

Gender through Tradition in ‘Prufrock’ and ‘Songs to Joannes’

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I’m not gonna write you a love song

In the 1910s, T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock’ and Mina Loy’s ‘Songs to Joannes’¹ irrevocably expanded the traditional love song in two distinct directions. Despite their titular similarities, the poems are worlds apart. In ‘Prufrock,’ questions of identity, action, and tradition swirl in the timorous mind of a diminutive neurotic dandy too meek to answer or even voice them. Irony abounds as the reader discovers that Prufrock’s ‘Love Song’ is entirely within his own mind. Loy’s offering ignores poetic convention so much that her lack of respect for form, rhyme, and decency scandalized many of its initial readers.² A gamut of emotions surface among its collage, coursing with a double-dose of generative cynicism.

These poems each represent tradition as an influence on gender through its effect on conceptualizations of language and sexuality. Ironically, these two love poems emerge as taxonomies of failure: men and women do not speak to one another. They communicate these failings in markedly different ways, however. ‘Prufrock’ is a cautionary tale of the modern man. Enslaved by hero-worship and obsessively inert, he is fearful of both conversation and physical interaction. ‘Songs’ assaults sentimental language as insufficient and contemporary gender-roles as sexually divisive, preferring a violent action to inertia. Accompanying its combative elements, often submerged in the violence, protest, and obscurity of Loy’s language, is a representation of love with bitter complexities.

¹ Republished in *Lunar Baedeker*, in a significantly altered form, as “Love Songs,” the original text from Alfred Kreyborg’s magazine *Others* is longer and more personal. According to Roger Conover, “Love Songs” is often chosen for inclusion in anthologies due to its presence in *Lunar Baedeker* and Jonathan Williams’ *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables, Selected Poems by Mina Loy* rather than authorial preference. Conover theorizes that many of Loy’s revisions (when they were her revisions and not the work of an editor like Williams) are motivated by a desire to escape censorship—perhaps prompted by the shocked rejection she experienced after “Songs to Joannes” was first published (1996, pg. 224). Conover’s arguments, in addition to the primacy of “Songs to Joannes,” make the preferred version for this paper.

² Carolyn Burke covers the reception(s), critical and popular, of “Songs to Joannes” extensively on pages 5-9 and 190-208 of her comprehensive biography *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (1996).

There are significant differences between the two works that must be considered before any extended comparative study. 'Prufrock' is, generally speaking, more playful than 'Songs to Joannes,' and frequently presents pun and absurdity via the mock-heroics of its main voice. Additionally, its sing-songy rhymes lend it a light-hearted tone despite the images portrayed in the poem, which include anesthesia, seedy city streets, and dismembered women (2; 4-9, 70-72; 55, 62³). 'Prufrock' also gives us hints, in lines like 'Do I dare to eat a peach?' (122), that we are not expected to take its protagonist seriously. Eliot ironizes Prufrock, being sure not to prescribe his attitudes, while Loy's voice in 'Songs to Joannes' is her own reflective consideration and its humor is never at the expense of the credibility of her voice. 'Prufrock' whispers its questions of gender tangentially, while 'Songs' whispers are measured scorn. Loy's mythic vignettes are not allowed to dominate the poem, whether 'Pig Cupid' (3) or the parable of the virgins (14-16). 'Songs' is personal⁴, while 'Prufrock' is epic; an observation which would likely please Eliot as well as Loy.

Eliot's Tradition

The differences in text are complemented by the drastic differences in their respective authors. Eliot's work (both as creative author and critic) provides a trove of published material concerning his theories and practice. This is hardly the case for Loy, who published three critical essays during her lifetime, one of which was only recently discovered (Conover, 1996, p.217). 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' provides particularly illuminating insight into 'Prufrock' when Eliot says, of the poet, that 'the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously'⁵ (1956, p.48). Contrasting with Eliot's traditional theory are Loy's 'Aphorisms on Futurism,' where she uses 'that rubbish heap of race-tradition' (1996, p.152) as a term of derision for the human subconscious. As Virginia Kouidis observes, 'Futurism seems to have awakened Mina Loy to . . . the need to reject the strictures of the past' (1997, n.p.). Eliot's idea that 'the poet must develop or procure the

³ Quotations from 'Prufrock' are from the 1974 Faber edition of Eliot's *Collected Poems*, and both they and the citations from 'Joannes' reference line numbers rather than page numbers.

⁴ Peter Ackroyd's biography of Eliot quotes several of his Harvard course-mates who describe him as a "dandy," "well dressed," and "bookish" (30), suggesting a more intimate relationship between poet and Prufrock than is often assumed.

⁵ This interpretive clue enables an Eliot critic to make otherwise risky interpretive leaps in the cases where Eliot alludes, as I will do in this paper.

consciousness of the past' (1956, p.52) disagrees with Loy, who terms the past 'a trail of insidious reactions' and bans reliance on 'the turbid stream of accepted facts' (1996, p.150). The two viewpoints are not directly opposed, as Eliot insists that 'novelty is better than repetition' (1956, p.49), and Loy's poetry does allude to previous writers, their starting points and attitudes are radically different.

Prufrock's place in the Western literary tradition of Dante, Shakespeare, and the Bible consistently paralyzes him with feelings of inadequacy. The patriarchal literary history of which he is a part is shaped by individuals who accomplish heroic deeds, in diametric opposition to his life, measured in coffee spoons. This perceived unimportance couples with his sense of propriety to inflate his self-consciousness and inhibit him from expressing himself out of fear. Prufrock's exclamation 'No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be' (111) introduces Shakespeare's anti-hero into the cadence of the *Inferno*'s 'For I am not Aeneas, am not Paul; / nor I nor others think myself so worthy' (Alighieri, 1995, lines 32-33, Canto 2). In this section, Dante is protesting to Virgil that he is unfit to overcome the trials that prevent his ascent to heaven. Prufrock's denial, like Dante's, is an instance of perceived inadequacy in relation to a character of literary fame. This character of negation is exemplified by his refusal to identify with John the Baptist, insisting 'I am no prophet—and here's no great matter' (83). As the poem nears its end, the irony inflates:

I grow old . . . I grow old . . .
 I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled.
 Shall I part my hair behind? Do I dare to eat a peach?
 I shall wear white flannel trousers and walk upon the beach.
 (120-23)

In the *Inferno*, Dante proceeds, overcoming his self-esteem issues with the help of Virgil. Prufrock, in contrast, remains inert and stagnantly aging to ponder fashion and diet.

Dante and Prufrock are both surrounded by their 'ancestors' in their writings. Unlike Dante, however, Prufrock never sets out on a journey—he only plans, and realizes the futility of his plans—the streets he travels 'follow like a tedious argument' (8) and he fears that even his hypothetical vacation, a 'walk upon the beach,' will be deadly. Dante's journey begins in a wood, lost, and his journey is to find—Prufrock is always within his own mind, and consequently has no intended destination.

‘Prufrock’ is contextualized within Eliot’s Western literary tradition from the outset of the poem. Allen Mandelbaum translates the epigraph, taken from Canto XXVII of Dante’s *Inferno*, as:

If I thought my reply were meant for one
 who ever could return into the world,
 this flame would stir no more; and yet, since none—
 if what I hear is true—ever returned
 alive from this abyss, then without fear
 of facing infamy, I answer you.
 (lines 61-66)

Martin Scofield prematurely dismisses any connection between Eliot’s poetics and the importance of the epigraph to *Prufrock*: ‘Dante’s Speaker (Montefeltro, a corrupt friar) does not seem to throw any light on Eliot’s figure . . . for the reader of the poem it seems an example of how Eliot’s erudition may sometimes intrude on his material’ (1988, p.57). What Scofield overlooks is the formal importance of the selection from Canto XXVII of *Inferno*. Montefeltro’s confession immediately follows the speech that Eliot quotes, though it is left out of the selection. In effect, ‘The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock’ comes to replace the story of the deeds of Montefeltro. The connection between Prufrock and Montefeltro is not one of character but of situation, as they are both suffering hellacious consequences for their inaction: Prufrock for never asking the ‘overwhelming question’ of line ten, Montefeltro for not repenting and confessing of his fraudulent counsel⁶.

In addition to setting the scene for Prufrock’s dramatic monologue, the Dantean context points to clues to identifying the ever-present pronouns which are essential to understanding precisely what Prufrock is saying, and to whom. The poem does not begin, as Scofield writes, ‘with the invitation of a Love Song’ (1988, p.47), since the ‘you’ of line one is not Prufrock’s lover but a guide to Prufrock’s urban wanderings. Instead of ‘Prufrock’ as a confession of a failed attempt to express his affection, it becomes a confession of his failure to even try. Without correctly identifying the poem’s pronouns, the assertion that Prufrock does not ask his ‘overwhelming question’ could be contended, based in part on lines like ‘some talk of you and me’ (89). If Prufrock is addressing his would-be lover in these lines, then his affliction would be

⁶ In Montefeltro’s defense, he was pre-emptively absolved by Pope Boniface VIII. The demon of Canto XXVII reminds us, however, ‘one can’t absolve a man who’s not repented, / and no one can repent and will at once; / the law of contradiction won’t allow it’ (lines 118-20). Unfortunately for Montefeltro, logic was not Boniface’s strong suit.

the problem of the Biblical Moses, who cannot make himself understood⁷. Instead, his fear of miscommunicating keeps him from communicating in the context of his love song. The irony continues to another level, as the reader is aware of Prufrock's difficulty only through his own musings: the man who can't communicate is the voice of a confessional love-song.

Revisiting Prufrock's exclamation, he provides further insight into the source of his fear with:

No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be.
 Am an attendant lord, one that will do
 to swell a progress, start a scene or two,
 advise the prince, no doubt, an easy tool
 Deferential, glad to be of use,
 Politic, cautious, and meticulous;
 Full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse;
 At times, indeed, almost ridiculous—
 Almost, at times, the Fool.
 (111-19)

Prufrock has constantly wavered to this point in his love song, and the comparison to Hamlet's indecisive musings are warranted. The Dane is empowered by the heroic narrative, however, and eventually decides to act. Prufrock is not the tragic hero, but a minor character: an 'attendant lord,' Polonius⁸. Prufrock denies his kinship with Hamlet as he refuses to act, substituting for action the questions of propriety with which Polonius is concerned throughout Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Prufrock's inability to express himself to women follows as a direct consequence of his consistent identity-relation to the masculine symbols of his literary history, prescribing a set of tropes he constantly compares himself to.

Loy's Futurism

The literary characters of Prufrock's past interdict his present, but the voice of 'Songs' reacts violently to these intrusions of tradition on her life. For Loy, the traditions of the past have prescribed gender-imbalanced attitudes, especially toward sex. 'Pig Cupid his rosy snout /

⁷ This would consequently be a vital turning point in the poem, forming the climactic point of Prufrock's conversation, leading to a completely different reading of the second half of the love song as a reaction to his lover's rejection.

⁸ Polonius, in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, worries that he will be thought a fool (I.iii.114), while Hamlet calls him a fool three times (III.i.124; then again after killing him in III.iv.36 and 233). Eliot's language draws our attention to Polonius' kinship with Prufrock—his constant self-consciousness and worry of others' opinions.

Rooting erotic garbage' (3-4) twists the cherubic male love-god into a smut-nosed animal, while the female self-prescribes:

I must live in my lantern
 Trimming subliminal flicker
 Virginal to the bellows
 Of Experience
 (14-17)

Loy's allusion to the Parable of the Ten Virgins from Matthew 25 juxtaposes the societal expectations for the genders: her lover is encouraged by his culture to 'root' for sexual pleasure. This is not too distant from Cupid's tendency to fire arrows at unsuspecting victims to indulge his voyeurism. Meanwhile, 'she' is required to wait patiently for the return of the groom to his wedding feast. In the Biblical parable, the groom's arrival is delayed and five 'foolish' virgins go out to purchase more oil as theirs is running out. While they are visiting the local merchants, the groom returns, the door to the feast is shut, and upon the virgins' return they are denied entry. The hypocrisy of the parable is integral to Loy's allusion. Despite the fact that the groom's delay is the only reason that the five 'foolish' virgins need oil, they are still excluded from the feast. The groom can be delayed without consequence because the schedule of the evening's activities revolves around him, just as Pig Cupid can root for 'erotic garbage.' The virgins, however, are expected to be at the groom's beck and call. They must be prepared, in spite of any eventuality, to celebrate his wedding at the moment of his arrival.

Just as Loy points out the dissonance in traditional gender-roles, she ruthlessly ironizes sentimental language via juxtaposition:

When we lifted
 Our eye-lids on Love
 A cosmos
 Of coloured voices
 And laughing honey
 And spermatozoa
 At the core of Nothing
 (90-95)

This is what Paul Peppis highlights when he observes that 'in "Love Songs," vocabularies of science and rationality cohabit antagonistically with vocabularies of love and sentiment' (2002, p.574). The extreme abstraction of the language is inappropriate, to Loy, and one of her responses is to invoke precise scientific language as an attempt to recover genuine expression in

love poetry. She invokes psychological terminology to ironize the exclusivity of her relationship to Joannes:

Is it true
That I have set you apart
Inviolable in an utter crystallization
Of all the jolting of the crowd
Taught me willingly to live to share

Or are you
Only the other half
Of an ego's necessity (115-22)

The pun on marriage ('the other half') is combined with the Freudian image, resulting in a narcissistic desire to possess. Loy again juxtaposes to consider her own motivations, and seems to reduce her affection for Joannes to mere psychological tendency, cloaking her unconscious desires in rationalization. Similarly, she contrasts phrases of emotional attachment with sexual urge, as in XIV:

To you
I bring the nascent virginity of
—Myself for the moment
No love or the other thing
Only the impact of lighted bodies
Knocking sparks off each other
In chaos
(158-64)

Loy again uses alternating imagery to interrogate her own emotions, though here she also suggests (if not outright rejecting) a consistent self-identity. The 'nascent virginity of / —Myself for the moment' suggests a snapshot of a stable self, but includes the impossibility of that self to remain stable; the future potential of 'nascent virginity' is completed by the image of bodies' friction causing sparks, which is drained of positive connotation with 'No love or the other thing.' The sentimental idea of self is systematically eradicated from sex, reversing the expectation that a love song would abstract the sexual embrace. These contradictions outline the idiosyncratic nature of Loy's relationship to Joannes, resisting the Romantic tendency to abstract and idealize past love and instead using Futurist imagery of the machine.

However, Loy admits the appeal of the sentimental ideal in XVI:

We might have lived together
In the lights of the Arno

Or gone apple stealing under the sea
 Or played
 Hide and seek in love and cob-webs
 And lullaby on a tin-pan

And talked till there were no more tongues
 To talk with
 And never have known any better
 (173-81)

Their Italian paradise, complete with fruit to tempt them, would provide a permanent home for the lovers. Once again, Loy counterpoints, this time with ‘love and cob-webs’ to build tension. This *tabula rasa* is impossible, though, because the two lovers do know better, as the last line implies. Loy consistently weighs Romantic or traditional conceptualizations of love with scientific or bitter depictions, invariably dismissing the 19th century’s indulgences as immature.

Loy evokes childish imagery⁹ throughout ‘Songs,’ but section X’s ‘Shuttle-cock and battle-door / A little pink-love / And feathers are strewn’ (97-99) gives an unexpected connotation to the backyard game. The ‘emphasis on the embattled “door” that the “cock” would enter’ (Burke 207) provides a tension-releasing trivialization of sex and light poetic play¹⁰. There is more to the lines than a pithy pun for genitalia, however. In a game of badminton, the descendant of the game to which Loy alludes, the shuttle-cock is rarely used for more than one match. The process of smacking it about with a racquet (battledore) detaches the feathers that smooth its descent—with each ‘impact of lighted bodies’ (59) the ‘cock’ becomes less physically capable of another round. The line ‘Feathers are strewn’ outlines this wear, and implies Loy’s dissatisfaction with Joannes’ sexual contribution to their relationship.

The flow of ‘Songs’ embodies Loy’s poetic, described in ‘Modern Poetry’ as ‘the spontaneous tempo of their [the poets’] response to life’¹¹ (Loy, 1996, p.157-58). Linda Kinnahan concentrates on the embodiment of this idea, asserting that ‘Loy speaks of the male’s libidinal experience from a woman’s perspective, describing it as “a clock-work mechanism / Running down against time / To which I am not paced.”’ Here, her focus upon sexual difference locates itself in the body’ (1994, p.56-57); Loy reclaims love poetry by refusing to follow the penile

⁹ One of the “bird-like abortions” (40) of section IV has a baby in a padded porte-enfant “Tied with sarsanet ribbon / To her goose’s wings” (47-48), abjuring Mother Goose rhymes, while the bell-ringing pranks of the boy in section V are decidedly youthful.

¹⁰ This is another example of Loy shocking her readers.

¹¹ Which, as her increasingly famous quote claims, “is generally reducible to sex” (qtd. in Burke, 191).

during their relationship? Or is Loy applying her personal insistence, in ‘Feminist Manifesto’¹², that ‘Women must destroy in themselves, the desire to be loved’ (1996, p.155)? Rachel Blau DuPlessis points out the ‘contradictory relation’ between the poem and manifesto (1998, p.53), but Loy’s aspiration seems to be an escape from the self in love: the stanza ends with ‘terrific Nirvana’. However, Joannes’ insistence on distance delays that eventual ‘seismic orgasm’ after Loy’s miniature tension-point, ‘They shall become god,’ breaks its flow with her trademarked dash-barriers. The poem’s climax is again delayed by Joannes’ individuality, made explicit in XXXI:

Crucifixion
Of a busy-body
Longing to interfere so
With the intimacies
Of your insolent isolation
(390-94)

Joannes’ independence, akin to the attitude Loy prescribes for women in ‘Feminist Manifesto,’ leads to her own suffering as he severs their connection. In effect, she has become a martyred Christ for pursuing access to Joannes’ solitude.

(meta)Physical Eliot / Physical Loy

‘Language was developed for one endeavor, and that is . . . To woo women!’

- John Keating, Dead Poets’ Society

As the 20th century reincarnation of a Romantic poet unironically asserts, language, and by extension poetry, employs abstraction to reach physical results. Prufrock’s love song is dominated by ‘a structure of anticipation and memory’ (Ayers, 2004, p.23), which echoing the plans and promises of love poetry from English tradition. ‘Prufrock’ dialogues extensively with ‘To His Coy Mistress’, in many ways the archetypal metaphysical love song. Marvell begins his lyric of seduction with ‘Had we but World enough, and Time, / This coyneess Lady were no crime,’ (1-2) immediately pressuring his lover to renounce her reticence—a song that could easily be sung to Prufrock, who occasionally mentions that ‘there will be time’ (23, 26, 28, 29, 31, 32, 37, 39, 47) as a method of delaying the ‘crisis’ of the moment. After

¹² Written in 1914, the “Feminist Manifesto” was still unpublished when “Songs to Joannes” was completed, only finding publication in *The Last Lunar Baedeker* (Conover 216).

Prufrock's fearfully flickering greatness, he gives cause for hope that he will eventually voice his question with another allusion to Marvell, asking:

Would it have been worth while
To have bitten off the matter with a smile,
To have squeezed the universe into a ball
To roll it toward some overwhelming question,
(90-93)

Of course, Prufrock does not voice his question. In Marvell's poem, the lover encourages 'Let us roll all our Strength, and all / Our sweetness, up into one Ball' which Prufrock recoils from. Instead of the ball as an image of a tightly wound sexual union, Prufrock has created a plaything to bat in the general direction of his elusive question. His fear of the sexual embrace and insistence on propriety casts him alongside the critics who called the first four sections of 'Songs' 'hoggerel' or 'swill poetry' upon their initial publication in *Others* (Burke, 1996, p.6).

In the case of Andrew Marvell, the abstractions of the love lyric are to the immediate sexual benefit of the poet. Disconnecting the threat of consequences that encouraged women's sexual purity from any causal relationship to intercourse is part of Marvell's wooing tactic. Loy's 'Feminist Manifesto' preaches against the 'man made bogey of virtue' (1996, p.154) prescribing 'the unconditional surgical destruction of virginity through-out the female population at puberty—' (1996 p.155), attacking the same cultural pressure that Marvell's love song is trying to circumvent. While the politics of Marvell's seduction are far different from Loy's suggested social programs, his poetry is crafted so that his mistress will forget her 'quaint honour' (line 29) and instead 'tear our pleasures with rough strife' (line 43). This is a similar 'emancipation' that Loy envisions in the sexual embrace, though hardly without its problems.¹³

The patriarchal quality of Prufrock's world is summarized by Alicia Ostriker, asking 'Prufrock may yearn to be Hamlet, but what woman would want to be Ophelia?' (1982, p.87). In 'Prufrock,' Eliot is wholly unconcerned with questions of this sort. Prufrock's love song treats women as objects within his world that exist solely in relation to subjects. The female as subject appears sparsely within 'Prufrock.' The refrain, 'In the room the women come and go / talking of Michelangelo' (13-14), represents the women of Prufrock's world as generalized and transient.

¹³ There are massive differences in the gender-power dynamics and class pressures of each poem, and I am not claiming that these two poems exist in an ideal world somehow elevated from history; rather, I wish to point out that, in spite of these differences, both poets see sexuality as a desired end to which impediments should be dismissed or destroyed, often without considering wider social consequences.

Confusion likewise appears whenever Prufrock imagines a female voice. Insisting ‘That is not what I meant at all’ (97, 110), the woman’s voice is cacophonous to his love song. Because Prufrock might ‘presume,’ precisely as he did not want to do (54, 68), she might shame him. Reiterating their trifling nature, Prufrock imagines them obsessed with his physical appearance, cattily gossiping ‘How his hair is growing thin!’ (41) and ‘But how his arms and legs are thin!’ (44) while he wonders ‘Do I dare / disturb the universe?’ (45-46). These voices are controlled, introduced, and ushered out of earshot by Prufrock. In this way, Prufrock’s imagined voices become self-fulfilling prophecies of his own failure. Even his companion, the ‘you’ of line one, is silenced with ‘Oh, do not ask, ‘What is it?’’ (12). The last line of the poem underlines his difficulty, when he finally experiences another ego and ‘human voices wake us, and we drown’ (131). Again, remembering that this is a love song provides a comic tint to this depressing finish: how could Prufrock have ever hoped to sing it in the first place? Singularity of perspective forms Prufrock’s fragmented reality, reducing all ‘others’ to objects within his sight.

Just as I have argued that the introduction of female voices confuses Prufrock, Tony Pinkney asserts that ‘It is proximity to the female body that ruptures narrative continuity’ (1984, p.40). The female body is introduced, as most of the images in ‘Prufrock,’ as a series of what Pinkney calls ‘part-objects’ (1984, p.40):

And I have known the eyes already, known them all—
 The eyes that fix you in a formulated phrase

 And I have known the arms already, known them all—
 Arms that are braceleted and white and bare
 (But in the lamplight, downed with light brown hair!)

 Arms that lie along a table, or wrap about a shawl.
 (50-51; 62-64; 67)

Prufrock’s inability to communicate with women has resulted in their dismemberment and fetishization. As Jan Montefiore quips, ‘the women may be in pieces, but they are terribly sexy’ (2011, n.p). His paralysis, caused by the eyes’ ‘formulated phrase,’ is a direct reaction to his inability to interact with an ego other than his own. He insists that ‘I should have been a pair of

ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas¹⁴, (73-74), because his proper representation is a part-object in relation to other part-objects.

Eliot's treatment of a potential lover in 'Prufrock' is mirrored by Loy's reflections on her former lover in 'Songs.' That both of these poems dismember their lovers is significant. Instead of metaphors for the lovers' identities, each speaker concentrates on a part of the body and its effect on them. Loy uses her lover's genitals as metonym, while Eliot allows his polite masculine gaze to drift to socially acceptable points of focus. Joannes is a 'skin-sack,' (17) both a scrotal image and a surreal reduction of her lover to nothing more than a physical form. This limiting is reinforced with 'something the shape of a man' (21), providing a cynical objectification of Joannes which surfaces repeatedly in the poem. As with Prufrock, Loy's trouble interacting with her lover results in a reductive and separating approach. Unlike Prufrock, Loy has the past success of 'ephemeral conjunction' (303) to contrast with the present 'Withdrawal of your sun' (323), providing 'Songs' with a much broader account of their interaction, from their 'humid carnage' (111) to 'cool cleaving' (203).

Conclusion

Loy's 'Spawn of Fantasies' is commentary on culture and language as well as the relationships that are affected by them. She romps through a disintegrated relationship to criticize the influence of the past, and leaves an idiosyncratic record of love in a time of intense personal and political flux. 'Prufrock,' addressing issues of identity and language through Eliot's traditional¹⁵ lens, highlights the problem of self-consciousness in the reflective literary man while mocking it all the while. These two love songs, imbued with the troubles of their authors' experiences, provide complicating ideas of gender-relations in the originary stages of 'Modernism.' The issues they raise contribute to an understanding of love in the early 20th century which is nuanced as well as stark, committing prejudices and predilections alike to their literary descendants. Their discussion is evidence that Loy was right: 'Love,' is, as she wrote in 'Songs to Joannes' last line, 'the preeminent litterateur.'

¹⁴ Tony Pinkney elucidates an image originally posited by Michael Edwards in *Eliot/Language*—the crab as writer's hand, belying Prufrock's fragile grasp on language. For more on this, see pages 40-41 of *Women in the Poetry of T.S. Eliot*.

¹⁵ In his sense of the word: "in consideration of the past."

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