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Marginal Forms and Marginalized Subjectivities: The Hybrid Modernisms of Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D.

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Abstract of the Dissertation

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This dissertation examines the relationship between literary modernism's mixed-genre forms and its representations of marginalized characters through a study of works by Djuna Barnes, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and H.D. I argue that these authors borrow from various established genres to create new hybrid forms capable of granting fuller expression to the female and queer subjects of the early twentieth century. Though scholars took up hybridity as a way to theorize postcolonial identities and forms of resistance in the 1990s, this project reveals that the aforementioned modernist authors began to strategically deploy forms of hybrid subjectivity decades earlier. Marked by radical social change engendered by the suffrage movement, the Harlem Renaissance, and the consolidation of identity categories based on sexual acts, the turn of the twentieth century ushered in a range of new, emergent subjectivities. The works discussed herein reflect social and cultural understandings of these new subjects as fundamentally hybrid, as embodying a form of personhood that is intrinsically *other*. Expressions of hybrid subjectivity in the literature of this period take the form of hyphenated identities, such as African-American; denigrating homophobic epithets, such as "half-man"; or dehumanizing metaphors, such as monstrous feminine. Yet, the works of Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D., I argue, do more than mirror sociocultural assessments of hybrid subjects; they challenge these troubling representations and deploy new counterhegemonic conceptions of hybrid subjectivity. Through an analysis of works by these queer modernist authors, this project demonstrates how representations of hybrid forms and subjectivities can be used to enact a critique of oppressive social and literary constructs. I conclude with a brief study of Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home* as an example of a hybrid "metamodernist" text that extends and reanimates the aesthetic and sociopolitical imperatives found in the works of Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D.

My scholarship adds to feminist and queer studies of modernist literature by revealing both the prevalence and the potential utility of hybridity as an expression of modern

marginalized subjectivities. Furthermore, this dissertation offers a thorough study of the under-theorized generic particularities of hybrid texts that strive toward these ends.

For Margaret Wise Fox
(1913-2007)

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Introduction

Modernist Representations of Hybridity: "an Image of the 'Interstices'"[1]

"On or about December 1910 human character changed. I am not saying that one went out, as one might into a garden, and there saw that a rose had flowered, or that a hen had laid an egg. The change was not sudden and definite like that. But a change there was, nevertheless … All human relations have shifted—those between masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children. And when human relations change there is at the same time a change in religion, conduct, politics, and literature." ~ Virginia Woolf, "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown"

"The only way to get outside dualisms is to be-between, to pass between, the intermezzo … never ceasing to become." ~ Gilles Deleuze, "Becoming-Animal"

Set on the brink of World War II, Virginia Woolf's posthumously published novel *Between the Acts* briefly pauses before the acts of the village pageant and between the two World Wars to expose a gay man's experience of shame and homophobic violence. In a transient moment of interconnection, William Dodge imagines delivering a cathartic confession to an eccentric spinster: "At school they held me under a bucket of dirty water, Mrs. Swithin; when I looked up, the world was dirty, Mrs. Swithin; so I married; but my child's not my child, Mrs. Swithin. I'm a *half-man*, Mrs. Swithin; a flickering, *mind-divided* little snake in the grass, Mrs. Swithin; as Giles saw; but you've healed me…" (51, emphasis added). Although I discuss Dodge and this passage in detail in a later chapter, I introduce this quotation here to foreground hybridity as a hermeneutic lens for reading queer subjectivity and other marginalized subject positions within modernist literature. Woolf's depiction of Dodge, I argue, is representative of literary trends at this time to represent forms of difference through hybridity.

Dodge describes his marginalization in rather striking terms, calling himself a "half-man"

[1] The quotation in the title of this chapter comes from Homi K. Bhaba's *The Location of Culture* (20).

and a "mind-divided little snake." His self-characterization draws on images of hybridity to describe his subjectivity and consciousness. His masculinity and humanness comprise only half of his identity, with the other half formed from something fundamentally other and inhuman. Like several of Woolf's other novels, *Between the Acts* formalistically mirrors this liminality and hybrid subjectivity, in this case, through the fusion of dramatic and novelistic techniques and through the metaphorically significant "between" of the text's title. This relationship between Woolf's generic experimentation and her compelling marginalized characters, I argue, is more than mere coincidence.

Hybridity recurs in different forms throughout modernist literature that depicts disenfranchised subjects. Djuna Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women*, for instance, portrays lesbians and women of ill repute as animal-human mixtures with udders, rabbit ears, and tails. These women do not seek assimilation within dominant society but flourish in their grotesque alterity. This dissertation investigates the trope of hybridity and its formalist equivalent—mixed-genre forms—to argue that hybridity operates as a pervasive device for representing the marginal subjects of modernism. *Marginal Forms and Marginalized Subjectivities: The Hybrid Modernisms of Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D.* maintains that these writers not only reflect sociopolitical conceptions of hybrid subjects but also seek to critique and reimagine subjectivity. The works by these authors, in fact, reveal how representations of hybrid forms and subjectivities can be used to enact a critique of oppressive social and literary constructs while enabling forms of queer potentiality. As Gilles Deleuze posits above, in-between spaces, forms, and modes of being may offer an alternative to stifling binaries and provide new ways of reconstituting or reimagining the conditions of minoritarian existence. I argue that the varied literary aesthetics of Barnes, Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and H.D. endeavor to create new genres to give fuller expression

to the marginalized subjects they represent. The hybrid aesthetic forms forged by these queer women writers help execute their critiques of structural violence by revealing the politics of representation.

Modernist articulations of radical change—like Woolf's above—serve not only to situate twentieth-century writers apart from their ostensibly repressed and stilted Victorian and Romanticist predecessors but also point to new emergent subjectivities. Women's suffrage, the Harlem or New Negro Renaissance, the rise of globalization, and the rise and fall of prominent empires shaped new subject positions in Great Britain and America. The published writings and case studies of Havelock Ellis in sexology and Sigmund Freud in psychoanalysis further complicated conceptions of selfhood: the self came to be understood by many as fundamentally divided, and while desire could be theorized and qualified in scientific terms, such desires might remain repressed for the given individual. According to Michel Foucault, modernity also marks the inception of "homosexual" as an identity category rather than a description of sex acts: "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (*History of Sexuality* 43). On a different level, the Great War highlighted, ever more clearly, the prominence and function of national borders and the subject formation contingent upon such borders. At the same time, the institution of the modern passport reinforced forms of liminality—one's position simultaneously as a citizen of the world and an outsider beyond the boundaries of one's nation. At modernism's periphery, World War II's death and internment camps made tangible the perceived threat of difference—ethnic, racial, religious, sexual, and ideological—as well as the fascist imperative to annihilate discernable forms of deviance. As Woolf's passage from "Mr. Bennett and Mrs. Brown" asserts, these types of widespread social changes and global phenomena shape the aesthetic formations of the modernist epoch.

Fragmentation and polyphony in texts such as T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* or Ezra Pound's *The Cantos* have long been understood to reflect modernist experimentation and changing understandings of the self broadly speaking, but few studies have focused upon the *generic* particularities of *marginal* strands of modernism, particularly those focused on the representation of disenfranchised subjects. In fact, I would argue more generally that scholarship on postmodernist literature rather than modernist literature tends to underscore the relationship between (hybrid) marginalized subjects and generic experimentation. Certainly, that is not to say that advancements have not been made in recognizing the marginal or neglected makers of modernism. Undoubtedly, feminist scholars took great strides in the late 1980s and 1990s to challenge the gender biases of canon formation and to highlight women writers who had been relegated to the periphery of modernism, if they were recognized at all. Bonnie Kime Scott's *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (1990), which argues that modernism was "unconsciously gendered masculine" (2), is one such tour de force.[2] More theoretically driven texts, like Rita Felski's *The Gender of Modernity* (1995), questioned the grand narratives of literary modernism, dispelling its myths, and historicizing women's place within modernity. Other studies, such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending* (1985), addressed the narratological developments in women's writing, with DuPlessis's work focusing on the rejection of the heterosexual romance plot that dominated nineteenth-century novels.

More recent critical works on literary modernism reflect the developments of queer and poststructuralist theory and offer viable contemporary approaches to representations of gender and sexuality in the period. Laura Doan and Jane Garrity's *Sapphic Modernities: Sexuality, Women, and National Culture* (2006)—"a project that aims to show how the sapphic figure, in

[2] Though chapters appear on the work of Eliot, Joyce, and Ezra Pound, Scott's anthology privileges women writers, including a few African American women writers: Jesse Fauset, Zora Neale Hurston, and Nella Larsen.

her multiple and contradictory guises, refigures the relation between public and private space within modernity" (1)—and Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism* (2001) point to the emergence of the sapphist as an identity category around the turn of the century and highlight key concerns regarding her legibility and intelligibility in the public sphere. Likewise, contemporary studies focusing on queer masculinity in modernism, such as Eric Haralson's *Henry James and Queer Modernity*, help attend to the specificity of modernist representations of queerness by establishing genealogies, tracing the development of key terms and expressions, and highlighting networks of influence and exchange.

Yet, in the midst of the New Modernist Studies, some feminist scholars worry whether gender will remain a viable object of study as the parameters of modernism extend to other nations and historical periods. In a recent special issue of *Mfs: Modern Fiction Studies* titled "Women's Fiction, New Modernist Studies, and Feminism," Anne E. Fernald expresses a similar concern while lamenting the current state of the field:

> one hallmark of the new modernist studies has been its lack of serious interest in women writers. *Mfs* has consistently published feminist work on and by women writers … still, this is the journal's first issue on feminism as such in nineteen years. *Modernism/ modernity*, the flagship journal of the new modernism and the MSA, has not, in nineteen years, devoted a special issue to a woman writer or to feminist theory. (229-30)

Although the inadequate representation of women writers in the modernist canon was a major concern for feminists of the 1990s, it remains a pressing issue today. The women writers included in Scott's anthology, for instance, are written about and taught by feminist critics, but many of these writers have only partially entered the canon; as Fernald reveals, women writers

and feminist scholarship continue to be peripheral in studies of modernist literature.[3]

Marginal Forms and Marginalized Subjectivities contends that more work must be undertaken to address the neglected and under-theorized works of female modernists, for these texts offer new perspectives on the varied forms of modern subjectivity. The following chapters take modest steps toward filling this critical lacuna through an examination of works by four queer women writers. Building on the aforementioned studies of literary modernism, the dissertation reveals how literature written by Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D. demonstrates that women and queer subjects occupy a particularly liminal place within this era. My attention to representations of marginalization has produced a new lens for understanding how certain modernists generated aesthetic practices that theorized "minor" subjectivities in relation to the "major." Put simply, this dissertation contends that the writers discussed herein portray women, lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals as hybrid subjects. For each author, hybridity takes a different form, but in all cases, gender and sexual orientation—and in H.D.'s work, race and national identity, as well—mark these fictional characters or fictionalized (autobiographical) subjects as distinctly *other* through their liminality, their plurality, or their heterogeneity. Though Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women* depicts women as monsters comprised of human and animal parts, more subtle manifestations of hybridity include the association of women and queer subjects with thresholds and borders in Woolf's *Between the Acts* and H.D.'s "Two Americans." When granted some degree of interiority, these characters show hybrid subjectivity to be a unique vantage point for critiquing dominant cultural formations and modes of thinking including, but not limited to, colonialism, discrimination, and masculine violence.

[3] Beyond the modernist journals, this phenomenon is also evident at the Modernist Studies Association Conferences. Each year, the Feminist Roundtable attracts hundreds of female scholars, but there are rarely more than a handful of men in attendance.

Difference is figured through hybridity, but this hybridity is not limited to representations of fictional subjects. *Marginal Forms and Marginalized Subjectivities* argues that Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D. make use of generic hybridity to aid in their expression of non-normative histories and desires and to challenge the ideological and institutional constraints of traditional genres. Woolf writes in *A Room of One's Own*, "History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men" (107). Woolf's overt critique of masculine genres in her essays finds its praxis in her experimental fiction. Her diaries and the early sketches of her fictional works reveal her efforts to blend distinct genres and to craft a more pliable form to accommodate her critique. Like her fictional Mary Carmichael, Woolf uses her writing to challenge the status quo of accepted narratives and ossified forms: "First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence … not for the sake of breaking, but for the sake of creating" (81). In *Orlando*, for instance, Woolf fuses biography and fiction, history and fantasy, and male and female to create a literary form capable of enacting her critique of gender norms as well as masculine paradigms and genres. For Woolf and the other writers of this study, form is inseparable from its content; hybridity in both of these arenas undercuts the taken-for-granted social, political, and linguistic norms of their historical moment. In another example, by crafting an (auto)biography detailing the lives of a Jewish lesbian writer and her life partner in the latter's voice, Stein transforms the autobiography as a genre; *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* fundamentally deconstructs and reconfigures the constructs of its genre while making bold claims about who can and should be represented within this male-dominated, *self*-centered genre. Stein's allusion to Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* at the end of the *Autobiography* reveals the way she works within a tradition while radically recasting this form to accommodate a queer female subject.

These writers exploit the modernist impulse for formal experimentation, using aesthetics to convey the social and political concerns of minoritarian subjects. H.D.'s participation in *Borderline*, a 1930 film directed by Kenneth Macpherson centered on an interracial love triangle, uses the borderline metaphor—a trope that conveys diverse forms of hybridity—and various montage sequences—a technique that achieves a new form through the *fusion* of separate pieces of film—to condemn racial injustice. Although at times, some of these writers participate in a type of modernist posturing that claims to remain apolitical in its pursuit of aesthetic innovation, the literary texts of these writers prove otherwise. For instance, H.D.'s *Borderline* pamphlet at one point feigns an apolitical stance, but other elements of the pamphlet, as well as the film's libretto, overtly undermine this purely rhetorical maneuver. The writers considered in this dissertation market themselves implicitly or explicitly as modern, if not modernist[4]—Woolf and Stein more overtly shape the definition of modernism through their essays and lectures—yet, I argue, these authors' works constitute a form of modernism's "minor literature." I borrow this term from Deleuze and Guattari's *Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature* as a way to read and repoliticize representations of gender and sexual orientation in the work of these women writers. Minor literature has been taken up most often by postcolonial critics to discuss the politically-charged work of writers from colonized or formerly colonized nations who choose to write in the language or forms of the colonizers; however, I argue minor literature, as a theoretical paradigm, may allow us to account for the effects of gender and sexual orientation upon language and even genre. "Minor," within this framework, does not preclude canonization—Kafka, for instance, is Deleuze and Guattari's exemplum of minor literature; minor literature instead reflects a different

[4] Laura Riding, in collaboration with Robert Graves, may be the first to have use the term "modernist" in its contemporary usage in her co-authored *Survey of Modernist Poetry* in 1927. "Modernistic" appears in contrast to the Victorian aesthetic in H.D.'s 1930 novella *Mira-Mare*.

relationship to language than so-called "major literature." The writers discussed herein experienced forms of social marginalization as a result of their gender, but furthermore, these authors were forced to contend with their place within a male-dominated literary tradition. Their peripheral forms of modernist expression give voice to the hybrid minority subjects represented within. These writers thus highlight the "collective, and even revolutionary, enunciation" of minor literature; Deleuze and Félix Guattari argue, "if the writer is in the margins … this situation allows the writer all the more possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility" (*Kafka* 17).[5] In their rejection of distinct hegemonic literary forms, the hybrid writings of Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D. make tangible the "revolutionary force for all literature" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 19).[6]

Unseemly Mixtures: Hybridity and Its Etymology

The term "hybridity" is shaped by its complex and varied usage throughout history. Its appearance within scientific, philological, and postcolonial discourses configures even our use of the term within common parlance. Appearing as early as the seventeenth century and surfacing more widely in the nineteenth century, "hybrid" and "hybridity" describe, broadly speaking, "Anything derived from heterogeneous sources, or composed of different or incongruous elements," though its initial usage more specifically referred to the offspring of two different species (*OED*). As one would expect, these terms appear throughout the work of Charles Darwin to describe plants and animals, though his letters also reveal his use of the term to describe a

[5] Their theory of "minor literature" will be examined in more depth within Chapter 1.
[6] Deleuze and Guattari explain, "We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures by the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (18). "Minor" is therefore not stable, but contingent upon shifting power relations. Minor literature may also be thought of as a politically driven mode or literary style that actively resists the oppressive nature of dominant forms.

person shaped by an interdisciplinary background: "No, by Jove, I will tell you what you are, a hybrid, a complex cross of lawyer, poet, naturalist and theologian! Was there ever such a monster seen before?" (338). Though Darwin jokingly calls his addressee a "monster" for his diverse and seemingly disparate qualities, the frequent association of hybridity with monstrosity predates Darwin and continues into the current moment.[7]

Michel Foucault's definition of the "monster" in *Abnormal: Lectures at the College de France 1974-1975*, is nearly synonymous with the hybrid: "the monster is essentially a mixture. It is the mixture of two realms, the animal and the human … It is the blending, the mixture of two species … It is the mixture of two individuals … It is the mixture of two sexes … It is a mixture of life and death … Finally, it is a mixture of forms" (63). In the context of the Middle Ages through most of the eighteenth century, he argues, "what defines the monster is the fact that its existence and *form* is not only a violation of the laws of society but also a violation of the laws of nature. … The monster combines the impossible and the *forbidden*" (*Abnormal* 55-56, emphasis added). In this context, the monster is thought to be a freak of nature, transgressing both the natural and the juridical. Foucault charts the development of the monster of this era into the *moral* monster, who emerges at the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth; finally, he notes the shift at the end of the nineteenth century from the "monster" to the "abnormal," an ideological distinction which fosters the emergence of neuropathology, psychoanalysis, and other technologies and practices of psychiatry (110). Though Foucault takes care to delineate these shifts, I argue that the vestiges of the hybrid monster remain tethered to

[7] Popular contemporary televisions shows like *The Walking Dead* and *True Blood* exploit audiences' fears of hybrid creatures—namely, zombies and vampires, respectively. Perhaps more to the point, in the case of *True Blood*, the hybrid monsters of the night also happen to be racial minorities and sexual deviants. Likewise, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, written at the *fin de siècle*, reveals a similar phenomenon, with fears of transgressive sexuality and racial contamination expressed through vampires.

modern conceptions of the abnormal subject.[8]

For instance, modern literature demonstrates that attributions of hybrid monstrosity are hurled at or internalized by queer subjects. In *The Well of Loneliness,* Radclyffe Hall reveals how this ideology shapes her protagonist's sense of self:

> She felt appalled at the realization of her own grotesqueness; she was nothing but a freak abandoned on a kind of no-man's land … England was calling her men into battle, her women to the bedsides of the wounded and dying, and between these two chivalrous, surging forces, she, Stephen, might well be crushed out of existence—of less use to her country, she was, than Brockett. (267)

Born a girl but identifying with masculinity, Stephen is trapped between two poles. Hall characterizes Stephen's existence through liminality, revealing that her sense of self reflects the perceived unnaturalness of her "sexual inversion." Woolf's Orlando also reflects elements of Foucault's hybrid monster for Orlando's status is uncontrovertibly "a legal labyrinth, a violation of and an obstacle to the law, both transgression and undecidability at the level of the law" (*Abnormal* 65). Though tackling many of the same concerns as *The Well*, *Orlando*'s tone and overall form is markedly different. *The Well*, for all its didacticism, presents hybrid subjectivity from a traditionally realist perspective, articulating the plight of the "invert" to garner sympathy and understanding; Woolf's hybrid, experimental novel, however, couches its protagonist's hybridity in humorous terms: "Thus it was in a highly ambiguous condition, uncertain whether she was alive or dead, man or woman, Duke or nonentity, that she posted down to her country seat, where, pending the legal judgment, she had the Law's permission to reside in a state of

[8] Foucault calls the earlier conceptions of the monster the "antecedents" to the abnormal individual (274), but the ties to the monster that violates the laws of society and nature appear much stronger than a simple genealogy. In the literature studied herein, modernist representations of hybridity may reflect a psychological reality rather than a physical abnormality, but similar associations and linguistic registers remain pertinent. See also footnote 7 for examples of gothic representations of monsters that combine modern elements of the "abnormal," or sexually transgressive, individual.

incognito or incognita as the case might turn out to be" (125). In Woolf's fantastic exploration of Orlando's transformation, the fictional, wealthy protagonist only becomes the victim of gossip and never suffers from discrimination or violence. Woolf's queer characters from other texts, in contrast, endure forms of structural violence. As suggested in my brief reading of the opening passage, Dodge internalizes understandings of homosexuality as a form of monstrous hybridity. His experience of double consciousness is akin to that described by W. E. B. Du Bois as the ontological state of African Americans at the turn of the twentieth century—though, Du Bois's argument, unfortunately, still applies today. This is not to say that experiences of marginalization and difference are reducible to equivalencies, but that hybridity may serve as a defining characteristic or primary means of representing minoritarian subjectivities at this time.

Within the context of race and ethnicity, hyphenated identities—though often written without the hyphen—use linguistic registers to designate hybridity. African-American, though frequently a misnomer,[9] may be the most common example of such a hyphenated identity. Nevertheless, colonialism had already marked portions of the black population as hybrid long before they were deemed American citizens in any sense of the term. The colonizers invented terms like "quadroon" and "mulatto" to denote racial mixing and impurity. A similar term exists in Spanish to describe individuals of mixed race, specifically people of Spanish and Native American descent: mestizos.[10]

In the American context, "mulatto" remained relevant as a concept at the beginning of the twentieth century. Literature of the period frequently thematized the plight of the mixed-race

[9] Americans frequently apply the term African American to any black person regardless of nationality. Beyond this misusage, the identity category, though "politically correct," is inadequate and ill-fitting for many black Americans whose ideological or genealogical connection to Africa is scant.
[10] See Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* for more on the hybrid identities of Spanish and indigenous descent.

subject, with some authors, including Jean Toomer and Nella Larsen, complicating and reworking the familiar trope.[11] Larsen pokes fun at racist ideology that suggests certain criteria may be used to tell whether someone is truly black: "White people were so stupid about such things for all that they usually asserted that they were able to tell; and by the most ridiculous means, finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of ears, teeth, and other equally silly rot" (10-11). Yet, this passage and terms like "mulatto" and "quadroon" also suggest that regardless of genetic makeup, blackness—even in theory—remains a signifier of difference; a quadroon is one-quarter black, *not* three-quarters white. This schema allows whiteness to remain a false symbol for racial purity even today.[12]

Since the end of the twentieth century, critical race studies and postcolonial theory have taken these concerns among their primary objects of study. The rise of multiculturalism and the prominent theories of cultural difference in the 1990s fostered the emergence of hybridity as a critical framework for discussing identity and culture. In his seminal work, *The Location of Culture*, Homi K. Bhabha seeks to identify and give voice to hybrid subjectivities formed through and as a result of colonialism and globalization. He focuses primarily on racial and cross-cultural forms of difference in the advent of late capitalism or postmodernity. While his study focuses on a later temporal moment and on subjectivities and cultures that emerge through miscegenation and transnational exchange, I find his attention to the socio-political possibilities of hybrid identities and cultural formations particularly useful for my analysis of the female and queer subjects of modernism. Bhabha writes:

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[11] See Rudolph P. Byrd and Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "Jean Toomer's Conflicted Racial Identity" for a succinct analysis of Toomer's efforts to challenge and supplant simplistic racial categories with the formation of a new "American" identity.

[12] The American public at large does not regard Obama as the first biracial president, but as the first black president. Whiteness is negated by blackness in a way that signals racial mixing as a contamination of whiteness.

> What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These 'in-between' spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood—singular or communal—that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. (2)

Bhabha's conception of hybridity involves an effort to reclaim historical agency, deconstruct hierarchical designations, and form strategies for making emergent subjectivies legible and legitimate. He argues, "The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation" (3). While my attention to hybrid minoritarian identities that stem from sexual difference and sexual orientation differs markedly from Bhabha's racially and ethnically hybrid subjects, the strategies he proposes and the political import he finds in works of literature, such as Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, provide models for the type of scholarly work this dissertation undertakes. Bhabha reveals that attention to the productive "in-between" spaces of subject formation may lead to new strategies for reorganizing and reshaping the social fabric of human relations and everyday life.

Marginal Forms and Marginalized Subjectivities demonstrates that the association of hybridity with postmodernity is belated: the many sociopolitical changes at the beginning of the twentieth century brought about similar experiences of liminality. In *Framing the Margins: The Social Logic of Postmodern Culture*, Phillip Brian Harper makes a similar claim, arguing, "For if postmodern fiction foregrounds subjective fragmentation, a similar decenteredness can be identified in U.S. novels written prior to the postmodern era, in which it derives specifically from the socially marginalized and politically disenfranchised status of the populations treated in the works" (3). His argument is theoretically compelling, and it shares with my own work a

fundamental assumption of continuity between modernism and postmodernism. Nevertheless, his study differs from my own in his focus on late modernism and mid-century American literature and in his disinterest in the formal elements of the texts he examines. Needless to say, the methodology of this dissertation is by no means exhaustive, but it participates in a recent tradition of approaches to neglected early twentieth-century literature.

"No Experiment, Even of the Wildest—is Forbidden": Modernism's Hybrid Forms

In *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen's teacher, confidant, and mentor, Miss Puddleton, or Puddle as she comes to be known, attempts to comfort the young Stephen with the possibility that her marginalization may provide her with a superior aesthetic sensibility: "Why, just because you are what you are, you may actually find that you've got an advantage. You may write with a curious double insight" (Hall 205). Suggestive of both double consciousness and Woolf's aesthetic theory of androgyny,[13] this passage highlights the subversive potential of hybridity while demonstrating the link between form and subjectivity that this dissertation theorizes. Yet, as Hall proves through her own writing, this is not an essentialist claim; hybrid subjects do not inherently or compulsively produce hybrid works. I argue that Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D., however, use hybrid or mixed-genre forms in an attempt to grant fuller expression to the hybrid subjects of their texts.

For these authors, form is not merely a reflection of reality but rather a means for responding to and reimagining it. DuPlessis claims that "narrative structures and subjects are like working apparatuses of ideology, factories for the 'natural' and 'fantastic' meanings by which we live. … Indeed, narrative may function on a small scale the way ideology functions on a large scale" (3). Building on DuPlessis's claim, I argue that if the arc of a fictional narrative reflects an

[13] For Woolf's theory of androgyny, see *A Room of One's Own* (97-103).

ideological perspective, genre does, as well. As discussed above, Woolf's contention with traditional genres is largely ideological. Genres like history and biography conflict with her feminist objectives because of their association with masculine values. Thus, for Woolf—and, I maintain, the other modernists studied herein—experimentation with mixed-genre forms is a means for transformation, a way to contest hegemonic values.

In a brief moment within *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf suggests that the influence of one genre upon another may be mutually beneficial: "books have a way of influencing each other. Fiction will be much the better for standing cheek by jowl with poetry and philosophy" (107). In her advice to women, she adds that, like Sappho and Emily Bronte, one must be both "an inheritor as well as an originator" (*AROO* 107). Hybrid forms—her own and those deployed by Barnes, Stein, and H.D.—fit these demands. The prose poem, the *roman à clef*, the illustrated chapbook, and the "play-poem," for instance, borrow from various established genres not in an effort to supplant standard forms with new ones or to simply recombine old forms merely for the purpose of formal experimentation, but to create something new—to construct genres capable of reflecting queer and feminist ideological interests. These writers are "inheritors" of the literature and literary styles of their predecessors, but they are also "originators" or innovators, making their own mark on their craft and in the process, reshaping the literary canon and the possibilities for future writers. At the end of "Modern Fiction," Woolf reminds us that "there is no limit to the horizon, and that nothing—no 'method,' no experiment, even of the wildest—is forbidden" (2092). And, as Woolf suggests in the epigraph to this introduction, these methods and experiments are intimately tied to the historical shifts in "human relations."

In defying "proper" genre conventions and failing to fit neatly in the categories of prose, fiction, or autobiography, these mixed-genre works create space for the representation of the

"improper," or marginalized, subjects of modernism. Barnes's aesthetics, aptly termed an "improper modernism,"[14] exemplify an overt defiance of standard high modernist genres and forms. In *The Book of Repulsive Women*, Barnes combines modern and sexually explicit drawings with poems containing strictly imposed rhyme schemes to establish a palpable tension and satirical critique in her chapbook. Barnes endeavors to represent the lesbians and loose women of her chapbook visually and metaphorically as animal-human hybrids. This expression rejects the ill-fitting Victorian strictures that still inform the socio-political values of the early twentieth century. Unlike Coventry Patmore's "The Angel in the House," Barnes's "repulsive women" reappropriate disparaging visions of monstrous femininity; they embrace abjection, animality, and transvaluation as means for expressing sexual difference.

While neither the prose poem nor the *roman à clef* are modernist inventions, they both became popular at this time. The *roman à clef* is a seventeenth-century invention for disguising a nonfictional account with a fictional key or cast of characters. The union of poetry and prose in the form of the prose poem emerged with the Decadents at the end of the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly, the way Stein crafts her prose poems or H.D. creates her *romans à clef* demonstrates that these authors make each form distinctly their own; yet, even before altering these literary categories to suit their subjects, these writers selected hybrid, "minor" genres. In an essay entitled "The Borderline of Prose," T. S. Eliot takes issue with the prose poem as an outdated and irreconcilable form: "I submit that, if this is read as prose, it is found jerky and fatiguing, because there is a verse rhythm in it; and that, if read as verse, it will be found worrying, because of the presence of prose rhythms" (158). Unruly in its formal opposition to both poetry and prose, the prose poem's queer resistance to generic conventions provides Stein

[14] Though similar expressions have been used to describe Barnes's work, I borrow this descriptor from the title of Daniela Caselli's book, *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus*.

with the necessary freedom to articulate non-normative desires, subjects, and linguistic expressions.

While Eliot disparages the prose poem, contemporary scholars tend not to think highly of the *roman à clef*. Scant critical work has been published on this hybrid form, which is frequently dismissed as a lowbrow form of gossip. Sean Latham reports that "Despite the variety and popularity of such works, however, critics and historians alike have largely ignored them, erasing the scandalous appeal of a few in order to recuperate them for the canon while dismissing the rest as mere ephemera" (12). Latham's book *The Art of Scandal*: *Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef* (2009) focuses upon the prevalence of this genre as a form of "gossip lit," but in his discussion, the ideological underpinnings of gender-based genre designations get ignored. Moreover, contrary to Latham's central claims, for H.D., the *roman à clef* was *not* "an art of scandal" nor a means for reaping the social and financial benefits of a broader readership (19); instead, it served as a form for creatively expressing and refiguring the implications of her personal history. Lawrence Rainey's disregard for H.D.'s *romans à clef*, for instance, reflects his gender bias, which echoes a cultural conception that women's autobiographical fiction is not truly literature. Though not a *roman à clef*, Stein's *Autobiography* confronts and challenges such gender-based genre assumptions. H.D.'s own *romans à clef*, nevertheless, prove to be far more artful and complex than a mere novel with a key. Her characters are often amalgams of various people and her depictions of language, place, and space are typically laden with metaphorical significance. Furthermore, these works combine elements of other genres and epistemological traditions including diaries, mysticism, Greek mythology, and psychoanalysis.

Chapter Overviews

I begin the dissertation with a discussion of Barnes because her relationship to modernism is most tenuous. Scholars find her work difficult to categorize and frequently characterize her early publications as derivative or Victorian. In drawing on earlier forms, however, Barnes defamiliarizes these aesthetic categories and reshapes them to enact her queer critique. My first chapter, "Improper Forms and Improper Subjects: Generic Hybridity and the Image in Barnes" examines two of Barnes's noncanonical, lesbian-centered texts—*The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack*—alongside her landmark 1936 novel *Nightwood* to reveal Barnes's commitment to an aesthetics of the marginal. Through a feminist appropriation of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a "minor literature," I argue that Barnes's queer aesthetic practices serve political ends; her texts focus on the representation of marginalized groups—predominately women and lesbians—and deploy sexually suggestive drawings or literary images within her uncanny hybridized forms. In so doing, Barnes's work strives to represent sexual difference and queerness through forms of radical alterity. Although scholars have argued that Barnes's *oeuvre* lacks continuity, I demonstrate that Barnes makes her satirical feminist critique *through* her hybrid forms, a unifying thread in nearly all of her work. This reading expands the categories of a minor literature to include generically hybrid texts, but it also helps us to reevaluate Barnes's underappreciated works like *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack*. Barnes's relationship to older forms, such as the almanac, and her oddly Decadent sensibility define her modernist aesthetic as queerly belated and markedly distinct from the other modernist innovations and styles examined within this dissertation.

My second chapter, "'History is too much about wars; biography too much about great men': Temporality, Counternarrative, and Genre in Late Woolf," examines a canonical author

and a central maker of modernism through her "minor," or lesser-studied, fiction. Though all of Woolf's fiction contains elements of formal experimentation, in my estimation, only her later works are truly hybrid. Yet, Woolf, herself, occupies a hybrid status within literary modernism. Unlike Barnes, she actively theorized the literary movement she was in the process of creating; this centrality, however, does not negate her minoritarian stance as a queer female writer. Deleuze and Guattari, in fact, take Woolf as an exemplar of their political and aesthetic philosophy.[15] In the *Persistence of Modernism*, Madelyn Detloff frames Woolf, Stein, and H.D. as "queer *metics*" to foreground their simultaneous position within and outside of culture. This category thus takes account of their complicity in and access to certain forms of (imperial and elitist) privilege (4). Detloff's term provides an important reminder of Woolf's dual roles within modernism.

This chapter reveals how Woolf invents hybrid literary forms as a means of critiquing and transforming masculinist values and genres. These generic diversions from the standard novel demonstrate Woolf's efforts to escape the ideological binds of established forms in order to provide fuller and more sympathetic representations of the women, lesbians, and gay men of her fiction. In my analysis of Woolf's later texts, namely *Orlando*, *The Waves*, and *Between the Acts*, I argue that Woolf uses temporality to form a counternarrative to dominant accounts of history. These texts establish radical temporal breaks that suggest that our past, present, and future may be reimagined or reconfigured. More specifically, Woolf uses time as a means of disrupting or reimagining patriarchal spaces to make room for marginal subjects within the nation's history. Thus, rather than establishing a separate feminist or queer temporality that exists apart from nation time, Woolf effectively reveals the existence of multiple coexisting

[15] They explicitly describe her work as "pass[ing] between" and "never ceasing to become" ("Becoming-Animal" 126).

temporalities.

My third chapter also examines works by a queer canonical figure, though my selection, or rather my pairing, of literary texts is atypical. "'Act so that there is no use in a centre': Hybridity and Queer Reproduction in Stein's *Tender Buttons* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*" juxtaposes my reading of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* with that of *Tender Buttons.* I propose that we read these two very different texts—an example of Stein's popular "audience writing" and a more markedly experimental work—alongside one another to gain a greater understanding of Stein's resistance to generic conventions and her focus on the decentered subject. Though one text is of apparent simplicity and the other of apparent opacity, they both reveal the precariousness of the modern subject and the breakdown of conventional binaries such as high/low and public/private. In anticipation of poststructuralist ideas regarding the instability and incoherence of identity, these works complicate seemingly straightforward categories of gender, subjectivity, sexuality, and genre. Furthermore, through my analysis of "queer reproduction," or generative forms of queerness in these texts, I argue that Stein resists heteronormative frameworks and insists on a queer futurity. These texts frustrate normative reading practices and demand that we learn to look and read in new ways.

The fourth chapter of the dissertation returns to modernism's periphery with my examination of H.D.'s hybrid prose. "H.D.'s Borderline Genres and States of Consciousness: the *Romans à Clef* of the 1930s" addresses a group of *romans à clef* known as the Dijon Series and focuses primarily upon "Two Americans" and *Nights*. These autobiographical accounts of her ménage a trois with Bryher and Macpherson reveal H.D.'s challenge to unified subjectivity and rigid understandings of gender, sexuality, and genre. As discussed above, H.D.'s appropriation of various traditions dismantles binary thinking, thus revealing the radical potentiality of both

hybridity and minor literature. This chapter also discusses H.D.'s involvement with Macpherson's *Borderline* and the promotional pamphlet she wrote about the film. The *Borderline* pamphlet, in particular, reflects H.D.'s efforts to represent racial difference through hybridity. "Borderline" serves as a metaphor for the liminality of African American existence, though this trope extends to the director, the genre, and the setting, as well. The film and the pamphlet condemn racism, but at times, their images and metaphors venture into troubling forms of primitivism. *Borderline* may be described as a *film à clef* transposing the tensions of the ménage onto the screen.[16] Though H.D. frames *Borderline* as almost exclusively Macpherson's project, I argue that "Two Americans" is her own rewriting of these queer and interracial dynamics. Of the four authors examined within this dissertation, H.D depicts subjectivity to be the most precarious and contingent.

My conclusion briefly explores modernism's legacy by examining its influence upon and relationship to contemporary literature. Expanding the generic focus of David James and Urmila's Seshagiri's formulation of "metamodernism" from fiction to autobiography, I analyze a hybrid contemporary work indebted to modernism for its formal structure and its political imperatives: Alison Bechdel's graphic memoir *Fun Home: a Family Tragicomic* (2006). Bechdel's text allows me to assess modernism's relevance in the present moment by reflecting upon its contemporary treatment of this dissertation's thematic concerns, namely, the relationship between subjectivity and genre. My reading of this hybrid text highlights the status of queer subjectivity in contemporary literature.

Overall, this dissertation argues that these women writers endeavored to create modern forms that were not already mired in masculine values and ideals; they therefore sought new

[16] Jean Walton calls *Borderline* a *film à clef* in her essay, "'Nightmare of the Uncoordinated White-Folk': Psychoanalysis and the Queer Matrix of Borderline."

representational strategies that would enable them to give expression to the socially marginalized subjects of modernity. Rather than merely working within certain established traditions and genres to expand or reshape these conventions, these authors drew from various genres to create new, hybrid forms. Combining poetry and prose, history and fantasy, and blurring the distinctions between biography, autobiography, and fiction, Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D. broke away from the strictures of standard genres to establish new forms. Unencumbered by the ideological baggage of established genres, these mixed-genre texts strive to depict, critique, and reimagine representations of marginalized subjects. This dissertation demands the critical consideration of hybridity as a viable modernist representational strategy, one that offers alternative conceptions of modern subjectivity.

Chapter 1

Improper Forms and Improper Subjects: Generic Hybridity and the Image in Barnes

Djuna Barnes is an enigmatic figure within modernist literary history. The photographs left behind depict a stunningly beautiful woman who wore dark clothing and frequently donned a cape. Barnes was known for her beauty, but she wished to be recognized as a serious writer rather than a pretty face or sexy legs. According to Andrea Weiss, "Djuna never forgave Gertrude [Stein] for admiring her legs—a sure indication to Djuna that Gertrude did not also admire her writing" (147). Although Barnes worked diligently at her literary and artistic crafts beginning in her late teens and early twenties, she would go on to disparage or dismiss several of her works later in life.[17] In addition to the contradictory feelings about her own work, the sexual politics of Barnes's love life are somewhat difficult to grasp. Barnes reportedly said, "I'm not a lesbian; I just loved Thelma" (qtd. in Lanser 165).

Barnes's resistance to identity categories finds its parallel in her rejection of genre conventions. As riddled with contradiction as her own life may have been, scholars have had an equally difficult endeavor attempting to characterize Barnes's *oeuvre*. Although T.S. Eliot endorsed Barnes's publications—most visibly in his introduction to *Nightwood*—her work cannot be characterized as participating in a mainstream, masculine form of modernism.[18] Her use of antiquated forms, like the almanac, and her redeployment of Decadent aesthetics inscribe

[17] She eventually cut publications like *The Book of Repulsive Women* from her CV, and in her final years, Barnes destroyed many of her remaining letters. See Catharine Stimpson's Afterword to *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes* for her account of Barnes's reclusive last years.

[18] Ezra Pound, in fact, offered only sexist and disparaging remarks of Barnes and her work. Shari Benstock notes that Pound wrote a denigrating limerick that criticized Barnes after the publication of *Nightwood* (232). Pound's remarks implicitly extend to Eliot, as he had just publicly supported Barnes's novel by means of his introduction to the text.

her early twentieth-century texts with a sense of belatedness, while her opposition to patriarchal constructs is markedly of its time. Barnes's works, I will argue, inhabit several borderlines.

Barnes's literary legacy reflects her tenuous relationship with mainstream modernism. Sylvia Beach once called Barnes "one of the most talented and, I think, one of the most fascinating literary figures in the Paris of the twenties" (qtd. in Weiss 146), yet she is not often considered a dominant figure of modernism and it is not her work in the Twenties on which scholars tend to focus. *Nightwood* garners most of the academic scholarship on Barnes, and Jeanette Winterson argues, "more people have heard of it than have read it" (ix). Barnes was a prolific writer and worked at various stages in her life as a journalist, a poet, a playwright, an artist, a novelist, and a writer of short stories. The varied nature of Barnes's work has led many scholars to argue that it simply evades categorization.[19] To a certain extent, their estimation is true; Barnes's publications actively resist traditional categories. Yet, amidst all of the texts of this versatile artist, two qualities of her *oeuvre* stand out: her feminist politics and generic hybridity. It is my contention that these two elements, unified in Barnes's texts, help us to understand better the relationship between literary hybridity and the feminist politics of this era.

For Barnes, poetry and prose, history and fiction, and text and image combine to form an aesthetics and politics of the marginal. I argue that Barnes's hybrid, or mixed-genre, texts reveal her challenge to generic conventions and "proper" forms of gender, embodiment, and sexuality. Through form and content, Barnes resists hegemonic social and literary structures; she rejects traditional romance, familial, and marriage plot lines and collapses the rigid boundaries of

[19] In a parodic version of Barnes's oft-quoted line about the "Condition of Woman" (*Ladies Almanack* 55), Frann Michel writes, "The very condition of Djuna Barnes' corpus is so subject to dismissal, so complex and so grievous, that to read her at one moment may be to misread her at the next" (170). The characterization of Barnes's work by scholars is akin to that of Rebecca West. Continuity in form and thematics has apparently proven to be much easier for some scholars to make sense of than a more varied (unruly) corpus. The connections I make here are less about establishing a definitive arc and more about tracing affinities between her lesser-known works and her canonical novel.

genre.[20] In so doing, Barnes gives us a glimpse of what thrives or could thrive outside of prevailing social structures and recognized literary forms.

First, I examine the intersection of Barnes's radical politics and hybrid forms in two of Barnes's "minor" texts, *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915) and *Ladies Almanack* (1928), and later in her esteemed novel, *Nightwood* (1936).[21] Both of the lesser-known texts take women, who have been historically and socially constructed as "others," as their subjects and intended audience.[22] Her women-centric texts pose a critique of patriarchal values and institutions, including compulsory heterosexuality, but the form of Barnes's critique differs vastly from the strategies of the other authors discussed in this dissertation. Barnes draws on multiple genres and disparate literary styles from a range of periods to create hybrid forms that give expression to her hybrid subjects. Through these representations, Barnes transvalues western conceptions of monstrous femininity. Her texts ultimately embrace sexual difference by valuing forms of radical alterity. Barnes transforms lack and repulsion by revealing the generative possibilities of these characteristics.

Although "lack" and "repulsion" have a distinct psychoanalytic resonance, I propose a reading of Barnes that is counter to psychoanalysis, a field that is grounded in the disparagement of these terms. Thinking about *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack* as examples of a "minor literature" helps to elucidate her aesthetics and politics of the marginal. Deleuze and Guattari's theory of a "minor literature," as articulated in *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, is

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[20] See Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers* for more on these traditional narratives. DuPlessis's text doesn't actually address Barnes and my argument about Barnes goes beyond showing how she resists the heterosexual marriage plot, but this text is useful for thinking about how female modernists rejected traditional forms to advance their politics.

[21] *Nightwood* was published in Britain in 1936 and in America in 1937.

[22] At the end of the introductory notes of *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes's narrator establishes her intended audience as "all Ladies" (9). Melissa Jane Hardie suggests that the poems from *The Book of Repulsive Women* are addressed to those "repulsive women" (124), and Benstock considers this, as well (240).

often put to productive use within postcolonial theory, but I maintain that we may better understand Barnes's early texts by diversifying the focus of "minor literature." Deleuze and Guattari define a work of "minor literature" through "the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation" (18). The designation "minor literature," however, does not reify minority subject positions; the "minor" is not a stable term, but one contingent upon shifting power relations and more specifically, its relationship to the "major." They explain, "We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature" (18). In their formulation, the primary manifestation of minority status is ethnicity, though they gesture toward race in the context of an African American vernacular (17). Djuna Barnes's work, however, demands that we broaden the scope of minority status to account more tangibly for gender.

Through my reading of Barnes, I highlight the ways in which her subversive play with language and her mixed-genre forms challenge and defamiliarize hegemonic ideologies. Barnes's feminine forms and her use of the image help to expand the parameters of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a minor literature; the deterritorialization of language takes shape within her *oeuvre* through her queer and feminist interventions into language and through the relationship posed between the words and the images. Her textual and sexual politics fundamentally challenge the demands set upon genre.

This framework also helps to account for why Barnes's earlier texts "failed." In their description of a "minor literature," Deleuze and Guattari argue, "Indeed, *scarcity of talent is in fact beneficial* and allows the conception of something other than a literature of masters; … what he or she says or does is necessarily political, even if others aren't in agreement" (17, emphasis

added). Minor literature resists dominant trends in their pursuit of a political agenda.[23] Ultimately, "minor literature" demonstrates the inextricable connections between language and power. Barnes's need to incorporate at least two genres into each text signals the inadequacy of a single genre to effectively advance her critique of normativity. Barnes wrote in the dominant language but refused the dominant forms; her works are examples of minor literature in so far as they use hybrid and feminine forms of writing to intervene in a much larger field of masculinist writings. The passage quoted above situates "minor literature" at the margins of the canon, and this is precisely where Barnes's early works have remained.

This chapter demands the reconsideration of Barnes's earlier works. *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack* pose a challenge to masculine Anglo-American modernist conventions and subvert patriarchal demands upon female embodiment and sexuality. These texts refuse traditional poetic and narrative structures, and deploy hybrid forms to critique grand narratives, rigid identity categories, and phallocentric frameworks. I also reveal that Barnes's early works have a great deal in common with her famous novel of the Thirties. Finally, I suggest that the fact that scholars may have had difficulty characterizing Barnes's *oeuvre* or situating Barnes's work within a modernist canon, may actually stem from the complexity of her experimentation, rather than a lack thereof.

"Dropping Crooked into Rhyme": Hybridity and Sexual Difference in *The Book of Repulsive Women*

In November of 1915, Djuna Barnes published her first chapbook, *The Book of Repulsive Women*. Appearing as part of the Bruno Chap Book series, which included works by Alfred

[23] "Minor literature" might be considered "subjugated knowledges" in Foucauldian terms, as it points to the relationship between power and knowledge, or in this case, power and aesthetic judgment.

Kreymborg and Richard Aldington,[24] this little book of "8 rhythms and 5 drawings"[25]—modestly held together by two staples—sold for fifteen cents per copy. The work featured Barnes's black and white drawings as well as her poetry and depicted an array of so-called "repulsive" women: lesbians, prostitutes, and female corpses.

In spite of the current critical attention to Barnes[26] and the various extant editions of *The Book of Repulsive Women*,[27] this text has yet to garner the scholarly consideration it deserves. In many ways, this collection fails to adhere to the poetic trends of the time; the poems fit neither with the imagism of Pound and H.D., nor with the fragmentation and dense allusiveness of the early 1920s. Because the poems are incongruous with the dominant aesthetics of the period, they tend to be ignored or disparaged.

From the perspective of major literature, *The Book of Repulsive Women* may be considered deficient or defiant in its refusal of clear-cut genre designations, though the form of Barnes's text mirrors the lack and repulsion associated with the grotesque women she depicts. Deleuze and Guattari's concept of a "minor literature" helps illustrate the extent of Barnes's

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[24] As part of the Bruno Chap Book series, Bruno published Alfred Kreymborg's *Edna: The Girl of the Street* (1915), *Mushrooms* (1915), *To My Mother* (1915); Richard Aldington's *The Imagists* (1915); Lord Alfred Douglas's *Salome: A Critique* (1915); and Oscar Wilde's *The Harlot's House* (1915) and *Four Letters From Prison* (1915). This series, including what Bruno labeled the "Special Series," ran from January 1915 through May 1916. The chapbook brings together modernists and *fin-de-siècle* decadents.

[25] "8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings" is the subtitle of the first edition.

[26] The rise of feminist approaches to literary modernism has been beneficial to literary studies and to Barnes in particular. Shari Benstock's *Women of the Left Bank, 1900-1940* (1986), Mary Lynn Broe's edited volume *Silence and Power: a Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes* (1991), Bonnie Kime Scott's *Refiguring Modernism*, Volumes 1 and 2 (1995), and Daniela Caselli's *Improper Modernism: Djuna Barnes's Bewildering Corpus* (2009) reveal contemporary scholarly interest in a range of Barnes's lesser-known works. Barnes's renewed relevance was marked by a 2012 exhibit at The Brooklyn Museum entitled, "Newspaper Fiction: The New York Journalism of Djuna Barnes, 1913-1919," which appeared in the Herstory Gallery of the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art from January 20-August 19, 2012, and The First International Djuna Barnes Conference was held in London in September 2012.

[27] Guido Bruno, 1915; Alicat Bookshop Press, 1948; Bern Boyle Books, 1989; Sun and Moon Press, 1989 & 1994; Routledge released a collection of Barnes's poetry call *The Book of Repulsive Women and Other Poems* (2003); The University of Wisconsin Press reprinted the collection within *Collected Poems with Notes Toward the Memoirs*, 2005.

critique and account for the perceived failure of *The Book of Repulsive Women*.[28] Early readings of the text posit aesthetic failure but do not engage with Barnes's representation of female embodiment or her critique of normativity, both of which, I argue, are central in this text.[29]

Through its form and content, Barnes's chapbook challenges the patriarchal values that have constructed women in terms of lack and repulsion. Barnes manipulates and transforms language, but this deterritorialization of language need not be understood simply on the linguistic level; *The Book of Repulsive Women* shows us that a "minor literature" may productively disrupt our fixed notions of genre, as well. Although the tone of the text remains rather dark, *The Book of Repulsive Women* fosters queer possibility in its resistance to dominant values and forms.

Barnes's satirical chapbook subscribes to an ontology of sexual difference; the chapbook exposes disparaging views of women's bodies in an effort to undermine the power of these dominant representations. In the text, we see women as deviant bodies, debased commodities, and decaying flesh. The poems and images draw on *fin-de-siècle* decadence in their grotesque depiction of prostitutes, lesbians, and corpses. The first poem of the collection foregrounds aberrant sexuality: it begins, "Someday … / We'll know you for the woman / That you are," and concludes with a lesbian sex act ("From Fifth Avenue Up," lines 1, 5-6). The final poem, called "Suicide," is divided into two parts: Corpse A and Corpse B. The first corpse, a battered woman, is "shattered" (1) with "a bruisèd body" (3); the speaker describes the second corpse in banal

[28] Burke is rather cynical about *The Book of Repulsive Women* and implicitly marks the text as somewhat of a failure in spite of the "notoriety" it initially received (69); Louis Kannenstine calls the work "derivative" and "traditional" (18); and Irene Martyniuk considers the separation of poems and images an aesthetic failure (67-68). Even Barnes left this text off of her CV. Editor Douglas Messerli notes, "Certainly, it was not a book that Barnes herself highly valued, and one suspects that she would have characterized it, as she had all her early journalism, as juvenilia" (7).
[29] Likewise, Benstock suggests that the importance placed on style in early Barnes criticism led to a fundamental misreading or misunderstanding of the subject matter: "The attention to style, however, constituted a way of sidestepping ideological questions that discussions of subject matter might have entailed" (244). She adds, "'problem of style' has been shown to be the effect of an interpretive strategy that disguises misogyny in the distinctions between style and substance and in the operations of criticism itself" (246).

terms, comparing her listless body to "beer gone flat" (12). The first and last poems set the tone, establishing *The Book of Repulsive Women* as dark, playful, and ironic. Andrea Weiss deems the collection "a satire on the way men look at women's bodies" (147), but Barnes's critique reaches further than the detrimental effects of the male gaze. Her text destabilizes these pervasive views and the heterosexist culture that perpetuates them.

Although the subjects of Barnes's poems and drawings include decadent, grotesque, and aging bodies; lesbians; and corpses, repulsiveness extends beyond these said groups. The title of the collection and the various poems themselves suggest that all women are or will be repulsive. Thus, the chapbook effectively casts woman as "other." This critical strategy lays out an appraisal and satirical response to the way women's bodies have been viewed and read by patriarchal society and so-called major literatures.

Barnes conveys woman as a radical "other" through her use of hybridity. Otherness is visible in the chapbook both as an interpretation of dominant representations of women and as a subversive appropriation of this portrayal. Hybridity therefore appears in two forms: the chapbook depicts woman as a hybrid creature, a mélange of human and animal parts, and it brings together two forms of art: drawings and rhythms. Certainly, the pairing of text and illustration is not new. Illuminated manuscripts, novels, and children's books have all made use of this conventional format. At first glance, even William Blake's pairing of poems and illustrations bears a striking resemblance to the structure of Barnes's chapbook.[30] Yet Barnes's work differs from these traditional forms in a few key ways. Barnes's images are drawings, not illustrations—a distinction that will be made clear below—and consequently, there is no direct

[30] Although her focus is not upon visual similarities between Barnes and Blake, Daniela Casseli deems Blake "an explicit intertextual reference" due to his influence upon poems like "In General" and "In Particular" in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, Barnes's use of Blake's spelling of "tyger" in *Creatures in an Alphabet*, and her "Biblically sounding chapter title" in *Nightwood* (79).

correspondence between the poems and the images.[31] Barnes's use of drawings and poems makes an implicit argument about the inadequacy of a single genre to articulate her argument. Irene Martyniuk makes a similar point: "the verbal must be complemented and completed with visual images in order to tell the complete tale" (66). Though a complete tale would never be possible, *The Book of Repulsive Women* and much of Barnes's later works remain dedicated to giving representation to marginalized subjects. This political and collective impetus to her *oeuvre* thereby demands a complementary formal technique to fully subvert the hegemonic structures at the center of her critique. The form of *The Book of Repulsive Women* helps to perform Barnes's argument: the hybridity of this work is key to the hybridity of the minor or marginal subject positions Barnes wishes to consider. The chapbook's difference from major poetic forms of the time likewise parallels its representation of sexual difference.

The original arrangement of the chapbook underscores the role of hybridity in the text. The first edition of *The Book of Repulsive Women* contains two distinct sections. The "rhythms" or poems appear at the beginning of the text and the drawings appear at the end of the volume, introduced by a separate title page. Later reproductions have not respected the original format of the chapbook but instead have integrated the images and poems; the various extant editions reflect different editorial decisions in the arrangement of poems and drawings. Routledge, which has reprinted this collection along with some of Barnes's other work under the title *The Book of Repulsive Women and Other Poems* (2003), made decisions about which poems were meant to be paired with which drawings and proceeded to incorporate the drawings on the same pages as the poems. Douglas Messerli, editor of the 1994 Sun and Moon Press edition, suggests that there

[31] Caselli concurs, "The five drawings accompanying the eight rhythms, *not obviously related to specific poems*, fail to explain them as much as the illustrations in *Ladies Almanack* do, but reproduce instead the complexities found at textual level" (76, my emphasis), though she does not develop this point further.

is a direct relationship between the artwork and specific poems, but states, "Without knowing Barnes's original intentions, I felt editorially more comfortable placing the art on facing pages of the poems rather than on the same pages. Moreover, the art seemed to relate, in my mind, with poems different from those Bern Boyle [a previous editor] had chosen" (9). Even the size and orientation of some of the images have been changed in the subsequent editions.[32]

Some scholars may see the integration of images and poems as an improvement upon the original text,[33] but even conservative and conscientious editorial changes alter the way we read and interpret Barnes's text in potentially detrimental ways. The subtitle to the work, "8 Rhythms and 5 Drawings," reflects the original publication layout and places equal emphasis on both components of the project. Also, the extended title notably refuses the commonplace terms "poems" and "illustrations." If this is a request to abandon our preconceptions of standard forms, then we must also resist the temptation to read her images as subordinate to the "rhythms," as merely illustrations of the poems.[34] Barnes's drawings are not simply examples of the implied arguments made within the poems; they contribute to the discourse on bodies and boundaries in nuanced ways. As a mixture of artistic languages drawn from the literary and visual arts, *The Book of Repulsive Women* produces something new. Its expression through image and text and

[32] In the first edition, the figure walking with the two birds is situated so that the woman is effectively walking up the right side of the page. In subsequent editions, the image has been shrunk and rotated clockwise 90 degrees.
[33] Though she does not view the new editions as superior to the first, Martyniuk considers the complete separation of text and image to be one of the reasons that this text failed aesthetically (67-68). Messerli says, "As Bern Boyle so astutely recognized, certain of the drawings appear to fit on the page perfectly with the text" (8). He reprinted the 1994 Sun and Moon Press edition with the drawings and poems on adjacent pages to replace the 1989 Sun and Moon Press edition, which replicated the format of the original publication.
[34] Other issues of Bruno Chap Books make use of a subtitle with the designation "rhythms," such as Alfred Kreymborg's *Mushrooms: 16 Rhythms* (Feb. 1915) and *To My Mother: 10 Rhythms* (Apr.1915), Sadakichi Hartmann's *Tanka and Haikai: 14 Japanese Rhythms* (June 1915), and H. Thompson Rich's *Lumps of Clay: 16 Rhythms* (Dec. 1915). However, not all of the poetry works adopted this term. The September 1915 issue features Lord Alfred Douglas's *Salome: a Critique, The Beauty of Unpunctuality: an Essay and Three Poems* and The January 1916 issue features H. Thompson Rich's *The Red Shame: 17 War Poems*. The University of Maryland, which houses most of Barnes's papers, did not have proofs of *The Book of Repulsive Women* or records of any correspondence between Barnes and Guido Bruno, so Barnes's original intentions cannot be assessed with certainty.

its rejection of conventional terminology emphasize the hybridity of the work and Barnes's commitment to breaking with the established forms of major literature. As Deleuze and Guattari say, "Expression must break forms, encourage ruptures and new sproutings" (28). In its attention to marginalized subjects and its commitment to unconventional forms, *The Book of Repulsive Women* does just that.

By this point in her career, the pairing of text and visual images was already long familiar to Barnes, as sketches frequently accompanied her work as a journalist.[35] Her pictures for the newspaper, however, tended to be much lighter in tone than the dark and highly sexualized drawings in *The Book of Repulsive Women*. Her drawings for *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* in 1913, for example, do not resemble the dark woodcut-looking images from *The Book of Repulsive Women*. The style of the drawings in the chapbook has frequently been compared to the work of the British artist Aubrey Beardsley.[36] Beardsley's black and white images are also sexually explicit, but his work with lines is thinner and more precise. Barnes's raw and abstract drawings serve as a commentary on hegemonic representations of female embodiment.

Both the drawings and the poems suggest that woman is a hybrid creature by highlighting primitive and animalistic qualities. Herein, Barnes literalizes the metaphors present in major literature and philosophy that relegate women to a less than human status.[37] The "othering" of women in this fashion reminds us of the ways in which theories of sexual difference have been deployed to advocate for the regulation of women's bodies. In the collection, women are depicted as carnal beings in a state of entropy. Each poem underscores the physicality of the

[35] Barnes's writing and drawings frequently appeared in The New York Morning Telegraph, New York World Magazine, and The Brooklyn Daily Eagle.
[36] Kannenstine notes that her publisher, Guido Bruno, called Barnes "the American Beardsley" (23).
[37] Be it Aristotle or Rousseau, Henry Miller or Norman Mailer, representations of women as irrational, incomplete, and even bestial abound in major literature.

female body. “From Fifth Avenue Up” depicts women’s bodies that are “sagging” and “bulging” (31) and “Twilight of the Illicit” features “long blank udders” (1) and “dying hair hand-beaten” (13). In the eyes of society, time turns these women into grotesque entities.

The grotesquerie is also couched in terms of deviant sexuality. The third poem begins:

> And now she walks on out turned feet
> Beside the litter in the street
> Or rolls beneath a dirty sheet
> Within the town. (“From Third Avenue On,” 1-4)

The subject’s movements beneath “a dirty sheet” mark her, her sexuality, and the spaces she inhabits as literally sullied. A later poem, “Twilight of the Illicit,” also marks debauchery by means of “spotted linen” (3). Whether in the private quarters of a bedroom or in the public streets of New York City, this woman is surrounded by filth. The “out turned feet” highlight this woman’s birdlike gait linking excessive sexuality with animality and establishing parallels between this poem and the drawing of the androgynous figure with two birds reprinted below (Fig. 1).

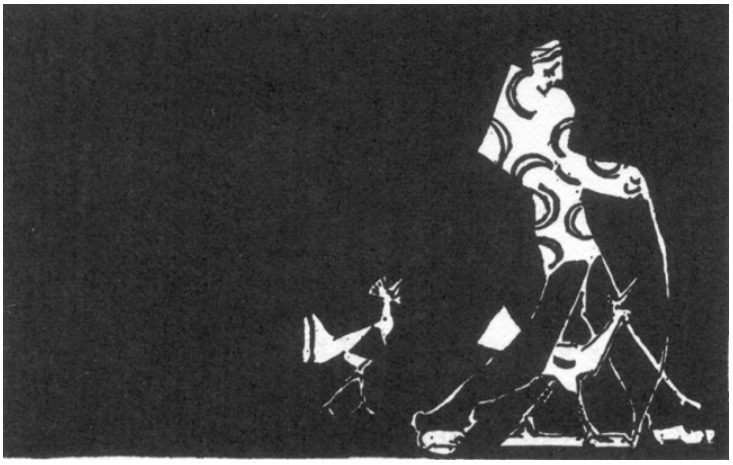

Fig. 1: The *Flâneuse*. Image courtesy of www.digital.library.upenn.edu. This appeared as the first image in the first edition of *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915). The original image was rotated 90 degrees to the left.

Barnes’s black and white drawings also emphasize otherness through excess, vice, and the grotesque. The third and fourth images in the first edition—which are perhaps the most startling images of the collection—feature naked or half naked women (Figs. 2 and 3). The first

of these is semi-upright, posing on a brick wall with her back arched, one knee bent and the other leg fully extended behind her:

Fig. 2: Becoming-Animal. Image courtesy of www.digital.library.upenn.edu. This appeared as the third image in the first edition of *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915).

She holds two limp flowers in her hand. Her features convey excess and animality. The woman's face seems to be embellished with lipstick and eye makeup in such a way that makes her look more terrifying than beautiful.[38] What one assumes to be her hair closely resembles reptilian spikes. Rabbit ears appear atop her head and a tail, taking the form of a dotted line, seems to protrude from her buttocks. As Bonnie Kime Scott notes, this is an early example of the "beast turning human," perhaps a nascent image of Robin Vote in Barnes's later work *Nightwood* (84). The figure is positioned in front of a dark sky and set against a gray textured moon.

The second nude drawing appears to convey an orgy (Fig. 3). A reclining woman,

[38] Scott suggests that this may, in fact, be a mask (84).

perched above the other figures, is partially covered by a piece of fabric, which hangs over her bed. She is grasping the appendage of another figure:

Fig. 3: The Orgy. Image courtesy of www.digital.library.upenn.edu. This appeared as the fourth image in the first edition of Djuna Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915).

Scott identifies these ambiguous limbs as hands and arms, but they could very well be feet and legs (84). The indeterminacy of the body parts seems deliberate. The legs or arms, adorned in animal-print fabric, bleed into the white of the page creating a discontinuous border around the drawing. The two figures below the reclining woman appear to have flippers in place of hands. One is clearly a Chinese man as evidenced by his exaggerated Fu Manchu. His rounded back, which is heavily textured, appears to be covered in scales. An additional limb extending from the shoulder stretches upward, possibly between the woman's legs. All of the limbs have a "phallic quality" to them (Scott 84). The figure in the center is difficult to describe and its gender is indecipherable. The face comes closest to resembling a Venetian mask. Like Picasso's painting *Les Demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907), Barnes's drawings provocatively make use of prostitutes,

masks, and primitivism in their refusal to depict traditional feminine beauty.

This image and the second one in this collection—depicted below featuring a bodiless Asian figure wearing a traditional conical hat—reveal an underlying orientalist preoccupation in this work (Figs. 3 and 5). Racist stereotypes perpetuated by the fear of "Yellow Peril" were present in England and America at the beginning of the twentieth century,[39] but their presence in the chapbook is more than a reflection of the time. By situating stereotypical Asian figures in the same frames as deviant women, Barnes is equating woman with the racialized other. This unsettling gesture raises questions of ethnicity, representation, and belonging central to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of minor literature. When read as separate entities, the grotesque features of the drawings are apparent, but only when read alongside the poems do we have a "blur of languages" with "ambiguous edges" and "changing borders" that constitutes a fitting genre for the representation of cultural otherness (Deleuze and Guattari 24).

Proper bounds and boundaries are crossed throughout the collection. Nearly all of the drawings reveal ambiguous or inconsistent borders. In one image of a woman dancing, dotted lines are used to represent her legs, but the incomplete borders do not clearly demarcate the woman's lower half (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4: The Dancer. Image courtesy of www.digital.library.upenn.edu. This appeared as the fifth image in the first edition of *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915).

[39] Sax Rohmer's Dr. Fu Machu novels were also popular at this time.

Her midsection also requires the work of the viewer to fill in the missing lines. In another image, which features a woman grasping a Chinese lantern, suggestive of the world's oldest profession,[40] the figure's lower half entirely vanishes into the whiteness of the page; this drawing has only partial borders on a small portion of three of its sides (Fig. 5). Arms and legs are only partially visible with white patches (created by negative space) cutting cross-sections out of the body parts.

Fig. 5: Woman with Chinese Lantern. Image courtesy of www.digital.library.upenn.edu. This appeared as the second image in the first edition of *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915).

While the blurring of borders and boundaries may point to the marginal space women have been assigned within the Western public imaginary, these images are also distinctly modern. Barnes's drawings are representative of early experiments in modern art and they articulate the many levels of hybridity and otherness that her poems alone cannot convey.

Paradoxically, the drawings and poems depict women as simultaneously incomplete and excessive. Female bodies take the shape of "lips, long lengthened" ("Twilight of the Illicit" 15),

[40] Historian Nils Johan Ringdal notes that Southeast Asian brothels are still marked by red lanterns today (201). The red lantern was also a visual marker for Parisian brothels at the *fin de siècle* (253).

"bulging" bellies ("From Fifth Avenue Up" 31), and a "Massive mother" ("Twilight of the Illicit" 27). Evidently the text luxuriates in the abject, which Julia Kristeva describes as "a vortex of summons and repulsion" (1), and that which "disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous" (4). Kristeva's words aptly describe this dense, enigmatic, collection of drawings and poems. From her topics to her visual representations, Barnes challenges and disrupts borders: "Barriers and heart both broken" ("To a Cabaret Dancer" 33). Even the times that are frequently referenced, twilight and dawn, represent liminal temporal moments.[41] In her drawings, the grotesque images of disfigured female bodies bleed into the white of the page, as borders and boundaries must simply be imagined. Western women's bodies have been historically and culturally constructed as leaky and incomplete. They regularly bleed, and when subjectivity is contingent upon proper forms of embodiment, female bodies defy the "boundaries of the proper" (Shildrick 17). Yet while these excesses may be read as repulsive by the dominant society, they are not depicted as necessarily negative qualities within the poems. The excesses of women's bodies are replicated in the excesses of the alliterative verse, which stress the sensuality and physicality of these women; the poetic form underscores the transvaluation of these characteristics. The text thus works on multiple levels. First, *The Book of Repulsive Women* exposes phallogocentric logic in order to critique it. At the same time, the poems and images appropriate conceptions of lack, excess, vice, and repulsion in such a way that subverts this patriarchal view of women by valuing the very things that patriarchal culture despises.

The collection also challenges the Victorian directive for separate spheres. Barnes blurs the divide between public and private spaces through her use of decadence. Her decadent style is

[41] Galvin also notes that "the gay and bohemian nightlife" was known as the "'twilight world' of the 'demimonde'" (94).

reminiscent of Baudelaire's, but the relationship to his work seems to extend beyond style. Guido Bruno, the publisher of Barnes's chapbook, reinforced Barnes's connection to Baudelaire by calling an interview he gave about Barnes and her work "Fleur du Mal à la Mode de New York" after Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Hardie 122). Furthermore, in an article entitled, "The Invisible *Flâneuse*: Women and the Literature of Modernity," Janet Wolff argues:

> In Baudelaire's essays and poems, women appear very often. Modernity breeds, or makes visible, a number of categories of female city-dwellers. Among the most prominent in these texts are: the prostitute, the widow, the old lady, the lesbian, the murder victim, and the passing unknown woman. (41-42)

Though Wolff does not address Barnes in her essay, her research reinforces the connections between these two authors. The repulsive women of Barnes's collection are city-dwellers of various kinds, but Barnes presents the *flâneuse* to the exclusion of the *flâneur*. Her repulsive women, for the most part, defy the strict gender division between public and private spaces, thus enacting a reversal of the traditionally masculine modern trope. This is worth noting, especially since many scholars tend to think of *The Book of Repulsive Women* more in terms of its *fin-de-siècle* qualities; Barnes is playing with not just a modernist trope, but a particularly masculine modernist trope.

This trope is complicated further by the increased visibility of women within the modern metropolis. Mass production, advertising, and commodity culture made women's active role in modernity more apparent. Through what Liz Conor calls "the disabling and enabling impacts of women's spectacularization," modernity opened up new spaces and made possible new feminine subjectivities as a result of the modern focus upon the visual (35). Conor writes, "'Appearing' describes how the changed conditions of feminine visibility in modernity invited a practice of the self which was centered on one's visual status and effects. … For women to identify themselves

as modern, the performance of their gendered identity had to take place within the modern spectacularization of everyday life" (7). However, negotiating the public space of the streets still carried with it certain risks for single women. The old associations of the un-chaperoned woman of the streets evoked a slippage between the consumer, the New Woman, the flapper, and the prostitute, a slippage that Barnes clearly plays with through the streetwalkers of this collection.[42] But Barnes does not merely appropriate decadent forms and tropes; she transforms these representations by critiquing their misogynistic usage by the French decadents and modernist artists alike.[43] As I will soon demonstrate, Barnes's poems situate true perversity within hegemonic patriarchal institutions, not female sexuality.

Barnes mitigates the somewhat problematic lens of "Otherness" prevalent in *The Book of Repulsive Women* by implicating her readers in the perpetuation of this damaging ideology. "To a Cabaret Dancer" catalogs a young woman's decline. The cabaret is first presented as an alluring lifestyle with "lights and wine" (7). Yet, the glamour and opportunities that this lifestyle purportedly offers soon prove to be a ruse. The dancer arrives with "splendid grace" (6), but she quickly becomes disillusioned by the experience: "growing wise [she] / Became less fine" (11-12). As "she groped and clung / About his neck" (15-16) and "sang / Between our knees" (19-20), her sexualized body explicitly becomes a commodity. Her experience slowly destroys her, for it "Soiled a sweet and ignorant soul /And fouled its play" (31-32). The poem's raw and sexualized verbs catalog her physical decline. The cabaret dancer's innocence is taken from her

[42] "From Third Avenue On" is one of the many poems that call attention to this slippage. Here, Barnes highlights this slippage by rhyming "street" and "sheet" in the first stanza of the poem. For more on the dubious relationship between these modern female identities, see Conor 39-76.

[43] Rita Felski argues, "The figure of the lesbian, for example, came to serve as an evocative symbol of a feminized modernity in the work of a number of nineteenth-century male French writers who depicted her as an avatar of perversity and decadence, exemplifying the mobility and ambiguity of modern forms of desire;" she adds, however, that many such texts failed to challenge traditional forms of masculinity, and many in fact replicated misogynistic perspectives (20).

along with her vitality. The speaker states:

> We saw the crimson leave her cheeks
> Flame in her eyes;
> For when a woman lives in awful haste
> A woman dies. (25-28)

The loss of pigmentation in her face, an easy metaphor for the loss of her spirit and liveliness, reinforces her body's physical decay. This poem mimics a familiar narrative,[44] but the tone of the final stanza shifts and implicates the reader:

> Until her songless soul admits
> Time comes to kill:
> You pay her price and wonder why
> You need her still. (41-44)

Rather than serving as a didactic cautionary tale, "To a Cabaret Dancer" highlights the hypocrisy embedded in society's attempt to criticize the dancer. The poem forces the reader to acknowledge his or her complicity in the woman's condition: it concludes by citing "you" and your participation in these types of exchanges as part of the reason for her demise. This poem must be read alongside "From Third Avenue On" to fully appreciate Barnes's critique of the limited options available to women at this time. "Twilight of the Illicit" and "From Fifth Avenue Up," on the other hand, offer subversive alternatives to the bleak prospects proffered by the heteronormative exchange of women prominent in major literature and society.

"Seen from the 'L'" is the poem that most explicitly registers the male gaze. The poem's title refers to a voyeuristic experience when riding New York City's L train, which runs part of its course above ground. A young woman's naked body is the subject of the poem:

> Still her clothing is less risky
> Than her body in its prime,
> They are chain-stitched and so is she

[44] The demise of the dancer echoes the narrative of other poems like Oliver Goldsmith's "When Lovely Woman Stoops to Folly."

Chain-stitched to her soul for time.
Ravelling grandly into vice
Dropping crooked into rhyme.
Slipping through the stitch of virtue,
Into crime. (13-20)

This stanza depicts a woman literally coming undone. The sewing metaphor—evocative of the feminine and domestic occupation of seamstress—carries this stanza to its completion with the unraveling of her virtue and her clothing paralleling the fall of the rhyme scheme: "Ravelling grandly into vice / Dropping crooked into rhyme." Even the speaker describes the rhyme as being twisted or out of place. "Crooked" also conveys the illicit nature of these rhymes or "rhythms" as Barnes called them, while underscoring the chapbook's queerness and its "minor" status. The self-reflexivity or meta-poetical nature of this and the other poems is further emphasized through diction and rhyme scheme. "Feet" and "beat"—common poetic terms—are stressed; they appear in several of the poems at the ends of lines. The other word frequently rhymed with one or both of these words is "sheet,"[45] yoking the sexual overtones to the form of these poems.

The last stanza of "Seen from the 'L'" reinforces this woman's status as an object:

Though her lips are vague as fancy
In her youth—
They bloom vivid and repulsive
As the truth.
Even vases in the making
Are uncouth. (21-27)

Lines 25-27 subtly allude to John Keats's ekphrastic poem, "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (Loncraine xii). Yet unlike Keats's meditation on a beautiful aesthetic object, this ekphrastic poem and the others in this collection subvert poetic conventions by taking on a traditionally beautiful subject

[45] "Feet" appears in "From Fifth Avenue Up," "From Third Avenue On," "To a Cabaret Dancer," and "Seen from the 'L.'" "Beat" appears in "From Fifth Avenue Up" and "Seen from the 'L.'" "From Third Avenue On" rhymes "sheet" and "street" with "feet" and "Seen from the 'L'" rhymes "feet" and "beat" with "sheet" and "street."

and representing her as repulsive.

Yet "From Fifth Avenue Up" is arguably the most transgressive poem from the collection due to its thinly veiled sex act and its interpellation of the reader. Its tone sharply contrasts with that of "To a Cabaret Dancer" in its playful use of language. Barnes's representation of cunnilingus in "From Fifth Avenue Up" entertains two perspectives on female embodiment and sexuality concurrently. The beginning of the sixth stanza lends itself to a reading of the female body as repulsive and depraved through the negative connotations suggested by words like "sagging" and "bulging." Yet, by the end of the stanza, the emphasis has shifted, and the stanza ends with a softer, more sensuous tone. This highly alliterative stanza does nothing to advance the poem forward other than describe sex outside of a phallic economy:

> See you sagging down with bulging
> Hair to sip,
> The dappled damp from some vague
> Under lip.
> Your soft saliva, loosed
> With orgy, drip. (30-35)

These lines describe female sexuality and pleasure in a way that anticipates the work of Luce Irigaray's essays "This Sex Which is Not One" and "When our Lips Speak Together." Lines like these, which play on the relationship between lips and labia, between language and the female body, conceptually and thematically anticipate the concerns of Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* (1928). Through double entendre, Barnes enacts a transformation or deterritorialization of the dominant language by enacting a legible form of feminine writing.

The unstable referents of the "From Fifth Avenue Up" make the reader complicit in the poem's orgiastic sex act. Earlier in the poem, the speaker uses the first person plural, referring presumably to the intended audience, which may very well extend beyond the repulsive women to whom, some have argued, this collection was addressed. Nevertheless, the previous stanza

suggests the collective movement from voyeur to actor, from watching to participating. The stanza begins with "We" but ends "at *your* feet":

> We see your damp chemise lie
> Pulsing in the beat
> Of the over-hearts left oozing
> At your feet. (26-29)

As the reader, one's own subject position is troubled. Is the reader part of the "we" that is performing cunnilingus or is the reader the "you" that is the recipient of the sex act? Whichever way it is read, the reader is implicated in this orgy. The following stanza emphasizes further the lesbian overtones of the poem by calling attention to the homoerotic (and incestuous) pleasure associated with breastfeeding:

> When leaning above your mother's
> Spleen you drew
> Your mouth across her breast as
> Trick musicians do. (38-41)

Thus, even a heteronormative contemporary reader is marked as an "improper" woman. This is a transformative moment in the poem and the collection, as a slippage has been established between propriety and repulsiveness. Although the mother seems to satisfy society's heteronormative reproductive demands, Barnes highlights the subversive bodily pleasure that both the mother and the child gain from the experience of breastfeeding.[46] In this textual moment, the term "repulsive" expands to include a broader constituency, thus becoming more inclusive by implication. *The Book of Repulsive Women* gives voice to underrepresented experiences of female embodiment and privileges alternative forms of motherhood, reproduction, and pleasure.

[46] In her essay, "Breasted Experience," Iris Marion Young discusses the pleasure of breastfeeding but argues that as a result of the incest taboo, society has reinforced a strict divide between motherhood and sexuality; this pleasure is therefore rarely discussed.

Moreover, when the women of Barnes's collection submit to their "proper" domestic roles, they become repulsive in a different sense:

> Ah God! She settles down we say;
> It means her powers slip away
> It means she draws back day by day
> From good or bad. ("From Third Avenue On" 9-12)

Domesticity, propriety, and heterosexuality strip this woman of her power and her freedom, leaving her with only "chinaware" (17), "over-curled, hard waving hair" (19), and "a vacant space … in her face" (22). Settling down may be understood as progress or maturity within the framework of mainstream society, but Barnes's poem undermines the value of this taken-for-granted lifestyle. Herein, settling down signals defeat. Barnes reveals that this woman's fate is not much different from the demise of the cabaret dancer who suffers for different reasons. In both scenarios, their faces reveal the loss of vitality. "From Third Avenue On" shows that it is a woman's attempts to *conform* to dominant gender roles that leave her empty and depleted. In moments like this, the text overtly challenges the value of compulsory heterosexuality and domestic complacency, thus enacting a transvaluation of dominant or "major" mores.

The Book of Repulsive Women, which is critical of the ways our culture reinscribes heteronormative values, ironically appropriates normative tropes. The chapbook's dedication situates the reproduction of patriarchal values and gender roles at the center of the text. Despite Barnes's fraught family life—marked by incest and betrayal—*The Book of Repulsive Women* is dedicated to Barnes's mother:[47]

> TO MOTHER

[47] Her upbringing in a polygamous household was distinctly non-traditional and Andrea Weiss argues may be more accurately understood as "exploitative and sexually abusive" (144). Weiss notes that Barnes was given as a "sexual sacrifice" to the brother of her father's mistress, later to be his second wife (144). The family member she was closest with was her grandmother, suffragette and writer Zadel Barnes Budington, but Barnes's relationship with her grandmother was possibly incestuous.

Who was more or less like All
mothers, but she was mine, and
so—She excelled.

As the figure responsible for introducing her children to social roles and values, the mother partakes in and reproduces conventions; through sexual reproduction, she produces new citizens. Since the symbolic order is aligned with the name of the father and the law that comes from that name, Barnes's dedication to the mother rather than the father signals her text's resistance to the phallic economy of the symbolic order. The dedication is ironic in its homage to *her* mother, but perhaps it serves as an opportunity to place blame. These lines also introduce the trope of maternity that recurs throughout the collection and foreground the relationship between the particular and the general that is evoked by Barnes's two poems: "In Particular" and "In General." In her reading of the dedication, Melissa Jane Hardie notes, "'More or less,' an equivocation that tropes oscillation as neutral effect, translates the simultaneous ascription of motherhood as a singular and plural category," a rhetorical move that "ironizes the singularity of any category" (126). Barnes's challenge to categories, which is somewhat subtle within *The Book of Repulsive Women*, would be pushed to its logical conclusion in *Nightwood*.

The form of these two poems also underscores an *inversion* of traditional aesthetic and cultural values. Barnes's use of enjambment in "In General" and "In Particular" enacts a deferral of pleasure, as the rhyme is pushed to the beginning of the subsequent line. "In General" reads:

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. (1-6)

Not only does this strategy defy our expectations but also, as Hardie puts it, the inversion of rhyme structurally complements the forms of sexual "inversion" Barnes introduces in the text

(125).[48] "In Particular," which appears a few pages later, maintains the same structure and much of the same language, including the same rhymed words—"Unpriced," "Undiced," and "Christ"—in lines 2, 4, and 6. The notion of transvaluation, implicit in the first poem, is rendered explicit here. The poem brings together disparate images and places religious value in question.

Barnes also plays with and inverts traditional conceptions of productivity and reproduction through her use of diction. The speaker of "Seen from the 'L'" observes, "Though her lips are vague as fancy/In her youth—/They *bloom* vivid and *repulsive*" (21-23, emphasis added). By the evaluations of major literature, the feminine body does not improve with age but becomes an object of repulsion and a symbol of the undesirable, and yet Barnes complicates her critique by using the word "bloom" to describe this process. This verb, which has positive connotations, describes the *production* of flowers. Here, repulsion becomes productive by offering an alternative to normative forms of reproduction.

This subversive play on reproduction appears in other poems as well. "Twilight of the Illicit" presents the maternal body in less than glorified terms: "You, the massive mother of / Illicit spawn" (27-28). Excess and animal overtones mark this woman and her offspring. Although the maternal body is frequently a symbol of heteronormativity, this woman is transgressive. "Illicit spawn" signals a perceived illegitimacy as far as the child is concerned, but Barnes leaves the nature of the transgression ambiguous. If one is to read an earlier image from this poem—"satiated fingers"—within the context of lesbian sexuality, as Mary E. Galvin does (95), these lines take on greater significance. Read alongside the earlier image and read with the last two lines of the previous stanza, we find that here, too, maternity may serve only as a metaphor:

[48] Here, Hardie is referring to the sexological term used to discuss homosexuality at the beginning of the twentieth century.

> One grieves that the altars of
> Your vice lie deep.
>
> You, the twilight powder of
> A fire-wet dawn;
> You, the massive mother of
> Illicit spawn;
> While others shrink in virtue
> You have borne. (23-30).

This is another example of transvaluation in the collection. Maternity becomes a trope for other forms of creativity. Galvin writes, "Indicating that her creative powers extend beyond procreation, the subject's 'vice-filled' existence is portrayed as fertile, despite the fact that her 'udders' are 'blank'" (95). Within this framework, vice is worthy of worship; virtue causes one to shrink, while vice offers expansive possibilities.

Finally, I propose that Barnes's use of animality goes beyond an appraisal of major representations of women. If we consider Barnes's use of animality as a dual movement—a condemnation of dominant representations of women as well as an appropriation of this portrayal (perhaps akin to the appropriation of the term "queer" within the LGBTQ movement)—we may see how Barnes moves beyond a simple critique. "Becoming-animal" may be a process of resistance in relation to the major:

> In the terms of art that Deleuze and Guattari characteristically use, becoming-animal is a movement from major (the constant) to minor (the variable); it is a deterritorialization in which a subject no longer occupies a realm of stability and identity but is instead folded imperceptibly into a movement or into an amorphous legion whose mode of existence is nomadic or, alternatively, whose "structure" is rhizomatic rather than arborescent, that is, restless, insomniac, or in flight rather than settled, upright, at one with itself and at peace with others. (Bruns 703-704)

In the binary logic of continental philosophy, woman is "not-man" or an incomplete version of him. In literalizing the metaphorical language that renders woman subhuman, Barnes subverts

this binary altogether. Woman is no longer left to be deigned an incomplete man, but is something different altogether. Barnes reveals that this state of otherness (or the "becoming-animal") has its own set of revolutionary values and pleasures.

Though *The Book of Repulsive Women* situates perversity within heteronormative frameworks, it never depicts female embodiment as freed from patriarchal culture. Barnes's later texts like *Ladies Almanack* venture closer to imagining this possibility. Barnes's chapbook nevertheless offers an insightful critique of the male gaze and its influence upon women. Through the speaker's subtle questioning of the term "repulsive," we see the supposed truth of this assessment undermined. Her images and poems draw upon and critique this cultural viewpoint by rescuing representations of the abject and words like "vice" and "repulsion" from their dominant portrayals within language.

Ladies Almanack: Queering the "Condition of Woman"

In the last twenty years, scholars of feminist and queer theory have begun to champion *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes's neglected women-centered text of 1928. Although "ambivalent" and "ambiguous" are prominent descriptors of the representations in this text, even amongst the writing of contemporary feminist scholars revisiting this work, *Ladies Almanack* has been read as a form of *écriture feminine* and considered to be a necessary addition to the lesbian canon.[49] Mary Lynn Broe's 1991 edited collection, *Silence and Power: A Reevaluation of Djuna Barnes*, certainly promoted a reexamination of Barnes's corpus, and particularly her overlooked works. Nevertheless, scholars reportedly still find this "minor" text difficult to place. At first, the book seems to be an odd recuperation of older forms and prose styles. *Ladies Almanack* actively plays

[49] Lanser records one of Barnes's responses to this text, which Lanser describes as ambivalent (164). Galvin argues that Barnes reveals lesbian sexuality as "integral to the modern setting" (86).

with language, incorporating double entendre and countless puns while borrowing from earlier forms of the English language, including Chaucerian verse, yet Barnes's experimentation with language might also be considered a response to the "Oxen of the Sun" episode in *Ulysses*.[50]

This hybrid book is a queer amalgamation of genres. Though purportedly a ladies' daybook, *Ladies Almanack* also takes the form of an almanac and a *roman à clef* that pays tribute to lesbian literati.[51] Through poems, speeches, narratives and illustrations, the book features allegorical stand-ins for the prominent figures of Natalie Barney's salon, a group of lesbian, expatriate writers thriving in Paris during the 1920s. Once again, Barnes incorporates illustrations alongside her text and integrates a plethora of different forms: song, poetry, prose, prophesy, diatribe, dialog, and diagram, thus forging an aesthetics that enacts the deterritorialization and defamiliarization of these linguistic registers. Barnes uses these hybrid forms and styles to give expression to the queer "ladies" of the *Almanack*. Like the title of *The Book of Repulsive Women*, the opening remarks of the *Almanack* also interpellate the reader: "Thus begins this Almanack, which all Ladies should carry about with them, as the Priest his Breviary, as the Cook his Recipes, as the Doctor his Physic, as the Bride her Fears, and as the Lion his Roar!" (9). These words frame the *Almanack* as integral to the ladies' identities and subsequently commence the female-centered narrative.

Ladies Almanack, allegedly written "in an idle hour" (Barnes "Foreword") when Thelma Wood was in the hospital, is "a Tale of as fine a Wench as ever wet Bed" (6). The parodic text, which is divided into calendar months rather than chapters, recounts the life of Evangeline

[50] According to Weiss, Joyce did not feel that Barnes's work was derivative of his own (162).
[51] Karla Jay is the only scholar I have encountered who believes otherwise. Bryher funded the publication, and Janet Flanner and Natalie Barney kept and annotated their copies of *Ladies Almanack* (Weiss 148, 150). Jay reads the tone of *Ladies Almanack* as a harsh critique of Natalie Barney and the other members of the salon by an embittered Barnes. Yet, The tone of the *Almanack* seems too playful and too laudatory to be a scathing critique of Barney's salon. See "The Outsider among the Expatriates: Djuna Barnes' Satire on the Ladies of the *Almanack*."

Musset. According to our narrator, "she had been developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy, when therefore, she came forth an Inch or so less than this, she paid no Heed to the Error" (7). Clearly a comical commentary on the disparity between Musset's sex and gender, this scene is a revision of the beginning of Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness*, published earlier that year. Adorned with hip-boots and carrying a whip, Dame Musset, who "learned on the Bodies of all Women" (35), is revered as a saint within this text.[52] Although Barnes borrows scenes from Stephen Gordon's upbringing to structure pivotal moments in the life of Dame Musset, Barnes based this character on Natalie Barney, not Hall; the other characters in the *Almanack* are historical figures who participated in Barney's salon. A limited number of copies were printed—1050 to be exact, fifty of which had been hand-colored by Barnes herself—and copies were given to members of the salon.[53]

Most of the characters in *Ladies Almanack* are proud lesbians. The exception is Patience Scalpel, the token straight woman who reportedly represents Mina Loy. Initially, she is a mouthpiece for patriarchy and spouts heterosexist assumptions and phobias:

> 'And what', she said, 'the *silly Creatures* may mean by it is more than I can *diagnose*! I am of my Time and my Time's best argument, and who am I that I must die in my Time, and never know what it is in the Whorls and Crevices of my Sisters so prolongs them to the bitter End? Do they have Organs as exactly alike as two Peas, or twin Griefs; and are they not eclipsed ever so often with the galling Check-rein of feminine Tides? … they have come to a blind Alley; there will be no Children.' (11-12, emphasis added)

Patience Scalpel is a product of compulsory heterosexuality and thus views reproduction as part

[52] The "Saints Days" in February are all events in the life of Dame Musset. Monika Kaup argues that *Ladies Almanack* ought to be read as a form of queer hagiography.
[53] Barnes used lots of primary colors—blues, reds, and yellows—and each copy of *Ladies Almanack* was colored differently. Weiss notes that Barnes even sold copies in the streets when her distributor failed to work out. (148). Sylvia Beach also carried copies of the text at Shakespeare and Company (Weiss 148).

of a woman's responsibility and identity. She has difficulty comprehending same-sex desire and often regards the other characters, as she did above, as "silly Creatures." Her speech, ideological stance, and last name connect her to other patriarchal figure in the text—the surgeon. Her last name is his tool of the trade, which he used to "deflowe[r]" Musset as a child (24). Although his offense is physical, and Scalpel's is verbal, they are both proponents of patriarchal values.

Patience's incessant questioning of lesbian desire takes place in juxtaposition to lesbian lovemaking. As Frances M. Doughty and others have noted, the lesbian love scenes are "only slightly disguised" (146) making the political and collective enunciation of the text rather overt. One such scene takes place in the month of May, the middle of spring, and is accompanied by a visual representation of the scene. Two women lie in bed together, one bare-breasted and the other nestling into her shoulder. Animals frolic in the background, reinforcing the Edenic qualities of this space. Another woman, presumably Patience, stands at a distance. The first words of this section begin:

> Sweet May stood putting her last venereal Touches while Patience Scalpel held forth in that divine and ethereal Voice for which she was noted, the Voice of one whose Ankles are nibbled by the Cherubs, *while amid the Rugs Dame Musset brought Doll Furious to a certainty*. 'What', said Patience Scalpal, [sic] 'can you women see in each other?' (30, emphasis added)

Patience's repulsion to lesbian sexuality resonates with the thematics of *The Book of Repulsive Women*. Although both works represent sexual pleasure, Barnes's portrayal herein relies on humor for her critique rather than transvaluation.

Likewise, in a humorous proselytizing fashion, Evangeline Musset addresses her female audience regarding the pleasures of sapphist love: "see how vain is Man's suffering, change it how you will, for though that Prick is nowhere in the Flesh of Sister for Sister, they cry as loud, yea, lament still more copiously, turning and twisting as if the very Lack were an extraordinary

Pain!" (57). "Lack" has been used within continental philosophy, psychoanalysis, and contemporary misogynistic discourse to argue that man is both whole and superior in contrast to his sexual counterpart, woman; however, within *Ladies Almanack*, "lack" brings about boundless pleasure.[54] Many of the playful claims that Barnes advances makes in *Ladies Almanack* anticipate arguments espoused by second-wave feminists.

The *Almanack*, featuring important dates and data, marks women's time. Almanacs take their structure from the calendar year and therefore are based upon cycles, but the cyclical nature of the text is indicative of feminine writing. Women appear as the symbols for each month and the text purportedly records their ebbs and flows. The book's extended subtitle reads: "showing their Signs and their tides; their Moons and their Changes; their Eclipses and Equinoxes; as well as a full Record of diurnal and nocturnal Distempers." The *Almanack* formalistically replicates the cycles of a woman's body, pleasures, and desires.

The world of *Ladies Almanack* is literally gynocentric. Character names (such as the Duchess Clitoressa), dialog, puns, and illustrations celebrate and sing the female body. Within the pages set aside for the month of August, Barnes has drawn the zodiac symbols in a concentric circle around a naked woman. Her shapely body is adorned only with an oversized bow about her neck and her hair has been styled and swept off her shoulders. Each body part has been affectionately labeled in handwritten lettering: "the hungry heart," "the breasts beguili[ng]," "the seeking arm," "the bella belly," "the back, backward leaning," "the dear buttock," "the twining thigh," "the kneeling knee," "the longing leg," and finally, with a line pointing to her genitalia, "the love of life" (52). Herein, the alliteration, which is a prominent feature of her poetic form,

[54] As Lanser puts it, "For Evangeline, the phallic Lack is as much the signifier of superiority as it is the site of feminine tragedy" (159). Frann Michel reads *Ladies Almanack* as a rejection of the psychoanalytic notion that women are castrated men. Lack is only implicitly evoked. She argues that the text questions the myth of castration and the notion that the female body is merely a mutilated version of a male body.

highlights the text's playful adoration of the female body. The woman's right arm is lifted up and one finger points to the sky; two fingers of her left hand point to the ground, perhaps an indication of a union between body and mind, the spiritual and the earthly.

The other textual illustrations also perpetuate the *Almanack*'s gynocentric politics. The opening image for each month features women to the exclusion of men. The month of May, as discussed above, contains a rather vivid depiction of lesbian sexuality, one among many in the text, though this and the book's final drawing are the most explicit visual representations of queer sexuality. The final image depicts two naked women whose bodies are closely entwined. The women's bodies form an inverted triangle—which has been read as a symbol for female sexuality and later homosexuality. At each peak, the women's bodies touch celestial images: moon, sun, and star.

Other provocative female-centered drawings abound. The frontispiece to the *Almanack* deploys clitoral imagery, although it is easy to overlook this image and see only as an ornate crest. Thus, as an operative of the "textual condition," to use Jeronme McGann's term, even the visual image is unstable. While someone outside of this salon may only see the crest, those in Barney's coterie are more likely to see the clitoris as a heraldic badge. Doughty explains, "The raised arm, holding a flower, not a sword, is a play both on a rampant heraldic animal and on the engorgement of the clitoris; the buxom mermaids framing the device also form the labia majora, while the foliage at the top can be seen as lifted and parted inner lips" (151). Musset's face then appears at the vaginal opening. Doughty notes that the intended audience would have been the lesbians connected with Barney's circle, but adds, "to be a lesbian is to live in a subculture which must maintain a selective visibility by being both visible to itself and invisible to the larger society" (152). Herein, Barnes appropriates the patriarchal crest and deploys it to speak as a

functional emblem for the text. Thus, she concurrently and persuasively undercuts the phallocentric logic of a crest by making it simultaneously about the clitoris—a clear example of the politicization and deterritorialization of the image. Like many of the images, puns, and allusions, being in the know only adds to the plurality of meaning and pleasure produced within *Ladies Almanack*.[55] One can certainly gain something from reading the *Almanack* without catching each double entendre, but recognizing the various levels of textual and sexual play makes one more aware of the subversive nature of this text.

In some ways, *Ladies Almanack* is deliberately evasive. In those meandering sentences with a seemingly infinite number of clauses, it is easy to lose track of the subject and to overlook salacious details. Although the text reveals Barnes's skillful command of the English language, *Ladies Almanack* rejects traditionally masculine displays of mastery, reason, and linearity. The purpose of this text is not to convey facts, or even plot, really. Instead, this book works to unravel many of these concepts. Even identity politics are largely refused; the text may be gynocentric, but lesbians are not simply lauded; they are also satirized. July, for example, parodies the rhetoric of lesbian lovers. The narrator promptly stops herself: "Nay—I cannot write it! It is worse than this!" (45). And when it comes to expounding on the topic of lesbians, Barnes's narrator does not pretend to be able to offer something radically new on the subject. In humorous fashion, the month of August begins with the following litany: "What they have in their Heads, Hearts, Stomachs, Pockets, Flaps, Tabs and Plackets, have one and all be some and severally commented on, by way of hint or harsh Harangue, praised, blamed, epicked, poemed and pastoraled, pamphleted, prodded and pushed, made a Spring-board for every sort of Conjecture whatsoever, good, bad and indifferent" (47-48). The metafictional joke, however, is

[55] See Doan's *Fashioning Sapphism* for more on the legibility of this discourse at the turn of the century.

that although all of these (now depleted) forms have been used to comment on sapphism thus leaving nothing left to say, Barnes's *Almanack* reveals that through the deterritorialization of both language and image, new iterations are possible.

In many ways, this book marks a shift from the center to the periphery in its representations of both women and history. Each "great moment of history" in *Ladies Almanack* refers to a pivotal moment in the life of Dame Musset, the book's heroine, or another important female figure (41). Thus, rather than history as we tend to encounter and conceptualize it, we have an articulation of her story, or as Hélène Cixous has put it, "herstory." Henceforth, we might conceive of Barnes's intervention in her own terms. In another metafictional gesture, Barnes refers to a fictional publication dedicated to the marginalized subjects of society: "for Life is represented in no City by a Journal dedicated to the Undercurrents, or for that matter to any real Fact whatsoever" (34). *Ladies Almanack* therefore steps in as the "Journal dedicated to the Undercurrents." Yet, rather than "data" presented as a dominant, master narrative, the *Almanack* posits a destabilized and decentered narrative with shifting perspectives. Susan Sniader Lanser describes the narrative voice as "evasive, devious, playfully indirect," explaining, "There are moments when the narrator does say or imply "I" and "we," but never in a context that commits her to a single, coherent textual identity" (158).[56]

The book is illusive and evasive; it draws the reader in only to continually destabilize her presumptions and her subjectivity in ways that extend Barnes's approach in *The Book of Repulsive Women*. As a female reader, one is simultaneously inside and outside the text. And through the slippage between "lady" and "lesbian," Barnes queers, at the very least, the stable

[56] Barnes is also careful not to establish sapphists as a homogenous identity category: "'Some women', said Dame Musset, 'are Sea-Cattle, and some are Land-Hogs, and yet others are Worms crawling about our Almanacks, but some,' she said, 'are Sisters of Heaven'" (38).

subject positions of her readers. Barnes's poetic prose replicates this instability. As Susan Sniader Lanser notes:

> The discourse of *Ladies Almanack*, similarly, is a dense and highly allusive prose through which almost nothing is made clear; the text speaks cryptically, figurally, and evasively. Sentences are winding, inverted, unfinished, or impossibly long. Antecedents get misplaced, verbs dangle, pronouns lose their source. Key words are sometimes elided from sentences whose meaning remain forever indeterminate. (157-158)

The narrator boldly states: "The very Condition of Woman is so subject to Hazard, so complex, and so grievous, that to place her at one Moment is to displace her at the next" (*Ladies Almanack* 55).[57] Although I will not venture so far as to credit Barnes with a post-structuralist analysis of the category of women, the text most assuredly enacts the limitations of categories—both of gender and genre. At the same time, Barnes uses this text as an opportunity to imagine new ways of being and new experiences for women outside of the current societal strictures.

Barnes's text performs one of the demands articulated in Stein's *Tender Buttons*: "Act so that there is no use in a centre" (498). This proto-deconstructionist remark should be applied to Barnes's work and contemporary interpretations of it. New readings of *Ladies Almanack*, or Barnes's work more broadly conceived, attempt to situate it as neobaroque (Kaup), as fully participating in the almanac genre (Taylor), as a response to sexological discourse (Berni), or as an embittered response to the other members of Barney's salon (Jay). Each of these readings attempts to supplant the last, applying a new lens with which to fully understand Barnes's enigmatic text. Ultimately, however, I argue this text resists such totalizing explications. It is difficult to place because of its intentionally slippery nature. The *Almanack* rejects grand

[57] Frann Michel parodies this oft-quoted line as the opening to her essay on *Ladies Almanack*: "The very condition of Djuna Barnes' corpus is so subject to dismissal, so complex and so grievous, that to read her at one moment may be to misread her at the next" (170).

narratives and appropriates master discourses only to mock and reject them. Even if we accept Julie Taylor's analysis of the almanac as a genre to which Barnes adhered, *Ladies Almanack* is still so much more than this. Certainly Taylor's explication helps to read the comparisons of woman to nature less problematically, but it doesn't close the door on Barnes's formal innovations. Most notably, what Taylor's work and other scholarship does not discuss—at least in quite these terms—is the way *Ladies Almanack* enacts hybridity through its concurrent existence as a *roman à clef*.[58] Although the key can be found in the afterword to recent publications of *Ladies Almanack* and in Andrea Weiss's *Paris was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank*, the text does play with "fact" and fiction" on multiple complex levels. *Ladies Almanack* depicts truth and history from a queer feminist perspective by challenging dominant rhetoric in an effort to dismantle it.

Nightwood and "the Space Between"[59]

Nearly every book and article written about Barnes conveys her obsolescence and difficult-to-categorize *oeuvre*. *Nightwood*, however, is the work by which all of her other texts are judged; this is the novel that was thought to have garnered the "right" kind of attention, a text representative of the modernist aesthetic. Yet, this aesthetic judgment seems to have much to do with the way the text was framed. Mariam Fuchs argues "Barnes's attachment to the eminent man of letters who became her editor at Faber and Faber was largely the result of Eliot's legitimizing what previous readers had criticized as obscure or incomprehensible" (289). Furthermore, as Jane Marcus notes, reviews of *Nightwood* at the time of its publication were

[58] Barnes's illustrations are also neglected in scholarship on *Ladies Almanack*.
[59] Nora uses this phrase to describe Robin, but "the space between" also captures the liminal qualities of *Nightwood*'s form and its many characters (167).

largely based upon "their opinion of Eliot and his introduction" (195). From several of the reviews published in 1936, it appears that many readers misread Barnes's novel as a "cautionary tale" or an "extremely moral work," and thus as a warning against lesbianism (reviews reprinted in Marcus 202, 198 respectively). Other reviewers read Eliot's introduction in light of his conservatism. In the *New Masses*, Philip Rahv writes, "And in his mannered preface to the novel, Mr. Eliot, ever on the alert for new proofs of original sin, only confuses the issue when he suggests that the book has 'a quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy.' Nothing, it seems to me, could be further from the truth" (qtd. in Marcus 200). In the *Saturday Review*, Theodore Purdy simply shifts Eliot's evaluations, noting Eliot's "failure to perceive that the atmosphere of decay in "Nightwood" [sic] stems from *fin-de-siècle* Frenchmen rather than from the Elizabethans" (qtd in Marcus 200).[60] Even here Barnes cannot escape hybridity, as the reviews from 1936 and 1937 read like accounts of a co-authored book. Some reviewers comment just as extensively on Eliot's introduction as they do on Barnes's work.

Beyond the inequitable dynamic of gender and power in Eliot's mentorship of Barnes are the generic concerns that he appears to settle in his introduction.[61] Although Eliot claims that Nightwood would "appeal primarily to readers of poetry" (xvii), he still considers the work a novel and makes clear that he would *not* go as far as to consider it "poetic prose" (xviii). In the American edition he explains: "To say that *Nightwood* will appeal primarily to readers of poetry does not mean that it is not a novel, but that it is so good a novel that only sensibilities trained on

[60] Purdy nevertheless disregards *Nightwood* as "coterie literature," interesting only as "literary sport, aptly conceived to convulse the Bloomsburys of the world" (qtd in Marcus 200).

[61] In her essay "Djuna Barnes and T. S. Eliot: Authority, Resistance, and Acquiescence," Fuchs reports an "unequal power relationship," and notes Eliot's strong hand in the editorial process, including his re-titling of the novel that would become *Nightwood* (289, 290). To be fair, Emily Coleman also had a heavy editorial hand in her proposed changes to *Nightwood*. Eliot's endorsement, however, seemed to aid in the reception of this novel, but the way in which it was framed inevitably effected the way it was read.

poetry can wholly appreciate it. Miss Barnes's prose has the prose rhythm that is prose style, and the musical pattern which is not that of verse" (xviii). His description is laden with contradictions, as the poetic qualities of the work are praised and then denied based upon generic distinctions. These contradictions, however, are part of Eliot's ongoing critique of the prose poem. Yet it seems the poet doth protest too much. According to Margueritte S. Murphy, Eliot attempted prose poems, as well (7).

In his 1917 review of Richard Aldington's work in *The New Statesman*, entitled "The Borderline of Prose," Eliot clearly situates the prose poem as an artifact of the Eighteen Nineties. Even during the 'Nineties, he reports:

> several critics took alarm at the confusion of the genres, cried out upon an age of decadence and charlatanism. Charlatanism, no doubt, still exists; but decadence is far decayed; and it is now a little late to assume this motherly perturbation. Time has left us many things, but among those it has taken away we may hope to count … the writings of miscellaneous prose poets. (158)

Eliot discusses the revival of the prose poem as if it were a disturbance. For him, the prose poem appears to threaten propriety, thus evoking the sense of repulsion equated with Barnes's perverse rhythms. He firmly states, "there are moments when we simply have to conform to the limitations of the medium we have chosen" (158). He critiques Aldington for failing to attend to the limitations of both genres: "I submit that, if this is read as prose, it is found jerky and fatiguing, because there is a verse rhythm in it; and that, if read as verse, it will be found worrying, because of the presence of prose rhythms" (158). His tone is undoubtedly distressed as he articulates the failure of these prose poems. He clearly establishes that prose may be deemed "poetic" and that verse may be called "prosaic" without any great disturbances and proceeds to provide examples (158-159).

Yet there is irony in Eliot's final remarks. He begins his final paragraph by stating, "This

is so obvious as not to seem worth the stating" (159). Clearly a three-and-a-half-column grievance that is purportedly a review of Aldington's work reveals Eliot's investment in this generic distinction, which after all, is evidently not so obvious. Eliot perceives that something is at stake in the blurring of genres.

The "prose poem" is still a contested form. It is considered a genre by some authors and critics but disparaged and ignored by others. Some contemporary writers reject the term for the very reasons that others cling to it. As Eliot noted in his review above, the prose poem has a history that begins with the Decadents. Contemporary scholarship, however, reveals a continued investment in defining the prose poem, which is ironic given the nature of its emergence as a hybrid genre and thus a subversive act. Margueritte S. Murphy argues:

> the prose poem is an inherently subversive genre as well as a historically subversive one. Because of its marginality, its situation on the 'borderline of prose' (T.S. Eliot's phrase), it must continually subvert prosaic conventions in order to establish itself as authentically 'other.' I see this necessity to subvert not just the conventions of verse, but also of prose as a basic distinguishing feature of the genre, which has few, if any, conventions of its own. Moreover, each prose poem must suggest a traditional prose genre to some extent in order to subvert it. The prose poem, then, may be seen as a battlefield where conventional prose of some sort appears and is defeated by the text's drive to innovate and differentiate itself, to construct a self-defining 'poeticity' … (3).

Many critics use brevity to delineate the boundaries of this hybrid form, but restricting the prose poem seems to be counter to its origins.

Does this "battlefield" represent more than a struggle over genre? Does it also reveal, for Eliot in particular, a dis-ease about the feminine nature of this form?[62] Murphy points to the relationship between gender and form when the prose poem first emerged: "The early linkage of the prose poem with androgyny is symptomatic of its function of putting in question the virility

[62] For more on the feminization of modernist writing, see Felski 91-114.

of the lyric ego and the 'muscle-power' of nineteenth-century prose" (201). However, the prose poem seems to be threatening for more than its androgyny, for it crosses boundaries and "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva 4). The prose poem's abject status, "[t]he in-between, the ambiguous" (Kristeva 4), calls to mind Barnes's depiction of the monstrous feminine in *The Book of Repulsive Women*. The feminine other and the hybrid genre both challenge "boundaries of the proper" (Shildrick 17); they complicate notions of selfhood and overturn seemingly stable constructs. The deterritorialization of language and standard forms is inherently a disruptive act. Barnes's forms of minor literature—including her poetic novel—deploy hybridity to concurrently subvert formal and sexual constraints. Not quite poetry, not quite prose, to paraphrase Eliot, this hybrid form disturbs categories and poses a threat to the authority of the traditionally masculine strain of modernism that was thriving at the time.

Yet, beyond Eliot's explicit resistance to "poetic prose," he still codes *Nightwood* in terms of generic hybridity; the language he uses to describe the novel is culled from various genres and disciplines. The lexicon of drama and musicology surfaces multiple times within his introduction.[63] Thus, in spite of his greatest efforts to present the text as sanitary and contained, his language betrays him. Ezra Pound and others demanded that modernists "make it new," but it appears that this manifesto remains limited to certain types of innovation contingent upon the auspices of authority and stability. Barnes's generic hybridity paradoxically poses a challenge to the Eliotic strand of modernism that perceives order through form.

Although Eliot's introduction foregrounds the question of generic hybridity, Barnes's poetic prose may only be one form of hybridity in this text. In fact, her poetic prose may be intimately tied to other forms of hybridity. I do not want to oversimplify Barnes's complex

[63] Eliot describes the final section as "essential, both dramatically and musically" (xviii) and discusses Dr. O'Connor in relation to a "performed play" (xix). He calls O'Connor's speeches "monologues" (xix).

oeuvre, but as I suggested in the beginning of this chapter, I contend that Barnes's work contains more of a sense of continuity than many critics—excluding Louis F. Kannenstine—believe;[64] the connection between her early and late works, I argue, has much to do with her treatment of the image. In *The Book of Repulsive Women* (1915) and *Ladies Almanack* (1928) discussed here and in *A Book* (1923), *Ryder* (1928), *Creatures in an Alphabet* (1982), and in much of her journalism, Barnes has used the image to create a parallel if not interwoven discourse within the text.[65] *Nightwood*, however is devoid of illustrations—at least in the traditional sense. But perhaps the image simply takes a different shape in this novel.

Joseph Frank's famous essay "Spatial Form in Modern Literature" argued for the centrality of the image in *Nightwood* less than a decade after its publication.[66] Citing the influence of the Imagist movement upon modern poetry and also prose, Frank uses the works of various modernist authors and poets to show the reliance of modern literature upon spatial form. Although Proust and Joyce are among the authors discussed, Barnes's work stands out to him, and *Nightwood* in particular.[67] Frank argues that this text is to be understood "spatially, in a moment of time, rather than as a sequence" (9). Temporality, characterization, and form are intimately related. He argues, "Writing of this order—charged with symbolic overtones—pierces

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[64] Although many critics make note of the various components which don't seem to fit, Louis F. Kannenstine and I are like-minded in our evaluation of *Nightwood* in relation to Barnes's earlier works: "The book's trans-generic mode enables Miss Barnes to focus the themes and stylistic techniques that had been forming for years into a cohesive whole. It is completely consistent with the earlier work in form and themes, only more concentrated and intricately worked within its selective range" (126). Kannenstine, however, doesn't use the image as the unifying element of Barnes's work. His remarks about *The Book of Repulsive Women* is also disparaging. He does find *Nightwood* to be a more successful version of *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack*.

[65] Doughty believes that the images in *Ladies Almanack* and *Ryder*, for example, are either visual representations of the text, or from popular art (137-143, 146-147).

[66] Frank's essay first appeared in *The Sewanee Review* in 1945. He has responded to various questions about this essay and critiques of it throughout the years. For this dissertation, I will be using the reprinted essay in his collection, *The Widening Gyre*.

[67] Frank argues, "Thanks to a good many critics, we have become able to approach *The Waste Land* as a work of art rather than as a battleground for opposing poetic theories or as a curious piece of literary esoterica. It is time that we began to approach *Nightwood* in the same way" (27).

through the cumbrous mass of naturalistic detail to express the essence of character in an image; it is the antithesis to the reigning convention in the novel" (Frank 30). As one might expect, Frank relates this back to Eliot's introduction wherein Eliot calls attention to the elements of *Nightwood* that make it unlike ordinary novels that came before it. Most obviously, it is unique in its form, in the shape the novel takes and its efforts to resist closure. Even Eliot's introduction hints at a spatial relationship within the text: "The book is not simply a collection of individual portraits; the characters are all knotted together … it is the whole pattern that they form, rather than any individual constituent, that is the focus of interest" (xx-xxi). This pattern, which resists linearity altogether, is crucial to an analysis of Barnes's text.

Picking up from Joseph Frank's reading of the novel, Louis F. Kannenstine also contemplates the centrality of the poetic image within *Nightwood*. Perhaps for Kannenstine, it is Barnes's use of the image that helps to blur the boundaries between poetry and prose. Kannenstine writes, "It brings the aims of the novel perhaps as close as possible to those of poetry, particularly with respect to the poetic image" (126). Barnes's use of the image is therefore tied to her generic hybridity.

As I have argued, Barnes's use of generic hybridity is intimately tied to the political impetus of her work, for generic hybridity highlights the duality or the othering qualities of the feminine. Thus, Barnes's poetic images and her drawings help enact her queer critique. Douglas Messerli, editor of the 1994 Sun and Moon Press edition of *The Book of Repulsive Women,* argues for the reliance on the visual within Barnes's work. He declares, "Barnes's writing is almost all inextricably connected with her art. … Even *Nightwood* is heavily reliant on the 18th and 19th century tableaux vivants [sic], which she describes as 'living pictures'" (Messerli 8). These "living statues" are first mentioned by Dr. O'Connor as he and the others anticipate the

arrival of Count Onatorio Altamonte in the novel's first chapter (*Nightwood* 16). Messerli's brief prefatory remarks to *The Book of Repulsive Women* do not go into the details of *Nightwood* or Barnes's use of *tableaux vivants*. The term refers to "A silent and motionless person or group of people posed and attired to represent a well-known character, event, or work of art," or in broader terms, "a person or group of people forming or striking a picturesque scene" (*OED*). A living painting, statue, or image is a hybrid creature. Oxymoronic in name, *tableaux vivant* draw upon the living and the inanimate to depict a person who is *in between* forms. The person enacts a melding of performance and painting (or photography) in a transient effort to capture the image. The *tableaux vivants*'s history of indecency—its frequent use of nude or seminude models and its association with sexual depravity and moral corruption—allows Barnes's use of it in *Nightwood* to resonate with the indecent drawings of *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack*.[68]

At the Count's party, however, characters only anticipate the "living statues;" the Count throws everyone out at the moment of his arrival. It is not until the next chapter, "La Somnabule" that we witness an ekphrastic textual moment. The deferral of this visual pleasure for Felix, and the reader, makes it all the more poignant. Felix first encounters Robin Vote when the doctor is summoned to her room. At this moment, she is compared to a work of art: "Like a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room … thrown in among the carnivorous flowers as their ration; the set, the property of an unseen *dompteur,* half lord, half promoter" (38). The setting is described as a theatrical set within a painting.[69] The

[68] For a brief overview of the moral charges launched against tableaux vivants, see Brenda Assael's "Art or Indecency? *Tableaux Vivants* on the London Stage and the Failure of Late Victorian Moral Reform."

[69] Daniela Caselli makes note of this ekphrastic scene, as well, but she also argues that this description "pushes to its extremes the function of woman as spectacle" (164). Her point obviously ties in with the arguments Felski and Conor make about the modern "appearing woman," to use Conor's term (3). However, Barnes's text seems to play

mention of "an unseen *dompteur*"—an animal trainer or tamer—foreshadows Nora's first encounter with Robin, and introduces yet another performative space, that of the circus. Multiple spaces condense into this one image and temporality expands and collapses here, as well. Time appears to be frozen like the scene of a painting and yet the excesses of this scene—the many settings suggested within the one—conjure up multiple temporalities.

Nothing about Robin seems of this world. In fact, we are told that she, the somnabule, "lives in two worlds" (38). Barnes describes Robin by using various images, but everything about her and this room is couched in terms of hybridity. Her body bears the aroma of "that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry" and "[h]er flesh was the texture of plant life" (38). The dualities at play here refuse to settle: Robin is an inhabitant of two worlds; the surface of her body is fleshly, yet plant-like; her scent conveys both dampness and dryness; and even the *dompteur* is "half lord, half promoter" (38). It is not one thing nor the other, but both.

The novel reaffirms Robin's association with the visual and the liminal. A few pages later, Barnes writes, "The woman who presents herself to the spectator as a '*picture*' forever arranged is, for the contemplative mind, the chiefest danger. Sometimes one meets a woman who is beast turning human. Such a person's every movement will reduce to an *image* of a forgotten experience" (41, emphasis added). This woman is Robin. She possesses "the quality" that "animals do" (44), but in addition to her bestial characteristics, the narrator frequently returns to a static image of her: Robin was "like an old statue in a garden" (45). Although she was not at the first party where the "living statues" were scheduled to appear, the statue and the sculpture

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more heavily on the performative aspects of identity in anticipation of Judith Butler and Homi Bhabha.

recur throughout the novel, always in relation to Robin.[70]

Her continual association with two realms and two temporalities mark her (and the novel) further in terms of hybridity. In "Watchman, What of the Night?" Nora comes to Dr. O'Connor's room to seek counsel for her emotional and psychological impasse and to ask about the night. She correctly suspects that it "does something to a person's identity, even when asleep" (87). What the unlicensed doctor imparts to her is long-winded, enigmatic, and meandering, but he attempts to reveal the illicit qualities of the night. He claims, "He lies down with his Nelly and drops into the arms of his Gretchen. Thousands unbidden come to his bed. … The sleeper is the proprietor of an unknown land. He goes about another business in the dark" (93). With a psychoanalytic resonance, O'Connor describes the dreamlike state of the sleeper in terms of wish fulfillment. Perverse desires may be acted upon without consequence: "Sleep demands of us a guilty immunity" (94). Nevertheless, Robin's indiscretions are not limited to her dreams; her many trysts also take place throughout the night.

O'Connor believes the night is inherently transgressive: "'Have you,' said the doctor, 'ever thought of the peculiar polarity of times and times; and of sleep? … The very constitution of twilight is a fabulous reconstruction of fear, fear bottom-out and wrong side up. Every day is thought upon and calculated, but the night is not premeditated" (87). There is an almost lawless disorder to the night and particularly at the margins of day and night.[71]

This type of inversion, however, is prominent in Barnes's other works, including *The Book of Repulsive Women*. Describing one of Barnes's unpublished drawings labeled "Woman Upsidedown," Frances M. Doughty argues, "The theme, if not the image, comes again from the

[70] She is associated later with sculpture (65, 75), statue (69, 70) and the fountain woman (61).
[71] This modernist fixation with the unruly nature of the night also manifests itself in the 1920 silent film, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari,* and the 1935 *roman à clef* by H.D., *Nights*.

world-turned-topsy-turvy drawings in *L' imagerie populaire*. … The natural versus the unnatural and the disturbance of the natural order are major themes in both *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack"* (143). Although many of the images Doughty describes are land and sky, prey and predator, and animal and human with reversed roles, this inversion of the order seems prevalent in *Nightwood*, as well, especially as far as the night is concerned. Night is another manifestation of the world turned topsy-turvy. *Nightwood*, like *The Book of Repulsive Women*, highlights the time in between day and night: twilight and dawn, moments that cause boundaries to bleed into one another.

Yet, this type of disturbance can be productive. Again, it is useful to think of productivity in non-reproductive (and non-heteronormative) terms as Barnes does in *The Book of Repulsive Women*, wherein productivity operates subversively. In the novel, night destabilizes objectivity and perspective. In Matthew O'Connor's late night advice to Nora, he says to her, "'Listen! Do things look in the ten and twelve of noon as they look in the dark? Is the hand, the face, the foot, the same face and hand and foot seen by the sun?'" (92). Although this counsel is not necessarily comforting to Nora, it is interesting in terms of the postmodern skepticism that it conveys. *Nightwood* reveals the subject to be fundamentally unstable. All efforts to maintain barriers, borders, and distinct margins prove to be futile, and nothing is as clearly delineated as we would like to believe, least of which is the subject.

Robin, who dresses like a boy, resides in two worlds, and is both "child and desperado" (38), Nora's "lover and [her] child" (166), is the most obvious hybrid subject within the novel; but all of the other main characters upset boundaries and destabilize categories as well. Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor, who today would fall under the transgender umbrella, describes himself as "the last woman left in this world, though I am the bearded lady"

(107) and claims "I never asked better than to boil some good man's potatoes and toss up a child for him every nine months by the calendar" (98). He and other characters reveal the purported links between sex and gender and sex and sexuality to be fallacious. Frau Mann, attired in tight circus garb, is said to be "as unsexed as a doll" (16). With her title and the homophone suggested by her surname, even her moniker is oxymoronic.

Each of Barnes's characters resides in a borderline of sorts. Jenny and Felix are often out of place and time. Jenny is a collector; she attempts to piece together a life from the discarded scraps of others' lives. Collecting inherently involves two temporalities, since "her present is always someone else's past" (105). Yet, she is trapped between "two tortures—the past that she can't share, and the present that she can't copy" (133). Felix, a symbol of the wandering Jew, is defined by his liminalilty. The narrator states, "there was no function in the world for which he could be said to be properly garbed; wishing to be correct at any moment, he was tailored in part for the evening and in part for the day" (11), and as Dr. O'Connor puts it, "'There's something missing and whole about the Baron Felix'" (29). His obsequiousness and irrational deference toward the past make Felix comically incongruous with his social status and historical moment. In an effort to honor a past he could never be a part of, "he bowed slightly to anyone who looked as if he might be 'someone'" (12). His efforts to determine the veracity of the Count's title are ironic. In response to Felix's question, "Is he really a Count?" the Duchess, thrown back by his audacity, retorts, "Herr Gott! … Am I what I say? Are you? Is the doctor?" (28). Baron Felix, Count Onatorio Altamonte, and Dr. O'Connor all bear titles they have not earned. Although many of his own accoutrements are not what they purport to be, Felix continues to believe in an authentic past of an "Old Europe" (11). Intuitively he makes a connection between kings and circus folk: "Early in life Felix had insinuated himself into the pageantry of the circus and the

theatre. In some way they linked his emotions to the high and unattainable pageantry of kings and queens" (13). However, he fails to realize that all of these roles are performative. His attempts to reach some sort of truth below the surface make him, like Nora, grounded in a modernist worldview.

Dr. O'Connor, on the other hand, a self-declared liar, is frequently of a postmodern mindset. He does not bow down to history in the way that Felix does. In fact, in many of his monologues, O'Connor actively deconstructs master narratives and dominant views of history. Even in a party atmosphere, Dr. O'Connor's dialog steers away from mundane pleasantries. He says to Felix and the other partygoers, "'but think of the stories that do not amount to much! That is, that are forgotten in spite of all man remembers (unless he remembers himself) merely because they befell him without distinction of office or title … the other'—he waved an arm—'we call history, the best the high and mighty can do with theirs" (18). To Nora he later says, "I have a narrative, but you will be put to it to find it" (104). Many of his monologues are overtly political—a quality Deleuze and Guattari emphasize as an essential part of minor literature—for they set out to challenge the dominant narratives and frameworks that exclude the queer characters of the novel. O'Connor makes clear that lives cannot be read simply in terms of linear arcs, nor should we expect them to follow the form of gender normative fairy tale romances.[72]

[72] O'Connor says, "Very well—what is this love we have for the invert, boy or girl? It was they who were spoken of in every romance that we ever read. The girl lost, what is she but the Prince found? The Prince on the white horse that we have always been seeking. And the pretty lad who is a girl, what but the prince-princess in point lace—neither one and half the other, the painting on the fan! We love them for that reason. We were impaled in our childhood upon them as they rode through our primers, the sweetest lie of all, now come to be in boy or girl, for in the girl it is the prince, and in the boy in is the girl that makes a prince a prince—and not a man. They go far back in our lost distance where what we never had stands waiting" (145). Judith Lee's "*Nightwood*: 'The Sweetest Lie'" argues that Nightwood is a series of "four 'anti-fairy tales'" (208). Hedvig and Guido Volkbein parody the fairy tale in their lack of adherence to traditional gender roles and in the way that their story fails to fit the "happily ever after" plot (208). Lee identifies Robin as a "caricature of the 'sleeping beauty' who awakens in the presence of the prince and whose destiny is determined by his" (210). Also worth noting is the way in which "Little Red Riding Hood" also makes its way into the novel in the episode with Matthew O'Connor in bed.

His pithy remarks anticipate Lyotard's critique of grand narratives and the arguments made by minority groups—representing both race and gender—in the 1970s and 1980s. O'Connor, who in Tiresian-fashion, prophesies the final reunion between Nora and Robin, is more substantial than a mere character.[73] At times, Dr. O'Connor seems to voice Barnes's metafictional apprehensions about the way her readers may interpret the book: "And must I, perchance, like careful writers, guard myself against the conclusions of my readers?" (101). Certainly, Dr. O'Connor, and the text as a whole, resists all-encompassing authoritative readings. He and all of the characters have stories, but they cannot be read or understood by following traditional scripts.

Nightwood might be said to shed light on a queer history, but Barnes would have likely rejected such a designation. Any label might threaten the potential of a person or a text. *Nightwood* actively resists such labels by destroying any glimmer of purity in both form and content. Genre, gender, history, sexuality, and the subject are destabilized throughout the text. In place of any one distinct form, there are multiple representations of hybridity and liminality. All of the barriers, margins, and borders that Western society diligently works to maintain have very little cultural value within the novel; they are part of an elaborate fantasy that quickly dissipates. There is no one in the novel that is not performing something. Each character is an outsider as far as dominant culture is concerned, but their struggles are nevertheless universal. *Nightwood*'s generic hybridity makes this text, and much of Barnes's work, deliberately impossible to categorize.

Conclusion

Through her use of feminine forms and generic hybridity, Djuna Barnes offers a

[73] Eliot first thought that "it was the doctor alone who gave the book its vitality" (xviii).

compelling critique of dominant forms of gender, sexuality, and genre. Her sexual and textual politics align in these works, which explicitly challenge patriarchal and psychoanalytic discourses. While texts like *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack* speak from a minority position, none of her texts claim to speak on behalf of one identity category; no group is presented as homogenous. Even in her use of language, meaning proliferates. Barnes transforms the possibilities of the text through her resistance to phallogocentrism and her instance upon generic hybridity. Generic conventions and traditional plot lines prove insufficient for expressing her counterhegemonic feminist ideals. Writing of queer poetics, Mary E. Galvin asserts, "In a culture structured significantly by heterosexism, the mind that can imagine other sexualities and gender identities must also imagine other ways of speaking, new forms to articulate our visions of difference" (xii). Generic hybridity seems to be one means of expressing marginalized identities and experiences.

Barnes's use of hybridity demonstrates the inadequacy of the aesthetic conventions available to her. In *The Queer Art of Failure*, Judith Halberstam argues, "knowledge practices that refuse both the form and content of traditional canons may lead to unbounded forms of speculation" (10). As an example of the queer art of failure, Barnes's work does precisely this. Her hybrid forms and hybrid subjects challenge the boundaries imposed upon genre, gender, and subjectivity. By reading Barnes in this way, I expand the concept of a minor literature to include the hybrid text. As Deleuze and Guattari attest, the creation of a new aesthetic is a political act. Thus, through my reading of Barnes's marginal works, *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack*, alongside her respected novel, I reveal hybridity to be not only a central component of Barnes's aesthetic practice, but moreover, a key function of her politics.

Chapter 2

"History Is Too Much About Wars; Biography Too Much About Great Men": Temporality, Counternarrative, and Genre in Late Woolf

Like her essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid," which proposes that we "think peace into existence" (*Collected Essays 4* 173), Virginia Woolf's fiction reveals the activist potential of the novel. The paradoxical (and perhaps naïve) imperative to think about peace when German bombers are most audible highlights the philosophical and political underpinnings of her work. Woolf describes the "interrup[tion]" caused by the German planes as a "*queer* experience" (173 my emphasis). Herein, Woolf points to the queering of time and space brought about by this disruption. Although any interruption arguably involves the disruption of time or space, the interruption Woolf describes above and those I will discuss in her novels disrupt dominant narratives and challenge hegemonic modes of thinking. Woolf describes a similar phenomenon in "A Sketch of the Past" when she refers to the "sudden shocks" that she finds "particularly valuable," especially for the way in which they serve her as a writer (*MOB* 72). She writes, "I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order" (*MOB* 72). Though such "shocks" or interruptions may be unpleasant, Woolf shows the political potential that may be recuperated from such moments. I call attention to both of these texts for the way in which they portray the sense of awareness that follows an interruption. In Woolf's novels, I argue, the interruption functions in a similar fashion. As I will soon demonstrate, formal and temporal interruptions in Woolf's novels open up space for the inclusion of marginalized

subjects and marginal narratives within Great Britain's history.

Woolf's novels are thus not simply aesthetic projects but political ones, and alterations to form exemplify more than stylistic preferences or high Modernist objectives. Rachel Blau DuPlessis notes, "Any literary convention—plots, narrative sequences, characters in bit parts—as an instrument that claims to depict experience, also interprets it. No convention is neutral, purely mimetic, or purely aesthetic" (2). Woolf's discussion of the fictional Mary Carmichael of *A Room of One's Own*, a character many scholars read as a figure for the author herself, demonstrates the inextricable connection between Woolf's formal considerations and her feminist objectives.[74] Woolf writes, "First she broke the sentence; now she has broken the sequence. Very well, she has every right to do both these things if she does them not for the sake of breaking but for the sake of creating. … 'Chloe liked Olivia,' I read. And then it struck me how immense a change was there. Chloe liked Olivia for perhaps the first time in literature" (*AROO* 81). This rupture, which is visible on the page from the level of the plot to the level of the sentence, represents a type of temporal break, as well. The politicized act of writing Carmichael's (imagined) work, in the same vein of Woolf's own novels, breaks from the Victorian strictures that kept women reticent, corseted, and in the home. This break from the past and its accompanying narrative constraints allows for the possibility of imagining a different present moment, one in which marginalized subjects—here women and women writers—gain in visibility and recognition. Though this action cannot revise the content of the literary canon and its underrepresentation of women, it does alter the way we read it and highlights its tangible gaps. Yet, the abandonment of the heterosexual romance plot and the focus on female subjectivity exemplified by the passage is only one way that Woolf seeks to challenge older

[74] Woolf reinforces this connection between her feminist aims and her break from traditional forms through her metafictional reading of Mary Carmichael.

forms and narratives. Never complacent and rarely satisfied with her work, Woolf's continued efforts to challenge generic conventions are evident in her diaries, novels, and published essays.

Her resistance to traditional forms is most evident in her hybrid fiction. Woolf came to resent the novel and strove to establish new forms that were better suited for representing some of the nation's disenfranchised subjects.[75] These works actively disrupt our expectations of genre by merging together two or more genres. In the works I examine—*The Waves*, *Between the Acts*, and *Orlando*—interruptions or disruptions occur primarily in relation to genre and temporality, which in turn give rise to new conceptions or representations of subjectivity and gender.

Certainly Woolf's formal experimentation with time is extensive even in her early novels. Big Ben, a symbol in *Mrs. Dalloway* for nation time and standard time, interrupts the musings of Clarissa Dalloway and marks the increments of her day. Her narrative counterpart, the shell-shocked Septimus Warren Smith, experiences the confluence of two overlapping temporal modes, for Evans and the war are constantly at his side. Clarissa, too, drifts between past and present, as her thoughts take her back to her youth, though in a far less traumatic fashion than we see with Septimus. In *To The Lighthouse*, the "Time Passes" section of the novel depicts the passage of time through absence, loss, and disrepair during the decade of the First World War; nature and time wreak havoc upon the Ramsays' vacation home. Erich Auerbach documents Woolf's use of subjective, interior time in his landmark essay "The Brown Stocking." Though his discussion focuses on a brief episode within *To The Lighthouse*, his reading of internal and external time applies to many of Woolf's novels.

Yet, Woolf's later, more experimental fiction probes beyond representations of subjective

[75] Woolf's diary reveals her frustration with the novel (*WD* 126) and *A Room of One's Own* conveys her disappointment with other traditional forms, many of which, she argues, have come to represent masculine values. Woolf's depiction of disenfranchised subjects typically includes women, gay men, and lesbians. Racial difference is typically elided and class is often only a secondary or tertiary concern in her fiction.

interior time to consider how alternative forms of temporality might work to create counterhegemonic textual spaces.[76] Though novels like *Mrs. Dalloway* and *To the Lighthouse* reveal the danger of adhering to "Proportion" and critique authority figures like Dr. Bradshaw and Charles Tansley, who oppressively impose their patriarchal views upon others, these novels have not gone so far as to imagine fictional spaces freed from the constraints of hegemonic masculinity. Figures like Septimus Smith and Lily Briscoe may refuse phallogocentrism, but not without costs.[77] That is not to say that Woolf's more experimental fiction is devoid of structural violence, for it is not. Yet, these later texts establish more radical temporal breaks that suggest that our past, present, and future may be reimagined or reconfigured. To use the language of Paul Ricoeur, "epics, dramas, and novels project, in the mode of fiction, ways of inhabiting the world that lie waiting to be taken up by reading, which in turn is capable of providing space for a confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader" (5). This confrontation or exchange carries with it ethical implications. The novel is not an object frozen in time, but a living, breathing entity. In the act of reading, worlds productively collide. Ricoeur explains, "the notion of the world of the text requires us to 'open up' … the literary work to an 'outside' that it projects before itself and offers to critical appropriation by a reader" (100). In this way, a text "escap[es] its own closure" (100). The formal structure of the text does not impede this opening up. In fact, it is my contention that the formal elements of a text may afford it more political possibilities through its effect on the reader and its revisionary efforts to reimagine the past or

[76] I don't mean to suggest that the treatment of time in Woolf's early works is simplistic, for it is not. (See, for example, Paul Ricoeur's extensive reading of time in *Mrs. Dalloway* in *Time and Narrative* vol. 2, 101-112.)
[77] Septimus pays for this refusal with his life. Lily Briscoe, on the other hand, must accept that she paints only for herself, as her paintings will be kept in the attic. Perhaps this makes her stronger and underscores her rejection of patriarchal standards, but it also points to a world in which women are still barred from certain professions—a topic Woolf takes up two years later in *A Room of One's Own*. Yet, Lily is, in some ways, still a conservative figure; at the heart of her painting is an adoration for the maternal image.

present moment.[78] In this respect, the form of a text has the potential to influence a reader's ideological perspective, to alter the way a reader makes sense of the world. In Woolf's work, formal and temporal ruptures are linked and both have implications for the world of the text and the world of the reader.

In the works I discuss below, Woolf's experimentation with time shapes her transformation of the novel and her representation of marginalized subjects. This chapter examines how Woolf's later fiction—*The Waves* (1931), *Between the Acts* (1941), and *Orlando* (1928)—uses alternative temporalities and temporal disruptions to form a counternarrative to dominant accounts of history. More specifically, I argue that Woolf uses time as a means of disrupting or reimagining patriarchal spaces to make room for women and queer subjects within Great Britain's national history. Rather than establishing a separate feminist or queer temporality that exists apart from nation time, that is to say, the external registers of temporality and history dictated by the state, Woolf effectively reveals the existence of multiple coexisting temporalities. Though feminist or queer time[79] does not fully supplant national or patriarchal temporal realms, it challenges the hegemony of dominant narratives and makes room for disenfranchised subjects and "minor" stories within representations of England's past and present. These hybrid texts proffer a history of their own; they engage with "the tradition" while also altering its

[78] In *Writing Beyond the Ending*, Rachel Blau DuPlessis demonstrates how twentieth-century women writers, including Woolf, have transformed the narrative strategies of the century before through a rejection of the heterosexual romance plot. Through formal strategies, they have prioritized female subjectivity. This dissertation chapter, however, aims to consider how Woolf's temporal, spatial, or formal interruptions open up space for the inclusion of marginal narratives and subjectivies.

[79] My use of queer time and space is shaped by Sara Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology* and *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*; Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Space*; and Elizabeth Freeman's *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories*. Halberstam, for example, writes, "Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification" (1). I situate queer time and feminist time largely in opposition to nation time as Victoria Hesford and Lisa Diedrich do in their edited collection *Feminist Time Against Nation Time*.

composition.

In the interludes and chapters of *The Waves*, Woolf's poetic prose interrupts traditional narratives and breaks free from the generic conventions of the novel. Through this new form, Woolf invests the abstract, fictionalized London of *The Waves* with maternal qualities, crafting a space unbounded by the masculine constraints of the city's historical past. Her use of cyclical time, her feminization of place, and her feminist creation myth revise a masculine literary and historical narrative. The nurturing locale of the London of *The Waves* fosters a transformation of the male artist figure, who eventually abandons tired dominant narratives in favor of more feminine or feminist uses of language.

In *Between the Acts*, Woolf makes use of her titular metaphor to deconstruct the spatial and ideological divisions between various temporal frameworks, subject positions, and places or spaces. Set just before World War II, this hybrid work of fiction melds drama with the novel in an effort to challenge dominant perspectives on war, history, and the construction of national subjects. Woolf suggests that personal and political "acts" must not simply be taken for granted. Moreover, her emphasis upon on the "in-between" offers a means of subverting simple binary oppositions between nation and Continent, public and private, nature and civilization, and actors and audience. Manifestations of the "in-between" therefore constitute small ruptures or interruptions in Woolf's text. These disruptions proffer queer potentiality by enabling the formation of temporary affinities and encouraging new ways of imagining progress and civilization.

As a *roman à clef* that melds fact and fiction, history and biography, *Orlando* is a hybrid text that overtly mocks generic conventions and stable understandings of gender, identity, and time. The text is a mock biography of a fictitious eponymous protagonist modeled on Woolf's

former lover Vita Sackville-West. Multiple temporalities and multiple histories converge in this gender-bending and genre-bending work. Although partially a response to her father's work on the *Dictionary of National Biography*,[80] *Orlando*'s critique extends to patriarchal forms and narratives in general. Woolf's narrator-biographer self-consciously reflects upon the conventions of biography while the text's photographs—purportedly of Orlando and Orlando's lovers—paradoxically undermine and disrupt the text's claims to truth and authenticity. Finally, Orlando's extensive lifespan and multiple selves challenge a simple understanding of time and unified subjectivity.

Like Einstein's theory of relativity[81] and Henri Bergson's theories of time, both published around the turn of the century, Woolf's works challenge a view of uniform time and reveal the necessity of understanding the interrelatedness of time and space.[82] Her hybrid fiction demonstrates how genre itself situates and makes tangible certain modes of experiencing time. Woolf's alterations to the form of the novel and her play with temporality have potentially liberating effects; they actively revise "the tradition" but they also shape the world of the reader by highlighting the unfinished political projects made visible in Woolf's work. Woolf's writing encourages her readers to think about the production of British subjects and national histories and the exclusions deemed necessary for that production.

Feminine Time and Space in *The Waves*

The experimental structure of *The Waves* was part of Woolf's vision for the novel from

[80] In *Orlando*, the narrator states, "The true length of a person's life, whatever the *Dictionary of National Biography* may say, is always a matter of dispute" (305-6).
[81] Einstein published his "Special Theory of Relativity" in 1905 and his "General Theory of Relativity" in 1916.
[82] Woolf notes at least once in her diary that Einstein was the subject of conversation between her and her friends (*D3* 68). Gillian Beer and Holly Henry have also written extensively of Woolf's relationship to science. Many scholars, excluding Ann Banfield, argue that Woolf's novels represent time in turms of the Bergsonian durée.

the beginning: "Away from facts: free, yet concentrated; prose yet poetry; a novel & a play," she writes (*Diary 3* 128). Though the "novel & a play" would not make its appearance until Woolf's final work of fiction, *The Waves* would nevertheless become a lyrical, hybrid text. The novel makes use of poetic prose and adopts the structure of the dramatic monologue, thereby incorporating facets of her initial plan into the final design of the work.

Years earlier in "Modern Fiction," Virginia Woolf criticized her literary predecessors for investing their talent and energy in vivid material images instead of emphasizing the psychology of their characters. Of Arnold Bennett's literary craftsmanship she writes, "There is not so much as a draught between the frames of the windows, or a crack in the boards. And yet—if life should refuse to live there? … His characters live abundantly, even unexpectedly, but it remains to ask how do they live, and what do they live for?" ("Modern Fiction" 287).

In *The Waves,* Woolf avoids materialist distractions through highly abstracted poetic prose. Her characters' interior processes constitute the essence of this text, which discernibly responds to the questions that Bennett's novels ignore. London punctuates *The Waves* with its lights and sounds, but in a text comprised primarily of monologues, the setting—structurally devoid of windows and floorboards—is far from concrete. For her six speaking characters, however, the nonrepresentational city enables shared experience and proffers its "inherited traditions" (*The Waves* 41). Englishness—a thematic concern present in much of her fiction—is questioned, but the novel makes deeper inquiries into the nature of subjectivity and the limitations of form. The novel's abstract setting, depicted frequently as a "maternal" London (80), helps to shape each character's understanding of identity as it concurrently functions to unite the group.[83] Woolf's emphasis upon collectivity challenges traditional understandings of

[83] Unity and dispersion are key themes in *Between the Acts* as well: "*Dispersed are we; who have come together.*

both subjectivity and characterization, while her nonrepresentational city opposes our generic expectations of setting and suggests that the novel follows a different temporal logic, one that resists normative structures. Woolf replaces the image of the warring Britannia, who proudly displays her shield and trident, with the peaceful, nurturing figuration of a maternal city. The feminized London of *The Waves* disrupts dominant patriarchal renderings of the nation's capital and fosters the coexistence of multiple competing representations of temporality in the novel. Woolf juxtaposes cyclical time with linear time in an effort to open up a world of possibility and revise the literary and historical space therein. This hybrid novel responds to the limitations of traditional narratives and narrative forms by rethinking the tradition to include minor stories and to mitigate the hegemony of nationalist histories. Though the maternal London cannot save all of its marginalized figures, it does serve to transform the masculine figure of the writer into a sympathetic character who eventually resists dominant narratives.

Woolf's 1931 novel thrives upon the tension between multiple contiguous temporalities. Woolf juxtaposes cyclical time with the narrative flow of her protagonists' lives through the arrangement of chapters and interludes.[84] The italicized interludes, which catalog the ebb and flow of the waves and the activities of the natural world, symbolize the passage of time through the movement of the sun over the course of a single day. With this structure (representative of cyclical time), the interludes introduce an additional narrative thread, break up the supremacy of the human-driven trajectory, and gesture toward a cosmic grandeur that transcends individual experience.

But, the gramophone asserted, *let us retain whatever made that harmony*" (133, italics in the original); "The gramophone gurgled *Unity—Dispersity*" (136). We are told Mrs. Swithin "belonged to the unifiers; [Bart Oliver] to the separatists" (81). The novel raised the question of unity through the arrival of Dodge, through the village pageant, and through various conversations.

[84] This false dichotomy is undermined by the presence of cyclical time within a lifespan, textually rendered through the births and deaths within the chapters. The figure of Susan, who is associated with the maternal, the natural, and the pastoral, also reveals how natural time and human time coexist.

The first interlude begins with a feminist rendition of Genesis:[85]

> *Gradually the dark bar on the horizon became clear as if the sediment in an old wine-bottle had sunk and left the glass green. Behind it, too, the sky cleared as if the white sediment there had sunk, or as if the arm of a woman couched beneath the horizon had raised a lamp and flat bars of white, green and yellow, spread across the sky like the blades of a fan.* (3)

As Molly Hite notes, the image of the sun, traditionally a masculine symbol, has taken on a feminine figuration in Woolf's opening scene (222). In this secular and modernized mythic tale of the world's origin, woman is credited with the grandest act of creation, one that is reenacted each day on a smaller scale with the rising of the sun. Herein, we have not the "angel in the house"[86] who appears as the idealized Victorian mother figure of *To the Lighthouse,*[87] but the substitution of a feminine creator for a masculine God, a schema we see carried through in Woolf's representation of a maternal London in the other sections of *The Waves*.

Unlike Genesis, this creation myth is couched in profoundly human terms. The speaker lyrically compares the skyline at dawn to a discarded wine bottle. This is an ironic leveling of the sacred and the profane, an intrinsically secular image that divests one of the most pervasive narratives within "the tradition" of its power. Within the first page of her novel, Woolf has already begun to speak to the dominant cultural narratives by offering a feminist alternative. These lines also operate as a temporal counternarrative in its reworking of origins. Yet even this origin myth operates in a decentered fashion by refusing to locate this moment in history. Instead, the text suggests that this grand moment recurs each day with the rising of the sun. *The*

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[85] In the annotated Harcourt edition of *The Waves*, Molly Hite notes the similarities between the first few lines of the interlude—"*The sun had not yet risen. The sea was indistinguishable from the sky…*"—and the first two lines of Genesis in the King James Bible (221).

[86] The "angel in the house" is Woolf's trope for the traditional selfless, dedicated, subservient Victorian wife and mother from her essay "Professions for Women." Woolf appropriates the expression "angel in the house" from Coventry Patmore's earnest poem by the same name.

[87] Mrs. Ramsay's death, like the deaths of Woolf's own parents, was greatly mourned and yet necessary for the writing of a modern narrative.

Waves therefore offers a more cyclical model of time and history that disrupts grand narratives and resists teleological views of history. Woolf's origin myth invests each day with the possibility of creating the world anew.

The lyrical interludes initially appear as a counternarrative paralleling the lives of Woolf's characters, but this perceived dichotomy between the natural world of the interludes and the human world of the characters dissolves in Woolf's novel. Though Woolf scholars have counted nine interludes in the novel,[88] I argue Woolf has actually included ten, a significant distinction based on the unifying formal properties of the final interlude. The first nine interludes have been formulated the same way: they are all italicized and begin on a new page. What I argue is the tenth interlude breaks with this format through the consolidation of the two inter-related components of the novel. The final interlude appears on the last page of the novel. The words are italicized but do not appear on their own page. After Bernard's rage against Death, and one blank space, we find our final interlude merged with the larger body of the text: "*The waves broke on the shore*" (220). The union of these previously separate sections suggests that the disparate forms and conceptions of temporality suggested by the cyclical interludes and the linear narrative are more related than the novel's structure initially implies. Furthermore, the integration of these narrative parts demonstrates the co-existence of these two modes rather than a dualistic model of competing temporalities.

As I write above, Woolf shows that the natural world is not separate from the human-dominated narrative of the novel. The merger of these two portions of text demonstrates a more significant connection between these realms than the simple parallels between the rising and setting of the sun and the life and death of Woolf's characters. The terms "interlude" and

[88] See, for example, Molly Hite's "Introduction" to the Harcourt annotated edition of *The Waves*, xliii.

"interchapter," which scholars use to define the italicized portions of the novel, suggest that these parts play a minor or secondary role in *The Waves*; the prefix "inter" marks these portions of the text as being between or among the other chapters, and the word "interlude" itself can be defined as "the pause between the acts, or the means (dramatic or musical) employed to fill this up" (*OED*). While this word aptly captures the dramatic elements of the work, it establishes a hierarchy of the novel's components. The interludes are often ignored or discussions of them are bracketed in many scholarly discussions of the text. Yet like her final novel, which I will discuss in detail below, this work also dismantles the ostensible boundaries "between the acts."

Within the first pages of her novel, or "play-poem" (*Diary 3* 139), Woolf establishes a tension between the concrete and the abstract, the permanent and the transient, and the individual and the group. In an early plan for the novel, Woolf envisions "the idea of some continuous stream, *not solely human thought*, but of the ship, the night &c, *all flowing together*" (*Diary 3* 139), which later develops into "a series of dramatic soliloquies … running homogenously in & out, in the rhythm of waves" (*Diary 3* 312, my emphasis). Beyond the interludes, the presence of a unified perspective vanishes and reality is depicted from multiple and overlapping points of view. The juxtaposition of characters' interior thoughts replaces traditional elements of fiction, such as plot and narration. With respect to the development of this experimental novel, Gillian Beer asserts, "It would bring into question what gets left out when life is described. It would test the established demarcations between individual and communal experience. It would extend the reach of language and suffer its debilities. It would follow a rhythm, not a plot" (76). These achievements challenge traditional understandings of subjectivity and setting, but they also indicate that the novel follows a different temporal logic, one that resists normative structures. *The Waves* abandons the dominant structure of the novel for a feminine form with a feminist

consideration of language, space, and time. Even the artist figure of the novel, Bernard, whom I will discuss in detail below, comes to understand the profound limitations of stagnant genres and conventional narratives. Eventually he abandons the techniques and motifs passed down through the tradition and arrives at the conclusion that he "distrust[s] *neat designs of life* that are drawn upon half sheets of note-paper" (177, emphasis added). Bernard's final words, like the structure of *The Waves*, resist such traditional narratives and clichéd expressions of life.

In the novel, the voices of Bernard, Louis, Neville, Susan, Jinny, and Rhoda communicate observations based on individual points of view, yet they combine to form a polyphonous expression of experience—albeit one limited to the middle class.[89] From youth to old age, these characters grow and develop, forging complex ties with one another and the external world. A shared childhood and early education in the rural school appear to have solidified a bond and created a sense of communal understanding among these figures. The depth of this relationship, however, goes beyond empathy. Bernard claims, "But when we sit together close … we melt into each other with phrases. We are edged with mist. We make an unsubstantial territory" (9). Proximity and relational understanding barely graze the surface of this connection. From Bernard's description, the divisions between the self and the other are indistinct. Mist-enshrouded boundaries shift and blur, with language presented as the passageway to the other. Building upon the notion of relationality espoused by Clarissa Dalloway in Woolf's earlier novel, Bernard's assessment underscores the complicated boundaries of the subject in *The Waves*.

Despite six voices claiming six separate subject positions, Bernard sees the individual as inextricable from the group. He asks, "But what is the difference between us?" (*The Waves* 34),

[89] Beer argues that Woolf "recognized that she had internalized some voices and not others" but eschewed working class voices for fear of condescension and misrepresentation (89-90).

and shortly thereafter more brazenly asserts, "I do not believe in separation. We are not single" (48). Certainly there is some truth to his assertion. Despite time, distance, and individual ambitions, all of the characters thoughts remain consumed by reflections upon the group, and they continue to find comfort in the collective whole. Louis remarks, "Could I be 'they' I would choose it" (25). He, like the others, feels the stress of individuality—the pressure to fit in, to establish order, and to gain acceptance. Separation is painful. Even the boys hold back their tears, as they depart for school—"a second severance from the body of our mother," as Bernard later suggests (90). But this is merely one of several separations that the characters must suffer.[90]

References to the maternal bond and the primordial separation of the child from the mother appear throughout *The Waves*: "Glittering, many pointed and many-domed London lies before me under mist. … She folds the ant-heap to her breast. All cries, all clamour are softly enveloped in silence. … But we are aimed at her. Already her maternal somnolence is uneasy" (80). The mist, which conveyed the permeable boundary between the self and the other, appears here as well. But the barreling train evidently threatens this unity between the self and the city. Unyielding, it approaches London with palpable violence: "Hurled at her like a missile … We are about to explode in the flanks of the city like a shell in the side of some ponderous, maternal, majestic animal. She hums and murmurs; she awaits us" (80). Although such aggression mirrors the violence of nature appearing in the interludes, the attack upon maternal London extends further, paralleling the rejection of the mother in order to follow the law of the father, later understood as the origin of the superego and the introjection of culture and civilization.[91] The

[90] In *Modernism and Mass Politics*, Michael Tratner diagrams various separations endured by the characters, which, he argues, corresponds to the arrangement of chapters. (See especially 218-222).
[91] Freud formulates the superego as an "internal authority" brought about by "identification with the father" (101, 95). See Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents*, especially 84-88, 95-96, and 100-101, for more on the formation of the superego.

erection of buildings and institutions depicted within the same passage resonates with a similar intensity.

Yet in transit to London, Bernard is lulled into a temporary sense of comfort and stability that is disrupted upon arrival. He reveals:

> Having dropped off satisfied like a child from the breast, I am at liberty now to sink down, deep, into what passes, this omnipresent, general life. … Then individuality asserts itself. They are off. They are impelled by some necessity. Some miserable affair of keeping an appointment, of buying a hat, severs these beautiful human beings once so united. (81)

Bernard notes the adherence of others to symbolic structures and capitalistic motivations. He becomes disquieted by the imposition of individual wills and his sense of security is ruptured. Bernard's words echo Freud's thoughts on ego-formation: "An infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world as the source of the sensations flowing in upon him. He gradually learns to do so" (13). Although well beyond infancy, Bernard's desire for a protective space of unity is a common sentiment, one that Freud calls "the oceanic feeling." In *Civilization and Its Discontents*, published by the Woolfs' Hogarth Press in 1930, Freud explains this phenomenon as "a sensation of 'eternity', a feeling as of something limitless, unbounded—as it were, 'oceanic'" (11). He continues, "I can imagine that the oceanic feeling became connected with religion later on. The 'oneness with the universe' which constitutes its ideational context sounds like a first attempt at a religious consolation, as though it were another way of disclaiming the danger which the ego recognizes as threatening it from the external world" (21). The oceanic feeling,[92] although strongest in Bernard, is also visible within the other characters

[92] M. K. Booker (50) and Gray Kochhlar-Lindgren (72) each make a single oblique reference to the oceanic feeling, but the concept is tangential at most to their arguments. In both cases, the term is applied only to Bernard. Kochhlar-Lindgren is most interested in applying Kristeva's theories of the semiotic to a linguistic analysis of the text, while

and remains strong through the end of the novel.[93] Neville declares, "Yet we scarcely breathe … spent as we are. We are in the passive and exhausted frame of mind when we only wish to rejoin the body of our mother from whom we have been severed" (171). Their desire to return to the mother's womb is a desire notably situated outside of time and consciousness.

Aside from direct utterances that communicate yearnings for the mother, all six figures desperately search for grounding, for something concrete and physical in the external world which they may grasp. Rhoda admits, "So I put off my hopeless desire to be Susan, to be Jinny. But I will stretch my toes so that they touch the rail at the end of the bed; I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something *hard*. Now I cannot sink" (17, emphasis added). Likewise, Bernard also searches for something stable and concrete: "I begin to doubt the fixity of tables, the reality of here and now, to tap my knuckles smartly upon the edges of apparently solid objects and say, 'Are you *hard*?'" (214, emphasis added). The binary opposition between internal and external begins to dismantle itself, as the existential struggles of Woolf's characters manifest themselves in the form of physical crises. The oceanic feeling's "oneness with the universe" is realized in passing moments. Louis observes, "The roar of London … is around us. … All separate sounds … churned into one sound, steel blue, circular" (98). This same synesthetic representation resurfaces at Percival's farewell dinner. Louis states, "We have tried to accentuate differences. From the desire to be separate we have laid stress upon our faults, and what is particular to us. But there is a chain whirling round, round, in a steel-blue circle beneath" (99). Here, Louis notes a union between the group and the city that takes shape as one fluid

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Booker is generally more invested in a Lacanian reading of the novel.

[93] Tratner's analysis of the novel hinges on a reading of their collectivity. In fact, he sees not six individual characters, but one "six-lobed creature" that represents Woolf's ideological movement away from separate selves toward a focus on groups (218). This, he argues, exemplifies Woolf's critique of individualism and imperialism, with the structure of the novel parallelling the contemporaneous socialist agenda and internal struggles of the British Labour Party (217-240). Though a sense of their collectivity is important to my reading, as well, I contend that the character are not as consolidated and amorphous as Tratner suggests.

movement that is circular rather than linear. Louis's words challenge the primacy of linear time and the notion of progress as a forward-moving force. The London of *The Waves* is therefore outside the constraints of history and temporality, and thus freed from its oppressive patriarchal past; herein, we have a clear aesthetic rendering of Julia Kristeva's "women's time:" a cyclical and mythical conception of time that operates in resistance to national or historical models of time and history. London thereby becomes an idealized space open to alternative possibilities. The potential for new political realities is palpable due to the text's emphasis upon collectivity over individual identity (Tratner 217-240).[94] The characters, in fact, gain stability and strength when they are together and when they think infrequently about the individual differences that separate them from one another—gender, national identity, and sexual orientation.

This unity with one another and the city has the potential to transcend time. After Percival's death, the six remaining characters reunite for a meal of mourning.[95] Place and present company provoke a flooding forth of old memories. Rhoda proclaims, "Yet they have only to speak, and their first words, with the remembered tone and the perpetual deviation from what one expects and their hands moving and making a thousand days rise again in the darkness, shake my purpose" (170). Rhoda's words parallel the descriptions of time in the interludes and connect these two portions of the text. Although sparse in details, the occurrence Rhoda describes calls to mind Marcel Proust's account of involuntary memory.[96] Rhoda's experience of unity with the past after this meal harkens back to Proust's famous scene of the *petite madeleine*, upon which the memory of the mother's kiss is superimposed (60-64); this provides yet another

[94] Tratner's book chapter "Ideology and Literary Form in *The Waves*" responds to critics who argue that *The Waves* is apolitical. Though I think the significance of the collective in Woolf's text transcends the specific details of her historical moment, Tratner nevertheless offers a compelling reading of collectivity in the novel in relation to the politics of this time. (See footnote 93 for more details.)
[95] Janine Utell argues that meals reinforce the solidity of the self while forging a communal connection (2).
[96] Woolf's diaries and letters reveal that she was indeed reading *In Search of Lost Time* as she was conceiving of and writing *The Waves*.

textual allusion to the longing for the dyadic union and the desire for collectivity. Here, at Hampton Court, Rhoda experiences a temporary sense of order that enables her to transcend her ongoing existential crisis, if only for a moment. For Rhoda and her friends, proximity coupled with familiar intonation and gesticulation open the floodgates to the past, providing a sense of unity and continuity that is otherwise absent.

Unfortunately, collectivity provides Rhoda with only momentary relief from the strictures of everyday life. Christine Froula notes, Rhoda is "in quest of the real" (207), of "the thing that lies beneath the semblance of the thing" (*The Waves*, 118), but in her search, Rhoda discovers that "not stories but structures console" (207). Though at times it is structure she craves, Rhoda is also frequently threatened by symbolic structures. Time, history, language, and identity are among the many systemic frameworks that oppress Rhoda. Evidence of Rhoda's struggle with the symbolic order occurs early in the text when she becomes paralyzed in front of the chalkboard:[97]

> The others look; they look with understanding. Louis writes; Susan writes; Neville writes; Jinny writes; even Bernard has begun to write. But I cannot write. I see only figures. The others are handing in their answers, one by one. … The others are allowed to go. … I am left alone to find an answer. The figures mean nothing now. Meaning has gone. … I myself am outside the loop. (13)

In this moment, Rhoda is left alone to grapple with these figures. The structure of this classroom with its emphasis on individual success leaves Rhoda feeling isolated and inadequate.

The legacy and structure created by narrative form and a male literary tradition are shown to be equally damaging forces that the six characters must confront. When the novel opens, Bernard is consumed with telling stories, mimicking the narrative form of his English literary

[97] If the symbolic order is supported by the "name of the Father" or the laws he comes to represent, as Lacan suggests, then Rhoda's struggle with the symbolic structure is partially explained by the fact that Rhoda is fatherless.

predecessors. Neville faults him for his desire to totalize (49).[98] In attempting to describe his characters, Bernard is hindered furthermore by his exhaustive accounts of setting, to the degree that he is unable to delve into the "private moment[s]" of his characters (35). Bernard's work initially appears to contain the same fundamental flaws Woolf had criticized within Bennett's work; however, the influence of the group identity eventually helps shape Bernard and his storytelling into a counterhegemonic force.

Woolf's choice of a traditional male artist figure in place of the female, queer, shell-shocked, or gender-bending artists prominent in her other novels is telling. Bernard is the character most representative of the norm or "the tradition" in *The Waves*. He is not female, nor foreign, nor queer,[99] yet he delivers the last words of the novel. Woolf's choice here reflects the power of the collective group identity. Gender differences become obscured and identity politics attenuated when affinities are formed.[100] In his extended monologue at the end of the novel, Bernard speaks not as a man, but as a representative of the group: "But now Percival is dead, and Rhoda is dead; we are divided; we are not here. Yet I cannot find any obstacle separating us. There is no division between me and them. As I talked I felt 'I am you.' This difference we make so much of, this identity we so feverishly cherish, was overcome" (214). The pain of difference—sexual and otherwise—is mitigated by the group's shared affinities. Through Bernard's words, Woolf disrupts our expectations of character and our understanding of

[98] Tamlyn Monson explores the conundrum of the ethical subject who can neither include nor exclude an account of the other. She uses Kristeva and Levinas to examine the violence of language.
[99] The other characters of *The Waves* are marginalized in some way. Susan, Jinny, and Rhoda are all women and when the text focuses upon their individuality, they are frequently defined through their bodies: Susan is the maternal figure, while Jinny is the overtly sexualized character. Neville is queer and Louis is an outsider due to his national identity—his father is from Brisbane. Though Bernard does not stand in for proper English masculinity and tradition in the way that Percival does, he is not marginalized in the same way as the other characters.
[100] I am borrowing the term "affinities" from Donna Haraway's discussion of collectives formed by choice rather than by blood relations or an identity category. She situates affinity politics in opposition to identity politics. See *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*.

individualism. Her focus upon collectivity poses a challenge to conventional views of gender and subjectivity, for the identity of the group is not based on fixed qualities shared by its individual members.

Bernard's understanding is also reflected in his use of language and form. He refuses to retell the tired old stories that have become emptied of truth. Bernard now distrusts the all-too-familiar narratives that dominate nationalistic rhetoric and prominent literary texts; he rejects these "stories of childhood, stories of school, love, marriage, death, and so on" and claims, "none of them are true" (177). Instead, he longs for something resembling Kristeva's formulation of the semiotic: "some little language such as lovers use, broken words, inarticulate words…" (177). The unrepressed structure he seeks gives birth to a new form of expression.

Bernard comes to understand the failure of the older forms he sought to imitate: "Whatever sentence I extract whole and entire from this cauldron is only a string of six little fish that let themselves be caught while a million others … slip through my fingers. … How impossible to order them rightly, to detach one separately, or to give the effect of the whole …" (189-90). In his search for a more inclusive form, one better suited for illuminating subjectivity, he calls for a howl and a cry—sounds unbounded by linguistic structures. Just as he begins to consider giving up, as he begins to project his aguish upon the city, stating "Again I see before me the usual street. The canopy of civilisation is burnt out" (220)—he senses a stirring, "another general awakening" (220). The novel has come full circle. It is again daybreak, and Bernard is restored with a sense of hope. He exclaims, "Yes, this is the eternal renewal, the incessant rise and fall and fall and rise again. And in me too the wave rises" (220). Bernard's words, which echo the cyclical qualities of the final interlude—"*The waves broke on the shore*" (220)—reflect his transformation and his ability to read the world differently. By rejecting the patriarchal

structures for viewing, understanding, and communicating experience, he discovers the possibility for eternal renewal offered by the cyclical model of the natural world and the maternal city.

The hegemony of the imperialist narrative, highlighted in Jane Marcus's influential reading of the novel, is undercut by this feminization of place and time. Though London is traditionally rendered masculine through its association with patriarchal traditions,[101] Woolf casts the London of *The Waves* as a feminine space. Susan M. Squier notes the long-standing association of London with a male literary tradition, one that has been hostile toward female intellectual and creative genius, which Woolf depicts through the fictional demise of Judith Shakespeare in *A Room of One's Own*. Although Squier does not address *The Waves* in her book on Woolf and London, her general assessment of Woolf's *oeuvre* highlights Woolf's aspirations to "revise the male literary and social heritage—*and* the city that had come to embody it" (3, emphasis in original).[102] The London that Woolf constructs in the novel is one pregnant with possibility. This nurturing urban locale flows in a circular path, as Louis notes, and as Bernard discovers, it is a city receptive to the fluid ebb and flow of subjectivity. The city even incorporates the regenerating natural cycles that Susan finds within the rural space of her farm.

In Woolf's creation of this feminized city-space, she also decenters the figure of the traditional hero. In the novel, we hear the voices of Bernard, Susan, Neville, Jinny, Louis, and Rhoda, but never the voice of Percival. The other characters worship and attempt to emulate him,

[101] In *Three Guineas*, Woolf's provides an extensive discussion of the patriarchal forms of "memory and tradition" that shape England and its customs (18); however, Woolf notes that women are fundamentally excluded this tradition and can hardly claim England as their country (see especially 79, 101, 107-109).

[102] In Susan Squier's book length discussion of Woolf and London, she argues that Woolf's struggle between a maternal and paternal social and literary heritage was "associated with the actual geographic split in her earliest years between those months spent in London (which she saw as embodying the male tradition) and those spent in the rural, maternal atmosphere of Talland House, Cornwall" (3). Although never directly addressing *The Waves*, she contends, "Woolf's adult response to this geographic and psychic split was to assimilate and then to revise the male literary and social heritage—*and* the city that had come to embody it" (Squier 3).

but he functions in the text as an icon for imperialist and patriarchal traditions:[103] "He is conventional; he is a hero" (88). Percival follows nationalist scripts, excels at sports, and dies on a colonialist mission. He had to be killed off so that the others could continue to exist. Like Woolf writes of her father's passing, "His life would have entirely ended mine" (*WD* 135). But rather than simply covering over the problematic history and national identity that Percival represents, Woolf permits him to figure in the novel as an overwhelming presence and absence for the other characters (not unlike her depiction of the old guard in her other novels).[104]

Though cyclical time is not intrinsically better than linear time, and as Rita Felski has rightly argued in *Doing Time*, cyclical time is not inherently a feminist form of time, Woolf's use of cyclical time in this novel underpins her feminist objectives. Divorced from the logic of phallogocentricism, the maternal London of *The Waves* opens up a space unbounded by the historical city and its masculine literary tradition, and enables new ways of understanding form, subjectivity, character, and time.

"What's Her game? To Disrupt?": Restaging History & Reimagining the Present Moment in *Between the Acts*

Woolf's posthumously published novel *Between the Acts*, which features a play within a novel, enacts a tension between its nostalgic, pastoral setting situated at the brink of war and the revisionist historical exercise enacted through Miss La Trobe's village pageant. Although some have read *Between the Acts* as a conservative book,[105] Julia Briggs argues that it is "Woolf's

[103] See Jane Marcus's "Britannia Rules The Waves" for a political and historicized reading of *The Waves* that focuses on Woolf's critique of imperialism in the novel.
[104] Though Woolf kills off this masculinist hero, he lingers in the memories and dialog of the characters. Percival's name also connects this character to medieval romances, Wagner's opera, and T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," thus providing a way to think about overlapping temporalities through intertextuality.
[105] Elizabeth Abel, for example, offers a pessimistic reading of the novel, arguing that Woolf "conced[es] patriarchy's triumph" (110); Marina MacKay makes note of a conservative turn in Woolf that took place between

most consistently underestimated novel" (85). The novel's strengths lie in its defamiliarization of history made possible by La Trobe's pageant and the productive disruptions caused by newspapers, exterior sounds, queer and unruly bodies, and unwelcome mirrors. Building upon Helen Southworth's analysis of interruptions in *Between the Acts* and largely diverging from Lucio P. Ruotolo's, [106] I argue that the aforementioned spatial/temporal disruptions help to deconstruct the binary logic that conceives of particular spatial and ideological positions—village and nation, nation and Continent, public and private, nature and civilization, and actors and audience—in terms of opposing interests.[107] Though the form of generic hybridity—the play within the novel—expressed by this text is the least experimental of the three novels I examine, Woolf's narratological experimentation alters what the novel is and what it can do in much the same way that the temporal and spatial disruptions operate; both challenge the unity of hegemonic spaces and temporal realms and destabilize binary thinking.

Between the Acts takes place over the span of twenty-four hours—notable as an Aristotelian unity of time and as a framework Woolf uses to structure several of her other

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the publication of *Three Guineas* and the writing of *Between the Acts* citing the reality of genoicide as a reason for Woolf to question her radical pacificism (29-32); some scholars, including Michael Tratner, have read the text in the context of Woolf's suicide (242). MacKay argues that the novel returns to the elegaic and traditionally conservative setting of the English country house (featured in *To the Lighthouse*), a rhetorical choice MacKay reads as "pastoral patriotism" (24-26).

[106] Both Lucio P. Ruotolo and Helen Southworth find some redemptive potential in the interruptions of *Between the Acts*. Southworth argues, "Woolf manipulates space as a means to empower the women" (46), while Ruotolo reads the interruption as a structuring device (219) an indicator of "Woolf's existentialist and anarchistic presumptions" (7), which creates within her texts a "promise of renewal" (17). Ruotolo uses the concept of interruption loosely to focus on issues of leadership and wholeness in the text. I find his reading of interruption in many of Woolf's other novels somewhat unconvincing. His book does not include a reading of *Orlando: A Biography* because he does not consider it a work of fiction (2). My argument is more closely aligned with Southworth's, but I place emphasis on different textual moments. Furthermore, many of the interruptions I will focus on will be moments of discomfort, moments in which certain characters, animals, or acts of nature disrupt expectations or conventions.

[107] Though MacKay and others have noted that the rural setting of *Between the Acts* is a synchedochal representation of England (23), I will show how the text strives further to dissolve the sizeable geographic and ideological boundary between the English countryside and Europe.

works.[108] When read in relation to Woolf's creation myth in *The Waves*, this increment of time takes on added significance, for it suggests the vast potential to remake and reshape the world with each day. The novel begins the evening before the village pageant and concludes the following night. The pageant is the main event of the novel and that which propels the narrative forward. Woolf's title, however, already functions as a signal to her readers that this text aims to disrupt grand narratives and shift our focus from the center to the periphery; yet it refuses to keep these terms completely separate. The title boldly announces the text's intention to unsettle our expectations.

Although the pageant is a yearly ritual, the audience's reactions lead us to believe that this year's production is somehow different. Though a pageant or history play presents itself as a *representation* of history and not the thing itself, Woolf's depiction of La Trobe's village pageant points to the *construction* of history as well as the political implications involved in representing Great Britain's cultural and historical past.

In particular, the village residents are surprised by the exclusion of certain elements of British history. Colonel Mayhew, for example, asks, "Why leave out the British Army? What's history without the Army, eh?" (107). Although his rhetorical questions may be read as complaints, these are serious questions that Woolf herself contemplated. In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf protests, "history is too much about wars; biography too much about great men" (107). She is critical of both genres, for they are fields where men have dominated as subjects and authors; they are also known for privileging violent masculinist endeavors. Woolf's critique underscores the importance of considering alternative visions of identity and nation building that

[108] Like *Mrs. Dalloway*, *Between the Acts* takes place on a single day in June. Both novels also deal with war. As discussed above, the structure of the day is also replicated in the interludes of *The Waves*. The first and third sections of *To The Lighthouse* contain portions of a single day separated by decade in time.

are not contingent upon acts of violence. Setting the novel in the recent past—in June of 1939—is one way that Woolf asks her readers to sincerely consider Mayhew's questions months prior to the advent of World War II. This imaginative exercise serves as a way of questioning the inevitability of war while calling "attention to the unfulfilled or unrealized possibilities of the past" (Berstein qtd. in Detloff 35).[109]

Miss La Trobe, like Woolf, ostensibly excludes war and the military from her representation of English history, though war looms legibly over the text: newspapers bring reports of violence on the Continent, and airplanes overhead interrupt Reverend Streatfield's summary remarks on the pageant. The village is not the isolated space that Giles imagines. Although its inhabitants comment frequently upon the beautiful natural landscape, they are not politically ignorant or apathetic. The novel intersperses the disembodied voices of the audience during the intervals and between the acts, communicating their preoccupation with the possible onset of war: "No one wants it—save those damned Germans" (103); "And my daughter, just back from Rome, she says the common people, in the cafes, hate Dictators" (83); "And what about the Jews? The refugees…the Jews…People like ourselves, beginning life again" (84). Herein, the villagers recognize the common bonds of humanity that they share with the Jewish and Italian people of the continent. [110] Their words announce an affinity or suggest a shared ethical stance among "the Jews," the "common people" of Italy who oppose their fascist leaders, and themselves. This felt or imagined affinity, while demonstrating the political import of affect,

[109] Madelyn Detloff calls attention to the importance of this date, using Michael André Berstein's concept of sideshadowing to show how Woolf invested June 1939 with possibility and avoided "the 'irresistible' closed circuitry of tragically emplotting the historical events she was living through" (35). While Detloff's argument is integral to my own, my reading of *BTA* differs from hers in the importance I place on generic and subjective hybridity and in my emphasis upon the "interruption" as a generative force in the novel for deconstructing binary oppositions.

[110] Although Woolf was known to harbor anti-Semitic convictions, Hermione Lee says, "in the course of her life's political reading of British culture she became critical and analytical of her own anti-Semitism." See Lee 308-310 for more on Woolf's anti-Semitic response to Leonard and his family.

undoubtedly exists in tension with the homophobic and misogynistic encounters in the novel. This sets into motion an odd unspoken discourse between "thinking peace into existence" and the difficulty of doing so.[111] Yet the narratological choice to set the novel in the recent past suggests the possibility of hope and peace triumphing against all odds.

Between the Acts gestures toward a larger global community that opposes violence and oppression, yet like *Three Guineas*, Woolf also forces her readers to confront British hypocrisy by recognizing acts of oppression within England. The pageant may be the most obvious disruption of teleological grand narratives and fixed conceptions of the past and present, but Woolf's most explicitly gendered interruption occurs between the acts or more precisely before them. In the pages leading up to the novel's ostensible main event, we witness the structural violence of everyday life. Isa's entrance into the library, where Bart Oliver is resting, reveals the politics of space and time. Herein, Isa becomes the catalyst for the disruption of the past by the present moment. Isa's father-in-law has fallen asleep and is dreaming of "himself, a young man helmeted … in his hand a gun" (13). Before Isa enters, Woolf's narrator underscores the fact that she is crossing a "threshold" (12):[112]

> The door opened.
> "Am I," Isa apologized, "interrupting?"
> Of course she was—destroying youth and India. (13)

Herein, Isa interrupts both a male space and a masculine realm of time. Bart Oliver, the patriarch of the family, dominates the library, but this space becomes linked to colonialism and violence through the dream that Isa cuts short. Though the library is a repository of cultural memory and tradition, it is a specifically gendered space, one from which women are often excluded. In *A*

[111] Detloff also considers this novel in relation to Woolf's essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid" (31-33, 40).
[112] "A foolish, flattering lady, pausing on the *threshold* of what she once called ' the heart of the house,' the *threshold* of the library, had once said: 'Next to the kitchen, the library's always the nicest room in the house'" (12, my emphasis).

Room of One's Own, Woolf considers the many levels of exclusion—women's exclusion from the canon, their lack of adequate representation within literary texts, and their exclusion from libraries. She extends her critique in *Between the Acts* by casting Isa as a closeted poet who conceals her work and her passion from her husband and extended family. The library and the male-authored books she peruses within underscore her exclusion from this sphere.[113]

Isa's interruption prompts an implicit defense of patriarchal values and Isa is, perhaps not surprisingly, met with masculine aggression. Bart Oliver attempts to hurt his daughter-in-law's feelings by insulting his grandson, whose masculinity he is already policing. "'Your little boy's a cry-baby,'" he says (13). Isa refuses to dignify her father-in-law's comment with a response. Her resistance goes further, as she also attempts to reject the role prescribed to her by society: "He was not a coward, her boy wasn't. And she loathed the domestic, the possessive; the maternal. And he knew it and did it on purpose to tease her" (14). Helen Southworth deems Isa's "complicity"—her role as wife and mother—both "accommodating and disruptive" (52). Her position within the home is crucial for bolstering the power of the patriarch, but her interruptions and rejection of the domestic and the maternal undermine patriarchal power. Furthermore, her son's lack of traditionally masculine characteristics threatens the potency of the Oliver bloodline.

Like Woolf, Isa also entertains the counterfactual. The imagination becomes a place of resistance where Isa may explore alternative possibilities without the danger than may come with acting on such impulses. Earlier in the text, Bart Oliver's recitation of Byron's poetry brings Isa to fantasize momentarily about a transgression of patriarchal values in the form of infidelity.[114]

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[113] Among the canonical poetry by Spenser, Keats, Shelley, Donne, and Yeats, the library is also filled with the work of nineteenth century historians, biographers, scientists—including Charles Darwin, Arthur Eddington, and Sir James Jean. (See Cuddy-Keane's Note in the annotated edition of the novel for more on the library contents, 158.)
[114] Ruotolo briefly calls attention to this textual moment as a merging of art and eros and as an "unstated affront to her husband" and father-in-law (208).

Though she does not act upon her desire for the gentleman farmer, she imagines a temporary union of sorts: "The words made two rings, perfect rings, that floated them, herself and Haines, like two swans down stream" (4-5).[115] While this brief reverie is interrupted by the intrusion of her husband into this fantasy realm, Isa is able to mentally escape the confines of her troubled marriage by daydreaming about Haines again later in the day.

Isa's use of the counterfactual is of greater consequence when she is confronted with the masculine sexual violence that haunts the text. Isa reads about the rape of a woman by English soldiers at Whitehall in the *Times* and this horrifying event comes back to her throughout the morning (14-16). When Lucy Swithin enters the room to announce she had nailed the placard to the barn, Isa reimagines the events from the newspaper and arms the young woman with a hammer:

> *Every summer*, for *seven summers* now, Isa had heard the *same words*; about the hammer and the nails; the pageant and the weather. *Every year* they said, would it be wet or fine; and *every year* it was—one or the other. The *same chime followed the same chime*, only this year beneath the chime she heard: "The girl screamed and hit him about the face with a hammer." (16, emphasis added)

For Isa, this is a moment to right a horrendous wrong, if only through the act of reimagining it, as Woolf does with the novel itself. Isa's thoughts also represent an interruption from the habitual, mundane dialog about the yearly pageant. The juxtaposition of masculine violence with annual chatter about the traditional pageant is suggestive of Woolf's critique of patriarchy within *Three Guineas*. The pageant is heralded as a cherished event celebrating British heritage, but the news

[115] The image is also evocative of the representation of Big Ben in *Mrs. Dalloway*.

simultaneously exposes the underbelly of nationalistic culture.[116] Herein, Woolf complicates the presumed righteousness of the Allies and the simple binary logic of good versus evil and ally versus foe as the nation's protectors are shown to be violent aggressors toward their own people.

The perpetration of masculine violence extends to additional forms of Otherness in the novel. The arrival of Mrs. Manresa, accompanied by William Dodge, is referred to as a "minor social crisis—this laying of two more places" (27), but Mrs. Manresa's intrusion doesn't upset the social order. Described in hypersexualized terms, Mrs. Manresa wields her sexuality to win over the two figures most representative of masculine violence: Giles and Bart Oliver. Her outsider status is reduced to sexual difference and she is read as a sexual object. Dodge, however, cannot be recuperated into a narrative with which Giles and Bart are comfortable. Already an outsider to this village, his body disrupts the homogeneity of the space and poses a threat to the conservative English country house because of his sexuality. Giles immediately judges Dodge to be a "half-bree[d]" (34), and later "A toady; a lickspittle … not a man to have straightforward love for a woman—[…] but simply a—At this word, which he could not speak in public, he pursed his lips" (42). Although Isa immediately guesses that Dodge is gay and wonders, "Well, was it wrong if he was that word? Why judge each other?" (43), Giles and his father feel threatened by Dodge's sexuality and respond with covert hostility.

In policing the space of Pointz Hall, Giles and Bart Oliver believe they are preserving a way of life that is under attack. Sara Ahmed speaks to this point in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*:

> Sexual orientation involves bodies that leak into worlds; it involves a way of orienting the body towards and away from others, which

[116] Though MacKay argues that Woolf's pacifist resolutions and her (in)famous comparison of patriarchy to fascism have given way to a more conservative stance that she terms "pastoral patriotism" (24-26), there are pointed textual moments—such as this one—where Woolf's critique of nationalism from *Three Guineas* remains strong.

> affects how one can enter different kinds of social spaces (which presumes certain bodies, certain directions, certain ways of loving and living) … orientations affect what it is that bodies can do. Hence, the failure to orient oneself 'towards' the ideal sexual object affects how we live in the world, an affect that is readable as the failure to reproduce, and as a threat to the social ordering of life itself. (145)

Dodge does not orient himself toward a "proper" love object and he therefore disrupts the social order of Pointz Hall. As a result of his sexuality, the presence of his physical body in the space of Pointz Hall exposes the exclusionary logic of traditional values. Like Isa, Dodge interrupts a patriarchal space and in doing so reveals the hegemonic dictates that govern it.

Though Dodge may not perceive his disruption of values as a form of power, it has a palpable affect upon Giles, rendering him angry and ineffectual. He is enraged by his inability to control the situation and by Dodge's tacit refusal to be assimilated into their heteronormative framework. Giles responds by sublimating his violent impulses into a game. He transfers his anger, homophobia, and self-hatred to stone kicking on the lawn:

> The first kick was Manresa (lust). The second, Dodge (perversion). The third, himself (coward). And the fourth and fifth and all the others were the same. After reaching ten, Giles finds a snake choking on a toad: The snake was unable to swallow, the toad was unable to die. … It was birth the wrong way round—a monstrous inversion. So, raising his foot, he stamped on them. (68-69)

The perversity of the contorted animals harkens back to the significance Giles attributes to the second kick of the stone. This association, combined with the sexological valence to the term "inversion,"[117] links Dodge to the "monstrous" configuration that Giles is quick to squash. Herein, as in Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women*, the body of the other has been constructed

[117] Sexologists and psychoanalysts at the time used the term "invert" to refer to individuals with same-sex desire whose gender presentation is more closely associated with the opposite sex. See Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, 2-14 for more on inversion**.** Detloff makes note of the connection between "monstrous inversion" and the term "invert" and also links this image with Dodge's description of himself as a "mind-divided little snake in the grass … as Giles saw" (Woolf qtd. in Detloff 47-48).

as "monstrous" and linked to animality.[118] Yet, rather than the subversive appropriation of monstrosity that we see in Barnes, Giles's thoughts expose the use of discriminatory rhetoric to rationalize violence and oppression. Furthermore, this description, rendered through free indirect discourse from Giles's point of view, contains a fundamental misreading of the event that underscores Giles's ignorance, egotism, and homophobia: A snake's specialized jaws enable it to swallow prey that is larger than its head, but Giles instantly squashes what he cannot understand. Though a stone and a pair of animals serve as a substitute for Dodge's body, these violent scenes render homophobic violence palpable.[119]

Although these scenes of homophobic violence may have a more profound effect upon us as Woolf's readers than on the pageant's audience, the discomfort experienced by Isa, Lucy, and Dodge allows for the formation of "affinities," to use Donna Haraway's term.[120] Isa recognizes that Dodge was "afraid to stick up for his own beliefs—just as she was afraid, of her husband" (35). Her poetry is hidden from Giles in account notebooks, but Isa feels comfortable enough around Dodge to share her poetry with him. Similarly, Dodge shares moments with Mrs. Swithin when the two seem to connect on a more intimate level than with their own families. In fact,

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[118] As Audre Lorde and many other feminists have argued in one form or another, language and representation may operate as tools of oppression. (See Lorde's essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House.") Woolf calls attention to the way this power operates by exposing Giles's line of thought and the linguistic structures he uses to rationalize this cruelty. His actions suggest strict divisions between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" bodies and ways of living and he uses these perceived divisions to grant his own subject position more stability and legitimacy. As Ahmed notes, "The national ideal is shaped by taking some bodies as its form and not others" (109). And for Giles, "It was a bit of luck—that he could despise [Dodge], not himself" (76).

[119] Due to the temporal setting of the novel on the eve of World War II and the centrality of the English history play, we are also made to consider Dodge's place within national contexts. Speaking to this point, Madelyn Detloff argues that Woolf's novel reveals how "national belonging is predicated on violent exclusion rather than the putatively innate bonds of Englishness" (35). She adds, "It is not a coincidence, then, that the novel's two boundary figures, who shore up the village inhabitants' sense of themselves as innately British subjects, are William Dodge, the shamed gay man, and Miss La Trobe, the lesbian playwright" (Detloff 47). The importance placed upon the English history play underscores Dodge's (and La Trobe's) exclusion from nationalist discourse. And looming in the background is the knowledge that within the Nazis' eugenicist discourse, Dodge and other queer subjects would have been targeted for elimination.

[120] Haraway defines an "affinity" as an alliance not based on blood relations or natural identification (277).

Dodge is moved almost to the point of confessing to her his experience of homophobic violence and shame. We learn that he wished to say, "At school they held me under a bucket of dirty water, Mrs. Swithin; when I looked up, the world was dirty, Mrs. Swithin; so I married; but my child's not my child, Mrs. Swithin. I'm a half-man, Mrs. Swithin; a flickering, mind-divided little snake in the grass, Mrs. Swithin; as Giles saw; but you've healed me…." (51). Instead he said nothing. Although this confession goes unexpressed, it does not take away the temporary feeling of community that Dodge experiences with Mrs. Swithin, or with Isa. Though less pronounced here than in *The Waves*, Woolf's use of the collective in this moment reminds the readers of its political potential.

Though Giles perceives Dodge's presence and his sexual preference as endangering the conservative values that the English country house, "in the very heart of England" (12), has come to represent, the stature and symbolic value of Pointz Hall has been founded upon pretenses. The narrator notes that the house failed to make the guidebooks and the Olivers have only been living at Pointz Hall for a little more than one hundred and twenty years (5-6). They have no ties to the established families who once lived in the region and many of their museum-like artifacts fail to bolster the family's prestige in any authentic sense.[121] For example, the "watch that had stopped a bullet on the field at Waterloo" belonged to a former butler, not a member of Oliver's family (6). The house thus preserves a *mythologized* English history and tradition that runs counter to Miss La Trobe's more disruptive village pageant.

As mentioned above, Miss La Trobe is an outsider as a result of her sexuality, but her

[121] "[U]nder a glass case there was a watch that had stopped a bullet on the field at Waterloo," but that belonged to a former butler (Woolf 6). Southworth likewise calls attention to the family's "tenuous" ancestry and notes that one of the paintings depicts only an "ancestress of sorts" and the portrait of the real ancestor failed to capture the man's "famous hound" (53). Southworth claims that even the power of the library is undercut by the middlebrow "shilling shockers" that previous houseguests discarded have discarded (52).

nationality is suspect, as well: "But where did she spring from? With that name she wasn't presumably pure English. … Mrs. Bingham suspect[ed] that she had Russian blood in her" (40). A failed actress with cigarette in mouth, a whip often in hand, and "rather strong language—perhaps, then, she wasn't altogether a lady?" (40). Although she is a marginalized figure who spends most of her time behind the scenes, her pageant, the ostensible main event of the novel, challenges this center/periphery model and undercuts the dominant narrative of English history and tradition. La Trobe is not meek like Dodge, but instead is called "Bossy" behind her back (44), and is described as having "the look of a commander pacing *his* deck" (43 my emphasis). But unlike a masculine dictator, La Trobe's deployment of history appears democratic; the production of her pageant reveals its constructed nature, making history visible as a *selection* of events. By opening up spaces for her audience's collaboration and participation, La Trobe refuses to delineate history as a fixed grand narrative.

Both she and Woolf resist a teleological view of history. The pageant provides an alternative measure of history that yields more imaginative and less violent ways of accounting for time, space, and representation. Though the "gaps" in La Trobe's pageant leave the audience asking questions, they make tangible the constructed nature of history and reveal the limitations of existing narratives. The narrator's rhetorical questions in response to La Trobe's play capture the central achievement of Woolf's narratological experiment: "What's her game? To disrupt?" (124). For both Woolf's and La Trobe's aesthetic and politically driven projects, the disruption of history, "the tradition," narrative form, and self-contained temporal modes is key.

The "Present Time" section of Miss La Trobe's pageant contains one of the most jarring and productively uncomfortable disruptions in narrative and temporal continuity. Erica Delsandro suggests, "[…] the past interrupts the present, reflects and refracts the audience and

actors, and suggests the possibility of a new, queer relationship with historical time" (90). Yet, the "Present Time" portion of the pageant disrupts more than just historical time; it alters our conception of history. Referring to Miss La Trobe's script, the narrator notes, "'After Vic.,' she had written, 'try ten mins. of present time. Swallows, cows, etc.'" (122). As we see in *The Waves*, nature, which is often theorized as antithetical to civilization and history, proves to be a part of national history: "The cows annihilated the gap; bridged the distance; filled the emptiness and continued the emotion" (96). Therein, nature serves as a unifying force; *Figgis's Guide Book*, the yearly return of the swallows, and Lucy's *Outline of History* also figure prominently in the novel as alternative natural histories.

Interruptions throughout the pageant, and especially during the "Present Time," point to the importance of the everyday moments that occur between the large acts of history. This section of the pageant disrupts the idea that history simply occurs or is made.[122] When a mirror is held in front of the audience, the binary between actors and audience collapses. These moments are initially filled with awkward silence as the audience's expectations are not met. They fidget and whisper to one another as they wait for actors resembling themselves to take the stage. Such actors never arrive, but instead, the audience must confront a mirror. Miss La Trobe calls attention to their agency and responsibility as the audience is reflected back to itself as the actors of the present moment. They are thus forced to see themselves as subjects in the process of creating the very history they are watching.

La Trobe's mirror disrupts their passive complacency and forces upon them a sense of accountability. Members of the audience shriek and attempt to shade themselves from their reflections. The mirror is cracked and is described by the villagers as "cruel" and "unfair" (125).

[122] Likewise, Madelyn Detloff calls attention to Woolf's choice to set the novel in 1938 to complicate the logic of war's inevitability (34-35).

The confrontation is uncomfortable and all they can do is squirm in their seats as they are made to face the image of themselves. The mirror coupled with the disembodied voice of the megaphone creates discomfort and fosters a queering of space. As Detloff, Galia Benziman, and others have noted, this is not the Lacanian mirror that reflects back a cohesive illusion of the self, but a shattered, distorted mirror, which reveals an unpleasant truth—a shattering of illusions.[123] The voice on the megaphone says, "*Consider the gun slayers, bomb droppers here or there. They do openly what we do slyly*" (127). Echoing the arguments of *Three Guineas*, the megaphone catalogs a litany of domestic offenses. Following these condemnatory remarks, the megaphone then demands introspection: "*Look at ourselves, ladies and gentlemen! Then at the wall; and ask how's this wall, this great wall, which we call, perhaps miscall, civilization to be built by* (here the mirrors flicked and flashed) *orts, scraps, and fragments like ourselves?*" (127). These "orts, scraps, and fragments" operate in opposition to the recorded history of civilization; they are what has been excluded from established national narratives. La Trobe questions the historical and national understanding of civilization,[124] but her remarks, which utilize the infinitive—"to be built"—underscore possibility in the present moment and an ethical responsibility for shaping the future. She instills the present with queer potentiality, as her words gesture toward the unfinished Enlightenment project, one of the more ambitious goals of modernism and the Bloomsbury group, in particular.[125]

Yet, La Trobe and her audience nevertheless consider the pageant a failure. One voice

[123] Mrs. Manresa, however, responds quite differently to the mirror, using it to calmly reapply her makeup: "Alone she preserved unashamed her identity, and faced without blinking herself. Calmly she reddened her lips" (126).
[124] Woolf articulates the same imperative in *Three Guineas*: "Let us never cease from thinking—what is this 'civilization' in which we find ourselves? What are these ceremonies and why should we take part in them" (63).
[125] Christine Froula situates Woolf's work with the context of "modernity's permanent revolution," which she defines as "a perpetual effort to reclaim the purpose and vitality of the Enlightenment project—as an unfinished and unfinishable struggle for human (including economic) rights, democratic self-governance, world community, and peace" (xii).

inquires, “And if we’re left asking questions, isn’t it a failure, as a play?” (135). Although each “saw something different” (144), they continue quoting from the pageant and asking questions about its meaning and form. La Trobe’s insecurity about the success of the play is beside the point. As Judith Halberstam suggests in *The Queer Art of Failure*, “Under certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (2-3). Halberstam thus proposes that failure may, in fact, be productive. In the case of La Trobe’s pageant, the perceived failure has forced the audience members to reflect upon the pageant in ways they otherwise would not. This year’s pageant has disrupted their expectations and caused them to consider not only the selection of events but also the representation of those events, or in other words, the formal qualities of the play itself. This subtle metafictional gesture speaks to Woolf’s larger goals and her efforts to challenge and disrupt narrative conventions in order to question previously naturalized categories while giving voice to marginalized subjects.

Judith Butler couches the potential for social and political change in similar terms. She argues, “The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation *between such acts*, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction” (192, emphasis added). Although here Butler is speaking specifically about gender, her language is uncannily similar to the title of Woolf’s novel and her argument illuminates La Trobe’s pageant. If the pageant does fail in some capacity, this failure is certainly a failure to meet expectations; it is a disruption that opens up space for the possibility of rethinking history, gender relations, and national identity.

***Orlando*: Destabilizing "the Indelible Footprints of Truth"**

In her 1927 essay "The New Biography," Virginia Woolf points to the limitations of Victorian biographies, which focus on "truth" rather than "personality" (*Collected Essays* 229). *Orlando*, Woolf's mock biography of a fictitious eponymous protagonist modeled on her former lover Vita Sackville-West, achieves both "truth" and "personality" as it melds fact and fiction to create a work of art.[126] Like Lytton Strachey's transformation of traditional biography, this hybrid novel operates as a critique of Victorian biographies; yet, on a grander scale, *Orlando* is a critique of patriarchal forms and narratives. Woolf's narrator-biographer self-consciously reflects upon the conventions of biography while establishing a narrative of gender-bending and genre-bending proportions.

Orlando is the story of a nobleman born in England during the Elizabethan Age with the ambition to become a successful writer. As time passes, Orlando barely ages as he courts women, travels abroad, marries, becomes a woman, gives birth, falls in love, and finally publishes "The Oak Tree," a poem begun centuries before, but not completed until the twentieth century.

The text playfully represents details from the life of Vita Sackville-West. Woolf's diaries and letters to Sackville-West reveal Woolf's intention to craft a *roman à clef*: "But listen: suppose Orlando turns out to be Vita; and it's all about you and the lusts of your flesh and the lure of your mind" (*Letters III* 428-29). Sackville-West's son, Nigel Nicolson, later deemed the book "the longest and most charming love-letter in literature" (202). Yet the book would become much more than a tribute to and fictional biography of Sackville-West. Among other achievements, the novel would eventually address many of Woolf's feminist concerns regarding

[126] In "The Art of Biography," Woolf comes to the conclusion that the limitations of biography prevented it from being a work of art (*Collected Essays* 227).

gender and sexuality. On both a textual and a metatexual level, same sex desire permeates the text, but much like *A Room of One's Own* published the following year, *Orlando* proceeds by indirection. As Leslie Hankins eloquently observes, "Woolf's lesbian narrative in *Orlando* suggests love and erotics between women, mocks compulsory heterosexuality, challenges homophobia, and slips coded lesbian signatures and subplots into the novel" (181).

But as I suggested above, this novel is also invested in the politics of language, genre, and authority. The issue of representation lies at its center. The biographer, the photographs, and other mediating devices like the telescope point to the ways in which our realities are constructed. Genre is one form of mediation whereby the structure of the text conveys assumptions about the content within. In the case of an English biography, genre is meant to announce the merit of its subject and the place of esteem *he* holds within English history. On one level, biography is thus about the production and re-production of proper English subjects. Woolf's novel both explicitly and implicitly responds to her father's work with the *Dictionary of National Biography* (*DNB*) as it mocks this genre and its conception of history. Julia Briggs writes:

> Since she had begun writing, Woolf had shown her impatience with a particular kind of history, history as the 'lives of great men', of heroes and hero-worship: it was part of an imaginary quarrel that she had with her father about the *Dictionary of National Biography*, with its emphasis on the lives of men of action, and its indifference to the lives of the obscure and of women; part of a larger argument on behalf of social rather than political history. (76)

Woolf's interest in genre foregrounds her vision of writing as a political act.

Perhaps not surprisingly, biographical and poststructuralist readings of *Orlando* abound and attempts to bridge these two discourses also appear within the rich and diverse body of scholarship on the novel. My reading of the text also merges various theoretical approaches to

Orlando through my focus on the figure of interruption in the text. [127] I argue that the various forms of interruptions in the novel reveal the instability of both the gendered body and the textual body. Orlando's extensive lifespan and change in sex may be the most obvious disruptions of a traditional narrative and a conventional understanding of the body, but these are only two of the ways Woolf's work poses a challenge to genre and gender conventions. Textual and paratextual elements, namely the illustrations, their captions, and the narrator's tangential and metafictional asides, disrupt our expectations and destabilize our understanding of subjectivity, gender, genre, and time. Photographs interspersed throughout the text interrupt the narrative and unsettle some of the assertions put forth by the written words. Though the photographs appear to be illustrations—and are labeled as such in the prefatory pages to the text—they function more precisely as a form of interruption, for they disrupt the illusion of wholeness in a subject. In this way, Woolf's formal strategies parallel those of Barnes, as both authors use visual images to complicate rather than illustrate subjectivity. As I will explain in detail below, the photographs in *Orlando* challenge temporal continuities as well as our understanding of subjectivity. The accompanying captions reveal the slippage of language and likewise open up room for multiple readings of Orlando's body. The photographs and their captions point to the lack of a unified subject and undermine various claims to truth throughout the text.

Woolf's use of the fictional narrator/biographer achieves these ends, as well. Like the photographs, the narrator's unknowingly revealing digressions expose the construction of the human body through language, clothing, and cultural norms while highlighting the artificial constructs of genre through his self-reflexive comments on the art of biography. The narrator's

[127] The scholarship on *Orlando* is voluminous, but my own work on the novel has been most informed by the work of Talia Schaffer and Karyn Z. Sproles.

truth claims and metafictional reflections produce interruptions to the sentence and the narrative as a whole while satirizing the *DNB* and other masculinist biographies. *Orlando* masquerades as a biography, a Bildungsroman, a Künstlerroman, a *roman a clef*, and a novel, but as I will ultimately show, Woolf aims to destroy all barriers with this work and create something new, a hybrid work free from conventions.

Orlando's table of contents, list of illustrations, and index reinforce the formal appearance of a biography and corroborate the generic declaration put forth in the title; yet, its preface is notably out of place. Long and detailed, this extensive, eclectic list of names includes family and friends, authors of the past and present, colleagues, and critics.[128] Woolf's preface to the novel begins with an acknowledgement of the many writers to whom this work is indebted. Although not an extraordinary gesture in itself, some of Woolf's choices are quite striking. She begins, "Many friends have helped me in writing this book. Some are dead and so illustrious that I scarcely dare name them, yet no one can read or write without being perpetually in debt of Defoe, Sir Thomas Browne, Sterne…" (vii). The first author she names is Defoe, whom she describes in her diary as "a great writer surely to be there imposing himself on me after 200 years" (*WD* 11). Laurence Sterne's name also appears on the list. Though she provides no rationale for the acknowledgement of eighteenth-century writers,[129] their most noteworthy novels—*Robinson Crusoe* and *Tristram Shandy*, respectively—share the conceit of making fictional claims to authenticity: both are ostensibly autobiographical or biographical works. In its claims to truth, *Orlando* parodies and appropriates certain conventions from these earlier works.

[128] For a detailed analysis of the Preface, see Southworth's "Virginia Woolf's Orlando Preface, The Modernist Writer, and Networks of Cultural, Financial and Social Capital" (75-107).
[129] In "'The utmost fluidity exist with the utmost permanence': Virginia Woolf's un-Victorian Sterne," M-C Newbould discusses Woolf's fascination with Sterne and his influence on her ouevre. Southworth acknowledges that "The *Orlando* Preface draws on a long tradition of parodic prefaces such as Miguel de Cervantes's preface to *Don Quixote* and Laurence Sterne's preface to *Tristram Shandy*" (75), but does not make any other mention of Sterne in her essay on the preface.

Though one typically thinks of Stein when it comes to modernist connections to Defoe, it seems that Woolf paid homage to this writer first.

Woolf's preface also makes the readers think about the parameters of a text. If, as Helen Southworth compellingly argues, Woolf's preface operates as an engagement with the literary and cultural marketplace and an acknowledgement of the material conditions of production, then the preface functions as a paratext that complicates further the boundary "between the inside and the outside" (Genette 261), between fiction and reality, and in this case, between public and private spheres.[130] By its very nature, a preface blurs the line between the world of the text and the world beyond it while highlighting the materiality of the book. In a text overtly concerned with forms of mediation, the preface acts as a reminder of the constructed nature of all texts and of the role genre plays in this construction. Woolf's text works to expose its own construction in an effort to disrupt our expectations of genre.

Beyond the preface, sentence-level interruptions begin with the first line of the narrative: "He—for there could be no doubt of his sex, though the fashion of the time did something to disguise it—was in the act of slicing at the head of a Moor which swung from the rafters" (13). The narrative commences *in medias res*, highlighting the centrality of both formal and temporal interruptions. Woolf's em dashes disrupt the flow of the sentence and situate Orlando's sex as an incidental but indispensable truth. Though less frequently quoted than the opening line of *Mrs*.

[130] In defining the paratext, Genette says, "But [a] text rarely appears in its naked state, without the reinforcement and accompaniment of a certain number of productions, themselves verbal or not, like an author's name, a title, a preface, illustrations. One does not always know if one should consider that they belong to the text or not, but in any case they surround it and prolong it, precisely in order to *present* it, in the usual sense of this verb, but also in its strongest meaning: to *make it present*, to assure its presence in the world, its 'reception' and its consumption, in the form, nowadays at least, of a book" (261, emphasis in original). In *The Interrupted Moment*, Ruotolo says, "I take seriously Woolf's designation of *Orlando* as "A Biography" (2). While I take issue with Ruotolo's naïve and uncomplicated acceptance of the book's extended title, it does highlight the role of the paratext in the framing and interpretation of a text. Karyn Z. Sproles notes that Orlando was originally improperly shelved by bookstores in England, which placed the work alongside other biographies (74).

Dalloway, this passage provides a condensation of many of the novel's key thematic concerns—sex, gender, race, class, nationality, and fashion—while demonstrating that each of these categories is inextricable from the others: Orlando's engagement in masculine play is herein highly politicized and his performance of aristocratic masculinity integral to his interpellation as an English subject.[131] Orlando's aggressive behavior on the first page of the novel is an imitation of "Orlando's fathers" who "had struck many heads of many colours off many shoulders, and brought them back to hang from the rafters" (13). At this moment, Orlando is the paradigmatic biographical subject: he is male, aristocratic, and already a proper English subject following in his father's footsteps. Yet, Woolf presents us with gendered and genre-based expectations only to make her later defiance of these conventions more pronounced. The formal and temporal disruptions of the novel's first sentence serve as subtle harbingers of the monumental disruptions to come.

The emphasis on the certainty of Orlando's gender identity in that first line foregrounds its very precariousness and upsets the presumed stability of the portrait that appears as the frontispiece to the novel. This image is a portrait of an androgynous aristocratic child adorned in male clothing from the Elizabethan era with the caption "*Orlando as a Boy*." Orlando appears with flowing locks of hair; full, crimson lips; and bows and flourishes on his shoes and clothes. Language here at first appears to stabilize gender when the body does not. The prepositional phrase "as a Boy" seems to emphasize Orlando's youth and to foreground the generic concerns of the biography and the Bildungsroman, yet when read in tandem with the novel's opening line,

[131] Though Woolf highlights the cultural and gendered violence of English masculinity in this scene, she is careful not to render violence an essential quality of Englishness or masculinity. Orlando's change in sex and the character's reflections upon social and gender constructs undercut the necessity of defining Englishness or masculinity in these terms. The initial yoking of these identity categories with these forms of aggression, however, allow Woolf to be critical of hegemonic forms of masculinity. Her novel calls attention to the construction and reproduction of gendered and national subjects by disrupting familiar narratives and generic expectations.

the instability of language and gender becomes apparent. Though "*Orlando as a Boy*" may mark a specific temporal moment in Orlando's life by denoting his prepubescence, the preposition "as" may also be read as "in the character, capacity, or function of" or "in theatrical and related use: in the role of" (*OED*). Given the nature of this text and Orlando's sex and gender transformations, all three of these meanings are pertinent. There is already a theatrical element to portraiture in its signifying props and posed subject, but Woolf's text also underscores the performative nature of gender and the role that clothing and language play in its construction. [132]

Throughout the text, we are told that Orlando is "clearly" or "obviously" a male or a female. As we see here and later in the novel, language disciplines the body by attempting to fix and stabilize it, yet the novel simultaneously undermines this structural violence by disrupting rigid formulations of gender, genre, and language. This type of slippage is apparent in my reading of the frontispiece and the novel's opening sentence above, but Woolf's use of the mock biographer and his self-reflexive commentary on the conventions of biography undermine many of the novel's claims to truth. (The biographer's gender is not revealed. However, due to the masculinist values that Woolf is critiquing, I will use male pronouns when referring to the biographer.)

For instance, the narrator subverts his own claims of objectivity by revealing the necessity of his intervention in the construction of the narrative. The narrator/biographer begins Chapter 2 with a confession that interrupts the narration of Orlando's life story:

> The biographer is now faced with a difficulty which is better perhaps to confess than to gloss over. Up to this point in telling the story of Orlando's life, documents, both private and historical, have made it possible to fulfill the first duty of a biographer, which

[132] Numerous scholars have illustrated the connections between Woolf's representation of gender in *Orlando* and Judith Butler's theory of performativity in *Gender Trouble*. See, for example, Christy L Burns (esp. 355-356); Talia Schaffer (26-63); and George Piggford (283-299).

> is to plod without looking to right or left, in the indelible footprints of truth; unenticed by flowers; regardless of shade; on and on methodically till we fall plump into the grave and write *finis* on the tombstone above our heads. But now we come to an episode which lies right across our path, so that there is no ignoring it. Yet it is dark, mysterious, and undocumented; so there is no explaining it. … Our simple duty is to state the facts as far as they are known, and so let the reader make of them what he may. (65)

Although the biographer is preparing us for the inexplicable coma-like state that Orlando assumed after the frost, the flood, and the loss of Sasha, his statement reveals much about genre assumptions, particularly those relating to biography. His comments highlight the biographer's reliance upon documents in order to deliver truthful accounts.[133] But what are these "indelible footprints of truth"? Within the text itself, the only documents to which we, as readers, are privy are the photographs and the portraits. Though we are told that the photographs are representations of Orlando and Orlando's lovers, their non-fictional counterparts were easily identifiable figures in the lives of Woolf and Vita Sackville-West. This merger of fiction and nonfiction further complicates the biographer's claims to truth.

The portraits in *Orlando* claim to be representations of Sasha, the Archduchess Harriet, Shelmerdine, and Orlando at various moments in the last few centuries but they challenge the biographer's words rather than substantiate them. For instance, when the biographer reports Orlando's change in sex, he explains that the only physical alteration is to Orlando's genitalia, and stresses that Orlando is in all other ways the same. In fact, he calls upon the reader to examine the portraits to validate his assertion: "Their faces remained, as their portraits prove, practically the same" (138). Yet, the sitter for Orlando's portraits wasn't always Sackville-West. The two earlier portraits of Orlando—"*Orlando as a Boy*" and "*Orlando as Ambassador*"—are portraits of Sackville-West's male ancestors, which hung at Knole, her ancestral home

[133] His words also inadvertently exhibit the constructed nature of biographies.

(DiBattista 254-255). When the reader looks at the various portraits, she can easily see that the faces are decidedly *not* the same, and the portraits do not actually "prove" anything.

The artifact meant to contain the "indelible footprints of truth" is both full and devoid of meaning. Photographs interrupt a narrative of growth by ostensibly freezing a moment in time and history and fixing the identity of the subject in that moment. Although Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes warn contemporary readers against easy readings and false assumptions of photographs,[134] Woolf's destabilization of truth and history through her use of images in the novel predate these late twentieth-century theories. Much like those theorists, Woolf also posits that there is not an essential truth conveyed in a photograph.

Talia Schaffer's and Maria DiBattista's careful and well-researched work on the photographs calls further attention to the elusive subjects of the portraits. Three of the illustrations—"*Orlando on her return to England*," "*Orlando about the year 1840*," and "*Orlando at the present time"*—are photographs of Sackville-West taken for inclusion in the novel. Yet, a simple equation of Sackville-West with Orlando is complicated by Sackville-West's costumes and poses.[135] This prevents a reader from being able to say that Orlando is Sackville-West since Sackville-West appears here posing as Orlando. The slipperiness of language in the captions has met its match with Woolf's elaborate play on identity. As Schaffer puts it, "Orlando's photographs constantly show their subjects masquerading as someone else, for the living sitter must pretend to be a fictional character, and the photographed character must look synonymous with the novel's character. The performance never works" (27). Yet, it seems

[134] See Barthes's Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography and Sontag's On Photography.
[135] DiBattista calls "Orlando on her return to England" "a lovely portrait but an anachronism…It was Woolf who insisted that VSW pose to evoke the pictorial manner of Sir Peter Lely, the portrait painter who was court painter for the court of Charles I" (255-256).Angelica Bell, Woolf's niece, likewise appeared in costume and posed for her portrait in Orlando as "The Russian Princess as a Child" (DiBattista 255).

to me that this sort of failure is precisely the point. This never-ending dance between the real and simulacrum has evolved into a tarantella that deliberately blurs the division between the two terms and their corresponding counterparts: Vita and Orlando.[136] The photographs can only offer the constant deferral of meaning.

As I argue in my first chapter, an illustration is meant to clarify, exemplify, or shed further light on what has already been conveyed in the written text. Yet Woolf's illustrations do no such thing. Rather than serving as the evidence that the biographer purportedly delivers, these illustrations do more to confuse than to clarify. Take, for example, the photograph of Angelica Bell that appears in the first chapter with the caption "Russian Princess as a *Child*" (54 emphasis added). Its inclusion in the "biography" appears out of place. When we meet Sasha, the Russian princess, she has already reached maturity. The alluring, androgynous figure that we see described in the early pages of the novel and the person with whom Orlando quickly falls in love is not the child depicted in Vanessa Bell's photograph.[137] In fact, the inclusion of this photograph of Angelica Bell further complicates the relationship between the fictional narrative and its biographical underpinnings. Unlike the already complex relationship between Orlando and Vita noted above, reality and representation become triangulated here. Schaffer writes, "Between the historical reality of Violet Trefusis, the textual reality of Sasha, and the photographic reality of

[136] And of course, Orlando both "is and is not Sackville-West," as Stimpson and other critics have suggested (47). Helen Wussow more cynically claims, "The photographs in Orlando have no subject to create. They are bogus signs (3). Colin Dickey, on the other hand, takes issue more specifically with the representation of Orlando in the text versus the representation of Sackville-West's gender in the photographs: "The figure depicted in the photos is, in many ways, absent from the prose itself; Orlando changes from a definitive male to a definitive female, whereas Sackville-West more ambiguously straddles the line, presenting a blurred composite of the two halves of Orlando's self. *The full portrait of Orlando lies somewhere between the two, between the prose and the images*" (386, emphasis added).

[137] According to Maria DiBattista, the photo of Angelica Bell was taken in 1928 by Woolf's sister specifically for inclusion in *Orlando* (255).

Angelica [Bell, Woolf's niece], impossible gaps intervene" (34).[138] The convergence of these three realities disrupts the notion of a singular truth and singular identity.

In the final chapter of *Orlando*, the narrator comes closest to explicitly articulating this modern view of subjectivity and truth and thus shattering the notion of a singular, stable subject: "For she had a *great variety of selves* to call up, far more than we have been able to find room for, since a biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may have as many thousand" (309, emphasis added). While in part a parodic gesture toward the multifaceted protagonist, the narrator admits to the plurality of the modern subject, albeit in playful and hyperbolic terms.

This confession, along with the photographs from the text, serve as a commentary on the ever-evasive subject of a biography, yet they simultaneously and paradoxically draw attention to a biography's attempts to construct a coherent individual subject, a feat that can only be achieved through the careful selection of facts. Even a work that purports to be fact is contingent upon an artificial form, a fanciful construct that transforms a lifetime of experience into a simplified narrative, something that Bernard from *The Waves* eventually comes to understand. Likewise, with its emphasis on the plurality of identity, the end of *Orlando* seems to achieve some degree of reconciliation between the reality of experience and the problem of representation particularly as it pertains to the form of the novel.

At one odd and vulnerable moment, the biographer makes a telling admission of his limitations (while simultaneously and passive aggressively deriding other genres): "To give a *truthful* account of London society at that or indeed at any other time, is beyond the powers of the biographer or the historian. Only those who have little need of the *truth,* and no respect for

[138] This relationship is potentially complicated by the additional figure of Valerie Taylor, who Woolf initially wanted to stand in for Sasha/Violet. See Schaffer 32-34 for a more expansive history of the photograph.

it—the poets and the novelists—can be trusted to do it, for this is one of the cases where truth does not exist. Nothing exists. The whole thing is a miasma—*a mirage*" (192, emphasis added). Herein, the narrator points to the qualities of society that "evade [his] analysis" (193); he says, "Society is the most powerful concoction in the world and society has no existence whatsoever" (194). This description of London society is much like the complex and multifaceted Orlando, who is always just out of reach for both the narrator and the reader. His language is also similar to the way that contemporary poststructuralists theorize gender: [139] "'Man' and 'woman' are at once empty and overflowing categories. Empty because they have no ultimate, transcendental meaning. Overflowing because even when they appear to be fixed, they still contain within them alternative, denied, or suppressed definitions" (Scott 49). Certainly this speaks to Woolf's discussion of androgyny in *A Room of One's Own* and to the gender-bending qualities of Orlando and Shelmerdine,[140] but more important, the narrator's words speak to the nature of Orlando's personality. Though at first the narrator struggles with Orlando's change in sex, he eventually comes to terms with the many gendered selves that Orlando encompasses.[141] Just as Bernard comes to stand in for the collective group of individuals in *The Waves*, we come to accept Orlando as an indivisible collective of subjects.

In his contempt for literature in the passage above, the narrator's metafictional

[139] It is also worth noting that the subsequent paragraph of Woolf's text delves into the education of each sex (194).
[140] In *Orlando*, see, in particular, Orlando and Shelmerdine's insistence on confounding each other's gender presentation (252).
[141] Early in the text, the narrator struggles with the reality and the linguistic implications of Orlando's change in sex: "we have no choice left but to confess—he was a woman" (137). His initial difficulty with pronoun usage points to his inability to understand Orlando as a collective self. By the end of the text, he has reached a greater understanding of Orlando. In the "present moment," the narrator says, "Choosing then, only the selves we have found room for, Orlando may now have called on the boy who cut the nigger's head down; the boy who strung it up again; the boy who sat on the hill; the boy who saw the poet; the boy who handed the Queen the bowl of rose water; or she may have called upon the young man who fell in love with Sasha; or upon the Courtier; or upon the Ambassador; or upon the Soldier; or upon the Traveller; or she may have wanted the woman to come to her; the Gipsy; the Fine Lady; the Hermit; the girl in love with life; the Patroness of Letters; the woman who called Mar … or Shelmerdine … or Bonthrop … or all three together … all these selves were different and she may have called upon any one of them" (309-10).

concession highlights the fantastical and duplicitous nature of the text, and his words reveal something of the relationship between truth and desire at work in its construction. In the final pages of the book, the narrator observes Orlando's attention to the "pattern hid behind the cotton wool" (*MOB* 73), her efforts to notice the immense personality, complexity, and history behind each person and thing and the interconnectedness of it all: "each gained an odd moving power from this union of itself and something not itself … this mixture of truth and falsehood" (323). The narrator's words also offer a fitting description of the book itself. Woolf's text suggests that it is not the task of fiction to tell *the* truth, but *a* truth. Through its own mixture of fact and fiction, *Orlando* achieves something greater than its component parts.

In its fanciful and playful nature, the text serves as a record of desire and a marker of queer temporality. Certainly the book's dedication and representation of Orlando highlight Woolf's love for (and irritation with) Sackville-West,[142] but the photographs signify desire in pointed and creative ways. As noted earlier, the portraits of Orlando as a young man are in fact portraits of Sackville-West's male ancestors. Woolf could have asked Sackville-West to pose as the more masculine Orlando just as she asked her former lover to pose as the feminine Orlando. The decision to include these other portraits therefore conveys more than just the range of Orlando's presentations of gender and contributes to more than the scope of Orlando's lifespan. These portraits serve as a way of reimagining the past and the present as it could have been or should have been. As Judith Brown notes, the photographs signify loss, but simultaneously serve as a "remainder of desire" (87). In the context of *Orlando*, Woolf's loss (Vita) and Sackville-West's losses (Violet Trefusis and her ancestral home) are memorialized and reimagined.

[142] See Stimpson's "Desire and Creativity in H.D. and Woolf" and Suzanne Raitt's *Vita and Virginia* for a more detailed overview of the ways *Orlando* has been read in relation to Woolf and Sackville-West's relationship and break-up.

Orlando's ability to remain in her family home is, in a way, foreshadowed through the portraits of her male ancestors. And though Woolf and Sackville-West had already ended their love affair prior to the publication of the text, *Orlando* remains as a product of that love and desire in spite of the loss.

As a result of its whimsical and revisionary qualities, *Orlando* and its protagonist are able to exceed the boundaries of time to create an alternative past. As Elizabeth Freeman suggests, an "escape from history" may also "give access to an alternative history" (xi). Most of the photographs in the text are anachronistic and indeed many have to be for them to have any purpose within Woolf's work. The image of Angelica Bell as the Russian princess, for example, is a photograph that appears in the text before the invention of photography. Other pictures were also taken in 1928—such as "Orlando on her return to England" and "Orlando about the year 1840"—but attributed to an earlier time period. Even beyond the obvious anachronisms, the photographs imbue the queer temporality of the text with desire and possibility.

As mythical as the character of Orlando is, Woolf did instill the book with the historical present by ending the novel in the present day, on the date of the novel's publication. Through this action, Woolf places importance upon the present moment and invests it with possibility as she does in *Between the Acts*. DuPlessis notes, "Narrative outcome…is where subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one last flare of meaning" (3). Though Orlando has lived for centuries, she is still young (thirty-six) and full of life. The narrative ends with one final (melo)dramatic display of desire: Orlando runs outside calling for Shelmerdine,"baring her breast to the moon (which now showed bright) so that her pearls glowed like the eggs of some vast moon-spider" (328-29). Like the photograph of Sackville-West in pearls, this final scene is "a complex fictional embodiment of Woolf's desire, and a laying claim to another, fantastical

reality" (Stimpson 47). Through this text, Woolf is able to reimagine the past and imbue the present moment with possibility. Though without the gravitas of *Between the Acts* (with war looming in the background), the implication is similar: the present and the future are before us, ready to be shaped by each day's actions.

Through the use of the interruption in the novel, Woolf undoes binary logic. Orlando, who lives for hundreds of years, is *both* male and female, Vita and not Vita, ahistorical and in history. Orlando transcends the categories of gender, history, and time. Like this hybrid figure, this hybrid text of the same name creates something new, something detached from the phallogocentrism that Woolf sought to critique.

Conclusion

Published in close proximity to *A Room of One's Own* (1929), *Orlando* and its protagonist appear to overcome many of the obstacles that Woolf lays bare in her nonfiction.[143] Reflecting upon women and the novel, Woolf's narrator notes:

> But all the older forms of literature were hardened and set by the time she became a writer. The novel alone was young enough to be soft in her hands—another reason, perhaps, why she wrote novels. Yet who shall say that even now 'the novel' (I give it inverted commas to mark my sense of the words' inadequacy), who shall say that even this most pliable of all forms is rightly shaped for her use? No doubt we shall find her knocking that into shape for herself when she has the free use of her limbs; and providing some new vehicle, not necessarily in verse, for the poetry in her. (*AROO* 77-78)

A Room of One's Own, in anticipation of Hélène Cixous's work on *l'ecriture feminine*, suggests

[143] Lois Cucullu argues, "Orlando narrates what *A Room of One's Own* subsequently theorizes" (48), and Celia Marshik suggests that Orlando may be a realization of the woman writer who is given sufficient time to compensate for the obstacles put in front of her (74). Orlando also fulfills Woolf's aesthetic demands: "one must be woman-manly or man-womanly" (*ROO* 102).

that her/story demands a different form, a structure distinct from the novel. Likewise, Woolf's diary is peppered with visions of her works in progress that express her distance from the calcified novel associated with masculine power and oppression. Woolf's remarks on *Orlando* reveal her disdain for this form: "Anyhow I'm glad to be quit this time of writing 'a novel'; and hope never to be accused of it again" (*WD* 126). While certainly *Ulysses* and other modernist works strove to redefine poetry and the novel, we see that Woolf's complaints with this genre are often couched in gendered terms. *Orlando*, *The Waves*, and *Between the Acts* move beyond experiments that allow for the representation of "an ordinary mind on an ordinary day" ("Modern Fiction" 2089); the formal structure of her later texts is informed by Woolf's dedication to disrupting normative temporal modes. Through her use of multiple coexisting temporalities, Woolf challenges patriarchal understandings of time, history, and subjectivity as well as the forms traditionally used to represent them.

Woolf's reflections on her own work reveal the limitations of the novel and the need to break free from these conventions. Each of these hybrid works seems to take comfort in liminality as each seeks out a space and a form that is distinct from the novel. The title of Woolf's last major work, *Between the Acts*, calls attention to the importance of this liminal space, a space that Woolf invests with political potential. Like *Between the Acts*, Woolf's use of interludes in *The Waves* also points out the importance of the minor acts and all that occurs between the major acts of history. Even *Orlando* speaks to the between-ness of history, time, and gender. Thus, freedom from writing a "novel" is also freedom from a teleological view of history. Through their very structure, Woolf's hybrid texts create a space for and grant attention to alternative histories.

Chapter 3

"Act So That There Is No Use in a Centre": Hybridity and Queer Reproduction in Stein's *Tender Buttons* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*

Today, scholars widely acknowledge Gertrude Stein to be an innovative modernist figure interested in challenging genre conventions and redefining or reconsidering the novel, the biography, the autobiography, and even the smallest linguistic register, the word. Though Stein's centrality in the modernist literary canon is secure at present, her reputation today obscures Stein's initially tenuous literary success and stature.[144] Frequently ridiculed or misunderstood, much of Stein's work garnered scant serious public attention for several years of her writing career.[145] Even Stein's brother and onetime roommate Leo mocked his sister's efforts at experimentation and expressed incredulity at her eventual fame.[146] Though Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* boldly boasts Stein as one the great "geniuses" of her time, this pronouncement undoubtedly belies her frustration and self-doubt.[147] *The Autobiography*

[144] Even Stein's centrality within literary modernism is a bit tenuous. Single-author Cambridge Companions exist for Woolf and H.D., but editors have rejected (Eric Haralson's) proposals for one on Stein on the grounds that there is no marketplace for such a text.

[145] For instance, Alfred Kreymborg's review *Tender Buttons* in *The Morning Telegraph* fails to acknowledge the legitimacy of Stein's work. Even the title of his review–"Gertrude Stein—Hoax and Hoaxtress: A Study of the Woman Whose 'Tender Buttons' Has Furnished New York with a New Kind of Amusement" frames her aesthetic project as mere frivolity (qtd. in Murphy 137).

[146] Janet Malcolm writes of Leo Stein, "He kept quizzing friends about their reaction, hoping to have them confirm his view of Gertrude as devoid of talent and of her admirers as 'fatuous idiots who go to hear her silly twaddle'" (39). Apparently, Leo was also skeptical of the *Autobiography* and wrote, "The book seems to me a rather clever superstructure on the basis of impenetrable stupidity" (qtd. in Malcolm 39).

[147] For example, Ulla E. Dydo shows that in Stein's letters to her agent, William Bradley, she, with great pains, expresses her distress at the lack of the publishing industry's interest in her work and her dependence on both him and the literary marketplace (543-546). "Toklas" also suggests in the *Autobiography* that this is a compensatory coping strategy for Stein: "But she always says some day they, anybody, will find out that she is of interest to them, she and her writing. And she always consoles herself that the newspapers are always interested. They always say, she says, that my writing is appalling but they always quote it and what is more, they quote it correctly, and those they say they admire they do not quote. This at some of her most bitter moments has been a consolation" (70). Finally, although writing with an obvious bias, Hemingway highlights the fragility of Stein's ego in *A Moveable*

nevertheless jumpstarted Stein's career and secured for her the acclaim she always sought.

In this chapter, I read *Tender Buttons*, one of Stein's most experimental texts, alongside *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, one of Stein's more accessible texts in order to highlight methodological consistencies in these ostensibly disparate forms. Both of these texts represent forms of generic hybridity. As a collection of prose poems, *Tender Buttons* is an amalgam of poetry and prose. The *Autobiography* is a combination of biography and autobiography narrated through the voice of a Stein/Toklas composite. Both works challenge generic conventions and resist normative frameworks. My reading of *Tender Buttons* and the *Autobiography* focuses upon forms of what I am calling "queer reproduction," a term I use to describe generative forms of queerness. This phrase has appeared elsewhere in scholarship but without adequate theorization.[148] My use of the term builds on José Muñoz's conception of queer futurity. In *Cruising Utopia*—a polemic written in response Lee Edelman's *No Future* and other antirelational queer theories— Muñoz demands that we understand queerness in terms of futurity, as a collective practice and politics directed towards creating a more equitable world.[149] Muñoz boldly declares, "QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. … The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (1).

Feast by explaining that bringing up Joyce in conversation with Stein was "like mentioning one general favorably to another general. You learned not to do it the first time you made the mistake" (28).

[148] Lawrence R. Schehr's *French Post-modern Masculinities: From Neuromatrices to Seropositivity* contains a chapter called "The Work of Literature in an Age of Queer Reproduction"—an obvious homage to Walter Benjamin—which examines "queer masculinity compounded by seropositivity" in narratives of HIV and AIDS in France (45); the two authors he studies reinscribe their same-sex desire and HIV positive status into their writing. Bill Basquin also published a short essay called "A Site for Queer Reproduction" concerning a queer film festival in *GLQ*. Neither author, however, theorizes his use of the term "queer reproduction."

[149] Muñoz contends, "I respond to Edelman's assertion that the future is the province of the child and therefore not for the queers by arguing that queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always in the horizon. I contend that if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon" (11). He also finds that antirelational queer theory contingent on negation—like Edelman's—reinscribes binary oppositions (13).

It is in this vein that I read Stein's work. Her linguistic play helps to reconceptualize the world as well as the lenses through which we view it.

In my reading of Stein's works, I use queer reproduction to discuss forms of production, reproduction, or repetition that occur outside of normative frameworks. I attend to the queer linguistic, generic, and temporal registers that constitute subjectivity, revealing how Stein uses these frameworks to challenge dominant forms. Queer theory, in its institution, was intended to focus on various forms of marginalization, not simply gay, lesbian, and transgender concerns. Recent turns in queer studies, in fact, have attempted to move beyond identity politics to consider how queer may be deployed as methodology.[150] I situate my analysis of queer reproduction within this context. Thus, through the lens of queer reproduction, I highlight the deliberately destabilizing registers of *Tender Buttons* and the *Autobiography*. I argue that these texts deconstruct unified subjectivity and forms of biological essentialism while challenging sexist genre conventions. Both texts use queer forms of repetition as a means for seeing words, objects, and ideas from a new perspective. My attention to queer reproduction in these texts highlights Stein's use of defamiliarization and transvaluation. These rhetorical strategies force Stein's readers to take an active role in the process of signification. These texts therefore resist mastery and privilege the plurality of meaning. In this way, making sense of Stein's work requires an "alternative" or "queer" reading practice.[151] Stein's writing calls attention to what

[150] Like Heather Love, Jack Halberstam, and others, I reject the "death of queer studies" narrative. Stony Brook University's "Q/F/T* SBU: A Year of Queer/Feminist/Trans* Study" is a lecture series that examines new viable directions for queer studies and one that, in fact, aims to situate "queer" as methodology: "Rather than thinking about queer/feminist/trans* as specific identity categories, we are more interested in queer/feminist/trans* as method(s) for enacting new subjects, analyses, aesthetics, politics, and worlds" (citation).

[151] Georgia Johnston claims that *Tender Buttons* produces "an alternative reading practice" (595) and Eric Haralson argues that Stein's legacy includes "lasting implications for a queer reading practice" (211). My reading of *Tender Buttons* expands these assessments by revealing Stein's linguistic challenge to stable subject positions. As I will soon show, Stein deconstructs the divide between reader and writer and ultimately proves to be both a reader and a writer of her own work.

Jerome McGann has called "the textual condition" by highlighting the text's perpetual instability (8) and its efforts to "wake [up readers] to the reality and truth of language" through its poetic form (137).

Through the juxtaposition of Stein's "experimental" work with her more popular "audience writing"—works created for the express purpose of consumption—I oppose the critical framework established by Stein and upheld by most scholars and deconstruct the ostensible binary between these two strains of her *oeuvre*.[152] In so doing, I engage with larger modernist debates regarding "the great divide,"[153] or the relationship between popular culture and High Modernism. In *Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity*, Aaron Jaffe calls attention to "a misleading tendency to explain high culture almost exclusively as a phenomenon of production while simultaneously treating mass culture almost exclusively as a phenomenon of consumption" (89). Though my focus on "queer reproduction" in Stein's work may initially seem to reify the high/low and production/consumption divide given Stein's status as one of the most avant-garde high modernists, I contend that Stein complicates an oversimplified notion of production and a superficial divide between high and popular works of literature. My reading of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* reveals how Stein's "audience writing" simultaneously troubles this divide between production and consumption, for even in Stein's most straightforward texts, the reader must take part in the production of meaning. Thus, all of her works, I maintain, challenge the dichotomy between the author/creator and the reader/consumer.

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[152] According to Dydo, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was "her first book of what she came to call audience writing, created to please readers, for success, rather than writing for its own sake" (5). Stein also called *Autobiography* one of her "open and public books," a category that opposed her "real kind of books" (Dydo 550).

[153] Andreas Huyssen deploys the term "Great Divide" to describe "the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture" (viii). He argues that this conceptual framework remains prevalent in the academy. His book *After the Great Divide* (1986) contends that while Modernism defined itself through "a conscious strategy of exclusion" (vii), postmodernism endeavors to unite high art and popular culture. Stein's *oeuvre*, I argue, complicates the dichotomy between high art and popular culture during the modernist epoch.

***Tender Buttons*: "The Difference is Spreading"**

Tender Buttons was Stein's first independently published work. Carl Van Vechten, a friend and avid supporter of Stein's literary career, recommended her work to the poet and publisher, Donald Evans.[154] His small New York publishing house, Claire Marie, which promised "New Books for Exotic Tastes" (qtd. in Murphy 137), published *Tender Buttons* in 1914, two years after she began composing the collection. Though today *Tender Buttons* is lauded by many as one of the great experimental works of Gertrude Stein and literary Modernism, this peculiar collection of prose poems was not always revered. According to Van Vechten, "It was widely quoted and ridiculed by friends and enemies in the American Press" (460). Despite its current security in the modernist canon, contemporary critics still consider *Tender Buttons* "an assault on reason" (Souhami xiii). It has simply taken time—the rise of feminism and the advent of poststructuralism—for the literary community at large to consider this "assault" as an asset of the text. As Marianne DeKoven explains, "She went a great deal further than anyone else in the modernist period in reinventing literary language in a way that undoes conventional, hierarchical, patriarchal modes of signification, substituting, in diverse stylistic modes, a rich, complex, open-ended syntactical and semantic polysemy" (*The Gender of Modernism* 480). She highlights the feminist implications of Stein's critique of reason, a term that serves as a stand-in for both masculine and rigid modes of thinking. As a repudiation of these values, *Tender Buttons* rejects conventional forms and generic conventions and privileges ambiguity and multiplicity over mastery.

As Stein's "most 'nonsensical' text" (Brandel 373),[155] *Tender Buttons* refuses

[154] The publisher wrote to her expressing interest in printing one of Stein's plays, but she supplied the manuscript for *Tender Buttons* instead.

[155] Brandel finds the "nonsensical" quality of the text to be one of its assets because it requires the reader's

straightforward interpretive strategies. Even the significance of the title remains a matter of debate, for Stein immediately presents the reader with a form of semantic confusion. Marjorie Perloff suggests:

> The very title *Tender Buttons* is a kind of Dada joke for, by definition, buttons are not tender. It has been suggested that Gertrude Stein is referring to buds (the French *tendres boutons*) or to nipples, but perhaps the best way to take the title is simply as an indication that the text itself will emphasize metamorphosis: hard objects become soft, wet substances dry up, persons turn into objects, buttons sprout before our eyes. (40)

Though Perloff conceptualizes Stein's wordplay through the metaphor of metamorphosis, perhaps we may more aptly conceive of its linguistic features as multiple, variable, and in a constant state of flux, for the text does not establish a narrative of one singular evolution of change, but is instead marked by the constant slippage of meaning. Sara J. Ford highlights other readings of the title, but ultimately refuses any singular interpretation. She notes, "Scholars have argued, for example, that the 'buttons' of the title 'mean' a variety of different things, including words, actual buttons, various parts of the female anatomy, and, amusingly, asparagus tips. As soon as we begin to see how the text resists any singular definitive reading, we can also see that such an approach is somewhat far from the point here" (47). Ford's receptivity to the multiplicity of meanings seems like the most responsible stance for engaging with this deliberately intractable text. Indeed, there are concrete limitations to imposing a singular meaning to the text. As Pamela Hadas states, "It is interesting, in a way, to go through *Tender Buttons* as one would a book of riddles trying to guess the 'answers' … but this approach (as she surely knew and was amused by) can only lead to overingeniousness on the one hand and frustration on the other" (60). Successful readings of *Tender Buttons* must therefore embrace ambiguity and the plurality

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collaboration (385). I do not agree, however, with his assessment that Stein "avoids making meaning" (385). I address this assumption later in the chapter.

of meaning.

The need for such nontraditional reading practices becomes evident quickly. The poems themselves, marked by density and ambiguity, are even more enigmatic than the title of the collection. *Tender Buttons* is divided into three sections—"Objects," "Food," and "Rooms"—and each prose poem is given its own specific title. The individual poems, however, fail to resemble their ostensible subjects. These odd stylistic choices call attention to "the poetical act which the artist sets in motion" and "heighte[n] our awareness of the peculiarity of the word" (McGann 149, 137). Take, for instance, "A DOG." The poem reads, "A little monkey goes like a donkey that means to say that means to say that more sighs last goes. Leave with it. A little monkey goes like a donkey" (474). Despite its title, the poem seems to have little—if anything—to do with "A DOG." Not even Stein's reflection on the poem accounts for the "dog" in the title: " 'A little monkey goes like a donkey…' That was an effort to illustrate the movement of a donkey going up a hill, you can *see* it plainly. 'A little monkey goes like a donkey.' An effort to make the movement of the donkey, and so the *picture* hangs complete" ("Transatlantic Interview" 508, emphasis added). Though Stein refrains from explaining the poem in a way that satisfies our curiosity about authorial intent, her comments nevertheless highlight the importance of sight and perception, which, I argue, are central concerns of the text at large.

Scholarship on Stein's *Tender Buttons* tends to fall into one of two predominant strains: lesbian readings of the text that attempt to decode cryptic passages written to or about Toklas or critical responses to the work that focus on the influence of cubism on Stein's prose poems. Both of these approaches offer rich insights into this multifaceted collection, but these imposing critical lenses have limited scholarly considerations of the text. Even more nuanced readings of *Tender Buttons*, like that of Sara J. Ford, whose work attempts to account for both of these

interpretations, tend to privilege one methodology over another. In this chapter, I take these major frameworks into account while shedding light on the generic particularities of this text and the new definitions of productivity to which it gives rise. I contend that Stein's use of the prose poem—a markedly hybrid genre—coupled with the queer overtones of the text give rise to new conceptions of productivity. Through the merger of two distinct genres, Stein produces new hybrid forms. Yet her rejection of standard forms extends to the level of the sentence and even the word. Stein's refusal to engage in what she called "Patriarchal Poetry" meant that she needed to promote new ways of seeing the world and new ways of deploying language. As a lesson in semiotics, *Tender Buttons* highlights the instability of the signifier and shows how the protean nature of language may transform masculinist notions of Logos. The first sentence of "Rooms," in fact, begins with the following imperative: "Act so that there is no use in a centre" (498). Herein, Stein highlights the productive deconstruction of dominant epistemological models. Acting as if there is no use in a center necessitates the disposal of stable formulations of genre, gender, language, and identity. In *Tender Buttons*, Stein defamiliarizes these categories to reveal how they function as constructs; as such, Stein suggests that gender, genre, and identity may be reconfigured through language with subversive possibilities. *Tender Buttons* insists that language, poetry, and identity must be made to appear strange in order to see these structures with fresh eyes. Stein's queer strategy of "Beginning again and again" is one way to liberate words from their conventional or clichéd meanings ("Composition as Explanation" 522). Thus, language can be reshaped to give birth to new forms and new objects, while gender and identity can be deconstructed to give rise to new modern subjectivities. In this way, Stein's work negates essentialist understandings of these categories. Stein's rejection of traditional linguistic registers therefore produces something new—subjectivities, genres, and forms, and objects. Though

Tender Buttons may be read as a lesbian love letter or an exercise in literary cubism, the text proves to offer more than these readings suggest. Through its hybridity, *Tender Buttons* challenges normative sexual practices and literary institutions; however, in doing so, the work also subverts traditional notions of productivity to reveal how queerness may be productive.

Stein's use of the prose poem reflects her interest in challenging generic conventions. As the name of this genre suggests, the prose poem is an amalgam of poetry and prose. As a *product* of the union between poetry and prose, the prose poem is inherently somewhat queer in form, for it is marked by its refusal to adhere to either set of conventions. Though not all literary scholars recognize this hybrid form as a legitimate genre, even critics scornful of this recalcitrant literary form are forced to contend with its existence and classification. I argue that it is the liminal status of the prose poem that grants the genre its own disruptive possibilities. In *A Tradition of Subversion: The Prose Poem in English from Wilde to Ashbery*, Margueritte S. Murphy argues that the prose poem is an incendiary form by its very nature:

> Because of its marginality, its situation on the 'borderline of prose' (T.S. Eliot's phrase), it must continually subvert prosaic conventions in order to establish itself as authentically 'other.' I see this necessity to subvert not just the conventions of verse, but also of prose as a basic distinguishing feature of the genre […] Moreover, each prose poem must suggest a traditional prose genre to some extent in order to subvert it. (3)

Murphy's overview of the prose poem highlights the contentious nature of the genre. Its very existence is contingent upon its simultaneous likeness and resistance to poetry and prose. In this way, its relationship to these conventional genres replicates a center/periphery model whereby the prose poem can only exist in relation to the major genres. Yet as a "minor" genre, the prose poem may aptly critique the "major" or established genres and thus more broadly functions as a critique of literary institutions.

Through their status as a "minor" form, the prose poems of *Tender Buttons* evade the prescriptive logic of both poetry and prose. The collection contains no narrative and follows no plotline; it moves instead from objects to food to rooms. The prose poems also bear little to no resemblance to either the rigid forms of Victorian poetry or the sparse nature of Imagism. In its density and plurality, *Tender Buttons* also differs greatly from the landmark hybrid texts of the following decade, such as Jean Toomer's *Cane* (1923), a powerful union of poetry and prose; or William Carlos Williams' *Spring and All* (1923), with its fusion of poetic form and essay. *Tender Buttons* does not visually resemble these collections, which make use of traditional poetic structures with clear line breaks, nor does it attempt to produce meaning in conventional ways. In his essay on *Tender Buttons*, Jamie Hilder candidly highlights the alienating linguistic elements of the text: "The book offers no standardized syntax or coherent referentiality to guide the reader" (66-67). In fact, according to Darcy L. Brandel, Stein prioritizes other poetic objectives above "making meaning":

> Her continual refusal to provide rational logic, her emphasis on sound over meaning, and her playfully random associations guarantee her readers a unique experience […] *Tender Buttons* is so disruptive that most readers have no idea even how to approach reading the text. Because she avoids making meaning, Stein's text offers no narrative structure to follow, aside from a more traditional title page that offers at least a suggestion of 'chapters.' (385)

Brandel accurately highlights the deliberately disruptive qualities of the text, which undoubtedly challenge a reader's expectations, though his estimation that Stein "avoids making meaning" is too hasty, as I will soon show.

Certainly, at first glance, the collection may seem a bit haphazard beyond its attention to domestic objects and spaces. Each section of the text takes on its own stylistic variance. In the first section entitled "Objects," Stein crafts fifty eight different entries—mostly nouns—ranging

in length from two words, as in "GLAZED GLITTER," to a little more than a full page, as in "A SUBSTANCE IN A CUSHION." Most of the entries draw their titles from ordinary household items. Some of the entries contain more conceptually abstract titles, such as "IN BETWEEN" or "MORE." The second section is labeled "Food" and begins with a list of all of the entries in the form of a paragraph with semicolons separating each of the forty entries. Many of these are named after food items: "ROASTBEEF," "MUTTON," "SUGAR," "CRANBERRIES," "MILK," "EGGS," and "APPLE"; others are a bit more surprising, such as "END OF SUMMER" and "A CENTRE IN A TABLE." The first entry, "ROASTBEEF" is several pages long, but the others vary in length with the shortest ("DINING") measuring in again at three words. The final section, "Rooms," is not divided into individual entries, but appears as one continuous prose poem that is roughly a dozen pages in length. In spite of the irregular length and structure of each section, the text is not devoid of meaning. Even as Stein declares in the very first prose poem of the work, *Tender Buttons* is nevertheless "not unordered in not resembling" (461). The prose poems may differ from both prose and poetry in their structure and in their objectives, but they are not without design or purpose. Through her attention to sound and to the individuality of each word, Stein allows us to encounter common words again as if for the first time. The euphonious qualities of language come alive as Stein obfuscates the signifying qualities of the sign. Language then operates in the text beyond its metaphorical function. Calling attention to the materiality of language, *Tender Buttons* highlights the fact that language does more than stand in for an absent referent. Rather than understanding language in terms of its lack and its inherent inadequacy, Stein points to the productive qualities of language—its variability, its mellifluous features, and its ability to bring new objects into being.

The prose poems do not make use of end rhyme, but they are attentive to rhythm and

sound. If one abandons the need to make immediate sense of the arrangement of words on the page, it is easy to become delightfully absorbed in the melodic qualities of the text. Hadas, in fact, warns against ignoring the musicality of Stein's prose poems: "Of course if one does not give willing attention to the individual words as sound as well as sense, one misses the sound sense of having so many possibilities—the major enchantment of such a chant" (59). *Tender Buttons* is highly alliterative and heavily peppered with consonance, assonance, and internal rhyme. Stein grants deliberate and sustained attention to sound, and in so doing, highlights the playfulness of language: homonyms, homophones, and puns abound. Seriousness and play prove to be a false dichotomy. Stein's play with sound undoubtedly produces meaning and allows for the slippage between words and their homophones.

Stein overtly positions *Tender Buttons* in contradistinction to the tired uses of language prevalent in the previous century. In "A Transatlantic Interview 1946," she explains, "You had to realize words had lost their value in the Nineteenth Century, particularly towards the end, they had lost much of their variety, and I felt that I could not go on, that I had to recapture the value of the individual word, find out what it meant and act *within* it" (504 emphasis added). Stein's words frame her aesthetics as markedly modern, but they also highlight the need to re-envision the merits of language. In her estimation, language has an active potential. Notice that she writes, "act within it," rather than "act upon it." This distinction is important, for Stein attributes language with some degree of agency here. Hadas similarly remarks of *Tender Buttons*, "It is as if she let the 'words write' their own meanings, but certainly, certainly not unconsciously" (60). Yet, obviously the words cannot produce meaning without the aid of readers.

Herein, Stein inadvertently highlights the collaborative nature of her project. Though she frames *Tender Buttons* as the collaboration between her arrangement of words and language's

signifying power, her articulation belies the importance of the collaboration that takes place between the reader and the text—the necessary process through which signs produce meaning. As Stanley Fish argues, "what utterers do is give hearers and readers the opportunity to make meanings (and texts) by inviting them to put into execution a set of strategies" (173). Though Stein is the creator of *Tender Buttons*, she is also one of its readers. Stein occupies these dual subject positions during the composition of the text. As a writer, her efforts to divorce language from meaning prove impossible, for they conflict with her position as a reader. Stein notes,

> I took individual words and thought about them until I got their weight and volume complete and put them next to another word, and at this same time I found out very soon that there is no such thing as putting them together without sense. It is impossible to put them together without sense. *I made innumerable efforts to make words write without sense and found it impossible. Any human being putting down words had to make sense out of them.* ("Transatlantic Interview" 504, emphasis added)

Writing is contingent upon reading, and therefore, Stein finds herself simultaneously occupying the roles of writer and reader. Furthermore, Stein foregrounds reading as an interpretive act, one that intrinsically forecloses the possibility of writing "without sense." Certainly, one cannot read *Tender Buttons* passively,[156] but the text moreover refuses simplistic interpretive strategies. Because of its resistance to rationality, mastery, and standard linguistic constructions, *Tender Buttons* requires more of its readers than most *writerly* texts. By placing words within a new context and arranging them in a way that is counterintuitive to the reader, Stein leaves the reader with no choice but to produce new meaning. Though undoubtedly *Tender Buttons* accomplishes "the goal of literary work (of literature as work)" in Barthes's estimation, for it "make[s] the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text" (S/Z 4), Stein achieves these ends on a

[156] Fish, in fact, altogether rejects the concept of "simply reading," for he believes it conveys an impossible scenario: "the possibility of pure (that is, disinterested) perception" (168).

microcosmic scale, as well, for the production of meaning occurs even on the level of a smaller linguistic unit—the individual word.

In *Tender Buttons*, transvaluation is a form of queer reproduction, a means for producing difference. Given that Stein argues words had "lost their value" in the previous century, part of her project must inevitably be concerned with the question of value. In "ROASTBEEF," the first entry of the "Food" section, Stein rejects the concept of utility. She writes, "There is no use there is no use at all in smell, in taste, in teeth, in toast, in anything, there is no use at all and the respect is mutual" (479). Certainly, on the most literal level, the word "use" does not appear within "smell," "taste," "teeth," "toast," or "anything," yet these words and their referents are not without value or purpose. And on a more philosophical level, Stein's formulation classifies "respect" as more important than "use." Herein lies an implicit imperative to think beyond the consumption value of words and objects, for Stein's list underscores the importance of the senses, of perception, of experiencing language, identity, and the world in new ways. Thus, her collection is contingent upon the production of new meanings and new associations for old words. As Stein writes in the same poem, "it is so easy to *exchange meaning*, it is so easy to see the *difference*" (477-478, emphasis added). Stein therefore supplants lost value and traditional values with new considerations. As Ford puts it, "Breaking open the hardened and comfortable shell of conventional language would open the doors to the possibility for difference, for then things that were of little value according to language's rigid program of classification might be set free to be *valued differently*" (60, emphasis added). The "possibility for difference" exists because of the ability to "exchange meaning." In other words, inscribed in the arbitrary relationship between the signifier and the signified is the possibility for changing that relationship.

In part, *Tender Buttons* represents an effort to abandon the stale and stagnant metaphors of the previous century that, in Stein's view, drained language of its significance and its specificity. For, "If lilies are lily white" (465), then language has lost much of its meaning. Although such an expression is purely tautological, it conveys language's metaphorical function. In a similar formulation on the adjacent page, Stein begins, "If the red is rose […]" (464). Herein, a flower and color appear in another conditional phrase, but the subject and the predicate adjective have been reversed. Though we may expect the rose to be red, this formulation productively complicates our expectations thereby causing us to actually attend to these words rather than skipping over them. In this setting, they gain new attention. The words still make sense and evoke an image. "Rose" may also refer to a specific color red, but in that case, "rose" functions in the same way that "lily white" does; both articulations refuse to take shape as similes. Each of these examples reveals the malleability and versatility of language: the second example demonstrates how an adjective, "red," can become a noun: "the red"—the shade of red about which I am speaking, while the first example shows how a noun, "lily," can be combined with an adjective, "white," to form a more specific adjective: "lily white." Stein's play with words also reminds readers of the specificity of language as she renders the derivation of these adjectives explicit. In this context, tired metaphors take on new life.

In *Tender Buttons*, even clichéd metaphors and expressions can be reinvigorated with subversive potential. One of the prose poems in the "Objects" section of *Tender Buttons* is called "RED ROSES." Though the red rose is a clichéd romantic image and a common sexual metaphor, Stein finds a way to divorce our association with this hackneyed trope from the words themselves. Stein shatters the cliché by taking the metaphor one step further. Instead of using the image to subtly suggest sexuality and female genitalia, Stein paradoxically uses puns and double

entendre to render the connotation far more explicit: "A cool red rose and a pink cut pink, a collapse and a sold hole, a little less hot" (472). Stein recuperates the tired metaphor by supplanting it with more transgressive images: "a pink cu[n]t […] and a […] hole." Herein, Stein's lesbian poetics produce new queer associations. This type of disruption yields new meaning while reanimating the red rose. Alliteration and assonance temper the perceived crassness of the term. In this new formation, Stein transforms the vulgarity of the implied connotations by couching base metaphors for female genitalia in poetic language. Though this strategy might distract possible censors, it moreover functions as an act of transvaluation and reclamation, not unlike second-wave feminism's reappropriation of "cunt."[157]

In other prose poems, Stein similarly complicates semantic logic to reveal the construction of purely arbitrary identity categories. In the poem, "IN BETWEEN, Stein writes, "A virgin a whole virgin is judged made and so between curves and outlines […] there is no satin wood shining" (472). Stein's wordplay highlights the fact that "virgin" is an identity defined through passivity. Stein emphasizes that this subject position it is "made" and subsequently "judged" from an external vantage point, while her use of passive voice underscores this point. The virginal female subject is actually cast as an object. This culturally constructed identity category is unquestionably gendered in Stein's account. Though chastity has long been thought of as a feminine virtue—Woolf's *Orlando* poignantly reiterates this reality—the prose poem somewhat overtly defines a "virgin" not only by the absence of penetration, but also by the

[157] See, for instance, Eve Ensler's *The Vagina Monologues*, and specifically "Reclaiming Cunt" (101-102); as well as documentation of the "Cunt Cheerleaders" performed by Doris Bigger, Susan Boud Vanalyne Green, and Cay Lang, part of a temporary exhibit called Chicago in L.A.: Judy Chicago's Early Work, 1963-74, currently on display at the Brooklyn Museum in the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art. The museum placard states, "As part of their recuperative project, Chicago and her FAP students reclaimed the word *cunt*, using it to describe the vulgar forms that appeared regularly in their artworks and performances. The Cunt Cheerleaders famously greeted the visiting feminist author Ti-Grace Atkinson at the Fresno airport, subverting the stereotype of the 1950s cheerleader by shouting sexually empowering slogans."

absence of the phallus "in between" her legs. A few pages later, Stein highlights another arbitrary signifier of purity: "A white dress is in sign" (475). Beyond the homophonous slippage between "in sign" and "insane," Stein's attention to the "white dress"—which became a symbol for the virginal bride with Queen Victoria—functions concurrently as a critique of Victorian and heteronormative values. Stein's discussion of the cultural power of arbitrary signs operates as critique of these terms; she reveals that as constructs, they bear no intrinsic meaning and as such, their cultural power may be undone and these terms may be subsequently be redeployed.

In other places in the text, Stein's wordplay complicates identity categories by de-essentializing gender and sexual desire. For instance, Stein disassociates the possession of the phallus from the male gender. The "pink tender descender" that makes its appearance elsewhere in Stein's collection (502), may also serve as an instrument for lesbian sexuality.[158] "PEELED PENCIL, CHOKE" states, in its entirety, "Rub her coke" (476). The sexual pun of this three-word poem, whether read as "Rub her co[ck]" or "Rub[b]er co[ck]," gives prominence to a queer sex act or sex toy. Both readings of the poem validate alternative forms of desire while highlighting the rise of new subject positions. The former legitimizes the formation of a sexual identity apart from biological circumstances. The iteration may also be read in light of Stein's own presentation of "female masculinity,"[159] a gender presentation and authorial stance that becomes ever more apparent in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

The implications of Stein's wordplay therefore go beyond challenging traditional values and meanings, for as *Tender Buttons* reveals, language shapes our reality, ideological perspective, and identity. Through her attention to words like "virgin," Stein shows how the body, like a blank page, operates as a surface for inscription. Stein's prose poems demonstrate

[158] Although the "pink tender descender" has a phallic connotation, it might also refer to external female genitalia.
[159] See Halberstam's book *Female Masculinity*, especially the introduction and first chapter.

what Judith Butler explains in *Gender Trouble*:

> acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, through the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality." (185, emphasis in original)

Stein may reveal how the body operates as a discursive formation. Though the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary, this relationship nevertheless produces a reality with real consequences. The body, and in this case, the virginal female body, is constructed largely through language. Stein demonstrates that "virgin," as an identity category, is merely the consolidation of discourses and acts produced "*on the surface* of the body," rather than a series of acts performed by a subject, as Butler suggests. This identity does not come from within, but from without. It is not based on an intact hymen or other physical characteristics. It is a value judgment arising from a heteronormative ideology that imposes such meaning upon the female body. Since, as Butler argues, the body becomes gendered through the consolidation of acts and discourses over time, and not as a result or manifestation of some intrinsic qualities, then the arbitrary nature of language enables the possibility of reconfiguring gender.

Stein's use of repetition transforms Butler's understanding of gender transformation through her emphasis upon its linguistic dimensions. Butler argues, "The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in […] a parodic repetition that exposes [… its] tenuous construction" (192). In other words, definitions of femininity and masculinity shift over time by altering the repetition of acts and discourses that constitute gender. In the context of *Tender*

Buttons, Stein's prose poems reveal that parodic repetition on the level of form may be deployed to transform not only conceptions of gender and identity, but also values and common words. Thus, for Stein, repetition is not a form of redundancy but a means for transformation. In fact, repetition proves to the method by which "difference is spreading" (*Tender Buttons* 461). In "How Writing is Written," Stein claims:

> The question of repetition is very important. It is important because there is no such thing as repetition. Everybody tells a story in about the same way. You know perfectly well than when you and your roommates tell something, you are telling the same story in about the same way. But the point about it is this. Everybody is telling the story in the same way. But if you listen carefully, you will see that not all the story is the same. There is always a slight variation. Somebody comes in and you tell the story over again. Every time you tell the story it is told slightly differently. (494)

Thus for Stein repetition is always repetition with a difference or repetition *for* a difference. Stein's famous articulation—"Rose is a rose is a rose is a rose"—is a perfect example of this. This phrase, which recurs in many of Stein's texts, calls attention to the materiality of language. Stein finds that paradoxically one way to reinvigorate the words that had lost their meaning is to repeat them. Thus, in her account of this phrase, Stein explains, "Now listen! I'm no fool. I know that in daily life we don't go around saying is a is a is a. Yes, I'm no fool; but I think that in that line the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years" (qtd. in Wilder vi). In Stein's children's book, *The World is Round* (1939), her signature expression also pertains to the nature of identity for the protagonist, Rose, who carves the phrase into a tree (52-53). The importance of perceiving things anew undergirds Stein's assessment of her signature phrase, and language becomes the vehicle by which perception may be reshaped and enlivened. Therefore, it is not surprising to see added emphasis upon words like "reed" (497), "read" (497), and "red" (496), and upon "EYE GLASSES" (470), "BLIND GLASS" (461), "spectacle" (461), "EYES"

(475) and "SOUND" (474) within *Tender Buttons*; these words highlight the importance of the senses—of the need for renewed attention to sight, sound, and experience of language. Moreover, these words signal the textual condition, highlighting through form Stein's emphasis upon experiencing the materiality of language anew.

Within *Tender Buttons*, many words recur and several poems are given the same title. For instance, there are two entries on "MILK" (487), "SALAD DRESSING AND AN ARTICHOKE" (496), and "CREAM" (493); 2 entries on "POTATOES" followed by one on "ROASTED POTATOES" (490); "ORANGE," followed by "ORANGES," followed by "ORANGE IN" (495-96); and four entries on "CHICKEN" (492-93). Each poem, however, is markedly different from the others by the same name. When read as examples of Stein's verbal cubism,[160] we see the possibility of reflecting upon the same object from multiple perspectives. Even though the poems are reflections or meditations, and not meant to be straightforward descriptions of their title, as evident in the poem "A DOG," Stein's words nevertheless bring into being new objects.[161] The umbrellas of *Tender Buttons* are a prime example of this. An umbrella seems like such an inconsequential item. They are misplaced, left behind, mistaken for someone else's. They bend and break in the wind and are so easily replaced. We tend to think of them as interchangeable; yet, Stein's poems urge us to think otherwise. Stein first presents us with "MILDRED'S UMBRELLA," a title that conveys ownership and specificity. Next, Stein gives us "A MOUNTED UMBRELLA;" its indefinite article nods to its generalizability, while the adjective tempers it by adding a particularizing quality to the noun. Finally, we encounter the

[160] Stein's verbal cubism differs from poems like "Patriarchal Poetry," which have a spatial component in their visual organization of the page. "Patriarchal Poetry" is not a shape poem, but its excessive use of repetition creates a visual design through the alignment of words and carefully chosen line breaks.

[161] By situating her work in contrast to the exhausted realist mode of the 19th century, Stein refuses to compose poems that are mere descriptions of their titles. Speaking to this point, Murphy notes, "Stein most effectively undercuts the descriptive mode by using structures associated with description, yet disrupting their functioning through lexical illogicalities and gaps" (144).

most nonspecific umbrella of Stein's collection: "AN UMBRELLA." Though Mildred's umbrella may very well be the mounted umbrella and the nonspecific umbrella, Stein has created three separate entities through her wordplay.[162] The vaginal shape of the open umbrella and the sexual connotations to the "mounted" umbrella highlight the erotic undertones of Stein's queer use of reproduction.[163]

Another word that recurs throughout the collection is "Alas," a homophonous proxy for "Alice."[164] By the time *Tender Buttons* was published, Alice B. Toklas had already become an integral part of Stein's life. Stein wrote the prose poems while with Toklas on holiday in Spain in 1912. Yet, Alice, like the umbrella, reappears throughout the volume from various viewpoints. "COOKING," one of Stein's many erotically charged poems, makes use of suggestive metaphors that Stein redeploys years later in *Autobiography*. "COOKING" states, "Alas, alas the pull alas the bell alas the coach in china, alas the little put in leaf alas the wedding butter meat, alas the receptacle, alas the back shape of mussle, mussle and soda" (492). Herein, Stein represents Toklas in highly sexualized terms. Alice appears not only as "the bell" Stein has rung, but also in more base terms as "the receptacle." If the image is not transparent enough, "receptacle" is also a botany term referring to "any of various specialized structures supporting reproductive organs" (*OED*). And certainly the "back shape of the mussle," or mussel, appears to operate as a metaphor for female genitalia, as well. Kathryn R. Kent and Murphy call attention to the further link between Toklas and the words of this poem due to its title and Toklas's own interest in cooking.[165] Stein's sexual relationship with Toklas is foregrounded in this poem, and also in

[162] Stein's play with specificity and generality is evocative of this exchange in Barnes's poems "In General" and "In Particular."
[163] The umbrella may even be said to be both vaginal and phallic.
[164] See Kent (161), Hadas (69), and Murphy (154).
[165] See Murphy 154 and Kent (139-165).

Stein's use of "cow" in "SUGAR": "A blaze, a search in between, a cow, only any wet place, only this tune" (486). Many Stein scholars read the "cow" of "As a Wife Has a Cow: A Love Story" and "Lifting Belly" as code word for orgasm, a meaning that seems applicable here, as well. Notably, the other "wet" place that is mentioned in *Tender Buttons* makes it difficult to read "wet" outside of sexual context: "necessity is a silk under wear. That is best wet" (488). Likewise, the "Aider" from the poem "THIS IS THIS DRESS, AIDER" seems to address Toklas, as well, for "she" notes in *Autobiography*, "In the story Ada in Geography and Plays Gertrude Stein has given a very good description of me as I was at that time" (4). If the poem, which reads "Aider, why aider why whow, whow stop touch, aider whow, aider stop the muncher, muncher munchers" (476), is read within a similar context, its articulation of jouissance might be understood herein as Stein's pleasure. Again, these are readings that are only belatedly made possible through the relationship between *Tender Buttons* and *Autobiography*. This reading also complicates and therefore mitigates Stein's seemingly retrograde use of "receptacle" by deconstructing the active/passive binary suggested by the term.

Although many feminist critics read *Tender Buttons* as an erotic love poem, Hadas identifies "complicated feelings" toward Alice in the poems and points to one of the "CHICKEN" poems as evidence (69): "Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third alas a dirty third, alas a dirty bird" (492). If one is to follow Hadas's logic here, Alice proves to disrupt the dyadic union established between Gertrude and Leo.[166] While it is likely that Stein lamented the loss of her brother in spite of his lack of support, her use of "dirty" may not be as straightforward as it seems. Stein notes elsewhere, "dirt is clean when there is a volume" (462).

[166] Malcolm and Kent suggest that the relationship had gone sour prior to the arrival of Toklas. Kent, for instance, reports the confluence of events very differently from Hadas: "At some basic level it was these events, as Stein herself acknowledges—the arrival of the woman who would be her lover for the rest of her life, and the consequent departure of her bullying, unsympathetic brother—that sparked *Tender Buttons*" (140, emphasis added).

To conclude, Stein's declaration concerning "dirt" exemplifies how the value of a common word with an assumed connotation may very easily change when placed within a new context. As such, it is exemplary of Stein's overall argument. In this case and under these circumstances, "dirt," the noun from which "dirty" is derived, paradoxically becomes clean. Dirt is no longer something to be avoided, but something of value. Through this display of transvaluation, Stein conveys the simple but ideological truth that all of our value judgments are contingent upon our perspective. Language and meaning, therefore, cannot be separated from ideology. While this poses a challenge for progressive thinking, Stein shows that language's malleability offers subversive potential for reshaping meaning and value. Traditional modes of thinking can be combatted by radically altering the form and shape of an argument or even a word. Though Stein assumed that words had lost their "value" and their "variety," they had not, in fact, lost their meaning. *Tender Buttons* reveals that meaning is never really absent, for meaning is something that must constantly be produced and reproduced. Through Stein's form of queer reproduction, the role of the reader proves to be central to the production of meaning. As in Barnes's work, the reader becomes complicit in Stein's queer poetics. In *Tender Buttons*, Stein destabilizes the divide between the author/creator and the reader/consumer so that readers of her text are simultaneously producers of meaning.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas: "A Source of Endless Pleasure"

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is the text that brought—and was created for the purpose of bringing—Stein the fame and accolades she felt she always deserved.[167] Written

[167] According to Dydo, the *Autobiography*, Stein's first "audience writing," was written for commercial appeal and therefore achieved its goals: "It changed Stein's daily life, her writing, and her sense of herself" (5). Dydo adds that the success of the *Autobiography* paved the way for Stein's successful lecture tour and operetta *Four Saints* (172).

expressly with the intention of attracting a popular audience, *The Autobiography* is Stein's most accessible work.[168] To call it "accessible," however, seems to belie its difficulty. Although presented as an autobiography and written in "regular English" (Malcolm 9), this ostensibly straightforward work is generically and theoretically complex. The book, which appeared in the first print edition without Stein's name on the cover or spine of the book, is purportedly Alice B. Toklas's autobiography. The final paragraph of the work, however, reveals Stein as the author and the narrative voice to be Stein's ventriloquism of Toklas. This confession nevertheless fails to provide the degree of clarity and simplicity it suggests.

Like the serpentine ouroboro that ingests its own tail, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is a circuitous narrative that folds back into itself. The last page reveals the narrative conceit and returns the reader to the present moment: "About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it" (252). This memorable and often quoted passage serves not only as the key to *Autobiography*, but operates as a condensation of the text's major achievements and preoccupations concerning identity, authorship, temporality and genre.

Although *Autobiography* may be easier to read than some of Stein's other works, its subtle sophistication and intricate design has prompted scholarship on a range of substantive topics. Generic concerns structure many scholarly works on the text, most of which take up the question of identity, or the authorial "I," in relation to the *Autobiography's* purported genre.[169]

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[168] It is organized into seven digestible chapters, as opposed to *The Making of Americans*, which is a giant tome… Malcolm noted that she literally cut the book into pieces to make the 900+ page experimental "novel" readable.
[169] For texts that focus heavily upon form or genre, see Corinne Andersen's "I Am Not Who 'I' Pretend to Be: *The*

Many scholars address the topic of Stein's egotism, with differing critical stances taken toward her declaration of genius.[170] Feminist criticism targets Stein's representation of gender and her multi-layered portrayal of Toklas from a striking range of critical perspectives.[171] With the rise of celebrity studies, Stein's *Autobiography* is now read alongside the films of Charlie Chaplin, and her iconicity has been represented in popular films of our day, such as *Midnight in Paris*. [172] Though my own approach to the *Autobiography* builds on this scholarship, I diverge from these major frameworks through my focus on queer reproduction, on forms of queerness that prove to be productive or generative.

The *Autobiography*'s form and narrative voice may be understood as a product of queer reproduction. This hybrid work, a cross between an autobiography and a biography, operates as a critique of these established genres as it produces a new, self-critical form. In it, Stein blends together the voice of her sex-same lover and life partner, Toklas, with her own linguistic idiosyncrasies to create a unique narrative voice—a product, or an amalgam, of the couple's voices. The unstable "I" of the narrative, serves as a means for critiquing the genre's intention of representing the formation of a stable identity. The *Autobiography* resists a teleological view of history and helps to deconstruct the notion of the unified subject.

My analysis of Stein's queer autobiography builds on the theories of women's

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Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and its Photographic Frontispiece," Lynn Z. Bloom's "Gertrude is Alice is Everybody: Innovation and Point of View in Gertrude Stein's Autobiographies," Phoebe Stein Davis's "Subjectivity and the Aesthetics of National Identity in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," and Paul K. Alkon's "Visual Rhetoric in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*."

[170] Some critics are intensely critical of what they perceive to be Stein's megalomania, including Stein's contemporary, Robert McAlmon (Norris 80), while others, such as Darcy L. Brandel, find "genius" to be an apt characterization of Stein's aesthetics. Of the many monographs on this topic, Barbara Will's *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of "Genius"* is the most extensive.

[171] See, for instance, Catharine R. Stimpson's "Stein and the Transposition of Gender" (1986), Diana Souhami's *Gertrude and Alice* (1991), Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *No Man's Land* (1994), Margot Norris's "The 'Wife' and the 'Genius': Domesticating Modern Art in Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*," Anna Linzie's *The True Story of Alice B. Toklas: A Study of Three Autobiographies* (2006).

[172] See Jonathan Goldman's Modernism is the Literature of Celebrity.

autobiography proposed by Sidonie Smith, who argues that there is a "double identification" that takes place when women write autobiographies (*Poetics 8*). Because this genre is contingent upon Western conceptions of a stable, masculine self, the female autobiography is caught between "paternal and maternal narratives" (*Poetics* 19); in other words, the female autobiographer "become[s a] wom[a]n writing a man's story […] [she] become[s] involved in a dynamic dialogue with two stories, two interpretations, two rhetorical postures" (*Poetics* 51).[173] In Stein's case, I argue, the "double-voiced structuring of content and rhetoric," endemic to women's autobiography (*Poetics* 51), becomes literalized through the narrative voice of a Stein/Toklas amalgam. Yet the hybridized voice of Stein's narrative is fundamentally queer, for Stein privileges the double-voice that emerges from the relationship between two women. Rather than reinscribing the centrality of the gender binary, Stein engages with essentialist notions of gender only to deconstruct them.

Therefore, like Woolf's mock biography *Orlando*, Stein's *Autobiography* also operates as a critique of and resistance to the masculine genre and masculine subject of the biography and autobiography. By placing herself, a woman, a lesbian, and a Jew, at the center of this text, Stein transforms the (masculine and heteronormative) genre to make space for queer subjects.[174] Moreover, through her use of the unstable "I," Stein highlights the underlying queerness of this ostensibly stable masculine genre. Her work deconstructs the self/other divide not only by inverting the center/periphery model, but also by pointing to the inherent duality of autobiographical writing.

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[173] Smith's description of this dual position of a woman autobiographer evokes W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness."

[174] In the *Autobiography*, the "double-voiced structuring" might even be said to take on (at least) a third dimension. The cubist dimension of Stein's linguistic play within *Tender Buttons* extends to the queer female subject of the *Autobiography*, whose hybrid subjectivity transforms not only a masculine genre, but also a heteronormative one.

Stein's queer use of repetition, another form of queer reproduction in the *Autobiography*, made manifest through the constant reiteration of certain details, the retelling of the same stories, and the recurring names of Stein's other texts, has generative potential. Stein's use of intertextuality—the constant repetition of her other works—helped promote her other publications and helped craft Stein's public reputation. The repetition of various anecdotes from different perspectives destabilizes the notion of a singular truth. Not unlike the "verbal cubism" of *Tender Buttons*, this form of repetition offers multiple dimensions to a singular event. Repetition in the text also works to destabilize a linear understanding of temporality and narrative.

Finally, using the framework of queer reproduction, I will reconsider the familiar trope of literary paternity. Stein queers the masculine trope not only by placing herself, a lesbian woman writer, in the position of genius, but also by destabilizing the notion of a solitary genius altogether. Though to some extent, the collaboration of the reader is necessary for the production of meaning, the privileged form of collaboration in *Autobiography* is that between Stein and Toklas. Though Toklas's role as Stein's secretary is well known, the narrative discloses the fact that Toklas was integral to Stein's literary success, helping her to edit her works and get them printed and distributed. Though Stein makes use of the literary progeny trope—calling her publications her "children" ("Transatlantic Interview" 516)—she fundamentally queers this conventional metaphor by revealing *Autobiography* to be the product of her collaboration with Toklas.

Though Stein uses a fictional conceit to frame her ostensible non-fiction, the central focus of the *Autobiography*, or the autobiographical subject, remains somewhat unclear. While Toklas's life is purportedly the subject, her biographical details appear secondary to Stein's. The

section of *Autobiography* declared to be dedicated to Toklas's background and her formative years is merely three pages in length. This three-page chapter, entitled "Before I Came to Paris," begins with information about her birth and briefly elucidates a few of her interests, but quickly turns to Stein, whom she met upon arrival in Paris. The achronological account of Toklas's first encounter with Stein at her Parisian home is a marker of the *Autobiography*'s queer temporal framework, but it is moreover meant to signify the profound impact Stein had upon Toklas's life. Stein's influence upon Toklas is so grand that it casts its shadow retroactively upon Toklas's life prior to Stein. The final paragraph of this section, however, does more than *suggest* that Toklas's life truly began once she met Stein: the chapter concludes by explicitly announcing, "In this way my new full life began" (5). These words depict Toklas's first encounter with Stein as a transformation and a rebirth.[175] Toklas's sexual and intellectual union with Stein produced for Toklas a new life—one of the many products of queer reproduction evident in *Autobiography*. While marking the significance of the moment, the passage frames Stein, along with Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead, as the three great geniuses of their time:

> The three geniuses of whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead. I have met many important people, I have met several great people but I have only known three first class geniuses and in each case on sight within me something rang. In no one of the three cases have I been mistaken. In this way my new full life began. (5)

"Toklas's" declaration highlights the eminence of these thinkers and locates her own life—the purported subject of the *Autobiography*—as subordinate to their own.

The frontispiece appears to corroborate this assessment of Stein's primacy in the *Autobiography*. The image features Stein in the shadowed foreground, seated at her desk with a writing implement in hand. Her gaze is downward at her work. Toklas enters the scene from the

[175] The related image of the "bell" within her ringing will be addressed later in the chapter.

far left with her hand still on the door handle. Though she is in the background of the photograph, she is well lit by the natural sunlight cascading in from the windows of the hallway. Addressing this image, Corinne Andersen writes, "it appears as if Stein, the brooding genius who toils away in mental solitude at her desk, has conjured up her muse" (28). This photograph visually depicts Stein as the genius that "Toklas" declares her to be.[176]

At first glance, this seminal photograph, to which I will later return, combined with the book's first chapter seems troubling. The relationship established in the initial pages of the *Autobiography* puts Stein in a position of power and suggests that Toklas takes on the role of the dependent housewife. Stein does, after all, establish the dichotomy of the "geniuses" and the "wives of geniuses," with Toklas always "sitting with a wife of a genius" (14). Each of the women appears to fit into an established binary gender model that replicates heteronormative strictures. This schema would therefore reinforce the precedent of "genius" as a masculine category.[177]

Much of the feminist criticism of the late 1980s and early 1990s attends to these ostensibly problematic textual politics in ways that often betray the complexity of the text. Such readings take Stein's appropriation of the phallus and her identification with masculinity as her complete and earnest association with patriarchal values. Yet, such readers overlook the playful, parodic, and performative aspects of the *Autobiography*. For instance, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar read the fictional conceit in *Autobiography* in relatively straightforward terms: they argue that Stein "Usurp[s] Alice's persona, appropriate[es] Alice's voice […] thereby turn[ing]

[176] This image originally appeared on the first edition of the *Autobiography*. Contemporary covers therefore deprive readers of the dynamic suggested by this image, including the hybrid narrative voice.
[177] Drawing on definitions of the term from German Romanticists, Barbara Will notes, "As a figure, the genius—*whose gender is always unquestionable male*—embodies energy, creativity, originality, inspiration, and the capacity to bring meaning to matter, to transform the world around him" (3, emphasis added).

collaboration into collusion […] a kind of cannibalism" (*No Man's Land*, 251). They add, "To 'have' Alice is to be a genius; but to 'be' Alice is to be fictionalized as a creature who functions like a rubber stamp" (*No Man's Land*, 251). Their reading leaves no room for ambiguity or nuance. In their estimation, Toklas is victim. The metaphors they use are violent and disturbing. Gilbert and Gubar portray Stein as an aggressor and accuse her of speaking for the other and treating Toklas as an object there for her manipulation. In a similar vein, Catharine R. Stimpson writes, "By 1932, when Stein wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, she was well-versed in turning her wife's 'remarks' into literature" (6), a gender critique that could be made of several male modernists, including F. Scott Fitzgerald. Stimpson's critique calls attention to the appropriation of Toklas's words for Stein's own profit, but moreover points to a well-established hierarchy: women's words are merely "remarks," whereas the words of a husband are valued by society as a form of cultural capital: "literature." I argue, however, that Stein self-consciously introduces these familiar paradigms in order to parody their logic.

Bonnie Kime Scott argues that modernism "was unconsciously gendered masculine" (2), but the association of literature with the masculine has a longer history than literary modernism. Gilbert and Gubar begin the first chapter of their landmark *The Madwoman in the Attic* with the following question: "Is a pen a metaphorical penis?" (3). Drawing on contemporary critics and writers from Aristotle to Gerard Manley Hopkins, they answer with a resounding "yes." Through the problematic logic of binary thinking and the Victorian ideology of separate spheres, women's powers of creation are limited to the body, to childbirth, while men's creative powers derive from the intellect and therefore enjoy expression in the public sphere in the form of literature. Though modernist and Victorian women writers alike fight against this misogynistic paradigm, Stein's work deconstructs this binary model altogether by demonstrating that both gender and

writing are performative acts.

Though Stein makes use of "the metaphor of literary paternity" described by Gilbert and Gubar (*Madwoman* 6) by overtly referring to her texts as "her children" and identifying herself as a "fond parent" ("Transatlantic Interview" 516), she fundamentally queers this masculine trope. She does so in part by appropriating the phallus. In taking up the pen to write an autobiography, Stein immediately transgresses the gender boundaries associated with this genre. As Woolf has demonstrated within both her essays and her fiction, men dominated the field of biography and autobiography.[178] Though Woolf's work critiques the disparity in representation, noting overtly that "biography [is] too much about great men" (*AROO* 107), her mock biography of Vita Sackville-West is packaged as a *fictional* narrative.[179] As a text overtly about the lives of Stein and Toklas, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*'s relationship to nonfiction is more clearly established and its subject matter more candidly expressed. Since readers were aware of the fictional conceit before reading the *Autobiography* Stein's transgressions of both genre and gender conventions explicitly and subversively mark the conventions of the genre and her departure from them.

The *Autobiography* positions a Jewish lesbian as a worthy subject of admiration and esteem. To a certain extent, a biography or autobiography at this time was meant to highlight a national subject whose life readers might emulate. In this way, (auto)biographies have much to do with the *reproduction* of proper national subjects. In *Autobiography*, Stein replaces the male subject with a queer female subject, an action that fundamentally queers and thus changes the genre while making room for marginalized subjects within national narratives. In spite of her

[178] In particular, see Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929) and her mock biography *Orlando* (1928).
[179] Though *Orlando* complicates the relationship between fiction and nonfiction, as discussed in Chapter 2, the text was not meant as a straightforward biography.

expatriation, Stein presents herself, as well as her work, as incontrovertibly American (Davis 21).[180] In so doing, Stein inverts the center/periphery model and asserts the value of queer subjectivity within both national and narrative contexts; she disrupts the old narratives and replaces them with a queer alternative.

Stein's form of queer reproduction undermines hegemonic masculinity and heteronormative frameworks. Stein disrupts stable conceptions of gender and identity in *Autobiography* and in her own gender presentation: Gilbert and Gubar call Stein "a female man" (*No Man's Land* 250) and Earnest Hemingway presents Stein as a "Roman emperor," adding "and that was fine if you liked your women to look like Roman emperors" (119). Eric Haralson notes that in Hemingway's work, Stein frequently "emerges as an objectionable *compound*, the Jewish lesbian" (178, emphasis added). In all three of these representations, Stein's identity is hybridized. Hemingway's words attempt to reinforce Stein's marginalization, but they moreover reveal Hemingway's anxiety concerning his own masculinity.[181] Stein's presentation of female masculinity reveals that masculinity may exist apart from men.[182] In destabilizing gender from the sexed body, Stein demonstrates how concepts like "literary paternity" and "genius" may also be reconceived and redeployed.

By using Toklas as a mouthpiece, Stein identifies herself as a more than worthy subject of a(n) (auto)biography; Stein is, after all, one of the "three first classes geniuses" that Toklas comes to know (5). Positioning Stein's name alongside Picasso and Whitehead places Stein among the greatest thinkers and artists of her time. Toklas's words underscore the singularity and

[180] Phoebe Stein Davis examines *Autobiography* within the context of national identity in her essay, "Subjectivity and the Aesthetics of National Identity in Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*."
[181] See Haralson's *Henry James and Queer Modernity* for more on Hemingway's gender presentation.
[182] Halberstam's Introduction to *Female Masculinity* elucidates this argument concerning female masculinity and explains the author's rationale for examining masculinity without men.

exclusivity of this category, marking Stein's inclusion within it as all the more noteworthy. But, Stein's "playful egomania," to use Malcolm's term (13), does not stop there, for Stein's position among the other two geniuses proves to be central.

One way that Stein establishes her centrality is through the repetition of her full name to the point of excess. Though "Pablo Picasso" (5), for instance, quickly becomes "Picasso" (6), Stein is always "Gertrude Stein," even on the final page of the narrative (252). Lynn Z. Bloom calls the constant use of Stein's name the "self advertising function" of the book (84), an action that promotes Stein and her work to the exclusion of many of the other artists and writers who make an appearance in the *Autobiography*.[183] Stein's self-promotion, which also includes the constant references to her own work,[184] transforms her name and her lesser-read works into marketable commodities. As a testament to her ingenuity, Stein's declarations, though articulated through Toklas, prove to be performative utterances: proclaiming her status as a "first class" genius seems to simultaneously bring that status into being.[185]

Though Stein may already be a genius, the public recognition of this status and her cultural elevation to "first class" reveal the importance of cultivating a public image. In fact, this promotion reveals a necessary slippage between genius and celebrity. "Toklas's" declaration belies the work that goes into making this social standing a reality. Stein's celebrity stature is carefully crafted in the text through the strategic use of other celebrity names in relation to her own. As Bloom notes:

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[183] Prominent writers and avant-garde artists were relegated to the periphery, but many took issue with the negative way they were represented in *Autobiography*. Some took their revenge in *Testimony against Stein*, published as a 1935 supplement to the journal *Transition*, one that Brandel notes had previously printed a great deal of Stein's work (371).

[184] Thank you to Eric Haralson for calling my attention to the self-promotional quality of Stein's references to her less successful texts.

[185] Stein also uses the label "first class" as a status symbol when talking about the highest caliber of "American letters" in a letter to Ellery Sedgwick in 1919 (qtd. in Will 133).

> When discussing habitués of her salon, […] Stein refers to the famous, the talented, and the notorious by name, and generally without identifying explanations. […] she leaves anonymous most of the more innocuous persons. Since *all are seen in relation to Gertrude Stein*, […] this technique has the repeated effect of making Gertrude Stein seem to be the focus of a coterie of luminaries. (84, emphasis added)

Stein's centrality is thus safely secured. She appears only to move in elite social circles and to be at the center of all of them. Jonathan Goldman adds that the list of celebrity names in *Autobiography* helps Stein accrue capital: "It is as if she sets that chain in motion while she remains a stable, unmoving figure whom less central personages approach, bringing others. Thus each name brought into the Stein fold intensifies the burnishing of Stein's own status" (90). Goldman's assessment of the power of name-dropping is accurate in the way this rhetorical gesture increases her prestige and contributes to the popular appeal of the book. Though Goldman's portrayal of Stein as a "stable figure amid the swirl of names" belies the precarious nature of identity in the text, there is some degree of truth to his claim (109).

Identity in the *Autobiography* proves to be fractured and unstable, but there are elements of Stein's identity that remain unfaltering. The *Autobiography* creates a sense of continuity and coherence through its portrayal of Stein as the modernist genius at the center of a Parisian salon and flourishing art movement. Though the text has no center per say—that is, there is no climax of which to speak, not even Stravinsky's performance of *The Rite of Spring* or the Battle of the Marne, which posed a serious threat to Paris[186]—Stein remains an important figure within the world depicted within the *Autobiography*. In fact, the "gratifying climax" occurs when Stein

[186] Though they attended the second performance, very little is said by Stein/Toklas in *Autobiography* about *The Rite of Spring* (see 135-137). The subsequent remarks in the text concern a dinner party. Likewise, though we are told that Stein and Toklas become distraught at the idea of the Germans capturing Paris, the episode is only granted a few pages, albeit from three different points of view (149-151). Moreover, the depiction of the Battle of the Marne that appears within the *Autobiography* destabilizes notions of "history" further since the accounts in the text are all banal narratives that were told from the home front. For instance, Nellie Jacot's story centers on her inability to haul a taxi since none were able to leave the city center (150-151).

secures a contract for *Three Lives* (146). Though her readers might anticipate a moment of personal and professional success to lie at the center of the autobiography, this is by no means a "gratifying climax" in the narrative given that we have already been informed of this event in the previous chapter. Though this reflects another instance of the text's queer temporal framework, it moreover reveals the way Stein actively markets herself and shapes her reputation in writing.

Speaking as "Toklas" grants Stein more freedom to represent herself as she wants the public to see her. In *Two Lives: Gertrude and Alice*, Janet Malcom writes:

> With *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, she not only achieved the vulgar celebrity she craved but brilliantly solved the koan of autobiography by disclaiming responsibility for the one being written. Speaking in the voice of her companion, Gertrude Stein can entirely dispense with the fiction of humility that the conventional autobiographer must at every moment struggle to maintain. (13)

Certainly, Toklas's delivery of this boastful declaration mitigates Stein's rhetoric and her narcissism. Having someone else declare her a "genius" also reinforces the claim's credibility. As Bloom notes, "*Alice-as-intermediary* softens the direct thrust, blunts the egotism, evades the hubris, and communicates her own appreciation of the rightness of Stein's opinion of herself" (85, emphasis in original). Not all readers and critics, however, feel that Stein should have abandoned all pretenses toward humility. Margot Norris, for instance, remarks that "Stein's *greatest transgression* in *The Autobiography*—for which even her most sympathetic readers and reviewers seem unable to forgive or exonerate her—is her calling herself, in Alice's voice, a genius" (80, emphasis added). Anderson calls out critics who "mistake Stein's critique of genre for a clever disguise of her self-centeredness" (29), though she fails to note the gendered implications of their readings. While "self-centeredness" in men is typically read as confidence, in women, the trait is often considered a form of unfounded arrogance. Such readings actually

suggest a cultural transgression that goes beyond egotism and self-promotion: to align herself with the masculine genius is the greater offense.

Such outrage, however, proves to be productive; it not only explicitly outlines the status quo, but also points to the constructed nature of terms like "genius" and "wife." Stein replicates this paradigm with a difference, divorcing these labels from any essentialist meanings. If Stein, a Jewish woman and lesbian, not only calls herself a genius, but proves it so through the reception of her book, then both masculinity *and* genius prove to be performative categories. Smith finds that Stein's ingenious performance of gender is twofold:

> One woman, Stein, who assumes the positionality of 'husband' in the heterosexual couple, speaks as another woman, 'Toklas,' who assumes the positionality of 'wife.' Stein, that is, puts on the identity of 'wife.' But something excessive happens when a woman performs femininity […] a disjunction occurs between the sexed body (Stein as biological female), gender identity (Stein as 'husband'), and gender performance (Stein as 'Toklas'/the culturally credible 'wife'). Body/identity/gender are rendered non-identical. ("Performativity" 112)

The *Autobiography* shows that one can perform either the role of "husband" or "wife," or, in Stein's case, both roles. As Smith notes, the terms are contingent upon positionality; these subject positions may be temporarily assumed and subsequently abandoned because they are divorced from sex categories. Goldman likewise calls attention to the performative nature of the terms "husband" and "wife," but aligns them with a different binary opposition. He explains, "By situating herself among the husbands, Stein adopts a position that is usually gendered male, thus turning the gendering of that role into a kind of public performance. Throughout *The Autobiography*, Stein categorizes husbands and wives as entities divided into public and private rather than male and female" (94). Goldman's assessment appears to overlook the fact that private and public spaces have always been gendered: the ideology of separate spheres inherently

defines the public sphere to be male and the private sphere female. Though the categories "private" and "public" themselves fail to complicate the gendered division of space, Stein's salon effectively deconstructs this binary.

In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the home doubles as a politicized public space. 27 rue de Fleurus is not only Stein and Toklas's residence, but also an art gallery, a salon, and the locale where Stein produces her own writing. Stein frames her home as a democratic space, a space that is ostensibly open to anyone:

> The idea was that anybody could come but for form's sake and in Paris you have to have a formula, everybody was supposed to be able to mention the name of somebody who had told them about it. It was a mere form, really everybody could come in and as at that time these pictures had no value and there was no social privilege attached to knowing any one there, only those came who really were interested. (13)

In the space of Stein's salon, social status appears not to matter. *Autobiography* stresses the free and open exchange of ideas. The text simultaneously situates 27 rue de Fleurus as an important site of modernist experimentation and production. Sara Blair writes, "In at least one of its local avatars, then, avant-garde production can be seen to take shape within a domestic space that nurtures particular networks of sociality, contact, and exchange" (423). Stein's salon serves as a register for the changing conditions of modernity and the possibilities inscribed in such change; moreover, the salon reveals that "genius" cannot, in fact, be marked as a solitary subject position, for a salon, by its very nature, exists as a form of collaboration and exchange.[187]

The *Autobiography* therefore shows "genius" to be a shared and constructed category. If

[187] Though he does not comment on the salon in particular, Brandel notes, "Stein's "genius" did not descend upon her from the heavens as she sat working solitarily in her room of her own, but instead, was a result of numerous influences and countless collaborations, ranging from the material collaborations of the publication and print industries which allowed her work to be published, to the intellectual and emotional collaborations of her friends, family, and the larger community, not to mention the fact that Stein was, inevitably, a result of her historical and ideological milieu" (385).

we revisit some of the textual moments and photographs that appear to situate Stein as the solitary genius, we will see that Stein imbues such moments with deliberate ambiguity.[188] Upon closer examination, the first chapter of the text complicates the aforementioned motifs present in the frontispiece. In this photograph, Toklas seems to be the Muse: she appears surrounded by light and her presence offers visual and formal contrast to Stein's dark figure hovering over the desk. Yet, at the end of the first chapter, "Toklas" presents *Stein* as a source of inspiration and new life; Stein becomes a type of Muse for Toklas, for it is under Stein's influence that "a bell within [Toklas] rang" (5). In this textual moment, we have a minor reversal, or queer reproduction, of the narrative suggested by the frontispiece. "Toklas" explains in detail:

> There I went to see Mrs. Stein who had in the meantime returned to Paris, and there at her house I met Gertrude Stein. I was impressed by the coral brooch she wore and by her voice. I may say that only three times in my life have I met a genius and each time a bell within me rang and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of the quality of genius in them. (5)

These words, to some extent, challenge the suggested power differential in Stein and Toklas's relationship and place Toklas on a more equal footing with Stein. Without the "egomania" of declaring herself a genius, "Toklas" effectively achieves these ends by coming out as a highbrow aesthete.[189] This passage marks Toklas as a sound judge of artistic merit, whose assessments precede the public's evaluation of the artist's work. Will, in fact, argues that it is "Alice's capacity, not Gertrude's, that is here being celebrated" (140). This passage, therefore, presents genius as a subject position and a category that can be shared with others. Although Toklas may

[188] I position my reading of Stein's "genius" in opposition to that of Gilbert and Gubar, who argue that through "the mystique of genius that infiltrates Alice's adulation of Stein, Picasso, and Whitehead, creativity is imaged as solitary and individualistic" (*No Man's Land* 251).
[189] Likewise, Haralson reads this passage as a declaration of Toklas's "aesthetic evolution," but also as a signifier of Toklas's "erotic awakening" (206).

not be a "first class genius," she proves to be a genius nonetheless.

The frontispiece, which is also more complex than it initially appears, complicates the category "genius" further by revealing its performative nature. The image suggests movement and process: Toklas is entering the room while Stein is writing. The photograph appears to capture an interrupted moment, a snapshot of their lives and an important moment in the production of high modernism. Yet, the photograph cannot be said to represent an authentic moment, for there is a third person present in the room taking the photograph. The caption—"Alice B. Toklas at the door, photograph by Man Ray"—reveals the identity of the third individual. This photograph, therefore, proves to be no more candid than the other shots of Stein that appear in the book. Though the other photographs reveal poses in front of notable landmarks or stills from inside her home, the frontispiece is similarly a posed photograph masquerading as a recorded moment. The photograph frames Stein as a modernist genius by drawing on familiar tropes before hinting at its own construction. Stein is performing this subject position for her readers by posing in a certain reproducible stance with the appropriate writing props at her disposal. Just as Man Ray's photographs of Marcel Duchamp as Rrose Sélavy reveal the play and performative qualities of gender (Rosenblum 121-124), Man Ray's photograph of Stein reveals the performative qualities of the category "genius."[190]

Other textual images complement this dynamic and highlight the constructed nature of genius as a category. For instance, the photograph entitled, "Gertrude Stein in front of the atelier door," calls attention to the ways that the text self-consciously crafts Stein's reputation as a genius. This image shows Stein clearly posing for her photographer and her audience: she is in

[190] Lauren Rosenblum compares the frontispiece to Man Ray's photographs of Rrose Sélavy, noting that both Stein and Duchamp actively control their images using these "copies" of themselves to project a persona. I extend Rosenblum's reading to include Stein's deconstruction of the category "genius."

the center of the frame staring directly at the camera and smiling. One hand is placed atop another. The photograph is appropriately placed after "Toklas" describes the entrance to Stein's home. The term "atelier" also positions Stein as an artist by placing her in front of her studio. The photograph seems to fit perfectly with the surrounding text, yet there is a tension at work in the image: like the photographs in *Orlando*, this picture simultaneously reinforces "authenticity" and points to its façade, its construction. The image confirms Stein's life in the Left Bank for her American audience and affirms the veracity of the narrative, yet because the photograph is posed, it is also artificial. As we learn from "Toklas," "She had come to like posing" (50). The photograph serves as a parody of authenticity while, to some extent, perpetuating the myth of the autonomous modernist genius. The physical description of the building adds to this mythology:

> The home at 27 rue de Fleurus consisted then as it does now of a tiny pavillon of two stories with four small rooms, a kitchen and bath, and a very large atelier adjoining. Now the atelier is attached to the pavillon by a tiny hall passage added in 1914 but at that time the atlier had its own entrance, one rang the bell of the pavillon or knocked at the door of the atelier, and a great many people did both, but more knocked at the atelier. (7)

We learn that the atelier was a freestanding structure with its own entrance. By extension, Stein is also framed as the independent genius in spite of the active and open construction of this status.

The interplay between authenticity and artifice is also visible in the relationship between the photographs and their captions. The caption to the frontispiece—"Alice B. Toklas at the door, photograph by Man Ray"—operates in a similar fashion to complicate and dismantle the impression it initially offers. Though the photograph appears to capture reality, the caption positions the image as a work of art; it is, after all, the only photograph with attribution. If we recognize that this photograph is as much of a construction as the others, then the division

between truth and fiction, and reality and art is blurred.[191] As I have argued in my discussion of Woolf's *Orlando*, this apparent contradiction or supposed opposition between truth and fiction, and reality and art is deconstructed by Stein's work as well. All of the photographs of the *Autobiography* document a reality, but it is nevertheless a reality that has been constructed and mediated through the art form of photography. The relationship between the photographs and their captions highlights the constructed nature of a(n) (auto)biography by suggesting the necessary interplay between art and the documentation of life, a point Woolf candidly stressed in her 1927 essay "The New Biography."[192]

The *arrangement* of photographs in Stein's *Autobiography* also complicates the status of truth in the text, and simultaneously highlights the text's queer temporality. The photograph of "Pablo and Fernande at Montmartre," for example, appears a few pages after Stein's explanation to Toklas that "[Fernande] and Pablo have decided to separate forever" (19). The picture does not appear when our narrator first describes the couple or upon Toklas's first encounter with the Picassos, but after a declaration of their breakup. Stein's choice here complicates the apparent truth of the image while troubling our sense of chronology.[193]

At other times in the text, "Toklas" purportedly portrays herself as a slave to chronological time. She declares, "I will tell the whole story as I afterward learnt it but now I must find Fernande and propose to her to take french lessons from her" (19). This is an intriguing

[191] Alkon writes, "This attribution suggests the possibility of viewing subsequent photographs as if they, too, are works of art." Though he naively implies "the reader has a choice" in the matter, he concedes that such a reading collapses the "distinction between art and photographic reality" (855). Andersen also acknowledges "the frontispiece upsets that idea that photographs come closer to reality than other modes of representation" (31).
[192] The collapse of the dichotomy between reality and art is also fundamental to Stein's aesthetics. In *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises*, Dydo explains, "Over and over Stein said that she composed what she saw; she did not invent. All of her works arises from the world in which she lived. At the same time, it can be described as 'abstract,' but that does not mean made-up or cut off from reality: it refers to the focus on essence rather than on detail" (17-18).
[193] Woolf's *Orlando*, discussed in Chapter 2, and Stein's *Everybody's Autobiography* also work toward destabilizing chronology within (auto)biographical form.

narrative strategy in terms of its deferral and its play with queer temporality. Toklas's comment brings into being two overlapping timelines. The "now" of her statement is markedly queer in its condensation of multiple temporal perspectives; "now" is simultaneously a moment of the past and one of the future. Thus Toklas's comments paradoxically serve as a disruption or dislocation of chronology in spite of Toklas's ostensible respect for chronological time above.[194]

The queer temporal framework coincides with Stein's destabilization of the authorial "I" in the final paragraph of the text. When Stein concludes the book with her confession—"About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it"—she never slips out of her fictional persona; the pronouns "I" and "she" remain affixed to Toklas and Stein respectively, even as Stein reveals herself to be the "she" who has composed the text. Stein's performative utterance epitomizes and further complicates—perhaps even parodies—Arthur Rimbaud's famous declaration, "Je est un autre."[195] Stein's articulation goes beyond the acknowledgement of the self as an other, for Stein's fictional ruse encourages readers to contemplate not only identity, but also authorship and genre. As Andersen notes, "The narrative persona of 'Alice B. Toklas' allows Stein to view her own subjectivity from the vantage point of the Other. Her critique of autobiography requires 'I' to signify improperly" (30). Stein's gesture makes tangible the fictional constructs intrinsic to a biography or autobiography by exposing the illusion of a coherent, stable self that is endemic to the genre.

In fact, the "I" of an autobiography will always "signify improperly," for the "I" of the text

[194] These idiosyncrasies also impart a sense of Toklas as a bona fide subject, a real person whose forgetfulness Stein found endearing. Queerness, therefore, is also present within the quotidian elements of Stein's relationship with Toklas.
[195] Harding and Sturrock translate this as "I is somebody else" (236).

can never directly correspond to the "I" of the author. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin elucidates the complexity of subject positions inherent in the genre. He writes:

> Even had he [author-creator] created an autobiography or a confession of the most astonishing truthfulness, all the same he, as its creator, remains outside the world he has represented in his work. If I relate (or write about) an event that has just happened to me, then I as the *teller* (or writer) of this event am already outside the time and space in which the event occurred. It is just as impossible to forge an identity between myself, my own 'I,' and that 'I' that is the subject of my stories as it is to lift myself up by my own hair. (256)

Bakhtin aptly captures the multiplicity of the "I" that results from writing about the self. He points to the inherent disconnect between the writing subject and the subject described in writing. Part of this disconnect, he explains, results from the passage of time. The queer temporality of the *Autobiography* is thus, in part, a representation of the overlapping temporalities involved in the writing process. Stein's narrative strategy anticipates Barthes's declaration of the "death of the author" while demonstrating her own theories regarding composition. In "Composition as Explanation" Stein claims,

> It is understood by this time that everything is the same except composition and time, composition and the time of the composition and the time in the composition. Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is different and always going to be different everything is not the same. Everything is not the same as the time when of the composition and the time in the composition is different. […] *The time when and the time of and the time in that composition* is the natural phenomena and of that composition and of that perhaps every one can be certain. (522-523, emphasis added)

Stein calls attention to three distinct temporal moments that must be understood in relation to composition. Like Woolf's *Orlando*, Stein's *Autobiography* shows that just as there are multiple selves realized through the composition of an autobiography, there are likewise multiple temporalities.

Yet the multiple Steins that come to being though the creation of the *Autobiography* are not just the result of "my own 'I,' and that 'I' that is the subject of my stories"; Stein depicts herself as multiple *beyond* her role as the writer of this text. In the *Autobiography*, "Toklas" remarks, "I often wonder, I have often wondered if any of all these doughboys who knew Gertrude Stein so well in those days ever connected her with the Gertrude Stein of the newspapers" (184-85). It is striking that the narrative voice points out that these young men knew Stein "so well." In doing so, she makes it clear that this is not simply a failure to connect a casual acquaintance to her literary reputation, but a larger fissure that suggests a possible disconnect between the person and the author, between a personal and a private life. In this respect, Stein conveys a familiar problem of the self with respect to the social world within the conditions of modernity.

Despite the gossipy nature of the text, there is also a sense that Stein is always out of reach and beyond our grasp. Stein deliberately constructs herself as a subject who always evades our understanding of her. *Autobiography* suggests intimacy by way of its title but withholds the truly intimate details of Stein's life. As Goldman humorously puts it, "Through the accessibility of a more realist mode of narrative, Stein coaxes readers into the atelier, invites them to look around at the famous objects she has collected, but then, when it comes to allowing them into the inner sanctum, she slams the door shut" (109). Though we become privy to the details of Picasso's tumultuous relationship with his mistress, we are perpetually excluded from the personal details of Stein and Toklas's lives. Stein makes transparent the fact that an autobiography conceals just as much as it reveals;[196] it is as much a construction as a work of

[196] Andersen argues, "Stein asserts that autobiographies reveal much more about the conventions of representation than they do about individual lives" (28).

fiction is.[197]

Though the instability of the "I" becomes explicit in the final passage of the book, this hybrid narratorial voice is present throughout the text. In fact, the slippage between Stein and Toklas becomes particularly apparent in the final chapter of *Autobiography*. More specifically, this happens when the fictionalized voice of Toklas begins to describe the collaborative process and the production of "Stein's" texts. First "Toklas" says, "I now myself began to think about publishing the work of Gertrude Stein. I asked her to invent a name for *my edition* and she laughed and said, call it Plain Edition. And Plain Edition it is" (242, emphasis added). The possessive adjective used to describe the book is "my," which is articulated through Toklas's voice. Herein, Stein queers production, ownership, and selfhood. Toklas's comments call attention to her own imprint on the work and imply a dual ownership of the *Autobiography*. This is not a singular instance of a slippage between the narrative voice and the authorial voice, for the same pronoun usage occurs elsewhere, as well: "Gertrude Stein wanted the first book Lucy Church Amiably to look like a school book and to be bound in blue. Once having ordered *my book* to be printed my next problem was the problem of distribution" (242, emphasis added), and later, "I decided upon *my* next book How to Write and not being entirely satisfied with the get up of Lucy Church Amiably" (243, emphasis added). Though speaking of Stein's next book, *How to Write*, "Toklas" again underscores her own (shared) ownership over the work. Stein's pronoun usage highlights Toklas's collaborative role in the production of her manuscripts.

While the last typed words of the *Autobiography* reveal its fictional confession, its final page complicates the temporality of the narrative and the reader's experience of it by returning

[197] Smith claims that women's autobiography calls attention to and potentially reshapes the fictions inherent within autobiography: "the fictions of memory, of the 'I,' of the imagined reader, of the story" (*Poetics* 45).

us to the beginning once we have reached its end.[198] The very last page of the book features a copy of Stein's handwritten words that would eventually become the first page of the *Autobiography*. The caption reads, "First page of manuscript of this book." However, this is not, in fact, the first page of the manuscript but quite obviously a reproduction of that page. The image has been reproduced for the printer and then subsequently reproduced thousands of times for each copy of the book.

The first page appears at the end so that the ending returns us back to the beginning in an endless cycle. This gesture signals a resistance to grand narratives and patriarchal modes of thinking, and in turn, the generic conventions of biography. In this way, the text may be read as a form of feminine writing that valorizes cyclicality over linearity. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* anticipates Cixous's demand for every woman to insert herself into history.[199] Stein is not a second-wave feminist and she isn't seen championing the cause of women—in *Autobiography*, she occupies her time talking to the geniuses and leaves the entertainment to the "wives" to Toklas—but her book nevertheless poses a challenge to masculine genres and conceptions of history. To assume herself a worthy subject of an autobiography or biography reveals an effort to question and subvert the masculine (auto)biography. The text offers a queer history, not only because it offers a narrative of life on the Left Bank by a lesbian, but also because it is not history as we are inclined to think of it; through its hybrid narrative voice, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* offers a personal history that is destabilized in its representation of time and subjectivity.

[198] In *Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce also utilizes this elliptical form.
[199] See Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa."

Conclusion

Stein productively disrupted conceptions of the stable autobiographical self within *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, but she also made a number of enemies. Various authors and artists took issue with Stein's portray of them, including Hemingway.[200] His posthumously published memoir *A Moveable Feast* is, in part, a vindictive response to Stein's account of his writing and his manhood. Yet, in my estimation, his attempts to seek retribution fail. Elements of Stein's queer generativity seep into Hemingway's narrative and supplant his self-centered account of the terms that ended his relationship with Stein:

> The maidservant opened the door before I rang and told me come in and wait. Miss Stein would be down at any moment. It was before noon but the maidservant poured me a glass of *eau-de-vie*, put it in my hand and winked happily. The colorless liquid felt good on my tongue and it was still in my mouth when I heard someone speaking to Miss Stein as I had never heard one person speak to another; never, anywhere, ever. Then Miss Stein's voice came pleading and begging, saying, 'Don't pussy. Don't. Don't, please don't. Please don't pussy.'
>
> I swallowed the drink and put the glass down on the table and started for the door. The maidservant shook her finger at me and whispered, 'Don't go. She'll be right down.'
>
> 'I have to go,' I said and tried not to hear any more as I left but it was still going on and the only way I could not hear it was to be gone. It was bad to hear it and the answers were worse. (118-119)

His response is marked by incredulity and disgust. Evidently, Hemingway is so repulsed by lesbian sexuality that he feels compelled to leave Stein's residence and terminate their friendship. Notably, his reaction is marked by overstatement—"never, anywhere, ever"—and repetition—specifically in his efforts to capture Stein's words. Yet, his need to replicate the language of their bedroom says more about Hemingway than it does about Stein. Through Hemingway's eyes, Stein's pleading "don't" seems to spread like contagion, spilling out of the bedroom, into the

[200] See footnote 183 regarding *Testimony Against Stein*.

hallway, and resurfacing in the words of the maidservant: "*Don't* go." The maidservant appears to be in collusion with Stein and Toklas with her own deviance suggested by early morning brandy and a wink. Hemingway depicts lesbian sexuality as a threatening, engulfing force; his sensual and overtly sexualized description of the liquid on his tongue[201] is *interrupted* by Stein and Toklas and thus his own sexuality upstaged by lesbian sexuality. The scene, as described by Hemingway, reveals how queerness has the power to productively disrupt hegemonic masculinity. Hemingway is emasculated by the episode. He is left to wait for Stein while she has sex, but moreover, Hemingway's own sensual experience seems a pale imitation of what is taking place in the bedroom.

Anne Carson briefly describes Hemingway's response in a book chapter entitled "The Gender of Sound." She does not comment extensively on the episode but says, "And it is interesting to hear him tell the story of how he came to end his friendship with Gertrude Stein because he could not tolerate the sound of her voice" (Carson 121), the very quality that "Toklas" says drew her to Stein.[202] Carson's chapter focuses upon patriarchal attempts to silence women: "Putting a door on the female mouth has been an important project of patriarchal culture from antiquity to the present day. Its chief tactic is an ideological association of female sound with monstrosity, disorder, and death" (121). In Hemingway's account, all three of these associations are present. To him, Stein represents a disruption of gender norms and a disruption of order. Since he cannot literally silence Stein, he chooses to leave the premises. He is incapable of taking Stein on her own terms and concludes the episode by saying, "That was the way it

[201] Sensual representations of alcohol on the tongue permeate Hemingway's writing, but Stein's interruption supersedes his depiction of this trope.
[202] Recall that "Toklas" says when she first met Stein, she "was impressed by the coral brooch she wore and by her voice. … a bell within me rang" (*Autobiography* 5). Thus, in both Stein's narrative and Hemingway's, voice and sexuality are linked.

finished for me, stupidly enough. […] She got to look like a Roman emperor and that was fine if you like your women to look like Roman emperors" (119).

I conclude with this episode to highlight the way queerness may productively disrupt dominant narratives. In spite of Hemingway's purported efforts to repress his experience, he ironically brings himself to relive the episode through his own repetition of this queer sex scene. Paradoxically, his attempt to disparage Stein undermines his efforts to silence lesbian sexuality. Hemingway's own masculinity and virility appear fractured and inadequate in comparison to Stein's. Herein, Stein intrudes on Hemingway's memoir. Her disruption of hegemonic masculinity in Hemingway's account also inadvertently demonstrates the deessentialization of sex, thus marking Stein's interruption as a generative form of queerness.

In Stein's own texts, the disruption of order and convention produces new modes of being, new forms of signification, new genres, and new subject positions. Stein reveals that forms of queerness may be generative. Her hybrid texts resist generic conventions and solicit the help of the reader in the production of new meaning. The defamiliarizing properties of her prose poems underscore the materiality of language, while her queer autobiography exposes the fictional constructs necessary for the creation of any autobiography.

In their emphasis upon generic registers, *Tender Buttons* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* highlight the textual condition; they call attention to the genre conventions that they proceed to undermine. These textual practices lay bare the ideological framework of genre as well as the gendered implications that undergird these conventions. By appropriating and subverting these constructs in the *Autobiography*, Stein reshapes the genre in order to give voice to queer subjects. Likewise, *Tender Buttons* forces readers to encounter language anew. By freeing words from their original context, Stein encourages her audience to perceive the world in

different ways: genre and gender need not be defined in rigid terms. In fact, Stein suggests that through language, we may reimagine these categories to reflect more fluid conceptions of gender and genre.

By reading *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* alongside *Tender Buttons*, we may better understand the various levels of Stein's linguistic play. Together, these texts reveal the breakdown of private and public spheres, and highbrow and lowbrow forms of literature. These categories prove to be superficial, for *both* Stein's audience writing and experimental writing mark their readers as producers of meaning. In the same vein, I have argued that Stein must be a writer and a reader of her own work. Furthermore, in each of these texts, Stein draws on autobiographical details, though arguably *Tender Buttons*, the "highbrow" text from this pairing, contains more private details than *Autobiography*. This autobiographical reading of *Tender Buttons*, however, only becomes available to most readers and critics long after the publication of *Autobiography*. In this way, the web of intertextual allusions in *Autobiography* provides a lens for reading many of Stein's earlier publications. As I have suggested, one cannot read *Tender Buttons* in the same way after reading *The Autobiography* and vice versa. Each of Stein's works transforms a reader's experience of the next, allowing Stein's legacy and aesthetic practices to live on. Like the "strange biographies which were to Gertrude Stein a source of endless pleasure" (*Autobiography* 55), *Tender Buttons* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* will remain for Stein's readers inexhaustible sources of contemplation and enjoyment.

H.D.'s Borderline Genres and States of Consciousness: the *Romans à Clef* of the 1930s

Though known to us primarily as H.D., Hilda Doolittle published her work under half a dozen different pseudonyms during her lifetime; each one corresponded to a specific genre, subject matter, or time in her life.[203] Ezra Pound first bestowed upon her the moniker H.D., *Imagiste*, a label that unfortunately overshadowed much of her career and her modernist legacy; at the time, this enabled Pound to promote H.D. as a modernist poet and allowed him to use her early poetry to help market his strain of Imagism.[204] H.D.'s first poems, including those published within her collection *Sea Garden* (1916), coincide with some of the tenets of Imagism, but the second half of the sobriquet did not aptly characterize the majority of her publications, which included lyric and epic poems, essays on film, short stories, novellas, and *romans à clef*. Despite the influence of Imagism on her later work,[205] H.D.'s early appellation proved to be a restrictive framework that continued to shape perceptions of her literary identity and reputation.[206] Even recently published Norton Anthologies, which acknowledge the existence of H.D.'s prose works, still frame the modernist writer largely in terms of her involvement with the

[203] For instance, Helga Doorn is the pseudonym that H.D. used for *Borderline* and other films produced by the POOL Group. Susan Stanford Friedman notes, "The various noms de plume that appeared on H.D.'s manuscripts and publications are an important part of her texts because each name crystallized a different identity for the writer as she both made and was (re)made by each text" (*Signets* 47). H.D. also had an extensive collection of pet names for herself and others that pervade her letters.

[204] Michael Knaufmann argues that H.D.'s early imagist poems set the standard for Pound's Imagist movement (59).

[205] Some scholars, such as Rachel Connor, trace the persistent influence of Imagism on H.D.'s *oeuvre* beyond the 1910s and '20s. See Connor's *H.D. and the Image*.

[206] Miranda Hickman notes that H.D. was trapped by her identity as an imagist, although not to the same extent as Amy Lowell was ("Sparse and Geometric Contour" 327). Michael Boughn adds, "Moving away from the limiting identification of herself as 'Imagiste,' an identification that led to a measure of recognition but quickly became confining, she used prose to loosen the stasis of Image while maintaining the hierophantic intensity of Image to move the sense of time out of some relentless historical progression" (122).

short-lived Imagist movement and place undue stress on Pound's influence on her career.[207]

Feminist scholarship has attempted to rectify representations of H.D.'s legacy by calling attention to the prolific and varied nature of her corpus. Due to the work of H.D. scholars such as Susan Stanford Friedman, the help of H.D.'s daughter Perdita Schaffner, and the New Directions Publishing Corporation, many of H.D.'s privately published and out of print works are now more readily available. Within the last decade, scholars have looked beyond H.D.'s canonical poetry to consider her novels and novellas and to focus on broader issues that span her *oeuvre*.[208] The critical attention to H.D.'s novels by members of the Modernist Studies Association (MSA), and the recent availability of many of her prose works from the 1940s, reveal H.D.'s changing reputation within the field.[209]

Yet, while novels such as *The Sword Went Out to Sea* (2009) *White Rose and the Red* (2010), and *Majic Ring* (2013) have received considerable attention within the last few years, H.D.'s *romans à clef* from the 1930s remain largely ignored. Rachel Blau DuPlessis highlighted this lacuna in H.D. scholarship in 1979, but little has been done since then to redress this scholarly neglect.[210] Over twenty years later, Friedman's discussion of the Dijon series within a section of *Penelope's Web* (1990) is still the most complete treatment of these *romans à clef*. Most scholars mention these texts only in passing if at all. The three Dijon "booklets," as H.D. called them,[211] consisting of *The Usual Star* (1934), *Kora and Ka* (1934), and *Nights* (1935), comprise a group of autobiographical fiction published in Dijon by Maurice Darantière, who also

[207] See, for instance, H.D.'s biography in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, Vol. D (2007).
[208] Annette Debo's recent monograph, *The American H.D.* (2012), for example, studies H.D.'s expansive career in relation to her American identity. Debo analyzes H.D.'s poetry, prose, and filmic appearances.
[209] For instance, MSA 2009 featured a panel on "H.D., Bryher, and Their Circle," as well as one dedicated solely to "H.D.'s Novels of the 1940s."
[210] DuPlessis calls attention to the lack of scholarship on understanding of these works in a footnote of "Romantic Thralldom in H.D." (188).
[211] H.D. refers to the texts of the Dijon series as "booklets" in *Compassionate Friendship* and in her letters.

published Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* and James Joyce's *Ulysses*.[212] *The Usual Star* included the titular novella as well as the short story "Two Americans," and *Kora and Ka* was comprised of two novellas: *Kora and Ka* and *Mira-Mare*. Published within a two-year period during the mid 1930s, this collection deals in part with H.D.'s *ménage à trois* with Bryher (Annie Winifred Ellerman), the independently wealthy daughter of a British shipping magnate, and Kenneth Macpherson, Scottish artist and filmmaker. H.D. and Bryher became romantically involved in 1919; however, Friedman explains, "Even if they had wanted to, H.D. and Bryher could not set up an establishment like Stein and Toklas (for example) without a complete break from their families, which neither was willing to make" (*Penelope's Web* 222). Bryher's marriage to Robert McAlmon in 1921 gave her the freedom to pursue her relationship with H.D. [213] For her second marriage of convenience, Bryher wed Macpherson in 1927 to help conceal H.D.'s affair with the young Scotsman. Though H.D's arrangement with Macpherson lasted only a few years, she would spend the rest of her life with Bryher, who supported her emotionally and financially. These autobiographical tensions form the backdrop for the fictionalized accounts of her Dijon series.

Though the autobiographical elements of these texts cannot be discounted, they offer much more than an account of H.D.'s intimate relationships. Since feminism's second wave, the connection between the personal and the political seems blatantly obvious, but for a writer accused (by Lawrence Rainey) of having "little interest, and no reason to have an interest, in

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[212] Friedman admits to her uncertainty regarding the texts of the Dijon series (*Penelope's Web* 394 n2). She cites the above texts, but also includes *Narthex* (1928), which was not published by Darantière. She speculates about a possible seventh text, though one of her suspicions is that the text that was destroyed. Because *Narthex* was published during the late 1920s and not by the Dijon printer, I am not including it in my discussion. It is only many years later that H.D. connects *Narthex* to the "booklets" of the Dijon series because of its attention to her time with Macpherson (See *Compassionate Friendship* 130, 132).

[213] Bryher's marriage to Robert McAlmon in 1921 was also a purely utilitarian arrangement that freed Bryher from the constant oversight of her parents. See Chapter 4 of Friedman's *Penelope's Web* for a detailed account of H.D.'s intimate relationships at this time. (See especially 221-232).

addressing anyone who stood outside of the coterie that surrounded her and Bryher" (112), the political implications of the personal bears repeating. Though largely an attack on Friedman's feminist recuperation of H.D., Rainey's "Canon, Gender, and Text: The Case of H.D" is also an assault on H.D.'s autobiographical fiction and more specifically, the *roman à clef*, which he dismissively links to aristocratic circles of the seventeenth century (113). He uses the origins of this genre to refute Friedman's assessment of H.D.'s prose as participating in a "modernism of the margins" and highlights her financial dependence on Bryher (113). Though Bryher funded the private publication of the Dijon series, Rainey's account elides the circumstances surrounding their publication, namely H.D.'s failed attempts to publish these works on her own. The limited editions of these texts were not an authorial choice.

Moreover, Rainey's dismissal of the *roman à clef* fails to acknowledge the prominence of this genre within modernism. In *The Art of Scandal: Modernism, Libel Law, and the Roman à Clef*, Sean Latham reveals the *roman à clef*—the novel with a key—to be far more popular during this time than scholarship typically acknowledges (16). Dispelling the illusion of the modernist genius that creates something from nothing, Latham points to the prevalence of gossip literature at the time, and sees in the modernist *roman à clef* a dismantling of the divide between highbrow and lowbrow culture. Latham states, "Far from being simpleminded acts of brutality or revenge, these works instead deliberately exploit the genre's aesthetics of detail in order to cross the boundary between the hermetic aestheticism of highbrow modernism and the considerable rewards—both social and financial—of the wider literary marketplace" (19). While this characterization proves true for modernists like Ford Maddox Ford, D.H. Lawrence, and Jean Rhys, Latham's argument cannot be said to fit H.D.'s circumstances; the involuntarily restricted circulation of her *romans à clef* prevented H.D. from reaping the benefits of the literary

marketplace.

Nevertheless, the *roman à clef* remains a marker of modernist experimentation. Neither fiction nor memoir, the *roman à clef* is, in point of fact, a new hybrid form produced through the merger of these genres. As Latham notes, "the roman à clef [sic] profoundly troubles any easy attempt at categorization since it must be defined, in part, by its duplicity" (9); that is to say, it is *both* fiction and nonfiction. A challenge to distinct literary categories, the *roman à clef* also deconstructs the divide between public and private, art and life, highbrow and lowbrow, and truth and fabrication. When conceived in these terms, this hybrid genre may and, I argue, *should* be read alongside the formal innovations of Woolf's *Orlando* and Stein's *Autobiography*. Indeed, H.D.'s thinly veiled autobiographical accounts reflect her efforts to understand her personal history through a modernist form of experimentation. The *roman à* clef, in fact, proves to be merely one of the unconventional forms and traditions upon which H.D. draws. Applying the "*à clef*" conceit to film and the short story,[214] and integrating, in the case of *Nights*, Christian and Hellenic mysticism with the diary form, H.D. expands the generic possibilities of the *roman à clef*. The versatility of this form also allows her to attend to the large-scale questions of modernity, such as the nature of subjectivity, gender identity, sexuality, and desire. The *roman à* clef, I argue, becomes an extension of her feminist revisionist myth-making strategies by affording H.D. the possibility of creatively reimagining and re-presenting her past.

Many critics oversimplify the Dijon series, reading these novellas merely in light of H.D.'s bisexuality. Friedman, for instance, frames these prose texts in terms of "the increasingly split and bisexual self in exile from the maternal body" (*Penelope's Web* xi). Lisa Rado and Diana Collecott, who focus on *Nights*, have similar readings. However, the fragmentation of

[214] Jean Walton labels *Borderline* a *film à clef*.

H.D.'s fictionalized surrogates is not limited to or even framed primarily in relation to her sexuality. To read these texts only in terms of her inability to manage her sexuality is reductive and inaccurate. Friedman's reading actually hinges on gender, not sexuality. But beyond this conflation of gender and sexuality, such readings reduce H.D.'s identity to these two axes.

I argue that the Dijon series reveals the multiplicity of subject positions maintained by H.D. (and others) at one moment in time. Instead of the deeply divided selves that these critics find in the protagonists of the Dijon series, I contend that H.D. largely represents her fictionalized self as hybrid—a composite of multiple subject positions. Accordingly, H.D. makes use of multiple genres and epistemological frameworks, including disciplines as seemingly disparate as Hermeticism and Christian mysticism, to establish this representation of herself as a multifaceted subject.

Though each element of H.D.'s identity—her gender, sexuality, nationality, and profession—serves as a marker of difference, her marginality is rarely cast as a solitary position within these autobiographical texts. In "Two Americans," for example, H.D.'s female protagonist experiences a sense of shared marginality—based on gender or national identity—with other characters. Even in works like *Kora and Ka* and *Mira-Mare*, which focus almost exclusively upon the interactions between two characters, the marginalized subjects H.D. depicts may be understood in generalizable terms. While the experiences she relates are her own, the power dynamics that they reflect are systemic.

Furthermore, I argue, H.D.'s examination of her subjectivity within these fictionalized accounts highlights an identificatory process that proves key to her identity as a writer. H.D.'s protagonists, who serve as proxies for herself, establish affinities centered around her different marginalized subject positions. Her epiphantic experiences in "Two Americans" and *Nights*

emanate from her intimate sexual or intellectual exchanges with others, but the encounters become a means of channeling *her own* artistic talent. Beyond the metaphysical visions facilitated by her intimate experiences with an other, these affinities may offer queer possibilities for confronting racial discrimination, patriarchal imperatives, and rigid social structures. The shared alliance established through H.D.'s ménage with Bryher and Macpherson offered a model for alternative kinship structures and artistic collaboration. Bryher and Macpherson adopted and helped raise H.D.'s daughter Perdita, but the three also worked together on Macpherson's feature-length 1930 film *Borderline*. They all also wrote for and helped edit *Close-Up*, the first English journal to address the aesthetic value of film. Though Macpherson eventually left their fold, for a time their ménage a trois offered a system of love and support that enabled artistic production on the fringes of mainstream modernism.

In this chapter, my reading of the *romans à clef* of the Dijon series focuses primarily on "Two Americans" and *Nights*, which I argue are the most illuminating and sophisticated texts of the group. My brief discussion of *Mira-Mare* and *Kora and Ka* appears only in relation to the other texts. I read "Two Americans" and *Nights* alongside H.D.'s *Borderline* pamphlet and her participation in the film itself. *Borderline*, a *film à clef*, serves as an illuminating complement to the *romans à clef* of the Dijon series, for while the film reflects the tensions and triangulated desires within H.D.'s ménage, it also depicts H.D.'s social engagement with the racial politics of her time.[215] Moreover, my analysis of *Borderline* and "Two Americans" highlights the limitations of H.D.'s identification with others. Though H.D.'s writing on this film and her short

[215] Though Friedman argues that in much of H.D.'s work, "The intent, if not the technique, is didactic, political" ("Scattered Remnant" 110), scholars like Michael Boughn, who wrote the afterward to *Narthex* and helped edit Robert Duncan's *The H.D. Book*, still find in H.D.'s prose a lack of engagement with the "social world" (120). My analysis of "Two Americans" and the *Borderline* pamphlet reveal that his characterization of H.D.'s detachment from the "social world" is largely unfounded.

story—set during an evening when the film was shot—endeavor to challenge racist ideologies and overcome racial difference, both of these texts inadvertently reinscribe troubling racial stereotypes. H.D.'s attempts to establish affinities based on marginalization highlight both the possibilities of queer theory and the potential obstacles encountered in the movement from theory to praxis.

Modernism's *Borderline*: H.D., Paul Robeson, and the Harlem Renaissance

In 1930, Harlem Renaissance actor and singer Paul Robeson starred in a film called *Borderline*, which featured H.D. opposite him. Directed by Kenneth Macpherson and produced by the POOL Group, comprised of Macpherson, H.D., and Bryher, the film deals with racism, jealousy, and desire through its depiction of an interracial love triangle. Slated as an art house film from the start, *Borderline* received a limited release and was underappreciated in its time. *Borderline* was rediscovered in the 1980s and is now available in its recently restored form through Criterion.[216]

Borderline is a silent black and white film produced after the popularization of the "talkie." Though its association with outmoded technology may be read as an homage and an act of mourning for a dying art form, *Borderline*'s aesthetics and thematic concerns are avant-garde. Macpherson, in fact, goes so far as to boldly and unapologetically declare his film to be "perhaps the only really 'avant-garde' film ever made" ("As Is" 237). Influenced by German and Russian cinema, Macpherson makes use of Sergei Eisenstein's technique of overtonal montage to place added emphasis on racial tensions, unspoken desires, and the unconscious mind. The film's taboo subject matter and experimental qualities contribute to its marginalization, but its minoritarian status offers political potential. *Borderline* and its creators comprise a marginal

[216] The George Eastman House restored the film.

modernism, a strand of modernism that is queer and interracial. *Borderline*'s director and many of its white actors were queer expatriates. Drawing on the resources of Bryher's family wealth, the POOL Group's modernist intervention strives beyond formal experimentation with the film's exploration of racial tensions and its overt indictment of racist ideology. Furthermore, as Annette Debo and other H.D. scholars have pointed out, the POOL Group's collaboration with the Robesons situates this European film simultaneously within modernism and the Harlem or New Negro Renaissance.[217] Debo's theoretical position falls roughly in line with that of Sieglinde Lemke, author of *Primitivist Modernism*, who uses forms of aesthetic collaboration to argue that Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance are "inextricably interrelated" (3). Michael North, on the other hand, also calls attention to the inextricable ties between the movements, but focuses on appropriation rather than collaboration: he reminds readers of the "white vogue for Harlem" and argues that certain modernist artists felt that "the artist occupied the role of the racial outsider because he or she spoke a language opposed to the standard" (Preface). In other words, white authors appropriated African American dialects, culture, and identity to fashion themselves as modern and unconventional. Taking a middle ground between North and Lemke, I use this collaborative project to highlight both the interdependence and the tensions between these movements. I argue that the film's marginal existence within both modernism and the Harlem Renaissance and its use of the then passé silent film genre mark *Borderline* as a "minor" art form. Yet its form aptly complements and helps establish its thematic focus. Through its use of montage and its status as a *film à clef*, *Borderline*'s hybrid composition heightens its representation of "borderline" subjects. The film's titular metaphor highlights the "in-between" status of its interracial relationships, its disenfranchised black subjects, and its peripheral queer

[217] As scholars have argued, the term Harlem Renaissance often seems inapt. The term "New Negro Movement" conveys an effort to acknowledge the other national and transatlantic cities where black arts thrived.

characters. Ultimately, I argue, the peripheral, queer-coded characters establish an affinity with Robeson's character and a temporary alliance in their shared marginalization.[218] Both the film and H.D.'s *Borderline* pamphlet highlight the subversive potential in the alliances established between the borderline or hybrid subjects. For H.D., these hybrid subjects pose a challenge to hegemonic ideologies through their exposure of illogical and unjust dominant social practices. Though the structures that oppress said marginalized subjects remain in power, the film posits the possibility of transformation on a microcosmic scale.

In between a European concert tour, a brief run of *The Emperor Jones* in Berlin, and rehearsals for *Othello* in London, Robeson and his wife Eslanda travelled to Switzerland in March of 1930 to film *Borderline*. Robeson appears in the film as Pete, and Eslanda appears as his estranged lover, Adah. Opposite Paul and Eslanda is early gay rights activist Gavin Arthur who plays the part of Thorne, a violent alcoholic having an affair with Adah. H.D., who is listed under the pseudonym Helga Doorn, plays the role of Thorne's jealous and neurotic wife, Astrid. The more peripheral characters, who are incidentally also the queer-coded characters, are played by poet and film critic Robert Herring, who performs the role of the pianist; Bryher, H.D.'s partner and Macpherson's wife—in name only—who appears as the butch bar manageress; and Gavin Arthur's wife, Charlotte, who acts the part of the femme bar maid and apparent companion to the manageress. Though significantly older than H.D. and Bryher, Blanche Lewin, who plays "the old lady," was also a part of their social circle. As I will show, the identity politics of the film and its actors demonstrate the utility of framing their critique of systemic violence from the margins and suggest possible affinities between black and queer marginal

[218] In "Two Americans" and H.D.'s *Borderline* pamphlet, this affinity formed through shared marginalization may also be understood as a form of cosmopolitanism. (See Rebecca Walkowitz's *Cosmopolitan Style: Modernism Beyond the Nation*.) Nationality and nationhood are not prominent features in the film; in fact, the unnamed town operates as the only visible governing body and the nationality of the characters themselves remains undisclosed.

modernisms.

In the pamphlet written by H.D. in 1930 for the promotion of Macpherson and the film, the "borderline" metaphor is rendered excessively explicit: the "borderline town" is complemented by the "borderline rooms," the "borderline social cases," and the "cosmic racial borderline" (110). Even Macpherson is rendered "borderline among the young cinema directors" (110). H.D. positions his aesthetics in national terms as an amalgam of English and German influences. Yet, as H.D. writes, though Macpherson is "English in general European terminology," this Scottish-born director's "fiber […] is celtic [sic]" (111). The pamphlet positions Macpherson as a "minor" director in a Deleuzian sense—a unique position through which to critique mainstream society and social mores. Though H.D. elides discussion of Macpherson's sexual practices within the pamphlet, his bisexuality places him along an additional borderline and grants him another vantage point through which to critique the dominant. As more than aesthetic collaborators, the members of the POOL Group benefitted from their ménage à trois in many ways. Bryher's marriage to Macpherson granted her freedom from her wealthy family and the ability to finance a plethora of modernist projects, including *Borderline* and *Close Up*, the first English-language journal to treat film as an art form.

The plotline of *Borderline* is, at times, difficult to follow in part because of its experimental qualities. Drawing on the work and innovative techniques of Eisenstein and Georg Wilhelm Pabst, the film relies heavily on psychoanalytic tropes and overtonal montage. In *Borderline*, the psychology of the characters and the images—a combination of short, rapid cuts, and longer, sustained shots—often take precedence over the plot. Nevertheless, the distribution of a libretto containing "the story" of the film suggests that the plot is of importance in

understanding *Borderline*.[219]

When the film begins, we are immediately thrown into a violent fight between Thorne and Adah. The libretto explains that Adah has been staying with Thorne and Astrid. While Adah and Thorne are arguing, Astrid calls Pete, who is apparently working in the same town where they are staying—unbeknownst to both Pete and Adah—to inform him of his wife's whereabouts, but he refuses her call. When Adah leaves, Astrid informs her of Pete's presence and Adah goes in search of him at the hotel/café where he is living and working. The two reconcile and walk around the town. In the meantime, Astrid goes to the café to complain about Adah, referring to her with racist epithets. Thorne storms in and the two engage in a very public and racially charged fight. The old lady, who appears to stand in for the town's dominant ideology or "small-town 'rectitude'" (libretto), shouts, "If I had my way, not one negro would be allowed in the country!"

When Thorne returns to Astrid's room, he rejects her embraces and she has a breakdown. Her listless body on the ground foreshadows her death, which takes place moments later. Astrid takes Thorne's knife and strikes him, slashing his hand and face. He takes the knife from her and accidentally kills her. Adah becomes the scapegoat for Astrid's murder. Adah also blames herself and leaves both Pete and the town. Thorne is acquitted, but the town subsequently insists on scapegoating Pete, who is asked to leave both the premises and the town.

Though racial tensions direct the progression of the narrative, the *Borderline* pamphlet downplays the film's politics. The pamphlet also proves contradictory. On the first page, H.D. makes note of the "black-white Problem" and acknowledges that "Pete and Adah must inevitably remain 'borderline,' whether by their own choice and psychic affiliation or through sheer crude

[219] Anne Friedberg calls in a "necessary key to the otherwise disjunctive and elliptical narrative" ("Approaching Borderline" 379).

brute causes" (110). A few pages later she declares:

> [Macpherson] is, in no way whatever, concerned personally with the black-white political problem. As an *artist*, he sees beauty 'take it or leave it,' he seems to say again and again, and, 'I'm not busy with party politics.' Nevertheless, in his judicious, remote manner, he has achieved more for that much mooted and hooted Problem (with a capital) than if he went about to gain specific sympathy. (112, emphasis added)

Yet, H.D.'s attempts to identify Macpherson as apolitical are misleading. She deliberately frames this essay to position Macpherson as an avant-garde director and laud him for his aesthetic achievements.[220] Accordingly, her essay touts the "film for the film's sake" slogan endorsed by *Close Up* and celebrated in Macpherson's first editorial ("As Is" 40).[221] However, in extolling Macpherson's aesthetics and discounting his politics, she whitewashes the politics of the film and obscures Macpherson's involvement in racial justice.

As Debo and others have argued, the film makes "visible the false premises and conclusions in the rape and lynching mythology" ("Interracial Modernism" 375). In one scene at the café/bar, a white patron insults Adah. In her description of the scene, H.D. asserts, "In the little café through which Pete stalks and his mistress turns, gazing with great eyes at a vague conglomeration of whites, we have something of the nightmare that we would image a sensitive negro might have, on facing a room full of antagonistic presences. […] that dream-nightmare permeates our consciousness although we may not know what it is or why" (*Borderline*

[220] Friedman notes, "Both H.D. and Bryher believed in and nurtured his talent, even after he began pursuing liaisons with young black men in 1929. Supporting him emotionally and financially, they urged him to focus his talents and to pursue the film career Pabst offered. But by 1930, Macpherson's creative drive began to dissipate, finally dissolving into neuroses in the early 1930s. … Within the context of its production, the pamphlet *Borderline* is something of a love letter to a lover already gone, one that projects the role of disciple/lover admiring the artistic genius of the director/beloved" (*Penelope's Web* 17-18). Drawing on Friedman's research and building on her own "film à clef" reading, Jean Walton provocatively suggests, "It would seem as though the racial purity of the creative ménage-à-trois is infected or corrupted by blackness in this account, as Macpherson shifts from sublimating (via aestheticized images of Robeson), to consummating, to symptomatizing his cross-racial desire" (248).

[221] For a more detailed discussion of the two strains of avant-garde cinema and *Close Up*'s placement within this schema, see James Donald's "Introduction," especially (29-33).

Pamphlet 122). Herein, H.D. hints at the political potential of film, noting the affective or subconscious influence it has upon its viewers. In his only confrontational scene in the film, Pete defends Adah by punching the man who disparages his wife. The montage sequence that follows incorporates flames and multiple shots of white fists in front of a poster of a headless black body, thus evoking the image of a lynch mob. Herein, the film depicts lynching as a mechanism for white control. H.D.'s pamphlet also challenges the logic of lynching by calling attention to similar imagery from Astrid and Thorne's public fight. Astrid calls Thorne "Nigger-Lover." In the public space of the bar, her words resound as a formal accusation. H.D. writes of this scene:

> Thorne, her faithless lover, by dream juxtaposition is seen posed as if a noose were dangling him from a floor, which we feel reel beneath his feet by this parallel of contraries. A small touch perhaps, to be noticed by a few only, but bound to have a subconscious significance. Macpherson, it is obvious, in just that flash, is demonstrating a tardy aphorism. *If a black man is hanged for loving a white woman, why should not a white man be likewise lynched for loving a black one*? Dream, I say. These conclusions happen only in the higher fantasy of dream value and of ultimate dream justice. (123, emphasis added)

When used to discipline a white body, the film's repetition and recontextualization of lynching imagery undercuts the white supremacist rationale for this violence. Clearly we would be remiss to say that Macpherson or the POOL Group were politically disengaged. One year before the filming of *Borderline*, as Macpherson worked on the screenplay and the sketches, *Close-Up* published a special issue that dealt specifically with the topic of Black actors in cinema. Included within this volume is a letter from NAACP Assistant Secretary Walter White. Macpherson also published an essay in Nancy Cunard's 1934 *Negro: An Anthology*, entitled "A Negro Film Union—Why Not?" Thus, as James Donald and Laura Marcus note, "Despite their passion for the specificity of film and for the experience of watching film, the contributors to *Close Up* were neither ignorant of, nor uninterested in, the social power of cinema" (33). In fact, in his editorial

to the 1929 special issue of *Close Up*, Macpherson writes, "Confronted with an instability (his own) which he calls a Race Problem, the white man is always going to portray the negro as he likes to see him, no matter how benevolently. Benevolence, indeed, is the danger" (qtd. in Donald 33).

Unfortunately, the problems of racial representation that Macpherson articulated above form a palpable impasse in both the film and the *Borderline* pamphlet. Though *Borderline* features Robeson as a "fashionable, contemporary figure" in comparison to his exoticized roles in films such as *Sanders of the River*, *Dark Sands*, and *Jericho* (Ian Christie qtd. in Nollen 28), and though he is without question the most likeable character in *Borderline*, the film establishes a conspicuous link between Robeson and nature. Prolonged shots that accentuate the contrast between light and dark feature Robeson's head framed by the clouds. When outside and among nature, Pete and Adah seem happy and content. The naturalness of the couple is juxtaposed with the mounting tension within the café and the volatile space of Astrid and Thorne's rooms. As Jean Walton and other scholars have commented, "unsurprisingly, blacks find themselves on the side of the 'natural,' and whites on the side of the 'civilized'" and neurotic (254). The pamphlet likewise describes this dynamic in troubling primitivist terms:

> Pete and Adah escape from their little room and stand on a hill side. Like a dream, the great negro head looms disproportionate, and water and cloud and rock and sky are all subsidiary to its being. Like a personal dream, gone further into the race dream, we see (with Pete) hill and cloud as, on that first day, created. Dream merges with myth and Pete, regarding a fair heaven far from the uncreated turmoil of that small-town café, says quite logically, 'let there be light.' Light has been, it is obvious, created by that dark daemon, conversant with all nature since before the time of white man's beginning. (122)

H.D.'s description of the film's visual imagery foregrounds the melding together of various abstract forms; unfortunately, these mythic and dream-like motifs reinscribe racist paradigms. As

Macpherson cynically warned in his editorial, "the white man is always going to portray the negro as he likes to see him." Herein, Pete takes the shape of an "earth god" (*Borderline* Pamphlet 111) in a pre-civilized world, a representation that prefigures H.D.'s description of Saul in "Two Americans." Both the filmic and the textual depictions of racial difference replicate disconcerting stereotypes.

H.D.'s description makes use of a troubling primitivist framework, but she nevertheless valorizes Pete's detachment from "white *man*'s beginning"—a legacy associated in the film with corruption and bigotry. This idealized distance from white, heterosexual male hegemony marks a possible avenue for resistance and highlights the film's queer potentiality. *Borderline*, I argue, posits affinity—an alliance based not on "natural identifications" but on "political kinship" (Haraway 156)—as a means of countering dominant structures of power. The affinity formed between the black characters and queer-coded characters operates as a counterhegemonic force in the face of the town's intolerance. Andrea Weiss and Jean Walton have called attention to the "sexual" borderline occupied by the queer characters in the film, who fulfill an intermediary role between the white and black characters.[222] Though they play this intermediary role, I contend that the queer characters more importantly serve as a moral compass in the film.

When Thorne tries the first time to pass the threshold of the bar to enter Pete's room, he is stopped by the bar manageress, played by Bryher, who asks, "Adah is his Girl, isn't she—not yours?" Her rhetorical question challenges Thorne's presumed ownership of Adah and undercuts his masculine and racial privilege.[223] In the following scene, the bar maid also responds to the

[222] The manageress, for instance, must deliver the town's news to Pete, and the queer-coded bar workers must hold back Thorne when his irrational anger toward Pete boils over.

[223] In the manageress's challenge to Thorne, women remain the possessions of men. Yet, I would argue her verbal jab applies solely to the heterosexual matrix, which Butler describes as "a hegemonic discursive/epistemic model of gender intelligibility that assumes that for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed

old lady's racist rant with a rhetorical question: "Why blame the negroes when people like Thorne are at the root of the trouble?" Finally, when Pete is asked to leave the town in order to protect the "common interests of all concerned," the manageress replies, "Sorry, Pete! What makes it worse is they think they're doing the right thing. We're like that!" To which Pete responds, "Yes, We're like that." The ambiguous "we" may suggest a shared humanity or a shared marginality, as Weiss proposes (20). Ultimately, I argue that H.D.'s conspicuous silence on this final "sexual" borderline in the *Borderline* pamphlet indicates that race, to some extent, becomes a complement to queerness in the film. The bar manageress, bar maid, and pianist form an affinity with Pete. The film does not reconcile these differences but suggests that some possibility for understanding is achieved through a shared marginality.

The final scenes of the film, which depict the reconciliation of Thorne and Pete, feature elongated shots of the two men staring into one another's eyes and smiling. The two shake hands for several seconds and the camera captures the handshake—the black hand within the white hand and the white hand within the black hand—from multiple angles. Both men have lost their wives—arguably due to Thorne's violence and indiscretion—but this bond erases any anger or jealousy that one may have felt for the other. Conveniently, the libretto explains, "They both realise that what has happened has been beyond them, and brought about by external circumstances—that enmity has been among others, and they themselves are mere instruments for its consummation."[224] Yet, the images and romantic entanglements on screen that mirror the fraught desires of the POOL Group's ménage a trois suggest a different narrative. Even if one

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through a stable gender (masculine expresses male, feminine expresses female) that is oppositionally and hierarchically defined through the compulsory practices of heterosexuality" (208, n. 6). The manageress exists outside of this matrix so her words may be read as a larger systemic critique. (Monique Wittig argues that within the institution of heterosexuality, women belong to men; therefore, "lesbians are not women" (32).)

[224] The libretto attempts to resolve Thorne's anger once "he realizes that [Pete and Adah] belong to each other" and Pete's anger dissipates once he revisits the room wherein Astrid died.

refuses to read the objectification and idolization of Robeson's on-screen body as a form of Macpherson's sublimated desire for Robeson,[225] or more generally, for the black male body, the triangulation among Thorne's relationship with H.D.'s character and his affair with an African American woman replicates the very circumstances of H.D.'s relationship with Macpherson at the time—the only difference being that Macpherson was pursuing African American men. The autobiographical dynamic of the film offers a metacommentary on their lives and desires,[226] but even without such details, the film concludes with an image that can be read as either interracial homosociality or queer desire. The women are thereby reframed as minor in relation to the momentary connection between Thorne and Pete. Though Thorne's character has been heretofore unsympathetic, the film suggests that his encounter with the racial (male) other has transformed him in some way. Pete must still vacate the town, but Thorne is upset to see him go. The film's visual image of the handshake suggests the possibility of a sustained alliance between blacks and whites, but *Borderline*'s ending is decidedly framed by Macpherson's vision, one that demands the erasure of women. Though scholars have not yet made the connection, I argue that "Two Americans" becomes H.D.'s aestheticized retelling of the same events, one that valorizes the transformative experience of the female artist without eliding or killing off the fictionalized former lover.

"Mask on Contrasting Mask": the Failure of Static Symbols in "Two Americans"

"Two Americans" is a short story, roughly ten pages in length, fictionalizing one evening at the Villa Kenwin (the Bauhaus-style home and studio in Switzerland shared by H.D., Bryher,

[225] See Walton's reading of Macpherson's sublimated desire (250) as well as Friedman's reading of it (100-104).
[226] Even Paul's Robeson's affairs have been transposed to the screen, only the film inverts the dynamic and presents Adah as the adulteress.

and Macpherson) during which H.D., Bryher, and Macpherson entertained and hosted Paul and Eslanda Robeson. The short story, privately published in 1930, corresponds to the time of the Robesons' visit during the filming of *Borderline*. Like the novellas of this series, "Two Americans" is a thinly veiled autobiographical tale, though the key to this short story *à clef* would be clear to anyone vaguely familiar with H.D.'s circle: H.D. is Raymonde Ransome, the protagonist; Kenneth Macpherson is Daniel Kinoull, the misunderstood artist and jealous lover; Bryher is Gareth, uncensored in her views and small in stature; Bennie Matthews is Robert Herring, "young Londoner, journalist, essayist, general utility man to one of the superior Quarterlies" (63);[227] Saul Howard is Paul Robeson, whose voice resounds on the gramophone; and Paula Howard is Eslanda Robeson, Paul Robeson's wife and manager. Unlike *Borderline*, the plot of "Two Americans" is straightforward and easy to follow, though very little occurs. The relationship between the characters and Raymonde's interiority comprise the majority of the story and take precedence over what transpires.

Like the other texts from the Dijon series, "Two Americans" garners minimal scholarly attention. Yet, when read within the context of the Harlem Renaissance and early 20th-century representations of race, Debo and Friedman have argued for the political significance of the text. Friedman argues, "The intent, if not the technique, is didactic, political" ("Scattered Remnant"110), adding:

> H.D.'s personal experience with the Harlem Renaissance played a key role in deepening and broadening her early feminism into a fully progressive modernism based in an identification with all the people who exist as 'the scattered remnant' at the fringes of culture. Rather than activism providing an agenda for her life and art, H.D.'s writing itself constituted her action against the

[227] Herring introduced Robeson to H.D.'s circle and promoted the arts of the Harlem Renaissance (Friedman, "Scattered Remnant" 97-98). In both *Borderline* and "Two Americans," Herring's character "loved Saul [or Pete] too much" (62).

dominant culture. (94)

Though H.D.'s identification with Robeson's character undoubtedly lies at the center of the text and helps frame H.D.'s work as socially and politically engaged, my reading of "Two Americans" departs from that of Friedman and Debo in my focus on the import of this identification for the artistic vision. Even in this largely straightforward account, I argue that H.D.'s identificatory process serves as a catalyst for her metaphysical transcendence. Though H.D.'s mysticism and occult practices are clearer in *Nights*, "Two Americans" nevertheless demonstrates the value of H.D.'s identifications beyond the potential for shared alliances—an important element of the story that Debo and Friedman overlook. Furthermore, my reading of H.D.'s identification with Robeson in "Two Americans" troubles Debo and Friedman's acceptance of H.D.'s progressive politics by highlighting some of her overtly racist imagery. Finally, as a significant retelling of the autobiographical events concealed within *Borderline*, "Two Americans" recasts the Robesons' visit from her own perspective. H.D.'s portrayal focuses on the way Robeson's character transforms *her* rather than Macpherson. Her representation of the desire, however, does not supplant the position of the former lover (herein Macpherson) with the connection formed with Robeson, as Macpherson does in *Borderline* (through his annihilation of Astrid), but rather she reveals how her intimate connection with Robeson renews another facet of her hybrid identity and restores her confidence in her work. Herein, H.D.'s use of the *roman à clef* is akin to the feminist revisionary mythmaking of her poems. As a form that unites her politics and aesthetics, the *roman à clef* allows H.D. to write over Macpherson's troubling disposal of the feminine. Poems like "Eurydice" give voice to the silenced women of Greek mythology and H.D.'s *romans à clef* bestow that voice to her fictionalized self.[228] In this

[228] "Eurydice" appears within *Collected Poems* (51-55).

rewriting of her personal history, H.D. privileges the perspective and interiority of the female artist.

"Two Americans" foregrounds the issue of race at the start of the short story: "Their faces remained faces yet for all that, those faces had turned now forever into static symbols, they were mask on contrasting mask, the one white, the other *as it happened*, black" (58, emphasis added). H.D.'s words highlight racial difference, yet, these coverings, or masks, appear to be somewhat arbitrary and they hide an inner reality that is of greater importance. Racial difference, it seems, may be overcome by a shared national identity. The very next sentence suggests that national identity may prove more important than race within the context of identity politics: "The two Americans faced each other in a crowded little living room, overlooking the Savoy Grammont" (58). Like the title of the short story, these words emphasize a unity in what is soon revealed to be their shared marginality as American expatriates living in Europe.

For H.D. and for her fictional stand-in, Raymonde, the encounter with the other from her own nation is an important exchange that helps sustain a core portion of her identity. Daniel is jealous of the connection Raymonde forms with Saul and reads their encounter in purely erotic terms: "I can see the man had an incredible fascination for you. […] I can see how you reach out to him. […] Yes, I can see it. I don't mind, it's all right. Of course, you should see more people" (64-65). Though Macpherson's character may have aptly perceived sexual tension between the two,[229] Raymonde resists his insinuation, finding in her interaction with Saul a link to her past and to a part of herself the others are incapable of accessing and understanding: "She couldn't find words in which to explain to Daniel. After all, she had never talked about America except to

[229] Friedman notes that H.D. was attracted to Robeson, who also appears as H.D.'s "bronze god" in her poem "Red Roses for Bronze" ("Scattered Remnant" 100). Macpherson's jealousy, however, may be amplified by his own desire for Robeson. Scholars have suggested that *Borderline* operates as a form of Macpherson's sublimated desire for black men (Friedman 100-104; Walton 250).

execrate its horrors as they all did" (65). Yet like Alex from *Mira-Mare*, Raymonde feels the need to defend America in spite of her knowledge that Daniel will never understand her connection to her motherland. Her American identity is an aspect of her personhood that he can never access.

Raymonde's exchange with Saul seems to signal a turning point in her relationship with Daniel;[230] it frees her from her overdependence on him. Drawing unexpected strength and self-confidence from her encounter with Saul, Raymonde proudly informs Daniel, "'You see,' she was surprised herself to hear what she said, 'he's removed a silver thorn out of my side, called Daniel'" (65). Raymonde's encounter with Saul proves to be a transformative experience. Speaking with Saul, a fellow American and artist, establishes a release that Raymonde describes multiple times in phenomenological terms: "As the voice lowered to a note of intimacy, she saw the thing [the pin] was out. She wouldn't wear Daniel Kinoull anymore like a martyr's jacket. She wouldn't have the sort of hair shirt now anymore to efface the somewhat weather-worn marble that she was. Weather-worn marble, Raymonde Ransome, faced Saul Howard, seared bronze." (59). Not unlike the depiction of colored masks at the beginning of the story, the masks of *Mira-Mare*, or the electromagnet charges that stand in for the lovers' bodies in *Nights*, the description of bodies above appears in abstract terms. Though perhaps an effort at avoiding objectification or the confining nature of human form, H.D. nevertheless conveys race, age, and cultural value through her choice of stone or metal. She describes Raymonde as "deficient," "crippled in some psychic song-wing" particularly in relation to Saul, whose "song flowed

[230] Macpherson's interest in the Harlem Renaissance developed into a series of dalliances with black lovers that proved to be a point of contention for H.D. and Bryher (Friedman, "Scattered Remnant 99; *Penelope's Web* 17-18). Jean Walton reads in Friedman's account a relationship between Macpherson's neurosis and lack of productivity with his pursuit of queer, interracial entanglements (247-49). This perceived decline coincides with the time at which "Two Americans was published.

toward all the world" (58), but at the very least, her ephemeral connection to Saul frees her from Daniel's trappings—the "martyr jacket," "hair shirt," and "silver thorn."

Raymonde's identification with Saul extends to the appropriation of his gestures. After her confrontation with Daniel, Raymonde uses one of Saul's powerful, symbolic theatrical movements to express her newfound empowerment:

> She swerved with that basic circular movement, that sort of hieratic turn that Saul had shown her. […] Is it true that movement of the human body throws out, as it were a sort of charted series of tabulated vibrations, so that just that circular turn, Greek bronze on rotating pedestal, did this thing? Raymonde, self-conscious, lost self; she revolved again; 'This is the way he said he moved when the imaginary host of white rises, off stage, in Deal's play.' She made the circular gesture, the room was obviously too small. Herself, seemed to have grown to some disproportion, seemed to stand equal to him. If she could let go things fantastically in-grown, she might yet be Saul Howard's equal. (65-66).

Raymonde transposes Saul's racially charged movement—enacted as he announced on stage, "I ain't no longer any poor white's chattel" (60)—to the context of gender. Though it is problematic to equate her relationship with Daniel (and other men) to the enslavement of blacks in America, H.D. figures an intrinsic connection between their positions of marginality, even beyond their shared expatriation. Both scenes of confrontation—Saul's within Deal's play and Raymonde's exchange with Daniel—pose a challenge to existing power structures. The words and circular gesture serve as forms of self-empowerment that challenge institutional forms of oppression. Saul's ability to rise above the obstacles set forth by racism, as evidenced by his popularity and stardom, give Raymonde hope that she may transcend her own gendered circumstances and the power dynamics of her relationship with Daniel. Her need to "let go things fantastically in-grown" is a nod towards H.D.'s insularity within the ménage a trois, [231] but herein, it is more

[231] Schaffner uses this same term in her introduction to *Nights* to describe their triad: "We were terribly ingrown, a

specifically a reference to the dangers of her unhealthy dependence on men. Described by DuPlessis as "romantic thralldom," H.D.'s over identification with pivotal male figures in her life borders on self-effacement, for "the entranced self is entirely defined by another" (179). DuPlessis does not name Macpherson among the men who transfixed H.D.—a group that included Pound, D.H. Lawrence, and Lord Howell—though H.D.'s reminiscences within *Compassionate Friendship* suggest that he played a huge role in her art and psychic wellbeing at the time.[232] Even within "Two Americans," Raymonde admits to her partial loss of self-hood in her aforementioned refusal to "wear Daniel Kinoull anymore like a martyr's jacket." As much as this story appears to be about race and national identity—a reading highlighted by Debo—H.D.'s own gendered identity and her internal struggle for empowerment also lie at the center of this text. The *roman à clef* allows H.D. to both reflect upon and creatively render her sense of struggle. These particular metaphors, which can only operate with the bounds of fiction, establish a sense of H.D.'s double bind—she loves Macpherson, but also finds their relationship parasitic. She depicts her fictionalized self bearing her attachment to Macpherson like a physical burden—a realization that is likely easier to express in fiction than nonfiction.

H.D. alludes to the gendered implications of her and her protagonist's fraught subject position through her use of "Herself" in the passage above. The grammatically awkward "Herself" harkens back to H.D.'s protagonist Her (a nickname for Hermione) in her 1927 manuscript *HER*, a thinly concealed account of H.D.'s relationship with Pound. As DuPlessis notes in her reading of this earlier text, "Her" is an obvious stand-in for "the situation of generic

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volatile microcosm in the vastness" (xiii).

[232] H.D. includes Macpherson in a list of men with whom she established an important kinship. With some of these men, H.D. had unresolved tensions; some of these relationships ended in rejection, which contributed to her nervous breakdowns; her relationship with many of these men became the subject of her psychoanalytic sessions. H.D. rereads the Dijon series, as well as *Narthex*, in preparation for some of her sessions with Dr. Erich Heydt in 1955. (See *Compassionate Friendship* 128-133, 140-142).

woman" (181). Though "Two Americans" is H.D.'s fictionalized account of a single evening in her life, H.D. frames her experience as somewhat generalizable. H.D.'s description of the other heterosexual relationship in the story—that between Saul and Paula—echoes some of the dynamics she described between Daniel and Raymonde. In each scenario, the female character sacrifices, willingly or not, her individuality and subjectivity for the promotion of her male artist partner.

Though generally dismissed by Raymonde's friends and thought to be "a very fair imitation" of Saul, Paula, as an African American expatriate, becomes triply marginalized because of her gender (60).[233] The pseudonym H.D. gives to Eslanda Robeson highlights her perceived insignificance and marks her as a mere extension of her husband. However, Raymonde realizes, "why, really she is right. We owe her everything. He is lazy. I don't believe Saul Howard would have troubled to have stopped off here, if it hadn't been for Paula. I don't even believe he would in the least be where he is, acclaimed by everyone on everybody's wireless and in all the gramophone shops, if it weren't for Paula" (60-61). By alluding to Paula's role as Saul's manager and highlighting her centrality in Saul's career, Raymonde gives Paula the credit that society fails to grant her. H.D. also makes a subtle connection between Raymonde and Paula in the subsequent paragraph by highlighting Raymonde's commitment to the advancement of Daniel's career: "She would do everything in her power to see that they took Daniel's work to heart, to see that everything went nicely" (61). The dialog represented between Saul and Raymonde also hinges upon the promotion of Daniel. H.D. writes:

> There had never been any doubt in her mind of Daniel. He was a cup to be protected, the crystal that he was, was brittle, people drew away from Daniel, shocked by some vibration that they could

[233] The title of this short story is "Two Americans." Though H.D. depicts three Americans, Paula remains absent from the title, which, I argue, refers to the transformative experience between Raymonde and Saul.

> not assimilate. The vibration of Daniel Kinoull was violet-ray for the majority. There had never been any doubt in the mind of Raymonde Ransome about Daniel. (59)

In this story, both women bolster the careers of their respective male partners by allowing their contributions to the construction of the male artist's public persona to remain invisible. Herein, H.D. is somewhat critical of her selfless devotion to Macpherson's film career. The *Borderline* pamphlet, on the other hand, highlights Macpherson's talent and ingenuity while erasing her own involvement in the production of the film. Published anonymously, the essay gives all the credit for *Borderline* to Macpherson and elides the fact that H.D. and Bryher were forced to edit the film when Macpherson became ill; thus, to its detriment, the *Borderline* pamphlet "enacts the marginalization that its own view of modernism theorizes" (Friedman, *Penelope's Web* 17-18). In "Two Americans," at least, H.D. conveys an awareness of her complicity in this marginalization, as well as her desire to overcome these troubling sexual politics. The *roman à clef* enables a degree of self-reflexivity that the *Borderline* pamphlet—as a marketing tool for the promotion of both the film and Macpherson—does not.

While in some ways Raymonde's connection to Saul suggests that a shared national identity may mitigate or collapse other forms of difference, this interaction also paradoxically brings out the many facets of Raymonde's identity. The short story begins and ends with an emphasis upon her American identity, but this identity category intersects with her role as a visionary artist. Saul reaffirms her connection to her American identity *and* renews her artistic vision, with the union of the two mirrored in her reading of the landscape:

> So all mental states, Raymonde often thought, were adequately to be measured, exactly shelved here. She stood on the Swiss side, as it happened, and looked across an almost New York drop, down a ten-story area, then up to the Grammont opposite. They were Swiss, they were French, with just that narrow upper arm of Lake Léman to measure them off. States, people, nations—it was all a

> matter of a slice of water or a muddy river or the shattered edge of a blood-spattered precipice, to go by. 'Mohammed and the mountain,' said Raymonde, facing, as it happened the ridge of the French Grammont, 'did or didn't come to him? It's come to me anyway. I mean,' she said, 'America.' (68)

Raymonde's vision of the mountains, crevasse, and lake act as a reflection of her American identity and her liminality. As an outsider looking in, Raymonde stands on the Swiss side of Lake Léman and sees the French-owned territory on the other side of the lake surrounding her. Jointly owned, the lake and surrounding mountain range serve as a border between France and Switzerland, yet on a more profound level, they echo her own borderline existence as a bisexual woman writer and expatriate.[234] H.D. links this moment of transcendence to America, yet, H.D.'s stance is not one of naïve patriotism. Raymonde's reflections also underscore the arbitrary nature of national borders as well as the violence used to maintain these borders. Her war-torn consciousness is not quick to forget the dangers of essentializing such divisions.

As evident from the passage above, H.D. frames the multiple axes of Raymonde's subjectivity in terms of her marginality. Yet, Raymonde's hybrid and liminal status, like H.D.'s, is nevertheless one privileged with a visionary perspective; in fact, the visionary and artistic experience appears to result from H.D.'s (and Raymonde's) marginalization.[235] This follows

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[234] Likewise, in *Mira-Mare*, I read Alex—who figures as H.D.'s surrogate—in light of this multiple marginalization: "The minute I bent my head back to look at the ceiling, there was a flunkey saying, 'madame?' with the sort of interrogation that simply shouted 'what are you a mere écrivan or écrivasse lobster doing in here?' I was a very clean fish. At least, I felt so, not crusted but transparent. He looked right through me. I was the only body in a world of ghosts or the only ghost in a world of bodies. *Anyhow, I was different*" (85, emphasis added). I argue that underscoring the slippage between écrivan or écrivasse and identifying herself as the "clean fish" highlights the importance of gender in her profession by alluding to the gendered underwater imagery of *Notes on Thought and Vision*: "In that over-mind, thoughts pass and are visible like fish swimming under clear water. … I first realised this state of consciousness in my head. I visualise it just as well, now, centered in the love-region of the body or placed like a foetus in the body. … Is it easier for a woman to attain this state of consciousness that for a man?" (94).

[235] Friedman argues, "H.D.'s particular modernism developed out of her identification with all the others who have been 'dispersed and scattered' by the forced of history: Blacks, Jews, Indians, homosexuals and lesbians, women, even artists" ("Scattered Remnant"116). Yet, as I will show, my argument departs from hers in both my critique of H.D.'s uncritical collapse of difference and in the relationship that I highlight between H.D.'s visions and her identification with others.

Delueze and Guattari's logic for the political value of a "minor literature," for as we have seen in Barnes, Woolf, and Stein, the marginalized position of the queer writer may prove advantageous for her critique of mainstream culture. For H.D., however, her access to the visionary experiences she writes about result from her borderline subjectivity and borderline states of consciousness. Though the other writers may envision a different world or different ways to exist in the world, H.D.'s visions take a mystical form. Her mysticism and other esoteric practices are less visible in "Two Americans," taking shape only in the transformation of her room to a "cella"—the inner sanctum of a Greek or Roman temple—and the epiphanic episode itself: "Exact message seemed to be written with a sort of lightning-crayon across the blue-black depth of the Savoy Alps beyond her. […] just the least discountenancing vision, it seemed to Raymonde that the mountain had said something" (67). Raymonde's encounter with Saul facilitates this transcendent experience.

Raymonde's metaphysical insights are, in part, linked to her conception of "home." For Raymonde, "home" is not necessarily bound to a physical locale but rather to a sense of identity, affiliation, and affinity. "Home" is also not limited to one framework or ideal. In fact, in "Two Americans," Raymonde feels a part of multiple affiliations and not one, individually, can aptly sustain her. Her first "home" is her chosen family:

> Home? Raymonde Ransome had found that; her spiritual home was Gareth, was Daniel. Both with burning grey eyes that matched her own eyes burning, they were more 'related' to her than anyone ever had been. They were related to her as Katherine [Frances?] had been related. But Katherine, in America, even then had been far removed from the thing that now held. (65)

Raymonde's queer kinship with Gareth and Daniel—like H.D.'s kinship with Bryher and Macpherson—supports her spiritually and intellectually; her ménage a trois helps her to establish her sense of self, which subsequently enables her writing to flourish. Yet, like Christian of *Mira-*

Mare (the Macpherson figure) who cannot understand her relationship to America (96) and who fails to fully grasp her artistic vision (76),[236] Daniel fails to perceive and help sustain certain sides of Raymonde. He and Gareth cannot replace her connection to her American identity, and thus Saul can offer Raymonde something that Daniel and Gareth cannot. Saul restores her relationship to America: "Oddly and for almost the first time, in her tragically rooted London war-consciousness, Raymonde Ransome felt that America was her home" (64). Though Raymonde's connection to Saul cannot replace her relationship with Gareth and Daniel, it is a form of identification on par with her queer affiliation; both offer redemptive possibilities for her psyche and her art. While in *Borderline*, one relationship takes precedence over all others, such is not the case for H.D. or her rending of these events in "Two Americans."

Though Debo and Friedman find this short story quite progressive in its treatment of race and national identity, I contend that it simultaneously replicates modernist forms of primitivism. "Two Americans" seeks to dispel racism and places Raymonde's connection with Saul at its center, but the text concurrently perpetuates subtle forms of racism. Like her *Borderline* pamphlet, H.D.'s insistence on "static symbols" undercuts her effort to challenge racist ideologies ("Two Americans" 58). Within the first few lines of "Two Americans," she writes, "He was no black Christ. He was an earlier, less complicated symbol. He was the Dionysus as Nietzsche so valiantly struggled to define him; possibly she stood vaguely for counter balancing Nietzschean Apollo, though where he was complete, she was strikingly deficient" (58). H.D. associates her fictional proxy with reason, while aligning Saul, the sensuous Other, with nature

[236] Alex thinks of Christian, "He would not catch the song in her throat. He could not. He could not catch the c and d and the minor trembling of a string; he could not hear the music. She listened to a voice, her own voice, that went on, meticulous in detail … He would not catch her song, he could not" (76). Some version of this first line recurs throughout *Mira-Mare*, signaling Alex's frustration with Christian's inability to see her in her entirety. Though an account of H.D. and Macpherson's romantic trip to Monte Carlo, she worries that "he never listened to what she said" (101).

and raw beauty.[237] She also calls him a "gigantic Being," stating that "He was really no person at all" (58). Herein, he is caste as a type and later he is simply a disembodied voice coming from the gramophone (59). Raymonde does not link his theatrical performances to his intellect and when she does acknowledge his intellectual capacity, it is in problematic terms: "he thought not as a man thinks" (60). Herein, "man" signifies white masculinity. Thus, H.D. figures his racial difference through forms of emasculation and primitivism.[238]

H.D. also presents Paula in essentialized terms, describing her intellect within a racialized framework. Robeson's wife is figured as the mixed-race woman in the *Borderline* pamphlet, and she appears as such here, as well: "Paula Howard, his wife, thought more as white folks, consistently, being more than half white" (60). Casting her as the mulatta, H.D. herein feels qualified to assess Paula's (and thus Eslanda's) dominant racial expression. In relation to her husband, who is of a darker complexion and formidable stature, she is far less exotic and also less interesting. Though Debo concedes that "unfortunately, H.D.'s work is not free of primitivization," she argues that "Two Americans creates a complex African American male character" (156). Her analysis overlooks the fact that Saul appears only through the eyes of the white characters. Unlike pure fiction, omniscience is not truly feasible in the *roman à clef*—the narrator can really only know the thoughts of her fictionalized self. In being true to the actual circumstances of her life, H.D. only conveys what she knows of herself and what she's observed and heard from Bryher and Macpherson, which amounts, in part, to desire and racial prejudice. They lust after him—"Bennie Matthews […] loved Saul too much" (62)—and measure their growth as liberal whites based on their patronage of black arts and their abilities to overcome

[237] Walton's reading of a similar binary opposition between white civilization and black primitivism in *Borderline* seems applicable here, as well.
[238] H.D. establishes a connection between Saul and nature through her reference to Dionysus, but she also compares him to "an earthquake or mountain" (62).

their initially racist views of Saul: Gareth first described Saul as "one of those Harvard niggers who talk English" (64).[239] H.D.'s character is at least somewhat self-critical of her suppressed racism, as figured by the tightening of her white mask following the conversation with Saul.

While it is tempting, as Friedman has done, to claim, "H.D. explored the issue of race as a way of identifying the bonds between her own and other's [sic] experience of being hostile in the world" ("Scattered Remnant" 104), this identificatory process has its limitations. Though the mimicry North discusses within *The Dialect of Modernism* is primarily linguistic, Raymonde's appropriation of Saul's racialized theatrical gesture functions in much the same way. While it effectively establishes H.D.'s text as participating in "a modernism of the margins," to use Friedman's term, this appropriation is undergirded by primitivist imagery and insistent reminders of racial difference. Unfortunately, some of the racism and social conventions that the POOL Group sought to challenge were reinscribed within their own artistic accounts. Though they fought against the illogical rationale for lynching and other overt forms of bigotry, they nevertheless exoticized black bodies and replicated racist stereotypes.

"The Old Mould Does Not Fit":[240] Alternative Configurations of Gender and Sexuality in *Nights*

Privately published in 1935 and reissued by New Directions in 1986, H.D.'s *Nights* has received minimal critical attention, even from H.D. scholars.[241] Judged by some to be a trivial

[239] Bryher's personal letters to H.D. are equally inflammatory in their blatant racism. See, for instance, Bryher's letter to H.D. dated March 21, 1933: "Nancy [Cunard] has one new black illiterate gorilla and one small but even blacker negro from Oxford" (*Analyzing Freud* 131).
[240] See *Nights* 33.
[241] *Nights* has not been reprinted since 1986, but it is available for purchase online through Amazon and through an independent bookseller operating through Barnes and Noble. Both websites convey limited availability.

roman à clef for the private consumption of her coterie,[242] H.D.'s *Nights*, I argue, proffers more than mere insights into the dynamics of her *ménage a trois* with Bryher and Macpherson. Its autobiographical elements cannot be discounted, but in reading *Nights* without a larger consciousness of its aesthetic achievements and its reevaluations of sex and gender, much is lost. H.D.'s hybrid text poses a challenge to traditional forms and conceptions of narrative authority by blurring fact and fiction and introducing a work purportedly written by two separate writers. H.D.'s play with the narrative "I" is similar to Stein's fictional construct in the *Autobiography*, though neither of the writers of *Nights* correspond directly to H.D. In this respect, H.D.'s hybrid subjects problematize stable conceptions of gender, sexuality, consciousness, and authorial intent while dismantling binary oppositions, such as that between body and mind. H.D.'s protagonist uses her metaphysical experiences to go well beyond the type of visions Raymonde described within "Two Americans." In a similar vein, *Nights* escapes the limitations of the sexed, gendered, and racialized body that contribute to the troubling inequalities highlighted within my discussion of "Two Americans." In relation to *Borderline* and "Two Americans," *Nights* reflects H.D.'s most abstract and experimental work due to its reliance on her esoteric beliefs and her simultaneous appreciation for and critique of psychoanalysis. H.D. relies upon multiple epistemological frameworks to communicate her understanding of her hybrid subjectivity.

H.D.'s protagonist, Natalia Saunderson, leaves behind a manuscript detailing her twelve nights of sexual ecstasy with a young man named David Leavenworth. In her Introduction to *Nights*, Perdita Schaffner aptly assesses, "Their bed is the epicenter" (xiii), but the text does not by any means border on pornography. Natalia's literary rendering of their bodies evades objectification through abstracted and metonymic lyric. Their sexual exchanges are most often

[242] See Lawrence Rainey's Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture.

couched in nature imagery or described in the scientific terms of electromagnetic charges. Moreover, the erotic episodes are secondary to what ensues. Natalia's sexual union with David leads to a transcendent experience that is paramount to her physical pleasures. Upon orgasm, Natalia escapes the confines of her body and the conventions of temporality and enters into a realm unbounded by worldly constraints. Here, she reaches direct contact with her deity and is freed from the physicality of her sexed and gendered body. This transitory experience provides the inspiration for as well as the content of her poetic prose. Perpetually left unfulfilled, Natalia considers each night an effort to advance her mystical practices and extend her otherworldly encounter.

Evidently privileged in her visionary gift, Natalia transcends the pleasures of the body, while her partner's earthly bliss ends promptly with ejaculation. David is in fact only a catalyst;[243] his stimulation is requisite, but often it is her autoeroticism that produces the visions: "David or Neil, they were only bridges, they led her to her dream" (87), and "the dream is more important" (54). In contrast to some of H.D.'s other works, feminine power in *Nights* may be associated with a superior epistemology rather than a sheer bodily creativity limited to childbirth. Although Friedman and Donna Krolik Hollenberg extol the "gynopoetics"[244] of *Notes on Thought and Vision* and the poetics as progeny metaphors of *Hermetic Definition*, *Nights* may offer a more exemplary model for both feminine and artistic creativity in the concurrent veneration of body and mind inherent in Natalia's mystical experience.

Looking to the occult practices of the ancient Greeks and the medieval Christians for

[243] Like "Two Americans," *Nights* replicates the use of the man as a mere catalyst, though Natalia reaches her visionary experience through orgasm.
[244] Friedman argues that H.D.'s *Notes on Thought and Vision* enacts an *écriture feminine* years prior to the work of Cixous and Irigaray. See *Penelope's Web* 11-12. Hollenberg also celebrates the "poetics of childbirth and creativity" as denoted by the title of her book, *H.D.: The Poetics of Childbirth and Creativity*.

guidance in her erotic endeavors, Natalia evades the limitations of normative gender roles, essentialism, and traditional understandings of pleasure. Yet, Natalia is not advocating an ideological return to an imaginary past of better times. Her use of early Christian mysticism, tarot and neo-pagan practices, and Greek mythology presents alternatives to the strictures of traditional modes of sexuality and desire. H.D.'s protagonist reveals the capability of these older forms to paradoxically dismantle traditional subjectivity while deconstructing the hierarchical binaries between mind and body, human and divine.

H.D. begins to complicate an understanding of the unified subject before we even enter the text. In fact, she publishes this novella under the pseudonym John Helforth, a traumatized and deeply divided character that appeared in H.D.'s *Kora and Ka*. His name appears on the cover of the 1986 edition in brackets below H.D.'s much larger initials. In her 1935 edition, she features his name to the exclusion of her own.[245] This is a contentious decision, given that Helforth is also the purported narrator whose voice we hear in the Prologue. Here, he informs the reader that he has been charged with the responsibility of publishing Natalia's text—the manuscript that appears as the second part of this novella. Although Helforth has ostensibly fulfilled his obligation, he has invariably compromised Natalia's manuscript not only by framing it with his own interpretive claims but by further appropriating the text through his assumed authorship. "Nights" appears as both the title of the novella as well as the title of Natalia's manuscript, which emphasizes the precedence of Natalia's text, while simultaneously undermining her authorial role in its production. The sexual and textual politics of Natalia's fictional text echo H.D.'s self-effacement in the *Borderline* pamphlet as well as the fraught

[245] In *Penelope's Web*, Friedman writes, "H.D. privately printed 100 copies of Nights in 1935 under the name John Helforth, a screen which particularly delighted her, even thought it surely couldn't have deceived the friends to whom she sent copies of the book" (270-1).

politics of Pound's role in naming H.D. and using her work to bolster his own career.

Autobiographical components and familial ties additionally complicate *Nights*. Perdita Schaffner commences the Introduction to her mother's novella with oversimplified responses to our initial inquiries of the text: "Who, to begin with, is this John Helforth, one book writer, author of *Nights*? He doesn't exist. He never did. His name is a pseudonym, he is H.D.'s alter ego. He redoubles as the fictitious John, first-person narrator of the prologue" (ix). Yet, she continues, "The Natalia of the introduction and of the ensuing tale is, of course, H.D. herself—multifaceted, every nerve exposed" (xi). Thus Schaffner supposes that with this text, we encounter two sides of H.D.; one is a free-spirited writer of poetic prose and a sensuous and experimental heroine, while the other a male dilettante psychoanalyst and complaisant technical writer and editor. Several critics have commented upon H.D.'s dichotomous psyche, including the author herself.[246] In a letter to Bryher dated December 16, 1934, H.D. writes:

> Like you, I suddenly discouvered (sic) an 'Earnest'—mine is a sort of replica of John Helforth.[247] I shall call him John for luck, whether he is John H., or not I don't yet know, but my Earnest, which is John, has begun to edit the works of the pre-Freud H.D. Its (sic) quite a joke, the duality coming into shape […]. (*Analyzing Freud* 521)

Here, we observe both a serious and a whimsical side to H.D.'s ingenuous confession. She unmistakably distinguishes her present self from her pre-Freud self, and yet mocks the emergence of these two sides or selves in her writing.

Examining H.D.'s prose, Friedman likewise notes the complicated treatment of

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[246] See Friedman, *Penelope's Web* 216-17; Collecott 74; Rado 82.

[247] John Helforth was first a character in *Kora and Ka* (1930). Earnest, according to Friedman, is "the male mask Bryher used in Manchester to narrate her passion for Elizabeth Bergner" (*Penelope's Web* 42). "Nights"—the second part of the novella *Nights*—was written first in 1931. The Prologue by John Helforth was added years later after her psychoanalytic sessions with Freud. H.D.'s repartee is evocative of Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

subjectivity, especially underscored in the Dijon series: "The division between the autobiographical 'I now' and 'I then' pervades all the texts, as does the dissonance between conscious and unconscious selves. Additionally, however, the fragmentation of the self became increasingly the central focus of the text—thematically and formalistically" (*Penelope's Web* 216). If we are to examine only the supposed split in H.D.'s psyche as exemplified through John Helforth and Natalia Saunderson, we are left with an unimaginative and fatalistic understanding of female creativity in the text. Rado, Collecott, and Friedman take our narrator at his word, accepting his account of Natalia's suicide without question, and thereby reading her death as an annihilation of the feminine aesthetic.[248] Rado argues, "Unable to reconcile her 'masculine' and 'feminine' halves, H.D. essentially kills the latter off, sacrificing not only her femaleness but her precarious psychic stability in a simultaneously murderous suicidal effort to capture, if only for a moment, the transformative power of the sublime" (82). Furthermore, Collecott and Dianne Chisholm regard Helforth as a mouthpiece for articulating H.D.'s malaise with regard to her own work.[249] Yet, as I alluded to above, this fails to take into account the intricacies of Natalia's circumstances and the complexity of her own hybrid subjectivity.

Helforth speculates about the causes of and motives for Natalia's death, but of these individuals about whom he speaks, he modestly admits, "I knew them all *slightly*" (3, emphasis added). His twelve-chapter introduction parodies her twelve nights of erotic experimentation, for he attempts to understand Natalia's unconscious intentions in the simplest terms. He assumes his knowledge of psychoanalysis qualifies him to give a definitive account of Natalia's art, her life, and her death. He fails to understand that she is not merely a pattern to be deciphered. Yet, he cannot escape convention and accordingly attempts to wedge her into a lackluster fairytale:

[248] See Collecott 74-75; Friedman 270-71.
[249] See Collecott 75; Chisholm 87. A discussion of their arguments will appear later in the chapter.

> Natalia was like that princess in a tale who had to climb a mountain, a glass-mountain at that. I don't remember the story, only the illustration in our nursery-Grimm, of a princess placing spike on spike in the smooth surface of a conventionally peaked, illustration mountain, while she made a ladder of it, then climbed these rungs, one after one, to—where? I have forgotten. Well, anyway it seemed to me, Natalia was like that. (9)

Helforth cannot recall the exact circumstances, for the story does not exist. The princess never escapes her surroundings through her own agency; a man must rescue her. Natalia breaks this mold, and Helforth largely fails to recognize her transcendence. David does not save Natalia through traditional chivalric means but simply aids her in her quest for erotic and metaphysical bliss. Yet, Helforth observes only Natalia's setbacks and inadequacies, presupposing that her "suicide" resulted from her inability to accept artistic failure. He concedes that Natalia "got her answer" (6) but refuses to consider that she may have succeeded rather than failed in her endeavor.[250]

Natalia envisions her quest in quite different terms. Her path is perhaps non-conventional, but her objective is universal. In the second nightly entry of her manuscript, Natalia explains her erotic endeavor, referring to herself—as she does throughout—in third person:[251] "Each must find his own high-road to deity. To-night, she was not far off" (52). Each night Natalia records a similar progression, as she gradually gets closer and closer to reuniting with her deity. Grace Jantzen, author of *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*, affirms that "in much of the Christian mystical tradition, the project is to be 'made divine,' to become God, or at least united with God; and this is a project of knowledge, of the intellect" (94). Certainly we observe such a schema for Natalia's sexual practices. Her carnal experiences with David Leavenworth are not manifestations of their mutual love. In fact, she tells him repeatedly, "'*I don't love you*'" (40).

[250] Schaffner rejects the conjecture that Natalia's death reflected H.D.'s own suicidal desire (xvi).
[251] This same narrative idiosyncrasy occurs in *Kora and Ka*, as well.

Yet their intercourse is about more than a bodily exchange for Natalia. The more alluring component is what follows coitus, when Natalia's visionary gift takes effect. Bodily pleasures transition fluidly into incorporeal gratification. Her eighth entry explains, "David or Neil, they were only bridges, they led her to her dream, they were the rainbow arch, they were their own particular color, or their own timbre or electron, but they were the bridge, were not the dream; she loved the dream. She spoke to the dream and her own vibrant deity was waiting" (87). Each of these men uniquely colors her sexual experience, but both serve a somewhat perfunctory role.[252] Since they can provide only the sexual impetus for Natalia's gnostic encounters, their part in this process is nominal. That is to say, David helps to stimulate Natalia, but he cannot transcend the carnal exchange. The power of the erotic enables her to escape her body and enter into a preternatural consciousness; David, however, is left behind to watch his own pleasure dissipate as his partner's ecstasy continues.

In this ethereal state, Natalia evidently experiences a suspension of her sense perception. In her first documented night with David, she is unable to recognize her speech as her own. She hears her voice, but believes it must belong to another. Not even David can comprehend her remarks; "her words are alien to him" (42). Yet, what is perhaps more alarming for David, is the corporeal detachment that accompanies Natalia's moments of transcendence. At times, she returns to him in a liminal state. She asks, "'Have I been away, then?' He said, 'yes, the Barton did something to you.' 'I feel more *away*, as you put it, now than I have for some time.' He said, 'I had your rather lovely body, but it was very empty'" (81). During such transcendent sexual encounters, David is evidently her only link to the material world, as her mind and spirit have

[252] Though DuPlessis does not include *Nights* in her discussion of H.D.'s romantic thralldom, *Nights* might be read in light of her argument as a textual release from the dangerous attachments she formed to men in real life. (See "H.D.'s Romantic Thralldom.")

been carried elsewhere.

Natalia records such episodes in what Chisholm terms her "heretic's journal" (82). Chisholm's psychoanalytic reading of the text recasts Freud's evaluations of sexuality expounded in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Utilizing Irigaray's "La Mysterique" as a starting point for her argument, she identifies an innately subversive quality to Natalia's practices, for she redefines and re-conceptualizes Freud's understanding of pleasure. Chisholm remains conventional, however, in her reading of the visions. She states, "*Nights* can be read as an advance in research, which would, like *Studies in Hysteria*, root out the psychological/psychic sources of hallucinatory or visionary experiences. It is cryptic research in the sense that it describes erotic self-analysis as a descent into the underworld hell of the unconscious" (86). Her dismissal of the visions as merely manifestations of the unconscious appears to miss the point. Chisholm's appraisal discounts the power and pleasure afforded by the erotic experience, while simultaneously disregarding the emphasis Natalia places upon the metaphysical component. Furthermore, although Chisholm acknowledges, "In content, 'Nights' [sic] reads like the confessions of ecstatic mystics of the late Middle Ages, the most famous of whom is Saint Teresa of Avila" (83), she overlooks the relevance of her observation. Natalia frequently reflects upon the past, but her erotic experimentation is not concerned with introspection. Her visions are fundamentally spiritual, and the objective of her sexual climax is to achieve a closer proximity to her god—not her unconscious desires. That the Christian mystics share these same aims negates Chisholm's allegations of heresy.

Jantzen delineates the model of medieval Christian mysticism, noting not only the spiritual factor, but also the prevalence of the erotic:

> With the women there is a direct, highly charged, passionate encounter between Christ and the writer. The sexuality is explicit,

> and there is no warning that it should not be taken literally. There is no intellectualising or spiritualising, no climbing up into the head, or using the erotic as an allegory hedged about with warnings. To be sure, the sexual encounter is also a spiritual one; moral and spiritual lessons are to be learned. But they are to be learned, not by allegorising what is happening, but by highly charged encounter. (133)

Jantzen emphasizes the necessarily literal interpretation of this erotic yet divine union. Sexuality cannot operate as metaphor, for this mystical experience is both bodily and spiritual. Although they may at first appear antithetical, these sensations prove to be reciprocal rather than mutually exclusive. Natalia describes her mystical exploration using language that closely parallels this "highly charged encounter":

> She was sexless, being one chord, drawn out, waiting the high-powered rush of the electric fervour. It crept up the left side, she held it, timed it, let it gather momentum, let it gather force; it escaped her above the hip-bone, spread, slightly weakened, up the backbone; [253] at the nape, it broke, distilled radium into the head but did not burst out of the hair. She wanted the electric power to run on through her, then out, unimpeded by her mind. (51)

The subtle trope of electricity underlying Jantzen's description explodes into the qualifying terms of Natalia's account of her mystical experience. "Radium" (51), "electric current" (51), "vibration" (85), "magnetic law" (102), and "positive" and "negative" charges (102) are just a few of the words and phrases that she uses to report her esoteric encounters. This portrayal renders David "only an instrument," or a "sort of conductor for some force" (38). Nevertheless, he is an intermediary for channeling a superior mode of understanding and Natalia believes him to be a gift from her god. The fact that she interprets the incarnation of her deity in David's corporeal form (87-88), however, suggests a blending of religious influences.

[253] The release H.D. described above the hip-bone in *Nights* harkens back to the release she described in "Two Americans" once she was freed of her overdependence on Macpherson. Both enabled a moment of transcendence and a degree of artistic productivity.

To aid her in her transcendence, Natalia draws not only from the medieval Christian mystics but looks to other traditions, as well. Her practices and visions allude to an array of faiths and esoteric beliefs, not unlike H.D.'s own spiritual convictions.[254] Natalia's visions transport her to the Egyptian Luxor temple (34) and later place her in front of the Aztec "winged snake" (87). Barton's occult knowledge that encompassed "a little about numbers and modified sort of Tarot" (82) add the perspective of numerology and neo-paganism to Natalia's empirical pursuits. Astrology also factors into her mystical endeavors. She reflects, "I was looking at the stars. There was the square of Pegasus. I got hypnotized and forgot Neil, looking at stars. I was in a sort of funnel" (97). Her pursuit of metaphysical truth rejects strict adherence to one faith or knowledge base, and by doing so, Natalia's open-minded approach is freed from all institutional constraints.

Greek columns and mythological allusions punctuate Natalia's visions, and the spiritual devotion and erotic overtones recorded in her manuscript hark back to the "trance of possession" prominent in the Greek rituals of Dionysian devotees (Goff 274). These "altered states of consciousness" ritualized by Greek women of antiquity were also considered a technique to "contain female violence" (Goff 274, 137). Dionysian revelers were alleged to tear men to pieces that came too close to them while in this altered state. Although a milder mimetic form, Natalia's sadistic bedroom tendencies offer an intriguing parallel to this ritualized female violence.

David's sadistic lovemaking, however, has been repeatedly contested by contemporary feminist scholars. Rado attributes guilt to Natalia's autoeroticism and argues, "her masturbatory experiments prompt Natalia to return to the suffocating bed of her lover David as a kind of masochistic punishment for her perceived transgressions" (86). Her onanistic admission, in my

[254] See Friedman's discussion of H.D.'s eclectic mix of spiritual and visionary practices in *Psyche Reborn*, especially pages 157-206.

reading, instead appears less as a confession than an implicit request to be left alone so that she may continue her vision. The manuscript states, "'you see you excite me and, after you left, I excited myself more.' But she didn't want to explain it. She must get away, must lie alone, must let lines and patterns and the two interlocked triangles of light and shadow, like the drawing-book illustration of light and shadow, draw her out" (89). David's premature ejaculations, in fact, frequently necessitate her self-pleasure. Masturbation moreover proves to be superior to his abilities to arouse her, as an earlier disclosure reveals: "But her aptitudes are many and she is glad to be alone in her own bed" (53-54). Rado's evaluation of Natalia and David's misogynistic sexual dynamics appears to be an oversight. As previously mentioned, Natalia's sadism is also part of the exchange. Both pain and pleasure govern their intercourse, and each consenting individual is candidly vocal when one crosses a threshold.

Friedman is similarly skeptical of Natalia and David's bedroom politics. She writes, "This erotically charged wish to overpower and be overpowered in a sadomasochistic economy of desire explains why Natalia is not healed in her affair with David, but brought even closer to death" (*Penelope's Web* 275). Friedman's assessment provides a literal analysis of Natalia's words and ignores the complexities of Natalia's mystical experience. The manuscript states, "She would lie in his arms, die, be so blotted into darkness. His lips would open her mouth, breathing the darkness that was sleep, that was oblivion" (65). But this oblivion is what Natalia seeks, for it is a privileged state that enables her to escape her body and come into contact with her deity.

In his discussion of medieval mysticism, Karma Lochrie explains, "aggression, violence, masochism, and dark despair are fundamental to the visions of some women mystics as the tropes of marriage and the languorous desire that we usually think of in connection with mystical sex" (184). According to Natalia, these darker and more painful sexual experiences actually

result in a more profound mystical encounter. She states, "he did not know that the crunching of her bones was the highest ecstasy, she would quiver involuntarily away, her stupid humanity would save bones from breaking and the heart that was about to leap, sea-anemone, back to its element, would shut in now, be stable. 'You almost broke my ribs'" (100). As Lochrie's comment suggests, mystical experiences are not uniform in nature, and each mystic describes varying levels of pleasure and pain.

According to Saint Teresa of Avila's autobiography, complete or partial death of the self connotes a union with God.[255] Thus returning to Friedman's observation, Natalia's nearness to death signifies a successful mystical experience rather than an imposing annihilation. Even the partial disconnect between Natalia's mind and body becomes an affirming component of her spiritual encounter. These mystical confessions undoubtedly complicate notions of human subjectivity, accounting for a bifurcation of selfhood and a blurring of human and divine with relative ease.

Natalia also valorizes her hybridity and embraces a plethora of names—Natalia, Nat, Neith, Neit. Accordingly, she finds any insistence upon unified subjectivity to be confining and impossible. Natalia recognizes that her identity is not singular but exists in plurality. Especially when in bed with David, she demands freedom from ideological constraints and demands upon personhood. She writes, "They have no names now, no identity. He will spoil everything if he insists on names, this fissure of personality" (40). In *Nights*, the rational is inimical to pleasure. To name is to signify, and Natalia resists the idea of being imprisoned in a fixed meaning. There is a violence associated with such strict rationality, which Natalia rejects outright. In Gilles

[255] Saint Teresa's autobiography does not appear to share this degree of mystical eroticism or masochism, but she does account for a suspension of bodily faculties and a death-like state. Her memoirs outline the various stages of her mystical experience, with each progression achieving a closer proximity to God. In the third stage referred to as the "sleep of the faculties," St. Teresa records a "nearly complete death to things and to the self" (Steinbock 61).

Deleuze's reading of the Marquis de Sade, he argues that the same force of control and intrusion imposed upon the victim during sadomasochistic sex is exerted in instances of pure reasoning. He argues, "reasoning itself is a form of violence […] the reasoning does not have to be shared by the person to whom it is addressed any more than pleasure is to be shared by the object from which it is derived" ("Coldness and Cruelty" 18-19). The difference with sadomasochism, however, is that both parties consent to predetermined terms.[256] The same cannot be said of the violence of language and signification. This pertains to gender, as well. Renne warns, "'If you have his child then *you* are woman, *he* is man, that's smashed'" (46). In Natalia's current arrangement, gender is not a relevant category. Not once does Natalia describe their bodies using conventional terms. Although gendered pronouns appear, all of the characters of H.D.'s novella are queer. Natalia and Neil are bisexual, Renne is a lesbian, Helforth is a "half-and-half sort of person" (5), and David is a godsend, at times a deity incarnate (87), and at others Natalia's "root" to the material world (47). Androgyny, bisexuality, and non-conventional forms of pleasure are all means of evading the rationalized imposition of patriarchal society.

H.D. constructs Natalia as a hybrid fusion of these three non-normative categories. Although her bisexuality is only mentioned in passing, Natalia herself describes the pleasure she receives from her androgyny and non-traditional desire. She portrays herself as "only a sexless wire that was one wire for the fulfilment [sic]. She was sexless, being one chord, drawn out, waiting the high-powered rush of the electric fervour" (51). Unsexed, she here resides in a state of pure pleasure. Rather than merely genital stimulation, all of her body has become an erogenous zone, and her orgasm radiates throughout.

[256] Freud, in fact, only considers sadism a perversion when it has been extended to "humiliation and maltreatment" (24). He notes also that "masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self" (24) and that "every pain contains in itself the possibility of a feeling of pleasure" (25).

In a reversal of the cultural practice of objectifying women, H.D. highlights the pleasures of viewing the male body. In a few ekphrastic passages, Natalia describes the scopophilic enjoyment of David's body as work of art; it is aesthetically pleasing to her and she comments upon the perfection of his arms and back (41). His image changes shape in her mind. Sometimes he is Michelangelo's David; sometimes he is cast in bronze. At other times, he is still clay and she molds him in her hands. Although Natalia privileges the spiritual part of her experiences with David, she reminds herself that corporeal pleasures are nevertheless gratifying: "She must not let the metaphysical content, though, spoil this. No, David's was a clay body, or a David, at best, hewn by Angelo, from stone" (38). The beauty of his body enables even her eye to convert into an erotogenic zone.[257]

As a textual representation of a relationship not plagued by dependence on men, H.D.'s depiction of herself through Natalia differs from the way she framed herself and her relationship to Macpherson in "Two Americans." The *roman à clef* affords her the creative license to revise and reframe her past. In *Nights*, Natalia's intercourse with David is one in which no one's personhood is overpowered or negated by the other. There are no institutional strictures that define the economy of their relationship. They have a system freed from conventional definitions of pleasure and desire, in which exchanges evade patriarchally-established subject positions and categories. If, as Schaffner suggests, the absent Neil is Macpherson and David represents a "composite" of men who came to H.D. as admirers (xii-xiii), then *Nights* enables H.D. to overcome or at least revise her over-identification with the central male figures in her life a facet of the *roman à clef* that differs from the memoir. In her second entry, Natalia declares, "In heaven, there is assuredly, no marriage nor giving in marriage. If she were a Christ, she would

[257] In *Three Essays on Sexuality*, Freud writes that in scopophilia, the eye operates as a sexual organ (35).

use, distribute this power" (51). With David, oppressive gender politics have been made obsolete, with if anything, a reversal of traditional power dynamics. Furthermore, the often androgynized renderings of their bodies offer a fluid spectrum of gender.[258]

The surviving male writer is acquiescent to the demands of society and his occupation but is notably unhappy. He projects his own lack of satisfaction in his life and art upon Natalia, whom he knew only "slightly" (3). He states, "I knew enough about Natalie, to know that her problems would have been my problems, but for my somewhat tantalising scientific habits. I had lost much and gained little […]" (6). Helforth admits to contemplating suicide, but his pitiable ambitions to "write a sort of second-rate best seller" sustain him (7). Nevertheless, he applauds Natalia for setting her sights higher in her aesthetic and metaphysical agendas:

> She wanted the realism of the white lightening, of the 'radium ray' she spoke of. She wanted truth of that order, and she was not the first to want it. There was another dame, burnt to ashes, Semele, I think her name was and a boy, driving his father's chariot. Also countless tales in history, of the stealers-of-fire order, men who for man, would drag down fire from heaven. She certainly seemed competent to do it, judging by her uncompromising frankness. (26-27)

Helforth situates Natalia's pursuit of metaphysical truth among other noble causes, but through these parallels, he also establishes her inevitable failure. His reading, like that of Friedman, Rado, and Miranda Hickman, assumes Natalia's death to be a suicide. Helforth appears to understand her epistemological quest and yet overlooks the correlation between mysticism and death. Contrary to Friedman's interpretation of "the erasure of the feminine through suicide" (*Penelope's Web* 270), I wish to posit that the character's pursuit of these two parallel lines

[258] Rado, however, reads Natalia's attempts at androgyny as a failure, with sexlessness translating to a denial of Natalia's femaleness (85) and the "fusion with masculine and feminine" ending in "self-annihilation" (87). But with obfuscated depictions of gender in all of H.D.'s characters, Rado's conclusion seems inapt. Natalia is arguably the most liberated character in the novel.

across the lac de Brey and into the center of this great lake, an action that Helforth reads as a suicidal impulse, was the final path to reunite with her deity. Rather than failure, this last travail was a success. In her penultimate night with David, Natalia remarks, "'Do you realise, do you realise what all this is? You do realise the miracle? You do know. I never felt like this, or supposed I ever could feel'" (101). Couched in the religious language of the medieval mystics, Natalia's words begin to echo their ultimate desire—to be taken to God.[259]

Twelfth Night also marks the eve of the Epiphany, or the manifestation of the divine. This revelation may constitute a new way of understanding Natalia's "suicide" as a type of rebirth or infinite union with her deity. In her last entry, she senses her proximity to this ultimate closure: "Now, she knew it was not because of Neil and the wire; something was drawing to an end, that was all. The great billow that had lifted her out of her stagnant misery, had broken, flung her high on the dry sand, then curving about her feet, it kissed her, curved into her body, impregnated her with all the sea." (104). Natalia had gotten as close as she could to her spiritual demigod by means of her intercourse with David, but she knew there was more. An asymptotal approach to her god would ultimately never suffice: "She was hovering over a stagnant pond, while the sea was waiting, while it had only to draw her—out—" (*Nights* 106). David was her "root" (47); he kept Natalia grounded and ultimately impeded her complete transcendence by bringing her back to her corporeal existence. Natalia would frequently forget to breathe and would begin to fade: "His mouth lay over hers, as she stopped breathing. Her breath was taken into his body, then she stopped breathing. […] He withdrew his mouth, shook her, so she must breathe. 'Do you know when I stop breathing?' He answered, 'always'" (64). David acted as a

[259] Chisholm points to the allusive title of this novella with its catalogued twelve nights of erotic experimentation, which she claims "suggests Shakespeare's carnivalesque *Twelfth Night*" (83), but she stops short of the religious significance of the allusion.

safeguard, ensuring that she would not become so absorbed in her vision that she was taken away. At times, even her own body resisted the transition, for she would call out when the ecstatic pain became too intense: "her stupid humanity would save bones from breaking" (100). Skating into the abyss of the lake thus avoided the hindrance of human interference and ostensibly provided a direct link to her god on the day of the Epiphany.

Helforth projects suicide and failure onto Natalia's ending, but his words are merely speculation. They may frame the beginning of the text, but Natalia's words reverberate more powerfully. Rachel Connor, in *H.D. and the Image*, reminds us of Helforth's role as "hermeneutic filter" (55). She states, "For Helforth's narrative not only controls the reader's interpretation of the experiences related in Nat's diary, it shapes the construction of her identity within the text. This is apparent in Helforth's hypothetical '(re)construction' of Nat's final moments, when she makes preparations for the skating trip that we assume ends in her death" (55). Connor's observation points to the fact that we are not privy to a death scene. Similar to Ford Maddox Ford's elided representation of suicide in *The Good Soldier*, Natalia's death is not narrated but is merely assumed. Perhaps like the Virgin Mary's Assumption into Heaven, Natalia may have been brought to her deity without suffering a death of any kind. Such a conclusion is no less plausible than Helforth's conjectures and speculative imaginings: "She *probably* sat on the wide muff […] The lake was, *maybe*, half a mile across […] She *may have* remembered […] She *might* wonder […]" (13, emphasis added). He even takes creative liberties to describe how he might have pictured her skating: "I do not visualise her skirt swirling and whirling like that ice-Pavlova […] I see her upright, swaying, swinging out" (14). He has crafted a work of fiction modeled on her twelve-part narrative sequence. Yet his psychoanalytic doublespeak reveals more about him than it could possibly say about Natalia. With Helforth's Prologue followed by a

manuscript almost three times its length, our frame narrative is nearly forgotten by the end of the novella. If Helforth is meant to be a critic of Natalia's work, and, as Collecott, Chisholm, and Cassandra Laity suggest, also a means for H.D. to articulate and ventriloquize her dissatisfaction and that of other critics with her previous works, this rebuke is largely subverted by the end of the novella.[260] The hypercritical male voice is left behind to fade into the background, while Natalia's poetic female voice resounds loudest and last, with the final words of this novella in her own penned manuscript.

Although Natalia's model cannot be emulated by most, H.D.'s representation of Natalia's hybrid subjectivity nevertheless offers new, more fluid ways of understanding gender, sexuality, and identity. Feminine power need not be limited to reproductive capabilities, and as Hollenberg concedes, H.D.'s attempts to use childbearing metaphors in her poetry are often fraught with ambivalence or apprehension (11). Her novella, however, permits a creative female writer to enjoy both her body and her mind in ways that are mutually inclusive. H.D. demonstrates that a woman can be both cerebral and erotic, and that by embracing and uniting these seemingly dichotomous faculties, she may discover a superior epistemology. The mind/body split proves to be a false binary and presumably a societal construct.

Conclusion

Michael Boughn, who wrote the afterward to *Narthex* in 2011 and helped edit Robert Duncan's *The H.D. Book*, compares H.D.'s "experience of mind at work in language" to the

[260] Collecott argues, "Helforth's nullification of Natalia echoes Robert McAlmon's negative response to the original text of *Nights*, which elicited from H.D. the confession that her style had reached 'a vanishing point of sterility'" (75), and Chisholm similarly proposes, "Since Helforth is a pseudonym for H.D., we may regard this judgment as reflecting the critical dissatisfaction of the author herself" (87). Cassandra Laity offers a nuanced version of their reading: "During her writing block of the 1930s, H.D. may have felt that her critics were killing her, another reason for the death wish that Friedman detects at the end of *Nights*, in which the heroine ice skates into oblivion—like Kate Chopin's Edna surrendering to the sea" (167).

experimentation of Woolf and Stein; yet, the engagement with the "social world" he encounters with Woolf, Stein, Joyce, and Faulkner, he believes is absent from H.D.'s prose (120). He ties his convictions to genre, arguing that H.D.'s resistance to the social fabric of this world would have taken her too close to the novel.[261] Though he aptly captures H.D.'s interest in representing different states of mind and forms of consciousness through experimental prose, his characterization of H.D.'s detachment from the "social world" is largely unfounded.[262] Though H.D.'s visions allow her to move beyond her historical moment, the texts of the Dijon series as well as her involvement in *Borderline* speak to her engagement with and attempts to transcend the identity politics of the "social world" of the 1930s. H.D. also influenced a number of contemporary poets including Robert Duncan and Diane DiPrima.

Unlike the predominately conservative mythic method employed by Eliot and Yeats, H.D. interweaves ancient Greek and Egyptian practices with other cultural conventions of past and present in order to create new meaning from these older customs. DuPlessis maintains, "H.D. saw her mythopoetic poems as acts of cultural resistance, heterodoxy and critique ("Myth-making" 125). H.D.'s mythic and mystical revisions make possible a more complex understanding of subjectivity and enable a broader and less confining interpretation of gender and sexuality. H.D.'s treatment of aesthetic and erotic practices in texts like *Nights* permit a rewriting of female power and pleasure that is freed from the conventions of masculine economies of desire. In "Two Americans" and *Mira-Mare*, H.D. at the very least, highlights an awareness of troubling sexual politics and commits her protagonists to realizing and breaking

[261] Bough argues, "The novel (and the short story as an offshoot of that) as a form is tied historically to a mode of perception or understanding that itself reflects a mode of being contracted or restricted within the thought of a singular material world. … *The Waves*, *Ulysses*, *Three Lives*, and *The Sound and the Fury* all push the idea of individuality into contortions of linguistic enactments of mind, but they never abandon the cosmology in which that individual is crucial to its order and the limits of its knowledge" (120-121).

[262] Friedman argues, "H.D.'s plunge into the esoteric only seemed to be a withdrawal. From her perspective, hermetic tradition offered a pattern of meaning in coded form to the initiate" (*Psyche Reborn,* 158).

away from this these confines.

Through her use of hybrid forms and her hybrid subjects, H.D. challenges unified subjectivity and traditional forms. The *roman à clef* and film *à clef* allowed H.D. to use her personal experience to examine questions of subjectivity prevalent to the modernist era. These mixed-genre texts participate in modernist forms of experimentation in ways that impressed H.D.'s contemporaries. In a letter from Conrad Aiken to H.D. dated October 31, 1934, Aiken writes of "Two Americans" and another Dijon text, "what you are doing with <u>form</u> interests me profoundly—what a lot of things lie ahead in that path! I hope you're going to do them…" (*Analyzing Freud* 441, emphasis in original). Certainly, the production of two more Dijon "booklets" continued H.D.'s efforts to play with this hybrid form. In some ways, H.D.'s treatment of the unstable subject mark her work as ahead of its time. Undoubtedly, through H.D.'s use of mysticism and her multiple and varying identifications with other marginalized subjects, the self proves to be more precarious in her texts than in those of Barnes, Woolf, or Stein. Though H.D.'s form of modernism is distinctly different from the other modernists I have considered in this dissertation, hers is nevertheless one that offers an imaginative escape for the queer expatriate writer from the strictures of this world.

Conclusion
Modernism's Hybrid Legacy in the Contemporary

"Modernity is back with a vengeance. People are reflecting anew on the protean meanings of the modern, on its ambiguous legacies and current realities. While only a few years ago, everyone was fixated on postmodernism, we are going back to that enigmatic phenomenon that precedes the 'post.' The significance of modernity is clearly not yet exhausted" ~ Rita Felski, *Doing Time*

This dissertation has shown how four women writers of the modernist period use forms of generic hybridity to give representation to the female and queer subjects of the early twentieth century. Although Djuna Barnes, Virginia Woolf, Gertrude Stein, and H.D. each has her own way of depicting modernity's hybrid subjects, all of these authors challenge the literary constructs and sociopolitical frameworks that privilege white, heterosexual, male hegemony. Barnes's decadent aesthetics and her pairing of drawings with text enact her resistance to distinct literary periods and styles; her queer, sexually explicit images and verse subvert the strictures of proper femininity by embracing forms of radical alterity. Woolf's more conservative approach to hybridity emanates from her simultaneous centrality within modernism and her hostility to its masculinist overtones. She strives to hybridize the novel in an effort to produce something new, a form freed from a patriarchal past. Her most compelling characters exist on the margins of "proper" society, though they seek connections with others to mitigate the isolating nature of their liminality. Stein, on the other hand, more boldly confronts traditional linguistic registers and brashly supplants the central masculine subject with a queer female one; through her use of queer reproduction, Stein's work blurs the distinction between genres, genders, and individual subjects. H.D.'s hybrid, autobiographical writings exist on the margins of modernist aesthetics along with Barnes's "minor" forms. In H.D.'s work, however, the self is a far more precarious

entity than as figured in the works of the other authors discussed herein. Nevertheless, H.D.'s *romans à clef* demonstrate that the hybrid subject, comprised of various borderlines, may offer the most insightful critique of dominant society.

Overall, this study has revealed that an examination of modernist literature through the lens of hybridity provides new understandings of the ways modernist writers responded to the social and cultural manifestations of disenfranchisement. This dissertation also acts as a corrective to outdated readings of Barnes and H.D, arguing for the need to revisit and reevaluate many of the "minor" works of modernist literature. Though at present Woolf and Stein are central figures within the modernist canon, I have shown that analyses of Woolf's lesser-studied novels add new perspectives on critical readings of gender in modernism, and unlikely pairings of Stein's work challenge the relationship between perceived modernist binaries such as high/low and production/consumption. As Felski suggests, studies of modernism are far from exhausted.

In fact, recent scholarship suggests that modernism's legacy is alive and well. In addition to studies that seek to reconceptualize the relationship between modernism and postmodernism, such as Phillip Brian Harper's *Framing the Margins* (1994), compelling new studies like Madelyn Detloff's *The Persistence of Modernism* (2009) demonstrate the relevance of modernism within the contemporary moment.[263] In a *PMLA* article published earlier this year, David James and Urmila's Seshagiri identify in contemporary literature an effort "to reassess and remobilize narratives of modernism" (89). They make note of twenty-first-century texts that deploy modernist aesthetics, such as defamiliarization, fragmentation, nonlinearity, and interiority, but they also point to works that revive modernist authors as central characters and

[263] Detloff's theory of the "modernist patch" establishes a genealogy between particular modernist writers and contemporary authors who sustain and cultivate an ethics of mourning that honors the particularity of loss.

those that self-consciously draw on modernism's historical specificity or its socio-ethical imperatives. Yet, rather than subsuming contemporary literature under the heading of an ever-expanding modernism, they contest unbridled forms of expansion within the New Modernist Studies and advocate for periodization. Accordingly, in refusing to read contemporary literature as a merely belated form of modernism, their articulation of "metamodernism" accounts for contemporary literature's historical distance from modernism and focuses on its permutations and reconfigurations as reflected through the present moment.

As such, metamodernism provides a helpful framework for contextualizing contemporary authors like Tom McCarthy, J. M. Coetzee, Jeanette Winterson, and Zadie Smith as well as twenty-first-century films like Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* (2011) and Stephen Daldry's *The Hours* (2002) by acknowledging their relationship to and distinction from the literary movement of the early twentieth century.[264] James and Seshagiri derive metamodernism from their characterization of trends in contemporary literature and their assessment of scholarship that addresses this literature; they also propose metamodernism as a solution to what they identify as problematic scholarly attempts to abandon current conceptions of periodization in pursuit of a seemingly interminable modernism, citing Susan Stanford Friedman's "modernist" study of sixth-century China as one such example (90). While metamodernism provides a viable lens for studying modernism's legacy within contemporary literature, James and Seshagiri's formulation of this twenty-first-century aesthetic has its limitations: their critical purview is one

[264] To give a fuller impression of the somewhat varied manifestations of metamodernism, James and Seshagiri argue, "Metamodernist practice redistributes the innovative energies of its predecessors. It pays tribute to modernist style (as in the writing of Allan Hollinghurst, Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Ondaatje, Zadie Smith, Jeanette Winterson); it inhabits the consciousness of individual modernist writers (Virginia Woolf in Michael Cunningham's *The Hours* [1998], Henry James in Colm Tóibín's *The Master* [2004], Henry James and Joseph Conrad in Cynthia Ozick's *Dictation: A Quartet* [2008]); and it details modernism's sociopolitical, historical, and philosophical contexts (Bruce *Duffy's The World As I Found It* [1987], Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt* [2004], Pat Barker's *Life Class* [2007])" (93).

that focuses primarily on fiction and the novel. In privileging fiction and the novel, their iteration of metamodernism reinforces generic and ideological distinctions within modernism that this dissertation has sought to complicate. Thus, in the final pages of this dissertation, I turn to the work of Alison Bechdel as way to examine modernism's legacy in the contemporary hybrid memoir. Through a brief study of her graphic memoir *Fun Home* (2006), I demonstrate how Bechdel's work, as an example of *autobiographical* metamodernism, "incorporates and adapts, reactivates and complicates the aesthetic prerogatives of an earlier cultural moment" (James and Seshagiri 93). As a queer woman writer working in and through hybrid forms, Bechdel exemplifies the modernist legacy established by Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D. Her twenty-first-century examination of subjectivity, with an emphasis on gender and sexuality, responds to the sociopolitical concerns of marginalized subjects foregrounded in the work of the aforementioned modernists.

As an inheritor of "the narratives of modernism," Bechdel structures *Fun Home* according to modernist aesthetic principles that privilege nonlinearity, interiority, and generic experimentation. The text, which weaves together the accounts of her father's untimely death and her journey of self-discovery, moves forward and backward in time in an effort to make sense of her personal trauma. Assuming her father's death to be a suicide, Bechdel culls the family archive for letters, photographs, books, and marginalia that might shed light on her father's reticence and the circumstances of his passing. Drawing on literature and analyzing her own life through literary terms, Bechdel cannot help but read her coming-out and her father's suicide as related events. The disclosure of her sexual identity to her parents was followed by a revelation of her father's affairs with men and teenage boys. *Fun Home* initially depicts Bechdel and her father as polar opposites, primarily because of their gender identities, their aesthetics,

and their demeanors, but by the end of the narrative, Bechdel claims an affinity with him based on queerness and a love of literature. The graphic memoir is an examination of their queer subjectivies and an effort to better understand their tenuous and often volatile relationship.

In a cyclical gesture not unlike Stein's in the *Autobiography*, *Fun Home*'s ending returns to the beginning of the narrative and presents the reader with a revised perspective on all that has transpired. The graphic memoir begins with a restaging of one of modernism's most popular myths—the fall of Icarus—in an effort to describe the "mythic relationship" between Bechdel and her father (4). Lifting her up onto his feet to play "airplane," Bruce Bechdel promptly drops his daughter. Though she initially stages her father as Daedalus, the great artificer, to highlight his impressive restoration of their home and his emphasis on appearances, Bechdel promptly undermines this schema by reframing him as Icarus: "it was not me but my father who was to plummet from the sky" (4). Bechdel further complicates this dynamic by later presenting her father as the Minotaur, thus revealing his aggressive, destructive side. Despite all these permutations, Bechdel concludes the book with a revision of the opening frames. Rather than letting Bechdel fall again, the final frame shows Bruce Bechdel prepared to catch his daughter: "But in the tricky reverse narration that impels our entwined stories, he was there to catch me when I leapt" (232).

The fall of Icarus is, of course, taken up by Joyce in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, one of the many modernist texts that Bechdel uses to give structure to her narrative.[265] In

[265] Bechdel uses allusions to modernist literature to form the titles of her seven chapters, drawing on Joyce, Camus, Stevens, and Proust. (Even Bechdel's use of children's literature—Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* (1908)—comes from this period.) The only chapter title alluding to a text not published during the early twentieth century is "The Ideal Husband." This allusion to Oscar Wilde's 1895 play by the same name, however, undoubtedly fits into the narrative of modernity. Staged in the same year as Wilde's trial, *The Ideal Husband* calls to mind the consolidation of modern identity categories based on sexuality, for as Laura Doan notes, "the prosecution of Wilde marked the arrival in public culture of the male homosexual" (27). Bechdel also compares her father to Gatsby and her mother to figures out of Henry James: "I employ these allusions to James and Fitzgerald not only as descriptive

this sense, Bechdel also makes use of the mythic method. As Eliot writes of Joyce's use of myth, "It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history" (130). The same could also be said of Bechdel's aesthetics. *Ulysses* also happened to be her father's favorite book and one that she studied extensively in college. Bechdel uses Joyce's treatment of paternity and the notion of Bloom as Stephen's "spiritual father" to provide a lens for reading her relationship with her own father (206). Yet in doing so, Bechdel queers Joyce's narrative; she self-consciously replaces Stephen and Bloom's status as exiles with her and her father's marginalization as queer artists. Though *Fun Home* operates as an homage to Joyce, it is also a transformation of his work.[266] Bechdel's description of a replicated page from *Ulysses* within *Fun Home* highlights the metamodernist impulse to update and reanimate modernist works:

> I thought this edition of *Ulysses* was beautiful. […] I wanted to recreate it because I liked how it looked. And I also wanted to write over it because it also annoyed me. I wanted to have my *own* commentary. That's something that you can do in comics that I really love. […] It was fun to do that. To sort of *violate Ulysses*. (*Public Conversation* 211-214, emphasis added)

The layering of her words over Joyce's provides an apt metaphor for metamodernism as a palimpsestic aesthetic: the traces of modernism remain present, but they must be enlivened with the relevance of the contemporary moment.

The graphic memoir is an inherently hybrid genre melding the comic strip with the long form of the memoir, but *Fun Home* explicitly pushes generic hybridity further even in its

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devices, but because my parents are most real to me in fictional terms" (67). Her second book, *Are You My Mother?: A Comic Drama*, brings Donald Winnicott and Virginia Woolf to life as characters rather than textual allusions.

[266] On a larger scale, *Fun Home* enacts a transformation of patriarchal inheritance. The placement of feminist texts such as Woolf's *Orlando*, Collette's *Earthly Paradise*, and Olga Broumas's *Beginning With O* within many of the frames undercuts the cast of male authors used to structure the individual chapters. Broumas's text, in particular, is a concerted effort to rewrite patriarchal myths. For instance, "Leda and Her Swan" supplants masculine violence with lesbian sexuality.

subtitle: *A Family Tragicomic*. Prompting "comic" to signify both "comic strip" and "comedy," and thus subsequently blurring the Aristotelian distinctions between tragedy and comedy, Bechdel's clever linguistic play is reminiscent of Stein's many puns and double entendres, as well as her challenge to distinct genres. And like Barnes's *The Book of Repulsive Women* and *Ladies Almanack*, Bechdel's narrative cannot be told without both the words and the images. However, as a cartoonist, Bechdel relies on her drawings to communicate much of her phenomenological experience of the world. Speech bubbles and sparse captions supplement these illustrations, but Bechdel renders her subjectivity primarily through images. The androgynous depictions of herself as a young child articulate her rejection of traditional gender roles long before verbally explicit declarations do as such: "I had become a connoisseur of masculinity at a young age" (95). Likewise, the visual depictions of her emotional distress at her father's violent insistence on barrettes and pearls articulate the psychological damage of his gender policing without the need for explicit commentary.

The images are also a way of articulating nuance and highlighting familial tensions. By juxtaposing her father's violent outbursts with his tender displays of devotion, Bechdel exposes the complexity of her fraught relationship with her father. Using the following layout, Bechdel strikingly contrasts her father's brutality with his endearing qualities (Fig. 6):

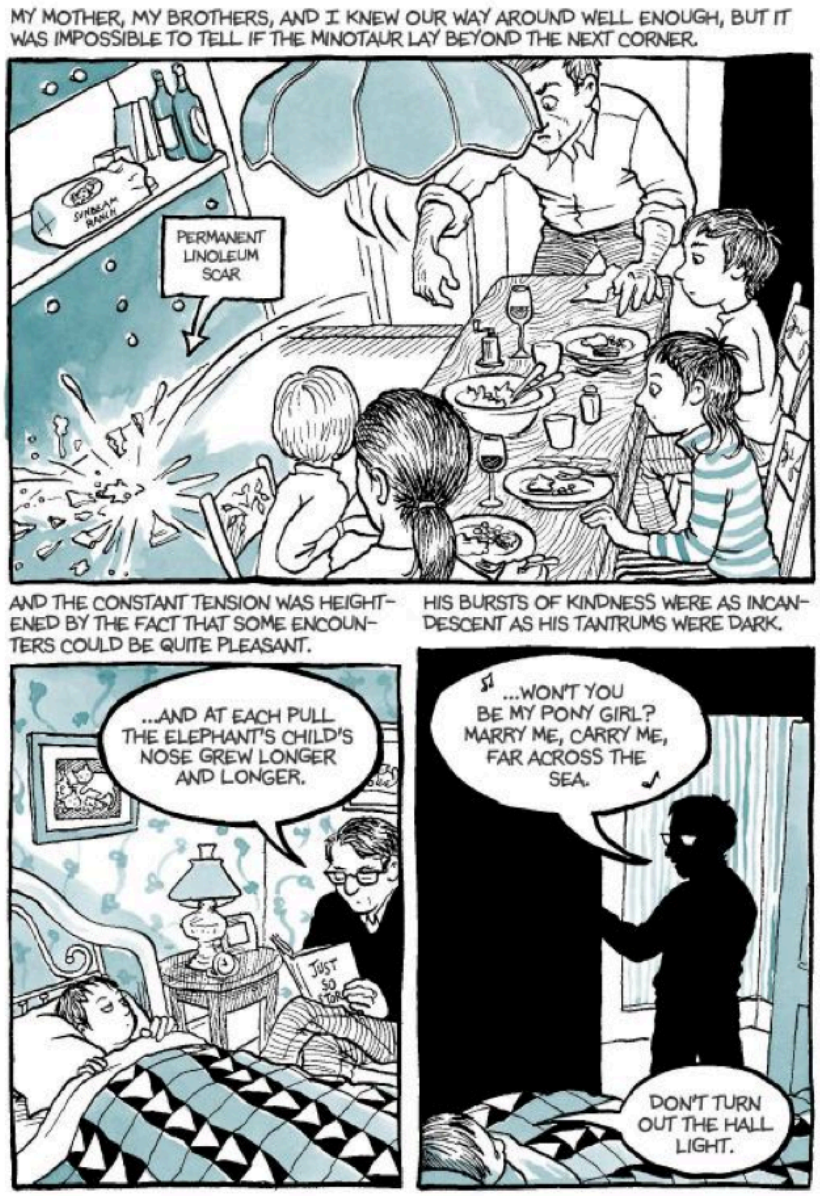

Fig. 6: Monstrous Minotaur and Attentive Parent. Through the juxtaposition of these images, Bechdel shows that her father plays both roles (*Fun Home* 21).

Bechdel also takes advantage of the unique characteristics of the visual image by using spatial metaphors to convey an emotional impression. For instance, at the end of the first chapter, the physical distance Bechdel displays between herself and her father in several frames poignantly captures a psychological dimension of their relationship; these images allow Bechdel to retroactively read her father's emotional distance as a type of absence in her life long before his

actual death (23). Yet these images and concise captions capture a sense of interiority akin to modernist expressions of free indirect discourse and stream of consciousness: Bechdel relies on facial expressions and visual symbols to convey a sense of inner reality typically portrayed through words.

The verbal cues that do appear within the graphic memoir operate by way of implication. For instance, Bechdel often dwells on a literary allusion and allows the illustration to establish the parallel between her life and the literary text:

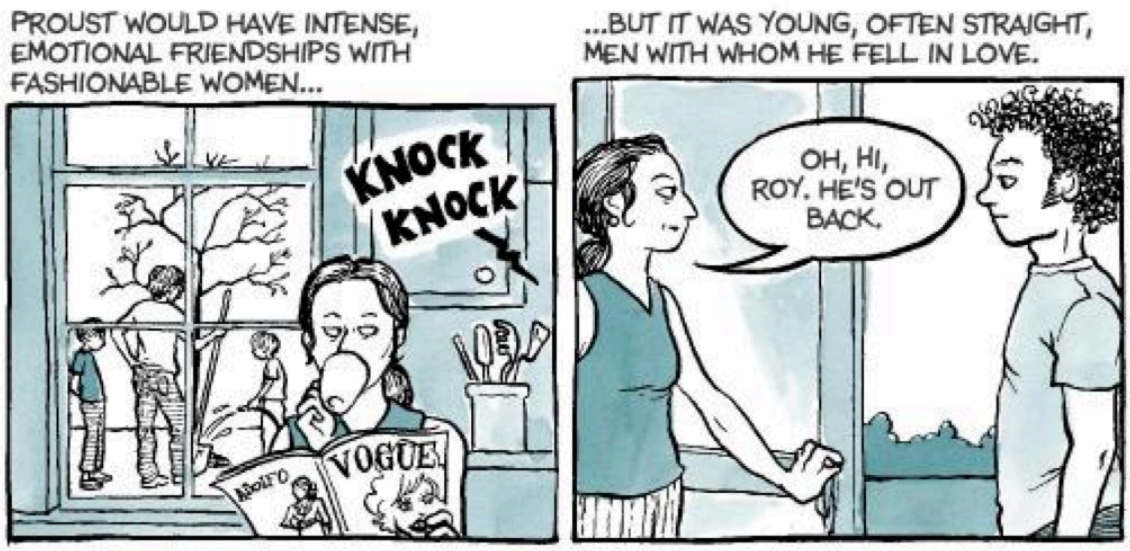

Fig. 7: A Proustian Parallel (*Fun Home* 94).

In this frame, Bechdel suggests through the relationship between the text and the image that her mother is the fashionable woman with whom her father is involved; yet, Roy is the true object of his desire. Bechdel's allusion to Marcel Proust helps her to retroactively make sense of her past, to allow it to cohere with an already-established narrative. In this way, her father's actions and desires are also normalized to some degree; though defined by society as aberrant and illegal at

this time, Bruce Bechdel's behavior nevertheless becomes part of a queer genealogy.[267] This is certainly not to say that Bechdel condones her father's affairs or his relationships with teenage boys, but rather her allusion to Proust helps demystify her father's actions; it is also a way for Bechdel to reflect understandings of identity and sexuality that diverge from problematic characterizations of abnormality.

Within the text, modernist archives frequently combine with family archives to give readers (and Bechdel herself) a sense of her father's hybrid subjectivity. Later in the chapter thematically structured around Proust, Bechdel reveals a number of photographs she discovered after her father's death, including one of Roy in a state of partial undress. The partly concealed date on the photo situates this private moment as part of a family beach trip. As the family babysitter, Roy accompanied Bruce and the children to the Jersey shore, while Bechdel's mother visited a friend in Manhattan. Bechdel's reflection upon this document takes shape through her illustrations and her allusions to *In Search of Lost Time*. This integration of family and modernist archives reveals her father's ostensibly dual life to be far more integrated that Bechdel originally imagined:

> In an act of prestidigitation typical of the way my father juggled his public appearance and private reality, the evidence is simultaneously hidden and revealed. A perusal of the negatives reveals three bright shots of my brothers and me on the beach followed by the dark, murky one of Roy on the bed. In some of Proust's sweeping metaphors, the two directions in which the narrator's family can opt for a walk—Swann's way and the Guermantes way—are initially presented as diametrically opposed. Bourgeois vs. aristocratic, homo vs. hetero, city vs. country, eros vs. art, private vs. public. But at the end of the novel the two ways are revealed to converge—to have always converged—through a vast 'network of transversals.' (101-102)

Although her father sublimated his same-sex desires into his home renovations and hid a side of

[267] Bechdel's allusions to Oscar Wilde and later images of life in the West Village also contribute to this narrative.

himself from his family, Bechdel suggests that her father's life can be most aptly characterized through liminality or integrated duality. As in Proust, these binary oppositions prove to be a dichotomy only in theory. Photographic negatives reveal that for Bruce these paths frequently converged. Most notably, evidence of his heterosexual coupling and his patriarchal obligations—photographs of his children—appear in frames adjacent to one of Roy, representative of his queer desire. Bechdel's efforts to decipher the truth from the lies results in a realization that there was not one authentic version of her father and one inauthentic version, but rather that her father was complex and multifaceted—a composite of various binaries.

The final image on that page underscores Bechdel's belated understanding of her father's liminal existence. She draws their car crossing under the Hudson River on that same trip, with Bruce, in the driver's seat, squaring between New Jersey and New York. A distinct line on the interior wall of the tunnel marks the borderline between the two states—a line that simultaneously symbolizes Bruce's many borderlines: his bisexuality, his effeminate form of masculinity, and the merger of his private and public personas. The spatial metaphors again correspond to social and psychological states, a technique deployed in Woolf's texts through an emphasis on doorways and in H.D.'s work through the centrality of national borders. Yet in *Fun Home*, Bechdel forges these particular comparisons through images rather than words. Even her incorporation of small, easy to miss visual details like the model of the family's car—the country squire—articulates an internal reality, and in this case, an internal tension. Featured within the city setting, the *country* squire reveals the (Proustian) intersection of apparent opposites—city and country—in Bruce's life.

Yet Bechdel's representation of her father bears the mark of history. She couches her depiction of her father's hybrid subjectivity in historicized terms, acknowledging that his

existence as a closeted gay or bisexual man in a pre-Stonewall era inevitably created a series of double binds. Though un-closeted queerness is not without its psychic and experiential challenges and dualities—Bechdel's own accounts within the memoir attest to this[268]—*Fun Home* posits hybridity as the ontological condition of the closet. In her adulthood, Bechdel better understands her father's fraught position and reads his attempts to control her gender identity through this lens. Yet, among these efforts to work through the various traumas of her youth, including her father's suicide, is an exploration of what could have been. Toward the end of the text, Bechdel entertains a counterfactual narrative of her father's life,[269] one that offers an alternative to the oppression of the closet. This fictional exercise, however, ends with entirely unsatisfying conclusions: his likely death from AIDS and the possibility of her never being born (195-197).

Although her representation of her own queer subjectivity in a *post*-Stonewall era still contains moments of duality—mostly with respect to her gender identity as a child[270]—Bechdel finds options and possibilities that were not available to her father. She comes out to her parents and joins the gay union at her college; she meets women and enjoys her sexuality; and perhaps most importantly, she writes an honest memoir about her life experiences.

From the beginning of *Fun Home*, Bechdel frames her own narrative in relation to her father's. She makes clear that his death and her journey of self-discovery overlap. At the very center of the book, Bechdel muses on the significance of this observation:

> And in a way, you could say that my father's end was my beginning. Or more precisely, that the end of his lie coincided with

[268] Bechdel, for instance, recalls forms of discrimination as a young adult in New York City (106).
[269] Though the context is entirely different, Woolf also makes use of the counterfactual in *Between the Acts*.
[270] For instance, on one outing, Bechdel asks her brothers to call her Albert instead of Alison, which she recalls as "a precocious feat of Proustian transposition—not to mention of tidy *melding* of Proust's real Alfred and his fictional Albertine" (113, emphasis added).

> the beginning of my truth. Because I'd been lying too, for a long time, since I was four or five. […] In the city, in a luncheon…we saw a most unsettling sight. I didn't know there were women who wore men's clothes and had men's haircuts. But like a traveller in a foreign country who runs into someone from home—someone they've never spoken to, but know by sight—I recognized her with a surge of joy. Dad recognized her too. 'Is **THAT** what you want to look like?' […] But the vision of the truck-driving bulldyke sustained me through the years. (117-119, emphasis in original)

Bruce Bechdel's pejorative pronoun underscored for his daughter the illicit nature of gender noncomformity, but this experience nevertheless remained a touchstone for her—conveying both a truth and an alternative to the strictures of normative gender roles.

Bechdel's account of this event began with her consideration of a large snake—one that initially symbolized her failed attempt to perform masculinity on a camping trip. Yet in the retelling of these events—of being frightened by this snake in the woods—Bechdel reframes this symbol with a more fluid view of gender: "[The snake is] obviously a phallus, yet a more ancient and universal symbol of the feminine principle would be hard to come by. […] Perhaps this *undifferentiation*, this *nonduality*, is the point" (116, emphasis added). The poststructuralist inflection Bechdel adds to this symbol is key to her contemporary rendition of queer subjectivity. Echoing the Deleuzian imperative to "get outside dualisms […] to be-between, to pass between" (126), Bechdel's reading of the snake offers a twenty-first century understanding of gender and sexuality that moves beyond binary oppositions.

Though Bechdel's father felt pressured to keep a part of himself hidden from the public, his daughter does not. Instead, Bechdel transposes the private into the public sphere, writing openly and candidly about her own queer subjectivity. Like the works of Barnes, Woolf, Stein, and H.D., this hybrid autobiographical narrative emerges as a cerebral art form with sociopolitical implications. As Bechdel herself remarked on her graphic memoirs, "it is kind of a

political act even though it is also very intimate" (*Public Conversation* 207). Though Bechdel inherits and reanimates "the narratives of modernism," she also transforms them. The snake, as a symbol for queer hybrid subjectivity is no longer the monstrous serpent, or in the words of William Dodge from *Between the Acts*, "a flickering, *mind-divided* little snake in the grass" (Woolf 51). Instead, the snake becomes a subversive symbol for queer potentiality, a form of reclaimed hybridity.

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