

“Once rebuffed by William Carlos Williams and banished from Rutherford, exiled to Europe, where she lived in abject poverty and died, the iconoclastic Baroness, Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, has been brought to life by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo. An informative introduction for newcomers, a detailed set of notes on her poems for scholars, a generous presentation of her poetry, and, best of all, manuscript reproductions of her distinctively printed poems rescued from various archives—what a marvelous gathering at last for the magnificent Baroness, who deserves no less from all her admirers.”

—**Dickran Tashjian**, Professor Emeritus of Art History, University of California, Irvine, author of *A Boatload of Madmen: Surrealism and the American Avant-Garde, 1920-1950*

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BODY SWEATS
The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven
Edited by Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo

She was “the first American Dada,” as a New York magazine editor dubbed her—a neurasthenic, kleptomaniac, man-chasing proto-punk of flamboyant appearance, as well as the author of delirious verse. She was Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, better known as Baroness Elsa, an agent provocateur within New York’s modernist revolution. Her outrageous character set an example that has filtered through the 20th and 21st centuries and is visible in Björk, Madonna, and Lady Gaga.

Less attention has been focused on Baroness Elsa’s poetry—only 31 of her poems appeared during her lifetime, most in ephemeral publications. This neglect is rectified by *Body Sweats: The Uncensored Writings of Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven*. Appearing more than a century after her arrival in New York, it is the first major anthology of her sensuous, daring poems to be published in the U.S. As the title alludes, her principal poetic muse was her own body, and in her poems the Baroness muses on the graphic details of ejaculation, orgasm, and oral sex. When she tired of traditional words, she created new ones such as “phalluspistol,” “spinsterlollipop,” or “kissambushed,” trying on words as she did her own ultra-modern fashion designs.

The Baroness’s poems—many available for the first time—reveal the impressive range of her style: long and condensed, cryptic and funny, austere and typographically playful, sonic and visual. Many of these poems are themselves art objects, written and decorated in red and green ink on golden paper, and adorned with her sketches and diagrams.

Just a few years before her untimely and enigmatic death in 1927, Freytag-Loringhoven had tried to ready her poetic legacy for an American publisher. In a suicidal letter to her friend, editor, and agent Djuna Barnes, the Baroness talked urgently about her hopes for “my book of Poetry”—a project left uncompleted at her death. It took two expert editors—Irene Gammel, author of the biography *Baroness Elsa* (MIT Press, 2002) and poet and scholar Suzanne Zelazo—to complete the daunting task left unfinished for many decades. They have furnished a critical introduction with new insight into major poems, the historical context, and the Baroness’s colorful biography, as well as an updated chronology. Generously illustrated with 20 color plates, the book features 75 photographs, art works, typescripts, and manuscripts, many of them with autograph annotations and decorations, and many never before published. *Body Sweats* presents a fresh view of an inimitable yet underappreciated artistic figure.

About the Editors

Irene Gammel is Canada Research Chair in Modern Literature and Culture at Ryerson University, Toronto, where she directs the Modern Literature and Culture Research Centre. She is the author of *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity* (MIT Press). **Suzanne Zelazo** is a postdoctoral fellow at the Modern Literature and Culture Research Centre.

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Advance praise for *Body Sweats*:

“*Body Sweats* remaps the frontiers of modernism. It allows us to see, for the first time, just how radical Freytag-Loringhoven was: her linguistic fearlessness puts her in the same league as Mina Loy, Gertrude Stein, and Abraham Lincoln-Gillespie. These poems also offer a challenge to contemporary writers; a century on, her work is still as extreme as anything being published today.”

—**Craig Dworkin**, Professor of English, University of Utah

“The Baroness’s legendary but barely glimpsed ‘omnipulsespun’ oeuvre takes its place here as the most vital recovery of a neglected modernist since Mina Loy. Her panoramic ‘arabesque grotesque’ of sex poems, city poems, nature poems, sound poems, and an astonishingly rich visual portfolio is given an ingenious arrangement by the scrupulous editors, along with a poignant and sensible introduction. The Dada queen prankster comes to life at long last in all her ‘stuttering incandescence.’”

—**Jed Rasula**, Helen S. Lanier Distinguished Professor of English, University of Georgia, author of *Modernism and Poetic Inspiration: The Shadow Mouth*