

Roger L. Conover: SOLISTI

Mina Loy (1882 – 1966) je bila ena izmed najizvirnejših pesnic svoje generacije, hkrati pa tudi ena izmed najbolj osamljenih. Resnico je izpovedovala sardončno in brezkompromisno, jezikovne strukture, ki jih je uporabljala, pa so bile po mnenju mnogih neberljive in škandalozne. Njeni nasprotniki so menili, da je nepoetična in nežensvena, njeni oboževalci pa, da je pogumna in sočutna. Neposredno in klinično je govorila o stvareh, ki so se jim druge pesnice stoletja izogibale ali jih olepševale. O spolnosti, na primer. Ni bila »ženska pesnica«. In zaradi tega so jo kaznovali.

V času, ko so ostale pesnice v suhoparnih verzih pisale o romantičnih ljubeznih, se je pero Mine Loy potapljal v ovulacijski cikel in merilo temperaturo vagine. Pisala je ostre satire na račun svojih ljubimcev in razkrivala travme svoje zakonske postelje. Prva izmed vseh je pisala anti-retorične pesmi o ločitvi, spolnosti, porodu, splavu in menstruaciji in sicer iz razpuščenega, fukajočega, rojevajočega in krvavečega zornega kota ženske. Zaradi takšnega zločina zoper tradicionalni neoporečni pesniški verz jo je družba izobčila ter prezirala, literarna srenja pa se je odrekla.

Navkljub poskusom, da bi njena dela preganili s strani »pravih« literarnih revij in kljub temu, da so njeno prvo knjigo pesmi newyorški uradniki zaradi »nespodobnosti« zaplenili, pa je delo Mine Loy v nekatere newyorške dadaistične publikacije in radikalne umetniške časopise vneslo neustavljivo skrivnostnost. Od konca prvega desetletja 20. stoletja pa vse do danes so njeno delo občudovali kot avantgardno poezijo v svoji najboljši obliki. Eden izmed najpomembnejših projektov - za tiste izmed nas, ki se ukvarjamo z izkopavanjem prikrivane deviantne literature preteklosti ter z ohranjanjem literarnega fenomena obrobnega in izrednega - je bil rešiti Mino Loy pred pozabo in zagotoviti, da se bodo njene pesmi zopet pojavljale tam, kjer jih bodo tolerantni bralci zagotovo našli. Z veseljem lahko povem, da se to v Ameriki že dogaja. Čeprav ta primer ni edini, pa se še vedno redko zgodi, da pesnik, ki so ga nazadnje omenjali v dvajsetih letih, spet vznikne v devetdesetih – in to celo kot fenomen. Še bolj presenetljivo pa je, da pesmi, ki so pred sedemdesetimi leti, ko so se prvič pojavile, izzvale paniko, še dandanes vzbujajo te iste strasti. Med tistimi, ki si pridržujejo pravico odrediti, kaj je prav in kaj ne ter med tako imenovanimi »čuvarji dobrega okusa« Mina Loy še vedno velja za »pesniško neprimerno«, za nevarno silo; njeno delo je še vedno izvzeto iz standardnih antologij. Vendar pa je sedaj ta izključitev predmet polemik. Čeprav uredniki, ki njeno delo izključujejo iz svojih antologij, sami nočejo govoriti o spornosti in problematičnosti svojih odločitev, pa so včasih le prisiljeni to storiti. In to je dobro. Čeprav je žalostno, da so tehnične nepravilnosti in moralne neprimernosti v poeziji Mine Loy še vedno krive, da se je ljudje izogibajo, pa so tisti, ki jo analizirajo, svojo pozornost le preusmerili z ženske na branje njenih pesmi; temu gre zahvala, da so te pesmi rešene odra histerije in postavljene nazaj na strani, kamor tudi spadajo.

V spominih, ki so jih napisali njeni kritiki, je Mina Loy dostikrat opisana kot »najčudovitejša čudovite generacije pesnikov«. V isti sapi pa so jo pogosto opisali kot nenavadno – tu ni bila mišljena zgolj njena fizična plat, pač pa tudi njena psiha. Najpogosteje so njen temperament označevali z besedo »nevrasteničen«, kar naj bi pomenilo, da ni razmišljujoče, pač pa nestabilno bitje, ki je venomer na robu živčnega zloma ali psihoze, ki je nezanesljiv sprejemnik objektivnega izkustva in ki je podložno radikalnim spremembam razpoloženja. Zgodba, da je ta, sčasoma izoblikovani profil njene osebnosti, profil napak razumljene in

samorastniške umetnice, ki se je spremenila v odmaknjeno in pozabljeno staro žensko, pomeni zgolj zamenjavo ene legende z drugo - obe pa temeljita na marginalizaciji. Kot pravi legenda, naj bi se Mina Loy kot stara ženska zazrla nazaj v čas, ko ji je »biti ženska« še nekaj pomenilo, preden se je izgubilo, preden je lepoto, ki je izrinila talent, zamenjala izguba, ki je izrinila ljubezen.

Bil je čas, ko je po nizu uničujočih osebnih izgub Mina Loy razmišljala, da bi se ubila s plinom. Če bi to tudi storila, bi nanjo dandanes verjetno gledali skozi prizmo mitičnega statusa, kot so ga deležne Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf ali Marina Cvetajeva. Vendar pa Mina Loy ni bilo do tega, da bi postala legenda. Raje je zavzela svoje mesto v vznemirjujočem svetu, ki jo je obdajal in se osredotočila na srečne trenutke. Ne glede na izgube, ki jih je utrpela – te nikakor niso bile majhne – se ni vdala. V skupnosti, kjer je živela, je bilo mnogo ljudi, ki se jim je še slabše pisalo. Svojo človečnost je namenila izražanju sočustvovanja z obubožanimi smrtniki in padlimi angeli – s pesniki, klovni, brezdomci in ostalimi »gobavci z lune/ magičnimi bolniki«, ki so jo obdajali. Ni postala zagrenjena. Svojih misli ni predala tožbam, čeprav je imela vzrokov za to več kot dovolj.

Prav tako, kot se je nekoč v življenju Mine Loy pojavil pesnik in boksar Arthur Cravan, ki se je v resnici imenoval drugače in ki je brez sledu izginil z obličja zemlje, je nekoč bila tudi pesnica, imenovana Mina Loy. Ni pomembno, da se v resnici ni imenovala Mina Loy in tudi ne, da ni bila rojena Američanka, pa tudi to ne, da njene kompleksne lepote in nedoločljivega izgleda fotografski aparat nikoli ni mogel ujeti. Če želimo razmišljati o njeni življenjski poti, moramo zapustiti dimenzije njene biografije in pričeti razmišljati o izgubljeni zvezdi, oddaljeni in vznemirljivi. Če želimo slediti njeni zgodbi, ne smemo beležiti življenjskih dogodkov, pač pa moramo z drugimi koordinatami zajeti izvire čarobnosti. Mina Loy je že razmeroma zgodaj pričela zanimati razširjena percepcija, ki izhaja iz življenja v čustveni in umetniški osami. Svoj demonstrativni in teatralični jaz je namenoma skrivala za zagonetnimi alter – egi, izdelala je sistem psevdonimov, pod katerimi je pisala, v javnosti pa se je kazala tako, kot da je svoja dvojnica. Po Parizu so v dvajsetih letih krožile govorice, da Mina Loy sploh ni resnična oseba, pač pa »izmišljena pesnica, literarna prevara, ki je zrasla na zelniku kritikov«. Zgodba pravi, da se je Mina Loy, ko je te govorice slišala, pojavila v salonu Natalie Barney in ostala tam samo toliko časa, da je dokazala svoj obstoj, nato pa se že zopet umaknila očem družbe: »Zagotavljam vam, da v resnici obstajam. Vendar pa je ostati nepoznan nujnost. Da sem ohranila svojo anonimnost, sem sprejela tveganje – biti pesnik«.

Ko je Arthur Cravan šest mesecev po njunem usodnem srečanju na plesu v maskah V Greenwich Villageu izginil, je bila Mina Loy noseča – nosila je njunega edinega otroka. Še dolgo po tem, ko je bil otrok rojen, je govorila, da je psihično noseča, bila je obsedena z zavedanjem, da se Cravanova zavest premika znotraj njene. Vse preostalo življenje se je, kadarkoli si je zaželela intimnega kontakta, vedno obrnila na Cravana, raje je imela njegove imaginarne nasvete kot pa nasvete prijateljev, ki so jo obdajali. Ko se je postarala in ko so njeni občutki izolacije postali močnejši, jo je dostikrat pregnanjala nedoločljiva prisotnost nekoga, nekega neopisljivega duha, Adoničnega pesnika, ki ji trka na srce. Ko je tavalala med brezdomci in stopala preko teles, posejanih po »javnem zatočišču« ulic Boweryja, ki so bile njeno svetišče, je venomer iskala žar nečesa izgubljenega – morda njegovih oči. Zgodi se, da traja celo življenje, preden se plesalci najdejo. Pogosto gredo en mimo drugega, ne da bi se opazili. Včasih se srečajo, ne da bi se dotaknili. In tako mora tudi biti. Kako naj vendar vedo, po tako dolgem času, če so isti ljudje in če je sploh prav, da se

dotaknejo? Kako naj se med seboj sploh prepoznajo? Kaj se je lahko na njihovih obrazih spremenilo? Kako usta in oči izražajo boj za vero, za spominjanje, boj proti vdaji? In kaj objemi povedo o ljubezni? Dostikrat nič. Obstajajo vprašanja, ki si jih lahko zastavimo o plesu in o spominih, ki jih vzdrami gibanje in oživi tek. Včasih pozabimo na ples in ga imenujemo z drugim imenom. Včasih zagledamo gib, ki ga naredi neka ženska, mišica se skrči za trenutek, ki je ravno dovolj dolg, da ga začutimo. Včasih mislimo predstavo o roki, ki se dotika vratu. Včasih ta dejanja pripovedujejo zgodbo – včasih tudi ne. Dve postavi na ladjah, ena utirajoča pot na vzhod, v čas, druga na zahod; ena, ki oblikuje prostor, druga, ki izničuje razdalje; obe slutita kopno – čudovito zarjo, čezmorski objem, koreografijo poezije in plesa, ki se združita nekje v veselju. Arthur in Mina? Gina in Miovanni? Morda.

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Mina Loy (1882-1966) was the one of the most original poets of her generation, and one of the most isolated. She told the truth in a way that was sardonic and uncompromising, employing linguistic structures that were considered unreadable and scandalous. She was thought by her detractors to be unpoetic and unfeminine, by her admirers to be daring and compassionate. She wrote directly and clinically about many subjects that "lady" poets had spent centuries avoiding or euphemizing. Like sex. She was no lady poet. And she was punished for it.

In a time when most female poets were writing romantic love songs in dehydrated verses, she was dipping her pen into glands of estrus and recording the temperature of her vagina. She wrote searing satires about her lovers and exposed the traumas of her marriage bed. She wrote some of the first anti-rhetorical poems in any language about divorce, copulation, parturition, abortion, and menstruation from the uncoupling, fucking, birthing, and bleeding woman's point of view. For these offenses against the traditionally polite genre of verse she was socially ostracized, critically scorned, and historically neglected by the literary establishment.

Despite the attempt to banish her work from the pages of "proper" literary magazines and the confiscation of her first book of poems on the grounds of "indecent" by customs officials in New York, Mina Loy's work added an irresistible cache to the pages of certain Dada publications and radical art journals in New York, and from the 1910s until the present her writing has been admired as an example of avant-garde writing at its best. One of the projects of utmost importance for those of us concerned with excavating the submerged literature of deviance from the past and with preserving the literary phenomena of the peripheral and the exceptional has been to rescue Loy from oblivion and make sure that her poems circulate again in places where tolerant readers are likely to find them. Finally, I am happy to say, this is happening in America. While this is not a unique case, it is still a rare occurrence for a poet last heard of in the 1920s to resurface in the 1990s, not as a footnote, but as a phenomenon. Perhaps more remarkably, the poems which caused a sensation of panic when they were first encountered seventy years ago still stir the same passion now that they did then. Mina Loy now, like Mina Loy then, is still considered "poetically incorrect" among the keepers of the canon and the so-called guardians of good taste. She is still considered a dangerous force; her work is still excluded from standard anthologies. But this exclusion is now being read as polemical. Even if the excluding editors do not wish to defend their choices as pointed and problematical, they are being forced to do so. This is good. For as depressing as it is that her technical irregularities and moral improprieties are still causing people to avoid her, at least now the analysts attention has shifted from looking at the woman to reading her texts, and in the process her poems have been recovered from the theater of hysterics and placed back on the page where they belong.

In memoirs written by her critics, Mina Loy was often described as "the most beautiful of a beautiful generation of poets". In the same breath, they often described her as exceptional not just in physique but in psyche. The word most often used to describe her temperament was "neurasthenic", suggesting that she was not a reflective being, but an unstable creature poised on the verge of breakdown or psychosis, an unreliable receiver of objective experience subject to radical mood exchange. The legend that this profile eventually created was that of a misunderstood and self-created artist transformed into a

reclusive and forgotten old woman--an exchange of one kind of legend for another, both based on marginalization. As an old woman, the legend goes, she looked back at that brief moment in life when "being a woman" meant something to her, before it was lost, before the marginalization of talent by beauty was replaced by the marginalization of love by loss.

There was a time when, after a series of devastating personal losses, Mina Loy considered turning the gas on and finishing herself off. Had she done so, she would probably be regarded today with the mythic status of a Sylvia Plath, a Virginia Woolf, or a Maria Tsvetayeva. But Mina Loy was not interested in becoming a legend. Instead, she took her place in the disturbing world she found around her and counted her blessings. No matter how great her losses, and they were considerable, she wasn't counting them. There were many in her community worse off. She used her art and her humanity to express her sympathy for the dispossessed mortals and fallen angels--with the poets, clowns, geniuses, bums, and other "lepers of the moon/ all magically diseased" around her. She did not complain. She did not turn bitter. And she did not give up her brain to weeping, although she had all the reasons necessary had she wished.

Just as there appeared a poet and boxer in Mina Loy's life named Arthur Cravan, whose real name was something else and who vanished without a trace from this earth, so too was there once a poet named Mina Loy. It doesn't matter that her real name was not Mina Loy, or that she was not American by birth, or even that her complex pulchritude and indeterminate looks could never be captured by camera. To begin to plot her itinerary is to immediately depart from the dimensions of biography and to plot a lost star, engaging and distant. To pursue her story is not to record the events of a life, but to tap the sources of enchantment by other coordinates. From a relatively early age, Mina Loy was interested in the heightened perception that comes from living in emotional and artistic confinement. She deliberately camouflaged her demonstrative and theatrical selves behind inscrutable alter egos, wrote under an elaborate system of pseudonyms, and impersonated herself in public as if she were her playing her own double. There was a rumour circulating around Paris in the 1920s that Mina Loy was in fact not a real person at all, but a fabricated poet, a literary hoax concocted by critics. Upon hearing this, the story goes, Mina Loy turned up at Natalie Barney's salon just long enough to give proof of her existence before removing herself from society once again:

"I assure you I am indeed a live being. But it is necessary to stay very unknown....To maintain my incognito the hazard I chose was--poet."

When Arthur Cravan disappeared six months after their fateful meeting at a costume dance in Greenwich Village, Mina Loy was pregnant with their only child. And long after that child was born, Mina Loy would still say that she was psychically pregnant, possessed by an awareness that Cravan's consciousness flickered inside her own. For the rest of her life, whenever she longed for intimate contact, she addressed herself to Cravan, preferring his imaginary counsel to her friends' more immediate society. As she aged, and her instincts toward isolation became more pronounced, she often found herself haunted by some indefinable presence, some unnameable ghost, some Adonic poet tugging at her heart. As she wandered among the bums and stepped over the bodies strewn on the "communal cot", the Bowery streets that were her secular convent, she was always searching for the glimmer of something lost, of his familiar eyes, perhaps.

It can take lifetimes for dancers to find each other. Often they pass without looking. Sometimes they cross without touching. And that is how it must be. For how would they know, after so long, if they were the same people, and if it was right to touch at all? How would they recognize each other? What might have changed on their faces? How do the

eyes and mouth express the struggle to believe, to remember, and not to give up? And what do the arms say about love? Often, nothing. There are questions we can ask about dance, and about the memories that motion excites and that running revives. Sometimes we forget dancing, and we call it by another name altogether. Once in while a gesture worn by a woman is seen, and a muscle is taut just long enough to be felt. Sometimes the idea of a hand on a neck is thought. Sometimes these acts tell a story, sometimes they don't. Two figures on ships, one ploughing east into time, one west; one shaping space, the other erasing distance; both sensing landfall--a Colossal dawn, a transatlantic embrace, a choreography of poetry and dance reconciled somewhere in space. Arthur and Mina? Gina and Miovanni? Perhaps.