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Paris Invertie: Expatriate Queerness, Then and Now

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Paris Invertie: Expatriate Queerness, Then and Now

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"Map-gazer": Boulevard Haussmann, Paris.

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L'Introduction

I am attached to Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936), Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1933), and Ernest Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* (1986, published posthumously) because of queerness and because of France, and, yes, because of queerness in France. In no way, shape, or form did my gawky adolescent experience of discovering and embracing my own queerness mirror the sleek allure of 1920s Paris – but (I like to think) there is a commonality in the doubled outsider experiences of being an expatriate and being queer that transcends both time and personal situation.

In a neat turn of events, Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* actually mentions both Djuna Barnes (200), although her name is only mentioned briefly in passing, and Ernest Hemingway (220), in a more flattering portrayal of him than his of Stein in *A Moveable Feast*: thus Stein's work helps physically tie all three works together, by showcasing their authors as contemporaneous entities.

Nightwood and *Autobiography* both resonate for me in their portrayals of queer femininity (from authors who were actually queer and female themselves, no less), both certain and uncertain. Perhaps surprisingly, *The Garden of Eden* resonates for me as well: in Hemingway's depiction of the character of Catherine there is a touching portrayal of a woman coming to terms with her own queerness, the “other” within her that she can sense but not yet name. However different these texts may be individually, together they illuminate one another's

messages on identity and being in wonderful ways, forming a trifecta of queer stories whose heterogeneous unity is its most beautiful asset.

In thinking about queerness and expatriatism, I have of course been thinking of French ways of queering this very text: in that spirit, I have chosen to take back the word “invert” or “*inverti*” as another sort of “queer.” I feel that this word choice is appropriate, especially given the era in which these works were written: for these queer characters, inversion of traditional norms (either by their faithful application to a non-normative situation or their toppling altogether) was the most effective way of queering them.

The works flow into one another through these common themes: queerness, expatriatism, Paris and France. The works flow into my own life through these themes. In what ways do these markers of identity coalesce? What deliberations can these works offer up on identity and the elasticity of lived experience? What bearing do they still have, now, today, for each other (and for me)?

Tu lis ces livres et tu penses avant tout à toi-même: tu oublies les effets stylistiques, le traitement des personnages, le symbolisme, tout ça, et tu te plonges dans des pensées égoïstes et enrichissantes de toi-même, de tout ce que tu as fait, et aurais pu faire, et feras. Surtout le passé : tu penses à Paris et comment tu y as grandi, là-bas, sous sa tutelle.

Tu te plonges dans tes pensées – qui sait quand tu remonteras à la surface ?



“City Blur”: Rue de Rivoli, Paris.

Part I:
Le Lieu Parisien

Paris, France is at the heart of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Nightwood*, and *The Garden of Eden* – even when she, the city, is not overtly visible. Together these works offer a complete vision of the city: *l'appartement* (au 27 Rue de Fleurus – the backdrop for Stein and Alice’s 39 year romance, both in fact and in fiction), *la ville de nuit* (the dark underside of the city, and of society, at night – like a sort of plein air *catacombes*), and *le jardin de faubourg* (a peripheral but nevertheless present element of *la ville de Paris* itself). Each

work takes a particular setting and queers it, after a fashion, offering an inverted interpretation of a classic literary space.

The cozy domestic sphere of the home, the dark underside of the city at night, and the idyllic paradise of the garden are all traditional settings rejuvenated through the lens of queerness. These differing locations offer a reflection on the intricacies of queer identity in the 1920s – and queer expatriate identity at that. France, and often more specifically Paris, fittingly becomes the new setting for a new exploration of identity, neatly overturning previously rigid structures or remaking them permeable and nebulous instead.

A l'âge de quinze ans je suis tombée follement amoureuse d'une fille de mon cours de russe. Ça m'a pris quelques semaines pour m'en remettre de cette infatuation et puis quelques mois pour admettre que j'étais lesbienne (« une gouine, » le mot interdit que j'avais appris l'été même avant ma réalisation, le mot qui me fascinait sans que je ne sache pourquoi) – entièrement lesbienne et rien d'autre. Elle était le catalyseur : les sentiments se sont dissipés au bout de peu de temps mais cette nouvelle identité est restée avec moi, pour toujours.

Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, as a literary embodiment of Stein's relationship with Alice, centers itself around the space they shared: the home. In the true convention of the domestic sphere, they took

on traditional heterosexual gender roles, with Stein as “hubbie” (one of their many nicknames for her) and Alice as the wife, in charge not only of their household affairs but also of the secretarial duties surrounding Stein’s writing (Souhami, 12). The work does not necessarily make explicit this gendered relationship dynamic, but the reader can observe the division of duties, as Stein noticeably focuses on her art while Alice tends to the home. A sense of both the breadth of Alice’s responsibilities and also of Stein’s gratefulness for Alice’s care emerges in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*:

I am a pretty good housekeeper and a pretty good gardener and a pretty good needlewoman and a pretty good secretary and a pretty good editor and a pretty good vet for dogs and I have to do them all at once and I found it difficult to add being a pretty good author. (251-252)

This laundry list of Alice’s duties seems to say very little explicitly about the queer nature of her relationship with Stein, although some evidence is provided by the awareness that those “pretty good’s” are tender praise from the lover (who is the recipient of each of those roles) and not puffed-up self-evaluation. In fact, the entire work is relatively devoid of conceited egoism, perhaps surprisingly given its twofold autobiographical nature: Stein’s double perspective, rather than giving her free reign for unlimited self-praise, allows her to look probingly and critically at her life and tenderly at her lover.

It is up to the in-the-know reader to fill in these blanks, and indeed this is the case throughout all of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, given the queer (and therefore “undercover,” at least to Stein’s greater reading audience) nature of their relationship: what is left unsaid is just as important as what is said

outright. Stein's *Autobiography* is complemented by *Lifting Belly*, a much more private work (published posthumously by Toklas), that details in "lesbian code" (Benstock, 188) the sexual intimacies of her relationship with Alice – who was, seemingly, also "pretty good" in bed. *Autobiography* is significant for what is left to the imagination of the reader and communicated implicitly. In this code, home-making is equated with love-making, and thus the sphere of the home, already an intimate one, takes on the connotations of sexuality that cannot otherwise be addressed to Stein's contemporaneous audience.

Surrounding domestic issues, the atmosphere Stein creates as Alice is one of the gentle back-and-forth of the long-married couple, under which it is possible to detect hints of the sexual aspects of their relationship: "I went to bed early and got up early and Gertrude Stein went to bed late and got up late so in a way we overlapped" (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 162) – a textbook illustration of the expression "opposites attract." Presumably this "overlapping" time spent in bed would include love-making, their very bodies "overlapping." As one reads between the lines of the prosaic details of their daily lives, it is possible to find glimpses of their shared sexuality.

Even mundane aspects of their life together can take on sexual undertones. "Gertrude Stein never likes her food hot and I do like mine hot, we never agree about this," Stein as Alice explains. She goes on to describe their compromise: "[Gertrude Stein] admits that one can wait to cool it but one cannot heat it once it is on a plate so it is agreed that I have it served as hot as I like" (114). The allusion to shared food is caught up in the notion of appetite and thus of sexual appetite: compromise, the cornerstone of any successful relationship, is therefore not

solely relegated to matters of food but also presumably to matters of sexual practice (and even artistic matters, compromise also being conducive in Stein and Alice's case to the act of literary creation). In Stein's long erotic poem, "Lifting Belly," food becomes intertwined in her metaphors for sex and for climax:

Question and butter.
I find the butter very good.
Lifting belly is so kind.
Lifting belly fattily.
Doesn't that astonish you.
You did want me.
Say it again.
Strawberry. (21)

Food, something humans want and need, becomes emblematic for sexual want and sexual need (references to butter slide into "You did want me" and end with a reference to strawberry – perhaps "strawberry jelly," an idea the reader can create to rhyme with "lifting belly," to complement the butter). "Lifting belly," the central metaphor for sex (perhaps because of what one finds "underneath" the belly, or perhaps because of the heavy breathing that occurs at the moment of climax), is done "fattily," a neologism that recalls both rich food and one particular strain of Alice's many nicknames for Stein, "fattie" and "fattuski" (Souhami, 114). The belly is by extension the location on the body for both the pleasure of eating and the pleasure of sex. Even an act as ordinary as sharing food can become code for the sharing of sexual intimacy: Stein bows to Alice's will (she gets it "as hot as [she likes]") in this domestic matter of food and their dynamics at the table are surely translated to the bedroom.

In this domestic sphere, roles are divided, and where one half of the couple needs help, the other can step in (although the boundaries of the roles remain relatively rigid). Stein as Alice ends the aforementioned “laundry list” of Alice’s responsibilities with the very practical “and I found it difficult to add being a pretty good author” (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 252): writing is Stein’s domain and, in an ultimate act of tenderness, she welcomes Alice into it by writing about her and for her, in her own voice. Assuming another’s voice could also be read as the repression or overwhelming of that original voice, but clearly this is not the case in *Autobiography*: given what is known about Alice’s active role in Stein’s writing as a typist, editor, critic, and even publisher, Stein’s adoption of Alice’s voice is an act of love. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is an ode to their thirty-nine year relationship: by making public the domestic details of their life together, Stein proclaims her love for Alice and writes about their shared experience through Alice’s eyes.

Stein’s focus on domesticity, on the lived as art, creates a safe space for her queer identity and her relationship with her female lover, allowing her to speak publicly about her queerness through use of a “lesbian code.” Stein fits her non-traditional relationship with Alice into the traditional hetero-patriarchal mold, however: although she is able to create for herself through her writing on shared domesticity a safe space for her queer identity, this is not a permanent solution. Queer identity must be given its own place to thrive on a level that is more than individual.

In sharp contrast to the gentle domestic sphere of Stein’s *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is Djuna Barnes’ *Nightwood*, whose setting for the many

relationships of the lonely, wandering Robin Vote is the night, the shadowy streets and alleyways of the city of Paris, domain of *invertis* of all kinds. Gone is the cozy domesticity of the shared home: many characters try to build a home with Robin and write her into their personal narratives, but she is a perpetual victim of the siren call of the night.

We do not encounter Robin until the novel's second chapter, "La Somnambule" ("the sleepwalker"): its very title is a prophecy that she fulfills as time and again she wanders away in the night, sleepwalking through life. We meet her in the day but she has fainted (she is unconscious, off in a night of her own making). She is clearly not a creature of the daytime: we view her insentient form through Felix's eyes and he senses the very frame of her flesh to be "sleep-worn, as if sleep were a decay" (*Nightwood*, 31). Already she is being eroded or worn away, seemingly by sleep, but really by the pressures of society to conform to the harsh light of the modern day – indeed she is later described as "the infected carrier of the past" (34), a relic of a primal age who does not fit the world into which she was released.

Even her very scent is primal and tied to elements of nature that need no sunlight (and in fact thrive in damp, dark environments): "the perfume that her body exhaled was of the quality of that earth-flesh, fungi, which smells of captured dampness and yet is so dry" (31). These references to fungus recall traditional descriptions of genitalia (both male and female), reducing Robin's body to the one aspect of her being that is truly visible and knowable to the reader, her sexual relationships with others. This first meeting sets up both her character and her position throughout the novel: she is "beast turning human"

(33), caught between these two worlds, and she does not have a voice of her own (our first glimpse of Robin is of her unconscious form, seen voyeuristically through another's eyes, and we see none of her interiority) – instead we hear from those who have tried to tame her and failed, from those who loved her but could not keep her.

As a creature of the night, Robin is in good company in *Nightwood*: the novel concerns itself primarily with *les invertis*, those who upend society's molds, who walk outside its lines and populate its dark underside as they search to fashion their conceptions of queer identity. Felix is caught between his unknown Jewish heritage and his title of nobility, a bid for legitimacy created entirely from his father's imagination (right down to false portraits of presumed ancestors), and this unease is manifested in his friendships with various circus performers, an established group of societal outcasts. His friendship with Frau Mann, the "Duchess of Broadback" (a mocking title of nobility and carnality that calls attention to Felix's own fabricated title), is one such performer, and her very name suggests her inability to fit into the traditional roles dictated by society: in German, Frau means "woman" or "Mrs." and Mann means "man," and so together both elements of her name create a paradox of gender. The description of her "in action" on the trapeze further enhances her subversion of gender: "the stuff of the tights was no longer a covering, it was herself; the span of the tightly stitched crotch was so much her own flesh that she was as unsexed as a doll" (12). She defies gender, becoming "unsexed," but in this manner she is also objectified and dehumanized, transformed into doll, lacking a live body and a sentient mind.

Nightwood's characters recognize their ties to the night (to varying degrees), and the night's ties to their own inversions. Dr. O'Connor laments to Nora the minuteness of the human heart in the face of the vastness of the night (in French, no less): "Ah, Mon Dieu! La nuit effroyable! La nuit, qui est une immense plaine, et le coeur qui est une petite extrémité!" (74). Later, he explicitly connects the night to a widely-accepted indication of supposed perversion:

Was it at night that Sodom became Gomorrah? It was at night, I swear! A city given over to the shades, and that's why it has never been countenanced or understood to this day. (77)

This clear connection inscribes the tale of Robin and Nora (almost fate-ordained in its tragedy) in a greater tradition of queer undertakings condemned by an unforgiving society. Not only is the night the locale of vice and sin, it is also impenetrable, inscrutable, impossible to understand, much like queerness, a turn away from the proscriptions of society (although not necessarily from the biological impulse for regeneration – the act of creation in these queer relationships will be explored later).

It is at night (in the still-darkness of the "faint light of dawn") that Nora spies Robin caught in an embrace with Jenny Petherbridge. Robin and Nora's gazes meet and lock, and Nora is left like "a body struck at the moment of its final breath" (58) – trapped like Lot's wife turned into a pillar of salt for her forbidden look at Sodom burning. References to straining vision ("eyes," "regard," "gazed"), in a play of light and darkness ("light," "shadow," "darkness," "luminosity," "obscurity," "illumination"), mirror Nora's thought process in this entirely dark moment of pure illumination, haunting the reader (57-58). The porousness of the

space of the night is both freeing and suffocating: the denizens of the night are constantly forging new identities and melting back into old ones, and it is impossible to keep a grasp on any one of them for very long.

Perhaps belonging to the night is both a liberation from the conventions of society (such as the proscriptions of gender roles) and an oppressive rejection from society's ranks (Robin loves whom she chooses but she is doomed in her own unhappiness, as if by fate, to leave her lover and begin again in the image of the lost love, a narcissistic pursuit). Given the heavy oppressiveness of society upon their selves and their relationships with others, the sphere of being and counter-cultural codes that Barnes' characters create are nebulous and permeable, constantly shifting, unlike the rigid solutions that Stein and Alice construct through the comfort of shared domesticity. And so creatures of the night they remain, preferring to exist in the fluid space of the city's shadowy nooks and crannies, in the cracks of the bustle of traditional metropolitan life.

Finally, after the home and the city at night, we have the garden in Hemingway's *Garden of Eden*: on the surface, the garden seems to have the gentle comfort and ease of the domestic sphere of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, but underneath lies much of the turmoil of the dark cityscape depicted in *Nightwood* (Nora's glimpse of Robin's unfaithfulness actually occurs in her garden, so the garden is certainly not all sweetness and light). Much like its heavenly namesake, the setting of Hemingway's novel appears to be an idyllic natural locale, populated only by two lovebirds – but soon a mysterious third person arrives and causes turmoil, in this case through the temptation of forbidden sexuality.

Hemingway's novel opens to a world centered entirely on his two protagonists, the newly married David and Catherine Bourne. Their world is insular: for the entire first page the Bournes are merely a "they," a pronoun that simultaneously plunges the reader into their relationship in medias res (they are not introduced – they do not even become "the young couple" until the bottom of the first page) and separates the reader from them, denying us entry into their world (following the trope of most young lovers). They are not even named until well into the work (David on page 7, Catherine on page 17): for all intents and purposes they are a single unit, much like their predecessors in *Genesis*, which makes their eventual forceful dissolution all the more shocking.

The ideas of nature invoked throughout *The Garden of Eden* seem simultaneously environmental and constructed: the landscape appears almost to have been placed there for David and Catherine (similarly to the original Eden), and though there are still references to human activity, they seem far removed from the leisurely activity of the Bournes. For example, the opening paragraphs of the novel touch upon the "fishing boats" and the "fishing people of the port" (3) the young couple observes from their vantage point by the sea, but these activities do not seem real until David catches a sea bass, the "biggest one [he's] ever seen" (10), with nothing more than a long fishing pole. Anecdotes like this one underscore the distance between the Bournes and the rest of their world, a distance created both by the narrow focus of their relationship (they really do only have eyes for each other – at least at first) and by the fact that they are not natives in this foreign land (of course the American tourist who writes for a living

can catch the biggest fish this French town has ever encountered – David Bourne is often nothing more than Hemingway’s incarnation of himself.).

The garden is, of course, the original locus of temptation: all honeymoons must come to an end, and the Bournes are forced to confront their own humanity and shortcomings in a spectacularly explosive fashion. Here queerness serves as a vessel for temptation, in a new form, playing off of the tiresome forbidden fruit that is run-of-the-mill heterosexual adultery. In this case the apple of knowledge takes human form in Marita, a mysterious foreign (seemingly – her provenance is not described, and we actually know very little about her) woman David and Catherine pick up by happenstance. Interestingly enough, it would seem that Marita only accentuates, rather than causes, the turmoil in this relationship: there is a nascent sense of queer identity in the character of Catherine, who begins physically changing her appearance to appear more masculine and vacillates between a female and a male persona, first in the bedroom but then out and about on her own (she takes solo trip to the Prado “as a boy,” for example).

David is reluctant, to say the least, regarding the appearance of his wife’s gender confusion (often within the confines of their bedroom). He does little to try and understand the source of her troubles, or try to assuage her fears about the changes within herself, instead attempting to resolve these issues by tamping them down. Catherine tells him point blank “Don’t call me girl” (a simple request) and he responds with “Where I’m holding you you are a girl” (17), imposing the limitations of her own body upon her just as she is trying to forget them (and neatly sexualizing her in a moment in which she has no desire to be treated as female). He then proceeds to touch her breasts, once again reminding her of her

body's femaleness (in fact, Catherine's forays into being a boy are often coupled with a heightened awareness of her breasts on David's part, as if in an attempt to tether her to her femininity and her status as an object of his sexual desire). David consistently tries to force Catherine to repress her queer uncertainty, which almost certainly contributes to the urgency these issues take on for her, and their subsequent destructiveness.

Catherine often takes on a begging, pleading tone in these instances with David. There is in this regard the potential for an interesting linguistic connection between *The Garden of Eden* and Gertrude Stein: Catherine's pleading language towards David during these moments of vulnerability very much resembles Hemingway's description in *A Moveable Feast* of an exchange overheard between Stein and Alice (an exchange that, at least by his own account, left him disgusted with Stein and unable to associate with her anymore – he apparently gets on his high horse and judges her for what would seem to be sado-masochistic sexual practice). He recalls overhearing “someone speaking to Miss Stein as [he] had never heard one person speak to another; never, anywhere, ever” and then hearing Stein say “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” (92).

Putting aside Hemingway's obvious investment in coming out on top in a book of reminiscences of the past, there is a connection between Stein's words and the pleading cadences found in Catherine's speech throughout *The Garden of Eden*. Especially when she is feeling uncertain of herself, because of her desires for masculinity, Catherine will say things like “Please love me David the way I am. Please understand and love me” (17) or “I say it and I said it and you said it. You

now please. Please you” (55). These Stein-esque turns of phrase stem from her lack of confidence in these intimate moments of sharing herself with David: she tries to pre-empt his negativity with an intensely supplicatory tone. It is as though her brimming emotions and fears flow out of her, unable to be fully contained by the conventions of language.

Regarding these changes within herself, Catherine tries to be lighthearted and assure David, saying, “Truly you don’t have to worry darling until night. We won’t let the night things come in the day” (22). Seemingly this places the garden, a sunlit daytime space of supposed tranquility, in opposition with the night of *Nightwood*, a time and place of darkness and inversion. In reality, however, these transformations of hers bleed out into the daytime (much to David’s chagrin), causing issues that fester within the Bournes’ relationship until these issues are replaced with Marita, a much more external point of contention, who still fits within the schema of Catherine’s queer rebellion and also simultaneously personifies the classic racial other (in her indeterminate dark, exotic foreignness). Thus the garden is perhaps not so distant from the dark urban sprawl of Paris, though it may seem distant throughout the novel as the landscape of the idyllic French countryside looms large.

Many chapters begin with a look to the surrounding landscape, most often viewed through David’s eyes, as he is the central protagonist and the only character whose interiority the reader is able to discern, through both the occasional dive into his personal thoughts and through his writing. These glimpses often describe a landscape that is “fresh” and “new” (68), one whose sky is perhaps “washed clean” (123), one that is redolent with the invigorating scents

of pines and sea air (78): this garden freshness, every day seeming like the illusion of a fresh start (most often to David, but also to Catherine, who persists in thinking that she can atone for her mistakes even as they grow larger and larger), offers a stark contrast to the stalemate tug-of-war playing out between the three lovers, as though to mask the dark undertones of Catherine's inversion.

Later, the freshness that the landscape offers mirror David's fresh new love life with Marita – or perhaps it is the other way round, and David has been influenced by the surrounding garden landscape to cleanse himself of his past and begin again – this time without the burden of a wife who is still trying to figure out the parameters of her identity. Catherine leaves for Paris on her own, and though the reader is offered very few details on this future, it is a choice she wrests for herself and makes entirely independently: ultimately her own sense of self is worth more to her than her relationship with David.

Given Hemingway's novel's tight focus on its two (then three, then two once more) protagonists, this world of the garden can seem very distant from the world of Paris, the lively metropolis that is a central focus in both *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Nightwood* (albeit often in contrasting ways). But the garden fits into the sphere of the city, as the seemingly natural element, the well-cultivated suburb that is actually a completely artificial construction. Paris is a secondary character in each of these works, whether placed proudly at the forefront or left lurking in the background by the author: no matter what its use, the city of Paris serves as backdrop or counterpoint for each setting, be it the home, the night, or the garden. The siren call of the city, heard at one time by each of these authors in turn, is heard again by these assorted

characters as they each make their way across the world: in a sense, each of these settings becomes Paris, making the city an essential part of each work.

Paris is the city in which Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas meet and subsequently make their home together. Given the city's importance in the foundation of their relationship (had the two expatriates not both come to Paris, they would never have met), Paris is central to the very structure of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. The chapter titles clearly demarcate life before Paris and life after Paris for the two women: in this fashion, "Paris" becomes code for their relationship. The first chapter, "Before I Came to Paris" (3), could easily have been titled "Before I Came to Gertrude," just as "My Arrival in Paris" (6) could have been changed to "My Arrival in Gertrude's Life." This is the way that the two measure their lives: once the "pre-Paris" and (significantly) the "Paris without one another" segments of their lives have been dealt with, the book gets down to business about their time together. The chapter titles then simply become the spans of the years: now there is nothing left to measure but time spent together, at home, in Paris.

Paris is even the overt subject of Stein's wartime memoir, entitled *Paris France* despite the fact that it was written in Culoz, a town in the southeastern region of Rhône-Alpes. Though the work talks about Parisian customs and Parisian women and past events in Paris, and even about how "Paris was the natural background for the twentieth century," artistically speaking (*Paris France*, 24), it is really about the absence of Paris: the work was written as Stein and Alice left their Parisian home and collaborated with the Nazi-following Vichy government in order to make it through the war intact. Thus the work speaks

implicitly of carving out a home away from home, or a Paris away from Paris, by musing on French culture, just as much for herself as for the reader, in a bid for comfort and consolation. At the end of the work, Steins speaks of how “we in the country” (an acknowledgment of her displacement) feel that “Paris is always there” (109). Paris is just as much a concrete concept as an abstraction, and the city’s lack is deeply felt.

In *Nightwood*, Paris is like a magnet to which troubled characters from all over the world are drawn together. Like many of the characters, Paris encompasses two contrasting worlds, the daytime of the city and the nighttime of its underbelly. Robin herself is described as a “born somnambule, who lives in two worlds” (*Nightwood*, 31): Paris reflects this duality and encompasses these two worlds. In describing Nora, the narrator states that “those who love a city, in its profoundest sense, become the shame of that city, the *détraqués*, the paupers” (47): the contradictions inherent to the city force into the night those who would stride out proudly in the day. Paris, the city of opportunity to which *Nightwood*’s characters make a pilgrimage, is full of nothing but dead ends: Robin leaves first Felix and then Nora alone in Paris (and even Jenny Petherbridge, vulture that she is, is unhappy in Paris with Robin). The confused hopes of this lost generation are mapped onto the city of Paris.

Paris is a distant entity in *The Garden of Eden* but it is nonetheless present. Paris is where Catherine and David met and experienced their whirlwind romance: in this heavenly French countryside, Paris is like a tether keeping their ties to the real world. They receive letters from Paris: notices from David’s editor on how well his book is doing, messages from the bank on their finances. Real-

world concerns rear their ugly heads in these missives from the distant city: David worries about the quality of his writing (he meticulously keeps any and all newspaper clippings relating to his work, for which Catherine mocks him) and about his apparent inability to financially support himself (up until the success of this latest work, the two of them had been living on Catherine's inheritance). The city of Paris thus breaks into this idyllic garden world and forces the Bournes to confront their own shortcomings: when either of them threatens to leave the other, they vow that they will go back to Paris, alone.

Deliberations on Paris, that draw the city into the story almost as another character, one whose very presence is illuminating, serve to reflect the differing conceptions of queer identity offered up within the pages of these novels. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, queer identity, while its basics are gender-swapped or inverted, still grounds itself in traditional societal molds, a practice that seems to function on a personal level for Stein and Alice but could not be sustainable across broader swaths of queer individuals. In *Nightwood*, queer identity is taken to the opposite extreme: a thorough upending of boundaries, which allows all kinds of nascent queer identities to bloom but also encourages a nebulous aimlessness within those senses of identity. Perhaps it is in *The Garden of Eden* that queer identity takes its most tenable form: though initially uncertain, Catherine's exploration of her own ambiguities leads to greater self-knowledge. Throughout all of the works, she is the only character able to put into words her feelings about her identity, even when it is at its most indefinable. Sure of herself despite the fact that she is leaving David and a relationship in shambles, where else could she go but Paris?

Pour moi Paris est une ville de découverte, de nouveauté, de possibilité – oui, tous ces clichés. C'est la ville à côté de laquelle j'ai grandi, et la ville qui m'a accueillie quand j'ai commencé à réaliser que j'étais lesbienne.

Trois ans de suite, je suis allée à la Marche des Fiertés à Paris, au mois de juin, pour fêter mon identité et mon histoire, avec tous ceux qui avaient ressentis les mêmes choses que moi. La première fois que j'y suis allée, j'étais toujours au lycée et j'avais seize ans : immédiatement, en sortant du métro, malgré le fait que j'étais au milieu d'une foule de gens que je ne connaissait pas, je me suis sentie moins seule.



“Opéra Garnier”: Avenue de l’Opéra, Paris.

Part II:

La Langue Française

France, the country that each of the authors behind these works, at one time or another, for varying intervals, called home, becomes the setting for Stein, Barnes, and Hemingway’s musings on an outsider identity that was often their own. Barnes and Hemingway were both perpetual American expatriates: both spent prolonged periods of time in France but ultimately they returned to home soil. Even Stein, who spent her entire adult life in France, never felt entirely comfortable with the French language and surrounded herself predominantly with English-speaking intellectuals: Sylvia Beach, owner of the Shakespeare and

Company bookstore in Paris, called her “the eternal tourist” (Fitch, 56). The outsider expatriate identity was therefore one they each internalized for the duration of their time in France: they were there only *pour séjourner* and not *pour rester*.

The same is true of their characters: Stein as Alice speaks like an American spectator of the French world around her, the protagonists in *Nightwood* are a hodgepodge of cosmopolitan wanderers constantly undulating towards and away from Paris, and the Bournes are the classic wealthy tourist couple off on an extended jaunt in a safely European foreign land. These characters’ varying relationships with expatriate identity offer an insightful perspective on their queer identities: both are marginal perspectives, outside of the norm.

Qui séjourne et qui reste, vraiment? Djuna Barnes et Ernest Hemingway, c'étaient des touristes; ils n'ont fait que séjourner. Gertrude Stein, elle est « restée » mais elle ne s'est jamais assimilée.

Moi, je suis restée – jusqu'à ce que je sois partie.

(Mais je me promets que, un jour, je reviendrai.)

La langue française makes an appearance in each of these works. To a native speaker these can so often seem like nothing more than a bid for authenticity, a *clin d'oeil* in the direction of readers trendy enough to be “in the know” that conveniently confers upon the text that very same insider quality. For some of the texts this may be the case, but these snippets of French also serve a

purpose in illustrating the outsider identity of the expatriate lifestyle, one whose correspondence with queer identity is impossible to ignore.

Hemingway's *The Garden of Eden* is one work whose use of French remains perhaps the closest to this surface level of *à la mode* initiation: as in other works, Hemingway seems concerned with the “us vs. them” dynamic of expatriate assimilation (with an almost pathological fear of being mistaken for a mere tourist, one of those bumbling Americans who speaks nothing but English and sticks out in this cool European environment like the proverbial sore thumb).

Thus French becomes a marker for a sort of assimilation, a peacock display of expatriate arrogance: although the newlyweds Catherine and David segregate themselves wilfully from others to create an Eden all of their own, when forced to surface for air they can ostensibly do so with the grace of expatriates who not only speak perfect French (and perfect Spanish) but also understand the linguistic and cultural intricacies (a deft ability with *argot* and a true sense of *le bon mot*) of each of their interactions with the European masses, *les gens ordinaires*. Often these interactions follow a type of logic that is entirely their own: a waiter will speak to the Bournes in French, they will respond in English, and the waiter will nevertheless understand them perfectly (38); or the Bournes will utter a pronouncement whose keyword is in French, while the rest of the words are in their native English, and they will be understood *sans problème* by the Europeans around them (234-235). For entire passages of dialogue to follow linguistic logic would of course be alienating for the (presumably monolingual) English-speaking reader, but this practice nevertheless underscores the flippancy of the Bournes' attitude towards French.

The ability to speak French (or not) even becomes a point of contention between the Bournes, once their relationship is past the point of being salvageable. In a moment of unhappiness, Catherine lambasts not only David's writing but also his linguistic prowess, addressing herself to Marita: "Of course his French is worse [...]. You've never seen him try to write it. He fakes along well enough in conversation and he's amusing with his slang. But actually he's illiterate" (215). The ability to speak French becomes conflated with other skills (certainly his writing, the skill he holds most dear, and perhaps even his love-making): his surface level understanding holds no water when observed under close scrutiny. Then, in response to a blithe "*Ta gueule*" from David, Catherine counters, for Marita's benefit, with "He's good at that sort of thing [...]. Quick tags of slang that are probably outdated before he knows it. He speaks very idiomatic French but he can't write it at all" (216). Her reproach seems like criticism that could be lobbed at Hemingway himself: in many ways Catherine appears to be complicit in this construction of French-speaking ability as the pinnacle of expatriate experience and a marker of other skills. Thus Hemingway perhaps offers a thinly-veiled confession or self-accusation of his own abilities through a character who is self-aware of this linguistic dynamic (much more so than the stuck-up expatriates in *The Sun Also Rises*, for example, who are overly concerned with separating themselves from the American tourist masses).

Ça s'applique à toi aussi – tu visites la Tour Eiffel, tu te perds dans le Louvre, tu te prends un steak-frites d'un bistro quelconque, mais est-ce que tu

connais vraiment Paris? Chaque fois que tu fais du lèche-vitrines sur la rue de Rivoli, tu t'achètes un livre à la librairie anglaise. Révéléteur, n'est-ce pas?

(Comment pouvais-tu connaître Paris? Tu ne te connaissais pas toi-même.)

J'ai fait la découverte du Marais après mon coming-out (oui, ça s'utilise en français – moi aussi j'étais surprise). Avec une amie on s'est prises un falafel et on a furtivement fait le tour d'une librairie homosexuelle, regardant bouche-bée les couvertures des films pornographiques et livres érotiques. C'était un univers masculin mais ça et là il y avait des enclaves lesbiennes – romans à couverture scandaleuse, guides de développement personnel, tous les auteurs qui me semblent maintenant habituels.

Seulement en me découvrant moi-même ai-je pu commencer à connaître Paris, à rendre intime ma connexion à cette ville qui m'a nourrie.

(J'y retourne chaque fois que je visite le Marais.)

This attitude towards language exemplifies a larger relationship between insider (in this case, European) and outsider culture. There is tension in the Bourne's (and often, more specifically, Catherine's) desire to assimilate to European foreign-ness, given the inherent impossibility of this transformation. Catherine is obsessed with becoming "darker," a physical marker of difference: "I

want every part of me dark and it's getting that way [...] and that takes us further away from other people" (30).

This desire for foreign "other"-ness can also be interpreted as a queer desire, especially given the fact that the darkness of her skin is conflated through language with her desire for gender fluidity, called "the dark magic of the change" (20), making a very clear contrast not only between her femininity and her masculinity but also between her whiteness and her potential for darkness. As her skin gets darker, her hair gets shorter: she crops it "as short as a boy's" (14-15) and ends up getting it cut exactly like David's, allowing her to slip all the more easily into queerness by counterbalancing an attraction to femininity – when she puts on a male persona in bed, she tells David he is "her Catherine" (17) – with a performance of masculinity.

Marita, the exotic dark foreigner whose name and provenance both remain unknown, is a rudimentary exemplification of the foreign outsider qualities sought after by Catherine and perhaps even a physical appearance of Catherine's own inner turmoil regarding these attributes: Marita is the foreigner Catherine longs to be but can never become, no matter how hard she tries, not to mention the wife Catherine wishes she could be for David (it would seem that Marita is a very handy plot device for this projection). Marita exerts linguistic superiority over Catherine (and, to a certain extent, David) through her deft use of French. One of the novel's final chapters ends with her confidently telling David, "We'll really do it. *Toi et moi*" (232): she uses the few words in French to assert both their togetherness and her exotic foreignness (which she pulls David into, a move that is no doubt very flattering for him), doubly binding her to David and leaving

Catherine out in the cold. Marita is simultaneously a manifestation of the “other” Catherine can never be and the normalcy she can never achieve, a twofold damning.

Although Catherine can never *be* Marita, she can at least sleep with her. Under the guise of offering Marita up to David – “I brought you a dark girl for a present” (103) – Catherine is able to safely explore this newly queer aspect of her identity (this often means completely objectifying Marita and reducing her to her foreign-ness, although ultimately, in many ways Marita comes out of this situation with the upper hand). By consummating this relationship with Marita, Catherine is able to label her feelings, allowing her to move past her dalliance with gender fluidity into a fully queer identity: regarding her kiss with Marita, Catherine clarifies, “she said it was better if I was her girl and I said I didn’t care either way and really I was glad because I am a girl now anyway and I didn’t know what to do” (113). She goes on to explain beautifully (and briefly, in the midst of a full-fledged, run-on session of gushing), “I never felt so not knowing ever” (113): perhaps paradoxically, the uncertainty of queer identity brings about a peace of mind (however brief it may be in this tangled love triangle) that the arrogant certainty of expatriate identity never could.

Moi non plus je n’étais pas sûre de moi-même – et cette incertitude a pu créer les plus belles moments de ma vie: c’était carrément délicieux de tomber amoureuse, et puis d’attendre un moment de réciprocité. Ça ne m’est pas arrivé souvent mais à la fin de mon année de Terminale, juste avant le bac, un

baiser ivre est devenu quelque chose de plus. Ce dont je me rappelle avec le plus de tendresse c'est ce moment initial, avant le vrai début des choses qui allaient suivre mais après la certitude que ce début allait bientôt voir jour. Je l'apercevais dans le couloir, je voyais son nom – Emma – dans mon téléphone, et j'étais heureuse dans ce limbes... peut être parce que je n'avais aucune idée de ce que je devais faire suivre.

Given the established parallels between queer identity and expatriate identity, it is no surprise then that in *Nightwood* the hazy, jumbled sense of expatriate identity reflects the characters' queerness. The novel's protagonists are unfettered by the burdens of both clear national identities and clear identities of gender or sexual orientation: they do not proclaim boundaries within themselves, choosing instead to remain fluid within their senses of self.

Queer identity and national identity are both equally confused concepts in *Nightwood*. The characters float aimlessly from country to country (from France to America and back, and all across the European continent), untethered and anchorless both physically and emotionally. Barnes reflects this fact by scattering snippets of dialogue in diverse European languages, including French (120) – of course – German (13), and even Italian (113), throughout the novel's pages. This linguistic jumble is alienating for any reader who is not a polyglot, giving us a reflection of what the characters are feeling in reaction to their uncertain identities. Likewise, queer identity is a fluid notion in the novel. Robin Vote drifts just as easily from person to person (first Felix Volkbein, then Nora Flood, and

finally Jenny Petherbridge) as she does from country to country: she is a citizen of no land and she is tied to no one. And the character of Dr. Matthew O'Connor embodies a fluid sense of gender identity: he surrounds himself with the trappings of femininity – “pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs” and “laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing” (70-71) – and proclaims himself “the other woman that God forgot” (129). Both his presentation and his disclosures of identity reveal a mutability characteristic of his fellow denizens of the night.

In conjunction with his changeable gender identity, Dr. O'Connor showcases a fluctuating sense of language: he is the character most likely to intersperse his speech in English with all manner of foreign words. In *Nightwood*, the characters' usage of French seems to attest more to their own confusion (which extends perhaps right into the realm of the linguistic) rather than any pretences of expatriate superiority, in contrast with *The Garden of Eden's* David and Catherine Bourne. He occasionally utters entire sentences in French, most often interjections, as though when overcome with emotion *la langue française* is most easily able to speak for the state of his soul: “*Ah, Mon Dieu! La nuit effroyable!*” (74) or even “*C'est le plaisir qui me bouleverse!*” (120).

In addition to these longer segments in French, Dr. O'Connor also regularly peppers his English sentences with the occasional French word, seemingly less to lend credibility to his expatriate abilities and more to accurately convey the sense behind his words: he speaks of “a wrenched *bretelle*” (76), “a *corbeille* of moth-orchids” (89), “ladies of the *haute* sewer” (118). The final instance, especially, an expression devised by Dr. O'Connor to mean prostitute,

illustrates the beauty of this linguistic fluidity: English and French combine wryly to create a heightened sense of meaning. Perhaps these vacillations allow for a newfound freedom: other languages allow you to describe things (and characterize yourself) in ways you cannot fathom in your native tongue. Much like language, identity can be constructed (and deconstructed) from diverse perspectives, and there exists no single path to a composition of identity.

Of course, one's identity depends entirely upon how one conceives of it: some concepts of identity embrace rigidity of form. Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, secure in their combined queer identities as well as their expatriate lifestyle, both in life and its novelized portrayal in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, offer a direct contrast to the fluidity espoused by the characters of *Nightwood*, just as the unambiguous routines of the home oppose themselves to the vague contours of the city at night.

Gertrude Stein sees a distinct separation between the French and English languages. In her other autobiographical work (one that is more explicitly so, as she is both author and narrator), *Paris France*, Stein explains that “french is a spoken language and English a written one” (5). Her personal relationship with the two languages is in fact strictly regimented in her deference to this philosophy: “I don’t hear a language, I hear tones of voices and rhythms, but with my eyes I see words and sentences and there is for me only one language and that is English” (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 70). Stein aligns herself unambiguously with the English language, with no expatriate *délusions de grandeur* about her abilities in French.

Stein as Alice later reiterates, “she contends that one can only have one *métier* as one can only have one language. Her *métier* is writing and her language is English” (76). Stein’s position on the matter of language is thus made very clear. Nevertheless, it may seem odd that the least expatriate of all these expatriate characters (by the time the book was published, Stein had spent 30 years in France) would be the most ready to proclaim her own American-ness and, what is more, disavow her linguistic connection to her adoptive country. This peculiarity is complicated all the more by her use of the French word “*métier*” to describe her writerly undertaking: although English is her only language, she still relies on this French word, which has no true English equivalent (“*métier*” is much more nuanced than “job” – it connotes craftsmanship, experience, arduous hours of *apprentissage*). Stein is complicit in this: she simultaneously distances herself from any potential relationship with the French language, with comments about herself like “she never read anything in french” (144), and weaves French into her story, effectively writing in French, if only for snippets at a time. Despite any of Stein’s reservations about the French language, “she needed Paris” (116). Her language showcases a masterful and understated use of French, rather than a bombastic dropping of buzzwords at key moments to give her readers a pat on the back for their clever expatriate understanding.

Stein’s relationship to French in her writing exemplifies her queer identity: on the surface, she seems to have very clear delineations between the boundaries of language, but there is still a layer of subversion going on underneath. In their relationship, Stein and Alice modeled themselves after traditional heterosexual

models, but because of their lesbianism, this example was inherently complicated. This traditional binary model (“I am the husband and you are the wife”) extends itself from relationship politics and gender roles right into the distinction between languages. Unlike in *The Garden of Eden* and *Nightwood*, the French in *Autobiography* is not signaled with italics (perhaps this is an example of an expatriate bid for authenticity), allowing it to be seamlessly integrated into the text, without calling attention to its occurrences. And, in an even more radical difference, almost all of the occurrences of French are either followed or preceded by a translation (or approximated translation) in English.

This translation can be a mediation that results in a loss of tone or sentiment, like the translation of “Moi j’aime pas ça” into “no I don’t care for it” (46), which loses the flippancy and aloofness of the original. But the fact of the matter remains that Stein includes both languages, allowing both meanings to be expressed, instead of reducing one to the other. This singular aspect of the work is a testament to the fact that Stein is trying to bridge two languages and two cultures. This double construction mirrors the novel’s own interior doubling, in the existence of Stein as author and Stein as character. Queer identity, much like expatriate identity, becomes the ability to cross boundaries (even self-made ones) and straddle two worlds: interiority and exteriority, the private (domestic) and the public, English and French. Stein does not keep these worlds strictly separate: instead they are permeable, able to interpenetrate one another to allow for richer meaning, to allow one’s lacks to be made up for by another’s excesses.

Relationship to French language in these *émigré* works comes to embody both a relationship to expatriate identity and a relationship to queer identity. The

character's myriad uses of *la langue française* speak to their multifaceted identities, and the variety of means at their disposal to express these inner multitudes. This jumble of languages, rather than falling into confusion and obscuring their queerness, actually serves to highlight difference, allowing characters to express the fluidity they feel within themselves without being confined by a single linguistic form. The properties of language are additive rather than subtractive: all together, this expatriate linguistic diversity only serves to enrich and emphasize the characters' queer experiences.



“Corridor”: le Marais (Rue des Ecouffes), Paris.

Part III: *L'Acte Créatif*

The apogee of a relationship, an intimate connection between two (or more) people, is the act of creation: the desire to create something from this relationship, to leave something behind after its passing as proof of its existence, an imprint of the emotional connection that once existed between these joined selves. In many queer relationships, the act of biological creation – the production of life through the physical joining of two bodies – is an inherent impossibility. The act of writing can be another form of creation, with words and

ideas rather than with the physicality of cells, allowing those in queer relationships to leave their shared mark on the world.

In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the act of writing becomes a form of creation on which Alice and Stein can collaborate. The work's very existence is a testament to their relationship: in writing about their life in Alice's voice, Stein creates an artistic work that is an eloquent combination of the two of them, much in the way that a child is made up of genetic material from its two biological parents. And the process was certainly an active one for both partners: Alice very clearly took a role in the writing process, well beyond the simple, passive function of muse.

Alice is reputed to have had a much greater influence on Stein's work than one might think given their ultra-traditional domestic arrangement: she typed up all of Stein's manuscripts, probably editing them along the way and then discussing with Stein changes she thought should be made (Benstock, 164). In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Alice is shown to have taken on almost a midwife's roles in the birthing of Stein's works: in order to publish a book of Stein's, Alice gathers information on the business of publishing, contemplates taking an associate, but then "[decides] to do it all by [her]self" (242). Stein wrote and Alice helped bring this writing into being, shaping it through her editing and then giving it physical form through publication. (Interestingly it would seem that in this dynamic Alice plays the more masculine role, as she is the facilitator or second-rung contributor to this creative process: she inserts herself into the work but does not gestate it, as in the process's biological correlate. This is a reversal from their usual dynamic – in which Stein takes on the traditional masculine

roles – that is nevertheless in line with the idea of artistic creation as a “masculine” pursuit, a concept also illustrated by the character of David Bourne in *The Garden of Eden* – more on that later.) Together they made publishing a collaborative process: Stein as Alice explains, “I asked her to invent a name for my edition and she laughed and said, call it Plain Edition. And Plain Edition it is” (*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, 242) – an event that resembles the matter-of-fact naming of a child.

In parallel with their traditional attribution of gender roles, Alice sometimes becomes a proud mother hen clucking over Stein’s work – would this make her the work’s mother or Stein’s mother? This blurring of boundaries between “lover” and “child,” veering almost into the territory of incest, also appears in *Nightwood*, between Robin and Nora – does the lover *become* the child (in some sense) when the relationship is incapable of begetting children? She has Stein’s “A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose” device inscribed on items throughout their home as a sort of crest, like a mother hanging a child’s drawing on a fridge (138). Alice’s investment in Stein’s creation and pride in Stein’s accomplishments both take on a tender, motherly aspect.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is the ultimate embodiment of this tenderness. The work itself becomes their joint creation, a whole made up of parts from both of its makers. The two women create it, give it form, and release it into the world, as though it were a child, although in this process they perhaps have more control over the final outcome, being able to fine-tune every word (as opposed to leaving traits up to the lottery of genetics). The work’s conclusion, in

which Stein as Alice reveals how Stein as author came to write Alice's "autobiography," recounts the origin of their joint creation:

About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. You know what I am going to do. I am going to write it for you. I am going to write it as simply as Defoe did the autobiography of Robinson Crusoe. And she has and this is it. (252)

This acknowledgment of the work's twist on the traditional autobiographic narrative (which nevertheless rigorously keeps up the false "she" and "I" pronouns right to the very end) cements this artistic creation as a cooperative undertaking: Stein's "I am going to write it for you" is the affectionate promise of a lover ready to commit to a selfless task (when in reality, this act is doubly "self-full," because of the two selves that have gone into the work – or perhaps three selves, given the split between Stein as character and Stein as author). Writing becomes a sharing of the self with another, allowing a remarkable permeability of their dual selves.

The originality of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is downplayed in its final paragraph – Stein's "you know what" is casual in its absolute simplicity. Almost paradoxically, the passage that comes closest to outlining the scope of the work, theoretically the portion of a work that addresses itself to the reader more than any other, is practically its most intimate: glimpsing this tender moment of conversation between the two women is perhaps as close as we get to catching them in the act of lovemaking: this is the very conception of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the true moment of "the act of creation." Just as the genre of the autobiography is "queered," after a fashion, the act of creation is queered as

well: together Stein and Alice create a beautiful testament to their relationship and love for one another, by sharing this love with a wider audience through the medium of prose, making life – shared life – into art.

For Stein and Alice, the act of creation is physically embodied in the very real shape of a book – none of the other characters can make such a claim. The queer act of creation is so thoroughly performed that it leaves behind manifold physical representations, whose physicality and thus ideas have stood the test of time (much more everlasting than a child, as their relationship lives on in the minds of myriad readers).

Qu'est ce que je fais en écrivant, moi? Est-ce que je me partage? Ou est-ce que c'est un acte égoïste? J'approprie mon pays adoptif, j'écris dans sa langue, j'y inscris mes histoires. Je l'utilise pour me créer moi-même.

The idea of writing as a gift or sharing of the self, in order to become one that is another, also occurs in *The Garden of Eden*: Hemingway's novel implicitly tugs at the same threads that Stein's work stitches into. Unlike Stein and Alice, David and Catherine have a dual possibility for joint creation: David is a writer but also, given their biological sexes, they are theoretically capable of bearing children together. Hemingway's characters are not self-aware or connected enough to make such a permanent commitment to the joint act of creation, however, but the theme of creation is nevertheless addressed.

Despite the existence of the physical capacity for reproduction, David and Catherine are mentally unable or at the very least unprepared to have a child. The subject does occasionally come up in conversation between the two of them, usually in remarks by Catherine. She tells David early on in the novel:

You can write afterwards. That way we can have the fun before I have a baby for one thing. How do I know when I'll have a baby even? Now it's getting dull and dusty talking about it. Can't we just do it and not talk about it? (27)

Ostensibly the subject is one she brings up out of a sense of female duty, motherhood being the next (perhaps the only) logical step after marriage for a woman of her era, rather than any maternal desire to join herself physically with David and (genetically) become one. For Catherine, a child means the end of fun for the two of them, just as David's writing means the end of their fun (a telling warning sign regarding the shadow his writing casts on their relationship). These subjects are "dull and dusty" – they mean maturity and adulthood, or, more specifically, womanhood, as opposed to the space of girlhood she currently seems to occupy (while David is called "the young man" by the narrator, Catherine is always "the girl" – sometimes unwillingly, as evidenced by her forays into "being a boy").

Later, in a quarrel with David, Catherine says, "I thought if I'd be a girl and stay a girl I'd have a baby at least. Not even that" (71). Perhaps they have been trying (or at least, not *not* trying). The problem is probably more mental (as a psychoanalytic plot device) than physical (given their relative youth and the apparent frequency of their lovemaking): this issue of creating life becomes

explicitly wrapped up in Catherine's nebulous sense of her own gender and sexual identity, and either her uncertainty or her latent queerness create some sort of blockage. Even this allusion to childbearing lacks any sense of desire for a child: she seems to mention it more to give herself a sense of purpose in her begrudging femininity than for anything else.

There is one way in which Catherine potentially makes a bid for reproductive creation: it is possible to read Marita as a child offered up to David by Catherine. She gives Marita to David as a "present," an object, and she throws herself into the mix, too, telling David to "stop being stuffy and be nice to your girls" (103), making the two of them into a single unit, possibly a mother-and-daughter pair under his tender paternal auspice. Catherine brags about her find the way a mother would brag about a child's accomplishments, enumerating her qualities: "She's not only beautiful and rich and healthy and affectionate. She can make jokes too" (103).

In true Electra complex style, the "child" begins to compete with the "mother" for David's affection, seeking ultimately to replace her. In an intimate moment in bed between the two of them, Marita, despite David's repeated insinuations for her to stop, says "You don't think about her when you make love to me?" followed by "You don't want me to do her things? Because I know them all and I can do them," and finishing with "I can do them better than she can" (185). She asserts her sexual superiority over her "mother" figure (in a manner so unpleasant and obvious that even David senses its ickiness) and then the role reversal is complete: for much of the rest of the novel, Catherine is a petulant

problem child, the thorn in their side (even as they try initially to be saccharine-sweetly compassionate about her mental issues).

The true mantle of creation thus rests on David, then, as a writer on the cusp of success, in line with Hemingway's views on the masculinity apparently inherent to the act of writing (also aligned with Stein's self-appointed male writerly role in her relationship). Unfortunately for Catherine, this creative side of himself is something he is unwilling to share with her. After their constant togetherness in the first part of the book, David begins to draw away from Catherine to write: he goes to the café, he works while she is sleeping, he writes while she is in Cannes – his instances of creation are kept very separate from Catherine, and it is in these instances that the reader is given his internal thoughts and perspectives (an advantage that is not afforded to Catherine).

It is not evident, at least initially, why he does not share this inner part of himself with her: perhaps he was embarrassed, having only just started to experience success, perhaps she was uninterested, or perhaps it was some chicken-or-egg, one begot the other combination of the two. Whatever the case may be, there is a clear division of intellectual selves between the two newlyweds. Catherine tells Marita towards the end of the novel "You know, I've never read a story of David's. I never interfere," very matter-of-factly, as though ignorance were truly bliss (156).

This separation is exacerbated by their approach to gender roles: Catherine financially supports the two of them on her inheritance – effectively making possible David's pursuit of a career as an author, given the career's initial lack of financial remuneration. In a sense, she mothers him by supporting him in

this way: in fact, the way she brings Marita into their relationship also resembles a mother playing the matchmaker, setting her son up with a woman of whom she approves – once again the lover incestuously becomes the child. In response to this supposed emasculation, he refuses to allow her access to the most intimate part of himself, the written word. He aggressively cultivates his own image and sense of self-worth, keeping clippings of all the reviews of his books and apparently reading them regularly (Catherine teases and later berates him for this), pushing his ego on Catherine without letting her reap the rewards of intellectual intimacy. Although Catherine shares her deepest secrets and insecurities (namely her clandestine forays into gender fluidity), David does not do the same for her – he keeps his writing, the most intimate part of himself, separate.

This separation does not stem from a mere sense of personal privacy: although David almost categorically refuses to permit Catherine to read his ongoing writing (she has not read his first novel, seemingly of her own volition), as he grows closer to Marita, the “better” wife that Catherine can never be, he allows her to read his stories, effectively sharing with her his macho act of creation, although he gives her little to no control over it (unlike what Stein does with Alice). The act of Marita reading his stories becomes a panacea for all his relationship woes: as she reads next to him and he reads over her shoulder he thinks, “he could not help sharing what he had never shared and what he had believed could not and should not be shared” (203) – suddenly all is right with world, as David is now able to share himself with the perfect woman.

Marita's reaction confirms this: "I'm so very happy and prouder than you are," she gushes (203). The use of the superlative "prouder" is telling – perhaps she feels the subconscious need to one-up him, given the manner in which he uses her as a springboard to rewrite himself without allowing her any of the same character development. Unfortunately we cannot read much into Marita because of her lack of voice in the novel. Whatever the case may be, whether it stems from the privilege he has granted her in sharing this part of himself or perhaps from the fact that it is a privilege that was never granted to Catherine, on some level, Marita is happy.

David feels able to share his writing with Marita: she has the correctly receptive or fertile mind (perhaps setting the stage for another type of fertility, later) and she is appropriately appreciative of his talents, unlike Catherine. Seemingly, David expects his partner to be as centered on himself as he is (making him the classic Lacanian child): Marita's symbolic motherhood over his writing helps cultivate this even further (in contrast with real motherhood, which only draws the mother away from her partner because of a child's needs and dependence on its caretaker). When Catherine finally reads a story of David's, she categorizes it as "horrible" and "bestial" (157), and calls him a "monster" (158), a clear contrast with Marita, who perfectly understands David's genius.

Later, Catherine hits him where it hurts: she gets ahold of his writings and clippings and burns them, effectively ending her relationship with David by killing the symbolic child he refused to let her mother. Of course, we get David's inner reactions and thoughts but none of Catherine's interiority – as usual all we have to go on about how she is feeling is what she says: "They were worthless and

I hated them,” she explains of his clippings and stories (209). Clearly the reader is not supposed to empathize with Catherine – “No one could do that to a fellow human being,” David whines internally (209), as though Catherine’s actions were some heinous crime against humanity – but although Catherine is clearly culpable, David did not share himself with Catherine in the same way she shared herself with him. Perhaps this momentary flight of selfishness is merely a fitting punishment for his long-standing and pronounced egoism. David is portrayed as a martyred figure throughout the book, for suffering through Catherine’s gender fluidity, her lesbian dalliance, her descent into madness – but really these actions all stem from her own queer uncertainty, something David constantly forces her to repress rather than explore or embrace.

In *The Garden of Eden*, the act of creation thus becomes a source for contention, a gift to be bestowed from the creative self only upon the partner who has proven herself worthy. The novel ends very much without Catherine: “So take the best one and write one new and good as you can,” David tells himself in a sort of sports-coach pep talk (238). Marita is not a person, she is merely “the best one,” the better story of the two available to him, more fodder for his writing. He can draw on her for new material, using her to flesh out and add detail to himself, making him the virile and multidimensional protagonist of his own life. Through writing and through people he creates himself, instead of creating anything new or meaningful (perhaps Catherine does come out of this on top, as she has freed herself from the heavy weight of David’s ego).

After the artistic, writerly acts of creation in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *The Garden of Eden*, the act of creation becomes physical or

corporeal at last in *Nightwood* (its characters' identities and senses of self are too fluctuating to put in writing through an artistic act of creation): of all the queer expatriate characters in these three works, Robin Vote is the only one to give birth to a child.

Robin wills herself into pregnancy when confronted by her husband, who stammers at her frantically in German and English, asking "Why is there no child?" (*Nightwood*, 41). Even as she searches for this state of obvious, physical femininity, she is described as "a tall girl with the body of a boy" (41): in the darkness of night, nothing can be certain and all boundaries are fluid. Robin's identity constantly occupies an in-between space. She seems to know immediately that is carrying a son (or perhaps she does not even consider the possibility of bringing a daughter into this world), and yet her thoughts turn to "women that she had come to connect with women": "women in history [...] and two women out of literature" (42). Perhaps a sort of wishful lesbianism, perhaps merely comforted by thoughts of powerful female figures, Robin's innermost thoughts while pregnant have a strange influence on her son later – like a mental transfer occurring in vitro from mother to child: Felix tells the doctor that "Guido loves women of history" (107). This is the one thing Robin leaves him.

Guido (named for Felix's father, in the continuation of a lineage that is in actuality entirely fabricated) never even knows his mother: she takes to wandering again soon after giving birth and ultimately leaves her family entirely. Societal expectations put pressure on her very sense of self (something Catherine in *The Garden of Eden* also seemingly feels in relation to child-bearing) and presumably cause her to break down: one night Felix walks in on her "holding the

child in her hand as if she were about to dash it down” (43) and not long afterward she tells Felix “I didn’t want him!” (44) and walks out, reappearing later with Nora Flood. As far as her investment or interest in her child, her act of creation, goes, it seems to be merely one more fluid aspect of her fluid identity, and not any sort of defining step in her character evolution (perhaps only in its lack thereof). She creates a permanent mark on the world, an indelible legacy, but she leaves it behind, to go off wandering yet again. Not even this physical manifestation of herself (albeit with a switched gender – her *inverti*) can anchor her down.

But the existence of Guido, Robin’s biological child, is a marker of her identity, an legacy for those she leaves behind, despite all her reluctance and unhappiness and wandering. Genetically, he is hers: the sight of Guido’s “slight neck” recalls to Felix “Robin’s, as she stood back to him in the antique shop on the Seine” (97). Guido is her physical imprint on the world, and Felix, her lone heterosexual partner, the father of her child, is lucky enough to be the recipient of this physical embodiment of Robin, the perpetual wanderer. He is allowed to keep a part of her, which none of her female lovers are ever able to do (in contrast, Alice had Stein’s writings, a physical and public testament to their shared love, with which to comfort herself after Stein’s death). This is one facet of the tragedy inherent to Robin’s queer relationships: both of her female lovers, Nora Flood and Jenny Petherbridge, are left not only bereft but also without purpose, having nothing to hold onto after giving Robin so many years of their lives. In this regard, even Robin cannot hold on to any part of herself, except

perhaps her instinctive needs and desires, which lead her in her boundless wandering.

To add insult to injury, Robin playacts at child-rearing with both of her female lovers: dolls are mentioned in the context of both relationships, a sort of sad facsimile of the act of biological creation. Obviously a child is not needed to make a relationship whole, but in the context of their era, these women suffer from the imposition of society upon their choices, turning any decision into a case of “either/or” – for every choice made, something is given up. Regarding the barren nature of their queer relationship, Nora sums it up to Dr. O’Connor, saying, “when a woman gives [a doll] to a woman, it is the life they cannot have, it is their child, sacred and profane” (128): as previous criticism has discussed, the doll becomes a symbol of the inherent inabilities of their relationship and, as is the case of any affiliation with Robin, the fact that it is fated to end, lifeless and inanimate. Robin mimics past relationships in her present one, playing out the same actions by rote (the scene in which she holds Guido over her head as if to dash him down is paralleled heavy-handedly with the doll in her relationship with Nora – although in this case the doll is dashed to pieces). All of her relationships follow the same proscribed pattern, and consequently none of them are tenable.

Robin is often described as a sort of primal, animalistic being: perhaps her drive for creation comes from a deep biological instinct. She is “a beast turning human” (33), an “infected carrier of the past” (34), she carries “the quality of the ‘way back’ as animals do” (36). As some sort of manifestation of the past, she acts by instinct, a primal instinct that supersedes all else (perhaps this is why the reader receives none of her interiority: she is too animalistic, too driven by her

urges to have the luxury of pausing for thought). Thus her apparent willingness to procreate could be just one more facet of this deep-seated, primal desire: a reaction to her circumstances rather than an action in and of itself.

Robin and Nora, due to their biological incompatibility, cannot create life together (they cannot even create artistically together, due to the unceasing fluidity of their identities and their relationships): they can only curate objects. Their relationship is focused on the old instead of the new, and in this regard it is unsustainable before it even begins: the objects in their Parisian apartment are described as “the museum of their encounter” (50). Thus the apartment becomes a place of safekeeping for relics of the past – and so what reason is there for Robin to stay? The two still manage to sustain their relationship for several years, ostensibly, but its entirety is compressed into a single chapter, beginning with Nora’s background and ending with her discovery of Robin’s betrayal. Time is distorted and compressed (page-wise, Robin and Nora stay together for less time than Nora and Dr. O’Connor spend lamenting the relationship after its dissolution), contributing to the sense that this relationship is over before it has even begun.

Because of the physical lack in their relationship, and because of Robin’s touching, bewildered childishness in the face of the imposed commands of society, Nora Flood takes on an odd maternal responsibility towards her. Robin’s partners often describe their relationship with her in terms of taking care of her and, most importantly, keeping her, most often like a sort of wild animal who they fear “might lose the scent of home” (50). Nora describes Robin as “my lover and my child,” explaining that, “Robin is incest too, that is one of her powers”

(141). This statement is revelatory of their shifting identities, as queer women and as expatriates: even their relationship is nebulous in its confines. Their personal mutability engenders interpersonal mutability. Nora even says that she “chose a girl who resembles a boy” (123): no facet of their identity is set in stone (immediately afterwards, Dr. O’Connor, the man who assembles himself as a woman, describes Nora’s love “for the invert,” emphasizing how this fluidity goes against the grain). Just as Robin was described as looking like a boy during her pregnancy, her female lover describes her as such after the end of their relationship.

This reference to juvenile masculinity also recalls Catherine’s ventures into boyhood, as she always refers to herself as a “boy”: to a certain extent, this “boyishness” could also be an assumption of innocent sexuality, rendering these female characters slightly more impermeable to the harsh gaze of a society eager to fit them into its boxes. While Catherine actively categorizes herself as a boy, Robin is described as such by others, who seek perhaps to extend this protection to her – still, she is a passive recipient of this characterization. Fluid boundaries enable self-expression (or perhaps the expression of another, in Robin’s case), seemingly, but also create a disconnect that can imperil human relationships. Lacking solidity, they crumble and fall into disarray.

In *Nightwood*, just as in *The Garden of Eden*, the act of creation destroys rather than reinforces the connections between humans. Perhaps creation is too solid an act for such nebulous identities to withstand (perhaps this is why David and Marita are able to ride off into the sunset together, as they are more sure of their identities once Catherine is out of the picture). As far as transitory

expatriate relationships go, Stein and Alice's is the most permanent, given the sheer length of their *séjour* in the rue de Fleurus. Their relationship is the most solid of all the ones seen throughout these works, so it is fitting for their act of creation to be the most solid and long-lasting. In many of these expatriate relationships, already tenuous connections are stretched to their breaking point: there is no hope for the solid domesticity of Stein and Alice when these very beings are constantly in motion, both physically and mentally.

In the Bournes' transitory expatriate state, they can hardly stomach the permanence of a child, and seemingly even the creation offered by writing is too much for David to share with his wife. David chooses Marita over Catherine because of her fertile (read: of the same opinion as he is regarding the brilliance of his work) mind and appropriate reactions, while Catherine is metaphorically left by the wayside. Physically, she does the leaving herself: in an ultimate act of power and agency, placing her still-forming queer identity over the numbing certainty and boredom of life with David (Catherine, with her "dark changes" and illicit desires, was the most interesting thing about him), she leaves the South of France for greener pastures, a true expatriate at heart. Although she does not have the permanence of creation, she does have the assurance of her own identity: a sort of self-creation that offers certainty in an evermore uncertain world.

Interestingly enough, all three works showcase occasional dynamics in which the lover (incestuously) becomes the child: thus in some cases, the relationship itself becomes a more ephemeral act of creation, a flash of light in the darkness. The act of creation takes on new importance in the doubly nebulous

identities of expatriate and queer: creation is a forceful, decisive act that brings something new and perhaps vulnerable into the world. For the often mutable *expatriés* and *invertis*, it can offer unprecedented solidity – in ways that can seem that loving, intriguing, and even frightening – and the sheer force of this solidity can backfire upon those who try to impose it upon their nascent senses of identity. These manifold creative acts – artistic, biological, emotional – can offer consolation (however brief) from the rigidity of the outside world, just as they can highlight the abyssal uncertainty of this outside world. For some, the act of creation is a solace, for others, a curse. In any case, the multiplicity of its forms emphasizes the myriad facets of these characters' queer identities: queering the act of creation is but one of many forms of expression, rebellion, or confusion.

La Conclusion

Queer identity is the common bond between *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Nightwood*, and *The Garden of Eden*: each work offers its own particular interpretation, mediated by its conjunction with expatriate identity. Each author takes and queers a Parisian space through the lens of literature, allowing a sense of queer identity to emerge.

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, with its portrayal of the cozy domestic sphere *au 27 rue de Fleurus*, creates both the most alive and the least livable of the queer spaces on offer. Stein and Alice have the most solid queer relationship of the ones seen throughout these works, and the most tenderly affectionate (once the reader realizes that home-making is actually a form of love-making), but their strict adherence to traditional norms makes their arrangement unsustainable on a grander scale and to a wider range of queer identities. Although they create beautifully together, turning the lived into art and thus enabling their relationship to stand the test of time (over and over again, every time the work is read), there is no room for the testing of boundaries.

Nightwood is an abrupt about-face after the gentle warmth of Stein and Alice's Parisian home: the harsh obscurity and vague contours of the city at night hold none of the certainty of Stein's work (perhaps the only certainty is uncertainty) – although the cover of darkness does allow for the blurring of boundaries, permitting the exploration of identity. Despite this freedom, *Nightwood's* queer characters are lonely wanderers in a city onto which they map

their confusions: their identities are nebulous and, consequently, so are their relationships (even when these relationships involve the physical tether of a child). This lack of permanence prohibits the formation of a true sense of self, making this tenuous queer identity as unsustainable as Stein's rigid one.

Somewhat surprisingly, it is *The Garden of Eden*, the false garden idyll that keeps Paris on its outskirts, that offers the most tenable vision of queer identity. As Catherine's conception of her own identity becomes more fluid, she gains in self-awareness, realizing what she wants and needs and becoming less and less reticent about seizing it. She tests the boundaries of her traditional relationship and ultimately discards it in favor of creating herself anew (Catherine Bourne, reborn). What are the implications of the apparently heterosexual, certainly very macho male writer offering the most sustainable depiction of queer identity? Does it occur despite himself? The novel very clearly sides with David – but it is Catherine I find myself asking about once I turn the last page.

There is no right or wrong way to try to form or articulate identity: my notion of sustainable or unsustainable models of queer relationships or queer identity stems from my modern mindset. Reading these works and their musings on queerness has influenced my conception of my own queer identity – as well as my conception of my own expatriatism. For me the two will forever be inextricably linked, and these works have helped me see the beauty in that connection.

Mes pensées coulent comme la Seine en-dessous de tout le reste. Elles coulent comme la Seine, leurs rives traçant le contour de l'appartement, de la nuit, du jardin – bref, de tout Paris. De mon expérience. De mon identité. Elles sont à moi, mais elles ne le sont pas, aussi : je les partage, avec ceux sur lesquels j'écris, et avec ceux qui me lisent.

(Peut-être c'est impossible de mettre en paroles tous ces sentiments, surtout dans une langue qui, pour tellement longtemps, n'était pas la mienne. Mais j'ai bien essayé... et j'ai eu

le

dernier

mot.)

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