

Lacing Up the Gloves: Women, Boxing and Modernity

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Abstract

This article explores women's early twentieth-century engagement with boxing as a means of expressing the fragmentations and contradictions of modern life. Equally drawn to and repelled by the visceral agonism of the sport, female artists and writers of the First World War and post-war era appropriated the boxer's virile body in written and visual autobiographies, effectively breaching male territory and anticipating contemporary notions of female autonomy and self-realization. Whether by reversing the gaze of desire as a ringside spectator or inhabiting the physical sublime of boxing itself, artists such as Djuna Barnes, Vicki Baum, Mina Loy and Clara Bow enlisted the tropes, metaphors and physicality of boxing to fashion a new understanding of their evolving status and identity within a changing social milieu. At the same time, their corporeal and textual self-inscriptions were used to stage their own exclusion from the sport and the realm of male agency and power. Ultimately, while modernist women employ boxing to signal a radical break with the past, or a reinvention of self, they also use it to stage the violence and trauma of the era, aware of limits and vulnerabilities.

Keywords: boxing, women, modernity, self-representation, gender

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No man, even if he had earlier been the biggest Don Juan, still risks it in this day and age to approach a lady on the street. The reason: the woman is beginning to box!

- German boxing promoter Walter Rothenburg, 1921¹

Following Spinoza, the body is regarded as neither a locus for a consciousness nor an organically determined entity; it is understood more in terms of what it can do, the things it can perform, the linkages it establishes, the transformations and becomings it undergoes, and the machinic connections it forms with other bodies, what it can link with, how it can proliferate its other capacities – a rare, affirmative understanding of the body.

- Elizabeth Grosz, 1994²

In his autobiography, the American poet and physician William Carlos Williams recalls a strange altercation with the German Dada poet Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven in the early 1920s. Trying to stage a tryst, the enamoured female poet had used the pretext of a medical emergency to lure Williams from his house in Rutherford, New Jersey. When her advances were rebuked, however, she purportedly hit the doctor ‘alongside the neck with all her strength’, causing a panicked Williams to purchase a punchbag and begin practising his boxing moves. When he next met the Baroness on Park Avenue, he ‘flattened her with a stiff punch to the mouth’.³ As bizarre as this episode may appear, its frequent repetition in the annals of modernism alerts us to its emblematic function, signalling that the modernist world was one in which the old gender categories were becoming unravelled, as women’s androgynous, no longer docile bodies openly inserted themselves into traditionally male games, persiflaging traditional rules and expectations. The Baroness’s body, with its pungent smell and athletic musculature made for Dada confrontation, is an emblem not only for the boxer’s paradoxical mixture of toughness and vulnerability, but also for the new woman who aggressively breaches masculine domains.

No other sport is as associated with masculine power as boxing, which may explain its attraction for women looking to push the boundaries of body and self during the modernist era. Vanessa Toumlin has shown that, as early as the nineteenth century, women could be witnessed boxing in burlesque or vaudeville shows. Prominent examples included the Scottish Johnson sisters, ‘who would exhibit in red velvet dresses, decorated with amber coloured cuffs and gold braid, complete with boxing boots and gloves’; American Marie Ford, who travelled throughout the United States challenging male and female volunteers to fight; and British-born Annie Hayes (née Hickman), who ‘claimed that she did fights against male opponents’.⁴ Some boxing matches pitted women against men, the crowd cheering on the women and the punches intensifying as the bets increased. Identifying a surge in the popularity of women’s boxing during the 1930s, sports sociologist Jennifer Hargreaves observes: ‘In its most pure form, it was a celebration of female muscularity, physical strength and aggression. Power was literally inscribed in the boxers’ bodies – in their actual working muscles – an expression of physical capital usually ascribed to men.’⁵ Extending this exploration of boxing as a metaphor for liberation, Erik N. Jensen studies the artistic, theatrical and performative dimensions inherent in women’s boxing during Weimar

Germany. As Jensen asserts: ‘By celebrating or engaging in violence themselves, these female boxing enthusiasts staked a claim to masculine behavior for women too.’⁶

In her essay ‘On Boxing’, American writer Joyce Carol Oates articulates a different, though somewhat complementary, position, noting that boxing is ‘the obverse of the feminine, the denial of the feminine-in-man that has its ambiguous attraction for all men’.⁷ Having attended countless fights with her father, a boxing aficionado, Oates knows the sport’s paradoxes intimately. David Scott paraphrases her to explain that: ‘In this way, the ring, in its geometrical symmetry with its matched opponents, becomes a mirror-like structure in which, for the duration of the bout, the boxer is trapped in a confrontation of self and other that can only be resolved by extreme violence.’⁸ Although there is admittedly a world of difference between (lawless) fighting and (codified) boxing in the ring, boxing is a primal sport, given in particular the intentional and legitimate blows to the head to achieve the desired knock-out of the opponent. Perhaps it is this primal element, with its channelling of violent trauma, which made boxing so popular for modernist artists and the public at large during the First World War and post-war eras. Interestingly, the ring’s agonistic structure evokes Renato Poggioli’s definition of the modernist avant-garde: ‘Of unlimited importance is the moment of *agonism*, no doubt representing one of the most inclusive psychological tendencies in modern culture.’ Whereas *agone* expresses itself in ‘contest, sport, and game’, as Poggioli explains, ‘agonism means sacrifice and consecration: an hyperbolic passion, a bow bent toward the impossible, a paradoxical and positive form of spiritual defeatism’.⁹ Such agonism is arguably also at the heart of boxing, a sport predicated on the sacrifice of one of the opponents.

For some writers, such as Bertolt Brecht, the sport’s appeal was precisely its risky and untamed (avant-garde) elements, presenting a counterbalance, as David Bathrick explains, to the ‘effete modernism [Brecht] saw, for example, in the work of the expressionists’.¹⁰ However, for others, such as Ernest Hemingway, the appeal of boxing lay in experiencing and celebrating the sport’s complex techniques and elaborate aesthetics. This was exemplified when American boxing champion Jack Dempsey described his opponent Tommy Gibbons as ‘a remarkably clever boxer’, but nuanced that he is not ‘a fast thinker’.¹¹ Likewise, in his article entitled ‘The Psychology of Boxing: Mental Concentration’, French boxing champion Georges Carpentier spoke of the boxer’s ‘necessary intelligence’, highlighting ‘the work of the brain during the fight, the constant calculations of causes and their probable effects’, and noting also that the fight involves resolving ‘mental problems’.¹² These articles appeared in *Der Querschnitt*, a German magazine launched in 1921 with the explicit goal of promoting boxing among artists. Formerly considered rough and low class, the sport was reframed as artful and intellectual, not unlike the advertisements for training bags in New York, which promised to make the user a ‘knockout artist’.¹³ The international contributors to *Der Querschnitt* included boxers such as Max Schmeling, Jack Dempsey and Arthur Cravan, alongside Futurist poets Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Giovanni Papini and writers Hemingway and Pound. The sport was elevated from brute, low-class entertainment to a meaningful and artful ritual whose objective it was to promote images of fitness and health and to transform humanity itself. It comes as no surprise that boxing recruited its sometimes Messianic aficionados from among prominent male modernists such as Picasso, Rodin and Matisse.¹⁴ But where does such a focus leave the women?

Building on earlier studies by Hargreaves, Jensen, Scott and Toulmin, as well as Kasia Boddy’s

impressive cultural history of boxing, this article is concerned with the ways in which modernist women writers and artists entered the arena of boxing. Sports historians have established the sport's remarkable popularity among women during the era, Boddy noting that '2000 women were estimated to have attended the 1921 New Jersey fight [between Dempsey and Carpentier]'.¹⁵ By engaging with boxing as practitioners and spectators, some used their own bodies as legible scripts for new identities – indeed scripting strength, agency and subversion into their musculature as a gendered narrative of modernity. By exhibiting muscular corporeality, the modern woman unscripted the traditional female body, which was codified in rigid opposition to the male body and inescapably tethered to her reproductive and domestic functions. This novel, muscular scripting of the New Woman's body is found in the iconic flapper as a slim-hipped dancer, or the toned body of the female tennis player, or in more risqué images of women donning the boxing glove. Drawing attention to the social construction of the female body within specific ideological and historical contexts, these corporeal performances of the New Woman as boxer are found in women's autobiographical self-portraits, allowing us to examine the shifting cultural terrain of the 1910s and 1920s and illuminating the ways in which women's bodies renegotiated boundaries of self and other. In some ways, the hard-working career woman who rose in society as a writer of best-selling fiction, or as an actress or model who achieved fame, or even the clerical worker who shaped an independent identity, mirrored the boxer's hard work and determination in his – or her – struggle to rise in society.

The following is an exploration of several prominent examples of such radical determination: Berlin novelist Hedwig 'Vicki' Baum (1888–1960) enters the ring through her body by literally lacing up the gloves and training with the men; journalist and writer Djuna Barnes (1892–1982) takes to the ringside to explore the question: 'What do women want at a fight?'; while British avant-garde poet Mina Loy (1882–1966) is introduced to the arena of boxing through her husband, the legendary boxer-poet Arthur Cravan. The autobiographical portraits of these women also include Brooklyn-born Hollywood actress Clara Bow (1905–65), the 'It Girl' of the 1920s and 1930s, who joins the ring through new mass entertainment technology by performing herself as a boxer for the camera. The women employ the tropes and symbols of boxing to signal a radical break with the past and to claim modern identities by foregrounding muscular and powerful corporeal selves. In their self-portraits women use the boxing ring to explore gender and sexual relations in the modern era; in doing so, they also exploit boxing as a metaphor to express the fragmentations of modern identity. As they negotiate the boundaries and limits of the female body and self, they proclaim new, multiple selves, but they are also acutely aware of the fact that as New Women they must still operate within a man's world.

Vicki Baum in Berlin

In her autobiography *It Was All Quite Different* (1964), best-selling novelist and scriptwriter Vicki Baum (who was born in Vienna in 1888 and immigrated to Los Angeles in 1932) takes us inside a legendary basement gymnasium on Berlin's Kurfürstendamm as a way of showcasing her birth as a New Woman in Weimar Germany. The Turkish trainer and prizefighter Sabri Mahir had opened his Studio for Boxing and Physical Culture ('Studio für Boxen und Leibesbucht') to women during the late 1920s, as Baum writes: 'I don't know how the feminine element sneaked into those masculine realms, but in any case, only three or four of us were tough enough to go through with it (Marlene Dietrich was one).' The atmosphere in the boxing studio

was highly charged and Sabri was relentless, as Baum recalls: ‘Stamping, cursing, shouting, screaming his commands, he made you keep up his speed, he wouldn’t let you off when you felt you had no more breath, no feet, no arms, not an ounce of strength left.’¹⁶ A space for sports, philosophy and literature, in which the likes of Brecht and other literati congregated, Mahir’s boxing studio intentionally blurred the boundary between physical and mental culture, between sport and art. In a way, it functioned like a male equivalent of the literary salon, a cultural institution traditionally hosted by women and fostering art and conversation within a semi-private/semi-public space. The unique atmosphere is captured in the title of a historical novel, *Tea Time at the Ringside* (*Teestunden am Ring*), written in 1998 by Turkish author Güney Dal and depicting Mahir’s boxing studio as a salonesque space.

Multilingual (operating in five languages) and cross-gendered (training men and women), Mahir’s studio cultivated the gender-crossing and multilingual identity constructions of Vicki Baum and Marlene Dietrich, who were fluent in German and English later in life, and were known for openly defying sexual norms (Dietrich was infamous for her androgynous roles and her bisexuality). Similarly hailing a queered identity, Baum was supposed to have been a boy named ‘Victor’ and her father addressed her as ‘my son’ in her childhood.¹⁷ For Baum, a twice-married (once divorced) woman and mother, Mahir’s studio was a space for restructuring gender identity. ‘At the verge of turning forty’, Baum writes in her memoir, she gained a feeling of ‘[her] own strength’ with Mahir in her corner, ‘giving out an almost tangible steam of energy to his warrior – me, five-foot-three, one hundred and four pound’.¹⁸ So impressive was her physical stamina that she was able to master the taxing rope jumping routine that Mahir had specially designed for Franz Diener (his star boxer and German heavyweight champion who fought at Madison Square Garden in 1926). Her physical constitution matched her creative power. As a best-selling writer with an output of over fifty popular novels, Baum is especially known for *Grand Hotel* (*Menschen im Hotel*), a novel made into an Academy Award-winning movie starring Greta Garbo in 1932, but her most transgressive subject was herself, as she transformed from middle-class *Hausfrau* into a figure of modernity by donning her boxing gloves. Even in her seventies when she wrote her memoir, Baum credits her ability to endure thirteen to fourteen-hour workdays to the skills instilled in Sabri’s boxing studio.

In her memoir, Baum tells the story of her life and career in terms that are paradigmatic of the boxer’s life. She reveals an emotionally difficult childhood (her self-absorbed mother struggled with severe mental illness, and her father was a ‘brutal, ignorant moron’).¹⁹ Refusing to dwell on the hardships, however, she ‘clenched [her] fists and shut up, and wandered off into still deeper circles of my own delirious inferno’.²⁰ She found solace in her body, as she writes: ‘The mirror frightened me, yet I was dying to find out how I really looked, not only my face, but me, all over. Naked.’²¹ Visualizing Grosz’s point that the body is ‘the stuff of subjectivity’,²² a remarkable memoir photograph (see Figure 1) shows the middle-aged Baum in a sexually ambivalent black training maillot, her body turned sideways towards the camera, cut off at the knees, her gloved hands hammering a pear-shaped punchball, her eyes intent on the target. We are reminded of Scott’s observation that the boxing gymnasium, with ‘its symmetrically activated equipment (punch ball, punching bags, skipping ropes, and other routines)’, as Scott describes it, effectively mirrors ‘the organized dynamic modern civilization’.²³ The opposite page shows a contrasting glamour photo taken after Baum’s visit to Elizabeth Arden’s New York salon, with bleached hair, pencilled eyebrows, lacquered fingernails and tailored jacket with smart lace necktie all

emphasizing the labour of modern feminine celebrity glamour.²⁴ The juxtaposition of the photos does more than anticipate Judith Butler's point on the performativity of gender; it speaks to the multiplicity of modern female selves inhabiting one body, while their mirrored opposition also evokes the mirrored opposition of the boxing ritual itself. If the modern glamour photo speaks of Baum's jet-setting celebrity, the boxing photo visualizes the agency, determination and hard work involved in the woman's struggle to inhabit a male world.

We are reminded here of Suzanne Zelazo's provocative assertion that the athletic body is *like* narrative, presenting a kind of liminal art form at the interface of sports and writing, as she explains in relation to the elite triathlete: 'Through her own bodily performance, the female athlete simultaneously mirrors, resists, and overwrites identity and autonomy in ways that are similar to the representational experimentation of avant-garde art. In so doing, she personifies her own emergent bodily poetics.'²⁵ We are also reminded here of what Amelia Jones has described as the artfully performed 'body self', the woman's boxing body as the theatrical stage for the emergent self, one that is involved in integrating multiple, even agonistic, selves, with fascinating tensions inscribed on the female body. Thus the boxing pose speaks of a new androgynous erotic, visualizing an assertive corporeal self that also evokes Scott's observation (paraphrasing René Denfeld) that boxing promotes physical awareness and sensual intimacy within a sexually neutral training space.²⁶ Boxing cultivates a sensuous self by sharpening awareness of all the senses as Baum evokes them through her training experience: visual (eyeing the punchbag or opponent), haptic (touching skin, flesh and leather; being touched and massaged by the trainer), aural (commands shouted in multiple languages), but also olfactory (the smell of sweat, rubbing alcohol and leather). Embracing a new gendered fluidity, Baum's boxing pose also proclaims a spectrum of new experiences, identities and pleasures that are remarkably autonomous from traditional heterosexual, marital and maternal bonds.

Even as boxing became more accessible for women, it made them acutely aware of the sport's limits. *Der Querschnitt* is a case in point, as the periodical insisted on the traditional formula 'boxing-men's sport' ('Boxsport-Männersport'),²⁷ and despite some intriguingly subversive representations, such as the pairing of photographs of male boxers with female intellectuals with university degrees, there are but few pictures of women boxers in its entire print run from 1921 to 1936, when the Nazis prohibited the magazine shortly after the Berlin Olympics. A rare example is found belatedly in 1933, showing two middle-class women dressed in Edwardian ankle-length skirts and white blouses sparring in the gymnasium; flashing their boxing gloves, they confront each other with expressions of serious sportsmanship and competition.²⁸ Taken in 1910, this evidently historical photograph appeared in a series of press photos showing 'the beginnings of female sports', with women playing tennis, dancing, roller-skating and ice-skating.

Moreover, even though the College of Physical Education had been offering lessons in pugilism to women since 1923,²⁹ women boxers in Germany seemed to be so troubling that they required containment. Baum explains that 'Sabri put one limitation on women – no sparring in the ring, no black eyes, no bloody noses. Punching the ball was okay, though, to develop a pretty mean straight left, a quick one-two; a woman never knew when she might have to defend herself, right?'³⁰ Safeguarding the female boxer from injury, this paternalistic policy presents an intervention into boxing sport's brutal history of blood and scarring, but also exposes deep-seated anxieties regarding women's emancipation and challenge of male gender privileges. In

this context, a 1930 photograph (see Figure 2) showing actress Carola Neher sparring with Sabri Mahir in the ring in his gymnasium is also informative, as the trainer's massive body assumes the defensive position with left foot forward and left arm extended to ward off Neher's right. While Neher is equipped with boxing gloves and a maillot, trainer Mahir is oddly dressed in business clothing, his white shirt and tie pointedly highlighting orderly civility but also suggesting that Neher was not taken seriously as a pugilist. Katharina von Ankum has observed that sympathetic accounts of the burdens on Weimar Germany's New Woman were often offset by warnings to women that 'the physical strains of their new professional and leisure activities would permanently damage their reproductive abilities'.³¹ Thus positive images of the New Woman's power and independence almost immediately generated a backlash image of failure (found, for example, in the fiction of women writers such as Christa Anita Brück, whose autobiographical novel *Schicksale hinter Schreibmaschinen* [Destinies behind typewriters] depicts a New Woman who fails to advance in the city and must return to the province to replenish her depleted energies). By extending their subjectivities through boxing, Baum and Neher certainly participated in claiming the sport as a female technology of self, but boxing was also an arena that ironically exposed the hurdles they had to overcome.

The 'Thrill' of Boxing

Where Baum, Dietrich and Neher empowered themselves by appropriating the boxer's glove as a way of negotiating new boundaries of identity, many of their female contemporaries entered the ring as spectators in Weimar Berlin, Paris and New York. In 1914 New York journalist and writer Djuna Barnes first posed the question 'What do women want at a fight?' Catchily titled 'My Sisters and I at a New York Prizefight', her article was published in the *New York World Magazine* at the dawn of the First World War. As Barnes writes: 'This was the first set of three four-round bouts, with Black Lahn and Mike Rosen to lead off; two ten-round bouts to follow; and the last and star feature to be between Phil Bloom and "Young" Gradwell.' Seated ringside, Barnes closely observes 'the women who dared the ringside and the girls further back sit[ting] rigidly upright, balanced between wonder and apprehension'.³² Channelling boxing through her own senses – ear, nose, eye and skin – Barnes explores boxing as a window into women's modern identities, including her own, by focusing on women's desire.

In referencing Barnes' ringside experience, Tim Armstrong makes deliberate use of a fin-de-siècle stereotype, summing up her response as the 'flicker of Salomé'. He observes: 'Phallic women, beheaded men; boxing becomes a form of decadence. For Barnes the original question – What do women want at a fight – becomes unanswerable as the whole field of gender resolves into a game of desire.'³³ Armstrong is certainly onto something in raising the question of desire, as the male boxer's semi-nude body makes the ringside sorority agents of desire, stimulating a reverse voyeurism for women who were traditionally the objects of the male gaze. The women 'consume' the male body as visual entertainment, and the woman writer appropriates the male body as a subject in her writing, breaching masculine territory. Thus Barnes anticipates the 1920s and 1930s, decades during which, as Kasia Boddy observes, '[b]oxers crop up as sex objects in the work of writers as diverse as Rosamund Lehmann, Jane Bowles and Zelda Fitzgerald'.³⁴

Yet Barnes also confronts the reader with 'the shock of clashing bodies', so intense it quickly numbs the spectators' sensibilities. It is the moment when the 'real' of the body in pain unravels

identity and language itself, Barnes observing that ‘he is no longer a fighter but a great and bewildered pain’, reminding us of Elaine Scarry’s eloquent argument that pain brings language to a halt, as extreme pain cannot be expressed in language beyond groans and cries.³⁵ Thus if psychoanalysis ‘translates everything into phantasies’,³⁶ then boxing does the opposite during the first era of Freudian psychoanalysis, confronting spectators and practitioners alike with the immediacy of the material body: its sweating, bleeding, secreting, vomiting and discharging organs and its ripping, tearing, hurting and groaning flesh. This confrontation of the real counteracts repression and rips away the conventional veil, which prohibited frank expressions in literature, especially by women writers, explaining why the ringside experience for Barnes is paradoxically also one of birth, as she describes the dousing of the boxer with a sponge of water: ‘Drops of it fall on our faces like drops of rain – a boxer’s baptism.’³⁷ By extension, boxing is a baptism and initiation for the modern woman whose ringside experience severs her forever from the shielded world of traditional femininity and corporeal repression. As a writer and journalist, Barnes deliberately immersed herself in risky situations in order to experience something of the very corporeal sights, sounds and sensations which a previous generation of home-bound women had been trained to repress, avoid and ignore. In doing so, and by bringing her own body and sensations into the narrative, Barnes’ essay effectively begins to unravel an entire cultural history of repression for women.

Without ever resolving the more troubling contradictions of her ringside experience – dramatizing an acute consciousness of senseless violence, on one hand, and of female spectators’ novel power, on the other – Barnes did feel compelled to delve deeper into the gendered layers of boxing, as seen in her 1915 article on heavyweight champion Jess Willard. Here Willard greets Barnes with a patronizing line, ‘What does the little lady want’, and, by selecting this quotation as the opening line of her article, Barnes counteracts his flirtatious condescension with a critical punch. By showcasing the boxer’s refusal to take women seriously, while cleverly transposing the techniques of boxing into her narrative, Barnes draws attention to women’s exclusion from the sport. Even though Willard asserts that if boxing becomes more of an art, ‘women will be doing it for a living next’, he qualifies: ‘They are great at a fight; they fizz up so easy. All you have to do is to land a punch, wink, look sassy, and you’ve got them in their hallelujah.’³⁸ Yet for all his loud-mouthed bravado, it is Barnes who dominates their verbal sparring. Unimpressed by his blustering masculinity, she counters by making him the target of her satire. By turning the prizefighter’s body into a blend of a Rodinesque sculpture and a gigantic tree stump (an image of satire and castration), she exposes his limitations as a subject of artful contemplation and ironic curiosity. ‘What is Time going to do with this ponderous Boy?’ she asks, noting, moreover, that Willard is not blessed with too much ‘gray matter’. Quickly out-manoeuvring the boxing champion, she delivers the rhetorical knock-out punch by asking Willard a philosophical question: what exactly about the ring is ‘an uplift’, she wonders; ‘Is it educational; is there anything in it that really benefits the crowd; any esthetic value?’ When Willard stumbles (‘Er – yes – well, say, would you mind saying that over?’), Barnes condescends to meet him on his level, as she observes with a self-reflexive irony: ‘I came down out of the interrogation class, and lifted up his palm, weighing it on my own, and found it very heavy. After that I understood a lot of things.’

The physical touch, like the first touch of two boxers in the ring, seems to create a moment of insight, a spark. A woman at ringside, Barnes seems to suggest, affords a stage on which to

magnify and expose the limits of the traditional codes of masculinity and femininity. It seems that, by taking the boxer's hand in hers, Barnes also understands something of the weightiness of wartime masculinity, a masculinity under siege, what Amelia Jones calls '*equivocal masculinity*' that was the result of 'neurasthenic' pressures, or what we call post-traumatic stress today, caused by the unprecedented brutalities of the First World War.³⁹ Interestingly, many writers, such as Hemingway, offered virile sports such as boxing and bullfighting as a strategy of remasculation in fiction (as seen in *The Sun Also Rises* [1926], with the protagonist Jake Barnes, who is impotent as a result of a war wound, and who seeks to rebuild his precarious masculinity in the world of boxing and bullfighting). Here, boxing offers the performance of a traditional and heroic masculinity, what David Scott has termed 'the illusion of the possibility of male assertion through courage, discipline, and strength'.⁴⁰ Hemingway tellingly recruited modern women as spectators, actively promoting the sport among his female friends, as he writes in a 1923 letter: 'Sat[urday] night we went to five prize fights – Tiny [Hemingway's wife Hadley], Ezra Pound, J[ane] H[ear] of the Little Review, Mike Strater, Mac [Robert McAlmon] and I. Swell fights.'⁴¹

Meanwhile, Hemingway's friend Jane Heap, androgynous and cross-dressing co-editor (with Margaret Anderson) of the era's most avant-garde literary magazine, *The Little Review*, treats boxing with a double-consciousness similar to that of Barnes. 'I had the Hemingways and a friend of theirs to dinner Friday night – after dinner – we went to the Provincetown', Heap writes to a friend in 1924, continuing: 'old-fashioned stuff from Strindberg at that – we left after the second act and went to a prize fight at Madison Square Garden – Mart [Margaret Anderson] was so "thrilled".'⁴² Exhibiting a bold female physicality, including a head of close-cropped hair, Heap's bodily vocabulary certainly proclaimed her kinship with that 'short-haired fraternity' of prizefighters and boxers.⁴³ At the same time, the fact that Anderson, the quintessential *femme* and Heap's former lover, 'thrilled' to boxing denotes a fair amount of irony. Similar to Barnes' bafflement, Heap's quotation marks around the 'thrill' are, perhaps, recognition of the paradoxical nature of modernist aesthetes and feminists like them finding enjoyment in a sport that stimulates deeply archaic emotions. This articulation of double-consciousness is a modernist trope, reminding us also of Marshall Berman's assertion that to be modern is 'to be moved at once by a will to change – to transform both themselves and their world – and by the terror of disorientation and disintegration, of life falling apart. They all know the thrill and the dread of the world in which "all that is solid melts into air."' For both Barnes and Heap, the ringside, like the experience of modernity itself, is ultimately about contradiction, or as Berman puts it: 'To be modern is to live a life of paradox and contradiction.'⁴⁴ Thus the agonistic nature of boxing mirrors the internalized double-consciousness of modernity itself.

Mina Loy's 'Colossus'

Whereas Baum is a practitioner, and Barnes and her ringside sisters are spectators, British expatriate poet Mina Loy approached boxing through aesthetic empathy, using her partnership with an actual boxer to sketch the boxing ring as an allegory for the paradoxes of modern love and gender relationships. In her memoir, entitled 'Colossus', Loy's response is deeply immersive, as she sketches a portrait of Arthur Cravan, the six-foot Dada poet and amateur boxer who famously fought Jack Johnson in Barcelona in 1916 and who was also Loy's husband for a short time before mysteriously disappearing in Mexico in 1918. Loy calls her memoir the 'newsreel of my memory',⁴⁵ the newsreel itself a modernist trope for historicizing war news,

obituaries, horse races and boxing matches. In fact, Loy's newsreel has the jerky movements of a boxer in the ring, with episodes strung together like the rounds of a match. "[H]aven't you met the prizefighter who writes poetry?" assailed me on all sides' is how Loy introduces Cravan.⁴⁶ Like the match of two prizefighters, the first meeting of Loy and Cravan, both dislocated British expatriates with avant-garde notoriety and alliances, was highly anticipated by New York's modernists. Cravan had first arrived in New York in January 1917 and his photo appeared in the avant-garde magazine *The Soil* in April 1917, along with information regarding his fight against world heavyweight champion Jack Johnson.⁴⁷ Verbal intimidation is part of the boxer's repertoire, a clever tactical game anticipated by Cravan, who notoriously heaped sardonic abuse on both men and women. Weary of futurist machismo and conscious of her vulnerability, Loy takes a defensive pose, wrapping herself in a protective armour of irony and distance, as she writes: 'the legends surrounding him were so extravagant that the very idea of encountering him frightened me'.⁴⁸

Noting his 'huge bulk' and 'empty stare', his body like a 'towering statue of animated stone, sway[ing] lethargically above the spectators', Loy both mythologizes and caricatures Cravan's boxer's posturing,⁴⁹ not unlike Barnes in her depiction of Willard. By deconstructing his body, isolating the eyes, torso, boots and other apparel to tease out a choreography of expressive associations, she toys with simultaneously transposing into her narrative the conventions of both boxing posters and lyrical love poetry. Such is the case when she captures Cravan at a party in the iconic image of the boxer between rounds: 'Slouched in his chair, the sneering muscles of his mouth and chin sunk onto his chest, his gaze fixed on his monstrous boots, he looked as if at any moment he might vomit disgust in the faces of his twittering companions.'⁵⁰ The image of his 'vomit[ing] disgust' suggests something of the violence of boxing. Just like a boxer in the ring, Loy finds herself physically enveloped by Cravan, their flesh entangled, their bodies composing a paradoxical 'partnership'. 'It was, to say the least, a negative initiation, this leaning flesh to flesh, as it were, upon a fount of physical repulsion,' Loy notes; 'I had never been encircled by a stranger or by anyone who revolted me before.'⁵¹ In fact, Loy's language toys with boxing allusions by insisting that 'this partner of mine had received too many blows to the brain'.⁵² Like Barnes' irony, so Loy's gives way to a double-consciousness which also mirrors the paradox of Anderson's 'thrill'. It is the same paradox that makes Loy exclaim in a single line: "'Modern' women!" – self-consciously staging her ironic awareness of just how much modern women like herself are prone to fall into old romantic and heterosexual traps through, in her case, an ambivalent yet powerful sexual attraction to a traditional (machismo) masculinity as symbolized in the super-sized physicality of the boxer.⁵³

The roped-off square in which boxing takes place is paradoxically named the 'ring' after the 'human rope of sympathetic spectators forming the approximate edge between boxing and the rest of the world', as Roger Conover explains.⁵⁴ Loy's sparring courtship with Cravan takes place at the Arensberg salon and the Webster Hall ball, the centre of New York Dada from 1915 to 1921. Thus located at the heart of avant-garde activities, the pairing of Loy and Cravan, whom she also calls 'King Dada', is viewed by 'a rope of sympathetic spectators' including Marcel Duchamp and poet William Carlos Williams, who provide commentary on her intensifying relationship. 'Don't *have* him,' urges Williams, explaining to Loy: 'You will only find yourself in a ridiculous situation. All these pugilists are bunglers in bed.' Still, Loy prefers Cravan's 'lumbering' body (read: traditional or hard masculinity) to the 'slick' hands (read: new or soft

masculinity) of Duchamp. Dismissing Duchamp as a ‘prestidigitator’ who ‘could insinuate his hand under a woman’s bodice and caress her with utter grace’, she repudiates the erotic possibilities of Duchamp’s gender-bending masculinity as flirtatious and non-committal. Thus she ponders: ‘*Why* was I considering taking Colossus above all the other men who had included me in their rounds when paying their illicit addresses to the seductive organisms whose lovely clothes made them appear to be so pathetically complete?’⁵⁵

Through the telescoped lens of her newsreel camera, Loy’s bedroom becomes the boxing arena and her bed the ring (the raised stage associated with the anticipation and anxiety of action), with Loy, in bed, waiting for Cravan to make a grand entrance as a prizefighter, as she writes about their first night together. ‘Colossus was taking a long time to walk across the floor. He had put on my bathrobe and it was flung open, displaying the frontal plane of his so solid, snow-white torso.’ The unveiling of Cravan’s body, erect and phallic, reveals the boxer in full gear; the nude torso marks the almost naked fighter in the ring, just as the bathrobe is part of the boxer’s iconographic apparel.⁵⁶ As Loy extends the fighting allegory (‘I thought of cock-fighting – how the swelling of blood vessels and the conceit of conquest turn the victor’s pace into a strut and give him an air of cruel surety’), she stages sex through the boxing allegory, writing: ‘He possessed me with an icy inertia, contriving the illusion that he was not, himself, involved in the curt, chill, passive union of flesh, and that had I stirred he would have tossed me out of bed like so much flesh that wearied his spirit.’⁵⁷ Like the boxers described by Oates who perform ‘skillfully but mechanically, who cannot improvise in response to another’s alteration of strategy’,⁵⁸ their bodies enact the constraints of the ring in the sex act, with the bed functioning as the narrow cube from which Loy can only escape by being tossed out by him. Thus this round seems to confirm her friend Williams’ warning.

Loy (just like Djuna Barnes) recognizes the contradictions of boxing as an allegory for modern life. Whereas Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, for example, suggests that Cravan was not a real boxer since he lacked a boxer’s discipline,⁵⁹ Loy in contrast embraces in the boxer’s identity the paradoxes of modernity itself. Cravan is the eternal outcast, whose baby picture evokes the quintessential boxer by giving ‘a surprising impression of the seated baby’s backbone being a rod of iron’.⁶⁰ He is the vertical figure against ‘the wide flat plain’. As she writes: ‘The wistful fog of the moon leaned upon it. Colossus brooded there beside me, his gigantic shoulders with their gentle droop stacked beneath his profile, heroic in perfection.’⁶¹ Translating the Wordsworthian moon as ‘emblem of the mind’ into a darkly brooding vision of traumatic war and loss, Loy’s title ‘Colossus’ is an ironic pun, a verbal punch, containing in its dead centre the word *loss* – the ritual ending of the boxing match. Mexico was the round during which Loy found and lost her Colossus, when, four months into her pregnancy, her unborn baby’s father mysteriously disappeared off the shore. Ultimately, Cravan’s boxer persona allowed Loy to integrate the paradoxes of their love during the war era, namely, the paradoxical play of togetherness and separateness: ‘His companionship was at times an antagonism, his consciousness pulling away from me, “the mistress presumptive”’.⁶² For Mina Loy, modern love, like a boxing match, is a game of erotic contradictions, like the ring an allegorical site in which modern identities are forged and severed.

Bessie Gordon and Clara Bow: Action and Counteraction

In teasing out her modern love story as a boxing allegory, Mina Loy's newsreel metaphor is particularly apt, considering the intimate closeness of the ring and cinema worlds. Dan Streible observes that boxing movies which focus on sparring and enactments of famous fights are relatively artless, with many long-shots and little editing.⁶³ This is true of one of the earliest female boxing movies, Thomas A. Edison's *The Gordon Sisters* (6 May 1901, available for viewing on the internet).⁶⁴ Named after its starring sorority, Bessie and Minnie Gordon, the mirthful film depicts the boxing sisters vigorously sparring for two minutes in front of an idyllic garden scene, its symmetry and beauty gesturing towards the artfulness of boxing as a cultivated sport. With Bessie dressed in black and Minnie in white for contrast, their gloved hands and nimble legs in constant movement, what is perhaps most striking is the kinetic energy and joy exuded as the women expertly showcase their professional boxing skills, circling, jabbing, punching, pushing and ducking, the short skirts of their dresses swinging, thereby amplifying the sense of choreographed movement and highlighting their boldly modern female physicality and sportsmanship. We are reminded of Klara Heydt's rhapsodic description, in a 1926 article in *Der Querschnitt*, of the modern body's 'magnificent principle of antagonism – action and counteraction',⁶⁵ a principle carried to its logical extreme in boxing. That the movie ends mid-way through the fight further accentuates its sense of kinetic movement, while the backdrop, presumably not a real garden but a theatrical setting, serves to highlight, like Loy's newsreel, the cinematic artifice of boxing. In fact, the women's running legs and moving arms offer a metaphor for the new movie technology itself, as film is likewise composed of running images.

Technology is also in the foreground of a boxing photograph featuring the same Bessie Gordon which appeared in an August 1905 issue of the literary periodical *Everybody's Magazine* (see Figure 3). Performing for the professional photographer's camera in Feinberg's Studio in New York, Bessie is shown with her striking punching-bag installation, a large steel-pipe apparatus whose machine-like sleekness announces its modernity. Caught in mid-movement, framed by the apparatus, Bessie's body creates an oblique line extended by her right leg, sharply cutting the picture diagonally, with her right arm firmly stretching outwards to pummel the ball, her eyes intent on the target. The dynamic body lines, along with the visibility of modern training technology, create the effect of modernity. Bessie's stage name of 'Belle' further emphasizes that identity is a public performance act, her subjectivity transformed by and through her engagement with the punchball apparatus (somewhat like a boxer in a ring). Gordon's feminine, white cotton lingerie dress accessorized with a belt, as they were typically worn in New York's summer resorts during the era, announces a leisurely upper-class occupation. At the same time, there is an evident tension created in the caption, 'Belle Gordon, Lady Bag-Puncher', a tension between tradition and modernity amplified by the homey Edwardian backdrop, the Pompadour hairstyle and the long dress. As Bessie's body fills the space, and she confidently takes her place in the male discursive world of boxing, the photograph implies a transitioning from old to new era, a transition in which the woman is the agent. The Gordon sisters announce what would become the 1920s image of female modernity – muscular, tough and assertive – while their pairing also suggests the possibilities of a refashioned sorority, now outside the domestic home. The photo is so powerful in its new bodily vocabulary that it reframes the very discourse regarding female identity: with boxing iconography superseding signifiers of the traditional, the Lady Bag-Puncher's status as wife or mother becomes radically secondary.

Two decades later, during the 1920s boxing craze, Belle Gordon's invigorating Lady Bag-

Puncher poses are playfully extended by actresses on both sides of the Atlantic. As Jensen notes, ‘a number of female celebrities cultivated their own image as pugilists, even if they had little to do with the actual sport’.⁶⁶ A case in point is Clara Bow, the 1920s American flapper icon and, though a generation younger, a contemporary of Baum, Barnes and Loy. Bow starred in boxing films and posed for photographs dressed as a boxer, presumably as promotional material. In one evocative photograph, she stands alone in high heels, adorned with silky boxing trunks, her prominent white boxing gloves and mischievous glance challenging the viewer to a flirtatious sexual game. Posing at the beach, a space of leisure and games, as well as on the empty stage, with her body throwing dynamic shadows, Bow invites spectators to project their own ludic and erotic desires onto her body, thereby also underscoring that sexuality, like boxing, is a modern game confidently displayed by the modern woman. A game is demarcated by time and space, as ludology theorist Roger Callois defines it,⁶⁷ but, within that demarcation, games are also open-ended in their possibilities. These limitless possibilities are suggested by the beach and by Bow’s wholesome yet decidedly erotic boxing posture.

In another remarkable photograph (see Figure 4), Bow holds both gloved hands to her head, with her upper body creating the silhouette of a pear-shaped punchball. Thus, in a curious way, she now personifies the punchball, with her face expressing mock fear and horror. Standing on a Malibu beach with the sea behind her, her angled elbows point straight downwards while the ribs on her maillot’s skirt run upwards. Both sets of lines converge on her solar plexus, a spot of high vulnerability in boxing. In contrast to this foregrounding of fragility is the remarkable confidence with which Bow displays her athleticism, kineticism and sexual energy. As such, we are reminded of Scott’s assertion that it is ‘the toughness and vulnerability of the boxer and the tension between these two aspects that constitutes the particular fascination of boxing as a sport’.⁶⁸ Bow’s physical pose can thus be read as a prescient self-portrait of a woman whose boldness commanded a price.

Around the same time that the boxing photos were taken, Bow, at age twenty-two, told the story of her career in ‘My Life Story’, serialized in *Photoplay* magazine from February to April 1928. A free-spirited flapper from 1920 to 1935, Bow was known as the ‘It Girl’, thanks to her starring role in the 1927 movie *It*, and was described by F. Scott Fitzgerald as ‘the real thing, someone to stir every pulse in the nation’.⁶⁹ Bow boldly claimed a liberated sexuality for women, declaring that she was not made for marriage and brazenly writing about her multiple lovers in her memoir. ‘I had to make a niche for myself,’ she explains in her autobiography. ‘If I am different, if I’m the “super- flapper” and “jazz-baby” of pictures, it’s because I had to create a character for myself. Otherwise, I’d probably not be in pictures at all. They certainly didn’t want me.’⁷⁰ In her memoir, she draws attention to how her teenage, queered, tomboy identity conflicted with traditional societal expectations. Like Baum, she was the daughter of a mentally unstable mother (who tried to kill her with a butcher’s knife), and, like her tragic mother, Bow herself would battle mental illness as an adult, with her stellar career and self-made identity unravelling just a few years after the remarkable boxing photographs were taken. As a lower-class woman, she did not have the protection of upper-class or upper-middle-class actresses, and she was systematically overworked and exploited by the studios. Her eventual fate was, like many a boxer’s, to become burnt out from the taxing physical demands. While Bow’s parody fighting poses were able to articulate something of the boxer’s defiance, the drag of her pose also suggests something of the uncertainty of gender itself. ‘*In imitating gender,*’ as Butler writes,

‘drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself – as well as its contingency.’⁷¹

Ultimately, the image of a woman shadow-boxing conjures up impressions of female agency and independence, alongside an undaunted determination to confront the barriers of a prejudiced society. By embracing boxing in the gymnasium, women signalled a femininity that was ready to compete with and outdo men in a domain that had traditionally been a male prerogative – that of physical power. At the same time, some boxing women felt compelled to play up their feminine selves, perhaps as a means of confounding the viewer or masking the overt masculinity of the fight. Since, as Scott remarks, ‘[s]porting images are particularly rich in their use of metonymy’,⁷² for Baum the glove helped restructure her body and identity, with her brazen musculature announcing her status as a New Woman. Yet she also expressed the need to augment her femininity, producing a multiplicity of selves requiring integration into her modern self: artist, career woman, wife and mother. Such identities were not easily negotiated or successfully integrated over a life span by many women of her era.

Despite the centrality of health, fitness and determination in the aforementioned instances, boxing women and women at the ringside cannot be read as exclusive carriers of messages of well-being and emancipation. They also conjure up the constraints of the ring, with boxing functioning as a metaphor for a world marked by agonistic principles. By bridging nature and art, body and mind, aggression and vulnerability, boxing ultimately offered Barnes, Baum, Loy and Bow a capacious metaphor, encompassing the contradictions and paradoxes of modern subjectivities, whose gender boundaries were being negotiated. As they literally and figuratively slipped on the boxing gloves, or stepped into the ring, or masqueraded as boxers, their identities as female artists capitalized on the stylized artfulness of boxing, and commented on the performativity of gender. ‘No combination of blows is “natural”,’ as Oates reminds us about boxing: ‘All is style.’⁷³ For modernist women, the embracing of boxing constituted a bold and highly visible corporeal departure from traditional femininity, one that integrates masculine technologies of self in ways that co-exist with more traditional feminine selves. In negotiating new boundaries in the relationship of body, self and other, these boxing portraits arguably gesture towards the body art of the 1960s by representing artfully constructed body selves, while using the body to inscribe both social constraints and women’s confident defiance.

It comes as no surprise that women’s claims to the most masculine of sports generated anxieties, as expressed in Walter Rothenburg’s epigraph or in Williams’ reaction to the Baroness, or even in Mahir’s clear prohibition of women’s boxing in the ring. Likewise, British boxing champion Robert Fitzsimmons wrote in *Physical Culture and Self-Defence* that ‘[m]uscle building brings beauty to woman’, only to caution female readers a few pages later: ‘Too much exercise is worse than not enough.’⁷⁴ Instead of boxing, he advises: ‘Women, play golf!’ Social anxieties may also explain the modernist women’s need to claim boxing subversively, as seen in Baum’s posthumous disclosure of her training photographs, or in the blatant absence of photographs showing mainstream actress Marlene Dietrich as a regular practitioner at Mahir’s boxing studio (although training women were featured in sports magazines and brochures aimed at upper-class women).⁷⁵ These women appropriated the masculine codes, rituals and symbols of the ringside in constructing modernist narratives of self by tapping the energies and resources of the male world.

Since boxing enables radical reinvention (as seen, for example, in the birth of boxing icon

Muhammad Ali out of Cassius Clay), boxing is a privileged figure of modernity. Yet if boxing is representative of modern life, it also allowed women to capture the trauma of the modern era, articulating what Scott calls 'the psychotic, or at least anarchic, potentiality of boxing'.⁷⁶ Perhaps it allowed them to express what Poggioli describes as the defining feature of the modernist avant-garde, 'a hyperbolic passion, a bow bent toward the impossible'. The woman assumes the basic boxing position, all muscles become legible with a new script, reminding us of Maurice Maeterlinck's evocation of the boxer in terms not of violence but of supremely focused energy: 'Every ounce is directed toward one or the other of two massive fists, each supercharged with energy.'⁷⁷

FIGURES

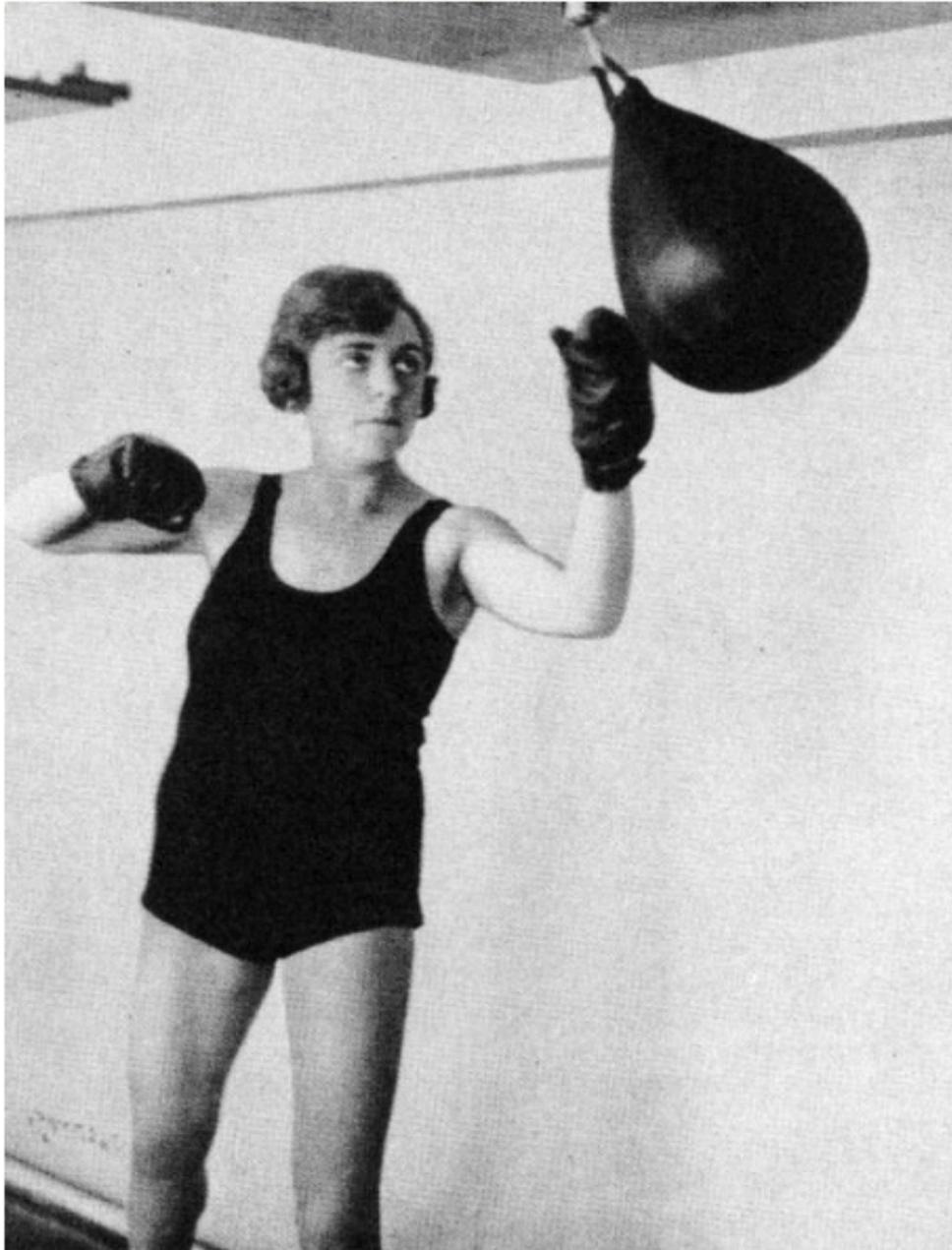


Figure 1: Vicki Baum in Sabri Mahri's studio, c. 1928. In Vicki Baum, *It Was All Quite Different: The Memoirs of Vicki Baum* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1964), photo insert following p. 180. Courtesy of the estate of Vicki Baum.

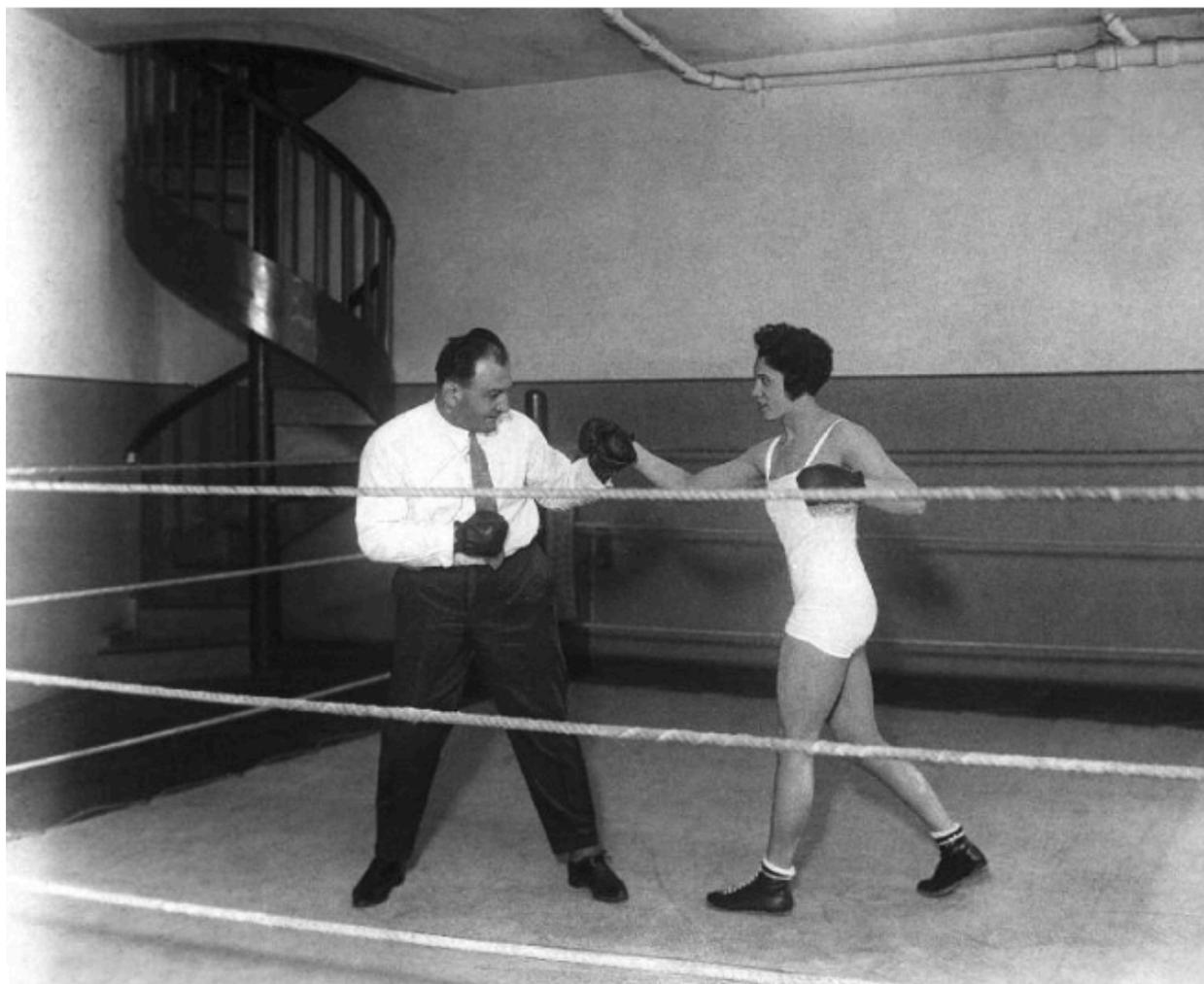


Figure 2: Sabri Mahir and Carola Neher. Photograph by Freiherr Wolff von Gunderberg, c. 1930. Ullstein Bild/The Granger Collection, New York, Number 0227953.



Figure 3: Belle Gordon – Lady Bag-Puncher. Photograph from Feinstein Studio, New York. In *Everybody's Magazine* 13(5) (August 1905), p. 238. Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library.



Figure 4: Actress Clara Bow, the 'It Girl', poses on a Malibu beach, 1927. Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

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Notes

¹ Quoted in Erik N. Jensen, *Body by Weimar: Athletes, Gender, and German Modernity* (New York, 2010), p. 51.

² Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington, IN, 1994), p. 165.

³ William Carlos Williams, *The Autobiography of William Carlos Williams* ([1948] New York, 1967), p. 169. For more details, see Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada and Everyday Modernity: A Cultural Biography* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 262–85.

⁴ Vanessa Toulmin, *A Fair Fight: An Illustrated Review of Boxing on British Fairgrounds* (Southcombe Farm, 1999), pp. 33, 38.

⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, 'Women's Boxing and Related Activities: Introducing Images and Meanings', *Body and Society*, 3(4) (1997), p. 37. See also René Denfeld, *Kill the Body, the Head Will Fall: A Closer Look at Women, Violence, and Aggression* (London, 1997).

⁶ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, pp. 58–9, 65.

⁷ Joyce Carol Oates, 'On Boxing' (first published in 1985), in David Chandler, John Gill, Tanis Guha and Gilane Tawadros (eds), *Boxer: An Anthology of Writings on Boxing and Visual Culture* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 33.

⁸ David Scott, *The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing* (Lincoln, 2008), p. 41.

⁹ Renato Poggioli, *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, trans. Gerald Fitzgerald (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 65–6. For a different approach, and a deconstruction of Poggioli's agonistic principles, see Stephen Voyle, "'Make the World Your Salon": Poetry and Community at the Arensberg Apartment', *Modernism/Modernity*, 15(4) (2008), pp. 633–4.

¹⁰ David Bathrick, 'Max Schmeling on the Canvas: Boxing as an Icon of Weimar Culture', *New German Critique*, 51 (1990), p. 122. See also Bertolt Brecht, 'Die Todfeinde des Sportes' and 'Sport und geistiges Schaffen', *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 20 (Frankfurt, 1967), pp. 28–9, 29–31.

¹¹ Jack Dempsey, 'Mein Kampf mit Tommy Gibbons', *Der Querschnitt*, 4(4) (1924), p. 224, author's translation.

¹² Georges Carpentier, 'Die Psychologie des Boxens: Geistige Konzentration', *Der Querschnitt*, 6(5) (1926), p. 383, author's translation.

¹³ 'Many a "Powder Puff"', advertisement, *Everlast Boxing Record*, 1926; reproduced in Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London, 2008), p. 223.

¹⁴ For an exploration of the early twentieth-century avant-garde's fascination with boxing, including a discussion of Bertolt Brecht and Arthur Cravan, see Lev Kreft, 'Hook to the Chin', *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research*, 46 (2009), pp. 70–8.

¹⁵ Boddy, *Boxing*, p. 218.

¹⁶ Vicki Baum, *It Was All Quite Different* (New York, 1964), pp. 281–2. For more on Vicki Baum, see Nicole Nottelmann, *Die Karrieren der Vicki Baum* (Cologne, 2007).

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- ¹⁷ Baum, *It Was All Quite Different*, p. 73.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 282.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, [11].
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.
- ²² Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, pp. ix, xi.
- ²³ Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, p. 123.
- ²⁴ Photograph insert in Baum, *It Was All Quite Different*, following p. 180.
- ²⁵ Suzanne Zelazo, 'Sport as Living Language: bp Nichol and the Bodily Poetics of the Elite Triathlete', *Canadian Literature*, 202 (2009), p. 33.
- ²⁶ Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, pp. 42–3.
- ²⁷ F.O., 'Ist der Boxsport roh?' (Is boxing rough?), *Der Querschnitt*, 1(6) (1921), p. 222, author's translation.
- ²⁸ 'Von den Anfängen des weiblichen Sports', photograph by Atlantic. *Der Querschnitt*, 13 (1933), p. 341.
- ²⁹ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, p. 79.
- ³⁰ Baum, *It Was All Quite Different*, p. 282.
- ³¹ Katharina von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Germany* (Berkeley, CA, 1997), pp. 2–3.
- ³² Djuna Barnes, 'My Sisters and I at a New York Prizefight', *New York World Magazine*, 23 August 1914, reprinted in Alyce Barry (ed.), *New York* (Los Angeles, CA, 1989), pp. 169, 170. Records indicate that the fight between Bloom and Gradwell took place on 24 July 1914, at Brown's Gym, in Far Rockaway, Queens, New York: Phil Bloom, http://boxrec.com/list_bouts.php?human_id=11847&cat=boxer&pageID=2, accessed 28 February 2012.
- ³³ Tim Armstrong, *Modernism, Technology and the Body: A Cultural Study* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 127–8. Armstrong offers a rare consideration of modernist women's interest in boxing in a subsection entitled 'Modernist Women and the Boxer: Loy and Barnes', yet he does not consider Loy's 'Colossus', which is my focus below.
- ³⁴ Boddy, *Boxing*, p. 220.
- ³⁵ Barnes, 'My Sisters and I', pp. 173, 172. The spectators' indifference towards pain described by Barnes illustrates Elaine Scarry's argument that the expression of pain seems to belong to an 'invisible geography'; as Scarry writes: 'Physical pain does not simply resist language but actively destroys it', *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985), pp. 3, 4.
- ³⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, MN, 1987), p. 151.
- ³⁷ Barnes, 'My Sisters and I', p. 172.
- ³⁸ Barnes, 'Jess Willard Says Girls Will Be Boxing for a Living Soon', *Vanity Fair*, 25 April 1915: Djuna Barnes Papers, University of Maryland Library, Reel 27, Frame 110–11. On 5 April 1915, less than three weeks before Barnes' published interview, Jess Willard had won a historic fight in Cuba against African-American world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson, which earned Willard the nickname 'Great White Hope', reflecting the racism of the era. After Jess Willard was defeated in 1919 by the new heavyweight champion Jack Dempsey, Barnes

interviewed Dempsey in 1921, as well as drawing his caricatured portrait, in which his hair is bristling and his chin is lowered in defensive posture.

³⁹ Amelia Jones, *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 40.

⁴⁰ Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, p. 136.

⁴¹ Ernest Hemingway to Isabel Simmons, 24 June 1923, Carlos Baker (ed.), *Hemingway: Selected Letters* (New York, 1981), p. 158.

⁴² Jane Heap to Florence Reynolds, 22 January 1924, in Holly A. Baggett (ed.), *Dear Tiny Heart: The Letters of Jane Heap and Florence Reynolds* (New York, 2000), p. 92.

⁴³ For details on the ‘short-haired fraternity’ of boxers and the boxer’s ‘legible body’, see Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, p. 21.

⁴⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1983), p. 13.

⁴⁵ Mina Loy, ‘Colossus’, excerpted in Roger L. Conover, ‘Mina Loy’s “Colossus”: Arthur Cravan Undressed’, in Rudolf E. Kuenzli (ed.), *New York Dada* (New York, 1986), p. 113.

⁴⁶ Loy, ‘Colossus’, p. 104.

⁴⁷ For the dates, see the detailed chronology provided in Jay Bochner, *An American Lens: Scenes from Alfred Stieglitz’s New York Secession* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 182–3.

⁴⁸ Loy, ‘Colossus’, p. 104.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁵¹ Roger L. Conover, ‘Foreword’, in Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, p. xx; Loy, ‘Colossus’, p. 106.

⁵² Loy, ‘Colossus’, p. 107.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁵⁴ Conover, ‘Foreword’, p. xix.

⁵⁵ Loy, ‘Colossus’, pp. 107, 108.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵⁸ Oates, ‘On Boxing’, p. 27.

⁵⁹ Gabrielle Buffet-Picabia, ‘Arthur Cravan and American Dada’, in Roger Conover, Terry Hale and Paul Lenti (eds), *4 Dada Suicides: Selected Texts of Arthur Cravan, Jacques Rigaut, Julien Torma and Jacques Vaché* (London, 1995), p. 75; she writes that she met Cravan at her New York apartment but calls his boxing ‘but amateur’s play’, while noting dismissively about his boxing match with Jack Johnson: ‘He was knocked out all the more swiftly as, in anticipation of the inevitable result, he had arrived in the ring reeling drunk.’ Still, Conover has documented that Cravan actually held out until round six. For Buffet-Picabia, boxing suggests a world of order, technique and social responsibility (providing an income), an order which Cravan consistently disrupts with his Dada antics.

⁶⁰ Loy, ‘Colossus’, p. 113.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁶³ Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema* (Berkeley, CA, 2008), p. 7.

⁶⁴ The two-minute movie is available for viewing on the online blog ‘The Boxing Gordon

Sisters', <http://thevirtualdimemuseum.blogspot.com/2009/07/boxing-gordon-sisters.html>, accessed 15 July 2009. See also Toulmin, *A Fair Fight*, pp. 31–3, for a discussion of other early boxing movies involving Belle Gordon and others.

⁶⁵ Klara Heydt, 'Reine Körperperformen', *Der Querschnitt*, 6(5) (1926), p. 377, author's translation.

⁶⁶ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, p. 95.

⁶⁷ Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (New York, 1961), p. 6.

⁶⁸ Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, p. 124.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Christina Ball, 'The Silencing of Clara Bow', March/April 2001, <http://www.gadflyonline.com/archive/MarchApril01/archive-clarabow.html>, accessed 15 May 2010.

⁷⁰ Clara Bow, 'My Life Story', as told to Adela Rogers St. Johns, Part III, Photoplay (April 1928): <http://theclarabowpage.tripod.com/clarabowlifestory/clarabowlifestory3.html>, accessed 15 May 2010.

⁷¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), p. 137, italics in original.

⁷² Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, pp. 102, 103.

⁷³ Oates, 'On Boxing', p. 27.

⁷⁴ Robert Fitzsimmons, *Physical Culture and Self-Defense* (London, 1901), pp. 47, 49.

⁷⁵ Jensen, *Body by Weimar*, pp. 94–5.

⁷⁶ Scott, *Art and Aesthetics of Boxing*, p. 136.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 17.