

The Kay Boyle Society

Virtual Panel

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Vulnerable Bodies in the Works of Kay Boyle, Mina Loy, and Djuna Barnes

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rjHpliNCDxE>

Chair: Anne Boyd Rioux, University of New Orleans

1/ “Thinking and Feeling Vulnerably through the Baroque Tropes of Mina Loy and Djuna Barnes,” Stamatina Dimakopoulou, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

2/ “Vulnerability as Lyric Gesture in Kay Boyle’s ‘Angels for Djuna Barnes,’” Anne Reynes-Delobel, Aix-Marseille Université

3/ “Representations of Male Vulnerable Bodies in Works by Kay Boyle and Djuna Barnes,” Amy Wells, Université de Caen Normandie

4/ “‘Irreparable Dummies’: Vulnerable Bodies in Mina Loy’s Late Works,” Yasna Bozhkova, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

“Thinking and Feeling Vulnerably through the Baroque Tropes of Mina Loy and Djuna Barnes,” Stamatina Dimakopoulou, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

Bio:

Stamatina Dimakopoulou (MA, PhD Lon) is Assistant Professor in American literature and culture. She has been Fulbright Visiting Scholar at New York University in spring 2016. Publications include articles on Surrealism, modernist magazines, U.S. poetry and art. She is co-editor of the volume *The Letter of the Law: Literature, Justice and the Other* (Peter Lang, 2013). She has recently co-edited a volume entitled *Ruins in the Literary and Cultural Imagination* (Palgrave-Macmillan, 2019), and a special issue on [*Records of Contingency: Forms and Media*](#). She is a founding member and co-editor of the peer-reviewed e-journal, [*Synthesis, an Anglophone Journal of Comparative Literary Studies*](#). Currently working on a monograph tentatively entitled, *Singularity, Vulnerability and the Texture of Experience*.

Abstract:

“Representations of Male Vulnerable Bodies in Works by Kay Boyle and Djuna Barnes,” Amy Wells, Université de Caen Normandie

Bio:

Amy Wells is an Assistant Professor in English at the Université de Caen. Her research focuses on gender studies, women studies, and geocriticism. She has published several articles and authored *Liberté francophonie sexualité, cinq écrivaines américaines en Normandie dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (2019).

Abstract:

Although it was not one of her favorite works, Kay Boyle edited and rewrote her novel *Gentlemen, I Address You Privately* from its original 1933 manuscript to have it republished in 1990, just a few years prior to her death. At first, the plot does not seem that original and Boyle herself was embarrassed by her over-writing. There are intrigues mixing love, money, and sex shared by a set of characters in Le Havre and Harfleur in a post-war context. However, the novel merits multiple reads that allow the subtleties of this interwar period, where most people are feeling vulnerable, to come through, in addition to more existential questions about purpose in life, emotional manipulation, homosexuality, and maternity.

What has personally drawn my attention to the novel is the choice of the setting: as Jean Bessière says, “Kay Boyle’s originality is to favor a neglected landscape: the Norman landscape”.¹ The landscape of Harfleur, as well as the daily culture of the peasants, enters directly into the plot of *Gentlemen, I Address You Privately* (1931). This time in Harfleur will impact Kay Boyle for the rest of her life—not only bringing her material to write about, but also ultimately making her ill enough to need to leave and head South, where her personal life would take a radical turn.

Unfortunately, there is not yet a French translation of this Norman novel, despite its relevant retelling of Normandy life in the interwar period. Although the plot includes both homosexuals and lesbians, this very short study will focus on the ways in which male vulnerable homosexual bodies are represented in the text. Firstly, a sense of vulnerability is created as both Munday and Ayton are fugitives, and this status deprives them of any true stability. In addition to being fugitives, Ayton in particular is financially strapped. Then, we will see just a few select examples of how Boyle portrays their homosexuality, and how this non-normative sexuality makes them vulnerable. Boyle’s updated concluding sentences of the novel leave readers with the hope that this vulnerability can be overcome, at least for Munday.

¹ Jean Bessière, « Le paysage normand dans les premiers récits de Kay Boyle : 1930-1935, » *Le paysage normand dans la littérature et dans l'art*. Université de Rouen, 1980.

“Vulnerability as Lyric Gesture in Kay Boyle’s ‘Angels for Djuna Barnes’,” Anne Reynes-Delobel, Aix-Marseille Université

Bio:

Anne Reynes-Delobel is associate professor at Aix-Marseille Université. Her research focuses on transatlantic avant-garde and modernism in the interwar period. She has published articles on Boyle and translated her 1932 novel, *Year Before Last* (PUG, 2019). She has also co-

authored with Mary-Ann Caws *Glorieuses modernistes. Art, écriture et modernité au féminin* (UP Liège, 2016).

Abstract:

In 1937, a year after the publication of Djuna Barnes's masterpiece, *Nightwood*, Kay Boyle wrote an intriguing tribute to Barnes, in the form of a lyric 'offering of angels' directly addressed to her friend and fellow writer, and laced with more or less opaque references to Emerson, Swendenborg, and Aquinas. This paper investigates the kind of 'representativity' Boyle construes through the poem. Supposing the angelic figure is a way for her to move human experience out of the flows of social, sexual, gender, and racial determination, how can it contribute to the formation of the public sphere? To carry on this inquiry I will attempt to articulate Boyle's lyric gesture with Barnes's poetics. As we will see, reliance on Mina Loy's own peculiar brand of ecstatic writing will also prove useful to elucidate Boyle's enterprise and maybe identify yet another one of these localized points of intersection and negotiation which constituted transnational modernism in the early decades of the past century.

“Irreparable Dummies”: Vulnerable Bodies in Mina Loy’s Late Work”, Yasna Bozhkova, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

Bio:

Yasna Bozhkova is a Lecturer in the English Department of the Sorbonne Nouvelle University in Paris. I hold a PhD in English Literature, which she received from the same university in 2016. Her dissertation is titled “Mina Loy’s Aesthetic Itineraries: Towards a ‘Meteoric Idiom.’” Her research focuses on twentieth-century American literature, transatlantic modernism and the avant-gardes, experimental poetics, and the relations between literature and the visual arts. She has published articles or presented papers on Mina Loy, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Djuna Barnes, Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, and Emily Dickinson.

Abstract:

This paper examines the turn to the vulnerable body in Mina Loy's late poetry, visual art, and novel *Insel*. After a focus on the sexual and procreative body in her early poetry, in her late work Loy increasingly focused on fragile, precarious bodies, violated, exhausted and broken by dispossession, displacement, anti-Semitism and war. I begin by looking at the 1930s semi-autobiographic novel *Insel*, where the protagonist is an emaciated German artist unable to produce art according to the demands of the capitalist art market, relying on the narrator to feed him, and terrorized both by the prospect of returning to Germany, where he would be persecuted for being a Degenerate artist, and by the looming possibility of a Nazi invasion of Paris. I then move on to examine a series of interconnected poems and assemblages Loy made in the 1940s and early 1950s, inspired by the Bowery bums in New York, where she lived after she herself had to be evacuated from Paris to New York to escape from the menace of anti-Semitism and the war. Finally, I discuss a poem inspired by a concentration camp photograph showing the bodies of Holocaust victims, which, I argue, represents the climax of Loy's preoccupation with vulnerability. I argue that Loy sees the vulnerability of the body as a means to articulate an acutely critical ethical stance, permeated with thorough-going empathy for the subject exposed to the violence of social and historical cataclysms. I also show that in her work, the notion of vulnerability is closely interrelated with artistic vision and tied in with aesthetic considerations.