

**Nonhuman animals and decorative modernism in  
Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy.**

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With a focus on their depiction of the use of nonhuman animal materials this article examines how Barnes and Loy's modernism specifically negotiates and disrupts the uncertain boundary between natural and cultural meanings in their engagements with fashion and the decorative. The article considers animal fashions and the limits of the human in Djuna Barnes's writing, from early pieces such as 'Vaudeville' (1915) and 'Madame Collects Herself' (1918) to her late poetry, and in her journalism for New York newspapers, *Vanity Fair*, *Charm* and elsewhere. It also explores Mina Loy's engagement with decoration and fashion through her poetry, in her essay on 'Modern Poetry' and in her work as a designer and inventor (including her design for a 'Horse Ear Hat'). The article argues that, through motifs of animal decorations in women's fashion, Barnes and Loy imagine animal-human confluences that deconstruct those dualisms and hierarchies that sustain an exploitative anthropocentric economy and a patriarchal cultural elitism.

Keywords: Djuna Barnes; Mina Loy; modernism; nonhuman animal; fur; fashion; decoration.

## **Nonhuman animals and decorative modernism in Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy**

Two decades ago, as an early career scholar looking for my first permanent academic post, I published an article on Djuna Barnes and Mina Loy that explored how their ‘participation in modern fashion and modernism poses a feminine subject who utilizes *and* subverts her status as spectacular object’ (Goody 1999: 280). Much has changed since 1999, both for myself (I am now a professor in a UK university) and in terms of the methodological and theoretical frames that are brought to bear on modernist women writers. The New Modernist Studies, birthed as I was completing my doctoral thesis, has substantially enriched the field in the last twenty years, modernist periodical studies has demonstrated the significance of publication context and paratextual codes, conceptual developments in feminism and new materialisms have reconfigured the reading practices of feminist scholars, and technological developments in digital archives and the digital humanities have given researchers access to previously inaccessible sources. I remain, as this article demonstrates, interested in practicing a feminist analysis of Barnes’s and Loy’s different but proximate interests in fashion and mass cultures and explicating their slant relationship to mainstream culture and high modernism. But I now find myself deploying very different tools and methods. The following pages thus turn back to the province of my earlier article whilst exemplifying the impact of developments in modernist studies and the resulting transformation of my textual practice. Circling back to revisit the dissident intersections from which Barnes and Loy, along with many women modernists, crafted their poetic I now have access to periodical sources and a reinvigorated theoretical frame that enable new apprehensions of their strategies. In the following pages my focus is on Barnes and Loy’s depictions of the use of nonhuman animal materials, such as fur, in fashion. As an artificial bodily surface, a marker of wealth, a trace of the beastly contiguities of the human animal, fur marks an uncertain boundary between nonhuman nature and human culture. It prompts Barnes and Loy, as I go on to argue, to particular forms of decorative modernism that trouble the anthropocentric capture of woman, animal, other.<sup>1</sup>

By the beginning of the twentieth century fur was primarily a luxury object of consumption for women but, as Julia Emberley recounts, it was a complex nexus of economic, political and aesthetic forces that led to the emergence of the ‘figure of the fur-clad woman [. . .] as

an exemplary token in the libidinal and political investments of the sexual exchange of women's bodies' (Emberley 1997: 142). Thus, early modern sumptuary legislation established the social hierarchies of fur and the colonial expansions of subsequent centuries brought new dynamics into the mercantile enterprise of the fur-trade. As the 'symbolic power, sexual and material excess' of fur accrued in the modern world (Emberley 1997: 72), fur was deployed, alongside an array of animal elements such as hair, skin, feathers, and stuffed creatures, in the burgeoning *couture* fashion industry of the late nineteenth century. This use of animals was met by protests at the time, including from groups allied with anti-vivisection or the vegetarian movement who recognized the anthropocentric violence of these decorations. The campaign against the trade in tropical and sub-tropical bird feathers eventually led to the banning of exotic bird imports with the Lacey Act (USA 1913) and the Plumage Bill (Britain 1921). In contrast fur farming was a lucrative global industry and continued as a widespread practice well into the twentieth century. The multiple valences of animal decoration – luxury, beauty, narcissism, sensuality, fetishism, domination, empire, class – coalesce uneasily on the body of the fur-clad woman. Fur was once the cover for animate, animal flesh, the tactile surface of a creature that protects but also extends out into the world, signaling and sensing. As human decoration fur carries the trace of its nonhuman animal source but now serves as inanimate cover for women's flesh, enlivening the objectified feminine with a lattice of accrued meanings generated by the forces of patriarchy and anthropocentric humanism. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs* (1870) is a pre-eminent text of the anthropocentrism of modernity, co-opting both woman and animal (skin) into the interiorized drama of a male fantasy of control and subjugation.

At the turn of the twentieth century fur presents as a naturalized symbol of femininity, wealth and prestige, and a sure signal of human superiority over the natural world. But fur also oscillates between natural and cultural meanings in modernity. That fur might inhabit a zone of '*intra-action*' (Barad 2007: 141) disturbing the objectification of both commodity-animal and woman-flesh suggests the possibility of a different body-politics of fur that releases murdered animal and subjected woman from the violence of humanism, ushering in the intensities of becoming-animal. Thus, as Emberley demonstrates, through the political, economic, and sexual meanings of fur the 'dualities of masculine/feminine attributes of power, animate/inanimate flows of libidinal desire and the black/white or smooth/hairy surface of human or animal skins emerge as affective sites' (1997: 94). These affective sites are ones where 'the values of economic exploitation and symbolic oppression

[are] negotiated' (Emberley 1997: 94), but they are also, as I argue here, locations where the limits of the sovereign human are exposed. Especially if fur and nonhuman animal decoration is returned to a vibrant materiality through Jane Bennett's accentuation of the fact that 'matter itself is lively' (Bennett 2010: 13), the animal decorations of women's fashions move clearly into a zone of comingling and 'entanglements between human and non-human materialities' (115); a zone resonant with becomings-other

The becomings that might be generated in the intensive, affective assemblages of surfaces, bodies, and functions of human and animal skins can be related to the recent animal turn in modernist studies. Carrie Rohman identifies a renewed, theoretically informed interest in 'the question of animal subjectivity in literary and cultural modernism' (2008: 1). Rohman and others have offered useful explorations of the ways in which 'modernist texts variously re-entrench, unsettle and even invert a humanist relation to this nonhuman [animal] other' (2008: 12). My approach to the work of Barnes and Loy is informed also by contemporary new materialist and posthumanist feminisms that displace the centrality of human agency, dethrone the humanist subject and argue for 'creative deterritorializations, intensive and hybrid cross-fertilizations and generative encounters with multiple human and nonhuman others' (Braidotti 2016: 691). Thus, in the following pages, I carry the multiple valencies of animal fashions and the ambivalences of modernist becomings-animal into my analysis of a distinctive aspect of Barnes's and Loy's modernism. I argue that depictions of fur and animal decoration in their work pose a resistance to those dualisms and hierarchies that sustain an exploitative anthropocentric economy and a patriarchal cultural elitism.

### ***Animal Fashions and the Limits of Humanism in Djuna Barnes***

In Barnes's *Nightwood* animal alterity, performativity and the fashioning of femininity are contiguous dynamics that play across the central figure of Robin Vote, first apprehended unconscious in a hotel room in a visual tableau that is '[l]ike a painting by the *donanier* Rousseau' (Barnes 1936: 31). This scene combines a frame of 'exotic palms' and 'unseen birds' with an arrested performance – 'Her legs, in white flannel trousers, were spread as in a dance' – that suggests she is the 'property of an unseen *dompteur*' (30, 31). But Robin, in her unconscious pose, is also enigmatically nonhuman; exhaling a perfume of 'earth-flesh, fungi' and 'oil of amber', her 'flesh was the texture of plant life' (31). Once awake Robin's eyes have 'the iris of wild beasts who have tamed the focus down to meet the human eye' and she is described as 'a woman who is beast turning human' (33). Readings of *Nightwood* that follow the animal turn in modernist studies

often take Robin as their starting point. As Rachel Potter reflects, the ‘woman who is a beast turning human’ is the central device in the novel that enables Barnes to ‘think about the relationship between and the boundaries separating the beasts and the human’; for Potter this exemplifies Barnes’s ‘engagement with the limits of humanism’ (Potter 2019: 62, 63). But, I would argue that Robin’s uncertain status as sovereign human subject is also impacted by her performative femininity (and that of other characters such as Doctor O’Connor and Frau Mann). Robin’s identity is framed and staged from the outset and continues through such details as her dressing in antique women’s clothes – ‘feathers of the kind his mother had worn’, skirts ‘wider and longer than those of other women’, ‘heavy silks’ and ‘a heavy brocaded gown’ (Barnes 1936: 38) – that signal the anachronistic fashioning of her non-normative femininity.

The absence of a subjective interiority for Robin in the novel also constructs her as a surface on which the libidinal energies of her lovers inscribe a meaning, and as an absolute (nonhuman) alterity on the verge of dissolution. But Barnes’s concern to interrogate the limits of humanism and the contiguous fashioning of the woman subject through becomings-animal are not only apparent in Robin and in *Nightwood*. As I examine in the first half of this article the deconstruction of the human is an integral feature of Barnes’s decorative modernism, the journalism, plays, poetry, and short stories from the 1910s and 1920s that seemingly diverge from the radical modernist experimentation of *Nightwood*. In her feature reflections on contemporary culture, engagements with the spectacle of modernity, and pithy accounts of fashion and desire, Barnes’s work undermines the assumptions of superiority and supremacy that bolster the masculinist, humanist cultures of modernism.

On April 24, 1915 Barnes’s poem ‘Vaudeville’ was published in the Munsey pulp magazine *All-Story Cavalier Weekly*, a publication that sandwiched a few poems and letters to the editor between serialized adventure stories and short stories: Edgar Rice Burroughs’s *Tarzan of the Apes*, for example, appeared in an earlier version of the magazine (*The All-Story*) in 1912. In contrast to the predominant fare of the *All-Story Cavalier Weekly* (the feature story for April 24, 1915 was Part One of ‘Harold Titus’ Frontier Serial’ *Doc*), Barnes’s poem focuses on a contemporary, urban topic: the vaudeville dancer. ‘Vaudeville’ evokes Oscar Wilde’s decadent poetic through its images of autumnal ‘wane’, artificial beauty (her hair is ‘cylinders of golden flake’) and ephemerality (Barnes 1923: 67). Further, the dancer’s body has a function similar to those in Barnes’s *Book of Repulsive Women* whose ‘bodies [act] as both the ground of representation and as apotropaic [. . .] guarding against the very figurative strategies through which they are described’ (Hardie 2005:123). The vaudeville dancer as feminine trope is evoked through her more-than-human proximities, in insect images ‘like a butterfly burnt out and dead’, and in

descriptions of her costume with its 'lace', 'satin', and particularly her decorative hem; 'And more demure and more than quite discreet | The hem that dusts her ankles with its fur' (Barnes 1923, 67). The emphasis on the 'demure' and 'discreet' skirt, and the tautological repetition ('more', 'more than quite') distances this dancer from Sacher-Masoch's fetishized 'Venus'. Nonetheless, the dancer's decorative hem evokes the fraught libidinal and political investments of fashionable fur and the feminine spectacle.

The early twentieth-century vaudeville stage was a site of mainstream variety entertainment that relied upon a spectacle of femininity. This femininity occupied an ambivalent place between the woman performer's 'assertive self-spectacle' and the positioning of women as 'passive objects for audience consumption' (Glenn 2000: 3). In this aspect vaudeville heralded the development of early cinema as a 'spectacle whose principle content is female embodiment' (Doane 2002: 543) whilst, with vaudeville theatres replaced by picture houses, cinema literally supplanted the popular stage in many locations.

The dancer's 'fur' in 'Vaudeville' suggests the attempt to capture and perform a version of (naturalized) sensuality in the display of woman, an appropriation and commodification of the animal body that enfolds and captures a feminine soma, positioning her as sexual spectacle. But the tautological 'fur' hem and the dancer who sports it also exceeds the functioning of the libidinal commodity in Barnes's poem and wards against her/its co-option into the logic of gendered display. As 'more than quite' human, not quite translatable as passive object of desire, this dancer inhabits the uneasy 'balance between women as active producers and passive reflectors of popular culture' on the vaudeville stage that Susan Glenn describes (2000: 216). Nevertheless, this dancer ultimately escapes the capture of the voyeuristic gaze. She leaves the stage and the 'quick applause and quick regret' of the audience who are left to watch 'the spotlight empty' (Barnes 1923: 67), replacing her legibility as eroticised feminine spectacle with the present-absence of her performance.

'Vaudeville' was reprinted in *Vanity Fair* in May 1923 by which time Barnes was in Paris, writing regular expatriate contributions for the American press. According to Phillip Herring, Barnes was first sent to Paris by Burton Rascoe, then associate editor of *McCall's* magazine in 1921, on a borrowed \$100, to provide articles and stories on 'what American women wanted to read [. . .] sophistication, a hint of illicit romance, a peek at fashion' (Herring 1995: 130). Barnes published in *McCall's*, the *New York Tribune* and other periodicals, and her contributions to *Vanity Fair* included stories, plays, sketches, other poems, and an interview with James Joyce. 'Vaudeville' on the pages of the 'smart' magazine *Vanity Fair* participates in a set of paratextual relations that recasts its subversions of the commodification of feminine bodies. Glenn suggests a

parallel that can be applied in an interesting way. For her the ‘modernist sophistication’ of the Broadway revue, that was increasingly positioning chorus girls as ‘luxurious goods’ rather than autonomous performers, has an ‘analogue’ in ‘smart magazines’ such as *The Smart Set*, *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker* (Glenn 2000: 126, 160-61). Thus Barnes’s ‘Vaudeville’, in its 1923 appearance, is both addressing a readership attuned to a sophisticated modernity that was co-opting the energies of popular culture into a mass-mediated spectacle, and enacting that process of co-option, depicting a vaudeville dancer within frames of middleclass, middlebrow consumption.

Barnes’s poem appears on page 67 of *Vanity Fair* as a central insert, enclosed by the short story ‘The Two Glass Doors: Wherein the Past and Future Becomes Transparent to a Perplexed Young Lady’ by Elinor Wylie [fig 1]. ‘The Two Glass Doors’ narrates the story of Perdita, the ‘perplexed young lady’ who revisits her past failed relationships with Hughie Graham (deceased) and Pat Mortimer (now married to Millicent) while waiting to have tea with George (who is ‘rich’ and a ‘staunch Presbyterian’) at Delmonico’s. Wylie was a poet and novelist and, at the time, poetry editor of *Vanity Fair*, so would have been responsible for assigning Barnes’s poem. Her story is light and arch in tone, but does ironize the position of the contemporary, bourgeoisie young lady as marriageable stock; Perdita realises her diminishing ‘value’ after four years that have ‘purloined the faintest hint of freshness and buoyancy from her beauty’. Envisaging her future as George’s wife Perdita has recourse to similes that resonate with the vaudeville dancer in Barnes’s poem. She imagines herself ‘small’ and ‘soft as a yellow butterfly’ or ‘tortoise shell kitten’, thereby iterating the performance of frail, submissive femininity that being George’s wife will entail. That Barnes and Wylie both play with tropes of feminine fragility and the animalised woman, foregrounding the performance, rather than inherence, of such tropes suggests something of the ambiguities of *Vanity Fair* as a textual space. The subtexts of their presentations of spectacular women address the sophistication of their readers, satirize assumptions about femininity, but also participate in the gendered displays of modernity.

It was in the pages of *Vanity Fair* that Barnes first deployed the pseudonym ‘Lydia Steptoe’, an authorial persona that Herring claims marked a distance between the ‘art’ she wrote under her ‘real name’ and her jobbing journalism (1995: 78). In fact, it signals the performativity of her position as woman writer, negotiating the cultural hierarchies of her modernist context and the dynamics of self-fashioning that were central to both the lives and texts of modernism. As I have argued elsewhere, the identity of ‘Djuna Barnes’ as a modernist writer emerged in a discontinuous way across the duration of her 1910s popular press publications and in interchange with the ‘contingencies, codes, and commercial requirements of the mass-market periodicals she

published in' (Goody 2019: 42). This writerly persona, as much as 'Lydia Steptoe', was an invention of/in the periodical press. In her Lydia Steptoe writing, and in her mass-market pieces of the 1910s, the interest in performing women (and in the performance of woman) that runs throughout Barnes's oeuvre, is manifest. The speaker of Barnes's 'Vaudeville' is in the position of spectator, but in her early stunt journalism Barnes places herself in the position of spectacular object – damsel in distress in 'My Adventures Being Rescued' and force-fed feminist in 'How It Feels To Be Forcible Fed' – in which lived experience and performed role are conflated.

In 'The Girl and the Gorilla', Barnes's other piece published in the colourful magazine supplement magazine of Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* newspaper in 1914, her interest in the uncertain line between the human and the nonhuman animal is also foregrounded. The stunt in this piece involves Barnes entering the zoo cage of a young, female gorilla, Dinah. But Barnes chooses to 'interview' what she terms the 'Gorilla woman' or 'Bushwoman', presenting this creaturely other as a rejoinder to 'all the different kinds of femininity in the world, their fads, fancies and fashions' (Barnes 1914b: 9). Dinah performs as (human) woman through Barnes' journalistic ventriloquism but one with a critical take on the preoccupations of human civilisation. In a parallel strategy in an article on the New York Hippodrome Circus, Barnes focuses on the nonhuman animal performers presenting elephants, to the reader, as 'gay, giggling chorus girls of the jungle' who become 'gorgeously cynical'. In a later article on the actress Fania Marinoff, Carl Van Vechten's wife, the nonhuman animal and the performing woman are further associated. The article is titled 'Should Anyone Call You "Catty" Make No Mistake; It's a Compliment' and presents a lighthearted interview with Marinoff, whilst also rehearsing an encounter with animal alterity:

Fania's husband had to read 2,000 books or so on cats before he could attempt a book, but Fania could have told him if he had listened to her, because, as she says:

'I have lain on the floor very quietly, making no movement, showing no sign of life, just to watch a cat rise up, yawn, and begin pacing. It was a cat who taught me how to rise up, how to yawn, how to pace. It was a cat who made me realize what can be done with an eyelid.'

As Fania Marinoff 'rises up' with/as a cat she poses the possibility of moving outside the cultural intelligibility of '2,000 books' and enacting a human-animal proximity that disrupts both the sovereign human subject and the designations of animal as nonhuman other.

Where Derrida is caught in naked embarrassment by the gaze of his cat and proposes that in this gaze and this cat ‘what we have here is an existence that refuses to be conceptualized’ (Derrida 2008. 9), Marinoff instead learns the performance of woman from the feline ‘eyelid’.

Barnes’s accounts of decoration, self-fashioning, and the nonhuman have a particular resonance for the short drama ‘Madame Collects Herself’, published in the *Parisienne Monthly Magazine* in June 1918. The *Parisienne* was a lucrative publication founded by H. L. Mencken and George Jean Nathan to publish excess material submitted to *The Smart Set*. It offered its US readership what David Earle describes as ‘the promise of risqué bohemianism and romance that France held for a provincial country’ (Earle 2016); Mencken and Nathan faced an obscenity charge in 1915 for the *Parisienne* that Eugene Crowe (the owner of *The Smart Set*) managed to get dropped. Barnes’s ‘Madame Collects Herself’ is more absurdist than risqué and like many of her early dramas published in periodicals ranging from *Others* and *The Little Review* to the *New York Morning Telegraph Sunday Magazine* and *Vanity Fair*, it is an ‘almost unperformable play’ (Taylor 2003:182) that depicts a middle-aged woman at a fashionable hairdressing parlour. With an obvious debt to Edgar Allen Poe’s ‘The Man That Was Used Up’ (1839), Madam Zolbo, a ‘stout, slightly pompous woman of forty odd, with high piled hair upon which rests an enormous velour hat supporting a bird of paradise’ (Barnes 1995: 62), is exposed as an assemblage of parts amassed from her various living and deceased lovers. But, unlike Poe’s Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith, whose alphabetical initials suggests the incremental process of his construction every morning, Madame Zolbo is the ‘Z’, the awkward letter and strange culmination of the alphabet, or as Barnes uses it in her *Creatures in an Alphabet* (1982) a ‘colophon’ (Gardiner 2019: 88). She is an emblem who signifies the sources of her own imprinture and demonstrates the paradoxical coherence of woman as a congregation of segments and decorations. Madame Zolbo is comprised of the hair, skin, digit, blood, and organs of men who have desired her (and thus organic as opposed to mechanical prostheses). She is also made from the parts of nonhuman animals – a ‘sable muff’ and ‘bird of paradise’ hat (Messerli 1995: 61) – that inscribe her femininity with a class and couture status that derives from those transactions in a co-opted nonhuman nature that underpin modernity.

When she is violently disassembled by the hairdresser, his wife, and his assistant, Madame Zolbo is reduced to a nonhuman animal form that literalises the metaphor of the caged bird – ‘a blond canary’ (65) that is hung in a cage outside under the hairdresser’s sign

– but is then almost instantly resurrected at the cost of ‘three men already lying dead beneath her cage’ (66). Her gendered corporeal assemblage is, not simply, a comic version of the *femme fatale* (indicated by the hairdresser’s references to ‘Salome’ and ‘Messalina’ [66]) and thus the product of the patriarchal imaginary, a woman who ‘gestically embodies this notion of the patriarchal construction of femininity’ (Farfan 2017). Madame Zolbo is also an embodiment of the colonial ideology that appropriates the nonhuman world. She is a decorative icon of the capitalocene and the plantationocene, and a product of the humanism that validates the violence of patriarchy and empire.

The complex nexus of self-fashioning, gendered corporeality, and the nonhuman realm finds a reprise in Barnes’s late poem ‘Rite of Spring’, published in *Grand Street* in 1982, the year of Barnes’s death. ‘Rite of Spring’, in its brief three lines, juxtaposes the human to ‘the silk worm’ that can ‘on a running thread | Spin a shroud to re-consider in’; mankind, in comparison, ‘cannot purge his body of its theme’ (Barnes 1982: 66). With its implicit reference to the Ballets Russes’s radical 1913 production of Vaslav Nijinsky’s *Rite of Spring*, the poem seems to cite the display of corporeal signification, decorative costuming and chthonic sexual violence that characterised the Ballet Russes’s performance. This sits alongside the influence of John Donne and what Cathryn Stez terms a ‘stylistic indebtedness to the metaphysicals’ (2019: 131).

Daniela Caselli suggests ‘Rite of Spring’ revolves ‘around an impossible purging ritual’ and the inability of the writer ‘to complete her “task”’ (Caselli 2009: 104, 105). As Barnes’s last published work, and one that she records on a manuscript was a labour of decades – ‘Twenty years trying to finish this poem’ (Barnes 2005: 145) – Caselli’s reading of the text is quite compelling. However, ‘Rite of Spring’ also figures a corporeal poetics that sets this last poem in dialogue with the dynamic of animal relations and fashioned bodies that figure throughout Barnes’s work. The domesticated *bombyx mori* that produces silk for textiles cannot fly and has lost camouflage pigmentation; it is entirely dependent on humans for its reproductive cycle. The ‘shroud’ of the silkworm is thus not (merely) a metamorphic shell but also an animal commodity in the modern textile and fashion industries. It is a transmutation of the nonhuman into a functional element of the anthropocentric machines of modernity. But in addition the silkworm’s shroud is, potentially, recuperative if its thread leads back to a re-considering of the human/nonhuman relation. The intimacy of *bombyx mori* and its pupa with the (mostly women) humans who tend them and spin, sew, and wear their silk suggests the touch and exchange of human and nonhuman animal through the pupa/shroud could also instigate a transfiguration of the human. Despite its pessimism about the probable fate of ‘Man’, ‘Rite of Spring’ also intimates the possibility of ‘purging’ the body of its human thematic and entering into an assemblage of

human-animal becomings. Barnes's final publication thus reiterates how her poetic critically negotiates the uncertain fashioning of the natural world through the legibilities of human culture.

### *Fashioning Poetry and Mina Loy's Decorative Visions*

In 1924 a new American magazine, *Charm: The Magazine of New Jersey Home Interests*, was launched under the remit of the Newark-based Bamberger's department store. Sophie Oliver identifies that Barnes and Loy were enlisted for the magazine by the editor Bessie Breuer when she was in Paris establishing a fashion bureau for *Charm*; in her later memoir notes Breuer recalls a lunch at 'the Brasserie of the Lutetia for Djuna and Mina', both of whom she had known in New York, in order to elicit their contributions (Oliver 2018: 110). Barnes contributed eleven articles to *Charm* between 1924 and 1928, under her name and the pseudonym Lydia Steptoe, while Loy's only contribution 'Modern Poetry' was published in April 1925.

Loy and Barnes had much closer connections than the pages of *Charm* magazine though. They lived in the same building (9, rue Saint-Romain) in Paris in the 1920s and were good friends during this period. Herring relates how 'Barnes often accompanied Loy and the girls [her daughters] to a café, where Mina would sit and work a crossword puzzle as the others chatted' (1995: 145). Carolyn Burke records that 'she [Loy] and Fabi [Loy's daughter Jemima Fabienne Cravan (Lloyd) Benedict] had spent hours at Djuna's helping to hand-color fifty copies of *Ladies Almanack*' (Burke 1996: 368). Loy herself appears as 'Patience Scalpel' in *Ladies Almanack* and she attributes her short drama 'Rosa', in which the titular character juggles 'three huge swords a couple of pistols, and a slim knife', to an author 'Bjuna Darnes' (Crangle 2011: 184). Loy and Barnes shared the precarious existence of independent women in expatriate modernist Paris but, whereas Barnes was an experienced journalist who wrote 'sophistication' a 'hint of illicit' and 'peek at fashion' for an American readership, Loy turned to interior design, decoration, and fashion to support herself and her daughters. As with Barnes's oeuvre, however, Loy's modernist poetry does not sit distinct from her inventions and designs. In my consideration of Loy in this subsequent section of my article, I contend that her innovative interdisciplinary modernism engages fabrication and creativity through tropes of the nonhuman and performative feminine that echo Barnes's critique of the legibility of culture and the humanist hierarchies of modernity. I begin this analysis with a re-reading of Loy's 'landmark essay' (Crangle 2011: xi), 'Modern Poetry'.

Anthologised in the 1996 *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* Loy's 'Modern Poetry' is often seen as particularly significant, offering, for example 'a modernist formulation of the relationship of self to poem' (Roberts 2010: 112). In the article Loy discusses the poetry of Ezra Pound, e e cummings, H. D., Marianne Moore, Lawrence Vail, Maxwell Bodenheim, and William Carlos Williams, making no direct reference to her own poetic practice. Her emphasis in considering the 'new poetry of unprecedented verse' is on music – Loy's opening salvo is to compare contemporary American poetry to Jazz, the 'new music of unprecedented instruments' – and on rhythm, movement, variety, 'life' and the 'spontaneous structure' of modern poetry (Loy 1925: 16).

Throughout her article, Loy is explicit that her focus is on America and American poetry, which she characterises as a poetry of 'living language' and 'flexibility of phrases' that derives from the 'acuter shock of the New World conscious upon life' (Loy 1925: 17). For Marisa Januzzi Loy's article 'supplies keys to her later career (and anticipates the claims which many historians of modernism have since made, about the first shoots in the so-called "revolution of the word")' (1998: 431). However very different implications emerge if 'Modern Poetry' is read, as I go on to do here, through the frame of its publication context, in a middlebrow, New Jersey fashion magazine. *Charm* was distributed free of charge to the more than 80,000 charge-account holders and customers of Bamberger's who constituted its readership and, as Oliver describes, one of its 'distinctive characteristics' was 'the way it combines localism and modernism' (Oliver 2021: 252).

Barnes's contributions to *Charm* as 'Lydia Steptoe' include an article on the hairdresser Master Antoine, in which he advocates the use of 'false hair' in coiffure if 'you want to be really dressed' (Barnes 1924: 26), another in which she imparts Madame Jenny's advice for dressing to your body shape (January 1925a), and one offering Madame Jeanne Lanvin's reflections on the 'woman of today' (1925b: 21). But 'Lydia Steptoe' also covers the experience of the American tourist in Paris in four articles and sketches, and contributes a piece on Pirandello and little Theatres in Rome (Barnes 1926). Throughout Barnes's articles and sketches, though maintaining the irony and authorial self-consciousness that marks all her journalism, are repeated appeals to an American audience and 'plenty of opportunities for the reader to feel a sense of familiarity or comfortable recognition' in her accounts of cosmopolitan culture and the 'competitive transatlantic fashion industry' (Oliver 2018: 121, 125). In a similar vein Loy's *Charm* article offers its middle-class woman readership access to a form of cultural capital that approximates the

cosmopolitan sophistication that *Vanity Fair*, for example, cultivated, whilst also reassuring of the relevance of the local (New Jersey) context.

‘Modern Poetry’ is a double-page spread in the feature-well section of *Charm*, illustrated with photographs of Moore, Bodenheim, Edna St. Vincent Millay and Cummings [fig. 2]; the final section appears in the back-of-book, on page 71, next to an advert for *Bird’s Neponset Rugs* and *Wilson’s O.K Plant Spray*. That Loy presents a fashionable, feminine modern poetry is emphasised by the page immediately following that covers Lucien Lelong’s Parisian couture designs, including a model photographed by Man Ray. Ray’s fashion photography often featured in *Charm* – Barnes’s articles on Master Antoine and Jeanne Lanvin, for example, are illustrated with Man Ray photographs. Alongside Loy’s ‘Modern Poetry’ the April 1925 issue of *Charm* has articles on ‘The Paris Openings’, ‘The Newest Types in Movie Stars’, the ‘Elusive Vitamins’, ‘The Avocado and Its Affinities’, ‘Rugs in the Modern Home’, ‘Implements for the Feminine Gardener’, and ‘The Ideal Tour—By Motorboat’. The visual inclusion of Millay, whom Loy does not reference in her article, with a photograph that is captioned ‘one of the poets whose work has been instrumental in revitalizing poetry in America’ is instructive, demonstrating how the editorial practice of the magazine emphasises the function of this feature in *Charm*; Oliver suggests this inclusion may have been Breuer’s editorial decision (Oliver 2021: 260). Millay epitomizes the fashionable, successful, literary New Woman, a Pulitzer Prize winning poet (in 1923) who serves to embody and feminise ‘modern poetry’ for the readers of *Charm* who might not be so familiar with the poets Loy mentions. Millay’s metonymic function is to signal the symbolic capital of contemporary, innovative poetry for *Charm’s* readers; in a similar way Loy’s account of poetic modernism renders it as familiar and relevant currency for her readership.

Throughout ‘Modern Poetry’ Loy adopts the first-person plural and an inclusive tone, deploying accessible terminology and images to translate ideas. Thus, when Loy utilizes phrases such as ‘genius’, ‘eternal quality’, and ‘perfect poem’ in her article, a strategy that appears incongruous given the suspicion, apparent throughout her work, of the way that such terms are deployed in the rhetoric of high modernism, these terms serve to validate poetic modernism for her middlebrow readership. Similarly, the most vivid analogies in her article, comparing poetic rhythm to tennis, or poetic language to ‘an adolescent Slav who has speculated in a wholesale job-lot of mandarins trying to sell them in a retail market on First Avenue’ are indigenous to the *habitus* of her readership in terms of class (tennis) and location (New York). When she calls on the expression of the ‘true

American' to validate the novelty of modernist poetry as 'composite' 'living' language, she makes the ultimate appeal to the national pride of her women readers (Loy 1925: 17), in a similar move to Barnes's consistent familiarising of cosmopolitan fashion and cultural life for an American readership. Loy's *Charm* article thus concerns local, American discourse and taste, suggesting poetry might be as beneficial as vitamins or avocados, as domestically enriching as a well-placed rug, or as smart as a motor-launch cruise. For Oliver, Loy's essay is less a 'definitive' account of modern poetry and more obviously about the 'transitoriness and instability of the new', illustrating how 'like fashion [. . .] the new poetry expresses the logic of capitalism' (Oliver 2021: 258, 262, 261). There may be ways in which Loy is articulating a unique vision of modernist aesthetics, but she is also unashamedly explaining how the fashioning of modern poetry matches the style of her readers.

That Loy's published and unpublished work evinces an abiding interest in fashion has been noted in scholarship for some time and has proved important to scholars seeking to negotiate Loy's oblique relationship to high modernism. Loy's earliest publications in the New York magazine *Rogue*, for example, reiterate the focus of this short-lived little magazine on fashion, femininity, the decorative, and the (seemingly) frivolous. *Rogue* had no consistent aesthetic or political program and occupied 'an awkward position as both an artistic journal with avant-garde pretensions, and an urban coterie magazine with a wider "style" remit,' (Longworth 2017: 482). This magazine, which for Deborah Longworth is more like *Vanity Fair* or *The Smart Set* in tone and content than it was 'the majority of Greenwich Village's "little magazines"' (471), was happy to manifest its own contradictions in published statements. The regular *Rogue* fashion editorial by 'Dame Rogue' (Louise Norton) frequently foregrounds the malleability of the human body, deliberately confusing the decorative and the natural. Reflecting in the first issue that 'As for legs—they come and go' in fashion (1915a: 16), in a later piece on 'Trouser-Talk' Dame Rogue observes that 'trousers make unduly conspicuous the comical bifurcation of man', that they are 'mere arbitrary symbols of sex', and that 'Legs seem ironically to ally us to . . . all the animals' (1915b: 16, 18, 17). Dame Rogue revisits the nexus of clothes, bodies, and animals in the final issue of *Rogue* in 'If People Wore Tails'. She proposes that 'maybe animals would like us better' if humans had tails, whilst also predicting that they would be treated as fashion accessories, curled, cut or decorated in various 'tail fads' with 'Tail-bows' 'Tail-rings' 'Tail-muffs' (1916b: 5). Dame Rogue's conclusion that 'But after all, perhaps, tails like legs would be thought nude and immodest, undressed, and we would have to wear stockings on

them too' illustrates how clothing and fashion delineates but also disturbs the uneasy distinction of human from nonhuman animal life

In one of her key 'Philosophic Fashions' pieces, illustrated with a drawing by Loy, *Dame Rogue* highlights the constraining relationships between women's agency and fashion as exemplified by the corset (*Dame Rogue* 1916a). Similar concerns pervade Loy's poetry in the magazine. From the "Transparent nightdresses made all of lace" that adorn the 'Virgins for sale' in Loy's 'Virgins Plus Curtains Minus Dots' (Loy 1915: 10), to the 'ferny flounces' of 'The threewomen who all walked | In the same dress | And it had falling ferns on it' of 'Giovanni Franchi' (Loy 1916: 4), Loy satirises the reduction of women to the decorative and ornamental. Her concern is to expose their actual function as 'flesh in the world' (Loy 1915: 10), deployed as spectacular commodity and designated as derivative and lacking in agential power. Rather than assert the status of women as sovereign subject, however, Loy's strategy was to satirise the humanist, patriarchal assumption of the original or autotelic, the 'fantasy' of the 'enigmatic | penetralia of Firstness' (Loy 1916: 4). In poems such as 'Giovanni Franchi', 'The Black Virginity', and 'Lions' Jaws', or in the play 'The Pamperers', she parodies the unique, avant-garde genius. In 'The Pamperers' she offers him, literally, as the invention of a fashionable, modern woman: 'Diana: dispensing entirely with the middleman, we now have the genius served directly to the consumer' (Loy 1920: 69).

Loy's poetic sequence *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* is, however, more pessimistic about the impact of Western discourses of originality, gender, and the human on racial and gendered others. The parents in the text, Exodus the immigrant Hungarian Jew and Ada the English Rose, are brutally curtailed by the ideologies of Victorian England. Ada is ensnared by a self-abnegating and destructive idea of purity, equipped with the 'upholstery' of femininity and with a 'impenetrable pink curtain' (a simultaneously ideological and material manifestation of women's virtue) impeding any access to or knowledge of her sexual body (Loy 1923-24: 48). She embodies the 'travestied flesh' of Imperial England (Loy 1923-24: 41), that is, the corruption and distortion of the flows and desires of immanence and the body into a burlesque approximation of 'the human'. Exodus, in turn, is abjected ('despised and ostracized'). He is the physically 'foreign' jew who has 'nothing but his pockets' (that is, his money metonymically imagined as clothing), to achieve any social standing (Loy 1925a: 193, 153). Exodus's career as a tailor emphasizes the dynamic of self-fashioning as 'self-pruning' that runs throughout *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*. Implicitly compared to Freud, and Freud's tailoring of the human in the creation of a

psychological interiority, Exodus is a ‘weaver of fig-leaves out of Cheviot’. His role is to, both literally and figuratively, cover the animal nakedness of the human. In doing so he constructs the supposedly inherent ‘nobler’ ‘manhood’ of the English gentleman through his fashionable exterior (the “latest thing in trouserings” | —or serge’), whilst always functioning as the alterity of that construct of the sovereign, human subject (Loy 1925a: 194).

In contrast to the tragic travesties of Ada and Exodus, in the short story ‘The Crocodile without any Tail’ Loy offers a comic version of the fashioning of the human. Burke recounts that this was written in 1926 for Loy’s daughter Fabi, when she was seven years old, to help her learn languages (Burke 1996, 372-73), and the story plays with the recognisable anthropomorphic dynamics of children’s literature. In ‘The Crocodile without any Tale’ six children find a crocodile and have his teeth taken out by a fairy, whilst his tail is bitten off by another jealous crocodile. They take him home to their ‘funny Mamma’ who helps to humanise and domesticate him by attaching a Christmas tree as his tail and giving him a bib and green crocodile baby-dolls. The crocodile becomes ‘useful and ornamental’, ‘growing more human every day’ (Crangle 2011: 19, 21). His creaturely instincts are replaced by an impersonation of the human including a desire to attend school and take singing lessons. The real advantage of the crocodile manifests, however, when the children fashion ‘two fine rows of teeth out of white cardboard’ (24) for his mouth and turn him into a lucrative performance of ‘ferocious’ animality tamed. In their circus sideshow ‘they put their heads between his teeth’ and, as a result of the huge success of this attraction, they ‘earned a large fortune’ (24). This ending of the story, which displays the commodifying of the nonhuman animal, re-fashioning it as ornamental and as a lucrative enactment of animal savagery is, like Barnes’s ‘Madame Collects Herself’, both comic and a potential critique of the economic exploitations of plantationocene humanism. The crocodile’s nonhuman animal body is renovated in the service of human desires, an ornamental savagery that mimics the use of crocodile leather in fashion accessories.

The writing of Loy’s ‘The Crocodile without any Tale’ and publication of *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose* in *The Little Review* (1923-24) and the 1925 *Contact Collection of Contemporary Writers* volume, coincided with Loy’s brief stint operating a commercial interior design business, running her own shop in the rue du Colisée, Paris, with financial backing from Peggy Guggenheim and Heyward Mills (Burke 1996: 341-44; Dunn 1998: 447). Loy designed the lamps and lampshades that were produced and sold and that featured innovative use of materials, found objects and natural forms as detailed in a *Daily*

*Telegraph* article from 1929. The article describes her new, non-flammable, opaque material called ‘verrovoile’, an arum lily lamp made of this glass substitute, lampshades made from ‘crystalline’ and decorated with ‘mermaids and goldfish disporting themselves among those mysterious plants that flourish at the bottom of the sea, swans among the rushes, and parrots’, and her use of ‘old blown glass bottles’ as lampstands (anon 1929: 7). But as Susan E. Dunn relates, Loy was undertaking commercial projects and was designing clothes and objects before living in Paris in the 1920s (Dunn 1998: 447). Some of Loy’s earlier colour plate designs are reproduced on the ‘Mina Loy: Navigating the Avant-Garde’ digital resource (Loy c.1914); they demonstrate a unique reworking of the ‘hobble-skirt’ fashion and colourful, multi-layered modifications of the feminine form.

Loy’s fashion designs also featured in an April 1921 article, syndicated in a Sunday edition of the *Pittsburg Press*. These designs appear to offer a sartorial enactment of Madame Rogue’s speculations about a vogue for animal appendages whilst also commenting on the appropriation of animals in the fashioning of the human. Entitled ‘Would You Be Different? Madame Loy Shows How’ [fig 3], the article introduces the reader to ‘Madam [sic] Mina Loy’s designs from New York’ that offer ‘something more striking’ than the ‘simple and severe’ turn of contemporary fashion. Loy has, apparently, been designing ‘frocks and hats’ for ‘several’ couture ‘houses’ but featured here are some particularly striking conceptions. One dress is a satin gown that seems to collapse contradictions, offering the ‘directness of a bathing gown, and fur-trimmed’, with this use of nonhuman animal decoration subverting any functional use. The second gown ‘madame calls simple lines’, and it similarly offers excessive adornment that belies any artlessness to the dress, exaggerating the sumptuary power of animal fur in marking the feminine body as luxurious and/or fetishized commodity. The dress has a huge ‘half-sleeve half-capelike innovation in silver and dragon’s-blood’ that features ‘white fur’ edging, with white fur around the waist and down to the hem of the dress.

Loy’s hats are also show cased and these offer an even more ‘striking’ refusal of the ordinary. First is a hat that appears playfully to allude to the straw boater by literally approximating a water-going vessel; it is a ‘rimless, crownless innovation’ in light green ‘Oiled silk’ called the ‘Canoe’. But Loy’s other ‘Horse Ear Hat’ is even more conspicuous. The article relates that ‘It’s of cerise straw with a basketwork stitch in henna wool, and curving under the chin and ending in two ear-like sprays at either side of the head, the strap of real horsehair’. This hat parodies the use of nonhuman animals in fashion: it cites the use of horse hair in the nineteenth-century dragoon helmet and the millinery plumage craze

for large sweeping feathers and even taxidermied birds of paradise. Crucially, the design takes the hidden structuring of restrictive Victorian women's fashion, the crinoline fabric made of horsehair and cotton or linen (from the French *crin de cheval*), and turns it into an excessive decoration on the outside of a hat. As the illustration shows, Loy's hat creates 'Horse Ears', approximations of animal appendages that turn the comic transformation of Bottom in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into couture fashion for women. Rather than marking women as organic, sexual creatures, Loy's 'Horse Ear Hat' suggests that the decorative feminine, and her paradoxical association with the materiality of the natural, can serve to deconstruct the boundaries between the human subject and the creaturely world of nonhuman becomings.

In her poetry of the 1940s and 1950s Loy concentrates on the urban underclass and the polluted streets of lower Manhattan. The decorative visions of these later poems are transformative ones that intervene into the proselytizing discourses of the worthy poor, but they also transgress the uncertain divisions between human and nonhuman world. Loy continues her earlier reflections on fashion and self-fashioning, but in her focus on the life of the New York Bowery she discloses, as she did in the figure of Exodus in *Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose*, the abjected and denied who occupy the liminal spaces at the edge of definitions of the human. The poor, disabled, and homeless of the city streets are transfigured in her 'compensations for poverty', while the animal vermin in 'Property of Pigeons' (1961), are given anomalous transcendence, presented in the 'gorgeous halters' and 'feathery drive | of preliminaries | to their marriages', while their excrement attains the status of angel vomit (Loy 1985: 180-179). The human subject of 'An Old Woman', one of Loy's last poems, posthumously published in *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, is one that has 'come apart', disaggregated by age and existing in a present participle space of 'vagueing' (Loy 1985: 261). The old woman consists of an unproductive, nonhuman materiality, whose 'future is a seedless pod' and whose body is a 'spoiled closet' in which the 'moths' of time 'erode internal organs'. In an image that recalls the 'shroud' of Barnes's 'Rite of Spring', Loy imagines human embodiment as an agglomeration of apparel vulnerable to the insect world. Both these women modernists, in their last writings, reckon with a failing body and human subjectivity that contrasts with the vibrant potential of nonhuman materiality and creaturely life. Barnes's 'Rite of Spring' suggests a metamorphic becoming beyond the human, but even in Loy's desolate vision of ageing lies the possibility, in the image of the elderly self as a 'bulbous stranger', of a latent renewal into vegetative life

Scholars have often located Barnes's and Loy's innovations in the complex textualities of *Nightwood* and the dense, allusive poems of *Lunar Baedeker*, but these women dissent from a simple co-option into a high modernist canon. Their work crosses boundaries and disciplines, implicated in the market-places of the early twentieth-century transatlantic fashion trade by necessity, rather than aesthetic agency. As Barnes and Loy's contributions to *Charm*, for example, indicate, they worked in service of this trade, translating Paris fashion, cosmopolitan culture, and modernist poetry for a middlebrow woman readership. But they also, even while designing or reporting on fashion, generate a nonconformist perspective. The critical dynamics that run through their work disturb the fabrications of femininity and the displays of fashionable women, and gesture towards the anthropocentric violence of modernity. Nonhuman animal decoration has a particular force in these critiques, signalling cominglings of artificial and original, human and nonhuman, and conceiving the possibilities of becomings-other. What emerges is an energetic sense of the 'natural' as a construct of human culture, whilst the ageing bodies in Barnes and Loy's final work pose an understanding of the 'human' as an inconsistent bulwark against an omnipresent, vital, nonhuman materiality.

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