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Networking Subversion:
A Feminist Analysis of the Modernist Salon

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Submitted for the examination of Doctor of Philosophy in English
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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree. However, the thesis incorporates to the extent indicated below, material already submitted as part of required coursework and/or the degree of:

Master of Arts In Communication and Culture awarded by
Ryerson and York Universities, Canada:

Some of the research and interpretations of literary and artistic texts put forth in Chapter Four (“A Chance of Survival”: The Stettheimer Salon and Its Feminist Legacy) are also featured in my Master’s thesis, *Gender Play: The Subversive Sexual Politics of the Stettheimer Salon, 1915-1935*. They have, however, been expanded, revised, and used to advance a completely original argument.

Signature: _____

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

CHELSEA OLSEN

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

NETWORKING SUBVERSION: A FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF THE
MODERNIST SALON

SUMMARY

This thesis offers a feminist theorisation of a vital—yet understudied—cultural institution of modernism: the salon. Taking existing feminist scholarship on the 17th- and 18th-century salon as a point of departure, I analyse how the modernist salon—namely, its female host(s) and the body of work it inspired—problematises masculinist histories of modernism’s development and canon. To do this, I take three American women-led salons from the first half of the 20th century as case studies: Gertrude Stein’s salon at 27 rue de Fleurus; Natalie Clifford Barney’s salon at 20 rue Jacob; and Florine, Ettie, and Carrie Stettheimer’s salon in New York’s Upper West Side. With each case study, I combine archival research with literary and artistic analysis to: a) recreate the salon’s atmosphere and gender dynamics; b) analyse how the salonière(s)’s beliefs and goals influenced her salon’s format; and, c) assess the salon’s influence on its host(s)’s and habitués’ cultural output, examining how salon-inspired art and literary works subvert gendered codes of behaviour and appearance. In doing so, I argue that the modernist salon worked to deconstruct sexual and artistic hierarchical binaries—such as male/female, masculine/feminine, heterosexual/queer, ‘high’ art/‘low’ art, and public/domestic—and advance a subversive feminist politics; yet, the form these politics adopted depended entirely upon the practices, goals, and values of the individual salonière.

The thesis consists of five sections. The introduction situates the thesis within existing salon theory and modernist studies, highlighting its unique contribution to research (as a feminist theorisation of the modernist salon), and outlines the thesis’ theoretical underpinnings, methodology, and structure. The first chapter focuses on how Stein’s gender-segregated salon provided her with the tools for her own self-promotion and subversive word portraits. The second chapter analyses Barney’s women-centric salon and how its explicitly feminist mandate to build and empower a community of (mostly queer) women writers influenced (and derived from) Barney’s feminist *pensées* and memoirs and habitué Djuna Barnes’ *Ladies Almanack*. The third chapter examines the Stettheimer salon and how its three sister hosts designed their salon as the medium for establishing their feminist legacy through an expansive literary and artistic oeuvre. The conclusion highlights the stark contrast between the Stein, Barney, and Stettheimer salons in order to emphasise the role of the salonière in curating the salon’s feminist politics and proposes directions for further research.

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Abbreviations

BLJD	Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques-Doucet
YCAL	Yale Collection of American Literature

Introduction:

To Each Her Own: Unpacking the Salon's Feminist Politics

"[The salonière's] personality may be made the means by which all intellectual and political movements may come together charmingly, socially, and learn to see the humanity in each" – Hutchins Hapgood¹

When Catherine de Vivonne, marquise de Rambouillet, first invited a group of literary men and women to her Parisian home in 1610 to discuss matters of societal, political, and cultural import, she unknowingly founded one of the most enduring and influential institutions in French cultural history: the salon.² Originally conceived as an offshoot of the court, the salon evolved into its own independent entity, which eventually revolutionised how members of 17th- and 18th-century French high society conceived of the world and those around them. It was primarily intended as a private venue in which men and women of all intellectual and socioeconomic backgrounds could engage each other in rational debate on topics as far ranging as philosophy, politics, and the arts—all without fear of public judgment or persecution. However, it was ultimately up to the salon's female host—the salonière—to determine the objectives and overall character of the space. She could exploit the salon's unique positioning—between public and private, elitist and egalitarian, insular and influential—to influence those intellectual, cultural, and political movements from which she was often barred. This continued to hold true, even as salons proliferated across Europe and the Atlantic and women began to claim a greater role in public life.

This thesis examines how the 20th-century salonière was able to infiltrate and influence the highly masculinist domains of literary and artistic modernism via her

¹ In: Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 9.

² When literary gatherings such as those of the marquise de Rambouillet began in the early 17th century, the term 'salon' merely referred to the room in which conversation tended to occur. It was not until 1807 that such gatherings became officially known as salons.

extensive salon network.^{3 4} It builds upon an established tradition in salon theory, one which figures the salon—specifically, the 17th- and 18th-century salon—as a feminist space. I show how the 20th-century salon evolves from its Enlightenment-era counterparts, analysing how matters of gender and sexuality were treated both within the salon space and throughout the body of work it inspired. To do this, I focus on three salons run exclusively by American women during the first half of the 20th century: the Stein salon (1906-1930), the Barney salon (1909-1968), and the Stettheimer salon (1915-1935). Using personal correspondence, memoirs, interviews, biographies, and literary and artistic renderings of the salon, I analyse each salon and its host(s)’s attitudes towards gender and sexuality. In doing so, I problematise any sweeping generalisations that figure the salon as a feminist institution. Instead, I propose that the 20th-century salon was a space uniquely suited to feminist politics, but how these politics manifested depended on the practices and values of the individual salonière.

1.1 Theoretical Concepts, Contextualised

Before a feminist theorisation of the 20th-century salon can take place, it is first necessary to define the term *feminist*. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), *feminist* is an adjective used to denote something “of, relating to, or advocating the rights and equality of women.” However, as Judith Butler contends in her seminal work *Bodies That Matter*, such a universalising definition negates the “differential power-relations” that

³ For more on how modernism was shaped as a masculine enterprise, see Bonnie Kime Scott’s *The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology* (Indiana: IUP, 1990) and *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2007).

⁴ While the term *network* is commonly associated with Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory, I use it to denote: 1) “a group of people having certain connections [...] which may be exploited to gain preferment, information, etc., especially for professional advantage” (“network, *n.* 5. b”); and, 2) “the action or process of making use of a network of people [...] for professional or other advantage” (“networking, *n.* 4”). While Latour’s theories make an important contribution to the social sciences and more specifically, the denaturalisation of the term *social*, I refrain from using them here due to their abstract and sociological nature. While actor-network theory “has tried to render the social world as *flat* as possible” so that links between actors in social networks are made “clearly visible” (Latour 16), I aim instead to fully flesh out the humanity and intimacy of the relationships between the modernist salonière and her network of habitués and, by extension, how these relationships problematised the sexual hierarchy and gendered binaries.

exist between women (5). *Feminist* is a heavily context-dependent term; its meaning shifts across cultures, historical eras, ethnicities, classes, races, and countless other temporal, spatial, and demographic variables. In 18th-century Europe, for example, salonières practised what Daniel Gordon terms aristocratic feminism: “a critique both of the domestic sphere to which women were relegated and the professional sphere from which women were excluded” (qtd. in Bilski and Braun, Introduction 6). Unlike their working class and non-white contemporaries, these women had the time and money to make such a critique; it was the ‘separate spheres’ that stood as their primary—and in some cases, sole—obstacle towards liberation.

For the 20th-century salonière, the ‘separate spheres’ presented less of an issue; suffrage, access to higher education, and two World Wars gave women—particularly white women of means—more points of entry into public life than ever before. As a result, women found new ways of challenging the status quo and exerting their agency—most notably through the figure of the New Woman. As Marius Ary-Leblond states, the New Woman strove to lead “a full life, a complete and powerful one, equal in intensity and output to that of a man” (qtd. in Nathan A36). Although patriarchal society deemed her inherently inferior to her male peers and attempted to limit her to ‘feminine’ forms of expression—what Kate Millett lists as “passivity, ignorance, docility, ‘virtue,’ and ineffectuality” (26)—the New Woman asserted herself as man’s equal.⁵ She wore pants, smoked, and refused to take orders from men. She completely refuted her designated sex role as mother and wife (Millett 26), either by remaining single for her entire life or entering into alternative relationship configurations with men and/or women. Unfortunately, the New Woman was not a viable role model for many working-class women and women of colour, who did not have the financial means or social capital

⁵ While Millett’s *Sexual Politics* may seem outdated to today’s feminists, it remains one of the most significant and sustained feminist analyses of the politics of personal relations; thus, it provides the perfect model for theorising the feminist implications of the modernist salonière’s relationships with her (often male) habitués.

necessary for taking such risks. She was ultimately the epitome of feminism for white women of means and, by extension, for the 20th-century salonière.

Yet, there were other obstacles—aside from patriarchal gender norms—with which the 20th-century salonière had to contend. Her salon served as a space within which upcoming writers and artists could come together to discuss and develop new experimental modes of creative expression, including Cubism, Fauvism, and more generally, modernism. Modernism was an intensely masculinist field, which Rita Felski defines as “a specific form of artistic production, serving as an umbrella term for a mélange of artistic schools and styles which first arose in late-nineteenth-century Europe and America [...and were] characterised by such features as aesthetic self-consciousness, stylistic fragmentation, and a questioning of representation” (12-3). While men and women both created modernist literary and artistic works, it was men who received the greatest acclaim. According to Bonnie Kime Scott, modernism “was unconsciously gendered masculine” throughout the first half of the 20th century (*Gender* 2). ‘High’ modernists prized experimental forms and ‘objective’ subject matter, which dealt with ‘serious,’ masculine issues like the war, above all else. Consequently, works containing personal narratives or references to domesticity were maligned for their innocuousness and, by extension, their femininity (Scott, “Introduction” 12). For women writers and artists to infiltrate or even cultivate modernist circles during this period was thus an act of subversion—a moment, according to Judith Butler, “in which one’s staid and usual cultural perceptions fail,” when the assumed naturalness of gendered codes of behaviour and appearance “come into question” and emerge as “a changeable and revisable reality” (*Gender* xxiv)⁶; these women served as a direct counter to the masculinist version of modernism, inserting themselves into the movement and resurrecting feminised modes of expression as inherently valuable.

⁶ I use the term *subversion* and its variants throughout this thesis with Butler’s theorisation of the term—and the subtitle of her seminal third-wave feminist text, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*—in mind.

For the purposes of this thesis, then, the term *feminist* can be defined as: any form of expression or action that subverts or problematises society's patriarchal order—an order which guarantees power and freedom to those men who act in accordance with idealised masculinity by exhibiting traits like “aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy” (Millet 26). Within this order, women, people of colour, queer people,⁷ ethnic minorities, the differently abled, and other minority groups are all rendered inferior to the white, able-bodied, heterosexual man. They are subject to systematic oppression, which limits their behaviour, their status, and their roles within society; women, for example, are expected to be passive servants to men, either as their wives or the mothers of their children. A feminist act, then, can involve any of the following: 1) a pointed break from social norms and roles, especially in regards to gender and sexuality; 2) an attempt to wrest power from men; 3) a deliberate muddying of gendered binaries, including male/female and masculine/feminine; and, 4) a devaluation of masculinity and its associated traits. Thus, any space that facilitates these kinds of acts—either as a result of its liminality or its occupants' ideological leanings—can be said to enact a feminist politics.

At this point, it is necessary to address how I conceptualise space—specifically, the salon (as) space—throughout the thesis. Similar to Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, I hesitate to suggest space is either an always already existing void in which people and objects are placed or an entity with innate features or characteristics—hence why I refrain from labelling the modernist salon as an inherently feminist space (Foucault 23; Lefebvre 36).⁸ Instead, I understand space as both the product and producer of particular sets of social relations, which as Lefebvre argues, “also serves as a tool of thought and of action; that in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of

⁷ I use the term ‘queer’ throughout this thesis as a means of denoting “any act or protoidentity that exists outside the realm of bourgeois, heteronormative reproduction and its correlative ideology of gender roles” (Kent, *Making Girls* 2).

⁸ I base my conceptualisation of space primarily on the theories of Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre as they are, according to queer spatial theorist Dianne Chisholm, ideal for understanding and theorising the production of queer space (26).

domination, of power” (26). In other words, space is not a neutral entity free from ideology or power structures; it reflects and (re)produces the relationships that allow dominant systems of oppression—such as capitalism, white supremacy, heteronormativity, and patriarchy—to endure. As Nancy Duncan notes in her introduction to *BodySpace: Destabilizing Geographies of Gender and Sexuality*, gender and sexuality “are constructed and negotiated spatially”—particularly through the preservation of the ‘separate spheres’ and the restriction of queer forms of sexual or gender expression to the private space of the home (4). Yet, as Lefebvre notes, “social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another” (86); even when a space is demarcated as private through the deployment of walls and borders, it retains “an ambiguous continuity” with other, public spaces (87). Thus, while the salon space is produced within the private space of the home—what Gaston Bachelard posits as “the topography of our intimate being” and innermost thoughts and dreams (xxxvi, 6-7)—it is in fact in dialogue with its ‘exterior’ other and the relations of power that constitute it.

However, that is not to say that the salon space—or any private space for that matter—cannot challenge the power relationships that produce public space. If “(social) space is a (social) product” (Lefebvre 26), then space—like the sets of social relations that produce it—is open to negotiation and fluctuation. It can be repurposed by marginalised individuals to produce alternative sets of social relations, which undermine and counteract those systems of power that sustain their marginalisation. Foucault terms such space heterotopia—“a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted” (24). According to Foucault, heterotopias can take many forms: they can serve individuals in crisis or individuals who deviate from the norm; they can be of “indefinitely accumulating time” or of “fleeting, transitory” time; their entry can be compulsory (as with prisons) or restricted (even if they appear to be open) (25-6). Even the function of a heterotopia is

mutable, as it shifts to accord with changes in the sociocultural landscape (25). With its liminal status, its subversion of cultural norms, and its inclusion of ‘deviants,’ heterotopia can be thought of as queer space—what Dianne Chisholm defines as “a practice, production, and performance of space beyond just the mere habitation of built and fixed [heteronormative] structures,” which can allow for the enactment of queer bodily pleasures (10). While the modernist salon was not often a site of sexual pleasure, it was—for all intents and purposes—a heterotopia for modernism’s outsiders, namely (queer) women. It was “fleeting, transitory”—only correspondence, diaries, and literary and artistic works remain to attest to its existence—and it often contested and inverted societal rules governing gender, sexuality, and art. Most important, however, is its mutable function; as a heterotopic space, the modernist salon could be altered to advance the feminist politics particular to its salonière’s needs and values.

1.2 Literature Review

Since the mid-1970s, a number of scholars have attempted to theorise the salon—specifically, the 17th- and 18th-century salon—as a feminist space. In her article, “‘Perfect Reciprocity’: Salon Culture and Epistolary Conversations,” Nicole Pohl suggests that the salon precipitated “an equality between the sexes grounded in rational friendship,” which served as a direct challenge to woman’s perceived intellectual inferiority in public life (142). Women could thus use the salon to exert influence not only over their male peers, but also over wider society. During the 18th century, the salon helped to disseminate what Joan Landes terms “the culture of polite society” to an ever-widening section of the population (24); salonières taught non-nobles how to dress, speak, and behave like a member of the nobility, thereby “making th[e] usurpation” of the entrenched elite a reality (Landes 24). Yet, for Susan Herbst, the salonière’s main power came from her “ability to dictate the bounds of the communication environment” (28). In selecting only certain topics for

conversation, the salonière subtly shaped the opinions and biases of her male habitués, who would then leave the salon space and spread their newfound ideas to the public. This leads Evelyn Gordon Bodek to deem the salon “*the* major channel of communication among intelligent people of means” during the 18th century (186): every idea, opinion, and criticism articulated within the salon space would be disseminated to the external world through mediums as varied as literature, philosophy, salon newsletters, and reports to the king.⁹ Thus, while men of letters tended to be the main focus of early salons, the salonière was, as Roger Picard asserts, the driving force behind these spaces—she was the one in possession of real power, the one capable of upending the status quo (12).

Consequently, many spatial theorists conceptualise the salon as a space ridden with transformative potential. In his foundational text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Jürgen Habermas draws upon the 18th-century salon as a model for his bourgeois public sphere. According to Habermas, the bourgeois public sphere is, first and foremost, “the sphere of private people come together as a public”—it is the space in which civil society can distance itself from public authorities and, in turn, challenge authoritarian forms of rule via rational debate (27). Ideally, institutions within the bourgeois public sphere will possess three distinctive criteria: 1) they will render social status irrelevant, thus “replac[ing] the celebration of rank with a tact befitting equals”; 2) they will question all institutions and beliefs considered to be immutable; and, 3) their conversation topics will be general in nature, granting everyone the opportunity to participate (Habermas 36-7). Theoretically, the 18th-century salon embodies all of these attributes: it allows for what Habermas calls “a certain parity of the educated” (32) and it divorces one’s capacity for reason from any supposed mitigating factors, such as socioeconomic status (33-4). As a

⁹ “The court often monitored the political dialogue of the salons by sending emissaries who reported back to the king. The court thought of the salon conversation as public sentiment” (Herbst 54).

part of the bourgeois public sphere, the salon could thus be employed as a revolutionary tool—a means of upending the status quo and subverting entrenched systems of power.

However, more recent scholars problematise Habermas' idealistic account of the bourgeois public sphere, pointing primarily to the sphere's exclusivity. In her seminal 1990 essay "Rethinking the Public Sphere," Nancy Fraser acknowledges the importance of the concept of a public sphere to "democratic political practice" whilst simultaneously calling for its "reconstruction" (57). Using "recent revisionist historiography" as a point of departure, Fraser argues the bourgeois public sphere was not a utopian space free from class distinctions and bias, but in fact "rested on, indeed was importantly constituted by, a number of significant exclusions"—namely the exclusion of women, the working classes, and racial and sexual minorities (58-9). Moreover, it was not the sole form of public to emerge during the Enlightenment; "there arose a host of competing counterpublics, including nationalist publics, popular peasant publics, elite women's publics, and working class publics," which worked to address the needs of those excluded from the bourgeois public sphere (61). Fraser coins the term "subaltern counterpublics" to distinguish between the bourgeois public sphere (and its modern equivalents) and the "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups [such as gendered, racial, and sexual minorities] invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (67). Whilst Fraser acknowledges how these subaltern counterpublics can enact their own forms of exclusion and marginalisation, they remain vitally important for countering dominant and oppressive ideologies in the wider public realm—much like the modernist salon gave (albeit, wealthy) women a space from which they could challenge their exclusion from the modernist canon and undermine gendered codes of behaviour, desire, and appearance that privileged their heterosexual male peers.

In his 2005 book *Publics and Counterpublics*, Michael Warner adopts Fraser's terminology to further explore how gendered and sexual minorities formulate their own publics to escape the patriarchal and heteronormative limits of the dominant public sphere. He posits that concepts of public and private space have been consciously gendered since the 1820s: "They are bound up with meanings of masculinity and femininity. Masculinity, at least in Western cultures, is felt partly in a way of occupying public space; femininity, in a language of private feeling" (24). However, Warner emphasises that the divide between public and private is very much permeable, allowing women to transform the private home "into a functional public [...] filled with talk and with the formation of a shared world"—a world which, I argue, can be found in the salon (37). Through his feminist, queer analysis, Warner recognises the revolutionary potential of Habermas's public sphere, but with two important caveats: 1) The "rational-critical debate" that Habermas deems synonymous with the cultivation of the public sphere is inherently patriarchal; thus, publics created with feminist and queer activism in mind will by necessity reject this type of debate for a less masculinist, heteronormative discourse (51); and, 2) Some publics—otherwise referred to as counterpublics—prefer to maintain a critical distance from more established, dominant groups within the public sphere, so as to better position themselves in opposition to the status quo (56). Similarly, Lauren Berlant problematises the rational, genderless nature of the Habermasian bourgeois public sphere with her own conceptualisation of an intimate public. In her book *The Female Complaint*, Berlant attests to the slippage between public and private, in that her intimate public fosters a community amongst marginalised groups through the sharing of mutual experience and emotional knowledge (viii). It provides a safe space for these groups to experience belonging, self-affirmation, and personal expression (viii), which—while Berlant never states as much—is what the salon constituted for women of means.

In their work on 17th- and 18th-century salons, Bodek, Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, and Joan DeJean all recognise how the salon's status as a domestic space allowed it to (largely) elude societal expectations and public censure; the salon thus emerged as an ideal site for a progressive form of gender politics to take root. In a time when women were believed to be "biologically, socially, and intellectually inferior" (Bodek 185), the salon reclaimed femininity from its inscribed inferiority and bestowed it with a subversive kind of value. According to Bilski and Braun, this occurred mostly through the feminisation of the salon's ethos, by which stereotypically feminine traits like "tolerance" and "refinement" became not only desirable, but also necessary within the salon space (Introduction 6). As such, women could exploit the salon's femininity to their advantage, subverting it into a venue for their own makeshift higher education. For Bodek, the 17th- and 18th-century salon constituted "an informal university for women" where salonières—through both conversation and written correspondence with their male guests—could engage with Enlightenment concepts and new modes of thinking that were otherwise off-limits to them (185).¹⁰ DeJean even credits the 17th-century salon as a "female preserve," in that it both fostered and publicised women's writing to an unprecedented extent (382-3). Pierre Bourdieu and Roger Chartier expand upon this claim, noting that the salonière served an important legitimising function for aspiring writers and artists (Bourdieu 50; Chartier 156); it was ultimately up to the salonière to decide which of her guests' careers she wanted to endorse (or destroy) by providing them with important connections to patrons and other influential members of the art community.

For many scholars, the 17th- and 18th-century salon derived its feminist status from its matriarchal structure. Not only was the salon woman-led, but it also resembled a female tradition, intended to be passed down from one generation of women to another. As Dena

¹⁰ During the 17th and 18th centuries, it was common for girls to only receive formal education up until the age of 12, out of a societal fear that any further knowledge could lead to madness or spinsterhood (Bodek 185); thus, any girl or woman who wished to pursue subsequent studies was forced to do so in private.

Goodman posits, aspiring salonières were expected to apprentice “in an established salon before breaking out on their own. The primary relationship that underlay the salon as a continuing social institution was thus between female mentors and students, rather than between a single woman and a group of men” (76). The salon was, in essence, an institution of sisterhood—an intimate public where women on the margins could share their experiences and develop their own support networks and communities. In many cases, these communities transcended national borders, fostering connections between the French salonière and other like-minded European women. It was through these connections, as Bodek notes, that early women’s groups, such as the English Bluestockings, were able to learn of the salon and adapt its basic elements to suit their (often feminist) needs (186).

The existing literature thus all points to the 17th- and 18th-century salon as a feminist (counter)public—a space in which women could challenge their inferior position in society through networking. However, very few scholars attempt to extend this feminist theorisation of the salon to the 20th century—partly due to the wrongful assumption of the salon’s demise and, most notably, the continued erasure of women from popular accounts of modernism’s development.¹¹ In his 1999 book *Institutions of Modernism: Literary Elites and Public Culture*, Lawrence Rainey calls for modernist critics to shift their focus away from the formal elements of modernism towards the cultural institutions and networks of patronage, collecting, and marketing that enabled modernism’s development (4-5); however, Rainey minimises the role of women salonières and writers, retaining the spotlight on canonical and oft-studied male writers such as Ezra Pound, James Joyce, and T. S. Eliot.¹² Alternatively, works by Steven Watson, Robert M. Crunden, and Stephen Voyce all highlight the significance of the modernist salon and often theorise it as a collaborative—

¹¹ For a solid overview of scholars’ misinformed accounts of the salon’s demise, see Kale’s “Women, the Public Sphere, and the Persistence of Salons.”

¹² For a succinct summary of Rainey’s troublesome treatment of H. D. and feminism, see Joy Castro’s review of *Institutions of Modernism* in: *South Central Review* 17.3 (Autumn 2000): 149-151.

and potentially subversive—space. In *Strange Bedfellows*, Watson figures the salon as “the most defined unit of organization” of the modernist era (8-9); it brought together “the enlightened rich,” “the bohemian poor,” the anarchists and the modernists—all of whom wanted to do away with the current social order (8-9). For Watson, then, the modernist salon served as the foundation upon which political, social, and artistic revolution could take root (8-9). Crunden similarly posits the salon as a revolutionary collective of outsiders, who deviated from social norms and sought to escape the status quo (xiii). Yet, according to Joyce, the salon’s “signature egalitarianism, diversity, and gender equality changes tremendously depending on the salon in question” (631). While modernist salons fostered “communal subjectivit[ies]” via dialogic communication and artistic practice, they were not—in Joyce’s opinion—inherently progressive or revolutionary spaces (630).

I build upon Joyce’s contention by problematising theorisations of the salon that posit it as an inherently feminist space. While I recognise how the salon’s unique liminal positioning and egalitarian impulse make it an ideal space for the advancement of a feminist politics, I am primarily interested in how the salonière curated her salon space and network to advance her own unique form of feminist subversion. This thesis thus works alongside the minimal body of feminist scholarship on modernist salonières, namely Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun’s *Jewish Women and their Salons: The Power of Conversation* and Shari Benstock’s *Women of the Left Bank*, to recover these women’s voices and vital contributions to modernism’s development. I use similar methodologies to Bilski, Braun, and Benstock, in that I focus on both the salonière’s life and work in order to render a more complete portrait of her wider role in modernism’s development. Yet, this thesis deviates from their work in two key ways: 1) It focuses exclusively on the 20th-century salonière, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of each salon and salonière under study; and, 2) It foregrounds how the salonière’s life, work, and politics directly impacted—and was influenced by—her salon. Moreover, it constitutes the first comparative study of the Stein, Barney, and

Stettheimer salons which, given the established connections between them, is long overdue.

1.3 Methodology and Scope

To conduct this study, I use a range of methodologies that are conducive to feminist modes of knowledge production. Rather than attempt to establish a factual, ‘objective’ account of each salon under study—which Tess Cosslett, Celia Lury, and Penny Summerfield associate with “a privileged white male-centered perspective that has [merely] pretended to universality and objectivity” (2)—I turn to personal narratives, such as memoirs, autobiographies, diaries, and correspondence, to piece together how the salonière and her guests perceived the salon’s dynamics from their first-hand experience. As Rita Felski argues, “feminist critics need to take seriously past women’s and men’s own understandings of their positioning within historical and social processes” (8), as it is these understandings that provide a richer, more contextualised and diversified version of history. Personalised accounts of modernist salon culture help to resurrect women’s voices, which Kakie Urch argues have so often been made “silent, absent” by popularised, masculinist retellings of modernism’s development (19). They foreground the importance of the salonière and, in turn, help to establish how the salon derived its character—first and foremost—from her.

Yet, while personal narratives allow for “the reclaiming of the female subject” and voice, Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck argue that they simultaneously foreground “the problematic status of the self” (1-2). Contrary to the enduring Enlightenment-era concept of ‘the sovereign (male) self,’ the autobiographical ‘I’ is not a unified, autonomous subject free from ideology or social, cultural, or historical context; it is in fact multiple and in a constant state of (re)production. In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson note the myriad ways personal narratives—and

by extension, their subjects—are mediated through language, memory, rhetorical devices, ideology, and social, cultural, and historical context (13, 31). The self life writer—what Smith and Watson term autobiography’s ‘real’ or historical ‘I’—draws upon an archive of personal memories to construct a narrative of her life (7). During this process of remembering, however, memories of the past become imbricated with experiences and desires of the present, thus producing the autobiographical ‘I.’ According to Smith and Watson, this autobiographical ‘I’—like its ‘real’ or historical source—is inherently multiple; not only does it encompass several fluid ‘I’s—the narrating ‘I,’ the narrated ‘I,’ and the ideological ‘I’ (72)—but it also shifts in accordance with a complex network of dialogic exchange between the writer, her peers, and her readers (who bring their own sociocultural moment and identity politics to their interpretation of the text) (16, 88). For Smith and Watson, then, personal narratives “cannot be reduced to or understood only as historical record” (13)—and nor does this project treat them as such. Rather, I use personal narratives with the understanding that “any utterance in an autobiographical text, even if inaccurate or distorted, is a characterization of its writer” and how they comprehend themselves, their relationships with others, and their position to and within their historical moment (Smith and Watson 15-6)—all of which are vital to dissecting the feminist politics of the modernist salon.¹³

Given ‘high’ modernism’s disparaging view of subjective—and thus feminine—literary modes, which Scott, Urch, and Lisa Rado analyse in detail in their own feminist modernist studies, personal narratives from the 20th century—especially those written by women—can be difficult to find (Scott, “Introduction” 12; Urch 18; Rado 5). While much of Stein’s correspondence and memoirs are now widely published and read, the personal writings and documents of other salonières—like Barney and the Stettheimer sisters—are mostly relegated to university archives. Much of my research on Barney was conducted at

¹³ This is particularly relevant to my use of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in the following chapter.

the Fonds Natalie Clifford Barney at the Sorbonne's Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques-Doucet in Paris, France. There, I read and translated her out-of-print collections of *pensées* and perused letters she received from some of her most notable habitués, including Mina Loy and Djuna Barnes. I also examined some of her handwritten salon guest lists, which revealed a number of habitués that have previously gone unmentioned in accounts of Barney's salon. However, access to the archive's more intimate items—such as Barney's correspondence with her long-time partner Romaine Brooks—were restricted, making any attempt to fully capture the atmosphere and dynamics of Barney's salon difficult. My archival research on the Stettheimer sisters was similarly limited, as it was conducted remotely whilst Yale University's Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library—home to the Florine and Ettie Stettheimer Papers—underwent a series of renovations. I scoured through hundreds of scanned documents, mostly of letters from the sisters' most frequent habitués and their personal diaries (parts of which were edited or redacted by Ettie). From these sources, I was able to collate a portrait of the Stettheimer salon—one which was corroborated in part by the sisters' own salon-inspired works.

This thesis combines historiography with literary and artistic analysis in order to, as Rado asserts, “eavesdrop upon, to hear snatches of a much larger cultural interchange to which we must turn if we are to gain a more authoritative perspective on the function and meaning of gender” (7). Each salon under study inspired a wealth of creative works by both salonière and habitué alike, including romans à clef, literary portraiture, poetry, paintings, and even a dollhouse. I analyse these works through a feminist lens, focusing on how their form and content work together as a commentary on the salon's gender dynamics. While each analysis differs in terms of its length and focus, I concentrate on a few key themes. With artistic works, I examine how they: 1) engage with the male gaze, which John Berger defines as the act by which a male spectator asserts control over a female subject and transforms her into his sexual object (47); 2) showcase gender's

performativity by denaturalising the categories of “male,” “female,” “masculine,” and “feminine”; and, 3) challenge modernism’s devaluation of art forms which engage with the feminised realms of the domestic and the personal. My literary analyses share a similar preoccupation with the deconstruction of gendered categories and hierarchies, particularly in relation to characterisation and language usage. I assess how formal elements such as diction, sentence construction, grammar, and figurative language work together to undermine language’s patriarchal restrictiveness and, in some cases, formulate a female-centric alternative.

In order to make this methodology workable, I have limited my study to three salons that were active during the first half of the 20th century: the Stein salon, the Barney salon, and the Stettheimer salon. While there are numerous other salons that fit this criterion,¹⁴ the Stein, Barney, and Stettheimer salons share a number of other characteristics, which make them suitable for comparative study. Firstly, the women responsible for these three salons—Gertrude Stein, Natalie Clifford Barney, and the Stettheimer sisters, respectively—were all Jewish American women of middle to upper class backgrounds, who expressed neither shame nor devotion to their ascribed faith. They rejected compulsory heterosexuality by taking partners of the same sex, practising polyamory, or embracing eternal singledom. Given these contextual similarities, I have been able to focus on how each salonière shaped the atmosphere of her salon without needing to account for any economic, social, religious, racial, or marital disparities between them.¹⁵ Secondly, all of these women played more than just host and patron to their male

¹⁴ Other salons from the first half of the 20th century include, but are no means limited to: Walter and Louise Arensberg’s salon at 33 West 76th Street, Mabel Dodge’s salon at 23 Fifth Avenue, Ruth Logan Roberts’ salon at 130 West 130th Street, and A’Lelia Walker’s salon at 108-110 West 136th Street—all in New York City; and Michael and Sarah Stein’s salon at 58 rue Madame in Paris.

¹⁵ While all of the salonières mentioned in the above footnote were wealthy and of high social standing, they differed from Stein, Barney, and the Stettheimer sisters in terms of their marital status and race. The Arensbergs and the Steins were married couples; Dodge was married several times and had children; and, Roberts and Walker were both married and African American.

contemporaries; they were artists and writers in their own right, who used their salons as spaces in which to practise and derive inspiration for their creative arts. Their works thus provide evidence of their salons' sexual and gender politics. Thirdly, Stein, Barney and the Stettheimer sisters were all connected to each other in some way: Stein was a guest of honour at Barney's salon; Florine Stettheimer designed the sets for Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*; and Stein and the Stettheimer sisters shared several salon guests, most notably Carl Van Vechten and Virgil Thomson. Yet, in spite of this connective chain between them, scholars have neglected to study their three salons in tandem; this thesis works to rectify this gap, and in so doing, draws out how Stein, Barney, and the Stettheimer sisters all fashioned distinctive salons for themselves—in spite of all their similarities and associations with one another.

1.4 Thesis Overview

This thesis consists of three body chapters, each of which offers a case study of a 20th-century salon ran by an American woman. I begin each case study with a basic description of the salon's structure and atmosphere, maintaining a keen focus on its gender dynamics. I then trace the connections between the salon's character—particularly its attitude towards gender and sexuality—and its salonière, positing that the salon's transgressiveness (or lack thereof) is as much a product of the salonière's individual belief and value system as it is of the salon's inherent liminality. Building upon this, I assess the extent to which the salon inspires subversive modes of artistic expression by both its salonière and its habitués. I pay close attention to how the salonière's values trickle down from the salon space to the works it inspires and, in doing so, position the salon as the key site from which the 20th-century salonière could build her reputation and promulgate her values to wider society.

My first chapter offers a historical overview of Gertrude Stein's salon, tracing its origins as a showcase for the Steins' modern art collection to its development as a literary hub where Stein mentored her male peers and found the inspiration for her word portraits. Using Stein's own memoirs, *Everybody's Autobiography* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Moveable Feast*, and various correspondences between Stein and her habitués, this chapter maps out Stein's seemingly contradictory attitudes toward gender and feminism and how these manifested in both her salon and her salon-inspired word portraits. While Stein held questionable views on the cause of women and segregated her salon along gender lines, she also posited herself as the possessor of male genius, challenged patriarchal grammar rules, and most significantly, framed herself as her habitués' judge and creator. Through analysing Stein's word portraits via a feminist lens, this chapter shows that it was through Stein's salon-inspired writings—rather than the physical salon space—that her subversion of the gender hierarchy manifested itself.

My second chapter gives an account of a more explicitly subversive salon—that of writer, lesbian feminist, and wealthy heiress Natalie Clifford Barney. Unlike Stein, Barney was not primarily interested in increasing her cultural capital or advancing her own career; instead, she viewed her salon as a venue for building friendships and connections amongst those she respected most. Specifically, this chapter examines how Barney used her salon to promote and bring together women writers and artists, such as Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, Colette, and Stein herself. Through analysing Barney's salon-inspired *Adventures of the Mind* (*Aventures de l'Esprit*) and her published collections of random thoughts (otherwise referred to as *pensées*), it illustrates that Barney cultivated a space conducive to female friendship and feminist action—two things that she prized in her personal life. While Barney welcomed men into her salon, their presence never came at the expense of her female guests' comfort or equal participation. In fact, Barney privileged her female guests above all, as her Temple of Friendship, her Académie des Femmes, and her regular homages to women writers

demonstrate. In providing a literary analysis of Djuna Barnes' *Ladies Almanack*—which takes Barney's salon as its main focus and inspiration—this chapter posits that Barney's salon constituted a queer feminist space, which not only levelled the playing field between men and women writers, but also encouraged (often queer) women to express their creative and sexual selves without fear of censure.

My final chapter analyses a seeming amalgam of the Stein and Barney salons—the New York-based Stettheimer salon. Run by sisters Florine, Ettie, and Carrie, the Stettheimer salon welcomed a predominantly male coterie much like that of the Stein salon; however, the Stettheimer sisters did not use their salon to propound the merits of male genius. Instead, they figured their salon as a space within which their habitués could express a multitude of gender and sexual identities safely and without judgment: privately queer men and women could openly embrace their sexuality, cis-presenting individuals could enact varied gender identities, and femininity could become a source of art and pride rather than a mark of shame. As this chapter will show, the Stettheimer salon garnered its queerness from the Stettheimer sisters themselves, who collectively refused to be limited to the expression of a singular sexuality or gender identity. Through their salon and the works it inspired—including Florine's artworks (namely *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* [1923], *Soirée* [1917-19], and *Family Portrait II* [1933]) and poetry collection, *Crystal Flowers*; Ettie's roman à clef, *Love Days*; and, Carrie's dollhouse and salon menus—the Stettheimer sisters created a feminist legacy for themselves, in which those gendered hierarchies governing personal and artistic expression were overturned and dismantled.

Together, these three case studies demonstrate the myriad ways in which the 20th-century salon disrupted the sexual hierarchy and its associated binaries—both in the space itself and in the works it inspired. Unlike most other theorisations of the salon, however, they facilitate a shift in focus: one that moves away from the space itself and instead, turns toward the woman who cultivated it. Moreover, these case studies not only foreground the

role of the salonière in the development of literary and artistic modernism more generally, but they also provide a female-centric alternative to the common masculinist version of the history of modernism and what it deems acceptable modes of modernist expression. In short, this thesis argues that the 20th-century salon's feminist politics emerge as a direct correlative of the salonière's own values, beliefs, and desires.

2.

“When This You See, Remember Me”:

Self-Promotion and Self-Making in the Stein Salon

“I had to find out what it was inside any one, and by any one I mean every one I had to find out inside every one what was in them that was intrinsically exciting and I had to find out not by what they said not by what they did not by how much or how little they resembled any other one but I had to find it out by the intensity of movement that there was inside in any one of them [...] I must find out what is moving inside them that makes them them, and I must find out how I by the thing moving excitedly inside in me can make a portrait of them” – Gertrude Stein¹⁶

For the aspiring artist, writer, intellectual, and art connoisseur of early 1900s France, the Saturday night gatherings at Gertrude and Leo Stein’s studio apartment were the most anticipated event of the week. Located at 27 rue de Fleurus in Paris’ 6th arrondissement, the Stein salon served as one of the first galleries of modern art. Its walls were plastered with Picassos, Cézannes, Matisses, Manets, Renoirs, and other Fauvist, Cubist, and Impressionist pieces. Famed modernist writer and frequent salon habitué Ernest Hemingway described the Stein salon as “one of the best rooms in the finest museum except there was a big fireplace and it was warm and comfortable” (*Moveable* 13). While guests came from far and wide to gaze upon the Steins’ eclectic art collection, many were left bewildered, unimpressed or, at worst, horrified, by what they saw. Confusion was, as Gertrude Stein writes in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, such a common “state of mind in a guest that they paid no attention to it” (15).¹⁷ Although the Steins’ holdings constituted pure “horrors” for some guests, including journalist Alice Woods Ullman (Letter to Stein 48) and San Franciscan painter Leslie Hunter—who ventured so far as to

¹⁶ “Portraits and Repetition,” *Lectures in America* (London: Virago Press, 1988), 183.

¹⁷ Throughout this chapter, I use *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* to reconstruct the Stein salon’s atmosphere and salonière-habitué dynamics, with the understanding that the text stems from Stein’s own lived experience within the salon and, more importantly, reflects how Stein wished her salon (and her role within it) to be remembered. While critics have disparaged *The Autobiography* for its seeming appropriation of Toklas’s voice, I share Smith and Watson’s view that Stein’s deliberate blurring of the text’s historical, narrating, and narrated ‘I’s serves more as a commentary on the irreducibility of the self and the collaborative nature of identity production—themes which were also central to Stein’s subversive salon-inspired word portraits (36).

say he “wished he had never gone to see them” (qtd. in Toklas 36)—they were never meant to please everyone. The Steins neither sought the approval of others, nor aimed to appeal to those “sane persons [who] cried out against the crude colours, the false drawing,” as one *San Francisco Chronicle* reporter decried (“Deserted” 7). 27 rue de Fleurus was, from its inception, a space for innovation, in which artistic—and later, literary—conventions were flouted in favour of wholly new and experimental forms of creative expression.

For all of its investment in artistic and literary innovation, however, the Stein salon was not made equally conducive to political or social revolution. Even after the salon transformed from a joint venture between brother and sister to an exclusively woman-led space, its salonière and guests refrained from problematising or transgressing social norms—particularly those relating to gender. The Stein salon was a gender-segregated space: Gertrude surrounded herself with what she termed male genius and sequestered most of her female habitués—whom she dubbed the “wives of geniuses”—in a separate room (*Autobiography* 18). While Gertrude maintained mutually beneficial relationships with fellow salonières, such as Natalie Clifford Barney and Mabel Dodge, she ultimately distanced herself from the cause of women, opting instead to privilege her own career and legacy above all else. To do this, Gertrude positioned herself as a male genius; she curated her salon as a networking hub through which she could associate with those most capable of advancing her career: men. Gertrude advised and supported male writers, such as Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Sherwood Anderson, in the expectation that they would reciprocate by facilitating the publication of her work. Gertrude was thus not merely a patron or mentor for modernism’s leading men—she used them for her own gain. As her literary portraits of salon habitués demonstrate, Gertrude positioned herself as these men’s superior, their judge, and ultimately, their creator. This chapter will foreground how Gertrude’s literary portraits undercut the problematic gender politics of the Stein salon,

examining how Gertrude derived the raw material for her portraits from the salon space and ultimately used it as a conduit for undermining men's presumed superiority.

2.1 The Origins and Structure of the Stein Salon

In spite of its now infamous status as a modernist institution, the Stein salon was never part of Gertrude and Leo's long-term plans; in her seminal work *Women of the Left Bank*, Shari Benstock suggests that it "came about almost [...] accidentally" (85). Gertrude and Leo—inseparable siblings from a middle-class Jewish American family—first moved to Paris in 1903 after they had both reached an impasse in their personal and professional lives; their elder brother Michael and his family joined them shortly thereafter.¹⁸ For Stein, the move constituted an escape, not only from what she deemed a boring life as a medical student at Johns Hopkins University, but also from a tumultuous relationship with feminist activist and editor May Bookstaver (*Autobiography* 91; Benstock 13, 147). For Leo, Paris was the ideal place to indulge his flourishing interest in art; he started dabbling in portraiture and attending the annual Salon d'Automne, familiarising himself with the art world's latest innovations and most promising newcomers. It was, in fact, the 1904 Salon that inspired Leo—and by extension, his sister—to become art collectors (Watson 38). The Steins began their collection modestly, buying inexpensive Cézannes, Renoirs, and Gauguins from famed art dealer Ambroise Vollard's gallery. Then, in 1905, they turned their focus towards the Cubists and Fauvists, purchasing their first Picasso (*Young Naked Girl with Flower Basket* [1905]) and Matisse (*La Femme au Chapeau* [1905]). As they proceeded to hang their new acquisitions on their atelier walls, the Steins attracted more and more visitors to their studio apartment. According to Stein, it was at this point that 27 rue de Fleurus began its slow and unintentional transformation into a salon: "Little by little people began to come to the rue de Fleurus to see the Matisses and the Cézannes, Matisse brought people,

¹⁸ Henceforth, Gertrude will be referred to simply as Stein, while Leo will continue to be referred to by his first name. By doing this, I intend to establish Gertrude as the main authority and impetus behind the Stein salon and its legacy.

everybody brought somebody, and they came at any time and it began to be a nuisance, and it was in this way that Saturday evenings began” (*Autobiography* 47).

Although the Stein salon’s year of origin is a point of contention for many scholars,¹⁹ newspaper reports from the period reveal that the salon most likely began in 1906, shortly after the Steins purchased Matisse’s *La Femme au Chapeau* at the 1905 Salon d’Automne (“Deserted” 7). From then until 1930, the Stein salon provided a space in which individuals of all socioeconomic backgrounds could encounter, dissect, and discuss the most current and groundbreaking trends in visual art and literature. Excepting the World War One years and summer vacations, it took place almost every Saturday evening at 9 p.m., which allowed guests to also frequent Michael and Sarah Stein’s nearby salon at 58 rue Madame in the afternoons.²⁰ Upon reaching 27 rue de Fleurus, guests would either ring the bell to the Steins’ pavillon—their two-storey living quarters—or knock on the adjoining atelier’s door (Stein, *Autobiography* 10).²¹ While Leo occasionally greeted guests, it was usually Stein who opened the door, asking “de la part de qui venez-vous?”—who sent you?—of all those seeking entry (Stein, *Autobiography* 17). Yet, the question was merely a matter of routine; most newcomers came with a letter of introduction from an established habitué and everyone—regardless of their answer—was invited in.²² Guests would first congregate in the atelier, admiring (or criticising) the eclectic art display until the Steins’ bonne, Hélène, announced that dinner was served. Stein and Leo would then lead their

¹⁹ Both 1906 and 1907 are cited as potential starting points by Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun and Steven Watson, respectively (“Gertrude” 113; 41).

²⁰ Although little information exists in regards to Michael and Sarah Stein’s salon, it is known that the couple was close friends with Matisse and served as his greatest patron (see *The Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, p. 3). They also collected works by Picasso, Cézanne, Vallotton, Gauguin, and Manguin; yet, according to their niece, Gertrude Stein Raffel, their salons tended to be less cosmopolitan and more American-dominated affairs, with “American painters like Alfred Maurer, Maurice Sterne, Pat Bruce, Walter Pach, Morgan Russell, and Marsden Hartley” frequently in attendance (129).

²¹ In 1914, Stein had a tiny hall passage built to connect the atelier to the pavillon; from then onwards, guests gained entry to the salon simply by ringing the pavillon’s bell.

²² For an example of one of these letters of introduction, see Sherwood Anderson’s 3 Dec. 1921 letter to Stein in *The Flowers of Friendship*, pp. 142-3.

guests to the dining room, where Alice B. Toklas claims they would be treated to a “dinner [that] was simple but well cooked” (27). After dinner, everyone would return to the atelier for a night of stimulating conversation and art.

In the salon’s early years, Leo served as its primary presider: he considered himself the more qualified of the two siblings to discuss art and therefore took it upon himself to facilitate the night’s conversation.²³ As his niece Gertrude Stein Raffel notes, “Leo explained to anyone who would listen” (133). Stein, on the other hand, appeared to adopt a more passive role; biographer James R. Mellow contends that Stein sat queen-like “in one of the high-backed Renaissance chairs in the studio, her legs tucked under her,” saying little to nothing at all as a constant stream of guests filtered through the atelier (4-5). For photographer and salon habitué Alfred Stieglitz, it was Stein’s resolute silence that left him “with the greatest admiration” for her; according to Stein, Stieglitz “had never known any woman well perhaps anybody to sit still so long without talking” (*Everybody’s* 72-3). Yet, Stein’s silent, immobile presence within the salon was in no way indicative of docility or disengagement. Stein made her habitués come to her and, as Mabel Weeks put it, “meet her on her own terms” (viii). From her throne-like armchair, Stein subjected her habitués to her controlling gaze, later fixing them in her image through the medium of literary portraiture.²⁴ In this sense, she posed a challenge—albeit, a nearly imperceptible challenge—to Leo’s control over the salon’s proceedings. As the years progressed, Stein’s power as salonière became increasingly more explicit. In 1907, Stein met Alice B. Toklas, a Jewish American expatriate who relocated to France shortly after the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Toklas quickly became an integral part of Stein’s life, serving as her typist, her muse, and her lover. When Toklas moved into 27 rue de Fleurus in 1910, Stein

²³ In a letter dated February 7, 1913, Leo tells Mabel Weeks that Stein’s “artistic capacity is [...] extremely small” (51-5). In a subsequent undated letter to Weeks, he suggests that Stein has fabricated and augmented her role in the salon’s creation (141-2).

²⁴ Florine Stettheimer maintained a similarly silent observer role within her salon, filing away details for her salon-inspired artistic and literary portraits.

and Leo's relationship changed significantly. In her foreword to *Journey Into the Self: Being the Letters, Papers and Journals of Leo Stein*, Mabel Weeks suggests that "Leo felt, after Alice joined the household, that there was less place for him there, and he began to feel impatient and was glad enough to ease off" (viii). Stein began to challenge Leo's artistic views, especially those disparaging Picasso's latest works and philosophy (Toklas 26). During these years, Toklas claims that Leo transformed from his old "amiable" self into a completely "unreasonable and unbearable" individual (26). Perturbed by Stein's on-going affront to his authority, Leo decided to leave 27 rue de Fleurus in 1913, opting to settle in Florence with his long-time love, Nina, instead. With Leo gone, Stein was able to use the salon exclusively to her advantage, transforming it into a networking hub for her own self-promotion and creative inspiration.

Under Stein's lead, the Stein salon retained many of its distinguishing features. While some of the paintings, such as those by Matisse, were sold, the atelier walls still resembled those of a—albeit crowded—modern art museum. As in the salon's early days, when "the Saturday evenings [...] were frequented by many [H]ungarians, quite a number of [G]ermans, quite a few mixed nationalities, a very thin sprinkling of [A]mericans and practically no [E]nglish" (G. Stein, *Autobiography* 104), the guest list remained thoroughly cosmopolitan—or, as Jayne Marek and Bilski and Braun argue, even further diversified—with Stein at its helm (Marek 67; Bilski and Braun, "Expatriates" 115). Instead of focusing strictly on visual art, the salon expanded its interests to encompass literature, music, and the academy. On a typical Saturday evening, one could find writers like Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, and F. Scott Fitzgerald mixing with painters Picasso, Francis Picabia, Pavel Tchelitchew), photographers (Stieglitz, Carl Van Vechten), professors (Bernard Fay), composers (Virgil Thomson), art critics (Marsden Hartley), and little magazine editors (Jane Heap). At these newly eclectic gatherings, Stein was the main attraction. No longer the passive, silent woman of Stieglitz's memory, Stein now "talked all the time" (Hemingway,

Moveable 13), delivering frank and memorable advice to all of her habitués.²⁵ According to Weeks, Stein’s “personality was magnetic”—she held “a tremendous appeal, particularly to young people” (viii). Throughout his letters and personal essays, Anderson confirms Stein’s appeal, figuring her as “a woman of striking vigour, a subtle and powerful mind [...] and a charmingly brilliant conversationalist” (White 15). In his first impressions of Stein as salonière, Anderson remembers her laughter and strength (White 9). In its later years, then, the Stein salon became an attraction not only because of its noteworthy art collection, but also because of its effervescent and engaging hostess.

Yet, in spite of all its defining features and eccentricities, 27 rue de Fleurus was not a wholly unique institution; it was, in many ways, indebted to the prototypical salons of 17th- and 18th-century France. According to Emily D. Bilski and Emily Braun, Parisians came to know Stein through her nods to French cultural traditions: she “perpetuat[ed] into the modern era the salon tradition of *femmes auteurs* and *femmes savants*”—those literary and learned ladies who were renowned for their hosting and conversational skills in Enlightenment-era France (“Introduction” 1). She paid homage to early salon notions of etiquette, observing a *jour fixe* schedule, fostering conversation amongst her habitués, and ensuring that some form of meal was served. Even Stein’s infamous greeting, “de la part de qui venez-vous,” played with salon customs: “She usually opened the door to the knock and the usual formula was, de la part de qui venez-vous, who is your introducer. 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” (G. Stein, *Autobiography* 17). Even though Stein accorded very little significance to her guests’ responses, her “formula” allowed her to appropriate the French salon model for her own purposes. It made her appear as if she was merely paying tribute to past salons, when in actuality, she was using

²⁵ There will be several examples of this advice later in this chapter.

her “formula” to critique what she considered to be these salons’ elitism and lack of originality. In a May 1923 letter to Van Vechten, Stein asserts: “The salons are mutually destructive, the independent [artist] is dying and its death is destroying the old salon. There is no more artistes francais, new ones are springing up all claiming to be unique but nobody believes them. The logic of the french triumphs. If you can’t epater [wow/impress] the bourgeois you can’t rebel” (76). In order to be fully accepted by her surrounding bourgeois community, Stein—a middle-class American émigré—had no choice but to pretend to comply with the Parisian desire for “a formula.” Otherwise, her ability to network and advance her own career would be negatively impacted; she would fail to impress those bourgeois individuals who would provide her with the means to stage her rebellion through her unique, deconstructive prose.

Although Stein’s playful repurposing of salon etiquette appears to undermine the institution’s traditions to some extent, 27 rue de Fleurus was still the unquestioning repository of many of the 17th- and 18th-century salon’s other distinguishing characteristics, including its emphases on letter writing and collaboration. In her work on salon culture, Nicole Pohl argues that epistolary production and salon conversation have a long and shared history (143). Salonières would keep in touch with their habitués outside of their salon’s *jour fixe*, allowing the salon to transcend its physical and temporal boundaries. Even when the salon was not in session, then, salonières and habitués would maintain the kind of reciprocal—and thus, mutually educative and beneficial—dialogue normally reserved for the salon space. In the case of the Stein salon, Stein kept correspondence with many of her habitués, including Picasso, Thomson, Van Vechten, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Mabel Dodge, and Janet Flanner, amongst others. In these letters, the salonière-habitué dynamic established at 27 rue de Fleurus plays out: Stein dispenses her personal and professional advice, while her habitués express their gratitude by praising her work to prospective

publishers.²⁶ As a result of this reciprocity, the Stein salon—like its Enlightenment-era predecessors—naturally emerged as a space for collaboration. While early salons demonstrated their collective nature mainly through reciprocal dialogue and the production of literary newsletters, the Stein salon’s own collaborative ethos emerged through both its salonière’s and its habitués’ artistic works. Not only were 27 rue de Fleurus and its occupants at the heart of well-known works by Hemingway (*A Moveable Feast*), Picasso (*Portrait of Gertrude Stein* [1905-06]), Van Vechten (*Gertrude Stein: Part of a Life in Pictures*), and Thomson (who adapted many of Stein’s writings into musical compositions), but they also featured as a key element in Stein’s own writings, most notably in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and her numerous word portraits. The Stein salon thus served to both reflect and amplify the 17th- and 18th-century salon’s collaborative leanings.

However, when the salon first emerged in 1610, it was not simply intended as a utopic space for artistic collaboration and reciprocity; it was innately competitive, positing itself as a central venue for networking and career advancement. In his book *The Rules of Art*, Pierre Bourdieu deems “the subtly hierarchised universe of the salons” as the key site from which creative men could build their reputations and initiate their transitions from starving to paid artists (50). The 17th- and 18th-century salon promised its guests access to patronage and employment opportunities and “was thus,” to use Roger Chartier’s words, “a necessity for anyone who wanted to get ahead” (156). For those aspiring artists of the early 20th century, the Stein salon served a similar function; to use Stein’s words, “...any village where there was a young man who had ambitions heard of 27 rue de Fleurus and then he lived but to get there and a great many did get there” (*Autobiography* 17). In the Stein salon’s early days, Stein and Leo applauded themselves for endorsing artists whose “pictures had no value”—like Picasso and Matisse—and catapulting them to stardom (G. Stein, *Autobiography* 17). In an August 1914 edition of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, one

²⁶ For a clear example of this, refer to Ernest Hemingway’s 18 Feb. 1923 and 17 Feb. 1924 letters to Stein (in *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961*, pp. 79-80, 111-2).

journalist suggests “it was entirely due to their [the Steins] efforts that Matisse was able to conquer for a short time a measure of the ridicule and the disgust of Paris” (“Deserted” 7); their patronage was an undeniable source of power. Receiving the Stein salon’s approval was synonymous with success and adoration—even if society’s general reaction to the promoted artist was less than favourable. This continued to be the case long after Leo had departed the salon. With Stein at the helm, 27 rue de Fleurus gave previously unknown writers like Hemingway an avenue by which they could achieve canonisation and thus extended the salon’s original networking function into the 20th century.

Similarly, the Stein salon shared its forebears’ commitment to creating a space built upon egalitarianism and transformative potential. According to Jürgen Habermas, the 18th-century salon constituted a bourgeois public sphere, in which “private people came together as a public” to converse without regard to socioeconomic status or established ways of knowing (27, 36-7). The Stein salon was, in many ways, an embodiment of this revolutionary public sphere. According to Stein, “really everybody could come in,” as long as they “were interested” (*Autobiography* 17): “In those days most of the guests were living more or less precariously, no one starved, some one always helped but still most of them did not live in abundance” (*Autobiography* 11). For Stein, the rank and socioeconomic status of her guests were irrelevant. The starving, unknown artist could mix with the Infanta Eulalia of Spain, as long as both were actively engaged and made meaningful contributions to the night’s conversations—they did not, in other words, focus on what Stein considered vapid topics like “clothes and perfumes” (Toklas 34). Moreover, Stein gave little credence to her society’s strictures regarding queer sexualities and desires.²⁷ Although she was rumoured to have some reservations about male homosexuality,²⁸ Stein hosted several gay men at her salons, including Van Vechten, Hartley, and Thomson, and she was herself a

²⁷ While sodomy was decriminalised in France in 1791, homosexuality was still viewed as immoral and deemed only tolerable when restricted to the private sphere. It was not until 1982 that queer people were granted formal protections from discrimination by the government.

²⁸ See Hemingway, *A Moveable Feast*, p. 18.

lesbian. According to Hemingway, Stein went so far as to position queer individuals as creatively superior to their heterosexual peers: “she got the idea that anybody who was any good must be queer, if they did not seem to be they were merely concealing it” (Letter to Arnold Gingrich 384). In her salon, Stein redefined who could constitute a great artist, and by extension, what could constitute great art. She challenged both artistic and literary conventions, celebrating work by artists who were commonly dismissed for their experimental style²⁹ and applauding the misuse of grammar and punctuation in her own salon-inspired writings. As Habermas advocates in his theorisation of the public sphere, the Stein salon allowed for “a certain parity of the educated” (32), in which both the privileged and the marginalised could collectively discuss and reimagine modes of creative expression.

2.2 The Impact of Stein’s Ambiguous Gender Politics on her Salon

In spite of its resemblance to the Habermasian public sphere, however, the Stein salon bears a more complex relation to its 17th- and 18th-century predecessors in regards to gender politics. As previously discussed, recent accounts of salon history and theory cast the early European salon as the ideal site for enacting feminist modes of subversion; its status as a public sphere institution opened it up to a more egalitarian form of sociability, which allowed formally disenfranchised women to gain a voice amongst their male peers. It was a space in which women could compensate for the lack of opportunities granted to them within the public realm, particularly in the fields of education, work, and politics. At first glance, Stein’s salon appears to be not only devoid of many of these subversive qualities, but directly opposed to them. It was essentially a gender-segregated space, where “the [male] geniuses came and talked to Gertrude Stein and the wives sat with [Alice B. Toklas]” (G. Stein, *Autobiography* 95). According to Hemingway, “the wives [...] were

²⁹ For a sense of what the common response was to Matisse, see the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s “Have the Steins Deserted the ‘Genius’ Whom They Discovered?”

tolerated” by Stein, but not much else (*Moveable* 13). Stein considered herself their superior, positioning herself as one of the (male) geniuses (*Autobiography* 9). Yet, it is neither fruitful nor accurate to label the Stein salon as either a feminist or anti-feminist space. Instead, 27 rue de Fleurus was—much in tune with its salonière’s own attitudes—a politically ambiguous space, in which the cause of women was neither discussed nor advanced. Stein recognised intellect and creativity as predominantly masculine ventures within the salon space, yet she also managed to transgress the line between male and female, promoting herself as a (male) genius in possession of immeasurable artistic knowledge and taste. Stein exerted great influence over her male habitués and was thus able to not only dictate the latest movements in art and literature, but also advance her own writing career via her salon connections. Even though the Stein salon may not have contributed to women’s suffrage movements—either in France or Stein’s native United States—nor improved the status of women as a whole, it certainly served as a venue for Stein’s own empowerment and self-promotion.

As Benstock posits, Stein “presents particular problems for feminist critics because, although an important woman in twentieth-century literature and culture, she remained absolutely uninterested in supporting the work of other women or even in acknowledging herself as one of them” (18); the cause of women was of little concern to her, even though she was herself often the subject of misogynistic vitriol and sexist discrimination. As Anderson notes in an unpublished notebook of his first impressions of Paris, Stein “had always been laughed at”—the subject of cruel and “strange stories” that always proved to be patently untrue (White 9). Even though her experimental writing rivalled that of her male contemporaries—Van Vechten once referred to her *The Making of Americans* as “perhaps bigger than James Joyce, Marcel Proust”—her attempts to have her work professionally published were blocked at every turn, with male publishers and literary agents making little attempt to understand Stein’s creative intentions (Letter to Stein, 16

Apr. 1923, 73-4). Unlike Joyce, Stein was greeted not with accolades, but with “the loud guffaws of the general [public]” (Anderson qtd. in White 16). Yet, in spite of all of this, Stein failed to see how the cause of women was “her business” (*Autobiography* 92). While she did not “at all mind the cause of women or any other cause,” Stein opted to place her own wellbeing and success ahead of that of her fellow women (*Autobiography* 92). As a result, Stein’s salon evolved into a gender-segregated space—not necessarily because Stein disliked or disrespected women, but because she needed to guarantee herself unmediated access to the men most capable of advancing her career. Unlike heterosexual women of the period, she—as a lesbian—could not rely on her sexuality as a means of winning over men in power; her salon and its accompanying networks of patronage and mentorship were her main offerings and she thus had to utilise them as carefully and methodically as possible.³⁰

In venues outside of her salon, Stein was in fact quite happy to associate with women. She occasionally attended the salon of self-proclaimed feminist Natalie Clifford Barney and even participated in Barney’s subversive L’Académie des Femmes, an institution aimed at challenging the all-male Académie Française’s conflation of intellect with masculinity. While the Stein salon may have typically heralded men as geniuses, there is evidence to suggest that Stein did promote the works of women to her habitués on a more intimate scale. In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway recalls how Stein encouraged him to read Marie Belloc Lowndes’ “marvellous” work in place of Aldous Huxley’s “inflated trash” and D. H. Lawrence’s “impossible,” “pathetic and preposterous” writing (24). Stein may have publicly distanced herself from the cause of women as part of her self-promotion strategy, but her personal interactions with salon guests suggest a clear interest in women’s creative success.

Stein’s relationship with Alice B. Toklas calls for a similarly nuanced interpretation. On the surface, Stein and Toklas appeared to adhere to a heteronormative relationship model, in which one party—usually male—assumes the patriarchal role of breadwinner,

³⁰ Anita Loos’ 1925 novel *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* satirises how the period’s powerful men were more likely to promote women who made themselves sexually available.

whilst the other party—most often, female—is left to take care of all domestic and emotional labour. As the ‘man’ in the relationship, Stein was free from any sort of domestic responsibilities and was thus able to devote herself completely to her writing career. Toklas, on the other hand, performed the ‘wifely’ duties—she managed the house and attended to all of Stein’s needs. She cooked Stein’s favourite American cuisine, typed up all of her manuscripts, and acted as her personal secretary. Even during their Saturday evening salons, Toklas maintained a servile position: she took it upon herself to entertain the wives, so that Stein could focus on networking with her male guests. Yet, all of Toklas’ writings suggest that she did not merely fall into the role of housewife—she chose it of her own free will and volition. From the moment of their first meeting, Toklas expressed the desire to devote her life to Stein: “It was Gertrude Stein who held my complete attention, as she did for all the many years I knew her until her death, and these empty ones since then” (23). Toklas derived great pleasure from caring for Stein and their home. While “the furniture and objects” in 27 rue de Fleurus always “fascinated” Toklas, it was not until she had to clean them herself that she “fully appreciated their beauty, their details, their proportions” (24). For Toklas, household chores were neither a mundane obligation nor a set of tasks to be fully delegated to her *bonne*, Hélène, but rather a medium for fostering intensely intimate and affective connections with the world around her. She fashioned what Beverly Gordon terms a saturated world for herself—an aesthetically pleasing and sensorially rich world derived entirely from one’s domestic duties (1-3). Toklas was both an active and creative force in Stein’s life; she wanted to be the wife to Stein’s husband, proclaiming in a gold leaf framed Annunciation to Stein: “My husband is mine and I am his” (Souhami 12).³¹ Toklas casts her relationship with Stein as one of reciprocity, in which neither party held sole control over the other: they were in equal possession of one another.

³¹ Translated from the (misspelt) French: “Mon epoux est a moy et je sui a luy.”

Benstock implies that “the impression of Alice Toklas as a silent and ministering partner” was, in many ways, a ruse: “Those who were allowed glimpses of the intimacy between the two women suspected that Toklas was the more powerful of the two figures, that Gertrude was dependent upon her in ways that gave Toklas dominance in the relationship” (168). In *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway provides what may be the most infamous glimpse of this intimacy, framing it as the primary cause of his and Stein’s long-time feud:

The maidservant opened the door before I rang and told me to come in and to 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 colourless alcohol 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. I’ll do anything, pussy, but please don’t do it. 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 and the answers were worse. (104)

In this version of events, Stein appears both weak and submissive. Contrary to the egotistical and formidable reputation she cultivated for herself, she forgoes her pride and “plead[s]” with Toklas—a silent yet impending presence who holds all the power. It is in this moment—this break in Stein’s authority—that Hemingway rejects Stein as his “brother” or equal (Letter to Anderson 62); she becomes tainted—feminised. Yet, the power dynamic between Stein and Toklas here is more complex than Hemingway’s understanding of it suggests—that is, if Hemingway’s version of events is even to be believed.³² While Stein appears the pathetic figure, “pleading and begging” Toklas to forgive her for some unknown misdeed, Stein simultaneously feminises and objectifies

³² After the 1933 publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Hemingway held a vendetta against Stein and attempted to disparage her character whenever the chance presented itself. For evidence of this, see *Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters, 1917-1961* (London: Granada, 1981): pp. 384-9, 410-1, 421-4.

Toklas, reducing her to her “pussy.” The resulting dynamic is thus one of constant oscillation, in which both Stein and Toklas adopt positions of dominance and submission in turn. This is clearly reflected in salon habitué Carl Van Vechten’s choice of nicknames for himself, Stein, and Toklas. While Van Vechten referred to Stein as his Baby Woojums, he labelled himself and Toklas as Papa Woojums and Mama Woojums, respectively.³³ As the baby in the triad, Stein was both highly dependent and the centre of attention; she needed Toklas and her male habitués for her livelihood, but she saw herself, in turn, as providing them with their lives’ purpose. Thus, even though Stein and Toklas appeared to the casual salon-goer as a heterosexist couple, the pair revealed a more complex, subversive dynamic to their salon regulars—one marked by mutual dependence and fluctuating power.

When it came to gender issues, Stein was full of contradictions; she subscribed to the notion of male genius, yet believed herself to be one. She refused to fulfil societal gender expectations which—as Mary Louise Roberts indicates in her book *Disruptive Acts*—restricted women from the fin-de-siècle onwards to a purely maternal or domestic role (3). Instead, Stein opted to influence the trajectory of modern art and literature while simultaneously advancing her own writing career. Ultimately, Stein cared for nothing outside of the establishment of what she termed “la gloire”—her glory, fame, and praise. As Weeks notes in the foreword to *Journey Into the Self*, “as early as 1900, Gertrude was most outspoken about wanting glory from her life. She repeated it again and again: ‘la gloire’” (viii). While such an attitude was undeniably subversive for the period, Stein’s method for realising her success was by no means as clear-cut. In a bid to establish herself as one of the men, she relinquished the feminine image of her salon’s early days in favour of more male-coded forms of dress. Her clothes were markedly plain; unlike the frilly, floral-

³³ The first written record of Van Vechten referring to Stein and Toklas as Woojums appears in a postcard dated 26 April 1932 (as transcribed in Burns, p. 255). While this postdates the Stein salon’s demise, it clearly reflects upon a dynamic that was already long in place.

patterned dresses of her partner Toklas, Stein's shirts and floor-length skirts bore none of the lace or accoutrements typical of early 20th-century feminine dress. They completely obscured her figure, rendering her sex more or less invisible. As the Stein salon passed into its latter years, Stein increasingly strove to appear less feminine. In 1926, she traded in her long curly locks for a crew cut hairstyle, which would become not only her trademark, but also a source of derision amongst her more conservative male habitués. In a 1948 letter to fellow author W. G. Rogers, Hemingway proclaims that he liked Stein "better before she cut her hair and that was sort of a turning point in all sorts of things" (650). Unlike the "lovely, thick, alive immigrant hair" that Hemingway came to love (*Moveable* 13), the crew cut hairstyle made no pretence at femininity; it transformed Stein—at least physically—into Hemingway's equal and thus posed a threat to his presumed (and socially designated) superiority. Yet, it is questionable whether Stein's cross-dressing tactics served as a dramatic restructuring or revisioning of gender relations or as a simple reaffirmation of men's superior status in society. In her article "Blessings in Disguise," Susan Gubar recognises cross-dressing as a highly political act employed by modernist women to both reclaim and "redefine the female self" (478). For Gubar, Stein's experimentation with her appearance was a clear affirmation of her "right of self-creation," in that it allowed her to "evade the gender categories that obsessed so many of her contemporaries" (495). Benstock, on the other hand, adopts a more sceptical approach, highlighting the ways in which cross-dressing reiterates femininity's perceived inferiority by casting masculinity as the enviable ideal (181). Stein's cross-dressing—while intended to circumvent the societal restrictions placed upon her sex—resulted in the implicit affirmation of men's superior status. In appropriating masculine forms of dress, Stein was essentially admitting to an inherent flaw in her sex—that femaleness and writing ability were somehow mutually exclusive. However, for those salon habitués who witnessed Stein's shifting appearance over the years, cross-dressing arguably represented something quite different—not only did

it reveal the tenuousness of the male/female binary, but it also presented the possibility for women to co-opt an assumed male authority.

For all her talk of male genius, Stein theorised that men and women were innately equal. After working with famed psychologist and philosopher William James in the late 1890s, Stein became obsessed with what she termed individuals' bottom nature.³⁴ As she explains in her epic *The Making of Americans*, bottom nature refers to those innate character traits that dictate everything that a person does or says: "Men and women have in them many ways of living,—their ways of eating, their ways of drinking, their ways of thinking, their ways of working, their way of sleeping, in most men and many women go with the way of loving, come from the bottom nature in them" (154). For Stein, then, this bottom nature represented a common denominator between the sexes; while both men and women derive their personalities from their bottom natures to varying degrees, their gender is more or less irrelevant. Bottom nature impacts each person's character differently: while "there are many kinds of men and there are many kinds of women and some of the millions of each kind of them have it to be made only of the bottom nature of their kind of them, some have it in them to be made of more or less mixing inside them of another nature or of other kinds of nature with the bottom nature of them" (*Making* 154). Thus, if a man and a woman could be equally indebted to their bottom nature, they could also share other traits and capabilities. In *What Is Remembered*, Toklas recalls how Stein proposed that all individuals, regardless of sex and gender, belonged to one of two character types—dependent independent or independent dependent: "The ones of the first kind of them always somehow own the ones they need to love them, the second kind have it in them to have power in them over others only when these others have begun already a little to love them, others loving them give to such of them strength in domination. Many men and many women have resisting in them. Many men and many women have attacking

³⁴ Ettie Stettheimer was also heavily drawn to the philosophy of William James; her PhD thesis focused on James' lecture "The Will to Believe."

in them” (42). In other words, men are not inherently superior to women, as both sexes are capable of wielding power over others. Although it is unclear whether Stein ever elaborated upon her theories during her Saturday night gatherings, the notion of bottom nature still left its mark upon 27 rue de Fleurus. While habitués like Mabel Dodge, Hemingway, and Fitzgerald encountered Stein’s theories in their reading of *The Making of Americans*, the concept of bottom nature also played a significant role in Stein’s salon-inspired word portraits. Stein believed that, through simple listening and observation, she could “find out what it was inside any one” of her habitués that made them unique (“Portraits” 183); she figured the universal trait of bottom nature—not sex or gender—as the formative element in habitués’ individual characters.

Yet, Stein’s salon often served as a networking hub primarily for her male habitués and herself. It provided relative unknowns like Picasso, Matisse, Anderson, and Hemingway with a venue to connect with the kinds of patrons and publishers—Dodge, the Cone Sisters, and *Little Review* editor Jane Heap, to name but a few—who would give rise to their later canonical status. Yet, for many male habitués, it was Stein herself who proved to be the most invaluable connection: her professional advice and mentorship were highly coveted and appreciated by all those who befriended her; she was willingly accepted as the architect of their careers and their success—at least, to start. In a spring 1923 letter, Anderson acknowledges both Stein and her salon as formative influences in his development as a writer: “It was a vital day for me when I stumbled upon you. But also there was and is something else. There was not only your work but also your room in the house there in Paris. That was something special too. I mean the effect on myself” (152). Painter Harry Phelan Gibb expresses a similar sentiment in a 1925 letter to Stein, recognising how greatly she influenced the writers of her era: “I find you have had a great influence on many of the story writers, some of whom have really got something worth while entirely through you. I think this should be some return, some satisfaction to you.

For it means that you have done good and shown a road clearly which is so well worth treading” (178). While Stein certainly served as a trailblazer and mentor for several of her male contemporaries, she never provided her guidance for free. For every piece of writing advice she gave out to a habitué, Stein expected some form of career boost in return—whether that was widening her reach by recommending her work to fellow writers and artists or by lobbying publishers, magazine editors, and literary agents to find a venue for her unpublished works.

This is particularly evident in Stein’s relationships with Hemingway and Fitzgerald. On the one hand, it is clear from much of Hemingway’s correspondence with Stein that he took her advice very seriously. In a 1923 letter between the two, Hemingway states: “I’ve thought a lot about the things you said about working and am starting that way at the beginning. If you think of anything else I wish you’d write it to me. Am working hard about creating and keep my mind going about it all the time. Mind seems to be working better” (79). Stein challenged Hemingway’s views on writing, causing him to realise that “writing [is] a hard job” and giving him the impetus to write his debut novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (Letter to Stein and Toklas, 15 Aug. 1924, 122). In exchange for this constructive criticism, Hemingway tirelessly promoted Stein’s *The Making of Americans* for serial publication in the *Transatlantic Review*. Hemingway lobbied *Transatlantic* editor Ford Madox Ford to publish the book and gave Stein advice as to how to handle the famed novelist and poet, telling her in a 17 February 1924 letter to “be haughty but not too haughty” with Ford to ensure that she would receive adequate compensation for *The Making of Americans*’ serial publication. When Ford suggested that he might have to cease publication of the novel, Hemingway threatened to “make such a row and blackmail that it will blow up the show” (Letter to Stein and Toklas, 14 Sept. 1924, 125).

Fitzgerald maintained a similar dynamic with Stein—even though he had much less to gain from her than Hemingway. By the time Fitzgerald first visited 27 rue de Fleurus, he

was already an established writer, riding on the recently published *The Great Gatsby*'s waves of critical—albeit, not commercial—success. Yet, he felt like he could learn much from Stein and he quickly adopted her as a mentor. In a 1925 letter, Fitzgerald tells Stein how “anxious” he is to read *The Making of Americans* and “learn something from it and imitate things out of it which I shall doubtless do” (115). In acknowledgement of this “future debt,” Fitzgerald championed Stein’s work to famed Scribner’s editor, Maxwell Perkins, but to no avail: “The old man’s mind was too old” to recognise how Stein could make a meaningful contribution to modernist poetics (115).

Yet, while these men recognised Stein’s influence and defended her work to editors and publishers alike, they also begrudged her power over them; after achieving their canonical status, both Hemingway and Fitzgerald actively turned against Stein and sought to destroy her reputation. In a 1933 letter to *Esquire* co-founder and editor Arnold Gingrich, Hemingway went to great lengths to disparage Stein’s character, questioning both her sanity and her talent:

I learned much [...] from G. Stein, who was a fine woman until she went professionally patriotically goofily complete lack of judgment and stoppage of all sense lesbian with the old menopause. Until then she was damned smart. Then she started taking herself seriously rather than her work seriously and because she had always been that way began to take that seriously too rather than as an accident of what she happened to be. Then she got the idea that anybody who was any good must be queer, if they did not seem to be they were merely concealing it. But what was worse she got the idea that anybody who was queer must be good. (384)

Here, the implications of Hemingway’s comments are twofold, in that they reveal: 1) the kind of misogynistic and homophobic attitudes Stein had to confront on a daily basis, making her success as both a salonière and a writer all the more impressive; and, 2) that Stein’s detractors could find no valid means, outside of sexism and homophobia, to discredit her. Hemingway roots Stein’s “complete lack of judgment” in her female biology and her lesbianism and implies that her high level of confidence—given her sex—is unwarranted. Fitzgerald, while less incendiary than Hemingway, also retracted his support

of Stein, later telling Maxwell Perkins, “Its [sic] good you didn’t take my advice about looking up Gertrude Stien’s [sic] new book (*The Making of Americans*). Its [sic] bigger than *Ulyses* [sic] and only the first parts, the parts published in the Transatlantic are intelligable [sic] at all” (Letter to Perkins 132). Similar to Hemingway, Fitzgerald discounts Stein solely based on her sex; while *Ulyses* is, at times, as unintelligible as *The Making of Americans*, Fitzgerald ignores this fact, contrasting Stein’s work unfavourably with Joyce’s equally obtuse, albeit male-centric, text. He renders Stein inferior to Joyce—a man for whom she held a deep-seated animosity.³⁵ However, this backlash reveals more clearly the ways in which Stein and her salon were subversive of prevailing gender norms. As salonière, Stein held such power and influence over her male habitués that she threatened not only their perceived authority, but the patriarchal system as a whole. She positioned herself as her habitués’ superior, making it clear in her word portraits that she was their creator. Hoping to restore their masculinity and their sex’s presumed superiority, Hemingway and Fitzgerald had no choice but to discredit Stein on the basis of her femaleness. Yet, their actions had the reverse effect; Stein achieved her greatest success after her split from these male modernists, publishing her commercial hit *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1933 and embarking upon her famed *Lectures in America* tour from 1934 to 1935.

Although much is made of Stein’s complex relationships with her male habitués, it is important to reiterate that she in no way ignored nor reviled the small number of female guests she did receive. In fact, 27 rue de Fleurus was itself an institution grounded in matriarchy and sisterhood. Not only was it woman-led from 1913 onwards, but it also owed its existence to two former salonières: Etta and Claribel Cone. Etta and Claribel were

³⁵ Many of Stein’s habitués make note of her dislike for Joyce. In a letter to Stein dated 20 May 1929, Thomson mentions “knowing the delicacy of [Stein’s] relations with said Joyce in the public eye” (115). Furthermore, in *A Moveable Feast*, Hemingway jests “If you brought up Joyce twice [in the Stein salon], you would not be invited back” (25). Yet, the reasons behind this animosity are unclear.

two unmarried Jewish sisters who lived for decades in adjoining apartments in Baltimore, Maryland. Etta took care of the household, whilst Claribel broke ground working as a doctor in the Johns Hopkins pathology laboratory. Together, they held an informal salon, which, on every Saturday night during the 1890s, provided a venue for artists and intellectuals to mingle and converse. The Cones' salon served as the perfect escape for Stein and Leo, who were pursuing challenging degrees at Johns Hopkins at the time. They became salon regulars, and by the time they moved to France in 1903, they were ready to establish a salon of their own. In this way, the Stein salon emulated the apprenticeship system of its 17th- and 18th-century Parisian predecessors. As Enlightenment-era scholar Dena Goodman posits, aspiring salonières were once expected to apprentice “in an established salon before breaking out on their own. The primary relationship that underlay the salon as a continuing social institution was thus between female mentors and students, rather than between a single woman and a group of men” (76). 27 rue de Fleurus similarly emerged as the result of female mentorship. It was through the Cones' example that the Steins developed the model for their own salon, taking the Cones' arguably American disregard for the formality and the invite-only nature of their European equivalents and adapting it for the Parisian salon scene.³⁶ Even after the Steins established themselves as successful salonières, the Cone sisters remained an influential force in their lives. Etta and Claribel made every effort to sustain close relations with the Steins, paying frequent visits to 27 rue de Fleurus and maintaining a steady level of correspondence. Moreover, the Cone sisters did much to forward Stein's writing career. While Etta typed up Stein's first manuscript, *Three Lives*, Claribel kept Stein informed “as to [her] fast-growing American fame” (Cone 93-4). Yet, the relationship between the Cones and the Steins was by no means one-sided. Stein and Leo taught the Cone sisters much about the modern art world

³⁶ While scholarship dissecting the American salon tradition is sorely lacking, it is likely that the absence of a bourgeois class system freed American salons from the strict social dictums and codes of decorum that defined their Parisian equivalents.

and facilitated connections between them and famed artists like Picasso and Matisse. Even though Etta had always shown an interest in art—she began collecting Theodore Robinsons and other conservative artworks in 1898—it was through her friendship with the Steins that she learned to expand her tastes and amass the avant-garde art collection for which her and her sister are now noted. The Stein salon thus constituted a space that was both indebted and beneficial to the women that foresaw its creation.

Moreover, Stein maintained mutually beneficial and respectful relations with the select few women that were welcomed into 27 rue de Fleurus' atelier—most notably with her fellow salonières Dodge and Barney. While Hemingway characterised Dodge and Stein's friendship as the highly competitive and cutthroat "America's legendary women sweepstakes" (Letter to Janet Flanner, 388), it was more than simply a battle for prestige and fame; the two women were important allies to each other throughout the 1910s. Dodge, for example, was responsible for introducing Stein to some of her salon's most loyal habitués, including Hartley, Stieglitz, Picabia, and, Stein and Toklas' most trusted confidant, Van Vechten. In turn, Stein immortalised Dodge in her 1912 "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia," for which Dodge expressed strong gratitude. From that moment onward, Dodge made several attempts to publicise and appraise Stein's writing. She circulated the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" amongst her artist and collector friends and even wrote an article for *Arts and Decoration*, praising Stein for her ability to "impel language to induce new states of consciousness" (Luhan 27).³⁷ In *Intimate Memories*, Dodge casts herself as the impetus behind Stein's crossover appeal in the United States: "That I helped her, not into the world she already inhabited with zestful pleasure, but into this new world, is undoubtedly a fact" (Luhan 27). In spite of the implicit resentment here, the fact remains that Dodge, at one point, held the "*greatest* admiration" for Stein and wilfully aided her

³⁷ At the time of *Intimate Memories*' publication, Dodge had changed her name from Mabel Dodge to Mabel Dodge Luhan. However, for reasons of consistency, I have referred to her as Dodge throughout this chapter.

career (Letter to Stein 52). In advancing each other's reputations, Stein and Dodge emphasised the salon as a tradition rooted in sisterhood—an institution within which women supported and mentored one another.

Stein's relationship with Barney performed a similar function; it was, according to Toklas, "a long and warm friendship," one in which both women respected and endorsed each other (115). Barney, a long-time advocate of women's writing, strove to create a support network for creative women across the globe. In a 1926 letter, Barney expresses to Stein her desire to hold a series of homages to important women modernists, including one to Stein herself:

The other night 'au Caméléon' I realized how little the French 'femmes de lettres' know of the English and Americans and vice versa (orful expression—only such clichés remain!) I wish I might bring about a better 'entente,' and hope therefore to organize here this winter, and this spring, readings and presentations that will enable our mind-allies to appreciate each other. As you will see, by enclosed card, je fête à mes prochains vendredis les 2 femmes qui m'ont si aimablement et humouristiquement exposés—and 'Colette' has promised to act a scene from her 'Vagabonde' which is to appear later in a theatre in Paris. I should like to add at least one Anglo-Saxon to this first group, and thought that *you, presented by yourself* would make a good representation—and balance the French trio. Will you! Shall we? (200)

While such an event reinforces the salon's ability to form a transnational community amongst women, it also shows the extent to which Barney admired Stein's work; Barney considered Stein to be one of the most important female writers of her time, and thus wanted to provide her with the wider audience and acclaim she deserved. In a show of female solidarity, Stein—a notorious homebody—acquiesced to Barney's request.³⁸ The *Hommage to Gertrude* took place on June 3rd, 1927, giving trailblazing women like Mina Loy a venue from which to praise Stein's work.³⁹ That same year, Stein became a member of Barney's subversive Académie des Femmes, which, in opposition to the all-male Académie

³⁸ In *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein acknowledges that she was very anti-social prior to the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (32).

³⁹ Stein gives the date of the *Hommage to Gertrude* in a letter to Virgil Thomson dated 6 May 1927 (37).

Française, aimed to recognise the meaningful contributions of women to the literary world. Barney was, undoubtedly, a positive feminist influence on Stein; it was through these two salonières' relationship that Stein was able to satisfy her own self-interest while—perhaps unwittingly—advancing the greater cause of women.

2.3 Gender Dynamics in Stein's Salon-Inspired Word Portraits

Although Stein maintained positive relationships with her fellow female salonières, her overall attitudes and views on gender remained contradictory. While Stein exhibited some feminist tendencies both within her personal life and her relationships with her female habitués, her treatment of the salon 'wives' and her attempts at disassociating herself from her femaleness are unquestionably problematic. Rather than commit herself fully to the cause of women, Stein maintained an ambiguous position, all in a bid to maintain her male habitués' loyalty and, in turn, to further her career prospects. While personal correspondence and memoirs offer a useful glimpse into the bewildering gender dynamic that characterised the Stein salon, it is perhaps Stein's word portraits that provide us with the most insight into her salon's inscrutable gender politics. In her twenty years as salonière, Stein recorded her impressions of both her male and female habitués via personalised word portraits. These portraits reveal not only how Stein viewed her habitués' form of gender expression, but also how she approached gender politics via the salon more generally. Similar to the salon that inspired them, Stein's word portraits express conflicting stances on gender norms and the status of women. They undermine patriarchal modes of thought and language, while simultaneously perpetuating damaging gender tropes—namely, that women are defined by their domestic surroundings. Yet, as Judith Butler iterates, the most powerful mode of resistance can emerge from within the oppressive structure (*Bodies* 123); confirming this, Stein's word portraits engage with patriarchal discourse not to legitimise it, but to dismantle it. This is evidenced in the way Stein uses her

portraits to reflect and celebrate 27 rue de Fleurus' collaborative ethos. She rejects the traditional sexual hierarchy, opting for a worldview in which all individuals—regardless of their sex or gender—both influence and are constituted by others. While Stein derived creative inspiration from her habitués,⁴⁰ she posited her portraits as central to her habitués' identity construction: she figured herself as her subjects' creator and, by extension, their creative mother. For all their collaborative tendencies, though, Stein's word portraits ultimately perform the same function as her salon—they are the arbiters of her *gloire*, her legacy. Stein renders her subjects extraneous, transforming their portraits into a reflection on her own creative talent. To borrow from Ulla Haselstein, "all of [Stein's] portraits are self-portraits, as well" (732).

Yet, Stein was fully cognisant of both the narcissistic and collaborative foundations upon which her word portraits were built. On the one hand, Stein saw literary portraiture as a medium through which she could prove her innate genius and satisfy her own creative desires. As she iterates in her *Lectures in America* series (1934-5), Stein "wrote portraits knowing that each one is themselves inside them and something about them perhaps everything about them will tell some one all about that thing all about what is themselves inside them and I was then hoping completely hoping that I was that one the one who would tell that thing" ("Portraits" 172-3). Stein believed that only she—with her extensive knowledge of human (i.e. bottom) nature—would be able to reveal to her habitués who they truly were; she thus figured herself not only as the catalyst for others' self-actualisation, but—more grandiosely—as their creator. In composing word portraits, Stein also precipitated her own process of self-discovery and self-fulfilment: "I must find out how I by the thing moving excitedly inside in me can make a portrait of them" ("Portraits" 183). In order to reveal the core of her subject's being, then, Stein needed to become more

⁴⁰ For a detailed discussion of how the salon and its habitués influenced Stein's unique fragmentary poetics of surface, see DeKoven, "Gertrude Stein and Modern Painting: Beyond Cubism"; Fitz, "Gertrude Stein and Picasso: The Language of Surfaces"; and Hoffman, "Gertrude Stein's 'Portraits.'"

intimately acquainted with her self. The portraitist and the subject are thus mutually constituted and the word portrait, in turn, resembles a collaborative exercise in identity construction. Stein needed her subjects as much as they needed her, as is evidenced through the dialogic nature of her writing process. In order to uncover the “rhythm” of an individual’s personality, Stein assumed that both talking and listening to the individual within the salon space were paramount (“Portraits” 174-5); looking, too, “could not be entirely left out” (“Portraits” 188). It was through these interpersonal exchanges in the salon space—these collaborations—that Stein was later able to construct a portrait from without.

Stein’s writing reflected her salon’s collaborative ethos, but in ways that were simultaneously detrimental and beneficial to the status of women. On the one hand, Stein positioned her male habitués as the wellspring of her creative inspiration; they served both as the primary focus of her word portraits and as the source of her disjointed and repetitive poetics. In the March 1913 volume of *Arts and Decoration*, Dodge describes how Stein consciously modelled her writing style after her male habitués’ Cubist and Post-Expressionist leanings: “In a large studio in Paris, hung with paintings by Renoir, Matisse and Picasso, Gertrude Stein is doing with words what Picasso is doing with paint. She is impelling language to induce new states of consciousness, and in doing so language becomes with her a creative art rather than a mirror of history” (Luhan 27). While Dodge invokes “Renoir, Matisse and Picasso” as Stein’s main influences here, thus reiterating the myth of male genius, she also positions Stein as their equal. Dodge proposes that Stein used Picasso as a stepping-stone towards the realisation of her own “creative art.” In other words, Stein did not simply copy her male habitués’ work, but rather transformed it into something entirely her own. While indebted to her male habitués to a certain degree, Stein also drew much inspiration from her female habitués and acquaintances—just not as explicitly. She focused many of her salon-inspired works on women, including word

portraits of habitués Dodge, Florence Blood, Mildred Aldrich, Ethel Mars, and Maud Hunt Squire, and most notably, her deceptively titled *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Stein used the written word to not only immortalise these women (and, in the case of *The Autobiography*, herself), but also to establish the female experience as one of value and purpose. Marianne DeKoven posits that interiority—“a privacy located mainly within domesticity but retrieved from its oppression of women—remains her central preoccupation” (“Woolf” 193); Stein strove to turn the domestic sphere—and its associated femininity—into an aesthetic and meaningful entity. While scholars like Gubar criticise how Stein exploits the highly domestic, feminised voice for her own self-promotion,⁴¹ its intention to give voice to the voiceless whilst simultaneously interrogating the supremacy of patriarchal language can be seen as a feminist form of subversion. Stein viewed English grammar as something that “any child thirteen years old properly taught” could master, and thus saw no point in adhering to its rules (“Gradual” 249). Within the domestic space of her salon, Stein found the inspiration to develop her own language—what Hélène Cixous might refer to as her “écriture féminine.”

In addition to her experimentation with language, Stein challenged conventional understandings of the portrait form through her salon-inspired literary portraiture. Unlike traditional portraitists, Stein veered away from representing her subjects in a clear, mimetic fashion, aiming instead for a non-representational and seemingly redundant form of description. Rather than invoke her subjects directly, Stein alluded to them through “a continuous succession of the statement of what that person was until [she] had not many things but one thing” (“Portraits” 176-7). This was not however a practice in mere repetition, for each time that Stein reiterated a statement in a portrait, “there was a difference”—a difference that, while perhaps not discernible upon first glance, could

⁴¹ Gubar claims that Stein’s co-option of Toklas’s voice in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is intrinsically linked to the salonière’s broader cross-dressing project, claiming that “Stein had overtly adopted feminine Alice’s voice in order to portray herself as a ‘great man’” (494).

transform the statement's meaning entirely ("Portraits" 177). According to Judith Butler, "the force of repetition in language may be the paradoxical condition by which a certain agency [...] is derived from the *impossibility* of choice" (*Bodies* 123-4). Read through this theoretical lens, Stein's use of repetition becomes less of an oppressive ideological tool and more of a medium for feminist subversion. In her repetition of difference, Stein is able to overcome the limitations of patriarchal language and grant herself agency. She also accomplishes this through her aversion to nouns and the process of naming more generally. In her "Poetry and Grammar" lecture, Stein expresses her distaste for nouns and their relative futility: "A noun is a name of anything, why after a thing is named write about it. A name is adequate or it is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it, if it is not then calling it by its name does no good" (209-10). She believed that as one "feel[s] what is inside that thing," there is no longer the need to "call it by the name by which it is known" ("Poetry" 210). For Stein, the name can never be an accurate representation of the thing—it is arbitrary, impersonal, and emotionally distant.⁴² Instead of relying on names to portray her subjects, then, Stein tried to articulate what it was that made her subjects unique—or, more simply put, human. In this way, she presaged feminist theorist Hélène Cixous, who advises to "be wary of names; they are nothing but social tools, rigid concepts, little cages of meaning assigned, as you know, to keep us from getting mixed up with each other, without which the Society of Cacapitalist Siphoning would collapse" ("Coming" 49). Stein's experiments with naming and repetition can thus be interpreted, as Julie Goodspeed-Chadwick claims, as "an unintended feminist project" which sees strictly defined categories and terms—especially those involving gender—unravel (9).

This is particularly evident in two of Stein's earliest word portraits: "Matisse" (1911) and "Picasso" (1911). In "Matisse," Stein works to destabilise the notion of

⁴² This indifference to names provides some explanation as to why Stein paid little attention to her guests' response to her question "de la part de qui venez-vous"—who sent you?—at her salon's entrance.

certainty, whilst also denaturalising patriarchal associations of greatness with maleness. As the portrait's opening sentence demonstrates, Stein accomplishes this primarily through her unique repetition of difference and use of neuter pronouns:

One was quite certain that for a long part of his being one being living he had been trying to be certain that he was wrong in doing what he was doing and then when he could not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing, when he had completely convinced himself that he would not come to be certain that he had been wrong in doing what he had been doing he was really certain then that he was a great one and he certainly was a great one. (139)

While the subject here is clearly male (as is indicated through the pronoun “he”), Stein attempts to render his maleness irrelevant. She conflates “his being” with “one being living,” thereby erasing his sexual difference and, in turn, transforming his experience into a universal “one.” She refers to him as “a great one” rather than “a great man,” for to do so would be to equate his sex with his exceptionality. Yet, what makes Matisse exceptional is unclear—he is “doing” something, but Stein never makes explicit what that something is; it is ultimately left up to the reader’s interpretation. Merrill Cole argues that unlike her male contemporaries, Stein refuses to “arrest and demarcate meanings” (84). In fact, Aidan Thompson credits Stein with “undo[ing] the assumption that codes of reading and writing produce stable (correct or true) meaning, unaffected by readers, and instead, demonstrates that all meaning whether in her writing or newspaper prose is subject to reader interpretation” (144). As part of this democratisation of meaning, Stein also interrogates the assumed stability and trustworthiness behind claims of fixed certainty. Throughout the portrait, Matisse must repeatedly “convince himself” of how certain he is regarding his actions and his reputation. His levels of certainty are subjective and turbulent at best, and thus alert the reader to practise scepticism in response to truth claims. At the same time, the portrait interrogates such claims so as to invoke the collaborative ethos of 27 rue de Fleurus. Matisse comes to the conclusion “that he would always be one being suffering [...and] expressing something being struggling” through conversing with those “some who

listened to him” (140). It is in interacting with others—particularly in the collaborative space of the salon from which his career sprang—that Matisse is able to understand himself and his work; even the method in which Stein describes him—as a sum of others’ opinions—reveals the extent to which he is the product of collaboration.

Written in the same year as “Matisse,” “Picasso” can—and should—be read as a companion piece to the aforementioned portrait. In the first paragraph of “Picasso,” Stein establishes similar preoccupations with gender and claims at certainty: “One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming” (142). Here, Stein offers no indication as to her subject’s gender; as “one,” Picasso becomes a neuter subject. She describes this “one” through the eyes of others, drawing attention to the ways in which certainty is mutable and subjective. While some were “certainly following” Picasso, others were merely “following” him; some found him “charming,” whereas others found him “certainly completely charming.” Rather than encouraging her readers to determine which of these claims is true, Stein pushes them towards making their own opinions by measuring such claims against each other and synthesising them in turn. As with “Matisse,” Stein also shrouds the nature of Picasso’s work in ambiguity: “the one they were then following was one bringing out of himself then something that coming to be a heavy thing, a solid thing and a complete thing” (142). While it is altogether unclear what this “thing” may be, it is important to note the very masculine terms by which it is described: “heavy,” “solid,” “complete.” Although such firm masculine language seems hyperbolic when used in relation to an undefined, vague “thing,” perhaps that is precisely Stein’s aim: to undermine the presumed pre-eminence of masculinity by equating it with its perceived opposite. As the portrait progresses, Stein continues to chip away at masculinity’s assumed superiority. She de genders the notion of

genius whilst also destabilising Picasso's own gender identity: "This one was one and always there was something coming out of this one and always there had been something coming out of this one" (142). As before, Stein refers to Picasso in neuter terms; his ability to always have "something coming out of [him]" is thus a result not of his sex, but of his individual talent. Creativity and maleness are not intrinsically linked. Moreover, the phrase "this one was one" suggests a kind of harmony within Picasso—perhaps a harmony of masculinity and femininity. Alternatively, it can also attest to Picasso's singularity; yet, this seems less likely given the implied symbiotic relationship between Picasso's work and his followers: "This one was one going on working. This one was one whom some were following. This one was one who was working" (142).⁴³ The positioning of these almost identical sentences evokes a cause-effect relationship between being followed and being able to work. It appears that without his followers—his collaborators—Picasso would not be able to continue with his work. In making such deductions, Stein foregrounds the pivotal role that both she and her salon played in Picasso's productivity and success. Stein was, after all, one of Picasso's first followers; she tirelessly defended his works and philosophies to her brother Leo and even paid homage to them in her own experimental writings. Moreover, with multiple of his works adorning its walls, the Stein salon expanded Picasso's audience, giving him the followers necessary to further his career and keep him inspired.

While Stein opts for neuter pronouns and denaturalises the concept of male genius in both "Matisse" and "Picasso," she does not make gender entirely irrelevant. Stein's status as a female writer is incredibly important for discerning these portraits' meaning, especially when one considers the authority position she assumes in regards to not only Matisse's and Picasso's character, but also their art. In reading the two portraits alongside

⁴³ This emphasis on Picasso being "one who was working" mirrors Picasso's own early letters to Stein and Leo, in which he constantly reiterates how much he is working (see pp. 14, 17, 33, and 71 of *Correspondence: Pablo Picasso, Gertrude Stein* for examples of this).

each other, it becomes clear that Stein did not consider Matisse as much of a natural talent as Picasso. Stein refers to Picasso as “one who had been all his living had been one having something coming out of him” (142). Otherwise put, Stein depicts Picasso as an innately artistic person; art was as intrinsic to his body as breathing, for he was always “needing to be working” (143). Conversely, Stein describes Matisse’s artistic practice as a matter of great “struggling” and self-doubt (139-40); art making is by no means a natural state of being for him. This is further evidenced in a 1934 audio recording of Stein’s reading of “Matisse,” in which Stein places hard emphases on words that connote judgment, such as “wrong” and “trying.” Yet, Stein also casts doubt on Picasso’s ability to turn his raw talent into something productive. She concludes the portrait on a somewhat dubious note, claiming that Picasso “was not ever completely working” (143). It is thus left unclear as to whether Picasso will ever be able to develop the work ethic required to fulfil his artistic promise. Stein’s bold judgments of men—particularly men lauded for their genius and excellence—was remarkably subversive given her entrenchment in a modernist art and literary scene dominated by male “geniuses.” As Natalya Lusty notes in her introduction to *Modernism and Masculinity*, “the culture and artworks of modernism emerged from the flux of irreconcilable social energies” (7). As the Great War facilitated massive shifts in gendered codes of behaviour and divisions of labour, general anxieties over the feminisation of culture began to emerge. As a result, male modernist writers like Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot formulated the process of creative innovation—the ability to “make it new”—as a masculine venture, mostly inaccessible to or unachievable for their female peers (Lusty 8-9). Thus, by scrutinising Matisse and Picasso’s abilities, Stein questions their ability to “make it new” and reclaims production as a potentially feminine enterprise; she uses her literary portraiture and her salon to govern and judge their success, and in doing so, she positions herself as their superior.

In 1923, Stein returned to the subject of Picasso for another word portrait, entitled “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso.” Similar to its 1911 predecessor, “If I Told Him” revels in ambiguity, lending itself to myriad reader interpretations from its opening lines: “If I told him would he like it. Would he like it if I told him. / Would he like it would Napoleon would Napoleon would would he like it” (464). Stein begins the portrait with an apparent set of questions; yet, the lack of interrogation points lends a sense of ambiguity and a rhetorical edge to the queries posed. Not only is it uncertain what Stein plans to tell Picasso, but it is also questionable whether she even cares about Picasso’s reaction to what she has to say; she is more concerned with the representation of her own stream of consciousness. The portrait thus becomes more about Stein’s writing process than its professed subject. As a result, it is difficult to discern the motives behind Stein’s repeated references to Napoleon here. Is it a mere diversion tactic, aimed at removing Picasso even further from the portrait’s line of focus so that Stein can assume centre stage? Or, is it meant to invoke a direct comparison between the Cubist painter and the 19th-century French emperor, which sees both being ridiculed for their egotism? According to Aidan Thompson, “readers are left to connect the names of the two men on their own [...and thus] actively participate in the meaning making process, which in turn requires thinking that is not overwhelmed by automatic patterns that resort to hierarchical mechanisms”—patriarchy being one such mechanism (146). Stein deliberately leaves the relationship between Picasso and Napoleon indeterminate, so as to encourage more critical and individualistic thinking from her readers—the kind of thinking that could lead to subversive political action. Linda Voris argues that above all, Stein’s oblique pairing of Picasso and Napoleon is meant to interrogate “an epistemology of ‘knower’ and ‘known,’ and on the dualism of subjects and objects that is predicated in propositions” (178). Since such dualistic modes of thought are often gendered, we can also interpret this move as a feminist form of subversion—even if inadvertent on Stein’s part.

“If I Told Him” makes no attempt to reify ideas of common knowledge or universal truths; it makes mention of static, widely accepted concepts, only to dismantle them piece-by-piece. Throughout the portrait, Stein exhibits a strong preoccupation with established portrait-making practice. Unlike classical portraitists, who aimed to reflect their subjects as closely as possible, Stein celebrated a non-representational mode of portraiture—one in which words replaced paint to formulate the sense of a person through montage and layering. In “If I Told Him,” she lampoons traditional portraiture’s valuation of “exact resemblance,” deeming such a goal both impossible to achieve and unfounded: “Exact resemblance. To exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact as a resemblance, exactly as resembling, exactly resembling, exactly in resemblance, exactly a resemblance, exactly and resemblance. For this is so. Because” (464). While Stein invokes the notion of “exact resemblance” multiple times here, she varies the term with each repetition—“exact as a resemblance,” “exactly as resembling,” “exactly in resemblance,” etc.—and in doing so, demonstrates how a resemblance will never be able to capture its subject exactly. There will always be some variance, no matter how slight. Even those who argue for exact resemblance in portraiture are unable to defend their reasoning for it; they can only resort to childish retorts and empty logic, equivalent to the adolescent “Because I said so.” Exact resemblance is therefore not inherent to portraiture, but rather an arbitrary norm passed down by those who govern the art world. Portraitists are told “to actively repeat at all, now actively repeat at all,” even though such attempts at direct representation can never fully be realised (464). Stein highlights this folly of exact resemblance through her experiments in both orthographic and homophonic word play. Throughout “If I Told Him,” Stein creates sequences of sentence fragments that mirror each other in terms of appearance and sound, but differ greatly in terms of their actual meaning: “As presently. / As exactitude. / As trains / Has trains. / Has trains. / As trains” (465). While “as trains” and “has trains” resemble each other in both pronunciation and orthography, their

meanings are completely disparate; one phrase references objects that bear a likeness to a train, whereas the other indicates the possession of an actual train. The likeness and the original are not the same thing, and nor—Stein would argue—should they be. “If I Told Him” thus becomes an exhortation on the power of relativity—a power which governs not only Stein’s literary portraiture, but also her salon. As words gain their power and their meaning through their relation to other words, the salonière and her habitués gain their power—their success, their reputation—through their proximity to the salon network.

Stein extends her preoccupation with exact resemblance to the realm of gender politics, focusing specifically on the perceived power differential between kings and queens. In an oft-cited passage from “If I Told Him,” Stein sets up an elaborate metaphor, which compares queens to shutters: “Shutters shut and open so do queens. Shutters shut and shutters and so shutters shut and shutters and so and so shutters and so shutters shut and so shutters shut and shutters and so” (464). Stein’s use of the word “shutters” is deliberately ambiguous here; whether it refers to the mechanism on a camera lens or to the window covering is more or less irrelevant. In either case, “shutters” are tied to vision and exposure; they can allow light in or block it out, depending on the user’s needs. Yet, it is not entirely clear what relevance—if any—this bears on queens. When interpreted literally, queens emerge as the bearers of light—the light by which their kings can see and rule. In other words, the queens’ role is a supporting one; they are only there to empower their husbands. There are however other ways in which we can interpret queens as shutters, most crudely in terms of their reproductive function. In royal marriages, queens held very little power or significance outside of their ability to produce an heir to the throne. While giving birth, not only would the queen’s vagina expand and contract—like a camera shutter regulating its aperture—but it would also bring forth a likeness of the subject, a positive image of the king and queen. This does not, however, imply that the queen can “not have the power as kings (or genius) to make something really new, that is a resemblance with a

difference,” as Thompson asserts (148). Stein insists throughout “If I Told Him” that there is, after all, no such thing as exact resemblance: the copy will always be a variant of its subject, not its mirror image. The queen emerges as the king’s superior, for it is she that holds the power to not only extend the throne’s legacy, but also to truly create something new. In this way, the portrait mirrors Stein’s own positioning within her salon on both a literal and metaphorical level. In the salon, Stein would sit queen-like on her armchair throne, waiting for her loyal subjects to come to her. Like the queens of “If I Told Him,” she is perceived as her male peers’ inferior and yet she is the real possessor of power, able to ensure—or hamper—these men’s success and legacy.

Much of “If I Told Him” hinges on the interrogation, if not outright subversion, of the established sexual hierarchy. The portrait creates a gender dynamic similar to that of 27 rue de Fleurus, in that Stein casts herself as her male peers’ superior. As Picasso’s “judge,” she renders him a mere “resemblance to [Napoleon]. / Who comes first” (464); Picasso is not only derivative, but also unjustifiably egotistical. While L.T. Fitz reads “If I Told Him” as “a tribute” to Picasso (236), it seems more likely that Stein intended the portrait as a check on Picasso’s ego—a terse reminder of his proper (inferior) place. In her book *Passionate Collaborations*, Karin Cope hints at such a possibility when she questions “the extent to which Stein, too, may be said, perhaps, to *make* Picasso” (45). Picasso may have inspired Stein’s later androgyny with his seemingly prophetic *Portrait of Gertrude Stein* (1905-6), but it was ultimately Stein (and her brother Leo) that made Picasso into a household name. Stein, thus critical of Picasso’s inflated sense of self, derides him and his masculine genius: “He he he he and he and he and and he and he and he and and as and as he and as he and he. He is and as he is, and as he is and he is, he is and as he and he and as he is and he and he and he and and he and he” (465). With its laughter-like repetition of “he,”⁴⁴ this passage not only pokes fun at Picasso, but the patriarchy more generally. “He”—the

⁴⁴ A 1934 audio recording of Stein reading “If I Told Him” confirm its laughter-like cadence.

patriarch, the idealised male—is transformed from an arbiter of fear and oppression into a catalyst for laughter—an act which Cixous conflates with the female body and feminist action. In her 1975 essay “The Laugh of the Medusa,” Cixous repurposes the misogynistic myth of Medusa⁴⁵ in order to suggest that laughter—not death—is the most powerful tool within a woman’s possession: “You only have to look at the Medusa straight on to see her. And she’s not deadly. She’s beautiful and she’s laughing” (38). As both a mode of nourishment and self-expression for women, the laugh poses a greater threat to a man than death (Cixous, “Laugh” 34). It can signify a woman’s rebirth, a coming into her own—or to use Cixous’ precise terms, a “coming to writing” (“Coming” 41). In this sense, the portrait’s “he he he he” provides an alternative way of reading Stein’s presence as both the subject and emitter of laughter. While Anderson remembers Stein’s laughter as a sign of her “health and strength,” it can also be read as a form of rebellion—of Stein returning the derisive “guffaws of the general” public in a sign of her disaffectedness and perseverance (White 9, 16). Coincidentally, Stein follows up her bout of subversive laughter with an assertion of her supremacy: “One. / I land. / Two. / I land. / Three. / The land. / Three / The land. / Three / The land. / Two / I land. / Two / I land. / One / I land. / Two / I land. / As a so” (466). Capable of landing her goal of *gloire*, Stein does what “they [Picasso and Napoleon] cannot” (466). Like an “a so”—a homophone for the French term for bird (*oiseau*)—she can reach great heights, but land safely time and time again; Stein is, in her eyes, Picasso and Napoleon’s—and perhaps all men’s—superior.⁴⁶

Stein’s word portraits are never truly about their professed subjects, but rather revolve around Stein’s own genius and self-promotion. This is particularly true of her 1923 portrait, “He and They, Hemingway.” Within the portrait’s opening lines, Stein displaces

⁴⁵ According to Greek mythology, Medusa was a monstrous woman who could turn men into stone simply through making eye contact with them.

⁴⁶ The image of the *oiseau* here parallels Florine Stettheimer’s trope of the flutterby—a fictional winged insect that she invokes throughout her portraits and poetry to denote her desires for artistic superiority and glory.

Hemingway as subject, turning her focus towards her own writing process: “Among and then young. / Not ninety-three. / Not Lucretia Borgia. / Not in or on a building. / Not a crime not in the time. / Not by this time. / Not in the way” (450). While many readers will attempt to find some sort of correlation between these lines and Hemingway’s biography, they will come up short. Other than a possible (oblique) reference to Hemingway’s book *In Our Time*, these lines appear to bear no relevance to the modernist writer’s life. Instead, they describe the cover of a French schoolchildren’s book—otherwise known as a *cahier*—within which Stein originally scribbled the portrait. Wendy Steiner, Ulla Dydo, and Franziska Gygax have established that Stein’s *cahier*, which belonged to a series on youth educators, “shows Victor Hugo as the *éducateur* surrounded by illustrations from four of his works, *Quatre-vingt treize*, *Lucrèce Borgia*, *Les châtiments*, and *Notre-Dame de Paris*” (Gygax 220). With this knowledge, the inspiration behind the portrait’s opening lines becomes clear and “He and They, Hemingway” emerges primarily as a love letter to Stein’s writing process—not Hemingway’s.

Even without this knowledge, though, the portrait’s opening lines still work to negate Hemingway’s importance—or, at the very least, his machismo. In reading for a likeness of the famed modernist writer, the opening lines appear as an apophastic form of description, which characterise Hemingway in the negative by revealing what he was not. Yet, in doing so, Hemingway becomes inexorably linked to his proposed opposites. While most of these linkages prove to be inconsequential, the Lucretia Borgia association feminises Hemingway, casting doubt on his hypermasculine image. Lucretia Borgia represents the ultimate in femininity; beautiful and alluring, she was—according to popular accounts—the 15th-century’s equivalent of the *femme fatale*. To connect Hemingway to such an embodiment of feminine charm and sin—even if it is via apophasis—serves to undermine not only his perceived maleness, but also his overall sense of identity. Throughout the portrait, Stein gradually destabilises Hemingway’s status as a concrete

subject; she refers to him directly only once, often opting to invoke him obliquely via various plays on his name, including “not in the way,” “on their way,” and “head away” (450). All of these instances of wordplay constitute a form of effacement for Hemingway—he is either rendered negatively (as is certainly the case with “not in the way”) or divested of his preferred epithet, “Hem.” As Gygax asserts, “not only is Hemingway’s name taken apart [...] but Hemingway as the subject of this portrait also gradually disappears” (220). While this may be Stein’s way of asserting herself as the portrait’s central focus, it can also be read as a liberating gesture towards her subject. By freeing Hemingway from his name—that “little cage of meaning,” as Cixous so eloquently describes it (“Coming” 49)—Stein allows him to defy others’ expectations and to become a more fluid, dynamic subject.

“He and They, Hemingway” is a deconstructive exercise for Stein; not only does she destabilise Hemingway as subject, but she also interrogates the logic that lies behind binary modes of thinking. She muddies the line between civilisation and savagery, suggesting that neither category may be as clear-cut nor mutually exclusive as they may seem: “A head is what every one not in the north of Australia returns for that. In English we know. And is it to their credit that they have nearly finished and claimed, is there any memorial of the failure of civilization to cope with extreme and extremely well begun, to cope with extreme savagedom” (450). Here, the north of Australia represents “extreme savagedom” and “the failure of civilization,” in that it was (and still is) home to a predominantly Aboriginal population and culture. In opposition to the cannibalistic practices of this savage Other, the white European man considers himself superior in knowledge and morality: “In English we know.” Yet, the last sentence makes it unclear as to whether such binaries—self versus other, civilised versus savage—are to be trusted. If “they” refers to the Aboriginal peoples of northern Australia, then it could be the English coloniser who represents “extreme savagedom”; it is thus to the Aboriginals’ “credit” that

they have been able to ward off the coloniser's attempts to 'enlighten' them. Conversely, if "they" refers to the coloniser, then the question still remains as to whether the act of conquering is as commendable as colonial discourse suggests: "is it to [the coloniser's] credit" that they can usurp a people of their culture and their land? Although this question appears irrelevant to our understanding of Hemingway, its implications for binary thinking are not. The portrait's binarial title leads us to conceive of Hemingway in opposition to an undefined "they"; perhaps he, like the English coloniser, viewed himself as superior to his peers. Yet, it is important to note that "He and They" is, following a comma, proceeded by "Hemingway." The opposition between he and they becomes moot, as both come together to produce Hemingway. In this sense, then, the portrait reiterates the collaborative ethos of 27 rue de Fleurus; it demonstrates that Hemingway's career was not solely the product of his individual genius, but also the result of others' input—especially Stein's.

Both in the portrait and her salon, Stein established herself as a key contributor to Hemingway's success: she viewed herself as his superior, his mentor, and his judge. While Stein provided Hemingway with invaluable writing advice during their personal interactions, she appears to assume a more distant, critical role in "He and They, Hemingway." According to Gygas, "the lines that follow the short vertical ones" at the portrait's outset can be interpreted "as a comment on Hemingway's inability to really create avant-garde literature" (221): "On their way and to head away. A head any way" (450). At first glance, these lines seem rather innocuous—serving as a possible allusion to Hemingway's upcoming move to Canada, where he would continue reporting for the *Toronto Star*. Yet, their causticity lies in their ambiguity. The first sentence could be a harmless reference to Hemingway's relocation, or it could be a condemnation, wherein Stein faults Hemingway for "head[ing] away" just as his literary career begins to show promise. Similarly, the second sentence offers itself up to myriad interpretations, ranging in tone from regretful to condescending. On the one hand, Stein could be lamenting

Hemingway's decision to relinquish his dreams of becoming a fiction writer, deeming that he was "ahead anyway" in terms of innate talent. Alternatively, Stein could be chiding Hemingway for sacrificing his literary career just to get ahead financially. Or, perhaps she doubts Hemingway's abilities entirely, labelling him "a[n empty] head any way." Yet, regardless of how these lines are interpreted, Stein emerges as Hemingway's superior. She considers herself a valid judge of his character and his art, highlighting her own role—as both salonière and literary portraitist—in cultivating his career and subsequent success.

In her portraits of her female habitués, Stein advances a more subtle subversion of gendered stereotypes. While many of her female-centric word portraits appear to condone patriarchal norms—particularly those that equate femininity with domesticity—Stein invokes such tropes in order to expose their problematic nature. This is readily apparent in the 1912 "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia," in which Stein describes Dodge solely in relation to her domestic surroundings. From the portrait's outset, Stein focuses primarily on Dodge's Florentine home, the Villa Curonia, and its atmosphere, rather than on the woman who maintained it:

The days are wonderful and the nights are wonderful and the life is pleasant.

Bargaining is something and there is not that success. The intention is what if application has that accident results reappearing. They did not darken. That was not an adulteration. (527)

At first, the portrait establishes life at the Villa Curonia—and by extension, the life of its owner—as carefree and idealistic; yet, the proceeding lines completely undermine this romantic depiction through their use of apophasis. Stein describes the Villa Curonia by revealing what it is not, rendering the paradisiacal atmosphere gloomy and foreboding. Its reputation "darken[s]," as it becomes associated with "accident[s]," failure ("not that success"), and the illegal activity of "adulteration."⁴⁷ As the portrait proceeds, Stein continues to problematise the Villa Curonia's front of perfection. While it appears to be a

⁴⁷ Adulteration is the process of adding illegal substances to other substances, such as food.

place of “desire,” Stein asserts that “there is no pleasure and the place is filling the only space that is placed where all the piling is not adjoining” (530). The Villa Curonia is not nearly as “wonderful” or as “pleasant” as it seems and nor, it can be assumed, is Dodge’s life there (527). According to the portrait, then, Dodge can be best discerned both within and through her domestic context; her home(making) dictates her happiness and sense of fulfilment. While this serves to naturalise the patriarchal link between femininity and domesticity, it is also a subversive move on Stein’s part. Ultimately, Stein capitalises on Dodge’s connection to her villa in order to reject the myth that domesticity equates to happiness for women; although women may be understood via their domestic environs, that does not necessarily mean they are well suited to them. Yet, the portrait—along with Stein’s other portraits of women writers and artists—also opens up the creative possibilities of the domestic sphere, in that Stein draws inspiration from the domestic environs of both her salon and Dodge’s own experience to compose it. For Stein, the domestic thus presents both a form of entrapment and a space for her own self-promotion and realisation as a writer.

The “Portrait of Mabel Dodge” appears in many ways to be a feminist text. It upholds many of the qualities that Cixous associates with *écriture féminine*, including a rejection of entrenched grammatical rules and a preoccupation with the (creative) female body’s functions. Specifically, the portrait foregrounds the breath as a key means of grasping both the Villa Curonia’s atmosphere and, in turn, Dodge’s personal character: “So much breathing has not the same place when there is that much beginning. So much breathing has not the same place when the ending is lessening. So much breathing has the same place and there must not be so much suggestion. There can be there the habit that there is if there is no need of resting. The absence is not alternative” (527). Here, Stein equates the breath with a “habit”; it is both a necessity—its complete “absence is not alternative”—and a sign of productivity. Not overly important “when there is that much

beginning” nor “when the ending is lessening,” the breath gains in intensity and purpose during the mid-stages of some unidentified process—arguably, a creative process. Cixous defines *écriture féminine* as a kind of eruption from the female body, which, if suppressed, will break down the body from within (“Coming” 10). For Cixous, this eruption takes the form of the breath; breathing thus constitutes a form of creative expression for women and, in turn, is vital to their bodily and spiritual survival (“Coming” 10). The “Portrait of Mabel Dodge” emphasises this connection between the breath and female expression as a means of highlighting what Stein views as Dodge’s personal suppression and unhappiness. For Dodge, “there is no exhalation” within the Villa Curonia (530); she cannot live nor express herself freely there, and thus, her body and soul are slowly disintegrating.⁴⁸ In this sense, then, the portrait displaces the male as the locus of all meaningful forms of expression, instead advocating for the nourishment and embracement of female creativity—an act from which Stein herself could greatly benefit.

In her portrait of Dodge, Stein reflects the contradictory gender dynamics of her salon by simultaneously cycling through rejections and affirmations of patriarchal authority. On the one hand, Stein refuses to focus on Dodge’s role as a mother, referring to it in a rather oblique manner: “The toy that is not round has to be found and looking is not straining such relation” (530). The toy’s presence—along with the childish internal rhyme here of “round” and “found”—are the only hints given as to the existence of Dodge’s son John. This is a subversive move on Stein’s part; she locates Dodge’s worth outside of motherhood, in spite of patriarchal society’s assertion that women are valuable only in terms of their ability to birth and mother (Millet 26). Moreover, in spite of the period’s restrictions on and ignorance of female sexuality, Stein depicts Dodge as a sexual being. As Marie Stopes notes in her 1918 marital advice book, *Married Love*, the early 20th century was—in spite of all its technological and scientific advances—still very regressive in its

⁴⁸ It is important to note that during her time at the Villa Curonia, Dodge attempted to commit suicide twice.

treatment of female sexuality: women were kept ignorant of their bodies and their sexual function out of “the idea that woman is lowered by sex intercourse” (24). While Stopes was one of the first scientists to attempt to normalise female sexual desire and educate women about their bodies, she still reflects her society’s heteronormative dictums on sex—that sex is to be reserved for a loving husband and wife. However, Stein renounces such notions, alluding to Dodge’s passionate affair with her son’s tutor: “A sap that is that adaptation is the drinking that is not increasing. There can be that lack of quivering. That does not originate every invitation. There is not wedding introduction. There is not all that filling” (528). Stein associates Dodge with sexualised language, like “quivering” and “filling,” in order to depict her as a woman with sexual needs; she does not condemn Dodge for this, nor does she suggest that Dodge must only fulfil these needs with her husband—there is, after all, no need for that “wedding introduction.” Sexuality is not a source of shame for Dodge, but rather a cause for joy: “Laughing is not evaporating. There can be the climax” (529). For Dodge, the laugh presents an opportunity for subversion, in that it undermines the patriarchal authority that both governs Dodge’s sexuality and silences her voice. Yet, the portrait simultaneously displaces Dodge as its central focus in favour of a seemingly unimportant man. It never refers to Dodge by name or by female pronoun, but it does make clear that “there has been William” at one point (529). It is not clear who this William is, nor whether he bears any importance to Dodge’s life. His identification though is enough to grant him more significance than the portrait’s professed female subject. Given how Stein felt about names, however, it is possible that William’s presence here is not intended as a reassertion of patriarchal authority. Instead, it could be an indication of William’s inadequacy and unimportance in relation to Dodge; as Stein states, “a name is adequate or it is not. If it is adequate then why go on calling it, if it is not then calling it by its name does no good” (209-10). By naming William and not Dodge, then, Stein suggests that Dodge, unlike William, is more than her name.

Similar to the “Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia,” “A Portrait of F.B.” (1913) describes its female subject, painter Florence Blood, mostly in domestic—specifically, culinary—terms. While the portrait rarely mentions Blood’s artistry, it goes to great lengths to capture the exact and repetitive nature of Blood’s domestic regimen: “Return after the garden, remain after the tea, single out a timepiece, so hatly and so true there is neither more to do. All the time is the past and piece meal is that meal and a little chicken is a liver, and solitude is enough” (176). Blood’s day-to-day life appears rote and somewhat empty; her mundane tasks, along with her “solitude,” are all that sustain her—her “piece meal is that meal,” the source of her satiation. As the portrait progresses, Stein increasingly employs gustatory language to get to the heart of Blood’s character. While this language serves to strengthen the patriarchal links between femininity and domesticity, it also works to subvert the trope of the ineffectual and weak female. Stein mysteriously associates Blood with “the distaste of pink pepper” (177)—an analogy that Blood herself admitted to not understanding in a June 1913 letter to Stein (80). Yet, “pink pepper” constitutes a perversion of the “sugar and spice and everything nice” of which girls—and by extension, women—are supposedly made. Its colour connotes femininity, but its spiciness makes it impossible to ignore; pink pepper, in short, contradicts traditional notions of the passive female and is thus the source of “distaste” for patriarchal society. The portrait portrays Blood as a strong woman and, in turn, problematises the domestic sphere’s perceived insignificance. At one point, Stein even masculinises Blood’s domestic activities to imbue them with more importance. Blood “bakes a table” and in doing so, transforms the feminine, supposedly frivolous act of baking into a masculine form of carpentry (177); housework evolves from a simple private matter to a meaningful act with real, concrete effects. In this way, Blood—as interpreted through Stein—affirms the theories of Beth Fowkes Tobin and Maureen Daly Goggin, which posit women’s domestic activity as “central to constructing social meanings that operate in the world beyond the

traditional prescribed (and circumscribed) boundaries occupied by women” (2); the portrait establishes that women’s work—however mundane or innocuous it may seem—is equal to men’s work in both meaning and value.

In many ways, “A Portrait of F.B.” serves as a reflection of the Stein salon’s atmosphere; it maintains a similarly contradictory stance on patriarchal gender norms, whilst also embracing a salon-like collaborative ethos. In particular, the portrait posits identity formation as a collective—rather than purely individualistic—endeavour. In attempting to uncover Blood’s true self, Stein ends up invoking her own self, as well: “A turn of the table does not mean that cups are there, it means that there is no loneliness and it means that the copy is not extreme when there is a frame” (177). While most of this sentence provides little to no insight into either the portrait’s subject or creator, its last phrase—“the copy is not extreme when there is a frame”—alludes not only to Blood’s and Stein’s most notable quirks, but also to the ways in which Stein aided Blood’s reputation. On the one hand, Blood was synonymous with “the copy,” in that most of her artworks were reproductions of fellow habitués’ works—most often, Cézanne’s. When framed, then, Blood’s work was “not extreme” or worthy of attention; it was through Stein, who refused to display art in frames, that Blood’s “cop[ies]”—her repetitions—could shine. In this sense, “A Portrait of F.B.” serves as much of an affirmation of Blood’s creative practice as it does Stein’s. Blood’s copies are reminiscent of Stein’s own repetitive poetics, in which Stein would repeat the same phrase over and over again, incorporating a slight variation each time so as to create a “continuous present” (499). Stein’s repetitive poetics, like Blood’s derivative portraits, were able to “shine” through their transcendence of time’s limits. Through articulating Blood’s character, then, Stein is able to formulate her own identities as mentor, patron, and creator—not only of literature, but also of people. In a May 1913 letter to Stein, Blood credits “A Portrait of F. B.” with causing her to rethink her entire self:

Oh! dear Miss Stein—oh! am I really like that and what—oh! what does it mean? I feel like a person who has rushed eagerly to the looking glass to see themselves with new eyes but alas alas, all the familiar landmarks have been quite swept away—eyes, mouth, hands, feet, and the rest, all gone!—I feel convinced you know me better than I do myself and if your knowledge is contained in these leaves do do give me the key. (79)

The portrait forces Blood to recognise her identity as a collaborative work in progress, which she can further develop through interactions with others—specifically Stein. Blood rescinds her autonomy, incorporating Stein as a vital component of her identity formation. In a letter dated June 21, 1913, Blood ventures so far as to state she is “quite lonely without ‘the taste of pink pepper’” (80); it is in collaboration with Stein that Blood comes to feel complete.

Although published over a decade after “Portrait of Mabel Dodge” and “A Portrait of F. B.,” “Mildred Aldrich Saturday” (1924) embraces similar themes and issues to its predecessors, including gender, deconstruction, and collaboration. It also unfolds primarily within a domestic setting—that of Aldrich’s Marne hilltop home, La Creste. However, its wartime context sets it apart, lending it not only a more grave air, but also a more urgent means for critiquing social norms and established modes of thought. While Stein rarely invokes the war directly, the portrait’s oblique title quietly makes the war’s presence—and its relevance to Mildred Aldrich—felt. The titular “Saturday” refers to the start and end dates of the First Battle of the Marne, which lasted from Saturday, September 5 to Saturday, September 12, 1914. Since Aldrich’s home overlooked the Marne River Valley, she was able to bear witness to all of the battle’s events; she even published a book of correspondence—*A Hilltop on the Marne* (1917)—detailing her experiences. The war had a profound impact on Aldrich’s life; it affected her daily comings and goings, whilst also serving as the catalyst for her most famous writings. Stein’s life and work underwent similar shifts: she abandoned her 27 rue de Fleurus home—and by extension, her salon—during the war and volunteered as a driver for the American Fund for French Wounded,

running missions in Perpignan and Nîmes from 1917 onwards. Unlike Aldrich, however, Stein was not interested in writing about the war's events. Instead, she uses it—and history's tendency to focus primarily on war's victors and losers—in “Mildred Aldrich Saturday” to both reveal and interrogate society's overwhelming preoccupation with end results. This becomes readily apparent from the portrait's opening lines: “And eggs or eggs or or eggs. Mildred Aldrich or interested in birthdays” (111). Here, Stein invokes a playful reimagining of the “Which came first: the chicken or the egg?” idiom, placing sole focus on the egg and rendering the chicken—the mother—irrelevant by default. In this allusion, Aldrich is the neglected chicken; she is the mother of Stein's creation—she serves as the inspiration for this portrait—and she is placed in opposition to “birthdays,” days on which the products of birth—rather than the deliverers—are celebrated. These lines not only critique society's celebration of the end product, then, but also its devaluation of mothers. As Harriet Scott Chessman argues, “this opening appears at first to claim an originary moment located undeniably within the female [...] however, intimates the uncertainty of such a claim” through its consistent use of “or” (113); thus, the portrait reflects how society's obsession with end results leads to a devaluation of the role of mothers—and women, more generally—in the individual's creation and development.

As the portrait progresses, Stein continues to cast doubt upon society's esteem for end results by foregrounding the stages that precede them. “Mildred Aldrich Saturday” bemoans a world in which societal reverence for outcomes results in “middle periods...[being] not described so” (113), arguing that process is, in fact, just as important as product:

Begin again.

Continually.

A history.

Not necessarily in the beginning and not necessarily in the beginning, she was not necessarily from the beginning she did not necessarily intend from the beginning to do as much as she did. (114)

Aldrich is an unfinished product, “continually” engaged in the process of reinventing herself—both on her own and others’ terms.⁴⁹ To approach Aldrich with a preconceived notion of who she is—a static image of her “from the beginning”—would be to rob her of all her nuances, her developments, and her quirks. The portrait equates Aldrich’s life with an ever-unfolding and shifting “history” and, in doing so, rejects the notion that there can ever be an end product; even history—the presumed authoritative, static account of past events—remains open to new interpretations and revisions. With its privileging of process, the portrait allocates little significance to established milestones—whether they be firsts or endpoints: “The first time. / When was the first time. / As the first time it was of no importance. / Another time as permanently and another time just as permanently” (115). At first, it is unclear as to what “the first time” refers, but it is ultimately “of no importance”; all events reoccur, leaving an indelible mark upon the individual’s life—regardless of when they happen.

This devaluation of “the first time,” however, has significant feminist implications, given the lines that immediately follow it: “Come. / Come. / Coming. Not just as permanently” (115). The portrait’s invocation of “the first time” thus appears to be a reference to Aldrich’s first sexual experience; the repetition of “come” and the acknowledgement of impermanence work in tandem to mimic a female orgasm. To claim that this “first time” is “of no importance” is to reject the patriarchal “cult of virginity” that Millett identifies (54). While women are meant to cherish their virginity and treat their defloration as a life-altering rite of passage (Millett 48), “Mildred Aldrich Saturday” suggests that sex, regardless of when it happens, amounts to the same “coming” every time. Moreover, the portrait transforms female sexuality from an issue of sin into a form of artistry, theorising a link between female orgasm and creative expression. It credits the act of “coming”—whether the act belongs to Stein or Aldrich is unclear—with its own

⁴⁹ “Mildred Aldrich Saturday” and its collaborative understanding of identity will be further discussed in this section’s forthcoming pages.

composition. Without the female's ability to "come again. And coming again," this "black and white and read all over" artefact would cease to exist (115). The portrait thus constitutes a kind of *écriture féminine*, in that Cixous states that women come to write through "the decensored relation of [themselves] to [their] sexuality, to [their] womanly being [...] her pleasures [*jouissance*]" ("Coming" 32). For all its feminist impulses, though, the portrait still depicts Aldrich as a primarily domestic being, obsessed with interior decorating and furnishing: "In doing as much so as she did and not necessarily from the beginning more as it was particularly furnished she furnished more she furnished so much more she furnished more than as much more. She furnished very much more. And so forth" (114-5). According to the portrait, it is ultimately through Aldrich's love of furnishing that everyone comes to know her: "we all knew about this" (115); her writing, her wartime experiences and her other distinguishing traits are minimised, as Aldrich becomes entrenched within her domestic—and thus, feminised—space.

Ultimately, "Mildred Aldrich Saturday" mirrors the salon and salonière that birthed it: it bears a questionable gender politics, in which women's contributions are simultaneously recognised and minimised, but it also elaborates a collaborative ethos by which Stein can enact her self-aggrandisement. After a lengthy discussion of Aldrich's overwhelming desire to furnish more and more—"in as many circumstances there were just as many circumstances fortunately for more"—Stein interjects with a commentary on Aldrich's identity construction: "We knew all about this. And so we did. And so she did. And so she did. And so she did" (115). It is through others' acknowledgement that Aldrich comes to recognise her love of furnishing as a key aspect of her identity; she is a collaboration of sorts, drawing upon both her own traits and others' impressions to form a complete self. Stein sees herself as playing a central role in Aldrich's identity formation, in that she uses her ability "to look. Describe look. Describe to look" (113) to uncover what makes Aldrich unique: "that thing all about what is themselves inside them" ("Portraits"

172-3). Yet, Gygas argues this portrait—along with all of Stein’s word portraits—is ultimately about the portraitist’s own self-promotion (210). After all, Stein states that the portrait’s “first effect of it was this, as when this you see remember me” (115-6). Although Aldrich is purportedly the focus of “Mildred Aldrich Saturday,” it is Stein whom the reader will remember best. Thus, Stein uses her word portraits not only to capture an impression of her salon and habitués, but also to ensure her own legacy—her *gloire*.

2.4 Conclusion

At first glance, the Stein salon’s gender politics appear problematic and regressive: Stein cast aside most of her female habitués as the mere “wives of geniuses” and, in turn, focused the majority of her time, respect, and mentoring capacities on their male companions. Yet, as this chapter has shown, the Stein salon was more complex than its gender segregation would suggest. In her roles as salonière and mentor, Stein positioned herself as her male habitués’ superior. She attempted to use her male habitués as a means of furthering her career and establishing lines of communication between herself and powerful publishers. As a selection of her salon-inspired literary portraiture illustrates, Stein held herself up as a queen and considered her habitués—both men and women alike—as her lowly subjects. In her portraits of esteemed literary and artistic men, such as Picasso, Matisse, and Hemingway, Stein portrays herself—and her salon, by extension—as the curator of not only their careers, but also their entire sense of self. She casts similar assertions in the portraits of her female habitués, figuring Dodge, Blood, and Aldrich as her creations. Yet, in doing so, Stein complicates her apparent favouring of men within the salon space; she transfigures both her male and female habitués as equally subject to her rule. She even uses her portraits of female habitués to critique how women are marginalised and domesticised in patriarchal society—an act she refrained from in her male-centric salon. Thus, while the Stein salon itself was less than revolutionary in terms of

its gender dynamics, it was from this space that Stein was able to draw from and create literary works that trouble the myth of male superiority. Like its contradictory salonière, the Stein salon was a creative force that simultaneously invoked, capitalised upon, and dismantled patriarchal ideology. Yet, as the following chapter on Natalie Clifford Barney's woman-centric salon makes abundantly clear, not all modernist salonières dealt with issues of gender and sexuality like Stein; the modernist salon's feminist politics developed in accordance with its particular salonière's value set and worldview.

3.

“I Am Not a Bibliophile, but a Humanophile”:

Natalie Clifford Barney and her Temple of Female Friendship

“What was marvellous about Miss Barney was that even if there were problems among the women, there was always the friendship that remained. If the person was angry or contrary, or if Miss Barney had spoken harshly to her or something—and she wouldn’t come back—well, one day or another she would come back. The friendship of the ‘Little Temple’ did a lot for Miss Barney, I think.” – Berthe Cleyrergue⁵⁰

As Gertrude Stein networked with the most celebrated male authors and artists of the modernist age, an equally significant community was amassing in the northernmost part of her Parisian arrondissement. A mere fifteen minute walk away from Stein’s own 27 rue de Fleurus salon stood 20 rue Jacob, the home of fellow salonière and Jewish American expatriate Natalie Clifford Barney. During their time, both Stein and Barney were well-respected patrons of the arts, commanding attention from their respective habitués. Like Stein—who sat queen-like on a Renaissance chair throughout her soirées, waiting for her guests to come to her—Barney would sit on a chair “right at the door of [her] dining room [...] and when the people came she did not get up,” according to her long-time housekeeper Berthe Cleyrergue; “they came over to greet her in her special place” (488). As the hearts of Paris’ “intellectual and artistic quarter,” Stein and Barney attracted a wide array of the creative and cultural elite, many of whom were looking for a home away from home (Benstock 80). Stein and Barney also shared a long-lasting friendship, mostly precipitated via Stein’s partner, Alice B. Toklas. Barney even hosted a night in honour of Stein at one of her weekly salons in June 1927, which—as was previously mentioned—Barney intended as a means of introducing Stein and her experimental writing style to the European literary community. Yet, according to Benstock, “the two salons could not have had less in common: Barney’s was formal, old-fashioned, almost stuffy, while the Steins’

⁵⁰ “The Salon of Natalie Clifford Barney: An Interview with Berthe Cleyrergue,” *Signs* 4.3 (Spring 1979): 490.

was casual, unassuming, and open to virtually anyone. Nor could these two women have seen their place in the Paris community less similarly” (15). While Stein refused to publicly align herself with the cause of women or the queer community, Barney was an openly lesbian woman and feminist. Contrary to Stein, who used her salon primarily as a means of promoting her own career, Barney desired for 20 rue Jacob to be a site of intellectual stimulation, international community, and most importantly, female friendship.

3.1 Overview of the Barney Salon

From 1909 to 1968, 20 rue Jacob cemented its status as a Parisian institution. On every Friday evening from early May to early July—and then again from October 15 to December 15—it became the go-to place for local and foreign intelligentsia, writers, artists, performers, and even royalty. The salon took place in the ground floor drawing room of Barney’s two-storied *pavillon*, which stood by itself at the end of 20 rue Jacob’s cobblestoned courtyard. While the room itself was not overly impressive to behold with its mismatched and second-hand furnishings, it overlooked the property’s garden and, fittingly, a small 19th-century Doric temple with the inscription *à l’amitié*—to friendship.⁵¹ At 4:30 p.m., Barney’s most intimate friends would begin to arrive, all dressed in elegant attire. According to journalist, novelist, and frequent habitué Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, guests would be treated to a light snack while waiting for Barney to descend from her upstairs bedroom, “dressed in white, wrapped in some ermine cape” (qtd. in Barney, *Adventures* 138). As the night progressed, a buffet would take place, where guests could help themselves to as many finger sandwiches, cakes, and fruits as they liked. However, the alcohol did not flow as freely. In her salon’s early years, Barney served only tea to her

⁵¹ This temple, which was known primarily as the Temple de l’Amitié (the Temple of Friendship) amongst Barney’s habitués and companions, emerged as a key site for Barney’s feminist activities and will be discussed in more detail later.

guests, believing that drunkenness had no place in a salon.⁵² It was not until later that punch, champagne, and occasionally whiskey were made available—albeit in small amounts.⁵³ Barney intended for her salon to be a meeting of the minds, a place where “people who would have the same ideas” could come together and discuss these ideas intelligently (Cleyrergue 490); for her, alcohol could only hinder that goal.

Over the course of a standard Friday evening, Barney welcomed between 50 and 75 people to her salon.⁵⁴ According to Cleyrergue, “certain invitations were sent to those who were not regular frequenters” or even those Barney would “say she hadn’t seen [...] in a long time,” always using Barney’s signature light blue stationery (492). Yet, “others came without being specially invited” (Cleyrergue 492)—they were Barney’s regular habitués, her close friends. While Barney strove to bring similarly minded people together for her salons, her guest lists were always markedly diverse. At one particular salon, Barney invited essayist Madame Aurel and her husband, journalist Alfred Mortier, Princesse and Prince Troubetzkoy of Russia, writer Cécile Sartoris, composer Ernest Charles, fellow salonnière and cosmetics entrepreneur Helena Rubenstein, French Catholic priest Arthur Mugnier, and author Marcel Proust, to name but a few (Invitations chez Natalie Clifford Barney). Over its decades-long existence, 20 rue Jacob also welcomed Stein and Toklas, painter Marie Laurencin, and writers Janet Flanner, Colette, Delarue-Mardrus, Mina Loy, Djuna Barnes, Ezra Pound, Marie Lenéru, Truman Capote, Radclyffe Hall, Pierre Louÿs, and Remy de Gourmont. Given its motley guest list, Barney’s salon developed a reputation as “the meeting place for all the eccentrics of Paris” (Delarue-Mardrus qtd. in Barney,

⁵² This puts 20 rue Jacob in direct contrast with the Arensbergs’ New York salon, which was infamous for its party atmosphere.

⁵³ It is unclear as to when or why Barney introduced alcohol to her salon. However, in the hand-drawn map of 20 rue Jacob that serves as the frontispiece of the 1929 edition of *L’Aventure de l’esprit*, Barney includes port and whiskey amongst her salon’s buffet offerings; it thus seems unlikely that Barney’s motives were tied to the prohibition movement in the United States, which ended four years after the map was published.

⁵⁴ Once a month, Barney would hold a larger reception, in which the number of guests could amount to as many as 150.

Adventures 138). Yet, as Delarue-Mardrus attested, “there are not only freaks at Miss Barney’s Fridays. One does not go to her house as to a zoo, in order to see a collection of one-of-a-kind characters. One goes there to encounter values” (138). These values emerged not only through conversation with the salon’s feminist host, but also through various *hommages* (the majority of which were to women writers), recitations of poetry, book launches, and occasional dramatic and musical performances.⁵⁵ Once the clock struck 8 p.m., though, “it was over. [Barney] was tired and she’d have a cup of bouillon and go up to bed” (Cleyrergue 490).

With its regimented structure and its mixture of the wealthy and the poor,⁵⁶ 20 rue Jacob seemed to conform to the Enlightenment-era salon’s structure and supposed egalitarianism. However, Barney challenged the traditional salon model in a number of important ways. Karla Jay notes how Barney first and foremost did not fit the typical mould of salonière: she was not a member of the established French bourgeoisie, nor did she have an official title like the Marquise d’Alembert or Comtesse Diane (Introduction 4). Barney ignored such elitist expectations and in turn made her salon—at least in theory—more widely accessible.⁵⁷ As George Wickes recounts in his biography of Barney, this inspired a decidedly mixed reaction from members of the local cultural elite, with significant literary figures publicly shunning Barney, both for her lack of status and for her sexuality (106). Romanian princess and writer Marthe Bibesco and poet Anna de Noailles refused to associate with Barney or her mostly queer coterie, with de Noailles famously proclaiming that “she was not interested in the writings of such people” (Wickes 106). As a result, Barney’s salon became a kind of refuge for queer people and other marginalised

⁵⁵ In *Souvenirs Indiscrets*, Barney claims that Colette premiered her work *La Vagabonde* as a dramatic performance at her salon (197).

⁵⁶ While Barney’s salon mostly consisted of wealthy people, it also welcomed the occasional starving artist—most notably Djuna Barnes.

⁵⁷ It is important to note that while Barney was not a member of the French aristocracy, she was still incredibly wealthy; if she did not possess such a substantial inheritance, it is unlikely that she would have been accepted as a viable salonière at all.

groups, as it tended to appeal to only the most open-minded and progressive members of aristocratic society. It served as a site where—as Barney herself stated—“no preconceived opinion reigns,” where entrenched values could be questioned and social norms could be broken (*Adventures* 197). Although 20 rue Jacob continued longstanding salon traditions, it did so in a subversive way. On the one hand, Barney upheld the salon as a venue for patronage, in that she believed wealthy people such as herself held a certain level of responsibility when it came to supporting promising young artists: “Let’s use the best minds, let’s assist them to come forward for us. Let’s not leave them to sink into material concerns, which are not meant for them. Let them be consumed in the most efficient way, to their best production, so that we can profit from them!” she argued. (*Adventures* 117). Yet, Barney did not desire the kind of authoritarian model of patronage exercised by earlier salonières.⁵⁸ She endorsed a patronage free of its “servile and obligatory aspect,” one which would see multiple patrons unite to sponsor writers via subscription without any expectation of recompense or creative limitations (*Adventures* 117).

In subverting the salon’s traditional systems of elitism and patronage, Barney set out the two main goals for 20 rue Jacob: to bring Europeans and Americans together and to cultivate a support system for (queer) women writers. Barney considered herself “a connoisseur of people” whose primary duty was to create connections between thinkers and artists whom would never otherwise meet (*Adventures* 43). In *Adventures of the Mind* (*L’aventures de l’esprit*), she outlines how she “wished to form: An intellectual, international elite,⁵⁹ an understanding across diverse languages. Sympathy, wireless telegraphy, receptivity to similarities and differences in the great family of minds situated beyond borders” (115-6). It was vastly important to Barney that Cleyrergue and her guests “always say that [her]

⁵⁸ See Pierre Bourdieu’s *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* for more information on the grand networking power of earlier salon models.

⁵⁹ I read “elite” here as a group of great minds, as opposed to a group of wealthy aristocrats. Barney’s elite therefore is one where everyone—regardless of circumstance or name—can participate, as long as they have proven their intelligence and/or creativity.

literary salon was international” (Cleyrergue 487); yet, unlike Stein’s equally cosmopolitan salon, 20 rue Jacob did not envision this international community as an almost exclusively male sphere. Instead, it advanced the Sapphic goals of Barney’s first salon in Neuilly, where queer women like Isadora Duncan, Sarah Bernhardt, Colette, and Renée Vivien came together to celebrate their sexuality without fear of persecution—infamous dancer and courtesan Mata Hari even rode in naked on a white horse at one of their gatherings, serving as a testament to the salon’s unwavering embrace of female sexuality (*Souvenirs* 192). Barney strove to recreate Sappho’s poetic circle, which she idealised as a utopian community where women poets could support, love, and positively influence one another in their creative endeavours (*Souvenirs* 51). She wanted to continue Sappho’s legacy—not only by fostering a supportive space for her fellow creative women, but also by reclaiming and foregrounding Sappho’s queer sexuality, which had often been sidelined or completely erased by male academics and historians (Benstock 281). She even created a play for her salon guests, *Equivoque*, which aimed to redeem Sappho as a historical lesbian figure and cast doubt on the widely held assumption that Sappho committed suicide over her unrequited love for a ferryman. By figuring Sappho as the inspiration for 20 rue Jacob’s queer community, Barney was able to situate queerness as a historical phenomenon, granting it validity and prestige. Her salon thus emerged as a space in which women writers and artists could be open about their sexuality while still inspiring respect. Cleyrergue insists that “there were always questions for all these women [who attended]—very literary questions, and not at all frivolous” or purely focused on sexuality (487); at 20 rue Jacob, Barney ensured that women were treated as men’s intellectual equals or even their superiors. In 1917, she held the Congress of Women for Peace at her Temple de l’Amitié, which was a women’s-only organisation built upon the belief that war was an inherently male endeavour that only women were capable of eradicating. This later evolved into the Académie des Femmes, which attempted to counter the inherent sexism of intellectual

institutions, namely the exclusively male Académie Française, by fostering connections between English- and French-speaking women writers and advancing the careers of women writers more generally.⁶⁰ Ultimately, Barney envisioned her salon as creating “an elite of equals,” in which women writers could receive the kind of critical acclaim and financial support that was made readily available to their male peers in wider society (*Adventures* 129).

3.2 The Barney Salon’s Feminist Origins

20 rue Jacob derived its character—its drive towards female empowerment, its desire for international community—primarily from Barney herself. Events from her childhood and upbringing formed the foundation of her salon’s ideals, specifically its feminism. Barney was born on October 31, 1876, to Alice Pike, a painter and patron of the arts, and Albert Clifford Barney, heir to the Barney Railroad Car Foundry. Barney received an education fit for a salonière: she learned French from her great-aunt Louisa, received private lessons from a French governess at her family’s Cincinnati home, and attended a French boarding school for a year and a half, where she learned “to sing, dance, ride horses, draw, and memorise French literature” (Benstock 278). However, her extensive education was all part of her father’s wider scheme—to tailor his daughter for a heteronormative lifestyle, through which she would have to conform to idealised codes of feminine behaviour. After catching Barney with a lengthy letter from lesbian writer Liane de Pougy, her father forced her onto the Washington debutante circuit in 1897 and also arranged a marriage between her and publisher William Morrow—a move which Benstock figures as “a ‘cure’ for [Barney’s] lesbian tendencies” (91). Fortunately, Barney managed to escape her father’s various prescriptions by travelling abroad until he died in 1902. Barney inherited over four million dollars from her father, which ironically gave her the means to

⁶⁰ There will be more in-depth discussions of these organisations—and their feminist ideals—later in the chapter.

live independently from a man and to challenge any societal norms that governed her behaviour and sexuality. Barney could then follow in the footsteps of her mother and maternal grandfather⁶¹ and build an intellectual community at her home—one in which others could also benefit from the freedom bestowed upon her.

With her substantial inheritance as a safeguard against persecution, Barney was able to express various aspects of her feminist belief system through both her own writings and her salon. In her collections of *pensées*,⁶² Barney adopts the epigrammatic form of literary men such as François de La Rochefoucauld and Oscar Wilde as a way of communicating her subversive thoughts on motherhood, relationships, sexuality, and gender equality. While this move can partly be read as a way for Barney to summon up more cultural authority, Bridget Elliott and Jo-Ann Wallace suggest that it is vital to recognise “the transgressive effect of [Barney] speaking in the masculine” (19). She uses the traditionally masculine epigrammatic form to discuss female-specific issues and, in doing so, undermines those patriarchal systems of thought that govern women’s bodies and behaviour. In her first collection of *pensées*, *Éparpillements* (Scatterings), Barney interrogates the reproductive imperative placed upon women during her sociohistorical moment—an imperative which places woman’s sole value in her ability to birth and raise children in line with established gender norms (Roberts 3). According to Barney, “the most beautiful life is that spent creating oneself, not procreating” (60).⁶³ She calls for women to fully invest in their own development and self-realisation rather than spend their entire lives devoted to the development of another. She dismisses the idea that motherhood is a gift and a pleasure, deeming it as “the most vile of tasks” (60).⁶⁴ It is a form of hard labour, one

⁶¹ Both Alice Pike and her father hosted salons of their own. Pike founded Studio House in Washington, D.C. and held many soirées to raise money for the arts, while her father cultivated a community amongst European singers and dancers at his Cincinnati home.

⁶² Thoughts.

⁶³ Translated from the French: “La vie la plus belle est celle que l’on passe à se créer soi-même, non à procréer.”

⁶⁴ Translated from the French: “la plus vile des besognes.”

aimed at restricting women's agency, their sense of self, and their sexuality. Barney suggests that "certain women are of such a slow sensual maturity that when they become mothers, they stay at that stage forever" (5).⁶⁵ She laments how female sexuality is inextricably tied up with the reproductive imperative, in that birthing children emerges as the sole motive for women to have sex; their sexual bodies and pleasures remain taboo and unexplored terrains.⁶⁶ In perhaps her most caustic critique of the reproductive imperative, Barney argues: "The gods do not reproduce: they are their own works of art" (60).⁶⁷ While this statement may appear to belittle the importance or potential artfulness of the act of mothering, it is important to read it through its sociohistorical context; Barney is not necessarily faulting or berating women who mother, but rather criticising how motherhood is imposed upon them as a means of suppressing their godlike potential.

Barney expressed many unconventional thoughts on women's role in society, especially in relation to their roles as wife and/or lover. In *Éparpillements*, she paints a derelict view of marriage, describing it as a kind of stasis: "Married: to be neither alone nor together" (6).⁶⁸ To Barney, marriage does not signify a union, a meshing of two souls—it in fact does little to alter one's sense of loneliness in the world. She builds upon this critique in her later collection of *pensées*, *Pensées d'une Amazone*, in which she dubs marriage "a false value" (2).⁶⁹ She questions why marriage continues to be such a well-respected institution, when it does so much to hold women back. While patriarchal society figures marriage as women's sole means of financial security, Barney begs of her women readers: "Do not

⁶⁵ Translated from the French: "Certaines femmes sont d'une si lent maturité sensuelle, qu'en devenant des mères, elles le restent à jamais."

⁶⁶ Here, Barney seems to echo the guiding sentiment behind Marie Stopes' famous marital advice book *Married Love* (1918)—that women's sexual needs and desires have been woefully ignored and as such, women need to start learning about and conceding to their body's natural urges (17, 24-5). However, unlike Stopes, who promotes sexual knowledge amongst married heterosexual couples in the hopes of "adding to [the State's] numbers" (xi), Barney aims to remove the reproductive imperative from sex entirely.

⁶⁷ Translated from the French: "Les dieux ne se reproduisent pas: ils sont eux-mêmes leurs chefs-d'oeuvre."

⁶⁸ Translated from the French: "Marié: n'être ni seul ni ensemble."

⁶⁹ Translated from the French: "une fausse valeur."

reduce yourself to marrying in order to improve your situation” (2).⁷⁰ For Barney, marriage is not a safeguard for women, but rather an exercise in self-degradation. She contends: “In marriage the lesser [party] dominates. Is this why marriage is the regulariser?” (4).⁷¹ Marriage has thus emerged as a vital tool for maintaining the patriarchal order, in that it allows men—the weaker sex, in Barney’s view—to perpetuate the illusion of their innate superiority and keep women from realising their full potential.

In keeping with this critical stance on marriage, Barney celebrated sexualities and relationship configurations that deviated from the norm—both within her own life and in her writings. Since her father’s early attempts to stifle her sexuality, non-conformity became essential to Barney’s existence. In *Pensées d’une Amazone*, she counters the idea that conformity is necessary for one to function in society: “It is said: it’s necessary to conform. I have never conformed, yet I am” (4).⁷² However, Barney did not just exist apart from societal norms; she thrived. In spite of societal calls for women to engage in heterosexual monogamy, Barney revelled in a life of lesbian polyamory.⁷³ She rejected patriarchal interdictions around female sexuality, arguing that women’s sexual behaviour bears no relevance to their worth as people: “Your purity does not depend on a state of ignorance, nor more or less on a state of virginity—your purity is as durable as yourself, your purity, it is you” (*Pensées* 14).⁷⁴ It is thus not virginity that makes a woman ‘good’ or ‘pure,’ but rather her character, her intellect, her self as a whole. In fact, Barney considered sexual expression as key to self-improvement. According to Remy de Gourmont, Barney practised a

⁷⁰ Translated from the French: “N’être plus réduites à se marier pour se faire une situation.”

⁷¹ Translated from the French: “Dans le mariage le moindre domine. Est-ce pour cela que le mariage est régularisateur?”

⁷² Translated from the French: “On dit: il faut ‘se conformer’. Je ne me suis jamais conformée et pourtant je suis”

⁷³ Even sexually progressive texts of the time period, such as the aforementioned *Married Love*, condoned sex only if it occurred between loving, married couples; lesbianism (or inversion, as it was then called) was understood as an aberration.

⁷⁴ Translated from the French: “Votre pureté ne dépend pas d’un état d’ignorance, n’a pas plus ou moins de virginité,—votre pureté est aussi durable que vous-même, votre pureté, c’est vous.”

“discipline of pleasure [...] that she claimed to make fit in the circle of intelligence”—in other words, her salon (197-8).⁷⁵ For Barney, pleasure—and love, more generally—were viable means for furthering one’s knowledge of the world and the people within it; it was a form of intellectual, as well as physical, stimulation. For this reason, Barney “did not limit love to one sex” or sexual desire to a single woman (*Éparpillements* 56)⁷⁶; she desired to expand her learning as much as possible via her discipline of choice.⁷⁷ Although she had long-term lovers—Romaine Brooks being the most notable—Barney was never monogamous. She craved independence and sexual freedom, two things which polyamory granted her. According to Cleyrergue, even the set up of her and Brooks’ Beauvallon house attested to her distrust of monogamy:

It had a beautiful large dining room which made a hyphen [*trait d’union*]—that is to say, they had said that no matter what, each one would have her own apartment, but the dining room made the ‘hyphen.’ Thus, the day that Miss Barney would receive guests Romaine didn’t appear and on the day that Romaine received friends Miss Barney did not appear. In that way Miss Barney could have her friends on her side—the dining room belonged to one or to the other. (490-1)

While Barney stayed with Brooks for decades, they continued to lead their own self-contained lives, sharing experiences in the “hyphen” only when they wished to do so. They established an alternative relationship configuration—one without the uneven power dynamic and limitations of patriarchal marriage.

A desire for equality—especially between the sexes—lies at the heart of many of Barney’s provocative *pensées*. While Barney criticised patriarchal institutions like marriage and motherhood for their disempowerment of women, she also took issue with women’s exclusion from political life. Barney saw equal political representation of the sexes as a necessity, figuring it as the only way states could effectively cater to their citizens’ needs:

⁷⁵ Translated from the French: “une discipline du plaisir [...] tel qu[’elle] prétende le faire rentrer dans le cercle de l’intelligence.”

⁷⁶ Translated from the French: “ne limite pas l’amour à un sexe.”

⁷⁷ This could be a potential reason for why Barney engaged in flirtatious relationships with her male habitués, despite not being physically attracted to them (this will be elaborated on later in the chapter).

“We cannot stress enough that a state, composed and governed by men, can never represent or substitute half of the race” (*Pensées* 8).⁷⁸ Barney even capitalises on stereotypes of femininity in order to stress the need for more women legislators: “We accord to women the qualities of astuteness, intuition, cunning and superior address more often than to men, why have we not granted them the ability to use it to the state’s benefit, to the minister of foreign affairs’ benefit, etc.?” (*Pensées* 7).⁷⁹ While Barney’s line of argument here is subversive for imbuing stereotypes of femininity with concrete utility and value, it is also problematic for its reiteration of a strict male-versus-female binary. According to Benstock, Barney was guilty of subscribing to a “highly feminised image of womanhood,” which stressed “the *otherness* of womanhood, its *difference* from the masculine norm” (307). This is evident in Barney’s unfavourable view of ‘manly’ English feminists:

English women are by necessity militant; they gain their women’s rights by sacrificing all the effects of femininity. But we must be severe judges only of unproductive excesses. American women have been successful in defeating their men while remaining women. Save for the vote, French women get a matriarchy without children. English women have won the vote while becoming men. One is not always free to choose one’s weapons. (*Adventures* 146)

Clearly, Barney ascribes to a binaristic understanding of gender. She conflates the English feminists’ militarism—aggression, violence—with masculinity, and calls upon other feminists to avoid their example at all costs. Yet, Barney appears to backtrack as their “severe judge,” acknowledging that English feminists may not have been “free to choose [their] weapons.” They developed tactics suited to their specific circumstances and still succeeded in getting the vote, which Barney views as a major steppingstone towards equality.

⁷⁸ Translated from the French: “On ne saurait assez souligner qu’un Etat, composé et gouverné par des hommes, ne pourra jamais représenter ou suppléer la moitié du genre humain.”

⁷⁹ Translated from the French: “On accorde aux femmes des qualités d’astuce, d’intuition, de ruse et d’adresse supérieures si souvent à celles des hommes, pourquoi ne leur accorderait-on pas la possibilité de s’en servir au profit de l’État, au ministère des affaires étrangères, etc... ?”

However, in disparaging feminists who adopt ‘masculine’ courses of action, does Barney reveal herself—as Mary Eichbauer argues—to be both “a feminist and a misogynist” (20)? The answer is more complicated than a simple yes or no. Barney was the product of her time—a time in which one’s gender was considered indivisible from biological sex and women were perceived as the inferior sex. Barney thus considered it vital for women to be true to themselves, to prove themselves as men’s inherent equals, and to take pride in their femininity. She worked hard to empower women, often portraying them as more capable than their male counterparts. In *Pensées d’une Amazone*, Barney highlights the ways in which women have been confronted with forms of adversity that men have never had to face: “To judge a man, take him out of his environment; to judge a woman, give her an environment of her own. – Women are so adaptable that one has never thought to give them a place” (2).⁸⁰ Women have had to learn how to adapt, whereas men have not—patriarchal society adapts to them. Yet, while Barney celebrates women’s adaptability as a source of power, she begrudges their lack of a place in society; her salon became a way of rectifying this, of giving women a space in which they were free from patriarchal constraints.

3.3 Female Empowerment in the Barney Salon

Although Karla Jay notes that Barney’s “agenda was not ‘feminist’ in the contemporary sense of the word [...in that] Barney saw her definition of feminism as applying to an elite group of women who were social equals,” there appears to be little indication that Barney purposely restricted her salon to a Parisian elite (Introduction 12). She deemed herself “lazy” in matters of friendship, suggesting that she was not particularly selective about who could enter her circle (*Adventures* 22). Thus, it was not so much social status that appealed to Barney, as much as it was an exceptionalism in character. In *Pensées*

⁸⁰ Translated from the French: “Pour juger d’un homme, sortez-le de son milieu; pour juger d’une femme, donnez-lui le sien. – Elles sont si adaptables qu’on n’a jamais songé à leur faire une place.”

d'une Amazone, she states: “I am not a bibliophile, but a humanophile; it is, in fact, in human beings that I look for rare editions” (158).⁸¹ Her salon was thus her main way of locating exceptional women—these “rare editions”—and empowering them; it became the physical embodiment of her feminist *pensées*. Within her salon, Barney found myriad ways for levelling the playing field between male and female writers. Most notably, she created the Académie des Femmes to counteract the exclusively male Académie Française. Unlike other salonières of the time period, Barney looked upon the Académie—and those men who were accepted into it—disparagingly. When her friend, writer and artist Jean Cocteau, was accepted to the Académie, Barney published a satirical sketch called “Harlequin à l’Académie,” in which she viciously portrayed Cocteau as a clown. According to Wickes, she even distanced herself from close friend and frequent habitué Paul Valéry after his Académie acceptance, suggesting that “he behaved as if he had just given birth to a child and noted that his poetry subsequently went into a decline” (163-4).⁸² Barney could not respect nor take seriously any intellectual body that failed to recognise the contributions of women—particularly when such women were producing work of “equal or superior merit to that of its [the Académie’s] Immortals” (*Souvenirs* 222).⁸³ While her Académie des Femmes would never be as esteemed or well-known as the Académie Française, it did provide some much needed financial aid and critical attention for women writers. On the one hand, Barney resuscitated the Prix Renée Vivien—a literary prize of 500,000 francs which she allotted to one deserving woman from her Académie every three or four years

⁸¹ Translated from the French: “Je ne suis pas bibliophile, mais humanophile: c’est en fait d’êtres que je cherche les exemplaires rares.”

⁸² Given Barney’s critical views on the reproductive imperative, it is unclear whether Barney uses this analogy to advance her belief that motherhood stifles women’s creative expression—in that the quality of Valéry’s work declines after he metaphorically gives birth—or to suggest that acceptance into the Académie is less meaningful than giving birth (for which she appears to hold little esteem).

⁸³ Translated from the French: “les femmes d’un mérite égal ou supérieur à celui de ses Immortels.”

(Cleyrergue 491).⁸⁴ She also held several nights in honour of American and European women writers, including Madame Aurel, Colette, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, Gertrude Stein, the Duchess de Clermont-Tonnerre, Mina Loy, and Rachilde (whose night of honour included a discussion of important American women writers like Djuna Barnes). These nights were not only intended to build an audience for these women, but also to cultivate a transnational female literary community around Barney's Temple of Friendship. As Barney once told Stein in a 1926 letter, she wanted more than anything else to "bring a better 'entente'" between European and American "femmes de lettres," which would "enable our mind-allies to appreciate each other" (200). Barney thus intended 20 rue Jacob primarily as a breeding ground for female friendship—a space from which women writers could work together to combat the sexism of the literary world.

In analysing Barney's memoirs, entitled *Adventures of the Mind*, and her various correspondences with salon habitués, her feminist intentions for 20 rue Jacob become even clearer. They establish how Barney perceived her male and female habitués differently and how she challenged her habitués' conventional modes of thought. In *Adventures of the Mind*, Barney provides terse judgments on the works and characters of both her male and female habitués, all whilst acknowledging the mutually beneficial relationships she maintained with them.⁸⁵ In this self-dubbed "statement of values" (21), Barney makes gender equality her central preoccupation. Even the book's original French title—*Aventures de l'Esprit*—works toward developing Barney's feminist ethics. As Jay points out in the book's introduction, there are multiple meanings of *esprit*: mind, wit, spirit—all of which are "opposed to the idea of *corps* or body" (2). With the book's title, Barney posits herself as an adventurer of the mind, a possessor of wit and spirit, rather than simply a bodily creature. Similarly, she

⁸⁴ The Prix Renée Vivien was first established in 1935 by one of Vivien's lovers, Baroness Hélène de Zuylen de Nyevelt de Haar, but was discontinued with the onset of World War Two. Barney brought it back in 1949.

⁸⁵ In some cases, these habitués were mostly connected to Barney's salon via correspondence (i.e. Marcel Proust).

discusses her female habitués without reference to their bodies; she associates them with the intellectual—a field which philosophers throughout history have marked out as the domain of men. As Elizabeth Grosz notes in *Volatile Bodies*, the philosophical gendering of the mind/body dichotomy—in which the mind is categorised as masculine and the body is deemed feminine—is by no means accidental: “As a discipline, philosophy has surreptitiously excluded femininity, and ultimately women, from its practices through its usually implicit coding of femininity with the unreason associated with the body” (4). While Barney plays into this problematic mind/body opposition throughout *Adventures*—a move for which Grosz faults modern-day feminists (3)—she does so in order to stage a powerful reclaiming of the mind for herself and the rest of her female coterie; she figures women as not only men’s intellectual equals, but in many ways, their superiors.

As both *Adventures of the Mind* and a wealth of personal correspondence demonstrate, Barney worked to assert her dominance over her male companions. She would flatter and flirt with her male companions, but only as a means of achieving intellectual stimulation and further knowledge: “Every lady has received highly flattering letters from her [male] contemporaries, and has known how to take them, just as I do, with that grain of salt, which only increases their piquancy. But wouldn’t it be a shame if too much modesty or too many scruples deprived us of ever knowing their intimate thoughts?” (*Adventures* 27). Barney thus saw flirtation as the key to her male habitués’ most “intimate thoughts.” It was a kind of game, one in which she could prove her power over the male sex.⁸⁶ Part One of *Adventures* includes many examples of the depth of Barney’s power—of her ability to be seen not only as men’s equal, but also their superior. This is particularly evident in a featured letter from poet Max Jacob, in which Jacob addresses Barney as his “dear colleague” only to then position himself “very humbly at [her] feet like a submissive

⁸⁶ As Chapter Four will demonstrate, this was a strategy that fellow salonière Ettie Stettheimer also employed in both her relationships with her male habitués and in her salon-inspired literary works.

admirer” (91). He considers her an equal, but also acknowledges her dominance; the image of him at her feet transforms Barney into a Christ-like figure, who can guide Jacob on the path to righteousness.⁸⁷ Yet, Barney does not cast her power over her male habitués as the mere result of flirtation alone; many of the men featured in *Adventures* are sickly and frail—the complete inverse of masculine dominance and strength. In her entire chapter on Marcel Proust, for example, Barney focuses primarily on Proust’s ill-health rather than his well-known intellect.⁸⁸ Snippets from Proust’s letters make his vulnerability known: “I am recovering from an illness which greatly resembles death” (58); “Your charming invitation both tempts and distresses me. I have a fever of 40” (59). Proust was even “afraid of [Barney’s] rather chilly Temple” (60), which he saw as a potential cause of exacerbating his illness. Jay argues that this emasculating focus on Proust’s ailments—along with similar descriptions of other male habitués—is done “intentionally to humanise them [men]. For traditionally, only the personal, physical life of *women* artists is discussed in public” (Introduction 10). Barney rewrites how men should be portrayed, casting them as fallible humans instead of all-powerful patriarchs.

In discussing writer Pierre Louÿs, however, Barney appears to be more subdued in the assertion of her dominance. She acknowledges Louÿs as one of her earliest and most enduring influences, claiming that she read his *Aphrodite* “while still a child” (32).⁸⁹ Barney saw Louÿs as “the defender of ‘young women of the future society’”—which included the sexually and creatively empowered women of Barney’s salon—and thus entrusted him with getting her work published (32).⁹⁰ However, Louÿs appears not to have held this over Barney, nor to have belittled her in his constructive feedback to her. In a featured letter to

⁸⁷ Later in this chapter, I will explore how Djuna Barnes reflects on Barney’s Christ-like positioning in relation to her habitués in the salon-inspired *Ladies Almanack*.

⁸⁸ It is important to note that Proust only physically attended Barney’s salon once in the early 1920s (Cleyregue 491). However, it is clear that Barney included him as part of the salon community, given her numerous invitations and extensive correspondence with him.

⁸⁹ She was actually 20 years old at the time.

⁹⁰ Louÿs dedicated *Songs of Bilitis* to “young women of the future society”—hence Barney’s moniker for him.

Barney, Loüys makes some suggestions as to how Barney can rework her manuscript for

Lettres à une connue:

It contains some pages ‘which don’t work,’ as we say in literary slang, some letters in which your poetic feeling expresses itself in terms that are a little old-fashioned, overused by bad poets, and thus discredited, do you understand? But against this, there are so many sentences that are excellent and even *admirable* that your text cannot be meddled with by a strange hand. Perhaps the best solution would be for you yourself to do it over ... Or, indeed, if you are tired of it, have it published as a private edition in America (it is always possible to do it if it is in French) and send your book to all the people whose taste interests you. But do not destroy it, that would be murder. In any event, continue to write, and be ambitious. You will be famous, I am sure of it. (34-5)

Throughout his criticism, Loüys ensures never to speak down to Barney; in fact, he addresses her as an equal—someone whom he deeply admires and wants to succeed. Loüys even appears protective of Barney’s work—he claims that destroying *Lettres à une connue* “would be murder” and warns Barney against allowing a stranger to intervene in the editing process. He clearly respects Barney, just as Barney respects him and his critical opinion. Yet, Barney makes it known that their friendship is by no means one-sided, in that Loüys stands to gain as much from it as she does. In *Adventures*, she credits her salon with providing Loüys with creative inspiration: “After listening to a flute, with its thrills and spins, coming from my cold conservatory, Pierre Loüys composed this quatrain [Noctv Renata]” (38). Barney takes partial credit for Loüys’ creation, foregrounding the collaborative nature of her salon’s environment and the mutually beneficial nature of their relationship. She manages to reassert her creative power as salonière and by extension, the significant role she plays in her male habitués’ success.

Barney similarly portrays her relationship with poet and philosopher Paul Valéry as a meeting of equals. In *Adventures*, she posits the reciprocity of their creative exchanges, both within the salon and the correspondences that stemmed from it: “Generous with ideas that he had not yet written, apparently as much a dilettante as I, our conversations became our works, outlines on the tablets of bright midnights. He brought a remarkable

attention to our conversation, and continued them or followed them toward endless ramifications, to which each of us took pride in adding ideas leading even further...” (102). Barney aided Valéry in developing his ideas, whilst simultaneously deriving her own creative inspiration from their exchanges. Their salon conversations were a mutually beneficial exercise in artistic production; they attested to the salon’s status as a collaborative space and as a breeding ground for new modes of thinking. It is clear that Valéry held a deep respect for Barney, and even valued her opinion over his own. On the one hand, he dedicated several of his works to her and entrusted her with composing their English translations. In a 1929 letter to Barney, Valéry even asks whether he should allow *This Quarter*—a modernist periodical—to publish translations of his work: “I would like to have an opinion—authorised—on this publication and on the quality of its translations and the works it contains” (Chapon 78).⁹¹ Valéry thought of Barney as an authority on literary modernism and thus trusted her to aid with his career decisions. It stands to reason, given that Barney did much to raise Valéry’s profile. On June 11, 1920, Barney held a night in honour of Valéry at her salon, hoping to “make [her] friends in Paris appreciate him” and to “introduce [him] to the New World” (*Adventures* 108). When Barney asked Valéry to offer similar help with her own writings, he deemed himself “unworthy of putting [his] savage hands on them” (108). Ultimately, he considered Barney his superior, even though their exchanges in the salon tended to be mutually advantageous.

The power dynamic between Barney and writer and caricaturist André Rouveyre was equally complex. While Rouveyre labelled Barney his “dear equal,” he still appears to value his “masculine judgment” over her female opinion (Chapon 66).⁹² In a 1921 letter to Barney, Rouveyre gives several reasons as to why Barney is wrong to include a preface in the reissue of *Pensées d’une Amazone*. He begins the letter by placating Barney, “it is possible

⁹¹ Translated from the French: “Je voudrais avoir une opinion—autorisée!—sur cette publication et sur la qualité des traductions et des ouvrages qu’elle contient.”

⁹² Translated from the French: “chère equivoque,” “jugement masculin.”

that things which do not work for me will be perfectly legitimate for you, because for example, in all that concerns you—the indication, the spontaneous momentum of your spiritual instinct can and should have more accuracy than the observations of a friend” (66).⁹³ Although he says that her views are more accurate than his own observations, he undermines this point with his overly critical views on *Pensées*. He argues that it is “not good” for authors to write prefaces for their own works, claiming that “the reader will always say [...] he will always say: ‘Hey what! That’s all!’” (66).⁹⁴ The author may intend for the preface to provide insight into how the book was written and how it can be read, but Rouveyre contends that the reader will always be dissatisfied with such insight—he will always desire further closure. Yet, Rouveyre’s line of argument here offers no consideration of Barney’s wishes or whether her voice is heard; instead, he privileges the male reader’s experience of the text above all else. When *Pensées* was reissued in 1921 with a new section ironically titled “Ce qu’ILS en pensent [What THEY think],” it became clear that Barney paid little attention to Rouveyre’s advice—or to the desires of her male readership, to which the male plural “ILS” refers—and instead, claimed herself as knowing best. This claim seeps into Barney’s discussion of Rouveyre in *Adventures*, in which she reprimands his overzealousness in criticising others when his own work is in a “critical state”: he “proceeds, he and his development, toward the Nothingness” (96-7). While Barney recognises Rouveyre as a “strong man,” she asserts her dominance over him; similar to Stein, who appoints herself as Picasso, Matisse, and Hemingway’s judge in her salon-inspired word portraits, Barney serves as Rouveyre’s judge and jury, “expos[ing] him” and his faults to the world as a means of shaking him from his creative stupor (101).

⁹³ Translated from the French: “il est probable que des choses qui n’iraient point pour moi soient parfaitement légitimes pour vous, car par exemple, en tout ce qui vous concerne, l’indication, l’élan spontané de votre instinct spirituel peut et doit avoir plus de justesse que les observations d’un ami.”

⁹⁴ Translated from the French: “pas bonne,” “le lecteur dira toujours [...] il dira toujours: ‘Hé quoi! c’est tout!’”

However, it was in her relationship with Remy de Gourmont, a deeply respected and significant figure in the literary world, that Barney demonstrated how deeply her power over her male habitués could run. De Gourmont was noted for spearheading the Symbolist movement and influencing myriad modernist writers, including T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, with his 1902 treatise on writing, *Le Problème du Style*. Yet, in spite of his power and influence, de Gourmont simultaneously admired and feared Barney, recognising her as the fount of his creative inspiration whilst anguishing over the challenge she posed to his way of thinking. His book *Lettres à l'amazone* (Letters to the Amazon)—which is composed entirely of de Gourmont's correspondence to Barney—testifies to the uneven power dynamic at the heart of their relationship. In *Adventures*, Barney reflects upon de Gourmont's writing process for *Lettres*, revealing just how vital her opinion was to de Gourmont:

No matter how accustomed he was to my presence, he went off to write them; and before forwarding them to the *Mercure*, I commented on them while reading them with him. I read, he watched me read, and this was the moment of intensity toward which his expectation converged: what I would say first of all, what I would not say, occupied him so keenly that I had this impression: on breathless lookout for my thought, he intercepted it, scarcely had it been formed, in order to possess it. Thus, he had the joy of seeing a privileged reader experiencing firsthand the impressions that he had just created. (54)

The “intensity” with which de Gourmont awaits Barney's opinion here is palpable: he is “breathless,” “keenly” watching her reactions as she reads. He comes across as a child seeking praise from his parent or teacher. Yet, it is also clear that de Gourmont is intimidated by Barney. He was never able to write his letters in front of her, even though they arose from their in-person conversations; de Gourmont desperately sought Barney's opinion, but ultimately feared what that opinion might be. As de Gourmont himself acknowledges, Barney always elicited his vulnerable side. In “Lettre première – Le souvenir” of his *Lettres à l'amazone*, de Gourmont suggests that he loses himself in Barney's eyes (8); he even credits her with making him a complete person, suggesting that she

exhumes some part of him that he thought long forgotten (8). In “Lettre quatrième – Chasteté,” de Gourmont admits his fearful devotion to Barney: “For me, if I could love again, and all the amazon that you are, I would easily put aside my standards of life and the concerns of my feeling, electing you over all that exists. But I am scared of your arrows and I draw my shield, which is silence” (46).⁹⁵ De Gourmont wants to devote himself entirely to Barney, but he fears what it would mean for his status and quality of life; to acknowledge Barney’s superiority would necessitate that he abdicate the male privilege granted to him within patriarchal society. However, de Gourmont did not always succeed in shielding himself from Barney’s power—she challenged his mode of thinking, especially in regards to women and sexuality. He states: “Sometimes, my friend, your life philosophy disconcerts me, meaning that it makes me think in a way that I have never thought before, and I draw a better understanding of the feminine sensibility, because even if you are an Amazon, you are a woman first and you obey your particular physiology” (197-8).⁹⁶ De Gourmont credits Barney with helping him develop his feminine side and, in turn, distance himself from patriarchal modes of thought. Although de Gourmont dubs Barney “a woman first” here, he does not intend to mock her, nor does he align femininity with weakness; he still recognises Barney as an Amazon—a woman warrior endowed with exceptional strength and prowess.

Yet, Barney resisted casting herself as the only powerful woman within her salon. As Part Two of *Adventures* demonstrates, 20 rue Jacob was a place where strong women reigned. While Barney characterises her male habitués as frail and vulnerable to her power, she mentions none of her female habitués’ afflictions, thereby “mak[ing] them seem

⁹⁵ Translated from the French: “Pour moi, si je pouvais aimer encore, et tout amazonienne que vous êtes, je mettrais facilement d’accord les normes de la vie et les inquiétudes de mon sentiment, en vous élisant par-dessus tout ce qui existe. Mais j’ai peur de vos flèches et je dresse mon bouclier, qui est le silence.”

⁹⁶ Translated from the French: “Parfois, mon amie, votre philosophie de la vie me déconcerte, c’est-à-dire me fait réfléchir selon un sens auquel je n’avais pas encore pensé, et j’en tire une meilleure connaissance de la sensibilité féminine, car si vous êtes une Amazone, vous êtes une femme d’abord et vous obéissez à votre physiologie particulière.”

stronger, superior, almost immortal” by comparison as Jay contends in *Adventures*’ introduction (11). She attributes traditionally masculine traits to all of her female habitués, for example: leadership and efficacy in Lucie Delarue-Mardrus (“a born president” (142)); mastery in Colette (“Hers is the discipline of a master, and her profession works her senses so well that they, too, become her domestic animals” (152)); and strength and accuracy in Rachilde (“I hail in her a strength that does not delude itself and which, taking all goals for targets, misses none of them” (153-4)). Barney wanted her salon to be a feminist space where women could receive the kind of accolades and critical attention that were commonly reserved for their male peers; the occasional presence of well-known feminists, such as Emmeline Pankhurst, Anna Wickham, and Valentine Thompson, served to further this progressive agenda.⁹⁷ 20 rue Jacob became a site of collaboration between women: Barney would seek critical feedback from her female habitués, whilst they involved Barney in their writing process. In a letter dated 3 June 1930, Mina Loy thanks Barney “for having a copy of your book sent to me. It makes me feel like a wraith I shall certainly have to revive”—it was thus through sharing her writings with her female habitués that Barney inspired them to “revive” and further engage with their own forms of creative practice. Barney often served as a source of creative inspiration for her female habitués, with many of them including her as a pseudonymous character in their works, including Lucie Delarue-Mardrus (as Laurette Wells in *L’ange et les pervers*), Radclyffe Hall (as Valérie Seymour in *The Well of Loneliness*), and Djuna Barnes (as Dame Evangeline Musset in *Ladies Almanack*, which will be analysed in-depth later in this chapter). However, Barney’s relationships with her female habitués were not strictly professional or intellectual, as her dealings with her male habitués were; they were deeply personal friendships, many of which were not always platonic. Barney would discuss all sorts of matters with her female

⁹⁷ While Barney makes no mention of Emmeline Pankhurst in *Adventures of the Mind*, she does include her in the hand-drawn map of the salon that serves as the frontispiece of the 1929 French-language edition of the book.

habitués, ranging from table purchases to a mutual concern for other friends' wellbeing.⁹⁸ 20 rue Jacob was, above all else, a temple to female friendship, where women sat at "the centre of the world's gravity" and men served as their "accessory" (*Adventures* 196).

In both Barney's memoirs and her personal correspondence, she makes it clear how important her female habitués were to both the salon and herself. Barney held the utmost respect for her female habitués and provided them with a venue to air their thoughts—free from persecution or ridicule. This is particularly resonant in Barney's relationship with playwright Marie Lenéru. In *Adventures*, Barney describes Lenéru as someone worthy of society's esteem: she is a "self-made woman," a "superwoman," a "seeress" (194). In Barney's eyes, Lenéru is a prophet, sent to cure society "of [its] essential struggles" through "catch[ing] sight [...] of feasible utopias, utopia, according to her, being the reality of tomorrow" (194).⁹⁹ Barney recognises Lenéru as pivotal to the development of 20 rue Jacob's feminist ethics, dubbing her the "tutelary genius" behind the Congress of Women for Peace, which brought "proven feminists" to "the steps of [Barney's] Temple to Friendship" all in a bid to combat the male-driven war (195). Barney even includes an excerpt from Lenéru's essay "The Witness" in *Adventures*, a move which begs that "The Witness" be read as part of Barney's own "statement of values" (21). In the excerpt, Lenéru issues her female readers with a call to action—to stop playing the passive witness to men's actions in war and "to rebel" (194). She urges her female reader to summon up "all her memories and all her mourning, [...] all the horrors to which woman forever remains the convulsed witness" and use them "to formulate, not a prayer, not even a wish, but a command to all those responsible, a command for which she will be able to raise heralds and executors, a command in which she will henceforth send her only reason for surviving: 'Let it never happen again!'" (195). Contrary to social dictum, Lenéru delegates

⁹⁸ See: Mina Loy, Letter to Natalie Clifford Barney, Letters 2 and 3 (of 5).

⁹⁹ As will be discussed later in the chapter, Barnes similarly figures Barney and other members of her salon coterie as prophets of a new queer female heterotopia in *Ladies Almanack*.

the typically male roles of actors and commanders to women and, in turn, empowers them to enact real, concrete change. Lenéru wanted women's voices to be heard, a goal that Barney was happy to oblige in her salon's activities and evidently, in her salon-inspired memoirs (21).

Barney shared an equally positive relationship with fellow salonnière Gertrude Stein and her partner Alice B. Toklas—although their friendship was by no means predicated on a mutual belief in feminism.¹⁰⁰ It was instead founded on a mixture of professional respect and personal affection. As Cleyrergue sums up, Barney “liked the literature of Gertrude Stein very much. Yes, indeed. But Miss Toklas [...] was her guardian angel [...] But really they were very intimate friends, very, very intimate” (489). On the one hand, Barney saw much potential in Stein and wanted desperately for her to succeed. She “want[ed] to believe, with Mina Loy, that Gertrude Stein’s brain [was] an innovation mill and that she w[ould] yet escape the gears and put to press a completely different style” (*Adventures* 177). As with her other female habitués, Barney located in Stein an immense strength, comparing her to Samson—the human version of God (177). Barney even held a night in honour of Stein in a bid to expand Stein’s audience. Yet, as Toklas states in a 1946 letter to Barney, the night meant more than just a career endorsement to Stein: “She was so pleased with everything you had arranged and so proud, so moved by your recognition of her work.” The homage affected Stein on an emotional level, revealing the extent to which her and Barney’s friendship was not merely a literary one, but a personal one, as well. Toklas’ letter—which was written shortly after Stein’s death—also affirms the affection she shared with Barney. Toklas thanks Barney for her kind words, which “touch [her] deeply.” As Toklas articulates a “need [for Barney’s] very fond remembrances” of Stein, the depth of her connection to Barney becomes clear. Barney’s relationships with her female habitués were therefore not simply a matter of intellectual stimulation, but of personal investment,

¹⁰⁰ For more on Stein’s ambiguous attitude towards the cause of women, see the previous chapter of this thesis.

as well. They spawned a kind of support network amongst creative—and often, queer—women, offering them the financial and emotional support required to hone their craft without any pressure to obscure their sexuality or who they were.

Barney's relationship with Djuna Barnes further demonstrates how this network of mutual support operated. The two writers engaged with each other's work, whilst also expressing their care for and comfort with one another. They became heavily involved in each other's personal affairs—Barnes introduced Barney to her long-time housekeeper Berthe Cleyrergue, whilst Barney attempted to find Barnes a suitable home in France. In a letter dated August 10, 1924, Barnes expresses her deep appreciation of Barney's house-hunting efforts: "Just in receipt of your letter about the effort to get rooms for a month or so – you are amazing – nobody thinks of such things, much less attempts them – it is so kind and so thoroughly unusual I do not know how to thank you – its [sic] too bad it fell through." In spite of her efforts "fall[ing] through," though, Barney still ventured to help situate Barnes, even offering 20 rue Jacob as a place to stay.¹⁰¹ Moreover, while Barnes tended not to publicly acknowledge her queer sexuality,¹⁰² there is evidence to suggest she felt like she could be open around Barney. In an undated letter sent to Barney, Barnes acknowledges her ability to relate to Barney's *The Woman Who Lives With Me* due to its depiction of lesbian love: "I have read 'The Woman I live with' [sic] – I like it – it is simple – it convinces one of a curious and deep feeling of – shall I say love – for a woman enclosed – yes, I think it very, very good – it is yet more poignant when you know its [sic] from a woman to a woman." Barnes can admit empathising with the "curious and deep feeling" of falling in love with a woman to Barney and acknowledge her queerness, thereby alluding to 20 rue Jacob's status as a queer-friendly space—which Barnes would later extrapolate on in her *Ladies Almanack*. Along with their personal connection, Barnes and

¹⁰¹ A few of Barnes' letters to Barney—all located at the Bibliothèque littéraire Jacques-Doucet—are sent from 20 rue Jacob, on Barney's signature blue stationary.

¹⁰² In spite of her long-term relationship with Thelma Wood, Barnes maintained: "I'm not a lesbian. I just loved Thelma" (qtd. in Jay, "The Outsider" 192).

Barney supported each other's careers: while Barnes attempted to find an American publisher for Barney's *The One Who Is Legion*, Barney provided Barnes with a humble living stipend so Barnes could focus on writing. Even when Barnes satirised Barney's salon circle in the *Almanack*, Barney still supported her, appealing to Richard Aldington to publish it (Wickes 180). In keeping with 20 rue Jacob's main objectives, Barney fought for Barnes to express herself without constraints, even when those expressions could be interpreted as a negative reflection on her efforts as a salonière.

3.4 Reading the Barney Salon through *Ladies Almanack*

Throughout her sixty-year tenure as salonière, Natalie Clifford Barney served as the inspiration for many of her habitués' creative works, including Renée Vivien's poetry and Radclyffe Hall's novel *The Well of Loneliness*. However, it is in Djuna Barnes's self-proclaimed "slight satiric wiggling," *Ladies Almanack*, that Barney and her salon circle receive their most extensive mention (87). Privately printed in 1928 with the financial help of Robert McAlmon of Darantière Press and Barney herself, *Ladies Almanack* functions simultaneously as a send-up of and homage to Barney's female-centric salon. In it, Barney appears as Dame—later dubbed Saint—Evangeline Musset, a pseudo-evangelist who makes it her life's mission to rescue women from the perils of heterosexual life. Through her sexual prowess and ambiguous gender identity, Musset manages to bring together a community of (mostly) lesbian women dedicated to experiencing and proselytising the power of an exclusively female love—a clear homage to Barney's own infatuation with Sappho's work and poetic circle, which foregrounded the power of love between women. Amongst its members are fictionalisations of Barney's own coterie, including Mina Loy (Patience Scalpel), Lady Una Troubridge (Lady Buck-and-Balk), Radclyffe Hall (Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood), Dolly Wilde (Doll Furious), and Janet Flanner (Nip). While the *Almanack* places Barney and her salon at its centre, critics debate whether the text serves as a

celebration or a castigation of the women of 20 rue Jacob, with some deeming it a feminist, lesbian empowerment tale and others calling it a biting treatise against female sexuality and Barney herself. This section will examine the debates surrounding *Ladies Almanack*, addressing both the praise and admonishment it has received to show that the *Almanack*—in spite of its potentially problematic parts—reflects and endorses some of the main intentions of Barney’s salon: to bring women together, to undermine patriarchal institutions that suppress and dehumanise women, and to transform female sexuality into a source of pride and community.

Since it became an object of scholarly discussion in the 1970s, *Ladies Almanack* has sharply divided critics into three schools, which frame the text as: 1) A ringing endorsement of lesbian love and women more generally; 2) A spiteful, misogynistic, and ultimately anti-lesbian indictment of Barney and her coterie; and, 3) A politically ambiguous text, which aims neither to endorse nor condemn Barney, her salon, and their mutual focus on female love and friendship. Feminist scholars Kathryn Kent and Shari Benstock belong to the first school, positing the *Almanack* as a purely queer-positive and feminist text. In her article “‘Lullaby for a Lady’s Lady’: Lesbian Identity in *Ladies Almanack*,” Kent positions the *Almanack* as a kind of ‘recruiting’ tool—a text around which “an ‘imagined community’ of lesbian practices and identities” can be fully realised (90). She even credits the *Almanack* with establishing a theory of queer reproduction by which lesbian love—in spite of its traditional associations with barrenness—emerges as a procreative endeavour (“Lullaby” 90).¹⁰³ Benstock shares a similarly positive view of the *Almanack*, arguing that the text helps to alleviate women’s alienation from their bodies and from history (250). She labels the *Almanack* “a predictive text, one that envisions a world where women are able to take control of their sexuality and sensuality in order to derive pleasure rather than pain from their bodies” (266). Although the *Almanack* is indeed a

¹⁰³ Queer reproduction and its importance to the *Almanack* will be further discussed later in this section.

satire, Benstock insists that Barnes's vitriol never comes at the expense of her lesbian subjects, but rather at the heterosexist society within which they are forced to live (249-50).

According to Jay and Laura Behling, however, the *Almanack* does indeed function as a direct repudiation of not only Barney and her female habitués, but also of lesbianism more generally. In her essay "The Outsider among the Expatriates: Djuna Barnes's Satire on the Ladies of the *Almanack*," Jay interprets the text as a bitter form of catharsis for Barnes, who was tired of being "perpetually placed in the role of the beggar at the feast" (185). For Jay, Barnes's resentment informs the entirety of the *Almanack*, particularly what Jay deems its unfair and unflattering depiction of Barney "as a conscienceless nymphomaniac [which] negates much of what she most valued in life: friendship" ("The Outsider" 189). Behling builds upon Jay's reading, suggesting that the *Almanack* was primarily Barnes's means of chastising Barney's "financial and cultural elitism" (506). For Behling, the *Almanack* does little to empower lesbian women; if anything, it belittles them, casting their sexuality as "simply genital intimacy" (517). While the *Almanack*'s use of archaic forms and images—particularly its woodcut-style drawings and loose almanac format, in which each section revolves around a month in the year—appears to lend historical validity to lesbianism, Behling contends that they actually work to discredit lesbianism: "These popular images were not an elite form; rather, they were indiscriminately mass-produced for an audience generally unsophisticated in tastes" (509). Lesbianism in the *Almanack* is thus—according to Behling—a sign of poor taste and hypersexualisation.

Yet, such interpretations of Barnes's text neglect how the *Almanack* was primarily intended for Barney and her coterie. As Susan Sniader Lanser contends, the *Almanack* was "an inside joke" (41), which Barney and her habitués took joy in deciphering; Barney and Janet Flanner heavily annotated their copies of the *Almanack*, using the margins to write down the real-life inspiration for each character. Moreover, the text's humour lies in its

reader's knowledge of the real 20 rue Jacob, which—rather than a hypersexualised orgiastic space—ended by 8 p.m. so that its host could “have a cup of bouillon and go up to bed” (Cleyrergue 490). However, that is not to suggest that the *Almanack* is a complete “piece of fluff,” as Barnes once claimed (qtd. in Benstock 249). For all of its bawdy humour, the *Almanack* engages in the important work of critique, queering the institutions and discourses that enshrine heterosexuality as a societal ideal. Yet, at the same time, the *Almanack* appears to indulge and accord with some problematic understandings of lesbianism and gendered difference—all of which have resulted from the heteronormative discourses the text works so hard to undermine. Several scholars have acknowledged this duality, offering more nuanced readings of the *Almanack*. Daniela Caselli, for instance, contests that the *Almanack* is “neither a celebration nor a chastising of the Barney coterie. It is neither about lesbian pleasure as the result of a different kind of knowledge based on excess nor a parody of an elitist world from the point of view of a cynical outsider” (108). Rather, Caselli argues the *Almanack* revels in ambiguity, so as to interrogate “the possibility of an innocent position, both for the narrator and for the reader” (109-10). Lanser offers a similar analysis, suggesting that the *Almanack*'s status—as either a lesbian-feminist text or an anti-lesbian diatribe—depends entirely upon the reader's own desires and subjectivity (39-40). In “Displacing Castration: *Nightwood*, *Ladies Almanack*, and Feminine Writing,” Frann Michel adopts a more conclusive and celebratory reading, whilst still recognising the text's ambiguous politics. For Michel, “the very excess of the praise of women” in the *Almanack* serves to undermine any apparent criticisms (54-5). Christine Berni builds upon this assertion, claiming that Barnes engages with “misogynistic or heteronormative medical, literary and visual precedents” as a means of “exploit[ing] the inconsistencies within those discourses and thereby produce ‘alternative modalities of power’” (101); in doing so, Barnes ultimately stages the *Almanack* as “the celebration of a lesbian universal” (Berni 99).

In keeping with Berni's and Michel's readings, the following analysis will foreground the *Almanack*'s positivity towards lesbianism and female community, suggesting that its seemingly problematic forays into heteronormative and patriarchal discourses—such as sexology and religion—are in fact satirical moves meant to continue the feminist work of 20 rue Jacob by subverting the patriarchy and its institutions from within. Every aspect of the *Almanack*—its multigeneric form, its depiction of lesbianism as an alternative religion, its participation in and subversion of patriarchal discourses—all serve to reflect the Barney salon's emphasis on female friendship and empowerment. The text reflects Barney's feminist *pensées*—particularly those which criticise the reproductive imperative, monogamy, and marriage—and claims a space for lesbian and queer women in history in a similar fashion to 20 rue Jacob's reclamation of Sappho as a lesbian. Its depiction of Barney as the evangelistic Dame Musset highlights Barney's main goal as salonière: to amass a transnational female-centred community that could provide (queer) women with the means to express themselves creatively and love and support one another freely—albeit, in not quite as orgiastic or indiscriminate a way as the *Almanack* depicts.

The *Almanack* slips between multiple genres and, in doing so, resists easy categorisation and generic convention. It resembles, on the one hand, a roman à clef—a novel with a key. It is a fictionalised account of the real-life 20 rue Jacob, in which both its salonière's and female habitués' identities are concealed via alter egos. Thus, a deeper reading of Barney's salon circle offers a further key to understanding the text. Amy Wells-Lynn refers to this obscuration of Barney and her female habitués' identities as one of the *Almanack*'s “coding strategies” (85-6), which enables the text to not only remain an inside joke, but also to escape censure. Members of the salon circle are able to decipher the *Almanack*'s code through what Wells-Lynn identifies as “tags” (95). The text includes numerous references to “the Temple of the Good Dame Musset” (18-9), which situate the action at 20 rue Jacob's Temple de l'Amitié; the scene between Musset and Doll at the

nearby Luxembourg Gardens serves a similar function. Moreover, Barnes is careful to provide clues as to whom each character represents in the *Almanack*, whether it is through the character's name or her way of dress. Doll Furious is a clear play on Dolly Wilde, whereas Lady Buck-and-Balk and Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood wear the same monocle and Stetson as their real-life counterparts, Lady Una Troubridge and Radclyffe Hall, respectively (18). This roman à clef format is not the *Almanack*'s only coding strategy, however. It also employs satire and bawdy humour in order to mask its bracing critiques of various patriarchal institutions, such as religion and the medical establishment, and its discussion of female sexuality. As Benstock notes, "this is a specifically female 'bawdy' that admits no males" (252); it frees female sexuality from male control, all in the guise of humour.

The *Almanack*'s various archaisms can also be read as part of its coding strategy; they all in their own way contribute to the text's interrogation of patriarchal institutions. The *Almanack*, as Caselli notes, poses "as the antiquarian object" (93). It contains 22 pen and ink drawings, drawn in such a way as to resemble woodcut illustrations of yore. While their archaic style lends the text a historical, conservative quality, their content is highly subversive. May's inset features two naked women in bed together (30), whilst March's illustration features a woman touching the buttocks of another (18). These drawings attempt to compensate for the dearth of lesbian women in official accounts of history by creating a space for them; they historicise lesbianism and queer female sexualities more generally. While Behling argues that "these popular images were not an elite form" and thus defame lesbianism (509), they in fact accomplish the opposite: they rid lesbianism of its taboo status and, in turn, make it commonplace.¹⁰⁴ In this way, Barnes' use of archaic images echoes Barney's own subversion of traditionally male literary forms—the epigrammatic form of the *pensée*, for example—to imbue radical feminist ideas with a sense

¹⁰⁴ In this section, I will mostly use the term 'lesbian' in lieu of the broader term 'queer,' as the *Almanack* is wholly focused upon love and sex between women.

of prestige, respectability, and logic. The *Almanack*'s archaic language similarly works to historicise lesbianism, whilst also creating a covertly feminine language. In *Late Modernism: Politics, Fiction, and the Arts Between the World Wars*, Tyrus Miller posits that many of the *Almanack*'s "truly arcane words—words for which the typical reader must appeal to the wisdom of the *Oxford English Dictionary*—refer to items of clothing or fabrics," all of which are traditionally associated with female activities, such as sewing and fashion (141-2). Thus, when the *Almanack* refers to fashionable or ornate items of clothing, such as a "tippet" (7), "a Belcher" (7), or "Busby" (31), it not only calls attention to the gendered nature of language, but it also marks out the *Almanack* as an exclusively female text.¹⁰⁵ The moniker of the *Almanack*'s anonymous author—"a Lady of Fashion"—upholds this interpretation, casting the world of fashion (and its associated terminology) as female.

The anonymity of the *Almanack*'s authorship also adds to the text's overall archaic impression, and more importantly, its status as an almanac. While Caselli argues that "almanacs do not provide us with a framework to explain Barnes's work" (100), they do reveal the impetus behind some of the *Almanack*'s major themes, including religion, astrology, and empowerment. In his extensively researched history of English almanacs, Bernard Capp establishes the almanac's role in "strengthen[ing] man's position in his struggle against the environment" (15). With the *Almanack*, this role is maintained yet perverted; instead of aiding man versus nature, the text strengthens the lesbian woman's position in her struggle against the patriarchal, heterosexist environment within which she abides. Whilst doing so, the *Almanack* pays homage to many of the almanac's key features, including its calendrical structure, its Saints Days, and its Zodiacal Man. Yet, the *Almanack* renders all of these features exclusively female. Each month is dedicated to either a specific woman or to women's general "Portents, Signs and Omens," "Her Tides and Moons," and

¹⁰⁵ According to the *OED*, a tippet is "a cape or short cloak, often with hanging ends," which is "worn chiefly by women and girls." A belcher is a blue neckerchief with "large white spots having a dark blue spot or eye in the centre," while a busby is "a tall fur hat with a coloured cloth lap hanging down on the right-hand side and (in some cases) a plume on top."

her “Distempers.” The Zodiacal Man—“a figure, unchanged since classical times, which showed the organs and parts of the body controlled by the various signs of the zodiac” (Capp 29-30)—becomes the lesbian Zodiacal Woman, and the Saints Days emerge as celebrations of Musset’s sexual exploits. The *Almanack* queers the traditional almanac, exploiting its associations with religion and astrology to posit the legitimacy and even supremacy of lesbianism. In this way, the *Almanack* taps into what Julie Taylor identifies as “the moral outrage [the traditional almanac] provoked” (733). As Capp points out, the almanac came under attack in the 1700s “for drawing men away from God, by offering information which was diabolical in origin,” in spite of its religious content (31). The *Almanack* evidently draws upon this history, formulating itself as a text which lures women away from heterosexist society and its associated institutions towards an alternative religion: lesbianism.

From its outset, the *Almanack* presents itself as a religious text—not only in its nods to the almanac form and its tenuous relationship with the Church, but also in its self-designation as a guidebook for ladies: “Thus begins this Almanack, which all Ladies should carry about with them, as the Priest his Breviary” (9). The *Almanack* positions itself as a pseudo-Bible—a text by which women should attempt to lead their lives. Unlike the breviary, though, the *Almanack* offers what it deems a more credible alternative to the Christian religion: lesbianism, or more simply put, love between women. While Christianity provides no proof of God’s existence—“What we know not, is our only proof of Him!” (14-5)—lesbianism has a proven saviour in Barney’s doppelgänger, Dame Evangeline Musset. In a simultaneous nod to and send-up of Barney’s devoted salon circle, the women of the *Almanack* hold Musset up as their personal Jesus, congregating at her “Temple of Love”—an explicit parallel to Barney’s own Temple de l’Amitié—to express their devotion and gratitude. Similar to habitués Max Jacob and Remy de Gourmont, who metaphorically placed themselves at Barney’s feet, Musset’s devotees are willing to suffer great indignities

to prove their faith in her. The narrator of February's section, for example, proclaims that she will "pour ashes upon my Head, gird me in Sackcloth, covering my Nothing and Despair under a Mountain of Cinders, and thus become a Monument to No-Ability for her sake" (17); she places herself at Musset's feet, acknowledging her "No-Ability" relative to Musset's glorious love(-making). Even Daisy Downpour, whom the text describes as "Godless and fearless, ma[kes] Fear and a God of the yellow Hair of Dame Musset" (63). These women are validated for placing their faith in Musset—she is a proven saviour, who has suffered greatly for the sins of heterosexist society. Her rape by "the Hand of a Surgeon" (24) reads as her crucifixion, and her subsequent avowal—"I am my Revenge!" (26)—as her resurrection. When one of Musset's followers, Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood, offers to seek vengeance on her saviour's behalf, Musset—like Christ—calls for "peace" in the face of such cruelty (26). Musset is God personified: "When the proof of God died, died Saint Musset, proof of Earth" (80). Even after her death, Musset continues to live on in the form of her disembodied tongue, bringing eternal pleasure to her loyal followers from "the Altar in the Temple of Love" (84).

While Musset serves as the saviour of her lesbian fellowship, she also emerges as one of its saints. The *Almanack*'s February section gives the most extensive account of Musset's saintly acts, which ultimately portrays the subversion of Christianity's (and more generally, patriarchal discourse's) authority as a miraculous feat. Musset is lauded for "lament[ing] Mid-prayers, that the girls in the Bible were both Earth-hushed and Jew-touched forever and ever" (15); in spite of the troubling anti-Semitic sentiment here, Musset's interrogation of the Bible's misogyny is powerful. Rather than accept Christianity's silencing of female voices, Musset opens up the possibility for a female-centric religion to be formed. She earns her sainthood in part for "calling for a Brides wing and a Feather to flock with" (15)—a community which shares 20 rue Jacob's own Sapphic influences and devotes itself exclusively to cultivating love amongst women. As a result,

many of Musset's miracles stem from her sexual exploits, including curing a servant of her Housemaid's Knee with "a kneeling-to" (15) and making "a Harlot a good woman by making her Mistress" (15). Unlike the Bible, which deems homosexuality a sin, the *Almanack* frames lesbian sex as a holy act capable of cleansing women of their moral improprieties and ailments. Rather than view Christianity as women's path to righteousness, then, the *Almanack* posits lesbianism as the ultimate goal. Musset is a saint not only because she is a lesbian, but also because she can "hush a Near-Bride with the left Flounce of her Ruffle" (15)—she has the power to rescue women from their stifling heterosexual lives and bring them to realise the joys and pleasures of female love and community. Musset thus upholds Barney's own desire to transform sexual pleasure and bodily knowledge into respectable arenas for self-betterment and intellectual growth—albeit, in a highly exaggerated way.

With the help of the "Members of [her] Sect"—her habitués—Saint Evangeline Musset—whose first name, according to Lanser, "recalls religious evangelists" (42)—embarks upon her holy mission: to proselytise the virtues of lesbian love and to bring more followers into her fold (31). Similar to Barney, a self-professed "humanophile" who strove to collect as many (queer) American and European women at her salons as possible, Musset is constantly on the lookout for potential 'converts,' keeping a keen ear out for "the voice of one who should be One of Us" (23). When Nip and Tuck come "to let [Musset] know there is a Flall loose in the 'Town who is crying from Corner to Niche, in that lamenting Herculean Voice that sounds to us like a Sister lost," Musset sets out immediately to "repair what has never been damaged" (31)—a woman who, inculcated with Christian, heterosexist doctrine, has never known the "very Tangle of Temptation" of lesbian love (32).¹⁰⁶ Musset's mission serves to problematise and satirise the work of

¹⁰⁶ This last phrase—"repair what has never been damaged"—can also be read as a critique of Musset's missionary work and Christian missionary work more generally i.e. the Flall is not in

Christian missionaries; she strives to lead women into temptation rather than steer them away from it. Yet, Musset expresses boredom at the relative ease with which she manages to convert her subjects: “‘In my day I was a Pioneer and a Menace, it was not then as it is now, *chic* and pointless to a degree, but as daring as a Crusade [...] What joy has the missionary [...] when all the Heathen greet her with Glory Halleluja! before she opens her Mouth, and with an Amen! before she shuts it!’” (34). The blatant hyperbole here—that lesbianism has become “*chic* and pointless to a degree” when in fact it was still highly taboo at the time of writing—satirises the redundancy of Christian missionary work rather than the lesbian cause.¹⁰⁷ As Caselli writes, the *Almanack* does not want “to turn the lesbian into a ‘nonsense’” (108), but rather, the idea of religious conversion into one. As the world’s largest religion, Christianity has become “*chic* and pointless to a degree”; converts are no longer necessary and yet, the Church continues to send out missionaries to thrust their beliefs upon others. The *Almanack* thus moulds lesbianism into an alternative religion not only to demonstrate the value in love between women, but also to critique the oppressive aspects of organised religion.

The *Almanack* shows particular care in disentangling female sexuality from its Biblical associations with original sin. Maisie Tuck-and-Frill aptly dubs lesbian love “a Farewell to the Creator” (23); it calls for a break from established religious beliefs, yet also poses an alternative form of spiritual experience. According to Maisie, the lesbian “gives her Body to all unrecorded Music, which is the Psalm” (23); the sexual act renders her a literal testament to her faith. Musset similarly posits lesbian sex as a gateway to Heaven: “Some women [...] are Sea-Cattle, and some are Land-Hogs, and yet others are Worms crawling about our Almanacks, but some [...] are Sisters of Heaven, and these we must

need of saving, much in the same way as Aboriginal and colonised people were not in need of Christianity.

¹⁰⁷ As was mentioned in the previous chapter, homosexual acts were not illegal in early 20th-century France. However, homosexuality was still considered immoral and public displays of homosexuality were not tolerated. Barney herself was evicted from her home in Neuilly because her landlord took issue with the openly “Sapphic” nature of her early salon gatherings (Wells-Lynn 95).

follow and not be side-tracked' ” (38). In Musset's hierarchy of holiness, lesbians are superior, whereas women who submitted to heterosexist society—and spent their lives reproducing like “Cattle” or “Hogs”—lie at the bottom. While Musset's reduction of mothers to cattle is dehumanising and potentially misogynistic, it does undermine reproduction as the ultimate goal to which women should aspire—a feat which Barney worked towards throughout her feminist *pensées*. It is from lesbian sex that women derive life's meaning: only “Pains” remain for the woman who never “put her Head within to see what rumpled meaning there sits” (36). It is for this reason that Daisy exposes “to the gaze of Dame Musset (had she looked) the machine-hooked glory of a Pair of near-pink Undergarments, most luringly loosened at the Weave at full good four Points” (63); she believes that she can “secure [herself] God” and a place in Heaven if she makes herself sexually available to Musset (63). By the *Almanack*'s end, lesbian sex and holiness have become commensurate. As “some hundred Women” gather to pay homage to the late Musset, they straddle over her still flickering tongue, “bent in Prayer” (84). Female pleasure is no longer a thing of condemnation in the *Almanack*, but a thing of divinity—a means of communicating with a higher power, whatever that may look like.

Biblical stories are similarly reimagined in the *Almanack*, helping to rectify the dearth of positive female and queer figures within Christianity; it creates a space for queer women within history and as such, pays homage to Barney's own desire to use 20 rue Jacob as a means of “recover[ing] Sappho from male professors who either had pictured her as a seducer of young girls or had denied the existence of a Sapphic sexuality altogether,” as Benstock explains (281). In its March section, the *Almanack* relates “the part about Heaven that has never been told” (24)—how the first lesbian came to be:

After the Fall of Satan [...] all the Angels, Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricornus, Aquarius, Pisces, all, all gathered together, so close that they were not recognizable, one from the other. And not nine Months later, there was heard under the Dome of Heaven a great Crowing, and from the Midst, an Egg, as incredible as a

thing forgotten, fell to Earth, and striking, split and hatched, and from out of it stepped one saying ‘Pardon me, I must be going!’ And this was the first Woman born with a Difference.

After this the Angels parted, and on the Face of each was the Mother look. Why was that? (24-6)

In this alternative creation story, astrology—commonly vilified as a quack science—and religion become intertwined, thereby ridding religion of its authority. While Behling bemoans “the inconceivability of the act itself”—and by proxy, its implication that lesbianism is also inconceivable (520)—Barnes purposefully makes the story ridiculous so as to delegitimise the Bible’s own ludicrous stories. In rendering the lesbian’s creation as both heavenly and astrological, Barnes manages to discredit Biblical associations between homosexuality and sin, whilst simultaneously recognising the marginalised position of the lesbian woman. As Capp details in his history of the almanac, astrologers were maligned by society for their false science; astrology was deemed unnatural and sinful (31), much in the same way that lesbianism was. It makes sense then that this “first woman Born with a difference” would want to distance herself from Heaven (and its religious affiliations) as quickly as possible (26); she is an outsider, ill-suited to the restrictions inherent to a traditionally pious life. The conditions of her conception attest to this fact, as she is the result of queer reproduction—what Kent defines as a process by which “queers reproduce other queers” via “instruction and seduction” (“Lullaby” 90). It is the same process by which Musset charges her disciples to seek out women “with a Difference” and bring them into her community’s fold—albeit, in a more inconceivable fashion. Twelve angels, all with “the Mother look,” come together to produce the first lesbian on earth (26). As Kent so aptly puts it, “in this image, Barnes wrestles not only reproduction but the idea of mothering from their heterosexual context, and rewrites them to include what can happen in various lesbian spaces, perhaps even the Parisian salon” (“Lullaby” 91). This alternative creation story can then be read as a testimony to Barney’s own goal as salonière: to provide

a space within which women could come together and create—rather than simply procreate.

This goal of Barney's—to prioritise and create space for female expression—is echoed in another queer reimagining of the Bible entitled "The Fourth Great Moment of History." As Doll Furious tells Musset, this tale, "which is of Sheba and Jezebel," reimagines the Queen of Sheba and Jezebel as lesbians destined for each other:

Jezebel, that flighty forthright, used to spend much of her Time in angling from her Window and crying 'Uoo Hoo!' to the Kings that way wending to War and to Death. And some turned in at her Door, and others went on, though not a many 'tis true. Thus was Jezebel employed, when the Queen of Sheba passed beneath her Window, and Jezebel leaning outward called 'Uoo Hooo!'

'And that was Jezebel's last 'Uoo Hoo!' (41)

On the one hand, this queer Biblical tale appears to uphold monogamy as the key to a fulfilled and happy existence. Its last line creates a sense of closure and fulfilment: Jezebel has met her apparent soulmate in the Queen of Sheba and therefore has no need to continue her search for sexual partners. Yet, it also repositions marginal Biblical women at the centre of history and shows lesbian love as restorative; it protects Jezebel from the condemnation and gruesome fate she meets in the Bible, much in the same way as Barney's play *Equivoque*—which was written and performed specifically for her salon coterie—foregrounds Sappho's lesbianism and rescues her from committing suicide over an unrequited love for a ferryman. As Ery Shin argues, "Doll's tale recasts violent male legacies to forge another part of history's elsewhere, where Jezebel is not killed by kings [...] Sheba's queen need not bother with Solomon, and Eve fares well without Adam" (31). Within this queer version of Christianity, then, man is rendered irrelevant. History—so often written by and for heterosexual men—becomes exclusively the realm of lesbian women.

However, religion and history are not the only patriarchal institutions to be humorously subverted by the *Almanack*. As Julie Taylor explains, Barnes employs features of the astrological almanac—“an object of ridicule by this time”—“to satirise and discredit the medical and moral authority of the contemporary sexologist” (717). The *Almanack* exploits its form’s associations with quack science to reveal the absurdity of sexological discourse, especially its theorisation of sexual inversion—which, depending on the sexologist’s usage, can best be understood in modern terms as a combination of homosexuality and transgender or gender-fluid identity. As works by famed sexologists Havelock Ellis and Stella Browne demonstrate, sexological discourse attempts to understand sexual inversion through case studies, in which subjects’ sexual desires, bodily gestures, physical appearance, and comportment are dissected to determine how (and why) their gender expression and sexuality deviates from their biological sex. In doing so, it creates clear—and arguably unsubstantiated—divisions between ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’ male and female behaviour and appearance.¹⁰⁸ While sexologists refrain from making moral judgments on sexual inversion—Browne argues that inversion is neither superior to nor worse than heterosexuality (65)—the apparent discord between an invert’s sex, gender, and his/her object of desire is still depicted as an unnatural perversion and a profound social issue. Browne characterises feminine inversion as a “very pressing and immediate” problem, arguing that lesbian sex “cannot replace the vital contact, mental and bodily, with congenial men” (65-6). Barnes employs this line of sexological discourse throughout the *Almanack*—not as an endorsement, but as a satirical device. When Musset first appears in the *Almanack*, she is introduced as “one Grand Red Cross for the Pursuance, the Relief, and the Distraction, of such Girls as in their Hinder Parts, and their Fore Parts, and in whatsoever Parts did suffer them most, lament Cruelly, be it Itch of Palm, or Quarters

¹⁰⁸ In one of her many case studies on feminine inversion (Case C), Browne considers her subject’s “long limbs, broad shoulders, slight bust,” her athleticism, her deep voice, and her leadership skills—all of which Browne codes masculine—as somehow all connected to the subject’s attraction to women.

most horribly burning” (6). Musset thinks clinically: she divides the lesbian woman up into distinct parts—“Hinder Parts,” “Fore Parts”—in order to locate what it is that specifically ails her. Musset usurps the medical practitioner of his authority and reveals the true cure for these “yelping” women as the one thing sexologists discredit as abnormal: lesbian sex (6). As Musset suggests, “no thing so solaces it [sexual desire] as other Parts as inflamed, or with the Consolation every Woman has at her Finger Tips, or at the very Hang of her Tongue” (6). The phallus—the ultimate symbol of patriarchal power—becomes irrelevant here; it is the tongue and the fingertips that guarantee a woman’s sexual release. The *Almanack* thus counters sexological discourse’s assertion that homosexuality is an aberration, rendering it superior to the supposedly normal heterosexual form of desire.

This counterclaim gains legitimacy throughout the *Almanack*, particularly via Patience Scalpel’s character trajectory. To start, Patience is a living embodiment of sexological discourse; she is, as Taylor notes, “a parody of doctors who attempt (and fail) to define lesbians and lesbianism” (723). Even Patience’s last name, Scalpel, frames her as a kind of surgeon, attempting to find the root cause of her friends’ sexual inversion. She is “cold” and clinical, as is emblematised in January’s illustration of a stabbed heart (11). The *Almanack* does not look kindly on Patience, and includes her “for one Reason only, that from Beginning to End, Top to Bottom, inside and out, she could not understand Women and their Ways as they were about her, above her and before her” (11). Like a sexologist—who relies on statistical averages and norms to determine what constitutes abnormal sexual behaviour—Patience relies solely on “Mathematical,” “Statistical,” and “Reasonable” sources in her attempts to understand lesbianism (12). As a result, she cannot view lesbianism outside of heterosexist discourse, for which reproduction is paramount. For Patience, lesbianism leads us through “a blind Alley” to the end of humanity (12); the pairing of “like to like” does not and cannot lead to the creation of new life, and is thus abnormal (12). Yet, the text undermines Patience’s—and by extension, sexological—views

of lesbianism on the final page of its January section, when an illustration of Musset serves as a visual interruption of Patience's diatribe. Musset emerges from Patience's speech, with a triumphant banner that reads: "Thus Evangeline Began Her Career" (13). As Tyrus Miller posits, "the heroine of modernistic affiliative (lesbian) community is born from the literal rupture of the filiative discourse that Patience Scalpel represents" (140); it is thus Patience's ignorance—her condemnation—that sets Musset off on her mission to bring together her "World of Women" (50). Yet, Patience comes to repudiate her views and in doing so, undermines the presumed authority of sexological and medical discourses. Upon hearing Musset's account of being raped "by the Hand of a Surgeon!" (24), Patience's faith in the medical establishment begins to falter. She frames the surgeon as an insane murderer, hoping his hand "drip[s] more Agony and Regret than the Hand of Lady Macbeth"—an allusion which simultaneously inverts the sexist trope of women leading men into sin and temptation (26). As the *Almanack* progresses, Patience even expresses a desire to become a lesbian. She "hint[s], then aver[s], and finally boast[s] that she herself, though all Thumbs at the business and an Amateur, [...] could mean as much to a Woman as another" (50). It is with this final proclamation—this confessed desire to love another woman—that Patience completely rejects sexological discourse, realising that love does not necessarily need to be procreative in order to be productive; she thus continues the work of Barney's feminist *pensées*, releasing women from the reproductive roles to which they have so often been limited.

Thus, the *Almanack* not only interrogates compulsory heterosexuality, but also the institutions that help to safeguard it. Marriage, for instance, is simultaneously queered and repudiated in the text. On the one hand, Lady Buck-and-Balk and Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood reimagine marriage as a union exclusively between two women, by which "we could do away with Man altogether!" (24). Yet, their reasons for queering the institution of marriage

are by no means progressive. Lady Buck-and-Balk and Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood want gay marriage to be legalised purely because it will allow lesbian women to lead moral lives:

Just because woman falls, in this Age, to Woman, does that mean that we are not to recognize Morals? What has England done to legalize these Passions? Nothing! [...] Therefore we think to bring the Point to the Notice of our Judges, and have it set before the House of Lords. For when a Girl falls in Love, with no matter what, should she not be protected in some way, from Hazard, ever attending that which is illegal?' (19)

The irony here is striking. Lady Buck-and-Balk and Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood want the Church and the State to formally recognise their union, absolving them of any sin connected to premarital sex. Yet, their sexuality renders them innately sinful from the Church's perspective; they will never be seen as moral. Lady Buck-and-Balk and Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood uphold the sanctity of marriage in spite of how little it serves to benefit them, but in so doing, they also reveal marriage's inherent hypocrisy. Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood wants gay marriage to be legalised primarily so that "straying [may] be nipped in the Bud" (20). Yet, her association between marriage and fidelity is unfounded, especially when one considers how many affairs her real-life alter ego Radclyffe Hall had with married women. Unlike its traditional almanac influences, the *Almanack* refutes marriage as "the normal condition," revealing the ways in which it provides false security to its participants.

In recognition of marriage's pitfalls, Musset proposes an alternative solution to Lady Buck-and-Balk and Tilly-Tweed-in-Blood's concerns about fidelity—duelling: "There are Duels to take the place of the Law, and there's always a Way out, should one or both be found wanting. A strong Gauntlet struck lightly athwart the Buttock would bring her to the common Green, where with Rapier, or Fowling-Piece, she might demand and take her Satisfaction, thus ending it for both, in one way or another" (20). Musset perverts the conventions of courtly love in order to suit her own needs. She wrests the duel from its patriarchal roots, transforming it into a profoundly queer act, in which two women—not men—vie for the heart of another woman. Rather than serve as an affirmation of

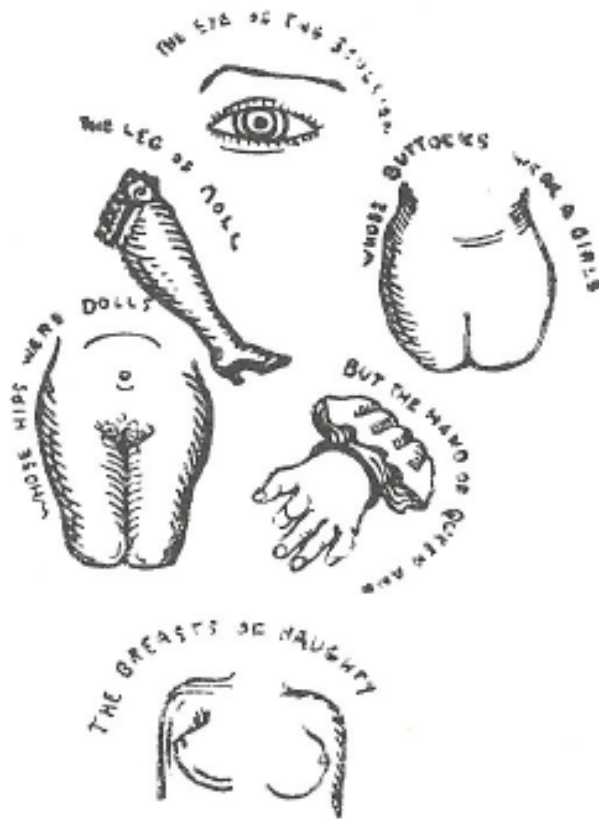


Figure 1: Illustration of Musset's ideal woman

masculinity, the duel becomes a means of validating (and enacting) lesbian sexuality. The women Musset describes are not so much duelling as pronouncing their sexuality—"demand[ing] and tak[ing] her Satisfaction" as they see fit. Regardless of the outcome, though, lesbianism remains triumphant. This is key for Musset, for whom heteronormative society holds little appeal. She wants to upend the status quo, for "Love of Woman for Woman [to] increase Terror" for the patriarchal order (20).

Yet, for all her talk of a lesbian revolution, Musset—like her real-life inspiration—can exhibit the behaviour of a misogynist. Similar to Barney, who can be faulted for her disparaging views of motherhood and what some could interpret as her womanising tendencies, Musset treats women like customisable dolls, detailing how she would assemble her ideal woman: "If," said she, 'I could mould the Pot nearer to the Heart's desire, I would have my Scullion's Eye lie in the Head of Billings-On-Coo, with the Breasts of Haughty on the Hips of Doll, on the Leg of Moll, with the Shins of Mazie [...] the Buttocks of a Girl I saw take a slip and slither one peelish day in Fall, when on her way to Devotion" (65). The *Almanack* includes an illustration of the aforementioned body parts on the accompanying page, which serves as a stark visual cue to the dehumanising nature of Musset's behaviour (Figure 1). Contrary to Behling's assertion that this "reassembling of

sexual parts [...] constructs a monstrous lesbian sexuality,” I consider this instance of misogyny as more of a satirical critique of how men—and patriarchal society more generally—treat women like objects (512). Musset takes men’s proclivity for objectification to an absurd level, focusing not solely on sexual body parts (“the Leg,” “the Breasts,” “the Hips”), but the inanely functional (“the Shins”), as well. The internal rhymes in her list—“Scullion’s Eye lie,” “the Hips of Doll, on the Leg of Moll”—render it innocuous, childish, and even spell-like, gesturing to those women whose knowledge of the female body led to wrongful accusations of witchcraft throughout the Early Modern period and, in turn, exonerating Musset for her similar understanding and itemisation of the female body. When Musset argues, “we should be able to order our Ladies as we would, and not as they come,” she further highlights the ridiculousness of her objectifying desires. Women cannot be made to order, much in the same way that they cannot live up to the romanticised Madonna figure. In short, Musset’s ideal woman should be read as a “comic literalising [of] ‘the blazon of traditional love poetry,’ ” intended to expose and ridicule the unachievable expectations set out for women in patriarchal society (Caselli 108)—not as a negative reflection on Barney and her treatment of women.

Musset is not only the enactor of female objectification, but its recipient, as well. Upon her cremation, all that is left of Musset is her Tongue, which “played about upon the handful [of ashes] that had been she indeed” (84). This disembodied tongue flickers on, providing “beatitude” to all who “came down upon that Urn” (84). As time passes, Musset’s followers “place [the urn] on the Altar in the Temple of Love [...where] it is said, [the tongue] flickers to this day, and one may still decipher the Line, beneath its Handles, ‘Oh ye of little Faith’” (84). As many scholars have pointed out, this last image of Musset—as purely sexual—is troubling. While Shin and Michel take issue with the disembodied tongue’s implications for female speech, Behling and Jay lament the reduction of Musset (and Barney, by extension) to a sexual object (Shin 34; Michel 55; Behling 519;

Jay, “The Outsider” 189). Even Lanser, who interprets “this wild finale” as a testament to the tongue’s status “as the ultimate sexual instrument,” finds Musset’s ending “lewdly patriarchal” (44). Although it is problematic for Musset to be reduced to a voiceless tongue, it is important to contextualise this final image within Barney’s own intellectualisation of sexual pleasure; as de Gourmont notes, Barney viewed sex as a discipline, a means for attaining intellectual growth (197-8). The tongue is thus above all an endorsement of female—specifically lesbian—sexuality and, by extension, female creative expression. In “Coming to Writing,” Hélène Cixous suggests that women’s creativity—specifically, their ability to write—stems from their connection to their sexual bodies. It is through “the ‘fundamental language’” of the body “into which all the tongues of things, acts, and beings translate themselves” into women’s writing (“Coming” 52). For Cixous, the tongue—the key instrument of female sexual pleasure—is particularly tied up with women’s ability not only to express themselves, but also to threaten men’s authority. In her short vignette “A Girl Is Being Killed,” Cixous identifies the tongue as a vital threat to the patriarchal order; when the titular girl expresses her desire to live, speak, and be heard, an unknown speaker threatens to “cut out her tongue” in support of the patriarchal character of the Superuncle (“Coming” 8). Without her tongue, it is believed that the girl will lose her power and no longer pose a threat. With this in mind, the durability of Musset’s tongue unleashes a deeper meaning. Even after being set on fire, Musset’s tongue—her phallus—continues to give pleasure—and by extension, the means of creative expression—to her coterie; in its immortality, the tongue casts doubt on the phallus’s presumed superiority. In fact, the phallus is completely absent from the *Almanack*; while much is made of Musset being “an Inch or so less” than a boy, she is strong and powerful without a penis (7). It is female sexuality and pleasure—not procreative sex—that emerges victorious in the *Almanack*. Rather than serve as an indictment of lesbian sexuality, then, the final image of



Figure 2: Musset's coat of arms

Musset's tongue reasserts lesbianism as an alternative faith, one by which women of "little Faith" can fully realise the joys of a woman's love and creativity.

Much of what has been interpreted as misogyny or homophobia in the *Almanack* serves this same goal: to assert the power of a queer female

sexuality. Before the *Almanack* even begins, it establishes female sexuality as its focus. The title page's coat of arms displays Musset emerging from a vagina-like hole, which is formed by two enticing topless mermaids (Figure 2). A fist emerges from the top of the opening, holding what appears to be a rose. As an emblem of Musset's character and achievements, the coat of arms can be read in one of two ways. On the one hand, it renders Musset's contribution to the world as purely sexual. She is literally inseparable from the vagina, and her conquests—or put more aptly, deflorations, as the triumphantly held rose would suggest—are who she is. Yet, the coat of arms is more subversive than that. It takes a highly regarded insignia often associated with patriarchal institutions, such as the State, the military, and the family, and queers it. Neither men nor masculine iconography are present here; Musset is the head of her own lesbian state, in which the love between women serves as the ultimate triumph. In this alternative universe, Musset retains a place in "the Hall of Fame" purely "for her Genius at bringing up by Hand" and "for her Slips of the Tongue" (9). Here, female sexuality is divorced from temptation and sin, and becomes a source of wisdom—of "Genius" (9). Musset and her coterie are not "sexual slaves," as Jay implies, but rather sexually liberated women ("The Outsider" 191). Their overt sexualisation

throughout the *Almanack* is not to reduce them to their anatomy, but to emphasise their freedom from patriarchal constraints—the “Duster, Offspring and Spouse,” as the text so succinctly puts it (7).

Similarly, the *Almanack*’s references to Musset’s masculinity are not intended as a disavowal of femininity or female power, but rather of gender roles more generally. When Musset describes herself as “never a Woman before nor since” (24), it is not out of hatred or disgust for women. Rather, it is a means of freeing herself from society’s conception of woman and all of its accompanying restrictions. Instead of adhering to strictly feminine codes of behaviour, Musset straddles the line between masculine and feminine, a trait for which Shin describes Musset as having “one foot elsewhere, one foot here” (23). The *Almanack*’s frontispiece aptly visualises Musset’s non-committal attitude towards gender norms (Figure 3). It shows Musset—in a very gender ambiguous outfit of a cape and boots—rescuing several women from drowning after they have fallen through thin ice. The caption reveals Musset to be “at her very best when carrying a pole and muff”—two items synonymous with male and female anatomy, respectively. The *Almanack* applauds Musset for her non-conformity, whilst also recognising the value of both masculinity and femininity. While the caption refers to Musset’s rescued as “frail woman,” the implication is not that women are inherently frail, but that Christianity moulds them as such. The *Almanack* suggests “it has pleased God, more and more” to lead “frail woman” to “exceeding [sic] thin ice” and watch her drown under the expectations thrust upon her. Unlike this “frail woman,” Musset refuses to accede to others’ expectations, especially those of her parents. While Musset “had been developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy, [...] she came forth an Inch or so less than this [and] she paid no Heed to the Error” (7). She began her life in accordance with her desires and dreams instead of her anatomy (or lack thereof). When her father chastises her for behaving like a man—much in the same way that Barney’s own father attempted to curb her lesbianism—

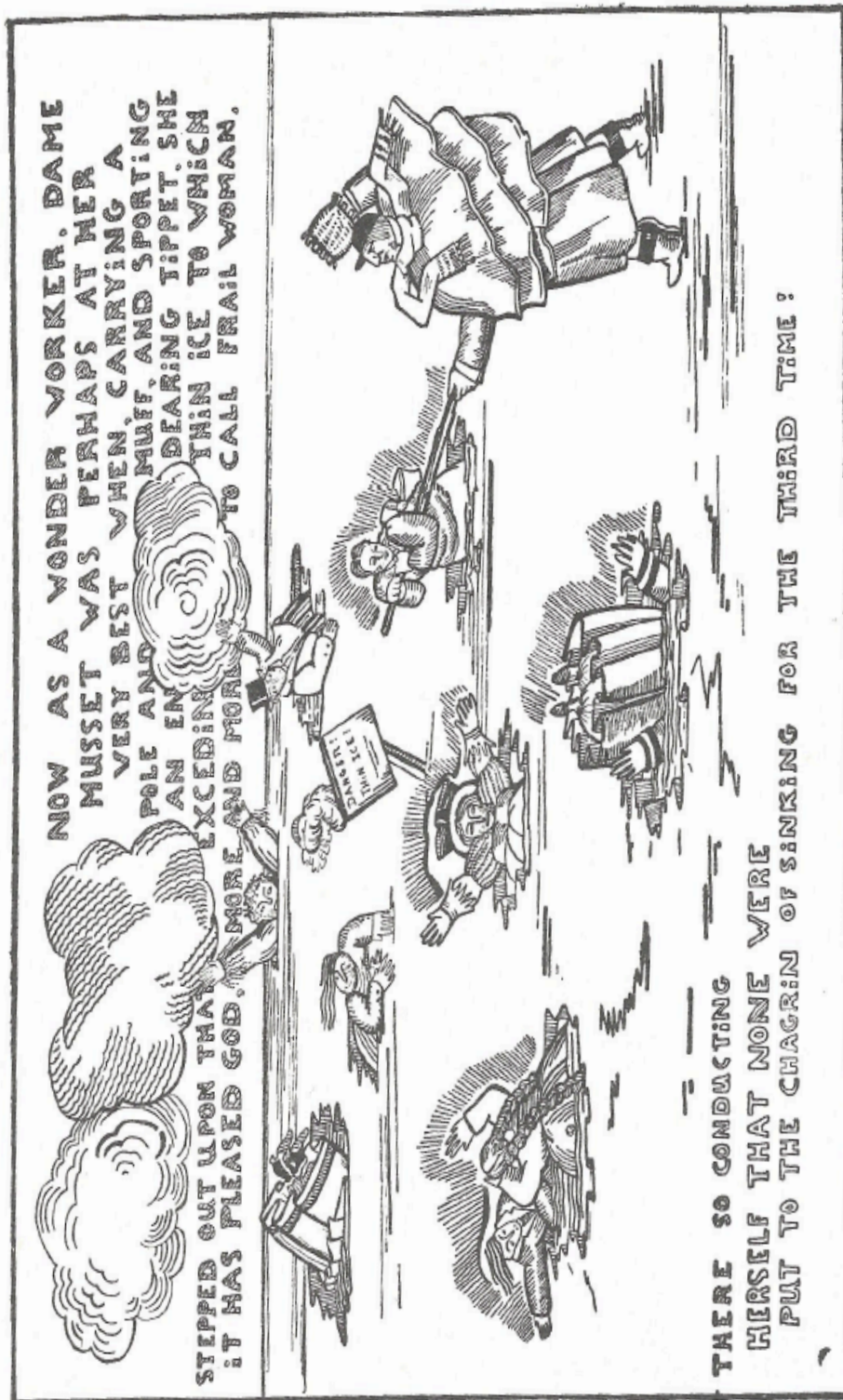


Figure 3: The *Almanack's* frontispiece

Musset points out the unfairness of his expectations: “Thou, good Governor, wast expecting a Son when you lay atop of your Choosing, why then be so mortal wounded when you perceive that you have your Wish? Am I not doing after your very Desire, and is it not the more commendable, seeing that I do it without the Tool for the Trade, and yet nothing complain?” (8). Musset does not deny her womanhood, but she refuses to accept the role of the docile female. In Musset’s estimation, anyone can lead the kind of empowered life to which men are privy, even if they lack the presumed “Tool for the Trade” (8). It is, as High-Head suggests, the patriarchy that “cannot let [a strong woman] be, or proclaim her just good Distaff Stuff, but will admit her to sense through the masculine Door only” (53); women can only be viewed as sensible, rational beings if they renounce their femininity and assume the behaviours associated with idealised masculinity. Any connection made between strength and masculinity in the *Almanack*, then, is meant as a critical reflection on what it means to be a strong woman within the patriarchy; Musset may be portrayed as masculine, yet she is still “at her very best” when feminine as well.

3.5 Conclusion

While *Ladies Almanack* may seem to caricaturise Barney and her salon circle at times, it does not do so maliciously; the *Almanack* indulges in excessive and reductionist characterisations of the women of 20 rue Jacob not to attack them, but to lampoon the patriarchal institutions and heterosexist culture with which they must contend. Barney intended her salon as a supportive space for (mainly) queer women—one in which they could overcome the sexism preventing their professional success and also feel at ease with their sexuality. The *Almanack* reflects these goals in a number of ways, namely through its depiction of lesbianism as an alternative religion. Throughout the *Almanack*, love between women emerges as a moral, prideful feat, a means of achieving holiness—even sainthood; “female solidarity is a community value” (Wells-Lynn 105), much in the same way as it was

for Barney. As a result, men are represented as more or less irrelevant in the *Almanack*—they cannot contribute to “this World of Women,” except as manual labourers (50). While Barney’s salon was not an exclusively female space, men were not Barney’s primary concern nor the target audience for her salon. Primarily, she wanted to promote women writers and artists—a goal that both her Académie des Femmes and nights of honour worked towards achieving. Barney, her salon, and the relationships that it precipitated served as the inspiration for several of her female habitués’ literary and artistic works, including Radclyffe Hall’s *The Well of Loneliness*; Lucie Delarue-Mardrus’ *L’Ange et les Pervers*; Romaine Brooks’ portraits of Barney, Lady Una Troubridge, and Élisabeth de Gramont; and, of course, Djuna Barnes’ *Ladies Almanack*. The *Almanack* reflects Barney’s feminist *pensées*, queering patriarchal institutions like marriage and motherhood, whilst simultaneously carving out a space for lesbian—or more generally, queer—women in history. Read together, Barney’s real-life salon and its literary representation in the *Almanack* demonstrate how 20 rue Jacob was a feminist space aimed at bringing women together and empowering them sexually and creatively.

However, not all salons run by women operated to the same ends as 20 rue Jacob; the character and purpose of the salon were ultimately dictated by the salonière’s own aims and ideas. The following chapter will foreground this point, analysing a salon that, like 20 rue Jacob, subverted gendered and sexual hierarchies, but to different effect. While the hosts and guests of the Stein and Barney salons mostly ascribed to a clearly demarcated male/female binary, the New York-based Stettheimer salon provided a space in which its female hosts and its mostly male guests could fully explore gender’s fluidity and create a body of artistic and literary work in testament to it.

4.

“A Chance of Survival”:

The Stettheimer Salon and Its Feminist Legacy

“I want to be read widely, in the hope that by communication to other minds my thoughts and feelings will become absorbed by them and incorporated into the ideational structure now building through the mental efforts of millions of contemporaries. For upon this structure rests and depends the structure of human society, its quality, its development, and—in our present real and yet unrealizable situation—its continuing existence” – Ettie Stettheimer¹⁰⁹

As the Stein and Barney salons demonstrate, the modernist literary salon was in no way a rigid institution. It was malleable, with its structure, its objectives, and its ethical code all deriving from its salonière’s own values and context. While Stein mainly used her salon as a means for her own career advancement, Barney was more invested in challenging the patriarchal literary establishment by providing a space for women artists and writers to come together and support each other. These salons, while seemingly discordant, seem to amalgamate in the Stettheimer salon (1915-1935). In spite of being an ocean away, the New York-based Stettheimer salon shared many characteristics synonymous with the Stein and Barney salons. While its three hosts—sisters Ettie (1875-1955), Florine (1871-1944), and Carrie (1869-1944)—did not aim to draw the most powerful and influential names in art as critic Paul Rosenberg once suggested, they—like Stein—did benefit from the professional guidance and new career opportunities their male habitués had to offer (Bloemink, *Life and Art* 94-5). The Stettheimer sisters structured their salon as both a testament to and wellspring for their own creative and intellectual prowess; it served as a personal gallery for Florine’s artwork and formed the basis of many of the sisters’ individual artistic projects. However, similar to the Barney salon, the Stettheimer salon was also a space that allowed for an interrogation of the status quo; its salonières refused to adhere to prescribed gender

¹⁰⁹ Foreword, *Memorial Volume of and by Ettie Stettheimer* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), v.

roles and, in turn, encouraged their (mostly male) guests to experiment with their gender expression.

Yet, in spite of all these similarities to the Stein and Barney salons, the Stettheimer salon—and by extension, its hosts—are by far the least known. There are a number of potential explanations for this, including the sisters' desire for privacy, a dearth of archival resources, and the sisters' unconventional artistic aesthetic.¹¹⁰ As a result, the most reliable, sustained account of the Stettheimer salon emerges from the sisters' own salon-inspired works. Florine's portraits and poetry, Ettie's roman à clef *Love Days*, and Carrie's salon menus and dollhouse work in tandem to provide a vibrant and rich portrait of the salon and its dynamics. They shed light on how gender was denaturalised in the Stettheimer salon via their embrace of androgyny, the inversion of the sexual hierarchy, and their high esteem for the feminised (and thereby devalued) realms of the domestic and the personal. These works carve out a space for the Stettheimer sisters and their salon in the otherwise male-centric history of artistic and literary modernism; they constitute a feminist form of legacy building, and consciously so. The sisters knew their salon—and all of its subversive power and values—would be lost to the annals of history, unless they immortalised it in their works. As Ettie proclaims in her foreword to *Memorial Volume of and by Ettie Stettheimer*, she desired to give both her and her sisters' relatively obscure works “a chance of survival,” which would allow them—and their subversive ideas on gender and sexuality—to influence the minds of many generations to come (v). The sisters' salon-inspired works thus not only provide us a window into the Stettheimer salon and the feminist values it espoused, but they also allow the sisters themselves—their values, “thoughts and feelings”—to live on (v). Ultimately, then, this chapter will frame the Stettheimer salon as both an embodiment of

¹¹⁰ The few archival resources that do exist have been carefully curated and censored by Ettie. Moreover, both Florine and Carrie's creative works were heavily rooted in the feminine, the domestic, and the personal—themes that were thoroughly disparaged by high modernists of the time. Further analysis of Florine and Carrie's subversive aesthetic will occur later in this chapter.

the Stettheimer sisters' feminist values and as a medium through which they could build their own (artistic) legacy and counteract the misogyny of the modernist landscape.

4.1 Overview of the Stettheimer Salon

From its inception in 1915, the Stettheimer salon served as a safe space for artists, writers, photographers, and art aficionados of varied sexualities and gender identities. Located first at 102 West 76th Street and then at 182 West 58th Street (Alwyn Court) from 1926 onwards, the salon welcomed a myriad selection of guests, including writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten, celebrity photographer Adolph de Meyer and his wife Olga—all of whom were privately queer, famed Dadaist Marcel Duchamp, art collector and former salon host Leo Stein, painter and poet Francis Picabia, sculptor Elie Nadelman, composer Virgil Thomson, artist Georgia O'Keeffe and her photographer husband, Alfred Stieglitz. However, one could not just show up to the Stettheimer salon, as admittance was by invite-only. The sisters wanted their unconventional guests to feel as comfortable as possible whilst in the salon space, and thus, any unknown entities were viewed as a potential risk to their guests' safety. Unlike other salons of the time, it was also difficult to pin down when a Stettheimer salon would take place. As Ettie points out in her July 9, 1917 diary entry, there was no *jour fixe* for their “long drawn out conversational sort of part[ies]”; they could take place twice in one week—once on the weekend and again during the workweek. Yet, in spite of this irregular schedule, the Stettheimer salon was always a very formal affair—both in terms of its setting and proceedings. While the salon space itself was richly ornate, with damask-covered furnishings, gilded chairs and tables, chandeliers, and decorative cherubs, the accompanying salon meal was equally elaborate, featuring courses as inventive as feather soup and halibut and lobster in mayonnaise aspic. As with the Barney salon, many of the Stettheimer salons were dedicated to honouring one of their guests or to a special occasion, such as the unveiling of one of Florine's newest

creations or a frequent guest's birthday.

Within the salon, each of the Stettheimer sisters had a unique role to play. On the one hand, Carrie—the eldest—was in charge of hospitality. Not only did she prepare the guest lists, but she also designed the salon's multi-course menus, working with a team of German cooks to ensure that all of her dishes were prepared to a high standard. When it came to the salon proceedings, however, Carrie was a somewhat absent presence. In a letter dated 26 July 1923, Marcel Duchamp labels Carrie “always the most silent of [the] three [sisters].”¹¹¹ Dressed in her signature gold and white dress, pearl collar, and rhinestone tiara, Carrie contributed more to the salon's ornate aesthetic than to its conversation—as did her sister Florine. While Florine provided the salon with all of its artworks and its distinctive décor, she refrained from participating in the salon's conversation. Similar to Stein in the early days of her 27 rue de Fleurus salon, Florine opted for an observational role, mining the salon context for inspiration for her latest visual and literary portraiture—all of which she composed at a remove from the salon space and its subjects.¹¹² It was thus Ettie who was the salon's central conversationalist and by extension, its heart. As Duchamp stated in an August 1917 letter, the salon “was not complete without [Ettie]” and her definitive voice.¹¹³ According to Francis M. Naumann, Ettie gave the salon its intellectual air, engaging her guests in conversations “on topics ranging from painting to politics, or from literature to philosophy (the latter two were her special areas of expertise)” (149). Yet, Ettie also served as the salon's moralist, defending her sisters against any condescension on the part of their male habitués. According to the sisters' friend Parker Tyler, Ettie would “put things straight” in such situations, stating: “We may be virgins [...] but we know the facts of life” (93).

¹¹¹ Translated from the French: “Toujours la plus silencieuse de vous trois.”

¹¹² In her 1917-19 portrait *Soirée*, Florine figures herself as an absent presence within the salon: she is present via her nude self-portrait, from which she literally oversees the entire proceedings.

¹¹³ Translated from the French: “Évidemment la maison n'était pas complete sans vous. Il y manquait cette voix definitive qu'on entend partir de la terrasse.”

With their unfixed time, multiple hosts, and unconventional guest list, the Stettheimer sisters' gatherings seemed to upend the traditional salon format, leading some guests to question whether their classification as a salon was even warranted. Virgil Thomson, for example, claimed that the Stettheimers "have no salon. They entertain their friends, most of whom happen to be celebrated" (qtd. in Richardson 74). Yet, for all its unconventionality, the Stettheimer sisters' gatherings retained many of the 17th- and 18th-century salon model's distinguishing features, particularly its investment in social and professional networking. As Pierre Bourdieu notes in his seminal text *The Rules of Art*, "the subtly hierarchised universe of the salons" allowed 18th-century artists and writers to build their reputations, make connections, and gain much-needed patronage (50). While there is little evidence that the Stettheimer sisters provided patronage to their guests, it is clear that they intended their salon-inspired works to raise their guests' profiles. In a diary entry dated July 30, 1917, Florine discusses how her next portrait—*La Fête à Duchamp*—will serve as "one more advertisement for him [Marcel Duchamp]--! Added to the already long list." Yet, this advertising was by no means one-sided; the sisters had much to gain from their guests, as well. In a letter dated July 6, 1921, Duchamp alludes to his willingness to use his artistic connections to further Florine's career prospects, promising to speak to Albert Gleizes about a potential exhibition for her. Moreover, in a series of letters dating from June and July 1922, Van Vechten reveals how he successfully lobbied influential publisher Alfred Knopf to publish Ettie's second novel *Love Days*. He even helped facilitate the posthumous exhibition of Carrie's dollhouse in 1944 at the Museum of the City of New York, imploring Ettie to catalogue all of the dollhouse's accessories and to include a portrait of Carrie in the exhibit (Letter to Ettie, 29 August 1944). As the Stettheimer salon developed an intricate network of connections between artists that rivalled its 17th- and 18th-century predecessors, it also advanced a similar mode of conversational etiquette. Enlightenment-era salons banned any topics that could highlight and reify difference between habitués as a means of

ensuring their (theoretically) egalitarian nature. As Anne E. Duggan iterates in her study of 18th-century salons, bodily matters, such as sickness and desire, wealth, and domestic responsibilities were thus all off limits, as they drew attention to the differing experiences of men and women, rich and poor, healthy and ill (99). The Stettheimer salon replicated this model, with Ettie insisting that her guests refrain from conversational topics that highlighted specificity and difference—such as gender and sexuality—and instead, focus on more general, universal topics like philosophy, politics, and art. It was—to use Bilski and Braun’s terms—a sexually neutral space (“Florine” 133), where the hierarchised binaries of male/female, masculine/feminine, and heterosexual/homosexual could be dismantled and reimagined.¹¹⁴

4.2 Gender Fluidity in the Stettheimer Salon and Its Artistic Representations

The Stettheimer salon was a matriarchal and gender fluid space, which in many ways paid tribute to its hosts’ own upbringing and disavowal of gender norms. The Stettheimers were, in effect, from a matriarchal family. While Florine, Ettie, Carrie, and their two other siblings—Stella and Walter—knew their father, they had no personal attachment to him; he was absent for most of their lives and eventually abandoned them for Australia in the late 1800s. It thus fell to their mother, Rosetta, to keep the family going in her husband’s absence. This had a profound impact on Florine, Ettie, and Carrie—they resolved to remain by their mother’s side for the rest of her life, even as Stella and Walter left the family home to pursue their own independent lives. While “this decision eventually adversely restricted the lives of all three women, taking time away from other pursuits and binding them to an increasingly hermetic existence,” as Barbara Bloemink argues, it also provided them with an escape from the traditional woman’s limited trajectory of wife,

¹¹⁴ This idea—that banning certain conversational topics from the salon could allow for gendered and sexual binaries to be overturned—sets the Stettheimer salon in sharp contrast to Nancy Fraser’s revisioned public sphere, in which “no topics should be ruled off limits” in an effort to make public minority interests and experiences (71).

mother, and domestic (*Life and Art* 10-11). The Stettheimer sisters never married nor bore children, putting their mother and each other before all else. They were, as Jean Nathan suggests, “the very models of ‘the new woman’” (A36). While they were by no means ashamed of their femininity,¹¹⁵ the Stettheimer sisters enjoyed playing with masculinity and, like their fellow salonière Gertrude Stein, donning male-coded clothing. In lieu of wearing dresses and skirts, Florine and Ettie opted to wear pants, hoping not only to be taken more seriously, but to also ward off any unwanted attention from the opposite sex.¹¹⁶ In a March 6, 1918 diary entry, Ettie seems to celebrate the polarising effect of her masculine clothing on a potential male suitor. While she acknowledges that “he won’t like me dressed as a man. Others may,” she derives pleasure from performing difference and embodying the asexuality that family friend Joseph Solomon once accorded to her salon (qtd. in Zucker 90); ultimately, she dressed to please herself, not society.

Florine expresses a similar attitude in her 1923 self-portrait, *Portrait of Myself* (Figure 4). In the portrait, Florine depicts herself as a sexless, ethereal being. With her long gangly limbs, slender hips and indiscernible breasts, she is the pure embodiment of androgyny. As Susan Fillin-Yeh points out, Florine’s genitals are made equally ambiguous, as “a garland of flowers circles, while concealing, the point of sex” (39). With their implicit connections to female genitalia and defloration, the flowers allude to Florine’s femininity, but they defer confirmation of her biological sex. They create a symbolic disconnect between Florine’s sex and gender, thereby allowing her to embody masculinity and femininity to varying degrees. She can wear the black beret of “the nineteenth-century romantic male artist” (Fillin-Yeh 39), whilst simultaneously adorning herself in feminine accessories, including high heels, earrings, and bright red lipstick. With *Portrait of Myself*, Florine thus fashions

¹¹⁵ Later in this chapter, I will discuss how both Florine and Carrie embraced feminised subjects—like the domestic and the personal—in their works.

¹¹⁶ In her essay “Florine Stettheimer: Hiding in Plain Sight,” Barbara Bloemink suggests that Florine’s adoption of masculine attributes and outfits were part of “a cultural strategy that helped her manage her double life and thus undermine the dominant social categories of gender that marginalised serious women, professional or not” (481).



Figure 4: Florine Stettheimer. *Portrait of Myself*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 102.6 x 67 cm. Avery Library, Columbia University, New York.

herself as neither male nor female, but rather an androgynous in-between. As Irene Gammel and Suzanne Zelazo posit in their article “Wrapped in Cellophane: Florine Stettheimer’s Visual Poetics,” Florine uses her art to facilitate her process of self-creation and self-expression (20); she paints herself into being, and in doing so, professes a profound belief in gender’s fluidity—a belief which became the defining feature of her salon.

While scholars of the Stettheimer salon are sparse and often varied in their approach, their work tends to converge on one issue: the salon’s status as a gender fluid space. In *Jewish Women and Their Salons*, Bilski and Braun figure the Stettheimer salon as a subversive space in which effete men could freely embrace their femininity (“Florine” 134). Cécile Whiting expands upon this, noting how the Stettheimer salon emerged “as a sanctuary in which women *and* men could express personal identities that, increasingly banned in public, forced them to retreat into the privacy of homes [emphasis added]” (46). Upon entering the Stettheimer salon, one could momentarily escape societal norms and the pressure to behave “appropriately” for their sex; they were free to be themselves. This freedom emerges through a number of Florine’s salon-inspired portraits, most notably *Soirée* (1917-19). In *Soirée* (Figure 5), Florine depicts a typical evening at the Stettheimer salon: Ettie—in a bright green ensemble—engages Isabelle Lachaise and Maurice Sterne in conversation, whilst Gaston Lachaise and Albert Gleizes deliberate over Florine’s latest creation. Only partially visible on the canvas’ right side, Carrie appears to be removed from the action—her role mainly takes place behind the literal scene. Florine—as the silent observer—presides over the entire scene from her massive nude self-portrait, with Leo Stein and Avery Hopwood directly in her line of sight. The men are intriguingly effete, with their delicate pointed feet, their demure poses, and somewhat camp fashion. The décor mirrors this effeminacy, with pink and red flowers scattered throughout the room in various forms—bouquets, paintings, even items of clothing. The room is overwhelmingly

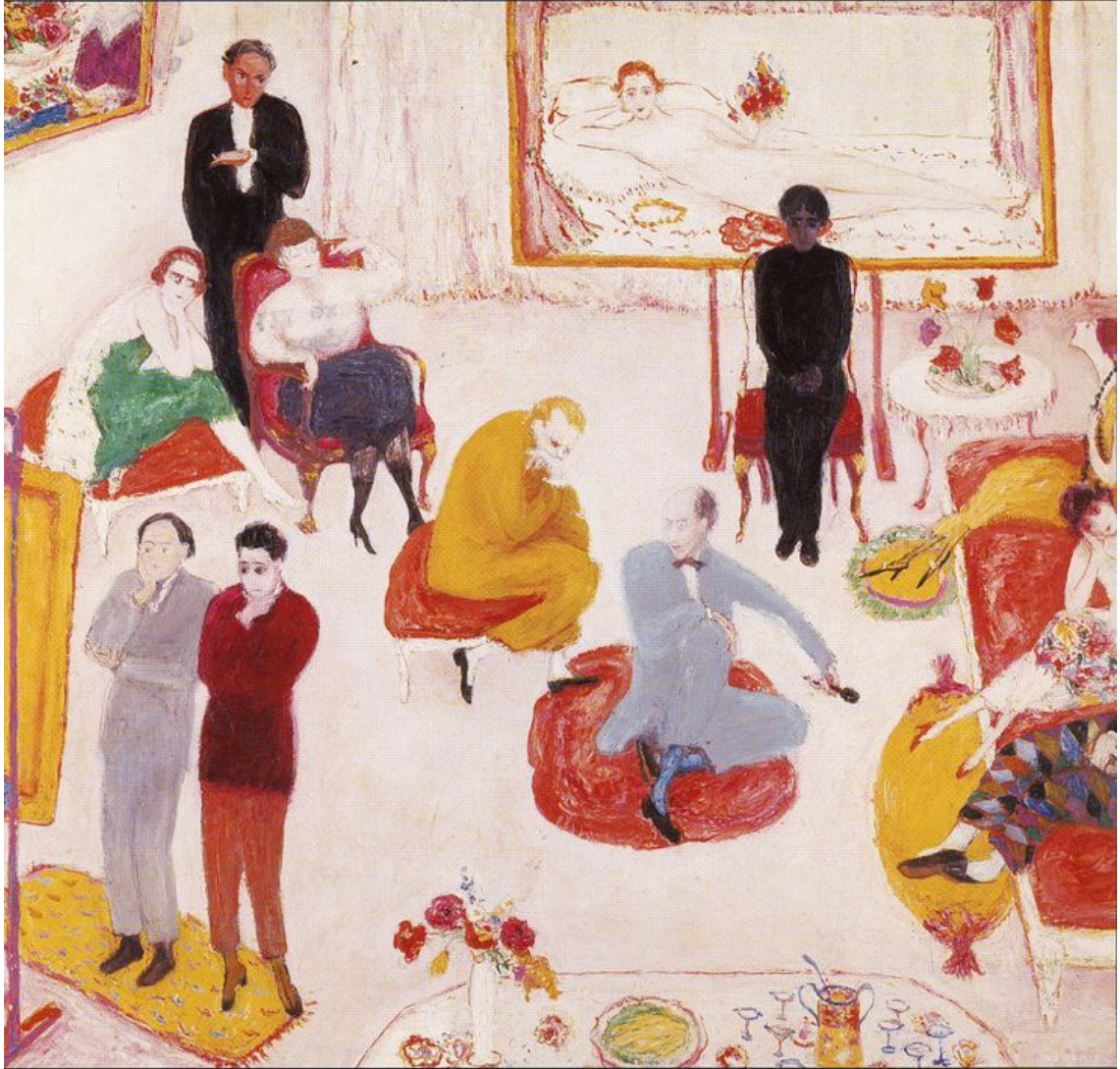


Figure 5: Florine Stettheimer. *Studio Party or Soirée*, 1917-19. Oil on canvas, 81.3 x 85.1 cm. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

rose, with the walls, the nude self-portrait, and the floors adopting the soft, feminine hue. Yet, as Bilski and Braun note, Florine's use of rose is also symbolic of her fluid conception of gender and sexuality. "Neither virginal white nor carnal red, rose is the in-between shade in the erotic spectrum" ("Florine" 134). This is echoed in Florine's somewhat ambiguous nude self-portrait. As with *Portrait of Myself*, the nude's sex is indecipherable; she has no distinguishable breasts, and her genitals appear to be obscured by the Hindu poet Sankar's head. This androgynous nude quietly dominates the top third of the canvas, casting an air of asexuality on the scene beneath her.

Individual portraits of salon guests are equally androgynous. In the 1922 *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten* (Figure 6), Florine vastly complicates Van Vechten's gender identity through his surroundings, his pose, and his costume. Van Vechten sits upon a spindly, delicate chair, encircled by nine roses and flanked on either side by black, fringed curtains. Oriental decorations, including a Japanese print of a geisha and a No mask, serve as his backdrop, invoking an exoticised femininity.¹¹⁷ The outside bustle of a fair, a Parisian café, and New York's Belasco Theatre—at which his wife, actress Fania Marinoff, once performed—encroaches on the intimate scene of the portrait, blurring the line between the masculinised public and feminised domestic space in a seeming ode to the semi-public nature of the salon from which the portrait was born. The sharp contrast between black and red provides an element of drama—which simultaneously counteracts the high modernist call for simplicity and sparseness. Van Vechten's suit is masculine, yet his cross-armed and -legged pose gives him an hourglass figure. He is a compilation of delicate, effeminate features: slender fingers, pointed feet, heart-shaped face, dainty nose. His bright red lips and seemingly shadowed eyes further belie his maleness, rendering him, if not

¹¹⁷ In his seminal work *Orientalism*, Edward Said outlines how Western colonial powers have worked "to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment period" (3). As part of this discursive process, the West figures the Orient as an exotic, passive, and thereby feminine space to be penetrated (137-8, 180). Artistic references to the Orient, then—whether consciously or not—serve as emblems of femininity and exoticism.

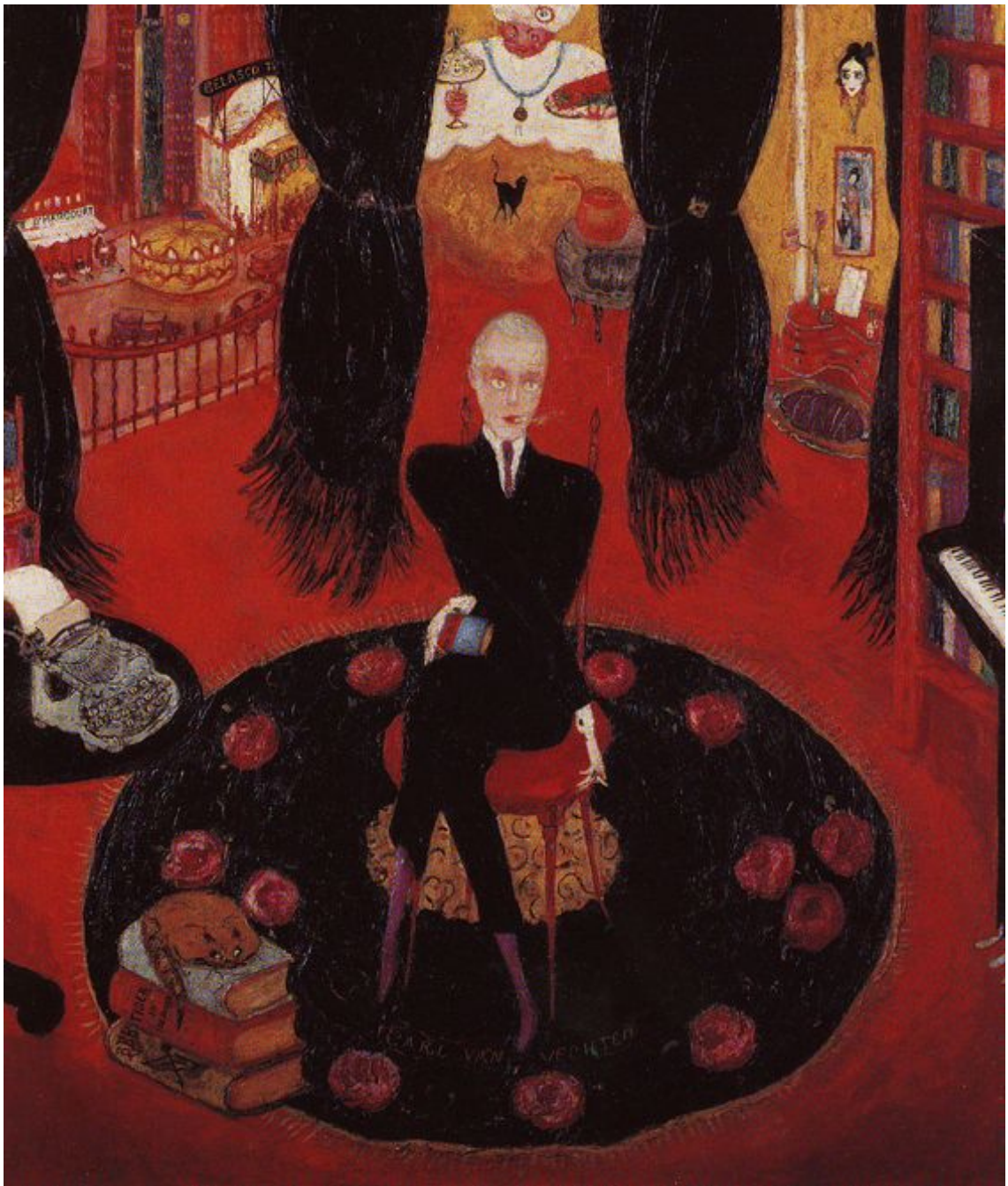


Figure 6: Florine Stettheimer. *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 90.8 x 80 cm. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.



Figure 7: Florine Stettin. *Portrait of Henry McBride*, 1922. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 66.04 cm. Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, Massachusetts.

effeminate, then certainly androgynous. Florine's *Portrait of Henry McBride* (Figure 7) achieves a similar effect. Originally conceived during a Stettheimer house party in Seabright, the portrait depicts art critic McBride suspended above the Seabright Tennis Tournament, keeping score of the games below. Behind him lies an homage to a number of McBride's favourite paintings and sculptures, including Winslow Homer's *Palm Tree, Nassau* (1898), Gaston Lachaise's *Woman (Elevation)* (1927), and a pastiche of John Marin's watercolour scenes. In combination, these images construct McBride as an art aficionado and a sports enthusiast—two roles associated with masculinity at the time. As with *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten*, however, McBride's masculinity is belied by both his effete pose and the messy and inexplicable presence of domestic comforts in public space. While McBride's moustachioed face and grey tie demarcate a male gender identity, his slight hourglass shape, pointed feet, and uplifted leg create the illusion of feminine coquetry. A lacy pink curtain and a string of multi-coloured flowers emerge from the top left corner of the canvas, threatening to encroach upon the homage to male artistry that dominates the background. Instead, they draw the eye to a triangular structure, on which both McBride and Florine's names appear. Florine places her full name at the structure's base, asserting herself as McBride's foundation. She emasculates him, usurping his claims to autonomy and authority by positioning herself as his literal creator. Yet, even though Florine's portraits cast doubt upon Van Vechten's and McBride's male gender identities, neither men took issue with their depictions. In a series of letters dating from March to April 1923, Van Vechten makes no explicit mention to his close friend and salonière, Gertrude Stein, of how *Portrait of Carl Van Vechten* androgynises him. Even when Stein points out how little the portrait resembles him, Van Vechten posits, "The picture is more about me than of me," thereby recognising how its different elements—including those aforementioned emblems of femininity—are true to who he is (Letter to Stein, 16 April 1923, 73). McBride was similarly unbothered by his effeminate pose in *Portrait of Henry McBride*; instead, he

ironically took issue with the portrait's emphasis on masculine sport, stating, "I have scarcely yet lived that down" ("Florine [Draft]"). These blasé reactions—coupled with the portraits themselves—reveal the extent to which gender bending was not only characteristic of the Stettheimer salon, but also wholeheartedly accepted and practised by its habitués.

The most explicit testament to the Stettheimer salon's gender fluid atmosphere, however, emerged in 1920, when frequent guest Marcel Duchamp birthed his female alter ego, Rose Sélavy. A visual composite of Florine and Ettie,¹¹⁸ Sélavy embodied the sisters' subversive attitudes toward gender norms and, in turn, the ways in which these attitudes influenced their habitués' personal outlooks. The sisters encouraged Duchamp in his experimentation with gender and he looked to them for inspiration and affirmation; he signed several of his letters to the sisters with his female moniker,¹¹⁹ and he sought their opinion on Sélavy's comportment. In a letter dated 11 August 1922, Duchamp tells Ettie: "I cannot wait for you to come to New York so that I can show off Rose Sélavy in bottle green."¹²⁰ With the sisters, Duchamp could openly present himself as female and explore his multiple selves freely and without judgment. Sélavy operates as a literal manifestation of Duchamp's fractured ego, right down to her ambiguous name. According to Deborah Johnson, Rose Sélavy has numerous potential connotations, including: "Rose [the colour] c'est la vie"; "Eros c'est la vie"; "rosser la vie," which means "to beat life"; or, "arroser la vie," which can contradictorily mean either "to toast life" or "to piss on life" (82). Duchamp made Sélavy's identity impossible to pin down, even adding a second "r" to her first name one year after her inception. Like the salon from which she originated, Sélavy was—as Johnson posits—"a feminist effort to perform the electivity of gender, destabilise gender binaries, and pictorialise the emerging concept of the 'New Woman'" (93).

¹¹⁸ See Bilski and Braun, "Florine" 133; Johnson 84.

¹¹⁹ See Duchamp's letters to Ettie dated 6 July 1921 and 11 August 1922.

¹²⁰ Translated from the French: "J'attends avec impatience que vous veniez à exhiber Rose Sélavy dans le vert bouteille."

Yet, Sélavy was ultimately an ephemeral creation, whose clever play with gender would only ever be experienced by Duchamp's inner circle. Through her art and poetry, Florine endeavoured to widen the reach of Sélavy and everything she represented—including the salon that birthed her. In her 1923 *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* (Figure 8), Florine represents Duchamp as a sum of two distinct selves: his male-presenting self and his female alter ego, Rose Sélavy. Duchamp sits on a pink chair adorned with symbols of his public (male) identity: his initials “MD,” his name, and a crossed pair of American and French flags. Other personal identifiers hang suspended in mid-air¹²¹: the chequered board, the horse head, and the clock all pay homage to Duchamp's love of chess, while the faint disc encircling the clock alludes to Duchamp's work with rotating discs, namely *Precision Optics* (1925) and *Rotoreliefs* (1935) (Bloemink, *Life and Art* 145). Encased in a frame of MDs, these emblems seem to attest to the dominance of Duchamp's male self over all other aspects of his identity; yet, they also subtly point to his desire to avoid easy categorisation and defy artistic conventions. As Jerrold Seigel notes, Duchamp upheld “the modernist rejection of tradition” in his works, collapsing established divisions between art and the everyday, the self and the collective, and sense and nonsense, amongst others (9). His experiments with rotating discs—to which the portrait gestures—were particularly adept at staging this rejection; they transformed ordinary objects into an aesthetically pleasing display that played on the limits of visual perception. As the discs spun, the patterns and phrases inscribed upon them became illegible; yet, it is through their incomprehensibility—their mutability—that the discs achieved their visual appeal. *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* pays homage to this idea, building upon the modernist preoccupation with legibility and fluidity to expose the tenuousness of masculinity and, more generally, gender identity. While signifiers of the male Duchamp dominate the canvas, Sélavy's presence is undeniable—her

¹²¹ It is interesting to note that both Florine and Ettie associate Duchamp with airiness in their works; in *Love Days*, Ettie gives Duchamp the pseudonym of Pierre Delaire—“rock of air.”



Figure 8: Florine Stettheimer. *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 76.2 x 66 cm.
William Kelly Simpson Collection, National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.

bright pink ensemble and her superior position make her stand out against the portrait's muted palette. With a simple turn of a screw, Duchamp unleashes her in all of her glory—a testament to gender's undeniable fluidity.

Florine's poem "Duche" provides a literary accompaniment to the portrait and its embrace of gender fluidity. With its opening image of "a silver-tin thin spiral / Revolving from cool twilight" (105), the poem establishes its ekphrastic relationship with *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* and its depiction of Rose Sélavy's triumphant emergence. As the spiral ascends to a feminised netherland—a "far pink dawn"—the poem becomes an allegory for what Florine views as Duchamp's own struggles with his gender identity (105). Once forced to hide his female self in the "cool twilight," Duchamp has initiated a new beginning for himself—Sélavy can now "dawn," but not for long:

A steely negation of lightning
That strikes

A solid lamb-wool mountain
Reared into the hot night
And ended the spinning spiral's
Love flight — (105)

The shifts in Duchamp's gender identity are abrupt—like a lightning strike—and constant. The contradictory image of "a solid lamb-wool mountain" reflects Duchamp's own conflicting selves; while Duchamp appears secure in his public male identity, his true self is as soft, light, and subject to modification as "lamb-wool." He oscillates between masculinity and femininity constantly, refusing to settle on a static identity. As he "rear[s]" Sélavy, he degenders the act of mothering, collapsing the distinction between physical and metaphorical forms of birthing. Ultimately, the poem figures Sélavy's creation as a form of self-care for Duchamp; the exploration of one's gender identity emerges as a "love flight"—a way of professing love for one's self. "Duche," along with its visual concomitant, elucidate the feminist significance of Rose Sélavy, and more importantly, the salon that

spawned her creation; both in her artistic renderings and her physical performance, Sélavy stood as a testament to the salon and its hosts' belief in gender's fluidity.

While the Stettheimer sisters incorporated their fluid concept of gender into their salon as a means of encouraging guests to fully explore their gender identities, they also did it to improve their own status as women. In rendering gender mutable, the sisters could overturn the sexual hierarchy—which positions woman as man's inferior other—and interrogate their own prescribed gender roles. The salon constituted a space in which Florine, Ettie, and Carrie could escape patriarchal law and assume positions of power. They ruled over their (mostly male) habitués, governing the salon's structure, conversational topics, and in the case of Sélavy, even creating them. *Soirée* serves as a visual representation of this gender role reversal; it figures the sisters—particularly Florine—as the salon's ultimate purveyors. They act as a tripartite panopticon: Ettie and Carrie preside over the top left and bottom right sections of the room, respectively, as Florine overlooks the entire scene from her nude self-portrait. Although Florine is physically absent, her presence overwhelms the frame; her self-portrait takes up a third of the canvas, whilst her latest creation—hidden from the audience's view—serves as the main topic of salon conversation. She dominates the space—ironically in a form associated with male domination. In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger notes how the nude operates as a patriarchal object—created by men for men's pleasure (49, 54). Florine subverts this power dynamic; not only does she paint herself for her own enjoyment, but she also designates her nude—not the male spectator—as the possessor of the gaze. She looks over her guests, yet none of them look back. Her sexual ambiguity allows her to interrogate man's superior position and claim his power for herself.

Florine achieves a similar effect in her other self-portrait, *Portrait of Myself*. Here, she positions herself high above the world—a God-like overseer of those who reside beneath her. She dominates the canvas, rendering the sun insignificant by comparison. Even her

signature—while faint—looms over the scene. Yet, Florine’s superiority is more than just physical; she positions herself as a rival to her male peers, thus challenging the gendered hierarchy of the arts, as well.¹²² Bloemink notes that “the exaggerated emphasis on her [Florine’s] eyes reflects her image of herself as an artist, seeing the world through heightened vision. Now with eyes wide open, Stettheimer is no longer a follower of others’ style of painting, but an innovator” (*Life and Art* 134). Florine strives for the glory and status typically reserved for her male contemporaries by means of a flutterby—a fictional winged insect that Florine commonly invoked to express her hidden desire for fame.¹²³ The flutterby reaches for the sun, much like the mythical Icarus. However, the flutterby avoids Icarus’ tragic fate; it remains within the sun’s proximity with no sign of faltering and, in doing so, alludes to Florine’s limitless creative potential. Rather than accept an inferior position to her fellow male artists, Florine asserts herself as their superior—both in her self-portraiture and within the salon space.

The salon-inspired *Portrait of Marcel Duchamp* also poses a challenge to the sexual hierarchy, but less obviously so. As was previously mentioned, emblems of Duchamp’s male public self dominate the portrait. His initials entrap the portrait’s contents and he controls the mechanism by which Sélavy emerges. Yet, Sélavy appropriates almost half of the canvas for herself, serving as a direct affront to Duchamp’s masculine superiority. In a literal upending of the sexual hierarchy, Sélavy attains a higher position relative to Duchamp; she looks down upon him in a pose suggestive of blowing a kiss, which—given the context—acquires an air of condescension. However, Sélavy is not the only female figure here to undermine Duchamp’s male authority. On the base of Duchamp’s chair, Florine has carefully painted the text “Marcel Duchamp by Florine Stettheimer,” positing herself as Duchamp’s creator in a move that mirrors Stein’s self-positioning as her male

¹²² A more in-depth discussion of this hierarchy will take place later in the chapter.

¹²³ This figure of the flutterby is most explored in Florine’s collection of poetry, *Crystal Flowers*.

habitués' creator. It was Florine—and her sisters—who provided Duchamp with the space and encouragement necessary to Sélavy's creation. While Duchamp controls the (metaphorical) crank that initiates Sélavy's emergence, it is ultimately Florine who governs them both.

Florine further asserts her power over men through her poetry. In "Occasionally," Florine reflects on the seemingly passive demeanour she performs, both within the salon and without. While she appears to be a silent, diminutive figure, she is in actuality a force to be reckoned with. Upon seeing her "light," men "got singed / Got scared / Rushed out / Called fire" (89); they could not "subdue it" or "extinguish it," no matter their efforts (89). Only Florine could "turn it low / Turn it out" (90). However, "out of courtesy" to these men, Florine "turn[s] on a soft / Pink light / Which is found modest / Even charming" (90). While Florine appears to abnegate her power simply to appease men, she later reveals this change in comportment to be merely performative. Stereotypical femininity provides Florine with a momentary means of self-protection "against wear / And tears" (90)—she will never relinquish her light permanently: "And when / I am rid of / The Always-to-be-Stranger / I turn on my light / And become myself" (90). Florine knows she is superior to her male company, even if they are incapable of acknowledging it. This becomes particularly apparent in "To a Gentleman Friend," in which Florine figures the titular friend as a "little floating worm" (90). Suspended in mid-air, he appears "different / From other worms" (90-1)—literally superior. Yet, his superiority is pure artifice; the female speaker "discover[s] the slender / thread / That fastened [him] safely to a solid tree" and subsequently "snap[s]" it, causing his downfall (91). Separated from his tricks and illusions, the gentleman appears as he truly is: a lowly worm who "squirmed / And wormed / And only wriggled" (91). His superiority is completely usurped, as the female speaker realises that she controls his fate. She is thus akin to a salonière, deciding upon which of her male guests to bestow her invaluable endorsement.

As much as Florine subverted the sexual hierarchy in both her works and the salon from which they sprang, she was not alone in this endeavour. Her sister Ettie launched a similar critique of male superiority in her own literary works, most notably in her salon-inspired novel *Love Days*. First published in 1923 under the pseudonym Henrie Waste,¹²⁴ *Love Days* is a roman à clef, which follows Susanna, a young woman in the midst of navigating higher education and formulating her thoughts on marriage and romantic love. She encounters a number of artistic men who aid her on this journey to self-discovery—many of whom are derived from real-life habitués of the Stettheimer salon. As many of these habitués have noted, Susanna—in many ways—serves as a proxy for Ettie. In a letter dated 31 December 1923, Duchamp—who appears as the novel’s flighty and flirtatious Pierre Delaire—situates *Love Days* as a confessional form of self-effacement for Ettie. He states: “I guess you clench onto Susanna like an incomplete doppelgänger or you intentionally mislead us, so that your real self will become even more mysterious.”¹²⁵ While the extent to which Susanna represents Ettie is unclear, Ettie uses Susanna as a means through which to challenge the sexual oppression she faced in her own life. Like Susanna, Ettie was intellectual and driven—she was one of the first women to receive a Bachelor’s degree from Columbia University, continuing on to complete her doctorate in the philosophy of William James at Albert-Ludwig University in Freiburg, Germany twelve years later.¹²⁶ Susanna undertakes similar university studies in both New York and Germany, engaging in philosophical modes of thought whilst doing so. During one of her many philosophical interludes, Susanna expresses disdain for gendered dichotomies, particularly those which privilege masculinised rationality over feminised feeling or

¹²⁴ Henrie Waste is a condensed version of Ettie’s full name: *Henrietta Walter Stettheimer*.

¹²⁵ Translated from the French: “Mais je suppose que vous vous serriez de Susanna comme d’un sosie incomplète ou intentionnellement trompeur afin que votre réel self soit plus mystérieux encore.”

¹²⁶ Stein was also highly influenced by William James; it was through working with him that she developed her theory of bottom nature, which drove her towards composing literary portraits of her habitués.

intimacy: “And as for that other matter, the matter of being personal,—even though it entailed some embarrassment, and some real and potential blushes, wasn’t finding things out worth these discomforts—supposing them to be discomforts and not merely an exciting game? Might it not indeed be one’s duty to be personal as a means to knowledge?” (9). Rather than view the personal as trivial or mindless, Susanna figures it as a vital means for accumulating knowledge and thereby collapses the gendered division between (masculine) knowledge and (feminine) emotion.

Throughout *Love Days*, Susanna finds great joy in dismantling the myth of man’s intellectual superiority. She is often characterised as man’s equal, both by others and herself. During her studies in New York, she emerges as a star pupil. Her English professor, Dr. Taylor, bestows what he considers to be great praise on her by suggesting that she will write the next *Trilby*. While Susanna finds this “imputation [...] flattering,” she is ultimately confused by it, noting “she had no more in common with him [George Du Maurier] than with Bismarck, or Solon, or Abraham—a lot of old men” (15-6). Susanna not only questions why Dr. Taylor’s point of reference is limited to old men, but also why his only means of complimenting Susanna’s intellect is to render her masculine. In “a kind of flamboyant protest against the attribution of Du Maurieresqueness,” she frames her “darkish bright hair [...as] a kind of materialized perfume of [her] age and [her] sex” (19); she wants to be recognised in her own right as an intellectual woman—not as an honorary man. When discussing the comparison with her friend Blanche, Susanna goes even further, envisioning herself as Du Maurier’s superior. She asserts, “I may write a better book than *Trilby*,” and in doing so, completely revises how the sexual hierarchy operates (17)—much in the same way as Ettie, who positioned herself as her male habitués’ intellectual superior within her salon.

Susanna builds upon this early experience, later questioning why men emerge as natural authorities on matters that do not pertain to them. After having moved to Germany

to continue her university studies, Susanna attends a lecture by the esteemed Professor von-Schnackenberg-Konitz, who she hopes will reveal new insight into the lesbian poet Sappho. What follows, however, is a moralistic condemnation of Sappho's sexuality:

Sappho was being treated not only in her character of poet, but as famous or infamous woman as well. She was being judged once more: was being exonerated, purified. Konitz was tonight not so much the scholar as the moralist; every moment he became more concrete as he gave expression to his opinion of Sappho's morals of twenty-five hundred years ago, and his opinion of her reputed morals, and his opinion of what morals should be.
(67)

Professor Konitz figures Sappho's sexuality—and by extension, her morality—as equally significant as her poetic contributions. Even though her life and her poetry have little bearing on his own experiences, he feels qualified to project his own morals onto her and to exonerate her in turn. Susanna begrudges Konitz's lack of scholarly vigour, aligning him with the old male professor from whom lesbian modernists, including Natalie Clifford Barney and her salon coterie, desired to reclaim Sappho (Benstock 281). She figures herself—and women, more generally—as better qualified to discuss Sappho. Susanna's friend Tom agrees, suggesting that Susanna, “being so much nearer to Sappho in sex and in age, ought to be able to get at her probable psyche better than the old Junker we listened to respectfully” (69). This sentiment not only rids Konitz of his prestige and perceived authority, but it also mirrors Ettie's own assertion of her and her sisters' authority within the salon space. Just as Ettie proclaimed “we may be virgins [...] but we know the facts of life” to those male habitués who doubted her and her sisters' intellect, Susanna asserts that women can be equally—if not more—knowledgeable or capable when it comes to certain matters of intellect (Tyler 93).

Yet, many of Susanna's most salient critiques of male authority occur outside of the lecture hall. She rejects all institutions that force women to uphold an inferior position to men—motherhood, domesticity, and most critically, marriage. Throughout *Love Days*, Susanna becomes a conduit for Ettie's own misgivings about marriage. In a 1918 letter to a

WWI soldier named Gansy, Ettie describes her views on marriage “as definite and extensive and rigid as my experience is limited” (Diary [1918]). She expands upon these views in a three-page long treatise, after which she tells Gansy to “please bury these remarks in the Mts. of Macedonia” (Diary [1918]). Fearful of how others would receive her remarks, Ettie decided to delete them from public record, leaving a gaping hole in her archives. *Love Days* acts as a supplement to Ettie’s censored archive, as it follows Susanna’s shifting attitude towards marriage. At first, Susanna expresses a complete aversion to marriage, comparing it to a form of death (17). Whenever a friend or relative inquires about Susanna’s marital status, she becomes instantly estranged from them (17); she cannot bear to think of herself—or any other woman, for that matter—in such an oppressive situation. Upon hearing of her cousin Penelope’s engagement, Susanna is “overcome by a sick feeling” (25). She despairs: “Oh, how could Penelope have done it ... Lawrence, a big solid wall cutting off sunshine and air” (26). For Susanna, marriage is a prison sentence for women; it entraps them, isolating them from their livelihoods and independence.¹²⁷

Yet, as Susanna ages, her aversion to marriage lessens and she finds herself betrothed to the passionate artist, Pol Grodz—a double for Ettie’s own short-lived love interest and habitué, sculptor Elie Nadelman.¹²⁸ Whilst on her honeymoon, Susanna is suddenly overcome with feelings of loneliness and entrapment (149); she regrets her decision to marry Grodz, whose desire for a passive wife and muse clashes violently with Susanna’s own thirst for independence and self-empowerment. Desirous of an escape, Susanna develops ways of usurping Grodz of his authority. She envisions herself as a Delilahesque figure capable of “shear[ing] him...of his power” and, after seeing how little his sketches of her resemble her own self-image, she refuses to continue serving as his silent, obliging muse (147). When Grodz attempts to sketch Susanna on the beach, she

¹²⁷ In this way, Susanna mirrors Barney’s highly critical *pensées* on marriage.

¹²⁸ Further discussion of this connection—as well as the novel’s other ties to the Stettheimer salon and its habitués—will occur later in this section.

opposes him—first by falling asleep and then by running into the ocean. In a bid to retain some semblance of authority, Grodz infantilises Susanna, deeming her a “stupid child” (156). He even calls her womanhood into question: “There should be moderation in all, especially in a woman! What have I said,—a woman! There are times when I doubt that you are a woman!” (156). While Grodz expects Susanna to be ashamed of her unfeminine behaviour, she “shak[es] with laughter” (156); Grodz—and the patriarchal gender norms by which he abides and works to enforce—are no longer a threat to Susanna, but rather a source of humour. In this sense, Susanna resembles Hélène Cixous’ feminist reimagining of Medusa; she uses laughter to subvert patriarchal means of oppression and, as such, she is cast as unnatural, ugly, or even an abomination by patriarchy’s main enforcers: men. Even when her marriage to Grodz crumbles, Susanna refuses to accept blame or responsibility. “She knew that the cause was ascribable to the nature of the structure itself” rather than to her own refusal to comply with feminine codes of behaviour and obey her husband’s rule (228). In a manner akin to her real-life double, Ettie, Susanna concludes that it is marriage and its hierarchical structure that is faulty—not her inability to accord with it.

Susanna extends this condemnation to romantic love more generally, viewing it as another justification for men to exert power over women. In conversation with her friend Tom, Susanna resents how society frames love as a woman’s *raison d’être*: “It’s thrust on me, as it so often is because I’m a girl. It seems to me, too, that it’s unnatural that I should be bothered unwillingly, should have this emphasis in my life just because I happen to be a girl” (75). She refuses to accept men’s advances as a natural part of her life and instead, she asserts her right to come and go without disruption. When “a remote passenger, one of the suitable, stout young men” on the streetcar meets Susanna’s eyes and gives her a “welcoming and inviting smile,” Susanna “withdraw[s] her offended eyes into her head, as it were [...and] moved bodily away, as far as possible from contact with this experience” (10). Rather than find such attention flattering, Susanna finds it an imposition—an attempt

to render her an object for male pleasure—and she reasserts her bodily integrity in response. From this emerges a clear sense of why Ettie barred topics like gender and sexuality from salon conversation; not only did such topics serve to reify difference, but they also increased the likelihood of sexual harassment—threatening the salon’s status as an egalitarian, safe space for all who entered it. As Ettie conceived it, the Stettheimer salon posed an asexual alternative to the hypersexual, male-dominated spaces with which her fictional doppelgänger has to contend. Yet, for all the unwanted advances she receives, Susanna finds creative ways for wresting power away from her harassers. When a man follows Susanna through the streets, she dehumanises him, comparing “his tactics to those of a dog” (40). She even imagines seeking vengeance against him, in which she “set[s] his remaining person in a cage, where it walked about on all fours. Until, finding even this caged and controlled presence unbearable,” she drops him into an abyss (41). She inverts the power dynamic between them, establishing herself as the master of his fate.¹²⁹

As subversive as this move is, though, it is but a mere fantasy. Susanna cannot emasculate her male harassers, but she can reassert her dominance through the act of flirtation. In *Love Days*, Ettie—like fellow salonière Barney—figures flirtation as both a consummate art and a weapon—a theme that has been traced throughout both her literary oeuvre and her relationships with her male habitués (Naumann 153; Bilski and Braun, “Florine” 132). Susanna approaches flirtation as if it were a game, and she its defending champion. Whilst dancing with a male suitor named Jack, Susanna “looked indeed as if she were flirting, but in the reality of her consciousness she was only playing. Playing at being agreeable to Jack,—at feeling agreeable, more agreeable than she really felt. Just for fun” (28). Susanna performs femininity here, not in order to please Jack, but to please herself. She cares little about Jack’s feelings for her, but recognises them as his weakness; she thus

¹²⁹ As previously discussed, this is a prevalent theme throughout Florine’s salon-inspired oeuvre; she figures herself as her male habitués’ creator and, by extension, the master of their fates.

exploits them, making him captive to her beck and call “just for fun” (28). Susanna repeats this strategy with multiple suitors, but not to as great effect as with Baron Johannes. During their interactions, the Baron admits to Susanna that she holds complete control over him: “You need no defence against me; I am your slave, neither willing nor unwilling, but unreasoning, unconscious, like one who, lost in the dark, suddenly sees a great shaft of light and follows it to its mysterious source, with a hope too great for words” (281). The Baron holds Susanna up on a pedestal, characterising her as his ideal woman; however, she is merely playing him in a bid to gain more power. She dehumanises him, figuring herself as his “master, his tamer” (283). As Elizabeth Janeway posits in her review, Susanna’s “sex is a weapon instead of a source of [male] pleasure, which terrifies men. [...]he is what emerged at the end of Victorianism when the curtain of male supremacy was finally lifted” (BR7). Susanna is thus not slave to men’s advances, but rather, their master; she capitalises on them to achieve her feminist ends.

It is thus Susanna’s love for herself that prevails. She prioritises her own desires over those of her male peers, whilst also divesting herself of the need for male validation. Susanna holds herself in great esteem, which—at the time of the *Memorial Volume*’s publication—was greatly subversive.¹³⁰ Susanna recognises herself as “dramatically beautiful” (8) and she feels perfectly content and complete in herself. She “resent[s]” the pressure to find a male partner for herself (75) and, instead, secures “a place of her own, where she might receive when she liked, and whom she liked, and in a setting she liked” (79). It provides her the space to enact her self-love—to express herself and to write without distraction.¹³¹ Yet, in spite of all of this, Susanna is eventually “weakened under the

¹³⁰ In the 1950s, female self-love was deemed exasperating and unpleasant. In his 1952 review of *Love Days*, Ben Ray Redman suggests that Susanna is “the most exasperating of heroines,” purely because of her high capacity for self-love (17). Elizabeth Janeway made a similar assertion a year prior, claiming that Susanna “is much too beautiful, fatal and pleased with herself to be to our taste” (BR7).

¹³¹ This scene prefigures Virginia Woolf’s argument in *A Room of One’s Own*, which was published six years later.

continual pressure from outside sources, [...] surrendering her loyalty to herself” (E. Stettheimer, Foreword x). By the novel’s close, Susanna has fully invested herself in Hugh, a sickly doctor. No longer the independent, defiant woman who laughed in Grodz’s face, Susanna comes to feel “physically incomplete,” “wounded and unhealed” when Hugh is apart from her (354). When Susanna realises that she has “lost him forever,” she is unable to cope: “Susanna sat up suddenly and clapped her hands over her eyes and mouth, and held her breath—Then she fell heavily back, unconscious” (356). Unable to envision a meaningful life without Hugh, Susanna facilitates her own dissolution. *Love Days* thus acts as a cautionary tale, warning its female readers to love themselves above all others—especially men. As Ettie states in her foreword to her *Memorial Volume*, it is an “act of treason” to do otherwise (x).

While *Love Days* derives many of its subversive views on love, marriage, and intellect from Ettie’s own feminist beliefs, it is equally indebted to her and her sisters’ salon. The salon acted as a physical embodiment of Ettie’s beliefs and, in turn, provided her with the characters necessary to *Love Days*’ composition. The most recognisable of these characters is Marcel Duchamp, who appears as the flirtatious artist, Pierre Delaire. Like Duchamp, Delaire is a mutable entity, “whose name so mysteriously suited him! Stone of air. ...Hard and light; like stone dependable and definite, and immaterial and imponderable and cool like air; and as mysterious as their paradoxical combinations” (94).¹³² While Delaire does not appear to have a female alter ego like Rose Sélavy, he takes no heed of gender norms, adopting a feminised “sensitive” and “delicate” persona whilst simultaneously rejecting patriarchal modes of knowledge (96-7). He further erodes the hierarchical division between masculine and feminine in his relationship with Susanna: he rejects masculinist logic and she, in turn, serves as his voice of reason (96-7). They engage

¹³² Florine depicts Duchamp in a similarly contradictory way in “Duche,” describing him as a “solid lamb-wool mountain” (105).

in a chaste flirtation, which mirrors Ettie and Duchamp's own "wordplay as foreplay" relationship in the salon and its related lines of correspondence (Bilski and Braun, "Florine" 132). As Duchamp suggests in a letter dated 6 July 1921, flirtation was a natural state for his and Ettie's relationship—so much so that moments without such coquetry were a rare surprise. However, their relationship—like Susanna and Delaire's—was never consummated; Ettie found Duchamp's impulsiveness off-putting¹³³ and, in turn, had Susanna recognise Delaire as too fundamentally different from herself. Duchamp appeared to take little issue with this depiction, however, stating in a letter dated 31 December 1923, "It is not for me to say whether or not it's a just [portrayal...]—and it's of little importance."¹³⁴ Instead, he takes joy from his inclusion in *Love Days*, deeming it "adorable" and signing off the letter with the English translation of his alter ego's name: Stone of Air. While Duchamp labels Delaire a "background" figure to *Love Days*' main narrative, his role is more significant than his minimal presence suggests; in both his chaste relationship with Susanna and his disavowal of idealised masculinity, Delaire serves as a testament to the Stettheimer salon's trademark asexuality.

Ettie includes other salon guests to similar effect. Dadaist Francis Picabia, whom Ettie once referred to as "a fat womanish enfant terrible" (Diary [1917]), appears as Susanna's "childlike" and exhausting companion Turro (104).¹³⁵ According to Susanna, Turro is "a woman's soul in a very male body" (113-4). He espouses that masculinity and femininity should be understood as inseparable entities, claiming that "originally man and woman were one; one single being; one and undivided [...] one unified individual" (126) and now that they have been wrenched apart, they are incomplete. According to Turro, it is

¹³³ In a July 24, 1918 diary entry, Ettie expresses dismay at Duchamp's sudden resolve to move to Buenos Aires: "I couldn't make out why [...] He has no prospects nor friends down there."

¹³⁴ Translated from the French: "ce n'est pas moi qui puis vous dire s'il est ou n'est pas juste [...] et c'est de seconde importance."

¹³⁵ Other evidence exists that links Turro to Francis Picabia. In a letter dated 31 December 1923, Duchamp tells Ettie he has been staying at Turro's house near the Notre Dame in Paris—Duchamp and Picabia were close friends and Picabia lived in Paris at this time.

only through performing a mix of masculinity and femininity, then, that human beings can achieve their original state of fulfilment. Turro thus emerges as an advocate for the same fluid conception of gender that the Stettheimer salon embraced. In opposition to Turro is Pol Grodz, who—as was previously mentioned—represents Ettie’s one-time love interest and occasional salon guest, Elie Nadelman. Although Nadelman and Ettie never married, Ettie builds upon their ill-fated relationship to expose marriage as a tool of patriarchal oppression throughout the novel. Grodz is the epitome of patriarchal rule: he considers himself Susanna’s superior, chastising her whenever she acts outside the bounds of proper feminine behaviour. Even his name alludes to his oppressive nature; he is literally what his last name suggests: a bulkhead, blocking Susanna’s access to the outside world. Yet, Susanna is able to chip away at his power, eventually regaining her freedom; she asserts herself as, if not his superior, then at least his equal. Grodz and Susanna’s relationship thus functions as a reflection of the real-life relationship between Ettie and Nadelman—or any of her male habitués, for that matter. *Love Days* pays homage to the ways in which the Stettheimer sisters flipped the sexual hierarchy and positioned themselves as their male habitués’ authorities in their salon.

4.3 Building a Feminist Legacy

Love Days was a means by which Ettie could leave behind some trace of her life, her salon, and the values that shaped them. In the foreword to her *Memorial Volume*, she expresses a desire “to be read widely, in the hope that by communication to other minds my thoughts and feelings will become absorbed by them and incorporated into the ideational structure now building through the mental efforts of millions of contemporaries” (v). Believing that her feminist views could have an integral impact on humanity’s “continuing existence” (v), Ettie strove to encapsulate them in her works—which, in turn,

emerged as literary proxies for her salon. While the reach of *Love Days* was rather limited,¹³⁶ many applauded Ettie's determination to make herself known. In a letter dated 17 April 1951, McBride tells Ettie that she has "built a perfect and enduring monument for yourself. You say you wish to be widely read and I think you will be."¹³⁷ Van Vechten expresses a similar sentiment in his 16 June 1922 letter to Ettie, stating the extent of *Love Days*' "permanence" and his certainty that it will be appreciated by many. When *Love Days* was released as part of Ettie's 1951 *Memorial Volume*, critics recognised it as an important book worthy of praise;¹³⁸ Ettie's attempt to build a legacy was—at least, from a critical standpoint—a success.

For Ettie's sisters Florine and Carrie, legacy building was a more fraught and laborious venture. Their works were both domestic and deeply personal; the majority of Florine's portraits and poems revolved around friends, family members, private gatherings, and food preparation, whereas Carrie's major contributions—the salon menus and the Stettheimer dollhouse—were firmly rooted in her domestic lifestyle. While such work would be relatively conventional by today's standards, it was the subject of much derision throughout the modernist period (i.e. the late 19th to mid-20th century).¹³⁹ With the advent of literary and artistic modernism, cultural tastes were sharply redefined; sparseness, simplicity, fragmentation, and impersonality were all considered hallmarks of 'good' art. As such, personal works, such as autobiography, memoirs, self-portraiture, and family portraiture, were cast as lazy, insignificant, and uninspired; they became, as Nina Van

¹³⁶ The novel had only one publication run and has been out-of-print for several decades.

¹³⁷ This quote is specifically in reference to Ettie's *Memorial Volume of and by Ettie Stettheimer*, which includes *Love Days* as its first selection.

¹³⁸ See Ben Ray Redman's "A Gifted Writer" and Elizabeth Janeway's "Susanna Moore and Ettie Stettheimer" for further details.

¹³⁹ In the past few decades, there have been countless art and literary works composed by women that have dealt with intimate themes and received acclaim; among the most notable are: Tracey Emin's *My Bed* (1998), which was shortlisted for the Turner Prize, and *Everyone I've Ever Slept With 1963-1995* (1995); Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), which won the 2005 National Book Award for Nonfiction; and, the work of Njideka Akunyili Crosby, which has won multiple art awards over the last three years.

Gessel notes, “the feminised [inferior] other of the masculinist high Modernist tradition” (140). The period initiated a similar devaluation of the decorative arts—of which both Florine and Carrie were purveyors. According to Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, women artists were “systematically effaced from the history of art” (xvii) throughout the 20th century due to a newly gendered hierarchisation of art forms, in which “the arts of painting and sculpture enjoy an elevated status while other arts that adorn people, homes or utensils are relegated to a lesser cultural sphere” (50). This hierarchisation had little to do with skill or methods but rather “where these things are made, often in the home” (Parker and Pollock 70). Modernists figured the home as a non-productive space, conducive to passivity and stasis; it posed, as Christopher Reed has argued, the central threat to modernism’s heroic ideal (2-3). To stay at home was to remove one’s self from history, to resist progress, or—for a man—to self-emascuate. “Since the home is associated with women and femininity,” Hilde Heynen notes, (metaphorical) homelessness emerged as the masculine ideal (2). While the Arts and Crafts Movement—with its emphasis on aestheticising everyday domestic objects, such as furniture and wallpaper—proved somewhat of an exception to this rule, Rosalind Blakesley argues it too was grounded in the masculine language of utility and functionality; the domestic sphere could only emerge as a site of artistic expression if it were men in charge of its manipulation and if such expression resulted in useful objects (7). Consequently, women artists who looked to the domestic for artistic inspiration were deemed unworthy of critical attention.

This devaluation of domesticity plagued Florine and Carrie throughout their lifetimes—and long after their deaths in 1944. While Florine’s art failed to attract critical attention until the mid-1980s,¹⁴⁰ Carrie’s dollhouse remains understudied. Yet, in spite of their protracted reach, Florine and Carrie’s works leave behind a vital legacy: they

¹⁴⁰ Both Henry McBride and Marsden Hartley—guests of the Stettheimer salon—posit Florine’s feminine aesthetic as the central explanation for her middling success (McBride, *Florine* 11; Hartley 19).

undermine artistic and literary modernism's male-centrism, positing an alternative in which the feminised domestic and personal spheres become worthy subjects for artistic representation and—by extension—immortalisation.¹⁴¹ Art provided Florine and Carrie with an outlet through which they could assert the value of their lives and experiences as women. Barbara Bloemink recognises this function in specific relation to Florine's portraits, arguing that their highly decorative and feminine subject matter serve as a direct affront to "the inherently 'masculine' turf of modernism" and its attempts to rid femininity of its creative potential ("Becoming" 113). Gammel and Zelazo make a similar assertion, positing that Florine exploits "the cultural value and opportunity" of the domestic in her works, in spite of its restrictive implications ("Wrapped" 16). Yet, Florine was by no means restricted to the domestic sphere; she had her own studio and she passed along all of the domestic chores and caregiving duties to her older sister, Carrie. Ironically, little scholarship exists on Carrie's creative repurposing of domesticity, even though she was the most embroiled in domestic life. The remainder of this chapter will address this inconsistency by analysing how both Florine and Carrie's works transform the domestic and the personal from sites of oppression and mediocrity, respectively, into tools for creative expression, feminist subversion, and legacy building; in turn, it will foreground the salon space—its guests, its values, and its structure—as key to this creative process.

Florine and Carrie were intensely private people. They led rather hermetic existences: they worked "in single strictness," revealing their completed pieces only to their most trusted friends and loved ones (E. Stettheimer, "Introductory Foreword" 12). However, not all of their work was intended for public consumption. *Crystal Flowers*—Florine's posthumously published collection of poetry—is one such work. Intensely personal and domestically inspired, *Crystal Flowers* provides a portrait of Florine at her most

¹⁴¹ In her Master's thesis, Quinn Darlington also draws parallels between Carrie's dollhouse and Florine's art, revealing how both works served as affirmations of femininity and mediums for self-expression (5, 47).

vulnerable; to read its contents is to play the voyeur—to see into the parts of Florine’s life and personality that she kept from public view. She constructed her poems to be disposable, writing them on scrap pieces of paper that could easily be mistaken for refuse and requesting that they ultimately be burned following her death. While this may simply have been a gesture of humility,¹⁴² Ettie ignored Florine’s request and privately published *Crystal Flowers* in 1949. In a letter to Ettie dated 19 March 1950, Georgia O’Keeffe acknowledges that while “no she [Florine] wouldn’t really have wanted” to have had her poetry published, “it is such a portrait of her it is nice that it is there.” In other words, *Crystal Flowers* constitutes an important part of Florine’s legacy—it encapsulates her life and salon in the permanence of print, preventing an otherwise assured fade into obscurity.

Crystal Flowers attests to a number of Florine’s artistic and personal values—particularly her revaluation of the domestic sphere and the personal. The collection is divided into ten sections, with topics ranging from the emotional (“Moods”) to the intimate (“Notes to Friends”; “As Tho’ From a Diary”). In the “Comestibles” section, Florine combines the domestic task of food preparation with the emotionally charged language of desire, formulating what Gammel and Zelazo call “a modernist language of love and sex” (“Words” 22). Like Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, “Comestibles” sees mundane culinary items become sensual entities, as their preparation incites their sexual excitation. Mayonnaise feels “giddy” from having oil poured “on my stirred self” (75) and meringue kisses get “hot—hot—hot” from being “thrust” into an oven’s “darkness” (74). These poems render the domestic exciting and sexy, but also dangerous. In “You Are Rough,” a feminised speaker relates what appears to be a personal account of domestic violence. She is punched, “treated [...] to hellfire,” thrown aside, and “kept close watch on” (74-5). She

¹⁴² Many women writers of the modernist period, including Katherine Mansfield, composed letters and other personal items with the expectation of publication; yet, they feigned humility and a desire for ultimate privacy. See: Jay Dickson’s essay “The Last of Katherine Mansfield: The Affective Life in the *Journal* and the *Letters*” in Maria DiBattista and Emily O. Wittman’s *Modernism and Autobiography* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

adopts a passive role, allowing herself to be altered to suit her—presumably male—abuser’s needs:

How do you want me?
I am your clay
I am pliable
I lie soft in your hands
Mold me (74)

At this point, the poem emerges as a critique of the sexual hierarchy. The abuser assumes a position of physical authority in relation to the speaker, but it is in fact she who is the source of his strength—his “daily bread” (75). Without her, he would be useless. The task of baking bread thus becomes a means through which Florine can expose the domestic sphere’s oppressiveness, and subsequently undermine it.

Many of Florine’s poems engage with pressing social issues, but from a deeply intimate space. In “Moods,” Florine explores feelings of exhaustion, sadness, disenchantment, and joy as subjects fitting of artistic representation. She embraces the stereotypical association of femininity with emotionality, telling of sobs that “rise / like / bubbles / in a syphon” without context or justification (89). Rather than portray emotion as a source of shame or weakness, “Moods” renders it—and its associated femininity—artful. Emotion emerges as a precipitate of the creative process, particularly in the section’s closing poem, “For a Long Time.” The speaker—a doppelgänger for Florine—recounts how she once painted in “mellow golden tones” while waiting for the perfect moment of inspiration to strike (98). As time passes, however, the speaker learns how to give herself over to the full spectrum of her emotions, “Knocking me / Jarring me / Hurting me / Rousing me” (99). She begins to see “Time / Noise / Color” (98) all around her, which urge her “in joy to paint them...” (99). It is ultimately her emotions—not rationality—that widen her artistic vision and encourage her to capture her experiences in art.

The remaining sections of *Crystal Flowers*—“People,” “Notes to Friends,” and “As Tho’ From a Diary”—reiterate this theme, paying homage to the Stettheimer salon through

invoking the feelings of intimacy and comfort it aroused. As Gammel and Zelazo note in their introduction to *Crystal Flowers*, “the salon provided the raw material, and possibly a safe and contained audience, for Stettheimer’s poetry” (19). Taken together, the “People” poems comprise an endearing portrait of the Stettheimer salon, with salon regulars Van Vechten, Charles Demuth, Thomson, and Duchamp all making an appearance. Their presence helps Florine pay homage to her salon and, more importantly, its inversion of gendered tropes and hierarchies. The poems appear relatively innocuous, but through close reading, quiet moments of subversion emerge. In her portrait of Van Vechten, entitled “He Photographs,” Florine is able to interrogate the gendered binary of masculine agency and feminine passivity. The poem features the photographer Van Vechten attempting to exert control over his female subject: “She is naked / he proclaims / She has no clothes / other than his words” (102-3). However, his words are ultimately ineffective, as “She turns them / into painted air” (103)—she usurps his authority, turning herself into an artistic force that “sucks him in” (103). The portrait thus reverses the traditional power dynamic between the male portraitist and his often nude, female sitter, in which—to use Berger’s apt observation—“*men act and women appear*” (47). It is the female sitter here who acts and renders her male surveyor into an aesthetic object. Similarly, in her literary portrait of Virgil Thomson—“V. T.”—Florine renders Thomson passive in the production of his collaborative opera *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1928), depicting herself—the set designer—and fellow salonière Gertrude Stein—the libretto’s composer—as his creative saviours:

My role is to paint
your four active saints
and their props
inside and out your portrait
St Gertrude will protect you all (106)

In designing the sets for *Four Saints*, Florine gives life to Thomson’s vision, but more importantly, she gives him his life’s purpose; the opera is “inside and out [his] portrait”—his *raison d’être*—and without it, he would cease to exist. She then likens herself to a saint,

suggesting that God urged her to design *Four Saints* via a thrush's song (106). "St Gertrude" emerges as another bearer of God's power, "protect[ing]" Thomson and ultimately bringing the production to fruition. Thomson is wrested of his power, as his female collaborators emerge as his superiors—his creators. It literalises the salon's reversal of the sexual hierarchy, in which the female salonière reigns over her mostly male guests.

The poems in "Notes to Friends" similarly draw from the domestic space of the salon in order to deconstruct gendered hierarchies—specifically those which advocate a masculinised impersonal form of art. The poetic notes are highly personal, showcasing the complexity of Florine's relationships with her salon habitués. She addresses a number of notes to Van Vechten, which range from outpourings of admiration to moments of frustration. In "Houpla Carlo!" poetry emerges as part of the salon's networking function. Florine endorses Carlo's works, calling for "American youth / [to] stand / on / one another's heads / and clap / their feet / in your honor!" (115-6). "Carlo" offers a similar endorsement, thanking Van Vechten for all of the "colorful scents" and "youthless gaiety" his work provides to its audience (114). Yet, Florine seems to begrudge her indebtedness to Van Vechten: "I am agitated [...] / bound up with you / for life / chained" (114). She acknowledges Van Vechten's influence on her work, but maligns its implications for their power dynamic, viewing her indebtedness to him as weakness. With these notes, however, Florine is able to even this dynamic out; they provide her with a means of control, through which she can govern how Van Vechten and his works are portrayed and received. Here, she embodies Bourdieu's theorisation of the salonière as a kind of power broker, who has the ability to improve—or degrade—the reputation and success of her habitués at any moment (50). While her art and poetry may be "bound up with" Van Vechten, his fate is equally "chained" to her (114).

The final section of *Crystal Flowers* reads "As Tho' From a Diary," to the extent that Florine's biographer and friend Parker Tyler posits its poems "are as acceptable for

personal testimony as are her diaries themselves” (13). They provide insight into Florine’s life—her childhood, her art, and her deepest, most private thoughts. In “And Things I Loved—,” Florine pays homage to her mother Rosetta and the profound influence she had on her art. She recalls her mother’s feminine “skirt all puffs of deeper shades / With flounces of point lace” and taste for the highly decorative: “A carpet strewn with flower bouquets / Sèvres vases and gilt console tables” (123). Lush details abound, providing a history behind Florine’s crowded, over-the-top aesthetic. These decorative memories blur with moments of maternal love, so “Fichues of Honeton and Point d’Esprit” and “Mother reading us fairy tales” combine to provide “loved and unforgettable thrills” (123). Florine refrains from differentiating between her mother’s style and her love, painting them as equally influential to her evolution into an artist. The poem thus creates a matrilineal legacy—an ultimate testament to the power of a mother’s love and, in turn, an homage to the matriarchal structure of the salon. Other “diary-like” poems (Tyler 13) also participate in legacy building. “Our Parties,” for example, establishes the importance of the Stettheimer salon and its associated gatherings:

Our Parties
 Our Picnics
 Our Banquets
 Our Friends
 Have at last a *raison d’être*
 Seen in colour and design
 It amuses me
 To recreate them
 To paint them. (133-4)

Florine dispels the association of frivolity with the salon, making its gatherings and its guests worthy of capitalisation. With the repetition of “Our,” Florine not only takes ownership of her and her sisters’ salon, but also professes her pride in it. The salon emerges as Florine’s wellspring of creative inspiration; that is its “*raison d’être*.” Florine’s and the salon’s legacies are thus inextricably bound up together: the salon gives Florine a means by which to leave behind her own artistic legacy, which in turn contributes to the

salon's immortalisation. It is through her poetry and painting that Florine gives the salon its "colour and design," but also, its life.

Florine's desire for artistic legacy, however, was constantly impeded by her works' deeply personal subject matter and her own intense need for privacy. As Henry McBride notes in a draft of *Florine Stettheimer*, Florine was exceptionally secretive regarding her works-in-progress and her artistic process: she showed her paintings only "when finished," and even then, to just "a few invited guests." There were many possible causes for this secrecy, but perhaps none more obvious than the failure of her first (and only) solo exhibition at the Knoedler Gallery in October 1916. For the exhibition, Florine wanted to replicate the intimacy of her portraits within the public gallery space. Using gilt, beads, fringe, and a white muslin canopy, Florine transformed the exhibition room into her bedroom, blurring the line between the public and private spheres. It made people profoundly uncomfortable and, "much to [Florine's] amazement – [she] sold nothing" (Diary [1916-17]). According to McBride, "there was already enough freedom and femininity in her [Florine's] work to bar it"; the feminisation of the exhibition space only made her works more "reprehensible" to the general public (*Florine* 11). The Knoedler exhibition thus figured as a turning point in Florine's artistic career. After its failure, Florine decided to hone her hyperfeminine and personalised aesthetic, painting family and close friends almost exclusively from late 1916 onwards (Naumann 150). The salon, in turn, emerged as her own personal gallery, where she could exhibit her most intimate and feminine works without fear of judgment. *Soirée* alludes to this shift, highlighting the salon's exhibitory function. Guests gather to celebrate Florine's latest unveiling in a room where some of her most personal portraits, *Family Portrait I* (1915) and her *Nude Self-Portrait* (1915), bedeck the walls. The salon constitutes a kind of liminal space, as it facilitates the public acts of exhibition and networking within an unapologetically personal space.



Figure 9: Florine Stettheimer. *Family Portrait II*, 1933. Oil on canvas, 117.4 x 164 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Many of Florine's familial portraits engage with this liminality, merging the private space of home with emblems of public life. This is particularly evident in her 1933 *Family Portrait II* (Figure 9), which Donna Graves suggests "places the Stettheimer women in a setting that is both inside and out, intimately domestic and monumentally public" (24). The painting's foreground is highly intimate, featuring Florine, Ettie, Carrie, and their mother Rosetta as their most authentic selves: Florine as artist, with her palette and paintbrush in hand; Ettie as intellectual, with an open book on her lap; Rosetta as unobtrusive matriarch, playing a game of solitaire; and Carrie as caregiver, close within her mother's reach. They appear to feel at home; yet, in a move that appears to pay homage to salon habitué O'Keeffe's own skyscraper series, a series of public landmarks—the RCA Music Hall, the Chrysler Building, and the Statue of Liberty—encroach upon the scene. However, they are wrested of their imposing status, appearing ghostlike and ephemeral against the backdrop of a deep blue sea. Emblems of domesticity—including a crystal chandelier and a decorative mantelpiece—match the landmarks in size and impression, whilst a trio of flowers at the canvas' centre dwarfs them all. The flowers become markers of femininity's power, triumphing against the imposition of masculinised—and in some cases, phallic—public monuments. They also pay a subtle tribute to the salon, in that their colours—carnal red, virginal white, and the pink in-between—represent the mixture of gender and sexual identities welcome to the sisters' gatherings.¹⁴³ Yet, *Family Portrait II*'s central concern is to provide a living record of the Stettheimer women themselves; Florine includes the portrait's year alongside her artist's signature and she embeds all of her sisters' names in the floor's centrepiece in order of their placement. The portrait thus emerges as an autobiographical text, "wherein themes of personal memory and family intimacy are

¹⁴³ This analysis extends Bilski and Braun's claim that Florine uses rose due to its in-between status on the erotic spectrum ("Florine" 134).

interwoven around occasional chronological [and geographical] anchors” (Bloemink, *Life and Art* xiii-xiv).

Florine’s portraits of her sisters similarly function as biographical artefacts; they reveal the sisters’ most salient character traits, which in turn offer insight into how they ran their salon. In her 1923 *Portrait of My Sister, Ettie Stettheimer* (Figure 10), Florine highlights a strong kinship between herself and Ettie. Ettie appears much like Florine does in *Portrait of Myself*: with wide, red-rimmed eyes—suggestive of a heightened creative vision (Bloemink, *Life and Art* 134)—and set against a fantastical backdrop. Sprawled upon a red divan, Ettie appears to be suspended above the moon. The nighttime setting renders her dark and mysterious, whilst her coquettish pose alludes to her flirtatious nature—which often came through in her interactions with salon guests. What is less clear, however, is the symbolic significance of the burning Christmas tree, which sits to Ettie’s right. On a surface level, the flames act as a signifier of Ettie’s burning passion for philosophy, education, and writing. However, the tree’s religious connotations cannot be ignored. Alight, yet not consumed by flames, the tree resembles a burning bush—yet, with its strings of beads, tinsel, and ornamentation, it pays homage not to God, but to the feminised decorative arts. The tree figures the decorative—and by extension, the feminine—as holy and resilient, whilst also attesting to the strength of Ettie herself. The manner of the tree’s burning upends expectations and, in this way, emblematises Ettie’s own desire to subvert common ways of thinking—both through her literary works and her salon.

In *Portrait of My Sister, Carrie W. Stettheimer* (Figure 11), Florine is far less oblique in her use of symbolism. The portrait features Carrie at its centre, dressed in her trademark white gown and pearl collar. Delicate antennae emerge from the top of her cap, a possible visual allusion to Florine’s flutterby in *Portrait of Myself* and everything that fictional insect implies. Like Florine, Carrie maintained a demure, shy demeanour in the salon; yet, she craved a legacy of her own. Despite being literally embedded in the domestic space—as the



Figure 10: Florine Stettheimer. *Portrait of My Sister, Ettie Stettheimer*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 102.6 x 66.7 cm. Avery Library, Columbia University, New York.

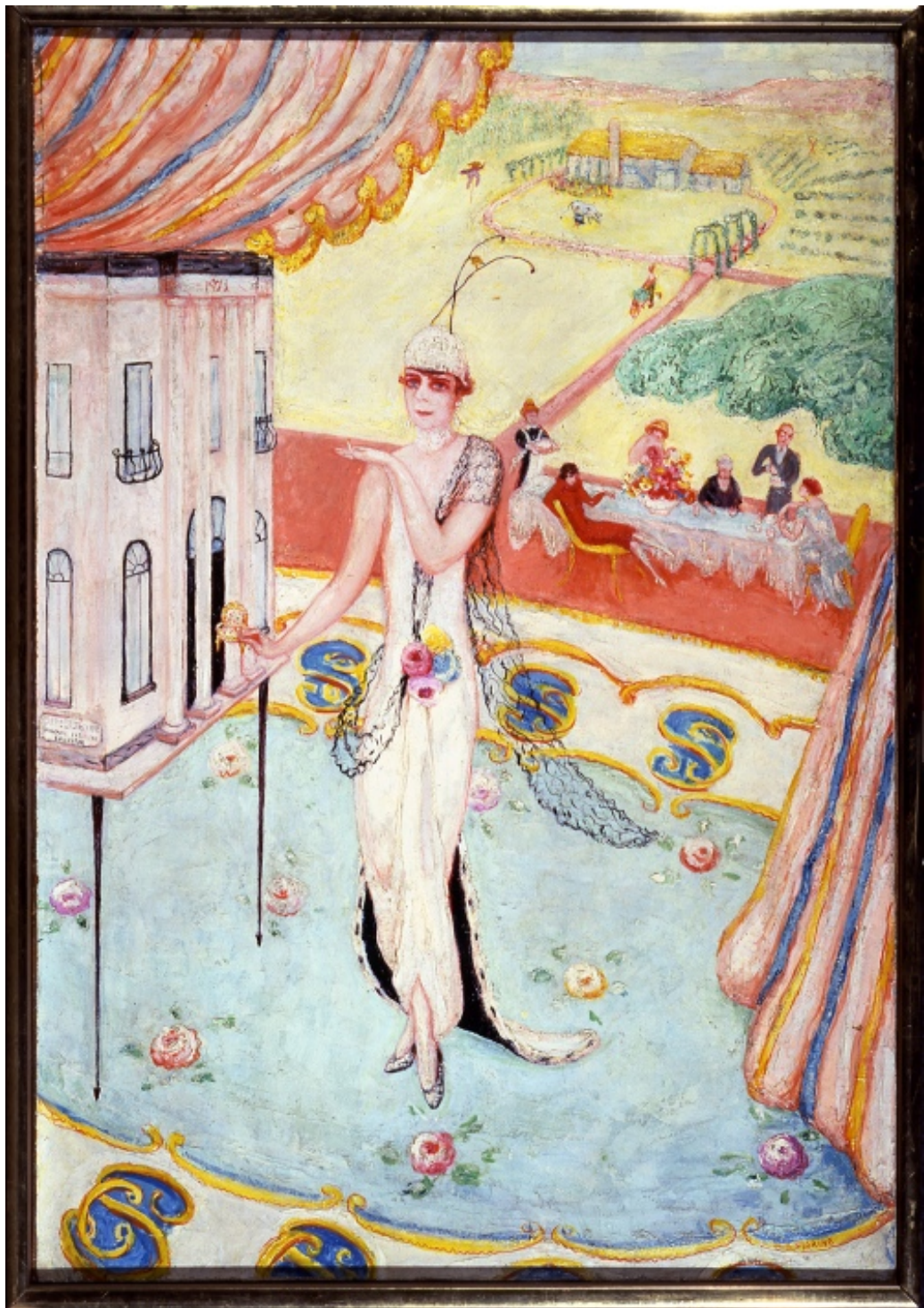


Figure 11: Florine Stettheimer. *Portrait of My Sister, Carrie W. Stettheimer*, 1923. Oil on canvas, 96.2 x 66 cm. Avery Library, Columbia University, New York.

portrait's monogrammed floor decals suggest—Carrie found ways to transform her domestic duties into a medium for artistic expression. In the portrait, she stands beside her most expansive project, the Stettheimer Dollhouse. In comparison to the rest of the portrait's scale, the dollhouse is massive—a literal manifestation of its significance to Carrie. She places her hand at its door, gesturing to give the viewer a peek inside. Yet, due to the portrait's temporal and spatial limits, the dollhouse's interior remains hidden—much like Carrie's true self.¹⁴⁴ The portrait's backdrop creates a sharp contrast to this hint of interiority. A dinner party unfolds at the centre of the canvas—an allusion to Carrie's public identity as domestic and salon hostess. Beyond that, however, sits a rural landscape, providing relief to the portrait's overwhelming domesticity. It symbolises Carrie's desire for escape—a wish to break away from her domestic confinement and establish herself outside of the home.

The salon provided Carrie with this escape. It became a creative outlet for her, from which she could expose the artistry involved in domestic tasks. For every salon gathering, Carrie developed and typed up an elaborate multi-course menu to serve her guests. Adamant that the salon menu would meet her expectations, Carrie purchased all of the ingredients herself and “trained a series of German cooks” to recreate her dishes (Bloemink, *Life and Art* 94). Meals began with rum cocktails or champagne, along with some kind of amuse-bouche, like honeydew melon or mixed cheese canapés (see Figure 12). Four courses would follow: soup, including Carrie's inventive feather soup; a seafood appetiser, like halibut and crabmeat in mayonnaise aspic with mixed salad; a main dish—such as turkey or squab—with several refined sides, including chestnuts, gooseberry preserve, or asparagus served with butter sauce; and, a dessert—most likely involving some kind of torte—alongside a cup of coffee or a glass of wine. Carrie's salon menus set the

¹⁴⁴ As Duchamp once stated in a 26 July 1923 letter to Ettie, Carrie was the least vocal and mysterious of the three sisters; she was more or less an unknown entity to anyone outside of the family.

November, 1929

Dinner

Honey Dew Melon

Soup

Halibut and Crabmeat in Mayonnaise Aspic
with Mixed Salad

Turkey Cranberries Chestnuts

Petit Pois

Vanilla Ice Cream Strawberries

Brod Torte Wine Cup Coffee

Guests

Marie Sterner, Muriel Draper, Toby, Barney Lintott,
Henry McBride, Charles Demuth, Carl Sprinchorn, Paul Reimers.

June, 1934

Dinner

Cocktails Mixed Cheese Canapes

Feather Soup

Halibut and Lobster in Mayonnaise Aspic
with Salad: Cold Slaw, Cucumbers
and Peppers

Squabs Bermuda Potatoes Gooseberry Preserve

Asparagus Butter Sauce

Strawberry Mousse Orange Torte

Guests

Mrs. Kirk Askew, Cecil Beaton, Peter Watkins, Boute^fde Monvel,
McBride, Ralph Flint, Virgil Thomson, Philip Moeller.

Figure 12: Carrie Stettheimer. *Dinner [menu designed by Carrie Stettheimer]*, November 1929-June 1934. Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven.

Stettheimer salon apart from its New York contemporaries—notably the Arensberg salon—which offered only a selection of finger sandwiches. Carrie used her salon menus not only to transform the mundane task of food preparation into an art form, but also to make herself known. As Sherrie Inness posits, cooking literature provided an alternative means for early 20th-century women to express themselves when they did not “have access to ways of expressing themselves in a more public fashion” (7). Janet Theophano advances a similar argument, demonstrating how cooking literature allowed “women whose lives were absorbed by the welfare of others [...] to write themselves into being” (9). Consumed by household chores and her mother’s care regimen, Carrie did not have time to compose an autobiography or book of memoirs; as far as archival records demonstrate, she was even too occupied to write letters or keep a diary. It was thus her salon menus that came to act as a record of her life. As if in acknowledgment of this, Carrie set out to make the menus as detailed and durable as possible. She included dates and guest lists on each of her menus, and she typed them, hoping to delay their degeneration. The salon menus thus perform what Theophano calls “an autobiographical function” (8), in that they serve as one of the sole written records of Carrie’s life, salon, and creativity.

The Stettheimer Dollhouse (Figure 13), on the other hand, stands as a visual testament to Carrie and the Stettheimer salon. Carrie first conceived of the dollhouse in the summer of 1916, whilst vacationing in the Floyd-Jones camp on Lower Saranac Lake with her mother and sisters. It was there that Carrie first discovered her passion for dollhouse making, constructing a dollhouse out of wooden grocery crates for a local charity bazaar. The dollhouse was a resounding triumph, raising nearly \$1000—over \$22,000 by today’s standards—for charity. Two years after this success, Carrie embarked on her most ambitious project: a detailed replica of her family’s New York apartments in dollhouse



Figure 13: Carrie Stettheimer. *The Stettheimer Dollhouse* [exterior], 1918-1944. Museum of the City of New York, New York.

form.¹⁴⁵ Scaled one inch to a foot, the dollhouse was designed to be 29 inches high, 56 inches wide, and 37 inches deep. It consisted of two stories and sixteen rooms, including the all-important salon. According to Barbara Zucker, Carrie “commissioned replicas of period furniture for the house, ordered special fabrics and tiny chandeliers, and thoroughly involved herself in its appointments” over the course of its twenty-five year construction (90). However, the dollhouse remained unfinished at the time of Carrie’s death, due to what Ettie deemed “many handicaps. For one thing, Carrie ran our ménage which was in later years a complicated and difficult one owing to our Mother’s prolonged invalidism” (“Introductory Foreword” 11). It was ironically Carrie’s entrenchment in the domestic space that both inspired and impeded the dollhouse’s creation. In its unfinished state, then, the dollhouse stands as a more accurate reflection of Carrie’s life, in that she never had the time to fully realise or care for herself.

However, the dollhouse is more than a simple record of Carrie’s domestic life and surroundings; it achieves a complete revisioning of domesticity, transforming the private space of the home into a realm for creative expression and feminist subversion. The dollhouse is—as Andy Warhol once noted—a work of art in its own right (Nathan A36). While miniature artworks by salon guests, including Marcel Duchamp, Gaston Lachaise, Albert Sterner, and Albert Gleizes, bedeck the walls and hallways, the dollhouse’s décor provides its own visual pleasures. The foyer serves as an opulent—and subtly subversive—opening to the house’s interior. Its teal, cream, and gold palette and numerous alabaster pillars give the space a palatial feel, but it is the room’s wallpapered back wall that stands as its most striking feature. As John Noble notes in his study of the dollhouse, the foyer “is dominated by the architectural fantasy of the wallpaper which represents a formal French garden in a *vue d’optique* that creates an illusion of depth as well as the paradox of the

¹⁴⁵ While the interior of the dollhouse replicated the Stettheimers’ New York apartments, “the façade and exterior of the structure were inspired by their summer home at André Brook” (Clark 8).

outdoors brought inside” (14). The wallpaper thus collapses the distinction between the feminised domestic sphere and the masculinised public sphere, revealing both to be merely superficial constructs. The dollhouse’s remaining rooms demonstrate an equally playful attitude towards surface. From the linen room with its black lace-trimmed cupboard doors, to the rose bedroom with its embroidered chiffon canopy and ruched blue and pink taffeta-bordered windows, the dollhouse presents itself as a highly decorative space. Needlepoint chairs and rugs furnish the salon, while the library features silver leafed walls, red lacquered furniture, and a minutely detailed Mah-jongg tile set—all painstakingly completed by Carrie. With its emphasis on ornamentation and its mixture of materials, the dollhouse ultimately stages a feminist reclamation of the decorative arts, which intensifies the salon’s own efforts to transform domesticity and decoration into sites for artistic expression.

The dollhouse was a redemptive project—not just for the decorative arts, but also for Carrie herself. It provided her with an escape from her hermetic existence and “the bother” of her domestic duties, which she apparently detested (E. Stettheimer, *Diary* [1918]). In her introductory foreword to John Noble’s study of the dollhouse, Ettie proclaims “that although my sister was an extremely successful and competent housekeeper, as our friends will confirm, she had no liking whatever for this job, and this, I imagine, no one suspected” (11). Rendered passive by her circumstances, Carrie lived merely in accordance with others’ needs, desires, and expectations. The dollhouse was a way for her to reclaim ownership over her life—to create a space that she could call her own. As Gaston Bachelard notes in his seminal text *The Poetics of Space*, the miniature presents a unique opportunity for the artist to condense and, in turn, possess her surrounding world (150). In recreating her domestic surroundings in miniature, then, Carrie was able to represent her life and even transform it. To use Susan Stewart’s terms, the dollhouse provided Carrie with “an absolute manipulation and control of the boundaries of

time and space” (63), by which she could free herself from the domestic life she resented and fashion herself a more aesthetically pleasing and independent existence. It even led her to rent her own studio at the Dorset Hotel from which she could work on the dollhouse “in single strictness” (E. Stettheimer, “Introductory Foreword” 12); the dollhouse thus facilitated both a physical and metaphorical removal from domesticity and mundane responsibility. To suggest that the dollhouse was simply an escape from the oppressiveness of the domestic sphere, however, would be to undermine its creative repurposing of domesticity. For Carrie, the dollhouse constituted what Beverly Gordon terms a saturated world—a means by which “domestic amusements,” such as paper dollhouses, scrapbooking, and party giving, could be reimagined as sources of fulfilment, sustenance, and most importantly, creative expression (1, 3).

Aside from her salon menus, the dollhouse was Carrie’s sole means of expressing herself. It was a central part not only of her life, but also of her self; she treated it like a diary—a receptacle for her deepest thoughts, feelings, and desires. According to Bachelard, the house is “one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind” (6-7). To see an individual’s home—their most intimate space—is to know them and their values (9, 152). While the dollhouse is by no means a “nonfiction[all]” text, as Quinn Darlington rightly asserts (33), it does provide insight into who Carrie was: a skilful artist with refined taste and feminist values, who transformed her domestic circumstances from a site of oppression into a source of artistic inspiration. According to Ettie, Carrie wanted “to create an object of intrinsic worth and at the same time contribute largely to some cause she was interested in promoting [...] I believe it was her hope to exhibit the house for such a purpose, and in the end to present it to a museum” (“Introductory Foreword” 11). Now, as part of a permanent exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York, the dollhouse has fulfilled its purpose: to expand not only our understanding of what constitutes art, but also the limits of Carrie’s legacy. Through the

exhibition, visitors get a glimpse of Carrie's domestic life but, more significantly, her value as an artist. In a letter dated 29 August 1944, Carl Van Vechten recognises this, asserting how vital it is for Ettie to include a portrait of Carrie alongside the dollhouse: "Somehow it seems a PART of this exhibit." The dollhouse and Carrie were thus inseparable. As Carrie assembled the dollhouse, it facilitated her "growing sense of self" as artist (Nathan A36); it was, in short, her self-portrait.

Yet, as much as Carrie invested herself in the dollhouse's creation, she also relied heavily on her salon guests for inspiration. In a series of letters dating from 1918 to 1921, Marcel Duchamp expresses his personal investment in the dollhouse's completion. In a 12 November 1918 letter, Duchamp inquires about Carrie's progress on the dollhouse, even drawing comparisons between her work and his own forthcoming experimentation with the miniature form, *Boîte-en-valise*, which he admits is still "out of sight" but "close to [his] heart."¹⁴⁶ Three years later, Duchamp implores Ettie: "Be sure to tell Carrie that I want to see her finished house upon my return" (Letter to Ettie, 6 July 1921).¹⁴⁷ Duchamp encouraged Carrie to persevere with the project, in spite of the many setbacks she faced. He even created a miniature version of his infamous *Nude Descending a Staircase* for the dollhouse's ballroom gallery (Figure 14). Other salon guests, including Alexander Archipenko, Gaston Lachaise, Marguerite Zorach, and Albert Gleizes, also contributed miniature artworks to the dollhouse—many of which play on traditional notions of the female nude. Rather than embrace the classical nude's geometrical structure and well-defined borders, which Lynda Nead understands as vital to the containment of female sexuality (6, 22), the dollhouse's nudes are misshapen and ill defined and thus embody the gender ambiguity characteristic of the Stettheimer salon. They defy the male gaze—an act through which a male viewer tries to control and objectify a female subject for his own

¹⁴⁶ Translated from the French: "Loin des yeux, près du Coeur."

¹⁴⁷ Translated from the French: "Dites bien à Carrie que je compte voir sa maison finie à mon retour."



Figure 14: Carrie Stettheimer. *The Stettheimer Dollhouse* [ballroom art gallery], 1918-1944. Museum of the City of New York, New York.

pleasure—and in doing so, further the salon’s own attempts to invert society’s sexual hierarchy. They similarly interrogate traditions regulating who can and cannot paint nudes. As Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright note in *Practices of Looking*, only male artists were traditionally allowed to paint female nudes, as women were not believed capable of producing ‘great’ art (79-80). Yet, the dollhouse problematises this sexist assumption, featuring nudes by male and female artists alike. The dollhouse’s library is similarly egalitarian, with miniature literary works by male habitués Van Vechten and Theodore Dreiser sitting alongside their host Ettie Stettheimer’s own roman à clef *Love Days*. The dollhouse thus figures as a testament to the “imaginative reciprocity of the salon circle” (Bilski and Braun, “Florine” 133); it is indebted to the salon, whilst simultaneously allowing for its contributions and values to live on indefinitely.

4.4. Conclusion

For Carrie, Ettie, and Florine, the salon was a fount of creative inspiration. Its attendees supported the sisters through all of their artistic endeavours, providing them with professional advice, connections, and personal encouragement. More importantly, however, these guests served as the sisters’ main artistic subjects. Marcel Duchamp, Carl Van Vechten, Virgil Thomson, Albert Gleizes, and myriad others appear multiple times throughout the sisters’ oeuvre, both as themselves and as composites. Yet, in almost all of their appearances, these men serve as conduits for the sisters’—and by extension, the salon’s—subversive gender politics, either facilitating a reversal of the sexual hierarchy or exposing gender as a fluid construct; some of Florine’s and Ettie’s works even carry forward the central preoccupation of Stein’s salon-inspired poetics—that the female salonière is in effect her (male) habitué’s creator. Thus, the salon not only served as the Stettheimer sisters’ source material, but it also gave them a means through which they could challenge patriarchal systems of power. Ultimately, it allowed them “a chance of

survival” (E. Stettheimer, Foreword v)—not only for themselves, but also for their mutually constitutive works, their feminist values, and their transient salon.

Conclusion:

Networking Subversion in the Modernist Salon and Beyond

“Begin with a small audience. If that small audience really believes, they make a big noise, and a big audience does not make a noise at all” — Gertrude Stein¹⁴⁸

Like its Enlightenment-era predecessors, the modernist salon’s unique semi-public positioning worked to partially obscure it from public expectations and censure; it emerged as a space from which the status quo could be challenged and its guests’ understandings of everything from literature and art to gender and sexuality could be transformed. Its events unfolded in the private space of its host(s)’s home, yet they wielded concrete effects in the public sphere, influencing the ways in which writers and artists expressed their creative and gendered selves beyond the spatiotemporal boundaries of the salon space. As detailed in the introduction, this has led many scholars to suggest that the salon—specifically in its 17th- and 18th-century form—was a feminist institution. Building on these feminist theorisations of the 17th- and 18th-century salon, this thesis has examined the extent to which modernist salons of the early 20th century operated as feminist institutions, taking the salons of Gertrude Stein, Natalie Clifford Barney, and the Stettheimer sisters as case studies.

While Stein, Barney, and the Stettheimer sisters shared basic commonalities—marital status, sexuality, nationality, and socioeconomic status being a few—and maintained connections to one another through their salons, their shared habitués, and in the case of Florine Stettheimer and Stein, their joint creative endeavours, the rationales structuring their salons were diverse in nature. As set out in Chapter Two, Stein segregated her 27 rue de Fleurus salon along gender lines so as to better position herself for cultivating

¹⁴⁸ In: Robert Bartlett Haas (ed.), *A Primer for the Gradual Understanding of Gertrude Stein* (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1973), 31.

personal connections to important literary men who could further her career and serve as the inspiration for her writing. While Stein's exclusion of (most) women from the salon space and her dismissive attitude towards women's suffrage seem to characterise her as a maintainer of the status quo, her salon-inspired word portraits enact a powerful subversion of the sexual hierarchy; she used them to wrest her male habitués of their perceived authority and assert herself—in spite of needing them to advance her career—as their judge and creator. Thus, while the physical space of the Stein salon did little to advance the careers of women, it did provide Stein with the raw material for her experimental and subversive writings. Barney's salon at 20 rue Jacob, on the other hand, was explicitly designed as a feminist space. Barney envisioned her salon as the meeting place for (often queer) women writers and artists, from which they could support each other in their creative endeavours and combat the patriarchal underpinnings of not only the literary establishment—as spearheaded by the exclusively male Académie Française—but society at large. The Stettheimer sisters were similarly guided by feminist principles in their roles as salonières; yet, instead of working within rigid gendered binaries to empower women, the Stettheimer sisters exploded these binaries, transforming their New York-based salon into a breeding ground for gender experimentation—both for themselves and for their mostly male habitués. They derived much of their creative inspiration from the salon and its gender fluid habitués, immortalising them—and by extension, their destabilisation of gendered categories—in various artistic and literary works; the salon, in short, provided the Stettheimer sisters with the means to preserve their feminist legacy.

In spite of these divergent rationales, however, Stein, Barney, and the Stettheimer sisters all utilised the salon's networking function and, by extension, its unique semi-public status to achieve their goals and their preferred forms of feminist subversion. While their salons were all by necessity small in scope, with the number of attendees ranging from eight to seventy-five on average, it was precisely their manageable size that made them so

conducive to enacting feminist subversion. When asked for the key to her fame, Stein once advised, “Begin with a small audience. If that small audience really believes, they make a big noise, and a big audience does not make a noise at all” (*Primer* 31). The salon provided that small audience to Stein, Barney, and the Stettheimer sisters; it was their trusted, loyal habitués who facilitated the kinds of connections needed to enhance the salonières’ careers and transport the revolutionary ideas of the salon to the wider worlds of artistic and literary modernism—namely through the publication, dissemination, and publicisation of both the salonières’ and their habitués’ salon-inspired works. Yet, given the myriad forms the modernist salon can take, it would be inaccurate to label it as an inherently feminist space; this thesis has worked to nuance existing feminist theorisations of the salon, arguing that while the salon’s identifying characteristics—its networking function, its semi-public status—make it conducive to feminist action, it was ultimately up to the salonière to determine how such feminist action would be realised.

5.1 Directions for Further Research

In order to further nuance feminist theorisations of the salon, however, race must be considered. While the various temporal, methodological, and financial constraints of this thesis have necessitated that I limit myself to salonières of similar racial, marital, and socioeconomic status, this in no way intends to suggest that only wealthy, white women used the modernist salon to develop and enact feminist forms of subversion. It is true, however, that very few modernist salons hosted by white women welcomed people of colour. If, or when, white salonières did welcome people of colour as their guests, they tended to treat them as a novelty; deeper engagement about their lived experience as a racialised person did not occur, as is evidenced in both the Barney and Stettheimer salons. When Bengali poet and Nobel Prize-winner Rabindranath Tagore made an appearance at 20 rue Jacob, Barney treated it as her “greatest coup,” implying that the appearance of a

person of colour was a rare, albeit special, occurrence (Wickes 109); her comprehensive hand-drawn map of 20 rue Jacob and its habitués seems to confirm this. Likewise, while Florine Stettheimer includes the Hindu poet Sankar in her 1917-19 portrait of her salon, *Soirée*, her and her sisters' diaries make no mention of other guests of colour. While people of colour were often excluded from white women-led salons, they developed their own salons in response, which served to recognise and nourish the artistic and literary capabilities of racialised—and therefore, marginalised—writers and artists. For example, the modernist salons of African American women—including suffragist and activist Ruth Logan Roberts' Harlem salon, businesswoman and art patron A'Lelia Walker's New York salon (commonly referred to as the Dark Tower), and poet and anti-lynching activist Georgia Douglas Johnson's Washington-based S Street Salon—played a vital role in the development of the Harlem Renaissance; yet, they remain under-researched. Of the studies of African American salonières that do exist, most focus exclusively on A'Lelia Walker and are non-academic in nature.¹⁴⁹ It is thus vital for future scholarship on modernist salons to explore how African American women adopted the institution of the salon to: 1) create an artistic and literary community in which African Americans could freely express and nurture their creativity; and, 2) campaign for their rights and freedoms—both as women and as African Americans. Such an examination will reveal how African American salonières' intersectional identities as black (and often, queer) women shifted their understanding and subsequent deployment of feminist politics within the modernist salon.

However, there is also a need to move beyond the modernist salon and begin to consider whether—and if so, how—the salon manifests itself today. In his article “Trending Now: Modern Salons from London to Dubai,” Toby White suggests that “today salons have had a renaissance,” citing the Paris and London Literary Salons, Salon London,

¹⁴⁹ See: Ben Neihart, *Rough Amusements: The True Story of A'Lelia Walker, Patroness of the Harlem Renaissance's Down-Low Culture* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2003); Andrea Barnet, *All-Night Party: The Women of Bohemian Greenwich Village and Harlem, 1913-1930* (Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 2004).

Vica Miller's New York City-based salons, the Sunday Salon, and various literary communities in the United Arab Emirates as evidence. Like many of their predecessors, these modern-day salons facilitate discussions of literature and art, often with an emerging artist or writer giving a talk or reading at the evening's outset. Yet, they are also marked by some key differences, which have myriad implications for the salon's conduciveness to feminist forms of subversion. Most notably, they often lack the semi-public status that made their predecessors so uniquely suited to enacting subversion, instead taking place in overtly public spaces, like festivals, bars, bookstores, art galleries, and even online venues. There tends to be no set location, day, or time for these salons; they move between a variety of venues and weekdays, with some opting for a monthly—instead of the standard weekly—schedule. Unlike salonières of the Enlightenment and modernist eras, their hosts make a conscious effort to attract a more racially and ethnically diverse set of guests.¹⁵⁰ While these shifts appear to further liberate the salon from its rigid structure and, to a certain extent, aristocratic roots, these salons are neither more accessible nor egalitarian just by virtue of their public status. Many of Europe's salons charge an entry fee, with Salon London charging £75 for year-round access to their events and the London Literary Salon charging up to £345 for a twenty-week long literary study group. While White argues “today's groups [salons] depend on the principle of equality—of all opinions being valuable and up for discussion rather than attack,” these exorbitant fees suggest otherwise; it is only those who can afford to attend who are received as equals. New York-based salons, by contrast, appear to uphold the salon's egalitarian underpinnings. They are free of charge and, most significantly, their proceedings are made accessible to all who have access to the Internet and social media. The host of the Sunday Salon, writer Nita Noveno, posts podcasts and video footage of her salon's events online and even publishes an e-zine—akin

¹⁵⁰ Vica Miller's last salon in New York City, for example, featured readings from two second-generation immigrant women writers: Indian American Pia Padukone and Ghanaian American Nana Ekua Brew-Hammond.

to the 17th- and 18th-century salon newsletters and pamphlets—as a complement. Through building an online presence, Noveno has been able to use technologies specific to the 21st century to expand the reach of her salon and encourage its proliferation in a number of other cities, including Chicago, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, and most impressively, Nairobi.

In this hyperconnected social media age, the ability to create networks of subversion, which facilitate the organisation of protests and sit-ins, raise public awareness, and combat various forms of oppression—Black Twitter and the affiliated Black Lives Matter movement being two such examples—has never been so easy or accessible. While these networks may not be identical to the modernist salons of Stein, Barney, and the Stettheimers in terms of their form or function, they are indebted to them—much in the same way as those modernist salons were indebted to their 17th- and 18th-century predecessors. They pose questions as to what constitutes a salon and, by extension, what forms of subversive potential the salon holds for today's context. The salon has proven itself to be an enduring institution, the effects of which have long outlasted its presumed demise in the French Revolution. Clearly the need for a space in which people can discuss, network, and create in the name of subversion is still important today; yet, the kind of subversion that takes place, as this thesis shows, depends entirely on who chooses to establish, maintain, and govern that space.

6.

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