

**National and Kapodistrian University of Athens
School of Philosophy
Department of English Language and Literature**

POETICS OF IDENTITY: MINA LOY VOICING THE FLUID FEMALE BODY

Pavlina Ferfeli

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Advisory Committee: Prof. Liana Sakelliou-Schultz (Supervisor), Prof. Eleni Kehaidou, Prof. Aiki Bakopoulou-Halls

Abstract

By investigating female embodiment in the work of American modern poet Mina Loy, this dissertation argues that the portrayal of the body appears in the mode of a subject-in-process whose embodied consciousness, intercorporeality and empowered representation are crucial for the formation of identity. The work contends that the body in Mina Loy's poetry is not solely an agent of rupture, revolt and agony but also proves to be one of healing, compensation and serenity, an idea that has not been sufficiently explored to date.

In particular, the dissertation traces the development of the poet's use of embodied identity and reveals how the sense of embodied selfhood is created and transformed (Chapter 2), sustained in an intersubjective context (Chapter 3), and finally represented as a structuring tool of ideology (Chapter 4). By analyzing the ways in which the multiplicity of the experience, perception and representation of the body is formed, the dissertation reveals female bodies as generative rather than descriptive, taking part in the actual construction of personal and cultural meaning.

Chapter 1 introduces the major characteristics of Loy's work and underlines its relationship to that literal and cultural framework which gave rise to the poet's distinctive vanguardist idiom. Chapter 2 grapples with the poet's multiple transformations of the female body with the observation that it reveals carnality as a complicated process in which embodied identity can potentially become a process of dematerialization. To support this claim, the work explores how Loy's representation of embodiment ranges from the portrayal of extremely physical bodies to that of fictional bodies of alternative embodiment and last, to transcendent or disembodied creatures. By doing this the chapter reveals that oscillation between the material and the transcendent is deliberate and aims to ground woman in an embodiment of process, shattering the stereotype of the female body as fixed, passive and submissive. Having previously discussed the multiplicity of female bodies in Loy's oeuvre, in Chapter 3 the work turns to an investigation of the poet's need to achieve an embodied relationship with those she treasures most, the lover and the child she is carrying. Its main objective is to prove that the poet views female embodiment not as solely related to one's own materiality but transforms it into a site of intercorporeality. Identity in process is thus sustained in Loy's poetry through a repertoire of relational embodied selves which enrich and complicate the female lived body. Last, Chapter 4 focuses on the representation of embodied gender subjectivity which forms a powerful generator of ideology. Employing the analytical strategies of the feminist politics of vision, it reads Loy's poetic and visual work as a radical redefinition and regeneration of the female body as signifier of cultural meaning.