

GOT TO BE REAL: *Body Sweats*
Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven
ed. by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo
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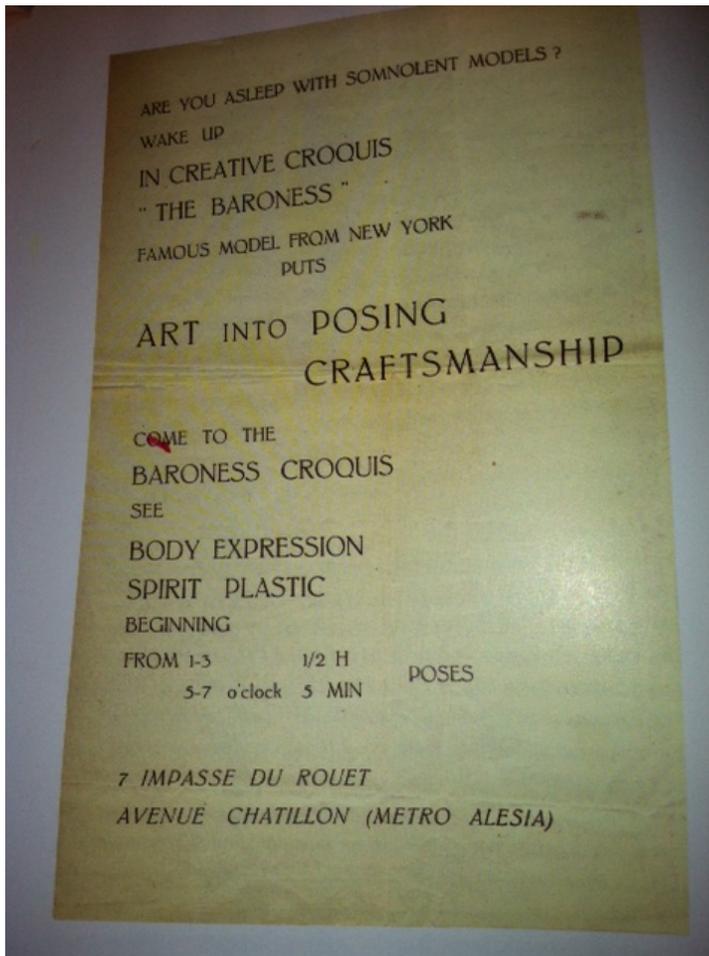
There once was a time when poets all came capitalized, when only to write was proof insufficient of one's aesthetic *veritas*, when animas was real gravitas, when one had to, like the field primordial, fairly ooze with self-generation. That time, my piglets, is today. Alongside the sterile clucks over the crowd-sourced, and the batten on the *autre donnée*, there is a cry for poet-authenticity like nobody's business. And in the mirrored halls of SOULS NOT! FOR! SALE!, there is no portrait that hangs so heavy as the one that wears the crown:

Baroness Elsa Von Freytag-Loringhoven.



She was queen of Dada, siren of the Surreal. She made Pound look merely Poundian, Barnes slightly soppy, and Duchamp, a thin man prone to bon mots. Graced and afflicted in equal measure with some *à la* mode of major order disorder, the Baroness (as the editors of *Body Sweats* and I, and now you, think of her) lived life *sehr* large as matter of course, by way of largesse. Lover of Duchamp ("The Baroness is not a futurist. She is the

future.”); subject of Pound (“*the Baroness*” / *von Freytag etc. sd/several true things / in the old days*, “Canto 95”), compatriot of Barnes (“a citizen of terror, a contemporary without a country”), pet of Heap (“The Baroness is the first American Dada.”), the Baroness was a work, never in, but *of* progress. Denizen of New York (v. downtown, unclear how she got there) by way of Kentucky (stranded by lover after helping him fake his suicide) by way of Dachau/Munich (architect 2nd husband) by way of Berlin (artists’ model), Baroness by way of marriage to a real royal who had the grace to have himself quickly killed in the first aerial War. The prepositional suits her, as it often, in usage, presages “much,” and the Baroness was *of much* as much as she was of anything at all. As is often the case, her irreverence was reverence itself: to the Baroness, Marcel was “M’ars” (say it and think Brit), and she wrote a poem about his orgasms (“Aphrodite to Mars”), and William Carlos Williams “W.C.” (*res ipsa*), and she did not similarly salute him. She scavenged readymades off the street, including a 1917 sculpture from a twist of plumbing pipe mounted on a miter box, that she titled *God*.ⁱ As a 1910 *New York Times* headline proclaimed of the Baroness, post-arrest in Philadelphia: “She Wore Men’s Clothes.” When, the lady could have asided, she bothered to wear anything at all.



Being a good Dadaist, she killed herself eventually, inevitably, though maybe accidentally. Snuffed out in 1927 by an old gas stove improvidently used to heat her Berlin apartment, which she selected exclusively because “it looked like a coffee pot.” It

should be noted that the Baroness had written a number of suicidal letters to Barnes around this time (she was short on funds and the winter was very long), but still, it looked like a mistake, or a joke. That is to say, “coffee” is close enough to “coffin.” *L.H.O.O.Q.*

Like her noisy life story, the Baroness’ written work was stuffed with sound and sense, mostly consensual. She wrote about sex with the endless enthusiasm of a true cocksman, connoisseur of licks and pricks, taken with both fists. Like a good woman/phallus, form followed function, as in the jiggly:

Trust me
I do agree
Madam—I firmly stand that ground
Coitus is paramount
Ab-so-lu-te-ly! (“Ah Me!” (1918-1924))

Ergo, her famous “Ejaculation” (1918-1925) was perforce short and conjugal:

I want to die—
I want to live—
Between this
Lovembrace!

For who mounts better than a paramour? And what is death but a drive born of wanting life? And love ‘em, and embrace, brace as in a pair of partridges. Similarly, her sound poetry was quite sexy, though more senseless, which is arguably the sound-sense of sexy:

Tu—
Tu-ei—
Ei—jei—ja
Arrrloch!
Nnnnnnaaaaahhhhhh
Ppppfffffphphparrrllllljüüü
Hilüüü— — —
La—
Lila
Lü
La
Mund—
Jalamund
Mei!

(excerpt from “Duet” (1921-1922))

Sex finds its tongue, tongue finds its lap: true to her German roots, the Baroness mixed her own words when ordinary English would not do,ⁱⁱ especially in the matter of physical emphasis. A random sampling: *Ringsymbolwisdom* (“Secret”); *Orgasmdashed—*

(“Perpetual motion”); *Mossrocking frolicksome it rang*— (“Bloodsoil”). The first provokes Wagner, and there is in the Baroness a similar feeling of the *leitmotif*, where all parts are woven together by way of will and orchestration. Too, throughout the Baroness’ conjugations, one sees her contemporaries, peripherally—Joyce’s *riverrun*, Barnes’ *Nightwood*, Loy’s *Stellectric signs*, like everyone everywhere always, each tatting at corners of kindred cloth.

It should be noted in exuberant voice that the book *Body Sweats, qua* book, is a beautiful thing. This is to be expected from MIT Press, publisher of art books that are pleasurable to read and stare at. When the world is a better place, and more small presses understand that a sea of cheap shining faces is as alluring as a sea of cheap shining faces, all poetry books will be pleasurable to read and stare at. For this is the stuff of poetry, now again, when image is text and text, image.ⁱⁱⁱ The printed poems are accompanied by full color reproductions of the manuscripts, so that “Tempest” (1924-1925) for e.g., appears on yellowing ledger paper, the red lines of the major columns serving as Modrian-like frames for the fountain penned poem, written, as she would write, in all capitals. The editors understand that for the artist, the medium is part of the message, and to write

Suck

Lip

Quaff

Breath

Squallashed

Skin’s

Tick

Taste

Let

Me.

Black

Hairskeins

Plunge

Rigor

Boltblanched

Cheeks

Lit

Drunk

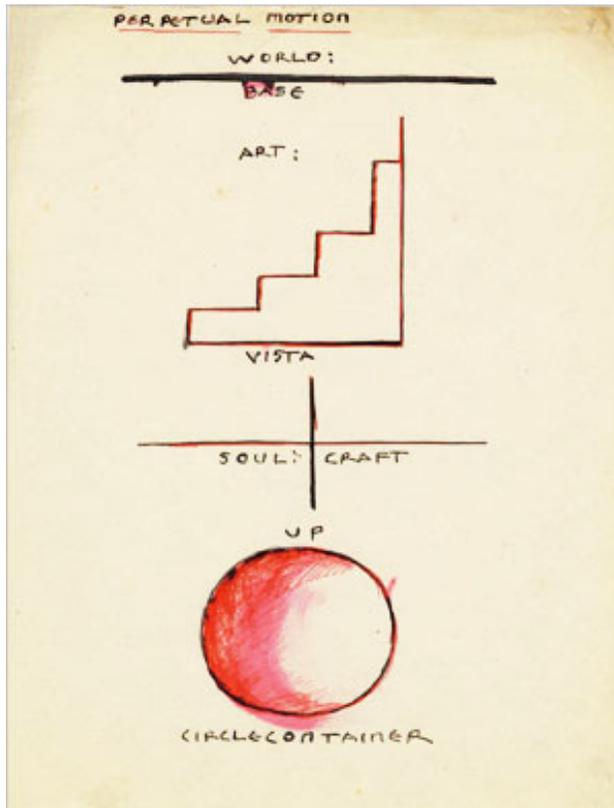
Bud.

on ledger paper is to take to account the assets of *amour* (the tick of skin, the suck of a lip, the permission wanted/given by the objet of desire) as set against its debits (the drunk). And “Adolescence” (*Ever—/ Sweet Heart--/ Tacit Enemy/ Knee/ To knee!*) is properly put: the title, centered, written in red, underneath which is also red-written “In Memoriam ~~Father~~ Pater,” the lines of the poem written in green, in two columns of two thirteen followed by one 6-line stanzas, punctuation (dashes, mostly, a period or two, and a few exclamation points) and amendments again in red, mirrors that mirrored and bifurcate time, blood-stained for girls and boys at war, green for gonads, and stricken

with the law of the father.^{iv} As then compared with “Ancestry” (1926-1927), set in matter-of-fact black on unlined white paper, the title underscored in red, which again colors the punctuation:

Dad was a corkscrew —
Bottle fair ma — — — — —
Cried she:
“Gee!
Thy spiral lofty brilliancy —
Slick”
“Let’s have a corking time”
Snapped he
Pulled cork
And
Damn his prick
I’ve got that turn in me!

These visual poetics are in addition to the poetry of her visual art (like Duchamp, often a pun, or visual-verbal balancing act, such as “Limbswish” (1917-1918), a metal spring wound around a curtain tassel, suspended by a wire mounted on a wood block) and to those poems that are imagistic *qua* images:



Not visual poetry but a poetry of the visual. Aesthetic fluency lay, not in parceling out one's practice like plots of sod, but in seeing all things as mediums, whether language, drawing, detritus, sculpture, costume, or coitus. The poems are simply another part of the practice as is the personae, just as the cranium is seen as just another dome, equally covered by a feed bag or coat of paint. In this, there was no practical, ethical, or aesthetic difference between pomp and circumstance.

Fact is, *noblesse oblige encore*. In a funny turn of events, the current notion that the work is the life is the work may be either a vestigial tale, significant insofar as it continues to wag the avant garde dog, or true with a capital "T," in the sentimental sense made popular by political poetry, made by those who would believe there's no place like home. But the Baroness saw that the whole thing, although serious as a snifter of gas, was still a hoot:

Morning in hallway.

<Starved Lady Studio Neighbor:>
"You may use the hot water—"

<Illustrator Youth Neighbor>
"Thanks—I'm going to shave—"

<Starved Lady Studio Neighbor>
"How perfectly exciting!"

(from "This Is The Life—In Greenwich Village" (1919-1922))

I have been accused of over-performativity in my own performances, as if there were a nugget of something other than the performance which ought be excavated for the sake of, well, I'm not sure exactly, but suspect it has something to do with the infra-mince between the meat of me and the sausage of the symbolic order. The Baroness is in this sense a delight in her own right. The Baroness is in this sense also an apt admonition: do not, *miene Schweine*, think for a second that what you cling to as your precious, un-snuffable slice of self is anything more or less than a well-attended gig.

*READY-TO-WEAR
AMERICAN SOUL POETRY.
(THE RIGHT KIND)*

(from "Subjoyride" (1920-1922))

Whether today's poet poses as a woman of a certain kohl-eyed sagesse or a young man scrappy and scruff as a promising dog, all are sucked into the craw of the mirror-eyed monster. Some more or less happily; the Baroness knew that there's an *i* in *Ding* (*My craziness consists in not being it / As normally under existing circumstances / I should be obliged to*, and this is *Heavy responsibility* "[My Craziness]"), and that in the realm of

pure posey, *ceci est toujours une pipe!* Fact is facts, dear stoats: we all tilt our throats to the knife. The difference is that some of us will look.

Art

Is

Shameless— —

Art

Is

Holy— —

Art:

God's

Breath— —

GOD IS SHAMELESS

In—

Holiness

Masterbrainorb

Imagination:

Truth-fixed

(“Spaciousness” (1923-1925))



ⁱ The nethers of M'ars' *Fountain*, also cr. 1917.

ⁱⁱ And wrote a poem about it, in red, on a bookmark-sized strip of paper: “[I hate hate]:

*I hate hate
Hate something
About German
Sound—words
That “longoutdrawness—“*

— — —
— — —

Complete with aside, written on its side:

Other side

English
I translated it from
German into English—
It is more beautifull
English! Though words
are as good as identi
cal!

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.scholarlyediting.org/2012/editions/baroness/intro.baroness.html> for practical application thereof.

^{iv} Anecdote by Margaret Anderson: the Baroness “shaved her head. Next she lacquered it a high vermilion. Then she stole the crepe from the door of a house of mourning and made a dress out of it. Later, upon arriving at the Little Review offices, she took off the crepe. ‘I’m better when I’m nude,’ she said.” Who isn’t?