

# 1 *Situating & Gendering Modernist Poetry*

“Paris, Capital of the Nineteenth Century.”

—Walter Benjamin, 1935, *Reflections*

Berlin is the greatest purely modern city in Europe.

—Karl Baedeker, 1912, *Berlin: Culture and Metropolis*

More than any other city in the world, [New York]  
is the fullest expression of our modern age.

—Leon Trotsky, 1916, *American Moderns*

In the composition, the artist does exactly what every  
eye must do with life, fix the particular with the  
universality of his own personality.

—William Carlos Williams, 1923, *Spring and All*

Paris, London, New York, Berlin—these great modern metropolises have long been regarded as central to the inception of modernism. As Raymond Williams asserts: “there are decisive links between the practices and ideas of the avant-garde movements of the twentieth century and the specific conditions and relationships of the early-twentieth-century metropolis.”<sup>1</sup> In the characteristics frequently ascribed to “the” metropolis—crowding, speed, development of new technologies, extreme juxtapositions of wealth and poverty—these cities may be imagined as common ground, but in a multitude of particulars they differed from one another. In its history, national and local social and legal structures, demographics, architecture, and culture of literary production, Berlin did not function like London, nor New York like Paris. Moreover, the differences experienced by writers growing up and working in these cities were more extreme for women than for men. Early in the twentieth century, local and national infrastructures gov-

erning women's lives varied extremely from place to place, even in world cities like these.

This book looks at particular modernist writers in the context of national and local structures to argue that location significantly inflected modernist women's performances of subjectivity, gender, race, and religion in their texts and in their lives by making different subject categories available to them and enabling or preventing particular modes of expression. While, as Keith Tuma writes, "Situatedness, contextualism: these aren't new words or tactics," no study has explored how cultural and national context affects women's writing with attention to poetry, and no study has compared the literary and life strategies of the women most active in experimental modernism internationally.<sup>2</sup> Such examination shifts the locus of modernist studies from the individual as such to individuals and groups in particular places. At the same time, it demands that the local be understood in relation to gender and in comparison with other locations.

In comparing female poets internationally, this book argues that modernist cultures take distinctive and distinctively gendered forms from one place to another, and that to the degree that one recognizes women as significantly engaged in its writing and art, modernism appears less conservative, antithetical to religion, and divorced from personal life constructions than it has been portrayed. Situating and gendering modernist studies illuminates the cracks in theories of gender, popular culture, and aesthetics that see the universal in the (usually male) individual—to paraphrase William Carlos Williams—or regard a single place and moment as representative. This argument is based on analysis of the works of Marianne Moore, Else Lasker-Schüler, and Mina Loy, in the context of their shared and distinguishing life patterns in New York and Berlin. Characteristics of these poets that have been described in previous studies as individualistic or eccentric (and that indeed appear so when examining one writer in isolation) in fact recur in the lives of other female, and to a lesser extent male, experimentalist writers locally, and sometimes internationally. Hence these characteristics are significant not just for thinking about individuals but for thinking about the period. At the same time, the particular form of these characteristics is shaped by context. My argument, then, continually addresses the boundary between what may be generally stated in a gendered account of modernist production and what must be understood in terms of local or individual contextualizing factors.

Many modernist writers were conscious of the relevance of location

to writing. Modernist narratives elevated various cities almost to the level of character: Virginia Woolf's London; James Joyce's Dublin; William Carlos Williams's Paterson, New Jersey; Nella Larsen's Harlem; and Alfred Döblin's Berlin. In their novels or poems, these writers assert the distinctive qualities of place. At a level approaching theory, Williams justifies writing about Paterson by quoting John Dewey's claim, "The local is the only universal."<sup>3</sup> Mina Loy writes enviously of the "fundamental advantage" carried by the "American poet wherever he may wander, however he may engage himself with an older culture"—namely the "shock of the New World consciousness upon life. His is still poetry that has proceeded out of America" (*LLB* 159). In contrast, more defensively, Ezra Pound claims that expatriation is necessary for Americans to become serious artists.<sup>4</sup> My interest, like Loy's and Pound's, lies less in what writers say about a place than in what specific locations provide that enables and influences their writing.

Unlike writers, critics more often write about modernism through the apparently universalizing lens of theory than the lenses of location, rarely acknowledging that theory, too, arises from particular circumstances. Failing to understand the locational basis of theoretical constructions leads to inappropriate generalization. For example, in an excellent analysis of commodity aesthetics, Laurie Teal uses the writings of Karl Kraus, Walter Benjamin, Otto Weininger, and Gustave Flaubert to demonstrate the depth of modernist misogyny, concluding that "all writings by women in modernity reveal traces of [the] misogynist paradigms [of modernist texts identifying modernity with prostitution] in their necessary negotiations of subjectivity and sexuality in the face of ideological reductions of woman to the body (the prostitute) and the relegation of mental endeavor to the masculine realm."<sup>5</sup> A modernist woman faced a "stalemate" in developing an identity as a writer: "there is simply no way, within these gender paradigms, to be both a woman and an artist, and there is no 'safe' way for a woman to (pro)claim her own sexuality without 'proving' that she is in fact a 'prostitute'" (Teal 104). Yet this conclusion does not hold for women in the United States, and it is misleading for many female expatriates. As I discuss in chapter 2, the prostitute is not an international figure for modernism or for the male artist, in part because the local positioning of modernist communities and of (especially middle-class) women in relation to both prostitutes and commodity culture differs enormously from city to city between the 1890s and 1930. Constructions of gender and sexuality similarly vary from place to place. Misogyny takes multiple national forms, as do women's responses to it.

Mina Loy, Marianne Moore, and Else Lasker-Schüler serve as examples of individuals whose work was inflected by the circumstances of their lives, respectively, as an expatriate in Europe and North America, in New York, and in Berlin. By the same token, these women were able to manipulate the local resources available to them in ways enabling their influential participation in their respective communities. A comparison of their and other women's lives raises the question of what constituted sufficient resources for such women and how their resources affected the forms of their art. In 1929, Virginia Woolf proposed that "to write *fiction* a woman needed a room of her own and 500 [pounds] a year" (emphasis added). On the other hand, Woolf speculated that only in "another century or so" might female poets be "born"; without a century of women's financial independence, access to rooms of their own, and the "habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think," women's writing of notable poetry is "impossible."<sup>6</sup> In point of fact, many women published poetry during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Celeste Schenck has argued, Anglo-American female poets were so popular that modernists attempted to marginalize the use of traditional form as feminine: they "willingly consigned poetic forms into the hands of genteel poetesses, keeping the 'new poetry' safe for the experimenters, the form-breakers, and the vers-librists—that is, the men."<sup>7</sup> The women who did break into the ranks of the "experimenters" were for the most part enabled by local and national patterns of earlier women's professionalism, enjoyment of legal, financial, and political rights, and access to the institutions producing aesthetic culture—as Woolf theorized they must be. Because such patterns varied from place to place, so did the ways women engaged in modernist writing and art and the numbers of women so engaged.

Of course, men's lives were also framed by access to education, sexuality, and degrees of marginalization from middle-class, racial, and ethnic norms. By the early twentieth century, however, middle-class men had approximately the same rights throughout Europe and North America, whereas women had widely varied legal, financial, and property rights, and cultural restrictions delimiting the boundaries of gender-appropriate activities, including education. The privileges of men did in fact vary according to race, ethnicity, and other factors—for example, of Jewish and Christian men in Russia or white and black men in the United States—but Jewish men enjoyed primary legal rights in all major European countries except Russia, and African American men in the United States had legal rights under federal laws, despite dis-

criminary state codes and practices.<sup>8</sup> Across Europe and North America, in contrast, even the rights of otherwise privileged white women were restricted to surprisingly various degrees. My point is not to minimize the effects of pogroms and racism or to claim women are uniquely affected by the conditions I discuss, but to point to widely differing conditions for women within countries generally seen homogeneously as “the West.”

This study claims neither that women have unique modes or concerns nor that location determines formal or topical patterns of writing and art but rather that an accurate understanding of modernism demands attention to the sometimes contradictory patterns of gender, location, and experimentalist poetics. Lasker-Schüler’s, Moore’s, and Loy’s poetry and lives reveal multiple overlapping and contrasting patterns, which in turn reveal the trends and tensions of the literary communities and national cultures where they developed their distinctive oeuvres. Even a brief glance at their early poetry reveals some of the ways that location inflects their articulation and conception of similar concerns.

In 1910, Else Lasker-Schüler—already well known as a poet and notorious as a bohemian in Berlin—published “Leise sagen” (“Say It Softly”) in the Expressionist journal *Der Sturm*, edited by her soon to be ex-husband Herwarth Walden. This poem of radical metaphorical juxtapositions and unreferenced pronouns was attacked by a local journalist as demonstrating “complete softening of the brain” (*Gehirnweichung*), initiating a libel case on the quality of Lasker-Schüler’s verse and generally of Expressionism. In 1914, expatriate British painter and poet Mina Loy published “Café du Neant” in *International: A Review of Two Worlds*—the first poem of hers to appear in print. Later published as part of “Three Moments in Paris,” “Café du Neant” uses Futurist techniques to explore gender relationships and the decay of communication in a mode laying the groundwork for the poet’s reputation as a radical poet and feminist. In 1916, Marianne Moore—who had begun publishing in the little magazines of New York and London a year earlier—published “In This Age of Hard Trying Nonchalance is Good, And,” a syllabic verse poem asserting the political and spiritual efficacy of conversational (or poetic) imagination and indirection over attack, through multiple formal techniques of indirection. None of these poems takes location, self-construction, or cultural history as a part of its focus, but each introduces aspects of these topics explored at greater length later in this study.

In the first stanza of “Leise sagen,” the unexpected prepositional phrase of line 2 quickly removes the poem from any context of realism:

You took for yourself all the stars Over my heart.	<i>Du nahmst dir alle Sterne Über meinem Herzen.</i>
My thoughts curl I have to dance.	<i>Meine Gedanken kräuseln sich Ich muß tanzen.</i>
You always do things that make me look up, Wearing my life out.	<i>Immer tust du das, was mich aufschauen läßt, Mein Leben zu müden.</i>
I can no longer carry the evening Over the hedges.	<i>Ich kann den Abend nicht mehr Über die Hecken tragen.</i>
In the streams' mirror I no longer see my reflection.	<i>Im Spiegel der Bäche Finde ich mein Bild nicht mehr.</i>
You've stolen the archangel's Swaying eyes.	<i>Dem Erzengel hast du Die schwebenden Augen gestohlen.</i>
But I snack on the syrup Of their blue.	<i>Aber ich nasche vom Seim Ihrer Bläue.</i>
My heart sets slowly I don't know where—	<i>Mein Herz geht langsam unter Ich weiß nicht wo—</i>
Maybe in your hand. Everywhere it pulls on my tissue.	<i>Vielleicht in deiner Hand. Überall greift sie an mein Gewebe.</i>

(WB, no. 167)

The rapid juxtaposition of surrealistic metaphors (a heart with stars “over” it, curling thoughts, evening as a burden to carry, syrup one can eat from an archangel’s stolen eyes) implies equally surrealistic consequences: apparently the speaker must dance because her thoughts curl, and “your” action makes her too tired to carry evening over the landscape. The compressed disjunction of these juxtapositions is echoed in the two-line, nonrhyming, unmetred stanzas. The poem provides no obvious system of order, only the speaker’s responses as a reflection of a world going wrong. Lasker-Schüler’s metaphors conflate romantic, spiritual, psychological, and physical realms of experience, suggesting desire, depression, and loss of identity while still affirming aspects of vital life: dancing, snacking on *Seim*, a syrup or honey, feeling an intimacy of touch as though a heart could—like the sun—sink into someone’s hand, and feelings could pull on life’s woven texture (*Gewebe*) of being. The speaker expresses radical alienation (even water no longer returns her reflection) but also the possibility of intimacy with an ungendered “you” and with all nature and spirit. In her universe of immediacy, the speaker’s heart and stars share the same space, evening

sets literally onto people's shoulders, and one can taste the sweetness of an archangel's eyes.

In a Berlin characterized by widespread artistic and literary innovation and bohemianism, by displays of nonconformity to public sexual norms, and by sharp divisions between institutions of high culture and avant-garde writers and artists, Lasker-Schüler's verse helped to establish a new sense of literary range. At the same time, the use of extreme metaphors skirting the sentimental and decadent (heart, stars, angels) and unidentified pronominal and deictic referents ("you," which thoughts "curl," which archangel) exemplify her own practice of disrupting norms. The only female poet widely respected during the period, and one of the few Jewish Expressionist poets, Lasker-Schüler had plenty of reasons for claiming that local streams (of thought, culture, or physical presence) did not mirror her: she could not look around and see anyone sharing the major defining categories of her life. The poem implies rebuke: "you" (a lover, society, God) selfishly take stars away from her orbit, wear her soul out. The speaker makes no mention of particular aspects of culture gone wrong, but there is a sense that the world has failed her. It no longer provides illumination (stars, archangel's eyes, the light of day); it does not allow her to see herself. "Leise sagen," like Lasker-Schüler's other poems, "soft[ly]" articulates a social critique with particular relevance to her life in Berlin.

The surreal is also an element in Mina Loy's "Café du Neant," although her tone is primarily ironic rather than desirous, and it expresses decadent ennui rather than alienation.

Little tapers leaning                    lighted diagonally  
 Stuck in coffin tables of the Café du Neant  
 Leaning to the breath of baited bodies  
 Like young poplars fringing the Loire

Eyes that are full of love  
 And eyes that are full of kohl  
 Projecting light across the fulsome ambiente  
 Trailing the rest of the animal behind them  
 Telling of tales without words  
 And lies of no consequence  
 One way or another

The young lovers hermetically buttoned up in black  
 To black cravat  
 To the blue powder edge dusting the yellow throat  
 What color could have been your bodies  
 When last you put them away

Nostalgic youth  
 Holding your mistress's pricked finger  
 In the indifferent flame of the taper  
 Synthetic symbol of           LIFE  
 In this factitious chamber of           DEATH  
 The woman  
 As usual  
 Is smiling           as bravely  
 As it is given to her to be           brave  
  
 While the brandy cherries  
 In winking glasses  
 Are decomposing  
 Harmoniously  
 With the flesh of spectators  
 And at a given spot  
 There is one  
 Who  
 Having the concentric lighting focussed precisely upon her  
 Prophetically blossoms in perfect putrefaction  
 Yet                   there are cabs outside the door.

(LLB 16-17)

The most striking effects of this poem are its lack of punctuation, unusual spacing within the line, Futurist capitals, and contrasting levels of diction. Whereas the difficulty of Lasker-Schüler's poem lies in connecting disparate metaphors of feeling and action, in Loy's the challenge is to follow the logic of sentences containing both extreme narrative juxtapositions and adjectives at odds with the connotative field of their subject: "perfect putrefaction," "baited bodies." Tables are coffins, eyes full of love are blackened with coal, lovers' bodies are disposable, life is indifferent, and the fact that both "flesh" and "brandy cherries" decompose "harmoniously" makes the former seem equally an item of luxury. If the "one / Who . . . Prophetically blossoms" at the poem's end can be read as the poet putting forth "her" poem, then even the poem arises from "perfect putrefaction."

Unlike Lasker-Schüler's poem, however, it is not clear that Loy's poem functions as critique. The sole contrast to this café world appears in the last line's "Yet," followed by white space and then "cabs outside the door." Although the "smiling" woman and buttoned-up lovers do not appear to seek to leave, the fact that the woman is challenged "to be brave" and observes the others' lack of communication suggests that cabs may indeed promise escape to some location where bodies are neither bait nor "hermetically" sealed and painted, and flesh might do

something besides decay. This is, perhaps, the ultimate promise of the expatriate: one can always leave.

Loy probably wrote this poem in Florence, where she moved in 1906, thinking back on her art student and younger married days in Paris. Given that Florence was a provincial town in comparison with Paris, the poem may both satirize the life of stultified pretense she had left behind and express nostalgia for a past of sitting among bodies "Like young poplars fringing the Loire," focused in "concentric lighting," engrossed in the pleasures of satirical, distanced observation. Even while mocking the lack of communication and imagination in those young bodies, the speaker romanticizes their condition of extremity and transience. The latter may have been particularly attractive to Loy. A mother of two in an unhappy marriage, she may have longed for "cabs outside the door" and the anonymity of a crowded bar where at least decomposition is "perfect." Loy positions her speaker in this poem as an observer of the woman as well as of the scene, but she expresses sympathy for this "blossom[ing]" woman smiling "as bravely" as she can while apparently prophesying a future of further decay. The poem ends without event, without the possibility of connection between people; even the young have left "the rest of the animal" behind, expressing love only in blackened eyes. It offers no desire, no hope of change, no sign of life beyond the vaguely reassuring presence of those cabs.

Moore's "In This Age of Hard Trying, Nonchalance is Good, And" shares some elements of irrational juxtaposition and compression but nothing decadent. Instead it works through metonymies and paradox to tell a tale about the effectiveness of indirection and the folly of elitist indifference. Unlike either Lasker-Schüler's or Loy's poem, it makes a point rather than mapping a feeling or condition of being:

*In This Age of Hard Trying Nonchalance is Good, And*

"Really, it is not the  
Business of the gods to bake clay pots." They did not  
Do it in this instance. A few  
Revolved upon the axes of their worth,  
As if excessive popularity might be a pot.

They did not venture the  
Profession of humility. The polished wedge  
That might have split the firmament  
Was dumb. At last it threw itself away  
And falling down, conferred on some poor fool a privilege.

"Taller by the length of  
 A conversation of five hundred years than all  
 The others," there was one, whose tales  
 Of what could never have been actual—  
 Were better than the haggish, uncompanionable drawl  
 Of certitude; his by-  
 Play was "more terrible in its effectiveness  
 Than the fiercest frontal attack."  
 The staff, the bag, the feigned inconsequence  
 Of manner, best bespeak that weapon—self-protectiveness.

(*EP* 198, 200)

Syllabic verse, the quotation of outside sources, unaccented end and internal rhyme (not/pot, the/humility, wedge/privilege, taller/all/actual/drawl) construct a layer of surface difficulty in this poem that is mirrored by its syntax: everything seems to occur according to a pattern (numbers of syllables, positioning of rhymes, notes on the quotations), but the patterns don't obviously explain anything. The title functions merely as the poem's first line, providing the reader no explanatory theme and mocking conventions of reason. Its concluding punctuation and conjunction "And" also mock titular units by signaling the beginning of a phrase rather than the expected resolution. This flaunting of the unexpected is exacerbated by the fact that the poem's first two lines appear to interrupt the title's voice and logic with their peevish (quoted) insistence, "'Really, it is not the / Business of the gods to bake clay pots.'" In short, the poem does all it can to throw the reader off balance—not through bizarre or extreme metaphors but through the lower-key disruptions of tone, syntax, and form.

The poem's narrative, however, eventually clarifies the relation of title to opening quotation through an implied logic of progression. Unlike Lasker-Schüler and Loy, who proceed through soundplay and successive images, Moore proceeds through implied logical connections. The sequence of the poem's statements suggests that those gods who felt themselves to be above usefulness and "humility," spending their time obsessed with reflections on their own esteem, consequently lost their chance to wield "the polished wedge / that might have split the firmament." In apparent disgust, this potent tool "Threw itself away," accidentally conferring its "privilege" on a human "fool." The tale teller whose spiritual height can be measured only by "the length of a conversation" or act of communication appears to be this same "poor fool." Rather, however, than lapsing into godlike admiration of his worth, this talker uses the gift of his "wedge" to make up stories far

“better” than any credo or doctrine—the “haggish uncompanionable drawl / Of certitude” characteristic of beings who assume their superiority to others. At the same time, his chatty fictiveness is also a kind of “axe,” “more terrible in its effectiveness” than a direct attack. The poem’s last lines return to the title: phonologically and semantically, “Feigned inconsequence” echoes “Nonchalance,” which we already know is “good.” The poet’s change of focus from “effectiveness” to “self-protectiveness” similarly suggests that the gods’ refusal to stoop to lowly activities of service and a “profession” (life career and stated claim) of “humility” weakens them.

Like Loy’s poem, Moore’s may contain a disguised self-portrait. A college graduate, voracious reader of texts of all kinds, active feminist campaigner for women’s rights, and in every way a product of the U.S. Progressive Era’s sense of possible reform, Moore celebrates an underdog. The gods are fallible and a “poor fool” enjoys a weapon of great power in his imaginative, inconsequential manner and wit. It is the fool, Moore suggests, who can survive his battles. The “nonchalance” she recommends is utterly absent from “Leise sagen” and “The Café du Neant,” as is the sense of happy accident and come-uppance. While there is no neat tying of ends in Moore’s poem, which remains disjunctive in any reading, there is nonetheless a sense of conclusion. The reader may not know what to do with the “staff” or “bag” proffered at the poem’s end, but there is none of the suspenseful torment of Lasker-Schüler’s pulled tissue or Loy’s simultaneous transience and decay.

Marianne Moore, Else Lasker-Schüler, and Mina Loy are each the subject of substantial critical work. Moore is increasingly discussed as one of the primary poets of American modernism; a similar plenitude of studies examines Lasker-Schüler’s poetry, fiction, drama, and life; Loy has inspired less criticism but is one of the female writers most often invoked in discussions of the avant-garde. For each, there are obvious omissions in the available scholarship as well as excellent resources. Moore is typically ignored by internationalist studies of modernism, as though her work did not intersect meaningfully with theoretical or supranational narratives of the period. Lasker-Schüler is similarly ignored in international comparative studies, at most appearing as part of a list of German poets or bohemians. Critical study of Loy places her conceptually within an international avant-garde but misleadingly as “American,” despite the fact that she spent less than three years in the United States before 1936.<sup>9</sup> By examining her poetry as “American,” such studies misrepresent the profound effects of her youth in London and expatriatism in Munich, Paris, Florence, New

York, and Berlin. Michel de Certeau and Luce Giard write that “living is narrativizing.”<sup>10</sup> Through the private narratives of their self-naming, dress, religious beliefs, attachment—or lack of attachment—to places and propriety, and through the public narratives of their poetry and art, these women construct tales that illuminate the larger narratives of modernism.

To my knowledge, neither Loy nor Moore knew Lasker-Schüler’s work, and she did not know theirs. In her few extant letters and notes, Loy makes no mention of meeting Lasker-Schüler or any other German writer or woman during her year in Berlin.<sup>11</sup> Moore could read German and would have seen Lasker-Schüler’s name in a 1927 *Dial*, mentioned as one of the three poets “with a sense of the beat of the times” whose work Paul Hindemith had set to music—the other two being Christian Morgenstern and Rainer Maria Rilke.<sup>12</sup> Although Lasker-Schüler knew some English and had an exhibit of her drawings in London, she did not read poetry in English. Loy and Moore did know each other. Moore attended Loy’s debut in Kreymborg’s one-act play *Lima Beans*, and Loy sketched Moore twice. There is no indication, however, that the two women had any contact after 1921.

I have chosen New York and Berlin to demonstrate the significance of location in part because both cities had sizable, relatively stable innovative literary communities with at least some important contribution from female poets. Both were also similar in epitomizing modernity. Paris, often regarded as the paradigmatic center of modernism, even by critics whose theoretical frameworks are predominantly German, was not a location encouraging French women to engage in serious innovative writing, for reasons that become clear only in comparative analysis.<sup>13</sup> The primary factors determining the degree of women’s participation in experimental writing and art appear to have been access to education, control of property and personal finances, and codes of social conduct. These factors differed radically in the United States, Germany, and France, as even a brief description of these nations attests.

Women in the United States enjoyed the most privileged circumstances on all three grounds of any middle-class women in Europe or the Americas. These privileges were in part the indirect result of the Civil War, which dramatically accelerated what was already a widespread movement toward women’s wage employment and higher education. The surplus population of women after the war brought even conservative women into this movement. At the same time, the conjunction of Abraham Lincoln’s 1862 land-grant program, establishing a

coeducational state university system, and the burgeoning of women's colleges with high academic standards offered increasing numbers of women the opportunity to study for professional careers. According to the census of 1910, 10 percent of all receivers of a Ph.D. were women, and in 1920 15.1 percent of all Ph.D.s were women—a higher percentage than at any other time in the United States up to the 1970s.<sup>14</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg claims that the effect of college education on women of this era can hardly be overestimated. In college, women were expected to succeed at a wide variety of endeavors utterly divorced from traditional notions of feminine occupation and in some cases directly violating Victorian norms—for example, putting a career before marriage or training a woman “to think and feel ‘as a man.’”<sup>15</sup> According to Smith-Rosenberg, many female college graduates of this era translated this displacement from traditional gender norms into optimistic ambitions for altering national and international assumptions and laws (255). Because they were “quintessentially American,” with their usually small-town and newly affluent bourgeois backgrounds, and because superior education offered them both economic autonomy and secure social status, they could “defy proprieties, pioneer new roles, and still insist upon a rightful place within the genteel world” (245). American women did not sacrifice social respect by rejecting traditional roles.

A striking number of the American women most prominently involved in writing and editing modernist literature—including Moore—attended college or professional school.<sup>16</sup> Among them, Gertrude Stein attended Harvard Annex (later Radcliffe) and then Johns Hopkins Medical School; Willa Cather graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1895; coeditor of *Poetry* magazine and poet Alice Corbin Henderson attended the University of Chicago from 1899 to 1902 and then because of her health moved to New Orleans, where she attended Sophie Newcomb College; coeditor of the *Little Review* Jane Heap attended the Art Institute of Chicago from 1901 to 1905 and studied mural design in Germany, while her coeditor Margaret Anderson spent three years at the Western College for Women in Ohio; playwright and Theatre Guild director Theresa Helburn graduated from Bryn Mawr and studied at the Sorbonne; Moore graduated from Bryn Mawr in 1909; H.D. attended Bryn Mawr; Djuna Barnes attended the Pratt Institute; Kay Boyle studied architecture at Parson's School of Fine and Applied Arts, also taking classes at Columbia University and (briefly) at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music; Edna St. Vincent Mil-

lay graduated from Vassar in 1917; and Genevieve Taggard graduated from the University of California in 1920. African American women active in modernism also typically attended institutes of higher education: Georgia Douglass Johnson graduated from Atlanta University in 1893 and attended Oberlin Conservatory of Music 1902–3; Alice Dunbar-Nelson graduated from a two-year teacher-training program at what is now Dillard University in 1892; Jessie Fauset graduated from Cornell in 1905 and received an M.A. in French from the University of Pennsylvania in 1919; Zora Neale Hurston attended Howard University and then Barnard, graduating in 1928; Gwendolyn Bennett attended Columbia University and graduated from the Pratt Institute in 1924; and Anna Julia Cooper received her B.A. from Oberlin in 1884 and her Ph.D. from the Sorbonne in 1925.<sup>17</sup> This is a remarkable pattern, key to understanding the symbolic capital of this generation of women.

American women also enjoyed relatively early economic autonomy. With the Married Women's Property Laws of New York in 1848, 1860, and 1862, married women in that state gained substantial right to control their own wages, property, and inheritance. Similar laws in other states soon followed.<sup>18</sup> Hence, just as middle-class women by the turn of the century had access to an education equivalent, and in many cases superior, to men's, both single and married women in most states could also hold individual checking accounts, inherit and will property, and dispose of their income independently of male family members.<sup>19</sup> They achieved full national suffrage in 1920. Although they typically earned far less than men and dealt with gender discrimination at many levels, a striking number of American women wrote, published, and edited poetry, fiction, and drama, and founded journals, presses, galleries, art schools, and museums. Such activity was enabled by the conditions summarized above.

The very different trajectory of nineteenth-century German history led to different conditions for women. Not unified until 1871, late-nineteenth-century Germany was in the midst of massive change. By 1914, it was the greatest industrial nation in Europe and prided itself on its modernity and progressiveness. To some extent, this progressiveness extended to women's rights. In the new Civil Code of 1888, German women gained the basic rights of political equality: married women had full legal status, could initiate legal proceedings, conclude contracts, and had control of their own wages and income. Thanks to compulsory education laws of the 1820s and 1830s in the old German Confederation, literacy was nearly universal at the time of unification. According to Helene Lange, in 1887 29.5 percent of the students in

Prussian secondary schools were girls—a figure comparable to England’s estimated 30 percent.<sup>20</sup> Girls were not allowed to take the university preparatory exam (*Abitur*) given in boys’ *Gymnasiums*, however, until 1896, and they were first admitted to German universities in 1908.<sup>21</sup> Lasker-Schüler was typical in not finishing high school.

Despite its relatively liberal laws, German patriarchal traditions and a conflicting paragraph of the Civil Code undermined women’s legal rights: paragraph 1354 gave the husband power to make all decisions concerning family life (Frevert 231). This contradiction mirrored general ambivalence in German society: on the one hand, since the middle of the nineteenth century there had been strong support for the liberalization of labor and property laws for women. On the other, the new state promoted ideals of masculine military heroism and the maternal, domestic woman. Further, because Germany could not begin to develop a nationally consistent system of public education or dispersal of printed matter until after unification, women were more isolated in the liberal or conservative trends of their local communities or families than in the United States.

The loss of male labor and lives during and after World War I forced German women into a wide variety of types of employment. With the founding of the Weimar Republic in 1918, women received full suffrage rights and, in 1919, full legal equality. Yet the weakness of the Weimar government, Germany’s extreme political instability, and the financial turmoil of the years immediately following the war made it impossible to implement these new laws. Moreover, the patriarchal family law of the German Civil Code was not revised. With Hitler’s rise to power in the early 1930s, the German government allied itself with a full-fledged campaign to reinforce legally and socially the old ideological bond identifying women as wives and mothers. Women in Germany, then, enjoyed some legal rights earlier than American women but had restricted ability to exercise them and less access to higher education. None of the German women prominent in literature or the arts studied at the university. Women were active in avant-garde art and literary circles, especially in the visual arts, but according to Christine Reiß-Suckow, *geistige Leben und die Macht* (spiritual/intellectual life and power) rested firmly in men’s hands.<sup>22</sup>

A brief comparison of France to Germany during this period helps illuminate what is distinctive to the latter and gives a context for Loy’s years in Paris from 1903 to 1906 and 1923 to 1936. Shari Benstock summarizes that at the turn of the century “Everything about [a French woman’s] existence—from economic security to social status—

depended on the benign protection of a system created for and controlled by men." Class and status provided wealthy women some social freedom, but even these women were affected by restrictive social codes. In contrast, even impoverished expatriate women like Loy were not affected by these codes because French society was essentially closed to them—and indeed most Anglo-Americans showed little interest in it.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, Paris was the perfect home for British and American expatriates.

Education in France was strictly segregated. Until 1880, there were no high schools preparatory for the university for girls, and until 1914 the curriculum at girls' lycées was typically less demanding than at boys'.<sup>24</sup> It was several decades before women gained full access to French universities. Women's property rights were similarly restricted. The Napoleonic Code of 1804 declared that the husband ruled the French family: the wife owed her earnings to her husband and required his permission for employment outside the home; Article 213 required a wife's obedience to her husband. Thanks to the campaigns of French women's groups, divorce was legalized in 1884, and in 1907 and 1909 French married women gained some control over their earnings and family property. Other early-twentieth-century measures, however, ensured the continuation of the status quo, and Article 213 was not removed from the books until 1938. Women received the vote in France in 1944.

Political history helps to explain early-twentieth-century France's gender codes. From the time of the French Revolution in 1789, France was embroiled in decades of internal revolt and wars of aggression. With France's loss to Germany during the Franco-German War of 1871, the Third Republic made political and economic stability a priority. Indeed, from the mid-nineteenth century on, maintaining traditional gender roles was regarded by many conservatives and revolutionaries as key to national stability. Because of the low national birth rate, pronatalist programs encouraging women's pursuit of domestic, not public, authority were also increasingly popular in France early in the twentieth century, creating a situation of conflicting cultural expectations for young women.

Not surprisingly under these circumstances, few French women participated in literary and artistic innovation. Of the twelve painters Gill Perry discusses in *Women Artists and the Parisian Avant-Garde*, only five were French, and they for the most part stopped pursuing avant-garde techniques after World War I.<sup>25</sup> Even during their early innovative periods, these women tended to work on the fringes of avant-garde

exhibiting groups, and those with strong access to such a group typically attained it through sexual intimacy with a more established male artist.<sup>26</sup> Even Surrealism, the historical avant-garde most often described as hospitable to women, became so only late in its development. Between 1924 and 1933, the period Susan Suleiman defines as the “most dynamic and ‘ascendant’ period of the movement,” not a single woman was included as a member and even in the 1930s and 1940s, none of the (few) female writers was French.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Benstock’s twenty-two “Women of the Left Bank” includes only three Frenchwomen: Colette, whose fiction was innovative from its first appearance in the 1890s but never associated with an experimentalist group or movement; Anaïs Nin, whose first novel was not published until 1936 and who in fact spent her formative educational years (1914–24) in New York; and Adrienne Monnier, an important bookseller and supporter of experimentalist work, but not a significant writer. Suleiman summarizes: “there were no outstanding [French] women writers in the first half of this century . . . who had the tenacity to construct an oeuvre (much less the kind of innovative, rule-breaking oeuvre that can be qualified as ‘avant-garde’ and that requires the self-confidence of, say, a Gertrude Stein) until Simone de Beauvoir,” who published her first novel in 1943 (31).<sup>28</sup> Given French women’s relative lack of financial independence, access to higher education, and cultural support for autonomy in any sphere outside the home, the basis for these patterns is clear.

Moore, Lasker-Schüler, and Loy are in many ways atypical, like most significant writers, but their lives illuminate representative patterns enabling women’s trajectories of success, and their poems illuminate patterns of modernist thought frequently overlooked in international modernist studies. As detailed in chapter 2, in some ways, their lives could not have been more different. Yet once each had committed herself to a life of artistic creation, she was devotedly and clear-sightedly ambitious in the pursuit of that career. Lasker-Schüler and Moore each felt herself to be both central to the circle of literary experimentalists of her time and an outsider to that circle—for reasons compounded of gender, life “style,” and religious upbringing and belief. Committed more to social and sexual liberation and to her own independence as a designer than to a particular art form or craft, Loy was perhaps more a lifelong artistic entrepreneur than a poet; she did not devote her life to writing but had brief periods of remarkable creativity in various forms. Moreover, during her most artistically active years Loy apparently felt no significant division between her beliefs or life and those of her circle.

She was the avant-garde poster girl, seen in her work, her appearance, and her life to represent the arts, the movement, and the times.

Each poet created for herself a poetic style that was utterly distinctive and original while sharing important characteristics with other experimental writers and artists of her time; all were admired by fellow poets. All thrived in cities and in literary milieus that were predominantly male. Lasker-Schüler and Moore created styles of writing that combined traditional uses of poetic form with experiments in rhythm, line length, stanza form, and rhyme. These styles, in different ways, foregrounded dialogue, processes of communication, a conception of interactive poetics—Moore’s “companionable drawl.” Loy’s verse from the beginning borrowed less from traditional forms and contained few illocutionary elements suggesting even a possibility for dialogue or communication: like the lovers of “Café du Neant,” she wrote “tales without words / And lies of no consequence.” All three poets painted or drew, and saw their poetry as associated with innovations in the visual arts at least as closely as with those in contemporary literature. Each woman also maintained close personal ties with individual artists, especially Lasker-Schüler with her *blauer Reiter* Franz Marc, and Loy with Marcel Duchamp and Man Ray. Moore knew many New York artists and was attracted to the *Blauer Reiter* concept of “spiritual necessity”—even purchasing a copy of the expensive *Blaue Reiter Almanac* in 1916. Loy’s association with the more radically disruptive art of Dada fits with the more disruptive language and project of her poetry.

Loy, Lasker-Schüler, and Moore participated in the shaping of modernism in particular places, and their lives and writing were in turn partially shaped by those locations. The following chapters demonstrate both individual and collective patterns of influence and response characterizing these and other women’s writing and art in the first three decades of the twentieth century. Chapter 2 examines sociological, cultural, and theoretical representations of modernity in Berlin and New York as a foundation for the more specific comparisons of the following chapters, with particular attention to the different structures of the experimentalist literary groups in these cities and a more detailed overview of all three poets’ lives. Chapter 3 interprets the politics of self-naming, both as fluxional performance of an unconventionally bounded self and in relation to the traditional speaking subject position or “I” of the lyric poem. Like numerous others across Europe and North America, all three women constructed a kaleidoscope of names for themselves, trying out aspects of identity and self-positioning, and

breaking normative gender as well as other boundaries. Contextualizing this language performance within the urgent national discourses on gender illuminates ways that these performances both respond to local hierarchies and resonate differently at the local level than internationally. Chapter 4 examines the semiotics of performed embodiment, interweaving discourses of dress, the sexological science of the era, and literary forms. All three poets saw dress and life patterns as arenas for performance of identities and ideas parallel to those of their art. Similarly, although none of these poets was obviously lesbian, each benefited from analysis that placed her within a homosocial continuum. Just as self-naming and gender redefinition were endemic especially to female writers and artists of the period, so was the testing of ranges of sexuality.

Chapter 5 deals with the importance of religion, and particularly Jewishness, to modernist aesthetics, challenging the widespread critical assumption of modernist hostility to religious belief and practice. For these poets, Judaism (variously conceived) provided artistic grounding. In part through her concept of, or identification with, Jewishness, each also engaged popular tropes of orientalism, with Lasker-Schüler and Loy employing these tropes as a part of their shifting poetic and self-constructions. Unlike more widely discussed patterns of orientalism, these poets' engagement with the East provided an indirect route to active commentary on their own immediate worlds rather than fantasy or escape. The final chapter returns to poetry as such, asking what we can learn about reading these three poets' works from the historical and cultural explorations of the rest of my study. It serves, in effect, as a reminder of why these chapters may matter to readers of modernist poems.