

# **Make It New?**

## **Modernism, Fashion and Transatlantic Modernity**

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I, Sophie Oliver, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

*Signed:*

*Date:*

## Abstract

This thesis explores the role of fashion in the work and publication history of three female modernists: Djuna Barnes (1892–1982), Jean Rhys (1890–1979) and Mina Loy (1882–1966). It proposes that to think about fashion was to critically reflect on the position of women in modernity and on the business of being an artist. Fashion emerges from interpretation of their published writing, illustration, archives and correspondence, and in relation to the reception of their work, as an expression of affiliations and of their positions in aesthetic traditions, networks and systems of value.

These issues are situated in the context of the relay of modernity from Paris, ‘capital of the nineteenth century’, to America, with fashion articulating the relationship between art and industry, national allegiances and – temporally – obsolescence, novelty, and cycles of return and renewal. The study ultimately asserts that these women’s work was subject to the same logic of fashion.

Chapter 1 argues that Djuna Barnes’s work of the 1910s represents through fashion a translation of nineteenth-century Parisian modernity in the context of early twentieth-century New York. The second part presents the first study of Barnes’s writing for *Charm*, suggesting that her contributions can be read in the light of this fashion magazine’s own transatlantic mediations.

Chapter 2 argues that Jean Rhys’s affiliations, and those of her characters, are articulated through fashion as restless negotiations between centuries and between such poles as America and Paris, standardisation and distinction, and high and popular cultures. The second part proposes that Rhys’s public reputation in the 1960s and 1970s drew on the same fashion discourses that were apparent in her work.

Chapter 3 reprises the theme of reputation, in the late work of Mina Loy. Her novel *Insel*, employment by the Julien Levy Gallery, and poetic series ‘Compensations of Poverty’ are read as fashion-conscious confrontations with her declining renown in the context of a transatlantic shift in cultural authority. In the second part, the post-war revival of Loy’s reputation is assessed in light of her own literary take on the value of her work.

The Afterword initiates some broader observations implied by the thesis’s arguments, namely that – in line with the self-consuming and restless logic of fashion – the place of the modernist scholar is as unstable and contingent as that of her objects of study.

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# Introduction

*'[T]hose who create things do not need adventure but they do need romance they need that something that is not for them stays where it is and that they can know that it is there where it is.'*

– Gertrude Stein, 'An American and France' (1940b: 62)

*'The decay of cathedrals  
is efflorescent  
through the phenomenal  
growth of movie houses  
whose catholicity is  
progress since  
destruction and creation  
are simultaneous'*

– William Carlos Williams, *Spring and All* (1951: 266–67)

*'The face of modernity itself blasts us with its immemorial gaze.'*

– Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (2002: 23)

## **MAKE IT NEW?**

Gertrude Stein's *Paris, France* (1940), a wartime defence of her adopted country, an attempt to explain why 'Paris was where the twentieth century was' and to assert that she herself was there, characteristically repeats simple keywords of few syllables. One of them is 'fashion'. Her argument is that 'everybody went' to Paris 'in 1900' because:

[i]t was in Paris that the fashions were made, and it is always in the great moments when everything changes that fashions are import-

ant, because they make something go up in the air or go down or go around that has nothing to do with anything (11).

Stein recognised that Paris sanctioned modernity, and that its seat as the world centre of fashion – itself a privileged expression of the modern – was no small part of its consecrating power. She saw, too, that there was something unstable about fashion, something arbitrary and irrational that was part of its modernity. In fact, Stein's premature retrospection on 'the twentieth century' seems both a consecration (of modernism and her place in it) and an overly hopeful bid to forestall the inevitable: the passing relevance of that modernism, its own ephemerality as a fashion. Indeed, Stein wrote *Paris, France* at a moment when many artists and writers had fled France and returned to or settled in the United States, just one sign that European modernism was fatally endangered and that America might be its new permanent home. Perhaps it is possible to say that her book acknowledged that fact all along, for if Paris was the place where the twentieth century was made, it was being made by an American like Stein. 'Americanism is born in me', she had already announced elsewhere (cited Bradbury 1995: 254).

In this thesis, I explore the work and publication history of three other female modernists for whom fashion was a preoccupation: Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys and Mina Loy. Looking at their writing and its reception in relation to fashion and transatlantic contact, specifically between America and Paris, their home city at various times and the subject or background of much of their work, I propose that to think about fashion was, for them, to think about the business of writing. Fashion was a means of critically and imaginatively reflecting on modernity, and often on the position of women in modernity. But alongside or even out of this, fashion emerges in their work – and in relation to the dissemination of their work – as an expression of their own experiences, desires, fears, fragility and fortitude as writers, their artistic affiliations and their positions in artistic traditions, networks and systems of value.<sup>1</sup>

Like Stein, these three women often associated fashion with Paris. But in the period in which they were writing, two decades after Stein's '1900', the

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<sup>1</sup> This approach is indebted to Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace's Bourdieusian *Women Artists and Writers: Modernist (Im)positionings* (1994), which sought to understand how female modernists 'position[ed] themselves', how they were 'positioned in relation to the avant-garde, alternate women's communities, and the geographical centres or peripheries of modernist production' (1), and how 'gender influences and informs' the construction of modernism as a field (2). Often my own lens is gender, but more strictly it is fashion (not an ungendered lens, of course), specifically how the discourse of fashion enabled my authors and others to articulate this process of positioning and construction.

city was no longer so securely the capital of fashion – or letters – that it had been since the mid-eighteenth century. This thesis addresses modernism written in the context of and in response to a tangible shift of cultural and economic authority from Europe to the United States. The ‘new’ of my title is, in one sense, the New World, or at least the North American part of it, which by 1925 was a fully functioning consumer society, the largest importer of Paris fashion (and thus its most significant arbiter), and home to an increasing number of native (and nativist) artistic and literary movements. The work that I discuss here does more than merely reflect these changes in the wider cultural and social fields. I argue that Barnes, Rhys and Loy understood and imagined the relationship between Paris and the United States as relevant to their own position in those fields, as women and as writers. Fashion was a brilliantly productive trope for doing so, not least because it is both art and commerce – the mythological poles represented by Europe and America. Fashion helped these women write about cultural hierarchies and value, in an era when consumer culture, associated in the popular imagination with the United States, was becoming firmly rooted and visibly dominant – a development perceived by some artists and writers as a threat, by others as an opportunity to be creatively negotiated. The three subjects of this thesis adopt both positions, often in ways that are hard to untangle and which suggest the full imbrication of modernism and mass culture, even as the one attempts to outwit its other.

They also look to fashion to articulate the very nature of shifting cultural phenomena. These geographic relays and temporal developments – as Europe gives way to the United States; as art has more and more in common with the commodity – are understood by these authors as the logic of fashion: the passing of trends; out with the old and in with the new (which might only repeat the old); the drive of commodification. More dramatically for them, they realise that women’s bodies and their own work are subject to fashion, or rather to its implicit shadow: obsolescence. This awareness, explored here through fashion tropes – from clothes, accessories, make-up, shopping, modelling and dressmaking to celebrity and reputation-building – is the occasion for pessimism but also for modernist irony and the assertion, therefore, of claims on the modern. Thus, to think through fashion is both to assert and to question Ezra Pound’s well-worn and misappropriated phrase ‘make it new’. I invoke it here with uncertainty to imply that thinking through fashion involves a critical assessment of modernism and its commonly assumed emphasis on innovation, and of male-centred narratives of



the movement.<sup>2</sup> But I also wear it self-consciously as a cliché of modernism in recognition of the fact that my argument ultimately demands the critic's work be considered in terms of fashion, a vexing idea on which I focus in my Afterword.

#### **FASHION, THE 'RESTLESS IMAGE'**

As this outline of the thesis suggests, its argument is bound up with the *logic* of fashion – the ways in which fashion operates, in an abstract sense but also in particular circumstances. The fashion historian Christopher Breward defines fashion as 'clothing designed primarily for its expressive and decorative qualities, related closely to the current short-term dictates of the market, rather than for work or ceremonial functions' (1995: 5). The 'expressive and decorative qualities' of clothing appealed to my authors (as analogies for their own artistic work or in relation to self-fashioning, for example), but the thrust of my argument is shaped according to the temporal and competitive aspects of fashion specifically – according, that is, to its market-driven features.<sup>3</sup> As a result, while there are examples of outfits in what follows and occasionally some attention to the materials of clothes, this thesis is concerned with items of dress predominantly as literary representatives of fashion's dynamic or system. It does not therefore draw on recent work in material culture studies or thing theory, to focus on clothes as objects in texts.<sup>4</sup> Rather, fashion appears, in my readings of Barnes, Rhys and Loy and of their publication histories, as an index of instability and transformation, of change and repetition, of value and its obverse. These issues were understood and represented by my authors in specific historical circumstances, which I explore, but they were also comprehended as general features of the fashion system or of what René König calls 'fashion-oriented behaviour' (1973: 46). As we will see, this move from the particular to the abstract

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<sup>2</sup> See Michael North's 2013 history of the new on the origins of Pound's adopted phrase in the *Da Xue* (Ta Hio), a book of Confucian philosophy, where it had more emphasis on renovation. North also reminds us that 'To innovate is, in Latin at any rate, to renew or to reform, not to start over afresh, though it has acquired in English usage the implication of introducing something new to a particular environment' (3). And, appropriately enough, that Pound's translation – which appeared in his work only in 1928, well after the 'major works of modernist art and literature' (169) – conforms to one of two models of novelty 'already circumscribed by history' (10). North argues that the new is always in debt to the past, and it is this, in fact, that 'makes the slogan exemplary of the larger modernist project' (169). And yet, see Rasula 2011 for an overwhelming catalogue of modernists heralding 'the new' as pure innovation in art and society.

<sup>3</sup> See also Elizabeth Wilson's definition: 'Fashion is dress in which the key feature is rapid and continual changing of styles' (2011: 3).

<sup>4</sup> As Marshik 2016 does, for example. This is not to say that material culture does not take into account the logic of fashion: see, for instance, Appadurai 1997: 34–38.

(from the ‘contingent’ to the ‘universal’ as Baudelaire had it in his own writing on fashion) is a hallmark of fashion and, as a result, of thinking through fashion. One way of explaining this lies in König’s description of the ‘all-embracing’ force of fashion, in which ‘the deviation from the hitherto observed and binding custom becomes as much a law as the regular behaviour’ (1973: 47, 45). Historical specificity gives way to abstract rules – particular deviations are eventually subsumed into the ‘system’. In this thesis, I explore the ways in which Barnes, Rhys and Loy used fashion and ‘fashion-oriented behaviour’ to represent and reimagine their own historical moments in relation to a more abstract logic of change and repetition, of differentiation and anonymity.

Fashion is a temporal phenomenon and a commodity: it is based on incremental changes to form according to market forces, changes that usually repeat or modify older forms. Historically speaking, this recycling phenomenon increased markedly in the late twentieth century (Breward 1995: 194), but it has been a constant feature of fashion. As the writer Karl Gutzkow explained in his ‘Fashion and the Modern’ of 1846: ‘The modern does not reject the old, but rather either moulds it according to its own taste, or drives it to an extreme where it becomes comical, or refines it in some other manner’ (197–98). Or, to stress the eternal aspect of this recurrent renewal, this is *Vogue* seventy years later:

That old saw, ‘Keep a frock seven years and it will be modish again’, is in general, true, though, owing to the craftiness of fashion purveyors, a vogue never returns in quite its old aspect, but with the irresistible appeal of novelty to capture susceptible hearts. (‘The Wheel of Fashion’ 1915: 170)

It is generally agreed that the first significant period of such fast-paced (and often arbitrary) change – the birth of something like a fashion system proper – was the mid-fourteenth century, with the rise of mercantile capitalism in European cities. From this point, fashion, as a means of differentiation (which Breward thinks of in terms of class, age, gender, sexuality and location rather than the emulation of social superiors, an older concept in the critical chronology), becomes a fundamental ‘medium for expressing social change and cultural value’ (Breward 1995: 183, 38). The other side of this emphasis on value and status were, of course, the disparities that began to arise between people and groups.

In a sense that is key to my thesis, fashion is about highly unstable and relative positioning. By dressing fashionably we say: I am *this* and not *that*; I am *different* from or the *same* as you; this is *in* and that is *out*. The terms of

these oppositions operate relationally or even dialectically. To distinguish yourself by claiming to be 'this' is often to align yourself with all the others who have made a similar claim. To announce yourself as out of fashion is often a move to be the very latest thing, ahead of even the current trends. In this sense it distils the logic of cultural production in Pierre Bourdieu's account, that of 'difference or distinction, a pure logic of positionality' (Garham and Williams 1986: 124). But fashion proposes standardisation as well as difference. Arjun Appadurai reminds us that, *pace* Thorstein Veblen and his model of consumption that is conspicuous and imitative, 'consumption must and does fall into the mode of repetition, of habituation. [...] Even in the most fashion-ridden of contexts [...] consumption leans towards habituation through repetition'. 'Even an unkempt beard must be maintained' (Appadurai 1997: 23–24, 25).

For Georg Simmel, writing in 1904, fashion is characterised by imitation but in fact this represents a form of social equalisation: it 'gives to the individual the satisfaction of not standing alone in his actions' (Simmel 1957: 542). Equally, for Simmel fashion differentiates one time from another, one social stratum from another, thus offering an important method of distinction. Ultimately, however, he thinks that the personal freedom suggested by fashion is a mirage: fashion binds people together, herd-like, promoting an insidious form of systematisation. Even in the most extreme case of individuation through fashion – 'the dude' is Simmel's example – the power of the social tendency is at work in that figure's emphasis or exaggeration of accepted norms. 'He leads the way, but all travel the same road' (549). To Simmel, the female sex represents an uneasy compromise:

A weak person steers clear of individualization; he avoids dependence upon self with its responsibilities and the necessity of defending himself unaided [...]. But resting on the firm foundation of custom, of what is generally accepted, woman strives anxiously for all the relative individualization and personal conspicuousness that remains. (550)

In 'relative individualization' and anxious 'personal conspicuousness' we see Simmel's idea that a compulsion towards repetition and uniformity might lurk behind a desire for distinction. We recognise, as well, an all-too-common misogyny regarding fashion's 'victims'.

No less than for Simmel, for Gilles Lipovetsky (1994) fashion is a crucial expression of interpersonal bonds, but one based on novelty, fantasy and the aesthetic assertion of autonomy rather than social distinction (5). Departing from the collective consciousness that characterised the pre-mod-

ern era (23), the rise of bourgeois modernity finds one of its most significant agents in fashion, through which humans recognise their power to organise aesthetically their own existence. Nothing short of revolutionary, in Lipovetsky's breathless version fashion was a marker of social superiority that democratised appearances (31). This narrative of autonomy accords with Breward's positive assertion that throughout its history, fashion has offered creative opportunities to its wearers. In the medieval period, Breward writes, despite the sumptuary laws, '[t]he power of clothing to transform and transgress perceived social barriers was perhaps stronger than its supposed ability to define them' (1995: 28); in the twentieth century, with the expansion of popular fashion, the consumer was offered an active role in 'creating meaning' through clothes. Elizabeth Wilson reminds us that fashion has 'been one of the ways in which women have been able to achieve self expression, and feminism has been as simplistic – and as moralistic – as most other theories in its denigration of fashion' (2011: 13).

Lipovetsky and Breward pose their fashion narratives in overt resistance to the cultural pessimism associated most predominantly with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* – their argument that the culture industry makes individuality an illusion (1997: 120–67) – although, as Wilson's comment above implies, countless damning narratives specifically related to fashion could be cited.<sup>5</sup> The fashion narrative of creativity or autonomy is one that the authors in my study wrote for their female characters and aspired to in their own careers, but they also resisted, ironised or undermined its celebratory aspect. The power to organise your own existence and create your own forms are not automatic rights, and may be compromised for any number of material reasons. And as Simmel saw, and – despite his contrasting, optimistic approach – as Lipovetsky implicitly suggests by connecting distinction and democracy: standardisation hovers behind individuation. The implications of this for women have been around since the first appearance of the fashion system. The medieval woman 'became entwined with concepts of weaving, textile work and fashion as "feminine" pursuits. This association was simultaneously constricting and empowering' (Breward 1995: 33). While associations with needlework might confine women to the domestic sphere,

[t]he management of the wardrobe took on a special significance, with the presentation and position of women at court increasingly

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<sup>5</sup> See Wilson 2011, Chapter 3, for a summary of fashion's detractors. See also her account of the very real oppressions and exploitations of the fashion industry in Chapter 4, and instances of feminist resistance to the fashion system, such as dress reform, in Chapter 10.

viewed as a feminine prerogative, specifically concerned with the display of power through a wealth of textiles and the cultivation of physical beauty. (Breward 1995: 33)

Six hundred years later, Diana Vreeland, the formidable editor of US *Vogue*, expressed something similar: ‘Doing your own thing is the greatest opportunity that has ever come over the horizon’ (cited in Mackenzie Stuart 2013: 243). Delivered by the editor of a commercial magazine, this victory speech for women condenses the contradictions that emerge from a feminism born of consumerism.

As these various contradictions and opposing attitudes and terms suggest, and in the language of René König’s book, fashion is ‘restless’. König finds ‘[a]gain and again [...] that concern with fashion results in two factions, uncompromising and irreconcilable’ (1973: 32). If fashion has been attacked throughout history, notably in moral terms for its superficiality and corruption, ‘there is, on the other hand, a corresponding secret need for it’, not purely on an individual level but as a social ‘regulator’ and means of expression within community (1973: 33). This regulation, too, points towards fashion’s restlessness, whereby continual change is balanced by stability, when deviations from convention become either aborted trends or assimilated norms, giving way to new deviations, and so on, and so on. ‘In fashion’, König writes, ‘the dynamic component is predominant’ (41); Walter Benjamin describes fashion as ‘indefatigable’ (2002: 11). As such, and as the authors treated in this thesis recognised, fashion is a privileged expression of the dynamic laws of society and of cultural forms – of flux, transformation, relationality, and the accession and secession of the sought after: power, visibility, value, relevance. Reading Barnes, Rhys and Loy – and the ways in which their work was received – according to the restlessness of fashion and fashion-oriented behaviour allows us to pay attention to such social and cultural dynamics and the effect they had on – and the responses they drew from – these women and their writing.

It is useful to place the aims of this thesis in the context of a growing body of work on fashion and literature, much of which has direct relevance to modernist studies.<sup>6</sup> The importance of clothes to notions of decadence and the dandy has been productively studied, and it is through other culturally peripheral figures – the gendered and queered self-fashioning of authors and characters – that modernism and modernity were, until recently, most often approached sartorially.<sup>7</sup> Since then a number of studies have recognised the

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<sup>6</sup> For a useful overview of this field and related areas, see Garrity 2014: 265–66.

<sup>7</sup> See M. Miller 2010, Fillin-Yeh 2001 and Doan 2001.

complex work of clothes in articulating the broad social, cultural, political and personal realities of modernity. Virginia Woolf has benefited most from this – her writing is the dominant subject of research on modernist literature and fashion.<sup>8</sup> Jane Garrity, for example, has written of how fashion functions for Woolf as a ‘metonym of modernity’, particularly the malleability of identity associated with the experience of modernity, but also of how clothes work as signs of ‘contemporaneity, vehicles for self-construction, signifiers of cultural resistance, and figures for the contemplation of the boundary between self and other’ (2010: 195–96).<sup>9</sup> Importantly, she stresses Woolf’s celebration of the expressive potential of fashion as commodity as well as its dangers: its ambivalence as a marker of modernity (2010: 208–09). I recognise all these features in my own authors’ approach to fashion, as will be seen in the following chapters, but the emphasis on the psycho-social function of dress (as, for example, an expression of shame, desire or rebellion) is one that I have underplayed, preferring a stricter focus on fashion, with its emphasis on market-driven change, and fashion-oriented behaviour.

Additionally, I am interested in how the logic driving fashion and such behaviour is one that applies as much to the work itself as its content – an inevitable conclusion, I contend, if this logic is observed as a dominant feature of modernity. Garrity hints at this line of thinking when she discusses Woolf’s essay ‘Modern Fiction’, in which fashionability is related to regressive styles of writing, and modernist innovation, therefore, with forms beyond the latest fashion: ‘a different outline of form becomes necessary’, Woolf writes. Garrity hears in this ‘the powerful sway of fashion discourse’ (2010: 207) but connects it back to Woolf’s feminism, which recuperates the clothes of male materialist writing for a feminine image of fiction. This seems entirely persuasive, but keeps fashion at the metaphorical level, where it clearly has value – as it does for me in much of my interpretation.<sup>10</sup> In another essay on modernism and fashion, Garrity writes of ‘the unacknowledged parallels between modernist aesthetics and the dynamics of fashion – namely the crisis of originality’ (2014: 266). Similarly, Jessica Burstein’s *Cold Modernism* (2012) reads Mina Loy’s preoccupation with the original and the copy in the context of early twentieth-century fashion’s sometimes anxious and paradoxical struggle to reproduce originality. Elsewhere, Nancy Troy (2003) has

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<sup>8</sup> However, the works of James Joyce, Elizabeth Bowen and Rosamund Lehmann have also been read for their vestimentary significance. See Wicke 1994, Plock 2012, Plock 2013. I will treat most criticism on fashion in relation to Djuna Barnes, Jean Rhys and Mina Loy in the individual chapters that follow this introduction.

<sup>9</sup> See also Cohen 1999 and Koppen 2009.

<sup>10</sup> This can be seen distinctly elsewhere, when Garrity describes fashion as ‘a way to think about changes in the novel form’ (2014: 265).

proposed analogies between the fashion system and conceptual art.

These new approaches are distinctive, and productive for my own thinking, in the way they see fashion as emblematic of logic or dynamics specific to modernity – operations that affect all cultural and social forms.<sup>11</sup> These critics seek to understand their subjects' response to a prospect both enabling and alarming. But in the scheme of my own argument I would also be interested to follow, for instance, the relationship between Woolf's comment ('a different outline of form becomes necessary') and the subjection of 'Modern Fiction' itself to 'fashion discourse'. How does the fashion discourse that Woolf employs pre-empt the fashion logic that determines how the essay is disseminated and received? The compelling logic of fashion pertains to the contexts as much as the content of literary work. A recent book by Alissa Karl on literary culture and consumer capitalism acknowledges this reflexive thinking. Her chapter on Jean Rhys, for example, explores the disciplinary procedures of the marketplace in Rhys's fiction, but then argues that shopping for clothes informs our reading of *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939) as much as its narrative (2009: 16–42).<sup>12</sup> Outside the realm of fashion but firmly within commodity culture, this is the path taken by Aaron Jaffe, whose *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity* (2005) argues that the logic of celebrity culture is relevant to the institutions of modernism as well as the aesthetics.<sup>13</sup>

## MODERNITY

There is an illustrious tradition of responses to modernity that invoke fashion as one of its key expressions.<sup>14</sup> Although such responses are not entirely confined to a single period or country – Thomas Carlyle serialised his *Sartor Resartus* in Britain in 1833–34 as a satirical, metaphysical response to the material ills of his own modern era – the connection between fashion and mo-

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<sup>11</sup> On the correspondences between modernism and the logic of capitalism and mass culture outside the realm of fashion, see Xiros Cooper 2004 and Goldman 2011. In a similar vein, Brown 2009 compares the 'expressive capacity' (9) of glamour to modernist literature.

<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Vike Plock applies her interpretation of social and sartorial nonconformity in Rhys's Left Bank fiction to her early career as a modernist. I am grateful to Dr Plock, who let me read the Rhys chapter in her forthcoming monograph on modernism and fashion before publication.

<sup>13</sup> Jaffe's book was influenced by the now seminal Rainey 1998. For a useful overview of modernism and celebrity, see Rosenquist 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Modernity is here understood to be the transformation of everyday life by capitalism, industrialisation, new technologies and new media, and the associated changes in culture and society, but as I discuss below, it also has a specifically aesthetic dimension relevant to fashion.

ernity is most concentrated in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Paris.<sup>15</sup> This particular version of modernity, which in French is often called *modernité*, was apprehended as the aestheticisation of urban life and therefore bound together both the experience and the forms of the modern. Fashion (indeed commodity culture more generally) exemplified the sense of ephemerality and novelty that came to define the experience, but this experience encompassed and could not be separated from the artistic and philosophical responses that it produced.<sup>16</sup> Thus Heidi Brevik-Zender describes ‘a veritable preoccupation’ among writers of the period from Balzac to Zola and Mallarmé in the following terms:

Fashion is interwoven throughout the very fabric of the literary works of this era, forming a complex textual discourse through which writers examined profound social and cultural changes associated with the experience of living as modern citizens. To follow fashion, chart styles, and chronicle fashion’s influences was to participate in modern society. Writing about fashion was thus a form of cultural critique, but one that doubled as a self-conscious expression of modernity itself. (2011: 54)

The best-known articulation of fashion’s aesthetic and social currency belongs to Baudelaire. His essay ‘The Painter of Modern Life’ (published in 1863) argues for fashion as an appropriate subject for the modern painter and a paradigm of modernity (Baudelaire 2010: 1–41).<sup>17</sup> The first aspect of this modern aesthetic theory derives from his sense of clothes as representative of a particularly contemporary beauty, ‘the beauty of circumstance’ (1), as opposed to ‘the academic theory of an unique and absolute beauty’ (3) (the philosophy of Kant, for example). Important, too, is the ‘sketch of manners’ (1) that can be made from observing contemporary fashions: ‘every age had its own gait, glance and gesture’ (13), and these should be reflected in art. Another art critic and friend of Baudelaire, the poet Théophile Gautier, adumbrated strikingly similar ideas in ‘De la mode’, published in *L’Artiste* several years earlier, in 1858. Gautier’s defence of contemporary dress as a subject for art suggests that it has ‘its own meaning’ (*sa signification*), and

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<sup>15</sup> See Lipovetsky 1994, Chapter 1, for an overview of fashion commentaries from the fifteenth century.

<sup>16</sup> The immensely useful Lehmann 2000 is the most comprehensive study of fashion and this version of modernity. On the aestheticised definition of modernity, see also Osborne 1995: 12 and Felski 1995: 13.

<sup>17</sup> This essay probably dates from between November 1859 and February 1860, but was first published in *Le Figaro* on 26 and 29 November and 3 December 1863.



that its study can illuminate the modern individual, ‘a previously unknown species’ (*une espèce inédite*).<sup>18</sup>

In Baudelaire’s now famous formulation, the aim of his ‘man of the crowd’, the modern artist observing all this modern life, is ‘to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, to distil the eternal from the transitory’ (12). This dialectical movement, in which fashion’s restlessness mirrors that of modernity, appealed to Walter Benjamin, who as a young man had translated *Les Fleurs du mal* and continued to write about Baudelaire, specifically the perception of modern life that his poetry offered.<sup>19</sup> Benjamin also made the dialectic central to his own paradigmatic approach to fashion. His thoughts on fashion are found throughout his writing and often in tantalising aphorisms, so it would be wrong to assume an overarching theory of modernity based on fashion. Equally, we can see that fashion was relevant to different strands of his work – as an objective fragment of Parisian modernity of the nineteenth century, a commodity fetish and a historiographical model, to name only a few. But as an exemplar of the dialectical image, a cornerstone of the notes and documents that have been published as *The Arcades Project*, fashion is certainly central to Benjamin’s thinking.<sup>20</sup> The 1935 exposé of *The Arcades Project* describes ‘passing fashions’ as dialectical images, ‘wish images’ – ‘images in the collective consciousness in which the new is permeated with the old’ (Benjamin 2002: 4–5). In 1940 he reprised this note in ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’, writing memorably that the ‘tiger’s leap’ of fashion from the present ‘into the past’ that it evokes reveals the ‘time of the now’ in history (1968: 253). Fashion was appreciated, then, for the way in which it destabilises the bourgeois forms of the new: as Benjamin wrote in Convolute K of *The Arcades Project*, fashion’s cycle of novelty and obsolescence helps us ‘overcome the ideology of progress’. Its inbuilt drive towards the outmoded is key: fashion ‘derives its force from what is forgotten’ (2002: 392–93). Fashion is both part of the phantasmagoria of modernity and potential agent of revolution. For if the ‘time of the now’ is revealed in history, Benjamin’s thinking suggests, subjects of modernity may be woken from the unreflective dreams of nineteenth-century industrialism, driven as these dreams are by constant anticipation of the new.

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<sup>18</sup> All translations courtesy of Elizabeth Oliver. Lehmann 2000, Chapter 1, discusses the question of whether Gautier or Baudelaire originated these ideas.

<sup>19</sup> His writing on Baudelaire is collected in Benjamin 2006, which includes two short fragments probably composed in the early 1920s, the essay ‘Central Park’ and the 1935 exposé for *The Arcades Project*, along with the well-known essays on the poet ‘The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire’ and ‘On Some Motifs in Baudelaire’.

<sup>20</sup> On the central significance of fashion for Benjamin, see Lehmann 2000 and Wollen 2003.

Baudelaire's and Benjamin's dialectical thinking through fashion is foundational in this thesis, in the sense that it provides examples of fashion's logic as a way to articulate modernity and the artist's place in it, and the larger temporal structures in which they must also be understood. Benjamin's understanding of Baudelaire's poetry as born of modernity and imprinted with modernity's 'negatives' offers a guiding model for the complex relationship between the artist and what are often deemed execrable features of modern society (between *idéal* and *spleen*) – a model for the dialectical relationship between art and industry, in which change comes from within capitalism.<sup>21</sup> This connects with Benjamin's dialectical view of fashion – as both that which makes a commodity out of the 'living body' and, by charging the new with the historical, that which contains revolutionary energies.<sup>22</sup> To be clear though: Barnes, Rhys and Loy do not have a political agenda comparable to Benjamin's neo-Marxism and nor do I in my approach to them. The end point of dialectical thinking as I read it in, and in relation to, their work is not the end of capitalism. It is rather the reckoning with capitalist modernity and its forms – a confrontation, or negotiation, that is not always successful.

Equally, Baudelaire and Benjamin are central points of departure for this thesis because their use of fashion highlights a certain blindness when it comes to gender.<sup>23</sup> In their writing, the dressed woman is a sign of modernity, an object – at times explicitly a commodity – who bears symbolic weight, but without agency of her own.<sup>24</sup> I am with Janet Wolff, who objects that Benjamin's version of modernity, privileging the arcades and streets of nineteenth-century Paris, as explored by the *flâneur*, excludes women. Even the interior, another significant space for Benjamin and one whose history is bound up with that of women, is not gendered in his thinking. In the case of 'thinking in images', Wolff writes, 'we have to be especially alert to how these operate' (2005: 329). In *The Arcades Project* the clothed woman recurs as an image – cycling (a favourite theme of Benjamin's, for it showed the female leg for the first time), promenading, dressed in 'giant skirts' – but

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<sup>21</sup> He uses the photographic term 'negative' in the fragment 'Baudelaire II' and indicates the dialectical relation between *spleen* (or melancholy) and the ideal in 'Baudelaire III', both in Benjamin 2006: 27–28.

<sup>22</sup> Both ideas are suggested in the 1935 exposé of *The Arcades Project* (Benjamin 2002: 4–5, 8).

<sup>23</sup> Of course, Baudelaire is not known for his feminism.

<sup>24</sup> The same criticism can be levelled at Thorstein Veblen, for whom the duty of consuming conspicuously fell to the carefully dressed woman: 'to impress upon the beholder the fact (often indeed a fiction) that the wearer does not and cannot habitually engage in useful work'. Not only does this living 'ornament' thus prove the wealth of her husband, she is his 'chattel', a reality confirmed by the impractical and uncomfortable clothes she is forced to wear in the service of shoring up his status (1957: 179–82).

never as the beholder of those images, one with agency in using them.<sup>25</sup>

Similarly, despite Baudelaire's and Gautier's appreciation of the particularities of fashion and emphasis on the aesthetic value of the contemporary, it is the transfiguring power of art that in both their essays remains dearly held. For his part, Gautier sets straight the persistent valuation of the classical ideal while himself elevating fashion to the status of antique statuary: 'Are not the folds of the frockcoat and the trousers as firm, as noble and as pure as the folds of a toga or a chlamyde'. 'The fashion of our times', he writes, would suit the Venus de Milo, 'what better praise could there be?' (1858).<sup>26</sup> This latent impulse to redeem fashion on the very same terms as art also characterises the essay by Baudelaire, whose 'Painter of Modern Life' emphasised the universal aspects that must be gleaned from the contingent: 'poetry within history', 'the eternal from the transitory' (2010: 12). Art may have a new source, previously barred, but it still gains legitimacy from what David Frisby describes as the 'ancient antithesis of the temporal and the eternal' (1985: 16).

Tellingly, both Gautier and Baudelaire apply this classicising gloss to the opposite sex, in a shared aesthetic language that seems to resist – to contain rather than celebrate – the dynamic aspect of fashion worn on the street.<sup>27</sup> In spite of the undergarment's widespread ridicule, women are right to prefer the crinoline, Gautier suggests in the same essay:

these full skirts, thick and powerful, spread out for the eye. [...] From this abundance of folds, which go flaring out like the fustanella of a whirling dervish, the waist emerges slim and elegant; the upper part of the body is set off to an advantage, and the whole body forms a gracious pyramid.<sup>28</sup>

Dressed thus, woman is a perceivable edifice, static and sculptural:

This rich mass of fabric acts as a sort of pedestal for the torso and head

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<sup>25</sup> See Convolute B, 'Fashion' (Benjamin 2002: 62–81).

<sup>26</sup> <[www.bmlisieux.com/archives/delamode.htm](http://www.bmlisieux.com/archives/delamode.htm)> [accessed 18 February 2013].

<sup>27</sup> Unlike their predecessor Balzac, whose 'Theory of the Walk', part of his *Traité de la vie élégante*, is 'in thrall to the allure of women in motion' (Evans 2012: 22).

<sup>28</sup> '[C]es jupes amples, étoffées, puissantes, largement étalées à l'oeil. [...] De cette abondance de plis, qui vont s'évasant comme la fustanelle d'un derviche tourneur, la taille sort élégante et mince; le haut du corps se détache avantageusement, toute la personne pyramide d'une manière gracieuse.' By comparison, male dress resists visualisation: 'one has to have a sense that a man is well dressed but later one should not be able to recall a single detail of what he was wearing' ('il faut qu'on sente qu'un homme est bien mis, sans se rappeler plus tard aucun détail de son vêtement'). While the dressed woman is turned into a known spectacle on the street, the man may slip out of sight in the crowd.

[...] If we were allowed to draw a mythological parallel where such a modern question is concerned, we would say that a woman in her full evening attire conforms to the ancient Olympian etiquette.<sup>29</sup>

In the sections of his essay devoted to ‘Woman’ and ‘In Praise of Cosmetics’, Baudelaire attributes to clothes a cohering, aestheticising effect on what he describes as woman’s imperfectly coordinated natural form. Wearing clothes and jewellery, she presents:

a general harmony, not only in her bearing and the way in which she moves and walks, but also in the muslins, the gauzes, the vast, iridescent clouds of stuff in which she develops herself, and which are as it were the attributes and the pedestal of her divinity (2010: 31)

Adornment and make-up give woman a unity that ‘immediately approximates [her] to a statue, that is to something superior and divine’ (2010: 34). The dialectic developed by Gautier and Baudelaire in fact comprises an alternative set of terms, by which the sign of modernity found in fashion is aesthetically turned against itself, in a transfiguring move that appears to be motivated by the need to redeem a threatening, feminine materiality only too evident to these authors in modern life.

Patrice Higonnet writes that Paris fashion ‘fetishized women’; he quotes Benjamin: ‘Fashion defends the rights of the cadaver over the living. The fetish ... is its vital center’ (Higonnet 2002: 118). In this light, Baudelaire’s and Gautier’s vision of dressed woman as stylised object adumbrates Stéphane Mallarmé’s fetishistic language of fashion in his magazine *La Dernière mode* (September–December 1874; see Mallarmé 2004). For Ulrich Lehmann, Mallarmé went further than even Baudelaire as ‘the first to regard fashion as an area imbued with all characteristics necessary to discuss *la mode* as the stylistic nucleus of the wider implications of cultural (as well as social, economic, and political) *modernité*’ (2000: 55). This discussion took place in the pages of a commercial fashion magazine, in which the dressed woman is doubly fetishised – first by the fashion and again by the elaborate language with which Mallarmé, who wrote every issue of the magazine himself, described these outfits. As Mallarmé philosophises through fashion, the reification of the female – or the compensation for her lack in Freud’s concept of the fetish – is twice inscribed.<sup>30</sup> In the twentieth century, the fetishisation of

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<sup>29</sup> ‘Cette masse de riches étoffes fait comme un piédestal au buste et à la tête [...] Si l’on nous permettait un rapprochement mythologique dans une question si moderne, nous dirions qu’une femme en toilette de bal se conforme à l’ancienne étiquette olympienne.’

<sup>30</sup> See Apter 1991 for an argument about the ‘rhetorical fetishisation’ of women and their

the dressed woman was reprised by the male surrealists, whose prurient obsession with the fashion mannequin formed part of their project to explore desire, including that which is channelled in consumer society: the modern mannequin revealed the marvellous, declared Breton in the first 'Manifesto of Surrealism' of 1924 (Breton 1974: 16). For the surrealists, women were, in Hal Foster's words, 'sites of desire more than [...] subjects of desire; women were asked to represent it more than to inhabit it' (2001: 203).

In the spirit of the dialectic, my thesis positions its three female writers as respondents to this male history of thinking through fashion who draw on and update that history for their own contemporary moment and gender.<sup>31</sup> They do this, I maintain, in ways that foreground women's restricted (and often maligned) symbolic function as the most visible wearers of fashion, but also in ways that stress women as active (though not always joyful) wearers, makers and philosophers of fashion – and, in their ways, analysts of modernity.<sup>32</sup> In doing this, I am influenced by Rita Felski's questions, now nearly twenty-five years old but still so resonant, about modernity's difference when you look at it through the lens of gender:

How would our understanding of modernity change if instead of taking male experience as paradigmatic, we were to look instead at texts written primarily by or about women? And what if feminine phenomena, often seen as having a secondary or marginal status, were given a central importance in the analysis of the culture of modernity? (1995: 10)

Much thought has been generated by Felski's provocation.<sup>33</sup> 'Feminine phenomena' have an increasingly central status in this field, in which my own work on female modernists and fashion clearly sits. As have many others with feminist intentions, I follow Felski's desire to 'address the multiplicity and diversity of women's relations to historical process', 'the spec-

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costume in the writing of the Goncourt Brothers. 'As in the language of fetishization, whereby the verbal substitute for the phallic referent is reified to the point where its origin is forgotten, so the Goncourts' idiolect of womanliness replaced the patriarchally inflected signifier with a hypostatized, essentialist sign of the feminine' (68–69).

<sup>31</sup> Similarly, contributors to Chadwick's and Latimer's edited collection on modernists in interwar Paris 'all benefitted from the rethinking of the terms modernity and modernism' (2003: xi).

<sup>32</sup> See also Chadwick and Latimer's appealingly dialectical point: 'In espousing the creative power and modernity of surfaces, artifices, and theatricality, [Baudelaire] prepares the way for a modern woman who is inseparable from her dress' (2003: xvi).

<sup>33</sup> Just one example is Ardis and Lewis 2003. Writing just before Felski, the equally important Scott 1990 and Elliott and Wallace 1994 were asking a related question: what does modernism look like from the point of view of gender?

ificity of women's lives and experiences', but heed her warning that women should not 'simply be placed outside' dominant conceptions of the modern (1995: 7, 15, 16). In this thesis I explore the manner in which the dominant conception of the modern represented by Baudelaire and Benjamin – and celebrated by Marshall Berman (1993), whose masculinist version of modernity Felski explicitly resists – is negotiated, replicated and reimaged in the work and publication history of my three subjects.<sup>34</sup> In the context of Paris, of course, this approach is situated in the critical wake of Shari Benstock's seminal *Women of the Left Bank* (1987), which also encouraged us to look at modernism as significantly influenced by gender and asked important questions like Felski's about women's experience of modernity, such as 'What was it like to be a woman in literary Paris?' (3). Although I am often concerned with the experience of women living and working in Paris, my own take shifts the question towards something like: 'What was the symbolic function of Paris in the work and careers of these modernist women?'

**TRANSATLANTICISM I:  
PARIS, THE CAPITAL OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

One of the ways in which the fashion narratives of the French tradition are updated in my study of twentieth-century writers is through the changing position of France, and especially Paris, by the time they were writing. The history of fashion is bound up with France, whose court (Versailles) was the central arbiter of taste while its influence lasted, but specifically with Paris, where haute couture developed. This pre-eminence was at its zenith during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when, equally, Paris thought of itself and was thought of as the centre of artistic and literary activity. If these ideas about Paris – and it must be stressed that they have most importance here as *ideas*, above and beyond their proven existence as material realities, as will be discussed – were still alive and well, by the 1910s (when the first works on which I focus were written) a certain pressure was being put on them, in fashion and in other art forms alike, by the growing cultural authority of the United States. It will be worth reviewing these mythological and historical dynamics in some detail, as they form an important context for this study.

The reality of Paris as a pre-eminent cultural centre – a place where art, literature and fashion, for example, have historically been produced – can-

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<sup>34</sup> Despite his commitment to the fragment and the ruin, Benjamin does, I would suggest, represent a dominant theory of modernity.

not be separated from its various myths. The ways in which it has been perceived, conceived and dreamed are as important as real events that have taken place in the city, because often they generated creative practice (as Stein acknowledged) but also because many of those conceptions have happened away from Paris, in the dreams of foreigners who may not have even been there. In Patrice Higonnet's own mythological narrative of the city (2002), from the mid-eighteenth century Paris became 'capital of the modern self', a myth that arose as the growing city took over from a moribund court at Versailles and answered the Enlightenment's hunger for modernity, knowledge and individualism. From around 1750, he writes, Paris was known as the capital of a new Republic of Letters, a heroic and authoritative seat of reason and ideas, and home to many foreigners seeking this intellectual climate. From 1830, the myth of Paris 'capital of modernity' was fully rooted. As we have seen in relation to Baudelaire and Benjamin:

In the history of the capital during the nineteenth century, this is surely the myth of origin, the Ur-mythos, the cosmogonic myth par excellence: the narrative that, more than any other, shaped the worldview of Parisians, be they intellectuals [...] or ordinary bourgeois. (Higonnet 2002: 261)

In his own study of myth, in which Paris plays a central part, Roger Caillois describes the urban setting becoming 'exalted along fantastic lines' in the early nineteenth century. In the works of Balzac and Baudelaire, he finds the intoxication of Romanticism inverted, as modern urban reality – modernity – was poeticised (2003: 178–82). The 'heroism of modern life', as Baudelaire called it, seemed to be most fully expressed in Paris, but in Higonnet's view this was met by an equally powerful myth of Paris as capital of alienation (2002: 205–29). We can see this expressed by writers from Balzac to Baudelaire who articulated Paris 'capital of modernity' in terms of crowds, fashions and detached individuals, or misery and squalor. Painters from Édouard Manet to Edgar Degas attended to the surfaces of the city – the stares of its courtesans and the spectacles of its *café-concerts* – but also to the miserable depths suggested by those on the periphery of society. 'Paris, capital of art' is another of Higonnet's myths, the 'most durable' (2002: 399). In this narrative, the city eclipsed Rome in around 1800 'as the undisputed capital of Western painting'. As in letters, this prominence was connected to the reaction of practitioners to modern life: 'it is in relation to modernity that art thrived in the French capital' (401). His vague 'relation' implies the difficulty of discovering which was the cause and which the effect.

The modernity and malevolence of Paris of the nineteenth century found expression in another prevailing myth described by Higonnet, that of *la parisienne*, the well-dressed woman who appeared in Gautier's and Baudelaire's writing. She was, Higonnet writes, 'the incarnation of a certain type of woman [...] vain, somewhat superficial, and excitable' (2002: 114). Even more, she was, through her association with fashion and her taxonomy as a type, a worrying sign of the reproducible commodity. ('One, one, one, there are many of them', wrote Stein in 'Aux Galeries Lafayette', which according to the editors of *Rogue*, in which the poem appeared, referred to 'so many shop girls or Parisiennes as one happens to prefer'.<sup>35</sup>) The *parisienne* had long been inseparable from fashion, which from the nineteenth century becomes so strongly identified with Paris that Fanny Trollope, Anthony's mother, was compelled to write:

The dome of the Invalides, the towers of Notre Dame, the column of the Place Vendôme, the windmills of Montmartre, do not come home to the mind as more essentially belonging to Paris, and Paris only, than does the aspect which caps, bonnets, frills, shawls, aprons, belts, buckles, gloves – and above, though below, all things else – which shoes and stockings assume, when worn by the Parisian women in the city of Paris. (Cited Higonnet 2002: 114)

It was as a result of the 'invention of the romantic woman-as-object', Higonnet suggests, that Parisian haute couture came 'into its own' (2002: 116). This is another large burden for the symbolic dressed woman to bear, and what makes Higonnet able to discern cause and effect here, but not in the case of the painters, is unclear. Undoubtedly, though, Paris is indelibly associated with fashion as the home of haute couture and despite significant changes (to be discussed) in the material realities of the industry from the first decades of the 1900s, this image flourished well into the twentieth century. In the mid-1920s fashion was 'Paris's largest industry', worth 2.5 billion francs in 1924 according to one source (Gronberg 1998: 26).

This brief and inevitably broad summary of Parisian mythologies should hopefully begin to suggest why Paris, fashion, art and writing would belong together for modernist authors, as explored in this thesis – and why, given the symbolic role of women in these related myths, such myths might be relevant and critically apprehended by female modernists. As a result of these myths of Paris, capital of modernity, at least until the early decades

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<sup>35</sup> Stein's poem was published in *Rogue* on 1 March 1915 and the editor's comments appeared in the following issue, 1 April 1915. Cited Burstein 2012: 164.



of the twentieth century, a series of equations in the cultural imaginary are frequently made. They possibly run in this order: Paris = modernity = women = fashion = art. But might equally be reorganised as: Paris = women = fashion = modernity = art.<sup>36</sup> Even if it is ultimately impossible to determine cause and effect, such powerful sets of associations have had material consequences for those engaging with them.

Indeed, in *The World Republic of Letters* (2004), Pascale Casanova bases her analysis of nothing less than the laws and power relations of the international literary marketplace and its history on those very associations. Following the premise that '[e]ach work that is declared to be literary is a minute part of the immense "combination" constituted by the literary world as a whole' (3), she suggests that literary legitimacy is secured in competition between writers and between national literary spaces (11). According to Casanova, the ultimate legitimating factor and source of literary capital is autonomy: 'the great writers have managed, by gradually detaching themselves from historical and literary forces, to invent their literary freedom' (xii). This literary world has its own geography, its own 'centres' and 'peripheries', and its own capital: Paris. In the eighteenth century, while London became the centre of the world economy, for all the reasons discussed by Higonnet and Caillois, Paris 'imposed its cultural hegemony' (Casanova 2004: 11) and by the nineteenth century was 'synonymous with literature' (26). In the competitive space that Casanova describes, literary capital and the holy grail of autonomy were accrued by an appeal to the paradoxical notion of French autonomy, 'pure' literariness (87), whether through its language or literary effects and values, or self-imposed exile in Paris, 'the place where literary consecration is ordained' (23) (she suggests that this authority lasted until the 1960s).

It follows, then, that this geography is comprised of 'peripheral dependencies whose relationship to [the] center is defined by their aesthetic distance from it' (12). In Casanova's scheme, this 'distance is also measured in temporal terms': Paris is 'the Greenwich meridian of literature' because 'the prime meridian determines the present of literary creation, which is to say modernity' (88). A work is defined as modern 'depending on its proximity to the criteria of modernity' (88).<sup>37</sup> Crucially, Paris represents this standard

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<sup>36</sup> See Gronberg 2003 on a feature article on Sonia Delaunay's simultaneous fashions, in which "woman" is invoked not only as a potential consumer but also as an outline of modernity itself: [...] Through the invocation of the [*parisienne*] Parisian fashion and art are construed as somehow inextricably linked in defining what is meant to be truly modern' (109).

<sup>37</sup> As Osborne discusses, modernity is in one sense all about legitimacy, which is 'latent' in its claim to break with tradition (1995: 11).

not only because of its championing of political and aesthetic freedom but because it is an arbiter of taste: Casanova proposes that Paris is the Greenwich meridian of literature because it is also the consecrating seat of fashion, ‘the outstanding expression of modernity’ (88).<sup>38</sup>

Her ambitious and broad scheme is open to criticism. Its vision of a hierarchical literary geography conforms to a colonialist vision of ‘civilisation’ disseminated from centre to periphery. For every instance Casanova has found of writers looking to Paris to access modernity (her book is historicist in the detail, if universalising in the aims), others might be cited in which a supposedly ‘peripheral’ figure found modern expression in their own local situation. A good deal of recent work has been devoted to the idea that modernity (and therefore modernism) did not happen uniformly around the world or in one time period.<sup>39</sup> Such criticism challenges our ideas of centre and periphery, and of origins and copies (a challenge I address in relation to the transatlantic axis of this thesis a little later).

However, Casanova’s argument offers several productive models for my own. For a start, the authors with whom I am concerned – and those who positioned them and their work – *were* engaged with Paris as a central cultural image. They made the same equations that Casanova makes between Paris and modernity and fashion and art. And in one rebuttal to the potential criticism of Casanova’s scheme outlined above, the factual reality of Paris as such a centre or the actual existence of other centres are – to my argument at least – almost beside the point compared to the compelling myth, the decline and fall of ‘Paris, capital of modernity’, which I argue helped shape the work and reception of Barnes, Rhys and Loy. Secondly, *The World Republic of Letters* is useful because it employs Bourdieu to understand world literary space as a field in which actors (in this case, nations) adopt and may change their position by investing in the cultural capital represented by Parisian modernity and autonomy. Paris as cultural capital (as a powerful idea) is central to the ways in which I read my authors’ work and its own location in cultural fields. Lastly, and building on these points, despite Casanova’s reliance on a pattern of Western cultural hegemony, her argument shares features with recent work on transnationalism and cosmopolitanism in literature, namely the central notion that national identity (and therefore national literary identity) is a dynamic, dialectical process. National identity emerges in the work of Barnes, Rhys and Loy – through the restless image

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<sup>38</sup> Casanova also refers to Stein 1940a in her discussion of this function.

<sup>39</sup> As in Friedman 2015. See Mao and Walkowitz 2008 for a discussion of this expansion of modernism along a ‘horizontal’ axis. Also useful is Clayson and Dombrowski 2016, whose essays reassess Benjamin’s claim for Paris as the capital of the nineteenth century.

of fashion – as constructed, contingent, often conflicting, but nearly always dialectical. Their work generates and is shaped by images of France (in the sense, outlined so far, in which ‘Paris’ represents ‘France’) and images of the United States formed in relation to one another.

#### TRANSATLANTICISM II: AMERICA–PARIS

In his own mythology of transatlantic relations, Malcolm Bradbury writes:

It has been fairly argued, by the Mexican historian Edmundo O’Gorman, that America was not discovered (it was there already, with its own dense culture and history) but invented – and invented in the image of its inventor, the Renaissance mind of Europe. (1995: 3)

In fact, what emerges from Bradbury’s account, and in many of the versions of the transatlantic relationship to which this thesis refers, is the sense of ‘America’ and ‘Paris’ as each ‘an idea, an opposite, a polar contrast’ (7). This ‘fundamental narrative’, which in Bradbury’s words is a ‘story of two poles of the imagination and two related and yet deeply different visions of the world’ (9), has been partly shaped by writers, artists and intellectuals who were fascinated by such mythical, already fictional places.

We can, then, look to some of these ‘higher myth-makers’ (Bradbury 1995: 7) to understand something of what these two poles with their different visions represented. In *The Age of Innocence* (1920), set in the 1880s, Edith Wharton has one character declare that ‘America has no need of letters’; it was the land of ‘bathtubs, not bohemia’ (Bradbury 1995: 7). Many of Wharton’s characters, and Henry James’s, seek in Europe a kind of cultural compensation for American materialism.<sup>40</sup> Ezra Pound performed that search personally, leaving the United States in 1908 for London, before moving to Paris in 1920. In his essay ‘Patria Mia’, written in 1912–13, Pound declared his country to be ‘enduring [...] the Dark Ages’ (1962: 26). He sees profit as the guiding motivation of his compatriots. In other spheres, in terms of political power, for example, such drive was highly regarded. In 1878 the British prime minister William Gladstone predicted that the United States ‘will probably be what we are now – head servant in the great household of the world, the employer of all the employed’ (cited Bradbury 1995: 249).

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<sup>40</sup> The mythical and irrational nature of these opposing images is clear when we consider the equally significant role of materialism in Parisian myths of *la parisienne* and Paris, capital of alienation.

Alongside America's growing industrial and economic strengths emerged what William Leach has called 'the new American culture' of consumer capitalism, characterised by 'acquisition and consumption as the means of achieving happiness; the cult of the new; the democratization of desire; and money value as the predominant measure of all value in society' (1993: 3).<sup>41</sup> Leach locates the beginnings of this shift in the 1890s and its entrenchment by 1915. Warren Susman (2003) locates a similar shift in American culture in these years from the hard-working, thrifty ethos of Puritanism to a 'culture of abundance', a spirit that reached its apogee in the 1920s.

These cultural historians, Leach and Susman, stress the positive effects of the cultures of consumption and abundance. Capitalism, materialism and mass culture emerge from their accounts as creative, liberating energies as well as compromising structures, modifying the image of them as dark forces decried by Adorno and Horkheimer or the cultural sterility lamented by Pound. Associating America with money and business, and Europe with the serious artist, Pound writes:

So far as civilisation is concerned America is the great rich, Western province which has sent one or two notable artists to the Eastern capital. And that capital is, needless to say, not Rome, but the double city of London and Paris. (1962: 31)

In a diagnosis of the state of American letters that resembles a failed version of Casanova's logic, he then describes the process by which American culture merely imitates and dilutes that of London and Paris, producing only 'hog-wash'. His conclusion of this point even more closely aligns with Casanova's spatial and temporal system: '[S]imply so much farther removed from the sources', the person with 'any vital interest in art and letters' is forced to leave the country (Pound 1962: 43). In Pound's view in 1913, then, the United States was one of Casanova's peripheral literary spaces: 'literally a dominated country that looked to Paris in order to try to accumulate resources it lacked' (Casanova 2004: 42).

By moving to Europe in order to close the gap between his homeland and the 'meridian', Pound performed the dialectical operation that Casanova describes. For expatriate modernists like Stein and Pound, Paris becomes a defining factor in the development of American modernism. This 'transatlantic equation', as Bradbury calls it (1995: 272), can also be put another way: modernism, a predominantly European movement, developed

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<sup>41</sup> See Steinman 1987 on America's strength in science and technology and the appropriation of those sectors' values by modernist poetry.

because of its transatlantic connections. ‘For the best part of a thousand years’, Pound wrote, ‘English poets have gone to school to the French. The history of English poetic glory is a history of poetic steals from the French’ (cited Edwards 2005: 122). Dannah Edwards quotes this idiosyncratic historiography as Pound’s own model: ‘He sought to reform the Anglo-American modernist canon by coordinating these “steals”’ (2005: 122).

The Parisian roots of American artistic modernism are also well known. Albert Stieglitz visited Paris in the summer of 1909, and the paintings that he encountered there (including those at Leo and Gertrude Stein’s home) formed the core of the exhibitions that he held at 291, his gallery on Fifth Avenue. Both Mina Loy and Djuna Barnes participated in this fertile scene, for they featured in Stieglitz’s journal *Camera Work*: Loy with her first appearance in print (‘Aphorisms on Futurism’ in 1914) and Barnes with her response to Stieglitz’s survey of artistic figures on ‘what “291” means’, in issue no. 47 of 1914–15. Her offering, one of the briefest, romanticises the labour of the artist: ‘291 is the Attic near the Roof. It is nearer the roof than any other attic in the world. | There insomnia is not a malady – it is an ideal’ (J. Green 1973: 291).<sup>42</sup> Stieglitz’s campaign for modernism informed the European outlook of the American artists whom he nurtured, while his resistance to American materialism – he didn’t advertise exhibitions and sold work only to those whom he felt were capable of understanding it – gave his project a certain anti-American aspect. On the other hand, in the service of a home-grown aesthetic, Robert Henri and his students at the New York School of Art – painters such as George Bellows and John Sloan, later known as the Ashcan School – eschewed the more radical experiments of artistic modernism in favour of modern American subject matter treated in a realist mode.<sup>43</sup> The seminal moment for American modernism is usually said to be the Armory Show of 1913, which Bart Eeckhout and Glen MacLeod also describe as ‘a watershed event in the transnational history of modernism’ (2015: 325) – the exhibition introduced the American public to post-impressionism and cubism. The Armory Show had a generative function for American poetry, too, as the avant-garde in these years (those around Walter Arensberg and Alfred Kreymborg) were characteristically both profoundly interested in painting and its relationship to poetry, and

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<sup>42</sup> Barnes also interviewed Stieglitz (Barnes 1987: 211–22).

<sup>43</sup> The history of the birth of American artistic modernism is recounted in Watson 1991: 70–81. Wanda Corn supports Watson’s account of the Parisian focus of Stieglitz’s activities for most of the 291 and *Camera Work* years (c. 1902–17), but she shows how Stieglitz’s support shifted during the First World War ‘from the continental modernists, among whom he proudly placed American practitioners, to a few native-born artists cut free from any international context’ (1999: 16). His new nationalist agenda did, however, continue to include criticism of American machine-age modernity.

displayed a ‘French bias’ that ‘helped to establish the close ties between Paris and New York that characterized modern art for most of the twentieth century’ (Eeckhout and MacLeod 2015: 325–26). With a broad brush, then, it is possible to state that the genesis of American modernism in the first two decades of the twentieth century is characterised by dialogues and disjunctions between New York and Paris.

These are old stories. As I have already suggested, they might even be regarded as old-fashioned, in light of new work on global modernisms and cosmopolitanism. Why return to the transatlantic axis? The editor of a 2016 special issue of *Modernist Cultures* on ‘new transatlanticisms’ asked the same question, concerned that a focus on the relationship between the United States and Europe might seem myopic given the global intersections with those continents that are the subject of more recent research (Barnes 2016). His answer, articulated in his introduction and represented in the collected essays, is to historicise instances of transatlantic contact. On one level, this seems to me a good impulse, a way to track the material coordinates of this mythical passage, and in the three chapters that follow I too pay attention to the ways in which my authors were involved in the traffic between Paris and the United States of, for example, writing in magazines and paintings in the art market. But on another level, I suspect that behind this will to historicise there is a need to compensate for the mythical – and thus seemingly less credible – aspect of the transatlantic relationship. Perhaps it seems to have become nothing more than an easily consumable, romantic narrative of lesbian salons and the Lost Generation. And yet, as mentioned, the status of Paris and America as complexes of myths and images long predates that era of transatlantic connection that is now thought of as *too* mythologised. The myths fuelled the connections – such consumable images became useful symbols of commodification, for example – and the connections generated more myths. Our attention to historical instances of artistic transatlantic exchange should also involve the way in which the myths of Paris and America shaped and emerged from those interactions. This is the approach I have taken here.

Returning to the transatlantic axis with the expanded lens of transnationalism and new cosmopolitanisms also changes its aspect as an object of study. Emphasising the porous borders of nations, these recent approaches to culture and literature view national identity as constructed in relation to or in conflict with other nations.<sup>44</sup> This doesn’t supersede the nation state or

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<sup>44</sup> See, for example, Robbins 1998, Bhabha 2001 and Appiah 2007, Chapter 6. In literary studies, see Walkowitz 2006 and Berman 2001. For a discussion of new cosmopolitanisms across intellectual disciplines, see Lyon 2012 and Agathocleous 2010.

ignore the local, but neither does it fix the boundaries of locations or communities. In Brooke L. Blower's 2011 account of Americans in Paris, a study that has been useful for my own, the growing sense of what constituted American national identity was in part formed abroad. In a period of developing nationalism in many countries, not least the United States, America worked out its 'Americanness' on foreign soil as well at home (Blower 2011: 11).<sup>45</sup> Much of what came to define American culture – Susman's 'culture of abundance' – from advertising to mass magazines, radio and the cinema – gained clarity in the context of the huge numbers of Americans living in Paris between the wars:

Americans in Paris began to see how they might capture vibrant national idioms, how they could construct new aesthetics and attitudes by rubbing them up against other subjects, traditions and techniques. [...] Amidst another culture, elements 'characteristically American' stood out 'in almost brazen relief', wrote one *Century* columnist in 1927. Americans abroad began 'to frame an impression of a civilization'. (Blower 2011: 38–40)

In response to this 'Americanization' of Paris, defiant versions of 'authentic' French culture emerged, but 'no more static or fully formed' than the versions of Americanness they used as a foil (Blower 2011: 87).

New transnational approaches to literature stress the ways in which texts reveal these very formations, the ways they draw attention to the fluidity, thereby retaining the sense of a transatlantic imaginary, with its fictional quality, without taking the images for granted. Paul Giles (2002), for example, has emphasised narratives of American identity as formed in relation to English culture. He reads literary texts for the ways in which they 'virtualize' these interactions, rather than mythologising them, a term he uses to distinguish between existing stories about national culture and literary versions of them that 'render the mythological circumference of the nation translucent' (15). Here, I take a similar path, looking for the ways in which literary texts and publishing contexts make 'translucent' the transatlantic imaginary, whether deliberately by authors or by others, including in my own readings. But where Giles's ultimate target seems to be cultural nationalism, literary and otherwise, I am more interested in what function the myths of national identity and their exposure play in the texts themselves and in their dissemination. Ultimately, I have wanted to find out what tropes of transnationalism

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<sup>45</sup> Such memoirs as Cowley 1994 also register this sense of defining a relationship to and a picture of their homeland from abroad.

or national allegiance have offered these writers concerned with the place of women in society and with their own position as writers in the literary field.

One way I have found to answer this lies in a comparison between the effort to position oneself, as a woman and as a writer, and the dialectical operations of fashion, both in an abstract sense (as discussed earlier) and in historical relations between the French and American fashion industries. In the first part of the twentieth century these national trades were defined by comparison and competition, relative values and dialectically produced identities – features that offer productive ways of reading my authors' versions of women's experience and the reception of their work.

In the field of fashion history, Valerie Steele has written about the sense of anxiety felt in America about the formation of the country's cultural identity in response to Europe:

The problem of constructing a national identity was especially deeply felt in a new country without an established cultural heritage of its own. In the Gilded Age, the American upper class increasingly tended to 'buy into' the European heritage, but many ordinary people clung to the myth that America was a uniquely virtuous and republican nation – one, moreover, that was dangerously threatened by the modes and manners of a corrupt Old World. (1998: 234–35)

This transatlantic narrative was mapped onto the dressed woman's body. The anxieties about a 'a corrupt Old World' date to the mid-nineteenth century, when dress reformers complained that American women wore fashions

from licentious Paris and infidel France! Where woman stoops from her high position of virtue and morality, to mingle with the vicious and impure, to pander to the low passions and base desires of compeers in the arts of hell!! Let American and Christian women blush, at the character of their Parisian models of fashion! (Merritt 1852, cited Steele 1998: 59)

In the section of Djuna Barnes's *Ryder* set (albeit with inconsistencies) in the late nineteenth century, the morally fastidious Ann refers to Paris as the place 'where civilization has worn everything down to the instincts', a play on the verb 'to wear' that also links French dress with 'base desires' (1995: 52). Nevertheless, by the time Barnes was writing and when my study starts, New York fashion was still almost entirely modelled on Paris trends. To take



one example of a magazine that has formed part of my research, throughout 1914 the pages of *Vanity Fair* display total Francophilia. In adverts, some of whose headlines are written in French, lingerie and clothes are either 'French' or have French names, shops sell 'novelties from Paris' and hairdressers claim to be 'just returned from Paris' with the latest styles. Articles describe the latest Paris fashions and probable trends, including the regular 'What the Parisienne Wears' and 'What They Wear in Vanity Fair', which focuses almost exclusively on the Paris houses. As the latter column explains:

A fashion is conceived in Paris; a week later it appears – if only photographically – in America, its good points are instantly seized upon and, in less time than it takes to tell, the innovation is on sale in the shops at a price that, in itself, offers a distinct appeal. ('What They Wear' 1914: 66)

However, the relative positions and functions of 'Paris' and 'America' in this quote actually reveal signs of a more subtle dynamic at play in the fashion industry. In her recent work on the first fashion shows, Caroline Evans has explored the struggle for cultural authority in the transatlantic fashion trade of the period.<sup>46</sup> From the 1910s American imports became the mainstay of the French fashion industry, a trend that was felt to have begun in 1919 and reached a peak in 1926 (Evans 2008: 247).<sup>47</sup> '[W]ith the largest domestic market in the world for fashion' (Evans 2013: 113), America fuelled the French industry creatively as well as financially, for the powerful buyers of US stores could make aesthetic demands along with those of supply. As one French journalist put it in February 1926: 'L'un propose, l'autre dispose' (BMD: DM). After the privations of the First World War and the rise of the dollar, the French fashion houses, once deemed creators of the authentic one-off piece, survived by capitalising on the US mass market, which translated the pieces as needed (Evans 2013: 123).<sup>48</sup> Paris functioned as a powerful idea that is in fact geared towards its American interpretation and use. Evans writes that 'a copy might be modified to such a degree in the U.S. that it was barely the same garment, yet still be marketed as Parisian, thus demonstrating how important the idea of French fashion remained to the American trade' (2013: 107; fig. 01).<sup>49</sup> Indeed, 'the American industry continued to

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<sup>46</sup> See particularly Evans 2013. See also Troy 2003 and N. Green 1997.

<sup>47</sup> Although Nancy Green writes that 'French garment manufacturers have been wary of growing American industrial strength since the nineteenth century' (1997: 106).

<sup>48</sup> After the First World War, French couture 'also began to see the need to produce for American tastes' (Evans 2013: 101).

<sup>49</sup> See also Burstein 2012: 131–43 on the 'vicissitudes of the Authentic Copy' (131) and its

depend on the ideal of French fashion long after its most astute practitioners acknowledged publicly that they had no logical need of it' (Evans 2013: 88).

If the Parisian couture design itself was almost materially irrelevant, entering the US market purely as an idea that was translated and adapted to suit US needs, the Parisian industry more generally occupied this symbolic status. That industry was complicit, promoting 'the mystique of French fashions' in order to benefit economically (Evans 2013: 72). Nancy Green (1994) has placed these cultural values associated with French couture in a longer history of the industry's complex relationship with art. She shows the sense of fashion as art to have been paramount to the French industry's idea of itself and its commercial success – in haute couture but also, although less straightforwardly, in the mass-produced, ready-to-wear clothing that developed in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>50</sup> The competition (both in terms of economics and cultural value) between these two segments of the market, which the elite couturiers liked to think of as a clear opposition between good and bad taste, was in the first decades of the twentieth century transposed onto what Green calls 'economic nationalism' (1994: 736). Although England and Germany were criticised by the French for having no style, it was the American manufacturers (France's main competitor in the mass market) and American women who came to represent the height of vulgarity.

'Nations thus became increasingly separated along an art/industry divide in garment industry imagery. And as the traditional nineteenth-century rivals were overtaken by another – the United States – the alignment of French artistry against American industrialism became a staple of the industrial language' (Green 1994: 742).<sup>51</sup> As Green explores at greater length elsewhere, the US garment trade has largely 'agreed with the French *imaginaire* of the art/industry dichotomy: French expertise in the former, American prowess in the latter' (1997: 112). These definitions fall into what she calls 'reciprocal visions': 'transatlantic understandings of the garment "other"' (106). Building on this idea, Caroline Evans writes of fashion journalism and the industry more broadly in the period following the First World War that 'France and America constructed a fantasy of the other as a foil to its self-image'. The 'fashion industry of each country depended on an image of the other to make its sales and to bolster its sense of self through the creation of a cultural imaginary of "French-ness" and "American-ness"' (2013: 112).

The issues at stake in these reciprocal visions – national allegiance and

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implications for modernism's anxious investments in originality and reproduction.

<sup>50</sup> See also Troy 2003, Chapter 1.

<sup>51</sup> On the national associations of the art/industry discourse, see also Evans 2013: 112.

transnational intersections, the cultural capital of Paris versus the growing authority of the United States, the unstable dichotomy of art and commerce – make the fashion industry in these years an immensely productive historical context and structural model for this thesis. In seeking to understand the relevance of fashion to Barnes, Rhys and Loy, I have often turned to this transatlantic trade to situate their place in and debt to transatlantic interactions and refractions, but also to explore the tension between art and industry in their work. Green's work in fashion history shows that any clear separation of the two is a mirage. It is hardly necessary to restate that the same is the case in modernist studies, which for three decades has been challenging the old notion of modernism's autonomy. As my thesis demonstrates, fashion is an especially useful trope for both modernists and their critics to investigate the relationship between art and commerce. Its dialectical movement between the universal and the material particular, as well as the potential definition of the item of fashion as both commodity and artwork (and the fashion designer or illustrator as similarly divided), make it a symbol of the complex imbrication of these spheres in modernity. The approach to capitalism that emerges in my readings of the work of Barnes, Rhys and Loy is often itself a dialectical one. To be sure, there are many instances of scepticism and extreme criticism, particularly of the ways in which consumer culture positions women, but the predominant attitude is one of negotiation. These authors turn the material aspects of modernity (in all their compromised and celebrated aspects) into material for their art.

They were not new in doing this. They follow Baudelaire, as I have discussed. Ezra Pound, too, despite his disillusion in 'Patria Mia' with American materialism, was confident of an imminent 'American Risorgimento' (1962: 26) and indeed predicted that this renaissance would come precisely from the country's modernity and specifically its industrial success. It would happen in New York, where modern architecture is paving the way:

I see [...] a sign in the surging crowd on Seventh Avenue (New York). A crowd pagan as ever imperial Rome was, eager, careless, with an animal vigour unlike that of any European crowd that I have ever looked at. [...] This new metropolitan has his desire sated before it is aroused. Electricity has for him made the seeing of visions superfluous. There is the sham fairyland at Coney Island, and, however sordid it is when one is in it, it is marvellous against the night as one approaches or leaves it. And the city itself about him, Manhattan! [...] And here [...] is our first sign of the 'alba'; of America, the nation, in embryo in New York. The city has put forth its own expression. The first of the arts arrive. (Pound 1962: 13–14)

In a dialectical move that mirrors that of Baudelaire as myth-maker of Paris, capital of modernity, Pound announces that this flowering of the arts will emerge because of and not in spite of America's materialism: 'At any rate, in these new buildings the mire of commerce has fostered the beautiful leaf. So commerce has, it would seem, its properties worthy of praise – apart from its utility' (15).

Pound's prophecy hints at modern America, 'the land of new cities, skyscrapers, assembly-lines, labour-saving devices, mass consumption and radical invention' (Bradbury 1995: 10), as the new site of modernity. Other artists in the same period were more explicit. In New York for the Armory Show of 1913, Francis Picabia told the *New York Times* that 'France is almost outplayed. It is in America that I believe the theories of the New Art will hold most tenaciously. I have come here to appeal to the American people to accept the New Movement in Art' (cited Bradbury 1995: 267). On arrival in the city two years later, Marcel Duchamp is reported as saying: 'If only America would realize that the art of Europe is finished – dead – and that America is the country of the art of the future' (Breuer 1915). A month later the same newspaper, the *New York Tribune*, was able confidently to declare: 'For the first time Europe seeks America in matters of art. For the first time European artists journey to our shores to find out that vital force necessary to a living and forward-pushing art' (cited Corn 1999: 43). Mina Loy, a key participant in the free-verse movement on the east coast of America associated from 1915 with the magazine *Others*, was later to suggest that such an American renaissance grew – as Pound predicted it would – from the streets of New York (Loy 1997: 157–61). As these modernist figures imply, and others since have argued, New York became the new capital of art in the twentieth century because it became more modern than Paris. Patrice Higonnet, for example, writes: '[W]hen Paris gradually ceased to be the capital of change, innovation, and modernity, art migrated across the Atlantic' (2002: 423). By the Second World War it was no longer possible to speak of a European avant-garde. After the war, the United States indisputably became the new home of artistic modernism and, in poetry, the so-called Black Mountain poets and those associated with them were emerging as heirs to the modernist tradition of Pound and Loy.<sup>52</sup>

These are broad historiographical brushstrokes. They tend to elide the dynamic, dialectical processes behind national aesthetic identity that I have already discussed. They are the stuff of myth as much as history, as Mark

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<sup>52</sup> For the pictorial aspect of this narrative, see Guilbaut 1983. The later modernist tradition in poetry is treated in my Chapter 3.2, on Mina Loy.

Tansey's mock history painting *The Triumph of the New York School* (1984; fig. 02) wryly acknowledges. The picture seems to say, derisively: As if the history of art could be told in terms of a battle between the Europeans, led by André Breton, and the Americans, under Clement Greenberg! I bear with these kinds of narratives because the shift they describe was registered in the writing and publication contexts with which I am concerned. The associated myths and dynamic of this shift from Europe to America are active in the work I discuss and its dissemination; they are, I propose, shaping factors in the development of (and were shaped in turn by) Barnes's, Rhys's and Loy's modernisms. And, crucially for my argument, they are related to fashion. Not only did the fashion industry function according to the same kinds of transatlantic refractions as art and writing, but as Higonnet also recognised, almost by definition modernity operates according to the restless logic of fashion: 'No doubt New York, in turn, will cease to be the world capital of art when modernity establishes itself somewhere else – or everywhere' (2002: 423). This dynamic was often understood by my authors – and by their critics and advocates – to relate to them, as women and writers subject to similar cycles of relevance and obsolescence. As a result they, and we, apprehend the instability of their work and careers as comparable to – even a symptom of – the instability of modernity itself.

#### **MODERNITY (AGAIN) AND METHODOLOGY**

There is a double aspect to modernity here: on the one hand, the periodised modernity of (in my case) Paris of the nineteenth century or New York of the twentieth, discernible in specific historical features and events and people's lived experience of them; and, on the other, the transhistorical nature of modernity as a temporal dynamic or logic – 'a reflexive concept of modernity as something which has happened, yet continues to happen – ever new, but always, in its newness, the same' (Osborne 1995: 13). I do not want to reject either concept, but rather see (as the authors in this study did, I believe) the latter as a philosophical realisation induced by the experience of the former. Peter Osborne describes this in relation to the male tradition to which I critically connect my female authors (the tradition of Baudelaire, Simmel, Benjamin, but also of Nietzsche and Marx) as the

generalization of an epochal form of historical consciousness into the temporal form of experience, itself the dialectical character of the new as the 'ever-same', articulated philosophically in Nietzsche's doctrine of eternal recurrence, and deciphered economically in Marx's analysis

of the logic of commodity production. (1995: 12)

Engaging with the modernity of their own historical moment, of which fashion was a key expression, Barnes, Loy and Rhys understood modernity, like fashion, as a temporal logic of change and repetition: a future-oriented process of change that is repeated. Just one sign of this understanding is the very fact that this recalls the nineteenth-century reflections of Baudelaire on modernity. But doing so in the context of twentieth-century Paris, their understanding was defined and sharpened by a sense of the shift of epochal modernity from Paris to New York.<sup>53</sup> This move from historical experience to abstract temporality does not need to involve an emptying out or homogenisation of modernity's content, as some critics of the abstract view of modernity have suggested.<sup>54</sup> The abstract logic itself had implications for these writers, for their characters were subject to its operations, as they were themselves when the publication or reception of their work brought into focus issues at the heart of modernity's temporal logic: legitimacy, differentiation, relative value, relevance and obsolescence.<sup>55</sup> Often these issues are gendered.<sup>56</sup>

My methodology in this thesis follows this dialectic between the historically particular and a temporalised history. Fashion in literature invites close attention to historicity – to the immediate material conditions of a text's production – but its temporal logic, like that of modernity, puts a certain pressure on such an approach. The restlessness of fashion subsumes the particular in the abstract truths of its system. One strand of my method is thus to historicise the work discussed in its cultural and historical contexts. My emphasis is on the specifically literary features of the texts in question, and frequently in close reading of them, but I develop interpretations in which aesthetics relate to ideological, social and cultural contexts. In order to do this I read the texts in relation to cultural and historical material and the authors' archival documents. But, as I have suggested, what emerged from that relationship – from the ways these texts articulate their contexts through the lens of fashion – was a view that such narrow historical brack-

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<sup>53</sup> My epigraph from William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All* is intended to suggest the same awareness on Williams's part. See Hillis Miller 1990 for an argument that Williams recognised '[t]here is no progress of poetry [...] only a perpetual replaying of the same drama in different forms' (88).

<sup>54</sup> See Osborne 1995, Chapter 1, for a discussion of these arguments, particularly Perry Anderson's objections to Berman 1993 in Anderson 1984. See also Berman's response (Berman 1984). This fear of homogenisation is behind Rita Felski's wariness of abstract theories of modernity (Felski 1995, Chapters 1 and 2).

<sup>55</sup> If modernity is a radical break with tradition and a claim to the new, Osborne also points out that 'modernity/modernities *grow old*' (1995: 20).

<sup>56</sup> On the gender of temporality, see Kristeva 1981, Felski 1995 and Felski 2002.

eting makes little sense on its own.<sup>57</sup> In the way that I read it, in their work (as in Benjamin's) the restless image of fashion speaks of the reactivation of the past in future moments. Thus I pay attention to how these authors set up this cyclical temporal structure, but also – in the second sections of each chapter – I look at the reception of their work. Each of the three main chapters ends with a scenario of publication or reception. These might also be characterised as examples of the work's afterlives. It is no coincidence that fashion and the concept of a literary work's afterlife were both theorised by Walter Benjamin. For Benjamin, the 'tiger's leap' of fashion from the present into the past that it cites reveals the 'time of the now' in history, while the legitimised afterlife of a work in translation imagines that work 'ever-renewed' (1968: 253, 72). Both propose a productive relationship between the contemporary moment and history, the new and the old, opening out onto the future. My studies of Barnes, Rhys and Loy begin with their historical interest in fashion but continue with the ways in which their work has been adopted or reimagined – made new, perhaps – either in contemporaneous or later publishing contexts, or by critical voices, including my own.

#### MODERNISM

The conclusions of this thesis have something in common, I hope, with Vincent Sherry's recent *Modernism and the Reinvention of Decadence* (2015). Sherry's book turns the appointed high priests of modernity and modernism – Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Marx, Freud, Benjamin, Conrad, Eliot, Pound – against themselves, or rather against their devotees, claiming them for the decadent tradition. For Sherry, Baudelaire is not, as my earlier section had it, along with most other histories of the movement, the progenitor of modernism, but of a decadence that is constitutive to modernism. Subsisting within modernism, the traditions of decadence expose the 'fraught and ultimately unavailable notion of the "original"' (284).

Fashion is a defining feature of modernism that simultaneously undoes the movement's definition.<sup>58</sup> It is both the supreme expression of modernity and of modernity's 'backward tracking opposite', in Sherry's words: decadence (2015: 88). But where Sherry is concerned to use decadence as a revealing agent of modernism's blind spots – the true temporal consciousness

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<sup>57</sup> For a spirited rejection of the historicist impulse, see Felski 2015, Chapter 5, 'Context Stinks!'

<sup>58</sup> In this I want to go further than recent criticism of fashion and modernity discussed earlier, such as Burstein 2012 and Garrity 2014, but am making explicit a point that I feel is latent in their discussions.

of modernism as opposed to its much-trumpeted originality ('a modernity against itself' (99), even 'a profounder modernism' (88) – I also want to keep the illusions in sight. Fashion promises novelty, even though it grants it as it passes, which is arguably not at all. My fashion-conscious authors understood this. Fashion's impossible logic of permanent novelty informs their versions of modernism, which remain invested in making it new (often for gendered reasons) even as they question that project. Of the three, Djuna Barnes is the most often associated with the decadent sensibility, but in what follows all of them are seen as exponents of a fashion-consciousness that is also an undoing of modernism's gestures towards the new.<sup>59</sup> Aside from this connection, which as far as I'm aware brings them together as a trio for the first time (a claim to originality bound to be undermined) – and in addition to Barnes's and Loy's well-documented friendship (they met in New York in 1920–21) – the authors shared their expatriation in Paris.<sup>60</sup>

Barnes (1892–1982) did not arrive in the city until 1921, but in her work of the 1910s she was already reflecting on its style, both its bohemian legacy and its contemporary stature in mainstream fashion.<sup>61</sup> In Chapter 1.1 I argue that her newspaper writing, illustration and poetry of that decade represent – through fashion – a translation of Parisian modernity in the context of early twentieth-century New York. Chapter 1.2 turns to the period of Barnes's expatriation in Paris (she left in 1931), presenting the first study of Barnes's writing for *Charm*, a New Jersey-based women's interest magazine. I suggest that her contributions – and the role of Barnes herself in the journal – can be usefully read through *Charm's* own transatlantic mediations and fashion coverage.

Jean Rhys (1890–1979) would have recognised my suggestion that a person and their work are subject to the logic of fashion. Chapter 2.1 argues that her affiliations, and those of her characters, are articulated through fashion

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<sup>59</sup> On Barnes's decadence, see the Afterword of Sherry 2015 and Weir 2008: 180–89. Although Loy is usually cited as the quintessential modern woman and an exemplary modernist for her connections to various movements and figures, her aesthetic and sensibility owe much to her early aestheticist leanings. Of the nineteenth-century movements, Rhys is most often connected to naturalism and impressionism. My second chapter discusses some of her apparent debts to Baudelaire.

<sup>60</sup> All three are included, with many other women, in Benstock 1987. The three of them also shared the pages of Ford Madox Ford's Paris-based *transatlantic review* in 1924. Rhys owned a copy of Barnes's *Nightwood* (Burton 1970: 106) and Loy studied at the St John's Wood School of Art on Elm Tree Road, London (Burke 2012: loc. 830), later to become the Anglo-French Art Centre, where on 10 November 1949 a reading took place of Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, adapted for BBC radio (see my Chapter 2.2). Recently discovered to be alive when the few who knew of her work thought she was dead, Rhys was invited to attend, but didn't make it (Rhys 1985: 59–62).

<sup>61</sup> The date of April 1921 is given by P. Herring (1995: 130). Benstock says it was 1919 or 1920, and that Barnes herself could not remember (1987: 235).



as restless negotiations between centuries and between such poles as America and Paris (which she visited for the first time in 1919, made her home for several years in the 1920s and returned to intermittently until the late 1930s); standardisation and distinction; and high and popular cultures. Chapter 2.2 proposes that the making of Rhys's public reputation in the mass media in the 1960s and 1970s drew on the same fashion discourses she found so compelling in her fiction.

Chapter 3 reprises the theme of reputation in the later work of Mina Loy (1882–1966), whose peripatetic life included two spells in New York and a long residency in Paris – over twenty years, a period in which (as her letters to her son-in-law Julien Levy witness) the city was losing its seat as the centre of aesthetic production. In 3.1 her novel *Insel* and employment by Levy's art gallery are read as fashion-conscious confrontations with her declining renown in the context of a transatlantic shift in cultural authority. In 3.2 the post-war revival of Loy's reputation is assessed in light of her own literary take on the value of her work in her poetic series 'Compensations of Poverty'.

The Afterword initiates some broader observations implied by the thesis's arguments, namely that – in line with the self-consuming and restless logic of fashion – the place of the modernist scholar is as unstable and contingent as that of her objects of study.

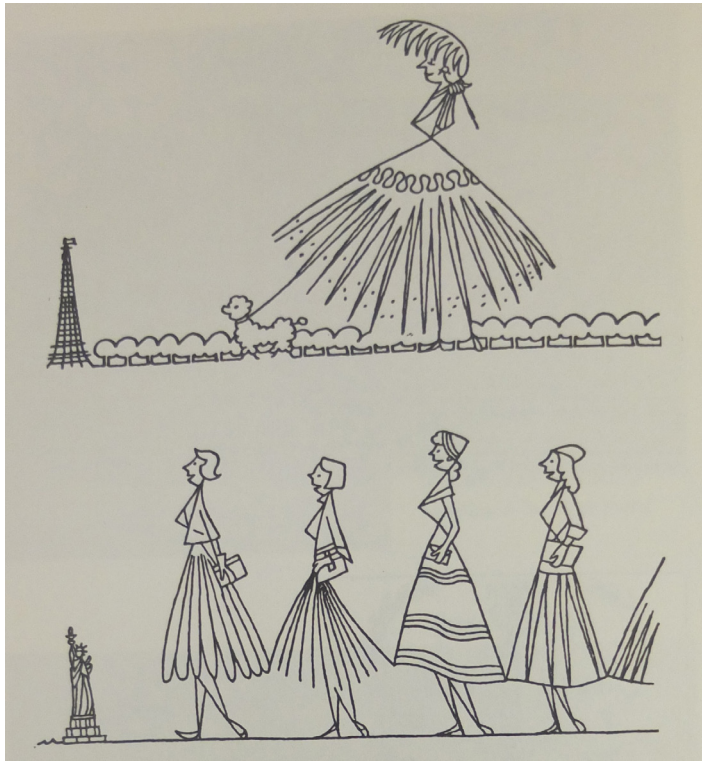


Fig. o.1



Fig. o.2

## CHAPTER 1

# **‘Paris Value’:<sup>1</sup> Djuna Barnes**

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<sup>1</sup> Barnes appears to have written these words at the top of one page of a draft reminiscence of 1939, ‘Farewell Paris’ (Barnes 2005: 249).

# Chapter 1.1

## ‘Fleurs du Mal à la Mode de New York’

### *Consuming Paris*

The May 1923 number of *Vanity Fair* contains a poem by Djuna Barnes, ‘Vaudeville’, first published in 1915 and here reprinted in a box within a short story by Elinor Wylie about a fashionable young woman. ‘The Two Glass Doors: Wherein the Past and Future Become Transparent to a Perplexed Young Lady’ (Wylie 1923) is about transitions in a modern woman’s life: between Paris and New York, the Left Bank and the Right Bank, and Greenwich Village and Fifth Avenue. The passages she makes map the cosmopolitan coordinates of an early twentieth-century modernity that readers of *Vanity Fair* would have recognised: the competing ascendancy of New York and Paris, the patterns of exile and repatriation between the two cities, and the different loci of fashionable life within them. This woman has no money, but the modern metropolis offers her opportunities for change if she only knows how to take them; like Cinderella she can manage these transitions with a new costume. A ‘purplish cloak’ and dress of ‘sleek lemon-yellow satin’ facilitate her progress from the Cour du Dragon (off Rue de Rennes, a street of fashionable shops in Saint-Germain-des-Près) across the Seine, and a chic but romantically shabby outfit is adopted for her return to Manhattan. She stands on the corner of Washington Square and Fifth Avenue, looking down into Greenwich Village and, the other way, uptown; and in a clear sign of the unceasing fashionable fantasies that the city indulges her, she hails a taxi – a ‘pumpkin chariot’ – instead of the bus, to Delmonico’s, a legendarily smart restaurant that, in its various incarnations, had introduced European cosmopolitanism into American dining (Erenberg 1984: 9–11). But every fashion will pass: in May 1923, the month in which this story appeared in *Vanity Fair*, the last Delmonico’s closed after a century. In Wylie’s story the passing of time is figured as the waning of fashions, sartorial and

geographical. Hence the story opens with Perdita – her name itself suggesting feminine loss – walking in ‘French heels’ through Washington Square; in a glass door she imagines that she catches sight of her former self walking in the Jardin du Luxembourg wearing crisp but out-of-date Parisian dress. The reference to *The Winter’s Tale* (Perdita was suspected to be the illegitimate daughter of the King of Bohemia) is a droll symbol of the translation of fashionable, bohemian life – and literary production – across the Atlantic.

Such allusions suggest that Wylie was artfully conscious of her story’s slight, vaguely sentimental content and tone, and of its consumption in the fashionable press. The conundrum of fashion – the mutability beneath a spectacle of ‘youth, frivolity and lightness’ (Evans 2003: 5), a defining dualism of modernity and one that fashion allegorises – makes Perdita merely ‘perplexed’, the ‘lost one’ that her name designates. But in the poem by Djuna Barnes inserted into the page, the inherent deathliness of modernity, the recurring expiration that accompanies the perpetual novelty-making of the modern and which fashion repeats, weighs more heavily. Barnes’s short poem condenses fashion, spectacle, modernity and death. It conjures a modern metropolitan scene: a dancer on the Broadway stage in footlights. She is a childlike graceful beauty with golden hair, dimples and ‘polished skin’, ornately dressed in lace, satin, fur and jewels: the dazzling spectacle of a well-dressed beautiful, youthful woman is the definitive image of New York modernity at this time (Banner 1983).<sup>1</sup> Barnes’s method enacts this modern moment, too: she describes the dancer suspended in light – ‘like sun motes spent in space’ – as if she is caught on film and played back in slow motion; she focuses photographically on different parts of her body but never gives us her whole. This is a decentred modern figure, just held together by the few tangible presences in the poem – her clothes, hair and skin – and even they are barely there: ‘a shower of lace’, fluttering ‘satin-saddled feet’, a ‘discreet hem that dusts her ankles with its fur’, a ‘spangled skirt’. The spectacle that gives the dancer temporary form is also simultaneously the agent of her disintegration in ‘pulsing’ light and ‘whirling rhythm’, as figured by the fragility of sun motes and the pause between the ‘music’s silence and its sound’ in the first stanza. Despite – and because of – the veneer of perfect skin and pretty fabrics, Barnes’s dancer is ephemeral. She is ‘too frail’, ‘more delicate than leaf-light on a lake’. Death marks the surface of her face: ‘the bister and the blue beneath her eyes’ are ‘like a butterfly burnt out and dead’. As she leaves the stage, ‘burn’ is repeated to seal the extinction of this beautiful, mutable creature.

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<sup>1</sup> Especially Chapter 9. See also Erenberg 1984.

Elinor Wylie was poetry editor of *Vanity Fair* in 1923 (Hively 2003: 94), and her decision to complement her own prose with this verse from the previous decade offers an interesting model for approaching Barnes's work of the 1910s.<sup>2</sup> Like Wylie's reputation, Barnes's writing from this period has often been devalued. However, as this publishing scenario suggests, ideas around fashion offer a number of productive ways to read Barnes's early output. If the poem's reprinting, which mirrors the revenant images of Wylie's story and brings to mind fashion's quotation of past styles, foregrounds the issue of time that was so crucial to Barnes, the conjunction also highlights the significant relationship between Barnes's work and the wider discourses of fashion in the period. These include: the expression of American modernity projected by a well-dressed young woman on the stage or in the street; the 'instant consumability' of modern culture, in Terry Eagleton's phrase, and the modernist packaging of this phenomenon as 'pop decadence', in Michael Murphy's (1996: 66–68);<sup>3</sup> the role of magazines in disseminating not just fashion but fashionable (often synonymous with 'modernist') ideas; the role of fashion in articulating a culture in transition, to which the story and the poem both point; the related transnational dialogues in the worlds of fashion, arts and letters; and the trend-driven contingency of the avant-garde. Barnes published the poem as a peripheral member of the American avant-garde in Greenwich Village in the 1910s, and it was reprinted by the beautiful and notorious Wylie at a time when Barnes was living in Paris (and contributing articles to *Vanity Fair* from her base there). The return of the poem thus echoes the transnational passages of Wylie's story, at once relying on and confirming both Wylie's and Barnes's reputations as cosmopolitan women of their era.<sup>4</sup>

Barnes's image and work were fashioned by others, by the magazines in which her writing and illustrations appeared, a positioning that was informed by and contributed to the cultural exchange between New York and Paris. Barnes's first publisher Guido Bruno is one of those who positioned her in strategic ways, as beautiful and picturesquely decadent, for example, a version of Barnes that has more recently been held up for inspection (Elliott and Wallace 1994; Caselli 2009). As Melissa Jane Hardie points out, in an interview with Barnes in 1919 Bruno characterises her as a follower of French decadence and 1890s English aestheticism in 'vigorous, ambitious America'. His title for the interview, 'Fleurs du Mal à la Mode de New York', is, Hardie

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<sup>2</sup> Farr 1983 has Wylie as 'literary editor' (28).

<sup>3</sup> Murphy recycles Eagleton's phrase as he coins his own.

<sup>4</sup> See Farrar 1924: 'Elinor Wylie [...] is the most polished and sophisticated of our youthful American women authors' (66).

writes, a jumble of the old and the contemporary that ‘represents modernity in or as an act of translation’ and portrays Barnes’s work as a translation of ‘Paris, “Capital of the Nineteenth Century”, as a nascent, twentieth-century American modernism’ (2005: 122–23). In what follows, the interpretation of Paris style – in which, as Bruno’s title also suggests, fashion (*la mode*) is central – will be explored as a feature of Barnes’s view of American modernity and of her own American modernism. This transition between countries and centuries suggests the transformation of contemporary American culture that is the background, and often a tacit subject, of Barnes’s work of the 1910s. I will consider how these changes, and the anxieties they generated, are represented by the presence of fashion in her writing and illustration in that decade. The fact of modernity as an act of translation as it shifts between countries also points to the larger temporal logic to which Barnes’s work subscribes: the temporal cycle of novelty and obsolescence in which she, her subjects and her work are caught.

#### TEMPORAL RELAY AND DELAY

Recent scholarship on Barnes has provided nuanced ways of thinking about her complex attitude towards time and the ‘returns’ that pervade her work and its publication history. Hardie addresses the trope of ‘the return’ specifically in *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915) and its material history, arguing that the collection textually (and proleptically) inscribes the metatextual issues that Barnes experienced with the unwanted return of the book as a republished collector’s item. For Hardie *Repulsive Women* anticipates the ‘problem of return’ through its style (a ‘homage to decadence’), subject matter (lesbians, corpses) and arrangement – the poems often echo one another but with modifications (‘From Fifth Avenue Up’ versus ‘From Third Avenue On’; ‘In General’ versus ‘In Particular’) – so that ‘nothing looks the same as it used to’ (Hardie 2005: 123). Hardie’s complex argument, which links close reading with material history, authorial intention with subsequent reception and dissemination, does justice to the equally intricate presentation of time in Barnes’s work and offers an ambitious model for relating text to non-synchronous context. Most crucially for my argument, Hardie conceives of the return as a dialectical movement with critical potential, which not only provides a way of thinking about Barnes’s use of the past to say something about the contemporary moment, but echoes the motions of fashion, which draws on its own history and creates it anew in the present.

A few years before Hardie’s article, Tyrus Miller (1999) had included Barnes in his study of *Late Modernism*, inscribing temporal problems into

the heart of her work: announcing the end of modernism and only with uncertainty the beginnings of another kind of writing, Barnes's art is always out of time. Although, as we will see, her early adoption of the 'sign of death' (T. Miller 1999: 13) complicates his periodising thesis, Miller's book foregrounded Barnes's critical relationship to modernism and her own historical time, and the temporal basis of her sense of their predicaments. Daniela Caselli echoed Miller's theme in her *Improper Modernism* (2009), which holds that if Barnes's 'bewildering corpus' (the subtitle of Caselli's book) can be defined, it is by its anachronisms. While Barnes's early work expressed a decadent affiliation some years after the demise of that aesthetic (Caselli 2009: 72), she later went further back in time to adopt arcane language and images. From this angle, Barnes produced what Caselli calls 'an unmodern, unfashionable, unconventional, and inopportune modernism' (4) that uses its untimeliness to question the possibility of originality, novelty and truth.<sup>5</sup>

Both Miller and Caselli relate Barnes's untimely criticism of modernism to her interest in fashion, reading in the old language and old garments in *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack* her awareness that 'modernism's absolute commitment to "the New" had as its corollary that yesterday's artistic rage could be tomorrow's old hat' (T. Miller 1999: 138).<sup>6</sup> Their shared point acknowledges the structural and conceptual import of fashion as a shorthand for obsolescence – as well as fashion's critical potential. In Miller's words, Barnes's works 'both are and are not "of the moment"' (13). This singular temporality, which is neatly conceptualised by fashion with its favoured prepositions 'in' and 'out', affords her an analytical long view of that moment. I would like to explore, in Barnes's work of the 1910s, how her interest in fashion as a particularly mobile metaphor for the passing of time is not solely an abstract appreciation – though it is that, too – but one rooted in her particular situation in New York at a moment when that city was translating Parisian modernity on different cultural levels. Ascribing a 'solid [...] historical dimension' (Caselli 2009: 10) to Barnes's work I do not want to suggest that it is merely a reflection of its context. Rather, I hope that Barnes's temporal preoccupations – so often articulated through fashion – will appear as both historically specific and, in turn, will mock the very idea of fixed historical specificity. This is a dialectical view of modernity that is brilliantly expressed through the restless logic of fashion.

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<sup>5</sup> Jessica Burstein makes a similar argument about Mina Loy's use of a decorative, *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic in her illustration and lampshade design, although, for Burstein, Loy remains attached to originality in fundamental ways (2012: 176–78, 190).

<sup>6</sup> See also Caselli 2009: 15. In the same chapter, Caselli explores fashion in Barnes's work (especially the cloak) as a sign of textual and semantic instability, and as a way to interrogate femininity. See also Goody 1999 and 2001a, and my own article Oliver 2013.



## THE RESURRECTED BOHEMIA

A Parisian influence on lifestyle was especially felt in Greenwich Village, where in the 1910s a section of the American avant-garde – artists, but writers and activists too – cohered. Although bohemianism was established in America by the mid-nineteenth century (Poe is often identified as the first American bohemian), the years 1910–17 in Greenwich Village have been marked as a crucial period of development in American bohemianism (Watson 1991; Levin 2010; Parry 1960). The homes of the Knickerbocker aristocracy on Washington Square were converted into small, cheap rooms, stables were turned into studios, and cooperative clubs in which painters and writers rented studios also appeared, ‘offering America’s closest counterpart to the genteel version of bohemia called “European style”’ (Watson 1991: 123). As with Poe and other earlier American exponents, the new bohemia was modelled on that of Paris, the original nineteenth-century version of which had been popularised in Henry Murger’s *Scènes de la vie de Bohême*. In 1914 *The Dial* described Greenwich Village as ‘the American parallel of the Latin Quarter’ (cited Levin 2010: 342), a comparison echoed a year later by the *New York Tribune*, which also announced ‘the resurrected Bohemia’ (Addington 1915). The members of the new bohemia were conscious of their French model, too. On its stationery the Hotel Brevoort, a restaurant popular with the Greenwich Village bohemians, gave its location as ‘Coin de la 5me Avenue et de la 8me Rue’ (Watson 1991: 127), and Hutchins Hapgood, an anarchist and writer for *The Masses*, remembered that:

For four or five years preceding the World War, what used to be called bohemian life in New York consisted of small groups, men and women, held together by the spirit of the old Latin Quarter of Paris. Some of these were painters who had worked in Paris and had brought back with them a desire to live in a somewhat similar way in New York; they were impregnated not only with the ideas of French art, but with the liberal experiences of the French cafes. (Hapgood 1972: 316)

But this impression of life in the French cafés was often stylistic, as Barnes – who moved to Greenwich Village in 1915 (P. Herring 1995: xxiv) – recognised in her article ‘The Last Petit Souper (Greenwich Village in the Air – Ahem!)’, an openly satirical portrait of Village ‘characters’, whom she names after popular French drinks – Absinthe, Vermouth and Yvette – to underline their transportation from the bars of the Left Bank (Barnes 1916c). In his survey of bohemianism in America, published soon after the

demise of the early twentieth-century incarnation about which Barnes writes, Albert Parry characterises these imitations of Parisian lifestyle as a physical performance: ‘The territory was different and so were many of the social and economic conditions, but the admirers of Murger’s scenes insisted on installing them into their respective native hearths almost bodily’ (1960: xxii–xxiii). Barnes calls this embodiment of Paris a ‘dialect of the physique’ – ‘There are moments in the lives of all of us, or shall I say some of us, that must be lived in French’ – and recognises the importance of clothes in the pose: one ‘leopard who had chosen his own particular spots’ wears a ‘neatly shaped, frayed’ coat that ‘possessed a sort of indefinite reluctance about admitting itself passe’ and a felt hat bearing uncut stones that ‘stan[d] in relation to jewelry, as free verse to poetry’ (1916c: 668–70). Her reference to the current vogue for free verse among the American avant-garde equates experiments in literature with fashion. Crediting French bohemian style in the making of American modernism’s image, Barnes also points to the trend-driven nature of creative endeavour.

As her mordant profile of bohemian poseurs records, by 1916 the new bohemia had become self-conscious (the process of commodification is nebulous and hard to date but it is generally agreed among commentators that this phase accelerated from around 1914).<sup>7</sup> Greenwich Village had evolved into a brand, of which Guido Bruno was a tireless promoter. Publishing several journals dedicated to Greenwich Village and holding art exhibitions in his ‘garret’ on Washington Square, Bruno recognised the public appeal of the Parisian stamp: ‘All at once it came to me! [...] Of course, this is the Quartier Latin of America. [...] I made up my mind to tell the world about this strange spot in the most commercial business city on earth’ (cited Levin 2010: 377). If the making of the new bohemia involved translating French bohemianism, its marketing was no less reliant on that legacy. ‘Bohemians have a preference for foreign make’, Barnes writes (1916e: 234), acknowledging the importation of Europe’s cultural commodities. But the ambiguous boundary between bohemia and commerce in Bruno’s statement – does he mean that bohemia is an enclave, or that it is perfectly situated to

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<sup>7</sup> Parry 1960 recalls that publicity of Greenwich Village had been ‘raging’ since early 1914, when ‘a committee of the big merchants of the locality [...] went to Fred Howe, director of the People’s Institute in lower Fifth Avenue, with an offer of \$15,000 to advertise the Village as a worth-while region and thus to stop the migration of customers uptown’ (307). Watson 1991 states that by 1917 ‘Villagers began to metamorphose into marketable parodies of themselves. Even Mabel Dodge advertised her services as an interior decorator in the *New Republic*.’ He also notes the publication of the first guidebook to the district in the same year (231). Barnes’s articles about Coney Island similarly depict a spectacle in decline. Parsons 1998 relates this ageing site to the fading world of the circus in *Nightwood*. All three – bohemia, Coney Island and the circus – provided Barnes with sites for a ‘social-psychological exploration of modernity’ (272–73).

be commodified? – hints at the inherent compatibility of the two worlds. Indeed, the commercial undermining of this avant-garde’s bohemian project may have always been imminent. In *The Voice of the City* (1908), the Greenwich Village writer O. Henry describes the scene in a bohemian café: ‘A famous actress was discoursing excitably about monogrammed hosiery. A hose clerk from a department store was loudly proclaiming his opinions of the drama. Thus went Bohemia’ (cited Parry 1960: 259). Jerrold Siegel, in *Bohemian Paris* (1986), reminds us that the bourgeois and bohemian are ‘parts of a single field’ (cited Levin 2010: 2), which Barnes herself admits when she writes that the public is only ‘that part of ourselves that we are ashamed of’ (1916c: 668). And as Joanna Levin suggests, the opposition was not straightforward in America, whose advanced industrialisation blurred the socio-economic distinctions on which French bohemianism developed (2010: 2–3). But as she also points out, this made American bohemia an ideal place from which to understand American culture more broadly: both the foreignness of the model and the familiarity of the domestic object of opposition produced a sense of self-consciousness in the bohemians, often informing critical representations of their lifestyle and their country.

In accounts of Barnes and Bruno’s relationship, Bruno has been maligned, Barnes scholars tending to separate their subject’s artistic position from Bruno’s unscrupulous commercial activities.<sup>8</sup> In fact, the articles about Greenwich Village that they both wrote at this time share a similar sense of self-consciousness about their role as Village insiders variously interpreting or obstructing an image of the area for their readers. The articles can even be seen as part of an ongoing conversation between Barnes and Bruno, as they take up similar themes and at times seem to respond to (perhaps even copy) one another. (In the 23 September 1916 issue of *Bruno’s Weekly*, Bruno attributes a reprinted illustration from *The Book of Repulsive Women* to ‘Djuno Barnes’, a brilliantly appropriate slip in this context.) He had begun to refer to her in *Bruno’s Weekly* in October 1915; he continues to mention her and reprint her poems and drawings throughout 1915 and 1916. In *Bruno’s Weekly* in January 1916, Barnes publishes an article on the Ballets Russes dancer Adolph Bolm (the troupe performed in New York in January and February 1916),<sup>9</sup> while on 19 February 1916, in the same journal, Bruno

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<sup>8</sup> According to Hank O’Neal, Barnes didn’t like Bruno either, and complained about his bad breath (cited P. Herring 1995: 89). Phillip Herring, for whom Bruno is a ‘complete charlatan’, also suggests that he was one of the models for *Nightwood’s* Guido and Felix Volkbein (1995: 215–16). For a more generous picture of Bruno and his contribution to American modernism, see Rogers 2012.

<sup>9</sup> ‘Topics in Chronicling America – Serge Diaghilev and the Ballet Russes (Russian Ballet)’  
<[www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/diaghilev.html](http://www.loc.gov/rr/news/topics/diaghilev.html)> [accessed 5 September 2017].

compares the gowns of the Village designer Florence Gough to Léon Bakst's costume designs for the Ballets Russes (1916a: 500). On 29 April Barnes's 'The Last Petit Souper' is accompanied in *Bruno's Weekly* by her picture of a dancer in the Ballets Russes, and in November of that year, in 'Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians', Barnes refers to Florence Gough (although she spells it Gaugh) and her 'effects of Bakst' (1916e: 234). On 4 March 1916 Bruno complains about popular accounts of Greenwich Village and dismisses its bohemian image in favour of 'what we are' (1916b: 531). Parts of this piece (and others) are reused in 'Greenwich Village As It Was' (Bruno 1916d) in *Pearson's Magazine* in September 1916, the first issue edited by Frank Harris, whom Barnes had introduced to Bruno. In the following number, Harris includes a sequel by Barnes, 'Greenwich Village As It Is' (1916d), in which, like Bruno but with greater ambiguity, she dismisses the popular idea of bohemia and defends an authentic version of the Village. It is interesting to note that both associate the 'sham' version of bohemia with dress, indeed that so many of these points of comparison hinge on questions of fashion, image and spectacle. On 19 August Bruno (1916c) had spoken of the Village as a trend that will pass and rise again, an idea that Barnes reprises on 26 November in 'How the Villagers Amuse Themselves' (1916f).

If Barnes's ambivalent position in these articles was not enough to suggest her cynical view of an 'authentic' Greenwich Village, this intertextuality within a cliquy publishing scenario – in which, like fashion, views are recycled and adopted with ironic emphasis – complicates the division between the avant-garde and the commercial, between the authentic and the copy.

As Barnes's and Bruno's articles suggest, the commercialisation of Greenwich Village was in part due to the increased press attention on the area as a tourist attraction. Barnes wrote four articles about the Village in 1916, all of which are informed by the sense in which its image is constructed by popular opinion, such as that of 'Madam Bronx' in 'Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians':

I have heard of old houses and odd women and men who sit on the curb quoting poetry to the policemen or angling for buns as they floated down into the Battery with the rain. I have heard of little inns where women smoke and men make love and there is dancing and laughter and not too much light. I have heard of houses striped as are the zebras with gold and with silver, and of gowns that – (1916e: 237–38)

Barnes's abrupt interruption of Madam Bronx points to the centrality of Vil-

lage fashion in this hearsay. Uptowners visited the section expecting to find girls with bobbed hair in smocks and open-toed sandals, a stereotype that was quickly adopted by female tour guides (Levin 2010: 376). Single female women also made a living running tea rooms that adhered to popular conceptions of bohemian lifestyle, a phenomenon that Barnes documents in a later article, 'Crumpets and Tea', in which 'white-haired ladies with necks encased in flaring Flemish collars' (1917b: 274) seek European originality through a decorative scheme of antiques and tapestries. Directly invoking the French tradition, Barnes adds that perhaps if Zola was horrified by the well-fed bourgeois shopkeeper, he would have approved of these women's emaciated appearance.

Typically for these articles, Barnes treats the sociological developments that were an important part of bohemian life in the 1910s – the independence of women, for example, as here – as just another fashion, often French-inspired. In 'Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians', the 'Radical pests', disciples of Baudelaire, have 'flowing ties and flowing morals' (241). Deborah Saville (2005) has shown how closely connected were modes of dress and behaviour in Greenwich Village at this time, when clothes were charged with cultural significance: the reconfigured social conventions, free speech, and new conceptions of sexuality and feminist politics for which Greenwich Village became a centre. Barnes was clearly aware of these new ideologies. The desire for an equal society and an interest in psychology are present in her image of the waiters in the Breevort and the Lafayette: 'they are the only waiters in the world who feel free to cultivate their innermost longings [...] Well, isn't Bohemia a place where everyone is as good as everyone else [...]?' (1916e: 233). But her rhetorical questions show that she is probing received ideas. And if her vignette of 'spicy girls in gay smocks' and 'capricious clothes that seem to be making faces at their wearers' (234) captures the pairing of bold patterns and bold politics in the new bohemia, the sense that these garments have a mind of their own expresses a supplementary logic that works against their wearers' intentions. The colours and patterns, 'Wild, wild exotics of fabrics – effects of Bakst' (234), are the main event: fashion has taken over, and Barnes's sense of its place in the Greenwich Village brand is indicated by her glib expressions, like slogans: 'flowing ties and flowing morals', 'effects of Bakst'. Significantly, the latter makes reference to Paris fashions: Léon Bakst's costumes and staging for the Ballets Russes had an enormous effect on style in the first half of the 1910s, largely through his influence on Paul Poiret, but also his collaborations with Jeanne Paquin and a considerable presence in the press (M. Davis 2010). By 1915 *Vogue* refers to the 'Bakst influence' as something worth recording for posterity in the canvases of great artists ('The Wheel of Fashion' 1915: 170).

As her references to Bakst show, Barnes was equally aware of developments in mainstream fashion and the influence of Parisian style on American dress and related behaviour. A number of her newspaper articles and short stories of the 1910s respond to such transformations in American culture. In her first known piece of journalism, 'You Can Tango – A Little – at Arcadia Dance Hall', she creates a fictional scene involving Reginald Delancey, a young man with fashionable friends who play polo, and a working-class girl named Delia O'Connor. The two meet at the Arcadia Dance Hall, a modern dance hall set up by the 'Social Centers Corporation' to regulate dancing and eliminate 'the old-style dance hall with its flickering gaslights and furtive faces' (Barnes 1913a: 13). Dancing at this time was the subject of a huge moral debate in America, as the 'dance craze' – a 'profound revolution in American life', according to F. Scott Fitzgerald (cited Erenberg 1984: 146) – spread across the country and new dances such as the tango and the turkey trot seemed to conservative minds to cross the boundary of acceptable behaviour.<sup>10</sup> As Louis Erenberg writes, 'In the years of the dancing mania, the ballroom team personalized many of the fears and dreams of urban life' (148).

The outrageous style of the dances was closely connected to the new styles of dress imported from Paris (a clumsy conflation perhaps – one often made, as we will see – of licentious Paris and ethnic otherness, in this case the African origins of the new dances). Barnes indicated the overt association in an interview with Lillian Russell the following May when she probed the actress for her opinion of the 'modern dressing' and the 'modern dances' (Barnes 1914b: 54). The image of the modern American woman at this time was closely bound up with these two phenomena, and their combined effect – as Barnes's question implies – was attracting widespread comment.<sup>11</sup> In the Arcadia Dance Hall 'the turkey trot is absolutely taboo' and the 'tango may be danced in modified form', in order to 'elevate the tone of dancing and to place the dance-hall business on a clean and wholesome basis', as the treasurer and secretary of the SCC reports in Barnes's piece (1913a: 15). The innocent and modest Delia O'Connor, we learn, works at the 'Paris' department store, which in the light of the Parisian associations of the new dances gives Barnes's piece an allegorical reading: the dissemination of Paris fashions and associated behaviour among American working-class wom-

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<sup>10</sup> See also Barnes's interviews with Irene and Vernon Castle (1914a), and Flo Ziegfeld, director of the Ziegfeld Follies dance troupe (1914c).

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, James 1914 and Rittenhouse 1914.

en, and the regulation of such behaviour – in short, the Americanisation of fashion involving a commodification of Parisian style, and the blurring of class boundaries that these developments in consumerism helped to effect.<sup>12</sup>

In Barnes's short story 'What Do You See, Madam?' (1915b), an organisation called Prevention of Impurities on the Boards is charged with regulating a performance of *Salome*, the apotheosis of Old World corruption.<sup>13</sup> But the dancer playing the seductress here, Mamie Saloam, escapes poverty on the Bowery through her interpretation of the role, by swapping cotton and gingham for lace stays. If Barnes saw clearly the anxieties induced by European influence, she also recognised the part it played, via clothes and the theatre, in class mobility among American women.<sup>14</sup>

Her article 'Fashion Show Makes Girl Regret Life Isn't All Redfern and Skittles' (1915c), in which she reports on a parade of the latest fashions in a theatre, again reflects the anxieties surrounding this cultural importation, in terms of national and female identity. Organised by the actress turned producer May Tully, 'The Fashion Show' was held at a major New York vaudeville theatre, The Palace, in April 1915 (Schweitzer 2009: 206). Filling the theatre to capacity four times, the show featured twenty-five models (all 'perfect thirty-sixes' according to *Variety*, an impression echoed by Barnes) stepping onto the stage through an enlarged cover of *Vogue* magazine in a reported \$50,000-worth of gowns and jewellery 'from abroad and from the salons of leading dressmakers at home' (cited Schweitzer 2009: 206). This native element was part of a wider effort to develop original American fashion, and Marlis Schweitzer notes how savvy was Tully's effort to connect 'The Fashion Show' with *Vogue's* recent Fashion Fête (November 1914), an exclusive event that had suggested a new trend for 'fashion nationalism' while the long-dominant Paris ateliers were closed due to the war (207).<sup>15</sup> In fact, French couture resumed almost normal production after a few months, and when the big houses protested *Vogue's* sponsorship of the Fashion Fête, Condé Nast sent an emissary to placate Paul Poiret with the suggestion of a 'French Fashion Fête' in America (Chase 1954: 107). Nevertheless, Schweitzer credits Tully with impressive business acumen, for she had persuaded the New York designers Bonwit Teller and the Paris couturi-

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<sup>12</sup> See Leach 1993, Chapter 4, and Erenberg 1984, Chapters 2 and 5.

<sup>13</sup> Wilde wrote one theatrical version, while Richard Strauss composed another as an opera, which was frequently performed (and decried) in New York at this time. See Barnes's interview with Mimi Aguglia (1913d), one actress who took the lead role. Phillip Herring claims Wilde's play 'as a very important early influence' on Barnes (1995: 122).

<sup>14</sup> On Barnes's satirical response to the issue of censorship in the theatre in the 1910s, see Bockting 1997, which also locates Barnes's texts in the context of contemporary debates around women's and performers' identities.

<sup>15</sup> See also Evans 2013: 90–91.

ers Lanvin and Redfern to lend their gowns in return for free advertisements and onstage announcements that everything on show was available to buy at nearby department stores or salons (2009: 206).

Barnes responded to the blatant consumer orientation of the show and tacit understanding that journalists would further advertise these firms with a series of wry product placements: 'With a shock you appreciate you are not a la mode, that you do not Maison Maurice through life, that you do not negligee a la Bonwit Teller to bed. Ah, well! Life has never been all Redfern and skittles!' (1915c: 207). Translating the fashion houses into verbs and adopting French words and phrases without their accents, Barnes reproduces at sentence level the importation of Paris fashions and the struggle for cultural authenticity.

Meanwhile, her articulation of her own outmodedness refers to the complicity of department stores, fashion houses and the stage in shaping female identity as consumers.<sup>16</sup> As William Leach has shown, the translation of Parisian fashion practices in America involved a movement across class boundaries, for the 'upper-class French trade', which supplied a few clients from the private houses of couturiers, became an American mass market that reproduced the latest mode from Paris for a less affluent clientele at a third of the cost (1993: 95). Most innovative in this respect was the introduction of the elite and exclusive French fashion show into the mass market, the first example of which was probably 'The Fashion Show' at Madison Square Gardens in 1903 (Evans 2013: 77–78). By the time Barnes covered the Palace fashion show, the format was almost fixed: '[L]iving models paraded down ramps in theaters or department stores, spotlighted by light engineers to a musical accompaniment' often with theatrical effects of a particular theme, usually Parisian (Leach 1993: 102). These shows brought Parisian fashions to a broad audience, creating female consumers and democratising their desire for clothes. As May Tully is quoted as saying in Barnes's article, 'The fashions have been getting a pretty tight hold on the world, and when one sees which way the mind runs, it's simple enough. What could be more entertaining to the average woman than a beauty parade?' (1915c: 210). Equally, with staged condescension Barnes says to one of the actors, 'Why, this is your supreme chance. What could you be but a chorus girl if you hadn't been picked to be a star in a beauty parade?' The girl responds, 'Why, a model of course. That's what I am. I'm not a chorus girl at all and never have been. You've bought my face a million times upon the current magazines' (208–09). This is a de-

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<sup>16</sup> See Leach 1993 on the indomitable role of department stores in the rise of American commodity culture. Chapter 4 considers their merchandising of fashion. See also Schweitzer 2009, Chapter 5, on the complicity of theatres in this effort.



liberately staged hierarchy, pitting, at the top, Barnes the journalist (who makes opening references to the Old Masters of literature), beneath her the model, and, lowest, the chorus girl. The obviously false nature of this encounter draws attention to the new matrices of female identity in America in part facilitated by the new fashions: ‘For surely,’ Barnes writes, ‘we are becoming but the models to our gowns’ (207). Here she responds to a very real and recent cultural phenomenon – the use of live models in a theatrical setting – that had far-reaching effects on class categories and the visibility of women’s bodies.

Indeed, Barnes dramatises her own response to the fashion show as one of overwhelming desire, of submission to a flawless spectacle, a ‘phantasmagoria’ (206), a ‘sensation of orgy’ (207), with religious accents of exaltation and ordainment. These vivid phrases and analogies have striking links with Marx’s theory of commodity fetishism, and although it would be inappropriate to overstate the connections between Marxism and Barnes, it is clear that here she articulates the fashion show in terms of capitalism and the commodity.<sup>17</sup> As in Marx’s concept, these clothes take on a life of their own:

I ask you what temperament could dominate such things as the swirling, truculent, commanding, belligerent, docile, and arrogant charm of this thing laced upon the body of a girl? [...] The styles have got us by the throat – we laugh as they hurl us to the ground. (Barnes 1915c: 207–08)

Twenty years before Walter Benjamin was to adopt the ‘phantasmagoria’ as a key expression of nineteenth-century capitalism in Paris, Barnes finds it renewed in twentieth-century American merchandising, itself an interpretation of a Parisian original.<sup>18</sup>

There are elements that suggest the underside or resistant opposite of this spectacle: Barnes’s own unfashionable ‘ninety-eight-cent near-linen [shirt-]waist’ (207); the realisation that for her, ‘Life has never been all Redfern and skittles!’, a play on the working-class British idiom ‘life isn’t all beer and skittles’; and the constant repetition in the first half of the article of that word ‘life’, which erupts disturbingly in phrases in which it has ostensibly been idealised: ‘After all, life is merely a matter of succumbing becomingly. [...] Life hangs upon a thread – the drawstring of a chemise, the ribbon in a petticoat’ (208). Redfern – i.e. fashion – replaces beer – i.e. real life – in

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<sup>17</sup> As in Marx 1867, Chapter 1. On Barnes’s journalistic preoccupation with spectacular culture, see Biers 2003, Goody 2012a and Green 1993.

<sup>18</sup> On the importance of the term to Benjamin’s *Arcades Project*, see Cohen 1989.

a self-conscious opposition between the authentic and the commodified, the real and the spectacle. In fact, we will see that beer is used regularly by Barnes in the 1910s as an overdetermined symbol of the real in contemporary American culture, suggesting her nuanced view of its place (and its aesthetic representation) in modern life. At the fashion show, reality is inseparable from the spectacle; image is paramount – how Barnes and the audience perceive the subjects, how the actors perceive the audience and vice versa – as figured in the moment when Barnes notices what the audience look like from the stage of the theatre: ‘A thousand heads like a field of well-ordered cabbages broken upon my vision. Holy smoke! Did I look like that to the actors? [...] “I don’t like it at all,” I said aloud’ (210). This kind of self-consciousness, the result of an awareness of the viewer’s expectations, is attributed to the current ascendancy of Paris fashions and their translation in American consumer culture.

#### THE OBSOLETE BOHEMIAN

I have been reading Barnes’s work for signs of New York’s negotiation of Parisian style. In the case of Greenwich Village bohemia, we have seen that this occurred at a time when the bohemian lifestyle was becoming self-conscious – as it was being commodified. We have also seen that, contemporaneously, Barnes was sensitive to the wider operations of American commodity culture and the currency of Parisian trends. I now want to consider how the passing of Greenwich Village as a culturally and historically specific fashion (and its sartorial manifestations) may have informed Barnes’s distinctive vision of time.

Much of Barnes’s writing of the period reflects on the obsolescence of the bohemian in America. Her story ‘Who Is This Tom Scarlett?’ (1917a) questions the identity of its eponymous character, a bohemian figure, in a world that has moved on. In ‘Fashion Show Makes Girl Regret...’, discussed above, Barnes has the sole male actor in the parade, a European-style dandy who wistfully invokes Victor Hugo, realise that his ‘peculiar type of masculine charm’ has been eclipsed by a new brand of celebrity, the glamorous girl of the stage (1915c: 209). Equally, the eponymous protagonist of ‘Paprika Johnson’ plays her ‘pawnshop bango’ and sings from the fire escape of her building for the patrons of a bar below; she is ‘the cabaret performer of the beer garden’, a star of *fin-de-siècle* Paris adapted to twentieth-century New York (1915a: 42, 45). As early as 1913, in an article for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, the Americanisation of the Parisian artistic type is allegorised in the person of Therese (without the accents as in the French), whose mel-

ancholy, self-conscious poetry is informed by commercial culture: “Let us walk in the moonlight upon the sand [...] where the waves look like sheer strips of broken beer bottles” (Barnes 1913b: 49). In these pieces Barnes is thinking about the figure of the artist and his or her place in modern American culture, whose authenticity – again symbolised by the beer bottle – is questioned.

But it is in the four articles on Greenwich Village that Barnes deals most extensively with the place left for bohemianism. The position that she takes in all four is difficult to pin down. The ‘patriot’ with a ‘little home in the fifties with its wax flowers, its narrow rockers and its localisms’ (1916c: 668) is denigrated, and so are his received ideas about how a bohemian dresses and behaves. And yet the bohemians are satirised for their modes and manners, too. Mocking those above and below Washington Square equally, Barnes’s only certainty seems to be that the pose of European bohemianism is passé. In ‘How the Villagers Amuse Themselves’, one of the guests at a Village ball laments the passing of the old bohemia, self-consciously modelled on Oscar Wilde and Victor Hugo:

‘life has become so pure that it is no longer a pleasure to go slumming. [...] one can sit in the gutters of Manhattan and arise covered with nothing worse than the shadow of a star. Jean Valjean could have passed beneath our city, gone through its most corrupt sewers and found – what? [...] Nothing but a lot of castoff ethics and two or three discarded points of view.’ (1916f: 250)

In ‘Greenwich Village As It Is’ (1916d) Barnes compares the area to an artist who has committed suicide because he has painted his canvases in perishable colours and, like flowers, they are beginning to fade. If at first it appears to subscribe to bohemian values – a Baudelairean morbidity and worship of the ephemeral – the description in fact recognises more the ready recuperation of those values, for the canvases are being appraised in a museum.

The obsolescence of Greenwich Village bohemianism was an example to Barnes of fashion’s operation: the interpretation of a nineteenth-century Parisian aesthetic formed just another temporary vogue. In ‘Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians’ she thus offers two versions of bohemia – a set of alternative styles – a European aestheticism and something like an American realist mode:

There are the evenings in the studios, blue and yellow candles pouring their hot wax over things in ivory and things in jade. Incense curling

up from a jar; Japanese prints on the wall. A touch of purple here, a gold screen there, a black carpet, a curtain of silver, a tapestry thrown carelessly down, a copy of *Rogue* on a low table open at Mina Loy's poem. A flower in a vase, with three paint brushes; an edition of Oscar Wilde, soiled by socialistic thumbs. [...] And then – a small hall bedroom under the eaves, a dirty carpet lying in rags; a small cot bed with a dirty coverlet. A broken shaving mug with a flower in it, a print of a print on the wall, a towel thrown in a corner, a stale roll and a half-finished cup of tea. [...] A pair of torn shoes, a man's body on the bed, with arms thrown out, breathing slowly the heavy breath of the underfed. (1916d: 242)

Deborah Longworth suggests that both these scenes are indebted to Europe, the latter to Henry Murger's or George Du Maurier's romanticised visions of bohemian poverty (Longworth 2012: 465). But Barnes's descriptions of the seedy back rooms bear comparison to contemporary realist paintings, which manifestly opposed the European influence in favour of an American urban vernacular. Her image of the Hell Hole – 'the dirty back room with its paper cutouts of ladies in abbreviated undergarments, the men at the tables, the close atmosphere, the sordid faces [...] the still, dead beer; the heavy air, the inert bodies' (243) – is echoed in John Sloan's aquatint of a scene in the same bar (1917; fig. 1.1). Barnes studied in New York art schools (the Pratt Institute between 30 September 1912 and 19 March 1913, and the Art Students League in 1915–16 [P. Herring 1995: 64–65]) at a time when Sloan (1871–1951) and such contemporaries as Robert Henri (1865–1929) and George Bellows (1882–1925) were significant influences on New York painting. Her earliest newspaper illustrations for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (see figs 1.2, 1.3), characterised by a fluid line equally suited to poverty, dissolution, caricature, urban rhythms and the sinuous, shimmying movements of the stage and the dance hall, bear comparison with the New York realism of the so-called Ashcan School of painters, many of whom focused on the same urban subjects as Barnes the journalist. Compare, for example, the faces of 'The Unconvinced' in Barnes's 'Round Ben Franklin's Statue Forum Orators Fret and Fume' (fig. 1.3) with those in the foreground of George Bellows's *Stag at Sharkey's* (1909; fig. 1.4).

A strain of the American vernacular also runs throughout Barnes's four Greenwich Village articles, as in 'Greenwich Village as It Is', where the 'melting-pot' on the south side of Washington Square, described with self-consciously natural rhetoric, is tellingly opposed to the superficial cosmopolitan (Paris-bought) fashions of the Knickerbocker aristocracy on the north:

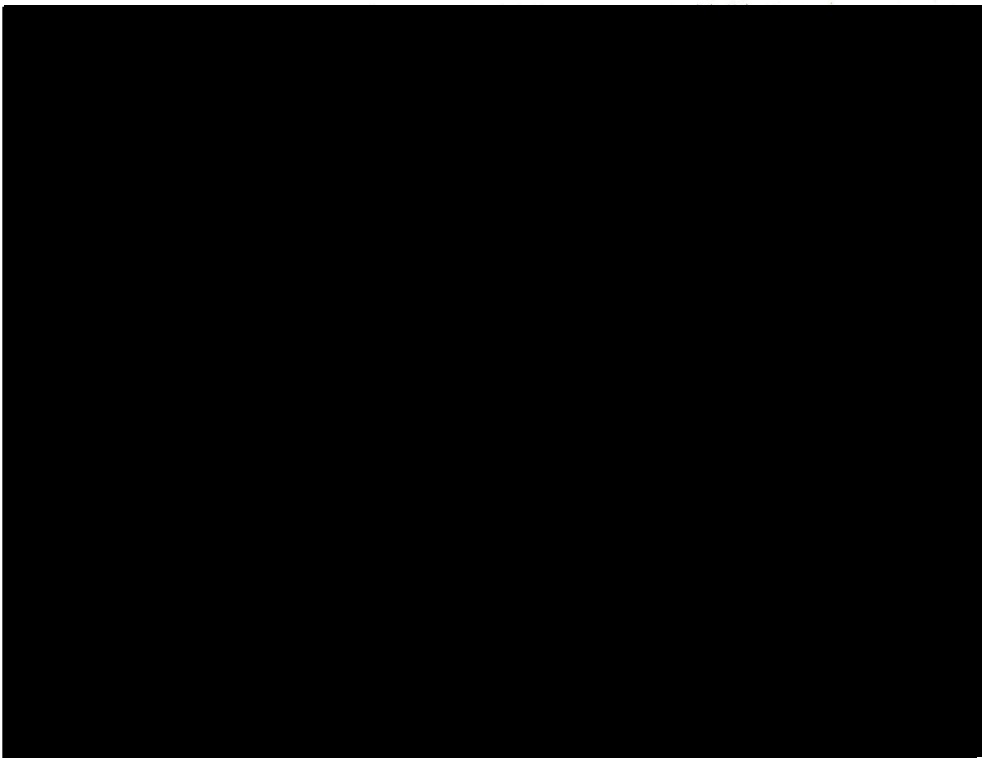


Fig. 1.1



Fig. 1.2



Here on the North side are stately houses inhabited by great fortunes [...] and all those whose names rustle like silk petticoats, and on the other side a congeries of houses and hovels passing into rabbit warrens where Italians breed and swarm in the sun as in Naples (1916d: 300)

As before, neither option is nuanced enough to accept, and Barnes's use of a sartorial analogy points up her sense of any version of bohemia as a style.<sup>19</sup> In 'Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians' the alternative aesthetics are personified in differently dressed figures: the Queen of Bohemia, all exotic beauty, 'arising in dimity glory, shaking loose myrrh, long stifled, from crumpled lace' (233); and 'King' McGrath, who leaves his squalid bedroom to start his day 'in full dress' (245), his bohemian uniform. Neither is favoured, and Barnes only confirms the perpetuity of fashion and its capacity for renewal. As she concludes about bohemia in 'How the Villagers Amuse Themselves': 'all these nights [...] sink steadily and die. To rise again. With differences' (251).

Scott Herring argues that in these articles Barnes toys with middle-class white expectations of bohemia, teasing the uptowner 'with the sexual or ethnic type' but failing to deliver and thus 'prompt[ing] a minor crisis in sensational underworld representation, a crisis in her reader's ability to discern and categorize these populations' (S. Herring 2007: 165).<sup>20</sup> In a tangential reading of these articles, I propose that Barnes stages the belatedness of bohemia's currency in 1916, a passing of a fashion. Not so much an active frustration of bourgeois expectations (bohemia does not exist) as a reflection on the changes those expectations have wrought (bohemia no longer exists because of its commodification). Where Herring argues that the indeterminacy of the articles is a result of their simultaneously offering and undoing 'cultural specificity', I suggest that 'cultural specificity' – the popularisation of bohemia in New York in the mid to late 1910s, the passing of a subculture – is the agent of that indeterminacy. The larger point of this – lest it seem that I am reducing Barnes's work to a mirror of its historical circumstances – is that her abstract appreciation of the passage of time, which consumes all cultural forms (including Barnes's own political agency), was developed in particular circumstances.

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<sup>19</sup> Elliott and Wallace say that '[i]t is obvious that Barnes produced a number of different Bohemias, each carefully tailored to meet the requirements of a different editor or audience' (1994: 139), but these differences exist within articles as well as between them.

<sup>20</sup> A similar argument is given by Heise 2009, although he historicises Barnes's deliberate illegibility in the context of the regulation of urban space.

## ILLUSTRATING OBSOLESCENCE

Barnes's view of new bohemian interpretations of Parisian modernity and their inherent obsolescence is crystallised in the drawing 'Russian Ballet', which underlines the borrowings at work in fashion and its inbuilt outmodedness (fig. 1.5). The drawing accompanied Barnes's first article on Greenwich Village, 'The Last Petit Souper' (1916c), which, we have seen, deals with three obsolete bohemian types of French extraction. When it was published in *Bruno's Weekly* on 29 April 1916, the piece was also illustrated with three drawings by Aubrey Beardsley, who appears regularly in Bruno's various Greenwich Village magazines as an icon of their version of European bohemia. Barnes, too, is representative for Bruno: on 27 November 1915, in the same magazine, he congratulates her merely for getting out of bed and writing and selling a poem, for which it is noted the landlady will be grateful: Barnes is the archetypal bohemian, living hand to mouth by her art. And on 21 October 1915 he had announced her as the 'American Beardsley', a comparison he seems to have wanted to emphasise again here. But while Barnes's drawing may derive its black-and-white drama and graphic sinuosity from Beardsley's aesthetic, several factors suggest that she was self-conscious about this European influence. As has already been pointed out, she was using the decadent aesthetic some years after its heyday: this kind of belatedness is a hallmark of Barnes's work, Daniela Caselli (2009) observes. Given Bruno's own predilection for the style, this is not in itself, however, an index of irony.<sup>21</sup> More suggestive, in connection with this outmoded style, is the subject matter, which appears to be a hybrid scene from two different productions first performed by the Ballets Russes in Paris in 1910 and included in their run at the New York Opera in 1916 – seminal moments of European modernism returning, to a great fanfare, for an American audience ('America Is to See It' 1915). The black character marks the ballet of the drawing's title as *Schéhérazade*, with its 'golden slave', while the flying creature above him is surely *The Firebird*. As Barnes's emphasis on the slave's patterned trousers highlights – they make a central triangle in the picture and are its only lively formal incident – both productions were designed in full exotic style by Léon Bakst (M. Davis 2010: 120–27).

In the context of an article about bohemians outlandishly dressed in Parisian mode, this overt visual reference to Bakst's designs points to the extensive use of them made by fashion designers since the performance of *Schéhérazade*, the 'effects of Bakst', as Barnes was to write in 'Becoming In-

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<sup>21</sup> Weir 2008: 180–89 discusses Barnes's work as part of a specifically American decadent revival in the mid-1910s.





*Russian Ballet. By Djuna Barnes*

Fig. 1.5

AMERICA IS TO SEE IT, THE MAGNIFICENT  
BALLET RUSSE.—AGAINST BAKST'S BACKGROUND,  
THE INCOMPARABLE NIJINSKY AND KARSAVINA

"Papillons," below, is a romantic fantasy staged by Bakst and danced to Schumann's music by Karsavina (at right of photograph) and a ballet of butterflies. The photograph was taken at an outdoor rehearsal at Lausanne, Switzerland.



Photograph by Kraus Schneider

Lilou, Tchernihova has that grace of dancing and of beauty peculiar to the Russians, and even before the exacting and expert Russian audience she is a favorite. In "Clopate" she has a leading part.

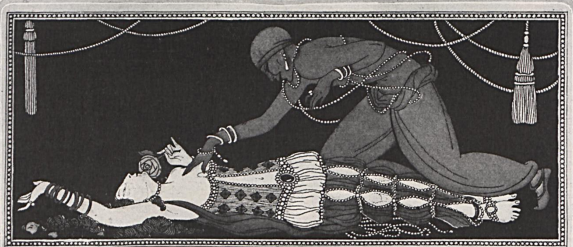
"Schéhérazade," at the right, is colorful as only Bakst can make it, tense with the music of Rimsky-Korsakov, and sensuous with the dancing of Karsavina, and of Nijinsky as the black slave. This sketch of the principals is by Georges Barbier, of Paris.



© F. O. Hooper

Adolf Palm is leading mime and "maître des ballets," and for graphically weird pantomime and dancing he is unequalled. In Schumann's "Carnaval" in which he appears, he dances with Karsavina.

In the middle below is Leonide Massin, in "La Légende de Joseph," and though this ballet will not be given in America, the dancer will appear in other roles. Massin created a sensation in this impersonation as much by his classic figure as by the finish of his dancing.



© Berlin Photographic Co.

"Le Dieu Bleu" is an exotic tale of Hindu gods, monsters, miracles, and love, staged by Leon Bakst with all the splendor of massed colors and the richness of fantastic detail for which he is famous. The costume above was designed by him for "le fiancé"



Photograph by Sami Stranburg



© Berlin Photographic Co.

The scenic backgrounds against which the ballets are danced, and the costumes that clothe them, are an essential part of the Ballet Russe. The costume above is for an attendant in "Le Dieu Bleu," staged by Leon Bakst, who stages most of the twenty ballets.

Fig. 1.6



Fig. 1.7

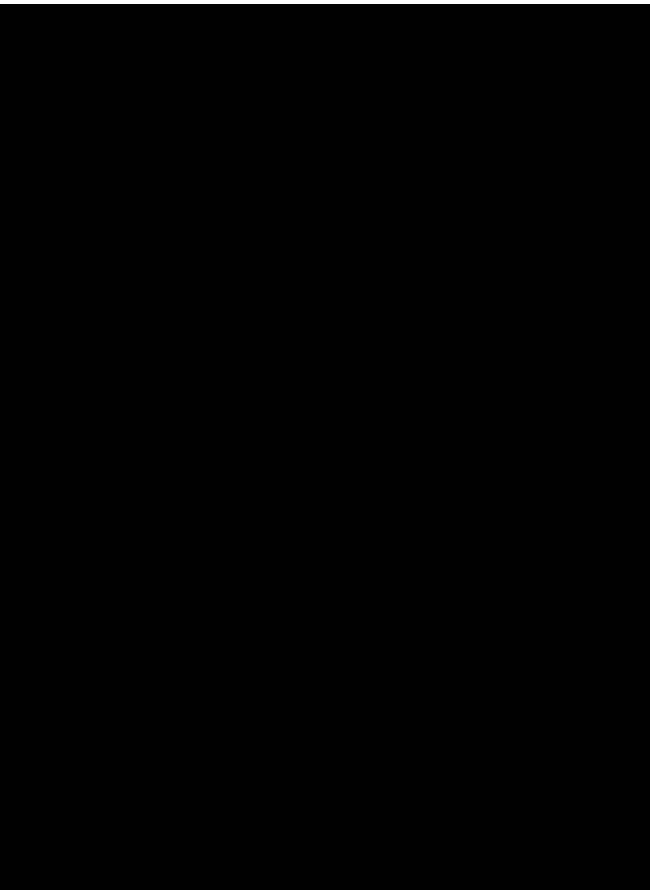


Fig. 1.8

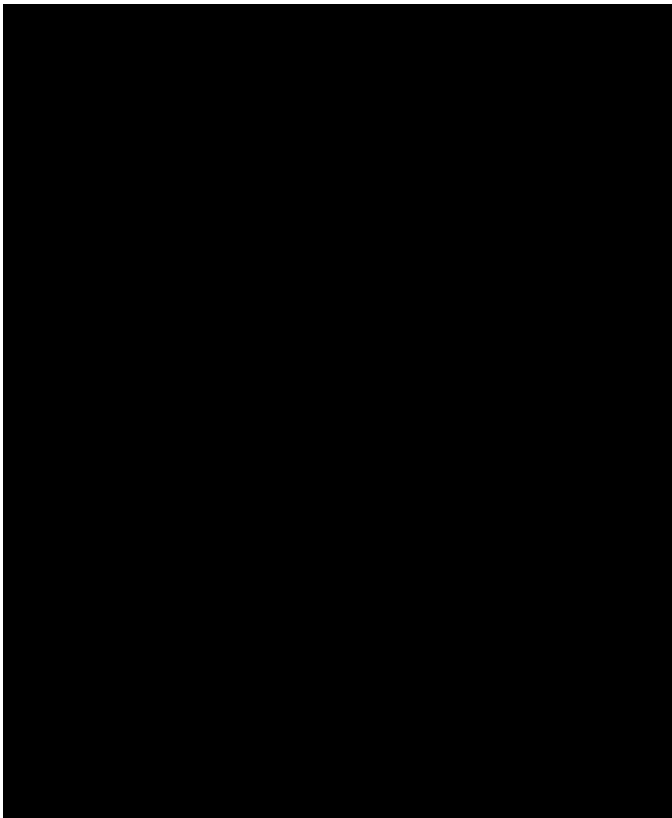


Fig. 1.9

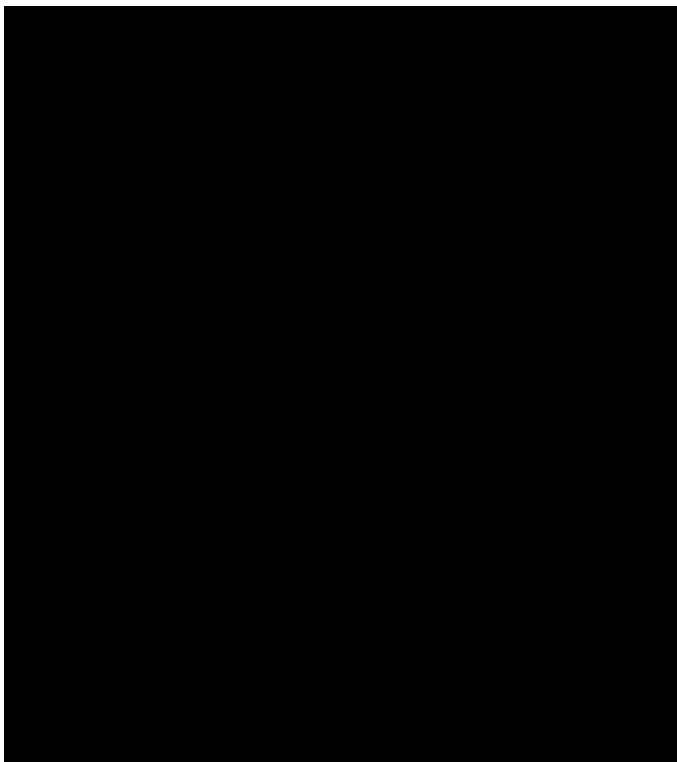


Fig. 1.10



Fig. 1.11

timate with the Bohemians', cited earlier. Indeed, the trousers of 'Russian Ballet' have more in common with the look of orientalist Paris fashions of the pre-war years than with anything Bakst actually designed for the stage (fig. 1.6). The prominent 'eye' motif of the trousers was part of Bakst's set design for *Schéhérazade* (see fig. 1.7), but it was also a ubiquitous graphic device in the representation of subsequent couture interpretations of Bakst's sumptuous costumes. The fashion illustrator Georges Lepape's renderings of and riffs on Poiret's *style sultane* make extensive use of this pattern (see figs 1.8–10). In fact, the whole composition of 'Russian Ballet' appears to have been borrowed from a stylised representation of *Schéhérazade* by another fashion illustrator, George Barbier (fig. 1.11), whose 1913 series of Ballets Russes prints was publicised in the New York press at the time of the American tour (see fig. 1.6, central image).

Ultimately Barnes's blend of two separate ballets and her own consumption of a mass-produced image underline the borrowings at work in interpretations of style – Barnes's use of an 1890s aesthetic, fashion's of Bakst, and the Villagers' of Parisian bohemianism. If she was indeed using a decadent aesthetic as an index of untimeliness, these specific cultural references relate her sense of belatedness to the American interpretation of Parisian modernity and the passing of Greenwich Village bohemia.

In a survey of Barnes's artwork, Douglas Messerli dates Barnes's use of a 'Beardsley-esque' style to 1915, when, after producing mostly 'snapshots' of figures for her journalism, she began

to perceive the potential of her art, exaggerating her images and displacing the contemporaneity of the subjects by recasting them in *fin de siècle* contexts [...] Barnes set her Greenwich Village bohemians [...] in a shrouded world of decadence, an 'artworld', in which life was different from the realism of the New York Streets. (Messerli 1995: 8)

Alternatively argued, Barnes adopts this style in the year in which she moved to an increasingly commodified Greenwich Village, not because she wanted to put her bohemian subjects in another world, but because she recognised the impermanence of their own. By using that aesthetic so long after its currency had expired, she draws our attention to the very notions of the contemporary and fashion that are the larger subject of her Greenwich Village work: how quickly fashions pass, how they can be taken up and adapted just as soon as they appear.

Similarly, her use of that aesthetic elsewhere signals her awareness of its ready adaptation – as a fashion – in the forging of American modernism.

In the 21 October 1915 edition of *Bruno's Weekly*, an upcoming exhibition of artwork by Barnes was announced as taking place at Bruno's 'garret' on Washington Square. Bruno describes Barnes's thirty-four drawings and pastels as a 'new venture in the grotesque', the kind for which 'Frequently she has been called the American Beardsley'. So successful does Bruno feel the exhibition will be, he predicts that 'It is just a question of time, until she will "put it over" and we will see her work spread through to our popular illustrated publications' (Bruno 1915: 142–43). Barnes had in fact already contributed a drawing to *Vanity Fair* in July 1915 ('Vampire Baby', reproduced in Messerli 1995: 93), an outstepping of Bruno that is instructive, as we will see. And in December 1916 she had another in that magazine, a drawing in the decadent mode that she had adopted the year before, accompanying a story entitled 'The Murder in the Palm-room: An Adventure in Silver and Black' (fig. 1.12). In his thorough bibliography, Douglas Messerli (1976: 23) attributes the drawing to Barnes, which seems credible because of its distinctive style and the signature, 'Dobrujda', a macaronic tag that uses some of the letters and phonemes of her actual name. But on this account, Messerli also attributes the story to Barnes, which I contest on several grounds.<sup>22</sup>

Firstly, the piece bears little stylistic resemblance to the distinctive short fiction that Barnes was publishing contemporaneously. Secondly, she was not commissioned by *Vanity Fair* for any other writing at this time, and was not, in fact, until April 1922, when she interviewed and wrote a profile of Joyce, after which she contributed regularly: by Messerli's estimate, eleven pieces (poetry, prose, drama and non-fiction) in the seventeen months between July 1922 and November 1923 (three more pieces appeared in 1929–30).<sup>23</sup> And thirdly, viewed in the context of the previous few issues of *Vanity Fair*, 'The Murder in the Palm-room' is in fact one of a series of 'advertistories', written or commissioned by the magazine to advertise itself in a witty and flirtatious way that is typical of its editorial policy at this time. The piece occupies a full page after forty-six pages of adverts and before the contents page, on which it does not have an entry. As with the other 'advertistories', it concludes with a quip about *Vanity Fair*: the September 1916 example ends 'this is only an advertising page in *Vanity Fair*!' and 'The Murder in the Palm-room' turns out to have been motivated by a stolen issue.

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<sup>22</sup> Caselli 2009: 70–71 offers the same attribution.

<sup>23</sup> The exact extent of Barnes's contributions to periodicals is unknown; an updated bibliography would be hugely productive for Barnes studies. The reach of her journalism is underestimated too, since many of her pieces were syndicated. One search in the Library of Congress newspaper databases on one afternoon yielded sixty-two articles or drawings by Barnes in newspapers across the United States between 1914 and 1923. Some are known, many others – such as an article about an actress who learnt 'movement and repose' from her cat – are, to my knowledge, unknown.



Fig. 1.12



Fig. 1.13



Despite the likely misattribution of the story, the interesting fact remains that Barnes's drawing – announced by Guido Bruno only a year earlier as an exemplar of French decadence and New York's bohemia in Greenwich Village – is used here to illustrate an advertisement in a wide-circulation magazine. The decadent style is easily adapted to the purpose: apart from the cute, almost cartoon-like female subject, the drawing resembles closely Barnes's other illustrations in this mode.<sup>24</sup> Michael Murphy (1996) has shown that the adaptation of European artistic styles was a prominent feature of *Vanity Fair* and other early twentieth-century glossy magazines. He argues that by adopting the styles of European modernism in their type-faces, layouts and adverts – as part of a general effort to bring cultural modernity to readers – but with an ironic awareness of their own commercial role in this effort, the 'slicks' acknowledged the 'instant consumability' of modernism, and perhaps, even, that such an operation was inherent to being modern. This 'pop decadence', as Murphy calls it, might be attributed to Barnes, too; he refers to mutability rather than the aesthetic, although that is of course doubly relevant in Barnes's case and underlines the reason she may have used the decadent mode in the first place.<sup>25</sup> If 'instant consumability' is Terry Eagleton's phrase (1986) for the fate that modernism attempts to forestall, Murphy argues that not all modernists display this 'contamination anxiety' (Murphy 1996: 66). Rather than forestall commodification, Barnes seems to acknowledge its inevitability: her advert witnesses the 'instant consumability' of the decadent aesthetic, as nineteenth-century Paris is translated for the consumption of twentieth-century New York.

#### **THE BOOK OF REPULSIVE WOMEN**

When *The Book of Repulsive Women* is not described as decadent, it is said to be untimely, even unfashionable; that its apparent debt to a nineteenth-century aesthetic is a deliberate anachronism (Caselli 2009: 70). I want to modify this to suggest that the poems and drawings that make up the collection are also fashion-conscious, in ways that relate to and expand on the aspects of Barnes's journalism that I have been exploring.

On one level the collection is fashion-conscious because, as with the newspaper articles and illustrations, the dress of the 'repulsive women' re-

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<sup>24</sup> An easy crossover between bohemian and mainstream illustration style, or even a shared visual language, is also demonstrated by the significant presence in *Bruno's Weekly* (and often on its cover) of such graphic artists as Coulton Waugh, Clara Tice and Illonka Karasz (the latter went on to design a number of *New Yorker* covers).

<sup>25</sup> Goody 2007 uses Murphy's term to describe Barnes's work too, in relation to her journalism (91).

flects the influence of Parisian style in America. In three of the illustrations women are wearing clothes reminiscent of Ballets Russes style, the ‘wild, wild exotics of fabric’ that make faces at their wearer, as used by Barnes in her ‘Russian Ballet’ drawing. As I will explore in more detail a little further on, this style might reflect a general trend for exoticism, which can equally be linked to a *fin-de-siècle* aesthetic; in some instances, the drawings themselves seem to belong to that mode. Yet, one illustration (fig. 1.13) depicts a woman walking in the most contemporary trends: a tunic, trousers and a turban hat – all of which were popularised by Paul Poiret, possibly inspired by Bakst’s designs, and represent the height of fashionable dress. Her modish appearance is underlined by her emphatically made-up eyelashes (in 1915 American women were only just starting to wear heavy make-up [Banner 1983: 217]) and her confident stride, which seems to evoke ‘a wider female mood that rejected restrictive clothes and embraced the pleasures of motion and rhythm’ (Mackenzie Stuart 2013: 37). In another, a woman holds what, in the context of decadent or oriental style, might be a lantern, but looks equally – and particularly given her artistic robe in Bakst pattern and close-fitting hat – like the French-style reticules and bags that were fashionable at that time (fig. 1.14). Such alternative interpretations are offered throughout the collection, as we will see, and contribute to Barnes’s vision of fashion.

With its modern, urban subjects, *Repulsive Women* is also linked to Greenwich Village and Barnes’s Greenwich Village articles of the following year. The collection was published by Guido Bruno from ‘His Garret on Washington Square’ (as the title page announces), as volume two of ‘Bruno’s Chap Books’. The Chap Books’ blend of Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, and such contemporary writers as Barnes and Alfred Kreymborg (both of whose poems Bruno calls ‘rhythms’ in a nod to the American free-verse movement), witnesses Bruno’s view of modern American art building on that of Europe of the previous century, just as he saw Greenwich Village of the 1910s as an American Latin Quarter. Textually, *Repulsive Women* begins precisely at Washington Square, too: ‘From Fifth Avenue Up’. Implying the movement of the L-train along its 14th-street route, ‘Seen from the “L”’ plots the northern boundary of the area, and its setting – a high apartment, level with the tracks, in which ‘A vague molested carpet pitches | Down the dusty length of stair’ (1915d: 95) – is echoed in ‘Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians’. There, the ‘little back room’ of the bohemian has its own ‘musty hall’ and ‘carpet lying in rags’: rhyming ‘musty’ and ‘dusty’ across similar imagery – including the seedy comparison of a worn carpet to an abused woman, ‘molested’ in one and ‘lying in rags’ in the other – Barnes

adumbrates in *Repulsive Women* the realist version of bohemia that she was to offer in the article. In both, the figures have their ‘blooms in jars’ (1915d: 94).<sup>26</sup>

‘Seen from the “L”’ is in one sense a poem of modern American urban realism, a poetic version of a painting that one of the Ashcan School might have made contemporaneously: the listless naked woman glimpsed from the train tracks in her shabby apartment, the glimpse itself informed by the modern media of photography and film, and approximated by Barnes in her casual opening, *in medias res*: ‘So she stands – nude – stretching dully.’<sup>27</sup> The clothes line whose ‘every beat’ has ‘fashioned’ a ‘frail mosaic’ on the window is an unsentimental sign of poverty used by, for example, John Sloan in *Red Kimono on the Roof* (1912; fig. 1.15), and by Barnes herself in another article about bohemia in Brooklyn (1913c). The ‘etched’ mosaic and the vases ‘in the making’ to which she compares this woman seen from the L-train confirm the poem’s relationship to works of art. Such self-conscious references undercut the realism with European symbolism. Indeed, the aesthetic of *Repulsive Women* is, overall, impossible to define because it shifts. From the American urban realism of ‘Seen from the “L”’ and ‘From Third Avenue On’ to the *fin-de-siècle* grotesque of ‘Twilight of the Illicit’; from the surreal exoticism of one illustration (fig. 1.16) to the dainty graphic modernity of the cabaret dancer (fig. 1.17), which would not have been out of place in *Vanity Fair*. As in ‘Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians’, Barnes draws on different models of modernity – nineteenth-century Europe and contemporary America – to offer alternative ways of representing her subjects.

The poem ‘Suicide’ condenses these alternatives as a dialectic. The first verse describes ‘Corpse A’ in something like the synaesthetic language of symbolism:

They brought her in, a shattered small  
Cocoon,  
With a little bruised body like  
A startled moon;  
And all the subtle symphonies of her  
A twilight rune.

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<sup>26</sup> It is interesting to compare Edmund Wilson’s description of the house in Greenwich Village in which Barnes lived at this time: ‘That cavernous old house [...] with its wastes and stretches of linoleum, its steep staircases and rambling halls, its balustrades, its broken skeleton hatrack ... the desolation of its corridors, the interminable and exhausting climb of stairs’ (1975: 255). Equally, Suzanne Churchill points out the liberating potential for women of apartment-dwelling in the first decades of the twentieth century (2006: 17–18).

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Longworth (née Parsons) also connects Barnes to the Ashcan School, but via the urban subjects of her newspaper articles (Parsons 2003: 10).



Fig. 1.14

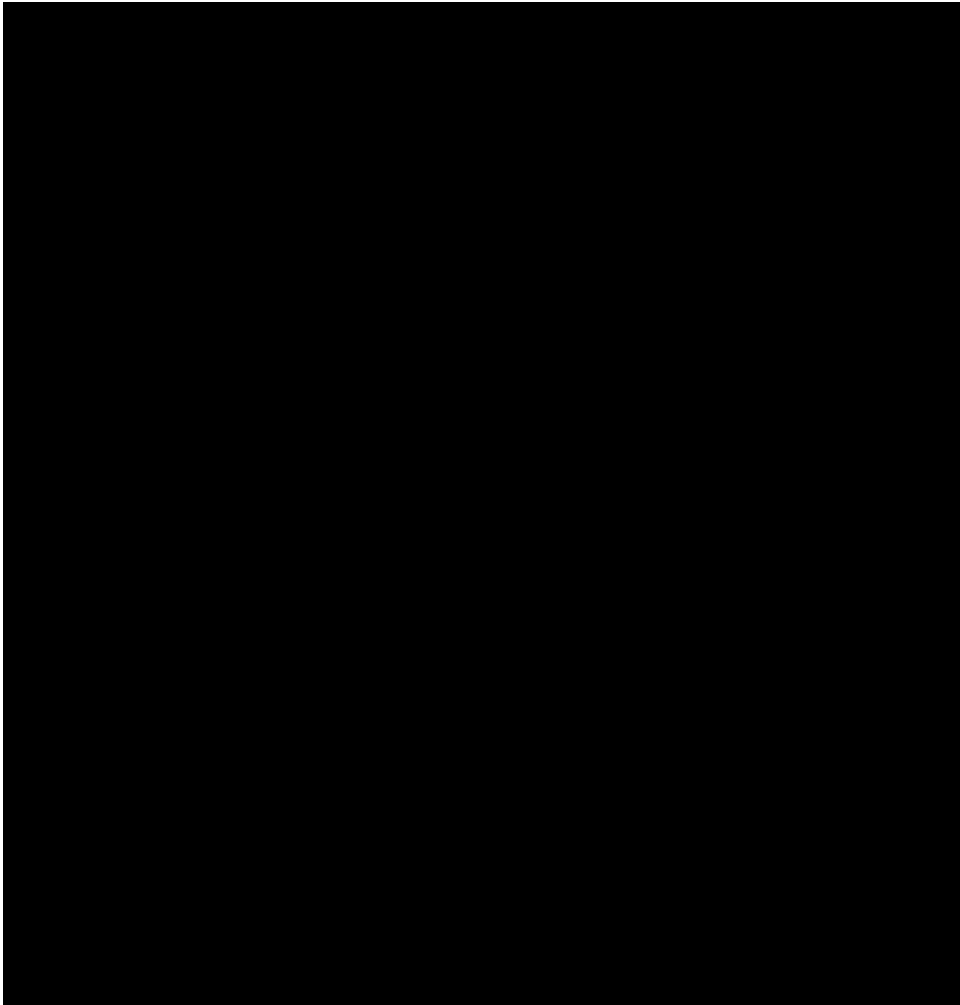


Fig. 1.15

Fig. 1.16



Fig. 1.17



And in the second verse, which echoes the first with its alternative subtitle ‘Corpse B’, the scenario returns in a different mode, this time the urban realism seen elsewhere in the collection:

They gave her hurried shoves this way  
And that.  
Her body shock-abbreviated  
As a city cat.  
She lay out listlessly like some small mug  
Of beer gone flat. (1915d: 100)

Moving ‘this way | And that’, and in so doing, as Melissa Jane Hardie has explained, returning but with a difference (‘nothing looks the same as it used to’ [2005: 119]), ‘Suicide’ stages the dynamic of fashion. Barnes’s ironic take on the drive towards novelty at the heart of fashion’s return is her knowledge that the new mode will, in turn, be moulded or refined itself, will be drained of its energy. She captures this subsequent operation in the second verse of ‘Suicide’, with its imagery of urban momentum giving way to flat beer, an inevitable, self-perpetuating process: this is a corpse, a woman already dead when she came in; and a suicide, taken by her own hands. Just as, in ‘Becoming Intimate with the Bohemians’, the inevitable passing of Greenwich Village bohemia led Barnes to describe it as a set of alternative styles and fashions, here she stages the temporal absolute in the same terms.

What I am developing here is the idea that Barnes’s awareness of the temporal absolute in *Repulsive Women* appears to draw on the same moment of New York modernity. The fashion-consciousness of the collection, it seems, is rooted in – and exemplified by – American responses to Paris. If ‘Suicide’ addresses the dynamic of fashion through an ultimately bathetic return, it also stages the temporal and geographical relays of modernity through its alternate national aesthetics, the symbolism of Baudelaire and nineteenth-century Paris, and the realism of contemporary New York. We have seen that these alternatives structure the collection as a whole: within poems and drawings and between them, *Repulsive Women* rocks over time and space between the sites of modernity that have informed my discussion of Barnes’s journalism. This is, I propose, a dialectical American modernism, that understands its modernity as a translation – a consumption even – of earlier iterations, and, as such, as transient and like a commodity.

To the aesthetics of France and America can be added cognate features: the downtown/uptown binary suggested by ‘From Fifth Avenue Up’, whose

title's implied motion links Washington Square with the fashionable boutiques of upper Manhattan; up-to-the-minute Parisian-flavoured dress worn on the streets of New York (fig. 1.13), itself borrowing from the exoticism of the Ballets Russes; the bohemian apartment on the one hand, and the mainstream modernity of the cabaret dancer and Broadway on the other.<sup>28</sup> In the drawing of the dancer, the figure holds a miniaturised version of herself as if to echo these transitions, translations and commodifications.

The fashion dynamic, we have seen, includes the inevitable obsolescence of every point of reference. In *Repulsive Women*, the obsolescence of bohemian life in Greenwich Village, which I have suggested to be associated with Barnes's early interest in fashion, is instead that of women and their bodies, subject to perpetual change. As I have intimated here, the collection is structured predominantly by a physically grounded time. Titles – 'From Fifth Avenue Up', 'From Third Avenue On', 'Seen from the "L"' – imply motion between points. Poems begin with temporal markers – 'Someday...' (1915d: 91), 'And now...' (94) – and then continue to look both forward and back, often only conditionally, in a confusion of tenses that is materialised, in 'From Fifth Avenue Up', in the image of a pregnant baby (92). As suggested by that anarchic possibility, Barnes's view of the inevitability of obsolescence – the fashion-time to which bohemia is subject – here applies to female biology. The woman in 'From Third Avenue On' has withdrawn from life – 'her powers slip away' – an outmodedness represented by 'over-curved, hard waving hair', either once-fashionable or off the mark (94). Similarly, if her counterpart in 'Twilight of the Illicit' is also in the process of dissolution – 'Slack'ning arms', 'satiated fingers', 'the sweeter gifts you had | And didn't keep' – her 'dying hair hand-beaten' and the 'great ghastly loops of gold | Snared' in her ears are signs of fashion redirected into symptoms of an aggressively ageing body (97). In 'To a Cabaret Dancer' there is some suggestion that an equally violent focus on women as a spectacle is responsible for their becoming 'less fine', that 'time comes to kill' under the spotlight:

A thousand lights had smitten her  
    Into this thing;  
Life had taken her and given her  
    One place to sing.

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<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting, as Michelle Clayton does, that the Ballets Russes exploited their own dialectic, signifying the 'latest modernity – seen in their explosive effect on fashion and décor – but also a modernity which harnessed and transformed the national past, transmuting Russian primitivism into the up-to-date' (2014: 37).

[...]

The jests that lit out hours by night  
And made them gay,  
Soiled a sweet and ignorant soul  
And fouled its play. (98–99)

And, certainly, the sense of these ‘repulsive women’ growing old or corrupted in the sight of another’s gaze is emphasised throughout the poems by their distinctive second-person plural address, a judging ‘we’ watching ‘you’ or ‘her’. This dual sense in which the look of women’s bodies (their dress and style, but also the way these are apprehended) is both responsible for their eventual obsolescence and provides a conceptual framework for describing it (the fashion-time to which I have referred) is captured neatly in ‘Seen from the “L”’, which equates the dissolute female subject with a work of art in progress (‘Even vases in the making | Are uncouth’) and fabric:

Still her clothing is less risky  
Than her body in its prime,  
They are chain-stitched and so is she  
Chain-stitched to her soul for time.  
Ravelling grandly into vice  
Dropping crooked into rhyme.  
Slipping through the stitch of virtue,  
Into crime. (95)

The constitutional obsolescence that is the hallmark of fashion-time, the perpetual undoing that is paradoxically built into a process of making, is crystallised in Barnes’s use of the arcane ‘ravelling’.

In fact, *Repulsive Women* takes the implications of female corporeal obsolescence to their extreme. One of its most startling visions is the childless woman of ‘From Third Avenue On’. Applied to a woman’s biology, the logic of fashion-time allows Barnes to conjure not only a pregnant baby, but also a woman who has not conceived, her sex-specific functions superseded in this perpetual undoing. Her outmodedness is refigured in her childlessness:

Those living dead up in their rooms  
Must note how partial are the tombs,  
That take men back into the wombs  
While theirs must fast. (94)



It seems easy to malign such descriptions, which appear to conform so readily to an image of 'barren' women, and, because they are implied to be lesbians, to the idea of homosexuality as a lack. Indeed, Scott Herring concludes that the poems are misogynistic (2007: 156), and to Phillip Herring they 'portray lesbian life in the most horribly negative terms imaginable' (1995: 88). A similar conclusion might be reached by the preceding discussion of the way in which fashion-time operates – the constant return of fashion to renew its sources amounts to perpetual, inherent obsolescence and, speeded up as it were, to obsolescence before the fact. But we have also seen Barnes's interest in the turning away of fashions, in the alternative and resistant mode of realism, for example.<sup>29</sup> In 'From Fifth Avenue Up', the lesbian subject is not represented as a spent force; rather she is an alternative sexual model who resists force with force:

For though one took you, hurled you  
Out of space  
With your legs half strangled  
In your lace,  
You'd lip the world to madness  
On your face. (91)

Barnes's image of this rejected satellite, simultaneously returning and turning away, dressed in what seems to be the restrictive hobble skirt of the early 1910s (another fashion introduced to America by Paul Poiret), condenses the relays and delays of modernity that I have been exploring as the operation of fashion.

As these divergent interpretations suggest, the issue of Barnes's attitude towards these 'repulsive' women is contested and often conflicting. Proceeding on the basis that the collection is fashion-conscious, and that this consciousness is historically and geographically situated, in the remaining part of this chapter I will use fashion to consider Barnes's view of American women in 1915. This view – I argue – has its critical sights on modern American culture and continues to focus translations and tensions between New York and Paris. We will see that fashion articulates Barnes's age especially well, just as it did for Baudelaire in Second Empire France.

There are, in fact, a number of correspondences between Barnes's and Baudelaire's paradigmatic uses of fashion. Barnes, too, locates the fleeting vision of the female body as an artistic object in an urban setting, 'Seen from

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<sup>29</sup> The identification of these tropes in the collection – the return and turning away – is Hardie's.

the “L”<sup>30</sup>. Her titles for two other poems in the collection, ‘In General’ and ‘In Particular’, recall Baudelaire’s formulation of the duality of art (contingent versus eternal), and we have seen how a dialectical structure is equally key to Barnes’s own version of fashion. They both approach similar types of women as ideal subjects for their visions of contemporary society: ‘fallen womanhood’, ‘woman in revolt against society’, ‘little dancers, frail, slender, hardly more than children, but proud of appearing at last in the blaze of the limelight’, ‘macabre nymphs and living dolls’ (Baudelaire 2010: 37, 35, 38). Both survey the ‘low life’ in order to re-evaluate modern beauty. And yet, where Baudelaire strives to compensate for the reification of existence by exalting the commodity (fashion) and the woman who wears it with poetic meaning (Lehmann 2000: 34), Barnes refuses redemption. I will go on to explore how – as in her journalism – *Repulsive Women* instead exposes cultural tensions in the capitalist society of her own era, projecting them on the clothed female body.

I have discussed how, in her journalism and short stories, Barnes responded to transformations in American society, to William Leach’s ‘new American culture’ of consumer capitalism. Leach locates the beginnings of this shift in the 1890s and its entrenchment by 1915. *Repulsive Women*, published that year, can be read against this new culture, which is the background, opposing force and tacit target of Barnes’s ultimately satirical verses. The plaintive questions and despondent conclusions of ‘In General’ and ‘In Particular’ speak of the transition from a society that measured worth against the standards of the Church to a system of value – a new religion – based on business and consumption. As Leach writes, ‘Increasingly, the worth of everything – even beauty, friendship, religion, the moral life – was being determined by what it could bring in the market’ (1993: 8):

What altar cloth, what rag of worth  
Unpriced?  
What turn of card, with trick of game  
Undiced?  
And you we valued still a little  
More than Christ.  
(‘In General’, Barnes 1915d: 93)

What loin-cloth, what rag of wrong

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<sup>30</sup> Several critics have associated this vantage point from the elevated train with that of the *flâneur* transposed to twentieth-century New York. See Hardie 2005: 129 and Loncraine 2003: 41.

Unpriced?  
What turn of body, what of lust  
Undiced?  
So we've worshipped you a little  
More than Christ.  
(‘In Particular’, Barnes 1915d: 96)

Leach's ‘everything’ determined by the market, as Barnes acknowledges in the latter poem and throughout the collection, includes desire and women's bodies. Her outmoded women are ‘repulsive’ in the eyes of society, which rates novelty. Relegated to their garrets, outsiders to the economy of acquisition and consumption, they are disappointed – and disappointing – citizens of the new order. In keeping with the imagery of the other poems and the illustrations, ‘In General’ and ‘In Particular’ use a conjunction of fabric, garments and flesh to articulate this valuation of the body.

Indeed, if clothes are commodities and indices of value, Barnes's opinion of fashion must be informed by her feeling for these women, sacrificed to consumer culture – such sympathy as is evident in the disillusion of ‘In General’ and ‘In Particular’; in the poem addressed ‘To a Cabaret Dancer’, as if in tribute or quiet greeting; in the gaze into interior, often private, spaces; and in the dialectical tendency of the collection, suggesting willingness to consider another view. *Repulsive Women* exposes and opposes the assumptions of modern America, of which fashion – permanent commercial novelty for every buyer – is a perfect expression. Published in the year in which Helena Rubinstein opened her first beauty salon in New York (Banner 1983: 217), the book counters the spectacle of female beauty in the slicks and on the stage and screen – the vogue for the modern, youthful ‘New Woman’ (Parsons 2003: 15; Goody 2007: 165).<sup>31</sup>

And yet, true to its dialectical habits, *Repulsive Women* not only reflects in seamy detail the underside of that phantasmagoria, but offers its own imaginary (possibly celebratory) vision of a dissident modern woman, seemingly based on a set of real and specific anxieties that were associated with women and spectacular culture at this time. I have already considered Barnes's journalistic coverage of the dance craze and the fashion shows, and her awareness of their place in a society in transition – or in crisis, depending on who

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<sup>31</sup> On Barnes's evaluation of the New Woman elsewhere, see Goody 2001a. On the obsession with youth encouraged by the dance craze of the 1910s, see Erenberg 1984, Chapter 5. For complementary arguments about the social construction of the ‘repulsive’ women, see Benstock 1987: 240–41; Broe 1990: 19–45, 20–21; and Galvin 1999: 84–102. Although she discusses Barnes's criticism of American commercial culture in the context of the early work, Plumb 1986 does not consider *The Book of Repulsive Women*.

is watching. The 1915 collection relates to an overlapping group of concerns, located in Greenwich Village and surrounding areas – ‘From Fifth Avenue Up’ and ‘From Third Avenue On’, as the titles of two poems indicate – ‘permissive’ sections of Lower Manhattan associated in the popular imagination with large gay and ethnic populations, and commercialised leisure in the form of dance halls, nightclubs and cabarets (Heise 2009: 292). As Louis Erenberg has shown – and as Barnes’s own articles on the subject witness – the mainstreaming of once-illicit entertainment venues and activities in the 1910s encouraged a strain of cultural anxiety in spite of, and because of, its democratisation of leisure across classes and the sexes (a development that was also welcomed, which is Erenberg’s primary topic). A major focus of this perceived ‘cultural decline and urban pathology’ were women and girls, those on the stage of cabarets, and those enjoying their dance floors. The correct form of ‘womanhood’ was at stake (Erenberg 1984: Chapter 3).

*Repulsive Women* articulates these various coinciding fears and flaunts their object, dramatising a recognisable city space and an associated view of cultural decline that was both motivated and reinforced by the geography that the collection traces. While one subject is demonised and hunted down for her sexuality (‘Someday [...] We’ll know you for the woman | That you are’ [Barnes 1915d: 91]), others are pathologised – and thus controlled – as recluses. All are described with graphic relish, Barnes in *épater les bourgeois* mode. ‘To a Cabaret Dancer’ seems to respond most literally to contemporary fears about the sexualisation of women, narrating the story of a young woman who took to the stage with optimism but has been corrupted by its vice, eventually sliding into prostitution:

A thousand lights had smitten her  
    Into this thing;  
Life had taken her and given her  
    One place to sing.

She came with laughter wide and calm;  
    And splendid grace;  
And looked between the lights and wine  
    For one fine face.

And found life only passion wide  
    ’Twixt mouth and wine.  
She ceased to search, and growing wise  
    Became less fine. (98)

The cabaret, to quote Erenberg once more, ‘expressed the deep tensions of a culture in transition’ (xiii). These transformations are connected to those described by William Leach, and in the development of consumer and entertainment culture alike, Paris’s particularly commercial model of modernity was translated – and diluted – on American soil. Like Leach, Erenberg finds the beginnings of change in the 1890s and its entrenchment in 1915, the year of *Repulsive Women*. The relevance of these dates to Barnes’s aesthetic response to the cultural transition they mark is not coincidental. Referring to a *fin-de-siècle* European aesthetic, she takes advantage of its decadent mood of decline to evoke both the real problems she perceives in her own era and the anxieties of her bourgeois compatriots. Aware of the commercial currency of this aesthetic – as we saw in her early drawing for *Vanity Fair* (fig. 000) – she also invokes the consumer culture stoking these issues, and the translation of Parisian style in the making of modern American identity. But how does this relate to her interest in fashion? On one level, as we see reflected in Barnes’s New York articles and in *Repulsive Women*, fashion is one of the mass-cultural developments, along with nightlife, that played a significant role in the development of modern American consumer culture and the concomitant changes in expectations about women’s image. However, I now want to open out another fashion presence in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, one that crystallises all these issues – cultural transition and anxiety, national identity, the commercialisation of Parisian culture, women’s bodies and their clothes – in complex layers of association around one outfit.

I have already referred to this outfit, worn by a fashionably dressed young woman striding down an empty street pulling two birds in tow (fig. 1.13). The divergent styles of the book’s illustrations, the nature of which I suggested above, reach a confusing climax with this scrappy, enigmatic drawing. (Are they chickens?) Its contemporaneity, its difference from the Beardsley mode so frequently ascribed to its companions, is puzzling. But, I have argued, according to the dialectical structure of *Repulsive Women*, and to the logic of Barnes’s ‘pop decadence’, such anomalies are constitutive. And in fact, while its alternative style remains, we will see that this illustration connects with the others, and the poems, in interesting ways. The woman depicted has a strikingly modern silhouette, the product of the rectilinear and straight-lined forms introduced to women’s dressmaking by Paul Poiret in the first two decades of the twentieth century. First ‘liberating’ women from the petticoat and the corset, Poiret took inspiration from antique and eastern dress to shift women’s fashions from tailoring to drapery, from a statuesque model (fig. 1.18) to an emphasis on flatness and planarity (fig.

1.19) that Barnes's drawing echoes in both its sartorial subject and its own graphic form (Koda and Bolton 2007: 13–14).

The woman's entire outfit – turban, tunic and trousers, and the bold geometric pattern – owes its look to the oriental style that dominated haute couture before the First World War, largely the result of Poiret's innovations but supported by the enormous popularity of the Ballets Russes and its exotic styling in these years.<sup>32</sup> A vogue for Turkish trousers had been introduced to Europe with the opening of trade and travel routes with the Middle East in the eighteenth century, and trousers for women had been a key component of the American dress-reform initiative in the mid- to late nineteenth century (Garber 1992: 311–13). But the fashion for 'harem trousers' in the 1910s, as haute couture and, as a result, in modified form in mainstream fashion – mainly as split skirts, such as the *jupe-culotte*, rather than full trousers – was inaugurated by Poiret, whose spring 1911 collection (figs 1.20, 1.21) was dominated by these oriental creations (Troy 2003: 102).<sup>33</sup> The oriental look was given fresh momentum by Poiret's 'Minaret' style, originally conceived as costumes for *Le Minaret*, a play by Jacques Richepin that opened on 19 March 1913 in Paris and was set, according to the script, 'in the Orient of the Thousand and One Nights' (Troy 2003: 197). Poiret's outlandish costumes included bouffant trousers and tunics or bodices with projecting wired hoops or hems that created a 'lampshade' effect. The outfits that he based on these designs were hugely influential on Paris fashions, and enthusiastically taken up in America, not least because Poiret orchestrated a tour of major US cities in September 1913 to introduce them to the American market.<sup>34</sup> His campaign received extensive press coverage and promotions in department stores (Troy 2003: 212–27), and the outrageous silhouette of the so-called lampshade tunic was welcomed in its less extreme form, a flaring hip tunic, 'stiffened to "minaret" breadth' (*Vogue* [US], 15 November 1913: 40).<sup>35</sup> As *Vogue* reported in February 1914, the wired skirts of Poiret's creation 'seemed synonymous and impossible. But our clever mod-

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<sup>32</sup> An interesting counterpoint to this avant-garde translation of high fashion is that Poiret himself crossed the divide in the other direction: Lehmann discusses his loose friendship with Francis Picabia and fellow Dadaists in 1916–17 (2000: 355–56).

<sup>33</sup> It is widely thought that Poiret's oriental theme was developed in response to Léon Bakst's designs for *Schéhérazade*, although Poiret himself denied the influence. See Poiret 1931: 178.

<sup>34</sup> See also 'Paul Poiret Here' 1913 and 'Poiret, Creator' 1913. As part of his tour, Poiret gave a series of lectures at colleges, including the Pratt Institute. According to Phillip Herring's dates for Barnes's attendance – September 1912 to March 1913 – she must have missed the couturier's appearance by six months.

<sup>35</sup> Evans 2012 writes that '[a]lthough American stores had initially refused to buy Poiret's Minaret gown, by autumn 1913 when he showed it on film in his U.S.A. tour, all the major New York importers bought it, including Gidding, Wanamaker and Gimbel.' (69, and see 273 n. 95).



Fig. 1.18



Fig. 1.19



Fig. 1.20



Fig. 1.21



# THE CONFLICTING LINES of the SPRING SILHOUETTES



Last season, at this time, two silhouettes were offered, short tunic and long, and . . .

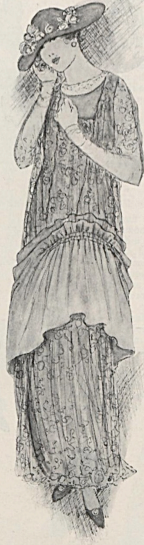
AND what will be the spring fashion? While the gay world, the world which makes or breaks the fashions, is stealing a second summer from the year in Aiken, Palm Beach, or California, making winter really wintry by skating, bobbing, and ice boating not only at Placid, but on the country estates at Lenox, Tuxedo, and Long Island, or impartially mixing dancing and charities at home, the coming fashions have already cast their shadows.

### TWO SILHOUETTES

Those who trace the twists and turns on fashion's pathway, can already discern a trend—in fact, two trends this season, for authorities disagree as to the silhouette. Never has a season been more interesting. The Paris designers, with the courage which marks the French, have taken up their work again, and since early in January have been making new things, and their lead will be followed eagerly by America. Now,



Here is one of the two silhouettes now offered for the spring: a bodice which rather closely hugs the figure, and a skirt well flared. Model from Premet



Here is the opposing silhouette: straight lines, with perhaps a slight break somewhere between shoulder and ankle. Bendel importation from Chéruit

below the waist; this tunic is distinctly new. Callot has not yet spoken on this subject in an authoritative way, but her latest models still retain the straight lines, although fullness appears in the skirt section either in plaits or gathers, or in an applied tunic across the back, as shown in the model sketched at the bottom of the following page.

### SUITING THE MODE

There are two noticeable types in suits. The English "service suit" has been the inspiration for Bernard, Douillet, Lucile, and many others of the French houses in making such tailors as that sketched just below. For such tailored models, the lines are semi-fitted. Some of them flare more than others on the hips, but invariably the sleeves are long and the coat is belted and pocketed, and fastened in a more or less



. . . Vogue correctly forecast the ultimate triumph of the long tunic, which is still good



A late Chéruit model shows a tactful treatment of the "fashion problem"; tucked like an apron front and back to a straight skirt at the hip-line is a full, low-dropped tunic

at the end of January, new models have come from Chéruit, Worth, Paquin, Premet, Dreccoll, Doucet, Douillet, Georgette, Bernard, Lanvin, and Jenny, and a few from Callot. These are early models, to be sure, but they show fresh ideas.

As always at this season, ideas conflict. Each house is showing its new line and it rests with that intangible factor, popular opinion, to act as jury—and finally to select the mode. It must be remembered, however, that as the French houses produced fewer models than usual throughout the winter, those that they offer for early spring will surely be exceptionally new and good.

Last year at this time, Vogue traced the mode through five years, and not only predicted aright the popularity of the short tunic and the puff, but glimpsed on the spring horizon the long tunic which was launched by Chéruit late in December and shown in Vogue as early as January, although it was not generally seen in America until March. A reprint of this model is given at the top of the page on the right, while on the left is shown the short tunic.

This season also there are contradictory elements in fashion. On the one hand, there is the gown on semi-fitted lines, the gown that gives the rather straight silhouette; on the other, there is the gown with the close waist and full skirt. Both silhouettes are here now, and it is from their development that the prevailing mode will evolve. At first it was thought that the tight waist and full skirt would sweep the mode. They certainly will be worn; but there is a question as to their continued dominance. Mme. Simcox brought over the Chéruit model with close bodice and full skirt, which is sketched at the right on page 25, but an even later Chéruit gown, imported by Bendel and sketched at the right just above, shows straighter lines and an applied tunic



"Six of one and half a dozen of the other" is the philosophy of a suit which hedges judiciously between the straight line and the flared. Bernard model from Thurn

Fig. 1.22

erns made a wearable skirt of them, and gradually, during the summer, the tunic wended its way to preeminence and triumphantly dominated the winter mode of 1913' ('Five Years' 1914). In fact, the influence of this modified tunic can still be seen on the pages of *Vogue* in 1915 (fig. 1.22) and on Barnes's walking woman published that year.

As Nancy Troy has shown, modification was crucial to Poiret's commercial popularity in America. Her book *Couture Culture* (2003) explores the manifold tensions between originality and reproduction in the careers of early twentieth-century designers, including Poiret. If, as she demonstrates, his success in France rested on the careful concealment of commercial strategies behind a facade of artistic originality that appealed to a select elite of female clients, in America he maintained a badge of authenticity but embraced marketing strategies like the tour and collaborations with department stores, in acknowledgement of the broader market. Troy's study is especially interesting for the nexus of tensions she draws out in Poiret's fashions, in which the original/reproduction opposition is joined and inflected by anxieties around national and gender identities. In America, at pains to reach as wide a base as possible, Poiret stressed the classicism and simplicity of his Minaret designs, for, although popular in France, they had also been controversial. Their 'racially marked exoticism' was as troubling to national character as it was appealing (116). In this pre-war period, national identity was at stake, and cultural anxiety surrounding orientalism was not confined to an Eastern Other, for the *munichois* style of Germany was also associated with a decadent, feminine orient. Equally, the *jupe-culotte* and harem trousers had threatened gender roles by their association with sensuality, feminism and the New Woman. A similar connection may be detected in American press coverage of the Minaret style, for example, in a *New York Times* report of a show at the Art Students League of New York:

The minaret skirt, the short-wired affair, was one of the most popular styles, so popular that it was copied in the costumes of the whole of 'That Damn Band' [...] The minaret skirts of the band were worn over blue striped trousers [...] Returning to the costumes of the pretty young artistes, they resembled the band in other things than minaret skirts – the colors were so striking that they made almost as much noise. [...] Trousers were very much in evidence. They were the real thing, not to be disguised under the name of harem skirts or pantallettes. ('Fearsome Freaks' 1914)

As suggested by her quirky pets and the Greenwich Village setting of *Repulsive Women*, Barnes's striding woman in full trousers ('the real thing')

may wear a bohemian interpretation of the fashionable oriental style. Barnes also refers to women's trousers in 'How the Villagers Amuse Themselves', when she observes the Dada artist and poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven in a red pair, herself with an unmistakably orientalist aura: 'catch the subtle, dusky perfume blown back from her – an ancient human notebook' (1916f: 249). (Walking chickens on a lead might plausibly have been something this unconventional figure was seen doing as well; certainly, she is thought to have worn large false eyelashes [Gammel 2003: 238]).<sup>36</sup> As with the other poems and illustrations in the collection, Barnes's drawing pictures a dissident woman, associated – because of her dress – with an independence that often induced fear in conservative society. As Marjorie Garber writes, if Turkish trousers in the twentieth century suggested an 'aura of sexual fantasy', they have also been a sign of 'the reconfiguration of gender roles through the interposition of certain fantasy structures derived simultaneously from colonial dreams and colonial fears' (1992: 313).<sup>37</sup> This ambiguity is underlined in Barnes's drawing by the jutting phallic presence of the cockerel's comb between the woman's legs (Martyniuk 1998: 66).

Indeed, this orientalism informs not just the woman in trousers but *Repulsive Women* as a whole, in which a pattern of liberation, desire and fear gains impetus from classic orientalist tropes projected anew in the context of the spectacular modernity of New York City. If, in Edward Said's foundational conception, orientalism effects a relationship of political power between the Occident and the Orient, in nineteenth-century European art and literature this discourse was also mapped on to a relationship of erotic power between the sexes (Said 1991; Nochlin 1991: Chapter 3). In Peter Wollen's words, fear of the Other became fearful desire (2008: 5). The hallmarks of an orientalist fantasy of fearful desire are overwhelmingly present in *Repulsive Women*, and many have already been discussed in other contexts in this chapter. The dialectic that Melissa Hardie identifies, and which has been crucial to my argument, is also the push/pull of fearful desire, as Hardie herself acknowledges (2005: 123). In the poems, Barnes's women are indolent and sensual, 'stretching dully' (1915d: 95) with 'satiated fingers' (97), 'vague' lips (95) or 'lang'rous | Length of thighs' (91). 'Illicit', as one title has it, they present a mystery or a threat, a blend of eroticism and violence:

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<sup>36</sup> Barnes described the Baroness as 'one of the most astonishing figures of early Greenwich Village life' and noted that '[s]he batiqued her tailored suits' (Barnes 2005: 254), which again suggests something of the poet's presence behind this illustration.

<sup>37</sup> For a similar argument about the mapping of cultural fears (in this instance, lesbian identity) onto the changed status of women in the early twentieth century, see Kent 1993: 89–96.

Leaning across the fertile  
Fields to leer  
As you urged some bitter secret  
Through the ear.  
(1915d: 91)

They are almost all described in architectural settings of ill-repair as a sign of further corruption. And the illustrations collude in these generic orientalist visions, from the moon with a mustachioed Japanese face (fig. 1.14) to the half-naked Arab sloping along with drooping facial hair and pierced ears, framed – below an odalisque-like creature – in the classic window shape of Arab architecture (fig. 1.16). And, elsewhere, the Sphinx, female symbol of Egypt reimagined as a nocturnal New York silhouette (fig. 1.23). Although rarely designated as orientalist, such features are generally taken as a symptom of Barnes's adherence to a decadent aesthetic.<sup>38</sup> This does seem reasonable: as Peter Wollen has noted, a fearful desire of the Other was the narrative force of many symbolist and decadent works. Orientalist fantasies were given fresh currency in 1899 by J.-C. Mardrus's new translation of *The Thousand and One Nights*, which was dedicated to Mallarmé and published by the symbolist journal *Revue blanche* in series over the following five years. The productions of the Ballets Russes and the couture designs of Paul Poiret were themselves rooted in symbolist and decadent culture – Poiret was a friend of Mardrus – and Wollen suggests that the popularity of *Schéhérazade* and of Poiret's orientalist collections derived largely from their sense of licence and exotic fantasy (2008: 1–10).<sup>39</sup>

And yet, throughout this chapter I have attempted to open up a gap between Barnes's aesthetic and her intention in using it. I have argued that *Repulsive Women* responds to cultural anxiety about licentious women, an anxiety that is perfectly – and pointedly – expressed by the orientalist mode. I have also stressed the dialectical character of the collection, its use of different stylistic strategies to emphasise their temporal contingency as passing fashions. In this way, Barnes reveals the mechanics of any representation, and thus the authority of an orientalist narrative about these 'repulsive' women. She rejects 'the myth of stylistic transparency', to quote Linda Nochlin writing about Manet's *Masked Ball at the Opéra* (1873–74), which, Nochlin argues, depicts erotic commercial transactions in a way that refu-

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<sup>38</sup> An exception is Kannenstine 1977, which finds in the illustrations 'the cliché of the mysterious East' and 'the evil Orient', but doesn't ascribe any irony to its use (24).

<sup>39</sup> See also M. Davis 2010: 123. Poiret's orientalism was itself often conflated with gender masquerade. See Evans 2013: 39 and Silver 1989: 174–81.



Fig. 1.23

es the naturalising orientalist version of a slave market by Gérôme (1991: 45–46). Although Nochlin does not mention them, clothes are crucial to what she calls Manet’s ‘deconstructive-realist’ approach. For while, as she says, his attention to artifice undermines any easy assumptions about gender in his paintings, it is his diligent focus on contemporary fashion that guarantees the actuality – and thus the irreducible sexuality – of his female subjects. Barnes’s work is far from Manet’s strange realism, but we have seen that there is a place in it for ‘the real’ as a stylistic option and dialectical alternative. In this way, her striding woman in trousers historicises the fearful desire of women that the orientalist mode of the collection expresses, reminding us of the contemporary vogue for oriental styles by which fashion appropriated and reinscribed that cultural discourse. These images of women as fearful do not denote absolute female qualities but time-bound choices – styles of representation that are reinterpreted and revived throughout history. In this sense women and their bodies are subject to fashion – as the striding woman tells us by her relation to the other figures, all out of time in their ways. The fashion-consciousness of the collection makes these women’s ‘repulsiveness’, their obsolescence, contingent on things like taste and demand.

In fact, Barnes’s use of orientalist tropes can be seen in a wider commercial context, another method by which a gap is opened up between those tropes and their use. Nancy Troy locates the popularity of Poiret’s Minaret style in America as part of what William Leach describes as a merchandising obsession with the East in the 1910s (Troy 2003: 231). Throughout the decade, department stores, advertisements, films, novels and theatrical productions celebrated oriental themes (Leach 1993: 104–07). Barnes’s focus on the role of Salome witnesses the significance of this popular fad: in her story ‘What Do You See, Madam?’, discussed earlier, she updated Salome’s famous dance for the moment of mass culture, recognising the specifically national redirection of this biblical femme fatale as a symbol of the American dream. As Leach writes, orientalism was a symptom of

changes taking place within Western society – and especially in cities – that [...] symbolized a feeling of something missing from Western culture itself, a longing for a ‘sensual’ life more ‘satisfying’ than traditional Christianity could endorse. [...] By 1915 the dream life of many well-off Americans bore the imprint of orientalist fantasies. (1993: 105)

In light of Barnes’s criticism of the consumer industry that satisfied these

desires, the orientalism of *Repulsive Women* supports its view of the commercial conscription of women's bodies.<sup>40</sup>

If Leach's study updates Said's connections between orientalism and European colonial powers, transferring this discourse to America, *Repulsive Women* encompasses all these national inflections. Pledging allegiance to a European aesthetic – 'What is more European, after all, than to be corrupted by the Orient?', asks Richard Howard (cited Nochlin 1991: 33) – in order to criticise the new American consumer culture that itself embraces that aesthetic, Barnes's 'pop-orientalism', as it might also be called, is both an oppositional celebration of decadence and a satire of decline – an anti-bourgeois (bohemian, even) statement that is aware of, and gains force from, being commercially compromised.<sup>41</sup> The presence in Barnes's book of orientalism, which historically has displaced sexual prejudices in racial ones, domestic anxieties in international ones, points to this kind of complex layering. It also speaks of cultural and national identities and transition. As Nancy Troy's and Peter Wollen's studies of Paul Poiret show, fashion is an especially articulate subject for these tensions. In *The Book of Repulsive Women* the 'antinomies of modernism', in Wollen's phrase, are art and commerce, Paris and New York, and fashion comes to exemplify the transactions between them that characterises much of America's developing modernity in the 1910s.

In this context we can connect the repulsive women with Barnes herself, publishing for an audience whose taste will deem her *in* or *out*, and tracing the transatlantic movement of aesthetic practice between Europe and America. Fashion – whether in clothes or aesthetic conventions – permits Barnes to reflect on the historical moment in which she was writing, witnessing her place in the history of ideas but also making her aesthetic a matter of shifting vogues. This publication that reflects on its historicity, and on the historicity of representations of women, is a curious kind of writing of the self – not an interior self but an aesthetic one. Ageing or obsolete female bodies are connected to an artistic or textual self that is just as much a product of temporal conceptions. But what artistic self does this connection suggest, for Barnes, a young 22-year-old author releasing her first non-journalistic piece of work, self-consciously obscure and, therefore, new? The new – in Barnes's vision – like the striding woman, is a version of the old.

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<sup>40</sup> In the case of Selfridge's, Mica Nava prefers to see the department store's embrace of Ballets Russes-inspired fashions as 'cosmopolitan'. Her more positive articulation of the same phenomenon allows for the ways in which women themselves 'appropriate the narratives of difference' by enjoying such styles (2002: 85).

<sup>41</sup> See the preface to Weir 2008 on the paradoxes and secondhandness of the decadent revival in America.

Barnes's aesthetic relies on similar versions of recycling or translating the past. If it suggests a writerly identity that exists in and is subject to a kind of fashion system, it also reserves for itself the haute-contemporary position of being even ahead of the new. Like her striding woman, Barnes manages to be new and dissident, and to historicise that identity – a move that is central to her novelty and her dissidence. In the next part, I will turn to Barnes's place in *Charm*, a consumer magazine that commissioned modernist writers and artists to translate a fashionable cosmopolitan lifestyle for a mainstream American audience and made good use of the haute-contemporary flavour of Barnes's work. I will read her contributions for a sense that she had of herself – and of her place in the avant-garde – as fully subject to the restless logic of fashion.



## Chapter 1.2

### Make It New Jersey!

*Barnes in Charm Magazine, 1924–28*

#### ‘PARIS GAVE EVERYONE PERMISSION’

If Barnes’s temporal awareness was stimulated by her experience of the transience of New York bohemia in the 1910s, two decades later it was encouraged by the passing of the Paris that she had known in the 1920s and 1930s. A published article of 1941, ‘Lament for the Left Bank’, and a set of related prose drafts in her archive from around the same time, reflect nostalgically on Paris on the brink of invasion and following the Nazi occupation.<sup>42</sup> Notes headed ‘Farewell Paris’ and ‘written around 1939 N.Y.’ (Barnes 2005: 249) are structured as a series of reminiscences that each begin ‘When...’, a piling-up of history that accelerates throughout the piece. The people and events that made Paris where modernity was – Joyce, the *Little Review*, Pound, Cocteau, Stein, the Ballets Russes and their *Sacre de printemps*, Paul Poiret – are recounted as consumable images, acknowledging both their passage into history and the mythologising that takes place with it. In another draft she writes theatrically of her years there:

We were taking in the last breaths of Rome before the fall, Carthage before the destruction, Pompeii before the ruins. No one in our generation will ever again taste it as it was. [...] The ham bones of the Couchon d’Or mingle with the bones of our body (Barnes 2005: 245)

Barnes understood herself to be physically subject to the shifts of history; she situated herself historiographically, even as her keen sense of the

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<sup>42</sup> In Barnes 2005 Phillip Herring published the drafts as ‘notes towards the memoir’, but as Aaron Yale Heisler recently pointed out in his introduction to the reprinted ‘Lament for the Left Bank’, Herring seems to have missed the fact that the drafts were used as material for the published article (Barnes 2015: 111–12).

ephemeral lent this placement a transience. In the draft she called 'War in Paris' ('about 1939–40') she wrote: 'In each generation's flesh is the knowledge of a million generation's [*sic*] death' (Barnes 2005: 266). That she felt this personally in this case, to the extent of identifying with Paris, is evident from the way she makes her own illness, with pneumonia, the narrative centre of this piece and an allegory for the imminent fall of the city.

As the first half of this chapter explored, Paris was symbolically significant in Barnes's work even before she arrived. The city was one element of her dialectical thinking, by which she reflected comparatively on her homeland, a logic that found renewed relevance when she moved there in the early 1920s. She explained in 'Lament for the Left Bank' that '[f]ew American writers took Paris as a literary background, though Paris was the magnet that drew them toward their own minds'. She describes writers 'who, though apparently "terribly American," could not have been so without Vantage Ground' (1941: 92). In her notes for the piece, she claims that 'Paris gave everyone permission to get a character' (2005: 238). Specifically, Paris helped them to look with clarity on their origins; the comparison of French culture enabled the development of a specifically American literary identity.

This sort of framing with the aid of 'vantage ground' also took place within the pages of the women's magazine *Charm*, to which Barnes contributed along with other mainstream journals from her base in Paris. Published monthly by the Newark department store Bamberger's between 1924 and 1932, this magazine made use of Barnes and her articles on Paris, I suggest, to foster a particular kind of American identity. Its fashion coverage, I propose here, helps illuminate the instrumentality of her persona and her writing, but also offers a perspective on the way she in turn used Paris to articulate her own position within the shifts of modernity.

#### **'BRING[ING] EUROPE TO YOUR DOOR'**

According to Phillip Herring, Barnes was sent to Paris by Burton Rascoe, the associate editor of *McCall's* magazine, because her journalism offered – to the average American reader – 'sophistication, a hint of illicit romance, a peek at fashion' (1995: 130). Apparently, this New York writer represented qualities associated with the French capital, even seemed to embody them, as her distinctive writing merged with her distinctive appearance:

Djuna Barnes, who was as subtle and as individualistic in her caricatures as she was in her short stories and pseudo-Elizabethan stories of bawdry, was one of the handsomest women I have ever seen and one

of the most amusing. I never saw her wear anything except a tailored black broadcloth suit with a white ruffled shirt-waist, a tight-fitting black hat, and high-heeled black shoes; and I rarely saw her without a long shepherd's crook which she carried like a Watteau figure in a *fête galante*. (cited P. Herring 1995: 131)

Another New York editor and friend of Barnes's, Bessie Breuer, made the same association between Barnes's writing and sartorial styles. In the drafts for her unpublished memoir, begun in 1972, Breuer remembers Barnes in Paris in 'a peaked Russian cap like Jane Heaps [*sic*] and always a black cape flowing down to her ankles' (PP: BBM). It was clearly her dress sense, as well as the 'extraordinary short stories' Barnes was then writing for 'the Paris magazines', that made her the ideal writer for the new American magazine that Breuer was hired to edit: when *Charm* first began, Breuer recalls, Barnes was 'to do fashions' (PP: BBM).<sup>43</sup> The equation of Barnes and her cosmopolitan style is, as Caselli (2009: 1–7) has pointed out, a somewhat tired one. The way in which Barnes has 'stood in for' a version of bohemia, in her lifetime and after, may even 'explain the lack of critical attention accorded to [her] work' compared to some of her male contemporaries (Elliott and Wallace 1994: 124). If Barnes had to sell herself as a 'prototyp[e] of the modern, thus lending authority or [...] symbolic capital' to her 'product' (Elliott and Wallace 1994: 123) – and Elliott and Wallace are surely right to worry about the compromises inherent in that position – here I would like to follow a path in which an equation between Barnes and fashion leads not just towards reification, to Barnes as representing a particular value, but also some further understanding of her writing and its own view of systems of value.<sup>44</sup>

Like Barnes, Breuer started her career as a journalist working for New York newspapers and magazines. She wrote for *Ladies' Home Journal*, pieces on the state of feminism for *Harper's Bazaar* and, according to a feature of September 1915 in *Good Housekeeping*, edited a column on 'Women's Varied Interests' for the *New York Tribune* (Young 1915: 311). She soon became

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<sup>43</sup> Bessie Breuer was born Elizabeth Freedman; she also wrote as Elizabeth Breuer. A copy of Breuer's notes is also held at the Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center. I am referring to a digital version generously shared with me by her son Peter Poor, which follows a slightly different order and bears additional explanatory notes by Poor. I am most grateful to him for the material and information that he has passed on to me; to his daughter Anna Poor; and to Professor James McManus for putting me in touch with the Poores.

<sup>44</sup> I give my interpretation of the view offered by the *writing* in place of Elliott and Wallace's speculations about how Barnes herself must have felt about her value or representation (see e.g. 136–37).

editor of the *Tribune*'s Sunday edition, in which role she had 'fun' enlarging her staff with bright young women such as Barnes (PP: BBM). In February 1916 Barnes contributed a piece on the 'Pet Superstitions of Sensible New Yorkers' (1916b). Such articles would have confirmed for Breuer that Barnes was smart and modern as well as stylish. Questioning venerable New Yorkers about their superstitions, she invokes and sardonically dismisses Freud: 'One always looks up an authority to avoid quoting him. I looked up Sigmund Freud, and so am in a position to go on with this story without further contemporary interruption' (3). As so often, it is Barnes's apparent rejection of the modern – the occupation of an outsider position – that makes her *de rigueur*.

A similar tone and positioning characterises much of Barnes's writing of the early 1920s, as in the fiction, plays and journalism that she contributed to *Vanity Fair* in 1922 and 1923, whether signed or using her pseudonym Lydia Steptoe.<sup>45</sup> A dialogue between a shipwrecked American society couple, 'Five Thousand Miles' stresses that nature is a construction in order to laugh at 'All the Current Talk About the Wild Free Life in the South Seas'; not only it is naive, she suggests, but her own illustration, reminiscent of a Gauguin, reminds us that it is an old gesture (1923a). 'Against Nature' (1922b), meanwhile, mocks the decadent faith in artificiality by invoking Huysmans from the point of view of 'a cultivated woman' from New York. Satirically revealing the impossibility of adopting any essential position, Barnes still claims the position of the modern artist for herself: outmoding her artistic predecessors and out-thinking her American contemporaries. Both articles translate and supersede nineteenth-century French aesthetic values in a specifically American contemporary context, an attitude that will be particularly valuable to *Charm*.

If Breuer's recollection is correct, Barnes was hired for *Charm* after she had already contributed to publications based in Paris, that is after the appearance in March 1924 of 'The Journal of Marie Makemischieff' in the Paris edition of the *Chicago Tribune Sunday Magazine* and in April 1924 of 'Aller et Retour' in the *transatlantic review*.<sup>46</sup> 'The Journal' is written in the form

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<sup>45</sup> There is more work to be done on the way Barnes used this pseudonym. I do not subscribe to Phillip Herring's suggestion that she adopted it 'so that she could reserve her real name henceforth for art' (1995: 78), partly because intentionality is hard to support and mostly because, as I argue throughout this chapter, there is a good deal of art in the pieces she wrote under this name. To separate the journalism from the 'art' is to cleave to a division between high and low that no longer straightforwardly persists in modernist studies (post-Huyssen 1986), as reflected in this thesis.

<sup>46</sup> Since Barnes did not write anything for *Charm* until the November 1924 issue, this timeline would fit. However, Breuer may also have misremembered, perhaps thinking instead of Barnes's numerous contributions to US magazines with a Parisian or cosmopolitan flavour.

of the fictional diary of a young transnational girl, clearly based on *The Journal of Marie Bashkirtseff* (1890), the *journal intime* of a *jeune fille* of Russian nobility written in French (Marie knew imperfect Russian) and immensely popular on its publication in English in the 1880s and 1890s.<sup>47</sup> This document of self-fashioning of a New Woman deeply concerned with her toilette and her own death becomes, in Barnes's hands and in the international edition of an American newspaper, a comment and a satire on perceptions of France as simultaneously seductive, modern, licentious and decadent:

I have been to Rome. Rome means nothing to me. I have been to Vienna. Vienna means nothing to me. I have been to Paris. Paris means nothing to me. I have been to the kremlin. The kremlin never meant anything to anybody. Now I am back in Kensington Gardens, and Kensington Gardens is not holding my attention.

Where shall I go? What am I to do? [...]

I have been tea'd at the Countess's, lunched at the Ambassador's, and dined at the King's. Now I am leaning in the window, overlooking the Bois, dressed in flimsy muslins, waiting for the grand ball that is to take place at twelve. [...] I am drowsy with history, and saturated with sophistication. (Barnes 1924a: 2)

This extract exemplifies what Barnes represents for such journals mediating between Paris and America: a sardonic ear for the mores of European society and a satirical voice that allows for a sense of knowingness on the part of the American reader – a distanced, safe flavour of sophistication. Barnes as Steptoe both 'stands for' Marie/Paris/sophistication/modernity and, with her ironic tone, opens up a gap by which a bourgeois audience can position themselves comfortably in relation to those symbols.

A subscription advert beneath 'The Journal of Marie Makemischieff' promises readers of the *Chicago Tribune* returning to America that this publication will 'bring Europe to your door' (23 March 1924: 11). Barnes's writing for *Charm* can be said to serve the same purpose. According to Breuer, she was essential to *Charm's* content and voice. Breuer's notes for her memoir recount how she came to edit the magazine and make decisions about its scope and tone. Some time before 1924, when the magazine was launched, she was approached by representatives of Bamberger's. The store was setting up a house journal 'on the order of *Vogue*', to 'establish the importance of their department store all over New Jersey and beyond. And advertis-

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<sup>47</sup> For an academic account of the diary, see Wilson 2010.

ers will pay for it' (PP: BBM). Although at first she was suspicious of these commercial ties, Breuer (who had been recommended by Barton Currie at the *Ladies' Home Journal*) was persuaded by their promise 'that there would be complete independence of the editorial staff' (PP: BBM). In fact, a blend of art and commerce thoroughly characterises the magazine, as we will see. Like *Harper's Bazaar*, it was intended to be a mix of 'fiction, articles, fashion'. Breuer's wish that 'the fashion must be first rate' was taken seriously (BBM). Like *Vogue*, *Charm* needed a fashion bureau in Paris, and Breuer made a trip there to establish an office. Her memoir reveals the extent to which the magazine was jointly defined by its fashion and literary content in Breuer's mind, as modernist contributors were chosen for their stake in both fields. Barnes 'will write the articles, do interviews with Chanel and other great designers'. Mina Loy, noted for her style ('this dramatically beautiful English woman'), was enlisted to contribute articles too (PP: BBM).<sup>48</sup>

Breuer's recollection of her activities in Paris reflects this non-hierarchical association of art and fashion. Lunches were apparently organised to meet her chosen fashion editor (Dorothy Mines is named in the role from the June 1924 issue), then Loy and Barnes – 'the Ritz for her, the Brasserie of the Lutetia for Djuna and Mina' – both luxury hotels with glamorous and literary associations (PP: BBM).<sup>49</sup> On this trip to set up her fashion bureau, Breuer had her photograph taken by a studio specialising in artists and their work (fig. 124) and proudly surrounded herself with a nominated set of bohemians and artists, 'the group in Paris, for Charm magazine': Barnes, 'living in an apartment completely decorated with [?] figures'; Loy, 'the exquisite English black-haired poet whom I had known in the Village [...] mistress of Marinetti'; Peggy Guggenheim and Dan Mahoney, 'a witty Irish émigré' who 'performed an occasional abortion for friends', on whom Barnes was to base *Nightwood's* Matthew O'Connor (PP: BBM). If Breuer's vision for *Charm* connected art and fashion as complementary spheres, she also seems to have acquired her artistic 'group' as fashionable accessories deemed to be vital to the success of the magazine.

Breuer's complicity in instrumentalising writers like Barnes was evident to her:

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<sup>48</sup> Breuer writes in her memoir notes that when Barnes returned from Chanel, 'she reported in her drawl "She wants to make me a dress. Just down to my knees. I must not hide my beautiful legs."' Perhaps Breuer is recollecting a later incident, for Barnes did interview Chanel, but for the magazine *Physical Culture* (Barnes 1931). In general, Breuer's memoir notes cannot be entirely trusted. Loy only wrote one piece for *Charm* (Loy 1997: 157–61), published after Breuer's tenure.

<sup>49</sup> In Mina Loy's *Insel*, discussed in Chapter 3.1, Loy's fictional counterpart Mrs Jones and the artist Insel (Richard Oelze) sit outside the Hotel Lutetia, listening to the air-raid sirens that signal the fragility of Europe by the mid-1930s.



Fig. 1.24

But what is the simplest thing to acquire. Fiction, short stories by the finest English and American writers, going begging for lack of magazines to print them. And yet they establish the tone of the magazine. Again the irony, how cheap good art. (PP: BBM)

These contributors were hired labour, and although they came cheap, their value to the magazine was significant – their particular function to generate the general character or attitude of *Charm*. Breuer exploited Barnes's surplus value – the difference between the wages she earns for writing for *Charm* (her exchange value) and the value of the service she provides to the magazine. This second value is now known as her symbolic or cultural capital. But in 1923–24, Barnes hardly has significant value as 'Djuna Barnes' in inverted commas, what Aaron Jaffe (2005) calls the imprimatur – a textual mark or style that stands in for the body of the author. Rather, Barnes's value to Breuer seems to be in her equivalence with 'Paris' in inverted commas, what Barnes herself appears to call 'Paris Value' in the heading of a draft reminiscence of 1939, 'Farewell Paris' (Barnes 2005: 249).<sup>50</sup> In the context of *Charm* – as in other comparable magazines of the period – Paris means avant-garde art and literature, and fashion, a sheen of the sophisticated. This conforms to Faye Hammill's assessment of the function of smart magazines such as *Vanity Fair* that 'propose that sophistication is the property of a distinguished elite, and yet covertly offer an education in sophistication' (2010: 3). Alice Wood interprets British *Harper's Bazaar* according to the same model: as a fashion periodical that 'exploited modernism's perceived exclusivity and high cultural value to flatteringly construct its readers as culturally sophisticated' (2016: 371).

Both Barnes and Malcolm Cowley – indeed many of the 'English and American writers' in *Charm*, such as Arthur Moss and Florence Gilliam – were commissioned to report on the Parisian scene to which they had relocated. By far the most frequent contributor, Cowley went on to write a regular books column, but his first feature, 'Parnassus-on-the-Seine' (July 1924; the year of Breuer's editorship), is a piece on the gods and landmarks of literary and artistic Montparnasse. Part sardonic who's who and part earnest guide, it tries to steer a course between the known and the supposedly lesser-known Left Bank. Cowley, who later wrote that he 'presented the literary scene in terms that I hoped would interest New Jersey housewives', saw himself as a cultural translator (1978: 62). Barnes's eleven contributions, signed either as Djuna Barnes or Lydia Steptoe, range from a profile of Pa-

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<sup>50</sup> This point modifies Elliott and Wallace 1994, which argues that in her earlier New York journalism Barnes 'stood in for the bohemian' (123).



risian artists' models (1924b) to the latest in Parisian hairstyles (1924c) and interviews with the French *couturières* Jenny and Jeanne Lanvin (1925a/b). Elliott and Wallace write that '[a] huge proportion of her nature journalism [...] involved interpreting artistic and expatriate communities for a variety of readerships in the United States' (1994: 128), and her pieces for *Charm* confirm this interpretative role. Her function in the magazine is evidently to provide Parisian material, a taste of France and its arts and style for American readers. She does so in a way that highlights her position as a mediator of French culture.<sup>51</sup> Of Lanvin, she writes (as Lydia Steptoe) that:

these designers of gowns for the *élite* are as difficult to net as a trout [...] But *I* saw Jeanne Lanvin for thirteen minutes by the clock, eleven more than she had promised, because I came up behind an Empire dress, and for those few minutes I was able to stand and watch her unobserved. (1925b: 20)

Barnes literally positions herself between her subject and readers. She has been allowed exclusive access to this elusive woman, along with a celebrity photographer: the accompanying image, by Man Ray, shows the designer sat in her 'sanctum' (20) wearing the outfit that Barnes describes. Yet she must steal her observations of Lanvin. Barnes's staging of this scene imagines her back to the reader, who is permitted a peek over her shoulder, as it were. Lydia Steptoe stands somewhat distant from Lanvin and the New Jersey reader, with whom she nevertheless shares her privileged point of view.<sup>52</sup>

The degree to which Barnes identifies with and mediates between her subjects and readers varies throughout the *Charm* pieces. In 'The Romance of Beautiful Jewels' (1925c) Barnes (again as Lydia Steptoe) actually identifies as a fashion writer – 'we in the craft' – and as such mediates between one culture and another: on the one hand, fashion and prevailing tastes – a realm of the initiated – and on the other, the New Jersey readers who aspire to that world. 'When some one says: "She was the most beautiful and the most clever woman I ever met!" what do you instantly picture that woman to be?' (44). Asking her female reader to imagine, perhaps to desire a particular identity, Lydia Steptoe then provides up-to-the-minute advice for how

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<sup>51</sup> Only one of Barnes's articles for *Charm*, 'Rome and the Little Theater', is not focused on either Paris or fashion (1926b). Her interview with the opera singer Mary Garden, a household name in America by this point, focuses on the question of 'How the Woman in Love Should Dress' (1925e).

<sup>52</sup> See Caselli 2009: 16 for a similar tension – between familiarity and inaccessibility – in another of Barnes's *Charm* pieces, 'The Models Have Come to Town' (1924b).

she might achieve it in the form of style education and practical guidance: ‘Why is the pearl prized above all else? [...] because blonde and brunette alike are at their very best in its company, on formal and informal occasions’ (44). ‘Emeralds bring out the best in pigmentation’ (44). “‘Jade and what?’ The answer is jade and anything’ (45). The title of ‘The Coiffure á la Grecque [*sic*]’ (1924c), a familiar Barnesian mash of French and English, recognises its author’s function as a translator of foreign custom. Here, Barnes’s ventriloquism of the fashion or style arbiter is so complete that her account of the wisdom of Parisian celebrity hairdresser Master Antoine appears by the end of the piece to have blended into Antoine’s own voice: ‘And then, when all has been arranged to my lady’s liking, there are hundreds of combs to choose from’ (91). Such articles rehearse Barnes’s *Ladies Almanack* (1928), in which a ‘Lady of Fashion’ narrates a kind of satirical conduct book introducing the rarefied world of lesbian Paris.

In the Lanvin article Barnes’s voice, as Lydia Steptoe, is emphatically present in the narrative and in the inclusion of her questions. It is a voice familiar from Barnes’s interviews of the 1910s: aphoristic, arch and melodramatic (‘The plump, capable hands were close cuffed, and below this cuff the pearls and diamonds again took up their story of affluence’ [1925b: 20].) As in so many of the early interviews, her technique and function as interviewer is self-consciously incorporated, alerting us to potential slip-pages between subject and object: “‘You are a dangerous questioner’” returns Lanvin at one point (1925b: 71). The danger lies in the extent to which Barnes and her questions direct the piece. For although her subject purportedly speaks throughout, that voice is implausibly translated from the ‘scrupulous French’ (21) – Barnes herself spoke the language little – and it often sounds uncannily like the interviewer’s own, as in: “‘I think Americans are the most beautiful people in the world, next to the beautiful French. The American child, charming, but as a rule not childishly enough caparisoned’” (21). The subject is refracted through the prism of typical Barnesian imagery (such as the antiquated caparison) and favoured themes. For example, Lanvin’s reputation as a *couturière* to young women becomes an opportunity to meditate on temporalities other than that of the contemporary moment represented by fashion.<sup>53</sup> The designer herself is compared to Queen Victoria, while her mannequin appears to have stepped out of a nineteenth-cen-

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<sup>53</sup> The illustrations to this piece, by *Vogue*-regular Ethel Plummer, are decidedly contemporary, only underlining this tension. See Seitler 2008 for a discussion of Barnes’s and Plummer’s first appearance on the page together, in *Vanity Fair* in 1915. In their cartoons and accompanying rhymes, Seitler writes, the two women convey ‘the atavistic allure of the modern girl’, an ‘expansive time’ (241) that Barnes frequently opens up, as in the Lanvin piece.

tury fashion plate:

It was twilight, and the pale, stately miss who wore all those bewitching crinoline effects, she of the early Victorian sloping shoulders, was unhooking her last demonstration, a thing of pink silk [...] that gave a hint of those dear dead days when no young girl was quite young without pantaloons. (20)

If Barnes overwhelms her subject, collapsing the remove initially set up between them, her relationship with her American readers remains characterised by a tension between proximity and distance:

[W]hat of the modern Miss, the ‘flapper’, as we call her in America? [...] A look of pain rose to the immaculate braids, ‘I don’t know what you mean by “flapper.” Is that what we mean by impertinent?’

I colored for my country. ‘Perhaps a little –’ (21)

Representing America, yet she blushes for American manners. ‘I colored for my country’ reads both as an act of patriotism and a quiet betrayal.

#### **MAKE IT NEW JERSEY! MODERNISM AND LOCALISM IN CHARM**

*Charm* itself, during Breuer’s editorship and in the years afterwards, maintains a balance between cosmopolitan modernity – represented by Paris and its art and fashion, and the magazine’s discernible quality and slick look – and domestic pride. Established by Bamberger’s of Newark for its 90,000 account holders in New Jersey, *Charm* had ambitions to rival *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*. It hired many of the same illustrators and photographers as these cosmopolitan publications – Helen Dryden, Ethel Plummer, Allen Saalburg, Dorothy Edinger, George Hoyningen-Huene – and shared a modern aesthetic, including a contemporary mix of photography and illustration, modern typography and generously spaced, clean layouts (figs 1.25–1.27). Especially in its first year, it reflects the ties of Bessie Breuer to the transatlantic avant-garde.<sup>54</sup> As a declared ‘home-interest’ magazine, it emphasised interiors, domestic management and fashion, along with New Jersey matters, but the reader might also be interested in politics, art, poet-

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<sup>54</sup>Breuer was a close associate of Duchamp and in these years also knew Man Ray (whose photographs appear frequently in *Charm*) and Picabia. With all three men she was briefly involved in setting up a ‘New York Dada’ magazine (it never materialised) (PP: BBM). For a brief discussion of Man Ray’s photographs in *Charm*, see Pepper 2013: 21.



Fig. 1.25



Fig. 1.26

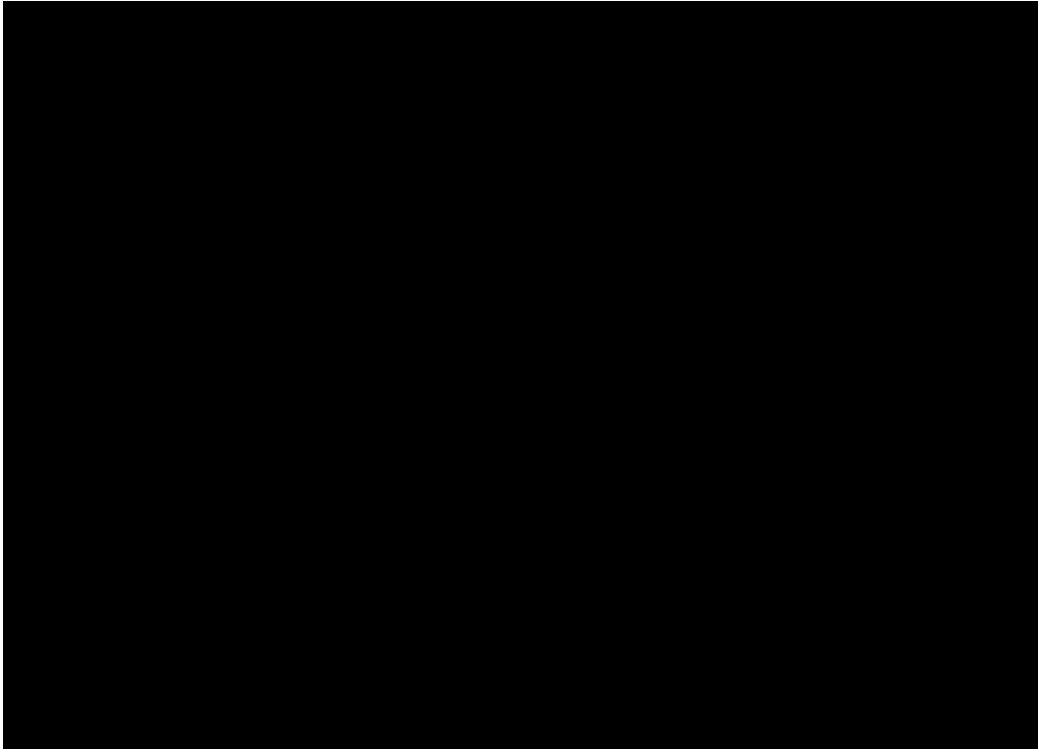


Fig. 1.27

ry, psychology, which are frequently introduced by authors associated with the new movements in art, literature and politics.<sup>55</sup> Along with Loy, Barnes and Cowley, *Charm* commissioned, for example, Allen Tate, the editors of *Quill* and *Gargoyle* Arthur Moss and Florence Gilliam, and the art critic and co-organiser of the Armory Show Walter Pach.<sup>56</sup> Others have connections to modernist networks and progressive movements in politics: the feminists and suffragists Inez Hayes Irwin and Jeanette Eaton both worked for *The Masses*, and presumably knew the feminist and prolific journalist Brenda Ueland, an associate of Louise Bryant. Ueland's many *Charm* articles on feminist issues include an interview with Rebecca West (Ueland 1924). *Charm* ran features on modernism across the arts – 'The Modern Use of the Camera' (June 1928), 'Modernists in Literary Art' (August 1928), 'The Primitive in Modern Art' (December 1928) – and whole issues were devoted to 'the modern' (April 1928) and Mexican modernism (January 1930).

But *Charm*'s modern content was often filtered through a local theme.<sup>57</sup> Progressive articles on women in politics regularly focus on New Jersey figures (for example, Bugbee 1924). When Alfred Barr, the director of the Museum of Modern Art, contributes a piece on his newly founded institution (1929), he looks to John Cotton Dana of the Newark Museum as a shining example, suggesting that it will be years before New York can surpass its audacity. *Charm* thus uses its sophisticated, modern look and outlook to create a slick, confident brand of localism – an aspiration that matches that of Bamberger's itself, a Newark institution intent on cultivating civic pride and loyal customers.<sup>58</sup> Writing in her former university's alumnae magazine, then assistant editor Katherine Gauss articulates the expansive identity of *Charm* and the local allegiances that colour it:

Besides being a magazine which tries to keep vitally in touch with almost everything – fashion, household problems, travel, art, music, education, society, books, and other things of the moment – and interpret them to make them especially interesting to a New Jersey

<sup>55</sup> Supported by a close and detailed analysis of *Charm*, O'Connor and Cummings 1984 describes the typical reader as a middle-class housewife with some disposable income and dreams of social mobility. This is the only other scholarly work on *Charm* that I have been able to locate.

<sup>56</sup> Pach 1924, Moss 1925a, Moss 1925b, Gilliam 1925a, Gilliam 1925b, Tate 1926.

<sup>57</sup> In fact New Jersey holds a special place in relation to modernism that deserves full exploration, including for example Alfred Kreymborg's determination to make Ridgefield the 'fountainhead' of modern poetry with his magazine *Others* – as reported in Johns 1915, an article that makes much of Mina Loy's 'Love Songs' in the context of this peaceful bohemian enclave. The piece was possibly commissioned by Breuer as the date may have coincided with her tenure as Sunday editor on the *Tribune*.

<sup>58</sup> See Hamburger 2000 and Shales 2010.

public, it is able to offer services that we feel are somewhat unique. We are able for instance, with the help of the Junior Leagues of New Jersey, to bring the Neighbourhood Playhouse of New York fame to New Jersey; to offer space in the store and means whereby a dancing class may be held within the financial reach of children who otherwise might be deprived of such important training. (1929: 32–33)

Attention to the magazine's fashion content also reveals a dialogic relationship between the cosmopolitan and the local. Fashion accounts for much of *Charm's* content, from reports on the biannual couture collections in Paris to illustrations of retail versions. The fashion pages are typical for the period, in that they replicate the Paris-centrism of most American women's publications. Illustrations and photographs of the latest designs by Parisian couturiers feature prominently each month. April is the crucial issue for its breathless reports on what are known as the spring openings, the major annual showing of the Paris collections. As had been the case for decades, it appears that Paris sets the style and the United States follows faithfully: 'By April the mode for the spring and summer months has been authoritatively decreed by Paris and accepted in America' (March 1925: 9).

The potent symbolism of Paris is in fact geared towards its American interpretation. Apart from illegal copies, presumably, *Charm* features all the versions of Paris fashions that were imported or adapted for the US market, 'adapt[ing] [...] the French mode for American women', as *Charm* phrases it (January 1925: 8): illustrations of the original garments imported from France; models known artfully as 'absolute copies'; others that are 'adaptations'; and frocks, ensembles and accessories that 'follow Patou's favourite silhouette', or are 'inspired by Chanel' or made in a fabric of 'Lanvin green'. This reflects Nancy Green's model of economic nationalism, discussed in the introduction – the use of French artistry to prop up a thriving US mass market and thus bolster US identity as democratic and authoritative in industry.

However, in *Charm*, the translation of Parisian associations also works to support local, New Jersey identity. Parisian style has been customised for Bamberger's specific market, then bought in Newark and worn by New Jersey women. As one of the magazine's adverts puts it: 'The shadow of Paris is the substance of Spring Fashions at Bamberger's' (fig. 1.28). For among the many versions of Parisian models, whether absolute copies or mass-market interpretations, what is constant and never in doubt is that what you see is on sale at Bamberger's, as the reader is reminded in a caption on each of the fashion spreads and sometimes in the advertising section too. Paris may 'sponsor' or 'sanction' the latest style, as *Charm* frequently phrases it, but

The  
Shadow of Paris  
is the Substance of  
Spring Fashions  
at  
BAMBERGER'S

THE retinue of  
Bamberger stylists is back,  
with the original models . . .  
the pick of the Grand Cou-  
ture openings . . . following  
like the shadow of Paris, close  
on their heels. The copies are  
completed . . . line for line . . .  
stitch for stitch . . . according  
to Bamberger's exacting  
standards. The breath of  
Paris' spring fashions is blown  
across the width and breadth  
of one of America's great fash-  
ion floors . . .

This issue of CHARM pictures  
some of the more important  
spring models; they are priced  
very close to landed cost; and  
their copies will be found at  
such common-sense prices  
that every woman may have  
at least one Paris reproduc-  
tion in her own spring ward-  
robe.

PARIS FASHIONS  
THIRD FLOOR

**L. Bamberger & Co.**  
"ONE OF AMERICA'S GREAT STORES"  
NEWARK, N. J.

Fig. 1.28

its sponsorship is regally symbolic. The real work is done in New Jersey, where the buyers at Bamberger's and the editors of *Charm* claim to help women make the right decisions about their wardrobe according to figure, taste and budget. In one article relaying 'The Message of the Mannequins', the importation of French fashions into New Jersey even makes possible her specifically domestic identity:

the great February Openings are over, and every ship that leaves France is laden with trunks and boxes full of the creations of Gabrielle Chanel, or Lanvin, or Premet, or Patou, or Worth, or Jenny, or of any one and a half dozen others. And after we have seen all of them, and taken our pick, we can go about our spring planting or our task of having the house redecorated, knowing that for another season, at least, our clothes are off our minds. (Hawthorne 1924: 17)

If the editorial features of *Charm* helped to make a modern New Jersey woman, so too do its fashion pages. This local identity is created in dialectical relationship to an idea of Paris and its style: sophisticated, artistic and cosmopolitan. This same structure will offer a productive lens for reading – as the New Jersey readers might have read them – Djuna Barnes's contributions to the magazine.

#### **'SAFE ARRIVAL BACK HOME': BARNES'S SATIRICAL ARTICLES**

Earlier I characterised Barnes's role in *Charm* as a translator of French culture. She was both a symbol of cosmopolitan modernity and a mediator between that world and an American mass readership. The foregoing digression was intended to suggest a similar function in the magazine's fashion coverage. Clearly, Barnes fulfilled a function at *Charm*, for she continued to write for the magazine for several years after her friend Breuer resigned as editor. In Barnes's later pieces (1925–28), which I will now discuss, her value is transparent, for they support the brand of sophisticated civic spirit that was *Charm*'s ultimate aim. But they also offer a self-conscious view of the system of relations in which her writing accrues such value.<sup>59</sup>

Four of the last pieces that Barnes contributed, signed by Lydia Steptoe, are a series about Americans abroad, mostly in Paris. These travel articles,

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<sup>59</sup> Here I disagree with Elliott and Wallace's suggestion that '[t]he more bourgeois she thought her audience, the more sincerely, even romantically, she represented bohemian or avant-garde culture' (1994: 130).



as I will call them, suggest a complex, mutually constituted relationship between Barnes's brand of European cosmopolitanism and the American identity of her readers. Broadly speaking, they interpret or translate elements of Parisian life and culture as experienced by the American traveller or expatriate. Although clearly satirical, their exact tone and intention are difficult to place, for they combine satire of bourgeois habits (familiar from Barnes's New York journalism of the 1910s) with plenty of opportunities for the reader to feel a sense of familiarity or comfortable recognition. If *Charm's* recurrent air of cosmopolitan modernity, especially associated with Paris, is present in the form of Barnes's satire of middle-class mores, she makes this idea of Paris particularly easy to swallow. In this, the pieces also fit into *Charm's* localism, for they work to secure the New Jersey reader's identity, using received ideas about France – Frenchness, Parisian cosmopolitanism – as a kind of foil against which the reader's sense of self might be affirmed. As such, the issue of 'home', so central to *Charm's* agenda, recurs in relation to an idea of cosmopolitan Paris, a tension between distance and proximity that is both exploited and collapsed.

'A Bit of an Indiscretion' ostensibly satirises the American abroad, playing on the clichés of a typical trip to Paris – mangled French, difficulties with the currency and tipping, the ubiquity of American tourists, their compulsion to shop and their desire to find the authentic France, their commitment to 'seeing the world' and their preference for consuming it in easy images. But although the piece seems to send up American habits, Barnes also conjures a set of scenarios that would have been comfortably recognisable to the American reader, whether well travelled or only well versed in what European travel of the era demanded. Here is one, on arrival in Paris:

No matter how much of the language you think you have got, it is disconcerting to turn on *eau chaude* and get *froid* and to turn on *froid* and find that it is – quite. When, with a laugh of abandon, in an ecstasy of undaunted culture, you press the bell marked *femme de chambre*, and a light shoots down on you just when you don't want to see yourself, and, maddened, you press *lumière*, and get the *femme de chambre* just when you did not want to see her – well, it's sort of French, perhaps, but you are utterly done in. (1925d: 18)

As are we by Barnes's typically protracted sentence, here a sophisticated performance of American exasperation in the face of French convolution.

With a cosmopolitan's disdain for the provincial, Barnes offers readers a taste of modernist autonomy – as a Paris representative, she is obliged to

give her readers this sense of artistic distance from their own lives; that is, after all, one idea of Paris that they would expect. This conforms to what Andrew Goldstone has described as Barnes's 'performance' of cosmopolitanism. Arguing for the ways in which autonomy is socially produced ('socially self-reflexive'), he suggests that Barnes's pose of aesthetic autonomy, lived through her exile in Paris, is 'secured only through the exhausting, lonely performance of the aesthete role' (2013: 111). But in 'A Bit of an Indiscretion' she also gives her readers a chance to laugh – together, in the know – at familiar experiences and stereotypes, which reflect just as pointedly on the perceived idiosyncrasies of the French. And more, her irony (part of that performance of modernist autonomy) invites their collaboration as interpreters and colluders. That shared identity conforms to Wayne Booth's characterisation of 'stable' irony (the type where the latent meaning is discernible) not 'as something that undermines clarities, opens up vistas of chaos, and either liberates by destroying all dogma or destroys by revealing the inescapable canker of negation at the heart of every affirmation' (ix) (which might also describe some strains of modernism), but rather an effect produced between author and reader 'together' (xiv), the project of a 'community of minds' (14):

Often the predominant emotion when reading stable ironies is that of joining, of finding and communing with kindred spirits. The author I infer behind the false words is my kind of man, because he enjoys playing with irony, because he assumes my capacity for dealing with it, and – most important – because he grants me a kind of wisdom; he assumes that he does not have to spell out the shared and secret truths on which my reconstruction is to be built. (Booth 1974: 28)

Barnes's method in this *Charm* piece, and in those that follow, ultimately affirms rather than undermines the reader's identity, producing an easily consumable idea of Paris, both modernist and mainstream.

Indeed, the next article in the series, 'This Yearning for Solitude', proceeds to satirise the cosmopolitan pose of autonomy. Lydia Steptoe is in this article a 'Dômite', but 'one of those persons who love to sit in the Café du Dôme, Paris, surrounded by great people – Stravinsky, Pascin, Copeau, James Joyce – and to dream of hermits and of solitude' (1926a: 46). Her bid to be alone results in a disastrous holiday on Mallorca. She cannot bear the real conditions of solitude, of an autonomous, primitive existence. Barnes allows the reader to laugh at this American abroad, helpless without dollars, company and running water, while also – as in the previous article – provid-

ing a familiar if caricatured picture of European travel: Mallorca amounts to inhospitable accommodation, goats, rain, olive oil and bad food: ‘what we, in America, would call cattle-fodder’ (47). Siding with her compatriots, in this way Barnes produces for them a safe, digestible version of cosmopolitan Paris that ultimately shores up American superiority. And yet the article still retains the flavour of Parisian aestheticism, for in Barnes’s satire – in her own distancing from the Dômities and sending up of bourgeois priorities – she saves for herself the position of autonomy. This idea of Paris is preserved, even as it is – and because it is – satirised. In reference to Barnes’s 1922 article about arriving in Paris, ‘Vagaries Malicieux’, Goldstone writes: ‘Shadowing Barnes’s essay is the sense that expatriation may already be a hackneyed gesture, something that can only be cited or performed’ (2013: 133). To distance herself even from modernist exile, as she does in ‘This Yearning for Solitude’, is – in Goldstone’s terms – to avoid ‘any compromising identification’ (134), artistic or otherwise. And yet, what emerges from that haute-cosmopolitan position in the *Charm* piece is something amenable and satisfying to her New Jersey readers. As she mediates between the two poles, Barnes’s identification *is* compromised, for she articulates both the distance between them and their interdependence. The ‘position of the outsider’, fiercely defended by Barnes in Goldstone’s view (135), is also the crux of her mass appeal – and thus what dialectically affirms the position of the ‘insiders’.

A safe distance from, or protected intimacy with, Paris is the goal of ‘French Etiquette for Foreigners’, another kind of conduct guide that promises to ‘make travelling a pleasure and to ensure safe arrival back home, for all persons who feel that their “finishing” can best be completed in Europe’ (1927: 20). The ‘unknown quantity’ the French soul is compared to a lion to which the American is thrown, and the article continues to make a series of national slurs on the mysterious French, who are rude, proud, ruthless, haughty, lazy and obstinate (20). The satirical voice ensures it is also a congenial one, and in the very idea of a guide to surviving the tourist trip lies an implicit mockery of the hapless American abroad. But again, a sense of recognition is generated against an easily consumable idea of Paris, bolstering American identity – or as Barnes writes, ensuring ‘safe arrival back home’.

Paris is thus dialectically related to the United States in these articles. It has a function: symbolic and useful, it is an idea against which an idea of America is formed, like the ‘reciprocal visions’ that Nancy Green (1994, 1997) identified at work in the transatlantic fashion trade.<sup>60</sup> This is explic-

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<sup>60</sup> This is structurally similar to Caselli’s point about Barnes’s ‘Diary of a Dangerous Child’, in which ‘innocence is fashioned as a comparative term within a system’ (2002: 195).

itly articulated in Barnes's final article for *Charm*, in which Lydia Steptoe returns home from Paris. Paris has worked its 'insidious charm' on her, but its true purpose was to convince her of the relative greatness of the United States: 'The culture of Europe may eat upon us long, but not forever [...]' What is the veritable smile of Mona Lisa unless it can be compared, ever so often, to the grin of Chaplin?' (1928: 28). The two cultures form their specificity in relation to one another: the suggestion is that you leave home in order to understand home better. This is clarified when Lydia visits her family – in New Jersey. She urges her mother to come away with her again, "to any place that is far enough from home for you to realize what home is like. Any place on that wild Atlantic that will teach you what a great and glorious place you have left" (29). In a sign of America's modernity (like Chaplin; France on the other hand is associated with relics and mementoes), and of communication between geographic locations, the Steptoes are listening to the radio. Connected to the modern world yet offered, through that connection, security in their own place: this is the *Charm* family of readers in microcosm. The parochialism of using a distance-defeating medium such as radio to listen to 'Home Favorites' sang by a 'proud contralto from New Bedford' – a gentle satire that relates in tone to that of the other pieces – is equally cast as patriotism, a proud localism even, and an American sense of cultural authority (29).<sup>61</sup> Barnes manages at once to mock her country's sense of superiority and to confirm it, a pact that Barnes has made with *Charm's* readers throughout the four travel pieces, providing a taste of cosmopolitan life – of which her satire is a distinct flavour – that says there's no place like home.

#### **'[T]HE ONLY TRUE MODERN'**

If this reading compares Barnes's journalism to the work of *Charm's* fashion coverage, does it simply equate her and her writing with commodities? Is this merely a domesticated version of modernism, made palatable for a mainstream audience – made for easy cash? Is there no room left for Barnes's agency? I want to suggest that such anxious questions – whose answers may be 'yes' – also point usefully towards how we position her writing, and towards how Barnes herself did. Andrew Goldstone says of Barnes that her 'cosmopolitan modernism [...] does have real-world effects. Her achievement was to create, in the teeth of considerable social obstacles, an auton-

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<sup>61</sup> Like all national mythologies this image is based on and elides complex transnational dialogues, given that the radio was invented by an Italian, Marconi, working in England.

omous space for herself within the field of literary modernism' (2013: 130). In ways that differ from Goldstone's account of Barnes's cosmopolitanism, I suggest that – beyond even the field of modernism – her articles for *Charm* and their echoes of the competitive transatlantic fashion industry reflect the self-conscious process of creating a position for herself in the literary field.

Here, I would like to return to Pascale Casanova's 'world literary space', discussed in the introduction. Following the premise that '[e]ach work that is declared to be literary is a minute part of the immense "combination" constituted by the literary world as a whole' (2004: 3), Casanova suggests that literary legitimacy is secured in competition between writers and between national literary spaces (11). According to Casanova, and in a historicising argument echoed by Goldstone, the ultimate legitimating factor and source of literary capital is autonomy: 'the great writers have managed, by gradually detaching themselves from historical and literary forces, to invent their literary freedom' (xii). In the competitive space that Casanova describes, literary capital and the holy grail of autonomy were accrued by an appeal to associations with Paris, 'the place where literary consecration is ordained' (23) and fashions are decreed.

Bringing *Charm* back into the frame, Casanova's scheme echoes the magazine's dialectic between the local context of Newark and the cosmopolitan fashions, art and literature of Paris, by which a 'peripheral' space moves closer to the 'criteria of modernity' (2004: 12, 88). Except that in *Charm*, including in Barnes's articles, Paris is not only a cosmopolitan model to be copied, but one that is transformed in its local translation.<sup>62</sup> Placing Barnes in this context and seeking to understand how her pieces for *Charm* mediate an idea of Paris for the benefit of New Jersey readers opens her work discursively onto the realm of cultural competition. As an American writer in an American magazine with provincial ties, at once claiming proximity to and charting the cultural distance from Paris, Barnes reflects the laws of Casanova's world literary space. Her self-consciousness about the roles that she and her readers play, about their national or local allegiances and transnational ideals, and their dialectically produced identities as 'cosmopolitan' and 'national' or 'local', reveals her awareness of this geography, Casanova's 'immense combination' that is 'the totality of texts and literary and aesthet-

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<sup>62</sup> This dialectic between the local and the cosmopolitan characterises much of the work on 'new cosmopolitanism'. Jessica Berman (2001), for example, has shown that in the United States in the second half of the nineteenth century, in a way that was echoed in *Charm* in the 1920s, cosmopolitanism was embraced as an American characteristic and source of pride. As I have done, she finds '[t]his odd combination' (36) particularly well illustrated in magazines of the period, in 'their insistence on the strength and primacy of American ways of life, and the continued reliance of these magazines on travelogs, international perspectives, and literature by European writers' (37).

ic debates' (3) – magazines like *Charm* that publish writers; their readers; Barnes's 'travel' articles and their representation of aesthetic values; and works of literature like *Nightwood*.

With reference to that novel, Goldstone argues for Barnes's struggle to situate herself in the literary field, but says that she does so by choosing a position of 'personal and narratorial detachment' from 'coteries and communities' (2013: 112). For example, *Nightwood's* 'nativist fascination with racial and national identity' is not about 'a communal political project'; the book 'limns not a nativist but an outsider or migrant aesthetics' (128). But the *Charm* articles suggest – as did my reading of *The Book of Repulsive Women* in the first half of this chapter – that choosing a cosmopolitan aesthetic associated with Paris is a decision located in relation to American cultural identity. Barnes the 'outsider' is also Barnes the American, aesthetically distant from the meridian of world literary space and knowingly charting that distance while also trying to close it.

Because in Casanova's scheme this space is temporal – the distance is also that from modernity – '[t]he gap between the "capital" and the "province"' is also that 'between past and present, between ancient and modern' (95). Thus Barnes's reflections in the *Charm* articles on the gap between capital and province can be directly related to her consistent preoccupation with the arcane, her deliberate anachronisms and self-conscious staging of lateness. Casanova observes that world literary space and its workings are most apparent to those who are distant from its meridian, 'those who are not quite of their time' (95). That assessment is often made of Barnes. In the case of *Repulsive Women*, I proposed that her untimeliness is culturally and geographically specific to early twentieth-century America. This can now be described as a knowing performance of American literary lateness and a self-aware attempt, adopting Parisian-flavoured aesthetics, both to be more modern and to reveal that effort. Barnes's exposition of the mechanisms of world literary space is often her bid to win legitimacy within it – a position that always and necessarily undermines itself as part of its formation. We saw that her satirical travel articles, for example, preserve her position of autonomy as one necessary means of showing how it comes about.

In *Repulsive Women* and in her journalism for New York newspapers and *Charm*, Barnes also challenges Casanova's insistence on the centre/periphery structure in which the United States is one of the outliers, appealing to Parisian aesthetics in order to move closer to the literary present. In all these texts, I have observed an incipient American cultural ascendancy – whether local or national – brought into dialogue with Parisian hegemony. The artistic autonomy represented by Paris is often put under pressure by a

specifically American identity, even as the latter relies on and translates the idea of Paris. This I have called Barnes's dialectical American modernism. It does not denote an essential national identity, but rather Barnes's historically specific awareness of that identity as a position to be made and reformed within a system, in relation to other possible identities.

That Barnes was aware of the cultural field in which she occupied a place, and the role of Paris in it, is clear from the four prose fragments she wrote in 1939–40 with which I opened, but also from the notes she made for them around the time (fig. 1.29) (UMD: DB 1.4.7). The notes constitute pages of names, places, drinks and dishes that stand in, metonymically, for 'Paris', as Barnes did in *Charm*, and then are reused in various configurations in the drafts. On one page is a reference to the 'Federal Works Project Administration' and Col. Brendan Somervell, its head from 1936 (fig. 130), dating these notes to 1939 or after, when the Works Progress Administration, part of Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal, was renamed.<sup>63</sup> As well as a reminder of the ways in which artists are employed – the employment of artists was one of the WPA's most notable schemes – or unemployed (perhaps her own unemployment lies behind Barnes's note), this transatlantic confluence on the pages of Barnes's notebook serves as a sign of change in the cultural field. As the Paris of the 1920s recedes into memory, hazy under the sign of Barnes's question marks, an era of American art and cultural authority is heralded.

Goldstone rejects 'American cultural nationalism' as 'hardly the most important context for understanding Barnes' (2013: 138), but as it inflects her reflections on legitimacy and illegitimacy, a central concern of her work as many critics have observed, it surely has significance. Such an inflection allows us, for instance, to connect her queering strategies to her place in the broadest literary field, and to see her reflections on national and transnational aesthetics as a further facet of her queer aesthetics. Barnes's work is above all about belonging and not belonging. *Ladies Almanack* promises to 'sho[w]' the 'Signs' and 'Tides' of its mostly lesbian characters, creating a coterie that is nonetheless presented as illegible to outsiders – does this make it an example of communality, distinct from the uncomprehending observer, or does its unrepresentability signal a suspicion of communal projects? *Ryder*, a story about a family with legitimate and illegitimate sides,

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<sup>63</sup> Phillip Herring (Barnes 2005: 249) and Caselli (2009: 116) suggest these notes were made in the 1920s, which Aaron Yale Heisler repeats in his introduction to 'Lament for the Left Bank' (Barnes 2015: 110). But given the reference to the WPA and the fact that many of the entries are accompanied by suggested dates or dates with question marks ('Dingo 1921', 'Fougets 21 or 22', 'Three Mountain 1922?') it seems more likely that Barnes wrote these retrospectively, attempting to recollect people, places and chronology in preparation for the commissioned article 'Vantage Ground: Lament for the Left Bank' (1941).

NINA Hammet	(Hollywood)
Sylvia Goff	antheil -
Massinier on	Champs Elysees
Shawwood Anderson	Strick - Swedish
Quai d'Anjou - duck	first American Bar 1921
Granges - icles	Dingo 1921
St Louis	Jocky
Joy - Cocteau	Jungle
Radiquet -	Gypsy bar - St. Louis
Tour d'Argent	Lewis
x Laper Rouse	Boulev. Blanche
Jouquet - 21 or 22	(Rossi drinks
to Jules -	Raphael -
Bourquignon -	Raspail
for key - h	claret & Burgundy
	of vintage years
	Chateau - Yquem

Fig. 1.29

Federal works	rue des Ecoles
Projects	Les Croisiques
administration	La Boule -
Al. Ameroll -	Les champs des Mars
Food - fouden -	* Where the point stops
andouillettes -	foinet? -
hop legs - penne	Floyd Gibbons
Snails	* Sarnois Sur
Cocquie St Jacques	Siene
name of man	St Julien les
who cleaned	Pauvre -
x up?	Cote des Sports
Boutiques	rue des Four
Muse Carnaulet	croix rouge?
	shut opening onto St 9

Fig. 1.30



borrows wilfully from the canon of Western literature, in which it cannot be assuredly placed. In each case, as throughout her writing, identification is always at the same time – sometimes to someone else – disidentification. The only certainty is that both are part of a system, their meaning produced in relation to and through each other. In this chapter I have explored Barnes's literary uses of fashion and the fashion contexts in which her work was published, both of which permit us to see another facet of this aspect of her writing. Barnes's dialectical American modernism, developing at a moment in which her country was incorporating French ideals into its own nascent cultural authority, reflects this process and performs the positions available to her as a writer in that context. Historically rooted, aesthetic, industrial, competitive, a barometer of taste and a symbol of untimeliness – fashion offered Barnes, as it offers the modernist critic, a fluid trope for foregrounding the operations of belonging and unbelonging at the intersection of art and nation. In the next chapter I turn to Jean Rhys, whose approach to fashion was no less concerned with affiliation – aesthetic, national and female – but far more resistant to American cultural authority.

## CHAPTER 2

# ‘Paris again’:<sup>1</sup> Jean Rhys

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<sup>1</sup> This is the heading of one section of Rhys’s unfinished, posthumously published autobiography, *Smile Please* (1979).

# Chapter 2.1

## Fashion in Jean Rhys

### *Affiliation and Illusion in the Left Bank Fiction*

#### **‘A SECOND SKIN’**

In 1973 Jean Rhys reflected: ‘All my life I’ve loved clothes, I think of them as a second skin. It started when I first went to Paris’ (Parkin 1973: 33).<sup>1</sup> The statement reimagines her lifelong interest in dress – more, her life itself – beginning in Paris. Clothes and Paris were connected to Rhys’s fragile sense of being, and of being able – able to present herself to the world, to move through and belong to it, and to work. ‘Paris, Paris, Paris, Paris’ chant the wheels of the train that transports Sasha Jensen to the city in *Good Morning, Midnight* (2000b: 103). The rhythm offers her form, as it did Rhys: the thought of Paris (along with her native island Dominica) ‘make[s] me want to write’ (Rhys 1985: 171). Her literary career was launched in the city, and a good deal of its output composed and based there. The thought of clothes, too, is galvanising, and especially so for her insecure female characters. The fantasy of dressing up that Rhys recounts in her notebooks and in the notes for her autobiography – ideas about growing up and getting married, for example, are performed through clothes<sup>2</sup> – is replayed again and again in her fiction, becoming an integral structural element as this illusion alternately boosts and fails her protagonists.

The psychological motion that accompanies fashion’s constantly renewed promises is joined by its dialectical movement between periods.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Gautier’s observation in ‘De la mode’ (1858): ‘The garment of the modern age has become for man a sort of skin.’

<sup>2</sup> As in the listed contents of a trousseau in the Black Exercise Book (McF: JR 1.1.1) and the memory of dressing up as a Zouave in *Smile Please*: ‘dressed to go to the dance I stared at myself in the glass with rising happiness and excitement, for I was transformed’ (Rhys 1979: 90).

Rhys uses clothes to reflect on historical change and continuity as much as personal coherence and crisis. Linking the two is the notion of clothes as a ‘second skin’. The idea recalls Virginia Woolf’s ‘frock consciousness’, a mode of being (dressed) in the world that implicitly involves relationships with others.<sup>3</sup> For Rhys, the complex dynamic of fashion (and its signification across both sartorial and cultural trends) helps to articulate her characters’ isolation and attempts at engagement, and her own literary and artistic affiliations. These two strands are not arbitrarily connected: as Judith Gardiner explored at length three decades ago, Rhys’s main theme of inclusion versus exclusion encompassed the literary canon as well as the social order (1989: 24). If Gardiner took ‘moral empathy’ as a structuring dynamic within Rhys’s texts and between her texts and her readers, specifically one guiding female relationships, here I suggest that fashion is a privileged mode of expressing affiliations – personal, national and aesthetic – and the idiosyncratic moral character they acquire in Rhys’s world view. France, but especially Paris, are in Jennifer Milligan’s words ‘constructed in Rhys’s *oeuvre* to provide a potential route away from alienation towards assimilation’ (1999: 278). Intimately bound to Paris, her fashion-consciousness registers the promises and illusions of that impulse.

#### **THE LEFT BANK: PARIS THEN AND NOW**

In this section I will establish something of Rhys’s approach to Paris and its aesthetic legacy, focusing on her debut publication, *The Left Bank: Sketches and Studies of Present-Day Bohemian Paris* (1927), which, through art and fashion, reveals a dialectical relationship with Paris of the nineteenth century and reflects on the moment of modernity in which Rhys wrote. Clothes feature in almost every story; along with art – its compromises, consolations, illusions and realities – they are the collection’s central motif, a combination that recurs throughout her interwar novels and unpublished writings, but is most concentrated here.<sup>4</sup> Her short story ‘Mannequin’, for example, is distinctively pictorial, with its dynamic, harmonious vision:

Georgette passed her and smiled; Babette was in a fur coat.

All up the street the mannequins were coming out of the shops,

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<sup>3</sup> On 27 April 1925 Woolf wrote in her diary that ‘people have any number of states of consciousness: & I should like to investigate the party consciousness, the frock consciousness &c’ (Woolf 1982: 12). As L. Cohen suggests, the term highlights the distinction between the external (clothes) and the internal (mind) (1999: 150). See also Wicke 2001.

<sup>4</sup> See Joannou 2012.

pausing on the pavements a moment, making them as gay and as beautiful as beds of flowers before they walked swiftly away and the Paris night swallowed them up. (1927: 70)

Such a modern urban scene, of the kind that Caroline Evans (2013: 26–27) places in the panoply of images of walking women that formed the backdrop of nineteenth-century Paris, points to a series of comparisons between the stories of *The Left Bank* and Impressionist painting.<sup>5</sup> Aesthetically, Rhys's pictorial techniques are comparable to those of the Impressionists. The scene cited above suggests the harmonious but bustling, naturalistic distribution of figures across countless Impressionist scenes (see fig. 2.1). 'Tea with an Artist' opens with the subject, Verhausen, in a café. The position of his female companion makes the setting self-consciously pictorial: 'He was drinking rapidly one glass of beer after another, smoking a long curved pipe, and beaming contentedly on the world. The woman with him wore a black coat and skirt; she had her back to us.' (1927: 73) The modernist composition, almost photographic in the woman's informal, naturalistic position facing away from the viewer, is reminiscent of Degas's work especially (fig. 2.2), but this perceptual emphasis is found throughout Impressionist painting (see fig. 2.3). Such approaches were adopted as appropriate ways of capturing modern life, and it is this primary subject matter, in various manifestations, that most forcefully connects *The Left Bank* with the 'new painting' of the mid- to late nineteenth century.

The Impressionist preoccupation with the artist's role in capturing modernity is echoed throughout Rhys's stories, which focus on artists, fashion illustrators and a poet, either appraising or featuring in typically modern situations. Most recall the genre scenes favoured by the Impressionists, their brevity and lack of narrative compounding affinities with tableaux, as in 'Trio', whose title evokes the visual facticity of the story, with its three fig-

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<sup>5</sup> The comparable approach of these stories to painting has never been lost on readers. As well as 'sketches' in the subtitle, picked up by several, D. B. Wyndham Lewis called the stories 'thumbnails' ('Hinterland in Bohemia') while another reviewer recognised their attempt to 'paint' ('feeling, emotion, passion') rather than narrate ('Scenes of Parisian Life', *Yorkshire Weekly Post*, 2 July [1927?], page unknown). Press cuttings. McF: JR 1.2.25.

On Rhys's debt to the literary Impressionism of Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford, primarily in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, see Bender 1990, which outlines Rhys's 'impressionist' technique of stressing the construction of facts according to perception. Bender describe *The Left Bank* as 'a collection of impressionist sketches', although he also designates the closing scene of 'Mannequin' as 'surrealistic' (81). As I hope will become clear, his discussion is most suggestive in the present context for its identification of a dialectical pattern across Rhys's fiction, borrowing from nineteenth-century precedents and projecting these forward throughout her own writing as a means of social criticism.



Fig. 2.1



Fig. 2.2



Fig. 2.3



Fig. 2.4



Fig. 2.5



Fig. 2.6



ures who do not move from the corner table of a Montparnasse restaurant (1927: 83–85). The collection draws on the ‘repertoire of modern metropolitan life’ (Iskin 2007: 67) that was also the Impressionists’ principal subject: the cafés, streets, parks, artists’ studios and shops of Paris – even the railway stations, implicit in the title and background of ‘In the Rue de l’Arrivée’ (1927: 113–21), named after the street that historically led south from the arrival platforms of the original Gare Montparnasse.<sup>6</sup> The spectacle of the modern city, and the classification of its types, is as much Rhys’s concern as it was the Impressionists’.

The association of women and Paris with spectacle in one of these types – the *parisienne* – is also characteristic of the collection and of Impressionist painting, as in Manet’s portraits of well-dressed women from society and the demi-monde. Rhys’s ‘In the Luxemburg Gardens’ [*sic*], a genre scene, comprises a ‘depressed young man, meditating on [...] the futility of existence’, perhaps an impecunious poet or artist, children playing and ‘a girl’ whom the man finds attractive (1927: 71–72). Her green hat, picked out as a pictorial splash of colour along with the children’s overcoats, comes to stand in for her person, and this spectacle of a well-dressed woman resolves both the story and the man’s gloom: ‘Such a waste of time, say the Luxemburg Gardens, to be morose. Are there not always Women and Pretty Legs and Green Hats.’<sup>7</sup> ‘In a Café’ reprises the spectacle of the *parisienne* in her most iconic historical form, the prostitute (*grue*), indelibly associated with Second Empire France and represented throughout the painting of the period: ‘The *grues* are the sellers of illusion of Paris, the frail and sometimes pretty ladies, and Paris is sentimental and indulgent towards them’ (1927: 51). ‘In a Café’ is one of several stories that seem to make references to specific Impressionist paintings, intertextualities that support an interpretation of the collection in this context. The title is also that of a significant work of 1875–76 by Degas, *Dans un café* (fig. 2.4; also known as *Absinthe*). Rhys may well describe the same painting in ‘Tea with an Artist’:

A girl seated on a sofa in a room with many mirrors held a glass of green liqueur. Dark-eyed, heavy-faced, with big, sturdy peasant’s limbs, she was entirely destitute of lightness or grace.

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<sup>6</sup> Although the Impressionists were mostly based on the right bank of Paris.

<sup>7</sup> Michael Arlen’s extremely popular novel *The Green Hat* had been published in 1924. There, too, a hat stands in for the female protagonist, Iris March, a *femme fatale* (thought to have been based on Nancy Cunard) whose modern femininity threatens conservative English values and masculinity. Arlen is mentioned by F. Scott Fitzgerald in *Tender is the Night*, a book also concerned with the feminine threat to masculinity via spectacular culture.

But all the poisonous charm of the life beyond the pale was in her pose, and in her smouldering eyes – all its deadly bitterness and fatigue in her fixed smile. (1927: 78)

The narrator of the latter story recalls a work by Manet: perhaps *Plum Brandy* of c. 1877, known as *The Plum (La Prune)* (fig. 2.5), was in Rhys's mind.<sup>8</sup> The subject has the same 'fixed smile', but with its glass of 'green liqueur' and background of mirrors, the Degas – which was on public display at the Louvre from 1914, and included in an exhibition of Degas's work in Paris in 1924<sup>9</sup> – fits her description more accurately, suggesting an amalgam of these two contemporaneous images. More veiled references to Manet appear elsewhere in the collection. *Plum Brandy* may also be a source for the image of Dolly Dufreyne, the fashion artist and modern woman of 'Rue de l'Arrivée':

She sat drooping a little on the dark red leather bench, huddled in her black coat with its somewhat ragged fur collar, to all outer appearance calm, respectable, and mistress of her fate. [...] the brandy crept warmly and treacherously to her brain... (1927: 116–17)

The setting of 'In a Café' is more placid than Manet's *Bar at the Folies-Bergère* (1881–82; fig. 2.6), but 'the only vividness [...] the only spots of unrest' seem to echo its famous barroom display: 'the pictures exposed for sale, and the rows of liqueur bottles, traditional bottles of bright colours and disturbingly graceful shapes' (Rhys 1927: 50). The 'pictures exposed for sale' gesture towards both a pictorial source and a degree of self-reflexivity. Rhys's 'spots of unrest' mirror the *taches* (spots) of colour with which Manet often painted, a technique used to mark the bottles in *A Bar* as almost abstract shapes on the surface of the picture plane (Reed 2003). The 'disturbingly graceful shapes' of the bottles liken them to the female figure, a comparison made by Manet himself between the corseted form of the barmaid (frequently interpreted as a courtesan, on account of her sales role and disenchanted expression) and the green bottle to her right, a description that points – 'disturbingly' – to the woman's absence in Rhys's version of the scene. It seems likely that the same painting was in Rhys's mind when she

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<sup>8</sup> Rouart's and Wildenstein's catalogue raisonné of Manet's paintings states that it was exhibited in Paris at Paul Rosenberg's gallery in 1922 (1975: 224).

<sup>9</sup> <[http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no\\_cache=1&numid=1147](http://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/collections/catalogue-des-oeuvres/notice.html?no_cache=1&numid=1147)> [Accessed 6 January 2014]. The painting entered the collection of the newly established Musée d'Orsay in 1986.

wrote ‘At the Villa d’Or’, in which the ‘Boot-Lace King’ Robert B. Valentine stands with a young female artist and admires ‘the curves of her figure’, before trying to justify his appreciation of art in much the same terms:

‘My wife’s always talking about Art. She thinks I don’t understand anything about it. Well, I do. Now, for instance: Bottles – the curve of a bottle, the shape of it – just a plain glass bottle. I could look at it for hours. [...] I started life in a chemist’s shop – I was brought up amongst the bottles. Now the pleasure I get in looking at a bottle makes me understand artists. [...] D’you get me?’ (1927: 162–63)

He walks inside to ‘the sweet and mocking music of “La Bergère Légère”’, a folk song, but here surely also a deliberate shadow of Manet’s painting.<sup>10</sup>

If these references suggest Rhys’s specific interest in the representation of women in Impressionist painting, they also tie this interest to commerce. Consumption – buying and selling, but also eating and drinking, and consuming culture – is everywhere in *The Left Bank* (and in her interwar novels, in which the *dame de comptoir* is only one such sign), as it was in the French painting under discussion. The effect of new bourgeois values and a developing consumer culture on Impressionist techniques and subject matter – the modern scenes and spectacles already mentioned – has long been established.<sup>11</sup> And if, as Ruth Iskin (2007) shows, artists were influenced by the newly aestheticised scene of the city street – posters, advertisements, shop windows – in their ambitions to capture modernity, they also responded to the expectations of the bourgeoisie, an affluent audience and set of clients who, writes Gary Tinterow, ‘expected to see its interests and behavior reflected in the art that it acquired’ (2012: 18). This generation of artists and their art were both subject to and reliant on market discourses. Robert Jen-

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<sup>10</sup> It is perhaps impossible to verify whether Rhys had seen *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*, although she may have had opportunity. The work was one of the major pieces included in Roger Fry’s first post-Impressionist exhibition at the Grafton Galleries in 1910–11, ‘Manet and the Post-Impressionists’, during which time Rhys was living in London and having a relationship with Lancelot Grey Hugh Smith, an aristocrat and, according to Carole Angier, art collector (1990: 65). Less likely, although conceivable, is that she knew Jacques-Émile Blanche’s monograph *Manet*, published in Paris in 1924, which included a sketch for *A Bar*. Veronica Gregg suggests that Manet’s *Nana* may have been a point of reference for Rhys in the opening chapter of *Voyage in the Dark*, which presents Anna Morgan reading a copy of Zola’s novel *Nana*. Gregg points out similarities between Manet’s painting and the cover of the book as Rhys describes it (1995: 117), and it is true that Anna (identified with the courtesan through similar names and the subsequent sale of her body) can focus only on the visual aspects of the book: the picture on its cover and ‘the look of the dark, blurred words’ (Rhys 1969a: 9).

<sup>11</sup> A critical trend set by Clark 1985.

sen situates the challenge they posed to the 'Academy, its schools and chief exhibition site, the Salon', not just in aesthetic but also economic terms: their difference from conservative precedents was in part based on selling work through commercial galleries, dealers who became influential advocates for the new painting (1994: 18–19). To the amazement of the narrator, the painter of Rhys's story 'Tea with an Artist' considers himself immune from the market by refusing to sell his work, a noble gesture that Rhys undermines by making him greedy in other respects. Neither wholly autonomous nor entirely complicit, Verhausen represents perfectly the ambiguity of Rhys's attitude towards art and its function throughout *The Left Bank*, and perhaps also – in that very ambiguity – the compromised, precarious status of art in the consumer society that is the explicit context of her stories.<sup>12</sup> As I will now explore, the other prevailing subject in the collection – fashion – is used to represent the same territory, establishing further connections with, and ultimately diversions from, Rhys's nineteenth-century Parisian precedents.

Gloria Groom argues that the Impressionists' need to distinguish their painting in a commercial context was met in part by fashion, which they exploited in their subject matter as a 'powerful marketing strategy'. They were seen to 'self-brand and self-fashion in response to a vibrant consumer culture that, like fashion itself, demanded innovation and visibility' (2012b: 33). She suggests that such artists as Monet and Renoir, dependent on their practice for a living, chose to depict up-to-the-minute dresses in order to announce themselves and gain recognition (39). Recent scholarship such as that carried out by Groom has demonstrated the far-reaching relevance of fashion to Impressionism, in the paintings proper as signs of the modern age and modern individuals, and in what Groom calls 'the social network of fashion'. This intimately connected world of art, commerce and fashion operated around – and was epitomised by – its shared primary subject, the clothes-conscious *parisienne*, often an artist's model, as well as such contemporary journals as *L'Artiste*, which included pieces on 'the social, political and artistic scene in which fashion reigned' (Groom 2012b: 43).

*L'Artiste* also published those philosophers of fashion Charles Baudelaire and Théophile Gautier, both of whom were closely associated with the new painting of the era and its exponents. Indeed, the influence of Baudelaire is directly connected to the prevalence of fashion in the Impressionists' work. Tinterow writes that

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<sup>12</sup> As another indication of this attitude, her artists are often portrait painters, a commercial genre often compromised by its market – those commissioning.

[b]y the end of the 1870s, when the majority of the New Painters had found a small but influential audience, Baudelaire's dictum on modern life [...] was fully assimilated by the artists who admired the critic – as well as nearly every other figure painter at the Salon. (2012: 21)

Gautier's 'De la mode' (1858) was published in *L'Artiste* in 1858, and two years later Baudelaire's poem 'To a Passing Woman' appeared in the journal. Like 'The Painter of Modern Life', the poem represents Baudelaire's theory of the dialectical shift from the contemporary detail to universal poetry, as expressed in a particular style of dress hem. The troubled state of mind of the *flâneur*-poet, who echoes the essayist's suspension of an august and sculptural dressed woman, suggests that aesthetic 'fixing' represents some form of control over an unruly, elemental female body:

The deafening street howled around me. Tall, slender, deep in mourning, a majestic grief, a woman passed, one hand ostentatiously lifting and swinging scallop and hem;

Supple and stately, with her statuesque leg. And me, I was drinking, hunched up like a freak, in her eye, a pallid sky where the hurricane is born... (Rees 1992: 155–56)

One of Rhys's stories from *The Left Bank* particularly recalls 'To a Passing Woman', but with significant differences of emphasis that appear to relate to Rhys's perception of the altered status of art and the artist by the 1920s. 'The Grey Day' reads as a satirical sketch of a Baudelairean poet. But in Rhys's version the wild atmosphere of Baudelaire's poem is nothing more than an overcast sky and a damp mood. The poet longs, Rhys writes, 'for the sight of a pretty woman – a useless creature with polished nails, expensive scent and the finest of silk stockings – marked and warranted – For Ornament Fragile –' (1927: 141). As with 'To a Passing Woman', a stockinged foot is the modern poet's subject matter. But here an ornament replaces an antique fragment. '[M]arked and warranted' brings to mind the packaging in which the stockings were sold. Or perhaps the ornament that is her foot is 'marked and warranted' with the tag of a department store. This imaginary woman appears to have stepped from a window display, or to be dressed in the merchandise of the salon for which she models. Like Baudelaire's passing woman, she is an image, but it is of a new, more conspicuous kind, openly commodified. The shadow of Baudelaire throws into relief the commercial priorities of Rhys's own moment, in which capitalism is far more advanced

than in the 1860s. By this point, Paris was more emphatically the city of spectacle that had shaped Baudelaire's poetry. As Tag Gronberg (1998) has described it in the context of the 1925 Expo, this is the *ville lumière* as the city of commerce and luxury, associated with women and fashion in a way that by now far exceeded – but relates back to – Baudelaire's version. In this culture, the poet and his art are endangered, as 'The Grey Day' makes clear. The passing woman, the subject of the poet's art, never materialised. The women he met instead 'marched heavily', carrying parcels. 'One even held a green broom and looked as if she'd like to sweep the poet out of existence with it' (141). The unstoppable march of commerce, again symbolised by feet, will sweep art away. The image lacks subtlety, but as the poet complains about his loss of inspiration: 'Imagine being a poet in a world like this!' (142).

Such stories in *The Left Bank* are a version of the aestheticisation of everyday urban life that Baudelaire recognised and responded to, with the dressed woman as its archetype. But distinct from Baudelaire's 'passionately-held belief in the purity of art' (2010: xviii), its power to redeem the impurities of the material and the quotidian, Rhys's view is less idealistic. In this collection, fashion's dialectic exposes the true operation of Baudelaire's own, performing a knowing, almost satirical impression that reveals both its debt to and difference from the master copy.

Writing about spatial configurations between interior and exterior in Rhys's fiction, Christopher GoGwilt also describes a restatement of Baudelaire's dialectical writing: '*Good Morning, Midnight* reiterates but also complicates in turn the dialectical relation between rooms and streets that Benjamin traces in the poetry of Baudelaire. Sasha Jensen, Rhys's female *flâneuse*, retraces the logic of Baudelaire's *flâneur*', her movements through Paris blowing open the 'bourgeois illusion of a separate private interior space insulated from the place of work and social labour' (GoGwilt 2005: 68). That Rhys works both in and against a nineteenth-century French tradition might be interpreted in two related ways. As GoGwilt's essay suggests but does not elaborate, one is concerned with her own historical moment. My own interpretation of this historical context, Rhys's specific version of aestheticised – commodified – daily life, will be addressed later. Rachel Bowlby also articulates a connected shift in context between the centuries, one of gender, which propels Rhys's walking women beyond such French male precedents as Baudelaire and Proust:

The woman in the street is not the equivalent of the man in the street, that figure of normal representativeness; and her sexually dubious as-

sociations give to her stepping out a quality of automatic transgressiveness that is also the chance of her going somewhere different. (Bowlby 1992: viii)<sup>13</sup>

For Bowlby, who is thinking about Woolf in this assessment too, Rhys's novels in fact give the lie to a chance of going somewhere different. Nevertheless, Bowlby's model of walking in writing, even in the case of Rhys's impasses, offers another version of a materially located dialectic between literary past and present – 'possibilities for women to walk or write in ways that diverge from those laid out for them on masculine premises, in literary streets already well-trodden by men' (viii). And this points to the other interpretation of Rhys's relationship to a French nineteenth-century heritage, concerning her gendered, but also geographic and ethnic, relationship to literary and national tradition.

Helen Carr invokes Rhys's literary forebears in order to dispel the picture familiar from early Rhys criticism of an emotional, anti-intellectual, biographical writer whose 'modernism was forgotten' (1996: 1, 9–10). Rhys read constantly, wanting to know what other writers 'were about' and quoting from them in her letters and fiction. To *Wide Sargasso Sea* – her prequel to *Jane Eyre* – can be added such conspicuous examples as 'The Day They Burned the Books' and 'La Grosse Fifi', stories that explicitly refer to others by Maupassant;<sup>14</sup> *Good Morning, Midnight*, a reference to a poem of the same title by Emily Dickinson that Rhys also uses as her epigraph; and the ending of that novel, 'Yes – yes – yes....', an ambivalent affirmation of female agency linked to the more celebratory conclusion of Joyce's *Ulysses*: 'a grimly anaphrodisiac counterpart to Molly Bloom's dying fall', in Christopher Ricks's words (1970: 13).<sup>15</sup>

Rhys herself avowed her appreciation of nineteenth-century French lit-

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<sup>13</sup> See also Howells 1991: 27 on Rhys's reluctant or compromised *flâneuses*.

<sup>14</sup> The eponymous female protagonist of 'La Grosse Fifi' (Rhys 1927: 165–91) seems to refer to Maupassant's 'Mme Fifi' and the prostitute protagonist of his 'Boule de suif'. In 'The Day They Burned the Books' (Rhys 1968: 40–46), a young female character rescues from the fire Maupassant's *Fort comme la mort*.

<sup>15</sup> These are by no means exhaustive. See Carr 1996, Gardiner 1989, Howells 1991 and Milligan 1999 for further intertextual references. In addition to her *roman-à-clef* *Quartet*, in which Ford Madox Ford appears as Heidler, there are several references to the modernist avant-garde in Rhys's fiction. The model Kiki de Montparnasse (Alice Prin) appears briefly as 'Cri Cri' in *Quartet*, and more obliquely in *Good Morning, Midnight*, which cites a line from Man Ray's 1928 film *L'Étoile de mer*, based on a poem by Robert Desnos and starring Kiki. Describing an English mannequin, Rhys writes that she is 'belle comme une fleur de verre' (2000b: 21), an appropriation that was perhaps motivated by the significance of clothes, mirrors and the female image in Man Ray's film, and the occupation of its leading lady. The same line forms the basis of Rhys's poem 'In the Looking Glass' (McF: JR 1.3.9).

erature and its formative role in her own writing. Her archive includes a bundle of transcriptions that she made, in a steady hand (perhaps as a child or young woman), of the work of poets from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, but with an emphasis on the latter. Théodore de Banville, Victor Hugo, Gérard de Nerval, Alfred de Musset, Baudelaire and Paul Verlaine are all present.<sup>16</sup> The inclusion of birth and death dates suggests that she copied them from an anthology, as an assiduous student would. Much later, in conversation with Mary Cantwell for the magazine *Mademoiselle*, Rhys acknowledged the influence of French literature (and Ford Madox Ford's in suggesting it to her) on the shape and precision of her novels:

I think French books helped me an awful lot there. They had clarity. Ford insisted – if you weren't sure of a paragraph or a statement, translate it into another language. And if it looks utterly silly, get rid of it. Anglo-Saxon is rather messy, don't you think? (Cantwell 1990: 23)<sup>17</sup>

This distinction of value between French and English – between France and England (and America, as we will see) – recurs throughout her writing, connecting both language and nations with ideology. As a white creole in Dominica, Rhys was neither Caribbean nor English; expatriated in England from 1907, she felt equally displaced. This dislocation has engendered a great number of scholarly and biographical accounts of the radical sense of homelessness that permeates her work and afflicts her characters.

But French language and literature offered Rhys a protective haven, implicitly connected to issues of travel and belonging. As she wrote to Francis Wyndham: 'for years, I escaped from an exclusively Anglo Saxon influence and have never returned to it' (Rhys 1985: 281). Adopting the French Anglicism 'Anglo-Saxon', as she often does in her fiction, Rhys makes clear the alternative she prefers. This identification opened up a space in which she could write (and therefore live, as she often implies), but it also informed her idiosyncratic moral programme. For if French writers had a stylistic influence on her work, their oppositional stance, Carr notes, supported her satire of the middle classes, almost always associated in her work with the English, and her empathy with the underdog. Her debt to Maupassant in

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<sup>16</sup> McF: JR 1.6.11. The poems by Baudelaire transcribed are: 'Hymne' (not titled here), 'Madrigal triste', 'Recueillement' and the first line of 'Spleen' (also untitled): 'J'ai plus de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans' (I have more memories than if I'd lived a thousand years). Poems by Rimbaud and his friend Jean Richepin that Rhys typed out are also in the archive (McF: JR 1.3.9).

<sup>17</sup> When asked what she read, Rhys replied 'Contemporary French novels – I've forgotten their names. And I loved Maupassant, Anatole France, Flaubert' (Cantwell 1990: 24).



this regard is particularly evident in a story like ‘La Grosse Fifi’, with its sympathetic but reviled female protagonist and smug English artist. This ‘speaking back’ to dominant ideologies, a term used in postcolonial and feminist criticism and often in Rhys scholarship, is a hallmark of her fiction, and frequently associated with France and the French language.

And yet also latent in her evaluation of France, and even consonant with the arguably irrational moral superiority she often attributes to the French, is a sense of a more superficial aesthetic superiority. Perhaps it is the subtext of her aesthetic justifications in the Cantwell profile – English is messy and ugly, and needs tidying up in elegant French. It is certainly detectable in this passage of a ‘diary’ entry, written around the same time as ‘The Day They Burned the Books’: ‘an irritation, harsh, gritty, this feeling about England and the English’ (Rhys 1979: 165); ‘I never once thought this is beautiful, this is grand, this is what I hoped for, longed for. [...] Then why did I feel it in Paris?’ (Rhys 1979: 169). Beautiful and grand Paris – her ‘love’ (Rhys 1985: 171) – fulfilled her aspirations, as it does those of her characters (who are certainly not literary in the way in which Carr describes Rhys), satisfying a range of needs. These are creative and intellectual, as Carr rightly argues, but also personal, romantic, aesthetic, moral and quasi-political.

Like Carr, Carol Ann Howells emphasises Rhys’s negotiation of modernism and its precursors: her ‘poetics of urban space’ is a feminine revision of those constructed by Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Joyce, Eliot and Pound, one that articulates the dread and hostility of such space for a woman. Howells cites the unpublished notebook (the Black Exercise Book) in which Rhys describes looking for a book on psychoanalysis in Sylvia Beach’s bookshop (Howells 1991: 17). She finds Freud’s essay ‘Femininity’ and ‘speaks back’ to his controversial argument. A picture emerges of Rhys consciously placing and modifying her own writing in relation to cultural traditions and contemporary context, the placement dependent on, but never ossifying, her position as a woman. Refuting the critical focus on a ‘Rhys woman’, Carr makes a similar observation: ‘Rhys’s use of autobiography, I want to argue, needs to be understood as the attempt to make sense of, and to find words for, *the position in which she found herself*’ (1996: 22) [my emphasis]. Rather than an essentialising version of woman (or of a feminist as always *against* patriarchal systems and structures), this is a relational approach that draws on different sources, personal and transpersonal, past and present, to make literary sense of a material situation. Jennifer Milligan argues for a similar interpretation of her ‘rigorously self-conscious works which interact with canonical texts in such a way as to constitute a form of vibrant, ongoing dialectical process’ (1999: 287). For Milligan, this defines Rhys’s work as modernist, and yet other critics have identified the same methodology as

postcolonial – another example of ‘speaking back’. Howells proposes that Rhys constructs ‘a feminine colonial sensibility becoming aware of itself in a modernist European context’ (1991: 5), a dual approach taken by Mary Lou Emery (1990 and 2012) and Helen Carr, although the latter also suggests that this complex positioning – heightened by Rhys’s status as a poor female creole migrant – makes her a precursor of postmodernism (Carr 1996: 24). Critical definitions aside, it is the mobile, multidirectional (thus often ambiguous) affiliations that matter here. Rhys’s work draws on both a colonial sense of displacement and proto-modernist and modernist aesthetic traditions to forge a dialectical relationship with her various contexts, an unrestricted process that claims allegiances but at any point might also rewrite the very traditions or contexts from which it derives.<sup>18</sup>

To return to *The Left Bank* and Rhys’s versions of Baudelaire and the Impressionists, it is now clear that drawing on nineteenth-century aesthetics and subject matter does not preclude her from both following them sincerely and rewriting them on their own terms. She proceeds much in the way that fashion operates, both imitating and distorting the past in order to make something specific to its own context, in what Gilles Lipovetsky calls fashion’s ‘endless interplay of innovations and reactions’ (1994: 20). Rhys finds in her nineteenth-century precedents not only visual and literary examples but also models for exploring her own times. The effect is often self-consciously generic, an idea and image of Paris that Rhys has inherited – is invested in – but which she regularly undercuts and updates for her own metropolitan moment.<sup>19</sup>

An American fashion artist (a 1920s female version of Constantin Guys, perhaps) appears in ‘Tout Montparnasse and a Lady’ as a symbol of change. In Montparnasse to be ‘thrilled’, but drinking artificial lemonade and disgusted by the real-life misery of the ‘Dope Fiend’ sitting in the corner (actually, ‘a very hard-working and on the whole abstemious portrait painter’

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<sup>18</sup> See also Goldman 2011 on Rhys’s version of modernist interiority, characterised by ellipses and exclusions in order to ‘efface the interior life’ of her disenfranchised protagonists (140–41). Seshagiri 2006 describes the complex ‘transitional literary quality’ of *Voyage in the Dark*, in which she sees a challenge to the continued relevance of modernism and the inauguration of postcolonial literature. Johnson and Moran (2015b) point out that Rhys’s ‘multiple appearances in the groundbreaking *Oxford Handbook of Global Modernisms* (Wollaeger and Eatough 2013) speak to her centrality to this coming-together of modernist and postcolonial studies’ (2–3).

<sup>19</sup> Andrew Stephenson (2011) has argued that a similar strategy for understanding contemporary Paris took place in the case of the photographers Jules, Louis and Henri Séeberger. Between 1923 and 1931 the brothers were commissioned to create an archive of images of Paris for a Hollywood cinema agency, to be consulted by filmmakers working with French or Parisian subjects. In making a consumable picture of contemporary Paris, it was necessary to translate historic, recognisable tropes into changing ones, ‘inscribing [...] pre-existing narrative codings’ into the ‘post carding of Paris’ (112).

[Rhys 1927: 55]), she represents the diluting modifications to Parisian culture introduced by the Anglo-Saxon presence, associated with healthy rationalisation and ambition: ‘*Why* bring people like that?’ she inquired hotly. ‘Why?’ She went on to explain how easy it is to be broad-minded and perfectly respectable, to combine art, passion, cleanliness, efficiency and an eye to the main chance’ (55). The perceived threat of standardisation represented by American commercial culture was also the theme of ‘At the Villa d’Or’, in which, as I described earlier, Rhys articulates a tension between authenticity and mass production using Manet’s *Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. I also suggested that Manet’s painting may be latent in ‘In a Café’. In that story, a singer performs ‘Les Grues de Paris’, a song whose narrative of a warm-hearted prostitute reduced to poverty and the disdain of a former lover recalls the plot of Zola’s *Nana*, a novel that Rhys later referenced in *Voyage in the Dark*. Located in relation to nineteenth-century artistic coordinates – both concerned with women selling their wares – the story replays them with contemporary significance. The audience is galvanised by the myth of Paris that the song represents – the women look in their mirrors and the men drink thirstily and fidget in their seats, as if their appetites are whetted – a momentary investment in an illusion that is replaced with an alternative one by the next song: ‘Mommer loves Popper. Popper loves Mommer. *Chanson Américaine. Demandé*. Peace descended again on the café’ (Rhys 1927: 52). This Tin Pan Alley hit of 1923 invokes a more innocent version of sexual relations, and with it a more innocuous atmosphere.<sup>20</sup> The recycling of nineteenth-century French art and literature here has a deliberately draining effect connected to contemporary associations of American popular culture. Rhys’s comparison of the singer to Hermes, a god of transitions and boundaries who moved between the divine and mortal realms, signals her own movement across periods and between artistic realms.<sup>21</sup>

In drawing on these works of nineteenth-century Paris, Rhys historicises her concerns – she makes the past relevant to the present – but also, crucially, she demonstrates them in action. By recycling nineteenth-century imagery and preoccupations, consuming her artistic precedents, she performs that process that is her focus: art as product, revived according to trends and subject to commercial pressures – art as fashion. For this reason, it is unsurprising that fashion in its sartorial sense plays a crucial symbolic

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<sup>20</sup> ‘Papa Loves Mama, Mama Loves Papa’ was recorded by Cliff Friend and Abel Bauer (Robinson 1994: 121).

<sup>21</sup> Hermès is, of course, also a Paris-based brand of luxury goods, notably handbags, established in the nineteenth century. For Walter Benjamin the gods understood the ‘threshold between times’, a capacity he associated with fashion. ‘Neoclassicism in France’, cited Lehmann 2000: 211.

role in *The Left Bank* stories. ‘The Grey Day’ is an example. Looking back to understand the present, Rhys’s story recognises in fashion the dialectic that Walter Benjamin called *tigersprung*, the tiger’s leap from the present into the past that reveals – in a potentially revolutionary way – the presence in history of ‘now-time’. But in her sad, drained version of Baudelaire’s poem, we see also Rhys’s awareness that fashion, as a commodity, may represent only the deadening recycling of past forms. After *The Left Bank* this kind of repetition comes to be of enormous structural importance to Rhys’s characterisation and, given the centrality of her protagonists, to her novels more generally. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, to which I will turn at the close of Chapter 2.1, this repetition is the very rhythm of Sasha Jensen’s life and, as I will suggest, explicitly bound to her fraught investment in fashion.

#### ‘THE VALUE OF AN ILLUSION’:<sup>22</sup> *QUARTET* AND THE ARCHIVE

The issues that I have been exploring in the short stories – dialectical features, tensions between art and industry, cultural and national affiliations, Americanisation, and the relevance of these for the modern female subject – are all at work in *Good Morning, Midnight*. After a close consideration of *Quartet* of 1928, and of archival material that supports a deeper understanding of Rhys’s affiliations, I will consider how the later novel develops these issues in complex ways through fashion. The thread that connects all this material is one that I take to be Rhys’s central concern: the relationship of the individual to the mass.<sup>23</sup> Lurching unevenly and unhappily between an extreme form of self-indulgence and the forlorn hope of sociability, Sasha Jensen resists and yearns for community, a word that is somehow at odds with the critical and popular image of Rhys and her work. After all, her five novels replay the solitude of a central female character and her tangential position in relation to society. Her short stories are often saturated with a loneliness that grew more acute as she grew older.<sup>24</sup> When in the 1960s her editor Diana Athill found her a flat in a Housing and Community Association in Chingford, so that she could escape her hated isolation in Devon, she objected: ‘the word community rather alarms me’ (Angier 1990: 580).

And yet the relationship between the self and others is Rhys’s obsession, from her first to her last text. Despite the loneliness of her characters, her novels are generously peopled, as many minor figures fade in and out, mir-

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<sup>22</sup> Rhys 2000a: 21.

<sup>23</sup> This is also an abiding preoccupation of another novel sensitive to clothes: Woolf’s *The Years*.

<sup>24</sup> As in the collection *Sleep It Off Lady* (Rhys 1976a).

roring or echoing the protagonists, passing judgement or reaching out to them momentarily. It is true that relationships are frequently antagonistic: those between Marya and the expatriate artistic colony of Paris in *Quartet*, for example. And yet that book is almost exclusively about the ways in which people relate. Tangled romantic and filial associations – Marya and her husband Stephan, once adventurous lovers but now bound miserably in their exile; the English couple Heidler and Lois; Marya and Heidler as lovers; and Marya and Lois as wary friends and rivals – swerve between familiarity and comfort, cold deceit and brutality. As its potentially harmonious title suggests – *Quartet* was used for the first US edition and later UK editions, and was originally preferred by Rhys to the more directly caustic original, *Postures* – for every destructive and unequal relationship in the book there are countless gestures towards affiliation. From the Rue St Jacques, with its gay sounds of the gramophone and working men in bars, ‘a beautiful street. The street of homeless cats’ (Rhys 2000a: 52) to the ‘familiar’ queue of women at the prison, the depressing aspects of the place ‘all arm-in-arm as it were’ (85), signs of sympathy and bondage among the poor and dispossessed are valued.<sup>25</sup>

But the very idea of authenticity is at stake in the novel. Its central theme, so important to Rhys, is illusion. *Evitez le contrefaçons [sic]*, reads a billboard visible from Marya’s hotel-room window – ‘Beware of imitations’ – but her wariness of the Heidlers in this scene, signalled by the advert, reflects equally on the credibility of the goatherd and the ‘thin, high, sweet music’ that she hears him play each morning (87). Her impulsive reaching out towards this native Frenchman is compromised by the sense that it, too, may be an imitation. Significantly, as we will see, this pervasive mistrust is articulated through references to clothes and accessories: the ‘scarf of smoke’ from the trains pulling out of the station below versus the outfit of the ‘horrible little boy’ advertising Lion Noir; the sugary ‘pink or mauve chemises’ of the *petites femmes* who have laid on her bed before her, the same colours as the wallpaper and the counterpane (87).

The idea of ambiguous partisanship is located in the first passage of the novel. Marya is seen leaving an upmarket café in which she has been sat for almost an hour and a half, drinking coffee, smoking cigarettes and reading the week’s *Candide* (7). In *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson locates the newspaper as a key agent of national consciousness, a sign of ‘community in anonymity that is the hallmark of modern nations’ (2006:

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<sup>25</sup> I strongly disagree with Carole Angier’s assertion that ‘there is very little morality’ in *Quartet*, that Rhys ‘is not interested in right and wrong, but only in what people say and do’ (1990: 177–78).

36). But the gesture to Voltaire's novella reminds us that Rhys's novel is a *Bildungsroman* of sorts (one that mocks ideas of progress), and one about disillusionment, and its conflation with a contemporary journal with nationalist, anti-republican and antisemitic views also presents a troubling picture of the relationship between the individual and the group, since Marya is described in terms that suggest she is not of European origin: 'Her face was short, high cheek-boned, full-lipped; her long eyes slanted upwards towards the temples and were gentle and oddly remote in expression' (7). The difficulty of knowing which association to make is also latent, for we can assume that Marya is making the wrong one, and perhaps unthinkingly: she 'had long ago stopped questioning' (14).

This opening prepares us for an extended opening sequence about female affiliation. As Marya is window shopping (like the newspaper, another mode of imagining community) on the Rue de Rennes, 'own sister to the Tottenham Court Road' [my emphasis], her friend Esther de Solla appears. '[W]hat are you doing in this part of the world?' she asks (7), a displacement that this encounter and the following scene promise, yet ultimately fail, to redeem with images of sorority. Esther takes Marya to her studio, 'hidden behind a grim building where the housewives of the neighbourhood came to wash their clothes' and leading off a courtyard in which a *marchande des quatre saisons* keeps her stock (endorsed by the concierge's sister-in-law). Esther shows Marya her 'beautiful' drawings of groups of women, '[m]asses of flesh arranged to form intricate and absorbing patterns'. It's best to 'make an effort to get away from the Anglo-Saxons in Paris' (8), she advises, as if this imagined community of different types of women, many of them native Frenchwomen, offers a haven. The sanctuary is short-lived, for Esther invokes a sorry image of 'hundreds of women round here painting away' (10), calls her landlady a 'shark' and is preoccupied mainly with her own material situation: 'She looked round her austere studio, and the Jewess's hunger for the softness and warmth of life was naked in her eyes' (11). Under these overt signs of labour, every woman is out for herself – in light of her blunt ethnic stereotype, including the author. The absorbing abstract drawings point to the illusion that Rhys has deflated.

These introductory passages adumbrate the prevailing structure of *Quartet*. Its leitmotif of illusion falters between hope and despair, as illusions, primarily about affiliation, are formed and shattered. One way of articulating this view of human relationships is through clothes, which throughout the book give definition to characters as well as implying their deceptions. Rhys makes use of the rich symbolic and metonymic possibilities of clothes and accessories to suggest, for example, Heidler's English respectability and

self-possession through his bowler hat (89), and Stephan's casual familiarity via his old felt hat worn on the back of his head (128). Although she consistently relies on the symbolic and psychological portent of clothes, as described by J. C. Flügel (1966), Rhys moves beyond this to a nuanced version of unreliable social relations mediated by dress, fluctuating between definition and unintelligibility, illusion and disillusion.<sup>26</sup> Heidler's bowler is all to do with 'keep[ing] up appearances' (89) and the reassuring solidarity suggested by Stephan's jaunty hat is false, as the decorating work being done in their hotel implies in that scene (128): the imprisoned Stephan has already let Marya down before he eventually knocks her to the floor and leaves her for dead.

In this sense, the title for the English edition that Rhys initially disliked, *Postures*, is entirely apt, as she herself came to realise:

I've always thought that I called it *Postures* because I was sick of the whole thing and *Postures* was a meaningless title. But was it so meaningless? Hadn't I unconsciously gone back to my first idea that everyone was posturing. All a pretence [*sic*]. ('L'Affaire Ford', McF: JR 1.2.23)<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps she was actually convinced of this early on. In July 1928 (the novel was published in the UK in the autumn of 1928), one of her correspondents seems to have been enlisted to find suitable literary comparisons for 'Postures', one might assume to compensate for the title's meaninglessness. He or she – only the first page of this letter survives (in the British Library archive's photocopies at least), so the signatory is unknown – cites examples from T. S. Eliot's early poetry. From the 'Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', lines that associate posturing with clothes and anxiety on behalf of the individual about the judgement and censure of the group:

I grow old... I grow old  
I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled

<sup>26</sup> See, for example, Flügel's discussion of the phallic symbolism of shoes, hats and ties, the female symbols of shoes and jewels, and the power symbols of trophies (1966: 27–30), all of which Rhys draws on.

<sup>27</sup> This unpublished, undated fragment in which Rhys reflects on her relationship with Ford Madox Ford and Stella Bowen, and the circumstances of her early career as a writer, was written in response to the publication of Arthur Mizener's biography of Ford, *The Saddest Story* (1971), as Rhys herself explains in the opening of the piece. She may have read the book, which she borrowed from Crediton library, some time after its publication, but 'L'Affaire Ford' can at least be dated with certainty to after 1971.

Shall I part my hair behind?  
Do I dare eat a peach?  
I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach  
I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each.  
I do not think they will sing to me.

And the sender continues:

Now this is undoubtedly intended to represent postures on the part of the writer. The first two – or perhaps three – lines may be quotable and will add to the general mystery of the title. Besides, they are probably very applicable to Mr Heidler! Possibly also to Stephan... Again from T. S. Eliot, the poem being 'Portrait of a Lady'  
'And I must borrow every changing shape  
To find expression ... dance, dance  
Like a dancing bear,  
Cry like a parrot, chatter like an ape.  
Let us take the air, in a tobacco trance...'  
Here the first four lines are very possibly apposite. (BL: JR RP206)

Aside from the compelling link between Rhys's first novel and the modernism from which she has often been disconnected – the speculation that Rhys may have been tempted to quote from 'Portrait of a Lady' to support her own literary endeavours, a modernist posture in its own right – the correspondences observed between her book and Eliot's poems throw into relief the illusions involved in social relations in *Quartet*, and the role played by clothes.

It is perhaps the relationship between Lois and Marya that most fully dramatises this view. The women perform a frantic dance, as their roles in Heidler's life as wife and lover bring them together and force them apart. Moments of closeness are common:

They sat side by side on the divan and wept together. Marya wondered how she could ever have thought Lois hard. This soft creature, this fellow-woman, hurt and bewildered by life even as she was. 'She simply is more plucky than I am,' she thought. 'She puts a better face on it.' (2000a: 43)

And yet their bond regularly collapses with the typical deflating movement of disillusion. Sitting on the model stand, posing for Lois, Marya reflects



that she ‘admired her benefactress, but the moment of soft intimacy had come and gone’ (48). Rhys uses clothes to define the frequently ‘changing shape’ of their failed attempts to find expression. Lois dresses Marya, like a doll, and poses her in specially bought outfits, while Marya helps to prepare Lois’s costume for a fancy-dress party. Intimacy and inequity alike, as well as the play between the two, are articulated with the concealing–revealing movement of clothes. We see here that clothes are implicitly involved in Rhys’s ethical outlook: her sense of human relations in flux with the shimmer and fade of illusion.

It is no wonder, then, that the word ‘chic’ recurs in *Quartet*. In addition to its more common reference to style, which is also used in the novel, Rhys employs chic as a term of approval for congenial, brotherly or sisterly behaviour.<sup>28</sup> Chic is a moral word in this context, a sympathetic attitude towards another human being. Marya remembers Stephan’s protection: ‘He was awfully chic with me’ (98). One guard in the prison in which Stephan is held is chic for he allows prisoners nearing the end of their sentences to grow their hair, which is ordinarily kept shaved (98). As this subversion of the ‘machine’ of society suggests, the etymology of the word expands connotations of sympathy to a system or set of social practices involving wily, devious behaviour; going against established procedures; getting around obstacles; and skill or aptitude.<sup>29</sup> But Stephan believes the Heidlers are chic, too:

‘And, look here, I want to be able to thank your friends, the Heidlers. I suppose they can’t want to meet me, but all the same I would like to thank them. It was *chic* what they did, to take you into their house when I was in jail and to be your friends; yes, it was *chic*.’

‘Wasn’t it?’ said Marya in a hard voice. (107)

The repetition of the word and Marya’s steely suspicion of its justness in this case underline the extent to which ‘chic’ is a question of good and bad. Its use in art discourse of the nineteenth century – ‘faire du chic’ is to draw from memory, and ‘chic’ can mean false or bad<sup>30</sup> – points to its potential

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<sup>28</sup> The term was debated in the contemporary press, too, as in the article ‘Le Chic’, which discusses its real meaning – and its ineffability (BMD: DM).

<sup>29</sup> ‘chic’ (1), <<http://www.littre.org/definition/chic>> [accessed 9 September 2017].

<sup>30</sup> ‘chic’ (2), <<http://www.littre.org/definition/chic>> [accessed 9 September 2017]. And according to Baudelaire: ‘*Chic*, this hideous and bizarre word, coined in our own day, which I do not even know how to spell but am obliged to use because the artists’ confraternity has adopted it to express a modern monstrosity, denotes: painting without reference to a model or to nature. Chic is the abuse of memory; chic means rather memory of the hand than memory of the brain’ (Baudelaire 1981: 86).

inauthenticity, and supports the idea of an aesthetic dimension to Rhys's ethics.<sup>31</sup>

The dual associations of 'chic' with dress and an ethical code are surely not coincidental: throughout *Quartet*, we have seen, Rhys employs the mobile significance of clothes – concealing and revealing, illusion and its transparency – to track a similar fluidity in social relations. At times the two are explicitly connected, as when Stephan appraises a dress of Marya's in a way that reflects on the behaviour of her dressmaker ('It's not worth that [...] Not that it is ugly, but it has no chic. I expect your dressmaker cheats you' [18].), or when he approves of another character as 'a good girl' because she mends his coat (134). For Rhys, style is a matter of strategy and taking sides: 'We must get Mado another hat', says Lois. 'She must be chic [...] She must do us credit' (67). When the artist's model Kiki of Montparnasse appears in a thinly disguised cameo, Lois's social rivalry with her is expressed as a style war: her name here – 'Cri-Cri' (33) – combines a *cri de guerre* with *le dernier cri*.

As sinister as illusion can appear in *Quartet*, and throughout her fiction, the frequent falling of the veil is equally disturbing. Hence Marya realises 'the value of an illusion [...] and that the shadow can be more important than the substance' (21). In another typical instance of the dialectic I have been tracing, just as Heidler finally breaks it off with Marya, she recognises a man she once knew by the name of Monvoisin, 'my neighbour'. After a gesture of 'treacherous' (115) cruelty, redemption is promised in a brief, unspoken moment of potential solidarity. She then remembers where she met him – he is a friend of Stephan's and one night they all went dancing together, Monvoisin in the company of another girl. But the balance of their foursome was upset after they were joined by a very tall man who sang 'Si j'étais roi' ('If I Were King'): Rhys warns of the threat to solidarity when someone wants power, one of the lessons of her novel. Marya is wistful and longs for the friendliness marked by Monvoisin and the memory of this original quartet. Leaving Heidler,

[s]he walked on with the fixed idea that if she went far enough she would reach some obscure, dark cavern away from the lights and the passers-by. Surely at the end of this long and glaring row of lamps she would find it, the friendly dark where she could lie and let her heart burst. (117)

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<sup>31</sup> In a newspaper profile of Jean Rhys, John Hall points towards a similar connection between 'a concern for appearances' and 'right behaviour' on the part of the author herself (1972: 8).

If this darkness is the ‘shadow’ more comforting than the ‘substance’, the next encounter reiterates the restlessness of any ethical value. Echoing ‘Rue de l’Arrivée’ and anticipating the ‘gigolo’ character René in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Marya meets a man of uncertain origin, like herself, whom she accompanies home. When she complains about the bright light, still in search of the ‘friendly dark’, he ties two blue silk handkerchiefs around the bulb. It is ambiguous whether this is a gesture of protection and solidarity, or a symbol of concealment and deceit. Rhys decides on neither, and again uses clothes (the ‘rag of illusion’ [2000b: 145]) to express the ambivalence.

It is often felt to be difficult to untangle Rhys’s complex ethical outlook, and tempting to conclude that it lies with such statements, common in her fiction, as: ‘I’ve realized, you see, that life is cruel and horrible to unprotected people. I think life is cruel. I think people are cruel’ (2000a: 42), or ‘You don’t like me, but I don’t like you either’ (2000b: 38).<sup>32</sup> But more recently scholars have been working through the despair detected in Rhys’s *oeuvre* to find modes of empathy and human connection (Heller 2013, Johnson and Moran 2015b). Indeed, behind Rhys’s moral schemas lies a certain martyred sense of a sullied ideal, sacrificed to the cruelty of others (‘I’ve realised, you see...’), of a vulnerable person fighting back at a hostile world that has disappointed her. Janet Lyon writes something similar about Rhys’s vision of cosmopolitanism in *Quartet*, which ‘dramatizes the failure of cosmopolitan promises, even as those promises remain unarticulated and only obliquely suggested’ (2012: 387). In Rhys’s writing it is possible to discern the shape her idealism – an illusion – once took, and nowhere more so than in her notebooks and unpublished fragments. A brief optimistic idea for human relations seems to have remained intact at certain moments before the re-working and perfecting process.<sup>33</sup>

In two instances, both probably dating from the late 1930s, we see this expressed in relation to a particular moment that she experienced in the south of France. The trip itself appears in *Quartet*, when Marya is sent by Heidler to get away from Paris, so it is likely to have taken place in the mid-

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<sup>32</sup> Jo Hill, a close friend of Rhys’s in her final decade, maintains that the image of Rhys as ‘difficult’ (as in David Plante’s memoir *Difficult Women* [1983] and echoed throughout accounts of her, especially in later life) is not entirely accurate. *Conversations with the author*, 2016.

<sup>33</sup> In fact, something of this thwarted generous impulse was recognised in what is arguably Rhys’s first entrance into the literary canon, Geoffrey Grigson’s first edition of *The Concise Encyclopedia of Modern World Literature* (1963). According to the author of Rhys’s entry (369–70) – probably Francis Wyndham – Sasha in *Good Morning, Midnight* is ‘not malicious; pity extends beyond herself to embrace all other sufferers. For her suffering transcends its cause. This is not only a study of a lonely, ageing woman, who has taken to drink; it is the tragedy of a distinguished mind and generous nature that have gone unappreciated in a conventional, unimaginative world’ (370).

1920s.<sup>34</sup> The novel's version of the trip does not include this particular episode. As she tells it in the notebook known as the Black Exercise Book (McF: JR 1.1.1), which Carole Angier and Elaine Savory both date to 1938 (Savory 1998: 65), there is 'Only one day to set against all this', 'all this' perhaps referring to the difficult childhood memories she has recounted in her notebook up until this point, for example her seduction as a teenager by an older man, Mr Howard. But the moment may also be set against the unhappy events fictionalised in *Quartet*: the failure of her marriage and the affair with Ford. Years later, she described it to Diana Melly as one moment in her whole life in which she felt happy.<sup>35</sup> She writes that she was:

walking along in the hot sun thinking then not thinking & being intensely happy for I existed no longer but still the trees [...] and the soft wind that smells of flowers and the blue dreamy sea & I was the wind the trees the sea the warm earth & I left behind a prison a horrible dream of prison. & my happiness impossible to write of it active laughing with joy. Do you see now oh then it was just a dream of prison yes of course what a fool I was [...] I don't know how long this state of bliss lasted then suddenly I was back in myself but the happiness was not quite gone & I walked into Cannes and had a coffee at that café caught the bus back, still happier than ever in my life though just the shadow of the other happiness (McF: JR 1.1.1)<sup>36</sup>

Stressing its importance, she continues to pinpoint the place, the time of day and the month of this event: 'the road from Théoule to Cannes one hot day in August about two to three o'clock'. She clarifies that she was 'quite well', i.e. not drunk, for she hadn't had wine with lunch. As well as the sense of unity with nature already described, she states that 'It's the feeling of being one with human beings'. We see here Rhys's transient happiness based on a sense of oneness with others, a loss of the self in merging with the world.

In two separate single-page documents, one of which is dated 3 July but without the year, Rhys has typewritten an account of the same episode in similar terms. The other page is entitled 'The Forlorn Hope', reiterating the singularity of this positive experience and its frail contrast to her general sense of her 'life on earth' (McF: JR 1.1.17). Again, she articulates it as a 'feel-

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<sup>34</sup> Angier 1990 dates Rhys's trip to Cannes to 1926 (158).

<sup>35</sup> Conversation with Diana Melly, 5 March 2014.

<sup>36</sup> '[J]ust the shadow of the other happiness': i.e. as she first felt it. This is clear from one of the typed versions of this episode discussed below, dated 3 July, in which she writes that when she left the beach, 'The happiness I had felt was not so enormous, seeming to swallow everything else up, but it was still there' (McF: JR 1.1.17).

ing of being merged with human beings'. In the dated, untitled piece, which focuses on the ineffability of this experience, she writes: 'I was certain that the end was joy, not only for me, but for everyone' (McF: JR 1.1.17). And although in 'The Forlorn Hope' she restates its rarity and that it 'would be a salvation' but she 'cannot get it. [...] People cannot do it, not with me', in the dated page the feeling of merging with others, and the idea of a shared happy end, seems certainly to have affected her attitude towards people:

I decided to get the bus back to Théoule. I didn't look at the people with my usual suspicion, verging on dislike. They seemed kind, smiling people. I had always made up my mind that I ought to beware of conductors of buses, but this one was a kind, smiling man. (McF: JR 1.1.17)

In the light of these documents, the 'suspicion, verging on dislike' that characterises so many relationships in *Quartet* seems not to be the full story. The motion between illusion and disillusion, affiliation and hostility, mirrors instead a thwarted feeling of solidarity. Rhys knows the possibility of connection with others, and she mourns its disappointment. Her gestures towards affiliation in the novel reflect attempts to reach out and unite with others, while the countermoves of mistrust echo their frequent failure. What remains at least is the forlorn hope of positive relationships, and a martyred sense of its unfulfilment. It is this, I believe, that drives her ethical point of view.

If a direct connection with people has been impossible for Rhys, literature has acted as a medium, not only for unity but a limited impulse to action. In 'The Forlorn Hope' she writes that 'Only through books sometimes I can get it', before slipping directly, mid-sentence, into a recollection of another female writer whose stories she reread when she got back to England and found 'quite first rate'. Can we assume that this writer comes to mind because she felt that same happiness when she read the stories? The 'feeling of being one with human beings', particularly here with another female writer, is expressed as an active solidarity, for in the middle of the same sentence Rhys reminds herself that 'I must write a story about the English attitude to women writers soon' (McF: JR 1.1.17).<sup>37</sup> There follows a long, at

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<sup>37</sup> A similar sense of female community in part based on literature emerges from some of Rhys's correspondence, notably with Peggy Kirkaldy, with whom she regularly discusses her work and other books from the 1930s onwards (Rhys 1985). Towards the end of her life, in 1969–70, her brief correspondence with the fashion photographer Barbara Ker-Seymer focused on books that Ker-Seymer sent to Rhys, eventually by book subscription from Harrods (TGA: BKS). It is worth noting that the other abiding topics of Rhys's

times quite incoherent section, possibly notes for this very story, about this attitude towards ‘lady novelists’ and double standards towards male and female writers.<sup>38</sup> Rhys’s own attitude towards women is notoriously caustic at times, and her feelings about feminism consistently derogatory, so these notes are unique for their fairly straightforward defence of female writers and ‘female broadcasters’. She identifies with these women, much as she does in the context of Sylvia Beach’s bookshop, discussed earlier: angry at constructions of femininity she feels able, in her writing, to ‘speak back’ to those who make them. And whether written from the Left Bank of Paris or against the English, this show of feeling for women clearly has national definitions in Rhys’s mind.

National and ethnic affiliations are central to Rhys’s writing and her view of relationships, as I have already discussed and will continue to explore throughout this chapter. This is also apparent in an essay entitled ‘Clouds in Stone’, perhaps subtitled or alternatively called ‘The Richelots of Paris’ (McF: JR 1.1.11).<sup>39</sup> A typed document of five sides, with added handwritten notes and four sides of handwritten text extending the typed section, the piece reflects sentimentally from some distance in time on the close relationship that Rhys formed with Germaine Richelot (‘the only friend I’ve ever had, I think’) and her family in Paris in 1919, recalling their home and its positive associations.<sup>40</sup> Some of the material was used in the Paris section of *Smile Please*. As she explains in both pieces, she was hired to speak English with the children of Germaine’s sister, Mme Bragadier, and some neighbouring children. In ‘Clouds of Stone’, reflecting, typically, on the possibility of their inauthenticity, Rhys concludes:

One thing wasn’t a fake the goodness in Mademoiselle Richelot’s eyes. Someone like myself doesn’t mistake that look – ever. [...] more that I mistake the opposite – the usual look. [...] In Mademoiselle [Germaine Richelot] was the pure spring of goodness untainted.

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letters to other women are clothes and shopping.

<sup>38</sup> She expresses the same sentiment in a letter to Evelyn Scott on 10 August 1936: ‘I think that the anglo-saxon idea that you can be rude with impunity to any female who has written a book is utterly *damnable*. [...] Well my dear if it were my last breath I’d say HELL TO IT and – to the people who do it –’ (Rhys 1985: 32).

<sup>39</sup> Rhys has written in hand ‘The R’s of Paris’ at the top of the first page.

<sup>40</sup> In ‘Clouds in Stone’, she writes that she left Paris for Vienna in early 1920. Angier 1990 dates Rhys’s first arrival in Paris to late 1919 (109). Germaine wrote long and thoughtful letters to ‘Ella’ in the 1920s, giving tentative, always complimentary opinions on Rhys’s work, and showing concern for her literary and personal lives. She also acted as an advocate for Rhys’s work, for example sending three of her stories to a Valentino Williams in 1926. See BL: JR RP6206.

Against the ‘usual look’ that crosses the eyes of so many characters in Rhys’s fiction, which her protagonists, like Rhys admits here, can mistake, we find in this account her knowledge of an unsullied model of interaction. Germaine is an example of Rhys’s ‘forlorn hope’ for harmonious relations between human beings.

Told almost as a story, rather than direct recollection, ‘Clouds in Stone’ has two narrators, the central ‘voice’, whose first-person monologue is given in speech marks throughout, and the ostensible author of the piece, whose only direct words are the first: ‘She said: “To me the years have different scents...”’ Both voices are Rhys’s but the effect, especially with this nostalgic opening, is one of romance, of ethereal ‘clouds’ in the stones of history, of the passage of time. The piece is written self-consciously from a distance (‘I shall never forget...’), and its focus on the ethnicity of the Richelots – they are half-Jewish – which is only briefly registered in the Paris section of *Smile Please*, suggests that it may have been written soon after the Second World War.<sup>41</sup> In *Smile Please*, she writes: ‘Much later in England, shortly after the second world war, I heard in a hair-dresser that the Germans had taken over the house and stolen everything in it, and I was very sad. I thought of the Madonna that smiled’ (1979: 147). These exact circumstances seem unlikely, but certainly ‘Clouds in Stone’ registers some knowledge of or speculation on the Richelot’s fate, and expresses the sadness in more interpersonal terms than regret at the loss of their house and its artefacts:

I shall always remember standing at the foot of the stairs seeing Made-moiselle Richelot coming towards me and knowing at once that she was far more shy than I was – more shy, more delicate, with tentacles reaching in every direction which were far more fine, tho not so sure, than mine [*sic*]. She is the only human being I have ever met who had tentacles more fine than mine.

These people were ~~Jews~~ half Jewish – that’s why ~~they were like this~~ I write this. It is to pay a debt which I can never pay – the dropped eyelid, the Madonna that smiled (because they had a collection of thirteenth-century Madonnas and they always smile), the soft couch (you must rest when you feel tired)

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<sup>41</sup> The handwriting is that of Rhys in her middle age. Some shaky corrections in pen have been made to make certain letters clearer, their strong angles distinctly reminiscent of Rhys’s idiosyncratic writing in later life, which would suggest that she returned to the piece when she was revisiting the material for *Smile Please*.

Fondly remembered throughout the piece, here Germaine is figured as a kindred spirit, sensitive to the world like Rhys. If we think back to Rhys's forlorn hope of connection with 'everyone' in the largest sense, these tentacles appear like a mode of reaching out to make that connection as well as more specifically a set of nerves for measuring other people.<sup>42</sup> In recognising them in Germaine she compounds a sense of solidarity she feels with this friend, an affiliation that here takes on further moral significance in light of the treatment of Jews. Rhys's first thought, crossed out, is that Germaine's tentacles are related to her Jewishness (that 'measuring' approach, perhaps, for it conforms to stereotype); her second is that the very reason she writes this piece of remembrance is that she owes her a debt. On a personal level, it is a debt of gratitude for the benevolence that Germaine showed her, symbolised in the smiling Madonna and literally remembered in the rest she was urged to take (she was pregnant at the time). But on a historical plane, the reason 'why I write this' is that '[t]hese people were half-Jewish'. Rhys feels compelled to stand by them, for their kindness to her and in response to the historical fate of their race.<sup>43</sup>

And the national associations of Rhys's sense of morality are extended when we consider the role of Paris in 'Clouds in Stone' – its background function in 'The Richelots of Paris'. The instinctive identification with Paris that I explored earlier comes in part from this happy time that she spent with this family. The romance of the piece is partly a romance about the city – a dream about the very stone of its streets – rosy memories of this place where '[t]he light is quite pink' (cited Angier 1990: 108). The goodness of Paris even exceeds that of Germaine. The last section of handwritten text, some of which is illegible, reads: 'I often think of it – she can't have been unique. I suppose there are other wealthy[?] people [...] ~~who aren't evil [...]~~ – good. But another Paris. No I don't think so.' In Rhys's imagination, and in her particular system of morality, Paris is beyond reproach.

Of course, the goodness of Germaine and Paris suggests an antithesis, much as the title of the piece works with disparate substances. Such contrasts are characteristic of Rhys's titles, which often play with opposing values: *After Leaving Mackenzie* was once called 'Wintry Orchids';<sup>44</sup> *Good*

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<sup>42</sup> Mina Loy, too, was invested in the idea of sensory antennae, as we will see in Chapter 3 in relation to her novel *Insel*. Such imagery appears in some of Loy's earliest work as a failed method of communication between the sexes, as in 'Human Cylinders' of c. 1915, with its 'one elastic tentacle of intuition', quivering 'among the stars' (Loy 1997: 41).

<sup>43</sup> Given its language of debt to other people and persistent questioning of what is 'good', I disagree with Elaine Savory's assessment that this essay does not deal with ideas of morality and culture (1998: 194).

<sup>44</sup> A letter to Rhys from the American publishers of *Quartet*, Simon and Schuster, dated 27 February 1929, notes that they 'await with keen interest your next novel, "Wintry Or-



*Morning, Midnight* turns a hearty welcome of daylight into a black comedic greeting of death; *Voyage in the Dark* was conceived as ‘Two Tunes’,<sup>45</sup> a heading that Rhys also used for a version of ‘Leaving School’, an account of leaving Dominica for England as a teenager that eventually became the story ‘Overtures and Beginners Please’.<sup>46</sup> Rhys had a consistent sense that there was always another side to a story: ‘two ways of looking at it’, as a solitary, underlined scrawl in one of her notebooks phrases it (Orange Exercise Book, McF: JR 1.1.4). To the authoritative voice she introduces one of opposition; to the dominant cultural genre she contrasts a popular type; for each interpretation there is almost always a substitute. The value of the opposite – night as opposed to day, clouds in stone – corresponds to Rhys’s view of the underdog, which generally in her moral outlook is associated with ‘good’. In light of my reading of *Quartet*, it can also be connected, structurally and in terms of ethics, to her interest in illusion and the ever-present reality of its unmasking. But interestingly, the binary framework also appears to have implicit national connotations. If ‘Wintry Orchids’ evokes Rhys’s disturbing experience – which she bequeaths to Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* and Anna in *Voyage in the Dark* – of the cold of England after exotic Dominica,<sup>47</sup> ‘Two Tunes’ suggests Anna’s divided mindsets between the two places. They are connected to Rhys’s leaving home, her disappointment with England (‘I am going to England, what shall I find there, no matter what, not what I sought, said Byron, not what I sought or what I seek’ [‘Leaving School’, McF: JR 1.2.24].) and growing resentment of the English, and – significantly – her going on the stage and the passage to becoming a writer in Paris. ‘Leaving School’, later ‘Overtures and Beginners Please’ about her first school in England and finding there a vocation as an actress, was in two drafts – the only versions that extend the content to Paris – subtitled ‘How I became a novelist’.<sup>48</sup> It is clear that for Rhys the outlook of ‘two tunes’, two sides of the story, is fundamental to her literary endeavours. Writing is an ethical matter, inflected with complex identifications with the West

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chids’, and have jotted down on our editorial schedule that we may expect this some time this summer’ (BL: JR RP206).

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum of agreement between Rhys and her UK publisher Constable dated 23 July 1934 (McF: JR 2.1.7).

<sup>46</sup> There are ten versions of this piece in the McFarlin Library. The one subtitled ‘Two Tunes’, called version 1 in the finding aid, is handwritten in a red exercise book (McF: JR 1.2.24). ‘Leaving School’ was commissioned by the *London Magazine* in 1962 but was not published until it appeared as ‘Overtures and Beginners Please’ in *Sleep It Off Lady* in 1976 (Angier 1990: 505).

<sup>47</sup> See Rhys’s account of first feeling the cold on the boat in Rhys 1979: 97–99.

<sup>48</sup> In version 4 the subtitle is given in parentheses and with two question marks; by version 8 it seems Rhys was more confident with the title, although it does not appear in the published story, presumably because the latter no longer includes the Paris section.

Indies and France, and hostility towards England. Words are a ‘relief’ from the ‘harsh, gritty’ feeling she has about the English: ‘Disappointed love, of course’ (Rhys 1979: 165).

This attitude does not always refer directly and only to writing, appearing instead displaced onto or combined with popular culture. As implied by the journey to novel writing via the stage, and the title ‘Two Tunes’, Rhys’s moral programme seems to be connected to popular song.<sup>49</sup> ‘Songs My Mother Didn’t Teach Me’ (McF: JR 1.5.1), a very late piece (1978) that exists in five drafts (as ‘Songs’ in the first version), explores her idea that ‘All my life I have been haunted by popular songs’.<sup>50</sup> Not ‘better things’ (‘Chopin, Debussy and Ravel’), which give her merely ‘pleasure’, but ‘cheap popular music’ (version 1), ‘popular street music’ (version 2): this is the music by which she is ‘possessed, obsessed’ (version 5).<sup>51</sup> In versions 2 and 3 she writes: ‘I believe these songs influenced me far more than I knew at the time.’ The question of influence suggests that they fed into her work. She adapts a line from *The Winter’s Tale*: ‘Waking with them in my head. Walking, talking to it. “And for the ordering of her affairs to sing them too.” Not quite that but very nearly.’ So these songs provide a soundtrack to her existence, giving it shape in the way in which writing and literature does.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, ‘Sometimes I think I can divide my life into neat sections headed by the songs I loved at the time.’ This life is the life after Dominica: before the 1914 war, in France and then back in London. These are the songs that her ‘mother didn’t teach her’, the songs she learnt herself and that thus define her sense of belonging in Europe: the shape that, in retrospect, becoming a novelist gave to her identity.

Haunting, possession and obsession – and not quite being able to understand this compulsion (‘I still don’t understand why I find popular music so enthralling’, she says in version 4) – certainly correspond to Rhys’s vocation to write (‘What is this force that takes hold of me so that I feel more like a pen

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<sup>49</sup> In ‘Poets and Poetry’ (McF: JR 1.4.21) she defined poetry as ‘words that sing’; Savory adds that ‘in that sense her fiction was largely poetry’ (1998: 243, n21).

<sup>50</sup> This opening line appears in slightly modified form in each of the five drafts. The date of 19 July 1978 is written in another hand on the first version. Savory notes that a fragment of outline for *Smile Please* mentions ‘Songs...’ as being in progress for the autobiography (1998: 180).

<sup>51</sup> Frost 2013 argues that Rhys’s fictional resistances to pleasure (associated with the vernacular) articulates a critique of the consensus and its troubling political implications during the rise of fascism and communism. Based on these archival materials, I would shift the emphasis to suggest that Rhys is drawn towards the consoling, dark pleasures of popular culture.

<sup>52</sup> In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha walks to an almost constant soundtrack – ‘just dance and leave the music to me’ – so much so that the book becomes almost a performance rather than a monologic piece of narration: ‘What an amusing ten days! Positively packed with thrills. The last performance of What’s-her-name And Her Boys or It Was All Due to An Old Fur Coat. Positively the last performance’ (2000b: 154).

than anything else,' she wrote in one essay, 'One early morning last week...' [McF: JR 1.3.7]). They also speak of the sadness of this nostalgic type of music, of its darker side. Music, like clothes, trades in comforting illusions, as she articulates in another piece on the subject, here making more explicit the link with writing. 'Music and Words' (McF: JR 1.3.3) is an intriguing, at times sharply ironic piece, not always clear and combining several strands of ethical and aesthetic thought and bias. Judging by the handwriting of the pencil additions and some correspondences with her first works of fiction, it dates from an earlier period in Rhys's life. In line with her bitter objections to middle-class complacency and cruelty elsewhere in her work, it is:

Dedicated to all those who, having miraculously weathered the storms of a mis-spent life, come safely to haven in a comfortable flat in Kensington and while stuffing themselves with food with respectable voices bleating on the north, south, east and west sides of them, seeing through a half-open door the street outside calm and tamed ... hear a voice crying 'LOST, LOST, ENDLESSLY, FINALLY AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, LOST.'

Rhys is concerned 'not that these things happen', that inequality and misery exists. '[W]hat makes it that "la vie est drôle, my dear" [a line that she gave to a character in *Quartet* too (2000a: 67)] is that they are forgotten':

Beauty, Sadness and Injustice – all forgotten, and as if they had never been. Except by me, except by such as I. Tormented by these moments, saying 'They shall not die, I even I, will thrust a pin through them and exhibit them at twopence a copy.' Those blue moments, those rolling, rollicking, golden hours. (McF: JR 1.3.3)

The significance of street music (i.e working-class music [Savory 1998: 180]) in this moral battle between the 'fat swine' and Rhys and those she takes on her side, is that it consoles. In this consoling movement, moments of beauty, sadness and injustice are sentimental. In the language of American popular song, they are transformed into their gentle, poignant opposite – 'rolling, rollicking golden hours'. If in 'Songs My Mother Didn't Teach Me' Rhys values the songs she found herself (some of which are American too), the handwritten note at the top of the first side of 'Words and Music' indicates that the consoling music is: 'Pappy & Happy [...] songs my mother taught me wishing she was an Escape artist or the sisters Pappy & Snappy'. Again music is connected to escape and the formation of identity, but here it

is judged as a means of illusion, perhaps necessary delusion – an American brand of bittersweet innocence that recalls the work of popular song in the story ‘In a Café’, discussed earlier. The contemporary British poet William Scammell (1939–2000) recognised this need for the consoling confluence of music and sentiment in Rhys in his poem about her: ‘Cheap music costs | Cheap feelings lie | Both are good to have’ (BL Sound: C43/50).

According to the structuring binaries that Rhys favours, and the dynamic of illusion that I discussed in *Quartet*, switching between concealing and revealing, in the second half of ‘Music and Words’ the illusion of song is compared counter-intuitively to shadow: ‘I have always loved shadows. [...] you see things and you don’t see them. [...] Shadows are ghosts, and the voice of someone going into the air and passing quickly is a forlorn ghost.’ Shadows mock you, like beauty. Rather than merely dilute ‘Beauty, Sadness and Injustice’, then, a consoling illusion responds to them with the indeterminacy of ‘shadows of leaves on a wall [...] fluid like water, changing every second from the fluid to the static.’ Forever shifting, illusions – songs, shadows, clothes – capture both sweetness and sorrow. Rhys articulates this elsewhere, in an untitled poem:

I am beloved of Sorrow. She walks  
Close behind me with small dancing steps:  
Not grave sorrow clad in weeds  
And mournful eyed:  
No – my sorrow’s dressed in scarlet;  
Her hair is wild and reckless as a gypsy’s  
And her hands are gay with gauds;  
She smiles and sings.  
And when she sings it’s strange  
And very sweet:  
Sweet as the wind in the trees;  
Sweet as are all things restless, dear and fated. (McF: JR 1.3.9)

The defence of this particular type of sentimentalising, a tragic lyricism whose patron saint is this pagan siren, is associated in ‘Music and Words’ with the ‘lady novelist’, whom Rhys supported in ‘The Forlorn Hope’. To the great amusement of the ‘Hearts of Oak’ – the ‘manly satisfying husband’ and the ‘beautiful, tender wife’, clearly English given the arboreal metaphor – the writer who will not ignore ‘Beauty, Sadness and Injustice’ addresses romantic and affecting moments:

How he at last wept and said 'It's no use'. How she grew old and ridiculous. How he kissed my eyes to wake me in the morning. The sound of that old man's voice and the look in the old woman's eyes. (McF: JR 1.3.3)

Rhys wants both to rescue these subjects from the derision of the Hearts of Oak, and defend the lady novelist from their scorn. She assumes the role of the reviewer, herself a 'lady novelist, with a sneering intonation' and turns the usual line on its head:

(give up trying to touch the Hearts of Oak.) In fact, [...] the latest recruit to the ranks of our gentleman novelists (my one wish is that before I die I may write a review which starts 'This latest recruit to the ranks of our gentleman novelists has...').

From the dedication and first-person delivery to an audience who 'don't want to listen', to the assumption of the part of the lady novelist reviewer, 'Music and Words' is a performance. In a poignant piece of sentiment that responds appropriately to her creed, the manuscript in the archive is smeared with her make-up, in which is caught an eyelash. Smudges of pencil and foundation merge in this self-styled turn of music and words, a score and script whose subject is Rhys's ethical outlook as a writer.<sup>53</sup> This outlook values illusion as a means of responding to the world and relating to others, while recognising its violence. It shows aesthetic solidarity with those who are dismissed by the powerful and complacent, an affiliation based on the frail beauty of shadows.

In this section I have looked both to Rhys's first novel *Quartet* and to her archive to develop a sense of her ethical thinking. I have explored ways in which illusion is bound to her idiosyncratic moral outlook, to the fraught question that obsesses her and her characters: the relationship between the individual and society. Human relations, I have suggested, are in flux with the shimmer and fade of illusion, associated in her thinking with clothes,

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<sup>53</sup> Writing specifically about make-up in Rhys's work, Rishona Zimring (2000) argues for the empowering and expressive potential of cosmetics, as well as their role in the commodification of women.

words and music: there is a clear aesthetic dimension to her ethics. Rhys holds a forlorn hope that relationships can be positive, and gestures of affiliation in her writing both correspond to that illusion and are marked by its sorrow.<sup>54</sup> Certain affiliations appear to be more viable or desirable than others – those in whom Rhys or her characters recognise themselves, often women, and (for Rhys) those associated with writing. Competing national and ethnic associations inform Rhys’s system of morality. In the next section, I would like to focus more specifically on fashion in order to understand how these ideas structure *Good Morning, Midnight*. I will ground this understanding in the cultural moment that is the novel’s background.

**‘YES?–NO?’: FASHION AND FEMALE COMMUNITY IN  
GOOD MORNING, MIDNIGHT**

Briefly returning to the significance of song, and to *Quartet*, originally published as *Postures*, I wonder if Rhys took the alternative title from the Broadway and later chart hit ‘Yes! We Have No Bananas’ (1923), which narrates a quartet (and that is the word used in the lyrics) of cooperative male friends.<sup>55</sup> Marya hears the song as she is walking in the city, as part of the opening sequence concerned with the potential of female relationships. While she reflects on the claustrophobic clan of Anglo-Saxon artists, a Frenchman attempting to play a popular song is instead associated with camaraderie and a pleasurable, loosely associated, native French populace in a street of ‘shabby *parfumeries*, second-hand book-stalls, cheap hat-shops, bars frequented by gaily-painted ladies and loud-voiced men, midwives’ premises’ (2000a: 9). Present here are some of the hallmarks of Rhys’s approach towards affiliation that I want to explore in the context of fashion; most will be recognisable from the preceding discussions. It is a dialogic approach that compares one form of affiliation with another. This I will call Rhys’s yes?–no? struc-

<sup>54</sup> For Jessica Berman, Rhys’s ethical outlook is defined by her refusal to resolve relationships, an openness that ‘disrupts the promise of a communal future’ and supports ‘an oppositional politics of identity’ (2011: 77).

<sup>55</sup> Words by Frank Silver and music by Irving Cohn, score published by Skidmore Music Co., New York, 1923. Looking back on the ‘jazz age’ in 1931, F. Scott Fitzgerald also refers to this song as a symbol of happier times, before the crash, a time of illusions: ‘Now once more the belt is tight and we summon the proper expression of horror as we look back at our wasted youth. Sometimes, though, there is a ghostly rumble among the drums, an asthmatic whisper in the trombones that swings me back into the early twenties when we drank wood alcohol and every day in every way grew better and better, and there was a first abortive shortening of the skirts, and girls all looked alike in sweater dresses, and people you didn’t want to know said “Yes, we have no bananas,” and it seemed only a question of a few years before the older people would step aside and let the world be run by those who saw things as they were – and it all seems rosy and romantic to us who were young then...’ (1993: 22).

ture, suggesting at once both the existence of alternatives and intractable contradiction, the situation we saw in *Quartet*. This conversational structure, which becomes especially important in *Good Morning, Midnight*, proposes dialogue and interaction, but its unanswered questions make any ethical implications ambivalent. Here, as elsewhere, these sides are expressed as one art form against another – the expatriate painters and writers versus popular song associated with a possibly more authentic French culture. Implicit in this opposition are national affiliations: her mistrust of the authoritative English, whom she consistently elides with the American residents of Paris, versus an ill-defined but instinctive identification with a native French community. The distinction is symbolically complicated by the imperfect translation of an American chart song, ‘Yes, We Have No Bananas’, a tension between authenticity and standardisation in the context of national differences that, as we have seen, can be felt elsewhere in Rhys’s interwar fiction.

All these elements – a dialogic, at times dialectical structure, and a tension between authenticity and standardisation in the context of national and local affiliations – are also present in Rhys’s approach to fashion. The way that her writing rocks between alternatives, between similarities and difference, links it conceptually to the operation of fashion. The persistent quest for novelty that drives fashion is based on a somewhat paradoxical recycling of what has come before and the endless introduction of incremental changes to such details as cut and decoration – changes that are often barely appreciable and regularly contradictory. Rarely wholesale revolution, fashion involves a compromise between repetition and difference, between innovation and order. Thematically, this compromise is also central to Rhys’s writing, especially *Good Morning, Midnight*. The fantasy of the protagonist Sasha Jensen’s life – that ‘there is always tomorrow’ – is best expressed by her preoccupation with fashion:

Tomorrow I’ll go to the Galeries Lafayette, choose a dress, go along to Printemps, buy gloves, buy scent, buy lipstick [...] buy anything cheap. Just the sensation of spending, that’s the point. I’ll look at bracelets studded with artificial jewels [...] necklaces of imitation pearls [...] And when I have had a couple of drinks I shan’t know whether it’s yesterday, today or tomorrow. (2000b: 121)

This temporal collage, a central feature of the novel, is a drunken vision, but it is also the particular temporality of Sasha’s life, in which there is always hope of a new day that turns out to be the same as the day before: ‘when I think “tomorrow” there is a gap in my head, a blank – as if I were

falling through emptiness. Tomorrow never comes' (133).<sup>56</sup> The narrative of the book is governed by Sasha's lurches between hotel rooms, whose incremental differences poorly conceal deadening repetition:

A room. A nice room. A beautiful room. A beautiful room with bath. A very beautiful room with bath. A bedroom and sitting-room with bath. Up to the dizzy heights of the suite. [...] Swing high... Now, slowly, down. A beautiful room with bath. A room with bath. A nice room. A room... (29)<sup>57</sup>

This mantra is rearticulated in her investment in what she calls a 'transformation act' (53), through the buying of clothes and a hat, and having her hair dyed. She eventually mourns the unfulfilled promise of differentiation – already present in the mass-produced department store purchases: 'Only five minutes ago I was in the Deux Magots dressed in the damn cheap dress of mine [...] and now I am lying in a misery of utter darkness' (145). The fantasy innate to fashion – its promise like a new hotel room – is aligned with the threat of standardisation and loss of identity that became pressing discursive issues around fashion in the period in which Rhys was writing. Thus fashion articulates the relationship between the individual and the mass, a tension also reflected in that between singularity and standardisation.<sup>58</sup>

Sasha's life is an endless interplay between distinction and similitude. 'Quite like old times [...] Yes? No?', she imagines her room asking in the first line of the novel (9). She encounters a woman who understands and reflects Sasha's own sadness but makes an effort to distance herself from its public display. Their identification is based on the deathly associations of song discussed earlier. The woman is learning to sing 'Gloomy Sunday'. 'I like that song', says Sasha. 'Ah yes but it's a sad song', the other replies. Written by the Hungarians László Jávör and Rezső Seress during the Great Depression and a growing fascist presence in Hungary (Spencer 2002: 163), this enigmatic song adumbrates the interplay of personal and historical realities that characterises *Good Morning, Midnight*. It appears to have been a notorious song in the 1930s, when a number of suicides identified with its

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<sup>56</sup> We might also say that it reflects the 'rhythms of industrial production', in Arjun Appadurai's phrase (1997: 39) – time commodified.

<sup>57</sup> This motion – 'Swing high, swing low' – includes another reference to popular entertainment. A film of that name was made in 1937, an adaptation of the Broadway play *Burlesque*. The first adaptation of the play was called *The Dance of Life* (1929).

<sup>58</sup> Rhys's clothes-conscious protagonists do not always dress in the latest fashions. Marshik points out that Julia in *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* experiences the same disillusion from second-hand garments (2016: 171).



lyrics (Marcus 2012: 61). Released in America in 1936 with English words by Sam Lewis, it was recorded that year by such artists as Paul Robeson (Spencer 2002: 163).<sup>59</sup> The woman's giggles about the song's sadness and the American friend who then joins her point both to the consoling aspects of popular song that we saw in 'Music and Words' and the standardising aspects of American mass culture. When Sasha starts to cry at something the song brings to mind, the woman bristles: 'I understand. All the same... Sometimes I'm just as unhappy as you are. But that's not to say that I let everybody see it' (2000b: 10). This attempt to differentiate herself from an unseemly exhibition of emotion is belied by her phrase 'All the same.'

Like many of Rhys's protagonists, Sasha emerges through her doubles and copies, identified across a café or reflected in a mirror. In this way Rhys creates a character that is imitative, in some senses mechanical. On the other hand, it evokes a community of women with similar worries and hopes. Both possibilities are evoked in Sasha's colourful memories of women in public bathrooms, their individuality both sustained and undermined by the imagined community of women they form under the sign on the lavabo door. This brief moment feels exalted, as Sasha imagines this place where together women look in the mirror and reassure themselves – a space of sorority, 'something to heal a wounded heart' (10). But the peril of uniformity lies behind it: like the monogram on the door, these women may be nothing more than mannequins – a 'shop-window full of artificial limbs' like the ones Sasha recalls seeing in London in the next passage. Yet immediately the threat of standardisation is potentially redeemed by the novelty of fashion. 'I think you need a change', says her friend Sidonie. 'Why don't you go back to Paris for a bit? You could get yourself some new clothes. You certainly need them' (11). This opening sequence is a complex, layered series of scenes, images, memories and fantasies in which clothes, image and female community and antagonism are linked to contemporary politics in a set of reflections, none of them resolved, on standardisation and difference. The anxious striving that Georg Simmel associated with fashion defines Sasha, who veers between the restricted individuating promise of fashion offered by mass-produced clothing and the desperate need to fit in:

Faites comme les autres – that's been my motto all my life. Faites comme les autres, damn you. [...] this is my attitude to life. Please,

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<sup>59</sup> Spencer also notes that the song was popularised by Billie Holiday in 1941. The deathly associations of fashion were attached to the song when Björk sang it at Alexander McQueen's funeral in 2010 (Jones 2010, Honciuc 2010).

please, monsieur et madame, mister, missis and miss, 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. (88)

The sense of clothes as a uniting and dividing principle, and in connection to the conforming demands of society, appears to be wired into the genesis of *Good Morning, Midnight*. In the Green Exercise Book in Rhys's archive (McF: JR 1.1.2), her notes for the novel comprise a draft section that was eventually published in extended form as 'My Dear Darling Mr Ramage' in *The Times* in 1969, and later in *Sleep It Off Lady* as 'Pioneers, Oh, Pioneers'. The published stories concern the martyred Mr Ramage, victimised as eccentric because he eschews normal clothes (he goes without trousers at his home in Dominica and his eventual death implies that he has been sacrificed, if not literally – his death is unexplained – then symbolically, to public opinion). Clothes here feature as uniforms that unite a group against an outsider, a relationship between the individual and society that seems to haunt an earlier version of Sasha Jensen. For the fragment in the Green Exercise Book, entitled 'The Martyr', segues into drafts for *Good Morning, Midnight*.<sup>60</sup> 'Sophy', who becomes Irene in 'Ramage' and 'Pioneers', and her sister Loraine (eventually Rosalie) are walking on Market St when they see an eccentric local woman, Mrs Menzies, riding with a package of melting ice in her lap.<sup>61</sup> Sophy jeers at her, starting to giggle ('That's mad as a hatter. She ought to be locked up...'), and when Loraine is sympathetic Sophy says to her and a Mr Carew standing with them: 'The fact is Loraine likes crazy people [...] you like Mrs Menzies and you liked Ramage [...] you cried when they locked him up.' There is then a break before a new section starts at the top of the following page, which begins with Sophy's recollection of 'The time we went for a walk & for no reason no reason at all stood for ten minutes staring listlessly at that woman'.

This new section is a draft for Part 3 of *Good Morning, Midnight*, in which Sasha (previously called Sophia – she changes her name) and Enno are fugitives in Europe (Rhys describes the draft in the exercise book as 'fugitive', as if it's a working title), making their way between cities en route to Paris. The memory of her cruelty to Mrs Menzies makes her cry, and 'the next time I cried was in the lavatory of the station at \_\_\_ when all at once it came over

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<sup>60</sup> The title is difficult to read; it may be 'The Martyre', using the French for 'martyrdom'.

<sup>61</sup> Sophia was also Jean Rhys's grandmother, the wife of her Welsh grandfather Rev W. Rees William, and the middle name of Rhys's older sister Minna (b. 1886) (Angier 1990: 6, 9).

me again'. In the final text of *Good Morning, Midnight*, it is not this guilt that makes Sasha cry (none of that memory remains) but the thought that she doesn't have any decent clothes for her arrival in Paris:

'What are you crying about?' he says.

'It's my dress. I feel so awful. I feel so dirty. I want to have a bath. I want another dress'

[...]

The lavatory at the station – that was the next time I cried. (2000b: 101)

In the following passages she is overly preoccupied with getting clothes in Paris, so as not to attract attention: 'I didn't think it would be like this – shabby clothes, worn-out shoes, circles under your eyes [...] the way people look at you' (102). Whereas in the Ramage stories, Sophy and Irene represent the machine of society, expecting conformation, in the draft for *Good Morning, Midnight* and in the final text, Sophia (Sasha) identifies with those who are expected to conform. There, fashion represents the anxiety caused by the dialectic identified by Simmel between difference and similitude, and is related in Rhys's imagination to social injustice.

In the period in which Rhys was writing her Paris fiction, women's fashion was characterised by similar oppositions between autonomy and standardisation, and associated with much anxiety. From the new visibility of French women, aided by certain ways of dressing and hairstyles, to the proliferation of women's magazines and mass-produced clothing, fashion was a key expression of increasing equality for women in interwar France. Mary Lynn Roberts, whose book *Civilisation without Sexes* is the standard English-language publication on the topic, traces the origin of the *femme moderne* to the new woman of the pre-war avant-garde, the embodiment of 'a modernist ideal of womanhood, pioneered by cultural radicals' (1994: 19).<sup>62</sup> But whereas the new woman was largely confined to bohemian circles, the *femme moderne* could be 'the girl next door' (Roberts 1994: 20), and as such was a more visible image associated with popular cultural forms. And Roberts maintains that progressive associations were only one side of the picture. The *femme moderne* was the focus of a number of real and imagined anxieties around broader cultural change:

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<sup>62</sup>On female identity in the period, see also Stewart 2008. Tiersten 2001 and Mesch 2013 address an earlier period in which striking developments in female identity in France were associated with consumer culture.

the privileged site for a larger ideological project: how to come to terms with rapid social and cultural change, and how to articulate a new, more appropriate order of social relationships [...] changes associated with the war (5).

New fashions such as shorter hemlines and bobbed hair were associated with a crisis in domesticity and population stagnation, as in 'Venus Androgyne' (1928), an article hypothesising that the hard lines are the fault of mothers who choose not to breastfeed their children (BMD: DM).<sup>63</sup> Sartorial trends were also linked to the threat to traditional culture posed by mass production, and the Americanisation of French culture. In 1926 *Vogue* ('Fashion: The Debut of the Winter Mode') acclaimed a streamlined black dress by Chanel as the couture version of a Ford car. Others aligned the new fashions of the decade with the dynamism and mobility of automobiles and consumer culture in order to hail the emancipation of the modern woman. Before the market itself made these associations for its own ends, the radical feminist Henriette Sauret, for example, welcomed short hair as a 'gesture of independence; a personal venture' (cited Roberts 1994: 80). But as Roberts describes, for some, whether moral detractors or feminists, the modern woman, or *garçonne* as she was often called – independent, androgynous – represented 'a colder, more impersonal world' (75). The machine aesthetic of the new fashions was seen as an agent of social control and homogenisation, a 'tyranny of liberty' (Roberts 1994: 86) in which America loomed large in distinction to an idea of authentic French culture:

The innocent young thing (*l'oie blanche*) of yesterday has given way to the *garçonne* of today. In this way as well, the war, like a devastating wind, has had an influence. Add to this sports, movies, dancing, cars, the unhealthy need to be always on the move – this entire Americanization of the old Europe, and you will have the secret to the complete upheaval of people and things. (*Progrès civique*, 13 June 1925: 840, cited Roberts 1994: 9)

The *femme moderne* recurs throughout Rhys's interwar fiction, often in ways that similarly complicate the progressive connotations of the type. A cast of anonymous women in Rhys's fiction, and in many ways her female

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<sup>63</sup> These associations were not a new concern. Breward 1995 describes the response to increasing numbers of women dressing as men in seventeenth-century London as a similar worry about 'social dislocation': 'indeterminate fashionable creatures on the streets could do little else but inspire misogynistic and fearful condemnation' (95, 94).

protagonists, embody both the possibility of individuation (promised in part by fashion) and the social and psychological realities that restrict its fulfilment. The ‘pretty women’ of ‘Illusion’ are paired in contrast to the ‘petites femmes, anxiously consulting the mirrors of their bags’, the face and underside respectively of the ‘cult of beauty’ (1927: 1). In *Voyage in the Dark*, when Anna thinks about clothes, she is:

too sad to cry. [...] People laugh at girls who are badly dressed. [...] “But it isn’t always going to be like this, is it?” I thought. “[...] Something must happen to make it different.” And then I thought, “Yes, that’s all right. I’m poor and my clothes are cheap and perhaps it will always be like this. [...]” (Rhys 1969a: 22–23)

Clothes, hair and make-up give Sasha Jensen a sense of coherence but they also restrict her individuality, making her machine-like: ‘Saved, rescued, fished-up, half-drowned [...] dry clothes, hair shampooed and set. Nobody would know I have ever been in it. [...] I’m a bit of an automaton, but sane, surely – dry, cold and sane’ (Rhys 2000b: 10).

The image of the mechanical female body predates the interwar years, but associations of women and technology took on new associations in relation to fashion in this period.<sup>64</sup> Roberts chronicles the scientific and mechanical discourses that commentators attached to the geometric, streamlined shapes of the new fashions, which seemed to erase sexual difference, making the female silhouette – and in a frequent rhetorical slip, the female body – ‘nothing more than a rigid straight line’, ‘nothing more than the intersection of two planes, like a geometric line’ (Prax 1926 and Vautel 1924, cited Roberts 1994: 68, 69). In other cases, this negation of the feminine was characterised as inversion: ‘The species feels itself endangered by a growing inversion [*uranisme*]. No more hips, no more breasts, no more hair’ (Lièvre 1927: 54–7, cited Roberts 1994: 70). This image of young women as a kind of ‘monster’, ‘beyond the realm of natural law’ (Fournier 1925: 637–8, cited Roberts 1994: 71), expressed fear at what was perceived as a loss of definition and intelligibility – a lack of humanity. Caroline Evans (2008 and 2011) explores similar perceptions and anxieties in relation to the uncanny figure of the mannequin, the living models first used by couturiers in this period. Many associated mannequins with the *femme moderne*, who was compared by some to a doll (‘Venus Androgyne’, BMD: DM).

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<sup>64</sup> Evans 2011: 63 cites the example, in literature, of Auguste Villiers de l’Isle-Adam’s *L’Eve future*.

One of the most striking images of *Good Morning, Midnight* is a sort of cyborg *femme moderne*, an image that captures the sensuous, futuristic appeal of the fashionably dressed, and the spectre of fashion's control of the individual:

All that is left in the world is an enormous machine, made of white steel. It has innumerable flexible arms, made of steel. Long, thin arms. At the end of each arm is an eye, the eyelashes stiff with mascara. When I look more closely I see that only some of the arms have these eyes – others have lights. The arms that carry the eyes and the arms that carry the lights are all extraordinarily flexible and very beautiful. But the grey sky, which is the background, terrifies me. ... And the arms wave to an accompaniment of music and of song. Like this: 'Hotcha – hotcha – hotcha. ...' And I know the music; I can sing the song. (156–57)

Remembering Gilles Lipovetsky's stirring account of the aesthetic cult of the self, discussed in the introduction, fashion appears to guide Sasha's desires – fantasy, novelty, sovereignty. And yet such optimism is almost parodied in *Good Morning, Midnight*, whose hopes for individuation are repeatedly subsumed in these images of standardisation and helpless imitation. The tentacles that Rhys felt she and Germaine Richier owned, nerves with which the shy can sensitively communicate with the world, are here transformed into the antennas of a faceless technology.<sup>65</sup>

Lipovetsky opposes the cultural pessimism of Adorno and Horkheimer by arguing for a central role for the frivolous in democratic politics: 'Fashion does not bring about the definitive alienation of the masses; it is an ambiguous but effective vector of human autonomy, even though it functions via the heteronomy of mass culture' (1994: 9). This argument holds great appeal for a complex feminist understanding of fashion and subjectivity under capitalism, but the place of fashion in Rhys's novel actually seems more in line with the Frankfurt School approach. She relates fashion's articulation of the tensions between singularity and similitude to the homogenising force of fascism, represented in the novel by the background of the 1937 Paris Expo, a visual spectacle of German and Soviet ascendancy and battle for authority

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<sup>65</sup> Rhys's conception of the homogenising, mechanical aspects of society was not confined to *Good Morning, Midnight*. Her story 'Outside the Machine', begun in the 1930s or 1940s, imagines its hospital setting as a microcosm for society's conforming strictures (Rhys 1987: 176–209).

that, equally, proposed the marriage of art and industry.<sup>66</sup> The exhibition bookends the novel, appearing first towards the beginning in Sasha's nightmare of a tube station in London filled with people and placards reading 'This Way to the Exhibition'. Sasha's desire to go against the tide, to assert her singularity, is thwarted by the mechanical crowd:

I touch the shoulder of the man walking in front of me. I say: 'I want the way out.' But he points to the placards and his hand is made of steel. I walk along with my head bent, very ashamed, thinking: 'Just like me – always wanting to be different from other people.' (12)

The dream ends with a gory image of blood streaming from a wounded man shouting 'murder, Murder'. His claim to be Sasha's father, a gesture of affiliation, is violently sacrificed to the forces of homogenisation, here represented by a crowd-pulling visual spectacle. Like Adorno and Horkheimer in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Rhys associates mass politics with mass culture, expressing the political fears of her time in terms applicable to a single woman in the modern city – a quest for liberty within authentic community thwarted by standardisation. Sasha has this dream after she remembers a Cossack cap and 'imitation astrakhan coat' that Enno bought for her in the 1920s (11), reaffirming the connection of fashion to this tension between singularity and standardisation, and setting up an imaginative link between fashion and international politics.

The organisers of the 1937 Expo advocated their event as an entertainment that would match American mass culture. Edmond Labbé 'explained that one of its aims was to entertain and thus to win back the attention of "our sons and daughters who today, in order to shake off their boredom, look to American Negro tunes"' (Bloch 1980: 11, cited in Higonnet 2002: 372). Perhaps it is no wonder, then, that Rhys chose to articulate her anxieties about standardisation in the context of the world's fair. Like Adorno and Horkheimer, Rhys associated the sinister changes wrought by an imperial mass culture with America.<sup>67</sup> Her poem 'I Buy Your Dreams', published in 1935 in a Dutch magazine, *Kroniek voor hedendaagse Kunst en Cultuur* (Chronicle for contemporary art and culture), imagines the private fantasies of the individual as worker and consumer, controlled by those for whom he

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<sup>66</sup> On the significance of the Exposition in the novel, see Britzolakis 2007.

<sup>67</sup> For a specifically French take on this question, see Singer 1980, with its discussion of Paul Valéry's resistance to Enlightenment thinking, modernisation and the values of American production.

labours (McF: JR 1.3.9). He is an English clerk '[e]arning three-ten a week', '[o]ne of the lowly ones', but Rhys's alternative title for the poem, 'I'm a Dreamer, Aren't We All?', connects him to an anonymous mass of the oppressed. The faceless plural authority of the poem (the 'masters') conceals the fact of the clerk's toil with the opium of the twentieth century, dreams of

[...] paying off my 'easy terms'  
Conducted rambles for my holidays,  
Football, and getting drunk on Saturday,

The wilder fantasies with which they dope him come from American mass culture, an aeroplane's trip across the Atlantic:

Sometimes I take a flight and dream of luscious film-stars,  
Smart restaurants, cars that break record.....

And then wake, snarling.....

To dream again of film-stars,  
Murders, thefts.....

[...]

I grow old, my masters, dreaming the dreams you give me,  
Dreaming, by your kind permission, of film-stars,  
Murders, Monte Carlo, asters in my garden....

The fantasies of murdering his masters are suggested to him by the dreams of American movies that they supply, dreams that serve to quell those very aggressions. This literally vicious cycle echoes the violent and nightmarish aspects of dreaming in *Good Morning, Midnight*. Indeed, published just a few years before, the poem relates to Rhys's ideas for the novel. Sasha's anger towards her employer in a couture shop is expressed as a similarly repressed assault, in this case verbal. After an imaginary tirade between the worker and the boss who represents Society, in which Sasha wishes him 'a lot of trouble', she sighs, 'Did I say all this? Of course I didn't. I didn't even think it' (Rhys 2000b: 26). Thinking is suppressed in 'I Buy Your Dreams' too:



If I should think?  
But that's  
What you try  
So hard  
To stop.  
Don't you?

As in the poem, in *Good Morning, Midnight* Rhys responds to American authority. The novel registers the power of the dollar and associated cultural developments, from the perceived 'invasion' of American tourists and residents in Paris, which reached a startling peak in the mid-1920s, to the concurrent changes affecting the French fashion industry as a result of the dominance of American buyers. Although Paris had been a destination for elite Americans since Franklin and Jefferson visited, it was the overseas mobilisation of more than two million soldiers and support staff during the First World War that transformed the size and character of the American community in Paris. This contingent began to include 'businessmen, diplomats, and journalists, a small but vibrant African American crowd, bohemian cliques of illustrious lights and eccentric riffraff, and troupes of college students and fellows' (Blower 2011: 6). The number of permanent residents rose from 8,000 in 1920 to 32,000 in 1923 to an estimated 40,000 high point during the mid- and late twenties. Americans ranked among the ten largest foreign populations in Paris.<sup>68</sup> And by the mid-1920s hundreds of thousands of American tourists visited each year. Thirty thousand had made the trip in 1919; 400,000 did it in 1925 (Blower 2011: 22). Americans themselves recognised the effects of this influx, calling it an 'occupation' (cited Blower 2011: 6) and commenting on the rapid 'Americanisation', which to one newspaper recalled 'the growth of a Middle West city twenty or thirty years ago' (Blower 2011: 45). They also noticed the growing fears of their hosts about the same phenomenon: one American correspondent diagnosed an 'obsession' on the part of the French (Blower 2011: 55). Brooke Blower writes:

Aware of Americans' growing confidence and changing relationship to the capital, Parisians deplored how visitors paraded brashly through the city center as if Paris existed solely for their own enjoyment. [...] In time, Americans became associated with a broad range of social

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<sup>68</sup> Blower 2011 points out that this is difficult to ascertain reliably due to many visitors avoiding the registration process.

practices, cultural aesthetics, and other subtle details [...] a cluster of values and symbols believed to be characteristic of a uniquely modern and urban civilization modeled by the United States. (57)

As Blower describes, against these cultural and social practices – advertising, the English language, a highly visible nightlife, racialisation – there was some refusal: ‘French itself signified for some a defiant, local authenticity’ and the ‘café-concert, surviving on the fringes of Paris’s new nightlife, served as another particularly strong bastion of French resistance’ (86). A city of two sides developed in the public imagination: on the one hand the materialistic Paris of the foreigners, and on the other an authentic, ‘healthy, quiet, sensible’ Paris of the French (85). But as Blower points out: ‘What it meant to be French was no more static or fully formed a concept than what it meant to be an American’ (87). The association of America with commercial culture, for example, ignores the longer history of French progress in this area. Cars, department stores, advertising posters and film were all pioneered in France. Even neon lighting, a blazing symbol of American hedonism in Paris, was invented by a Frenchman (87). Fashion, too, is a key site of both French commercial innovation and claims for immunity from such concerns (Troy 2003).

As we saw in the case of *The Left Bank*, Rhys’s writing opens up many of these biases, associations and contradictions. Her time in Paris coincides with the first major signs of American commercialisation – whose presence in her work I will shortly explore further – and yet I have read the stories that she wrote there for their continuities with nineteenth-century French spectacular society. Her Parisian fiction is often placed on the side of the ‘healthy’ or ‘real’ side of Paris.<sup>69</sup> One of the aims of this chapter is to show her natural inclination towards a native Paris and French culture more generally. And yet she is also aware of romanticising, of her investment in myth and illusion. Not to mention that Rhys’s work invokes (and describes) a much wider territory than Europe and America. What in fact emerges is a picture of interwar Paris whose material specificity is related – by Rhys, but also by her contemporaries – to an array of cultural, political and ideological issues, many of which are connected to other times and places. In the analysis of Rhys’s work that follows, America is present, as it was for the natives with whom she often sympathised, but it contributes (as it did for others) to the articulation of a number of associated concerns.

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<sup>69</sup> Rhys herself separated ‘the real Paris’ from that of the ‘Montparnos’ (“America in Paris” or “England in Paris”), suggesting that she saw and loved ‘something of the other Paris’ (1985: 280).

Certainly, ‘tout Paris’ is part of this. *The Left Bank* and *Quartet*, as we saw, direct a certain amount of irony, mistrust or straightforward bile towards the expatriate colony of Montparnasse. They are often English, but Rhys’s prejudices against that nation appear to influence this characterisation rather than any identifiable historical impetus. Her prevailing use of the French term ‘Anglo-Saxon’ suggests the same elision made by the French between American and English, and an implicit siding with France.<sup>70</sup> If French disdain was reserved largely for the more extensive (and visible) American community, Rhys redirects this towards her own *bête noire*. But many of the observations that she makes about the Anglo-Saxon colony and its influence suggest American particulars, as I explored earlier in relation to *The Left Bank*. In *Quartet* the inauthenticity of the Englishman Heidler is connected to a billboard poster for Savon Cadum raised high above the Gare Montparnasse, a brand whose adverts featuring the face of a baby appeared all over Paris from the mid-twenties. If in 1924 Giorgio di Chirico thought the advert’s ‘gigantic putto’ rose ‘with the troubling of solemnity of ancient myths’ (Fagiolo 1982, cited Higonet 2002: 376–7), according to Blower many criticised the campaign as a pernicious example of Americanisation, Joseph Roth, for one: ‘The baby may be the brainchild of a French soap manufacturer, but it’s more than just an ad.’ It was ‘a symbol of America: America over Paris’ (Roth 2004: 27, cited Blower 2011: 74). Rhys seems to be drawing on such contemporary fears about insincerity and national authority.<sup>71</sup>

In Blower’s account, these kinds of visible signs of American power were perceived as part of an overall ‘noise’, both visual and aural. ‘[A]ll sorts of objects punctuating the horizon [...] were often interpreted as omens of a debasing cosmopolitanism or an invading Americanism ready to overtake the capital’s charms’ (2011: 73). French had ceased to be the popular language in certain areas in the city, and frequently English-language signage was adopted (72), as if internationalism signalled transformation into a kind of Babel (73). As the soap billboard suggests, Rhys’s fiction records the same kind of ‘noise’ – not only street noises as you might expect from urban literature, but sounds and images that bear national associations, as I have proposed

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<sup>70</sup> As in this comment in *L’Oeuvre*: ‘France is becoming an Anglo-Saxon colony. There are too many parasites here, eating our food, drinking our wine, going untaxed, and paying ridiculously little for everything they consume, thanks to the exchange.’ Cited and translated in Blower 2011: 70. Blower writes: ‘More and more, when French pundits talked about “Anglo-Saxon” or “Anglo-American” threats to “Latin” values, their arguments often devolved into more specific grievances about Americans’ (2011: 69).

<sup>71</sup> As Rhys acknowledged in her *Left Bank* stories, such attitudes to commercialisation had older precedents. Baudelaire lamented that ‘Pitiful man is so Americanized by zoocratic and industrial philosophers’ (cited Higonet 2002: 275).

in the case of popular music. She creates collage of sounds – fragments of speech and song, heard from windows, through hotel walls or through the doors of a *tabac* – that speak both of modernist textuality and cosmopolitan realities. The French-language elements of these, which are common, may be evidence of her affiliation; they certainly contribute to a general sense of a diverse city in which various affiliations might be demanded.

For Rhys's Paris fiction registers not just a city of American and English visitors, but what Blower describes as the world's leading destination for immigrants in the period, newcomers from Europe, Africa and the Caribbean who came looking for work or fleeing their situations at home. Rhys's stories – 'The Sidi', 'Trio' – attest to this transforming metropolis and resulting tensions with natives, while her novels, too, are written against the backdrop of a 'city sat poised on a brink of an increasingly unstable and politicized world', absorbing 'an explosive mix of [...] refugees and activists'. 'Paris during these decades was, arguably, among the most polarized places in the world' (Blower 2011: 8–9). Thus, in *Good Morning, Midnight*, Sasha wears imitation Russian clothes and the Russian artists she befriends play Bedouin music, confused symbols that signify new routes of travel and new modes of interaction across borders, as well as conflict and displacement. The context of fascism in Europe and the Soviet Union gives a darker hue to these cultural clashes and instances of ethnic hybridisation.

The influx from the United States, therefore, was only partly responsible for the xenophobia that tainted Paris at this time. Parisian attitudes towards the American presence were situated in and inflamed by a broader context, 'an increasingly unstable and politicized world'. It is in this context, one regularly adopted as an appropriate critical lens through which to view Rhys's work, that we might assess her own attitude towards Americanisation and such associated issues as standardisation and authenticity, thinking about her writing in terms of a hybridisation broader than only the colonial – and of cultural as well as national imperialism. The relationship between these issues and the American presence in Rhys's mind is clearly expressed in *Good Morning, Midnight* by instances of tourism. After one of her meditations on the deadening similarity of hotel rooms ('A beautiful room with a bath? A room with a bath? [...] All rooms are the same.'), Sasha overhears two American visitors dutifully admiring portraits of Rimbaud and Verlaine, and observing with mild curiosity that they had lived here together (33). Her imagined response is a frustrated defence against blandishments about two French poets we know Rhys valued highly, and gestures towards the tourists' unease with cultural difference: "Yes, he lived here too. They both lived here. The lived here together. Well now, isn't that interesting" (34).

The question of taking sides with the French against the superficiality of American tourists also drives Sasha's recollection of her stint as a tour guide for American Express when she was last living in Paris. This most popular of travel agents at Place de l'Opéra, as Sasha's account states, was a vital centre of American expatriate living. Serving 13,000 visitors in the summer months by 1927, it was also used by semi-permanent American residents (including Emma Goldman and Henry Miller) as a mailing address (Blower 2011: 22). Factually specific, Rhys's account of a job she may well have held herself also witnesses the attitudes of American tourists described by Blower:

More and more, American audiences were expected to have detailed familiarity with not only the city's famous monuments but also other, more obscure places and people. To be culturally literate required understanding references to the Arc de Triomphe and the Louvre, but also to the *bouquinistes*, the races at Longchamp, the Ritz, and Zelli's. (Blower 2011: 42)

'Thus, once Americans arrived to Paris, they knew exactly where to go' (43). As do Sasha's 'very rich and very sad' clients:

Now she wants to be taken to the exhibition of Loie Fuller materials, and she wants to be taken to the place where they sell that German camera which can't be got anywhere else outside Germany, and she wants to be taken to a place where she can buy a hat which will épater everybody she knows and yet be easy to wear, and on top of all this she wants to be taken to a certain exhibition of pictures. But she doesn't remember the man's name and she isn't sure where the exhibition is. However, she knows that she will recognize the name when she hears it. (Rhys 2000b: 27)

Sasha enlists the help of others in service positions – 'waiters, old ladies in lavabos, girls in shops' – to find the name. 'They all respond. There is a freemasonry among those who prey upon the rich' (27).<sup>72</sup> The passage speaks of a voracious and superficial cultural imperialism; the strength of the dollar; the visitors' preoccupation with images – shorthand for inauthenticity – and their tendency to standardise varied cultural phenomena; and the solidarity of a native working class. Sasha's reaction to losing her job at American

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<sup>72</sup> The line is an adaptation of one of Maupassant's in 'Boule de Suif'.

Express is typical: she longs for a black dress she had coveted in a previous job in a couture house. The threat of standardisation posed by the American tourists, and Sasha's own indeterminacy without a job, is potentially redeemed by fashion: 'If I could get it everything would be different' (28).

A set of issues related to the American Express role is at stake in Rhys's evocation of a dress-house, which comes a little earlier in the novel. For those observing changes in the fashion industry in France, the dominant American presence in certain parts of Paris was directly related to American authority (economic and, as a result, aesthetic) in the French fashion market. American buyers and expatriates were not the same groups, of course: representatives from American department stores, manufacturers and boutiques travelled over for the seasonal presentations. Writing about the importance of clothing in the French economy, Robert Wilson described 'about twelve hundred American men and women travelling twice a year or oftener across the ocean on this professional errand and bringing with them into the leisurely city a breeze of American zip and bustle' (cited Gronberg 1998: 26). And yet in one article of 1926, the 'invasion' of American tourists and visitors in what the author calls the 'territoire occupé' is a declaration of war equal to that waged by the 'barbarians' controlling the productivity of the top couture houses ('Une Académie française', BMD: DM). The French journalist reports from one of the spring presentations, a glamorous show for an audience of 400, of which apparently only two are French. The models speak English and the catalogue is in English, all for the benefit of the American buyers, who, it is reported, are in aesthetic control of French couture as a result of the strength of the dollar. Nothing short of a threat to French culture (an 'aesthetic peril'), language and land, this hegemony is most seriously a danger to the economy, for French women can no longer afford to shop at the *grands couturiers*. The French shops are not for the French now: while French women are still elegant, they must make do with what is put on sale, the 'crumbs of strangers'.

The very same stratification along economic and national lines is registered in *Good Morning, Midnight*, for Sasha's dress-house is one of those 'still with a certain prestige – anyhow among the French – but its customers were getting fewer and fewer' (Rhys 2000b: 16). Coming directly before her recollection of the tour-guide job, Sasha's role as a *vendeuse* carries a similar set of implications about national tensions.<sup>73</sup> These scenes in the shop are confused and nightmarish encounters of different languages and national identities, characteristics and priorities. Sasha's disorientation in the face of

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<sup>73</sup> In an unpublished story 'And Paris – Sinister', fashion figures as a trade exclusively catering to rich American residents (McF: JR 1.1.6).

the impersonal owner (an Englishman, although this again reflects Rhys's particular distaste for the English) echoes a period of international tension, in politics and industry, as the priorities of capitalism were perceived to threaten authentic values. Caroline Evans has documented the ways in which American production techniques permeated the trade in France. Dependent on providing model dresses for the US industry, couture houses had to adapt to its industrialised modes of working. Couturiers themselves realised that: 'The haute couturier, who is an artist, must also be a company director, a bank manager, and a factory owner' (cited Evans 2008: 255). *Good Morning, Midnight* registers the disturbing sense of paradox that arose from this compromise. Sasha's boss at the couture house is not the couturier, who tellingly does not appear in the story, apparently replaced by the anonymous (and not French) Mr Blank. If his name is that of a faceless bureaucracy, it also suggests the bank, underlined by his sending Sasha to find the cashier. Her misunderstanding of Mr Blank's poor French accent results in a disorienting struggle to locate the cash office, Rhys's symbol for a clash of languages and cultural priorities: 'Kise – Kise ... It doesn't mean a thing to me. He's got me in such a state I can't imagine what it can mean' (Rhys 2000b: 22).

As Evans argues, the adoption of production-line techniques extended to the female body, which in the early fashion shows with living models was treated as a standardised unit. Earlier I touched on mechanical conceptions of the female body and the implications for identity. In *Good Morning, Midnight*, Rhys reflects on many of the same issues. She uses the hybridity of fashion – between industry and art, uniformity and distinction – and the related implications for female subjectivity both to worry about the spectre of standardisation and to explore the possibility of coherent identity through belonging. The fashion trade in interwar France was overwhelmingly female, a 'feminised industry [...] serving a feminine clientele' as Mary Lynn Stewart has observed (2008: 97), but it was also a site of unrest. Nearly a quarter of Paris's population of four million worked in the women's garment industry, most of them women and girls. Of huge economic significance, the industry was also an index of class divides, for fractious industrial relations characterised the period (Stewart 2008: 92). In this feminised, polarised context (in a national sense, too, as discussed), and against the masculine authority of her two managers (part of what Jennifer Milligan calls the book's 'oppressive masculinized landscape' [1999: 284]), Sasha's job in the dress-house offers her opportunities for identification with a group of female French women,

consumers and workers alike.<sup>74</sup> First she connects her suffering with that of a customer she had served – ‘I cry for a long time – for myself, for the old woman with the bald head, for all the sadness of this damned world’ (Rhys 2000b: 25) – while simultaneously, a dress that is being held for her might have bolstered her sense of self in the difficult encounters with the owner. It ‘has been worn by a lot of mannequins’ and yet ‘it is my dress’ (25). A saleswoman has been kind and promised to keep it for her. Somewhere between the solidarity of a network of working women and the individualism permitted by this black dress with wide sleeves embroidered in vivid colours, Sasha feels she would have had the self-possession to deal with the impersonality represented by Mr Blank. But in a further dialectical move, we learn that the dress costs the same as Sasha’s monthly salary: the possibility of distinction and happy identification is disturbed by the thought that she is interchangeable with her outfit, merely one unit in a system of exchange. The Marxist echoes in this interpretation are not lost on me: the idea of social relations being mediated by things, the fetishisation of the commodity, which appears to possess magic powers. Rhys’s tenuous sense of community emerges from within a system in which it is always threatened.

#### **‘[H]OPE [...] AND YET MORE HOPE’**

I have been developing a context in which I will now read one final fashion scene in *Good Morning, Midnight*. The context I have described is one of national and local conflicts and affiliations, of unresolved tensions between uniformity and difference, in which the relationship between the individual and society – the troubled possibility of community that obsesses Rhys and her female characters – is often mediated by fashion. This scene is set in the salon of a celebrity hairdresser, which Sasha visits as part of her transformation act. Her desire for transformation is felt even more keenly after a humiliating encounter with two English women who sneer at Sasha’s appearance. The hairdresser scene comes immediately after Sasha’s memories of losing her baby son. Hairdresser and the midwife are explicitly compared, their roles pertaining to two current, conflicting, images of modern femininity, the mother and the modish woman. The hairdresser, Félix, is likened to Monsieur Antoine (one of Barnes’s subjects for *Charm*, discussed in Chapter 1.2), responsible for some of the more radical styles of the early twentieth century. The scene in the hair salon, then, articulates the difficul-

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<sup>74</sup> Milligan 1999 also stresses the apparent need in the novel ‘for a special, intimate space [...] in which women may more freely bond and communicate’ (285).



ty of negotiating these types, and responds to Sasha's disidentification with expatriate women.

Like the couture house, this space draws on the characterisation discussed earlier of Paris as a woman's city, a historical association made through consumerism and visual display. Flicking through a set of French women's magazines, Sasha imagines an extension to this feminine community united by the fantasy and novelty offered by fashion, a bond with native French women based on aesthetic self-determination in a consumer context. Rhys uses the conceit of a readers' letters page to create an imagined community of women in the same position as Sasha. Her interior monologue at this point becomes a conversation with the editors of the magazine and two correspondents who mirror the roles between which Sasha has been torn, the *femme moderne* and the mother:

'*Pierrette Clair de la Lune* – No, mademoiselle, your letter is nonsensical. You will never get thin that way – never. Life is not so easy. [...]'

'*Petite Maman* [...] you are not reasonable. Love is one thing; marriage – alas! – is quite another. If you haven't found that out yet you soon will, I assure you' (Rhys 2000b: 52–53)

'Clair de la lune' is a folk song, and 'Petite Maman' also suggests the *petit peuple* with whom Sasha has consistently identified, popular references that invoke an imaginary network of anonymous, ordinary readers. But as well as community, self-determination is encouraged in these letters, a dual purpose that characterised many women's magazines in the period. One of the stack that Sasha reads, *Femina*, has received considerable scholarly attention. Its role in reconciling old and new identities and expectations, its negotiation of American culture in the context of French fashion, and its mix of graphic illustration and photography, of artistic subjects and sensibility, and commercial content, make it a particularly interesting case for women's studies in a wide cultural sphere.

Rachel Mesch (2013) describes the *Femina* of the pre-war years as negotiating traditional models of femininity and the *femme moderne*. Emphasising transformation, this compromise was projected as an achievable fantasy in the magazine, which Mesch evokes as a kind of virtual salon. In this 'unique discursive space', a network of editors and readers collaborate on a new model of womanhood that reconciles femininity with consumerism, and encourages women to develop their own creative and critical voices:

*Femina* cultivated its readers as a community, referring to them con-

sistently and throughout each issue directly as ‘chères lectrices’ [dear readers]. The directness of this second person address encouraged readers to see themselves as fully part of, indeed implicated in, a conversation, rather than simply observers. [...] the repeated invocation of the magazine’s plurality of female readers served as a reminder to each individual that she was not alone, but rather part of a shared community of women that was separate, distinct and special. (Mesch 2013: 38)<sup>75</sup>

Rhys evokes this same territory in the hair salon, creating in that physical women’s space an imagined space of interaction and improvement, based similarly on fantasy and aesthetic transformation inspired by the magazine:

No, mademoiselle, no, madame, life is not easy. Do not delude yourselves. [...] But there is hope (turn to page 5), and yet more hope (turn to page 9). ...

I am in the middle of a long article by a lady who has had her breasts lifted when he takes the dryer off my head. (2000b: 53)<sup>76</sup>

We recognise the direct and intimate address, but Rhys seems to have less faith in authentic creative and communal possibilities. Sasha is arch about the role of the magazine in offering hope in the form of physical perfection, and her own complicity in cleaving to such homogenising visions. She leaves the salon with ‘a very good blond cendré’ (53), a satisfactory example of a type.

But in a body of work in which communities appear hostile and suspicious, and relationships are generally unequal, an imperfect but clearly felt affiliation enabled by consumerism is Rhys’s best hope. That self-determination and community are brief and uncertain here reflects the fantasy structure of fashion and its dialectics – between the individual and the mass, distinction and uniformity – as well as the shared realities of Rhys’s modern women, trying to define themselves in the shadow of standardisation and with the help of illusion.

Sasha leaves the hairdresser thinking she will fret about her new look for days, but instead forgets herself and instinctively heads to the Luxembourg Gardens, feeling content. There she stands watching forlorn-looking fish in a pond; three are red and one gold. Intermittently, other visitors join

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<sup>75</sup> See also Beetham 2006.

<sup>76</sup> This recalls the fantasy offered by the hotel room earlier in the novel: ‘I’ll escape from mine, into room number 219. Just try me, just give me a chance’ (Rhys 2000b: 32).

her and they form a row. They come from a procession of shabby women wheeling prams and men buttoned up in black overcoats. The sad display of fish, mostly uniform but for the singular gold one, and this small audience of momentarily united strangers are symbols of Rhys's best hopes for community, as prefigured in the salon scene: imaginative, briefly held among the anonymous or downtrodden, and existing only within a spectacular context in which distinction is usually outdone by standardisation. True to the restless promise of fashion, this still and strangely peaceful image is immediately disturbed by Sasha's renewed thoughts of self-determination through clothes: 'I must go and buy a hat this afternoon ... and tomorrow a dress. I must get on with the transformation act' (53).

## Chapter 2.2

### Jean Rhys in Fashion

#### THE FEEDBACK LOOP

The idea that Rhys became fashionable instinctively seems inaccurate. In work and life she promoted an image of herself living ‘outside the machine’, as one of her stories is titled. But she herself acknowledged her complex feelings towards the machine, admitting that ‘I *hate* publicity and the public’ and yet she longed for her work ‘to be understood and read and so on. A hell of a mix up is my poor mind’ (Rhys 1985: 235). Indeed, once established, her relationship with the mass media was reciprocal, a symbiosis that permeates the writing and reception of her work. She was quietly eager for exposure from the time she was ‘rediscovered’ in the late 1940s. In November 1949 the actress Selma Vaz Dias placed an advert in the *New Statesman* asking for information about the whereabouts of Jean Rhys. Nothing had been heard of her since *Good Morning, Midnight*, which, like her other interwar books, had been highly praised for its style but had not earned her any lasting renown (Savory 2009: 106–07). Vaz Dias wanted permission to adapt *Good Morning, Midnight* for radio. Rhys saw the advert and immediately contacted her, a renewed relationship with the literary world that – after a further period of lost contact – eventually led to the publication of her final book *Wide Sargasso Sea* in 1966.<sup>77</sup> The attention had fed her desire to write: ‘I am really very grateful to you,’ she told Vaz Dias in 1949, ‘for I was convinced that I never wished to write again, and now I do – even rather badly’ (Rhys 1985: 62). Vaz Dias’s passionate interest in adapting Rhys’s work marked the beginning of a long-standing creative relationship, during which Rhys often proposed further material for broadcast, including ideas specifically for television or radio.<sup>78</sup> Sasha Moorsom, the BBC producer of the eventual broadcast of *Good Morning, Midnight* in 1957, recalled its effect on Rhys in

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<sup>77</sup> Angier 1990 documents the reappearance of Rhys on the literary scene, and the writing and great success of *Wide Sargasso Sea*.

<sup>78</sup> Hollis 2000 gives a thorough account of the uneasy relationship between Vaz Dias and Rhys. For Rhys’s broadcasting ideas, see Rhys 1985: 144, 147, 149–50, 156.

terms of sustenance: it was ‘almost as if she was in cold storage, waiting for someone to warm her up, so she could start living again as a writer’. But Moorsom also articulated the other side of what was certainly a mutually rewarding relationship: with its distinctive first-person voice, *Good Morning, Midnight* was ‘perfect for radio’ (‘I’ll Have to Go On’, BL: S).

Rhys’s writing represents and was subject to such cultural feedback, a relationship between the work and its public context that was the subject of *The Left Bank* stories discussed earlier. If that collection borrowed terms from fashion’s cyclical temporality, here I would like to show that the same is true of the post-war revival of her interwar work. A number of recent critical texts have addressed the dizzying ways in which Rhys’s work relates to its context, from its publication history to Rhys’s own autobiography (Goldman 2011, Kalliney 2013). Notably, several do so in the context of fashion (see Karl 2009). To these I will add, with some constitutive tangle, that fashion’s quotation of past styles, its consumption of historical precedents, is as relevant to Rhys’s fiction as it is to the process by which her fiction became fashionable in the 1960s and 1970s. This chapter focuses, then, on what Aaron Jaffe would call the ‘afterlife’ of Rhys’s interwar work, whereby value is assigned to the writing by ‘cadres of reverent “readers”’ (Jaffe 2005: 14). It surveys the popularisation of Rhys and her writing, outlining the way in which her post-war reputation was shaped in the mass media.

In line with Jonathan Goldman (2011) and John Xiros Cooper (2004 and 2010), for whom modernist texts aesthetically express values fundamental to mass culture, I suggest that this representation in the mass media repeated certain structures and themes already discussed in the work itself. This is also to say that the work adumbrated the terms of its popularisation. Or instead: that mass culture set the terms for Rhys’s work and its reception. These are perhaps the only logical conclusions for a writer who perceptively addressed the relationship between art and mass culture. Such a ‘coming to pass’ implies both Rhys’s clear-sightedness about certain forms of modernity and their ubiquity. Crucially, the relationship between work and world identified here also follows – although this may be another iteration of the same conclusions – the logic of fashion, which repeats past forms, anticipates future styles and, Karl writes, ‘embodies the primacy of exchange and circulation under capital’ (2009: 22).

#### **‘CULTURE HERO’**

By the time *Wide Sargasso Sea* was published in 1966, and thanks to the editor and critic Francis Wyndham, Rhys already had the beginnings of a re-

newed, strong reputation.<sup>79</sup> Even after the success of that novel, when her publishing career was in full throttle, this thriving industry was centred on the recycling of her interwar work. At least one of the earlier novels was reissued in the UK and/or the US in hardback or paperback in each of the eight years following the publication of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. In 1968 a selection of stories from *The Left Bank* was reprinted and updated with a set of ‘new’ short works, most written two decades previously and often set in an earlier era (Rhys 1968). The reissues generated media attention that extended far beyond reviews. Profiles, interviews and a number of photographs by such leading figures as Bill Brandt and Fay Godwin (fig. 2.10) appeared in newspapers and women’s magazines, and in the early 1970s television producers found Rhys’s work (both the reissues and the ‘new’ stories) to be fertile ‘existing material’ (one BBC Existing Material Brief describes Rhys as a ‘very distinguished novelist’) (29 December 1971. BBC: JR RCont20). Although the corporation’s negotiations with Rhys’s agent Margaret Ramsay were often fruitless, given that a number of the novels were under option for film rights in this period, BBC records reveal extensive use of extracts of Rhys’s fiction on radio arts programming throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s (BBC: JR RCont20). Several stories with interwar themes were dramatised, and Tristram Powell’s edition of *Omnibus*, featuring the award-winning actress Eileen Atkins as a composite of Rhys’s fictional heroines, made extensive use of the words and atmosphere of her 1930s novels.<sup>80</sup>

By 1974 Rhys’s reputation had spread across the Atlantic. As Wyndham had championed her work in the 1950s and 1960s, the poet and critic Al Alvarez became an advocate in the 1970s, proclaiming her in the *New York Times Book Review* to be ‘The Best Living English Novelist’ (1974). The encomium had an immediate effect, generating further publications and media attention. ‘It’s high time the Americans were told about your books. I only hope they now go out and buy them,’ Alvarez wrote to Rhys (25 March 1974. BL: AA 88595). And they did: from 1974 the demand for her fiction in the US was clear, as Vintage brought out the first paperbacks that year. A year later Alvarez was encouraging her to take up an invitation to New York: ‘After all, you are a great culture hero there. Which is as it should be; the only absurdity is that it didn’t happen 40 years ago’ (24 November 1975. BL: AA 88595).

Rhys and her work had become fashionable, a development officially sanctioned by Julie Kavanagh’s 1974 profile of the ‘lost’ author in *Women’s Wear Daily* (fig. 2.7). Originally an American fashion trade journal, by this

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<sup>79</sup> For a fuller account of this rehabilitation see my article, Oliver 2016.

<sup>80</sup> ‘The Jean Rhys Woman’, first aired BBC1, 24 November 1974.



point *WWD* was a 'fashion gossip' magazine with a mass market, decreeing who and what were the latest social and cultural phenomena (Kelly 1972: 6). In late 1974, it seems, Rhys was. Indirectly referring to Alvarez and the effects of his praise, Kavanagh writes of a Rhys 'cult'. Aside from this currency, the article seeks further justification for her relevance to readers of a fashion magazine: Rhys is 'keen to keep the conversation on fashion' and '[b]oth she and the heroines in her books think a lot about clothes'. More compelling is Kavanagh's appreciation of echoes of the fashion system in the resurfacing of Rhys's earlier work: the article is titled 'Rhys-cycled'.

Similarly, a British feature from the previous year connected Rhys's notoriety with her engagement with clothes, to the extent that she and her work come to exemplify fashion and its dialectical logic. In February 1973 the 82-year-old Rhys, once a jobbing mannequin, was given her own fashion shoot in *The Sunday Times*, styled by the notorious fashion editor Molly Parkin (fig. 2.8). Rhys is presented as visually of a moment that had just past: an erstwhile 'dolly bird', a stereotype associated with 1960s London but with precedents in the era of her own young adulthood (Beward 2004: 168).<sup>81</sup> She wears heavy kohl eyeliner, false eyelashes and clothes from Ritva, Lord John, Caroline Charles and Lucienne Phillips – Chelsea and Kensington labels and boutiques that had helped to make London a fashion capital in the previous decade (Parkin 1973). Rhys had also worked as a saleswoman in a forerunner of the 1960s boutique, on Bond Street, she recalled in a letter to her daughter in 1965 (Rhys 1985: 294). The photographs were taken for *The Sunday Times* by Norman Eales, whose images of the real dollies Jean Shrimpton and Twiggy had appeared in such youthful mass-market magazines as *Vogue*, *Queen* and *Cosmopolitan* (Condon 1992).

The justification for this feature is given in the text. Contemporary quotes from Rhys, collaged together with long citations from her interwar writing, support the relevance of clothes to this celebrity author (again the word 'cult' is mentioned). In this sense the piece is almost literary, and in fact seems to borrow from Rhys's fiction, with its blend of temporalities and short, discrete sections of suggestive text, left juxtaposed for the reader to make connections across them. The image of a present-day fashionable Rhys – and that of a recently fashionable London, a latter-day bohemia – is understood through the fashion-consciousness of her fictional characters and the association with interwar Paris, the mythical home of couture, bohemianism and modernism (it is noted that she was a contemporary of Joyce, Fitzgerald and Hemingway). The article thus distils the dialectic of fashion,

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<sup>81</sup> By 1973 'the idea of "Swinging London" [...] had lost those connotations of excitement and new possibilities' (Beward 2004: 151).



which Rhys herself had recognised in *The Left Bank*: the constant production of novelty with reference to past forms.

This fashion-time that repeats the past, potentially unendingly, is alluded to with further quotations from Rhys's novels. From *Good Morning, Midnight*: 'My child, don't hurry. You have "eternity in front of you." She used to say that sarcastically, Sister Marie-Augustine, because I was so slow. But the phrase stayed with me.' And from *Voyage in the Dark*: 'It was one of those days when you can see the ghosts of all the other lovely days. You drink a bit and watch the ghosts of all the lovely days that have ever been from behind a glass.' (Parkin 1973) Rhys and her writing symbolise not just fashion but a particular time-consciousness, a version of modernity itself. To borrow Ilya Parkins's words, this is not solely the progress-oriented idea of modernity but one in which the new also has 'an unshakeable relationship with the old', as in Benjamin's writings (Parkins 2012: 26). According to this model, modernity's forms return with new relevance in the future. *The Sunday Times* fashion shoot reveals Rhys's modernism and the lovely days of interwar Paris returning to haunt her new readers.

#### **'HAUNTED TIMES'**

Echoing her own preoccupation with ghosts, critics of Rhys's work have often reached for spectral metaphors.<sup>82</sup> Reviewing *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Colin MacInnes, whose *Absolute Beginners* had reflected social tensions in 1950s London, described this novel set in the nineteenth century as a book for 'our own haunted times' (1966: 28). He appears to have taken the lead from Francis Wyndham's introduction to *Wide Sargasso Sea*, first published in 1964 as a preface to Part One of the novel in the journal *Art and Literature*, in which Wyndham compares Rhys's earlier books to those of her modernist contemporaries and finds 'how little the actual text has "dated"' (Rhys 1964: 176). This assessment recurs again and again in reviews of the reissued 1930s novels. For Francis Hope (1967), reviewing *Voyage in the Dark* and *Good Morning, Midnight*, '[t]he gap of 30 years seems insignificant.' So much so that he interprets *Good Morning, Midnight* in terms of contemporary popular culture: its protagonist Sasha Jensen's 'walks round Paris are as blankly miserable as Monica Vitti's strolls in front of Antonioni's camera'. To Hannah Carter, that novel seemed 'years ahead of its time' (1968: 5). De-

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<sup>82</sup> And continue to do so: Erica L. Johnson and Patricia Moran (2015b) explore Rhys's consistent return to 'a certain spectrality of existence' (1) in the introduction to their recent edited collection.

spite its particular geographic and temporal contexts, Rhys's interwar fiction appeared timeless to readers of the 1960s and 1970s, which is also to say that it appeared of their time. And of Rhys herself almost every article from the period repeated the same narrative, a quest for a missing author who was last seen in Paris in the 1930s and has been found living in rural Devon. Like an old style revived (two articles even identify a Jean Rhys 'revival' [Carter 1968: 5, Macauley 1976: 7]), she is 'Rip Van Rhys' (Davies 1966: 13), 'rediscovered' (Macauley 1976: 7); she has 're-emerged from obscurity' (Hope 1967: 26) – a contemporary icon whose persistent relevance is related to her past.<sup>83</sup> The trend is perfectly illustrated by a spread in *Vogue*, on which is printed one of Rhys's reissued interwar stories alongside pictures of 'Jean Rhys then' and 'Jean Rhys now' (fig. 2.9). Several high-profile photographers of the period captured her on a threshold – in a doorway or at a window – as if to underline her emergence from obscurity and her liminal residence in the past and the present (see fig. 2.10).

What was the appeal of Rhys's 1930s subject matter? Why in the 1960s and 1970s does her voice remain, as Al Alvarez puts it, 'young'? (1974: 7). What connects 'then' and 'now'? After the social and political movements of the 1960s, Elaine Savory proposes, post-war readers of Rhys's interwar novels were better able to appreciate the frank treatment of marginal figures that had shocked her original readers (2009: 108). In 1964 Francis Wyndham, a key participant in and commentator on 'Swinging London' (in *Queen* magazine and *The Sunday Times* colour supplement, for example), had identified a specific mood of the era, prophesied in Rhys's interwar writing:

the novels of the 1930s are much closer in *feeling* to life as it is lived and understood in the 1960s than to the accepted attitudes of their time. The elegant surface and the paranoid content, the brutal honesty of the feminine psychology and the muted nostalgia for lost beauty, all create an effect that is peculiarly modern. (Rhys 1964: 176)

The three stories that the BBC adapted for television in 1973, published in *Tigers Are Better-looking* in 1968 but set in interwar Paris or London, were originally broadcast on BBC2 as part of a series called 'Then and Now', '[s]ix new plays showing the work of women writers, three set in the 30s and three in the 70s' (*Radio Times*, 1–7 September 1973: 49).<sup>84</sup> The 'then' plays

<sup>83</sup> Seshagiri 2006 develops a different, more teleological, temporal narrative from the classic Jean Rhys 'revival' trope, in which the 'phoenix' of postcolonial literature arises from the 'ashes' of modernism.

<sup>84</sup> The Rhys stories adapted were: 'The Lotus', 6 September; 'Outside the Machine',

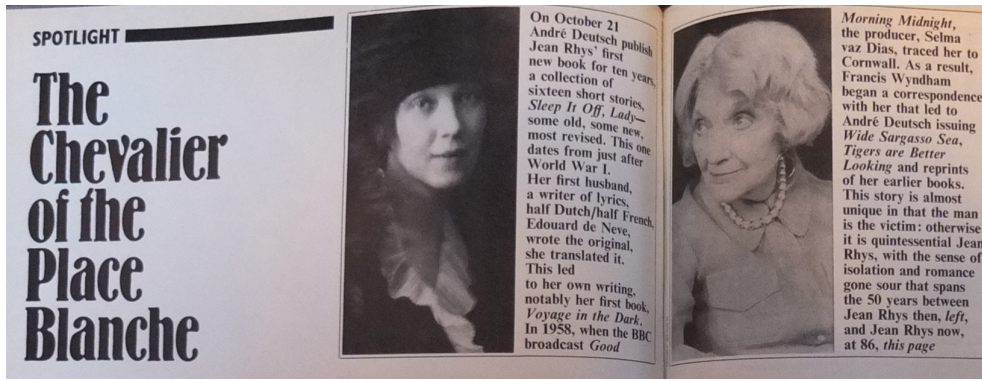


Fig. 2.9



Fig. 2.10

adapted from Rhys's stories are shown alternately with the 'now' plays, a structure that invites comparisons between the two periods and the themes of the writers, all concerned with female experience. With its disempowered women, Rhys's 'Outside the Machine', for example, foreshadows the contemporary feminist lens of Fay Weldon's contribution 'In Memoriam', whose oppressed mother, according to the *Radio Times* listing, is 'a classic female eunuch' (6–12 October 1973: 45).<sup>85</sup>

The BBC existing material brief for Rhys's stories describes them as 'Three ironic studies of the relationship between "respectable" people and social underdogs in which the respectable people are seen to be "as alarming as tigers"' (27 October 1972. BBC: JR RCont20). In a period in which racial minorities and women had become much more visible and vocal, Rhys's iconoclastic stories appeared prescient. They offer a bitter view of society divided between the powerful and the powerless. They seem to speak for those overlooked, like the ageing lady in 'The Lotus' (Rhys 1968: 107–19), or to observe the status quo overturned. In 'Tigers Are Better-looking' (Rhys 1968: 68–82), the white male writer Mr Severn, once one of the 'Untouchable[s]', is an endangered figure. A female music teacher (implied to be white since Mr Severn does not designate her race) longs to travel to South Africa, while a young black couple speak in cut-glass English accents. Hierarchies between black and white, centre and periphery, are ever-relevant and yet no longer clearly defined, and the authority of age and patriarchy endures precariously under pressure.

Rhys consistently obfuscated the politics of her work, but in one interview she appeared to acknowledge the link between her sympathy for 'the underdog' and contemporary minority politics:

Ford was struck by her 'instinct for form' and 'terrific – an almost lurid – passion for stating the case of the underdog.' Ms. Rhys smiles wryly, remembering the remark: 'They don't need me for that any more... Now the underdogs are barking for themselves.' (Kavanagh 1974: 26)

Going further still, she connected the autobiography she was writing at the end of her life with the turbulence of contemporary society. It is as if that which she had always been writing towards had finally come to pass, her

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20 September; and 'Tigers Are Better-looking', 1 October. The 'now' plays were Jill Hyem's 'Equal Terms', Edna O'Brien's 'Over' and Fay Weldon's 'In Memoriam'.

<sup>85</sup> To Hunter Davies, *Voyage in the Dark*, ending with an abortion, 'sounds like a 1930s Edna O'Brien' (1966: 13).

past pointing forwards to this future:

I've got a title, but the publisher's not pleased with it. They want to call it *Smile Please*, but I want to call it *And the Walls Came Tumbling Down*. That's what I feel is happening. Of course, I don't know. I only know what I read in the papers. (Vreeland 1979: 233)

She insisted on her distance from women's liberation (Rhys 1978: 70), and yet as second-wave feminism gathered pace, Rhys's interwar work offered critics and readers a strikingly modern case study of female oppression and patriarchal power. For the *Guardian* reviewer of the reissued *Quartet* and *After Leaving Mr Mackenzie* in 1969:

No one, with the possible exception of Ann Quin, has written so intimately of the subtle masochism of the 'free' woman in a world where men are masters. [...] Jean Rhys's achievement in these astonishing books is to distil and make lucid certain aspects of women's experience of the male. (Nye 1969: 9)

In 1976, in a substantial profile in the popular (non-radical) feminist magazine *Ms.*, among features on male contraceptives and how long a woman can wait to have a baby, Judith Thurman implicitly addressed the themes of (and challenges to) second-wave feminism through Rhys's typical female protagonist. Women's role in their own oppression ('She has submitted to a squalid complicity with her predators – their company, their protection, their money – in exchange for the pleasure she can give them as a victim') extends to mistrust of the 'sisterhood' and the damaging work of the male gaze: 'Jean Rhys's woman [...] has existed for the pleasure of the spectator. No one has noticed her mind because she has never really been – or been perceived as – an individual' (51–52).

In similar, though less theoretical terms, Rhys and her flawed female protagonists had appealed to the fashion and lifestyle magazine *Nova*, whose reader was intelligent and frank ('Women Who Don't Like Their Children', 'The Woman Who Drinks'), highly educated but equally highly sexualised, according to Val Williams (1998: 103). Beneath a photograph of a sultry Rhys smoking a cigarette, in 1967 Judy Froshaug wrote for *Nova* that Rhys 'has an uncanny understanding of people, particularly of women: women who spend their lives balanced between despair and a sort of frantic hopefulness, women alone, women who beg to be loved but expect to be rejected' (45). Such women, suffering from and resistant to increased freedoms,

had a place in *Nova*'s own complicated take on liberation, which it valued in concert with 'beauty, sexuality and success' (Williams 1998: 103).

For progressive women's media of the period, then, Rhys was a representative of 'the arts' but also a medium for the era's public conversations about gender and sexuality.<sup>86</sup> In 1973, as the so-called sexual revolution reached its peak and not long after the passage of legislation making abortion more widely available, her novel *Voyage in the Dark*, about the 'fall' of a chorus girl, provided London Weekend Television with an opportunity for two scenes of (post-coital) female nudity (BFI: N-89581).<sup>87</sup> Part of a series called 'Between the Wars', with a jazz-age themed introduction, the programme self-consciously looks back, using costume especially to designate the period. Explicitly associating clothes and female sexuality – a connection that Rhys herself makes (Anna Morgan's pledge that she'll 'do anything for good clothes' suggests even the exchange of her body [1969a: 22]) and which the programme takes as a central motif – it also uses fashion to mark the novel's relevance to contemporary issues around the freedom and regulation of the female body.

These 'reverent "readers"' (Jaffe 2005: 14) of the 1960s and 1970s, those who collectively ensured Rhys's public afterlife, looked at her work of the interwar era in a way that made sense of their own. The social and political 'revolutions' of the post-war period seemed to have historical counterparts in the dissident attitudes of bohemianism. Indeed, Peter Kalliney identifies a causal relationship between Rhys's modernist dissidence, specifically her 'antagonism towards metropolitan literary culture', and her 'reinvention' as a 'postcolonial intellectual' when the market for postcolonial fiction was at its peak (2013: 241). Following a different trajectory in Rhys's career to that which I have traced, his point underlines a shared conclusion: Rhys's writing was subject to fashion. She envisaged it herself in *The Left Bank* when she used fashion to symbolise the compromises of art in a commercial world. Thinking about fashion, its cyclical nature and its dance between originality and repetition, Rhys's work anticipated its own mediation in the same terms. In the next chapter, I propose that Mina Loy responded directly and in the moment to the value of her work, creating in her novel *Insel* and in her late poetry a means by which to reflect aesthetically on her devalued reputation.

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<sup>86</sup> Correspondence in the McFarlin Library shows that *Mademoiselle* and *Cosmopolitan* solicited work from her (McF: JR 2.2.2; 2.6.2; 2.6.8), in addition to the stories published in *Vogue*. The consumption of Rhys's work in magazines promoting a liberal feminist agenda through consumerism contradicts Rhys's view of the constraints of consumerism on women. On the liberational consumerist agenda of *Ms.*, for example, see McCracken 1993.

<sup>87</sup> Broadcast 8 June 1973. The Abortion Act 1967 came into effect in April 1968.

## CHAPTER 3

# **‘In view of America’:<sup>1</sup> Mina Loy**

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<sup>1</sup> Loy 2014: 140.

## Chapter 3.1

# A Portrait of the Artist in the Age of Celebrity

### *Insel and the Julien Levy Gallery*

It is a truth almost universally acknowledged by her critics that in her day Mina Loy represented the archetypal modernist woman. They quote the 1917 *New York Sun* article that says Loy is ‘always half-way through the door into Tomorrow’ (‘Do You Strive...’ 1917). Or they might turn to Man Ray’s profile portrait of the poet with a thermometer hanging from her right ear (1920), which seems to suggest that Loy represents the avant-garde scene to the extent that she holds some equivalence with a Dada found object.

Perhaps we need to shift this uneasy equation of Loy with object and image. It has often been noted that while a clear sense of Loy’s fashionable appearance has survived, her poetry has had a more circuitous journey (not to mention her visual art, which barely survives at all).<sup>1</sup> Until recently, as Aaron Jaffe notes, Loy lacked a body of work in the public domain (2005: 100–01).<sup>2</sup> Sandeep Parmar contends that ‘Loy’s literary reputation has been hampered by a fixation on her physical presence’ (2013: 66). But we might

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<sup>1</sup> While Loy’s well-known interdisciplinarity is key to much of this chapter, my main focus will be her prose and poetry. Further work on her visual art, although needed, is complicated by how much has been lost. Burke 2012 gives us tantalising details about Loy’s lost paintings, such as titles gleaned from exhibition reviews and lists of works. More recently Zelazo 2015 has looked at Loy’s surviving collages as examples of ‘multisensual aesthetics’.

<sup>2</sup> The situation has changed, not least because we now have access to Loy’s prose works, a selection of which were published by Dalkey Archive Press, edited by Sara Crangle, in 2011. Loy is central to Davis’s and Jenkins’s *History of Modernist Poetry* (2015), as the editors acknowledge (13). With Stein she is one of two authors with an entire chapter devoted to her work. That it is written by Crangle underscores the value of the published body of work in Loy’s new position.



also do justice to Loy's own confrontation with her uncertain reputation – the subject of Chapters 3.1 and 3.2 – by introducing a more nuanced understanding of the requirement to be modern, addressing the way reputation is shadowed, like modernity itself, by obsolescence.

A different artwork helps set this scene. Joseph Cornell's 'daguerreotype object' *'Imperious Jewelry of the Universe' (Lunar Baedeker): Portrait of Mina Loy* (1938; fig. 3.1) is a small-scale framed box construction that was made in at least two versions. In each, another 1920 photograph of Loy by Man Ray is collaged against a background suggestive of the night sky. Arranged on top, and echoing the shape of, Loy's body are shards of glass, clearly emblematic of jewels – echoing the title of the work, a line from her poem 'Apology of Genius' (1922). Cornell depicts Loy according to her own aesthetic programme, the cosmological materialism of *Lunar Baedeker*, published by Robert McAlmon's Contact Editions in Paris in 1923. But by 1938, she was back in the United States, fleeing the war that dispersed an already waning avant-garde. She had not published anything new since 1931.<sup>3</sup> In this light, the 'genius' avant-gardist Mina Loy of the 1920s, represented by an old Man Ray photo and her Parisian little-press book of poetry, appears out of fashion. She is – like the daguerreotype that Cornell invoked – all but obsolete. Her achievement, although clearly admired by Cornell, is based on an earlier moment that she will fail to repeat.

Cornell's object – bijou, charming, seductive, yet broken – reminds us of Walter Benjamin's almost contemporaneous thoughts about fashion, the commodity and death. In both exposés for *The Arcades Project*, drafted in 1935 and 1939, he writes that fashion makes the living body into an object, aligning it with death and so with obsolescence. He quotes a line from Leopardi – 'Fashion: "Madam Death! Madam Death!"' – to illustrate that fashion invokes its demise as soon as it arrives (2002: 8, 18–19). The way in which fashions, sartorial and otherwise, make an ephemeral object of the subject is found in interesting guises throughout Loy's work. Here I will consider her work of the 1930s: the novel *Insel* and her employment as an agent for her son-in-law Julien Levy's art gallery, as documented through their correspondence. In these endeavours she negotiates through fashion the question of the subject as object, and the waxing and waning of reputation.

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<sup>3</sup>'Lady Laura in Bohemia' and 'The Widow's Jazz' appeared in the Spring 1931 issue of *Pogany*.

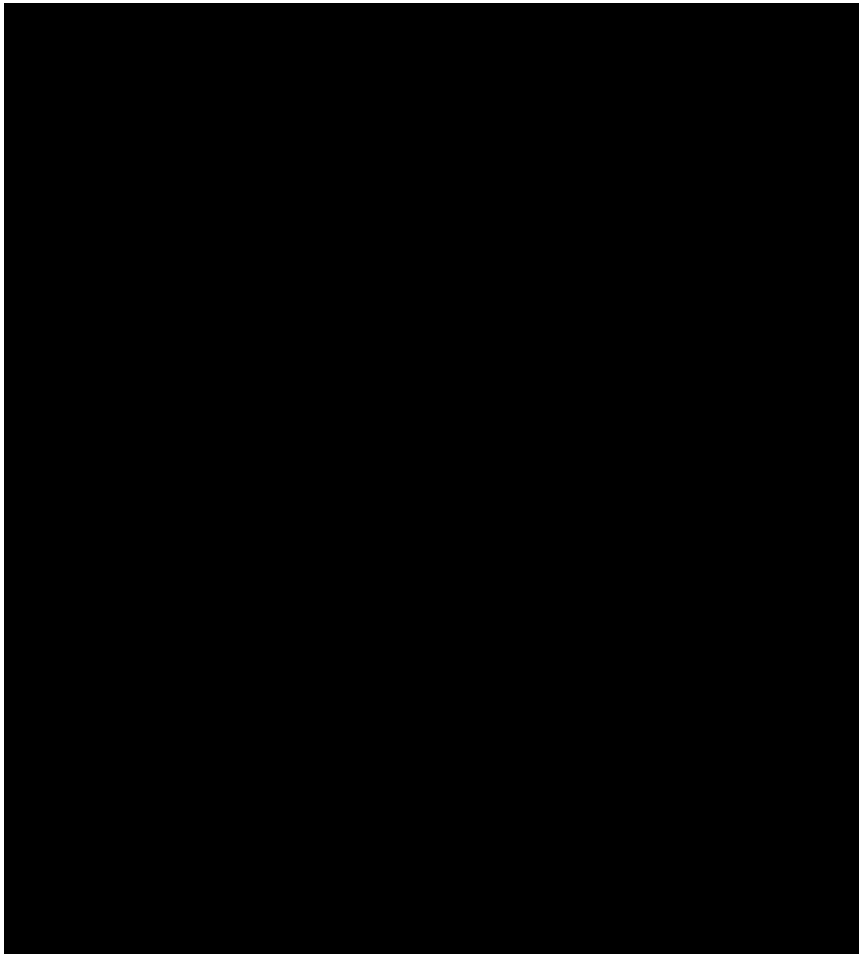


Fig. 3.1

*Insel* is a *Künstlerroman* that is also a story about its female narrator's own artistic identity. Originally conceived as part of Loy's immense (and unpublished) fictionalised autobiography 'Islands in the Air', and drafted from around 1936, the novel dramatises an intimate and fluctuating relationship between two artists: the eponymous male German painter of the title and Mrs Jones (an appropriately anonymous-sounding name, as we will see), who is also an agent for a New York gallery. The corresponding details of Loy's life are well known: between 1931 and 1936, after the closure of her lampshade business and the temporary cessation of her poetry, she acted as the Paris representative for the Julien Levy Gallery. As Levy's agent, Loy provided a link between artists in Paris (mainly those associated with Surrealism and Neo-Romanticism) and the American market, choosing works for Levy's approval, coordinating packing, shipping, customs requirements and insurance, and communicating the wishes of the dealer to the artists and vice versa.

In this capacity she met Richard Oelze (1900–1980), a German artist who arrived as an exile in Paris in 1933. Loosely associated with the Surrealists, Oelze made detailed figurative and landscape paintings whose lyrical, biomorphic forms also connect him to Neo-Romanticism. He had no reputation at the time, but this aesthetic at the crossroads of two movements enjoying a growing notoriety and market value in America must have marked Oelze as a new talent. Loy certainly recognised him as a remarkable subject for a book – a novel, this chapter argues, about artistic identity and reputation in the context of America's increasing dominance in the art world.

Many of the cultural contexts in which critics have read *Insel* point towards this national bias, from Christian Science's general sense of human improvement – arguably a form of American optimism and the perfection of the individual<sup>4</sup> – to David Ayers's assertion that one of the novel's subjects is 'the difference between economics and creativity' (2010: 221) and, more directly, to Tyrus Miller's compelling proposal that *Insel*, with its decomposing artist-protagonist, registers the demise of the European avant-garde. Miller uses Walter Benjamin's 'Artwork' essay to explain *Insel*'s unstable 'aura' and photographic or cinematic characterisation (he is a 'man-of-light', said to be developing like film, a human projector) as signs of a 'crisis of consciousness [...] a liquidating impulse that the camera [...] had already brought into reality' (1999: 216). Benjamin's association of cinema

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<sup>4</sup> On *Insel* and Christian Science see Armstrong 2010, Ayers 2010 and Vetter 2007.

with ‘distracted’ mass viewing leads us towards the Frankfurt School’s wariness about American mass culture. Indeed, Loy’s technological presentation of Insel – his ‘rays’ are X-rays as well as the immaterial projections of the film camera – indicates that he may have been developed in the image of American industrial and mass-cultural might. And yet, mindful of Miller’s sense of technological modernity as a sign of crisis and therefore of transience and obsolescence, and equally mindful of the fact that X-rays and cinema are hardly novel technologies in the 1930s, I will read *Insel* for its sense of the outmoded as much as its desire for the new.

This language of competition – what or who is ahead – is central to Hilda Bronstein’s feminist argument (2000), which describes *Insel* as a Surrealist novel, but one that resists that movement’s representation of women. Thus, she proposes, the novel engages with some of its central tenets and tropes, while also satirising and offering a ‘unique critique’ of Surrealism.<sup>5</sup> As Bronstein and others have pointed out, the presentation of Insel as a mentally unstable muse to Mrs Jones inverts André Breton’s gendering of artist and muse in *Nadja* (1928). The question of *Insel*’s relationship to Surrealism will be taken up again later in this chapter. I will read Loy’s novel as more of a ‘position piece’ on Surrealism than an expression of the Surrealist impulse.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, just as she had been with Futurism, Loy considered herself something of an observer of the movement, recalling to Levy: ‘I once wrote you a long letter about Surrealist jealousies – I seemed to be an authority for a whole afternoon’ (5 May [1934]. Phil.: JL).<sup>7</sup> As I will explore, in *thinking about* Surrealism in the mid- to late 1930s, Loy was surely thinking about the fate of the movement after it was introduced to America. The demise of the avant-garde of Tyrus Miller’s thesis is – in another significant narrative – its relocation across the Atlantic.

*Insel*, then, has generated an eclectic interpretative vocabulary, partly because of the various different contexts Loy appears to draw on simultaneously in her development of the artist Insel (to which I am about to add). This creates an overdetermined, malleable character whose substance is made in his reception, in the eyes of his reader-audience. This is only right, for Insel is imagined, as I will argue in one section here, in the mould of a celebrity. But it has also emerged in previous chapters that this kind of

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<sup>5</sup> This position is reiterated by Kinnahan 2017 (see chapter 2). Arnold is more unequivocal about Loy’s ‘satire on the whole surrealist endeavor’, which ‘continues [a] pattern of ambivalent feelings about avant-garde groups she had been associated with’. ‘Afterword’ in Loy 2014: 175, 174.

<sup>6</sup> Ayers 2010 does something similar.

<sup>7</sup> All correspondence between Loy and Levy cited here is from this collection. I do not always agree with the Philadelphia Museum of Art’s dating, so some dates in parentheses are my own suggestions.

multivalent figure – made to embody or register a number of conflicting ideologies and interests – is frequently a woman, and the focus is often her mode of dress. In this respect, then, Insel will bear comparison with the fashion mannequin. Certainly, the variety of contexts giving substance to Insel’s dematerialising form suggest that he is best understood as a product of his cultural conditions. In this spirit, the chapter develops an argument that Insel is fashionable: a subject to be fashioned and one whose persona and art aspire to the fashionable.

#### LOY ON FASHION

Loy’s personal and professional interest in fashion is now well established. Sylvia Beach recalled that she made all her own clothes (cited Dunn 1998: 443). Loy’s first husband suggested that her early dresses in printed fabrics and daring colours pre-empted Poiret’s draped lines (Burke 2012: loc 1891). As well as designs for a posture-improving ‘corselet’, her archive contains sketches for swimming costumes, evening gowns and a new type of ‘dress material’ (YCAL: ML II.7.184, II.7.187).

As with this appealing proximity of clothes and manuscripts, Loy’s life-long investment in fashion is closely connected to her writing. Her early challenges to artistic and sexual convention were expressed as what Rowan Harris (2010) has discussed as a gynophobic ‘repudiation’ of existing models of femininity, often best represented by dress.<sup>8</sup> In ‘Songs to Joannes’, Loy’s long sequence proposing a radical aesthetic vision alongside a new vision of sex relations, clothes inhibit or fix one’s form: ‘silly shoes’ (Loy 1997: 62) and dresses in the shape of a lampshade (54).<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, the constrained woman of the Victorian era – against which Loy set herself – is represented by constricting or old-fashioned modes of dress (Dunn 1999). To be modern and enlightened, Loy suggests – to resist one’s inheritance – was to dress differently.

Conversely, Alex Goody argues that Loy’s modernity lay in distancing herself from fashion: interrogating the ‘oppressive reality of the New Woman stereotype’, for example, by making the difference between the New

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that she rejected femininity. Cristanne Miller has explored Loy’s early investment in modern and aestheticised forms of femininity in relation to her appearance in photographs (2005: 111–14). In a compelling argument, Kinnahan suggests that Loy may even have developed a sense of what constituted female beauty (and the possibility of reforming those conventions) through her own experience as a subject of images (by George Platt Lynes for example) that nod to fashion photography (2016: 33).

<sup>9</sup> But see Harris 2010: 41 for an interesting suggestion that the speaker still walks on stoically in her ‘silly femme shoes’.

Woman and her grandmother only a matter of fashionable dress – in other words, not substantial (2001a: 52–53). But another way of putting this is that Loy used fashion to explore versions of the modern self and that she articulated her experimentalism and modernity by claiming a distinct position from that which she perceived to be the latest vogue. Much like Barnes in the *Charm* articles, Loy set herself apart from mainstream fashion in a way that is entirely consistent with fashion’s logic. *Rogue* itself formed a chic, sophisticated image by satirising a mainstream fashion magazine, *Vogue*.<sup>10</sup>

Fashion in Loy’s work, then, is not only about clothes but about relative cultural positioning – who is in front or behind, in or out of fashion. Not only was she concerned with her own position but she had a mordant sense of humour about such position-taking. Her work of the 1910s and 1920s often punctured the posturing of those concerned with their own publicity, as in ‘Lion’s Jaws’ (c. 1919), which satirised the fashionable philandering and media-courting of Gabriele d’Annunzio and the Futurists (Loy 1997: 46–50). The prose piece ‘The Stomach’ (Loy 2011: 104–08) takes a typically gendered view of fetishes of the new and questions of origin and copy. Tim Armstrong writes that the story’s central female figure, a muse to a great artist, presides over the ‘birth of new movements’. ‘Like Picasso’s African figures [...] this is a site of modernity’s parturition’ (1998: 117). Loy appears to cleave to associations of women with reproduction and the arcane or timeless, and men with production of the new. But the agency of this woman as the mother of modern art begs the question of who came first, upsetting the primary status of the male artist. That the matter is a question of fashion is already clear from the context: this male artist is all the rage.<sup>11</sup> But it is also suggested by the woman herself, whose striking pose – hips and stomach thrust forward, hence the story’s title – is highly reminiscent of contemporary descriptions of the fashion mannequin of the 1910s and 1920s. Cocteau recalled the designer Chéruit exhorting his models to ‘throw out your stomachs! Don’t draw in! Bulge! Bulge! Throw out your stomachs!’ (Evans 2013: 233). This is a modern figure, like the flapper of Caroline Evans’s description, ‘pushing the stomach and hips forward and sideways, allowing the torso to sag and slouch’ (2013: 233). The story questions where modernity lies – with the man or the woman, in art or fashion – competitive elements that are also central to *Insel*.

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<sup>10</sup> On *Rogue*, including Mina Loy’s contributions, see Longworth 2012.

<sup>11</sup> It is tempting to speculate that the real-life model for this sculptor was Auguste Rodin, whose work Loy’s first husband Stephen Haweis had photographed in Paris in the early 1910s in a style he also applied to Loy as his ‘favourite model’ (Burke 2012: loc. 1940). The potential context of fine-art photography of both artwork and female model enriches the story’s gendered treatment of the original versus copy theme.

The female narrator of *Insel*, Mrs Jones, is described as Insel's 'originator' (Loy 2014: 125). One of Loy's methods to articulate this sense of Mrs Jones's responsibility for Insel as a *creation* is to characterise him as a mannequin figure. The uncertainty about his physical identity and his resemblance to mechanical or technological apparatus makes it seem as if 'his visible person were a mannequin he operated on occasion' (31). This uncanny quality, part human (or at least organic) and part mechanical – a quality closely associated with the fashion mannequin, as Caroline Evans (2011, 2013) has explored – makes Insel an 'animate cadaver' (50), a 'ventriloquist's dummy', 'carved for a joke out of moldy wood' (51). In this capacity he is a model to be posed by Mrs Jones, who in one scene appreciates him aesthetically in the language of the fashion house: "I do so enormously enjoy your plastic geometry," I observed to Insel, who, as if fitting a label to perfection, swayed his dreary silhouette of aerial bones, against a lifted sheet bleached in the reflection of his phosphorescence' (101).

This description appears to present a paradox. As a mannequin-type figure whose 'plastic geometry' is admired, Insel is evidently material, and yet he is barely there, a 'dreary silhouette of aerial bones', somewhere between the ether and the earth. The fabric that he 'models', a sheet hanging behind him, is also strangely substanceless, for it is given its 'bleached' features by the reflection of Insel's phosphorescent glow. Exceeding exact comprehension as much as the bounds of the material, Loy's picture of Insel nonetheless suggests a compelling sense that his immateriality is a kind of dress in which he is clothed. This recurs throughout the book, as Loy uses images of encasement, sheaths and coverings to emphasise the surface of Insel's body as a material substrate on the verge of immateriality, or as a threshold between the two states. He is a 'primordial soft-machine without the protective overall' (7), taking shelter in 'makeshift burrows [...] in an unearned earth' (8). Emphatically *made*, Insel is on the verge of dematerialisation, a state that Loy finds best expressed by fabric: he

was made of extremely diaphanous stuff. Between the shrunken contour of his present volume his original 'serial mold' was filled in with some intangible aural matter remaining in place despite his anatomical shrinkage. An aura that enveloped him with an extra external sensibility. (46)

This aura is something like an intangible outfit, as Mrs Jones discovers when

she ‘tapped him lightly on the arm [...] and fe[lt] my hand pass through “something”. The surface of his cloth sleeve, like a stiff sieve, was letting that something through’ (46). Elsewhere, it is a ‘radial starfish underpattern of his life’ (127), the ghostly skeleton of a garment.

We might say, then, that Insel is also on the verge of disappearance. This liminality, between the modern and the outdated, was part of the mannequin’s appeal to the Surrealists: the ‘modern *mannequin*’ is ‘marvelous’ like ‘romantic ruins’, wrote Breton in the first Surrealist manifesto (Breton 1974: 16). This imaginative blend of subject and commodity object held a special place in Surrealism’s iconography, from Man Ray’s images of Poiret mannequins in the fashion pavilion at the 1925 Expo, one of which crossed over to the cover of *La Révolution surréaliste* (G. Wood 2007b: 5), to the large-scale installation of an entire ‘street’ of mannequins at the International Surrealist Exhibition of 1938 (Smith 2014: 149). Their interest can be connected back to Eugène Atget’s photographs of shop windows populated with faceless mannequins (fig. 3.2).<sup>12</sup> In imagining Insel as a mannequin, Loy engages with this specifically Parisian history. Like the cafés, studios and boulevards that make up *Insel*’s scenography, the fashion mannequin is an emblem of Parisian modernity. She is distinctive in that she is marked, like the fashion she models, with the sign of modernity’s passing.

Indeed, in the novel, written at the end of Surrealism’s Parisian era (a lateness to which I will return), this history and its symbols are under further pressure. This pressure comes especially from the reversal of gender roles. As in Bronstein’s argument about Loy’s subversion of the female muse/male artist relationship, Loy draws on Surrealist preoccupations in order to disrupt them, giving the male artist the place of the female mannequin. Insel’s mesmerising appeal, an almost erotic charge described throughout the book for its effect on Mrs Jones, suggests something of the industrial glamour of the mannequin, as Loy creates an *homme fatale* from the ‘fashionable femmes fatales’ (Mahon 2007: 131) of the male Surrealist imagination.

There is also the fact that Insel is not an object mannequin but something like a living one – somewhere between object and subject – in that he is described as something dead come to life. He reminds Mrs Jones of a ‘magically animated corps[e]’ (Loy 2014: 33), an ‘animate cadaver’ (50). If

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<sup>12</sup> Kinnahan 2017 (88) suggests that ‘Loy would have known [Atget’s] corset shop photograph, if not from its initial publication [in *La Révolution surréaliste* in June 1926, where a mannequin image by Hans Arp also appears] or perhaps from seeing Atget’s photographs earlier in Man Ray’s studio, then certainly its reappearance in 1936 within the pages of Levy’s surrealism anthology. In Chapter 2 she makes a case for the relevance of Surrealism’s version of Atget to Loy’s poetry, and of the movement’s figuration of women in the form of the mannequin.





Fig. 3.2

this characterisation recalls the ambiguous status of the fashion mannequin, between subject and object, it also places Insel in the Pygmalion tradition, a precursor of the cinematic or electric animation of the figure that informs *Insel*.<sup>13</sup> The Pygmalion myth certainly lies behind the Surrealist interest in the doll and the mannequin, but it also focuses attention on the maker as much as the living sculpture, a maker who in *Insel* is a woman artist. Marquard Smith reminds us that the Pygmalion myth is about narcissism:

inanimate human form can end up figured as a stand-in or fetishistic surrogate for an other, for one's self, for one's self as other, for the progenitor himself even, with such inanimate human form reciprocating as a witness to such self-love. (2014: 20)

This logic of substitution and equivalence underpins *Insel*, its narrative driven by the shifting power relations between Insel and Mrs Jones. She is magnetically drawn to him, and yet he comes to rely on her support too, a relationship of fluctuating power, dependence, charm and revulsion that is ultimately the novel's subject. One moment she wants to understand his 'influence, so urgent was my premonition of some treasure he contained', the next: "This man is *fearfully* banal," I said to myself, discerning in his confidences the prim hypocrisy of a wastrel bamboozling the patroness of some charitable institution.' Only for her to fall again under his influence: 'Slipping back into his sensitized zone, I swallowed his platitudes gratefully' (Loy 2014: 40). Conversely, Jones feeds Insel and offers him shelter, and provides an umbilical link between him and his dealer in New York, Aaron, succour that Insel alternately wants to repay – "Now you be ill, and go to bed so I can nurse you." (100) – and reject.

Whether economic, erotic or familial – all of which modes are suggested – Jones's sustenance of Insel, which eventually gives way to her predominance as she prepares to move to America and his charms fail, is the act of a godlike author figure. At this point in the novel she is Pygmalion to his Galatea, Frankenstein to his monster.<sup>14</sup> Living sculpture, mannequin or cinematic image, Insel is Jones's creation. Thus the female artist and her own status as an author are as much the subject of *Insel* as the eponymous male.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> That Loy was interested in updating the Pygmalion story for modern times seems evident in an unpublished poem, 'Pygmalion and Galatea' (YCAL: ML I.5.45). This comic poem, with a jaunty ABCB-rhyme scheme, imagines Pygmalion's wife contemplating divorce and Galatea leaving to join the Ziegfeld Follies as a 'living picture'.

<sup>14</sup> Both Armstrong 2010 and Ayers 2010 point out the relevance of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* to *Insel*.

<sup>15</sup> This self-reflexive dynamic has a longer history in Loy's writing: with more space it would have been useful to explore her poem-portraits of the 1920s of such figures as Stein

If Insel is mannequin (both alluring and instrumental), Jones is his opposite – the dressmaker or fashion designer. The comings and goings of Jones and Insel, which echo the ebb and flow of power in their relationship, are connected to this female artist-maker, who allows Loy to explore the limits and the potential of female artistic expression.

Jones's identification with the dressmaker is not straightforward but it is highly suggestive. Jones agrees for Insel to stay in her apartment while she is out of Paris but will return every few days for a dressmaker's fitting. While in one sense Jones is thus also a model, her interchangeability with the maker figure is suggested by the dressmaker's occupation of Jones's apartment and studio for her own creative labour – the dressmaker is a substitute for Jones. Insel does not stay there in the end, but he does look for Jones each day. He only knows she has been there by the signs of her fitting: 'where you trod there lay little fragments of stuff. I could trace your movements by the pins you shed on the floor' (Loy 2014: 28). Before long, 'Insel turned up regularly as soon as my fitting by the dressmaker was over' (31), suggesting another element of interchangeability, this time his with the dressmaker. Yet, on arrival Insel's grin seems to announce "'I've bought 'it,' [...] as if his visible person were a mannequin he operated on occasion' (31). Loy's habit of creating multiple identities for herself here applies to Jones and Insel, each of whom are both model and maker – an allegory for their competing claims to creativity at this early point of the novel.<sup>16</sup>

We are alerted to the dressmaker as a fluid trope on its first page, as part of Insel and Jones's first proper meeting:

I had been giving tea to my little model after the pose when he arrived. Her Slavonic person was colored a lovely luminous yellow, owing to some liver complaint, and her sturdy legs, which *I supposed he could not see* for she was already dressed for the street, were of such a substance as sun-warmed stone. With the promptness of a magnet picking up a pin, he made a date with her for the following day. (3; italics in original)

Loy does not let us know whether this is an artist's or fashion model, but from the presence of certain words – pose, dress, pin – we may infer she is

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and Joyce, with which she placed herself in avant-garde company.

<sup>16</sup> On Loy's multiple pseudonyms and anagrammatic plays with her own name, see Goody 2001b.

the latter. Inaugurating a consistent suggestion that Jones is both an artist and a designer or dressmaker, the ambivalence is key, for it introduces the question of hierarchy between the arts and artistic activities. Loy soon uses this hierarchy to explore the difference between male and female creativity.

Already informed that Insel is an artist whose work is being sent to his dealer in America by the agent Jones, we then learn that Jones is also a painter, when Insel catches sight of photographs of her paintings. Their mediated presence implies an absence, a lack that is her failure to succeed: “‘Those’ are my ‘last exhibition’ cancelled the moment the dealer set eyes on them” (20). Working as an agent to support Insel’s success, her own as a painter is compromised. But in this novel, so replete with the dynamic appeal of other media, the photographs also signal room for other avenues of creativity:

I felt, if I were to go back, begin a universe all over again, forget all form I am familiar with, evoking a chaos from which I could draw forth incipient form, that at last the female brain might achieve an act of creation.

I did not know this as yet, but the man seated before me holding a photo in his somewhat invalid hand had done this very thing – visualized the mists of chaos curdling into shape. But with a male difference. (20)

In the context of gender differences and alternative media, Loy introduces the possibility of new form.

The frustrations and potential of the female artist are then imagined in terms of the dressmaker. Having offered Insel the use of her apartment when she is out of Paris, Jones is oppressed by the need to tidy her belongings to make way for him. Such worldly responsibilities draw her away from the ‘creative dimension [...] to concentrate on something in which one takes no interest, which is the major degradation of women’ (22). Eventually, she recognises a solution, stuffing her manuscripts and miscellaneous papers into an old painting overall, which she sews up into ‘a corpse-like sack’ on her Singer sewing machine (23). On the one hand, Jones is sealing up her work as if dead, and using a traditional women’s craft to do so – signalling her female restriction in relation to the compelling male Insel. And yet, her anthropomorphic creation clearly anticipates Insel as mannequin, turning him into her own creation rather than merely a creative force to be accommodated. Indeed, she makes this cloth dummy in a productive ‘frenzy’, after inertia, and it has a satisfying, emboldening outcome for Jones (‘I was once more myself’ [23]). Ultimately questioning its limiting associations, Loy re-

veals the potential inherent in the dressmaking trope, showing the way in which female stereotypes and symbols can be redirected for positive female use.

Loy's image of ascendant feminine creativity combines several of her (and Jones's) practices – painting, writing and dressmaking – to forge an intermedial conception of the successful female artist. In this, her vision of the artist-dressmaker points towards a contemporary figure whose own career traversed disciplinary boundaries and made their permeability central to her reputation. The *couturière* Elsa Schiaparelli is surely behind the imagery of the scene just discussed, in which Jones contemplates 'a bureau whose drawers must be emptied' (22), turning that item of furniture into an outfit, as Schiaparelli did, after a series of paintings by her own male collaborator Salvador Dalí (figs 3.3, 3.4).<sup>17</sup> Launched in August 1936 for her Winter 1936/37 collection, Schiaparelli's bureau-drawer suit is exactly contemporaneous with Loy's move to America and the beginnings of *Insel*.

Loy and Schiaparelli are likely to have met by the late 1910s and would have had ample opportunities to renew a connection into the 1930s. Schiaparelli's introduction to the avant-garde came through Gabrielle Picabia (Schiaparelli 2007: 31), who also knew Loy in New York at around the same time. Later, in Paris, Schiaparelli frequently modelled her own clothes in photographs taken by Man Ray, another associate of Loy's in both cities. Schiaparelli knew and owned work by Pavel Tchelitchew (Blum 2004: 16, 36–37), whom Loy represented in her capacity as Julien Levy's Paris agent. Bettina Jones, Schiaparelli's loyal assistant, was a close friend of Levy and his wife.

In fact Schiaparelli features explicitly at the end of *Insel*, when the 'relative positions' of Insel and Mrs Jones are 'entirely reversed' – the latter's power making her aloof, like 'a strange specimen' (Loy 2014: 142). Insel notices a lampshade design that Mrs Jones has made that incorporates a celluloid coil 'of the colour that Schiaparelli has since called *shocking* pink. Made to be worn round pigeon's [*sic*] ankles for identification, I had picked it up in the Bon Marché' (143; emphasis in original). Schiaparelli's use of the adjective 'shocking' dates to 1937, when she gave the word to a perfume range and the colour for which she has since become famous. Loy's deliberate (and competitive) redeployment of it not only helps date the drafting of *Insel*, but gives us a model for her vision of the successful female artist. Rather than

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<sup>17</sup> One of which appears on the front of an announcement for a Dalí exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery from December 1936 to January 1937 (Kinnahan 2017: 102). Kinnahan suggests that Schiaparelli might also be behind Loy's reference to harlequin buttons in the poem 'Mass-Production on 14th Street' (which I discuss in Chapter 3.2), since her 'Harlequin collection of 1938 received much fashion notice' (103).

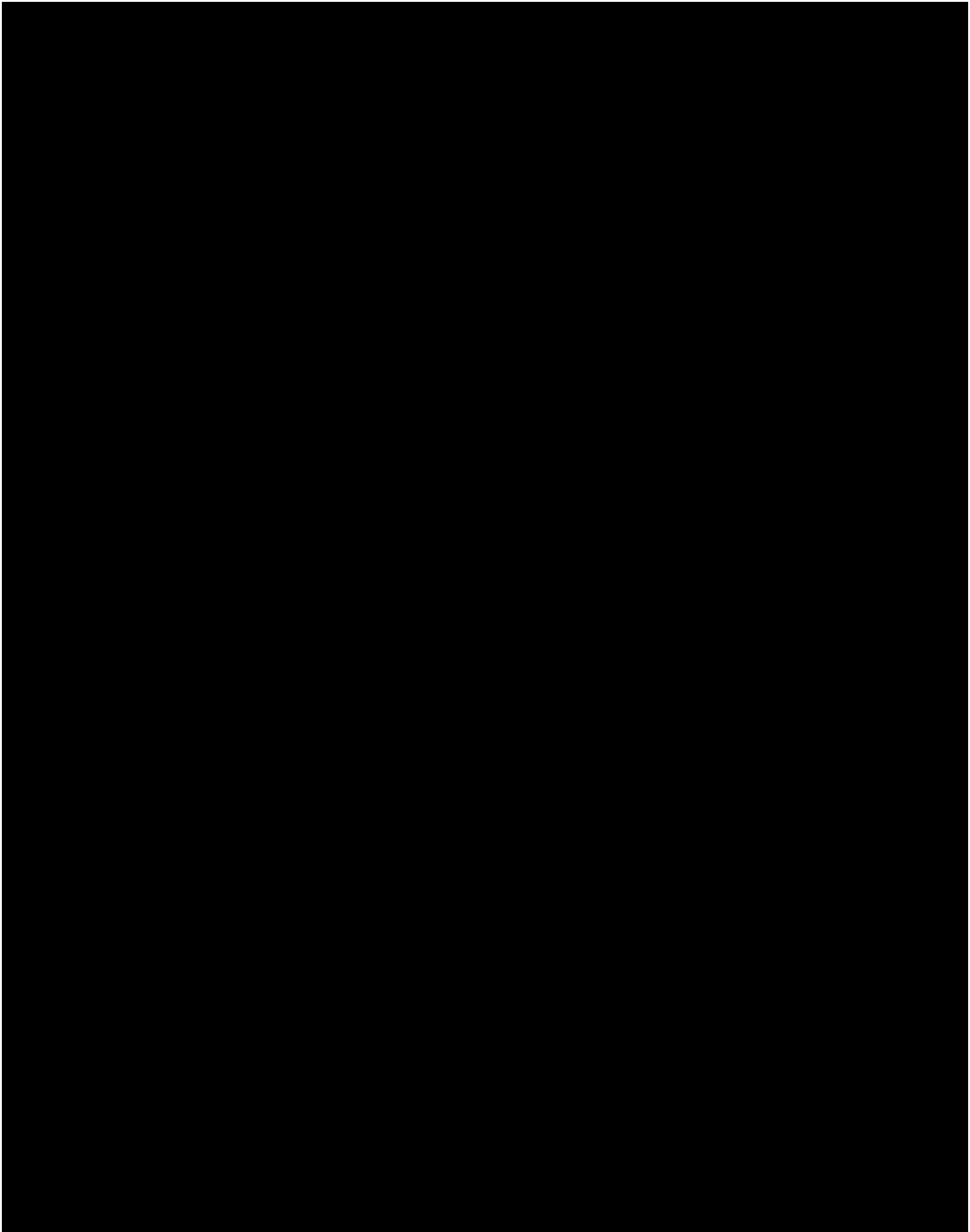


Fig. 3.3

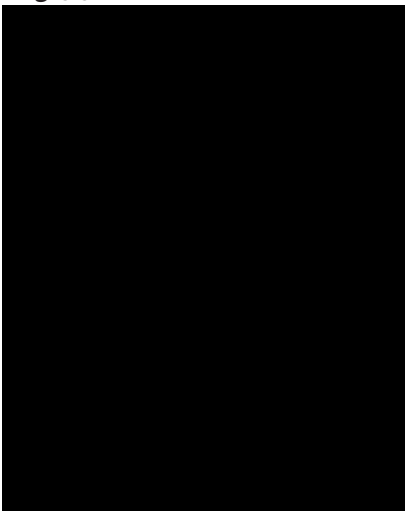


Fig. 3.4



Fig. 3.5

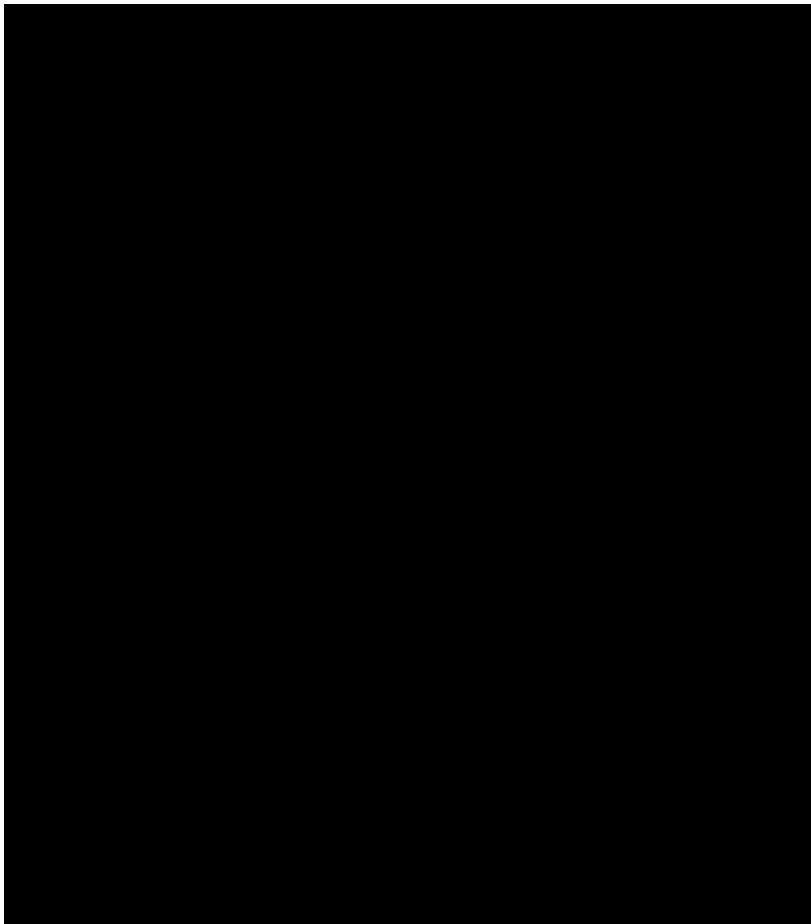


Fig. 3.6

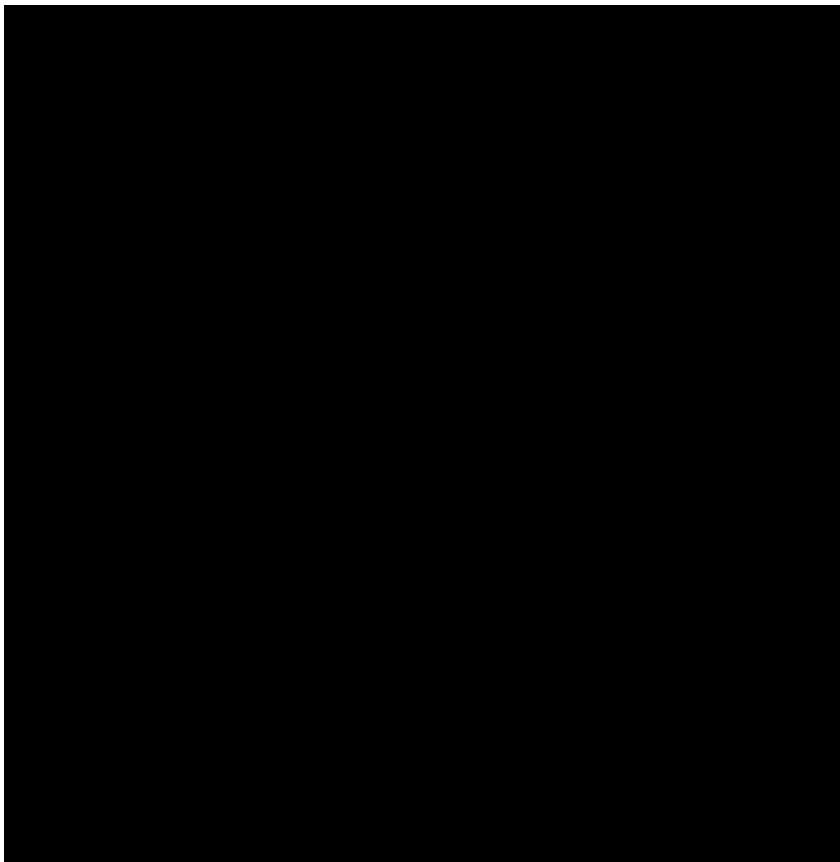


Fig. 3.7

‘an image of the individual artistic mind in aimless drift’, as Tyrus Miller has it – an image of capital and collective labour processes that threatens the singular artist (1999: 213–15) – the reference to this lampshade incorporating mass-producible plastic in the context of Jones’s ascendancy signals the rise of the female artist. This woman must navigate the worlds of commerce and creativity – making work with materials from, and potentially for sale in, Bon Marché.<sup>18</sup>

Schiaparelli makes sense as a point of reference for *Insel*. The novel’s relationship to Surrealism and its negotiation of capitalism find a model in the Italian designer, who combined the two without contradiction. As well as working with Dalí she collaborated on commercial art objects or outfits with Louis Aragon, Meret Oppenheim, Giacometti, Leonor Fini and Cocteau, all associated with (if not all official members of) the Surrealist group. She responded to Surrealist imagery, as in her fingernail gloves of 1936, which recall Man Ray’s 1935 photograph *Hands Painted by Picasso* (fig. 3.5). In 1936 in *Harper’s Bazaar*, Julien Levy proclaimed Schiaparelli to be ‘the only designer who understands Surrealism. Her dress with the bureau drawer pockets and her vanity case covered with fur are Authentic’ (cited Blum 2007: 142). This statement in an American fashion magazine witnesses Schiaparelli’s success in the United States: Dilys Blum documents her meteoric rise (2004: 35), as Janet Flanner had before her, calling Schiaparelli a ‘comet’ whose silhouettes were destined for ‘a background of square-shouldered skyscrapers’ (1932). Schiaparelli may have offered Loy a productive example of European art packaged for the American market. But Levy’s assertion in *Harper’s Bazaar* also suggests something about Surrealism’s relationship to commerce that Loy too appears to have grasped in *Insel*. Namely, that by the 1930s, it had ‘escaped the bounds of an avant-garde art movement’ (G. Wood 2007b: 2). Seen by some as its death, this proliferation into commodity culture is felt by others to have been anticipated by, even to be somehow integral to, Surrealism itself.

#### THE SURREALIST OBJECT

Krzysztof Fijalkowski provides a useful corrective to the narrative of decline that has attached itself to Surrealism’s assimilation into the worlds of fashion, design and advertising, reminding us that the material world was an integral part of its project. He writes that ‘[t]he extraordinary revelation of

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<sup>18</sup> Something that Loy had to do in her own dealings with such department stores as Macy’s and Wanamaker’s, who placed orders for her lampshades (Burke 2012: loc. 7616).



material facts, not pleasurable fictions [...] are its ultimate quarry' (2007: 101). The Surrealists attempted to negotiate this context, 'engaging with material phenomena of all kinds' in order to understand the 'workings' of bourgeois culture 'and, ultimately to create a way out from under its spell' (Malt 2004: 38, 39). One way, says Fijalkowski, was to 'chart the fascination, and often the absurdity, of the new'. The other was to explore what commerce leaves behind (2007: 103).<sup>19</sup>

Equally, discussing the proliferation of a Surrealist style, for Ghislaine Wood 'Surrealism precipitated its own commodification' (2007b: 8), especially through the Surrealist object. In the 1930s Surrealist practice shifted from unconscious and automatic techniques towards the 'highly subjective, oneiric desire to find objects that could reveal unconscious processes and thereby move the subject into the object by reifying the intellectual or creative process of art production' (Lehmann 2007: 24). This move signalled 'an acute awareness that [...] the fate of the subject lay intimately bound to that of the object' (Fijalkowski 2007: 110). Expressing a reified form of subjectivity, Surrealist objects were often anthropomorphic and/or suggestive of sex, as in Giacometti's *Suspended Ball* (1930–31; fig. 3.6). For similar reasons, the Surrealists were also invested in the fetish, where an object stands in for a human presence or part, yet the bodily imagery remains, 'invoking [...] both the commodified body and the eroticized commodity' (Malt 2004: 113).

The Surrealist object is a regular presence in *Insel* and evidently a contemporary genre in which Loy was interested. Insel himself makes a Surrealist object by wrapping up a pad of writing paper, perhaps something like Yves Tanguy's drawing of words transformed into a biomorphic block of text, *Vie de l'object* (1933; fig. 3.7). Jones's 'corpse-like sack' made on her Singer sewing machine is clearly in the vein of the Surrealist fetish, which so often took the form of an item of clothing, for its proximity to the human body, 'symbolic of hidden fantasies and phantasmagories' (Lehmann 2000: 354). Insel himself is closely associated with his suit (in his case comprising suit, shirt, handkerchief and a white comb), a classic motif in both Dadaist and Surrealist fetish iconography, which privileged the hat, tie and shoes (Lehmann 2000: 354–55).<sup>20</sup> If, like his mannequin-qualities, Insel's faded grey suit dilutes the mythologies of Parisian modernity – 'Baudelaire's and Gautier's *habit noir*, the black wool suit of Montesquiou and Mallarmé, the dark attire of the nightly flâneur' (Lehmann 2000: 321) – it also situates him

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<sup>19</sup> The latter approach is represented by Benjamin's essay 'Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia', included in Benjamin 2009.

<sup>20</sup> Although Lehmann points out that Surrealists largely favoured female clothing.

in relation to contemporary Parisian artistic discourse. For the suit mediates his 'rays', the source of his peculiar attractiveness (Insel refuses to have it cleaned), and thus it is the suit in which desire is concentrated, as in the fetish model.<sup>21</sup>

Indeed, Insel emerges from the novel as a kind of Surrealist object, but one that exposes (like the fetish or the anthropomorphic sculpture mentioned) its fusion of subject and object. In one sense Insel creates himself as a work of art: 'He had no need to portray. His pictures grew, out of him, seeding through the inter-atomic spaces in his digital substance to urge tenacious roots into a plane surface' (Loy 2014: 83). He is a 'truly congenital surrealist' (44) – not merely representing the Surrealist imagination, but embodying it, as when his very eyes appear to warp time in the way that Salvador Dalí can only allegorise:

You saw the watch in hallucinatory transformation, its dial advancing the gray diamonds of his eyes out of a murk more mysterious than darkness instead of correcting the eyes' mistake. He possessed some mental conjury enabling him to infuse an actual detail with the magical contrariness surrealism merely portrays. (Loy 2014: 33)

Given the commercial art world in which Insel is embroiled in the novel, he shares the Surrealist object's complex relationship to the subject and the commodity – he is artist, work of art and item for sale in one. He also conforms to Fijalkowski's view of Surrealism's negotiation of the material world through the new and the outmoded: Insel is by turns marvellous and blandly material, potentially the hottest new thing but on the verge of physical decay and artistic decline, his wondrousness always threatening to become prosaic. In this way *Insel* appears in step with – and self-conscious about – Surrealist practice and its compromises.

Insel is also Jones's creation, and if the Surrealist object signals this awareness of the bind between subject and object, he expresses something of her. Which is also to say that he expresses something of Loy. Fijalkowski calls this the 'mutual delineation' of subject and object (2007: 110). Jones fashions something of herself in Insel, and so does Loy, in what Bourdieu describes as 'an enterprise of *objectification of the self*, of autoanalysis, of socioanalysis', which stands in place of 'customary complacent and naïve pro-

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<sup>21</sup> More could be said about Insel's suit, which as Lehmann 2000 has examined, holds a significant place in Dadaist and Surrealist iconography. It might be connected to Loy's husband Arthur Cravan, who is often identified as a dadaist and a dandy. André Salmon, for one, remembered Cravan 'clean-shaven' and monocled (Lehmann 2000: 365).

jections of an autobiographical type' (Bourdieu 1996: 25; italics in original). Indeed, this plays with what Philip Lejeune (1989) called 'the autobiographical pact', in which the subject and object of autobiography are identical. In her autobiographical novel Loy opens up a gap in the pact of autobiography, suggesting instead a complex form of identity between subject (Loy) and object (Insel).

Given that Insel is a creation – a dressed mannequin, a Surrealist object – a comparison is inaugurated between Insel and Loy's own writing. We know from the novel that Jones wants to write a biography of Insel, and that he models his life on the novels of Kafka. As the subject of Loy's own *Künstlerroman*, too, he is a textual product (an object produced from text, perhaps like Insel's own Surrealist writing pad). We might ask, too, how the technological and literary shaping of Insel's body is related to Loy's literary corpus, especially given that his extension and perfection fails, apparently sacrificed to Jones's own improvement.

Furthermore, Insel is like a Surrealist object, a genre that has vexed ties with commerce, and like a mannequin, a figure used to sell both clothes and image. He represents a commercial opportunity in America as the New York gallerist 'Aaron's latest surrealist' (Loy 2014: 4), and accordingly, Loy's novel is marked by fashion's language of competition and obsolescence – who is the 'latest' thing, who is 'in' and who is 'out'. *Insel* is, then, also about fashionable reputations – Insel's, Jones's, but also Loy's. As I will discuss in the next section, this is situated in the context of the shift of cultural authority from France to America.

#### **'AMERICA SHALL CLAMOR FOR YOU'**

For Tyrus Miller, *Insel* is a story about the devaluation of art when the avant-garde is 'on the verge of disappearance'. Insel himself literally 'embod[ies] [...] the predicaments of the artist during this time' (1999: 208–10). Miller suggests that the Depression and the geopolitical crisis of the 1930s made the artist's and writer's previously secure and privileged position in society a far more precarious one; a new 'genius', that of capital, which 'harness[es] the energies of the multitudes in processes of collective labor and political movements', replaced the autonomous artist (215). But rather than merely registering this crisis, *Insel* also offers a solution, one that makes a pact with the 'genius of capital'.

As a German in Paris at a time of imminent war, Insel's safety is threatened, but in his homeland he would be rejected as a degenerate artist. His response is 'an ardent yearning to flee to New York from a threatening war'

(Loy 2014: 44), to be ‘forever in New York’ (45), whose skyscrapers become the subject of his mental projections (and thus of his art). Like Insel’s hero Kafka, who in his unfinished first novel *Amerika* (published posthumously, 1927) invented a vision of the country without actually visiting it, Insel projects the country he wants and needs. In his own version of the American Dream (a phrase coined in the 1930s but with a long history of mythical self-renewal), New York offers not only a safe haven, but artistic success. When Insel agrees to let Jones write his biography as long as she gets him to New York, she declares: ‘I’ll write at once. America shall clamor for you’ (14). Insel’s paintings (and potentially his self) have an exchange value for the gallerist Aaron and his agent Jones, whose efforts to sustain him are carried out in order to help him produce work for sale in New York as well as find refuge there. Jones describes herself as ‘a tout for a friend’s art gallery, feeding a cagey genius in the hope of production’ (55). When struggling with a painting, Insel is urged by Jones to finish it ‘for America’ (115). As this suggests, the narrative thrust of the book is towards America, where money can be made and reputations transformed. Eventually, according to the competitive logic of their relationship, it is Jones rather than Insel whose plans to emigrate appear to be fulfilled: ‘In view of America, I was constantly on the hop – busy with buyers of furniture – packers littering the place with straw’ (140).

In line with Miller’s argument, the European avant-garde does appear to fade in the final chapters of the novel. Insel is reduced to ‘the “normal” man’ (Loy 2014: 142) and classic Parisian haunts are visited as if in a swansong to the city’s bohemian life.<sup>22</sup> That Loy is aware of America’s ascendant position at this point is signalled by Jones’s parting gift to Insel of a box work by Joseph Cornell, incorporating ‘early *Ladies’ Journals*’ (144). Making art from commercial material and translating European Surrealism into a distinctly American idiom, Cornell represents the shift in the late 1930s and 1940s of the artistic centre of gravity from Paris to New York. Loy and Julien Levy (the model for ‘Aaron’ in *Insel*) each played a role in this shift.

### **JULIEN LEVY, ‘HOT STUFF’**

The Julien Levy Gallery opened at 602 Madison Avenue on 2 November 1931 with ‘American Photography Retrospective Exhibition’. Originally intending to show only photographs, Levy soon realised the challenge of selling

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<sup>22</sup> Of these the Hotel Lutetia, outside which Jones, Insel and Man Ray sit, seems particularly resonant, with its veiled reference to ancient Paris, ‘Lutèce’, or ‘nauseating swamp’ in Celtic (Higonnet 2002: 264).

that medium and concentrated on painting, mostly European, and predominantly by artists based in Paris ('one always is doubtful of American painting' wrote Loy to Levy [30 July 1934]). In so many accounts of Levy he emerges as emblematic of New York and the American art scene: 'He *was* New York', recalled Dorothea Tanning (1998: 15; emphasis in original). Levy was a tastemaker, his gallery a 'forum' rather than a 'salon-style sanctuar[y]' for art of the past (Schaffner 1998: 23–24).

Well before the gallery opened, Levy was ambitious for his reputation. His letters to Loy express a sense of commercial confidence: 'Julien wants to set the West ablaze and found a dynasty of Loys', he wrote on 4 September 1929. 'Did I tell you about my automatic clean towel cabinet? [...] In a few weeks we will place it on the market and then the millions will roll into my pocket.' On Berenice Abbott's collection of photographs by Eugène Atget that he exhibited in 1930, he commented: 'If they are half as successful as they deserve to be, my reputation as a person, a connoisseur, an art dealer, man in public life, etc. will be made' (JL to ML, 9 May 1930). Even after the Crash, business in his new gallery gave Levy reason to be optimistic: 'Times are very bad here this year and there is an almost over-powering feeling of failure in the air. But I have already made some minor sales even before the gallery has opened' (JL to ML, 29 October [1931]). 'There is no denying', he boasted in 1933 after speaking on the radio, 'that the Levy's [*sic*] public life is crescent' (JL to ML, 27 March [1933]).

Indeed, Levy and his gallery had become 'hot stuff', as Loy phrased it (ML to JL, 26 December [1934?]). The gallery screenings of avant-garde films such as Dalí's *L'Age d'or* were apparently attended by 'all the four hundred and the intelligentsia', the 'best' audience he had ever seen, and he and his wife Joella – Loy's daughter – were famous for 'giv[ing] the best parties in New York' (JL to ML, undated [January 1933] and 26 February 1934). He was seen to be ahead of the times, as Tanning recalled: 'By the time the Museum of Modern Art got around to its famous exhibition "Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism", in 1936, the Julien Levy Gallery had given New York four years of surrealist shocks' (1998: 15). This language of competition, in which Levy is seen to be, and feels himself to be, ahead of the pack, is the language of fashion. In 1940 *Newsweek* reported that the Julien Levy Gallery was 'one of New York's most fashionable art shops' (cited Schaffner 1998: 53), a reputation already consecrated by *Vogue*: Levy's exhibitions were noted in the magazine fairly regularly, and by 1938 he was featured at length in an article on 'The Middle Men of Art'. Julien Levy Gallery is 'a gallery principally for the sophisticated and for the young', wrote the author. Levy's 'keen [...] eye, focussed on the Parisian scene, may discover this decade's Cézanne at any

moment' (Saunders 1938: 102).

As *Vogue* recognised, the gallery also had a consecrating function, making the art that it showed fashionable, or as Loy put it in a letter to Levy: 'I am sure the value of an artist depends on the *impresario*' (25 July [1934]). '[T]his decade's Cézanne' is a classic fashion formulation, signalling the latest version of a previous trend and suggesting the competitive edge in which one artist is ahead of the rest. More than any others, the Surrealists that Levy promoted were in fashion: they were 'very fashionable, the latest thing', recalled another gallerist, Leo Castelli (Pincus-Witten 1982, cited Schaffner 1998: 20). Explicitly comparing them to fashionable dress, Chick Austin, whose 'Newer Super-Realism' exhibition at the Wadsworth Atheneum (opened October 1931) was technically the first of Surrealism in the United States, wrote: 'We do not hesitate to dress in fashion because we fear that next year the mode will alter... These pictures are chic. [...] They are of the moment' (cited Zlotzky 1986: 59). Of the many lamentations for the fate of European Surrealism after it crossed the Atlantic, Dickran Tashjian's line that it was 'diluted' and 'debased' (1995: 2) – in the form of Dalí's window displays for Bonwit Teller, for example – betrays a fundamental model of cultural transfer that we have seen many times before, including in the world of fashion: a Parisian idea translated for the purposes of American commerce.

Certainly, Levy and his gallery were 'conduit[s] for some of the most vital aesthetic charges originating in Europe' (Schaffner and Jacobs 1998: 10).<sup>23</sup> His endeavours to bring Surrealism to an American audience were aided early on by the gallery's 1932 exhibition 'Surréalisme', which he claimed, *pace* Chick Austin, to be the first of its kind in the United States and which, as Tanning noted, predated by four years Alfred Barr's at MoMA. Of course one legacy of Surrealism's fertilisation in the United States was Abstract Expressionism, a home-grown school that owed some of its subjective gesturalism to the European movement. In line with this dialectical process, Levy saw himself not only as a mediator between Paris and New York, but a special kind of interpreter. His 'Surréalisme' exhibition suggested a modification of the movement's definition along more American lines, with the inclusion of a selection of front pages from American newspapers – so-called 'scandal sheets' reporting the 1926–27 affair between 'Peaches' and 'Daddy' Browning. Levy wrote that he 'wished to present a paraphrase which would

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<sup>23</sup> Although Levy is best known for this effort to bring European art, particularly Surrealism, to America, Kinnahan's useful research on Levy reminds us that the gallerist was invested in diverse aesthetics, bringing together US photographers and socially conscious art, including documentary, with Surrealism (2017: Chapter 1).

offer Surrealism in the language of the new world rather than a translation in the rhetoric of the old' (2003: 80).

#### **LEVY AND LOY: A 'BALANCING ACT BETWEEN EUROPE AND AMERICA'**

Loy played a significant part in Levy's ideas about Paris. His memoir tells the story of his first trip there in 1927 with Marcel Duchamp and Robert McAlmon, whose accounts of Loy's place in the Montparnasse crowd made her a fashionable image that preceded their actual meeting. She represented a world to which Levy was attracted – 'a whole universe of people and talk' – the avant-garde, and the sophistication of Paris (2003: 32).<sup>24</sup> But there is a constant sense throughout Levy's accounts of Loy – in his memoir and in their letters – that by the time they met, Loy already belonged to a recent past. The idea of the avant-garde that she represented was the age of her notoriety – of 'Love Songs' (published just before she met Duchamp) and *Lunar Baedeker*. In 1930 Levy advised her: 'You shouldn't write poetry [...]. Remember you have been in hectic retirement for several years, and whereas your past verse led a movement, that movement has since exploded' (31 July). Loy is fixed in the image of her past, as in Levy's recollection that she was 'ageless. A handsome woman, she had once had, I was surprised to learn, jet black hair in a pompadour. And a handsome woman she was at that moment, quite able to compete with her past' (2003: 36). In 1935 Levy says twice in two months that Glenway Wescott has reported from Paris that 'he never saw you looking more beautiful and alluring and exactly as when he first knew you' (JL to ML, 9 September [1935]).<sup>25</sup> Loy's value rests in matching up to the earlier version of herself.<sup>26</sup>

Her value also lay in the contrast of this romantic image to America, in Levy's eyes. After one party with his compatriots, for example – 'the usual provincial American' – Levy wrote to Loy that he was 'nostalgic for your conversation' (undated [1927]). Although Levy was disdainful about the 'banality' of America, he wanted to 'nourish' and 'crossbreed' its 'fledgling culture', and saw Paris as a source of rich cultural content and sustenance: 'I being Antaeus and Paris the ground on which I was thrown to rise again, replenished tenfold. In addition to tending to business, I filled my spiritual and intellectual luggage with all manner of things to bring back to America'

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<sup>24</sup> Somewhat misleadingly, given that she had been just as much associated with the US avant-garde.

<sup>25</sup> See also 8 October [1935?].

<sup>26</sup> A task that Loy set about mechanising with her 'Corselet', to be worn 'at the approach of middle age figure changes [...] to train the "setting" skeleton to "set" to a semblance of youthful formation' (YCAL: ML II.7.186).

(2003: 71, 100, 118). Levy suggests that Loy and her modernist apartment fed his malnourished imagination: ‘To one brought up in a land still redolent of Grand Rapids, leavened with heirlooms, this abundance of subtle, casual visual experience was a banquet for which I had been starved’ (2003: 120). His words echo those of that earlier explorer of ‘transatlantic contact’, Henry James, for whom Europe was ‘a banquet of initiation’ (cited Bradbury 1982: 20–21).

As well as representing an idea of Paris, Loy served a useful function in this dialectical project to bolster American culture: Levy would stay with her while in Paris on buying trips, her household the ‘perfect location for my own balancing act between America and Europe, the new world and the old’ (Levy 2003: 118). And, of course, Loy practically served Levy’s purpose by acting as ‘the Paris agent of the Levy affairs’, with ‘full authority’ to select works from the artists with whom Levy had established relationships or whom he had identified as potentially commercial (JL to ML, undated [1932?] and 27 May [1934?]). Carolyn Burke’s account of Levy’s and Loy’s business and personal relationships stresses this active function, as well as the impression that the older woman made on her son-in-law: ‘It is no exaggeration to say that this elective affinity molded his sensibility. Loy’s modernist values became those of Levy’s gallery’ (1998: 61). For a decade, she states, ‘Julien remained under Mina’s spell’ (66). But although Loy was clearly an important figure for Levy, and he was certainly seduced by her artistic and intellectual credentials and beauty, his memoir and correspondence with his mother-in-law show that the dynamic between them was more complex.

Loy herself was ‘devoted to Julien – his battles are my battles – the Levy “way” is my way’ (ML to JL, undated [1927?]). She was also financially dependent on him and his family. As Burke notes, Julien’s father Edgar Levy bought Peggy Guggenheim out of the lampshade boutique that she had founded with Loy, on the condition that Julien remained an apprentice in his father’s property firm for several more years. Compromised so that ‘Mina could be free’, ‘Julien acted as her parent, protector, and liberator’ so that she ‘became, in a sense, his alter ego’ (1998: 61). As we have seen in *Insel*, Loy’s vision of differently gendered alter egos and their power dynamics emphasised flux and, ultimately, imbalance. Loy’s freedom to write was also the other side of the Levys’ paternalistic authority. Levy characterises his marriage to Joella as a rescue: she and her mother were saved from the shop, which was ‘fast avalanching into a nightmare’ (2003: 119).

Once the gallery had opened and Loy became Levy’s representative, their letters reveal a palpable shift in the balance of power between them. Levy’s early, callow adulation is replaced by business matters, in which Loy



is emphatically the employee, although a sardonic one, receiving her ‘daily bread’ and dedicating herself to her ‘[g]entle Boss’: ‘Of course I am ready to do everything that can be of any use to you’ (undated [1933]). Yet she is frequently anxious about her decisions (‘I hope I have not made an awful mess’ is a recurring worry [e.g. 11 September 1934]), and in the dark about Levy’s (‘I don’t quite know what your agreements are with your “patients”’ [25 January 1934]). His brisk, mostly typed letters of one or two pages, usually on the gallery’s headed paper, are met by Loy’s handwritten, extensive, digressive and much-corrected missives. ‘Oh, how to be businesslike’, she wonders in one (undated [1934]).

But her role is not exactly to be businesslike, for although an agent for the gallery, she is also one of Levy’s artists – she had one exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery, in January 1933 – and corresponds with him in both capacities. Levy signals this confusion of roles by referring frequently to ‘Mina Loy’ in the third person, as in: ‘Will you also get in touch with Mina Loy and Pavel Tchelitchev and tell them that their materials for exhibition here this season must be received surely before January 15th’ (undated [1932]). Dependent on Levy for his subsidy – ‘the monthly fortune’ (undated [1931]) – she panics about his demand for work and is paranoid about his approval:

I ought to have written before but I was so rattled when you wrote that you wanted my paintings for January – that I had to immediately “change gear” – which is a very disturbing process [...] I was going ahead with things however – when I wrote you that Mr Sakier who said he had been sent by you to look at my paintings – said they were sentimental & he didnt [*sic*] like them. [...] from your letter I thought that his report had disinterested you. (28 November 1932)

Although she represents Levy’s interests and hands over financial support to his artists, Loy belongs with them rather than him. ‘[Y]our starving artists are my only real friends’, she writes ([after March?] 1936): she occupies a precarious position relative to (and reliant on) the authoritative, ‘business genius’ Levy (ML to Joella Levy, undated [1931]). In keeping with this hierarchy, Loy’s contribution to the gallery’s work is absent from Levy’s memoir. He does not, for example, mention any of her assistance in purchasing paintings by Dalí or Eugene Berman, both of whom he treats at length. Instead, Loy is present as the beautiful image of her notorious youth, the perfect icon for his ‘balancing act between America and Europe’.

This hierarchy maps directly on to a geopolitical one that emerges from the Levy–Loy correspondence. While the American gallerist prospers by

importing and selling paintings from Paris, protected from European events if not inflation, France and its capital are in an increasingly unstable position. From 1933 on, Loy's letters record the economic and social instability induced by Hitler's rise to power, as the chancellor announces his 'Boycott of the Jews', in Loy's phrase (30 March [1933]), American banks close, prices rise, and war appears likely. On 19 September 1934 Loy confesses to Levy that 'I have a feeling the whole building may be blown up by the Germans' and begins to think about returning to America: 'Even if there is not actual war there is going to be a fearful mess here in every way [...] We would be safer in America however poor'. In February 1935 Loy tells him that there is a 'strange deathbed atmosphere over here – & that equally strange expectation of something that must -- in accord with the successive fatality of generations -- be born -- probably still born'.<sup>27</sup> Compared to Paris – the dying, unproductive mother and her stillborn child – the United States represents safety, sustenance and paternalistic protection, an authority that mirrors and informs Levy's over Loy and the other artists whose work he sells (and ironically inverts the 'nourishment' that Paris has given Levy and American culture). The market for contemporary art in Paris is lifeless:

[Gallerist Léonce Rosenberg] says Dali [*sic*] is finis in Paris -- I hear that Leonce [*sic*] himself is fini -- he came out of the dark -- when I went into his place -- it was all dark -- looking very 'wan'. My most definite impression lately is that theres [*sic*] something rotten in the state of art deal. (ML to JL, February [1935])

Loy 'expects any moment to receive cards for the funeral of modern art' (1 July [1935]). Meanwhile, Levy's gallery is 'in a very healthy condition' and New York is on the rise: 'as a place [it's] not so bad these days', he writes to Loy to encourage her to make the passage (undated [August 1935?]).<sup>28</sup> And, as we will see, if Dalí is 'finis' in Paris, he is just getting going in New York.

#### **'[A]RE YOU GOING OUT OR COMING IN?'**

This is a competitive cycle, in which one national culture decays or deval-

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<sup>27</sup> This letter is dated 29 February, but 1935 was not a leap year, so either Loy's day or the archive's year is incorrect.

<sup>28</sup> This is not necessarily an accurate picture of the American economy in the mid-1930s, which was still suffering from the Crash of 1931. But as Levy articulates himself, it was necessary to maintain an image of vitality: 'Business in America just struggles along (altho I should have liked to keep that news away from the French for reasons of personal politic which you can understand)'. JL to ML, 2 April 1934.

ues while the other grows in comparison. Indeed, the logic of competition drives Loy's work for the gallery, often with national motivations. She is, for example, eager 'to demonstrate the power of the Levy side' in relation to other dealers, particularly the French dealer Pierre Colle (12 February 1933), who is a rival but also does work for Levy. Loy may herself have felt in competition with this new 'agent', but she also senses the threat he poses to Levy. She reports that Colle has closed his Paris gallery, suspecting that rather than representing Levy's interests in Europe, Colle would like a share of the stronger US market:

He thinks America is a much better country to work in than France – is delighted with it. [...] & as [Galerie] Quatre Chemins said that Colle *and* Levy [*sic*] I cannot see but that he is giving the impression that he is 'going in' with you in New York. (19 January 1934)

Despite her characteristic assertion that 'business is a mystery to me', she perceives that the terms cannot be favourable to Levy – 'it seems as it will be rather "halving" to have two dealers carrying the same painters in New York' – and defends his authority based on the fashionable reputation of the gallery, which 'has so much renommé now that surely you could have got Cocteaus & early Chiricos without Colle' (19 January 1934).

Competition is also implicit in the choices that Loy makes about an artist's work, which often rest on judgements about the relative quality of paintings: 'selected most definitely for you No 28 It's a beauty / I almost retained 29 – theyre [*sic*] both the same subject rather different [...] in the end I stuck to one' [undated 1932]. Judgement is also frequently made comparatively between artists. At Léonce Rosenberg's, Loy sees work by Viollier, who 'seems to have improved', while Rosenberg's Picabias are 'frightful'. Indeed, the question of value is always a relative one, as witnessed by a French review of a Campigli show 'setting him far above the other painters' (ML to JL, February [1935]). Just as in Loy's ongoing battles with customs and shipping companies, her criteria and that of the dealer system in which she is working is: 'are you going out or coming in?' (ML to JL, undated [after February 1934?]). Hence the American artist Abraham Rattner is 'the coming man' (24 May 1934), 'Tchilitchew [*sic*] is going to be quite important' (30 July 1934) and Balthus is possibly 'the only thing that can come up to your expectations for the coming season & so I intend to keep after him' (1 July [1935]). The great concern behind all these efforts is who is in fashion and who will be the next big trend. In line with the national hierarchy, in which predominantly European work, sold in Paris, is feeding the stronger

US market, the ultimate question is who will ‘tak[e]’ in America, as Loy puts it of Bérard (ML to JL, 25 July [1934]). Levy’s ‘expectations’ are for a ‘hot’ new painter to launch in New York.

These artists’ dependence on the in–out cycle of fashion makes explicit the exchange value of the artist as a figure, not just the artist’s work, for their reputation is just as important as the quality and style of the art. In this respect, Salvador Dalí was the quintessential celebrity artist. Represented by the Julien Levy Gallery (and Loy) from 1933, from these early years of the decade Dalí stood for Surrealism to most Americans (Tashjian 1995: 36). As the movement was translated in the United States and became a popular phenomenon, Dalí replaced Breton as its visible figurehead. In June 1934 *Vanity Fair* cited him as one of their ‘New Reputations of the Year’. In November 1936, at the time of his second exhibition at the Julien Levy Gallery and during the run of ‘Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism’ at MoMA, a *Vogue* journalist verified that he ‘is the Surrealist school of to-day’ (Agha 1936: 131). The following month he featured on the cover of *Time*. His renown was a media coup, achieved by his eccentric, theatrical persona (Tashjian 1995: 52–56). In 1934 Loy wrote to Levy wondering on the artist’s behalf if he

couldn’t give Surrealist lectures in America [...] of most startling Surrealist phenomena – the lecture to be given in short clear sentences & he thinks of wearing something in the way of a huge comb growing out of his hair – I think his Spanish hoarseness rising [?] from the gap in his lower teeth would be very winsome. (undated)

Levy and Loy clearly understood his personal appeal as good for business and wanted to package it, to repeat it, *standardise* it even. Levy did ‘not require anything short of a new Dali’ (ML to JL, 1 July [1935]).

The underside of this model of personal value – another version of the subject as object that we saw at work in *Insel* – might be considered in the case of Eugene Berman, a Neo-Romantic painter represented by Levy with a growing but not secure reputation among American buyers. A significant aspect of Loy’s and Levy’s economic arrangements concerns the monthly payments that Levy makes to certain artists, including Berman. In December 1934, the figure that he receives is 1,600 francs a month (later Richard Oelze will also receive a subsidy, of around 1,000 francs). Levy acts more like a patron than a dealer, giving Berman an allowance and expecting a quota of paintings in return. Berman relies entirely on Levy, without whom

he 'would be – literally – dead' (ML to JL, 15 March [1934]).<sup>29</sup> By contrast, at the gallery, 'Everything is busy, thriving, and exciting' (JL to ML, 16 November 1934). Berman is, then, physically and existentially subject to the thriving market that the gallery represents and drives. Levy sells paintings by Berman, but Berman is exchanging them for the assurance of his very self. The same equivalence, between paintings by Berman and Berman himself, is acknowledged when Levy writes:

His new pictures looked as if they might be quite dull, the drawings were awful, and I can't sell enough right now to pay back what I have given him so far [...]. Can't let the boy starve, but wish he would work harder and better. (JL to ML, undated [after January 1934?])

Berman's existence is secured only by the quality of his work, and that is subject to market tastes, which are those of America and are themselves a matter of fashion. Thus Levy regrets that Berman's new work is 'dull' and that he tends to repeat himself – after all, novelty and excitement are the chief qualities of fashion.<sup>30</sup> Thus he advises:

I feel very strongly, others here agree and I have told him before, that he should do much more work with the figure. A little less landscape and architecture and more figure pieces would give variety, sex appeal, and added saleability. (JL to ML, 2 April 1934)

His comments allude to the tastes that govern Berman's success (variety, sex appeal), and to the market to which he is ultimately beholden (the saleability of his work). And, being physically equivalent with his pictures in the manner just discussed, Berman himself is literally subject to fashions. Indeed, by November 1934, Levy felt a 'definite beginning of an anti-Berman trend' (JL to ML, 16 November 1934). Given his precarious reliance on Levy and the art market, this is a trend towards Berman's extinction as much as the devaluation of his work.

Loy, meanwhile, felt that he might be saved if he could leave Paris for the United States, where his value would be assured: 'I wish people could do something for him & get him to America – I really believe he's of some importance' (ML to JL, 19 September [1934]). In early 1935 Berman did

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<sup>29</sup> On 26 December [1934?], Loy reported 'huge excitement over your cheque -- Bermans [*sic*] tongue hanging out'.

<sup>30</sup> In a letter to Levy of 6 December [1934?], Loy reports that she has 'told Berman about repeating himself without slaying his soul' and insists that Levy's role is to convince his clients to see 'what is new in his last painting'.

cross the Atlantic, and turned his attention to an American subject: the Manhattan docks. Levy writes to Loy that '[h]is exhibition opens April 2nd and I hope to have at least one example of the American product' (undated [March 1935]).<sup>31</sup> Berman's reputation was made in Paris and his cachet as a European artist was central to Levy's project to 'nourish' US culture, but this idea of Paris was interpreted in American terms, whether in subject matter or to suit the taste of US buyers.

In fact, the same conditions applied to Loy. She was also dependent on Levy, receiving the same 1,600 francs as Berman (December 1934). This was remuneration for her work as agent (although payments from Levy predated the opening of the gallery), but it has the same equivalence with her person and her work, for without it she feels she would not 'be here to write at all' (30 March [1933]). Loy is also subject to the same fashions of aesthetic taste. Her exhibition at the gallery in January 1933 was not a great success: no paintings were sold during its run of six weeks and only one canvas was sold afterwards, and at a low price: \$175, compared to the \$350 profit that Levy expected to make on a show of Tchelitchew's drawings (a much less valuable medium) (JL to ML, 27 March [1933]). When reporting these figures to Loy, Levy refers to Tchelitchew as 'Tchelichaplin', a droll response to Loy's suggestion 'that if you want to sell Tchel: well you should have him over to New York & talk about himself – thats [*sic*] his masterpiece – he's really good' (15 March [1934]). Both recognise that this artist's personal appeal and self-fashioned image has had a hand in his US sales. Loy, by comparison, has no reputation as a painter. Her exhibition has been arranged, so she feels, for the 'dead month of January' (ML to JL, 28 November 1932). Tellingly, at Joella's suggestion, Levy printed Loy's poem 'Apology of Genius' (without the title) on the announcement – as if her earlier literary renown among the avant-garde might be transferred a decade later. Caroline Burke also suggests that a number of paintings that were included in this exhibition were misdated, and that Levy may have encouraged Loy to use earlier dates to increase the value of the work (2012: loc. 10988). But in the event, six paintings were returned to Loy. Levy kept a few back for 'when you give your exhibition next year' (undated [1933?]), but the fact he didn't keep more is indicative of her lack of reputation: without a show to generate interest, he would not have been able to sell her work.

Levy's advice is that

your last show should be followed up, if you seriously continue paint-

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<sup>31</sup> As I will return to in Chapter 3.2, this was also once Pound's phrase for Loy's poetry: a distinctly 'national [American] product' (1918: 58).

ing. You can't start to really sell until your name is rebuilt, and articles etc. should commence in Europe and permeate to America if the reputation of an artist is to be seriously considered by the blind morons here. (22 April 1933)

His strategy depends on the relationship between the new world and the old, in which a pre-existing European avant-garde reputation is promoted with the cultural weight of European (Paris-based) magazines, to be absorbed in America, where, despite being 'morons', the art buyers are ultimately responsible for 'rebuil[ding]' the artist's name. Loy is fully subject to a system in which artistic fashions are consecrated in Paris but sealed in the American market, where they 'take', or not. Thus Levy senses that a change in taste will favour Loy's pictures, and can suggest she adapt her style even better to suit the new fashion:

The vogue here has changed radically (through Florine Stettheimer's designs for the Gertrude Stein Opera) Whereas last year your pictures were criticized for being feminine and personal, now everybody is crazy for pictures which are 'féerique' and candy box and magical. The dealers are fighting with each other to give a Stettheimer show. [...] (If you do decide to paint more, I would suggest adding color this time [...]) (undated [after February 1934])<sup>32</sup>

But Loy did not send more works to New York. Despite Levy's repeated enquiries about a suitable date she did not provide material for another exhibition. On 30 July 1934 she reported to Levy that she is 'painting a lot & if at the end of the month there are any that really turn out well I will stick a few in if I may. One never knows how things are going to turn out with this Loy!' By 26 January of the following year, she had not sent work – 'I suppose you have filled up my date in March – I was going to send my things and pay the extra 4 dollars myself – but each picture needs something – that final feminine touch?' Both letters suggest Loy's awareness of the system in which her work accrues value (or devalues). Referring to herself in the third person, she acknowledges the value of a name and its attached reputation,

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<sup>32</sup> Gertrude Stein and Virgil Thomson's *Four Saints in Three Acts* premiered at the Wadsworth Atheneum museum in Hartford, Connecticut, on 7 February 1934. Levy sent photographs of the opera to Loy (ML to JL, undated [1934]), perhaps as further encouragement to work in the vein of Stettheimer's designs. On the fashionable reception of *Four Saints*, see Watson 2000. Ironically, the material that Stettheimer used to such spectacular modern effect in her set design – cellophane – had been, according to Burke (2012: loc. 7616), a key material in Loy's lampshade designs in the previous decade, making Loy the trendsetter. See Brown 2009, Chapter 6, on Stettheimer and cellophane.

and perhaps even a desire to cultivate an air of mystery. Her suggestion that the work demands something feminine may relate to Levy's advice of the previous year, and certainly implies that a particular allure (the 'sex appeal' that Levy wanted of Berman?) might benefit the work. And yet these letters also produce a sense of deferral, uncertainty and omission – the pictures might or might not be sent, they are not finished, and Loy herself has been replaced in the gallery's schedule. These are absences that also speak of Loy's anonymity.

Although she represented to Levy an icon of the European avant-garde, we have seen that this is an outmoded reputation, that Levy reminded her she was in 'retirement'; the movement she led 'has since exploded'. Her aesthetic belatedness mirrors the sense in which, at this moment, Paris (though symbolically still the capital of art) was losing its value: threatened by war, with a failing art market, its historical value as a cheap home for artists and the consecrating seat of beauty and artistic authority was in decline. America, by comparison, as represented by Levy's gallery and clients, is an insurgent authority. Its stronger economy and market for art decree taste and are responsible for the very survival of European artists.

Loy's letters to Levy, whose youth and buoyant optimism are one outward expression of American ascendancy, are full of gendered comments on her personal decline and devaluation. The 'trouble' with women, she writes, is 'well look at me [...] we don't last' (20 October 1929). 'My memory is entirely gone', she exaggerates in 1934, '& I spend all my life looking (When I want to paint) for my spectacles' (undated). Compared to her young son-in-law, Loy (although only in her late forties and early fifties during the time she worked for him) clearly feels her age and anonymity. She wrote in 1928:

Well being the common place average woman, I do hope one of your twins will be a boy. [...] I saw your nice friend Evans – he had to rush off – and I took him to the terrible quite-respectable-restaurant that has opened up next door – and we drunk fines – which I hadn't done for years – then I went to Djuna [Barnes]'s where a lady declared a passion for my white hair. ([1?] May)

Self-consciously she adopts a traditional point of view about families and places to eat; refers, as mothers and grandmothers might, to Levy's 'nice friend'; and draws attention to her ageing appearance. She is insecure in her position as a has-been (a once-was), as we see when she mentions 'the fear that mother in laws have of their son in laws – now the old order reverseth & the young come into their own' (ML to JL, undated [December 1933?]). Loy



relates her sense of personal decline to that of her work and her previous emblematic modernity. Referring in another letter to Levy (undated [1933]) to her 'subconscious', she immediately rejects the modern attitude that the Freudian term conjures: 'But that is all over – a broken down grandmother who cannot write an English sentence forwards has at last come to take her simple meal without – excitement.' Later in the same letter: 'All I want is a cigarette & a detective story & a choice of those [illegible] simple word puzzles [...] that's what I like – with a sentimental feuilleton with tea.' Consigning modern expressions of subjectivity, complexity (and complex writing) and the thrill of novelty to the past, Loy self-consciously charts the distance from her erstwhile reputation as a modernist poet. Now she feels her worth devalued: she is a 'total loss', a 'junk writer' (ML to JL, undated [1933]). '[E]verything I touch disappears', she writes poetically, as if in an elegy for her own production (ML to JL, 6 December 1934).

#### **'I FRIGHTFULLY WANT TO WRITE IT MYSELF'**

Such magical immateriality recalls that of Loy's character Insel, whose own value and reputation is so much at stake in the novel that bears his name. In the current edition of *Insel*, Loy's name is there on the front cover too, of course. But the text went unpublished in Loy's lifetime, despite her efforts to find a press who would accept it, a struggle against anonymity that is also the book's subject. That paratextual echo is not a coincidence: as her correspondence with Levy of the 1930s shows, Loy's book was written in the context of intimate experience of precarious reputations, those on the rise and those in decline. In light of the Levy–Loy letters, the anonymity that hovers threateningly behind the search for celebrity in *Insel* is as much about Loy herself as it is about Insel or his real-life counterpart Richard Oelze.

Like Loy, and like Insel in the novel, Oelze was eager to get to New York. Loy wrote to Levy on his behalf, explaining that '[b]eing a German he's in a hopeless fix wherever he happens to Be except perhaps America'. She begs Levy: 'Please will you ask [Alfred] Barr if he can get anyone to think up someone who can give some pretended reason why Oelse [*sic*] could be needed in New York' (undated [after March 1936?]). The US offered Oelze not just a safe haven but a lifeline. 'I am convinced he ought to be preserved', writes Loy, for she is also convinced that Oelze is Levy's 'next Dalí':

I am sure that of all your discoveries he's the one that's [*sic*] got the real stuff in him. I consider that he's entirely still in Chrysalis condition – fairly ready to burst out [...] Man [Ray] & I were sitting inside the

Lutetia with the Air raid sirens roaring [...] and I felt so strongly some effort should be made on his behalf. [...] He's much too remarkable for me to just wash my hands of him. (Undated [after March 1936?])

Loy wrote this scene with Man Ray into *Insel*. Indeed this 'effort' to get Oelze to New York and the argument for saving him, that he is 'too remarkable', are a significant part of the book's plot. However, as discussed, the novel is also about the fluctuating relationship between Insel and Jones, and Loy's pleading letter to Levy reveals that it is in another sense just as much about Loy herself. She adds to her arguments for assisting his passage to America: 'Also – & here's the selfish reason – he has confessed to me that he thinks he is really entirely a painter – & couldn't write his life I wanted him to – & I frightfully want to write it myself' (undated [after March 1936?]). Oelze's life must be saved so that Loy can write it. Here again is the equivalence between artist and work, as we saw with Berman, except this time it is an exchange of one artist (Oelze) for another's work (Loy's).

This is written into *Insel*, too, as examined by Andrew Gaedtke, for whom the book represents a therapeutic relationship in which subject (analyst) and object (analysand) are in danger of losing their distinction. He writes that Insel's 'painful drives', his 'erratic and auratic transmissions', are transformed into 'a literary product' (the book that Mrs Jones plans to write) (2008: 159). In therapeutic terms, this is an ethically suspicious transaction, for:

Jones has retreated to complete a text which will bear her name and grant her (and only her) the cultural capital that she had perhaps been pursuing from the start. [...] Jones's work has bought her a new lease on a flagging literary career, but [...] it has been paid for with Insel's very being. (159)

The Levy–Loy letters – as well as Loy's publication history – make it clear that Loy's own career was flagging at this point. Writing a book in which a version of herself transforms another artist into a work of art, and a product to be marketed, Loy created in that artist a discursive figure for the conditions in which she found herself in the late 1930s. Loy's own career is stalled, and it is associated with the Parisian avant-garde, itself now in decline while New York grows in stature. The art of a culturally emboldened United States cannot be separated from consumerism, and in this context the artist must reckon with celebrity.

## ‘[P]ATHETICALLY MAIMED CELEBRITY’

We have seen that Salvador Dalí was the exemplar of the celebrity artist. Dalí’s fame rested on his notoriety in the United States, where by 1936 Surrealism was a public phenomenon.<sup>33</sup> But magazine coverage in the late 1930s also illustrates the movement’s precarious position as the latest craze. In November 1936 M. F. Agha writes for *Vogue* that ‘the Surrealist school [...] has such an immense capacity for propaganda, and for making converts, that its influence is felt everywhere’ (131). This is otherwise known as ‘Surrealism Mania’, in Cecil Beaton’s words the following February: ‘Surrealism has swept the country like a plague. People are conscious, now, that pianos have cuticles and orchestras skins, that rooms must be soft and hairy, and that every one is suffering from paranoia’ (1937: 114). From Breton to Beaton: divorced from Breton’s radical politics but crossing a line between art and commodity that had been finely blurred in the movement itself, Surrealism became a trend to be followed. Its influence

percolates downward. What is a snobbish art scandal to-day, is an accepted style to-morrow, and a merchandised style the next day. [...] I am told that the five-and-ten cent stores are even now doing a brisk trade in framed reproductions of Dali paintings. (Agha 1936: 131)

The author notes the devaluation of an artist’s work as it goes through the stages of fashion, from rarefied, intangible mystery to mass-produced commodity. By March 1937, Surrealism is at the top of *Vogue*’s ‘thumbs down’ column: in the cycle of fashion, its period of ascendancy is limited (‘*Vogue*’s Spotlight’ 1937: 88–89). *Vogue*’s consecrating function here reminds us of its status as an arbiter of Surrealism’s fate, rather than a mere recorder: the movement was subject to fashions, as much as shaping them.

Loy came to the United States in 1936 – ‘the year of the Surrealists’ according to *Harper’s Bazaar* (cited Blum 2007: 156) – and drafted *Insel* in this period of the movement’s short-lived public notoriety and passing as a trend. Her novel is, to quote Beaton’s words again, highly ‘conscious [...] that pianos have cuticles and orchestras skins, that rooms must be soft and hairy, and that every one is suffering from paranoia’. It registers the precarious fashion for Surrealist figures, which itself answered the era’s need for seductive personalities. She had once hoped that Richard Oelze was the

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<sup>33</sup> According to Peggy Guggenheim, by 1936, when the Surrealists had an exhibition in London, she and Djuna Barnes thought ‘Surrealism was over long ago, and that we had had enough of it in the twenties’ (2005: 150).

‘new genius to bite Dalí’ and these hopes (and their unfulfilment) for Oelze are clear in his fictional representation.

Insel is introduced as a ‘pathetically maimed celebrity’ (Loy 2014: 3); his ‘aura’ and special hold over Mrs Jones (‘some intrinsic quality I have never found in anyone else’: 95) clearly align with what the US historian Warren Susman has described as ‘the aura and power of personality’ – an early twentieth-century development of the nineteenth-century sense of ‘character’, established with the rise of the film star (2003: 220–23). The adjectives that Susman finds most frequently associated with personality are applicable – and in some cases actually applied – to Insel: fascinating, stunning, attractive, magnetic, glowing, masterful, creative, dominant and forceful (Susman 2003: 217). As important as Insel’s art in securing his success is what Susman would call his ‘personal charm’ (220). This is what works so forcefully on Mrs Jones, and later fails, along with his attempt to get to America. It is a peculiar type of charm, as Mrs Jones admits – Insel is emaciated and has rotting teeth – but she predicts that Insel’s ‘beauty of horror’ ‘should be worth such a lot of money to him’ (Loy 2014: 68) and in her vision he conforms to Susman’s assessment of personality: ‘One is to be unique, distinctive [...] make oneself stand out from the crowd, and at the same time appeal – by fascination, magnetism, attractiveness – to it’ (220).

In Nicholas Daly’s account, the ‘It’ girl – that ‘screen goddess’ who epitomises the culture of personality – is a ‘hodgepodge’ of late Victorian, Edwardian and modern discourses, combining electricity, sexual magnetism, Freudian drives, popular science and spirituality (2004: 90). This jumble almost exactly fits Insel’s overdetermined, *fin-de-siècle*-meets-modern characterisation. But a male film star seems to figure more overtly in Loy’s pathetic celebrity: Charlie Chaplin. Always vain, Insel wears a mellow grey shirt, a comb and a ‘huge white handkerchief’ (99), and is distressed when Jones washes his suit. Part of his ‘beggar’s capital’ (87), this outfit – with its exaggerated cartoon-like accessories – immediately recalls Chaplin, then ‘the most famous man in the world’ (North 2008: 187) but also the subject of ‘rapturous articles in the intellectual journals’ (North 2008: 20), i.e., ‘both “popular” and distinctly “highbrow”’ (North 2008: 54).<sup>34</sup> Loy develops Insel as a Surrealist version of Chaplin’s Tramp:

A warm appreciation stole around my heart for that adorable domes-

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<sup>34</sup> In 1920 Loy and Chaplin had both appeared on Tristan Tzara’s list of official Dada adherents (Burke 2012: loc. 5988). As well as film stars, Susman identifies Henry Ford – Loy’s ‘greatest hero’, as she calls him in a letter to Levy in May 1928 – as a key figure in the culture of personality.

ticity of the tramp, which first attracted me, when in my childhood, a clown, taking off his tattered overcoat displayed a wash-hand stand built into the lining.

At that moment my friend Insel was very dear to me. (2014: 99)

Like an impresario spotting a talent, Jones (a keen cinemagoer) sees that Insel's success will rest on his finding a mass audience: "If you want to make a fortune [...] you should go on the Music Halls... Of course, you'd need to rehearse – Have someone sit in the back of the theater and tell you *where* you get your effects" (101). In this respect, Insel's characterisation as a cinematic or photographic effect – his 'developing' and so on – acquires additional significance, making him the self-reflexive product of an image. Like Chaplin, who is often referred to as a creation of his films – 'a function of the audience's familiarity with his image' (Goldman 2011: 130) – Insel is a technological production, a subject who is more like an object, albeit one with limited materiality.<sup>35</sup> In her drafts for *Insel* Loy calls him a 'simulacrum' (2014: 165). He too exists only as an image to be received by an audience: he 'suffered, it would seem, from the incredible handicap of only being able to mature in the imagination of another. His empty obsession somehow taking form in obsessing the furnished mind of a spectator' (132).<sup>36</sup> The instability of this ontological status is underwritten by the reference to Chaplin. We can recall that *Insel* was begun in around 1936, making Loy's allusion to the star coincide with his anachronistic *Modern Times* of that year, 'a film that was widely held to have mocked its own title by remaining silent, even in 1936' (North 2008: 185).

Loy's creation of Insel as a potential celebrity reflects her view of art and reputation in the 1930s. Following her work for Levy and with Salvador Dalí, and in the context of Surrealism's rise in America, she was well aware what it took to make a name (and a fortune) for yourself: *effects*, the appeal to an audience that was perfectly suited to the spectacular culture of America's consumer society. 'I would make a million with Dali's face if I were a film producer', she told Levy (February [1935]). She recognises in Oelze's tattered, hungry deterioration a selling point, making the fictional Insel a Tramp-like figure, a bohemian artist who might cross over and find mainstream notoriety. However, Insel does not get to America. If his deteriora-

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<sup>35</sup> See also Victor Shklovsky's assertion that Chaplin is 'nearly the only movie actor who originates from the material itself'. His 'gestures and films are conceived [...] in the flicker of the grey-and-black-shadow' (cited Rancière 2013: 191). In this respect Rancière compares Chaplin to the dandy, making himself a work of art.

<sup>36</sup> Loy had observed something similar of Marinetti in the early 1910s (Burke 2012: loc. 3301).

tion is one moment a kind of glamour, the next it merely indexes his failure to realise the promised celebrity – to reach an audience who will become familiar with him – and his descent into the outmoded. This twin possibility – celebrity and anonymity – charges the novel.

Celebrity has recently been theorised as a model of subjectivity closely related to the model produced by modernist texts. Jonathan Goldman, for example, writes that:

celebrity makes the self contingent; identity depends on an audience for its continued existence, turning the individual into a stereotype, condemned to perform itself until death. This process, we might say, turns the psychological subject into an object, something that lacks agency over itself. (2011: 1)<sup>37</sup>

Modernism, too, at least in the case of its hegemonic figures, relies on this objectification, for it ‘generates a figure of the author as a unique, larger-than-life personality, a [...] repository of encoded meaning, though one that can only be read as such after it has been turned into an object’ (Goldman 2011: 2). Similarly, Aaron Jaffe proposes that: ‘Unlike movie stardom, the matrix of associations supporting [modernists’] reputation is not intrinsically image-based but predicated instead on a distinctive textual mark of authorship.’ This ‘imprimatur’, as Jaffe defines it, ‘turns the author into a formal artifact, fusing it to the text as a reified signature of value’ (2005: 20). Modernists, Goldman and Jaffe assert, were good at turning themselves into textual commodities, but commodities that transcended their consumer associations with their image of idealised individuality.

In fact, Loy made a similar argument herself about painting in a short essay, ‘The Metaphysical Pattern in Aesthetics’.<sup>38</sup> Here she designates the ‘essential factor in a work of art’ as its metaphysical ‘pattern’, a ‘screen formed by the directing lines or map of the artist’s genius’ (Loy 2011: 263). Key to her argument is the sense in which the ‘singularity’ and ‘individuality’ of the artist-genius (the ‘God in the machine’) is *recognisable* (Loy’s word) in this pattern – what Jaffe would call the artist’s imprimatur (Loy 2011: 263). The problem with this model is that women artists and writers have found it much harder to displace their image in favour of the object – the painting or the text. In the female modernist’s case, the process of reification is distorted, as something of the image remains (Loy’s and Barnes’s repeatedly mentioned beauty and style, Loy’s representativeness of the modern wom-

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<sup>37</sup> Also relevant is Brown 2009, which connects modernist form to glamour.

<sup>38</sup> Carolyn Burke suggests a date of 1923 (2012: loc. 6847).

an) and the forging of an imprimatur is inhibited by their relative struggles to establish an enduring body of work. Jaffe acknowledges this historical problem, writing that

the high literary labor of the solitary genius is underwritten by solid bodies of authoritative texts. [...] The reputations of women modernists [...] have long suffered by dwelling among the forms of low literary labor in memoirs and biographies; by and large, women modernists lacked access to the production of durable literary goods as vehicles of reputation. (2005: 100)

Indeed, Loy is one of Jaffe's examples. Discussing the recovery of Loy's work in the last thirty years by her executor and editor Roger Conover, Jaffe notes:

Loy's ascendant reputation depends on finding durable goods – that is, raising a modernist textual apparatus – where there were only apocryphal accounts, replacing the wrecks and lesser labors of an 'anti-career' with products of high literary labor as modeled, authorized, and perfected by more (contemporaneously) successful contemporaries. (100)

This project has more recently been taken up again with Sara Crangle's collection of Loy's essays and plays, and Sarah Hayden's new edition of *Insel*, both referred to throughout this chapter. But the novel anticipates through the figure of Insel the highly unstable process of making a reputation.

As discussed, Insel represents a complex blend of subject and object, one that can now be related to Jaffe's and Goldman's model of literary celebrity. His hybrid self, simultaneously a body, his own artwork, the subject of Jones's biography and Loy's own book, echoes Jaffe's argument that modernists 'hybridize[d] bodily agency and textual form' (2005: 3). In this he provides a figure for the process they describe – the making of celebrity. True to its genre, Loy's *Künstlerroman* reflects on the artistic self – it does this in an age when celebrity is so much an issue. Insel is a version of Loy, in the manner explored earlier – like Pygmalion's Galatea or the Surrealist object, a narcissistic reflection of herself and her desires. Thus he also indexes her sense of failure and the difficulty she had in creating a lasting body of work for herself.

In his quasi-immateriality, Insel appears to be heading towards Jaffe's '[d]etached, disembodied reputatio[n]' (2005: 10) or Goldman's 'idealized,

incorporeal entity, a self that carries on a perplexed relation to the body and any picture of that body' (2011: 11). His auratic form might represent an aesthetic ideal, perhaps a modernist suspicion of mass-reproducible images. But Insel also exposes the contradiction at the heart of the modernist celebrity self as modernist artwork, for as we have seen, he never rids himself of his material associations – he is, like a mannequin or a Surrealist object, always made, even as he verges on the incorporeal. The narrative of *Insel*, too, is driven by the aesthetic idealisation of its eponymous figure and his return to disappointing, prosaic materiality: 'When some mysterious fuel failed him, Insel remained – a mess of profane dross' (Loy 2014: 82). Always a commodity, the possibility of his devaluation and decay is ever-present: they are 'driving force[s] in the circulation of both words and things', according to Jaffe (2005: 11). By the end of the novel, Insel's stock is low:

In his soaring, flagging excitations he might have spent a spiritual capital and going broke, be raising exhaustive loans on the steadily decreasing collateral of his vitality, until an ultimate bonfire in those eerie eyes should be extinguished in some unimaginable bankruptcy. (82)

However, Insel's deteriorating form not only suggests his devaluation and decay: it is, at the same time, his value – his selling point as a Surrealist version of Chaplin's Tramp. Like Schiaparelli's 'Tear Illusion' dress (fig. 3.8), his dematerialising body is his aesthetic distinction. In this sense, Loy's vision of Insel's decline can be read as a statement of aesthetic intent. He is like her flea-market finds (and like 'vintage' items nowadays): revalued and valuable because marked by the past. In other words, devaluation is turned to account. After all, in comparing her art to that of Schiaparelli, Loy suggested the necessary and creative negotiation of the commodity. The same impulse was behind the Surrealists' embrace of the object and Julien Levy's translation of Surrealism into an American vernacular form. Scholars have also noted a comparable strategy throughout Loy's work, in which 'disadvantaged states' such as devaluation and uncertain legitimacy (which are often gendered) are reformed in an 'enabling role' (Goody 2001b, Bronstein 2001). My reading of *Insel* suggests a less definitive version of this impulse. Loy's 'pathetically maimed celebrity' Insel, a vision of her own 'flagging career' but also a Surrealist Tramp, can also be read as an aesthetic choice – and thus a bid to give new, consumable shape to her artistic self. Recalling Levy's nickname for Pavel Tchelitchew – 'Tchelichaplin' – *Insel* might even be cast as Loy's literary interpretation of Neo-Romanticism, the high-profile





Fig. 3.8

and high-selling movement that she helped to promote in the United States, with its 'attractive ambience of pathos and ruin' (Schaffner 1998: 36). Again it is possible to compare this to the unresolved contradictions of the Surrealist object: her novel exposes the threat of commodity culture in the form of a devaluing artist, all the while transforming that figure into an aesthetic object, which itself will ultimately be valued in market terms. *Insel* not only registers, as Tyrus Miller argues, the 'historical pressures on the figure of the artist' and her failure to come to terms with them: it also represents an attempt aesthetically, and in all its compromises, to negotiate the new context.

As both a commodity and an art object, especially in the 1930s as we have seen, fashion is particularly well suited to articulating these contradictions. In *Insel* Loy uses fashion to emphasise the artist as a self to be created and a fashionable commodity to be sold. Jaffe notes that in Joyce's *Künstlerroman*, *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, the repeated use of the word 'forge' 'connote[s] deliberate fabrication' of the artistic self (2005: 36). Loy's novel is highly self-conscious about this process, stressing the commercial context in which the artistic self is formed, one that might work (as in Schiaparelli's case) to the maker's advantage, but which also subjects her to the market and its fluctuating valuations. For Jaffe and Goldman, the logic of celebrity is not so much represented by or in modernist texts as operating *through* them. Jaffe, for example, writes that the fabrication of the modernist 'author' happens with the reader, who 'detects the imprimatur of the literary modernist' (2005: 39). In both its subject matter and its publication history, *Insel* begs the question: what, then, to make of a modernist without readers at this point – or publishers, even – no one to seal the legitimisation? In Goldman's thesis (and implicitly in Jaffe's), the modernist author is born with the text: 'the author, rather than being established as predating the text, comes into being as a figure within the writing' (Goldman 2011: 69). This 'birth' depends on the reification of the individual in her text and on the recognition of that text as modernist by its readers. Unpublished in Loy's lifetime and written over ten years after she had last appeared in print and two decades since her avant-garde status had been announced, *Insel* – with its decaying central figure – might instead register this modernist's demise.

Another, still provisional rebuttal to this persistent possibility is that throughout *Insel* the United States presents the chance of artistic rebirth. Loy wrote the novel, as Mrs Jones carried out her role, '[i]n view of America' (Loy 2014: 140). Its narrative is driven towards the new world as sanctuary and new aesthetic sanctifier, but ends before divulging whether either character arrive. But Loy drafted *Insel* mostly from the safety of New York,

and another ending to the novel, recently identified in the Loy archive at Yale by Sarah Hayden, is set in Manhattan. ‘Visitation of Insel’ is what Hayden calls an ‘addendum’, once intended as an ending to the novel but excluded from subsequent drafts. It describes a domestic interaction between Jones and her two daughters Alda and Sophia, who confirm many of the fears that underlie the novel itself and which Loy expressed in her letters to Julien Levy. Alda cruelly taunts her mother: “‘Aaron [...] doesn’t see why he should give you that hundred dollars. [...] *Your book!*” she sneered, “It’s an excuse\_to get money out of us! [...] You’re no good – never have been any good –”’ (156). It is a voice that may have sounded in Loy’s own mind – a ‘blank truth’, her narrator says: ‘Alda’s recriminations were identical with mine of myself’ (156).

Following this destabilising scene, in which Loy also raises the troubling idea of exchanging a novel for money, Insel appears to Jones. He bolsters her failing confidence, fulfilling the function established in the main draft:

His ‘presence’, conveying a solemn hilarity, declared in my brain ‘Ess ist doch nicht schlimm genug \_\_ \_\_ Nothing they can do to you is bad enough \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ you’re a revenge on your unfair advantage \_\_ \_\_ they cannot see what we see.’ (159)

This ‘surrealist man’ (163) also echoes his earlier characterisation, caught between the immaterial and material: ‘When he responded only to the terrestrial, his body became heavy with lead; when more rarely, to the celestial, his spirit lightening, he diminished in weight’ (162). This precarious balance is lost when Sophia interrupts the ‘visitation’, crying: “‘Mamma! I can’t set the curls at the back of my neck.” In lightning metamorphoses, the clockwork of the surrealist man runs down’ (165). Loy condenses the central dynamics of the main draft, in which Insel’s idealised aesthetic form – his autonomy – is always related to (and threatened by) consumer culture. Here, that culture is represented by the image – like a captioned advert from a woman’s magazine – of a young woman struggling to perfect her hair. In turn, his loss of energy apparently results in the decline of Jones’s own creative power and she returns to her domestic, maternal function.

But after Insel’s aura fades and Jones mourns him, a ‘creature of my own species’ (166), she then attends to Sophia in the bathroom, a scene that Loy describes in explicitly aesthetic terms:

Sophia, rising from the incredible chaos she produced in the tiny bathroom, her arms white snakes ‘before the fall’, was weaving in the

air the rhythm of her toilet.

Under my fingers the clammy tendrils clinging to her neck sizzled in the curling tongs. Her curses of procrastination crackled about my head while through the slab-like snow of her luminous back that faint electric 'comfort of life' conveyed her intrinsic aloofness of honnied marble. The silk, as if pleased to find no intervening fabric, slipped on the bare severity of her body.

I 'do her up'. (166)

Again Jones is Pygmalion, her daughter Sofia her Galatea, a sculpture of 'honnied marble'. Referring to textiles ('weaving') and music ('rhythm') as well as the plastic arts, Loy returns to her image of the interdisciplinary female artist. Dressing her female model, this artist finds its definitive expression in the fashion designer, clothing a modern woman in silk and electricity.

Far from losing her creative power when Insel is interrupted by an image of consumer culture, Mrs Jones's art is shown to derive its energy from the sphere of fashion. True to the negotiation of the commodity that drove both the Surrealist object and Schiaparelli's designs, Loy imagines art and consumer culture in dialectical relation. The closing image of her alternative ending to *Insel* 'identif[ies] that Beam controlling a surrealist man with the high-light on a fallen curler' (167). The most immaterial of aesthetic forms is produced through and understood in relation to the material. Loy puts it this way in the final line of 'Visitation of Insel': 'It is, in as far as I am aware, no particularly cleanly matter from which radium is extracted' (167). Once back in the United States, Loy's understanding of art as a negotiation between aesthetics and commerce is given clear expression.<sup>39</sup>

The reality for Loy as an artist was even messier. Burke suggests that 'Although Mina had been an asset [to the Julien Levy Gallery] in Paris, she was now a poor relation. "Promised Land", her account of the period after her return to New York, is depressing to read' (2012: loc. 8127). She successfully marketed some of her designs – a perfume bottle made from tubes in which

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<sup>39</sup> The recognition of this relationship is not new in her work. In 'Gertrude Stein' (1929) she exclaimed: 'Would not life be lovelier if you were constantly overjoyed by the sublimely pure concavity of your wash bowls? The tubular dynamics of your cigarette?' (1985: 298). In 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose' (1923–25) she wrote of artists making 'moon-flowers out of muck' (1985: 142). If her references to wash bowls and tubular dynamics recall Duchamp's and Picabia's valuation of American modernity in the previous decade, the process of producing art from the context of materialism also has a national aspect in 'Anglo-Mongrels', for while the British artist 'Esau', based on her first husband Stephen Haweis, 'absorbs the erudite idea | that Beauty IS nowhere' – a metaphysical ideal – 'So did the mongrel-girl | of Noman's land | coerce the shy | Spirit of Beauty | from excrements and physic' (1985: 143).

individual cigarettes were sold – but not others: a powder compact called ‘French Window’, her commercial interpretation of Duchamp’s artwork *Fresh Widow* (1920), did not catch on (Burke 2012: loc. 8123). And the fact remains that this ending to *Insel* was never included in Loy’s draft, and the whole book was not published until 1991. The interpretation offered above is only possible as a result of the critical work of recovery – scholarly efforts to define for Loy a substantial corpus of work, to compensate for the failure of historical readers to recognise her modernist textual self. In line with Loy’s novel and its representation of precarious reputations, it is thus impossible to settle on an interpretation of *Insel* as either heralding her aesthetic rebirth in the context of American ascendancy or tracking her steady devaluation in the decades following her modernist heyday.

Using fashion, in *Insel* Loy wrote the unstable, compromised process of fabricating an artistic self. While the fashion designer offers a model for the female artist, one working in a commercial world dominated by America, the dictates of fashion are part of a system of competition and relative value (much like modernism, according to Jaffe and Goldman) to which Loy herself was subject and that she experienced throughout her work for the Julien Levy Gallery. As was discussed in that context, this system also had national inflections: Loy’s work as Levy’s agent was part of an effort to translate a declining Parisian avant-garde in a burgeoning New York art world – as *Insel* registers. In the following section of this chapter, I will turn to a series of poems that Loy wrote after she herself arrived in New York from Paris. Here, the trope of fashion recurs as a means for Loy to write a textual version of the self, one who is subject to – and seeks poetically to understand and forge a new place in – the transnational and transtemporal movement of aesthetic practice.

## Chapter 3.2

# Poetics of Reputation/ Reputable Poetics

### *'Compensations of Poverty' and Modernist Poetry after Loy*

#### INCOGNITO/ANONYMITY

The 'Visitation of Insel' looks forward to Loy's late group of poems known as 'Compensations of Poverty', which are equally concerned with marginalisation and devaluation.<sup>40</sup> Alda's taunt to her mother Mrs Jones – 'You're no good – never have been any good' – is echoed in both the manuscripts and the final version of the poem 'On Third Avenue'. Lines from the poem's drafts express the same sense of familial accusation:

'You should have disappeared years ago'  
So for the ease of the unloving loved  
I disappear –  
(YCAL: ML I.5.112)

These lines also gradually fade in the revision process: eventually only the first remains as the opening to the poem.

This second part of the chapter will suggest further connections between *Insel* and several of the 'Compensations of Poverty' poems. In some senses the novel is more properly part of a poetic tradition than a novelistic one, despite its variation on the *Künstlerroman*. Indeed, in important ways, the issues that have been at the centre of my reading of *Insel* are fundamental to modernist poetics. The very idea of poetics, stressing the scene and craft of

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<sup>40</sup> Judging by Loy's archival notes it seems that the group emerged as a collection from a number of possible poems, published and unpublished, that Loy listed in August 1944. What starts as an alphabetical 'List of Poems' with twenty-four typed titles and several handwritten additions becomes eventually – after a number of different versions of the list, one referred to as 'Kansas Poems' – a shorter list of fifteen poems under the heading 'Compensations of Poverty' (YCAL: ML I.5.72).

writing poetry, is now associated with the modernist tradition. It is in staging this ‘event of making’, in Peter Nicholls’s phrase (2007: 54), that modernist poets introduced uncertain boundaries between subject and object, or between different versions of the subject. The ‘I’ of Pound’s *Canto I*, both Odysseus and ‘the poet’ who interjects at the end to reflect on the process of producing this version of Odysseus, is an ‘I’ that does not express something of the poet himself but instead the conditions of making the poem, its place in a tradition and its material. The result cannot be pure impersonality – the poem in place of the poet as Eliot had hoped – but instead is a version of ‘the poet’ forged and promoted by his poetry. Even ‘impersonality’ has become part of the public image of ‘Eliot’ and ‘Pound’. And in fact Christina Walter (2014) has recently demonstrated in relation to Loy, among others, that a clear distinction between an innate interior personality and objective impersonality makes little sense in the early twentieth century, by which point – as Warren Susman, cited earlier, argued – personality was understood to be a construct, more a product of exterior features than stable essentials.<sup>41</sup>

As Maud Ellmann says in her discussion of the contradictory doctrine of impersonality, Pound shows ‘that the author is a function of his signature, produced within a certain moment, medium, milieu’ (2013: 17). In blurring the lines between herself as author and her own object, *Insel*, and doing so with fashion tropes – making as fabrication – Loy was also referring to a similarly complex self, both biographical and aesthetic, personal and impersonal at the same time. She was referring to the conditions in which she worked and in which her reputation was devalued: all part of her own ‘moment, medium, milieu’. In a fittingly apocryphal story about Loy’s elusiveness, the poet herself drily acknowledged that the other side of impersonality is anonymity: she apparently arrived at Natalie Barney’s salon to refute the rumour that she didn’t exist with the admission that ‘it is necessary to stay very unknown. ... To maintain my incognito the hazard I chose was – poet’ (cited Loy 1985: xviii).

Ellmann’s point that the impersonal author is a function of their signature makes clear (as Jaffe’s and Goldman’s work, already invoked, also suggests) that impersonality is a privilege. Poetry is hazardous; anonymity is the poet’s hazard, especially the female poet’s. ‘Impersonality is everywhere the resistance to the self’s efforts to think well of itself’, writes Charles Altieri (2006: 61). Certainly an easier thing to achieve, then, when others have ascribed value to you instead. And even if that value was more readily as-

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<sup>41</sup> Like I have done, Walter goes on to argue for *Insel* as a personality constructed in a ‘complex [...] performance’ (2014: 155), but she stresses the techno-visual mediations of that process.

cribed to the woman artist, to evacuate the body of the author in favour of a style risks eliding the female body and her specifically female voice. Loy said as much when she worried in the ‘Feminist Manifesto’ (1914) about ‘The women who adapt themselves to a theoretical valuation of their sex as a relative impersonality’ (1997: 154). This is impersonality as silencing. Because Loy pays attention to the ways in which women are subordinated to men, the I and the authorial ‘I’ are in uncertain balance in her work. Rather than rejecting outright subjectivity and autobiography in favour of the indeterminate play of performativity (as in Gilmore 1998 and Goody 2001b), we might instead think about why and how they remain in Loy’s work. Rita Fel-ski reminds us that such concepts often ‘possess an important strategic relevance’ for women writers (1989: 70). Of Loy, Suzanne Churchill observes that she ‘both invites and subverts a literal conflation of the narrative “I” and the biographical author, forcing her readers to question whether she speaks for or as a woman and to interrogate what constitutes a woman’s position, place, or space’ (2006: 206; emphasis in original).<sup>42</sup> Such playfulness is singularly well suited to a literature concerned with reputation: the uncertainty about whether the I is the biographical author or a narrative self directly illustrates the difficulty of both securing a position as a woman, and evading specifically ‘a woman’s position’, in the literary field. Loy’s ‘incognito’ might simultaneously be a reflection on her anonymity.

Certainly in ‘On Third Avenue’ the word is used in that way:

‘You should have disappeared years ago’ –

so disappear  
on Third Avenue  
to share the heedless incognito

of shuffling shadow-bodies  
(Loy 1997: 109)

A blank space, which in the recent age of Loy studies (once a body of work had started to be established) has become a ‘signature’ emblem of ‘Lovian’ typography, is also the disappearance of these bodies. The question of *whose* bodies is one that returns us to the subject/object relationship, for there is a definite suggestion here, and throughout the poems in this series, that Loy the poet identifies with the ‘shuffling shadow-bodies’ whom she observes,

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<sup>42</sup> See also Gilmore 1998, which similarly argues that Loy ‘render[s] the woman writer’s presence in her texts visible yet elusive’ (273).



mostly the overlooked and unredeemed – the bums, derelicts and vagrant children of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, her home for much of her time in New York between 1936 and 1953. For Deirdre Egan, these poems of the 1940s ‘suggest Loy’s fears about her own marginalization as woman and poet’ and ask ‘how do we value the female poet in a literary world where the poet appears as marginalized as her artistic subjects?’ (2009: 969, 977).<sup>43</sup> Amy Morris has taken the point further, addressing it more specifically in relation to Loy’s reputation in this latter stage of her career. She reads the ‘Compensations of Poverty’ as ‘the product of and an unsentimental commentary on her own experience of cultural marginalisation: her failure to translate avant-garde notoriety into canonical status, to cash in on modernism’ (2013: 81).<sup>44</sup>

In other words, Loy did care about her reception. Her recovery as a lost modernist genius has often emphasised her autonomy from such concerns, as a form of avant-garde status.<sup>45</sup> She was also, as we will see, inclined to romanticise the marginalised, but in ways that seem fully cognisant of her audience or lack thereof. Sara Crangle maintains that there is ‘ample evidence’ that Loy was ‘serious about preserving and perfecting’ her work (Loy 2011: xix). In relation to the ‘Compensations of Poverty’ we can point to further proof. In 1943 Loy sent several of the poems that would eventually be grouped under that heading to the *New Yorker*. Each determined and hopeful letter (‘May I beg you to glance once again?’, ‘Do you like this one?’) was quickly answered with a polite rejection (NYPL: NY 2236. 3.1.394). As Morris rightly says, ‘it would be wrong to celebrate a marginality that was ordained by circumstances’, when Loy ‘was excluded from the institutions of culture’ (2013: 83). As I did with *Insel*, I want to explore what Loy fashions from that marginality and those circumstances. I will consider the way in which she wrote (and rewrote) herself and her value in these poems using fashion, which in this context is the out of fashion.

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<sup>43</sup> We should worry about equating artistic with social marginalisation, but Loy identified with these figures in social terms too: she was herself almost destitute in these years, financially reliant on her young daughter Fabi and – to their visitor Natalie Barney’s distress – without a refrigerator (Burke 2012: loc. 8164).

<sup>44</sup> I am not concerned with the reasons for this failure here, but Sara Crangle gives several interesting conjectures: the fact that avant-garde artists generally struggle to become canonical unless engaged in ‘the most flagrant means of promotion’; the paternalism of ‘literary history in which female writers have long been consigned to the margins’; and Loy’s significantly decreased poetic output after 1930 (2015: 275–302 and 298n4).

<sup>45</sup> See Parmar 2013: 47–49 on this mythmaking tendency to ‘glamorize a marginal minority by disavowing the canon’.

## ‘ORIGINAL DESIGN[S] OF DESTITUTION’

In these late poems fashion allows Loy to stage relationships (and slippages) between herself and other subject positions and to stress the fabrication of language (the event of making) in its wider institutional context. Both the material instability of fashion and fabrics, and the more abstract instabilities of the fashion system – such as the threat of obsolescence – render that event as highly precarious.

In response to the instruction to disappear in ‘On Third Avenue’, Loy doubles herself with the anonymous workers of the Lower East Side sweatshops. They are ‘irreparable dummies’, fashioned by ‘Time, the contortive tailor’ in ‘sweat-sculptured cloth’ (1997: 109) (‘fashions of sweat sculptured cloth’ in one draft version [YCAL: ML I.5.112]). In another draft, this part was associated with the line: ‘The fashion arbiter | is time’ (YCAL: MLI.5.112). Literally the hidden seam of fashion, these figures provide Loy with a figure for her own artistic obsolescence in this late period of her career. Their dispossession is also hers, for it is presented as a textual one. The poem continues

of shuffling shadow-bodies  
animate with frustration

whose silence’      only potence is  
respiration  
(Loy 1997: 109)

Their silence lacks the possessive ‘s’ after the apostrophe and is followed by another blank space. To be the wrong side of fashion is here a grammatical and poetic state, and one connected to the materiality of the page, its blankness given ironic depth by the fact that this part of the poem was not published in Loy’s lifetime.<sup>46</sup>

The ageing female figure of ‘Chiffon Velours’ (written in 1944) is firmly outside the fashion system, ‘at rest against the corner-stone | of a department store’ (Loy 1997: 119). This spot is

Hers alone to model  
the last creation,

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<sup>46</sup> Part II was included in Loy 1958.

original design  
of destitution.  
(119)

Despite her marginalisation, Loy's language gives this woman agency as the creator and originator of this outfit. The poem is clearly ironic, given her exclusion from the department store, but this elevation of her destitution to a matter of art also associates her with the poet. Modelling her own 'creation', the woman is also Loy's model.<sup>47</sup> The creation is both the outfit and the poem.<sup>48</sup>

The equivalence between poet and poetic object here is suggested by the opening – 'She is sere.' (119) – a short line dense with puns and phonetic slips. Both 'sere' (withered or threadbare) and 'seer', 'she' is object and poet. The literal meaning of 'sere' to describe the woman's fading appearance is also undermined by a phonetic alternative: 'She is here.' The play between absence and presence that haunts the question of Loy's poetic 'I' re-enters, proposing the old woman as an unstable equivalent for Loy the poet. It revolves again around her clothes, for another phonetic alternative – 'She is sheer' – makes the ambiguous presence a quality of the fabric, chiffon velour: fine, thin and diaphanous. Further word play alludes to Loy's observing presence in remodelling this woman's destitution: 'The site of vanished breasts | is marked by a safety-pin' (119). Because 'site' is also 'sight', Loy and her poem, granting visibility to the woman, are like a safety-pin: marking that which has disappeared, holding it together, but only just. As in *Insel*, these tropes stress the fabrication of the work; this poem is as much about its own status as 'an original design of destitution'. The self-referentiality is confirmed in the final stanza, when 'her black skirt', which

glows as a soiled mirror;  
reflects the gutter –  
a yard of chiffon velours  
(119)

The image of the dress reflecting more dress, just as the final two words of the poem echo its title, creates a sense of self-sufficiency – the *constructedness* of the modernist poem and poet – that is belied by its theme: margin-

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<sup>47</sup> Potter 1999 points to another ambiguity that mirrors Loy's own: whether the woman herself is subject or object (259).

<sup>48</sup> These slips between original and copy recall Stein's poem about a department store, 'Aux Galeries Lafayette' (1915), which, Burstein 2012 reminds us, pits 'each' and 'one' against 'many' and 'them' (165).

alisation and invisibility. If the modernist poem stresses the ‘event of making’, Loy uses the same approach to highlight the hazard of writing poetry, whose event here is marginal and uncertainly recognised.

The point is condensed in the oddly hybrid title of this poem. In English and American ‘chiffon velour’ (no ‘s’) is a lightweight, soft fabric, but Loy’s ‘velours’ with an ‘s’ also denotes the French for velvet (and therefore also the English ‘chiffon velvet’, which the *OED* cites in use from at least 1908). *Un chiffon*, again in French, is also a rag, a scrap of old fabric, whose relevance to this poem is evident; but equally it has referred for centuries to a scrap of paper of little importance, with writing or without.<sup>49</sup> The woman, her outfit and this poem, then, are potentially rags: discarded or devalued. An additional definition, in both French and English, implies a gendered aspect to this devaluation: chiffon refers to feminine ornament, decoration, trimmings and – by extension – frippery.<sup>50</sup> If the poem itself is regarded as of little importance, then, it is because of its female associations of trivial matters, returning us to Loy’s anxiety about the marginalisation of the female poet. And yet, decoration implies transformation; *un chiffon* is a scrap of fabric repurposed. In this poem, and others in the group, Loy implies the recycling of significance and value.

To explore this further, consider ‘Mass-Production on 14th Street’ (1942), set in what once was New York’s so-called ‘Ladies Mile’ with its historic department stores, ‘conservatories of commerce’ in Loy’s words (1997: 112). She reimagines the district as a feminine floral ecology, an ‘iris circus of Industry’, an ‘Ocean in flower | of closing hour’, in which garment-worker and consumer collaborate (111):

The consumer,  
the statue of a daisy in her hair  
jostles her auxiliary creator  
the sempstress – on her hip  
a tulip –  
horticulture  
of her hand-labor. (112)

Both consumer and sempstress wear flowers: they are related. One is produced by the other: the sempstress is the ‘auxiliary creator’ of the consumer. And with this, Loy again compares herself, as creator, to the sempstress, the maker of 14th-street fashion. If the sempstress’s ‘hand-labor’ is the flower

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<sup>49</sup> ‘chiffon’ (2), [www.littre.org/definition/chiffon](http://www.littre.org/definition/chiffon) [accessed 11 September 2017].

<sup>50</sup> ‘chiffon’ (3), [www.littre.org/definition/chiffon](http://www.littre.org/definition/chiffon) [accessed 11 September 2017].

she has made (her ‘horticulture’), Loy’s own hand-labour – her *culture* – is the poem she has written, in which mass-production is reimagined as the time of reproduction and female labour, the production of both clothes and poetry. The ‘eye’(/I) of this poem is described as ‘a commodious bee’; it

gathers the infinite facets  
of the unique unlikeness  
of faces  
(111)

Loy writes herself into this poem as both detached observer and fertilising collaborator. Geoff Gilbert (2010: 192–93) points out that the bee/I/maker here is both industrious – like the workers – and that which effaces their labour in producing a comprehensive image/commodity. His essay, if I understand its subtle reasoning correctly, seeks to understand how this poem and Loy as poet are formed in response to modernity. She ‘will not be formed durably under capitalism’ (190), but some version of ‘active individuality’ (Loy’s phrase, from ‘Modern Poetry’) is expressed by her prosody, which is like her lampshade-making, ‘performed among economic determinations’ (200), and thus ‘grasps the world and her writing together’ (201). His argument resonates with my own picture of Loy producing a poetic version of herself in relation to the market.

#### ‘VALOROUS DISREPUTABLES’

For many critics, the fashion-oriented poems in the ‘Compensations of Poverty’ group are highly critical of mass production.<sup>51</sup> The terms of their interpretation – exploitation, exchange and alienation – derive from Marx. Discussing ‘Mass-Production on 14th Street’, Potter writes, for example: ‘Rather than social relations between humans assuming “the fantastic form of a relation between things”, objects seems to have accrued the social relations which humans no longer possess’ (1999: 258). Critics are often reluctant to read in Loy the aesthetic transformation of difficult material realities, as if this signals a reactionary stance.<sup>52</sup> Suzanne Hobson agrees with Potter and

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<sup>51</sup> Potter 1999, Egan 2009, Goody 2012b.

<sup>52</sup> There is a similar tendency in feminist readings to place Loy (and women) on the ‘right’ side politically, as in Kinnahan 2017: ‘Revising the Surrealist attraction to urban simulacra, the simulacra activated in [‘Mass-Production on 14th Street’] stimulates not pleasure, however, but a dehumanizing kind of violence enacted upon the female by consumer culture’ (92). I struggle to read violence in this poem (the scissors to which Kinnahan refers are, after all, ‘rosy’, their actions jaunty (‘snip space | to a triangular racing lace’). Her

extends the point to argue that Loy's late poems do not assume a religious or even godlike position by elevating human dereliction and material suffering (2010: 254). There is evidence, though, that elevation was in a sense Loy's project, as in her earlier words, from 'Modern Poetry' of 1925: 'surely if there were a heaven it would be where this horrible ugliness of human life would arise self-consciously as that which the poet has made of it' (Loy 1997: 159). Certainly, in the 'Compensations', the marginalisation of Loy's figures implies a criticism of the systems of consumption and production around which they loiter, but humans *do* possess social relations in these poems. Hardly godlike, but equally not the detached observer that Hobson describes in 'Hot Cross Bum' (2010: 258), Loy writes herself into them, asserting relations between herself and her subjects that transfigure their devaluation. In 'Mass-Production on 14th Street', all are connected as mirror images of each other in an alternative system of exchange.

The equivalence that is so central to Marx's version of the commodity is an intimate, female and collaborative equivalence. Maker, model and consumer are present: the 'garment-worker' and the 'sempstress', who are 'auxiliary creator[s]' of the 'consumer'; the 'pedestrian ocean' of consumers, metonymically represented by their walking legs, 'rosy scissors of hosiery', and therefore themselves models; and the mannequins, 'idols of style', reflecting 'through mirrored opals' 'their mobile simulacra's | tidal passing' (Loy 1997: 111–12). Loy's language betrays some anxiety about the indeterminacy of humans and commodities: the models' 'chic paralysis', their status as both 'girls' and 'walking dolls', 'jolt[ing]' a 'robot turn' on their carousel display (112). But there are as many signs that her endeavour in this poem is to create something new from within the system of mass production.<sup>53</sup> The natural imagery that makes the first half of the poem abundant and excessive –

flower over flower,  
 corollas of complexion  
 craning from hanging-gardens  
 of the garment-worker. (111)

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interpretation conforms to a common feminist dualism of capitalism as a male system of oppression versus an oppressed female subject without agency (except in the case of the female writer, who has a negative value as a disrupter of the system), which I have resisted in such simple terms throughout this thesis.

<sup>53</sup> Much more than an early poem like 'Three Moments in Paris' (1915), with its disjointed rhythm and isolated verbs mimicking an inert and dismembered commodified female body ('dolls | Propped against banisters | Walls and pillars | Huddled on shelves | And composite babies with arms extended | Hang from the ceiling | Beckoning | Smiling') (Loy 1997: 17).

– finds its equivalent in the active and productive verbs of the final five stanzas that suggest aesthetic enabling: ‘project[ing]’, ‘imaging’, ‘combin[ing]’ and ‘letting’ (112). The poem mirrors reproduction and aesthetic production, and in doing so resituates mass production as fertile and artistic.<sup>54</sup> From the ‘conservatories of commerce’ Loy projects a new image – her own poem – in which women are connected and doubled in a feminine system of production, both commercial and aesthetic. In this way ‘chic paralysis’ becomes a virtue: Loy’s own style (her ‘cold modernism’ as Burstein [2012] calls it) rather than the disabling objectification of women.

Discussing ‘On Third Avenue’ and its cinematic content, Alex Goody proposes that Loy ‘acknowledges both the social paralysis that popular media could induce and the aesthetic recreation that it promised’ (2012b: 76). Both possibilities are present in ‘Mass-Production’, too. Its closing lines double a female observer with a mannequin but in such a way that the latter is transformed:

two lovers, crushed  
together in their sweet conjecture  
as to Fashion’s humour,  
point at the ecru and ivory  
replica of the dress she has on,  
doused in a reservoir of ruby neon;

only – – her buttons are clothespins  
the mannequin’s, harlequins. (113)

Her synthetic objecthood is reimagined in terms of valuable material (ivory) and precious gems (opal, ruby, harlequin). If the commodity is a combination of use value and exchange value, Loy transfigures both. Her subjects in this sequence ostensibly have neither; the poems give them aesthetic value and sentimental value. They are now ‘valorous disreputables’, as she calls them in ‘Time Bomb’ (1997: 123), the word for their heroism simultaneously suggesting their worth. The garment-workers with whom she identified in ‘On Third Avenue’ are aestheticised and monumentalised, compared to ornate sculptures with ‘the eroded bronze contours | of their other aromas’ (1997: 109). Their lack of value is transformed into a heroic aesthetic value,

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<sup>54</sup> Kinnahan 2017 (93) provides a compelling point of reference here: a 1931 collage by Joseph Cornell of corn and flowers producing an image of a fashionable woman’s body, reprinted in Levy’s *Surrealism* anthology in 1936 and in *Harper’s Bazaar* in 1937.

with the irony that move demands but transformed nonetheless. By doubling herself as poet with these subjects – who are also objects and who also mirror each other – Loy proposes an alternative economy: one that surpasses what they are worth in monetary terms in terms of female, collaborative creativity.

By identifying Loy the poet with her poetic objects and doing so in the realm of fashion and mass production, these poems acknowledge her place in the market. Her poetry is a commodity. But without committed publishers (not for want of trying) its value is low. And as discussed in relation to *Insel*, for the modernist author the process of successfully turning your work into a commodity involves the full sublimation of the author's personality in favour of what Jaffe calls the textual imprimatur. In self-consciously staging the various equivalences between Loy the poet and her poetic objects, Loy exposes the seams in that process. She is imperfectly suppressed as author (we cannot help but read these poems in relation to her authorial lack of success at this point) and as a result, she produces an image of the difficulty of commodifying her work. But in place of this failure, the 'Compensations of Poverty' propose a female-centred alternative. The voice of the female poet, unsuccessfully de-personalised, remains to speak of the compromises and the promises of female creativity, in a way that transfigures the market on which Loy's career is now devalued.

#### **NEW YORK, CAPITAL OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY**

There are national inflections to be read in this group of poems, and in the transforming arc that I have traced within them. Several critics have noted their relation to modernism in its hegemonic conception, as something like Benjamin's 'Paris, capital of the nineteenth century': a twentieth-century production of modernism's genealogy. Potter writes that 'On Third Avenue' reprises 'a familiar tradition of modernist city-poems and prose pieces from Baudelaire to the Surrealists' (1999: 257). The scene has been updated, she says: the neon lights and their associations of standardisation place the poem firmly in its own era, in mid-century America. But in her view, informed by Adorno's cultural pessimism, in this geographic and temporal shift the 'erotic promises of Aragon's and Breton's Paris have receded. In contrast to the strolling seductions offered by Nadja, Loy offers a static and artificial erotic economy' (258).

In my alternative reading, in which creative energies are renewed from within the context of capitalism, these poems have more in common with the Parisian version of modernism than Potter allows. Their function is



much like Loy's rummaging in flea markets, a favourite pastime of Breton's, too. Drawing on the sociologist Hervé Sciardet, Krzysztof Fijalkowski writes that the objects of the flea market share a

commercial trajectory from rejection by previous owners to discovery, requalification and resale [...]. Scales of value shift and categorizations are redrawn [...] the physical object might once again be mobile, and its use, destination and value subject to change. (2007: 109)

In the terms in which I have read these poems, they have a flea-market aesthetic: they rescale the value of the outmoded within the commercial system. More broadly, they share something of Surrealism's initial impulse, defined in the first issue of *La Révolution surréaliste* (1924) as 'any discovery that changes the nature or the destination of an object or a phenomenon' (cited Foster et al. 2004: 251). Extending this constellation of Romantic responses to modern life, they also align with Benjamin's account of the ragpicker, as read through Baudelaire's 'Le Vin des chiffonniers' (Benjamin 2006).<sup>55</sup> The *chiffonnier*, whose name Loy also echoed in 'Chiffon Velours', collected urban refuse, which industrial processes had given 'a certain value' (Benjamin 2006: 53).<sup>56</sup> The ragpicker was not a bohemian, Benjamin acknowledges, but 'everyone who belonged to the *bohème* could recognize a bit of himself in the ragpicker': they shared a sense of precariousness and 'a more or less blunted state of revolt against society' (54). They have in common a 'dream', both making something new of their modern urban surroundings: 'they, too, reeked of wine casks, and they, too, had turned gray in battles' (54). The ragpicker collects urban detritus and transforms it, like the painter and poet of modern life. Like Benjamin's Baudelaire, in her poems of the 1940s Loy emerges as a poet shaped and compromised by capitalism, from which she attempts to create a new art. It is the capitalism of a later moment and a different city: post-war New York.

If, for Benjamin, Surrealism was 'the first to uncover the revolutionary energies apparent in the "antiquated" [...]. The way poverty – not just social

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<sup>55</sup> Though they are not the only observers of Paris to praise such marginal individuals (of which there were still five to six thousand in 1903): Higonnet 2002 describes a 'whole literature [that] grew up around' these 'exceptions to the bourgeois order', and of course Atget repeatedly photographed them (219–22).

<sup>56</sup> For a related figure working in a similar vein, see Marshik 2016, Chapter 4, in which she discusses the second-hand clothes dealer and used garments in middlebrow and modernist writing. For Marshik, second-hand clothes are not modern and, particularly in modernist fiction, they threaten individuality, but she does cite literary instances of communal belonging and transformation mediated by used garments.

poverty but equally that of architecture, the shabbiness of interiors [...] flip suddenly into revolutionary nihilism' (2009: 148), Loy seemed to think the shabby paupers themselves were the perceptive ones. In 'Time-Bomb', the 'ruins' (her tellingly romantic word) are 'those valorous disreputables':

sentinels  
in an unknown dawn  
strewn with prophecy  
(1997: 123)

This poem might be read as a sister text to Benjamin's contemporary image of the dialectical movement between the present and the past, itself a kind of time bomb, whereby the 'time of the now' is 'blasted out of the continuum of history' (Benjamin 1968: 253). Loy's lines

Only the momentary  
goggle of death  
fixes the fugitive  
momentum .  
(1997: 123)

echo Benjamin, suggesting the way in which a ruin appears to arrest progress in an image of the passage of time, which captures past, present and future at once. The punctuation is belated, leaving in its wake spaces for something new to emerge.

Of course, Loy's fixing of 'fugitive momentum' also directly recalls Baudelaire's own account of the modern artist's requirement to 'distil the eternal from the transitory', from the 'fugitive' (2010: 12). But where her poems echo Baudelaire, they have none of the privileged, detached viewpoint of the *flâneur*, or the contempt Baudelaire often felt for his fellow city-dwellers.<sup>57</sup> 'Ephemerid' (1944) stages the poetic 'metamorphosis' of a passing moment in the city: a 'little girl' pushing a doll or a child 'in a fragile, | stalling | doll's perambulator' in the shadow of the El train tracks, 'a long white muslin curtain, | tied to her pull-over', is transfigured by the poet's eye into an insect-like creature, 'some aerial, unbeknown' (Loy 1997: 117, 116). '[A]float from her' (117), the curtain is an inversion of the heavy fabric

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<sup>57</sup> See Kinnahan 2017: 44 for a discussion of Loy's feminising of Baudelaire's *flâneur* in the context of her rummaging in the Marché aux Puces. Comparing Loy's and Baudelaire's corpse imagery, Crangle 2015 finds that Loy's preoccupation with gender inequalities 'refuses Baudelaire's sustaining, erotic corpse' (280).

of skirts that revealed the feet of the fashionably dressed to Baudelaire. Just as in his conception, from this fleeting New York scene '[t]he Eternal is sustained' (116). But with this girl-child pushing a pram, Loy turns the fixing of time's 'fugitive momentum' into a fixing of reproductive time: like Barnes's image of a pregnant baby in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, Loy condenses the cycle of female maturation with an image of a child begetting a child. In this context, Loy equates aesthetic metamorphosis with the human life-cycle, and so again doubles herself with her subjects, as suggested by the indeterminate presence of the doll. In this way, the male aesthetic tradition that sought to capture the temporal particularities of modernity, often through fashion, is feminised.

What is more, Loy's version of this tradition suggests its geographic shift from Paris to New York – a shift that had personal meaning for Loy as we saw in *Insel*. The final stanzas of 'On Third Avenue' recreate the scene of Baudelaire's 'To a Passing Woman' with a vision of a moving trolley car:

Transient in the dust,  
 the brilliancy  
 of a trolley  
 loaded with luminous busts;

lovely in anonymity  
 they vanish  
 with the mirage  
 of their passage.

(1997: 110)

The figures of the bus are like mannequins – 'luminous busts' – framed in the window as if in that of a shop front. Anonymous in these years, like these figures of consumer culture, Loy reinscribes her anonymity as aesthetic – 'brillian[t]', 'lovely', a 'mirage' – and she does so in terms that take us back to the origins of modernism in its hegemonic conception, to Baudelaire's fleeting fashionable image. The passage of modern aesthetics, which by 1942 had new headquarters in New York, figures in terms of fashion. Aligned with that passage, Loy understands her own devalued position in relation to historical change. But 'On Third Avenue' transfers us to the sweatshops of the Bowery, rather than fashionable Fifth Avenue, so in fact historical change is refigured in relation to Loy's devalued position. In this way, Loy's late poetry locates New York as the site of modernity (heir to Paris capital of the nineteenth century) while simultaneously inscribing it with the sign of

immanent passing that modernity, by definition, wears.

And in the nature of fashion, Loy also makes something new of obsolescence. ‘On Third Avenue’ and ‘Mass-Production on 14th Street’ point to the dominant consumer culture of the new world. But as Loy reckons with her own devaluation, she realigns her aesthetic self with that new culture – *and* transforms it according to her own aesthetics, concerned as it has always been with female (pro)creativity. Out of fashion herself, Loy used fashion to understand and attempt to remake her historical situation, aligning herself with the outmoded *and* the new, and shaping both in her own aesthetic image. Fashion is part of Loy’s fabrication of an aesthetic self, one that is able to acknowledge the effects of time and history on her artistic corpus and its reputation, and to make something new of that historicised self.

**‘WHAT DOES NOT CHANGE | IS THE WILL TO CHANGE’:  
MODERNIST POETICS AFTER LOY**

The geographical and historical shifts, and the meditations on value and reputation, that I have read in Loy’s late group of poems were both elided and distortedly reflected in the new phase of critical reception of her work that began at the same time. In 1944 the poet Kenneth Rexroth wrote a piece about Loy in the San Francisco-based journal *Circle*. His prescient assessment of Loy as a forgotten poet that should be recovered (‘we need a little reading to buck up a verse fashion at present in the state of a patient under metrasol-curare therapy’ [70]) is of course based on the poems she wrote in the 1910s and 1920s. She had not published any of her post-war poems by this point: the first, ‘Ephemerid’, was to appear in 1946 in *Accent*. Nevertheless, the fact that Loy’s ‘obscurity’ – the subject of the literally obscured poems that she was writing at the time of Rexroth’s article – is for him a point of *value* (she is ‘singularly isolated historically’ [70]), presents an ironic version of the transformation that I have explored in that group.<sup>58</sup> In fact, Rexroth uses the almost synonymous ‘virtue’, several times:

Her virtues are self-evident. She is tough, forthright, very witty, atypical, anti-rhetorical, devoid of chi-chi. Unlike those one might name, she never spills verses as easy and polished as Robert W. Service, packed with information about the Popol Vuh, Kierkegaard, My Life With a Strip Teaser, and the Diamond Sutra. The virtues of her inten-

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<sup>58</sup> A further irony is that in a later work Rexroth deems Loy’s lack of success to be the result of her lack of social conscience, an argument that is harder to make in relation to the later poems that Rexroth doesn’t know (1973: 70–71).

tion are likewise the virtues, as Dr. Winters has shown us they must always be, of her metric. (1944: 70)

The question of value that Loy was exploring contemporaneously, in relation to social and aesthetic worth, is here instead a matter of 'virtue' with its unmistakable qualitative connotations. Any suggestion of the market, in which commodities are valued in relation to each other, is suppressed in favour of the comparative worth of poets (Loy versus Robert Service, plus those 'one might name', presumably Eliot and Pound) and the internal criteria of the poem: its metre.

To be sure, Rexroth does not isolate Loy's poetry from all material concerns: his candid feeling that '[a]s one reads of Mina Loy's babies, one's sphincters loosen' (69) signals a crucial appeal of her work in its counter-cultural (and later) revival – her attention to physical processes. And yet, it is the linguistic surface of her poetry that he appears to regard above all else. Even as he gently mocks Pound, at this point a pariah, referring to the 'Poetry Renaissance' when 'people thought Ezra Pound and TS Eliot learned' (70), many of Loy's 'virtues' situate her in the tradition that Pound inaugurated (or reactivated, depending on how you look at it) with Imagism – 'tough', 'forthright', 'anti-rhetorical', 'devoid of chi-chi', no excessive 'information', and that virtuous metre.<sup>59</sup> The reference to Yvor Winters aligns her with an anti-Romantic objectivity that, in Winters's early poetry at least, owed much to Pound's Imagism (Yezzi 1997).<sup>60</sup> And despite Rexroth's feeling that Loy 'has been singularly isolated historically', his article does place her in the company of, among other figures, the Objectivists Rakosi and Zukofsky, who 'may have read her with profit' (70).

Rexroth's suggestion of, on the one hand, obscurity and, on the other, an American objective tradition was cemented when his piece was republished in Jonathan Williams's Highlands Press edition of *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables* (1958), Loy's first collection since *Lunar Baedeker* of 1923. Although it included a section of 'Later Poems', the 1958 book – and the recovery it announced – is as its title suggests a restatement of her modernist credentials. William Carlos Williams provides a preface that both affirms Loy's obscurity and situates her in the avant-garde of the interwar years:

When she puts her word down on paper it is clean; that forces her

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<sup>59</sup> Indicted for treason the year before, Pound is also absent from Rexroth's closing list of presiding talents.

<sup>60</sup> Winters's rejection of Romantic intuition and self-expression is articulated, for example, in the preface to Winters 1960: 8.

fellows to shy away from it because they are not clean and will be contaminated by her cleanliness. Therefore she has not been a successful writer and couldn't care less. But it has hurt her chances of being known. [...] This small book, of 60 pages, contains all she has written in 40 years that she has found it worth while to keep. Almost all the poems are from her first book, *Lunar Baedeker*, published in 1923 by Robert McAlmon, the Contact Press, in Dijon. These make up the first 30 pages, by far the most striking, the most brilliant of the author's compositions. (Loy 1958: 9)

The 'contemplative' poems of the later years are devalued in comparison to these 'clean' (as in precise, objective) poems of the earlier period. Williams, himself the representative of a specifically American strain of modernism, claims Loy for the same tradition.

Although the subject matter of 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose' – republished in the 1958 collection – is England and Englishness, in a third preface the British expatriate poet Denise Levertov admits that Loy's sensibility does not seem English, which is 'so alien to hard substance and close scrutiny'. The latter qualities are those of an American brand of objectivity – 'Bite on it, you'll break your teeth' (Loy 1958: 15) – in addition to which she finds '[a] close reasoning', and

[a]n appetite for sounds – for words as sounds – which results in a scintillating precision. And it's this that makes for – IS – the close reasoning: it's there IN the words! Here's a virtue! There are words, which are sounds, which were once made up experimentally by our forebears – don't we live in a daily forgetting of that? (14–15)

The reference to experimental forebears and the terms with which Levertov characterises them take us back to Pound, and specifically to his own 1918 appreciation of Loy's poetry. His 1918 review of the 1917 *Others* anthology, in which four of Loy's 'Love Songs' and three other poems appeared, identified Loy's poetry as 'logopoeia or poetry that is akin to nothing but language, which is a dance of the intelligence among words and ideas and modification of ideas and characters' (Pound 1918: 57). Levertov's 'close reasoning' among the words themselves is a very similar account of 'intelligence among words'.

The overall effect of the three prefaces and choice of poems in the 1958 *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables* is a claim for Loy's singularity or obscurity (an autonomy from any tradition) that in fact places her firmly in the mod-

ernist tradition as an exemplar of difficulty and recalcitrance. Amy Morris describes this as a

long-lived critical mythology that included the following points: Loy's avant-garde poems were the best; the value of her poetry was connected to its peripheral relationship to the canon, and, because of its 'exceptionalism', her poetry would appeal only to the most discerning reader. (2013: 85)

We can add to this another recurring sleight of hand: that Loy is a nationally affiliated poet. This goes back to Pound's 1918 review too, which claims that Loy has produced 'something distinctly American in quality' (57). In fact, Loy herself did appear to feel an affinity with the United States as the site of modern ideas from the beginning of her poetic career, for she wrote proudly to Carl van Vechten in the month that the 'Love Songs' were printed (July 1915) that "we" are doing much better in America – England is still writing love poems which I consider extremely unwell' (cited Churchill 2006: 192). But as suggested by Loy's quotation marks around the plural 'we' and this allegiance based on publishing opportunity, her assimilation as an American poet has always been contingent. It was dialectically produced and a product of historical shifts, of which it retains traces. And actually, Pound seems to acknowledge the fact, describing Loy's achievement in English and French: '[t]he arid clarity, not without its own beauty, of *le tempérament de l'Américaine*' (1918: 58). The distinctly American temperament, 'which would not have come out of any other country', is actually also a little bit French (58).<sup>61</sup>

Matthew Hart, however, objecting to the way in which Loy's cosmopolitan poetics have been aligned with American qualities (as in Perloff 1995), suggests that Pound slips into French as a way of annexing cosmopolitanism for America (Hart 2010: 185). He notes that many subsequent critics have followed Pound's lead. Indeed, the equation 'avant-garde = American tradition' was replayed in 1965 when Paul Blackburn, an associate of Jonathan Williams and Denise Levertov from among the so-called Black Mountain poets, interviewed Loy (Blackburn and Vas Dias 1965).<sup>62</sup> (On the recording Blackburn mentions that Robert Creeley had also intended to be there, but could not attend.) Blackburn and the other interviewer, the poet Robert

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<sup>61</sup> This is what Marjorie Perloff (1995) would later call Loy's 'thick nationalism', Melanie Petch (2011) her 'mid-Atlantic imagination' and Matthew Hart, discussing 'Anglo-Mongrels and the Rose', her 'vernacularized and politicized transnationalism', a poetics 'formed by its position between and among linguistic and political locations' (2010: 189).

<sup>62</sup> A transcript is included in Shreiber and Tuma 1998, introduced by Carolyn Burke.

Vas Dias, ask her to read the poems they clearly most admire from the period of her avant-garde renown, all republished in the 1958 collection: ‘Lunar Baedeker’, ‘Parturition’, several of the ‘Love Songs’, and ‘Joyce’s “Ulysses”’. This rare documentary recording of Loy, in which she draws attention to her ageing body – her false teeth and difficulty seeing the words – both confirms her marginal status and heralds her as a progenitor of the contemporary heirs of American modernism.

Fifteen years later, the first book-length study of Loy’s work, by Virginia Kouidis (1980), went further, making a case for the poet’s place in the American canon, as both an heir to Emerson and Whitman and ‘a precursor of postmodernism [...] of poets such as Kenneth Rexroth, the Beats, Charles Olson and the Black Mountain poets’ (138). I want to return to this line of thinking here, but look more closely than Kouidis does at some of the aesthetic allegiances that it implies. After all, Kouidis’s canon relates Loy to a Romantic heritage on the one hand and, on the other, several figures – Olson, Black Mountain poets – associated with an objectivism more properly part of the classical strain of poetry.<sup>63</sup>

During the 1950s poets such as Blackburn, Creeley and Jonathan Williams became part of an identifiable if loose group of figures associated with Black Mountain College and the affiliated *Black Mountain Review*, ‘outsider’ institutions offering alternatives to establishment aesthetics (Power 2002; Harris 2014; Scroggins 2013). Creeley taught at the College, and Williams was a student; Charles Olson, a teacher there from 1951 and rector from 1953 to 1956 (its final year), suggested that Creeley, by now living in Mallorca, start a magazine to promote the school. His *Black Mountain Review* (1954–57) published the new generation of American poets, such as Jonathan Williams (who was to print its final issue at Jargon), Denise Levertov and Paul Blackburn (who also distributed the magazine in New York), but simultaneously generated a strong sense of the modernist tradition in which they were located – with work by William Carlos Williams and nods to Pound, via the Objectivists (Zukofsky and Lorine Niedecker) to Olson, whose ‘Maximus’ poems and essay ‘Projective Verse’ (1950) claim Pound and Williams as figureheads.<sup>64</sup>

Turning to Pound and Williams was part of these poets’ accession to the innovative tradition of experimental poetry: a counterpoetics in opposition to the orthodoxy of New Criticism (which favoured Eliot). If the

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<sup>63</sup> Wilkinson 2010 compares Loy’s *Songs to Joannes* to Robert Creeley’s lyric poetry, positioning both of them somewhere between the objective and subjective strains of the tradition.

<sup>64</sup> Harris 2014: 161 points out that translators of *The Cantos* are found throughout the *Review*.



*Black Mountain Review* asserted a modernist tradition and self-consciously modelled itself on modernist little magazines, other American post-war publishing ventures forged explicit links between contemporary poetry and its avant-garde roots, as Gregory Barnhisel (2005) has explored in relation to the revival of Pound's reputation in these years. James Laughlin's *New Directions* press, which was central to Pound's rehabilitation, printed the Objectivists and the Black Mountain poets and the first critical appreciations of their work by critics like Hugh Kenner, in so doing strengthening the sense of a Poundian tradition, one coming to light in the 1950s and 1960s but actually reaching back through the 1930s to the high modernist period itself (Barnhisel 2005: 179). Barnhisel describes the efforts of the *New Directions* journal and Grove Press's *Evergreen Review* in the same vein: 'Each firm, through its journal, stressed the continuity of the modernist project' and tried 'to convince academic critics and admirers of the older poets that the younger generation was indeed carrying the modernist torch' (182).

In 1960, just two years after Jonathan Williams published Loy's *Lunar Baedeker and Time-Tables*, he and many of the other poets in this Pound-William Carlos Williams tradition, including Levertov and Blackburn, were canonised in Grove's anthology *The New American Poetry*. The generation that its editor Donald Allen announced was suitably marginal for exponents of a counterpoetics, with its 'total rejection of all those qualities typical of academic verse', for 'most of what has been published so far has appeared only in a few magazines, as broadsheets, pamphlets, and limited editions, or circulated in manuscript' (Allen 1999: xi). Yet these poets are still emphatically part of a tradition (one, in fact that he had originally intended to represent in the anthology):

Following the practice and precepts of Ezra Pound and William Carlos Williams, it has built on their achievements and gone on to evolve new conceptions of the poem. They [the new, younger poets] are our avant-garde, the true continuers of the modern movement in American poetry. Through their work many are closely allied to modern jazz and abstract expressionist painting, today recognized throughout the world to be America's greatest achievements in contemporary culture. This anthology makes the same claim for the new American poetry (Allen 1999: xi-xii)<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> In his 'Afterword' to the 1999 edition, Allen says that he had initially 'visualized leading off with recent work by William Carlos Williams, H.D., e. e. cummings, Marianne Moore, Ezra Pound, and Wallace Stevens' (448).

Allen's narrative here (both overt and implied) is by now a familiar one in this thesis: the transnational movement of modernism from Europe to the United States. While positioning the new poets as the heirs of an existing US modernist tradition, his reference to Abstract Expressionism and his use of the phrase 'our avant-garde' points to the post-war emergence of a specifically American progressive movement to take the mantle of the original European avant-garde. Kaplan Harris points out that this transference was always a feature of Black Mountain poetry, which has a central place in *The New American Poetry*, describing the 'group' as

a changing of hands after World War II, when the international intelligentsia among the faculty conferred its prestige on the emerging American avant-garde. The original faculty of the 1930s and 1940s counted among its members an all-star roster of European modernists whose authority was necessary for elevating the reputation of the start-up college. (2014: 156)

Olson's 'The Kingfishers', with which *The New American Poetry* begins, refers to the College's first principal, Josef Albers ('Albers & Angkor Vat'). Opening with the observation that 'What does not change | is the will to change' (Allen 1999: 2), the poem seems to announce modernism as a continually renewing project.<sup>66</sup> Olson may have advised Allen to drop the 'aunties' and 'grandpas' from the anthology – 'In fact those connections strike me as smudging the point; 1950 on [...] Exactly (1) change of discourse, and (2) the American gain, or the pain [of] being able to – once more – come through' (1999: 448) – but even as he implies that historical amnesia is necessary to assert national pre-eminence *now*, the foundational modernist tradition (itself formed in relation to Europe) returns in that echo of Williams's 'American grain'.

The revival of interest in Loy's work in the 1950s and 1960s should be seen in the context of this project to assert a renewed and renewing American modernism.<sup>67</sup> In fact, her role here continues past mid-century, as when in 1982 the National Poetry Foundation launched a journal edited by Basil Bunting and George Oppen, *Sagetrieb*, which as its subtitle initially stated is 'Devoted to Poets in the Pound-Williams Tradition'.<sup>68</sup> The journal, which

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<sup>66</sup> On this line of thought, see Matterson 2015.

<sup>67</sup> 'What is most interesting about all this [renewed attention to Loy] is that both the older generation who are the official spokesmen and preservers of the avant garde and the avant garde itself turn time backward in its flight to find a voice that was not only ahead of its own time but one which is still out in front' (Morse 1961: 14).

<sup>68</sup> The subtitle was subsequently changed to *A Journal Devoted to Poets in the Imagist/Ob-*

was also associated with contributing editors Robert Creeley, Denise Levertov and Jonathan Williams, placed Loy at the head of a modernist genealogy: the 'Gallery' section of its first issue opens with a 1957 photograph of her, followed by William Carlos Williams and Ezra Pound in 1958, Oppen in the early 1950s, Basil Bunting in 1979 and details from Ian Hamilton Finlay's garden Little Sparta.<sup>69</sup> As well as a reprinted essay on Loy by Jonathan Williams, this issue also includes recollections of Louis Zukofsky and Charles Olson, sealing the sense in which this tradition reaches back to the modernism of Loy/Pound/Williams via the Objectivists and Projectivists and those associated with Black Mountain.

Despite the diversity of poets within this heritage, it is possible to identify broadly defined shared concerns that point to the place of Loy in its genetics. Charles Altieri, discussing 'The Objectivist Tradition', in which he includes poets like Olson and Levertov alongside Zukofsky et al., characterises it as 'first of all a discipline of the poetic will and a critique of prophetic roles assumed by nineteenth-century poets' and 'that body of work molded by freeing imagist techniques into methods of thought based on notions of field, measure, and "open form" in the service of principles of sincerity and objectification' (1999: 30, 32). These definitions hinge on, but resituate, an old dualism – the subjective versus the objective. '[G]etting rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the "subject" and his soul', as Olson wrote in 'Projective Verse' (1997: 247), involved finding new ways to represent the poet at work in poetry – what Altieri describes as 'the mind's act brought to objective form' (1999: 32). Following the mind's act in the open field of the poem is what Levertov admired in Loy's 'close reasoning' across words and sounds, and – according to Robert Vas Dias – what Paul Blackburn and Robert Creeley liked about Loy's poetry too.<sup>70</sup> For that reason, and for her 'precision', Vas Dias found her to be 'a very contemporary poet' and her interwar poems 'not at all dated'.<sup>71</sup>

I would now like to return to the terms in which I discussed Loy's 'Compensations of Poverty' poems, and consider the ways in which the historiographical moves I have been exploring – placing Loy in an American objective modernist tradition – curiously (and complexly) reflect and elide the work of that late group. Loy's understanding of her obscurity – her failure to 'cash in on modernism' as Amy Morris put it – was, we see now, literalised in the new wave of appreciation of her work that began concurrently.

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*jectivist Tradition* and, in 2002, to *Poetry and Poetics After Modernism*. Loy continues to appear in *Sagetrieb*, most recently in DiMarco 2006.

<sup>69</sup> *Sagetrieb*, 1, 1 (Spring 1982), 107–15.

<sup>70</sup> Conversation with Robert Vas Dias, 24 May 2017.

<sup>71</sup> Conversation with Robert Vas Dias, 24 May 2017.

These new fans passed over them, even as they invoked Loy in the process of their own canonisation. Instead, Loy's latter obscurity, which she treated as a question of (lack of) market value, was transformed into an aesthetic value or virtue – but of her earlier, avant-garde poetry. The cultural currency that Loy acknowledged as devalued was revalued. I have argued that Loy, too, transformed that lack of value, but in a way that affirmed her feminism. This aspect of her aesthetics would not be critically reclaimed until the 1980s, when critics such as Carolyn Burke recognised Loy's cultural political targets.

I also discussed the way in which Loy's late poetry suggests a genealogy of modernism, and one that shifts from Europe to the United States. We see now that this anticipates the post-war affirmation of modernism as a continually renewing, transnational project. But my reading of those poems – through the restless lens of fashion – stressed a dialectical relation between her contemporary American context and a French tradition from Baudelaire to the Surrealists, with its Romantic residues. In Loy's revival as part of an American modernist tradition, which valued her pre-war poems (most of which were actually written in Europe), this particular French ancestry is suppressed in favour of the antithetical, classical strain that emphasises the objective over the subjective, the linguistic surface over self-expression. Via Pound, this other strain can be traced back to a different set of French precedents – the hard, impersonal clarity of the Parnassians Gautier and Laforgue rather than the heroic Symbolism of Baudelaire's modern lyric poet.<sup>72</sup>

Such an evacuation of the poet's ego is, as Loy's late poems recognised, a privilege. The autobiographical 'I' that creeps back into those poems – and many earlier ones – is a symptom of Loy's awareness of such privileges and her own failure to access them consistently. But it is also a leftover – *un chiffon* – of what more properly belongs in the Romantic tradition (the Baudelaire or ragpicker who knows he is part of the market), which remains, repurposed, in her 'American' poetry. Thinking through fashion about these literary lineages allows us, as it did Loy, to see what gets left behind as well as what gets recycled – what goes out of fashion as well as what remains in. According to the logic of fashion, as Loy understood it to apply to her and her work, modernism emerges as a project continually recreated and dialectically created, in the cases I have discussed, between Europe and the

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<sup>72</sup> On Pound's French preferences, see Edwards 2005, Nicholls 2010 (which explores affiliations between Pound and Loy) and Perloff 1981: 159. Here Perloff also situates Pound's advocacy of certain French poets in the context of his quarrel with Yeats's Symbolism, and, elsewhere (Perloff 1985), in relation to the critical opposition between Pound and Wallace Stevens's romanticism. For a contrary view of Pound as a fuzzy mystical and esoteric, see Mellors 2005.

United States – but also, in this very process of recreation, a highly unstable project that forgets as it renews. In light of this view, which aligns Loy with modernism itself, she does appear to be the archetypal modernist, as the *New York Sun* had suggested in 1917. But only if we think about modernism not solely as that which is ‘always half-way through the door into Tomorrow’ – the *Sun*’s assessment of Loy (‘Do You Strive...’ 1917) – but simultaneously always on its way into the past.

## Afterword

This thesis has been strung on temporal tropes associated with fashion: return, innovation, renewal and repetition. In this context a conclusion would



be inappropriately final. Instead, in the spirit of the cycle of endless change, I have included here a short afterword that repeats and dialectically builds on the conclusions that have been drawn throughout. The approach to fashion that I have narrated in the cases of Barnes, Rhys and Loy has implications for me as a critic of their work. I cannot be exempt from the logic of fashion that dictates the value of some cultural forms above others, and the passing relevance of those that set the trends. My position-taking as a critic of modernism is unstable and subject to the laws of the field: the

choice to write a thesis about fashion, for example, was original enough to secure research-council funding five years ago. By now, with several other books and articles published or on press, the subject might have a less secure footing. Perhaps it is on its way out, a possibility that has real-world effects: the viability of my finding a publisher for a book, and as a direct result, of getting a first academic job.

In the image here I am wearing a dress that belonged to Jean Rhys. It was given to me by Tristram Powell, a television director whom I met when I was

researching the BBC's attention to Rhys's work. Tristram had been given the dress by Jo Hill, a friend of Rhys's in the last decade of the author's life. The photograph is intended to signal the instability described above: the fêted originality of the research find, a buried modernist treasure that may confer prestige on me, the modernist critic; versus the precarious relevance of an inexpensive dress of the 1910s in a once-fashionable *japonisme*-style printed cotton. We can recall Walter Benjamin's idea that fashion makes a commodity out of the living being, thus aligning it with the corpse. 'Fashion: "Madam Death! Madam Death!"' (2002: 8, 18–19). Or, now, we might think of Djuna Barnes's 'repulsive' women, or Sasha from Rhys's *Good Morning, Midnight*, or Loy's Insel, all dressed as a sign of cultural and personal conformation to the laws of fashion: originality and obsolescence, singularity and standardisation.

But equally, this photograph illustrates a personal and transhistorical connection between me and Rhys and her work: not a loss to history but a renewal of history in the present moment. I have learnt from my three subjects that fashion is an imaginative way to conceive of the continued relevance of history as much as it gives shape to anxieties about consignment to the rubbish-heap of history.

#### **CONVENTIONAL/COOL**

Rita Felski, in her recent book *The Limits of Critique* (2015), recasts the work of the literary and cultural critic as, by now, deeply conventional. Not in fact the solitary and detached innovator of the critic's own conception, she is part of a community guided by a series of generic traits and habits. Far from abstract and immutable, the critic's work is, then, subject to fashion. Indeed, the new genre of which Felski's book is an example – 'post-criticism' – implies that one mode has lost its sheen of originality and a new one is taking up a fresh, oppositional position whose novelty and distinction from the critical status quo is seductive.

In this light, we begin to see how the cultural critic might be nothing more than a 'knowledge worker', as Alan Liu has it in *The Laws of Cool* (2004), sorting knowledge as part of a system or many systems. (Felski would object to my implicit undervaluation of the everyday practice of work compared to critique, but Liu is more worried about the levelling of the two spheres, especially in the age of data.) What is the difference, he asks, between the critics who today 'manage literary value in "cultural context"' (*the prevalent methodology*) and 'the broader realm of professional, managerial, and technical knowledge workers who manage information val-

ue in “systems”)? (3) – the ‘self-named “cool”’ (9). After all:

advanced literary study has since the 1970s evolved from structuralism through deconstruction to cultural/multicultural criticism, so as to swing into conjunction with an information society that meanwhile evolved in parallel from logocentric corporations and broadcast empires to the postindustrial equivalents of cultural diversity – flexible-team corporations and distributed information networks. (4)

Not only does this story conform to the logic of fashion, but it is implicitly nationalised in a way that is by now familiar in this thesis: literary study, Liu suggests, has followed a path from French high seriousness to diluted, highly commodified versions in the American academy.

### **HISTORY, HISTORY, HISTORY<sup>1</sup>**

Liu’s question is related to one that I have frequently read in my subjects’ work: how, in the context of capitalism, if at all, can the artist or the critic of art find some measure of distinction? Adapting the terms from capitalism – as Baudelaire and Benjamin did, and as I have proposed Barnes, Rhys and Loy did – Liu’s answer is ‘creative destruction’, but with an emphasis on the latter half of Schumpeter’s classic phrase. If capitalism privileges the new and innovative, history, Liu observes, is the distinctive domain of those who want to negotiate a place for themselves in the prevailing system (2004: 5). In fact, he goes further than this embrace of history at first suggests, advocating not a Benjaminian rescue of the superceded past but the practice of a ‘dark’ kind of history: art that destroys and critics who chart the history of that destruction (8).

Aware of their unstable positions, as women, writers and artists – and within capitalism – Barnes, Rhys and Loy made work that acknowledged the darker aspects of history. Fashion helped them to negotiate ideas of obsolescence and loss of value. But not so they could welcome those states nihilistically. The gesture seems particularly masculine, given the significantly harder task women have obtaining relevance and value in their fields. In providing a model for historical return, fashion emerges in their writing as a salve against forgetting. The recall of history might also be the voracious

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<sup>1</sup> This is not an original title: I have borrowed it from the performance maker Deborah Pearson’s latest show (premiered 2016), a piece about personal connections to the larger structures of history.



consumption of the past – a nostalgia factory (the possibility haunts modernist studies) – but this is fashion’s dangerous edge. It has much to concern us as well as much to teach. If only briefly and precariously, then, its logic can suggest a progressive way forward: the reactivation of that which has been forgotten or destroyed.

This is partly Felski’s answer too. She proposes in place of critique, with its suspicion of the status quo and negativity, a kind of positive criticism that attends to the way literary texts travel in space and time, and are reanimated in new and often distant situations (2015: Chapter 5). This method of history has also been the *modus operandi* of the feminist literary recovery that is responsible for bringing to light work by little-known female modernists, and renewing its relevance in a continuing tradition of feminist or female aesthetics. In the context of such figures in interwar Paris, Shari Benstock observed the political significance of the model of history that demands the continued relevance of the past (1987: 5–6). A place and time apparently fixed in images of the ‘Lost Generation’, mostly men, must not be sealed; certainly those who were *actually* lost to history (mostly women) should not be celebrated, as Liu’s proposal would imply. Instead that place and time can be opened out to new futures so that its female history survives. To be sure, once retrieved the forgotten may well become fashionable, partly because they were lost. Barnes and Loy certainly have that sheen. They are *in* while other, neglected writers are *out* (Bessie Breuer, whom I discussed in Chapter 1.2, is one of that anonymous mass). But the other side of this merciless cycle is that their turn may come. If it does, which would in so many cases undoubtedly be welcome, it will owe much to the restless logic of fashion.

Briefly and precariously, then, I will embrace my own place as modernist critic in that cycle, and the potential obsolescence of my position, as the unstable zone in which the creative destruction of fashion also stands for the present and future renewal of female legacies. Such contingency is necessary so that the garments of history may be loose enough to dress other future bodies; so that old and forgotten styles of thought will return, made new.

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