

The Poet's Essay -

Mina Loy

Aphorisms on Futurism

DIE in the Past
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.

LOVE the hideous in order to find the sublime core of it.

OPEN your arms to the dilapidated, to rehabilitate them.

YOU prefer to observe the past on which your eyes are already opened.

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 houses.

BUT the smallest person, potentially, is as great as the Universe.

*Loy's grave marker in a woodland cemetery in Aspen, Colorado
(designed by Herbert Bayer; Franz Berko photograph)*

WHAT can you know of expansion, who limit yourselves to compromise?

HITHERTO the great man has achieved greatness by keeping the people small.

BUT in the Future, by inspiring the people to expand to their fullest capacity, the great man proportionately must be tremendous—a God.

LOVE of others is the appreciation of one's self.

MAY your egotism be so gigantic that you comprise mankind in your self-sympathy.

THE Future is limitless—the past a trail of insidious reactions.

LIFE is only limited by our prejudices. Destroy them, and you cease to be at the mercy of yourself.

TIME is the dispersion of intensiveness.

THE Futurist can live a thousand years in one poem.

HE can compress every æsthetic principle in one line.

THE mind is a magician bound by assimilations; let him loose and the smallest idea conceived in freedom will suffice to negate the wisdom of all forefathers.

LOOKING on the past you arrive at "Yes," but before you can act upon it you have already arrived at "NO."

THE Futurist must leap from affirmative to affirmative, ignoring intermittent negations—must spring from stepping-stone to stone of creative explorations; without slipping back into the turbid stream of accepted facts.

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THERE are no excrescences on the absolute, to which man may pin his faith.

TODAY is the crisis in consciousness.

CONSCIOUSNESS cannot spontaneously accept or reject new forms, as offered by creative genius; it is the new form, for however great a period of time it may remain a mere irritant—that moulds consciousness to the necessary amplitude for holding it.

CONSCIOUSNESS has no climax.

LET the Universe flow into your consciousness, there is no limit to its capacity, nothing that it shall not re-create.

UNSCREW your capability of absorption and grasp the elements of Life—*Whole*.

MISERY is in the disintegration of Joy; Intellect, of Intuition; Acceptance, of Inspiration.

CEASE to build up your personality with the ejections of irrelevant minds.

NOT to be a cipher in your ambiente, But to color your ambiente with your preferences.

NOT to accept experience at its face value.

BUT to readjust activity to the peculiarity of your own will.

THESE are the primary tentatives towards independence.

MAN is a slave only to his own mental lethargy.

YOU cannot restrict the mind's capacity.

THEREFORE you stand not only in abject servitude to your perceptive consciousness—

BUT also to the mechanical re-actions of the subconsciousness, that rubbish heap of race-tradition—

AND believing yourself free—your least conception is colored by the pigment of retrograde superstitions.

HERE are the fallow-lands of mental spatiality that Futurism will clear—

MAKING place for whatever you are brave enough, beautiful enough to draw out of the realized self.

TO your blushing we shout the obscenities, we scream the blasphemies, that you, being weak, whisper alone in the dark.

THEY are empty except of your shame.

AND so these sounds shall dissolve back to their innate senselessness.

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—

ACCEPT the tremendous truth of Futurism
Leaving all those

—Knick-knacks.—

Feminist Manifesto

The feminist movement as at present instituted is

Inadequate

Women if you want to realise yourselves—you are on the eve of a devastating psychological upheaval—all your pet illusions must be unmasked—the lies of centuries have got to go—are you prepared for the Wrench—? There is no half-measure—NO scratching on the surface of the rubbish heap of tradition, will bring about Reform, the only method is Absolute Demolition

Cease to place your confidence in economic legislation, vice-crusades & uniform education—you are glossing over Reality.

Professional & commercial careers are opening up for you—

Is that all you want ?

And if you honestly desire to find your level without prejudice—be

Brave & deny at the outset—that pathetic clap-trap war cry

Woman is the equal of man—

She is NOT!
for

The man who lives a life in which his activities conform to a social code which is a protectorate of the feminine element—
—is no longer masculine

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The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of their sex as a relative impersonality, are not yet Feminine

Leave off looking to men to find out what you are not—seek within yourselves to find out what you are

As conditions are at present constituted—you have the choice between Parasitism, & Prostitution—or Negation

Men & women are enemies, with the enmity of the exploited for the parasite, the parasite for the exploited—at present they are at the mercy of the advantage that each can take of the others sexual dependence—. The only point at which the interests of the sexes merge—is the sexual embrace.

The first illusion it is to your interest to demolish is the division of women into two classes the mistress, & the mother every well-balanced & developed woman knows that is not true, Nature has endowed the complete woman with a faculty for expressing herself through all her functions—there are no restrictions the woman who is so incompletely evolved as to be un-self-conscious in sex, will prove a restrictive influence on the temperamental expansion of the next generation; the woman who is a poor mistress will be an incompetent mother—an inferior mentality—& will enjoy an inadequate apprehension of Life.

To obtain results you must make sacrifices & the first & greatest sacrifice you have to make is of your "virtue"
The fictitious value of woman as identified with her physical purity—is too easy a stand-by—rendering her lethargic in the acquisition of intrinsic merits of character by which she could obtain a concrete value—therefore, the first self-enforced law for the female sex, as a protection against the man made bogey of virtue—which is the principal instrument

of her subjection, would be the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity through-out the female population at puberty—.

The value of man is assessed entirely according to his use or interest to the community, the value of woman, depends entirely on chance, her success or insuccess in manoeuvring a man into taking the life-long responsibility of her—
The advantages of marriage are too ridiculously ample—compared to all other trades—for under modern conditions a woman can accept preposterously luxurious support from a man (with-out return of any sort—even offspring)—as a thank offering for her virginity

The woman who has not succeeded in striking that advantageous bargain—is prohibited from any but surreptitious re-action to Life-stimuli—& entirely

debarred maternity.

Every woman has a right to maternity—

Every woman of superior intelligence should realize her race-responsibility, in producing children in adequate proportion to the unfit or degenerate members of her sex—

Each child of a superior woman should be the result of a definite period of psychic development in her life—& not necessarily of a possibly irksome & outworn continuance of an alliance—spontaneously adapted for vital creation in the beginning but not necessarily harmoniously balanced as the parties to it—follow their individual lines of personal evolution—

For the harmony of the race, each individual should be the expression of an easy & ample interpenetration of the male & female temperaments—free of stress

Woman must become more responsible for the child than man—

Women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved—

The feeling that it is a personal insult when a man transfers his attentions from her to another woman
The desire for comfortable protection instead of an intelligent curiosity & courage in meeting & resisting the pressure of life sex or so called love must be reduced to its initial element, honour, grief, sentimentality, pride & consequently jealousy must be detached from it.

Woman for her happiness must retain her deceptive fragility of appearance, combined with indomitable will, irreducible courage, & abundant health the outcome of sound nerves—
Another great illusion that woman must use all her introspective clear-sightedness & unbiassed bravery to destroy—for the sake of her self respect is the impurity of sex the realisation in defiance of superstition that there is nothing impure in sex—except in the mental attitude to it—will constitute an incalculable & wider social regeneration than it is possible for our generation to imagine.

Modern Poetry

Poetry is prose bewitched, a music made of visual thoughts, the sound of an idea.

The new poetry of the English language has proceeded out of America. Of things American it attains the aristocratic situation of vitality. This unexpectedly realized valuation of American jazz and American poetry is endorsed by two publics; the one universal, the other infinitesimal in comparison.

And why has the collective spirit of the modern world, of which both are the reflection, recognized itself unanimously in the new music of unprecedented instruments, and so rarely in the new poetry of unprecedented verse? It is because the sound of music capturing our involuntary attention is so easy to get in touch with, while the silent sound of poetry requires our voluntary attention to obliterate the cold barrier of print with the whole "intelligence of our senses." And many of us who have no habit of reading not alone with the eye but also with the ear, have—especially at a superficial first reading—overlooked the beauty of it.

More than to read poetry we must listen to poetry. All reading is the evocation of speech; the difference in our approach, then, in reading a poem or a newspaper is that our attitude in reading a poem must be rather that of listening to and looking at a pictured song. Modern poetry, like music, has received a fresh impetus from contemporary life; they have both gained in precipitance of movement. The structure of all poetry is the movement that an active individuality makes in expressing itself. Poetic rhythm, of which we have all spoken so much, is the chart of a temperament.

The variety and felicity of these structural movements in modern verse has more than vindicated the rebellion against tradition. It will be found that one can recognize each of the modern poets' work by the gait of their mentality. Or rather that the formation of their verses is determined by the spontaneous tempo

of their response to life. And if at first it appears irksome to adjust pleasure to unaccustomed meters, let us reflect in time that hexameters and alexandrines, before they became poetic laws, originated as the spontaneous structure of a poet's inspiration.

Imagine a tennis champion who became inspired to write poetry, would not his verse be likely to embody the rhythmic transit of skimming balls? Would not his meter depend on his way of life, would it not form itself, without having recourse to traditional, remembered, or accepted forms? This, then, is the secret of the new poetry. It is the direct response of the poet's mind to the modern world of varieties in which he finds himself. In each one we can discover his particular inheritance of that world's beauty.

Close as this relationship of poetry to music is, I think only once has the logical transition from verse to music, on which I had so often speculated, been made, and that by the American, Ezra Pound. To speak of the modern movement is to speak of him; the masterly impresario of modern poets, for without the discoveries he made with his poet's instinct for poetry, this modern movement would still be rather a nebula than the constellation it has become. Not only a famous poet, but a man of action, he gave the public the required push on to modern poetry at the psychological moment. Pound, the purveyor of geniuses to such journals as the "Little Review," on which he conferred immortality by procuring for its pages the manuscripts of Joyce's "Ulysses." Almost together with the publication of his magnificent Cantos, his music was played in Paris; it utters the communings of a poet's mind with itself making decisions on harmony.

It was inevitable that the renaissance of poetry should proceed out of America, where latterly a thousand languages have been born, and each one, for purposes of communication at least, English—English enriched and variegated with the grammatical structure and voice-inflection of many races, in novel alloy with the fundamental time-is-money idiom of the United States, discovered by the newspaper cartoonists.

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This composite language is a very living language, it grows as you speak. For the true American appears to be ashamed to say anything in the way it has been said before. Every moment he ingeniously coins new words for old ideas, to keep good humor warm. And on the baser avenues of Manhattan every voice swings to the triple rhythm of its race, its citizenship and its personality.

Out of the welter of this unclassifiable speech, while professors of Harvard and Oxford labored to preserve "God's English," the muse of modern literature arose, and her tongue had been loosened in the melting-pot.

You may think it impossible to conjure up the relationship of expression between the high browest modern poets and an adolescent Slav who has speculated in a wholesale job-lot of mandarines and is trying to sell them in a retail market on First Avenue. But it lies simply in this: both have had to become adapted to a country where the mind has to put on its verbal clothes at terrific speed if it would speak in time; where no one will listen if you attack him twice with the same missile of argument. And, that the ear that has listened to the greatest number of sounds will have the most to choose from when it comes to self-expression, each has been liberally educated in the flexibility of phrases.

So in the American poet wherever he may wander, however he may engage himself with an older culture, there has occurred no Europeanization of his fundamental advantage, the acuter shock of the New World consciousness upon life. His is still poetry that has proceeded out of America.

The harvest from this recent fertiliser is the poetry of E. E. Cummings. Where other poets have failed for being too modern he is more modern still, and altogether successful; where others were entirely anti-human in their fear of sentimentality, he keeps that rich compassion that poets having for common things leads them to deck them [sic] with their own conception; for surely if there were a heaven it would be where this horrible ugliness of human life would arise self-consciously as that which the poet has made of it.

Cummings has united free verse and rhyme which so urgently

needed to be married. His rhymes are quite fresh—"radish-red" and "hazarded," and the freeness of his verse gives them a totally new metric relationship.

But fundamentally he is a great poet because his verse wells up abundantly from the foundations of his soul; a sonorous dynamo. And as I believe that the quality of genius must be largely unconscious, I can understand how Cummings can turn out such gabble when he is not being sublime. He is very often sublime.

In reading modern poetry one should beware of allowing mere technical eccentricities or grammatical disturbances to turn us from the main issue which is to get at the poem's reality. We should remember that this seeming strangeness is inevitable when any writer has come into an independent contact with nature: to each she must show herself in a new manner, for each has a different organic personality for perceiving her.

When the little controversies over what is permissible in art evaporate, we will always find that the seeming strangeness has disappeared with them in the larger aspect of the work which has the eternal quality that is common to all true art.

Out of the past most poets, after all, call to us with one or two perfect poems. And we have not complained of being too poor. You will find that the moderns have already done as much.

H. D., who is an interesting example of my claims for the American poet who engages with an older culture, has written at least two perfect poems: one about a swan.

Marianne Moore, whose writing so often amusingly suggests the soliloquies of a library clock, has written at least one perfect poem, "The Fish."

Lawrence Vail has written one perfect poem, the second "Canibulistic Love Song," a snatch of primitive ideation with a rhythm as essential as daylight. Maxwell Bodenheim, I think, had one among his early work, and perfect also is a poem of Carlos Williams about the wind on a window-pane.

Williams brings me to a distinction that it is necessary to make in speaking of modern poets. Those I have spoken of are poets according to the old as well as the new reckoning; there are others who are poets only according to the new reckoning. They

are headed by the doctor, Carlos Williams. Here is the poet whose expression derives from his life. He is a doctor. He loves bare facts. He is also a poet, he must recreate everything to suit himself. How can he reconcile these two selves?

Williams will make a poem of a bare fact—just show you something he noticed. The doctor wishes you to know just how uncompromisingly itself that fact is. But the poet would like you to realize all that it means to him, and he throws that bare fact onto paper in such a way that it becomes a part of Williams' own nature as well as the thing itself. That is the new rhythm.

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There is no Life or Death,
Only activity
And in the absolute
Is no declivity.
There is no Love or Lust
Only propensity
Who would possess
Is a nonentity.
There is no First or Last
Only equality
And who would rule
Joins the majority.
There is no Space or Time
Only intensity,
And tame things
Have no immensity.

*Loy in Florence, ca. 1909, holding her daughter, Joella,
and wearing a hat and dress of her own design*

Sketch of a Man on a Platform

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

Among the men you accrete to yourself
You are more heavy
And more light

Force being most equitably disposed
Is easiest to lift from the ground
So at the same time

Your movements
Unassailable

Savor of the airy-fairy of the ballet
The essence of a Mademoiselle Genée
Winks in the to-and-fro of your cuff-links

Your projectile nose

Has meddled in the more serious business
Of the battle-field

With the same incautious aloofness
Of intense occupation
That it snuffles the trail of the female
And the comfortable
Passing odors of love

Your genius

So much less in your brain

Than in your body

Reinforcing the hitherto negligible

Qualities
Of life
Deals so exclusively with
The vital
That it is equally happy expressing itself
Through the activity of pushing
THINGS
In the opposite direction
To that which they are lethargically willing to go
As in the amative language
Of the eyes

Fundamentally unreliable
You leave others their initial strength
Concentrating
On stretching the theoretic elastic of your conceptions
Till the extent is adequate
To the hooking on
Of any— or all
Forms of creative idiosyncrasy
While the occasional snap
Of actual production
Stings the face of the public.

Human Cylinders

The human cylinders
Revolving in the enervating dust
That wraps each closer in the mystery
Of singularity
Among the litter of a sunless afternoon
Having eaten without tasting
Talked without communion
And at least two of us
Loved a very little
Without seeking
To know if our two miseries
In the lucid rush-together of automatons
Could form one opulent well-being

Simplifications of men
In the enervating dusk
Your indistinctness
Serves me the core of the kernel of you
When in the frenzied reaching-out of intellect to intellect
Leaning brow to brow communicative
Over the abyss of the potential
Concordance of respiration
Shames
Absence of corresponding between the verbal sensory
And reciprocity
Of conception
And expression
Where each extrudes beyond the tangible
One thin pale trail of speculation
From among us we have sent out
Into the enervating dusk

(16)

One little whining beast
Whose longing
Is to sink back to antediluvian burrow
And one elastic tentacle of intuition
To quiver among the stars

The impartiality of the absolute
Routs the polemic
Or which of us
Would not
Receiving the holy-ghost
Catch it and caging
Lose it
Or in the problematic
Destroy the Universe
With a solution.

The Dead

We have flowed out of ourselves
Beginning on the outside
That shrivable skin
Where you leave off

Of infinite elastic
Walking the ceiling
Our eyelashes polish stars

Curled close in the youngest corpuscle
Of a descendant
We spit up our passions in our grand-dams

Fixing the extension of your reactions
Our shadow lengthens
In your fear

You are so old
Born in our immortality
Stuck fast as Life
In one impalpable
Omniprevalent Dimension

We are turned inside out
Your cities lie digesting in our stomachs
Street lights footle in our ocular darkness

Having swallowed your irate hungers
Satisfied before bread-breaking
To your dissolution
We splinter into Wholes

(11)

Stirring the remorse of your tomorrow
Among the refuse of your unborn centuries
In our busy ashbins
Stink the melodies
Of your
So easily reducible
Adolescences

Our tissue is of that which escapes you
Birth-Breaths and orgasms
The shattering tremor of the static
The far-shore of an instant
The unsurpassable openness of the circle
Legerdemain of God

Only in the segregated angles of Lunatic Asylums
Do those who have strained to exceeding themselves
Break on our edgeless contours

The mouthed echoes of what
Has exuded to our companionship
Is horrible to the ear
Of the half that is left inside them.

Marble

Greece has thrown white shadows
sown
their eyeballs with oblivion

A flock of stone
Gods
perched upon pedestals

A populace
of athlete lilies
of the galleries

scoop the facades of space
with spiral curves
of idol substance
in the silence

A colonnade
Apollo haunts Apollo
with the shade
of a lost hand

12

Gertrude Stein

Curie
of the laboratory
of vocabulary
 she crushed
the tonnage
of consciousness
congealed to phrases
 to extract
a radium of the word

On Third Avenue

1

"You should have disappeared years ago" —

so disappear
on Third Avenue
to share the heedless incognito

of shuffling shadow-bodies
animate with frustration

whose silence' only potency is
respiration

preceding the eroded bronze contours
of their other aromas

through the monstrous air
of this red-lit thoroughfare.

Here and there

saturnine
neon-signs
set afire

a feature

on their hueless overcast
of down-cast countenances.

For their ornateness

Time, the contortive tailor,
on and off,

clowned with sweat-sculptured cloth
to press

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upon these irreparable dummies
an eerie undress
of mummies
half unwound.

2

Such are the compensations of poverty,
to see——

Like an electric fungus
sprung from its own effulgence
of intercircled jewellery
reflected on the pavement,

like a reliquary sedan-chair,
out of a légend, dumped there,

before a ten-cent Cinema,

a sugar-coated box-office
en jail a Goddess
agitter, in her runt of a tower,
with ritual claustrophobia.

Such are compensations of poverty,
to see——

Transient in the dust,
the brilliancy
of a trolley
loaded with luminous busts;

lovely in anonymity
they vanish
with the mirage
of their passage.

Photo After Pogrom

Arrangement by rage
of human rubble

the false-eternal statues of the slain
until they putrify.

Tossed on a pile of dead,
one woman,
her body hacked to utter beauty
oddly by murder,

attains the absolute smile
of dispossession:

the marble pause before the extinct haven
Death's drear
erasure of fear,

the unassumed
composure

the purposeless peace
sealing the faces
of corpses—

Corpses are virgin.

Time-Bomb

The present moment
is an explosion ,
a scission
of past and future

leaving
those valorous disreputables ,
the ruins ,

sentinels
in an unknown dawn
strewn with prophecy .

Only the momentary
goggle of death
fixes the fugitive
momentum .

Faun Fare

Surreptitious fanfare
of unadams
amingle with ouradams

a seemingly uniform guesthood
met in unsolemn sociability

the amiable scuffle
of cocktail party.

Hooveless fauns
their goat-haunch
discard to antiquity
their hairiness
woven to our worsted.

Most smiles are similes
some
almost imperceptibly
simper to mystery—

As were the tail of the eye
lidded with unlisted likings
on ocular trail
of invitation
to untypical trysts

As were the tail of the eye
feeling for fallacious Foci
a Flitting tongue
licking its luminous chops

o'er tit-bits of other tastes
undue

to the apple
the devil
delivered to Eve.

Neo-Fauns

Whom no forestal feminae
need flee

Altered is the prey.
Of priceless use to civilization

You faun
are balm

to night-club addict
undercover-virgin

for whom
Adonis as escort
—obliging her prestige
as cosmetics her cheek—
is a must.

Faun in you
may she trust
to stage no thrust
of Sabine rape
behind the chauffeur's back

O unisex
Black marketing Amor

with your intermuscular caress
of wrestling entry
to Felicity's
unsentinelled
Arcana.

Your something-for-nothing
Variance
to infertile "Sin."

You
dual yet single
Votaries of Venuseros

As in Athens
So in Manhattan
Erosvenus evokes
his-her worshipper

or whispers

Eros is ours
for is not

Eros
forever overall
a male?

Or implores
for fauns' ease.

Quiet please!
As mondial calliopes
Blaring the bisexual norm
foment the Fauns'
allergy to diapers.

16

An Aged Woman

The past has come apart
events are vagueing
the future is inexploitable

the present pain.

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

More like moth
eroding internal organs
hanging or falling down
in a spoiled closet

Does your mirror Bedevil you
or is the impossible
possible to senility
enabling the erstwhile agile
narrow silhouette of self
to hold in huge reserve
this excessive incognito
of a Bulbous stranger
only to be exorcised by death

Dilation has entirely eliminated
your long reality.

Mina Loy
July 12th
1984