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De-Centering the Margins: Disintegration and Liberation in the Later Works of Mina  
Loy, Jean Rhys and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven

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## Abstract

The purpose of this dissertation is to trace a timeline of female marginalization from the middle of the twentieth century backwards, within the Anglo-American modernist and the New York avant-garde scene. Focusing on the work of Mina Loy, Jean Rhys and Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven during the later years of their lives and careers, my aim is to examine the lonely female figure of the twentieth century depicted in their work, who is alienated because of her disintegrating youth. Loy's later poetry, as well as Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) depict a failed vision of human experience that cannot be reclaimed, establishing the binary oppositions of gender and aging within a consumerist culture. Even though Elsa's later work also reflects on such themes, her sound poetry reconstructs an embodied vision of modernity by unsettling the effects of capitalism on the corporeal self. Concluding my analysis with the "Mother of Dada," I argue that Elsa's performative poetry liberates Mina Loy's female subjectivity, which is striving to preserve a youthful appearance, and simultaneously transforms Jean Rhys's heroine into a sexually liberated human being, who is no longer constrained by the beauty standards of an industrialized modernity.

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## 1. Introduction

After Carolyn Burke's publication of *Becoming Modern: The Life of Mina Loy* (1996), the "exemplary avant-gardist" (1) is no longer just a passing presence in modernist memoirs; Burke reclaims Loy's place as an important modernist figure of the century, while simultaneously underscoring the importance of location and dislocation, belonging and unbelonging. Built upon the foundations of a modernist vision it proceeds to break down into fragments and reimagine in order to "fight the failure of literature to treat life honestly" (Kouidis 170), Mina Loy narrates an odyssey of sorts in poems intrinsically linked to her own path to self-discovery. Carolyn Burke's restorative gesture of bringing Mina Loy's life to the forefront after decades of research, reconstructed a biographical narrative in a way that still speaks to a contemporary audience, and acknowledges the challenge of unearthing the unaccounted-for condition of a name that "has been granted a forceful personality, a cerebral bearing, a perfect complexion, and a sexual body ... but not a voice" (Conover 10). Loy's work becomes an assemblage of multiple poetic images that provide a glimpse into the conditions of a gendered experience that refuses to conform to modernist conventions or to a fixed identity, like most of her fellow artists. Her choice to disrupt a process of belonging through her work becomes the starting point for a radical female "other" that was nothing and everything at once. Described by Roger L. Conover, the editor of *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1997), as an artistic presence that appeared unexpectedly, "using her various identities to transform the cultures and social milieus she inhabited" (12), Mina Loy confronted the fundamental ideologies of her time through contradictions that constituted the transnational subjectivity she embraced, both as an artist and as a woman.

After abandoning her English roots and leaving behind traces of her artistic talent in some of the major European urban cities, namely Florence, Munich, Paris, and Berlin during the early years of the twentieth century, Loy acquires a hybrid American identity and shapes a unique perspective on degeneration and exile through "a method of construction that gave body to the developing modern consciousness while carrying private meanings at once erotic, aesthetic, and spiritual" (Burke 8). A citizen of the world and an

experimentalist in her own right, the originality of Loy's work has been overshadowed by its inability to remain in the spotlight after the publication of her earliest poems and manifestoes. As Jonathan Weiner aptly puts it, she was "one of the most avant of the avant-garde based on her work as a poet" (151), even though she declared to Jonathan Williams during the last years of her life that she was never, in fact, one. Mina Loy's work focuses on a vision of a failed human experience, which struggles to comprehend the ways through which the self is associated to the world. Through a collage of free verse poems that embrace language as a liberating force in a metaphysical exploration of the relationship between the "I/eye" that observes and those who are being observed, she parses the white space with sentences and explores it through words seemingly scattered on the page. Even though, in some cases, it is still unclear whether the inconsistent punctuation in her work is a conscious decision on her part or an editorial error, since many of her poems appeared in magazines without being proofread or even typewritten, she manages to dismantle the boundaries between binary oppositions, as well as grammatical structures, by subverting the use of the English language altogether. Drawing upon unfamiliar words that were impossible to understand without a dictionary in hand, "she made deft use of good words that were out of use, and when she couldn't find the word she needed, she created one" (Conover 217). Her imagery is like a kaleidoscope of fragments that reflect on the ambiguity of life and the obstacles one faces towards the path to self-fulfillment, and leads to a prismatic vision of reality at large; Loy "expressed this vision by trying to make new noises with the English language" (Weiner 156). Her poems expose the hypocrisy of a patriarchal society and de-objectify the female body through their unconventional typography and unladylike subject matter. Even though the poems included in *The Lost Luna Baedeker* can be read independently, an indistinct narrative connects the fragmented sentences of her poetry and suggests a continuity, expanding the potentiality of form and syntax in the process.

Another female writer whose work could be defined as a guidebook to the capitalist aesthetics of modernity during the first part of the twentieth century, Jean Rhys subverts the vision of a lived human experience in the metropolis, in order to focus on a disintegrating reality of unbelonging and displacement. A voice for the voiceless, female other, much like Mina Loy, she rejects the linearity of traditional narratives and combines

fiction with autobiographical elements that masterfully intertwine the past and the present, without providing the reader with any particular details as to when each is taking place; where time, as a sequence of events, is concerned, she establishes a chronology of personal experience that goes against the spatial and temporal setting of the modern novel in order to challenge its conventions, as well as the “entire fabric of social and moral order which governs so much of society” (Staley 1). Rhys’s radical sensibility and “Creole consciousness” (45), as Erica Johnson argues, are projected into her novels’ complexity, as well as her heroines’ attitudes towards a world in which they do not belong, thus reflecting her own experiences as one of the displaced figures of the modernist era. Born in the Caribbean island of Dominica to a father of Welsh descent and a Creole mother with Scottish, as well as Irish origins, according to Helen Carr, she was always torn between the different cultures she was born into, which contributed in turn to the restlessness with which she perceived her own identity as never quite belonging to either.

Forced into a state of inbetweenness due to her status as an outcast, Rhys identified with the oppressed history of blackness and was aware of the racial binary that dominated the world at large, even at a young age. Never black enough for her island in the West Indies, nor white enough for Europe, the sense of displacement Rhys experienced formed a complex racial identity she explored throughout her literary career. Her ability to “understand and identify with the plight of the black immigrant who enters the alien world of white England” (Staley 5) influenced her perspective as a female outsider, and she found herself in the spotlight only after the publication of her critically acclaimed novel titled *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966; described as a prequel to Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* (1847), it reclaims the voice of the “madwoman in the attic” (Gilbert and Gubar 1979) in a way that subverts the cultural stigma around mental illness and exposes the mechanisms of a patriarchal society, founded upon the suffering caused by colonial oppression and imperialism. Her ascent to literary fame a decade before her death, albeit belated, left no lasting impressions on Rhys, since it had eluded her until she reached her seventies and had come too late.

Another marginal female figure of the twentieth century, and one of the most radical and controversial of her era, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven was described by Jane Heap,

the publisher of *The Little Review*, as “the first American dada...the only one living anywhere who dresses dada, loves dada, lives dada” (46). Alienated from the literary scene for her exaggerated performances, through which she also subverted gender expectations, Elsa challenged the notions of propriety by obliterating the boundaries between real life and art. Her performance of what Amelia Jones calls an irrational subjectivity “could not retreat to any established model of femininity” (Schor 134), while it simultaneously dismantled the gender dynamics within Dadaism, which privileged male artists and objectified the female figures they portrayed in their work; an artistic movement born in the midst of the First World War, Dada and its anti-bourgeois stance challenged the aestheticism of modernity, as well as the rise of a consumerist culture. Consumption itself became a necessity in a mainstream culture of mass production, thus alluding to a distorted perception of the metropolis and what it represented for Dadaism; the metropolis was transformed into a site of negation for Dadaism, which mocked the materialistic attitudes of a capitalist modernity, while becoming a refuge for writers and artists at the beginning of the century. Elsa’s contribution to the provocative absurdity of the movement was expressed in her ready-made poetry, which engaged with the effects of capitalism on the body, in order to both unsettle and critique it. Merging the sounds of the city through the physicality of being an observer in it, she quickly became a questionable figure the American mainstream culture was wary of and the modernist counterculture she occupied the margins of could not fully comprehend or relate to. An emblematic figure of Dada, she embodied art through her performative poetry and transgressed the boundaries of language altogether.

Born in Germany to a Polish mother she adored and a German father whose behavior was too controlling for her free-spirited mind, Elsa was another expatriate artist who migrated to New York in the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the most featured artists of *The Little Review*, she published most of her poetry during the second decade of the century and used discarded objects she collected from the streets to make her own assemblages; she introduced herself as the Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven after her brief marriage to the German Baron Leopold von Freytag-Loringhoven in 1913, according to most of the biographies that have been published throughout the years on her life and work. Using her “sound poetry as a means of materializing herself in the world”

(Gammel and Zelazo 261), she dismantled language and poetic rationalities in order to re-establish Dadaism as a form of absurd expression, collectively producing chaotic versions of modernity in the process. The hybridity of her poems, clearly indicated in the verbal play she engaged with, as well as the grammatical distortions of her verses, subverted capitalist values and mechanical aspects of modern life and “brilliantly negotiated the urban industrial era’s multifarious modes of rationalizing the modern subject” (Jones 146). By wearing costumes made out of used objects, she turned herself into a living collage in order to strip them of their function, thus exposing the hypocrisy of economic worth, since products of mass consumption became useless once they had served their purpose. The Baroness reversed the traditional consumer role of the individual by repurposing utilitarian objects, essentially turning refuse into art. Her poetry speaks of a dysfunctional industrial modernity, which was epitomized by the excessive use of manufactured products; a system whose function was “to regulate bodies not only by turning them into efficient machines of production but also by constructing them as perfect consumers” (Jones 128), it evolved in an unprecedented manner at the time.

Tracing a timeline of female marginalization from the middle of the twentieth century and backwards within the avant-garde in the chapters that follow, I argue that Mina Loy, Jean Rhys and Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven’s later works illustrate the alienating potential of a consumer culture on an aging, female corporeality. My analysis begins with Mina Loy’s depiction of a failed lived experience within the metropolis in her poetry, resulting from the individual’s inability to resist the effects of time on the body, as well as the signs of disintegration it inevitably leaves behind. Examining the social polarizations of age and gender in a capitalist culture of excessive consumption through Jean Rhys’s *Good Morning, Midnight*, my aim is to explore the ways through which a marginalized, middle-aged woman moves through the urban space and interacts with it through others’ experiences of alienation. Concluding with the “Mother of Dada,” the Baroness Elsa von Freytag Loringhoven, I argue that her work, both textual and visual, liberates the self by reconstructing an embodied vision of modernity, while negating it in the process. An ode to aging as a natural process which reclaims women’s agency over their own bodies, the Baroness’s performative sound poetry liberates both Mina Loy’s aging female subjects and Jean Rhys’s middle-aged heroine.

## 2. “[T]he longing and the lack” of youth: Time, Language and the Self in Mina Loy

All I get out of life is the sensation of looking for something which has a flavour of eternity.

Mina Loy to Carl Van Vechten

With a defiance that was aimed primarily towards her Victorian heritage, as well as the oppressive institutions that limited female subjectivity, the art Mina Loy engendered through the various mediums she worked with throughout her life “reconsiders the penetrability ascribed to the feminine in Modernism” (Armstrong 120). As Tim Armstrong writes, Mina Loy uses the body “as a means of performing modernity” (114) and *The Lost Lunar Baedeker* (1996) provides readers with her extraordinary journey throughout the decades, a modernist vision of embodied experience. The title itself subverts the ironic use of the Baedeker by expatriate artistic communities of the early twentieth century, who were truly immersed in experiencing the cosmopolitan modernity of the metropolis through its contents. As opposed to a traditional “Baedeker”, originally introduced at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a reliable travel guide containing maps and other useful information on unfamiliar destinations, offering tourists superficial encounters with the surface of urban cities, “Loy’s poems focus on the very sights that would be excluded in a guidebook’s prescriptive itineraries” (Bozhkova 11). A quest for identity, Mina Loy’s feminine subjectivity is projected on to a transnational guidebook recounting the desperation of a degenerating reality, which is juxtaposed to the dream of artistic immortality those same communities were trying to establish through their experimental work. Mina Loy’s use of the term does not provide the necessary information for the reader to rely on, when visiting the unfamiliar streets of her modernist texts. On the contrary, its negation points towards her dismissal of gender dynamics, which are reflected on the distortion of the “Baedeker’s” meaning as “lost” and “lunar,” words usually associated with what Robin Lakoff calls “women’s language” (48). Language, stereotypically associated

with a performative view of masculinity as a social practice, has led to the marginalization of a feminine reality Loy opens the door to through her work.

In what follows, through an emphasis on how Mina Loy explores the limits and the potential of language to represent the vulnerability and destitution of those unfortunate enough to succumb to a failed lived experience in the margins of the metropolis, I argue that Loy's depiction of aging in her later poems has resulted in a failed lived experience of modernity at large; the female subjects she gives a voice to in her work, and by extension Loy herself, textually assert themselves in the urban space and challenge the binary oppositions established on the basis of an individual's gender, age and subsequently, external appearance. Representing "a world in which 'the beautiful' lay hidden in what appeared ugly to conventional sight" (Weiner 156), her poetry expands on the disintegrating reality of youth as an embodiment of old age that is juxtaposed to the capitalist notion of external beauty, filtered through a process of production and fueled by consumption in an urban setting. Through a shifting viewpoint that re-visualized linguistic and poetic conventions and refused to conform to categorization, Loy's abstract use of language depicts the disintegration of human existence, which she calls a "queer coincidence" in her "Notes on Existence," written between 1914 and 1919. An archive of sorts, only included in the first updated volume of Mina Loy's work released in 1982 and titled *The Last Lunar Baedeker*, these notes appear seemingly placed out of order to form another textual collage that anticipates the themes explored in the poems I have chosen to focus my analysis on. A "construction of the editor from fragments in the papers of Mina Loy" (Caws 702), these paragraphs reflect her beliefs on the failure of life to achieve society's expectations of beauty within the superficiality of the twentieth century that, in her words, becomes a "surreality" (332). This pessimistic approach to the past, as dead as "a mummy with a thousand features crumbled into dust" (331), is juxtaposed to the "undying conviction of perfection" (332) Loy negates in her later works by oscillating between the center of the artistic communities and the margins of the Bowery. After withdrawing from society to settle in the Bowery, a neighbourhood in Lower Manhattan populated largely by prostitutes and drug addicts during the second half of the twentieth century, the sense of being an outsider and occupying a liminal space of representation, even within the artistic communities she frequented at the beginning of her career, is

reflected on her perception of the impoverished area “as a kind of biosphere prior to heavenly attainment, a marriage between heaven and hell where valuative inversions took place daily” (Weiner 156). Witness to interactions that impacted her perspective by subverting the temporality of the modern subject within a capitalist society, she involves the speaker of her poems in a struggle towards self-discovery and growth that might, or might never occur. As a result, Loy contradicts modernist concepts of progress by embracing the harsh side of mortality through the decadence of the Bowery; inspired by the disintegrating reality of those who inhabited it, she transcends modernism as a transformative movement altogether.

Masterfully crafting a wor(l)d vision that explored modernism as an innovative outlook without disregarding the self-reflexivity of the artist as both the spectacle and the spectator of their art, Mina Loy found herself identifying with “the outcasts and marginalized figures in society” (Weiner 157) while making others see through her eyes, as a person of higher status observing them from above. In one of her late poems, “Chiffon Velours,” written in 1944 and eventually published in 1947, she recounts the experience of an old woman in the street. Writing as if observing her from afar, detached and at the same time sympathetic in its description of the woman’s inevitable predicament, the poem asserts the textual female body as an ailing presence that blurs the lines between life and death by refusing to fully succumb to either, since she “flee[s] from death in odd directions” (line 5) and is “somehow retained by a web of wrinkles” (line 6); even though death is upon her and the wrinkles function as a sign of her body giving into the irreversible effects of time, they also hold that same body together and prevent death from taking over. Chiffon, a popular fabric at the time, is juxtaposed to the woman’s desolate appearance in a way that establishes a binary opposition by taking both subject matters out of context and rearranging the way they are portrayed in a contemporary setting. Originating from the French word *chiffe*, which loosely translates to rag, as well as the Arabic *šiff*, which means translucent, the sheer and shimmery appearance of the fabric itself was associated with an elegance Loy’s subject lacks at first glance. This “original design/of destitution” (lines 14-15) resonates with the poet’s attempts at eluding the linearity of time, which she ironically achieves by preserving the effects of time on the body through the materiality the words attain on the page.

This “original design” (line 14) the woman envisions wearing resonates with Loy’s attempts at exposing the repercussions of capitalism and the ways they affect those of a lower status. With her body dressed in scraps, the woman depicted in the poem longs for the luxury of capitalism, but does not have the means to achieve that luxury. As a result, her only consolation is being a witness to consumerism, but never becoming a consumer herself. Confronted with a transformative vision of a deprived woman who becomes “the unretouched picture of our common death” (Kouidis 132), we are left to question the temporality of time and its effects on a poverty stricken, “[r]igid/at rest against the cornerstone/of a department store” (lines 9-11) female body. This department store, the foundation of a consumerist society which might hold the key to the woman’s rebirth, becomes a resting place for her instead. Introduced at the beginning as a “sere” (line 1), the woman’s hope for renewal is contradicted by her withered appearance, which is what defines her throughout the poem; hovering between life and death, her decaying body becomes a “divine entity” (Shreiber 480) whose partial transformation at the end of the poem generates Loy’s response to social and cultural matters. The illusion of beauty the fabric reflects momentarily is filtered through the filth of the gutter, briefly presenting the possibilities the woman envisions while wearing “the last creation ... of destitution” (lines 13-15). Fashion becomes another institution that oppresses the female subject of the poem, since she exists in the margins and only manages to partly transcend them through “half her black skirt” (line 20) which is glowing, while the other half remains rooted in this fallen world she cannot escape from.

The parallel Loy establishes between the luxury of these “memorial scraps” (line 16) and the anonymous woman’s “reviling age” (line 4) draws a self-portrait that points towards another one of her poems titled “An Aged Woman,” also composed at a later stage in her life. These “skimpy even for a skeleton” (line 17) clothes the woman is wearing glow like “a soiled mirror” (line 21), which “reflects the gutter” (line 22) and are purposely placed out of context, much like Loy herself as an increasingly marginal figure within the artistic communities, who reclaims her status as a distinguished member of society by living among the derelicts of the Bowery. According to Carolyn Burke, Loy was quite “conscious of her age and embarrassed at the thought of seeing those who had known her at the height of her beauty” (418) and being seen by them while residing at the Bowery,

which demonstrated, in a sense, her own self-imposed status as an outcast. The woman in the poem becomes a forgotten trace of another era and confronts Mina Loy's fear of growing old in "a yard of chiffon velours" (line 23). A symbol of destitution, she establishes the binary between the old and the new, the former represented by the corporeality of her aging body and the latter by the materiality of the "flowery cotton" (line 19).

Mina Loy's poems place the intuitive female body in a cross-cultural discussion with the discursive qualities of *logos*, since the aged woman embodies the process of both seeing and seeking the Other in/on the dirty mirror's reflective surface; in Loy, becoming the Other suggests the existence of an omnipresent identity which resists society's patriarchal mode of expression through works that "enlarge readers' consciousness by defamiliarization" (Dowson 60). Alternating between abstract sentences that construct a concrete vision of the world as she perceives it, the vivid imagery in "An Aged Woman" displaces the figure of the artist by the figure of the vagrant. As a result, she is "providing a different kind of vagabondage" (Bozhkova 26) that was ahead of her time, and maybe still remains ahead of ours.

The use of a second person narration, a technique Loy employs throughout her career, makes her poetry even more unconventional by substituting the portrayal of personal experience through the use of "I" with the self-reflexive qualities of "you," thus establishing an interactive literary experience with the reader. This mirror-like image she evokes through a metaphorical self-portrait that directly reflects her own fear of aging raises the important question of representation and detachment, as well as representation by means of detachment. Thus, the mirror functions in its metaphorical sense in "An Aged Woman" as much as it does in "Chiffon Velours," since Loy tries to detach herself from becoming the aged woman she addresses in the former and observes in the latter by substituting a first person point of view with "a particular use of the second person pronoun ... [which] generates an alternating pattern of identification and displacement that constructs an intersubjectivity between narrative elements" (Hantzis 4). This intersubjectivity entails a relationship between the poem's narrator and potential addressee, who might or might not be the aging woman of the poem or the author herself, the authorial

presence and the person at the receiving end of this exchange, the reader. Is Loy writing as if speaking to herself while staring at her reflection in the mirror or is she indirectly addressing the reader through the use of the second person? The female figures in her poems defy social and cultural expectations, exposing the reader to an ambiguous voice that collapses gender dynamics by depicting “the struggle and failure of her subjects not so much as personal suffering, but as illustrations of her own metaphysics” (Kouidis 171).

The poem’s description of “the present      pain” (line 4), with the space between “present” and “pain” demonstrating Loy’s manipulation of typography, as well as the literal use of the present tense, objectifies the latter, and the “precision/with which it struck in youth-time” (lines 5-6) becomes the point of departure for a journey towards “a long reality” (line 21). Mina Loy masterfully paints a metaphorical, if not disturbing picture of a deteriorating youth that cannot be reclaimed, since the “future is inexhaustible” (line 3) and out of reach, both for the aged woman she addresses in the poem and for Loy herself; the reader is thus placed at the edge of the margins and becomes witness to the conventions of language coming apart through words Loy has placed out of context, much like “[t]he past has come apart” (line 1) for the aged woman in the poem. Virginia M. Kouidis argues that “forceful satire gives way to a more reflective and discursive tone, the cynical worldly wisdom of an observer remarking the persistence of humanity’s evasions” (186), going beyond the boundaries of an imposed discourse in an effort to deconstruct the grammatical structures that govern it. The inevitability of old age alludes to a grotesque reality, becoming “more like moth” (line 8) and depicting the body’s disintegration by reducing it to “eroding internal organs/hanging or falling down/in a spoiled closet” (lines 8-10). The first few lines of the poem juxtapose the sense of pessimism with modernity’s glorious promises of progress centered within an urban setting, even in the postwar era; the promise of prosperity and success becomes intertwined with the inevitable reality of aging once again, and the old women of both poems are deprived of “any worldly defense against time” (Kouidis 132). As a result, objectifying time allows Loy to subvert the process of aging through words seemingly placed together in an accidental way, while involving the reader in a metaphysical exploration that aims to “comprehend and express the human situation, [in order to] leave the individual open to discovery and growth” (Kouidis 173).

The use of the indefinite article “an” in the title, much like the second person narrative Loy employs in the poem, betrays her inability to come to terms with the visible manifestations of old age on the body, since “what she wanted most of all was to look as she had in her youth” (Burke 435). Time, one of the subject matters in her work as an artist, eludes her desperate attempts at evading, in turn, the gothic-like repercussions she attributes to it in her poems, as “An Aged Woman” herself. Thus, we could argue that the figure of the old woman who will eventually “be exorcised by death” (line 19), could also be a substitute for “her former self, the slender nude of Stephen’s photographic studies, the agile image of Man Ray’s portraits” (Burke 413), resulting from the embarrassment she felt, according to Carolyn Burke, over her old age, fading beauty and diminished social status. But what if Loy opted for “the” instead of “an” in her poem’s title? The explicitness of the former, juxtaposed with the anonymity of the latter, points towards the fluidity of identity she embraced throughout her life and career, as “the most original woman of her generation” (Conover 12). The use of “an” as a singular indefinite article, indicating a non-specified female individual who could be one of the many faces in the crowd of “misfortune’s monsters” (“Hot Cross Bum” line 5) roaming the streets of the Bowery, becomes the “Bulbous stranger” (line 18) in Loy’s poetry, an otherized self that has been marginalized. Exposing the materiality of “a” woman’s aging body shatters the deep-rooted illusion of a fixed reality and refashions it into a poem which speaks to the ruptured, and most likely failed, vision of any self.

Once again, Loy uses the mirror as a literary device that becomes transformative in its representation of the self, which is still “illusory or incomplete at best” (Oster 63). The function of the mirror as both metaphor and allegory is once again called into question when the speaker of the poem, and by extension Loy, asks the reader, as well as the poem’s addressee: “Does your mirror Bedevil you?” (line 11). An object that signifies the reflection of the external self, frozen at a particular moment in time, transcends spatial and temporal boundaries by being displaced in the context of Loy’s poetry. Judith Oster suggests that “[w]hether sought or come upon accidentally, a view in a mirror is instantaneous, not a gradual process over time” (60) and the mirror becomes “a trope expressing identity disruption or formation” (60). If so, we could argue that the poem forces us to seek out our reflections on a mirror’s surface, in order to come to terms with our own inner selves and

reflect on whether our “real body” is transformed in the present, through the self-awareness it might achieve through our “reflected body” sometime in the future. This paradox is negated in Loy’s poetry, since the “Bulbous stranger” (line 18) might be the alternative for the “real body” and represent an embodied corporeality which has given in to the passage of time, whereas “the erstwhile agile/narrow silhouette of self” (lines 14-15) might represent the ideal “reflected body” of a younger self, the one staring at the “you” addressed in the poem.

An illusion that makes “the impossible/possible to senility” (lines 12-13), the youthful appearance of the aged woman is staring back at her, while also illustrating her inability to come to terms with aging and the loss of her youth. A subject grammatically constructed by Loy and, at the same time, constructing a look into her own self-consciousness, the aging self reflects on the cross-cultural narrative she guides her readers through in this Baedeker of abjection that bravely presents an intimate experience of dealing with old age as a woman, without conforming to modernist aesthetics of form and language. Trying to maintain a youthful appearance while coming to terms with the fragmented reality of her corporeal self, the woman is caught at a standstill between a nostalgia for youth that can never be reclaimed and a resentment for the aged body she inhabits. Even if the tone of her poem is pessimistic to say the least, she envisions the sublime through this corporeal self, literally and metaphorically facing the truth of its expendability.

Mina Loy, writing as “a woman standing up for herself” (Gunn 48), places her signature at the end of the poem, along with a date: “July 12th/ 1984” (lines 22-24). In his editor’s notes included in *The Lost Lunar Baedeker*, Conover makes it a point to note that the poem is, in fact, “signed and dated prospectively at the bottom of the page in Mina Loy’s hand” (330). Even though its composition date remains unknown, the publication of “An Aged Woman” posthumously breaks down the boundaries surrounding a spatial and temporal framework within the institutionalized discourse of language, and by extension literature, demonstrating Loy’s genius in the process. Deliberate or not, what can be described as an epitaph at the end of a poem which deals with vulnerability and aging that can only “be exorcised by death” (line 19), makes us wonder whether it truly longs for the

“reflected body” of a past self, while trying to come to terms with the ailing, “real body” of the present self, but addresses both from the future. If that is the case, this “spectral encounter between the self and its reflected image” (Conover 330) does not only break down spatial and temporal boundaries, it transgresses them altogether; Mina Loy’s transcendentalism lies in this spectral self, a voice coming from the unknown future, which manages to leave behind the “flavour of eternity” she was always in search of. Just like Loy’s work was recognized posthumously, the woman in the poem takes on the form of the female artist, who envisions herself in the future and refuses to succumb to “death’s erasure” (“Letters of the Unliving” line 12), opting instead for the “long reality” (line 21) she achieved as an artist, even after her death in 1966.

In her late poetry, Mina Loy insists on “an ironic poetics of excess, which in turn transforms poetic language into waste” (Bozhkova 28) and conjoins the past with the present in order to expose the capitalist aesthetics of modernity and the alienation of communities that are excluded due to their lower status. “An Aged Woman” generates feelings of unbelonging through the displacement a female ailing body experiences, while dealing with the painful reality of her youth being wasted away. Time, as a universally accepted definition of the “nonspatial continuum in which events occur in apparently irreversible succession from the past through the present to the future” (“The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language”), becomes the determining factor in this process of disintegration. Even though both women in the poems analyzed experience the destructive effects of time on their bodies and conflate their present older selves with their absent youthful appearance, they also acknowledge their potential as multidimensional female figures who bring together what is physically present with the spiritually absent, in order to explore the possibilities of a journey towards self-discovery.

Another one of her poems that deals with time as a continued sequence of irreversible events is titled “Time-Bomb” and was first published in 1961, only five years before Mina Loy’s death. Originally composed sometime in 1945, the poem conflates the present both with the past and the future, in a way that depicts the explosive reality of the postwar period; time, which also explodes in the poem, becomes a symbol of destruction. As opposed to the poems discussed earlier though, “Time-Bomb” does not depict the

individual in a state of distress over a slowly dissipating youth, but “points to a nuclear disintegration of language” (Bozhkova 47) altogether. It is not clear to whom the poem is addressed or whether it refers to a particular conflict, but the violence it describes can only point to war and its effect on the world and by extension, the individual; even though there is no clear mention of human presence, Loy once again explores a failed vision of the world, but this time, war becomes the cause of its disintegration. Abandoning traditional typography completely, Loy employs blank spaces that separate the words from each other in a sort of “typographical fragmentation [which] add[s] visual and tactile dimensions to the words’ referential power” (Kouidis 173). A visual reading of the poem allows us to experience the full force of her technique, since each word appears to have exploded, pushing the one that follows it further away and leaving behind a blank space in between them.

In her reading of “Time-Bomb,” Cristanne Miller has suggested that Mina Loy returned to writing poetry after a fifteen-year hiatus because of her return to New York and settling in the Bowery, and in response to the Second World War in Europe, which the United States entered in 1941. The poem itself begins in “the present moment” (line 1), which remains ambiguous, since the exact date of the poem’s composition is still unknown. This moment “is an explosion ,/a scission/of past and future” (lines 2-4), suggesting a spiritual disruption that is neither pleasant, nor predictable. The speaker of the poem describes a linear time which is cut short by the bomb exploding, displacing reality altogether as a result and putting the future on hold. If we take the events that transpired during the summer of 1945 into consideration, when the United States dropped two atomic bombs in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the subject matter becomes a political commentary that must be acknowledged. This critique of war as an institution perpetuated by society at large makes us wonder where Loy situates herself, not only as a female artist, but as a human being whose life was overturned by the reality of war. Unable to detach her consciousness from a world that has literally and figuratively exploded around her, she alludes to the individual’s suffering, irreversible and simultaneously rooted at this specific moment in time.

Consisting of four stanzas, “Time-Bomb” includes only four verbs, one strategically placed within each. The present “is an explosion ,” (line 2), indicating a fixed state of being which leaves no space for reclaiming the past since it will remain in an explosive state indefinitely. “[L]eaving/those valorous disreputables ,/the ruins ,//sentinels” (lines 5-8) implies a continuity that might, or might not be temporary, bringing the present and the future together, while establishing a contrast between those without reputation or social standing showing great courage in guarding a destroyed world. Thus, we could argue that Mina Loy’s critique is also pointed towards a society whose aim is to metaphorically consume, but which has ended up being literally consumed by something far greater than capitalism; war has displaced its sense of time and the boundaries between socially acceptable individuals and those existing in between the margins have collapsed in the face of such a tragedy. If the unthinkable has become a reality, “an unknown dawn/strewn with prophecy .” (lines 9-10) awaits those who are deemed unworthy by society, but regardless of their status, the prophetic vision of the future they are called to protect leaves behind traces of a new beginning. According to Miller, “the poem’s final stanza implies that the explosion of the present creates some kind of future momentum, or at least allows such momentum to proceed” (194), since the “momentary/goggle of death/fixes the fugitive/momentum .” (lines 11-14) and establishes the potentiality of something that is still absent.

In this particular poem, Loy establishes the binary opposition between presence and absence in a subversive way, since the presence of the ruins in the present is juxtaposed to the absence of what is yet to come in the future. In an attempt to shock the reader, Loy presents an unnatural vision of the world which is historically accurate, but can never be fully acknowledged as such. Even though Linda A. Kinnahan, suggests that “a pencil note on the draft of ‘Time-Bomb’ dates its composition to the end of August 1945” (206), after the detonation of the atomic bombs, no such fact has been corroborated. This ambiguity does not detach the reader from the setting or prevent a meaningful interpretation of the poem, but confronts the limits of language and deconstructs time as a sequence of events that are determined by the past and determine, in turn, the future. Is “[t]he present moment” (line 1) actually taking place in Loy’s particular present and written in the context of the Second World War which has specifically taken place in 1945 or does she define it

as a general concept with infinite possibilities, since any moment could be defined as one's present? Almost mechanical in its description of a world in ruins, "Time-Bomb" provides us with an account of disintegration that goes beyond the corporeal body as such, without altering Mina Loy's perception of time, established in her work throughout the years. This "scission" (line 3) between a past that is now absent and a future which has yet to be determined cannot be mended, much like the youthful appearance of the aging self cannot be reclaimed.

3. **“Pain of Youth, Walk away from me:” Aging, Alienation and Despair in Jean Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight***

I've never written about being happy, never. I didn't want to. Besides, I don't think you can describe being happy.

(In Their Own Words - British Novelists: Among the Ruins 1919-1939)

A text that is experimental in design, *Good Morning, Midnight* was published in 1939 and demonstrates the ambiguity of Rhys's work through its dismissal of conventional modernist tropes; the city attains an alienating nature in Rhys's fiction, especially in the case of Sasha, who is as alienated from others as she is from her own self, thus moving towards “a radical acknowledgement of modern mass culture” (Konzett 63) and its dehumanizing effects on the individual. Her focus on the female experience of alienation in a male dominated society deconstructs gender binaries by exploring the vulnerability of a middle-aged woman whose failed vision of womanhood has led to a lonely, if not desperate, human existence. Allusive and quite ironic in its depiction of the economic displacement its heroine faces due to her gender and age, the novel exposes the pretentious nature of modernism and critiques the social polarizations oppressing women and the poor, or both in the case of Sasha Jansen. Described by critics as a continuation of her previous novels, it received negative reviews at the time of its publication, since it was considered to be too pessimistic for the circumstances surrounding its release to the public, which took place right after the outbreak of a Second World War. A collection of Rhys's letters published posthumously reveal her correspondence with English novelist and reviewer Morchard Bishop, who wrote to her after the initial publication of *Good Morning, Midnight* in order to express his feelings on the novel's depressing context to which she responded that her intention was never for it to “be hopeless” (*The Letters of Jean Rhys* 34). Even though it is arguably her most contemporary work, it is also the most neglected when it comes to the literary recognition it received at the time, since a well-written narrative could not make up for the negativity surrounding the main character's storyline, at a time when

Europe found itself at the onset of another major catastrophe. Even now, critical studies on Rhys's work focus more on her earliest or later publications, mostly in relation to the autobiographical elements that have contributed to the themes she explores in them. *Good Morning, Midnight* thus occupies a liminal space of representation within the modernist era, much like its author, as well as its main character.

A novel which traces the disintegrating dream of a modern society by exposing the rootlessness of human existence through its protagonist's drifting spiritual reality, *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) asserts the loneliness of womanhood through a marginalized point of view, thus bringing it to the forefront; Rhys's use of a stream-of-consciousness technique subverts the inhumane treatment of European consumerist culture by externalizing her heroine's internal struggles with being physically present in an urban setting, but spiritually absent from the various encounters that take place in it, thus alienating herself from it altogether. Through a narrative "limited to the protagonist herself, with other voices emerging only through the protagonist's conversations and recollections" (Hite 53), Rhys recounts the experience of Sasha Jansen, who has been objectified throughout her life for being a woman and eventually stigmatized because of her inability to achieve the various stages of womanhood, namely marriage and pregnancy. Reduced to a seemingly unnoticeable presence that goes through life as if entranced by her irreversible failures, since she has not been able to fulfill the roles assigned to her by a patriarchal society, the marginal character of Sasha is placed at the center of what is now considered as one of Rhys's major works, in order to undermine the structure of the novel altogether. A literary form that emerged with the bourgeoisie and privileged the agency of individuals that could attain a certain status in society, the modern novel has constructed another binary by privileging the assumption that "there are intrinsically major and minor characters, regardless of narrative context, and that certain categories of socially marginal human beings are by virtue of this social marginality fitted only to be minor characters" (Hite 25); Jean Rhys displaces the binary oppositions established by the assumption that only major characters have the ability to exercise free will, a power structure perpetuated by the middle class and its capitalist values. The "Rhys woman" (27) has spent her life on the sidelines, thus becoming the supporting character in her own narrative, which displaces both social and literary conventions by transgressing discursive structures and reversing the readers'

expectations when it comes to the form of the novel altogether. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways through which Sasha, and by extension Rhys, redefines the presumption that a woman on the margins cannot exist as anything other than a “minor character” in her own story due to her gender, age and social status, since she lives in a world where she is treated as such by the “major characters,” namely those who are more privileged and powerful than she is.

Described by Carole Angier, one of her biographers, in *Jean Rhys: Life and Work* (1990), as the “most painful of her novels” (367) to have gone through the process of writing, *Good Morning, Midnight* depicts a self-conscious woman who is fully aware of her shortcomings and by extension, her victimization within society. This is exactly where Rhys’s authorial presence becomes ambiguous in its universality, since she manages to be everywhere and nowhere at once by providing us with a journey towards self-knowledge that is largely based on her own life during the 1930s, while simultaneously distancing herself from the character of Sasha. Encouraged to return to Paris after a long absence, Sasha has “arranged [her] little life” (9) in a mechanical way that reflects the corporeality of the body which has essentially become a machine in the face of industrialism and technological advancement. The room she finds herself in at the beginning of the novel is personified through a third person point of view that imposes a temporal and spatial ambiguity on the narrative, since it speaks of the “old times” (9) without providing any specific details as to when these times took place or where; time as a sequence of events that occur in succession from an irreversible past, to an unpredictable future, becomes irrelevant since the present is never addressed as such by Sasha. “A large room [with] two beds, a big one for madame and a smaller one on the opposite side for monsieur” (9), exposes the gender binary Rhys negates by providing women with a bigger space within a private setting, thus reversing men’s dominating presence in the outside world and bridging the gap between the two. Sasha becomes the center of the margins from the very first paragraph of the novel, through “an extensive analysis of the metropolitan world around her” (Williams 5), which moves from the specific description of the private and the room’s contents to the general description of the public and the street surrounding it.

After this brief use of the third person, Sasha assumes a first person point of view in order to place herself within her own narrative and transports the reader to the catastrophic events of “[l]ast night” (9), during which she started crying. Fully conscious of her status as a victim, Sasha describes herself as “[s]aved, rescued, fished-up, half drowned, out of the deep, dark river, dry clothes, hair shampooed and set ... a bit of an automaton but sane” (10), after a woman chastises her for being unhappy on the inside and letting everybody see it on the outside; with this robotic-like inner monologue, Rhys projects Sasha’s consciousness onto the page and creates a permanent space for her to occupy as a vulnerable middle-aged woman who has consciously alienated herself from the world, after repeatedly being rejected by its inhabitants. Sasha finds herself in “a familiar lavabo” (9) at the place she had decided to “have [her] drink in after dinner” (9) and whose location still remains unknown to the reader, before her memories transport her to another lavabo, first in London, then in Florence and finally, somewhere in Paris. Without providing any context as to when the events Sasha describes took place, a recurring motif throughout the novel, this back and forth between time and space establishes a nonlinear narrative that makes what we assume to be Sasha’s present day overlap with another day she also depicts as her present at the time of its narration. With one memory merging into another, creating a kaleidoscope of visual images that shape the narrative, Sasha describes her routine in a mechanical way, maintaining her sanity through a repetition that transforms her corporeal body into an automated machine. For her, “[t]he thing is to have a programme, not to leave any thing to change – no gaps” (15), which allows her to function in a fast paced world she would have otherwise not been able to keep up with, while being operated at the same time by a capitalist system she is unable to escape from, like the automaton she describes herself as. By merging the past with the present, Rhys expertly traps us in a seemingly timeless sequence of events that assert her presence as an authorial figure who eludes time as such, while refusing to conform to the social polarizations that set her heroine apart in the first place; depicting the female experience of alienation, loneliness and aging within an urban setting, I argue that *Good Morning, Midnight* traces Rhys’ despair when confronted with the reality of her own mortality, foregrounded by her heroine’s old age.

Sasha's preoccupation with aging, and by extension Rhys's, becomes prevalent from the first part of the novel, when she recounts her experiences of working "in a shop just off this street" (16), while wandering through the streets of her past and refusing to accept that what she remembers happening with each step she takes does not belong in her present; she becomes spectral, in a way, with her ghostly presence reverberating through the urban spaces she occupies as she articulates her sense of belonging in these "transitional sites of encounter" (Plate 179) that transcend space and time. Trying to break this endless cycle of repetition Rhys has subjected her heroine's female subjectivity to seems impossible for Sasha, even when she tries to prevent herself from "trailing around aimlessly with cheap gramophone records starting up in [her] head" (15), since she still succumbs to remembering things as they were before, regardless of whether they have remained the same. Sasha's deeply rooted nostalgia for a utopic version of Paris resonates with a need to reclaim her youth and is reflected on her inability to grasp the passing of time as a natural process that conflates who she was at a younger age, with who she refuses to become years later. As Judith Kegan Gardiner suggests, Rhys's heroine "sees herself mirrored and foreshadowed by older women ... and she is constantly engaged in rejecting and remaking their images" (237), seemingly in an effort to help them, and her own self, escape from the margins of society as alienated individuals who do not conform to its norms, usually not by choice, but due to various determining factors they can neither control, nor change. Upholding standards of beauty by rejecting and remaking their external selves will contribute towards the women's survival within a male dominated world.

In the wake of Sasha witnessing a brief conversation between a "man who looks like an Arab" (15), who we can assume to be quite older than the "melancholy girl wearing spectacles" (15) that is accompanying him, it becomes quite evident that she projects her own pessimistic thoughts about life onto the people she encounters. As a result, she subverts their importance through the nonchalance and simplicity with which she describes their exchange, which might very well be a figment of her imagination. The man declares that "[l]ife is difficult" (15) and the girl agrees by paraphrasing that "life isn't easy" (15), thus establishing the binary oppositions of gender and age that set them apart through Sasha's narration of this encounter, as well as the diction Rhys uses to shift our focus towards her heroine's fleeting description of their external appearance. If the man had been

white and did not look like an Arab, life might have not been as difficult as he describes, which makes us wonder why a young girl who fits into the “machine” of society by conforming to its norms due to her age, agrees with him. Can we assume that she is a younger version of Sasha, who rejects the defining rules of a patriarchal society by forging her own path through a life that “needs a lot of courage” (15) to be lived by dispossessed individuals of any race, gender and age? Rhys does not inscribe any positive attributes to the girl, who is melancholic at the beginning and even appears to be dismissive at the end, “shaking her head and clicking her tongue” (15), but this passage foregrounds Sasha’s future encounters with René, reversing the role of the Arab man and the young girl with that of a gigolo and an older woman. Sasha’s memory speaks to us, but it also speaks to her, leading to the construction of a narrative through which she recalls her sense of being excluded, rejected and humiliated, while recounting the impact others have had on her life, even from afar.

The image of the girl is juxtaposed to another encounter Sasha becomes a witness to, while working at a dress house, the symbol of a capitalist economy which has not only commodified the female body, but has subjected it to an objectification women themselves have to sustain financially, by consuming other, mass produced commodities of mainstream culture; this endless consumption of fashion products produces, in turn, fashionable individuals who achieve a higher status in society by resembling mannequins with “satin skin, silk hair, velvet eyes” (Rhys 18). When “[a]n old Englishwoman and her daughter come into the shop” (22), the old lady’s eagerness to explore the products displayed in the showcases contradicts her daughter’s reluctance to be seen shopping with her elderly mother, who is looking for “something to wear in [her] hair in the evening” (22). Taking off her hat, she reveals “a white, bald skull with a fringe of grey hair” (22), a disturbing description of the corporeal body that alludes to an image of death, since the fringe of grey hair that remains on her head points towards her deteriorating health and the white skull suggests that the old woman’s body is going through the final process of decomposition and is slowly becoming a skeleton, even before her literal death. In this particular depiction of aging as a binary opposition, Rhys exposes the hypocrisy of society as a whole, which extends to the traditionally sacred relationship between a mother and her daughter. Both anonymous, observed by Sasha in a detached manner that does not prevent

her, and by extension the reader, from becoming a part of their exchange, the two women represent an institutionalized vision of modernity, which “was shaped and enabled by particular cultural and material forces” (Zimring 231). The daughter “is past shame, detached, grim” (22), while her mother “doesn’t care a damn about all this” (22), indicating another contradiction that sets them apart and gives us an insight to the financial, as well as emotional transactions taking place within the urban setting.

At the end of their interaction, the daughter chastises her mother in an accusing tone as they make their way towards the exit and Sasha’s inner monologue functions as a critique of the microcosm the two represent:

“Well, you made a perfect fool of yourself, as usual. You’ve had everybody in the shop sniggering. If you want to do this again, you’ll have to do it by yourself. I refuse, I refuse.”

The old lady does not answer. I can see her face reflected in a mirror, her eyes still undaunted but something about her mouth and chin collapsing... Oh, but why not buy her a wig, several decent dresses, as much champagne as she can drink, all the things she likes to eat and oughtn’t to, a gigolo if she wants one? One last flare-up, and she’ll be dead in six months at the outside. That’s all you’re waiting for, isn’t it? But no, you must have the slow death, the bloodless killing that leaves no stain on your conscience...” (23)

Through Sasha and her reaction to the way the old woman is treated by her young daughter, Rhys illustrates her heroine’s inner consciousness, whose empathy and compassion go against the inhumane treatment of the aged woman by her own flesh and blood. By expressing what the external self cannot through this first person inner monologue, she exposes the limitations of language while simultaneously transcending them; another contradiction, since Sasha externalizes her support towards the old woman without actually engaging with her in a verbal exchange, choosing to narrate it instead. Sasha’s humanity becomes even more evident as the novel progresses and she “cr[ies] for a long time – for [herself], for the old woman with the bald head, for all the sadness of this damned world, for all the fools and all the defeated...” (28), thus asserting another distinction in terms of binary oppositions, between an automaton and a human being. The daughter functions as

the personification of society's perception of the other, an intimidating opposition which threatens its foundations as an industrially operated machine, whose never-ending function depends on the individual's reduction to a mannequin-like subject. A young woman like Sasha, at least at the time this memory of the past she narrates occurs, did not have the financial stability to participate in the economic exchange that operates within this system, and an old woman like the one she attends to is looked down upon for being able to do so. At which point during a woman's life, is it actually acceptable for her to enjoy the fruits of her labor? When she is too young to have acquired them, like Sasha, or when she eventually becomes too old to be able to enjoy them without being criticized for it, like the Englishwoman? Both instances point towards the impossible accumulation of valuable resources with economic value that women have to achieve before living up to the standards of the beauty industry, a paradox they have to fulfil before aging takes over their youthful appearance, excluding them from it completely as a result. The old woman suffers through a double negation, marginalized both as a female who cannot reclaim her youth in order to actively participate in the capitalist economy she lives in, and as a mother whose bond with her daughter has disintegrated, just like her corporeal body described at the beginning of their exchange.

*Good Morning, Midnight* goes beyond the symbolic in Jean Rhys's depiction of trauma, deeply rooted in the binary oppositions its heroine embodies, not only through her own experiences, but also through the interactions she witnesses as a fascinated observer of the world, who refuses to actively participate in it. With the previous exchange taking place during an unspecified time during her life, Sasha moves on to another spatial and temporal reality she only shares fragments of with the reader. As Zimring argues, her use of both a first and third-person narration, which becomes intertwined with a second-person narrative voice at one point, establishes an almost disjointed narrative that "creates dissonance with cosmetic beauty's aura of wholeness, order, and symmetry" (217). Sasha's inability to secure a financial background that would allow her to consume the luxuries of capitalism, an experience intrinsically linked to her failure within a lived modernity, makes her even more willing to comply with a commercialized world, in order to assert her presence in it as a human being who deserves to be treated as such. Marginalized because of her gender, status and problematic national identity, which remains unclear to the reader

until the very end of the novel, she inadvertently “becomes engaged in a complete transformation of the self” (Yan 1281), both internally and externally. She becomes Sasha, after having experienced life as Sophia because “it might change [her] luck” (10) and engages in an inner dialogue with herself, in order “to decide what colour [she] shall have [her] hair dyed” (52). The process of dying her hair, which has to “be bleached [first], that is to say, its own colour must be taken out of it – and then it must be dyed, that is to say, another colour must be imposed on it” (54), demonstrates her need to belong and implies that in order to do so, she has to erase the past and construct a new identity, which will conform to the discursive regimes dictating modern life. Finally settling on blond cendré, the “most difficult of colours ... [that] is even harder on the hair than dyeing it platinum blonde” (54), Sasha draws attention to the painstaking and difficult process she is willing to endure, in order to escape from the liminal space of representation she has been forced into. When she finally goes through a hair makeover, Sasha manages to achieve a brief consolation through “a very good blonde cendré ... [a] success” (60), according to the hairdresser responsible for providing her with the appropriate look, on her way towards a new identity; after the process is done, Sasha “had expected to think about this damned hair of [hers] without any let-up for days” (61), but she soon forgets all about it on her way to Montparnasse, another location at the center of the metropolis. A nonchalance descends upon her after achieving such a difficult task, but her desperate longing for change does not even last as long as it took for her to visualize it in the first place. Rhys’s novel analyzes the effects of a capitalist culture on the aging body of a woman who is trying desperately not to succumb to it, even when she explores “the possibilities and effects of purchasable femininity” (Zimring 216), oscillating between the complex duality of being present and absent within that same culture she is struggling to belong to. Sasha’s social and emotional decline comes in the form of being entirely alone in the world; neither alive nor dead, this living death she succumbs herself to makes life unbearable and leads to a disintegration of the mind that occurs much earlier than that of the body.

Aging becomes an integral part of Rhys’s fiction, contributing to the alienation and loss of identity her heroine experiences. Another such instance of Sasha coming across a foreshadowing of old age within the narrative takes place when she decides that she “[has] to go and buy a hat” (64). In search of this material good, a recurrent motif in the novel

since the old Englishwoman also “tries things on her bald head” (23), she “wanders aimlessly along a lot of back streets where there aren’t any hat shops at all ... [a]nd then a street that is alive with them” (64). Through the simplicity of this description, Rhys calls attention to yet another opposition, which conflates Sasha’s depiction of the margins as a place which lacks the excessiveness of a commercialized street, filled with products of mass consumption. Sasha goes back and forth between the two, becoming a ghostly figure that exists in the present, while being haunted by her past and consciously “occupying the space of her younger self” (Fraser 502) as a result; walking through the streets she frequented in a past life, she is looking for what used to be “a good hat shop in the Rue Vavin ... [which] doesn’t exist anymore” (64).

Standing outside the first hat shop she encounters, Sasha observes a woman with hair that is “half-dyed, half-grey, [and] very disheveled” (64), making faces in the mirror while trying on hat after hat. Her dissatisfaction is evident in her “hungry, despairing, hopeful, quite crazy” (64) expression, which is juxtaposed to the pleasure usually associated with participating in a capitalist economy through such an exchange and acquiring, in turn, a new material good. The state of the woman’s hair, which betrays her age and functions as another contradiction within the narrative, emphasizes her need to survive while simultaneously negating it. Even though she is willing to invest in the potentiality of transforming her external appearance through the purchase of a new hat, as a means of becoming desirable enough within the context of a male dominated world, the woman’s half-dyed and half-grey hair once again places a female character Sasha has not personally met in a state of in-betweeness that reflects her own state of unbelonging and displacement. Is Sasha “watching [herself] as [she] shall become ... [i]n five years’ time, in six years’ time, shall [she] be like that?” (64) reflected on the woman trying to console herself by acquiring more material goods, spending more money as a result and still failing to fit in? Once again, Rhys imposes her own social views on the mechanics of consumerism, which has turned women into commodities, raising the question of the female existence as such and whether it will ever truly be enough for society’s standards of beauty. The desperate reflection of an alienated self, who is trying frantically to find ways to belong in a world “where youth and beauty are the essence” (Nebeker 98), disrupts

society's conventional picture of femininity and evokes the inner dislocation women are subjected to while trying to fully achieve it.

In the place of the “cruel-eyed daughter [who] causes the collapse of her old mother by denying a continuity between them” (Gardiner 239), society becomes personified through “the other one, the smug, white, fat, black-haired one who is offering the hats with a calm, mocking expression” (64), the saleswoman. Faced with yet another cruel treatment of an old woman by a seemingly younger one, Sasha presents herself with a choice between the two and refuses to conform to the superficiality of a patriarchal paradigm, which ascribes the qualities of “mannequins displayed in department store windows” (Yan 1281) on female subjectivities. This particular exchange negatively depicts those responsible for either overseeing or implementing the external changes women are constantly in search of, for the purpose of increasing others' perception of their desirability and attractiveness. Usually female, young and impressionable, those working at department stores are charged with upholding specific standards of beauty, glorified as a representation of the ideal female corporeality and prioritizing the superficiality of external appearances, while completely disregarding emotional competency, as well as personal accomplishments; this “devil with a damned soul” (64) mocking an aging woman brings Sasha's empathy to the forefront, since the way she treated the old Englishwoman while working at a fashion store herself was respectful of her age and understanding of her circumstances. Thus, we could argue that both women have fallen victim to the system of oppositions society has split humanity into, the old woman trying on the hats for her inability to conform to an ingrained definition of beauty and the young saleswoman for her mission to stay true to it, especially where other women are concerned. Through Sasha, Jean Rhys reshapes our perception of society as a whole and we are forced to “look past the awful bitterness of exclusion and defeat to a vision of sympathetic understanding and knowledge in [her heroine's] world of meagre opportunities and easy despair” (Staley 99).

#### 4. “Where youth? No find her:” Liberation, Embodiment and the Performative in Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven

Everything emotional in America becomes a mere show and make-believe. Americans are trained to invest money, are said to take even desperate chances on that, yet never do they invest [in] beauty nor take desperate chances on that. With money they try to buy beauty—after it has died—famishing—with grimace. Beauty is ever dead in America.

Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven in *The Little Review*

Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven used the body as a medium through which her art could be exposed to the world, turning the corporeality of being into a spectacle in order to challenge the bourgeoisie’s notions of an ideal, feminine beauty. Best known for her controversial performances, she reappropriated herself as a subject whose agency was not determined by the binary oppositions that were enforced on the understanding of gender relations. Negated through her portrayal of our “constructed performative relationship to each other as binary opposites” (Harding 43) these gendered perceptions of social conventions established a new poetics of representation that reclaimed women’s control over their own bodies and subsequently, their own identities. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the ways through which the Baroness reverses the socially constructed mechanism confronting female sentimentality with male aggressiveness, thus liberating women from the stereotypical submissive role they have been placed in by men throughout the centuries. By reclaiming the sexuality of the female body, deobjectifying it in the process, she exposes the limitations of the avant-garde in adequately representing female subjectivities. This poses the important question of whether the authorial male gaze which functions as the spectator and the sentimental female receiver of the gaze that takes on the role of the spectacle are oppositional constructions of gender, or just two sides of the same coin. The Baroness displaces the potentiality of both by transforming herself into an unexpected centerpiece, not constructed by a man’s perspective or objectified through it.



Figure 1, *Body Sweats 15*

In various photographs, the Baroness appears almost androgynous in a way that collapses the boundaries of gender altogether and manages to assign a sense of agency to her own corporeality. What is arguably one of the most remarkable photographs of the Baroness was taken in 1922 and it depicts her almost naked form standing next to Claude McKay (figure 1). Described by Adam McKible as a constellation of people who “differed radically in practice” (57), since McKay advocated for the conventional poetic forms he also practiced in his work and Elsa was notorious for dismissing them, they embody modernism by providing the visual image of a disruptive reality in this striking masterpiece of queer subjectivity. Both marginalized figures within the avant-garde scene, Elsa and McKay subvert the social polarizations of gender and race by being photographed together:

McKay is standing with his feet firmly planted on the ground, while Elsa's cocky expression asserts the sexual liberation of her body, also reflected on her external appearance and ostentatious headpiece, which we can assume to be assembled from found objects and debris. On the contrary McKay is wearing a very long dress which covers him from top to bottom and the pearls around his face provide him with an almost feminine quality that contradicts traditional expectations of asserting male authority. In that manner, the Baroness manages to deconstruct another binary, the one established between the artist and his muse; an artist in her own right, Elsa exhibits her own body as a work of art, thus occupying the role of both. Oscillating between the two roles she assigned to herself, she assembles experiences and sounds, found objects and debris, in order to create a new version of modernity that places the raw self at its center, whether male or female. In a literary piece dedicated to the Baroness, Eliza Jane Reilly suggests that "[b]y allowing unrestricted access to her nude form, and by her active involvement in the way it was displayed and decorated, she dislocated the male privilege from the artist-model, or subject-object relationship" (30). The Baroness's anti-aestheticism subverts the expectations of femininity ascribed on the female body and its external appearance within a social, as well as a commercial setting. By forcefully asserting herself into the urban space as both the spectacle that is being observed by others and the spectator that observes them in return, Elsa's control over the way she exposed her own naked form was quite provocative. Her outlook on anti-consumerism became liberating in a way that repulsed those who observed it and received astonished and embarrassed reactions that contradicted the male to female dynamics inherent in society at the beginning of the twentieth century, which are still quite relevant to a contemporary audience; this back and forth between the subject and object of observation creates a third space for the marginality of the self to be expressed through, a "conflation of image and action in a *lived* Dada, in its most extreme manifestations" (Jones 166) that cannot be fully contained.

Recognized and celebrated for her contribution to the avant-garde decades after her death in 1927, a groundbreaking collection of her poems titled *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven* (2011) was published posthumously by her long time biographer Irene Gammel, in collaboration with academic scholar Suzanne Zelazo, depicting how she "lived and died by the art that was in and of

her, a Dada experiment of her own making” (246). By focusing on the emancipatory potential of her work, I argue that the Baroness’s refusal to comply with the aestheticizing capitalist narratives taking over the twentieth century is reflected on the various ways she deconstructs the formal structures of city life. In the “rushing – crushing – exhilarating time of universal revel” (Freitag-Loringhoven 116) of her poem “Tailend of Mistake: America,” she engages her audience in a back and forth between a consumerist culture embraced by the individual living in the metropolis and takes things a step further by becoming the embodiment of this exchange. By transforming herself into a spectacle of abjection, she contributes to the “larger systems of commodity exchange and symbolic meaning that characterized and assigned value to life in a machine-age New York” (Jones 146). The prevalent ambiguity of her poems becomes an invitation for the reader’s active participation, since interpreting them is solely based on an individual’s lived experience of the metropolis. An “omnipotency – unerring – unmasking consumptive – assumptive, / ‘softie Susie’s’ impotence” (Freitag Loringhoven 116) paralyzes America, exposing it as a pretentious nation of excess and describing its progress as both “illusory and contradictory” (Gammel 280). The critique her poetry still generates within a contemporary conceptual framework does not necessarily concern the means of production as such, but how products are exploited by brand-centric means of shaping a unified urban, if not corporeal, way of being. By exposing the new industrialism prevalent at the time as a degenerating force that affects those who cannot keep up with it, she contrasts the sterile spaces of production with the wasteland of excess that is an inevitable result of consumption; as a result, she manages to redefine the discourses of capitalism that frame life in an urban setting through the manipulation of their very structure. Her ready-to-wear ready-mades become “*irrational machines*, pointing to the irrationality of technological processes that never obtain the clean efficiency promised by Americanism” (Jones 126).

In her cultural biography titled *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity* (2003), Irene Gammel suggests that while being in an optimistic emotional state, Elsa wrote herself a poem to celebrate her fiftieth birthday. A poem published for the first time after her death and written sometime in 1924, “Spring in Middle,” recounts her own personal experience of turning fifty in a celebratory manner that can be juxtaposed to both Rhys and Loy’s narratives of abjection. More optimistic in her deconstruction of aging,

Elsa depicts it as a process she associates with rebirth, since it takes place “early in spring” (line 2):

*I am 50.*

This early in spring — I notice my shouldersweat  
 Of such rife — penetrating — rank — frank redolence —  
 As advanced cadaver — fresh myrrhstuffed  
 Mummy let’s off — maybe.  
 (Surmise)

*Address to sun.*

Older one gets —  
 Younger —  
 Longer one climbs  
 Stronger —  
 Lighter —  
 Elevated — — —  
 Is  
 Law.

For  
 Spring —  
 Toetips  
 Hum!

Walk I must —  
 To not stumble —  
 Cautious!

Into

Treetop —  
 Presently —  
 High  
 I  
 Fly! (93)

Her allusion to spring in particular, points towards a spiritual renewal that does not disregard the “penetrating—rank—frank redolence—” (line 3) of a disintegrating body, but still embraces the transience of human existence. Elsa’s construction of a hybridized language alludes to Mina Loy’s use of uncommon words and functions as another assemblage of what Gammel describes as a “modern city creature [built] from dead pieces of language” (234). By reconfiguring the foundations of poetic form, the Baroness bravely announces her age to the world in a confessional poem that becomes an ode to old age.

After her declaration, “*I am 50*” (line 1), the Baroness associates spring with an “advanced cadaver” (line 4) and the repulsive odor a body emits through its grotesque transformation into a “[m]ummy” (line 5); with the first sentence of the poem written in italics, her age textually asserts itself by occupying the middle part of the page. This binary opposition foregrounds her deconstruction of aging in a literary context, through which the body becomes triumphant in its expendability since the “[o]lder one gets —” (line 8), the “[y]ounger —” (line 9) one becomes. Even if the external body succumbs to the inevitable process of growing old with the passing of time, the individual’s inner world remains unscathed, only becoming “[s]tronger —” (line 11) and “[l]ighter —” (line 12). Her use of these particular comparative adjectives establishes a comparison between a young version of herself that belongs to the past, and the older version she is celebrating in the present, while writing the poem itself; by making her audience aware that she had written “Spring in Middle” when she turned fifty years old, Elsa draws attention to the conventions of her medium and transfers the violent juxtapositions generated by her fluid identity into a fixed state of being that is transferred onto the page. The duality of the self is prevalent once again, since the past tries to overshadow the present and Elsa’s poem merges the two by

celebrating her life's journey which took place in the past and as a result, has led her to the present.



Figure 2, *Body Sweats* 95

The performative language Elsa represents through her sound poetry encourages her own self and the readers towards an elevated reality that breaks language apart, slashing sentences in half and creating a collage of words that engender a triumphant narrative of potentiality that is written in the first person. “Walk I must –/[t]o not stumble –/[c]autious!/[i]nto/[t]reetop –/[p]resently –/[h]igh/i/[f]ly!” (lines 20-28) she exclaims at the end, taking back the narrative as both the voice of the poem and its creator; her use of the “I/eye” makes the context of “Spring in Middle” even more personal, since she identifies with the speaker as an authorial presence and she becomes, by extension, the poem’s addressee. On the basis of my analysis, this also emphasizes how aware Elsa was of her aging body at a time when it was as unacceptable for a woman to write about one, as it was for her to become one; we could suggest that the Baroness’s own Baedeker guides

us through a process of becoming that disrupts the notion of the margin by reconfiguring the location of the urban setting as the center of language and modernity.

Writing as if performing to an audience, Elsa's unconventional use of punctuation emphasizes the materiality of her poetics disregards syntax and grammatical structures in favor of hyphens, dashes and sentences in italics, which start with a capital letter more often than not. The dashes she ambiguously places throughout the poem suggest a continuity that determines how each following line is arranged in this fragmented world she is trying to keep tightly in place. Much like her assemblages, she links together fragments of language and manages to capture the essence of the corporeal body textually, in order to deobjectify it. No longer constrained by the limitations of conventional poetic form, the female body takes over the narrative through the poem's continuous embrace of old age and flies towards its liberation; Elsa's refusal to conform within a linguistic framework functions as a symbolic, textual emancipation of her physical form and inner consciousness. The performativity of Elsa's sound poetry, beautifully described by Gammel and Zelazo in the introduction to *Body Sweats* as "regularly leap[ing] off the page to become a three-dimensional installation – a living, breathing Dada performance stunt" (13), transgresses space and time through the language of her body and its visual depiction on the page. The photograph "Spring in Middle" alludes to (figure 2), taken almost a decade before its publication, negates the materialistic aspects of modernity by placing the aging body at the center of an urban setting, usually associated with youthfulness and reproduction. Once again, the Baroness is wearing a tantalizing outfit, paired with a perplexing headpiece that evokes the posture of a bird ready to fly high, much like she wishes to do in the poem; her narrative voice is exclamatory in the poem, reflecting her expression in this dream-like state the photograph portrays and merging the visual with the textual in the process. The grotesque mortality of the external self the Baroness presents in the poem through the "frank redolence" (line 3) of the decaying body transgresses the boundaries of industrialism as an organic entity. Her work persistently "embraces motion as life" (Gammel 335) and rejects the idea of the body as an endlessly operating system, a machine, challenging Victorian notions of beauty in the process. Both the visual and the textual imagery she has provided us with, I argue, create the impression of an imposing, disjointed rhythm that stages the irrationality of a post-war period by depicting the unruly

image of the deteriorating female body's transgressive properties, as an excessive form of resistance.

Articulating the aging body through “a profusion of meanings that run through it in every direction” (Cixous 885), another one of her poems titled “Circle” and published in 1923 embraces the process of aging through the Baroness's disregard of youth and the social polarizations derived from it within a patriarchal society. An “important and versatile symbol for Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven” (346) as Gammel and Zelazo suggest in *Body Sweats*, the circle is reflected on the title, both as a signifier pointing towards the concept it refers to and as the actual sign visually represented by the circular placement of the word itself on the page. Prevalent in her work throughout the years, the circle in this case points towards the potentiality of the poem's conceptual framework, which generates a perpetual movement and leaves it open to interpretation:

Where youth?  
 No find her.  
 Instead  
 Find  
 What grew  
 Myself.  
 Longing?  
 Death hilarity  
 Sphinx  
 Inexorable.  
 Behind  
 Serpent  
 I wait  
 Round. (Freytag-Loringhoven 246)

An experimental poem, “Circle” poses a significant question from its very first sentence: “Where youth?” (line 1); directly addressing youth and engaging with it as a personified entity points towards the binary oppositions determining an individual's worth within the structures of society, namely age and gender. The following sentence of the poem, “[n]o

find her” (line 2), suggests Elsa’s critique of the unattainable idea of a young female body, which will never be reclaimed, nor does it need to. Through an almost grammatically incomplete sentence, Elsa makes her poetry even more challenging for her audience to understand and urges women to refrain from searching for their lost female selves. A critique of youthfulness in conjunction with the corporeality of a female identity, the poem poses the question of an “unattainable and problematic ideal” (Goodspeed-Chadwick 60). Emotionally liberating in its use of the first person, since it speaks to a wider audience through the author’s identification with the speaker, “Circle” delineates the insatiable desire for one’s journey towards self-awareness; the speaker of the poem is an extension of Elsa, emphasizing the fluidity of her movement towards old age in an organic and natural manner. The Baroness moves on from refusing to engage in a process of seeking “youth” towards encouraging herself, as well as the reader to “[i]nstead//[f]ind//[w]hat grew//[m]yself” (lines 3-6). She acknowledges the value of the female body in this autobiographical depiction of lived experience, which becomes a visual image of her own self as both the poet and the subject of her poetry, thus deconstructing the subject/object binary.

The significance of the circle as a symbol of repetition becomes even more relevant in my analysis of the poem, since the process of economic exchange is subverted through “a text that pivots on returning in a cyclical way to its themes” (Goodspeed-Chadwick 59); a female artist marginalized for her eccentricity, Elsa is trying to make ends meet in a capitalist economy of production, which reinforces consumption in circular motions the individual cannot break away from. The circle becomes an intricate part of nature with no beginning or end in sight, much like time, alluding to the cycle of life which is as eternal as it is temporal. The Baroness, who was perceived as repulsive in her aging body, transforms herself into a “Sphinx” (line 9) and negates the symbol of the circle which restricts what is placed within it by celebrating her “[i]nexorable” (line 10) female subjectivity, impossible for society to contain or limit. An otherized figure of modernist society, she ascribes a monstrous “[s]erpent” (line 12) identity to her own self, who is willing to “wait” (line 13) patiently for the repetitive motion of female liberation that is emphasized through her use of the first person. The last line of the poem, “[r]ound” (line 14), takes us back to its title and reinforces, once again, the repetitiveness of the circle,

which is literally and figuratively perpetuated by the Baroness. We could go as far as argue that through the image of the serpent and the last line of the poem, the title becomes an uroboros of sorts, an ancient symbol used by the “Greco-Roman culture ... to represent the sexual elements of eternity and existence” (Hixson 80). With the tail of the serpent representing the phallus and the mouth representing the womb, as Hixson suggests, the sexual duality Elsa embraces through her embodied poetry collapses gender binaries altogether, becoming even more androgynous in the process. A cultural critique that breaks away from the depiction of women as young and vulnerable, “Circle” embraces maturity as a process of becoming and alludes to Elsa’s repurposing of found objects. Turning the old into something she has unconventionally renewed by merging her own body with it allows her to appropriate the trauma assigned on the female corporeality and shape it into something valuable through her artistic talent. Resilient and unwilling to conform to beauty standards, she renounces youth and disregards aesthetic conventions.

The Baroness’s textual strategies and “poetics of the obscene” (2), as Yasna Bozhkova argues, explore an ongoing process of writing that is transferred onto the body and foregrounds her appropriation of both a feminine and a masculine identity through her exhibitionist approach to language. Repulsive and fascinating at the same time in her extravagant costumes made from discarded objects, the Baroness influenced a new observation of the city by depicting it as “a positive site for the other and the exile” (Parsons 9); a notion which suggests that the city itself should be perceived as an open space of becoming through her works’ endless process of exposing, acknowledging and redefining the boundaries of Dada and modernity at large, it allowed Elsa to form a connection with the streets she frequented, in order to recount her experience within an urban setting. Simultaneously occupying the role of the artist, the muse and the object of creation which results from such an exchange, Elsa’s embodied binary oppositions destabilize the very nature of modernism and language, while redefining “not only how poetry is written, but how it is read” (Gammel and Zelazo 7). During this process, Elsa poses a resonating question to her audience: How is poetry used as a way of expanding the very notion of being and becoming a self in an urban setting which consumes and is being consumed by the poetics of an embodied assemblage that inhabits the liminal space in-between?

## 5. Conclusion

The Baroness's hybrid poetry uses "words as much for their sound and pattern as for their social or personal significance" (Jones 145) and like Mina Loy, creates a kaleidoscopic vision of lived experience that merges the "two extremes of 'concept' city, the radiant utopia and the degenerate wasteland" (Parsons 9). This perception of the city as a utopia that can only be inhabited by rational beings, structured as a perfectly functioning system of traditions that rejects primitivism and the non-utilitarianism of Baudelaire's aimless wandering in order to write art and embody art, points towards Mina Loy's late Bowery poems and assemblages; Loy's artistic focus on the derelicts of the Bowery demonstrates a spatial marginality located in areas at the bottom of the social ladder and undermines a glorified perception of the metropolis, bringing its otherness to the forefront instead. Much like Elsa, Mina Loy collected trash from the streets in order to assemble her own three-dimensional constructions and according to Burke, reshape the notions of "an art whose status relied on its superiority to humbler forms of expression" (420). Both the Baroness and the Duchess, as Mina Loy became known while living in the Bowery, reconstruct the urban setting as the center of the margin. While the former becomes an object of her own creation in order to unsettle the notions of a fixed identity, appropriating art in the process, the latter critiques a system of oppression that is filtered through economic exchange and eventually leads to the loss of identity, which might or might not be possible for the individual to reclaim.

By establishing a point of contact between their works, I argue that Loy focuses on the external disintegration of the female body and its inability to withstand the effects of time, as the poems I have chosen to focus my analysis on demonstrate, and Elsa provides us with an embodied materialistic corruption that subverts the ideal perception of the female body, which she consciously objectifies; as a result, her work liberates the self in its never ending transformation towards old age. The urban landscape prevalent in their works, a quintessential part of modernity as such, brings "the psychological and the material into collusion" (Parsons 1) and constructs the marginal figure of the vagrant as a

presence that hovers between belonging and unbelonging, place and displacement within the metropolis.

Jean Rhys's heroine describes her existence in a mechanical way as an endless repetition, while also being aware of the dehumanizing manipulation she is subjected to in a consumerist culture, whereas Loy depicts the effects of old age on the female body by trying to detach herself from the experience altogether. Sasha merges the past with the present in an effort to relive the trauma she was subjected to because of her failure to conform to patriarchal conventions as an object of male representation and desire. As opposed to Elsa and Loy, Rhys's heroine provides us with a vision of modernity through others' experiences of marginalization within the urban setting, due to their status as old and female. As an authorial presence within the narrative, Rhys critiques stereotypical perceptions of femininity, which reproduce consumption in an endless cycle of repetition the individual cannot escape from; the only alternative to being shunned from the urban setting and a life that is deemed successful enough to capitalist standards is to conform to them. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys exposes the sole purpose of consuming, which was never meant to provide us with a means to an end, namely a happier life. On the contrary, producing detaches us from the process of experiencing the emotional satisfaction of being in relation to the objects we consume, since the constant increase of materialistic needs forces us to repeatedly aim for more. Dependent on the institutions and discourses responsible for manipulating them, the women in Rhys's text function as a critique of an alienating system that is founded upon the commodification of human beings, which serve its purpose either as producers of material goods or faithful consumers.

Longing for a youthful self that cannot be reclaimed, Rhys and Loy collapse the boundaries of language and explore its potential in liberating the self from the constraints of industrialist beauty standards, while Elsa breaks them apart and reconstructs them through her textual and visual representation of the female self in its entirety; embodying the utilitarian aspects of modernity through her ready-made assemblages, she challenges modernism's aestheticizing perception of the female body. Like her female contemporaries, Mina Loy and Jean Rhys, I argue that the Baroness forcefully creates a space for her voice to be heard, both visually and textually, while being aware of her body's

evolving multiplicity through time and space. Focusing on the aging female body's dispossession, I conclude my analysis with a quote from *Good Morning, Midnight*:

I am trying so hard to be like you. I know I don't succeed, but look how hard I try. Three hours to choose a hat; every morning an hour and a half trying to make myself look like everybody else. Every word I say has chains round the ankles; every thought I think is weighted with heavy weights. Since I was born, hasn't every word I've said, every thought I've thought, everything I've done, been tied up, weighted, chained? And, mind you, I know that with all this I don't succeed. Or I succeed in flashes only too damned well....But think how hard I try and how seldom I dare. Think – and have a bit of pity. That is, if you ever think, you apes, which I doubt. (106)

Engaging in a dialogue with herself, Sasha's unhappy life becomes a broken mirror whose fragments reflect the truth of her harsh reality, as a middle-aged woman who has been rejected by society. Aware of her surroundings and immersed in her own imaginary world at the same time, she delivers a scathing critique of the linguistic discourse she has chosen to liberate herself through, following in the footsteps of the Baroness and leaving behind traces of this potential for liberation the excerpt suggests for Mina Loy and every woman coming after her!

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## Περίληψη

Σκοπός αυτής της διατριβής είναι να ακολουθήσει ένα χρονοδιάγραμμα της γυναικείας περιθωριοποίησης από τα μέσα του εικοστού αιώνα μέχρι και τις αρχές του, εντός της Αγγλοαμερικανικής μοντερνιστικής και πρωτοποριακής σκηνής της Νέας Υόρκης. Εστιάζοντας στα έργα της Mina Loy, της Jean Rhys και της Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven κατά τη διάρκεια των τελευταίων χρόνων της ζωής και της καριέρας τους, στόχος μου είναι να εξετάσω τη μοναχική γυναικεία φιγούρα του εικοστού αιώνα που απεικονίζεται στο έργο τους, η οποία βιώνει την αποξένωση λόγω της κατακερματισμένης νεότητάς της. Η μεταγενέστερη ποίηση της Loy, καθώς και το *Good Morning, Midnight* της Rhys (1939) απεικονίζουν το αποτυχημένο όραμα μιας ανθρώπινης εμπειρίας που δεν μπορεί να ανακτηθεί, καθιερώνοντας έτσι τις δυαδικές αντιθέσεις μεταξύ φύλου, αλλά και ηλικίας σε μια καταναλωτική κουλτούρα. Παρόλο που στο μεταγενέστερο έργο της Elsa εντοπίζονται τα ίδια μοτίβα και λειτουργούν επίσης ως κεντρικές ιδέες, η ακουστική της ποίηση αναδομεί ένα αντιπροσωπευτικό όραμα της νεωτερικότητας που αναστατώνει τις επιπτώσεις του καπιταλισμού στη φυσική υπόσταση του ατόμου. Ολοκληρώνοντας την ανάλυσή μου με τη «Μητέρα του Ντανταϊσμού,» υποστηρίζω ότι η παραστατική ποίηση της Elsa απελευθερώνει τη γυναικεία υποκειμενικότητα της Mina Loy, η οποία προσπαθεί να διατηρήσει μια νεανική εμφάνιση και ταυτόχρονα, μεταμορφώνει την ηρωίδα της Jean Rhys σε μια σεξουαλικά απελευθερωμένη ορατότητα, που δεν περιορίζεται πλέον στα πρότυπα ομορφιάς που έχει καθορίσει μια βιομηχανοποιημένη νεωτερικότητα.