the conscious destruction of syntax” (Hampson and Montgomery 67) as discussed above, Loy also incorporated the futurist collage structure into her poetic artistry instead of the traditional linear use of language. In collage art, the linearity of images or words in terms of literature is diminished so as to capture the sensation of speed and movement. In contrast to the naturalistic three-dimensional painting depicting a static object, Marcel Duchamp and Giacomo Balla in their futurist paintings commonly emphasised the simultaneity of the partial arrangement as a multidirectional whole, whether in the form of visible traces of a naked man going downstairs shown in *Nude Descending a Staircase*, or a dog’s stepping feet and wagging tail in *Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash*. These paintings both present a concurrent space, where the past, present, and future of the object can be observed at the same time. In this way, Loy verbally sketched the dynamism of a busy street in her poem “Italian Pictures”. Burke has called it “one of the first English poems to employ simultaneity and juxtaposition as formal principles” (qtd. in Thurston 414). The poet-artist described the painterly scene of “the passionate Italian life-traffic” (*LoLB* 10) in a lively commercial street:

Oranges half-rotten are sold at a reduction  
Hoarsely advertised as broken heads  
BROKEN HEADS        and the barber  
Has an imitation mirror  
And Mary preserve our mistresses from seeing us as we see ourselves

Shaving  
 ICE CREAM  
 Licking is larger than mouths  
 Boots than feet  
 Slip Slap and the string dragging  
 And the angle of the sun  
 Cuts the whole lot in half (*LoLB* 11)

Juxtaposing the imageries of “Orange half-rotten”, “BROKEN HEADS”, “ICE CREAM”, “Boots”, and “the angel of the sun” from a kaleidoscopic point of view, Loy adopted a spatial composition on a canvas or a montage of fragmented elements to invoke the energetic, vibrant atmosphere of urban life. This futurist method is designed for drawing the dynamic scene by juxtaposing stasis and activity. By doing so, she set out the fourth stanza as closely following the third. The former bursts with the sound and action of selling oranges, shaving, licking ice cream, and dragging a string; by contrast, the latter seems comparatively calm and silent with the only motion of Mary’s “wonder[ing]” (*LoLB* 11). Thus, this collection of various voices or characters, working as Gilles Deleuze’s site of assemblage, can create a “multidimensional, multi-directional field” that is “traversed by different planes of effect, a productive field of contingent connections between particular point-signs” (Goody, *Modernist Articulations* 22) for multiple interpretations from both linguistic and pictorial perspectives.

### Loy’s “Joyce’s Ulysses” and Cubist narrative

Born in the same year 1882, Mina Loy and James Joyce were two of the most influential modernist precursors of experimental writing. As Edna O’Brien states in her biography of Joyce, Ezra Pound also spoke highly of Joyce and his *Ulysses* by placing him above all their literary contemporaries in this era of revolution (104). Standing on the central stage of his literary moment, Joyce is renowned as the “father of high modernism” (qtd. in Mullin 99), who greatly influenced the later writers but still retained his own uniqueness. Like Loy, Joyce’s travels between Ireland and mainland Europe extended and intensified his associations with Pound, T. S. Eliot, Frank Budgen, John Quinn, E. R. McCormick, and H. S. Weaver (Mullin 99).<sup>13</sup> However, his lack of interest in visual arts seems to distinguish him from the relation to Loy’s

interdisciplinary experiment on the literary language. Although Joyce once announced to someone that “[p]ainting does not interest me” (Ellmann 505), some scholars have endeavoured to connect his life with potential art-oriented experience, for instance, through his friendship with the painter Budgen in Zurich, his reading of Umberto Boccioni’s futurist book, and the likelihood that he attended a cubist exhibition in 1908.<sup>14</sup> Aside from all these assumptions, it is hard to detach Joyce fully from his artistic inspiration. His revolution of language was derived from the ideological multiplicity during the modernist period, and took different forms as described by Freudian psychoanalysis, Bergsonian vitalism, French symbolism, and surrealist art (Waugh 10) during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. *Ulysses*, as an ideal sample, should be this “sort of encyclopaedia” from Joyce’s point of view; it should not only embrace but also create its exceptional technique in a structural totality with “every hour, every organ, every *art* being interconnected and interrelated” (“Letter” 146-7).

Loy and Joyce were directly or indirectly associated with the modernist cultural movements that challenged the conventions of meaning and representation. They were both epistemologically conscious of the close conjunction between literature and visual culture, giving birth to what Marinetti called typographic design or telegraphic lyricism. Familiar with each other in Paris, they wrote and shared within a large circle of intellectuals and artists (Burke 1). Loy’s admiration and praise for Joyce can be identified from her poem “Joyce’s Ulysses”, the title of which typographically indicates “Joyce is Ulysses”, a genius and immortal creator of literary modernism:

Empyrean emporium  
 where the  
 rejector – recreator  
 Joyce  
 flashes the giant reflector  
 on the sub rosa – (*LoLB* 90)

Loy highlighted the Joycean usage of “torrential” languages and words “made flesh / and feeding upon itself / with erudite fangs” (*LoLB* 88-89). The language of *Ulysses* indeed impressed Loy and encouraged her to integrate this radically stylistic writing into her poetry, exhibiting the “increased experimentation, integration of obscure or archaic words, and linguistic punning and playfulness” (Prescott 123) typical of Joyce. Loy’s hybridity of

different cultural, medial, and artistic resources could be also recognised as a Joycean strategy of blending the old with the new, the “Spirit” with the “Flesh”, and the Irish/English traditions with a revolutionary voice:

The elderly colloquists  
the Spirit and the Flesh  
are out of tongue –

The Spirit  
is impaled upon the phallus

Phénix  
of Irish fires  
lighten the Occident

with Ireland’s wings  
flap pandemoniums  
of Olympian prose  
and satirize  
the imperial Rose  
of Gaelic perfumes  
– England  
the sadistic mother  
embraces Erin – (*LoLB* 88-89)

Echoing in her “Anglo-Mongrels and The Rose” (*LaLB* 121-30), Loy’s appropriation or reappropriation of the archaic vocabulary moves from the fixed meaning into a new artistically creative space, free from the colonialisation of the “imperial Rose” as a “sadistic mother”. Through language experiments, Loy and Joyce offered the reader a restless chain of multiple narratives to discover one’s national, racial, and sexual identities.

Apart from socialising and publishing their poems and prose together – separately not jointly – in *The Little Review*, their first official meeting took place in a Paris café in 1921, when Djuna Barnes interviewed Joyce shortly after the publication of *Ulysses* by Shakespeare & Company on his fortieth birthday (Parmar 148).<sup>15</sup> Loy took the opportunity to sketch a portrait of Joyce and published it in a special issue of *Vanity Fair*. Even though Loy is always celebrated for her experimental poems while Joyce is commonly accepted as

one of the most extraordinary novelists in the modernist literary realm, they shared certain aesthetic qualities relating to experimentalism in word, prosody, and form, thus achieving an autonomy of language and alternative ways of reading and interpretation. The following sections will then demonstrate how Joyce's revolution of language relates to Loy's in terms of linguistic visuality and sexuality.

Like Loy's futurist reconstruction of poetic diction, Joyce's revolutionary writing style in *Ulysses* could be identified as having a cubist manner. Beyond the interart allusions, their materialisation of language has transformed the textual linearity into an intermedial articulation; more importantly, their focus on the intermedial formality shall be regarded as a key part of "modernist intermediality" (O'Sullivan 283) that deconstructs the false dichotomy between word and image, time and space, and high modernist literature and mass culture. Despite being uninterested in painting, Joyce was reasonably aware of the technical values of modern art and concerned about the avant-garde movements, as evidenced from one of his conversations with Budgen in 1918.<sup>16</sup> When Joyce asked whether the chapter "Cyclops" read futuristically, Budgen asserted that it was, in fact, less futurist than cubist because "[e]very event is a many-sided object. You first state one view of it, and then you draw it from another angle to another scale, and both aspects lie side by side in the same picture" (153). Cubist painters tend to break down the worn-out techniques of classical art that render depth and shading, but rather to present the object in an extreme way from all angles on the canvas. In this sense, Joyce was able to abandon the linear narrative in literary tradition but employed multiple points of view as an alternative. Hence, the reader can view Dublin's panorama in detail through the flexible interchangeability of each angle of vision.

Apart from the stylistic hybridity in the form of parody or "comic play with language" (Wales 128) in "Cyclops", where the quarrel between the unnamed Citizen and Leopold Bloom transcends the various genres of ancient Celtic culture, Irish myth, Jewish history, and biblical materials, "Wandering Rocks" offers multifarious viewpoints of its vivid portrait of the city: from Father Conmee walking across the Mountjoy square to Mr. Bloom buying a novel for his wife, from Stephen Dedalus's daughters drinking pea soup at home to the Irish governors passing in their carriage.<sup>17</sup> The writer juxtaposed these scenes with the overlapping appearance of nineteen characters in this single episode, exhaustedly representing the totality and variation of Dubliners' lives in a fragmented but purposeful order. Doing anything but imitating, Joyce's

interart treatment of literary form is an art of “idiosyncratic transformation, revision, recycling, transvaluation” (Slote 1) that makes the language new and afresh. As a literary *Gesamtkunstwerk* of Richard Wagner’s musical one, the Joycean narrative reveals an apparent tendency of crossing different artistic genres and uniting all the media of art into modernist collaboration – an upgraded edition of Wagner’s “collective Art-work of the Future” (qtd. in Slote 2).

Moreover, Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which as approved by Cixous is “beyond any book and toward the new writing” (884) of gender and sexuality, might peculiarly resonate Loy’s feminist reformation of word. This new writing or so-called *écriture féminine*, from a feminist perspective, is supposed to include the writing of/about the female body, history (or her-story more accurately), and women’s self and identity, thereby challenging the cultural and political hegemony of masculinism. For example, in the last chapter entitled “Penelope”, the writer literally recorded Molly Bloom’s stream of consciousness in merely eight giant sentences separated by paragraph breaks, with little punctuation and no interruption from any other narrative voice. At four in the morning, the heroine has not yet fallen asleep but instead lies in bed presenting us with her subconscious in a feminine, discursive, and dream-talking tone. She mutters about immoral affairs with secret lovers, her past youth in Gibraltar, and finally her memories with Leopold Bloom. Molly’s pure interior monologue or unbroken flux of thoughts is a montage-like “tapestry of interwoven reveries [and] a virtuoso display of the apparent randomness, illogicality and repetition of thought processes” (Wales 91).

Similarly to Loy’s painterly strategy, Joyce displayed the gendered language or narrative in an illustrative and typographical way. Both focusing on the visuality, palpability, and “materiality of textual objects”, they chose to visualise the printed text through the telegraphic performance of its physicality, based on the employment of “mixed techniques, extensive layering, and transgression of natural borders” alongside the experimental use of structure, font, and page layout (Greenblatt 151). The mixture of verbal and visual representations could direct our attention toward the materialist approach to understand and interpret the characterisations and their sexual and ideological tension. To be specific, Joyce’s lengthy unpunctuated passages strike the reader, at first glance, with a sense of discursivity and smoothness of the flowing mind. Furthermore, he portrayed two visibly different modes of thought between the female, e.g., Molly’s inner voice at the start of “Penelope”:

Yes because he never did a thing like that before as ask to get his breakfast in bed with a couple of eggs since the City Arms hotel when he used to be pretending to be laid up with a sick voice doing his highness to make himself interesting for that old faggot Mrs Riordan that he thought he had a great leg of and she never left us a farthing all for masses for herself and her soul greatest miser ever was actually afraid to lay out 4d for her methyated spirit telling me all her ailments she had too much old chat in her about politics and earthquakes and the end of the world let us have a bit of fun first God help the world if all the women were her sort down on bathingsuits and lownecks of course nobody wanted her to wear I suppose she was pious because no man would look at her twice I hope Ill never be like her a wonder [...] (*Ulysses* 690)

And the male, e.g., Bloom's monologue in "Nausicaa":

Fine voice that fellow had. How Giuglini began. Smell that I did. Like flowers. It was too. Violet. Came from the turpentine probably in the paint. Make their own use of everything. Same time doing it scraped her slipper on the floor so they wouldn't hear. But lots of them can't kick the beam, I think. Keep that thing up for hours. Kind of a general all round over me and half down my back. (*Ulysses* 357)

In both a colloquial and conversational style, Molly and Bloom represent two distinctive ways of thinking through a visual and typographic form of literary language and structure.<sup>18</sup> Punctuating and paragraphing empower the text to become characteristic, meaningful, and self-referential. Bloom's short-sentenced, frequently-punctuated, telegraphic style of speech delineates a ponderous, unassertive, and powerless man of the middle class who is abnormally deliberative with his oral and mental expression. On the other hand, his wife, Molly, is characterised as an active, potent, and self-centred woman. Though she appears illiterate due to her semi-literary style with ungrammatical syntax, incorrect spelling, and lexical interest merely in the superficiality of everyday trivialities, she corresponds to the modernist mould of women and femininity by appearing to be genuinely sensitive, self-determined, and enthusiastic about life; as the last line says: "yes I said yes I will Yes" (*Ulysses* 732). Similar to Loy, who tried to transform the traditional reception of poetic word through the sound effects activated by the visual power of observing and experiencing, Joyce left enough space for the audience

to participate in and interact with the text so as to accomplish the interactive process of reading/seeing.

## Conclusion

Mina Loy and James Joyce, both as pioneers of modernist literature, led the revolution of language under the cultural context of artistic diversity, gender awareness, and ideological emancipation. Their consciousness of words helped them to rejuvenate the obsolete poetic language and add visible and tactile dimensions to recognise and intensify the referential power of the signifier. The self-referentiality or autonomy of word took an intermediary role in correspondence with sociocultural changes and aesthetic perception in the new epoch. In a new formalist sense, their experimental writings are not only meant to achieve the effect of defamiliarisation by estranging a familiar word or image to counter the habituation or automatism of reception, but more significantly, to reconsider the form as both shape and essence across different media and artforms that properly accounts for “modernism’s formal variety” (Lewis 15). As Lewis states, modernist intermediality enables a series of interdisciplinary, transcultural experiments with form, structure, and the materiality of language to shift the homogeneously textual understanding and provoke new aesthetic responses (17). Its linguistic awareness, either in poetry or fiction, has sought to problematise the nature of language by transforming it into a self-contained, autonomous state rather than a mechanical tool for signifying or representing the actual reality.

To conclude, this paper has critically investigated the intermedially defamiliarised form and language devised by Loy and Joyce, and discussed how their engagements with avant-gardism in the early twentieth century contributed to radical experimentations in language, prosody, and the materialist form of art. To probe into their innovations, it has analysed Loy’s manifestos and poems collected in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, with a complementary reading of Joyce’s *Ulysses*. Both as “rejector – recreator” with “torrential languages”, their new styles of writing with intense use of spacing, punctuation, and typography, built up a verbal-visual dialogue to further negotiate the aesthetised, gendered form of modernist literature. The intermedial dialogue, to a large extent, dissolved and refashioned the historically previous inconsistencies between word and image, the temporal and the spatial, content (signified) and form (signifier), the subject and the

object, as well as masculinity and femininity. As the core of this interartistic method, the materialisation of language, connecting the text with the attention to the visuality of a typographic structure, could offer new ways of refreshing and regenerating the sensual experience and aesthetic perception of readers, writers, and artists in reaction to the complexities of a more and more aesthetically modernised world.

### Endnotes

1. As shown from the title of Jolas's essay "The Revolution of Language and James Joyce", see Waugh 10.
2. The reason for Lewis to use the notion of medium is that she regards the form as an ahistorical, apolitical idea based on medium specificity – staying away from historical and sociocultural discussions.
3. For an example of this new formalism in association with both high/low cultures of aesthetic modernism, see Judith Brown, *Glamour in Six Dimensions: Modernism and the Radiance of Form* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2009) 1-19.
4. On the relationship between modernism and the avant-garde, see Glen MacLeod, "Modernism and the Visual Arts," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modernism*, edited by Michael Levenson (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011) 245-67.
5. On the other "U.S.-born expatriates" like Loy in American literature, e.g., Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, H.D., and T. S. Eliot (Miller, "Finding" 583). See more in Marjorie Perloff, "English as a 'Second' Language: Mina Loy's 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose'," in *Poetry on & Off the Page: Essays for Emergent Occasions* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 2000) 193-207.
6. For more about Loy's lampshade as a subject matter and a writing technique "recasting syntax, lineation and material printing" (626), see Julie Gonnering, "Shades of Meaning: Mina Loy's Poetics of Luminous Opacity," *Modernism/modernity*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, 617-29.
7. Pound deems Loy's revolution of poetic word as logopoeia in contrast with phanopoeia and melopoeia. See Pound, "Marianne Moore and Mina Loy," in *Selected Prose 1909-1965*, edited by William Cookson (London: Faber & Faber, 1978) 394-95; Bowen Wang, "Mina Loy, Logopoeia, and the *Alphabet that Builds Itself*," *The Modernist Review*, issue 39, 4 April 2022. For more about the relationship between Pound and Loy, see Peter Nicholls, "'Arid clarity': Ezra Pound and Mina Loy," in *The Salt Companion to Mina Loy*, edited by Rachel Potter and Suzanne Hobson (London: Salt, 2010) 129-45.
8. More can be found on the digital platform, *Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde*, edited by Suzanne W. Churchill et al. (University of Georgia, 2020) <http://mina-loy.com/manifesto/>.
9. On Loy's contact with Italian Futurists in 1913 when studying art in Paris, see Hampson and Montgomery 67-68. In addition, see Natalya Lusty, "Sexing the Manifestos: Mina Loy, Feminism and Futurism," *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2008, 245-60.
10. The special genre of manifesto has been defined as a key means for modernists and avant-gardists to give exhortations of their ways of thinking. See Janet Lyon, "Modernists

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- and Gatekeeping Manifestoes: Pound, Loy, and Modern Sanctions,” in *Manifestoes: Provocations of the Modern* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1999) 124-67.
11. Stein has a huge influence upon Loy’s style of writing, which could be better phrased as verbal design or the design of typography, for instance, the blank line, emptiness, the mental spacing and spatiality on the page (221). See Carolyn Burke, “Without Commas: Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy,” in *Poetics Journal Digital Archive*, edited by Lyn Hejinian and Barrett Watten (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 2015) 217-26.
  12. About the gendered space and metaphorical house of domesticity, see Laura Scuriatti, “Negotiating Boundaries: The Economics of Space and Gender in Mina Loy’s Early Poems,” *Feminismo/s*, no. 5, 2005, 71-84; Jacinta Kelly, “Of Archives and Architecture: Domestication, Digital Collections, and the Poetry of Mina Loy,” *Australian Feminist Studies*, vol. 32, no. 91-92, 2017, 171-85.
  13. He spent most of this time writing in the cities of Trieste, Zurich, and Paris. For more information on this, see John Nash, “Genre, Place and Value: Joyce’s Reception, 1904-1914,” in *James Joyce in Context*, edited by John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 41-51.
  14. For more information, see Jo-Anne Isaak, “James Joyce and the Cubist Esthetic,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, vol. 14, no. 1, 1981, 61-90. On Joyce’s friendship with Budgen during the period from 1918 to 1919 in Zurich, when they met almost every day to discuss the making of *Ulysses*, see Frank Budgen, *James Joyce and the Making of Ulysses and Other Writings* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1972).
  15. Also, *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* published their works in the same issue of 1925. On the relationship between Loy and Joyce, see Parmar, “The Artist Genius and the Divine” 139-50; Prescott, “Master of Meteoric Idiom: ‘Joyce’s Ulysses’” 117-33, where the author makes an elaborate analysis of Loy’s pencil sketch of Joyce (121).
  16. See Corinna del Greco Lobner, “James Joyce and Italian Futurism,” *Irish University Review*, vol. 15, no. 1, 1985, 73-92.
  17. On stylistic parodies and pastiches, see Wales 128-32. On other revolutionary aspects of this epochal novel, see Sean Latham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ulysses* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2014).
  18. For more about the gendered language, see Wales, “Joyce’s Voices in *Ulysses*” 68-104; Marian Eide, “Gender and Sexuality,” in *James Joyce in Context*, edited by John McCourt (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 76-87.

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