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Domesticity and the modernist aesthetic : F.T. Marinetti, Djuna Barnes, and Gertrude Stein

Allison Elise Carey

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Allison Elise Carey entitled "Domesticity and the modernist aesthetic : F.T. Marinetti, Djuna Barnes, and Gertrude Stein." I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in English.

Allen Dunn, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

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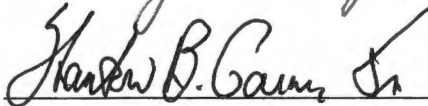
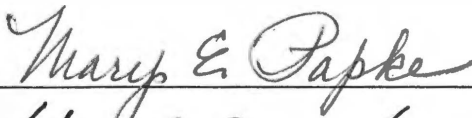
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Graduate Studies

Thesis
2003b
.C34

**Domesticity and the Modernist Aesthetic:
F.T. Marinetti, Djuna Barnes, and Gertrude Stein**

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Allison Elise Carey
December 2003

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Sue Carey, whose unfailing love and support sustained me through this project, and to my husband, Walter Squire, without whose patience, love, and nagging I could never have completed this project.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank all those who helped me complete my Doctor of Philosophy degree in English. I would like to thank Dr. Dunn for leading me through the thickets of literary theory, for his patience, and for introducing me to the work of Gertrude Stein and Djuna Barnes. I would like to thank Dr. Papke for her suggestions regarding feminist interpretations of the modernists, for her impeccable editing skills, and for her inspiration when other responsibilities threatened to distract me from this project. I would like to thank Dr. Garner for his kindness, his ideas, and his valuable guidance through this long process. I would also like to thank Dr. Brizio for serving on my committee.

I wish to thank the English Department for awarding me the Alvin Thaler Travel Fellowship in 1995. This award made it possible for me to attend the School of Criticism and Theory; my studies there greatly impacted my thinking about the dissertation project. I wish to thank Pino Natale for translating Paolo Possiedi's article "La cucina futurista" into English for me. I also wish to thank Dr. Bruce Wheeler for his encouragement throughout my time in undergraduate and graduate school.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends, whose support and distraction kept me together and made the completion of this project possible.

Abstract

Literary modernism has been presented, in scholarship and critical histories, as a masculinized movement: a literature largely by men and concerned with issues of literary form rather than with everyday life. This critical tunnel vision has inevitably prevented a full accounting of many key aspects of modernist literature. One issue of modernism that has been persistently overlooked by scholars is the central role of domesticity in many modernist texts *and* the importance to modernists of reclaiming the domestic as a subject of high art. As this study demonstrates, modernist texts often focused on everyday life, and these modernist treatments of the domestic were rarely purely formal. Instead, modernist authors used formal experimentation to transform and recover, not obliterate, the material of everyday life.

Three modernist authors—F.T. Marinetti, Djuna Barnes, and Gertrude Stein—provide particularly rich illustrations of modernism’s impulse to aesthetically transform the domestic. This study examines texts in which these authors critically engage domesticity: Marinetti’s *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932), Barnes’s *Ladies Almanack* (1928) and *Nightwood* (1936), and Stein’s *Tender Buttons* (1914). Marinetti’s, Barnes’s, and Stein’s transformations of the domestic rely on an aesthetics of desublimation, a recognition that threats, anxieties, and violences are concealed within the fabric of everyday life.

In *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti explores those conflicts inherent (but latent, contained) in nineteenth-century domesticity: conflicts which are racial, sexual, regional, national, and colonial in nature. Moreover, Marinetti appropriates domesticity’s potential

for containment and uses this power to symbolically control those outside the Futurist aesthetic and social program. Like Marinetti, Barnes explodes traditional domesticity in her novels, and she calls into question traditional definitions of gender and sexuality, as these novels problematize domesticity's traditional role as a site of the definition and maintenance of gender distinctions. However, these two novels have strikingly different tones and present very different images of the domestic: in *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes celebrates the grotesque excesses of domesticity, while in *Nightwood*, domesticity is a *memento mori*, a bellwether of the characters' and their society's steady disintegration. Stein's *Tender Buttons*, like Barnes's *Ladies Almanack*, privileges a domesticity which exceeds propriety, and Stein explores the nature of selfhood through the self's interactions with its immediate surroundings: the domestic sphere. In addition, Stein brings out the most vibrant, uncontrollable aspects of domesticity—its excess—particularly the violent and the erotic, which are, of course, those facets of life most likely to be absent from Victorian representations of the domestic.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1:	
Modernism and Domesticity	1
Domestic Antecedents	7
Modernist Responses to Domesticity	12
Theoretical Foundations	17
The Domestic Transformations of Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein	23
Chapter 2:	
Domestic Transgressions: F.T. Marinetti's <i>The Futurist Cookbook</i>	38
Pleasure in Excess	54
The Fragmented, Unregulated Agent	70
Marinetti and the Fruits of Colonialism	83
Chapter 3:	
From the Grotesque to the Uncanny: Djuna Barnes on Domesticity, Body, Self	99
"the Door that hath banged a million Years!": Grotesque Domestic Bodies in <i>Ladies Almanack</i>	107
"a swill-pail [. . .] brimming with abominations": Uncanny Domesticity in <i>Nightwood</i>	121
Chapter 4:	
"a violent kind of delightfulness": The Paradoxical Domesticity of Stein's <i>Tender Buttons</i>	134
Breaking the Noun	144
Rejecting Utility: <i>Tender Buttons</i> Critiques the Victorians	150
Defamiliarizing the Domestic: Violence in <i>Tender Buttons</i>	158
Chapter 5:	
Conclusion	172
Bibliography	176
Vita	188

Chapter 1 Modernism and Domesticity

Literary modernism has been presented, in scholarship and critical histories, as a masculinized movement. That is, with the exception of Virginia Woolf, who occupies “perhaps the sole female slot on the high modernist roster” (Harrison and Peterson viii), the modernist canon has always been decidedly male. This canon was anchored by “The Men of 1914,” Wyndham Lewis’s phrase to identify Ezra Pound, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and himself, which phrase was then adopted by Hugh Kenner in his influential study *The Pound Era*. In his *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, Andreas Huyssen describes the masculine slant of the modernist canon as “the powerful masculinist and misogynist current within the trajectory of modernism, a current which time and time again openly states its contempt for women and for the masses and which had Nietzsche as its most eloquent and influential representative” (49). This masculinized version of modernism has persisted and stood as the only version of modernism until the 1970s and 80s, when feminist scholars began to reassess the canon.¹

This narrowed focus of canonical modernism has, of course, impeded discussion

¹ For analyses of the gender politics of the traditional modernist canon, see Bonnie Kime Scott’s *Refiguring Modernism: The Women of 1928; The Gender of Modernism: A Critical Anthology*, edited by Bonnie Kime Scott; Shari Benstock’s *The Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940*; and Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*, especially Chapter 3, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” pp. 44-62. For an overview of modernism based on a broader, reconceived modernist canon, see Peter Nicholls’s *Modernisms: A Literary Guide*. For examples of a traditional analysis of modernism, see Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane’s collection *Modernism: 1890-1930*; Michael H. Levenson’s *A Genealogy of Modernism*; Hugh Kenner’s *The Pound Era*; Julian Symons’s *Makers of*

of some key issues of modernism, either because these issues were central to authors—often female authors—who were excluded from the canon or because they were thought to be trivial and, therefore, not proper material for high art. Virginia Woolf expressed this conundrum when she pointed out that “when a woman comes to write [. . .] she will find that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values—to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important” (qtd. in Harrison and Peterson vii). Instead, many modernists emphasized the formal over the personal or the representational. Michael H. Levenson describes Ezra Pound as “enthusiastically embrac[ing] the primacy of form independent of all representation: ‘form, not the *form of anything*’” (qtd. 135). In a similar vein of renouncing personal expression in favor of formal elements, T.S. Eliot famously asserts in “Tradition and the Individual Talent” that “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (1410). In traditional scholarship on modernism, scholars have indeed focused on form and have consequently neglected issues that Virginia Woolf feared would be considered “insignificant” or trivial. Thus, this critical tunnel vision has inevitably prevented a full accounting of many key aspects of modernist literature.

One issue of modernism that has been persistently overlooked by scholars is the central role of domesticity in many modernist texts and the importance to modernists of reclaiming the domestic as a subject of high art. The masculinized version of modernism has proven tenacious and has skewed the critical vision of even contemporary feminist

scholars of modernism. The situation is not, as Janet Wolff claims, that “the literature of modernity ignores the private sphere, and to that extent is silent on the subject of women’s primary domain” (45). Rather, critics have ignored modernists’ interest in the private sphere and have instead focused on the formal qualities of modernist literature—encouraged, of course, by such statements as those by Pound and Eliot quoted above. However, as I argue in this dissertation, despite the claim concerning modernism’s “persistent emphasis on form as an autonomous vehicle of aesthetic significance” (Eysteinnsson 11), modernist treatments of the domestic were rarely purely formal. My study will revisit modernist portrayals of the domestic, stressing the way that modernist formal experimentation works to transform and recover, not obliterate, the material of everyday life. Modernist treatments of the domestic are strikingly revealing—of the modernists’ challenge to the domestic and social legacies of Victorianism, of their strategies for healing the fragmentation and alienation of modern existence, and of their visions of the transformative potential of the artistic will. The modernist aesthetic project is not antithetical to the attempt to reconnect art and everyday life; rather, these aims are intricately connected. An examination of modernist portrayals of domesticity—so often ignored by the critical establishment—reveals the importance of the everyday to modernist aesthetics.

But what does a reconsideration of modernism and its incorporation of domesticity offer us as readers of modernist literature? Such a study will expand the canonical (and consequently limited) version of modernism. An examination of the work

of Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein reveals that the literature of modernity did everything *except* ignore domesticity; rather, domesticity became a focal point for much modernist art and literature. Also, this study will clarify the aesthetic projects of these three authors and will reveal the transformative power they ascribe to domesticity and to the artist him/herself. Their treatments of domesticity reveal a domestic sphere which alternately yields to the shaping force of the artistic will and remains impervious to the ineffectual artist, and which then becomes either a utopian haven or a drama of disintegration.

Modernist aestheticizations of domesticity are, first of all, protests against the nineteenth-century separation of art and life, embodied in the art-for-art's-sake motto of Aestheticism. In *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, Peter Bürger explains that European avant-garde movements of the twentieth century—such as surrealism and futurism—attacked “art as an institution that is unassociated with the life praxis of men” (49) and attempted to reconnect art and everyday life. Specifically, for Bürger, the avant-gardistes were reacting against nineteenth-century Aestheticism, which philosophy opposed the world of art to the world of the bourgeois everyday. According to Bürger, avant-gardistes shared Aestheticism's rejection of bourgeois society but did not share its strict separation of art and life. Instead, Bürger claims, the avant-gardistes attempted to reinvigorate art through—and reincorporate art into—the world of the everyday.

It is clear that many modernists shared this avant-garde project of reaestheticizing everyday life, especially the everyday world of the domestic.² Although they rejected the

² The relationship between the avant-gardes and modernism is a contested scholarly issue, and it is an issue which alone could provide the basis for another dissertation. Scholars disagree on whether the avant-garde is an aspect of modernism or if they are

stultifying traditions and restrictions of bourgeois society, many modernists focused on bourgeois domestic life—its objects, its relationships, its living space, and its pleasures—in their work. Three modernist authors—F.T. Marinetti, Djuna Barnes, and Gertrude Stein—provide particularly rich illustrations of modernism’s impulse to aesthetically transform the domestic. In this study, I examine texts in which these authors critically engage domesticity: Marinetti’s *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932), Barnes’s *Ladies Almanack* (1928) and *Nightwood* (1936), and Stein’s *Tender Buttons* (1914). In doing so, I also explore how these authors utilize and transform the literature of the bourgeois household: the cookbook, the conduct manual, the almanac, the household handbook, and the domestic novel. In addition to transforming domestic literature, Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein all attempt to transform and revivify other aspects of bourgeois domestic life—such as domestic relationships, good food, breakable knick-knacks—while they simultaneously attack repressive aspects of bourgeois domesticity.

In this chapter, I will explore three issues that are crucial to understanding Marinetti’s, Barnes’s, and Stein’s reassessments of domesticity. First, I will examine

separate literary/artistic philosophies. For the purposes of my argument, I classify Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein as modernists based upon their common commitment to literary experimentalism, their shared rejection of Victorian literary and social virtues, their overlapping literary influences, and their shared experiences as colleagues—and literary rivals—in 1910s-1930s Europe. Moreover, all three of these authors undoubtedly share the avant-garde’s desire to reconnect art and everyday life.

Although Bürger makes a sharp distinction between the avant-gardes and modernism itself, I do not maintain such a separation in my argument. Thus, while Bürger would not group F.T. Marinetti or other Italian Futurists among the modernists, I do. For further complications of this issue, see Astradur Eysteinnsson’s *The Concept of Modernism*; Andreas Huyssen’s *After the Great Divide*, especially Chapter 1, “The Hidden Dialectic: Avantgarde—Technology—Mass Culture”; Peter Nicholls’s

Victorian and earlier antecedents to these modernists' treatment of domesticity in order to understand the images of the domestic that the modernists inherited. These inquiries will focus on nineteenth-century domesticity and on still life painting, an art form that would itself be transformed by modernists such as Picasso and Man Ray. Then, I will investigate *other* modernist treatments of the domestic—to understand the modernist context in which my three authors conducted their literary transformations. As this analysis will show, several other modernists—certainly far more than have been widely acknowledged—centered aesthetic experiments on the domestic sphere and attributed aesthetic merit to domestic life. However, “the powerful masculinist and misogynist current within the trajectory of modernism” that Huyssen notes is especially apparent in some modernist portrayals of the domestic, as my discussion will illustrate. Finally, the third issue I will explore is my theoretical foundation for understanding Marinetti's, Barnes's, and Stein's reappropriations of the domestic. Specifically, my argument will be grounded in the work of Sigmund Freud and that of Michael Bakhtin. Freud's work on the uncanny provides a way to understand the intense power—alternately to comfort and to threaten—that is located within the domestic sphere. Bakhtin's work on the grotesque, especially as it has been interpreted by Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, facilitates an understanding of the excesses—gustatory, sexual, sensual—that pervade my authors' treatments of domesticity. Then, at the end of this chapter, I will provide brief overviews of my specific arguments about Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein.

Domestic Antecedents

As will be demonstrated, such modernist treatments contest the isolation and separation of art and domesticity insofar as both were figured in the Victorian period as pure refuges from the sullyng forces of the public sphere. The role of the home and of domesticity for the Victorian bourgeoisie is well-known: “in the child-centered nuclear family mothers and daughters were proudly and symbolically set apart from market activity and wage labor of any kind” (Brumberg 126). As a result, as Joan Jacobs Brumberg contends, an “intensification of family life” (126) marked the Victorian bourgeois domestic situation. The home became a focal point for those family members who were symbolically kept pure from market activity, and the domestic sphere increasingly came to represent “a haven in a heartless world” (Brown).³ Like the domestic, art (including the literary arts) was figured by the Victorians as pure, a refuge from public life and the marketplace. Similarly, both domesticity and art were credited as having redemptive powers: Matthew Arnold’s prognostications about poetry—that in “the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find [. . .] its *consolation and stay*” (596-97, italics mine)—echo contemporary claims about domesticity. Autonomy—of art from everyday concerns and of domesticity from the marketplace—was a constitutive quality of both art and the domestic under the Victorians. Aestheticism, a nineteenth-century literary movement, emphasized art’s

Calinescu’s *Five Faces of Modernity*; and Peter Bürger’s *The Decline of Modernism*.

³ I join Gillian Brown in borrowing this phrase from the title of Christopher Lasch’s *Haven in a Heartless World* (New York: Basic Books, 1977). Please see note #4, p. 203, of Brown’s *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* for her analysis of Lasch’s argument.

autonomy from “the means-end rationality of the bourgeois everyday” (Bürger 49). Like the art of Aestheticism, domesticity was represented as a negation of this means-end rationality and as offering an aesthetic alternative, an antidote to the public sphere. Marinetti, Stein, and Barnes all seek to heal this rift between art and the everyday and to reveal the falsity of the separation between public and private spheres.

Gillian Brown maintains that this notion of separate spheres—the Victorian version of domesticity as steeped in “values of interiority, privacy, and psychology” (1)—helped reshape the concept of individualism to fit the nineteenth-century American marketplace. She claims that “the confidence of encomiums to the virtues of womanhood and home simultaneously sublimated and denied anxieties about unfamiliar and precarious socioeconomic conditions and about the place of the individual within those conditions” (3). Thus, while bourgeois domesticity was figured as a pure realm, kept apart from forces of labor and market exchange, its very isolation, as Brown contends, was key to the maintenance of the capitalist economic system. However, the bourgeoisie was frequently criticized—before and throughout the modernist period—as being complacent and isolated in their homes while forces of change swirled around them. Even though, as Brown suggests, bourgeois domestic life was never truly a *refuge from* the market but was instead a *tool of* the market, domesticity itself increasingly acquired the taint of isolation and complacency.

The separation that Brumberg and Brown discuss—of bourgeois mothers and daughters *into* the domestic sphere and *away* from the marketplace—heightened the domestic sphere’s coding as feminine. Many critics have discussed this intense

feminization of domestic life in nineteenth-century Britain and America. Nancy Armstrong, for instance, describes this gender coding in *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*. Armstrong claims that conduct manuals and domestic economies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries “either suggest or openly state that without the domestic woman the entire domestic framework would collapse” (82-83); the domestic woman’s responsibilities included “authority over the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations, and under her jurisdiction the most basic qualities of human identity were supposed to develop” (3). Among the many powers that Armstrong attributes to the domestic woman, particularly notable is her power to shape identity; the connection between the domestic sphere and identity formation will prove key to modernist aesthetic transformations of the domestic.

The powers, however limited and provisional, that the feminized, isolated domestic sphere offered women were represented and communicated through domestic literature, including such forms as conduct manuals and sentimental fiction. The version of domesticity promulgated by this literature—the domesticity of the Victorian bourgeoisie—hinges on women’s authority and self-control, as well as on the domestic sphere’s own autonomous value system. Nancy Armstrong points out in *Desire and Domestic Fiction* that the “domestic woman executes her role in the household by regulating her own desire. So conceived, self-regulation became a form of labor that was superior to labor” (81). In sentimental literature, according to Nina Baym, “domesticity is set forth as a value scheme for ordering all of life” (27). The Victorian emphasis on domestic self-control and order, noted by both Armstrong and Baym, suggests that the

Victorians perceived a chaotic undercurrent to domesticity, a realm of darker passions which required such strict regulation. In addition to controlling—or merely hiding—such passions, Victorian domesticity entailed an obfuscation of power relations. As Gillian Brown makes clear, domesticity “as a value scheme for ordering all of life” in fact supports the value scheme of the marketplace. Likewise, this version of domesticity clouds gender inequalities by portraying women as extremely powerful, thanks to their total control over such important domestic matters as “the household, leisure time, courtship procedures, and kinship relations” (Armstrong 3). Although domestic literature communicated such key information about the domestic sphere and the domestic woman, it was stigmatized as lacking aesthetic merit and literary seriousness: as Suzanne Clark notes of sentimental fiction, “from the point of view of literary modernism, sentimentality was both a past to be outgrown and a present tendency to be despised” (2). Nevertheless, the version of the domestic that sentimental fiction communicated—that of the Victorian bourgeoisie—was both powerful and pervasive through the nineteenth-century and into the modernist period.

If sentimental fiction obfuscates power relations, then still life painting—another important representation of domesticity inherited by the modernists—instead comments upon such power relations through highly allegorical, pictorial representations of their conflicts. From its earliest Greek and Roman forms, still life focused on domestic objects, especially on food (Foster 258); and domestic objects were central to cubist still life painting—a form which, especially through the close friendship of Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein, was influential on modernist writers. However, in the case of still life

painting, just as in modernist literature, the importance of domestic subject matter has been misunderstood; critics argue that domestic images are transparent means for formal experimentation. For instance, Charles Sterling, in his *Still Life Painting: From Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* asserts that the domestic objects of cubist still life “are devoid of intellectual significance and are no more to him [the painter] than combinations of forms” (132). This attitude, that the domestic objects of art and literature are meaningless and without significance, has been refuted by many critics, but this attitude persists and in important ways shaped the modernist literary canon. In his “The Apples of Cézanne: An Essay on the Meaning of Still Life,” Meyer Schapiro refutes such an attitude, noting that “still-life painters have had to contend with the prejudice that their art is of a lower order because of the intrinsic inferiority of its objects” (21). Schapiro enumerates the many valences of these seemingly inferior objects, asserting that

the objects chosen for still-life painting—the table with food and drink, the vessels, the musical instruments, the pipe and tobacco, the articles of costume, the books, tools, playing cards, *objets d’art*, flowers, skulls, etc.—belong to specific fields of value: the private, the domestic, the gustatory, the convivial, the artistic, the vocation and avocation, the decorative and sumptuous, and—less often—in a negative mood, objects offered to meditation as symbols of vanity, mementos of the ephemeral and death. (19)

A look at Dutch still life painting will suggest an even more complex significance of domestic objects in still life and will point to similar representational possibilities in

the works of Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein. In his article “The Art of Fetishism: Notes on Dutch Still Life,” Hal Foster suggests that within Dutch still life, the wealth of objects lavishly displayed in the paintings operates as “so many synecdoches, if not of the Dutch empire, then at least of the Dutch market” and that

it appears that the objects of disparate classes and cultures are depicted precisely so that they may be mastered in representation, so that the domestic space and capitalist subjectivity of the seventeenth-century Dutch may be secured from its outside and others by a synecdochic incorporation of these very things. (256)

Apparently, the domestic objects of still life can act as metonyms of bourgeois wealth, and still life also operates as a test of representational power: that is, an attempt, through representation, to contain the threats of the increasing diversity of classes and cultures. These threats that are contained through still life’s representation—as well as the chaotic undercurrent of domesticity that the Victorians tried to control—are crucial to domesticity as the modernists inherited it: domesticity is both richly significant and ripe with sublimated forces to be uncovered through modernist experimentation.

Modernist Responses to Domesticity

Modernist artists and writers followed the impulse to reconnect art and life—the avant-garde project outlined by Peter Bürger—in a wide variety of ways: through radically different portrayals of the domestic, in tones ranging from the naïve to the ironic, with contrary visions of domestic power, and so on. William Carlos Williams’s

impassioned celebration of “The Red Wheelbarrow”—“so much depends/upon/a red wheel/barrow/glazed with rain water/beside the white/chickens.” (1-8)—contrasts sharply, for instance, with T.S. Eliot’s invocation of “the cups, the marmalade, the tea” (“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” 89) of London’s drawing rooms. Eliot is hardly figuring “the cups, the marmalade, the tea” as a sustaining or redeeming force, nor would he suggest that “so much depends upon” . . . “the cups, the marmalade, the tea.” Clearly, not all modernist treatments of domesticity respond to it with interest and appreciation. Likewise, Marinetti’s, Barnes’s, and Stein’s aesthetic transformations of domesticity reveal a continuum of response to domesticity, ranging from Barnes’s ironic pessimism to Marinetti’s boisterous celebration. These three authors are united, then, in their reaction against Victorian mores and aesthetics but differ widely on the nature of redemptive and aesthetic power they ascribe to the domestic.

The reconnection of art and life—including reaestheticizing the domestic interior— was a focus of modernist artists working in other media beside literature. The Dutch art movement De Stijl, which found its expression mainly through painting and architecture, particularly adhered to these goals. Like the literary modernists I have mentioned, the members of De Stijl assert that ““in general, man considers a work of art too much as an article of luxury, as something pleasant, even as a decoration, as something besides life. But art and life are one: art and life are both expressions of truth”” (qtd. in Jaffé 128). The spokesman and co-founder of the group, Theo Van Doesburg, critiqued the false separation of art and life, and called for their reintegration specifically within the domestic sphere:

But besides these physically functional needs, there are spiritual ones which appeal to our visual, aural, and tactile senses. Until now people tried to satisfy these spiritual (*surmaterielle*) demands by hanging a picture on the wall or placing a sculpture in space. Furniture should be aesthetically designed for that purpose, and the home would become a museum or concert hall. But the new architecture of the future should abolish that dualism. (Van Straaten 15)

Artists and architects of De Stijl attempted to abolish this dualism between art and life through the design of light fixtures, furniture, residences, and through “the design and execution of dozens of environmental projects, particularly interiors, which had as their aim the union of the arts in a constructive harmony that would herald a radically new postwar society” (Troy 3). Like Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein, the artists of De Stijl wanted to reinvigorate everyday domestic life by reaestheticizing it.

In attempting to reaestheticize domesticity and reconnect the everyday world to the world of art, modernists who pursued this project were reacting against the Victorian bourgeoisie and the centrality of domesticity to the Victorian bourgeois lifeworld.

Modernism’s hostility towards the bourgeoisie has been frequently noted: Daniel Bell describes modernism as a movement which “provid[ed] renewed and sustained attacks on the bourgeois social structure” (275-76), and Peter Nicholls cites modernism’s reaction against “the pressure in a modern democratic society to conform and identify with others. [. . .] Bourgeois culture thus seemed to ground itself in the awkward paradox that we become truly ourselves only by copying others” (13). Primary evidence of this hostility

is simple to find. In his autobiography *Blasting and Bombadeering*, Wyndham Lewis explains why early twentieth-century art movements were organized as militant groups when he comments rather scathingly that “I supposed they had to do this, seeing how ‘bourgeois’ all Publics were” (35). This sentiment is magnified in Lewis’s polemical writings in *Blast*, such as this item among his “Blasts and Blesses”:

BLAST—

years 1837 to 1900

CURSE Abysmal inexcusable middle class

A similar feeling is manifest in F.T. Marinetti’s essay “Marriage and the Family,” in which work he complains about family life that “one mucks around in the daily swamp of dirty domestic economy and dull vulgarities” (*SW* 77), and he asserts that “the family dining room is the twice-daily sewer drain of bile, irritation, prejudice, and gossip” (76). No real wonder, then, that so many critics have overlooked or ignored domesticity’s crucial role for the modernist aesthetic, considering that such hostility was expressed not only towards the bourgeoisie but also towards domesticity itself as a metonym for the bourgeois lifestyle. In reaestheticizing domesticity, modernists rescued it from the “passéist” bourgeoisie (as Marinetti terms it) and thus also carved out a space to critique the bourgeoisie.

Those modernists who pursued an aesthetic domestic project generally agreed that the Victorian bourgeoisie had lost touch with vital and exciting aspects of everyday life. Moreover, these modernists’ aesthetic transformations of domesticity also respond to the fragmented nature of modern life: desensitized, habit-ridden, and thus unfulfilling. One

theorist who points towards reaestheticizing the everyday as a means of healing this fragmentation is Victor Shklovsky. Unlike some critics who reject the everyday because of its link to a tradition-bound and complacent bourgeoisie, Shklovsky makes clear that quotidian existence is not to blame for the clouded modern consciousness but is, instead, simply another one of its victims. Shklovsky laments the fact that “habitualization devours works, clothes, furniture, one’s wife,” therein enumerating many of the same domestic fixtures that Marinetti, Stein, and Barnes attempt to recover in their works. For Shklovsky, “art removes objects from the automatism of perception,” a process he calls “defamiliarization”; and he makes clear—explicitly through his list of domestic fixtures and implicitly through a discussion of Tolstoy—that domestic objects both need and merit revivification through art. Shklovsky cites a passage from Tolstoy’s diary in which Tolstoy recounts a day when he was cleaning a room and could not remember whether he had already brushed off his couch. Tolstoy is disturbed by his confusion since, as he says, “If I had . . . acted unconsciously, then it was the same as if I had not” and that “if the whole complex lives of many people go on unconsciously, then such lives are as if they had never been” (Tolstoy, qtd. in Shklovsky 753). Shklovsky maintains that it is the role of art to heal such a breach, that “art exists that one may recover the sensation of life” (753). Important to Shklovsky’s argument is the role of artistic abstraction in restoring experiential immediacy to everyday life. For Shklovsky, the imposition of artistic form upon domestic material does not distance us from that material, but rather restores domesticity’s vitality and refreshes our experience of it. Shklovsky’s theories point to artistic abstraction as, paradoxically, a way to recapture the experiential

immediacy—a goal of the larger modernist aesthetic project —of domestic life.

Theoretical Foundations

Foster's discussion of domestic objects within Dutch still life—about their threat and its containment—suggests the central point of domesticity's attraction for the modernists of my study: Marinetti's, Barnes's, and Stein's transformations of the domestic rely on an aesthetics of desublimation, a recognition that threats, anxieties, and violence are concealed within the fabric of everyday life. The danger and power of domesticity certainly complicate the conventional images of the domestic which the modernists inherited: the isolated and complacent domesticity of the bourgeoisie and the ordered, self-controlled world of sentimental fiction. Domesticity presented modernist authors with a challenge: to draw out the latent threats and anxieties of domesticity without being overwhelmed by its bourgeois banality. The domestic desublimation is carried out through artistic abstraction, and the same paradox is apparent here as in the case of Shklovsky: artistic abstraction, rather than distancing us from the material of everyday life, in this case brings us closer to that material and refreshes our experience of it. While abstraction is conventionally thought to involve a sublimation, in the works of Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein it is instead based upon desublimation; the artistic transformation of everyday life reveals its hidden conflicts rather than burying them even deeper. The theories of Mikhail Bakhtin and Sigmund Freud will help to elucidate the dangerous potential of domesticity which these three modernists unleashed.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin outlines a connection between

domestic abundance and an impulse towards containment; this is a similar dynamic to that noted by Foster about Dutch still life. Bakhtin discusses in particular banquet imagery—and eating in general—and suggests that these feasts represent humankind coming to terms with and conquering its environment. As Bakhtin phrases it, “man’s encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself” (281). In Bakhtin’s construction, domestic imagery reflects humankind’s attempt to come to terms with a threat, to control those things which are beyond control, such as cultural change and the ephemeral nature of existence.

Bakhtin suggests many other levels of significance for the food of banquet imagery. He traces food’s traditional connection to work, contending that “as the last victorious stage of work, the image of food often symbolized the entire labor process” (281). Banquets are often also, for Bakhtin, “the occasion for wise discourse, for the gay truth” (283), as well as fulfilling “the function of completion” (281), often punctuating narratives. And, of course, food is symbolically linked to human fertility and growth (279) as well as to death and the underworld (301). As Bakhtin interprets them, these images of food are anything but content-free experiments in form (as some critics of domestic literary images would have it). The significance of the food, for Bakhtin, hinges upon its abundance, its excess. In Bakhtin’s description, banquet imagery—of food and drink in abundance— not only represents the triumph of the body “over the world, over its enemy” as the body “grows at the world’s expense” (282-83) but also signifies the “open unfinished nature” (281) of the grotesque body. Food transgresses the

boundaries of the body; and eating is merely one of that body's many interactions with the world: sexual, gustatory, excretory, and so on. Through eating, that which was once part of the world now becomes part of the grotesque body. However, the modernists will exploit the complexity of this significance: the very presence of this food is a potent reminder of the threat that eating would symbolically control.

In their study *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White extend Bakhtin's argument about the grotesque and transgression; they look beyond the medieval peasants of Bakhtin's discussion to "a political anthropology of *binary extremism* in class society" (26) in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Stallybrass and White's discussion sheds light on the importance of domesticity to Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein: they argue that the grotesque not only has significance beyond the bodily but also is key to identity formation. They maintain that "transgressing the rules of hierarchy and order in any one of the domains [psychic, bodily, geographical space, social order] may have major consequences in the others" (3). Through this figuration, we can understand that for the modernists, the domestic signified beyond the bourgeoisie and women's lived experience. Instead, domesticity offered the modernists a site where crucial issues intersect: issues of selfhood and personal identity, of gender and sexuality, of class, and of aesthetics and the limits of the artistic will. Perhaps the most significant of these to the modernists—and an issue to which Stallybrass and White devote much attention—is identity formation. Identity formation, according to Stallybrass and White, relies on the rejection of the grotesque: "its law is the law of exclusion" (25). Moreover, they identify a sublimation similar to that which the

modernists undo in their domestic transformations: “what is excluded at the overt level of identity-formation is productive of new objects of desire” (25). It is precisely this “‘taboo-laden’ overlap between high and low discourse which produces the grotesque” (26) and which so fascinates the modernists and renders domesticity ripe for their desublimations.

Sigmund Freud also points out the dangerous undercurrents of domesticity: in his 1919 essay “The Uncanny.” Of “The Uncanny,” Freud points out that the word, “Das Unheimliche” in the German, literally means “the unhomely” or “un-homelike,” and he defines the concept as “that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar” (220), such as domestic items, items of the household, and fixtures from childhood. Freud enumerates those things which elicit a feeling of uncanniness—dolls and doubles, dismembered limbs, threats to one’s eyesight—and he asserts that this feeling is triggered not by the strangeness or unfamiliarity of these items but, rather, by their familiarity and their presence in one’s childhood. Thus, we can see that a crucial element of the uncanny is its position within the domestic sphere, the location of the objects of childhood and the environment in which an uncanny feeling is triggered.

Like Bakhtin and Foster, Freud also explains that the objects of domestic life can both contain and communicate a threat. First, he establishes the connection between the uncanny and “the anxiety belonging to the castration complex of childhood” (233), an anxiety which unites fears surrounding identity formation and sexual development. Then, Freud explains that feelings of uncanniness are especially elicited by dolls and

doubles, which feelings, he says, act “as a preservation against extinction” in the minds “of the child and primitive man” (235). Once this developmental stage is past and this fear surmounted, however, “from having been an assurance of immortality, [the double] becomes the uncanny harbinger of death” (235). Those objects of childhood, which surrounded and comforted in the childhood home, in adulthood thus recall the forgotten anxieties of childhood and therefore evoke uncanny feelings of extreme discomfort.⁴

Crucially, Freud attributes the essential ambiguity of domestic space—the ambiguity which offers such rich material for Marinetti, Stein, and Barnes—to domesticity’s simultaneous capacity to provide comfort while sustaining the anxieties which disrupt that comfort; he does so through his meticulous etymological analysis of the word “heimlich.” In an exhaustive listing of “heimlich”’s various usages, Freud outlines one set of definitions which center on the meaning of “homey” or “comfortable”; he then considers a “heimlich” which, instead, denotes that which is hidden within the home, including the definition “concealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others” (223). Thus, Freud concludes, “the word ‘*heimlich*’ is not unambiguous, but belongs to two sets of ideas [. . .]: on the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight” (224-25). In other words, even within the definition of the word itself, “what is *heimlich* thus comes to be *unheimlich*” (224). As Freud indicates so clearly, the defining ambiguity of domestic space, its offer of a haven but its invocation of primal threats, is

⁴ One must notice that defamiliarization, in Victor Shklovsky's description, is similar to the uncanny in that its effects rely upon the familiar which is also unfamiliar; Shklovsky explains

reflected in the very term for “homelike.” This ambiguity—the preservation of uncanny threats within the domestic—is reflected in the interlocking definitions of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. The rich ambiguity revealed by Freud’s analysis makes the domestic sphere fertile for modernist explorations: of domesticity’s complex matrix of anxieties—about gender relations, the formation of the subject, and national, international, and racial relations—and other issues. Freud also points to the crucial connection between social relations—especially those within the domestic sphere—and psychic relations, a connection which the modernists of my study recognized and explored in their works.

In their treatment of domesticity, Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein seem drawn to this uncanny dimension of the domestic, to the power of its excess, to its seeming capacity to both contain and represent a danger. By reaestheticizing the domestic, these modernists seek to revive both the power and the danger of the domestic, harnessing this power and transforming it into a triumph of the artistic will. As Freud’s and Bakhtin’s comments make clear, these modernists did not need to carve out a space for their critique within domesticity; the space for critique is inherent in the domestic, in its facets which have been contained, repressed, or hidden. Insofar as Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein are interested in the repressed and hidden aspects of domesticity, they are engaged in the same project as Freud and Bakhtin: all endeavor to reveal hidden aspects of domesticity and to recover that darker, more primitive side of the domestic which refuses to be controlled by culture or manners. Such a project often involves uncovering a dimension of extremity in commonplace experience, as Freud suggests through his explorations of

defamiliarization as making "the familiar seem strange" (754). It is precisely this quality of

the castration anxiety and other childhood terrors sublimated within domestic space. Marinetti, Stein, and Barnes reveal and revel in this extremity. Marinetti highlights the sexual, racial, and international tensions latent within domesticity, as his *Futurist Cookbook* focuses on and fuses sexual tensions and colonial impulses. Gertrude Stein explores the violence of domesticity, from the operations of cooking—chopping, boiling, fricasseeing—to more interpersonal forms of violence. Djuna Barnes reveals, in *Nightwood*, a disintegrating domestic sphere peopled with the grotesque bodies of Freud's uncanny and a realm wherein a history of oppression is literally embodied, while her *Ladies Almanack* exploits the fissures in heterosexual domestic bliss. For all these authors, reaestheticizing the domestic presents an opportunity to recover the extremity of domesticity, to save domestic experience from the stagnation of bourgeois domestic life.

The Domestic Transformations of Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein

The texts by these three modernists—Marinetti's *Futurist Cookbook*, Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*, and Stein's *Tender Buttons*—reveal closer connections to Bakhtin's and Freud's ideas on domesticity and illustrate well the range of modernist responses to domesticity. These three authors are engaged in a project of desublimating the domestic, of plumbing its depths. They reveal the domestic to be not a refuge from dangers and anxieties—the site of the comfort and protection of hearth and home—but rather the breeding ground for those very fears and threats and the place where we must confront them. Through their project of reaestheticizing the domestic, Marinetti, Barnes,

familiar strangeness that evokes uncanny feelings, according to Freud.

and Stein invert domesticity, making its most latent qualities manifest and revealing the dark underbelly of the “haven in a heartless world.”

In his *Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti reacts to the possibilities of the domestic with an unbridled optimism, coupled with a little-concealed totalitarian urge. He touts Futurist cooking as a means “to create a harmony between man’s palate and his life today and tomorrow” (21), while the recipes also clearly function as allegorical social control. For instance, although the plenitude and spectacle of Futurist banquets mirror the peasant banquets that Bakhtin celebrates in *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin’s discussion, actual peasants are conspicuously absent from Marinetti’s banquets, unless they appear as servers or as scenery. The new domesticity of Marinetti’s shaping would feature a national Italian cuisine, redesigned by him, minus pasta and plus rice. Domesticity thus allows Marinetti to expand the aggressively nationalist aesthetics of Futurism into the material culture of everyday life while preparing this culture for “an ever more high speed, airborne life” (36).

Of all the modernist projects I examine in this dissertation, Marinetti’s cooptation of the cookbook is particularly ironic. Marinetti frequently and vociferously critiques the bourgeoisie, especially the institution of the bourgeois family. For instance, in his 1919 essay “Marriage and the Family,” Marinetti attacks the institution of the family as “legal prostitution” and as featuring the “tombstone of maternal tenderness” (77). His estimation towards traditional domesticity is clear: it is constraining and suffocating to the point of being deadly. He sums up his attitude thus: “All suffer, all are deprived, exhausted, cretinized in the name of a fearful divinity that must be overthrown: family

feeling” (77). Why, then, would Marinetti use the cookbook, a fixture of the bourgeois family world he so often rails against, to communicate his aesthetic?

In part, Marinetti’s use of the cookbook marks his project as part of the larger modernist project of aesthetic transformation: revivifying facets of everyday life through re-aestheticizing them. Certainly, Marinetti’s very use of this genre suggests that while the work is a parody—one which uses the literature of the bourgeois household in order to critique the bourgeoisie—it is also an indication of the value and potential Marinetti found latent in domesticity. Through *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti retrieves aspects of domestic life from their place in the bourgeois world he so actively critiques. Marinetti’s *Cookbook* also allows him to craft a version of the domestic which is outside the traditional, nineteenth-century version of domesticity as containment extraordinaire. In fact, the strictures of this nineteenth-century bourgeois version of domesticity present Marinetti with perfect material for his transformation. More importantly, however, Marinetti is drawn to the subtext of that version of domesticity: its capacity for containment, its power—pointed out by Foster, Freud, Bakhtin, and others—to contain a threat as well as to embody that threat.

It is no surprise that Marinetti would be attracted to a domesticity which connotes danger and which, as in Bakhtin’s or Freud’s formulation, stands as a constant reminder of that threat. Danger is a central feature of Marinetti’s aesthetic; the first line of the 1909 “Manifesto of Futurism” warns that “We intend to sing of the love of danger, the habit of energy and fearlessness” (41 *SW*), and Marinetti celebrates “war—the world’s only hygiene” (41). Marinetti’s love of danger thus draws him to that danger inherent but

repressed in domesticity, allowing him to take advantage of this potential in order to stage conflict rather than to squelch it, to represent social and political conflicts in gustatory terms. Marinetti utilizes the domestic as a site for his agonistic dramas, his experimental stage for exploring and controlling, in microcosm, the larger conflicts over which he had little or no control.

For Marinetti, then, the domestic naturally lends itself as a site of exploration, a laboratory in which he can draw out and master those conflicts inherent (but latent, contained) in nineteenth-century domesticity: conflicts which are racial, sexual, regional, national, and colonial in nature. He stages, for example, the regional conflicts of Italy in the “Synthesis of Italy Dinner,” in which work foods representing all of the regions of Italy—plus a course called “Colonial instinct” representing Italy’s colonial conquests—are served. The colonial instinct is also a driving force in the “geographic dinner” in which piece the diners choose their meals by pointing at parts of the waitress’s body—“she is a shapely young woman dressed in a long white tunic on which a complete geographical map of Africa has been drawn in colour” (129)—and in the “dinner of white desire” organized around the idea of “Ten Negroes” who “long to conquer the countries of Europe with a mixture of spiritual yearning and erotic desire” (136).

The food, costumes, and perfumes of which Futurist dinners are comprised not only allow Marinetti to enact prandial versions of larger conflicts, but they also enable him to prepare and consume embodiments of those represented as “other” in Futurist rhetoric: particularly women and colonized peoples. In this way, Marinetti enacts the behavior which Bakhtin describes as mankind’s “joyful, triumphant” victory: “he

triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself" (281). The almost cannibalistic treatment of Marinetti's preparation and consumption of totemistic representations of "others" is apparent here: one can simply eat that which is different. Marinetti thus appropriates domesticity's potential for containment, which was such a prominent feature of nineteenth-century domesticity, and uses this power to symbolically control those outside the Futurist aesthetic and social program.

Djuna Barnes mirrors Bakhtin's fascination with grotesque bodies in *Ladies Almanack* and enacts Freud's uncanny in the ghostly selves that populate *Nightwood*. The tone of *Nightwood* suggests that these characters are confined by those anxieties which, as Freud suggests, are usually effectively concealed by traditional domesticity; they embody the return of the repressed. And in both novels, Barnes explodes traditional domesticity and explores its repressed and hidden side in order to reveal sexualities, like Dame Musset's evangelical lesbianism, which help comprise the repressed of traditional domesticity. Barnes's version of domesticity, particularly in contrast to Marinetti's, seems utterly defeated by the same social forces and social change that in Marinetti inspire such optimism. In *Nightwood* especially, the domestic reflects the state of decay found in the rest of the world, but this decay is cast in sharper relief in the domestic sphere, as Barnes exaggerates the contrast between the comforts traditionally figured as part of the domestic and the lack of solace found therein by the characters of the novel.

Like Marinetti, Barnes upends Victorian domesticity in her work. Her treatment is, however, as different from Marinetti's or Stein's as her two novels, *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*, are from each other. As Freud and Bakhtin have pointed out,

domesticity and its representations always maintain a connection to that danger which they help to conceal. For Freud, that link lies in the feeling of uncanniness, an uncomfortable reminder of the terrors of childhood and of threats to sight, sexuality, and bodily coherence. For Bakhtin, the power of the domestic resides in its excess, the disorder that constantly promises to erupt, and in the reminder domesticity provides of mortality and death. Djuna Barnes responds to the nineteenth-century version of domesticity as containment by, in *Ladies Almanack*, revealing and celebrating this excess, while in *Nightwood*, domesticity is a *memento mori*, a bellwether of the characters' and their society's steady disintegration.

In *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes's critique of traditional bourgeois domesticity is quite direct, but the critique is more genial than that of *Nightwood*; the parodic gaze of the *Almanack* is aimed not just at the bourgeoisie but also at the expatriate lesbian community of Paris, the world of "Women and their Ways" (11). Like Stein's *Tender Buttons*, Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* exposes the lesbian erotic subtext of traditional domesticity, and it also points out the fragility of the marital system, through repeated examples of women who leave marital beds for female partners. In this text, Barnes aims her criticism broadly, at a compulsory heterosexuality in which women are funneled into traditional marriage, at those marriages which leave women unsatisfied emotionally and/or sexually, as well as at those women who enter lesbian relationships simply because these are currently in fashion.

In this novel, Barnes relies upon the literature of bourgeois domesticity—the conduct manual and the domestic novel—to frame her critique. While written in the

month-by-month format of an almanac, the *Almanack* more closely resembles a conduct manual in dispensing advice on behavior to women, however unconventional that advice might be. The narrative voice, “A Lady of Fashion,” and the protagonist, Dame Evangeline Musset, constantly offer cautions to female characters and female readers against bragging of sexual conquests and about how to choose a female partner. All of this advice is a far cry from the content of more traditional conduct manuals for women, which “represented a specific configuration of sexual features as those of the only appropriate woman for men at all levels of society to want as a wife” (Armstrong 59). In her *Almanack*, Barnes thus uses the literature which helped shape the bourgeois household as a wedge to help reveal its vulnerability.

Unlike *Ladies Almanack*, *Nightwood* has a very apocalyptic tone. Here, domesticity, as well as all the other features of a Victorian lifeworld, seems to be winding down. In this novel, Barnes uses domesticity’s link to danger to explode the domestic and to expose those darkest, most carefully contained threats: death, threat of dismemberment/disintegration, threats to (bodily, societal) continuity. Rather than the bulging, vibrant, interacting bodies of *Ladies Almanack*, *Nightwood* is filled with fragmented human forms, whose disintegration mirrors and is mirrored by the disintegration of the domestic, which, in turn, reflects the deterioration of Western Europe.

Through both *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*, Barnes also calls into question traditional definitions of gender and sexuality, as these novels problematize domesticity’s traditional role as a crucial site of the definition and maintenance of gender distinctions.

The heroine of *Ladies Almanack*, Dame Musset, for instance, “had developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy, [and] when therefore, she came forth an Inch or so less than this, she paid no Heed to the Error” (7). Similarly sexually ambiguous is *Nightwood*’s Dr. Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O’Connor, the figure who conducts the novel’s characters through their own Inferno, and whose habit it is to lie around wearing a woman’s nightgown and a wig of golden curls, “heavily rouged and his lashes painted” (79). These characters occupy domestic spaces and engage in domestic relationships which, unlike the bourgeois domesticity of Victorian tradition, do not maintain traditional definitions and distinctions of gender but, rather, continually call those into question and, in fact, encourage even further blurring of those boundaries.

Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, like Barnes’s *Ladies Almanack*, privileges a domesticity which exceeds propriety; she displays interest and finds power in those same aspects of the domestic upon which Freud and Bakhtin focused: the contained and repressed. Stein explores the nature of selfhood and identity through the self’s interactions with its immediate surroundings—the domestic—and her interest in the connections of identity to its domestic environment is similar to Freud’s focus in “The Uncanny.” Freud, like Stein, brings out the hidden recesses of the domestic in order to reveal those same hidden, unspoken recesses of subjectivity. The domesticity of Stein’s *Tender Buttons*, like that in Marinetti’s work, is offered as a potential site of social change, as she carves out a space there for a lesbian erotics not accounted for in Victorian domesticity. The domestic sphere of *Tender Buttons* retains, however, traces of the same ills which overwhelm domesticity in Barnes’s formulation. Stein seems to retain a bit of Marinetti’s optimism

for domesticity's transformative possibilities, but she also, like Barnes, acknowledges that the domestic is something less than a utopian space. Further, Stein's commitment to abstract expression echoes Marinetti's, while her almost mechanistic determinism resonates with the historical pessimism of Barnes's *Nightwood*. Stein figures the subject as an object of domesticity's shaping forces and reveals a subject quite unlike the subject-as-dictator of Marinetti's vision. However, her subject does not finally yield completely, unlike the ruined subjectivities which slip into the floods of history in Barnes's formulations. Although *Tender Buttons* is not pervaded with the intense pessimism of Barnes's *Nightwood*, Stein's figuration of domesticity in *Tender Buttons* does suggest the extent to which the domestic reflects conflict on a grand scale.

Gertrude Stein's attention to the domestic is not so immediately surprising as F.T. Marinetti's, but it has also been frequently misunderstood. Stein's treatment of the domestic is certainly part of her larger project to represent and to revitalize quotidian experience, including domesticity as well as language itself. Like the other modernists, Stein felt that our experience of everyday life has been clouded by habit and by the stultification of Victorian bourgeois existence. In her work, she attempts to wrench everyday life out of this stagnation and to restore to it an intensity that has been lost. Stein's exploration of domesticity, particularly in *Tender Buttons*, has been misread as her attempt to escape the referentiality of language and thereby to transcend (rather than to recover) the objects of everyday life, or, simply, as "Stein's celebration of the trivial" (Hoffman 66). (Such readings are linked, of course, to those previously mentioned which treat the content of modernist art as little more than a transparent opportunity for formal

innovation.) Critics have also tended to discount or ignore the remarkable prominence of violent images in the domesticity of *Tender Buttons*, apparently unable to reconcile the presence of such imagery, Stein's project of representing experiential immediacy, and the apparent absence of violence in Stein's *own* experience of domesticity. Instead, I would suggest, Stein's portrayal of violent domesticity is her response to the nineteenth-century version of domesticity as containment par excellence. Stein uses the power of the domestic to contain a danger as well as to memorialize this danger's presence and to draw out those aspects of domestic life most suppressed, most contained, in that nineteenth-century haven-in-a-heartless-world version of the domestic. Specifically, Stein brings out the most vibrant, uncontrollable aspects of domesticity—its excess—particularly the violent and the erotic, which are, of course, those facets of life most likely to be absent from Victorian representations of the domestic.

Stein's attempts to reveal and highlight the previously contained aspects of domesticity facilitate her project of revivifying everyday life. The violent, erotic, even dangerous domestic life of *Tender Buttons* is certainly more exciting and attractive to the artist than the homogenized version of the Victorian bourgeoisie. In addition, this exploration into domesticity's depths and the consequent work to restore to it its complexity and vibrancy allow Stein to transform domesticity into a form more appealing to her as an artist and more amenable to her own untraditional domestic situation with Alice B. Toklas. Domesticity's capacity to conceal and simultaneously to reveal a threat—and thus to be an ever-present reminder of that which is hidden and unspoken—makes it an appropriate trope for Stein's representation of the quotidian experience of her

lesbian relationship, a domestic situation most definitely not represented in traditional nineteenth-century Victorian domesticity.

In pursuing this project of exploring the power and the depths of domesticity, Stein was also able to continue her inquiries into the nature of subjectivity, an interest probably inspired by her study with William James at Harvard around 1894-95. Domesticity provided Stein with a crucial site for exploring the limits and definitions of subjectivity through a comprehensive examination of the subject's perceptions of its surroundings. Through the "Objects," "Food," and "Rooms" sections of *Tender Buttons*, Stein attempts to represent the immediate experience of the everyday, but this experiential immediacy is one of abstraction, an abstraction which, for Stein, as in Shklovsky's formulation of defamiliarization, paradoxically presents an opportunity to refresh the experience of the everyday. Stein says of her project, "I began to make portraits of things and enclosures that is rooms and places because I needed to completely face the difficulty of how to include what is seen with hearing and listening" with the addition of "color and movement" (*Lectures in America* 189). While Stein's work certainly displays the formal innovations characteristic of modernist literature, particularly in her struggle "with the ridding myself of nouns" (*Lectures* 242), the content of her work, its considerations of domesticity, is key to her project because it allows her to explore the influence of an environment upon its subject and vice versa. The result of these experiments is somewhat paradoxical: by reducing personality to mechanistic repetitions, to predictable and reproducible reactions and iterations, Stein opens a space for the shaping force of artistic agency.

The dark underbelly of domesticity is undoubtedly darkly attractive to these modernist writers. This attraction is due both to domesticity's status as a matrix of anxieties, an allegory for the forces with which the artist must contend and about which the modernists were particularly interested, and as the challenge which their reaestheticizing of the domestic presents to the artistic will. Georg Lukács sees not a challenge in this project but, rather, a danger; in "The Ideology of Modernism," he likens modernism's concern with everyday life to the ubiquity of madmen in modernist texts, suggesting that both themes represent retreats (into the home and into madness) from the real world and so reflect "an attempt to escape from the dreariness of life under capitalism" (482).⁵ For Lukács, the concentration on the domestic, as well as "this flight into psychopathology" (482), stifles protest and forestalls change by avoiding reality rather than critiquing it. In their recoveries of the domestic, however, Marinetti, Stein, and Barnes discover not a refuge from capitalism but, rather, a concentration of its violences and inequalities. Through their aesthetic transformations of domesticity, these three authors reveal the threats and anxieties harbored within the domestic sphere, and they show it to be neither a retreat nor an opportunity for flight but, instead, an immersion in the consequences of the fragmentation and alienation of modern existence.

Through reaestheticizing the domestic, therefore, Marinetti, Barnes, and Stein find a challenge to artistic agency, and their responses to domesticity reveal much about both their models of this agency and about the transformative potential they find in the

⁵ Joan Jacobs Brumberg and Gillian Brown maintain that the image of the domestic sphere as a retreat from capitalism is illusory and that the "separate" private sphere is a constitutive facet of the capitalist system.

domestic. Their various responses to the domestic thus illustrate the sharp contrasts between these modernists' visions of the transformative power of the artistic will. For Marinetti, that model of agency seems to be primarily a vision of a dominant, shaping force, while the domestic itself is, like much else in Futurist aesthetics, raw material which yields to the artistic will. Domesticity has the potential to be transformed, but only through the impetus of the transformational artist. In short, for Marinetti, domesticity provides the artistic will yet another opportunity for mastery. In *The Futurist Cookbook*, we see one extreme of modernism's transformational urge, as the aesthetic project threatens to occlude and even obliterate the object—domesticity—which it transforms (as in the “extremist banquet,” “where no one eats, and the only satiety comes from perfumes” [116]). As Marinetti removes the food from his cookbook, he clearly illustrates a case of artistic agency as all-subsuming mastery. He reshapes the domestic—certainly recovering its latent racial and sexual tensions—but threatens in the process to remove one of the defining features of domesticity (and of the cookbook): food.

In the case of Barnes's *Nightwood*, however, this transformative potential is notably absent, leaving the domestic, as well as the artistic will itself, prey to the vicissitudes of social and political change. Whereas Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* presents the domestic as pure material, waiting to be shaped by the artistic will, Barnes's *Nightwood* features a world in which everything, especially the domestic, is shaped by history—a reflection, to some extent, of Barnes's distress at the effects of fascism upon her beloved Europe. In *Nightwood*, the artistic will, like everything else, is at the mercy

of and is shaped by historical change. The artistic agency of *Nightwood* is made to appear as ineffectual and powerless as any of the characters of the novel, and, like them, the artistic will gradually weakens throughout the novel. The evangelical flair of *Ladies Almanack*'s Dame Evangeline Musset begins to suggest the novel's radically different sense of artistic agency from that of *Nightwood*. While clearly poking fun at both the heterosexual and the expatriate lesbian cultures, *Ladies Almanack* is also, in the tradition of its ancestor the conduct manual, a guide for behavior, however exaggerated and parodic this guide may be. A sense persists in this novel of the artist as activist; just as Dame Musset sets women on the right path, so, too, will the *Ladies Almanack* do so for the artists of the self.

Stein sculpts, instead, a phenomenological domesticity, which shapes the domestic subject just as that subject shapes its environment, the domestic. The transformative potential of domesticity is crucially located in this interaction, between the perceiving subject and its surroundings, and is therefore not isolated in either. Stein's *Tender Buttons* marks a different relationship of the aesthetic impulse to the material of domesticity than that in the works of Marinetti or Barnes. In Stein's work, domesticity is not merely material to be shaped but is also a shaping force on the artist. *Tender Buttons* is not only an homage to the domestic but is also a record of domesticity's own influence on subjectivity. Here, Stein presents a domesticity that is not purely inert material to be molded by the aesthetic project; the domestic of *Tender Buttons* clearly retains some trace of its previous incarnations—the lingering images of violence being only one example—but it also yields to Stein's aestheticization.

Stein, Barnes, and Marinetti rediscover, then, a sense of the dangers of domesticity. For all three authors, the latent extremities of the domestic sphere help to redeem it from its bourgeois habituation and restore to domesticity, and to everyday life more generally, a feeling of vitality and excitement. Along with this excitement, of course, come the threats and anxieties that were carefully repressed in Victorian bourgeois domesticity. Marinetti's, Barnes's, and Stein's varying treatments of the domestic obviously demonstrate their individual relations to the modernist aesthetic project but also reveal their various artistic visions as these play out in the laboratory of the living room and the kitchen. A closer look at these texts will prove revealing about their projects and visions, aesthetic as well as social and political. More broadly, an examination of this key but neglected issue—domesticity—will crucially expand our vision of modernist literature and its concerns.

Chapter 2
Domestic Transgressions: F.T. Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook*

My interpretation of F.T. Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932) contests those readings which take Marinetti's work to be an uncritical restatement of various ideologies of domination—fascism, misogyny, and political and capitalist imperialisms. Certainly, each of these ideologies has an influence on Marinetti's work. However, such readings fail to recognize Marinetti's ability to embrace the contradictions of these forces—and of those in his own work—and thus ignore the consequences of Marinetti's destructive affirmations: his undermining of the finite, contained, pure bourgeois self; revelation of gaps in colonialist logic; and enthusiastic dismantling of the savage/civilized dichotomy. In *The Futurist Cookbook*, we certainly see objectified images of the other—especially women and Africans—such as edible images of “The Jumping Askari (An East African Soldier)” (168) and “Beautiful Nude Food Portrait” (115), among others. Likewise, there are suggestions in the text that the consumption of such images is a form of symbolic domination and control: a triumph over “the fugitive eternal feminine imprisoned in the stomach” (28).¹ However, these images are accompanied by others so exaggerated that they threaten to form a critique of the ideologies—capitalism, colonialism, fascism—that they seem to promote. Marinetti intensifies the logic of capitalism in the conspicuous consumption which characterizes the *Cookbook*'s meals, and such cartoonish recipes as “The Cannibals sign up at Geneva” (which consists of a buffet of raw meats) make

¹ “L'eterno femminile fuggente imprigionato nello stomaco,” p. 19 of F.T. Marinetti e Fillia, *La Cucina Futurista*, Milano: Longanesi, 1986. All further quotations in Italian will be from this edition.

manifest the prejudices of the imperialist system. By pointedly extending, exaggerating, or reversing the logic of these systems through the meals of his *Cookbook*, Marinetti both calls attention to the contradictions of and tests the limits of the logic. The consequent revelations of *The Futurist Cookbook* follow not from studied, carefully reasoned analyses but rather from Marinetti's destructive affirmation of these ideologies. By so enthusiastically embracing and celebrating all aspects of these systems, Marinetti threatens to undermine them, since his celebrations encompass those aspects—prejudices, exclusions, violences, inconsistencies—typically obfuscated in affirmative portrayals of capitalism, colonialism, and fascism.

The conspicuous consumption that Marinetti describes in his *Cookbook* offers transformative pleasures—the consumer will be left “unencumbered, liberated, empty and bursting” (29)²—that are not typically associated with domesticity. However, in *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti's “lyric obsession with matter” (*SW* 87) focuses on domesticity and domestic objects, and Marinetti ascribes a transformative potential to the domestic sphere. Many aspects of domesticity make it an especially suitable object for Marinetti's aesthetic reconsideration. For instance, domestic life is central to the bourgeois lifestyle; thus, Marinetti's aesthetic revivification of the domestic both rescues it from the stultifying isolation of the bourgeois home and communicates an unmistakable critique of the bourgeoisie. In addition, the domestic sphere offers Marinetti (and Stein and Barnes, as well) a site ripe for desublimation, because it harbors so many powerful but usually obfuscated tensions: those about gender and social change, colonialism and

² “sgombro, liberato, vuoto e colmo” (20).

political policy, class status, and personal anxieties. The domestic sphere is also an ideal site for Marinetti's reconsideration of selfhood—his rejection of a bourgeois model of selfhood as finite and contained in favor of a fragmented Futurist self—because domesticity plays such a crucial role in identity formation. Most notably, domestic space is simultaneously the site where self-identity is formed *and* an arena of significant threat to that self's integrity in the form of Oedipal crises, uncanny fears, castration anxiety, and intense pleasures. Marinetti is also drawn to the domestic since it is defined by strict boundaries and order and therefore offers numerous opportunities for transgression. These boundaries—the sharp distinction between public and private spheres, between interior and exterior (of the bourgeois home), between insider and outsider (to the home, to the family), and, of course, between the bourgeois everyday and aesthetics—present Marinetti with an opportunity to dismantle the traditional limits of the domestic and consequently to unleash the forces which underlie it: excessive desires, obsessive passions, anxiety, violence. By releasing these energies, Marinetti makes them available for reappropriation in the service of his aesthetic project and specifically available for a critique of the bourgeoisie.

Critics of Marinetti fail to note the transformative possibilities that Marinetti proposes for the domestic in *The Futurist Cookbook*, and they also neglect to realize that Marinetti's project offers a test case for the Futurist aesthetic. Presumably, if the Futurist aesthetic is capable of aestheticizing the domestic—a sphere of low, earthy, quotidian concerns—then its transformative potential is boundless. As I noted in Chapter 1, Peter Bürger points to the avant-garde's attempt to reconnect art and everyday life; he

characterizes “the European avant-garde movements . . . as an attack on the status of art in bourgeois society” and notes that “the avant-gardistes demand that art become practical once again” (49). Critics have overlooked Marinetti’s place within such an avant-garde project; instead, they enact symptomatic readings which emphasize Marinetti’s work as political propaganda or as an allegory of domination. One such critic, Peter Nicholls, recalls Bürger’s assertions and pointedly rejects any *positively* transformative potential of Futurism:

It has often been argued, and with particular force by Peter Bürger, that the achievement of the avant-garde (he thinks primarily of Surrealism) is to call into question the very institution of art, to undermine aesthetic autonomy by seeking to make art part of the ‘praxis of life’. The disadvantage of this strategy, as we saw with Futurism, is that it can grasp the present only as a moment of destruction—destruction of the other or, ultimately, of the self. (109)

Instead, as I argue in this chapter, an examination of *The Futurist Cookbook* clearly shows that the present is not a moment of destruction for Marinetti but is instead a moment of creation and transformation: of foods into meals, of traditional self into Futurist selfhood, of the cookbook into an aesthetic manifesto, and of domesticity into an aestheticized realm. Throughout his work, Marinetti celebrates the moment of artistic creation for its dynamism *and* its irreproducibility; it is for precisely this aesthetic that

Futurism is frequently cited as a precursor to contemporary performance art.³ Nicholls mistakes these same aesthetic commitments in Marinetti's work for a love of destruction, rather than recognizing Marinetti's celebration of impermanence.⁴ The meals of *The Futurist Cookbook* allow Marinetti to explore both the ephemeral nature of art and of pleasure and the aesthetic potential of the domestic sphere.

The few scholars who comment directly on *The Futurist Cookbook* have offered symptomatic readings similar to Nicholls's, presenting the *Cookbook* as the allegorical annihilation of Futurism's "others" or, more concretely, as serving nationalist Italy's interwar policies. In *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising Under Fascism*, Karen Pinkus briefly discusses *The Futurist Cookbook* in the context of Italian culture during the 1920s and 1930s (the 1932 publication of the *Cookbook* locates it squarely within Pinkus's period of interest). Pinkus argues that Marinetti's call in the *Cookbook* for the abolition of pasta (dependent upon importation of foreign wheat) in favor of Italian-grown rice was his response to Italian government programs to reduce Italian grain consumption.⁵

³ For further discussion of the connection between Futurism and performance art, see chap. 1, "Futurism," in RoseLee Goldberg, *Performance Art: From Futurism to Present* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988).

⁴ At the same time, one must note the tension between Marinetti's celebration of impermanence and his adoption of the cookbook form, the most obvious formal quality of which is the infinite repeatability of its recipes. Many of the meals of *The Futurist Cookbook* would be impossible to reproduce, due to their use of rare ingredients or elaborate settings or to their heavy reliance on chance for the progress of the meal.

⁵ Marinetti's project to "free Italy from expensive foreign grain" through the abolition of pasta is also motivated by his feeling that pasta "ties today's Italians with its tangled threads to Penelopes's slow looms and to somnolent old sailing-ships in search of wind" (37 *FC*). The connection that Marinetti draws between a reliance on foreign grain and Italy's historical past is more fact than bombast: Reay Tannahill points out in her massive study *Food in History* that "it took 14 million bushels of wheat a year to feed the people

Pinkus interprets Marinetti's work—as does Nicholls—as an allegorical representation of mastery; she notes “the conflation of geometrical forms, blackness, and feminine sexuality in general” in the *Cookbook* and argues that the Othered body constructed through this conflation “is intimately linked with the question of national dominance” (96). This mastery is clearly gendered, Pinkus suggests, and the abundance of food in the *Cookbook* is “a way of overcoming (male) depression” (96). In her very brief, two-page discussion of *The Futurist Cookbook*, Cinzia Sartini Blum labels it symptomatic not of male depression but of a Futurist interwar “escapist tendency,” part of a project intended to distract “mass audiences preoccupied with socioeconomic problems” (135). Finally, Paolo Possiedi's article “La cucina futurista”—structured primarily as an introduction to the text for the unfamiliar reader—notes “the coarse priapic symbolism” of some recipes and “the frat humor that unfortunately animated the Futurists” (44).⁶ All of these critics portray *The Futurist Cookbook* as symptomatic: of an adolescent sense of humor, of an urge to dominate, of depression, of escapism, or of political complicity.

In pursuing such rigidly symptomatic readings, these critics interpret Marinetti's work as a transparent vehicle for various ideologies of domination, and they consequently fail to recognize the potential of Marinetti's exaggerated images to undermine those ideologies by revealing their inconsistencies. Pinkus's explanation that the language of *The Futurist Cookbook* “might well have been lifted from one of [the Italian

of Rome in Augustus's time . . . One third of it came from Egypt, and most from Sicily and North Africa. . . . Wheat was a factor not only in territorial expansion but in the history of seafaring” (72).

⁶ Thank you to Pino Natale for translating Possiedi's article into English for me.

government's] sugar campaign advertisements" (96) and Blum's characterization of *The Futurist Cookbook* as "escapist" (135) ignore the aesthetic commitments behind those of Marinetti's maneuvers that might appear to have merely political motivations. In addition, their haste to read Marinetti's work as a tool of a larger economic project—that of the Italian government or of capitalism itself—leads these critics to ignore Marinetti's and *The Futurist Cookbook's* utopian vision. In *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti is explicit about his expectations of a future when humankind will not have to struggle to produce nourishment for itself, and when everyday nutrition will be provided "through equivalent nutrients provided free by the State, in powder or pills, albumoid compounds, synthetic fats and vitamins" (38).⁷

Nicholls in particular fails to recognize Marinetti's technique of destructive affirmation and instead reads Marinetti's work as enthusiastically and uncritically supportive of these ideologies. For instance, Nicholls's insistence that Futurism strives "to make the subject a transparent vehicle of capitalist modernity" (98-99) ignores the divergence of Marinetti's aesthetic from that of capitalism. While Marinetti may frequently voice a love for war—as in the infamous point # 9 of "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism," which announces "We will glorify war—the world's only

⁷ "mediante equivalenti nutritivi gratuiti di Stato, in polvere o pillole, composti albuminoidei, grassi sintetici e vitamine" (29-30). Karen Pinkus suggests points of commonality between "Marinetti's futurist pill diet" (99) and "the purgative blood cures and laxatives for weight loss recommended by fascist 'science'" (98), noting that "pills are marketed within fascist 'science' as a kind of morning-after solution for consumptive binges" (98). While Marinetti does claim in *The Futurist Cookbook* that eating these foods will strengthen bodies, promote agility, and will not make people "heavy, brutish [. . .] slow, pessimistic" (33) like passéist food, weight loss is not a goal he specifically endorses or promotes.

hygiene—militarism, patriotism, the destructive gesture of freedom-bringers, beautiful ideas worth dying for, and scorn for woman” (*SW* 42)—he does so not because war feeds the capitalist industrial complex but, rather, because it feeds Marinetti’s love for danger, chance, and agonistic conflict.⁸ Unquestionably, this love of the aleatory—and the consequent privileging of the loss of control—is not a capitalist virtue; instead, capitalism promotes strict control and regulation. In its aesthetic commitment to the aleatory, Futurism thus anticipates surrealism, a chance-loving and avowedly anti-capitalist avant-garde.

The danger in a reading such as Nicholls’s is, of course, its strictly schematic nature: the attempt to correlate aspects of the Futurist aesthetic—the rejection of history, an embracing of contamination, and the excesses and fragmentation of the self—with capitalist ideology. In contrast, Frederic Jameson maintains—in the context of his discussion of a postmodern aesthetic—that these same aesthetic criteria are politically unstable, liable to be coopted in service of differing and even mutually exclusive ideologies.⁹ Georges Bataille makes a similar point about the political ambiguity of

⁸ Obviously, the Futurists’ “scorn for woman” will be central to the ambiguities of *The Futurist Cookbook*, in that Marinetti will maintain a posture of dominance even while embracing a sphere (and a genre) typically associated with women.

⁹ Jameson, of course, uses slightly different (and varying) terminology in his discussion. He asserts that “I take it as axiomatic that ‘modernist history’ is the first casualty and mysterious absence of the postmodernism period” (xi) and later comments that postmodern biographical historiography “substitutes the horizontal for the vertical, space for time, system for depth” (307). He notes the “constitutive impurity of all postmodernism theory,” which, he says, “must include the foreign body of alien content”(xii). This same lack of cohesiveness and imperviousness marks the postmodern subject; Jameson claims that “the alienation of the subject [in modernity] is displaced by

excess, which he calls “expenditure.” While unproductive expenditure assaults the bourgeois “principle of balanced accounts” (118), expenditure can also bolster the capitalist class system through the “ostentatious loss” that is the “ultimate function” (123) of wealth. Futurism embodies and anticipates the political ambiguities of postmodernism: it is neither quite so utopian as Bürger’s theories would suggest nor as complicit with capitalism as Nicholls insists. While Marinetti clearly anticipates a utopian moment of freedom from everyday necessity (thus seeming to embody Bürger’s utopian ideals), he also explicitly supports the Italian government’s economic policies regarding wheat and rice production (thus seeming to be complicit with capitalist and fascist ideologies as Nicholls suggests). At the same time, at other moments in *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti explicitly endorses excessive consumption of wheat products, an act he has condemned only pages before. Such self-contradictions suggest that Marinetti is devoted more to an aesthetics of transgression, excess, and flux and to a logic of contradiction than to a specific political or ideological system. An examination of the meals of the *Cookbook* will reveal that Marinetti privileges transgression over consistency or coherence and that he proffers excess, flux, and aleatory danger as means to achieve self-objectification and, consequently, self-transcendence.

To appreciate fully Marinetti’s project in *The Futurist Cookbook*, one must note that this was not Marinetti’s first gesture towards an aesthetic reconsideration of domesticity; he first pursued such concerns in his early essays. However, in a predictable Marinettian self-contradiction, Marinetti figures food in this early work as a residua of

the latter’s fragmentation” (14) in postmodernity. In a different formulation, Jameson

the bourgeoisie which must be overcome in pursuit of an aestheticized existence. These texts portray food and domestic life, metonyms of the bourgeoisie, as suffocating, repressive, and even deadly. In “The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic” (from *War, the World’s Only Hygiene*, 1911-1915), Marinetti charts his “nausea for the antique, for the worm-eaten and moss-grown” (SW 81) and celebrates the Japanese activity of producing explosives from human bones. He calls the activity “this lovely slap in the face of all the stupid cultivators of sepulchral little kitchen gardens” (83) and thus links food and the domestic sphere to an archaic, entombed existence. This disdain for the past persists throughout Marinetti’s career and is quite apparent in *The Futurist Cookbook*. In one notable moment of “the dinner that stopped a suicide”—the first meal of the *Cookbook*—an edible sculpture entitled “Forms of Nostalgia and of the Past” collapses (the only edible sculpture to do so), “spattering everything with sticky dark liquid” (26).¹⁰ This collapse suggests Marinetti’s attitude towards the past: it is unrecoverable, and the attempt to do so is futile, leading only to the stain—by the “sticky dark liquid”—of failure. Instead, Marinetti insists throughout his career that one must embrace the present, with all of its uncertain and sometimes dangerous possibilities.

In other early texts, Marinetti continues to express his disdain for the past, and he makes clear that a concern with food in daily life is something to be overcome in favor of more elevated pursuits. In “Electrical War (A Futurist Vision-Hypothesis),” from *War, the World’s Only Hygiene*, as Marinetti describes the quotidian revolutions that will be

describes “the *decentering* of that formerly centered subject” (15).

¹⁰ “inzaccherando tutto di liquide tenebre vischiose” (15).

wrought by electricity, he looks forward to the time when “because they easily find enough to eat, men can perfect their lives in numberless antagonistic exertions” (*SW* 106). In this essay, he continues his attack on Italian “*passéism*” (108), figuring this love of the past even in an alimentary metaphor: a vague fantasy of an anarchist assassination of a czar in which the czar explodes “like the cork in a last bottle of overaged champagne” (107). Throughout this essay, Marinetti figures food—food for subsistence as well as that for elite gatherings—as both linked to the past and a *passéist* obstacle to be overcome.

However, Marinetti’s 1920 essay “Beyond Communism” signals a shift *from* his earlier idea that food is irredeemably tied to the past *to* his theory which culminates in *The Futurist Cookbook*: that what must be overcome is not food itself but rather the everyday worries over sustenance. In “Beyond Communism,” Marinetti suggests that this daily concern with nourishment must be overcome in pursuit of “our new conception of life” (*SW* 148). He then establishes a contrast between physical and spiritual hunger, asserting that “If they could relieve the hunger of every stomach, there would always be those who can overcome their lust for refined, privileged dinners. One must stimulate spiritual hunger and satiate it with a great, joyous, astonishing art” (154). In these lines, Marinetti figures both practical concerns over hunger and privileged habits of fine dining as obstacles in the pursuit of art, thus anticipating his assertion in *The Futurist Cookbook* that the State will provide daily nutrition and, consequently, “the other hours can be perfected and ennobled through study, the arts, and the anticipation of perfect meals”

(38).¹¹ Marinetti makes clear that the Futurists are capable of stimulating this hunger for art: “Thanks to us [the Futurists], the time will come when life will no longer be a simple matter of bread and labor, nor a life of idleness either, but *a work of art*” (SW 157, his italics). Marinetti’s claim that the Futurists will render life a work of art highlights the connection of his work to the larger avant-garde project of reconnecting art and life and thus indicates the power that Marinetti perceived inherent in aesthetics: its ability to raise humankind above concerns of everyday necessity.¹²

Marinetti first signals his aesthetic reconsideration of food and other everyday domestic objects not in manifesto form but in the 1916 film *Vita futurista*, which survives only in a few still photographs and in descriptions by Marinetti and the film’s director, Arnaldo Ginna (who had been hand-picked for the job by Marinetti).¹³ Sequences in the

¹¹ “Questo, essendo ridotto a due o tre ore, permette di perfezionare e nobilitare le altre ore, permette di perfezionare e nobilitare le altre ore col pensiero le arti e la pregustazione di pranzi perfetti” (30).

¹² Also interesting about Marinetti’s argument in “Beyond Communism” is the way he interlaces a staunch defense of the bourgeoisie with a harsh condemnation of the family, suggesting that his condemnation of food rests more upon his oft-noted rejection of “family feeling” than on a rejection of specifically bourgeois domesticity. Marinetti first labels as false a sharp distinction between proletariat and bourgeoisie, then defends those usually labeled as bourgeois, asserting that “Soiled and moribund bourgeoisie is an absurd description of that great mass of young, intelligent, and hard-working lower middle class” (151). His critique of the proletariat/bourgeoisie distinction rests on an implicit reference to their united service in Italy’s ranks in World War I.

¹³ According to Caroline Tisdall and Angelo Bozzolla in their study *Futurism*, “Any discussion of Futurist cinema is complicated by the sad fact that all but one of the four films have been lost. There is even confusion about the identity of the survivor, which is kept unaccountably unavailable in the Cinémathèque Française. It now seems almost certain that this film is Bragaglia’s *Thais*, but since it has remained unseen since a single showing in 1969 any assessment of its value as a film or as a contribution to Futurism has to be based, as with Bragaglia’s other two films and *Vita futurista*, on surviving still photographs, contradictory recollections, and scanty documentation” (143-45).

film which involve food or the act of eating foreshadow the aesthetic reconsideration of domestic objects in *The Futurist Cookbook* sixteen years later. The episode of *Vita futurista* that most clearly anticipates Marinetti's aesthetic reconsideration of food in *The Futurist Cookbook* is sequence 5. In Marinetti's attempts to re-vision everyday objects in this sequence, his work here seems to illustrate Shklovsky's theories of defamiliarization. Marinetti describes the sequence as follows:

Searches for inspiration—drama of objects. Marinetti and Settimelli approach strangely assorted objects very carefully in order to see them in new lights. Explorations of herrings, carrots, eggplants. *Finally* to understand these animals and vegetables by placing them completely outside their usual surroundings.

[. . .]

Discussion between a foot, a hammer, and an umbrella—extraction of human expressions from objects to project oneself into new realms of artistic expression. (*SW* 135-36)

The objects seen here “in new lights” include the foodstuffs and objects common to a bourgeois household: herrings, umbrellas, eggplants, and hammers, among others. As will be seen later in *The Futurist Cookbook*, the reconsideration of domestic objects here is coincident with a reconsideration of the human body. In their discussion of the film in the volume *Futurism*, Tisdall and Bozzolla describe the experimental elements of the film, including sequence 5 (apparently paraphrasing and quoting from director Ginna's

own description in his *Cinema e letteratura del futurismo*¹⁴): “metallic costumes worn by girls in a ‘dynamic-rhythmic’ dance in sequence 5 reflected the light and succeeded in ‘destroying the ponderousness of the bodies’” (149). This treatment of the human body foreshadows Marinetti’s approach in *The Futurist Cookbook*: the simultaneous objectification of the body, blurring of the boundaries separating human from machine (the metallic costumes), and aesthetic reconsideration of domestic objects.

The culmination of Marinetti’s project to reaestheticize domesticity is apparent in *The Futurist Cookbook*, as a look at one of his “definitive futurist dinners” will reveal. The meal, entitled “springtime meal of the word in liberty,” demonstrates Marinetti’s aesthetic reconsiderations of food as well as his advocacy of excessive, orgiastic pleasure, stimulated by art and food as surely as by erotics. Like all of the “definitive futurist dinners” proposed in the *Cookbook*, this meal is elaborately plotted, including thorough descriptions of the diners, the server, the surroundings, and the food itself. The meal has been arranged for “three young men” in “a state of literary and erotic anxiety that cannot be appeased by a normal meal,” and they have been “plunged” into this state by “Walking across a spring garden through the gentle flames of a dawn full of childish timidity” (105).¹⁵ This description focuses on the vitality of the landscape as their inspiration: the energy of the burgeoning life of spring and of the dawn, usually depicted

¹⁴ Listed in “Sources and further reading” under the subheading “Studies of individual artists” on p. 210 of Tisdall and Bozzolla. Citation reads “Ginna: Ginanni Corradini, Arnaldo (Arnaldo Ginna), *Cinema e letteratura del futurismo*. Rome 1968.”

¹⁵ “La traversata di un giardino primaverile fra i dolci fuochi di un’aurora piena di timidezze infantili, ha dato a tre giovani, vestiti di lana bianca e senza giacca, un’ansietà tra letteraria ed erotica che non può appagarsi di una colazione normale” (148).

in Marinetti's work (as in 1909's "Let's Murder the Moonshine") as inspiring "inexhaustible enthusiasm" (*SW* 48).¹⁶ These introductory lines also point to Marinetti's connection of aesthetic pleasure and physical pleasure: the young men's "literary and erotic anxiety" will be sated by food. The meal itself begins as the young men are served "a synoptic-syngustatory plate, not hot, but gently warmed, of peppers, garlic, rose petals, bicarbonate of soda, peeled bananas and cod liver oil equidistant from each other" (105).¹⁷ The very nature of these ingredients violates definitional boundaries separating foodstuffs from medicines (bicarbonate of soda and cod liver oil); and their presentation—the ingredients so precisely "equidistant from each other"—and the inclusion of rose petals blurs the distinction separating food and medicine from aesthetics. Helpfully, Marinetti includes explicit directions for interpreting the symbolic value of the meal, and he makes clear that Futurist meals do not actually need to be consumed to be considered successful. Marinetti asks: "Will they eat it all? Will they taste just parts of it? Will they grasp the imaginative relationships without tasting anything? It's up to them" (105).¹⁸ Then, as he projects the progress of the meal, Marinetti speculates,

¹⁶ In Marinetti's work, dawn usually is a moment of explosive, transforming activity. It is at dawn when the Futurists in "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" rush out to begin their high-speed road trip. Likewise, in *The Futurist Cookbook's* "the dinner that stopped a suicide," Onesti's devouring of the last morsels of *The Curves of the World and Their Secrets* takes place at dawn.

¹⁷ "un piatto sinottico-singustativo di peperoni, aglio, petali di rose, bicarbonato di soda, banane sbucciate e olio di fegato di merluzzo, equidistanti" (148).

¹⁸ "Mangeranno tutto? Ne assaggeranno delle parti? Ne intuiranno i rapporti fantastici senza assaggiare neanche? A volontà!" (148).

Instantly they make an unusual metaphorical connection between the peppers (symbol of rustic strength) and the cod liver oil (symbol of ferocious northern seas and the need to cure sick lungs) so they try dipping the peppers in the oil. (105)¹⁹

In this passage, Marinetti has done a good deal of our interpretive work for us. His reading indicates both that the foods themselves do have symbolic significance and that this significance is often tied to place, to the location of the food's origins. These significances rely on a fairly traditional symbology, but it is also clear that Marinetti constructs this meal around novelty and around the rethinking of everyday items that unexpected contrasts can inspire.

The final moments of the meal illustrate Marinetti's conflation (reiterated throughout *The Futurist Cookbook*) of the pleasures offered variously by aesthetics, erotics, and food. The meal ends with a scene of absolutely unrestrained, orgiastic pleasure, equally inspired by aesthetics ("illuminating adjectives"), erotics (the server who is a "a buxom country girl in her twenties"), and the food ("a huge bowl of strawberries floating in well-sweetened Grignolino wine") (105). After the country girl serves the strawberries in wine by pouring them over the heads of the young men, they end up eating, licking, drinking, mopping themselves up, fighting each other across the table with illuminating adjectives, verbs shut between full

¹⁹ "Formeranno subito un rapporto metaforico inusitato tra i peperoni (simbolo di forza campestre) e l'olio di fegato di merluzzo (simbolo di mari nordici feroci e necessità

stops, abstract noises and animal cries which seduce all the beasts of springtime, as they ruminate, snore, grumble, whistle, bray and chirrup in turn. (105)²⁰

The release offered by these pleasures is substantial: the young men are transformed beyond the boundaries of conventional language as well as beyond the social niceties of the dining room. In this meal and throughout *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti continually blurs the boundaries between these (and other) pleasures and offers pleasure and its transgressions—of social norms as well as of bodily boundaries—as a recipe for self-transformation.

Pleasure in Excess

The Futurist Cookbook is marked by excess: both in Marinetti's representational strategies (his revelation through exaggeration) and, more crucially, in the indulgences of and the pleasures available to the *Cookbook's* diners. That is, the food of Futurist cooking is characterized by incredible excess (quantities of ingredients, size of meals, form and combinations of foods), and Marinetti depicts, as well, the excessive behaviors—both gustatory and sexual—of the diners. Through those diners, Marinetti highlights the transformative pleasures accessible through these indulgences. Theories of

curative di polmoni malati). Provino allora a intingere il peperone nell'olio di fegato di merluzzo" (148-49).

²⁰ "Entri allora la contadinotta ventenne e grassa, recando fra le braccia una grande bacinella piena di fragole nuotanti nel Grignolino ben zuccherato. . . . S'ingegnino loro finalmente a mangiare, leccare, bere, smacchiarsi, rissando sulla tavola con aggettivi illuminanti, verbi chiusi fra due punti, rumorismi astratti, urli animaleschi che sedurranno

the fetish, particularly those of Sigmund Freud and Georges Bataille, and Mikhail Bakhtin's discussion of the grotesque body hint at the pleasures and transgressions accessible through this excess. Since, as we shall see, the pleasures of *The Futurist Cookbook* transcend conventional notions of repression and release, the Marinettian fetish transcends the limitations of the static, contained, defensive Freudian fetish and is instead dynamic and polymorphously perverse. Moreover, by focusing on the pleasures offered by an excessive indulgence (or, as we see in the "extremist banquet," merely excessive waste), Marinetti pointedly offers a model of pleasure that is antithetical to a bourgeois pleasure principle structured around regulation. In so doing, Marinetti further undermines the bourgeois self, a self based upon coherence and self-control.

The excesses of the text are particularly apparent in "the dinner that stopped a suicide," *The Futurist Cookbook's* opening sequence, whose feasting and sexual intensity mirror the characteristics of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of the grotesque body. Marinetti's depiction of the grotesque body in "the dinner" (and throughout the *Cookbook*) indicates both the transgressive nature of Futurist cooking (with the transgressions of bodily integrity suggesting transgressions in other domains as well) and the reconceptions of selfhood which stem from this transgression. "The dinner that stopped a suicide" is an account of Marinetti, Prampolini, and Fillia's attempt to prevent the suicide of a fellow Futurist, Giulio Onesti, distraught over the death of his mistress (and nervous about the impending arrival of "the other one, who resembles her . . . too

tutte le bestie della primavera, ruminanti, russanti, borbottanti, fischianti, raglianti e cinguettanti in giro" (149).

much . . . but not enough” [24]).²¹ The piece recounts the plan to reinvigorate Onesti through Futurist cooking and describes the four Futurists creating twenty-two edible sculptures. The grocery list for the evening’s meal bespeaks incredible luxury and remarkable excess:

“Our ingenious hands need a hundred sacks of the following indispensable ingredients: chestnut flour, wheat flour, ground almonds, rye flour, cornmeal, cocoa powder, red pepper, sugar and eggs. Ten jars of honey, oil and milk. A quintal of dates and bananas” (24).²²

The act of eating here is just as excessive as the quantities of the food itself; when Onesti is served the sculpture intended to save him, *The Curves of the World and Their Secrets*, he eats from midnight until the following dawn.

Such excesses mark both this meal and its participants as part of the grotesque tradition. In Bakhtin’s account, “exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are generally considered fundamental attributes of the grotesque style,” the style of grotesque realism which features the grotesque body, and he asserts that “such exaggeration . . . is most strongly expressed in picturing the body and food” (303).²³ Specifically, exaggerated

²¹ “dell’altra che le rassomiglia . . . troppo . . . ma non abbastanza” (11).

²² ““occorrono alle nostre mani geniali cento sacchi dei seguenti ingredienti indispensabili: farina di castagne, farina di grano, farina di mandorle, farina di segala, farina di grano turco, polvere di cacao, pepe rosso, zucchero e uova. Dieci giarre di olio, miele e latte. Un quintale di datteri e di banane”” (11).

²³ Bakhtin himself contends that both the focus of his study and, thus, its applicability are limited; he asserts that his theories involve “no commonplace, privately consumed food and drink, partaken of by individuals” (278). At the same time, he maintains that imagery of food and drink retains its significance despite its context: “Bread and wine

eating and drinking (as well as sexual activity, of which more below) mark the body as possessing an “open unfinished nature” and, so, as transgressive: “the body transgresses [in the act of eating] its own limits: it swallows, devours, rends the world apart, is enriched and grows at the world’s expense” (281). Thus, the excesses of eating in “the dinner” and throughout *The Futurist Cookbook* reinforce Marinetti’s deconstruction of a coherent, closed, discrete, controlled bourgeois self, in both the transgressions of the body’s boundaries through eating and in the loss of self-control signaled by such indulgence. It is important to note that while this excess may *seem* like sheer dominance—the grotesque body “grows at the world’s expense”—a violation of the self’s own boundaries, which are so tightly maintained in the bourgeois subject, is requisite for such growth. Marinetti continually models a self in *The Futurist Cookbook* which is enriched by its own transgression and for whom pleasure comes not through self-control and regulation but rather through excess and the energies released in these transgressions.

Marinetti also establishes the transgressive nature of the body in *The Futurist Cookbook* through his representations of an excessive sexuality: both in the physical features of the edible sculptures and through sexual behaviors of the diners themselves. As I mentioned above, sexual activity is another mark of the grotesque body, “a body in the act of becoming, never finished, never completed” (Bakhtin 317); and Bakhtin emphasizes that genital organs and other such “excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices” (318) are the means through which the grotesque body “outgrows its own self,

have *their own truth, their own irresistible tendency* toward superabundance. They have

transgressing its own body” (317). Such bodily transgression, here in the form of eating that is conflated with sexual activity, is particularly apparent in “the dinner that stopped a suicide,” in both Onesti’s reaction to and the form of *The Curves of the World and Their Secrets*. The sculpture itself is described as follows:

Marinetti, Prampolini and Fillia, in collaboration, had inoculated it with the gentle magnetism of the most beautiful women and the most beautiful Africas ever dreamed of. Its sloping architecture of soft curves following one upon the other to heaven concealed the grace of the world’s most feminine little feet in a thick and sugary network of green oasis-palms, whose tufts were mechanically interlocked by cog-wheels. Further down could be heard the happy chattering of Birds of Paradise. It was a motorized edible sculpture, perfect. (26-27)²⁴

This description emphasizes the sculpture’s incorporation of sexualized aspects of a female form: feminine little feet, curves, and “two great emerald eyes” (26),²⁵ significantly the same color as those of the lover whose impending arrival inspired the crisis. The speech that precedes Onesti’s devouring of the sculpture emphasizes its sexual implications and, in true Marinettian style, exaggerates the aggression of sexual

the indestructible connotation of victory and merriment” (291-92, my italics).

²⁴ “Marinetti, Prampolini e Fillia, collaborando, vi avevano inoculato il magnetismo soave delle donne più belle e delle più belle Afriche sognate. La sua architettura obliqua di curve molli inseguentisi in cielo nascondeva la grazia di tutti i piedini femminili in una folta e zuccherina orologeria verde di palme di oasi che meccanicamente ingranavano i loro ciuffi a ruota dentata. Più sotto si sentiva la garrula felicità dei ruscelli paradisiaci. Era un mangiabile complesso plastico a motore, perfetto” (15).

²⁵ “due grandi occhi di smeraldo” (15).

activity, already implicit in the sculpture's conflation of sexual and territorial conquest. The three sculptors announce: "We love women. Often we have tortured ourselves with a thousand greedy kisses in our anxiety to eat one of them. [. . .] Their hearts, if clenched with the supreme pleasure of love, seemed to us the ideal fruit to bite to chew to suck" (28).²⁶ The additional conflation announced in these lines—of sexual contact made through the act of eating—is cemented through the description of Onesti eating the edible sculpture: that "he began like a lover to adore it with his lips, tongue and teeth" (29).²⁷ This line further characterizes eating as a transgression of the body's boundaries, on a par with sexual intercourse; and in the final lines of the narrative, Marinetti makes clear the pleasure and release attainable through such transgression. Marinetti describes Onesti after he has spent hours devouring *The Curves of the World and Their Secrets*: "He felt at the same time unencumbered, liberated, empty and bursting. Enjoying and enjoyed. Possessor and possessed. Unique and complete." (29)²⁸ Certainly, anyone searching for images of mastery and domination could find them here in the image of Onesti as possessor, actively enjoying his conquest of "the most beautiful women and the most beautiful Africas ever dreamed of" (26). However, the passage has clearly been written to indicate that Onesti not only acts upon the edible sculpture, but also that the act

²⁶ "Amiamo le donne. Spesso ci siamo torturati con mille baci golosi nell'ansia di mangiarne una. Il loro cuore, se stretto dal supremo godimento d'amore, ci parve l'ideale frutto da mordere masticare suggerire" (17-18).

²⁷ "Inginocchiatosi davanti, ne iniziò l'amorosa adorazione con le labbra, la lingua e i denti" (19).

²⁸ "Era insieme sgombro, liberato, vuoto e colmo. Godente e goduto. Possessore e posseduto. Unico e totale" (20).

of eating has acted upon him, and transformed him. These lines suggest that Onesti has transgressed the conventional distance between subject and object, as he is both “Enjoying and enjoyed” and “Possessor and possessed.”

In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White maintain that bodily transgressions, such as those represented in Marinetti’s *Cookbook* (and such as those in Bakhtin’s discussion, to which they specifically refer), have broader social and political implications. Stallybrass and White assert that “transgressing the rules of hierarchy and order in any one of the domains”— which include the human body, psychic forms, geographical space, and the social order—“may have major consequences in the others” (3). Specifically, they maintain “that transgressions . . . obsessively return to somatic symbols, for these are ultimate elements of social classification itself” (26). In his *Cookbook*, Marinetti obsessively focuses on such somatic symbols—e.g. the sexual overtones of “the dinner that stopped a suicide,” the orgiastic strawberry eating in the “springtime meal of the word in liberty”—and these bodily transgressions suggest a transgression of order in the social, geopolitical, and psychological realms as well. These transgressions pervade “the dinner that stopped a suicide.” For instance, Marinetti represents imperialism, a literal form of geopolitical transgression, through “the dinner”’s reliance on colonial ingredients (to be discussed in detail later in the chapter), and he enacts a form of social transgression by so obviously bringing the political realm into the dining room and thus dismantling the illusory separation of public from private sphere. Marinetti also clearly indicates his social transgressions and points to his project of dismantling a controlled, restrained bourgeois subjectivity through the pseudonym he

assigns to the suicidal Futurist, Giulio Onesti. In Italian, *onesti* is the plural form of the adjective *onesto*, which means “honorable,” “upright,” “decent,” “respectable.” By so marking Onesti as a symbol of decency and respectability, Marinetti emphasizes the transformative potential of Futurist cooking, capable of rendering the most upright, respectable bourgeois “unencumbered, liberated, empty and bursting” (29).

Moreover, by focusing *The Futurist Cookbook* around bodily transgressions and thus repeatedly orchestrating threats to the integrity of these “ultimate elements of social classification,” Marinetti evokes all those desires, destructive impulses, erotic obsessions which are repressed in service of that integrity. Likewise, Marinetti evokes and exaggerates the sublimated aspects of the other realms: the gender politics and repressed violences of polite society, the failures and fears of colonialism, the terrors, obsessions, and self-indulgent pleasures of the psyche. But crucially, by his constant evocation of that which is transgressive, that which is beyond the bounds of polite, restrained, ordered bourgeois society, Marinetti also evokes the powerful desires and pleasures associated with the forbidden. Stallybrass and White point out about that which is forbidden or excluded in the constitution of bourgeois subjectivity that these “low domains, apparently expelled as ‘Other,’ return as the object of nostalgia, longing, and fascination [. . .] , become symbolic contents of bourgeois desire” (191). These “low domains” are key to the pleasures of Marinetti’s exaggerations and excesses in *The Futurist Cookbook*. By exaggerating that which is excluded from the bourgeois social order—sexual and gustatory excesses, interracial desire, violence—Marinetti also evokes the pleasures contingent upon that exclusion and thus further threatens the bourgeois subject for whom

such desires are inescapably “other.”

The Futurist Cookbook's pleasurable excesses can also be better understood through the concept of the fetish: an everyday object which inspires intense pleasures (as do the domestic features and food of the *Cookbook*). Marinetti's fetishism in the *Cookbook* differs significantly from the conventional Freudian notion of the fetish in that the Freudian fetish is static, defensive, contained, while Marinetti constructs a more dynamic, less rigidly fixated fetish. Freud explains in his 1927 essay “Fetishism” that the fetish is an everyday item—a foot, a shoe, velvet, fur, even a smell—which has been substituted for something that is missing: the mother's phallus, the absence of which is a constant reminder of the castration threat and must be concealed (Freud 153-54). Central to this definition of the fetish, and key to Marinetti's fetishization in *The Futurist Cookbook*, are two key roles: it transposes desire (from one object to another), and it represents and literally embodies excess. This excess resides both in the nature of fetishistic pleasures as well as the “extraordinary increase” (Freud 154) of attention (from subject to fetish object, and from original object to fetish object). In contrast to the more fluid Marinettian fetish (inspired by an endless variety of household goods), the Freudian fetish is defensive and rigidly focused on a central object: Freud notes “the case of a man whose fetish was an athletic support-belt which could also be worn as bathing drawers” (156). This fetish is not flexible—the man could not transfer his attachment to other objects—and serves, more literally than other Freudian fetishes, the purpose of concealment: “This piece of clothing covered up the genitals entirely and concealed the distinction between them [between male and female genitalia]” (156). The fetishism of

The Futurist Cookbook aims not at concealment but revelation, is based not on protection of the regulated bourgeois self but rather on an assault on the bourgeois self's boundaries. As such, Marinetti's fetish bears a closer resemblance to that described by Georges Bataille in his essay "The Notion of Expenditure." For Bataille, unproductive expenditures such as "luxury . . . spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality)" (118) are opposed to bourgeois rationality and regulation; Yve-Alain Bois says in summary of Bataille's point that "The jewel, shit, and the fetish are all on the level of sumptuary expenditure" (55). Such expenditure clearly characterizes the meals of *The Futurist Cookbook*, in which five lone diners (four of whom fall asleep and don't eat at all) are served twenty-two edible sculptures ("the dinner"), or in the "extremist banquet" wherein elaborate dishes are seen and smelled but never eaten by the tantalized and famished diners. The excesses of the fetish are apparent throughout *The Futurist Cookbook* in the constant erotic charge of the foodstuffs as well as in the orgiastic pleasure offered by the food itself. Such pleasures are evident in the final moments of "the dinner that stopped a suicide." The intensity of Onesti's pleasure and the plenitude implied by the description of him as "unencumbered, liberated, empty and bursting" (29) both suggest the heightened thrill of and the sense of plenitude (however illusory) offered by the fetish. This passage suggests that Marinetti's fetishization of the domestic yields transformative and dynamic pleasures whose intensities do not serve the preservative and regulatory function of the Freudian fetish.

Besides its potential to inspire pleasure, the fetish also signifies the perpetual transposition of desire, an operation that would appeal to Marinetti's love of flux, change,

and indestructible energy. His use of the fetish allows for the proliferation of desire and for the interchangeability of its objects. The fetish itself is a vehicle for desire: through the eroticization of the fetish, desire is constantly moving, from (absent) maternal phallus to everyday object. In Freudian fetishism, this exchange is much more restricted: from maternal phallus to shoe to another shoe, while Marinetti practices an exuberant pan-fetishism wherein everything from edible sculptures to strawberries to dining apparel to “illuminating adjectives” is fetishized. Fetishism signals a victory for representation (Freud calls it “a token of triumph” [154]) in that the fetish preserves and gives expression to a desire that is otherwise, in Freudian terms at least, beyond representation. Of course, for Marinetti, such seeming restrictions merely present further opportunities for transgression; thus, throughout the *Cookbook*, Marinetti reveals the operations of the fetish through his exaggerations of it. If the fetish is, in Robert Stoller’s description, “a story masquerading as an object” (qtd. in Gamman and Makinen 1), then Marinetti unearths that story and retells it as an epic, for both the sheer joy of exaggeration and the energies released through desublimation. Throughout the *Cookbook*, Marinetti unpacks the stories behind everyday domestic items, persons, and situations—the food, the dining room, the music that accompanies dinner, the bodies of the diners themselves—and defamiliarizes these stories through the often jarring recontextualizations of his meals. Through this process, Marinetti offers a double threat to a closed, controlled bourgeois subjectivity: the threat concealed by the fetish and the overwhelming pleasures it offers.

Marinetti announces the operation of the logic of the fetish in *The Futurist Cookbook* through his insistent narrative attention to stereotypical fetish objects,

especially women's feet and legs. Feet are prominently featured in "the dinner," as part of the meal's matrix of sexual images linked to sites of cultural contestation. For instance, in Onesti's sculptural salvation, *The Curves of the World and Their Secrets*, an African landscape and machine parts are united with "the grace of the world's most feminine little feet" (27) to yield a hybrid figure built to order for Futurist fantasy. Here, Marinetti links three of the most pervasive passions in the Futurist mythopoeia: the female body, Africa, and machines. The medium of sculpture allows the Futurists to create such a figure, but it is specifically the medium of food that makes possible the literal consumption of this potent metaphor. *Lightness of Flight*, another of the edible sculptures of "the dinner," "offered the watching mouths 29 silvered lady's ankles mixed with wheel hubs and propeller blades" (26).²⁹ This sculpture, like *The Curves*, unites women's feet with the machine: Futurism's "great faithful devoted mistress" (*SW* 90). In these sculptures in *The Futurist Cookbook's* first meal, Marinetti introduces a representational strategy which shapes the *Cookbook*: by loading already heavily symbolic images with even more significance, and by then linking several such images, Marinetti destabilizes the conventional obfuscations of the fetish through excess. Such a process furthers Marinetti's project of desublimating bourgeois domesticity, and it unleashes another threat to the coherence of the bourgeois subject. Marinetti preserves the pleasures and obsessiveness of the fetish even while he undermines the sublimations upon which the fetish and the bourgeois subject are based.

Besides feet and thighs, the food of *The Futurist Cookbook* is molded into other

²⁹ "offriva alle bocche guardanti 29 argentee caviglie di donna miste di mozzi di ruote e

highly sexual images—mainly breasts and penises—with an exuberance and exaggeration that suggest both the pleasure of the fetish and the physical hyperbole of the grotesque body. The recipes—Strawberry Breasts (which “mak[e] it possible to bite into an ideal multiplication of imaginary breasts” [156]³⁰), Italian Breasts in the Sunshine, Sculpted Meat, and Excited Pig—make possible the cannibalistic wish that Marinetti expresses in “the dinner that stopped a suicide.”³¹ The Futurists’ sexualized and cannibalistic impulse towards women indicates another desublimation, the pleasures of which drive the *Cookbook*: throughout the text, Marinetti relishes both aggressive and sexual behaviors, and the breast recipes allow him to unite these impulses.

Of the penis recipes, the most elaborate one and the one most prominently featured in the *Cookbook* is Sculpted Meat, a dish which makes prominent an exaggerated sexuality in the dining room and which links this phallic sexuality with Italian patriotic pride: the dish is “a synthetic interpretation of the orchards, gardens and pastures of Italy” (143). This dish is characterized by its various excesses—in size, in number of ingredients—that mark it as grotesque; certainly, its appearance as a gigantic phallic meatloaf suggests elements of Bakhtin’s grotesque body. The dish’s form is exaggeratedly phallic, consisting of a large, molded cylinder of meat standing upright on a plate. As with many recipes in *The Futurist Cookbook*, this one is also excessive in the

d’ali d’eliche” (14).

³⁰ “Altre fragole fresche sotto la copertura di ricotta per mordere un’ideale moltiplicazione di mammelle immaginarie” (225).

³¹ In “the dinner that stopped a suicide,” the Futurists yell, “We love women. Often we have tortured ourselves with a thousand greedy kisses in our anxiety to eat one of them.”

quantity of ingredients included: the large rissole of minced veal is “stuffed with eleven different kinds of cooked vegetables,” “crowned with a thick layer of honey,” “supported at the bottom by a sausage ring” which itself “rests on three golden spheres of chicken meat” (143).³² Perhaps the most interesting excess of this recipe is the number of times it appears in the text: it is repeated, in full, five separate times, and it is mentioned even more frequently in narratives of Futurist dinners. This repetition serves to defamiliarize the food, to make the reader note more carefully the dish’s unusual (and perhaps unappetizing) combinations: the odd, likely mushy texture of a minced veal meatloaf, combined with the cloying sweetness of honey, all enclosing an overwhelming collection of eleven cooked vegetables. By including this recipe over and over again in his *Cookbook*, Marinetti repeatedly undermines a polite, restrained bourgeois domestic aesthetic and substitutes instead a desublimated domesticity, replete with sexual overtones, disconcerting images and tastes. The dish’s transgressive nature is also suggested through its name. The name of the dish, “Carneplastico” in Italian, plays on the dual meaning of the Italian *carne*, which indicates both “meat” (like chicken or veal) and “flesh” (including human flesh), thus enhancing the transgressive nature of the recipe through its blurring of animal and human. Sculpted Meat’s grotesque form and composition thus indicate the transgressive possibilities of Futurist food, and the *Cookbook*’s obsessive, almost fetishistic return to savor the recipe again and again

³² “ripiena di undici qualità diverse di verdure cotte. Questo cilindro disposto verticalmente nel centro del piatto, è incoronato con uno spessore di miele (C) e sostenuto alla base da un anello di salsiccia (B), che poggia su tre sfere dorate (D) di carne di pollo” (208). The capital letters in parentheses refer to a diagram of the dish in

suggests the potential pleasures offered through the transgression.

Both the fragmentation and exaggeration of the grotesque body as well as the unproductive expenditure of the fetish shape the “extremist banquet,”³³ a meal in which “no one eats, and the only satiety comes from perfumes” (116).³⁴ Marinetti’s description of the dinner guests—“five women, five men and a neuter”³⁵—focuses on features of the grotesque body, its “excrescences (sprouts, buds) and orifices,” especially fingers with which the guests operate the meal’s electronic gadgetry and mouths. The diners are reduced variously to “the guests’ fingers” (116) or to “all eleven starving palates” (117).³⁶ The most pointed instance of Marinetti’s embodiment of the diners through their excrescences and orifices comes near the end of the meal, after the neuter has placed an order for food:

But the order is canceled at the same time as the sea and all its silver fish, by the powerful scent of roses so curvilinear and succulent that the eleven mouths, left until then thoughtful or astonished, begin feverishly chewing the emptiness. (117)³⁷

This fragmentation of the guests’ bodies suggests a pleasure that is accessible through an

the Italian version. The English translation maintains these letters in the text while omitting the illustration to which they refer.

³³ “pranzo oltranzista”

³⁴ “in cui non mangeranno, ma si sazieranno soltanto di profumi” (165).

³⁵ “5 donne, 5 uomini e un neutro” (165).

³⁶ “dita dei convitati” (165), “tutti gli undici palati affamati” (168).

³⁷ “Ma la frase viene cancellata insieme col mare e relativa argentea pescheria da prepotenti profumi di rose talmente curvilinei e carnosi che le undici bocche, rimaste fino allora pensose o attonite, si mettono a masticare febbrilmente il vuoto” (167).

energetic and sensual incoherence rather than through a tightly controlled, coherent self.

While the “extremist banquet” stands as a testament to the pleasures of excess, Marinetti celebrates here a pleasure that is sensual rather than sexual, olfactory (and synesthetic) rather than gustatory. In its refusal of gustatory pleasures, this meal is the inverse of a Bakhtinian feast focused on eating and drinking, but the meal’s indulgences are no less excessive and the diners’ bodies no less transgressed by a constant onslaught of carefully contrived and symbolic perfumes. The meal’s setting seems especially extravagant: “a villa constructed for the purpose by Prampolini . . . on a tongue of land dividing the most lakelike of lakes . . . from the widest and most marine of seas” (116).³⁸ The guests’ aesthetic experience is to be enhanced by the scents from the lake and the sea, as well as by those from “a hothouse and its carousel of rare, odoriferous plants gliding past on tracks” (116).³⁹ The food in this meal—“three vaporizing food sculptures”⁴⁰—represents an even more conspicuous excess than that in “the dinner that stopped a suicide,” since this food is just as elaborate, just as luxurious as “the dinner”’s edible sculptures, yet is never even tasted by the guests. The “extremist banquet” thus highlights the conspicuous consumption of *The Futurist Cookbook*. By refusing actual consumption in favor of unproductive expenditure, Marinetti signals a more broadly

³⁸ “una villa costruita appositamente de Prampolini (su concezione di Marinetti), sopra una lingua di terra che divida il più lacustre dei laghi, tardo pigro solitario putrefatto, dal più ampio e marino dei mari” (165).

³⁹ “serra calda e relativo girotondo di piante odorifere rare scorrenti su binari” (165).

⁴⁰ “tre complessi-plastici vaporizzanti” (166).

defined pleasure, one that is inspired variously by “life, flesh, luxury, death” (117)⁴¹ and which refutes both a pleasure and a self defined by restraint and exclusion.

The Fragmented, Unregulated Agent

Marinetti’s thrill in contradiction and in excess (and the pleasures they bring) is an aspect of his aesthetic, which is centered on chance and accident, conflict and danger, flux and energy, and which privileges those forces over more secondary concerns of bodily integrity or a coherent literary “I.” The resultant model of agency is based upon this same energy and takes strength from accident, conflict, and danger, even when those forces threaten the self. Such a self is, by definition, in direct opposition to a bourgeois model of selfhood based on stasis, preservation, and strict regulation of desires and energies. The self that Marinetti fashions in *The Futurist Cookbook* is one, as I have discussed, that is remade by and thrives upon transgression, that has an “open, unfinished nature.” This Marinettian self (or Futurist self, as I call it elsewhere) is in excess of its self-creations and can take strength from the obstacles that threaten it: accident, conflict, danger. The Marinettian self’s agency is based upon the energy and vitality that are central to Marinetti’s aesthetic and embraces even those energies whose intensity threatens the self. The meals and recipes of *The Futurist Cookbook* reveal Marinetti’s model of modernist aesthetic freedom taken to predictably self-contradictory and self-destructive extremes.

By promoting excessive and even self-destructive appetites, Marinetti models a

⁴¹ “vita carne lussuria morte” (168).

self for whom coherence and the integrity of the body are extraneous concerns, and he thus also challenges the boundaries of capitalism, whose regulated exchanges promote a similarly regulated subject. If the Marinettian self indeed “embodied the larger, more devastating logic of capital” as Nicholls contends, then it is certainly *not* the tightly regulated self of monopoly capitalism but rather the self of late capitalism whose “more joyous intensities” (Jameson 29) would threaten the regulated self. Marinetti had indicated a reconsideration of selfhood, at least literary selfhood, early in his career, in the “Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature” (1912), when he moved to “Destroy the *I* in literature” and “To substitute for human psychology, now exhausted, the lyric obsession with matter” (87). Marinetti’s interest in destroying the literary “I” and in the aesthetic reconsideration of objects—“the lyric obsession with matter”—culminate in *The Futurist Cookbook* in which the literary “I” is undermined through self-transgression and through a reconception of authorship (signaled by the collaborative nature of the text).

Marinetti’s love of flux and danger, and his de-emphasis of a coherent self or body, are apparent in many works prior to the 1932 *Futurist Cookbook*. This aesthetic clearly shaped the 1909 “Founding and Manifesto of Futurism,” with its exultation of “aggressive action, a feverish insomnia, the racer’s stride, the mortal leap, the punch and the slap” (*SW* 41). In this text, Marinetti makes especially clear his advocacy of change, even if that change comes at his own expense. He writes of himself and his fellow Futurists: “When we are forty, other younger and stronger men will probably throw us in the wastebasket like useless manuscripts—we want it to happen!” (*SW* 43). Marinetti expresses a similar sentiment in “The Birth of a Futurist Aesthetic” (from *War, the*

World's Only Hygiene, 1911-1915), when he insists: "Put your trust in Progress, which is always right even when it is wrong, because it is movement, life, struggle, hope" (*SW* 82). Particularly apparent in such assertions is the tension, always present in Marinetti's work, between a self which embraces its own dissolution (or obsolescence) and the self which wants to record its own obsolescence.

This same love of flux and danger is apparent in several meals of *The Futurist Cookbook*, especially the "dynamic dinner" and the "new year's eve dinner." Both meals stage elaborate rejections of nostalgia and inaction, and both include violent outbursts directed towards those who prefer passéism and stasis over energy and change. In the "dynamic dinner" (a narrative taken, according to the text, from Marinetti's novel *The Steel Alcove*), Marinetti relates his attempt "to escape the inevitable dulling of sensibility during dinner" (118).⁴² In the narrative, Marinetti describes a doctor who fails to see "that the highest and most precious virtue is elasticity" (118).⁴³ While everyone is eating dinner, Marinetti calls out: "In order not to cloud our sensibilities, company will move two places to the right, quick march!" (118).⁴⁴ The move around the dinner table is accomplished, accompanied by "a brutal shove" (118), but instead of complying with Marinetti's order, the doctor retreats "to the terrace with his plate of pasta" (119).⁴⁵ The doctor is doubly doomed here: both by his inelasticity and also by his dedication to his

⁴² "sfuggire all'inevitabile impantanamento della sensibilità durante il pranzo" (169).

⁴³ "che la più alta e preziosa virtù è l'elasticità" (170).

⁴⁴ "Per non impantanare la nostra sensibilità, spostamento di due posti a destra, marsc'!" (169).

⁴⁵ "spingo brutalmente" (170), "sulla terrazza col suo piatto di pastasciutta" (171).

plate of spaghetti, already coded in the *Cookbook* as “a passéist food” (33).⁴⁶ The Futurist response to this unrepentant passéism is predictably swift and violent: a crowd follows the doctor to the terrace, where they beat him. The narrative ends ambiguously—“This was the way they murdered nostalgia” (119)⁴⁷—leaving it undetermined whether the victim was the doctor himself or his passéist ways.

The “new year’s eve dinner” features a similarly violent reaction to a scion of nostalgia. The dinner is designed to revitalize the “monotony” and “habit” of New Year’s Eve, to avoid “a happiness which has been enjoyed too often” (130).⁴⁸ The innovative evening is marred by one diner’s inability to overcome habit. When this diner exclaims “I haven’t yet expressed my good wishes for the New Year” (130), the other diners quickly “hurl themselves against the unwary conservator of tradition, whom they pummel repeatedly,” this act emphasizing the violent resistance with which nostalgia will be met.⁴⁹ The remainder of the narrative describes the meal’s innovations and the joys found in these. The meal’s conventional beginning, the “inevitable turkey” (130), is soon recast as “suddenly a live turkey is let loose in the room” (130).⁵⁰ This slapstick gesture inspires “momentarily uncontained joy” in the diners, and they are forced to rethink their

⁴⁶ “una vivanda passatista” (25).

⁴⁷ “Uccidevano così le nostalgie” (171).

⁴⁸ “monotonia,” “l’abitudine,” “un’allegria già troppe volte goduta” (188).

⁴⁹ “non ho ancora espressi i miei augurî per l’anno nuovo,” “si scagliano contro l’incauto conservatore di tradizioni che viene ripetutamente schiaffeggiato” (189).

⁵⁰ “l’immancabile tacchino,” “Ad un tratto si libera nella sala un tacchino vivo” (188).

conventional meal, to wonder at “this resurrection of the food they’ve just eaten” (130).⁵¹ Marinetti’s transformational project in *The Futurist Cookbook* is structured around such defamiliarizations of conventional meals; and this meal particularly highlights the pleasure—the “momentarily uncontained joy”—accessible through the revision of everyday life.

Such intense pleasures are coincident in the *Cookbook* with Marinetti’s deemphasis of the whole, inviolate human body, a pattern evident both in his fragmentation of the body and in his disregard for bodily purity. Through his repeated onslaughts to the body in the *Cookbook*, Marinetti demonstrates that his notion of agency is not contingent upon a coherent physical body. Many of the recipes and meals which have already been discussed are marked by physical fragmentation: the feminine little feet of *The Curves of the World and Their Secrets*, the breasts and phalluses of “Strawberry Breasts” and “Sculpted Meat.” Marinetti’s fragmentation of the human body also shapes his depiction of fellow Futurists and of the diners of his meals. His description of Onesti at the beginning of “the dinner that stopped a suicide”—“On the doorstep, at the car door, the emaciated face and far too white hand of Giulio Onesti” (23)⁵²—suggests a fragmentation and even dissolution of the Futurist body.

Some critics have linked the Marinettian fragmentation of the human body with a rejection of mortality and of the feminine (which inextricably ties the Futurist to the

⁵¹ “la gioia per un attimo scatenata” (189), “questa resurrezione del cibo inghiottito” (188-89).

⁵² “Sulla soglia, allo sportello dell’automobile, il viso emaciato e la troppo bianca mano tesa di Giulio Onesti” (10).

mortal, material world). In his essay “Propeller Talk,” Jeffrey Schnapp contends that “as was earlier implied with regard to the Futurist body/machine complex, his flight from the logic of death often entails a flight from those aspects of female anatomy and sexuality that seem too closely allied with earthbound forms of reproduction” (164).

Christine Poggi also attempts to explain “Marinetti’s fantasized fusion of the machine and the male body” (24), which she describes in terms similar to those of Schnapp: “Precisely because nature is understood as the locus of the feminine and the maternal, it must be opposed and displaced by both the machine, and its symbolic ally, matter (sheer dynamic physicality)” (24). For Marinetti, according to Poggi, nature is “inextricably linked . . . to cycles of gestation, birth, maturation, and death” (24). While both critics are accurate in noting Marinetti’s aesthetic opposition to death, the meals of *The Futurist Cookbook* reveal Marinetti to be offended not by death’s connotation of the vulnerability of the organic body but, rather, by the stasis that death entails. Indeed, in the *Cookbook* and in other works throughout his career, Marinetti celebrates physical vulnerability—and the accidents and danger which highlight that vulnerability—and consequently rejects the bourgeois emphasis on safety and physical preservation at the expense of flux and energy.

In addition to his fragmentations of the human body in *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti’s deemphasis of coherent corporeality is signaled by his constant staging of contaminations, both literal and symbolic, of the body. Stallybrass and White point out that “the bourgeois subject continuously defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of what is marked as ‘low’—as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contamination” (191).

Throughout *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti stages scenes in which the Futurist diner is confronted with that which has been coded as contaminating, from non-food items used as foodstuffs to the bodies of colonial or racial others (or images which symbolize those others). In so doing, Marinetti models a Futurist self that, unlike the bourgeois self, is not threatened by but rather thrives on contamination. In several recipes, Marinetti orchestrates a literal contamination of the body through his inclusion of ingredients which would not seem conducive to health: the eau de Cologne sauces for The Excited Pig (144) and Zoological Soup (168), the lime-tree charcoal of White and Black (156).

Marinetti revealed an interest in contamination—or, perhaps more accurately, a reconception of contamination and purity—as early as “The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism” (1909). There, he celebrates the car accident which left him upside down in a ditch, drinking industrial waste-laden ditch water. This water, which he calls “nourishing sludge” (*SW* 40), also prompts him to recall “the blessed black breast of my Sudanese nurse” (40). In this image, Marinetti simultaneously dredges up the old racist chestnut about the black wet nurse for whom the white child feels a nostalgic affection and celebrates events which would typically be considered contaminating: the contamination of human body by machine waste and the contamination threatened by interracial contact. This scene of potentially severe injury and contamination by industrial waste evokes in Marinetti the same transformative pleasure offered by Futurist cooking: “When I came up—torn, filthy, and stinking—from under the capsized car, I felt the white-hot iron of joy deliciously pass through my heart!” (*SW* 40-41). While Poggi can only read this passage as “ironically rhapsodic” (25), Marinetti clearly indicates here both the pleasure

and inspiration—this wreck having been the inspiration for the “Manifesto of Futurism”—offered by accident and danger, even at the expense of physical safety.

This early image of the racial other, the Sudanese wet nurse, foreshadows the many dramas of interracial contact and/or desire that Marinetti stages in *The Futurist Cookbook*; and in using such images, he exploits contemporary fears of racial contamination and thus further threatens bourgeois boundaries of social and racial purity. We have already seen an example of such contact in Onesti’s ingestion of *The Curves of the World and Their Secrets*. Karen Pinkus points out that the Italian colonial enterprise was characterized by an insistence that the “native should be, above all, marked as different from white” (73). The rhetoric mandating this separation centered upon images of contamination: “a constant motif of ethnographic and pseudoscientific writing was the possibility that whites might be dragged down by their ‘civilizing’ mission and wallow forever at the level of putrid swarm” (74). By repeatedly staging encounters between the Futurist body and allegorical images of the colonial or racial other, Marinetti both dredges up one of the most persistent fears of colonialism and models a Futurist self that is strengthened rather than threatened by its contact with the supposedly contaminating other.

Perhaps the most interesting example of Marinetti’s bodily contaminations and of his privileging of chance and danger is the “wedding banquet,” in which scene Marinetti attempts to revitalize a quintessential bourgeois domestic ritual. At the beginning of the narrative, Marinetti states his aim to reveal the tensions sublimated in such festivities: “The usual wedding banquet beneath its seeming and ostentatious air of festivity hides a

thousand preoccupations: will the couple be happy or not—intellectually, sexually, prolifically, professionally, economically?” (112).⁵³ Marinetti uses the meal’s food to reveal these worries and to unleash chance occurrences which both threaten physical harm and upset the routine of such an occasion. Each course in the meal disrupts the veneer of celebration and reveals “their tightrope states of mind” (112).⁵⁴

The banquet begins with a dish whose recipe is conventional—“A tureen of magnificent soup, known and loved by all (rice, chicken livers and beans in quail broth)” (112)—but whose presentation relies upon accident.⁵⁵ The soup is “borne aloft on three fingers by the cook himself, hopping on his left leg,” and Marinetti interjects commentary here that reveals both his love of chance and his wish to disrupt the traditions of the occasion: “Will he [the cook] reach the table or not? Perhaps he will topple over, in which case the stains on the wedding dress will be a good chance to correct its insolent and uneventful excessive whiteness.”⁵⁶ The next scene involves a similarly risky presentation—of a Milanese risotto with truffles—with the dish balanced on the head of the groom. Again, Marinetti revels in the accident involved and at the disruption: “If the dish tips over too, and turns the wedding dress as yellow as an African sand dune, it will

⁵³ “I pranzi di nozze comuni sotto la loro apparente e ostentata festosità nascondono mille preoccupazioni: se sì o no sarà felice l’accoppiamento, dai punti di vista intellettuale, carnale, prolifico, carrieristico, economico” (158).

⁵⁴ “equilibrisimo degli stati d’animo” (158).

⁵⁵ “Una zuppiera di magnifica minestra da tutti conosciuta e amata (riso, fegatini e fagioli in brodo di quaglie) sia recata in alto su tre dita dal cuoco stesso saltante sulla gamba sinistra” (158).

⁵⁶ “Giungerà o non giungerà? Forse si rovescerà e le macchie sul vestito nuziale correggeranno opportunamente l’insolente e poco fortunoso candore eccessivo” (158-59).

also be so much time gained by an unexpected shortening of the voyage” (112).⁵⁷ Here, the imagery of the African landscape contributes to Marinetti’s disruption of the purity, symbolized by the whiteness of the dress, of both the bride and the occasion.

The climax of the meal comes in the next course, a dish of sautéed mushrooms, through which Marinetti exposes the banquet’s undercurrents and incorporates chance and physical danger as means to revitalize the event. The mushrooms are wild, gathered by “the usual maniacal huntsman,” who announces of his contribution, “There’s every kind of mushroom, except the poisonous ones . . . unless my myopia has played an ugly trick on me. . . . For my part, I shan’t hesitate, though I fear a few absolutely fatal ones lurk somewhere in there” (112-13).⁵⁸ The possibility of danger invigorates everyone and leads to “the gay truth” (Bakhtin 282) that Bakhtin associates with grotesque feasting. As the bride begins to eat the mushrooms, the following conversation ensues between bride and groom: “They’re so good, says the bride. —‘You’re not afraid, darling?’ —‘I’m less afraid of them than of the infidelities you’re likely to commit, you brute!’” (113).⁵⁹ In this exchange, Marinetti airs questions of infidelity, typically left unspoken on the wedding day, and leaves ambiguous whether the mushrooms are actually harmful. He comments later of the mushrooms’ possible toxicity that “It doesn’t matter much” (113),

⁵⁷ “Se questa vivanda, nel rovesciarsi anch’essa, ingiallirà il vestito nuziale come una duna africana, sarà tanto di guadagnato sul tempo mediante uno scorcio di viaggio imprevisto” (159).

⁵⁸ “solito cacciatore maniaco,” “Sono funghi di ogni specie, eccettuata quella velenosa. . . . Io non esito, pur temendone alcuni qui dentro assolutamente mortali” (159).

⁵⁹ “Sono tanto buoni’—dice la sposa. —‘Non hai paura, amore?’ —‘Li temo meno dei tuoi probabili tradimenti, brutto!’” (159).

making clear that physical safety is subordinate to the energizing effects of chance.⁶⁰

The remainder of the banquet is structured around similarly thought-provoking mysteries: is the banquet's jokester *really* mortally stricken by the mushrooms? Is the fattest partridge *really* crawling with worms? The answers do not matter if the "alarming mushrooms and dynamic partridges" have succeeded in making the diners rethink marriage, banquets, and food.⁶¹ The physical well-being condition of the diners is subordinated to their aesthetic enlightenment.

Marinetti's assault on regulated, boundaried bourgeois selfhood in the *Cookbook* consists not only of his deconstruction of the coherent physical body but also of his deconstruction of the coherent literary "I," a project which engaged him through much of his career. As I mentioned, Marinetti announced this project in "The Technical Manifesto of Futurist Literature" (1912). There, Marinetti lists as part of the Futurist program the following imperative: "Destroy the *I* in literature: that is, all psychology. The man sidetracked by the library and the museum, subjected to a logic and wisdom of fear, is of absolutely no interest" (*SW* 87). In part, of course, Marinetti rejects psychology and interiority (the contemplation of the museum and of the library) as a part of his rejection of Decadence and Aestheticism. At the same time, Marinetti's call to destroy the "I" of literature is remarkable, especially as the call comes from an author so often thought monomaniacal, his aesthetic based upon a "desire for control and manipulation" (Van Order 28). Two years after he first called for its destruction,

⁶⁰ "Poco importa" (160).

⁶¹ "funghi allarmanti e pernici dinamiche" (161).

Marinetti again signals the end of the “I,” in 1914’s “Geometric and Mechanical Splendor and the Numerical Sensibility,” making especially clear this time that attention will be redirected from people to objects. In this essay, Marinetti says of the Futurists: “We systematically destroy the literary *I* in order to scatter it into the universal vibration and reach the point of expressing the infinitely small and the vibrations of molecules” (*SW* 98). Although the only concrete example that Marinetti provides here is martial in nature—“E.g.: lightning movement of molecules in the hole made by a howitzer” (*SW* 98)—one must wonder if “the infinitely small” might also aptly describe traditional conceptions of the domestic sphere and would thus point to Marinetti’s burgeoning interest in everyday objects rather than people.

Regardless, Marinetti’s call for the destruction of the literary “I” seems especially significant when trying to explain *The Futurist Cookbook*, a text in which traditional notions of the “I”—in the form of a protagonist or of a unified author—are continually undermined. Marinetti questions the literary “I” in his *Cookbook* by exploiting the qualities of the genre of the cookbook itself: the cookbook’s collaborative nature as well as its status as more instruction manual than finished product. Marinetti thwarts conventional notions of authorship in *The Futurist Cookbook* by pointedly emphasizing the collaborative nature of his cookbook; he lists at least thirty-one different people as authors of the various recipes. Thus, who is the author of the *Cookbook* itself? That question is not simple to answer even by purely bibliographic means; even though Marinetti is listed as sole author of the English edition, both Marinetti and Fillia are listed as co-authors of the Italian edition. But even if that discrepancy were resolved, Marinetti

evokes the inevitable questions here: who authors the cookbook? and who authors the food itself, once it is prepared? Is it Marinetti, who compiled the recipes (and clearly spearheaded their creation), or Farfa, P.A. Saladin, Dr. Sirocofran, or any of the other named authors of the recipes, or even the person who prepares the food? In asking such questions, of course, we remain beholden to the literary “I” that Marinetti insists we reject, but this inquiry highlights the transgressions of the “I” embodied in Marinetti’s choice of the cookbook as form. In utilizing the cookbook form, Marinetti capitalizes on its frequent blurring of authorship, as well as the inevitable diffusing of responsibility for the final product itself.⁶²

While Marinetti’s deconstruction of the literary “I” and disintegration of the physical body yield a new Futurist self, capable of experiencing extreme pleasures yet unchallenged by any threat to its coherence, throughout the text, Marinetti never shows us a complete picture of the new transformed Futurist self. Indeed, how could he? How does one represent the fragmented, ever-changing self in flux? Instead, Marinetti continually shows the reader what the dynamic Futurist self is not or shows us glimpses of the self in transition, since a self based on flux is never completed, continually in process. The contrary examples, the untransformed selves, are neither appealing nor viable: the suicidal Onesti, the victimized arbiters of tradition in the “new year’s eve banquet” and the “dynamic dinner.” The selves in transition, of which we get fleeting but

⁶² Although in some cookbooks—such as the Fanny Farmer cookbook or any of Julia Child’s cookbooks—the authorship itself is part of the book’s appeal, other cookbooks are built upon a (sometimes concealed) corporate authorship. The *Southern Living* cookbooks and the *Better Homes and Gardens* cookbooks are good examples of this

compelling glimpses, are marked by their unconventionality and their extreme pleasures: the gratified (but starving) diners of the “extremist banquet,” the chirruping and braying young men of the “springtime meal of the word in liberty,” and Onesti, at the conclusion of his dinner, “unencumbered, liberated, empty and bursting” (29). Through them, Marinetti offers Futurist cooking and, by extension, the Futurist aesthetic as means both to reconnect art and everyday life *and* to transform and gratify the self.

Marinetti and the Fruits of Colonialism

In *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti reveals the contradictions of both capitalist imperialism and a bourgeois domestic sphere which is defined both as a function of capitalist imperialism and by its separation from the realities of the public sphere. Marinetti thus calls into question the distinction between public and private spheres, and by staging dramas of colonialism within the domestic sphere through the meals of the *Cookbook*, Marinetti makes apparent the intricate connections between public and private. In so doing, Marinetti makes manifest the forces present in, even constitutive of, bourgeois domesticity: political and sexual aggression, fears of racial contamination, and desire for the fruits of capitalist imperialism. In addition, through his celebration of the pleasures of geopolitical transgression, Marinetti rejects the narrative of colonialism that casts it as a moral imperative to civilize the colonized; instead, Marinetti makes clear that colonialism is a primitive pleasure, based upon aggression, sexuality, sensuality, and the thrill of the exotic.

corporate authorship, as is the Betty Crocker cookbook, in which the fictitious author was

The capitalist imperialism that Marinetti analyzes in the *Cookbook* is specifically the imperialism which drove Italy towards costly territorial expansions into Libya and East Africa in the 1920s (Mack Smith, *Mussolini's* 33). These imperial ventures, as well as those of other European nations, had a direct influence in the Italian domestic sphere through the importation of various foods. These imported foods—particularly coffee, chocolate, and bananas—were closely associated with images of blackness and exoticism in Italian popular culture of the 1920s and 1930s, the same period as Marinetti's 1932 *The Futurist Cookbook* (Pinkus 25). These images were of objectified blackness, of black figures who appear happy to be selling these products to the Italian public. In one ad, mentioned by Pinkus, a black head is formed by bananas; in another, a black head announcing "I am coffee" is actually a large coffee bean (25). These images naturalize the connection between these foods and blackness, and do nothing to evoke or challenge the political realities which facilitate this colonial menu. In *The Futurist Cookbook*, however, Marinetti dismantles such happy, comfortable images, featuring the fruits of colonialism—those mentioned above, plus others to be discussed in more detail below—in recipes which unite these foods with exaggerated images of blackness, metaphorical representations of territorial expansion, and elaborately staged scenes of interracial desire. By filling his *Cookbook* with such images, Marinetti undermines the obfuscations of a bourgeois domesticity in which the political realities of colonialism, and the public's anxieties about them, remain unseen and unacknowledged. A closer examination of Marinetti's strategies in the *Cookbook* will clarify his defamiliarizations

herself a product of advertising agencies.

of domestic imperialism.

Marinetti's own imperialist impulses have been noted by critics, with most suggesting that Marinetti's work reflects a simplistic and stereotypical image of Africa: as a world of instinct and savagery, far removed from the civilizing rationality of Europe.⁶³ Andrew Hewitt, in *Fascist Modernism: Aesthetics, Politics, and the Avant-Garde*, complicates the typical interpretation of Marinetti's work which conflates his imperialism with his bellicose nationalism. Hewitt distinguishes the aesthetics of nationalism, based upon notions of "unity and completion," from the aesthetics of imperialism, which, in its push for national expansion, "implies an aesthetic of incompleteness" (98). For Hewitt, "the ambiguities of Marinetti's nationalism" are subordinated to his imperialism, which "celebrates transgression and the tendential negation of any such plenitude" (98). Such a distinction is important for understanding the recipes of *The Futurist Cookbook*: Marinetti's use of imperial products in the text cannot be seen simply as his incorporation of the fruits of imperialism into the Italian national body or as a testimony to the dominance of the Futurist self over the colonial other, since imperialism connotes incompleteness, a lack that requires supplementation. Instead, Marinetti uses that incompleteness—anxieties over reliance on foreign products, fears over colonial insurgence and miscegenation—to reveal the gaps in colonialist logic. His destructive affirmations of colonialism structure the meals of *The Futurist Cookbook*.

Marinetti presents an exemplary version of the logic of imperialist capitalism in the "geographic dinner" (Formula by the Futurist Aeropainter Fillia), a meal which

⁶³ For examples of such readings, see Wilson and Schnapp.

renders the entire Italian colonial enterprise in the form of a dinner party. In the “geographic dinner,” the ambiance is carefully contrived to evoke imperialist impulses: through the large atlases which the diners flip through as they await their meals—while they gaze out of dining room windows which “disclose mysterious distant views of colonial landscapes”—and through the accompaniment of “loud Negro music” (129).⁶⁴ In the use of the Negro music, Marinetti makes obvious the cultural imperialism which accompanies geographical imperialism. The geographical imperialism itself is the centerpiece of the meal, as the colonialist project is metaphorically enacted through the food and its presentation. As was mentioned in Chapter 1, in the “geographic dinner,” the waitress is specified to be “a shapely young woman” who wears “a long white tunic on which a complete geographical map of Africa has been drawn in colour” (129).⁶⁵ Guests order their food “not according to its composition but by indicating on the geographical map the city or region that proves most seductive to their touristic imagination and spirit of adventure” (129).⁶⁶ When a guest points at the waitress’s left breast, labeled “CAIRO,” he/she will be served “Love on the Nile,” consisting of “pyramids of stoned dates immersed in palm wine . . . [surrounded by] juicy little cubes of cinnamon-flavoured mozzarella stuffed with roasted coffee beans and pistachios”

⁶⁴ “lasciano scorgere misteriose lontananze di paesaggi coloniali,” “rumorosi dischi negri” (186).

⁶⁵ “formosa donna giovane interamente rivestita con una tunica bianca in cui è disegnata a colori una completa carta geografica africana” (186).

⁶⁶ “non secondo la loro composizione, ma indicando sulla carta geografica la città o le regioni che seducono la fantasia turistica e avventurosa dei commensali” (186).

(129).⁶⁷ A point at the waitress's right knee, labeled "ZANZIBAR," yields the "Abibi Special," which is "half a coconut, filled with chocolate and placed on a base of very finely chopped raw meat and steeped in Jamaican rum" (129).⁶⁸ This meal makes no secret of the colonial origins of its ingredients—dates, coffee, coconut, chocolate, and Jamaican rum—but, rather, makes obvious these origins through the pervasive colonial thematics of the dinner party. Moreover, the meal desublimates the sexual logic of colonialism, the conflation of sexual and territorial conquest, through the objectification and gustatory colonization of the waitress's body. The meal's design prompts the diners to fragment and objectify the female body as an analogue of the European colonial powers' fragmentation of Africa. Like other meals of *The Futurist Cookbook*, the "geographic dinner" reveals the forces, sexual and imperial, sublimated in a traditional dinner party. Moreover, through its casting of the colonial enterprise as a dinner party of exotic food and sexual-cartographic exploration of the waitress's body, this meal presents colonialism as a primitive pleasure and rejects any argument for its being a civilizing mission.

Again, central to the imagery of colonialism in the "geographic dinner" and throughout *The Futurist Cookbook* is the frequent use of ingredients which are colonial imports, foods not native to Italy. Certain of these ingredients—coffee, chocolate,

⁶⁷ "piramidi di datteri senz'osso immerso in vino di palma. Attorno alla piramide maggiore, cubi di latticini di cannella ripieni di chicchi di caffè bruciato, e pistacchi" (187).

⁶⁸ "mezza noce di cocco, repleta di cioccolato e disposta sopra un fondo di carne cruda tritata minutamente e inaffiata di rum della Giamaica" (187).

bananas, dates, and pineapple—appear with frequency in the text and are most often combined in dishes that represent African peoples and/or the colonial landscape, either through the foods' appearance or through the name assigned to the dish. Moreover, many of the recipes of Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* rely heavily on ingredients—sugar, chocolate, wheat, and bananas in particular—that carried a heavy symbolic weight in 1920s-30s Italy due to their role within Italian foreign policy. Sugar, chocolate, and wheat were significant due to their status as imported goods and were thus in conflict with the Italian government's policy of autarchy, while bananas (or the goal of having a steady, autarchic supply of them) were used as a rationale for colonization in East Africa. By repeatedly using these contested ingredients in *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti dredges up the anxieties of foreign dependence with which they were associated, brings those political anxieties to the fore in the domestic sphere, and thus disrupts the comfort and isolation of domesticity.

Increased consumption of sugar was seen as a sign of progress in Italy in the early twentieth century, but this sense of progress was complicated by Italy's dependence on foreign sources for sugar (until a campaign in the 1930's to declare sugar, extracted from Italian sugar beets, an autarchic product) (Pinkus 89-92).⁶⁹ Chocolate was also a source

⁶⁹ The consumption of white sugar was also seen as a status symbol in America and other countries of western Europe (especially Great Britain) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. As Waverly Root and Richard de Rochement explain in *Eating in America: A History*, "it [white sugar] cost more, which helped to augment its snob value; no housewife with any pride dared put coarse cheap brown sugar on her table, thus earning the derision of her sisters" (232). This snobbery was encouraged by sugar refiners; their advertising suggested that brown sugar harbored unseen parasites and contaminants and that the whiteness of white sugar was a sign of its purity (232). Also see Sidney Mintz's *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*.

of autarchy-related anxiety, as Karen Pinkus explains in *Bodily Regimes: Italian Advertising under Fascism*: “In addition to sugar, the dessert industry was concerned about chocolate, since cocoa beans were imported from nations adhering to the League of Nations’ sanctions against Italy (primarily from the Gold Coast, then under British control)” (93). A similar concern over dependence on foreign wheat led to the *battaglia del grano* (battle of the grain), a government initiative, launched in 1925, which encouraged domestic wheat production and at the same time discouraged consumption of wheat in favor of domestically-produced rice (Duggan 219, Pinkus 97-98). Marinetti refers to these wheat programs in *The Futurist Cookbook* during his diatribe against pasta, when he cautions the reader to “remember too that the abolition of pasta will free Italy from expensive foreign grain and promote the Italian rice industry” (37).⁷⁰ Despite Marinetti’s call to avoid products of “expensive foreign grain,” there are at least twelve recipes in *The Futurist Cookbook* that require flour, not to mention the hundred sacks of wheat flour used to construct “the dinner that stopped a suicide,” the text’s first meal. Why should Marinetti condemn a reliance on foreign wheat, then make wheat (or chocolate or sugar, with their similar threats to autarchy) an ingredient in so many recipes of the *Cookbook*? Clearly, for Marinetti, an aesthetics of excess and a logic of non-contradiction take precedence over any political consistency.

Likewise, why would Marinetti include so many recipes (at least sixteen separate ones, even more than the number of recipes which require flour) which feature bananas at a time when “a taste for [bananas] had to be assiduously cultivated in the Italian public”

⁷⁰ “Ricordatevi poi che l’abolizione della pastasciutta libererà l’Italia dal costoso grano

(Pinkus 25)? The cultivation of public taste for bananas provided a rationale, somewhat after the fact, for Italian colonial pursuits. In *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, Denis Mack Smith discusses the Italian government's attempt to encourage emigration to the colonies and to make the colonies seem more essential to the Italian economy, efforts which culminated in 1935 when the government set "up a banana monopoly so that only the inferior and overpriced bananas of Somalia could be sold in Italy" (35). By including in this 1932 *Cookbook* so many banana-based recipes, among them "colonial instinct," "Libyan aeroplane," and "colonial fish," Marinetti evokes the anxieties associated with Italy's colonial enterprise as well as promoting a product with which many Italians were relatively unfamiliar. Again, Marinetti does so to exaggerate this dependence, to bring the associated political anxieties into the domestic sphere, and thus to disrupt a bourgeoisie which sees the kitchen as the private sphere, far removed from the political realities of colonialism.

Meals and recipes throughout *The Futurist Cookbook* utilize these imported foods as they stage Italian militarism and colonialism. One such meal is the "synthesis of Italy dinner," which purports to allow for a sampling "on a single occasion [of] all the various regional foods" (127).⁷¹ One of the "regions" represented is actually an indistinct version of Italy's colonies, depicted in the dish "Colonial instinct," in the painting (on one of the four dining room walls) of "a view of southern seas enlivened with little islands by Prampolini" (127), in the "sweltering temperature in the room" (128), and in the "violent

straniero e favorirà l'industria italiana del riso" (29).

⁷¹ "in una volta sola le tante vivande regionali" (183).

perfume of carnations, broom and acacia . . . sprayed into the air” (128).⁷² Colonial products such as dates and bananas are the focal point of “Colonial instinct,” which is comprised of “a colossal mullet” stuffed with these items. Perhaps to indicate the melding of the colonies and the traditionally defined Italian nation, the mullet is served floating in an indisputably Italian product: “a litre of Marsala” (128). Through this recipe and the elaborate atmosphere which accompanies it, Italian colonialism is staged in the dining room, and by including this meal in his *Cookbook*, Marinetti makes manifest the concrete, everyday fruits of colonialism within the domestic sphere.

Another of the meals of the *Cookbook*, the “nocturnal love feast,” not only stages the territorial encroachments of Italian colonialism in prandial form but also desublimates the sexualized logic of colonialism (as did the “geographic dinner”). The meal itself is designed for two lovers, “uncertain if they should renew the fatigues of the bed or begin those of the table” (107).⁷³ In his description of the meal’s server—as “[t]he brown-skinned, heavy-breasted and big-bottomed Capriote cook”⁷⁴—Marinetti hints at the racial objectification that is so exaggerated in other recipes in the *Cookbook*, although the racism here has been somewhat exaggerated by the English translator.⁷⁵ The beverage

⁷² “un paesaggio di mare meridionale animato d’ isolotti Prampolini” (183), “Temperatura torrida” (184), “Un violento profumo di garofani, ginestre e gaggia viene spruzzato nell’aria” (184-85).

⁷³ “incerti se riprendere le fatiche del letto o iniziare quelle della tavola” (152).

⁷⁴ “La bruna mammelluta e naticuta cuoca caprese” (152).

⁷⁵ Suzanne Brill, translator of the English edition of *The Futurist Cookbook*, translates “La bruna mammelluta e naticuta cuoca caprese” (152) from “nocturnal love feast” as “The brown-skinned, heavy breasted native mama” (107). A more accurate

served, the War-in-Bed, is composed primarily of colonial products—pineapple juice, cocoa, various spices—all suspended in an Italian liqueur. The intermingling of the ingredients in this drink is suggestive of the physical encounter of the lovers and also points to the envelopment of the colonies themselves within the Italian empire. Most importantly, by so clearly linking the colonial enterprise with sexual desire—even through the name War-in-Bed—Marinetti reaffirms the connection between territorial and sexual conquest that he has already established in *The Futurist Cookbook*'s first meal, “the dinner that stopped a suicide,” and he again emphasizes colonialism's visceral pleasures rather than its civilizing mandate. The lines distinguishing sexual desire from colonial desire begin to blur in the “nocturnal love feast,” and Marinetti evokes these desires to call into question the aura of protective isolation (from public sphere) and self-control of traditional domesticity.

This same conflation of sexual and colonial desires is most strikingly exaggerated in *The Futurist Cookbook*'s “dinner of white desire,” a meal which reverses and pointedly critiques the logic of European colonial encroachment into Africa. The “dinner of white desire” is prepared for “Ten Negroes” who are “overwhelmed by an indefinable emotion that makes them long to conquer the countries of Europe with a mixture of spiritual yearning and erotic desire” (136).⁷⁶ This line, in its evocation of the overwhelming, indefinable longing which drives the colonial impulse, reveals the libidinal aspects of

translation—but one which does not stress (or construct) Marinetti as colonialist—is “[t]he brown-skinned, heavy-breasted and big-bottomed Capriote cook.”

⁷⁶ “Dieci negri . . . presi da uno stato d'animo indefinito che fa loro desiderare la conquista dei paesi eropei, con un miscuglio di tendenze spirituali e di volontà erotiche” (199).

such political ambitions. Unlike other meals in *The Futurist Cookbook* wherein whites eat colonial foods often associated with blackness, the diners here eat primarily Italian products (with the exception of coconut) which are, as the text repeatedly reminds the reader, all white—“twenty fresh white eggs,” milk, mozzarella cheese, and “sweet white Muscat grapes” (136)—and they drink clear liquors—anise, grappa, and gin. The text asserts that the “Negroes’ state of mind is affected as it were unconsciously by the paleness and whiteness of all the foods” (136),⁷⁷ although the nature of this effect is unspecified. Do the white foods heighten their desire for territorial conquest or sate it? In either case, the assertion of an effect by the foods’ color on the diners’ state of mind raises an inevitable question: do the coffee, chocolate, and other dark-colored foods throughout *The Futurist Cookbook* have an analogous effect on the (white) Futurist diners? Through the ambiguity of the meal’s title, the “dinner of white desire,” the nature of this effect is called into question, and the meal’s critique of colonialism is made apparent. Is the “white desire” of the meal’s title the ten Negroes’ desire for whiteness? Or does it instead point to the white desires (not moral imperatives or civilizing mandates) that drove colonialism? The logic of reversal that drives the meal, combined with the satisfaction of the diners’ desires through sensual pleasures, comments on the libidinal basis for the Italian colonial enterprise and implicitly rejects a moral rationale for Italian colonialism. By including the “dinner of white desire” in his *Cookbook*, Marinetti reverses and thus reveals the logic of European conquest in Africa, particularly the objectification of blackness (through the obsessive and exaggerated focus on the color

⁷⁷ “Lo stato d’animo dei negri è quasi inconsciamente suggestionato da tutte le vivande

white) and the sensual and emotional appeal of colonial conquest.

In the “official dinner,” Marinetti focuses not so much on the pleasures of colonialism as on the colonizer’s fears and colonialism’s failures. He highlights the racial objectification which persists in international diplomacy, and he lampoons the frustrating setbacks of (culinary) imperialism. In this meal, Marinetti evokes some of the most pervasive and enduring fears of European colonial ambition—fears of miscegenation, of the supposed barbarity of the colonial other, of the violence of colonial insurgence—through the dinner’s menu and thus particularly disrupts the order and reserve of the domestic sphere. Marinetti explains that the meal is intended to overcome “the grave defects that pollute all official banquets,” among which he numbers “insoluble world problems” and “the rancour of frontiers” (110).⁷⁸ Marinetti stages and exaggerates those problems and transgresses those frontiers throughout the meal’s menu and presentation. One dish, “The Solid Treaty,” clearly questions the efficacy of diplomatic efforts, comprised as it is of a nougat-constructed castle filled with “very tiny nitro-glycerine bombs which explode now and then perfuming the room with the typical smell of battle” (110).⁷⁹ Another dish, “The Cannibals sign up at Geneva,” is a serve-yourself buffet of raw meats (with an accompanying array of dips), an exaggeration of colonialist logics which label the colonized other as barbarians at best, cannibals at worst. In the

bianche o candide” (199).

⁷⁸ “i gravi difetti che inquinano tutti i banchetti ufficiali,” “problemi mondiali insolubili,” “l’astio delle frontiere”

⁷⁹ “piccolissime bombe di balestite che scoppieranno a tempo profumando la sala del tipico odore delle battaglie” (156).

dish “The League of Nations,” Marinetti both parodies diplomatic relations and evokes fears of racial contamination and of black-on-white violence. “The League of Nations” features “little black salami sausages and tiny pastries filled with chocolate custard, floating in a cream of milk, eggs and vanilla” (110),⁸⁰ the contrast in black and white foods offering Marinetti’s commentary on racial divides in international diplomacy. This combination of foods—chunks of salami floating in vanilla cream—seems both jarring and unappetizing, perhaps indicating Marinetti’s suspicions about (and disdain for) a homogenous racial and political harmony. Moreover, Marinetti dredges up Italian fears over the mixing of races and over racial violence with his specific note about “The League of Nations”: “While this dish is being tasted, a twelve-year-old Negro boy, hidden under the table, will tickle the ladies’ legs and pinch their ankles” (110).⁸¹ This image vividly, if cartoonishly, stages a colonial insurrection, with sexual overtones—in the male attention to women’s legs and ankles (a particular focal point of the fetishist)—and with a hint of violence in the pinching. The perpetually frustrated desires of the colonial enterprise itself are represented in the meal’s dessert, which was intended to be “a paradisaical fruit picked on the Equator”—thus assuredly of colonial origins—the arrival of which was delayed by innumerable “disasters on the road and train

⁸⁰ “salamini neri e cannoncini di cioccolato nuotanti in una crema di latte, uova e vaniglia” (156)

⁸¹ “Questa vivanda sarà assaporata mentre un negretto dodicenne, predisposto sotto la tavola, solleticherà le gambe e pizzicherà le natiche delle signore” (156).

derailments” (111).⁸² Throughout this meal, Marinetti evokes the political realities which subtend the domestic sphere—the fruits of colonialism in the chocolate and the Equatorial fruit—and dredges up the anxieties associated with those realities: fears of the racial other, of racial mixing, of violence. In this meal and the other meals of *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti deconstructs the logic of colonialism, reveals its inconsistencies through exaggeration, and questions the sanctity and isolation of the private sphere—the domestic sphere—by staging these public, political questions in prandial terms. The images of the Marinettian domestic are not comfortable, but that is precisely his point. Marinetti undermines a domestic comfort which is based on an illusory separation of private from public, using the most common ingredients of the kitchen to do so.

Such meals as the “official dinner” and the “dinner of white desire” clarify the appeal of the domestic for Marinetti and also highlight the ambiguities which would invite such narrow readings as those of Pinkus and Nicholls. In the domestic, Marinetti finds both a site of sensual pleasure—eating, sexual contact, the smells and sounds of the domestic environment—and a private sphere with intricate but obfuscated connections to the public sphere and such political realities as colonialism. Likewise, Marinetti finds within domesticity a site of repression, a sphere whose energies have been rechanneled in service of bourgeois rationality. The ambiguity of Marinetti’s enthusiastic celebrations of all aspects of the domestic and his consequent revelations of its obfuscations and its

⁸² “l’arrivo da tempo annunciato, ma sempre ritardato da ingombri e disastri automobilistici e da deragliamenti ferroviari, di una frutta paradisiaca scelta sull’Equatore” (156)

relationship to colonialism have led critics to misread his efforts, to see his celebration simplistically, as an uncomplicated endorsement of the misogyny, racism, and colonialism that undergird the capitalist domestic sphere. The ambiguities of Marinetti's treatment of the domestic are matched by the ambiguities of the domestic itself: its status as the site, simultaneously, of sensual pleasure and repression, of bourgeois regulation and the potential resistance (through excessive indulgence, through the fetish) to that regulation, and of a separation from colonialism and a reliance on foodstuffs from colonial sources. In *The Futurist Cookbook*, Marinetti advocates that resistance and revels in undermining the bourgeoisie through his unwavering championing of all aspects of the domestic, especially those usually regulated in the service of bourgeois rationality.

In their failure to see the ambiguous potential of the domestic energies Marinetti celebrates, critics have been lured by an urge to reduce aesthetic practice to a socio-historical phenomena. Peter Nicholls's assertion that "the deeper rationale of [Futurism's] apparently irrational metaphysic was quite simply that of the market" (99) is clearly shaped by such an urge. Likewise, it is too simple for Pinkus to focus on Marinetti's statement of support for the *battaglia del grano* and to ignore his clear contradiction of that policy only pages later. The criticism of Marinetti and of *The Futurist Cookbook* can serve as a cautionary tale for those who would let an allegorical, narrowly historicist reading suffice for a more complex assessment of a writer's work. Such readings have done particular disservice to writers such as Marinetti who lived and worked under repressive regimes and who, like Marinetti, even professed friendship for that regime's leader. At the same time, it would be equally simplistic and wrongheaded

to assert that Marinetti was an impassioned anti-fascist and neo-Marxist in his lampooning of Italy's capitalist imperialism and his attack on bourgeois rationality. Here, Fredric Jameson's treatment of the ambiguities of the postmodern aesthetic seems particularly relevant to a study of Marinetti's work. Jameson warns that "the attempt to conceptualize it [the postmodern aesthetic] in terms of moral or moralizing judgments must finally be identified as a category mistake" (46), and he calls for critics "to think this development positively *and* negatively at once" (47). It is debatable whether Marinetti's aestheticizations of the contradictions of colonialism actually challenged that system or merely blind us to the destruction and violence inherent in the system. Marinetti's aestheticizations of the domestic are neither uncomplicatedly complicit and oppressive nor inherently revolutionary and liberatory. They are, however, considerably more of a challenge to the political realities of bourgeois rationality and capitalist colonialism than has previously been acknowledged.

Chapter 3
**From the Grotesque to the Uncanny: Djuna Barnes on Domesticity,
 Body, Self**

In her novels *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*, Barnes desublimates the violences of conventional heterosexuality and of the patriarchal family—violences Barnes knew firsthand. Barnes’s experiences of domesticity seem especially unconventional when compared to those of the other modernists of my study. When Djuna Barnes was born in 1892, Stein and Marinetti were already well-educated, internationally-traveled children of financially comfortable homes. The eighteen-year-old Stein was living with relatives in Baltimore and planning her next year's attendance at the Harvard Annex, while a sixteen-year-old Marinetti was beginning his Jesuit education in Paris. In contrast, Barnes's early years found her family neither cosmopolitan nor financially solvent. Barnes was born into her father Wald Barnes's nascent social experiment in primitivist polygamy, in a two-room log cabin he built on borrowed land (and in which the family would live until Barnes was sixteen). The Barnes family scraped by on what Djuna's grandmother could wheedle out of her "benefactors" and on the few vegetables her father grew. Djuna's childhood was shaped by her father's notions about the animal nature of humanity. For instance, Wald insisted his children eat pebbles, “since chickens ate pebbles to aid their digestion” (Herring 34). Observing that “most animals are not sexually exclusive” (Herring 31), Wald advocated polygamy and promiscuity. Consequently, when Djuna was five, she gained a “stepmother,” soon followed by half-brothers and sisters, when Wald moved his mistress into the 15’x 29’ cabin with his wife and family.

In addition to her father’s theories, Djuna's childhood was shaped by hard

work—substantial domestic responsibilities fell to her as the oldest daughter and next-to-oldest child of eight (counting both families)—and by a family openness about sexuality and bodily functions. When she was eight, Barnes played midwife at the difficult birth of her brother. Two years later, her brother Saxon was born and was promptly circumcised by Wald on the family's kitchen table. As an adolescent, Djuna received erotic letters (complete with erotic cartoons) from her grandmother Zadel, who shared Djuna's bed when not travelling; one letter featured “a sketch of Zadel with her breasts stretched out of shape to look like penises” (Herring 55).¹ Wald Barnes was anxious for his daughter to become sexually active, so he arranged for a neighbor to take Djuna's virginity when she was sixteen, then arranged Djuna's marriage the next year to Percy Faulkner, a middle-aged soap-salesman and brother to Wald's own mistress. Djuna left Faulkner and returned to the family cabin within a couple of months but was turned out by her father a year later when Wald evicted his wife and her children in favor of his mistress and her children. By the time Djuna Barnes turned twenty and began writing professionally to support her mother and siblings, her vision of the domestic included gore, stifling responsibility, and coercive affection, as well as a bawdy sense of humor and an appreciation for exaggeration.

Barnes's literary reputation ranged from her early celebrity—aided in part by T.S. Eliot's famously lukewarm introduction to *Nightwood* and his role as Barnes's editor—to her self-described role as the “most famous unknown author in the world” (qtd. in Broe

¹ Zadel's racy cartoons are undoubtedly precursors to Djuna's bawdy illustrations in *Ladies Almanack*.

Silence and Power 341).² Although Barnes herself situates *Ladies Almanack* as “Neap-tide to the Proustian chronicle” (Barnes “Foreword” 1972)—thus within the tradition of the modernist novel—Barnes and her novels found only an ambivalent welcome in the modernist canon. However, in recent years, feminist scholars have reassessed Barnes’s novels and have situated her firmly within a broader and more diverse modernism.³ Like Stein and Marinetti, Barnes rejects the “modernist separation of literature from the kitchen” (Clark 6).

In the summer of 1928 Djuna Barnes privately published *Ladies Almanack*, a *roman à clef* about Natalie Barney and members of her salon, including Radclyffe Hall, whose infamous lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* was published only a month before *Ladies Almanack*.⁴ The vision of lesbian identity and pleasure that Barnes presents in *Ladies Almanack* stands in stark contrast to Hall’s self-identification “as a guilty, unhappy ‘invert’” (Benstock 115); the notoriety of Hall’s novel helped popularize the

² More recently, Barnes’s works are being republished and are finding new appreciation from feminist scholars of modernism and queer theorists. The most potent symbol of Barnes’s newfound popularity may be the 2000 publication of a Modern Library edition of *Nightwood*, with an introduction written not by T.S. Eliot but by Dorothy Allison.

³ Susan Sniader Lanser calls *Ladies Almanack* “a brilliant modernist achievement” (xvi). For overviews of Barnes’s relationship to the modernist canon, see Bonnie Kime Scott’s *Refiguring Modernism*, vols. 1-2: *The Women of 1928* and *Postmodern Feminist Readings of Woolf, West, and Barnes*. Also see Donna Gerstenberger’s “Modern (Post) Modern: Djuna Barnes among the Others.”

⁴ Barney’s salon and the extended expatriate lesbian community of the Left Bank are skillfully chronicled by Shari Benstock in *Women of the Left Bank*. The community included many literary figures besides Barnes, Barney, and Radclyffe Hall: Stein and Toklas, Janet Flanner (longtime Paris correspondent for *The New Yorker*), Dolly Wilde (Oscar’s niece), Sylvia Beach (co-owner of Shakespeare and Co., and first publisher of Joyce’s *Ulysses*), Mina Loy (a former lover of F.T. Marinetti, Loy was the token

image of the tortured, lonely, outcast lesbian.⁵ Stephen Gordon, *Well*'s protagonist and a thinly disguised version of Hall, thinks of her sexuality in these terms:

‘I am one of those whom God marked on the forehead. Like Cain, I am marked and blemished. . . . We may harm no living creature by our love; we may grow more perfect in understanding and in charity because of our loving; but all this will not save you from the scourge of a world that will turn away its eyes from your noblest actions, finding only corruption and vileness in you.’ (301)⁶

Instead of guilt, in *Ladies Almanack* the reader finds unabashed sensuality. In the *Almanack*, Barnes satirizes the British-born Hall as Tilly-Tweed-In-Blood who “sported a Stetson, and believed in Marriage [to her female companion, Lady Buck-and-Balk]” (19). Tilly-Tweed-In-Blood’s moralizing and her shrill cries of “‘My poor, dear betrayed mishandled Soul!’” (26) are overshadowed by the *Almanack*’s protagonist Dame Evangeline Musset (based on Natalie Barney) and Musset’s enthusiastic, guilt-free panegyrics to sensual pleasure. Musset evangelizes for “the Pursuance, the Relief and the

heterosexual of the group and was playfully satirized as the character Patience Scalpel in *Ladies Almanack*).

⁵ Benstock says Hall’s negative self-identification was common among women of the community, “most of whom demonstrated that they had internalized both homophobia and misogyny” (115). Louise Berkinow describes *The Well of Loneliness* as “about exile. Its mood is apologetic; it is meant as a plea for tolerance (of ‘inversion’) and it is dense with self-hate” (178).

⁶ See Susan Sniader Lanser, 166-67, for a formal and stylistic contrast of *The Well of Loneliness* and *Ladies Almanack*. Lanser maintains that “one can see [in *Ladies Almanack*] both resonance with and departure from *The Well of Loneliness*” (391, n11). Also see Bonnie Kime Scott, *Refiguring Modernism: The Women of 1928*, 242-57, for a comparison of the two novels and a consideration of their context in 1928 Paris.

Distraction, of such Girls as in the Hinder Parts, and their Fore Parts, and in whatsoever Parts did suffer them most [. . .]” (6, sic). Through Musset and the other ladies of the *Almanack*, Barnes explicitly rejects Hall’s vision of the tortured, outcast lesbian and offers instead a celebratory model of lesbianism that lauds ““the Consolation every Woman has at her Finger Tips, or at the very Hang of her Tongue”” (6).

In both the unconventional advice of *Ladies Almanack* and the decayed soap-opera of her later novel *Nightwood* (1936), Barnes figures a domestic sphere that transgresses Victorian bourgeois domesticity. In these two novels, Barnes demystifies Victorian domesticity and challenges its mandate of productivity, interiority—both personal (the finite, contained self) and domestic (one’s “removal from the marketplace” [Brown 3])—and sexual conformity. However, Barnes’s two treatments of domesticity are very different; she moves from the bawdy, raucous, grotesque domesticity of *Ladies Almanack* to a tattered, uncanny domesticity in *Nightwood*. In *Ladies Almanack*, the domestic sphere is sensuous and seems largely untouched by the effects of the past. In contrast, the domestic sphere of *Nightwood* is haunted by the past and plagued by decay.⁷ *Nightwood*’s characters indulge in sensual excess as do Musset and the Ladies, but they are too preoccupied by the decay to feel pleasure. Barnes’s changing representations of the domestic realm—its characters, relationships, atmospheres and enclosures—reveal her shifting attitude toward aesthetic and sensual pleasure and of the self who experiences those pleasures. Within the contrasting representations of domesticity in these two texts

⁷ In an enigmatic reference to the significance of domesticity in *Nightwood*, Field says “the relationship between the two women [Robin and Nora] was both passionate and intensely *domestic*” (Field 19, italics mine).

we can trace Barnes's growing pessimism about interpersonal relationships, the fate of Europe, the succor offered by corporeal pleasure, and the potential for art to affect any of this.

Challenging the tenets of Victorian domesticity in *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*, Barnes pursues her larger project of remaking the closed, fixed, stable Victorian self. Gillian Brown argues in *Domestic Individualism: Imagining Self in Nineteenth-Century America* that Victorian self-identity was "secured in and nearly synonymous with domesticity" and "locate[d] the individual in his or her interiority, in his or her removal from the marketplace" (3). In *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*, Barnes rejects this interiority—this isolation of the domestic sphere and of the individual from the marketplace, and this isolation of one self from another—yet she preserves the Victorian image of a self "nearly synonymous with domesticity." In both novels, domesticity functions as a double, a mirror for selfhood, for the condition of the human body, and for Barnes's own sense of artistic agency.

Barnes also undermines Victorian domesticity in these two novels by remaking the very literary forms—the almanac, conduct manual, household handbook, recipe book, domestic novel—that helped construct the interiorized Victorian domestic self.⁸ In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong argues that traditional domestic literature helped define ideal selfhood through its strictures

⁸ Scholars of *Ladies Almanack* see the novel as "multiple, parodic, of indefinite genre" (Frann Michel 176). Susan Sniader Lanser describes it as a pastiche—of the monthly chronicle, the picaresque fable, and the mock epic—and says "it uses or parodies the

about proper housekeeping, hygiene, behavior. Cookbooks and domestic novels operate as “social control” (21) in service of “the modern political state” (9).⁹ The social function of domestic literature thus erases domesticity’s sensual pleasures—including pleasures from meals, sleep, sex—and domesticity becomes (in Armstrong’s words) “totally functional . . . the context for representing normal behavior” (24).

A glance at traditional women’s instructional literature reveals its emphasis on conformity and practicality and its disregard for the sensual pleasures of domestic life. These texts dictate everything from personal hygiene to housekeeping to morality and virtue. In *The American Frugal Housewife* (first published in 1829), for example, one learns how to treat burns, cancers, “the piles,” and “sore nipples” (Child 116). *Putnam’s Household Handbook* (1916) offers hints on how to reduce strong cooking odors (Croy 125), how to use an asbestos mat to toast bread (127), and how to remove “fly specks on gilt frames” (67). Instead of such practicalities, many texts promote the virtues necessary for women of good homes. In *American’s Woman’s Home* (1869), Catherine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe devote chapters to “The chief cause of woman’s disabilities and suffering, that women are not trained, as men are, for their peculiar duties,” “The Christian Family . . . Woman the chief minister of the family estate,” and “Early Rising: A Virtue peculiarly American and democratic” (Beecher and Stowe, i-v).

In sharp contrast, Djuna Barnes’s domestic literature—*Ladies Almanack* and

saint’s life, the ode, the prayer, the lullaby, the allegory, the myth, as well as specific works from the Bible to *Finnegans Wake*” (157).

⁹ Nancy Armstrong describes domestic interiority as another construction of domestic literature, which “established modern domesticity as the only haven from the trials of a heartless economic world” (8).

Nightwood—rejects the normative social function of domestic literature, explores the least utilitarian aspects of domestic life, and thereby challenges Victorian strictures on aesthetics, pleasure, and selfhood. In *Nightwood*, she remakes domestic fiction partly by undermining the marital imperative of the domestic novel. *Nightwood*'s focus is not on courtship or marriage but rather on the disintegrations of relationships (and the parallel disintegration of the domestic sphere in which these relationships disintegrate). Just as she remade the domestic novel in *Nightwood*, in *Ladies Almanack* Barnes remakes the traditional household almanac. Through the voice of *Almanack*'s Dame Musset, Barnes co-opts the authoritative tone and imperative syntax of a traditional almanac, yet Musset's program for self-improvement advocates sexual and emotional contentment (instead of self-discipline and conformity advocated by traditional almanacs). Whereas a traditional almanac would give instructions and advice regarding "tasks that were performed within and for the household alone" (Armstrong 67), Musset's advice concerns contemporary Parisian lesbian life and its domestic pleasures, pleasures that transgress Victorian bourgeois domesticity. In her transformation of the forms of domestic literature in *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*—transformations of the almanac and the domestic novel—Djuna Barnes rejects the conformity required of the Victorian domestic self and offers instead, in the case of *Ladies Almanack*, a domestic self focused on contentment and sensual indulgence.

***“the Door that hath banged a million Years!”: Grotesque Domestic Bodies
in Ladies Almanack***

The appeal of a grotesque aesthetic resides for Barnes not only in the gross materiality of the body—all that “which protrudes, bulges, sprouts, or branches off” (Bakhtin 320)—but also in that body’s role as “a subject of pleasure in processes of exchange” (Stallybrass and White 22). In *Ladies Almanack* Barnes focuses on exchanges between female bodies and the world and figures these exchanges as both sources of pleasure and the means to deconstruct the closed bourgeois self. The transformed, open self is then reflected in an untraditionally open domestic sphere, unlike the traditional Victorian domestic sphere in which women’s lives centered on the home and were kept separate from the marketplace. In the novel the domestic sphere extends from Musset’s home to the *pâtisseries* of the Left Bank to the Bois de Boulogne; the home seems boundariless. Stallybrass and White explain that “the bourgeois individualist conception of the body” (22) centers on a closed, non-interactive body, whereas the “grotesque body is emphasized as a mobile, split, multiple self, a subject of pleasure in processes of exchange” (22), and certainly this is the case in *Ladies Almanack*.

In Barnes’s vision of that “mobile, split, multiple self” in *Ladies Almanack* the grotesque Ladies constantly participate in corporeal exchange: they are born into the world (the originary act of the corporeal body), and they eat, copulate, traverse the city, converse, evangelize on behalf of “Love of Woman for Woman” (*LA* 20), and urinate. Instead of repudiating human waste (a repudiation central to bourgeois identity in modern Europe, say Stallybrass and White), Barnes celebrates it, describing it in meticulous,

hilarious, mock-clinical detail.¹⁰ In one passage, for instance, Musset explains how one can identify “a Girl’s Girl” (22) from “Their Signs” (27) in urine: “in the Waters of such is seen the fully Robed on-marching Figure of Venus no larger than a Caraway Seed, a Trident in one Hand and a Gos-Wasp on the left fist” (28). In this passage, as she does in others, Barnes transforms domesticity’s most abject element, human waste—urine, or toenail clippings, or the gob of hair clogging the bathtub. Barnes finds comedy and perhaps eroticism in this image of a midget-Greek goddess. Domesticity in the *Almanack* is fierce, triumphant, and full of significance if one knows how to read the signs.

Barnes mirrors the qualities of the grotesque body—its openness, transgressive potential, sensuality, and its decay—in the objects, furnishings, and architectural features of the domestic sphere; I term the *Almanack*’s nexus of body and domestic sphere “grotesque domestic bodies.”¹¹ This mirroring is apparent in Barnes’s bawdy metaphors of female-anatomy-as-architectural-feature, such as the one I quote in this section’s title. As the *Almanack*’s narrator—the Lady of Fashion—frets about her lover’s extensive sexual experience, the Lady refers both to her lover’s house and to her lover’s genitals when she bemoans “the Door that hath banged a million Years!” (17). Barnes continues

¹⁰ As Shari Benstock describes the novel, *Ladies Almanack* signals “an acceptance, even a celebration, of the functions of the human female body” (254).

¹¹ In using *bodies* as part of this term, I aim not to privilege the role of the human body in the *Almanack*’s nexus but, rather, to exploit the multiple meanings of *body*. This word signifies not only “the material part or nature of a human being” but also “something that embodies or gives concrete reality to a thing; *specif*: a sensible object in physical space,” as well as “a group of persons or things” (*Webster’s*). Thus, “grotesque domestic bodies” is meant to suggest the shared materiality of the novel’s objects and bodies, their shared residence within domestic space, *and* the material nature of that physical space that they co-inhabit.

the domestic doubling in this same speech, when the Lady refers to herself and her sexual advances as “such a Stale Receipt” (15). Barnes’s diction here—using the archaic word for “recipe” to express the Lady’s fear that her body and her sexual technique will seem like a dish eaten too many times before—further conflates domestic sphere with female body. In addition, another definition of “Receipt” relates to commerce—in which a “receipt” is a document standing in proof of an economic transaction—and Barnes may indeed be referring to the economic exchanges that so often shaped her personal life.¹² In both the metaphor of “the Door” and the wordplay of “Receipt,” Barnes reminds the reader of the economies of *Ladies Almanack*: a bodily economy—concentrating on the female sexual body—and a domestic economy, in which the domestic sphere both mirrors and shapes the condition of its inhabitants.

The phrase “the Door that hath banged a million Years!” suggests not only the doubling of *Ladies Almanack*’s grotesque domestic bodies but also Barnes’s emphasis on transgressed boundaries, such as that of the oft-entered door. Throughout the *Almanack*, Barnes celebrates transgression: of bodies, domestic space, and Victorian social dictums.¹³ Barnes ascribes an inherently transgressive potential to all domestic space and to the physical bodies who inhabit it, yet she also reflects the ambiguity of transgression:

¹² Here, I refer not only to the fact that Barnes was the sole support for her family (her mother and younger siblings) by the age of twenty. Also, Barnes’s relationship with Natalie Barney was alternately that of friends, of lovers, and of patron-patroness. Moreover, Barnes may have written *Ladies Almanack* in part to help pay for her companion Thelma Wood’s appendectomy.

¹³ Barnes’s zest for transgression has led some critics to label her postmodern. Frann Michel says that “Barnes shares with postmodern writers on the feminine the assertion

the fact that transgression can be alternately (and even simultaneously) threatening and liberating. Unlike the *Almanack*'s literary predecessors—the conduct manual, book of saints, and almanac—which promote self-improvement through conformity, *Ladies Almanack* promotes self-transformation through transgression. The element of transgression also pervades the novel's vision of artistic agency—Musset's most potent legacy is the work of her tongue, both her edifying proclamations and her sexual exploits. The legacy of the artist, Barnes implies, is a product of the grotesque body.

The most apparent and infamous form of bodily exchange in *Ladies Almanack* is, not surprisingly, sexual. The flamboyant sexuality of Musset and the Ladies certainly would have faced censorship if Barnes had not privately printed and distributed the book. Throughout *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes reminds the reader of our corporeal vulnerabilities, but she concentrates primarily on the grotesque domestic body as pleasurable and productive. In *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes's metaphor of "that dear ancestral Home" equates sexual familiarity with a woman to familiarity with her home. Musset brags of her evangelical efforts on behalf of lesbianism and recalls "one dear old Countess who was not to be convinced until I, fervid with Truth, had finally so floored her in every capacious Room of that dear ancestral Home, that I knew to a Button, how every Ticking was made!" (34-35). In this passage, Barnes reaffirms the bodily domestic economy through Musset's metaphor about having "floored" the "dear old Countess." This phrase suggests not only that the couple have had sexual intercourse but also that Musset has literally inspected the Countess's floors and has become so well acquainted with the

that Woman has no single, stable place, but rather is multiple, indefinable, outside or

Countess's home that she was familiar with the upholstery, "knew to a Button, how every Ticking was made!" (35). This lighthearted portrayal of a sensual domestic sphere—inhabited by open bodies—is a striking contrast to the decayed, doomed domesticity the reader will find in *Nightwood*.

In another striking example of grotesque domestic bodies in *Ladies Almanack*, domestic objects are ascribed with agency; Barnes depicts home furnishings as sources of sexual desire. The foreword to the *Almanack*—ostensibly by "the Lady of Fashion"—describes the "Girls" to whom Musset brings sexual relief and locates their desires in the influence of domestic objects. These desires are ones

which do oft occur in the Spring of the Year, or at those Times when they do sit upon warm and cozy Material, such as Fur, or thick and Oriental Rugs, (whose very Design it seems, procures for them such a Languishing of the Haunch and Reins as is insupportable) or who sits upon warm Stoves [...] (6).

Here, the Rugs and Stoves seem to evoke sexual response, and the Design of the Oriental Rugs—"the Whorls and Crevices of my Sisters" (11)—mirrors female genital anatomy. Barnes also decorates the domestic sphere of *Nightwood* with "Whorls," but those whorls neither impart pleasure nor promote transgression. Instead, in *Nightwood*, Barnes describes the Volkbein home's decoration as follows: "The long rococo halls, giddy with plush and whorled designs in gold, were peopled with Roman fragments, white and disassociated..." (6 Plumb). The whorls in *Ladies Almanack* offer pleasure and human

beyond ordered systems of representations and thought" (170).

contact, while the whorls in *Nightwood* bespeak ghosts and fragments.

The seasonal reference of the phrase “which do oft occur in the Spring of the Year” is only one among many in Barnes’s *Almanack*. In such seasonal and temporal references—and in the book’s tone and structure—Barnes exploits the household almanac as a form, and she makes particular use of the facets of domesticity the almanac offers: not only moralistic advice and practical instruction, but also a sense of the year and of seasons. *Ladies Almanack* is structured as a “monthly chronicle” (Lanser xxix), and Barnes mirrors the seasons of the year in the stages of Dame Musset’s life: Musset’s death in the December chapter marks the novel’s end. Moreover, Barnes emphasizes the almanac’s temporal aspects in *Ladies Almanack*’s subtitle: *showing their Signs and their tides; their Moons and their Changes; the Seasons as it is with them; their Eclipses and Equinoxes; as well as a full Record of diurnal and nocturnal Distempers*. The almanac form, and especially its temporal and seasonal qualities, had a long-lasting appeal to Barnes. In 1930, just two years after the publication of the *Almanack*, Barnes contributed a sketch and some vignettes to Allan Ross MacDougall’s *The Gourmet’s Almanack*, and “Barnes later continued [the monthly form] in her magazine columns in *Playgoers Almanack* and *Knickerbocker Almanack*” (Lanser xxx).¹⁴ In part, the temporal qualities of the almanac may appeal to Barnes because the form yokes a traditionally feminine

¹⁴ MacDougall’s book is one of the few to have a longer subtitle than that of *Ladies Almanack*. His text’s full title is *The Gourmets’ Almanac: Wherein is set down, mouth by mouth, recipes for Strange and Exotic Dishes with divers considerations anent the cooking and the eating thereof, together with The Feast Days & The Fast Days And Many Proverbs from Many Lands also the words and music of such Old-Fashioned Songs as should be sung by all proud and lusty fellows*. MacDougall’s choice of the

measure of time—“*their Moons and their Changes*”—to guidelines and imperatives of the patriarchal household.¹⁵ Such a combination provides Barnes a perfect medium for her parodic reinterpretation of the domestic sphere.

The *Almanack*'s image of the grotesque domestic body reaches its comic and blasphemous peak in yet another of the novel's temporal references: the chapter on Woman's "Tides and Moons," in which Barnes likens the pelvic bone of Saint Theresa to that of Messalina. Through this comparison, Barnes evokes several key elements of the grotesque as these have been enumerated by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World*: "the dismembered bodies of saints" (350), the incorporation of death into the life cycle (359), and the link of death and the "material bodily lower stratum." Sexuality in Barnes's work is complicated, as it is in the work of Rabelais and other bawdy satirists whom Barnes admired, by the open acknowledgement that the body is both a source of pleasure and a site of decay and death. In the chapter on Woman's "Tides and Moons," Barnes portrays death as the great equalizer, especially in matters of morality and sexuality. The Lady of Fashion asserts that the "pelvic Bone of Saint Theresa gapes no more Honesty than that of Messalina" and that "the missing Door wherein no Man passed, is as Not as that windy Space where all were wont to charge" (56). In referring to Saint Theresa's genitals as "the missing Door wherein no Man passed," Barnes reminds us of that other door—"the Door that hath banged a million Years!" (17)—and again

almanac form, as well as the lengthy subtitle, was undoubtedly inspired by his friendship with Barnes and his familiarity with her work.

¹⁵ Lanser speculates in her introductory essay to *Ladies Almanack* that "The almanack form allows time to be both linear and cyclical, and perhaps this is one reason why

frames the female body as architectural feature. By comparing the pelvic bones of a famously abstemious saint and a famously promiscuous Roman empress, Barnes emphasizes the transitory nature of those membranes—as well as those attitudes—that define sexual virtue. Barnes utilizes this comparison to critique bourgeois sexual mores based upon boundaries of flesh: a flesh destined to be “unhoused” (56) by death.

The grotesque domestic sphere of *Ladies Almanack* is inspired in part by Rabelais, in part by the Rabelaisian aesthetic Barnes admired in Joyce, Sterne, Swift, and others.¹⁶ Like these writers, Barnes celebrates the grotesque sensuality of the domestic and refuses an escapist fantasy of domesticity. Throughout *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes alludes to the social critique offered by the book’s many bodily transgressions. That is, Barnes critiques compulsory heterosexuality, anhedonic models of domesticity, and the patriarchal Christianity whose textual forms Barnes co-opts. Barnes’s figurative subversion is, again, apparent in the image of Saint Theresa’s pelvic bone. The debasement of the holy relic indicates Barnes’s challenge to patriarchal Christianity, which challenge she furthers through her manipulation of Christian literary forms: in

Barnes often chose it: given her preoccupation with the relentless movement of history, it may have afforded a way to mark time’s passage without despair” (xxxv).

¹⁶ Critics have long commented on Djuna Barnes’s “brilliant, Rabelaisian vein of humor” (Broe 5) and have compared her work—especially her 1928 novel *Ryder*—to that of Rabelais and other bawdy satirists in Rabelais’s mold, including Swift, Sterne, Fielding, Shakespeare, and Joyce. Andrew Field calls Barnes’s writing grotesque, apparently using Ruskin’s definition (33). Susan Sniader Lanser says that *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack* have a “shared Rabelaisian iconography” (xxxix). Barnes’s admiration for Rabelais is apparent in her articles on James Joyce. Barnes calls *Ulysses* “that great Rabelaisian flower” (*Interviews* 295) and claims of Joyce that “His [Joyce’s] chief topic is Greek mythology... for he makes the Greeks ‘naughty boys,’ and leaves them shaking hands, across the gulf, with Rabelais” (“Vagaries Malicieux,” qtd. in Herring 101).

particular, the book of saints and the hagiography.¹⁷ As I suggest above, Barnes uses the comparison of the pelvic bones to challenge bourgeois strictures concerning sexual purity and thereby to undermine a bourgeois domestic sphere focused on enclosure (of women, within that domestic sphere) and regulation (of female sexuality, again, usually within that domestic space).

Barnes's connection of the sexual body and death seen in this passage on pelvic bones is perhaps made most obvious in the *Almanack's* final image, in the "December" section that marks the end of both the book and Musset's life. After Musset has died and been burned upon a pyre, her admirers discover in Musset's ashes "the Tongue, and this flamed, and would not suffer Ash" (84). In previous months of the *Almanack*, this same tongue provides sexual pleasure to the Ladies and evangelizes about the liberatory and revolutionary potential of lesbianism. And what is the significance of Musset's tongue, that organ which is the sole survivor of Musset's immolation? I disagree with Karla Jay who maintains that the tongue shows Barney/Musset "has been reduced to a sexual acrobat" (189).¹⁸ In part, Musset's nonflammable tongue signals the indestructibility of the grotesque body: Bakhtin explains that "In the grotesque body [. . .] death brings nothing to an end, for it does not concern the ancestral body, which is renewed in the next

¹⁷ In her use of the book of saints, Barnes may have been inspired by James Joyce. In her 1922 article about Joyce, Barnes recalls, "Once he was reading out of the book of saints (he is never without it) and muttering to himself that this particular day's saint was 'a devil of a fellow for bringing on the rain, and we wanting to go for a stroll'" (*Interviews* 295).

¹⁸ Susan Sniader Lanser argues that the tongue "becomes the double signature of sexuality and textuality" (163). Frann Michel suggests that the tongue symbolically links

generation” (322). In part, the tongue is also Barnes’s joke about the licentious habits and gossipy ways of her friends and neighbors of the Left Bank. When Musset’s admirers discover the flaming Tongue in her ashes, a struggle for position—and for unquenchable ecstasy—ensues: “but Señorita Fly-About came down upon that Urn first, and beatitude played and flickered upon her Face, and from under her Skirts a slow Smoke issued, though no thing burned [. . .]” (84). Moreover, the survival of the tongue reveals Musset’s legacy as the work of her grotesque body, both in the sexual pleasure she gave and in the liberatory lesbianism that she preached. As Susan Sniader Lanser puts it, “the Tongue—and the Text—outlives the flesh” (164).

Even as Barnes celebrates the pleasures and transgressions of the grotesque domestic body, she quietly acknowledges the vulnerabilities of a grotesque body and highlights the potential consequences of such openness. Among the consequences to which the Lady of Fashion calls attention are suicides of women lovelorn for other women (57), the hazards of “a bragging Tongue” (48), and the obsessive attentions of a persistent admirer of Musset: “all she has asked of me these ten Years is that on the Day I shall find a need of her, I shall place a Pot of Geraniums on my Sill, and she will come flying to me” (66-67). Elsewhere in the text, the pleasure of Musset and her circle is interrupted by the militantly heterosexual dissent of Patience Scalpel.¹⁹ This interruption

female passion and the power of women’s language” (182), but she concludes that the tongue is ultimately not a sign of power, since the tongue “cannot speak” (182).

¹⁹ The name Patience Scalpel invokes both the Puritan heritage of America (with the Puritans’ penchant for virtue-related names) and the cutting nature of Scalpel’s dissent. The Lady of Fashion notes that Scalpel’s “Voice was heard throughout the Year, as cutting in its Derision as a surgical instrument” (12). According to Susan Sniader Lanser,

is echoed in the structure of the novel. The narrative of Musset's life and loves is interrupted by the Lady of Fashion, who frets about miscommunication and the instability of her own domestic partnership. Often, the "consequences" foreground Barnes's satire of the social upheavals that accompany modernity. The most humorous example is the case of Masie Tuck-&-Frill, a midwife by profession, who is "because of the Trend of the Times, lamentably out of a Job" (20).

In addition to alluding to these and other potential pitfalls of transgression and excess, Barnes uses the text to critique the commodification of women, both within the expatriate lesbian community and within commodity culture at large. First, Barnes targets a lesbian sexual ethics in which women are treated as commodities, ones to be consumed and exchanged. Musset speaks of women as though they were components; she insists that "'We should be able to order our Ladies as we would, and not as they come'" (66). This insistence follows Musset's shopping list of fragmented female parts she would choose "'could [I] mould the Pot nearer to the Heart's desire": "'the Hips of Doll, on the Leg of Moll, whose Shins are Mazie's, all under the Eye of the Scullion, Etc., and the rowdy Parts of a scampering Jade in Pluckford Place'" (65). In other passages, Musset likens women to food—typically sweets such as "Cake" (34) and "mincemeat Tartlets" (45)—and thus continues the portrayal of woman as a commodity. Of course, we have already seen this pattern—framing the female body as a consumer good—in the *Almanack's* frequent comparison of the female body to household items: oriental rugs, knick-knacks, architectural features. In the passages quoted above, Barnes

Patience Scalpel is "the fictional counterpart to Barnes's close friend, the poet Mina Loy"

frames the female body as both consumer and consumed, both the agent who desires, selects, and consumes *and* the object of consumption. In Musset's wish list of female parts, she characterizes women as little more than objects from which to pick and choose. By referring to them as "Tartlets," Musset suggests both their sexual availability—they are tarts—and the insubstantial nature of her relationship with them: they are sweet but not nourishing or sustaining. In these images, Barnes critiques this economy in which women are the prime commodity, the currency of exchange, the focus of collectors, and the object of consumption

Not only does Barnes indict this system of woman as commodity, but she also calls attention to the key role of the domestic sphere within this system of commodification. As Barnes indicates through the tales of the *Almanack*, the domestic sphere is not a refuge from the market economy but is in fact integrated into the system of commodity. Barnes wrote the *Ladies Almanack* in an era when consumer goods and processed food were making significant encroachments into the domestic sphere. Laura Schapiro describes this change in *Perfection Salad: Women and Cooking at the Turn of the Century*:

Beginning in the 1920s, a new image of the American housewife took shape, an image suitable for a new age of material invention and consumption. The advertising industry, the manufacturers of household goods, the food companies, the women's magazines, and the schools all shared in the task of creating a woman who could discriminate among

canned soups [. . .]. (221)

In *Ladies Almanack*, the domestic sphere is the site of the commodification that Barnes critiques. It is in “that dear ancestral Home” where Musset “flooded” the “dear old Countess” (34-35), and “the Temple of the Good Dame Musset” (18-19) in which Musset asserts that “We should be able to order our Ladies as we would, and not as they come” (66). Here, Barnes undoubtedly exaggerates the commodification of women, yet the phenomenon is pointedly located within the domestic sphere, which is not—in Barnes’s figuration—a refuge from the marketplace but rather an extension of it. Although Barnes uses the *Almanack* to reveal the role of the domestic sphere within this economy of women, she nonetheless celebrates the pleasure and companionship gained through these exchanges.

Other critics have suggested that the critique in *Ladies Almanack* overwhelms its pleasures. For instance, Karla Jay disagrees with critics who “have described the book as a joyous celebration of lesbianism” (191). Instead, Jay characterizes the *Almanack* as the work of a woman conflicted about her sexuality and bitterly resentful of the “ladies” who “were economically independent women, free to choose not only where they lived but how they lived, sexually and otherwise” (193). James Scott goes even further in his claim that “the book satirizes the absurdity of modern promiscuity among women, and it protests the absence of the decent restraints of privacy” (80). As I indicate above, I certainly see an element of critique in the *Almanack*, but this critique is not “biting satire, verging on viciousness” (Jay 185). Barnes figures domesticity, the physical body, and that capital city of modernism—Paris—largely as a pleasurable and ever-changing

environment. While the female body is figured in the *Almanack* as a site of vulnerability (the link between life and death), it is more often presented as a site of desire and as a pleasurable site of that desire's fulfillment. For instance, although the "December" chapter tells of the death of Musset's body—"In this cold and chill December, the Month of the Year when the proof of God died, died Saint Musset [. . .]" (80)—that same body still provides sexual pleasure to her followers (from her tongue which survives her cremation).

Barnes was a very savvy student of consumerism herself, and she proved this through her skillful self-promotions, first as a fledgling journalist in New York City and then as an aspiring literati in Paris and Berlin. Barbara Green says of Barnes's early journalistic stunts that she "was engaged in performative journalism, staging sensationalistic events for public consumption" (70), and that Barnes's work "is a reenactment of the gendered ritual of exchange, secrecy, self-protection, and self-disclosure" (76). In addition to the societal function of female body as commodity, Barnes understands her own writing as a commodity, thanks in part to the "emotional toll of poverty" (Jay 185). Barnes's writing allowed her to support her mother and siblings after Wald Barnes turned them out. Years later, royalties—"literary monies" (Field 17)—from *Ryder* and from her anonymous *McCall's* articles allowed Barnes to purchase "a much grander place" (17) on the rue St.-Romain for herself and Thelma Wood. I do not agree with Frann Michel, who feels that *Ladies Almanack* escapes "the masculine economy" of exchange by being "[p]rivately printed and circulated" (176). Instead, Barnes reveals in *Ladies Almanack* that the domestic sphere is fully implicated in

economies of exchange in both those pleasurable exchanges that Stallybrass and White discuss (22) *and* those exchanges which reduce women to consumer/consumable.

“a swill-pail [. . .] brimming with abominations”*: *Uncanny Domesticity in Nightwood

One domestic object that held particular fascination for Barnes is the chamber pot, such as the “swill-pail” of this section’s title. In both *Nightwood* and Barnes’s earlier novels (*Ladies Almanack* and *Ryder*), the chamber pot is a central image of the domestic sphere. Barnes’s textual chamber pots reveal her changing vision of domesticity, of the human body (and its products), and of the efficacy of art. In Barnes’s earlier novels—*Ladies Almanack* and *Ryder* (Barnes’s semi-autobiographical novel also published in 1928)—chamber pots and their contents are figured as productive, inspirational, motivating, humorous, and noble, not as swill-pails brimming with abominations. As was mentioned above in the discussion of *Ladies Almanack*, the narrator describes the contents of the “Night Vase,” excretions that humorously reveal the lesbianism of their source: the urine contains “a whole school of Trulls, couched on a Conch Shell” (28) or “the fully Robed on-marching Figure of Venus no larger than a Caraway Seed, a Trident in one Hand and a Gos-Wasp on the left fist” (28). In *Ryder*’s third chapter (entitled “Sophia and the Five-Fine Chamber-pots”), the ““Flowing Bowl’ (or night vase)” (9) provides Sophia both physical relief and a personality test for potential suitors, based upon their reaction to the gilded lines of poetry she has inscribed on the five chamber pots (11). The bawdy, funny night vases of *Ryder* and *Ladies Almanack* give way to the abomination-filled swill-pails of *Nightwood*. A closer look at

the novel's "swill-pail" of "abominations" will clarify the domestic aesthetic of *Nightwood*.

In *Nightwood*'s key fifth chapter, "Watchman, What of the Night?" the protagonist Nora Flood pays a surprise 3:00 a.m. visit to her friend Dr. Matthew O'Connor. Nora is seeking companionship to relieve her misery, after having been abandoned by her lover and domestic companion, Robin Vote. This is Nora's first visit to the Doctor's rented room, so small that "it was as if being condemned to the grave" (68). The narrator relates what Nora sees, emphasizing the room's decayed disorder:

On a maple dresser, certainly not of European make, lay a rusty pair of forceps, a broken scalpel, half a dozen odd instruments that she could not place, a catheter, some twenty perfume bottles, almost empty, pomades, creams, rouges, powder boxes and puffs. From the half open drawers of this chiffonier hung laces, ribands, stockings, ladies' underclothing and an abdominal brace, which gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery. *A swill-pail stood at the head of the bed, brimming with abominations.* (68, italics mine)²⁰

Barnes's denotation of human waste as "swill" and "abominations" recalls Julia Kristeva's discussion of human excrement in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*.

²⁰ This passage, in its attention to the chamber pot and its allusion to feminine artifice, recalls Jonathan Swift's "The Lady's Dressing Room." In that poem, a lover is distressed to discover in his lady's dressing chamber, "Her Ointments, Daubs, and Paints and Creams,/Her Washes, Slops, and every Clout" (138-39). Like Swift, Barnes is interested in the "Slops" that reveal humanity's animal nature amongst the trappings of an artificial, socially-defined personal ornamentation.

For Kristeva, the contents of the chamber pot “*show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These body fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being” (3). The Doctor’s abominations—and *Nightwood*’s domestic sphere in general—are an ever-present reminder of the fragile border between animate/inanimate, a reminder of mortality. Domesticity does not please and distract as it did in *Ladies Almanack*; instead, it magnifies the perils of the human condition—physical decay, emotional loss, addiction, and so on—and evokes fears about the boundaries of selfhood.

In *Nightwood*, the chamber pot is a liminal space between (domestic) order and chaos. As such, it recalls the perilously fine boundary between self and other, animate and inanimate, human and animal, civilization and savagery: a boundary—and consequent anxiety about this boundary—which Freud defines as the uncanny. Freud explains that an uncanny object is frightening thanks to its reminder of childhood, of “a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people” (236). Uncanny objects and persons remind us of childhood memories and fears, and evoke a child’s sense of helplessness and uncertainty. I argue that *Nightwood*’s domestic sphere is pervaded by a lingering anxiety over the uncanny dissolution of self; in this argument, I disagree with Jane Marcus who sees in *Nightwood* a productive “female uncanny”(244) that encourages “merging, dissolution, and, above all, hybridization” (223).²¹ The characters in *Nightwood* fret about their own decay, that of

²¹ I also disagree with Marcus’s uncomplicated, positive reading of the novel’s fecal imagery, which she sees as “regenerative” (225) and “cleansing” (226).

their homes, and that of their society; the domestic sphere serves as a constant reminder of quotidian human decay. The body that was grotesque in *Ladies Almanack* becomes in *Nightwood* an ossified museum specimen, uncannily static. Thus, the uncanny domestic sphere of *Nightwood* reveals the vulnerabilities of the human body rather than the sensuality of that body (as in the *Almanack*). Instead, *Nightwood*'s uncanny domesticity couples an anxiety about tenuous boundaries with an irresistible attraction to artifice, to that which blurs the border between real/artificial and organic/inorganic.

In casting the domestic sphere of *Nightwood* as uncanny, Barnes does not reject the pleasurable, grotesque, fleshy domestic sphere of *Ladies Almanack*. Instead, the domestic sphere in *Nightwood* is a museum—"a fantastic museum of their encounter" (6)—that memorializes the formerly rich, plentiful domesticity of *Ladies Almanack*. The plenitude, pleasure, and vitality of *Ladies Almanack* become—in *Nightwood*'s stasis—barrenness, decay, and rococo clutter. In the first pages of *Nightwood*, the home of self-proclaimed "Baron" Guido Volkbein and his wife Hedvig is figured as "a fantastic museum of their encounter" (6).²² The description of the home's interior emphasizes its bloody color scheme: "the thick dragon's-blood pile of rugs from Madrid. The study harboured two rambling desks in rich and bloody wood. [...] and the Venetian blinds were of that peculiarly sombre shade of red so loved by the Austrians" (6-7). Barnes's diction presents the Volkbein home as part museum and part horror show, the residents as part immobilized specimens—like Prufrock's "patient etherised upon a table . . .

²² All quotations from *Nightwood* are from the 1995 scholarly edition of *Nightwood* published by the Dalkey Archive Press and edited by Cheryl J. Plumb.

formulated, sprawling on a pin . . . pinned and wriggling on the wall” (3, 57-58)—and part carnival freaks.

In figuring the novel’s characters as specimens, Barnes distances the reader from the characters and makes the reader complicit in the novel’s scopic economy. The narrator invites the reader to become a museum-goer and to examine more closely the specimens and their tableaux. In the narrator’s long inventory of the Doctor’s tiny room, Barnes’s diction emphasizes its grave-like atmosphere and its shabbiness. The Doctor’s possessions, perhaps once opulent, are “rusty,” “broken,” and “almost empty” (68); and his wardrobe of “ladies’ underclothing and an abdominal brace . . . gave the impression that the feminine finery had suffered venery” (68). The “venery” mentioned here, like the better days of the Doctor’s finery, is clearly long past. In this domestic imagery, Barnes conjures up long-forgotten sensual indulgence—like that in *Ladies Almanack*—whose physical consequences far outlive its pleasures.

This shift in Barnes’s 1928-36 fiction can be traced in part to simultaneous (and overdetermined) transformations in Barnes’s personal life and in European politics over this same eight-year span, by the end of which time “hope has died not only politically with the imminence of fascist plague but personally for Barnes” (Lanser 168). The decay in *Nightwood* represents a complex of these personal and political deaths, primarily the disintegration of Barnes’s long-term relationship with Thelma Wood *and* the coincident agricultural and economic decline and political instability of Western Europe. However, I concur with Mary Lynn Broe, who questions narrow readings of *Nightwood* such as its canonization “as the emblematic male modernist text [. . .] in its inscription of the decline

of western civilization, its characters representing the decay” (7). Although there may be an element of political allegory in *Nightwood*, the novel also inscribes the decline of Barnes’s relationships as well as her rejection of sensual pleasure and the grotesque aesthetic of *Ladies Almanack*.

Europe’s decline had very immediate, personal repercussions for Barnes. Barnes rightly understood the economic and political unrest she witnessed in 1920s-30s Europe to be a presage of her own domestic unrest and uprooting; she would eventually—in October, 1939—move back to New York and move in with her mother. Barnes had vowed never to move back to America, but “the impending conflagration in Europe” (Herring 242) became difficult to ignore. By 1933 when Barnes completed the second draft of *Nightwood* (Plumb x), she would have been aware of the unrest, if only through the new “ominously foreboding” tone of her friend Janet Flanner’s *New Yorker* column “Letter from Paris” (Benstock 119). Barnes’s perception of a depleted, devitalized Europe joins her growing sense of personal and aesthetic impotence to shape *Nightwood*. Consequently, the domestic sphere of *Nightwood* is even more heavily charged, full of import, weighted with meaning or significance than it was in *Ladies Almanack*.

Barnes’s sense of personal impotence in these years centered on her disintegrating relationship with artist Thelma Wood, “a tall, handsome, hard-drinking woman from Saint Louis” (Herring 156). Their domestic partnership lasted from 1922-1928; the relationship had disintegrated completely by 1932 (Benstock 256), in part because Barnes showed Thelma the draft of *Nightwood*, a novel she privately called ““my life with Thelma”” (qtd. in Plumb vii). Benstock says the “writing of *Nightwood* was an act of

revenge and an attempt at exorcism—each achieved its end. Thelma was angered by the portrayal of her as Robin Vote” (Benstock 256). In *Nightwood*, Thelma—chronically unfaithful and an alcoholic—becomes Robin Vote, a binge drinker who is chronically unfaithful to her partner Nora Flood. When the reader first meets Robin, she is passed out on her bed in the *Hôtel Récamier*. The domestic sphere—as characterized in the following passage—suggests neither the pleasure nor the grotesque plenitude of *Ladies Almanack*. Rather, domesticity is threatening. It is a trap, for “a woman who is beast turning human” (36). In the novel, Robin is the victim of the domestic: “[I]ike a painting by the *douanier* Rousseau, she seemed to lie in a jungle trapped in a drawing room [. . .], thrown in among the carnivorous flowers as their ration” (34).

Barnes’s characterization of Robin as an animal, as “beast turning human,” is only one phrase within the larger pattern of animal imagery throughout *Nightwood*. This imagery serves to evoke the uncanny, by recalling the animal nature of human beings and thereby questioning the boundaries of human selfhood. Such animal references most often focus on Robin: she “carried the quality of the ‘way back’ as animals do” (39), her eyes resembled “the iris of wild beasts who have not tamed the focus down to meet the human eye” (36), and she always “seemed to be listening to the echo of some foray in the blood” (42). Robin’s animality is uncanny because it reminds the reader of the fragile distinctions of humanity. For Barnes, Thelma’s promiscuity must have been an uncanny reminder of that of Djuna’s father, who had once justified his own promiscuity in the

name of humanity's animal nature.²³ That is, Thelma's behavior was uncanny for Barnes because it was all too familiar; Freud describes uncanny fears as arising from something that "is familiar and old-established in the mind" but "has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (Freud 241). Through the novel's animal imagery and other uncanny images, Barnes suggests that the most potent threats to selfhood are those closest to home, including death, of which Dr. O'Connor says "'While we are in the parlour it is visiting in the pantry'" (82), as well as the beast-Robin in the drawing room.

In *Nightwood*, as in *Ladies Almanack*, Barnes figures the domestic sphere as a double for the human body. Unlike the grotesque domestic body of the *Almanack*, however, the uncanny domestic body of *Nightwood* is defined primarily by its experience of loss. The loss is both emotional and material, due to decay, death, contamination, neglect, and malice. In *Ladies Almanack*, Evangeline Musset's works—sexual and evangelical—are individual accomplishments, and they outlive her. In contrast, Barnes's mouthpiece in *Nightwood*, Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor, anticipates a collective fate of total obliteration: "'I [. . .] have embraced every confection of hope, and yet I know well, for all our outcry and struggle, we shall be for the next generation not the massive dung fallen from the dinosaur, but the little speck left of a humming-bird [. . .]'" (127).

By arguing that *Nightwood* marks an aesthetic shift in Barnes's work away from the fecund, open grotesque of *Ladies Almanack*, I disagree with those critics who see in

²³ According to Phillip Herring, "Djuna told her friends that Wald rode circuit in the neighborhood to have sexual encounters with women and kept a sponge tied to his horse's saddle to wipe his private parts" (31)

Nightwood a “fecundity” (qtd. in Marcus “Mousemeat” 196) or a “liberatory” potential which “temporarily subsumes difference” (Russo 173). Instead, I agree with Susan Sniader Lanser, who argues that although *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood* share “a problematics of [...] desire,”

by the time of *Nightwood*, [...] hope has died not only politically with the imminence of fascist plague but personally for Barnes in the final rupture with her own Night Wood, love has lost its enchantment if not its force, and sexuality has become more bondage than bond. (168)

Certainly, *Nightwood* is darkly hilarious—indelibly marked by Barnes’s campy sense of humor—but the novel also reveals Barnes’s growing sense that the grotesque body and its desires are “more bondage than bond.” Again, this shift in Barnes’s aesthetic is especially apparent within the domestic sphere, through Barnes’s figuration of the domestic sphere as a decaying mirror for a decaying self.

Barnes undermines the finite bourgeois self in *Nightwood* not only through her revelation of the decay of the material body but also through her rejection of solipsism. Although the somber tone of *Nightwood* may remind readers of *The Well of Loneliness*, Barnes implicitly rejects Radclyffe Hall’s appeal to pathos and emphasis on individual suffering. Certainly, readers of *Nightwood* have noted its pessimism: T.S. Eliot mentions the book’s “quality of horror and doom very nearly related to that of Elizabethan tragedy” (xvi), and a reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* cites “symptoms of an indigestion or sickness of the soul so deep and pervasive as to seem irremediable” (qtd. in Marcus 196). However, unlike *The Well of Loneliness*, *Nightwood*’s pessimism is

universal rather than personal; as Doctor O'Connor asserts, "No man needs curing of his individual sickness, his universal malady is what he should look to" (32). Barnes does lace her pessimism with her dark humor, her love of the exaggerated fake, and her sense of satire. This aesthetic is most apparent in *Nightwood's* "great talker," Doctor Matthew-Mighty-grain-of-salt-Dante-O'Connor, whose dire pronouncements of universal doom are marked by laughter: "Laughing I came into Pacific Street, and laughing I'm going out of it; laughter is the pauper's money" (32).

Amidst the pervasive anxiety over boundaries and stability of the self, *Nightwood* also celebrates fakery, disguise, and other such threats to firm identity; its uncanny is laced with camp. Barnes's representation of an uncannily campy domestic sphere recalls Susan Sontag's definition of camp, that camp is "a love of the exaggerated, the 'off,' of things-being-what-they-are-not" (279). In her celebration of self-conscious ornamentation and (unconvincing) disguise, Barnes is in sympathy with those aesthetics—decadence, postmodern irony, camp—that manipulate and privilege artifice. Barnes's love of exaggerated fakery is apparent in her meticulous description of O'Connor's cosmetics, his feminine finery, and his appearance when Nora arrives:

In the narrow iron bed, with its heavy and dirty linen sheets, lay the doctor in a woman's flannel night gown.

The doctor's head, with its over-large black eyes, its full gun-metal cheeks and chin, was framed in the golden semi-circle of a wig with long pendent curls that touched his shoulders, and falling back against the pillow, turned up the shadowy interior of their cylinders. He was heavily rouged and his

lashes painted. It flashed into Nora's head: "God, children know something they can't tell, they like Red Riding Hood and the wolf in bed!" (69)

Barnes may evoke uncanny domestic terrors in the image of the wolf in bed (although Jane Marcus overstates the case when she labels this passage the "most powerful representation of the uncanny in the novel" [245]), but Barnes also suggests a primal *attraction* to such artifice, to such uncertainty. This uncanny camp may seem contradictory in that Barnes yokes a love of disguise with a yearning for clear distinctions. However, both the uncanny and the camp of *Nightwood* are defensive postures in response to some real or perceived threat to the self. *Nightwood* signals a retreat in Djuna Barnes's work: *from* a vision of the domestic as grotesque and *from* the representational promise of this grotesque as plenitude, multiplicity of meanings, and multiplied potential.

Barnes best embodies uncanny domestic threats through the symbolism of Robin and Nora's doll, which Robin had given to Nora earlier in their relationship and which Robin violently destroys during an argument. Freud maintains that a doll (as well as other images of doubles) becomes "an uncanny harbinger of death" (235) because "there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self" (234). Dolls had been a symbolic part of the Barnes-Wood household: "Djuna gave Thelma a doll every Christmas, a symbol of their union" (Herring 161). In *Nightwood*, Nora offers a reading of her and Robin's doll that echoes Freud: "We give death to a child when we give it a doll—it's the effigy and the shroud; when a woman gives it to a woman, it is the life they cannot

have, it is their child, sacred and profane” (118). Through a common domestic object—the doll—Barnes presents both her own losses to Thelma and death’s threat to self-integrity. Throughout *Nightwood*, Barnes specifically locates such threats within the domestic sphere and rejects the comfort, plenitude, and potential offered by the domesticity of *Ladies Almanack*.

In language evocative of uncanny fears—especially of “a time when the ego had not yet marked itself off sharply from the external world and from other people” (Freud 236)—Louise Berkinow characterizes Nora and Robin’s breakup as a reenactment of a child’s separation from her mother: “The ghostly mother reappears and plays her part. [. . .] This is not actual mother, but mother-as-construct, the expectation of constant mother-love, the experience of absolute dependence on a female, the uneradicable memory of it” (219). According to Barnes, however, the ghostly, uncanny double that haunts the Nora and Robin’s breakup is not mother but self. Barnes evokes uncanny fears—about the dissolution of selfhood—in Nora’s description of her breakup: a “man is another person—a woman is yourself, caught as you turn in panic; on her mouth you kiss your own. If she is taken you cry that you have been robbed of yourself” (119). In this passage, Barnes exploits the fear of losing oneself when one loses a lover, and she further conjures up uncanny fears over the disintegration of selfhood.

Barnes’s critique of bourgeois ideology within the domestic sphere itself—a realm traditionally defined by its role in bourgeois life—recalls Gertrude Stein’s use of domesticity in *Tender Buttons* (1914) and looks forward to F.T. Marinetti’s assault on bourgeois strictures in *The Futurist Cookbook* (1932). Like Marinetti, Barnes embraces a

domesticity that is sensual, transgressive, and socially satiric. Each of these authors looks to preserve aspects of domestic life—the sensuality, the relationships—while separating domesticity from its role within bourgeois tradition. Each uses the literary techniques of modernism—formal innovation and experimentation, literary abstraction, literary allusion—in order to revivify domesticity and to rescue it from Victorian bourgeois morality. Barnes, Stein, and Marinetti clearly perceive subversive potential within the domestic sphere. As each of them acknowledges, such potential for transgression is ambiguous; it can be coopted for both liberatory and reactionary ends. In Barnes's case, she exploits the transgressive potential of domesticity most fully in *Ladies Almanack* (1928); by *Nightwood*, however, the ambiguities of transgression overwhelm its potential.

Chapter 4

“a violent kind of delightfulness”: The Paradoxical Domesticity of Stein’s *Tender Buttons*

Gertrude Stein began writing *Tender Buttons* while she was vacationing in Spain with Alice B. Toklas—“in effect, a honeymoon” (Wagner-Martin 107)—in the summer of 1912. Gertrude and Alice’s trip was pleasant—“I liked Spain immensely” (Stein *SW* 108)—and productive—“We finally came to Granada and stayed there for some time and there Gertrude Stein worked terrifically” (111). As Stein would later write of this Spanish vacation in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1934), “it was there and at that time that Gertrude Stein’s style gradually changed” (111). In *Tender Buttons*, Stein departs from her earlier word portraits of people (“Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia,” “Cezanne,” “Matisse,” and “Picasso” are among the most famous). Instead of focusing on a specific individual, in *Tender Buttons* Stein creates portraits of domestic life, prose poems she later organized into three sections entitled “Objects,” “Food,” and “Rooms.” These domestic snapshots include “Apple” (48), “A Carafe, That Is a Blind Glass,” (9), “A Little Called Pauline” (25), and “Orange In” (58), among many others. Stein worked on these experimental domestic portraits for the remainder of their Spanish vacation, and, as Stein explains in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* “after the return to Paris she described objects, she described rooms and objects, which joined with her first experiments done in Spain, made the volume *Tender Buttons*” (Stein *SW* 112).

When Stein and Toklas returned to Paris—and to their famous apartment in the rue de Fleurus—they also returned to the daily domestic dramas between Gertrude and her brother Leo. Housemates for the past ten years, the siblings were once close; but by

1912, “Gertrude turned away from Leo for her own survival because he was contemptuous of her work” (Souhami 100). Leo’s contempt for Gertrude (and her friend Pablo Picasso) is apparent in his comment in a 1913 letter: “Both he [Picasso] and Gertrude are using their intellects, which they ain’t got, to do what would need the finest critical tact, which they ain’t got neither, and they are in my belief turning out the most Godalmighty rubbish that is to be found” (1913 ltr. to Mabel Weeks, qtd. Stendhal 67). Not surprisingly, the atmosphere in the rue de Fleurus was tense; Toklas later wrote of “‘the miserable time’ Leo gave Gertrude, adding, ‘he made me suffer’ as well” (qtd. in Wagner-Martin 112). The vacation of summer 1912 must have been a welcome respite for all three. After Stein and Toklas returned to Paris in the autumn of 1912, the tension in the rue de Fleurus heightened, culminating in Leo’s moving out the following spring. It was in this atmosphere of domestic friction and brotherly contempt that Stein completed *Tender Buttons*.¹

Stein’s domestic life in this period was thus marked by emotional extremes, from the contentment of her Spanish honeymoon to the discord of life with Leo. The domestic portraits of *Tender Buttons* reflect this radically paradoxical nature of Stein’s domestic experience. The image of domestic life that Stein portrays in *Tender Buttons* is alternately pleasurable and hostile, by turns comforting and brutal. Some phrases suggest a placid domestic sphere, in the authoritative tone (if not the logic) of an etiquette manual

¹ See Pamela Hadas for a strictly autobiographical interpretation of *Tender Buttons* as a reflection “of the differences sought by and between Gertrude Stein and her brother, of an immanent change in their living arrangements, of a change which includes Alice Toklas” (61).

or a cookbook: “An occasion for a plate, and occasional resource is in buying and how soon does washing enable a selection of the same thing neater. If the party is small a clever song is in order” (15, from “A Plate”). Other poems seem to suggest conflicts or domestic unpleasanties: “A jack in kill her, a jack in, makes a meadowed king, makes a to let” (29, from “This is This Dress, Aider”); “Count the chain, cut the grass, silence the noon and murder flies” (46, from “Cranberries”). *Tender Buttons* is pervaded by such imperatives to “cut” and allusions to “agitation,” “disgrace,” “pus,” “hurt,” “terror,” and “nausea.” In the strikingly different images of these prose poems, then, Stein explores a paradox of domestic life: that one’s home can be site for both one’s greatest joys and one’s most severe disappointments, and that domestic objects and rooms evoke those associations.

Despite obvious biographical precedents for *Tender Buttons*’s images, the text presents itself in rigorously formal terms: Stein constructed the poem around repetition, word play, and “linguistic leakage” (more on this below). Stein herself depicted the text as an exercise in the “strict discipline” (*Lectures* 196) of linguistic exactness and of refusing allusion. In “Portraits and Repetition,” Stein likens her work in *Tender Buttons* to still life paintings in her attempt to capture “what is seen ... includ[ing] color and movement” (*Lectures* 189), without clouding this with memory or with “hearing and listening and ... talking” (189). Overall, *Tender Buttons*’s organization suggests a household handbook or housekeeping manual: the three sections—“Objects,” “Food,” and “Rooms”—ostensibly depict those aspects of a home most demanding of a

homemaker's attention.² The "Objects" and "Food" sections are comprised of shorter prose poems, whose titles more or less realistically situate them as snapshots of household items. Titles such as "A Piano" or "A Chair" suggest at first glance a realistic treatment, while others such as "Careless Water" or "Suppose an Eyes" (through their refusal of standard logic or grammar) immediately announce their atypical visions of the domestic sphere. Within the individual prose poems, Stein's penchant for repetition and word play dominates, as in the poem "Chicken," which reads "Alas a dirty word, alas a dirty third alas a dirty third, alas a dirty bird" (54). Here, Stein repeats three words of this four-word phrase, and plays with rhyming of the fourth word—first "word," then "third," then "bird"—and of the rhythm of the repeated phrase. As Stein does in other parts of *Tender Buttons*, she practices what I call a sort of linguistic leakage here in which words of this poem are picked up from other, earlier poems and then carry over into surrounding poems. For instance, the poem immediately preceding "Chicken" (and also entitled "Chicken") ends with the phrase "a peculiar third," which phrase is recalled in *our* "Chicken"'s "a dirty third" (54). Then, in the next poem (also called "Chicken"), Stein again replicates the structure—"Alas a ..."—of the previous poem.

Critical arguments about *Tender Buttons* divide between formalist and allegorical readings. Those who argue that *Tender Buttons* epitomizes modernist formal experimentation assert that the content of Stein's experiments is irrelevant and/or non-existent. In her important study *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental*

² Of course, this organization also appears to overlook the intricacies of behavior and physical well-being, those aspects of housekeeping most closely linked with those who inhabit the home.

Writing (1983), Marianne DeKoven emphatically states that *Tender Buttons*'s prose poems "have no themes" (75). Other critics such as Michael Edward Kaufman maintain that these poems have no meaning beyond their nominative function and their commentary on language; he argues that "*Tender Buttons* is ... simply a narrative of the mind encountering language and print," that it features "descriptions not of things but of words" (450). Needless to say, those critics who see *Tender Buttons* as linguistic experiment see no allegorical import in the violent images of the text, since content is secondary to form.

Yet other critics depict Stein as an artist in allegories, and they consequently reject readings of *Tender Buttons* as a content-less exercise in linguistic experimentation. Marianne DeKoven's own scholarly career presents the contrast between the formalist and allegorical perspectives. By the time she wrote her 1996 introduction to a special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* on Gertrude Stein, DeKoven had abandoned her "they have no themes" argument. DeKoven wrote that

the way in which I insisted then on reading style more or less in a textual sterile zone, uncontaminated by questions of biography or history, or even particular referential meanings in the radical works, I now see as a legacy of the reactionary project of the New Criticism, inspired by the New Critical suppression of history, especially subaltern histories, and hypostatization of form as high literary mark of "distinction" (Bourdieu), both of which my subsequent work, as part of the cultural studies movement, has been dedicated to undoing. (474)

Those critics, like DeKoven in her later works, who see *Tender Buttons* as allegorical take two very different approaches to the import of *Tender Buttons*'s violent images: they explain the images as anti-violence protests or, conversely, as celebrations of the redemptive effects of violence.

In this chapter, I argue that Stein's portrait of domesticity in *Tender Buttons* reveals her appreciation of "violence," of the "miserable" moments in domestic life, because such moments defamiliarize domesticity and allow us to appreciate it afresh. My analysis hinges on Stein's ability to explore issues at once formal—a modernist experiment in form—and allegorical, a treatment of issues beyond the purely linguistic. How do Stein's formal questions also become allegorical ones? Stein herself has commented about the tendency of formal experiments to also have referential weight. In describing her experiments in *Tender Buttons*, Stein says "I took individual words and thought about them until I got their weight and volume complete and put them next to another word, and at this same time I found out very soon that there is no such thing as putting them together without sense" (*Primer* 18). Moreover, for Stein and other modernists, the domestic is the burden of the everyday that resists attempts to aestheticize it: here we need only remember William Carlos Williams's plums in the icebox or T.S. Eliot's teacups and coffeespoons. In Stein's project for *Tender Buttons*, linguistic defamiliarization becomes a model of the defamiliarization of everyday life: for what is more familiar or taken for granted than our language or our everyday surroundings? In the "Transatlantic Interview," recorded only a few months before her death in 1946, Stein explained that her project of "the recreation of the word" (*Primer* 18) was her response to

the tired, stale quality of language: “words had lost their value in the Nineteenth Century, particularly towards the end, they had lost much of their variety, and I felt that I could not go on, that I had to recapture the individual word” (17-18). In *Tender Buttons*, as Stein tries to recreate the word, she does so by simultaneously recreating the domestic sphere, restoring to it the freshness and intensity lost through overfamiliarity and through its co-optation by Victorianism. For Stein, domesticity had become the bland, inert aspect of the everyday; and like the word, this domestic world needs its variety recaptured.

In the formalist allegories of *Tender Buttons*, Stein depicts the domestic sphere as an energetic site of ambiguous potential, as full of conflict and cutting as it is of satisfying meals and passionate lovemaking. Stein emphasizes and does not attempt to reconcile the tensions inherent in this ambiguity between the pleasure of the good meal and the misery of domestic conflict. In fact, Stein attributes an aesthetic function to domestic misery: it makes our domestic pleasures more intense and poignant. Stein champions the clarifying effects of dissonant domesticity in an observation about Matisse: “He used his distorted drawing as a dissonance is used in music or as vinegar or lemons are used in cooking or egg shells in coffee to clarify” (*Auto* 38). Generally, the few critics who do note the unpleasant domesticity of *Tender Buttons* assume Stein rejects this misery.³ Instead, as I argue, Stein figures such unpleasantness as an integral facet of domestic life, an unavoidable consequence of living and loving. In *Tender*

³ See DeKoven *Rich and Strange* 198-201, Ruddick 192-218, Mitrano 94, Hadas 65. For a reading of the violence as “a dramatization of the death of conventional literary practice,” see Bridgman 130. Also see Jonathan Monroe, who sees the text’s violence as an initial signal of resistance to male aggression, followed by “ultimately a gradual

Buttons, Stein uses images of paradoxical domesticity—including moments of seeming violence as well as more pleasant encounters—to highlight domestic pleasures and to undermine hegemonic Victorian images of the domestic sphere.

Early reviewers of *Tender Buttons* recognized Stein's attempt to defamiliarize the quotidian domestic sphere.⁴ In his review of *Tender Buttons* in the *Boston Evening Transcript* in 1914, Robert E. Rogers states that Stein uses "exact arrangements" (33) of words to create a particular impression of "perceptions, conditions and states of being, never quite consciously before experienced" (Mabel Dodge, qtd. in Rogers 32). The experimental poet and playwright Alfred Kreyborg (writing for the *New York Morning Telegraph* in 1915) humorously highlights the potential of *Tender Buttons* to refresh those experiences "never quite consciously before experienced."⁵ Following a mock address to a frustrated husband—about a wife who is suddenly speaking Steinese after having read *Tender Buttons*—Kreyborg describes the transformation *Tender Buttons* has wrought on the husband's life:

All is well. Your connubial relationship has been strengthened by this new excursion into aesthetic adventure-land. Eating is no longer mere

dissolution of the text's resolve, ending in a qualified acceptance of and resignation to the status quo" (195).

⁴ Some contemporary critics describe this operation as Stein's "obsess[ion] with questions of definition" (Knight 38). In his article "Gertrude Stein, *Tender Buttons*, and the Premises of Classicalism," Christopher J. Knight argues that *Tender Buttons* is preoccupied with comparisons, that the text "privileges analysis and discrimination" (35). Also see Pamela Hadas, 62, for another suggestion that Stein is preoccupied with comparison.

⁵ Stein describes meeting Kreyborg in her Paris salon in 1919 in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (188).

eating. Sitting at the dinner table is no longer mere sitting at the dinner table. ... A new light shines down from the chandelier. There is a new light in what used to be your water glass. There is a light even in the eyes of the stolid cook who brings on the veal, vegetables and dessert—lo, the rhubarb itself shining with unwonted brilliance. (6f)

Kreymborg credits Stein not only with defamiliarizing domesticity—“She has given you a new sensation” of a “new light” from chandelier and water glass—but also with transforming the domestic sphere, changing “what used to be your water glass.”

Kreymborg emphasizes the revivifying potency of Stein’s work, calling it “a little tonic” and “a little fresh adventure.”⁶ Indeed, the force of Stein’s modernist aesthetic is potent if it can promote connubial tranquility, dehabituate domestic experience, and refresh one’s experience even of rhubarb.

In the early part of this chapter, I will examine Stein’s critical writings in which she parallels her project to defamiliarize domesticity with her poetic project—“the recreation of the word” (*Primer* 18)—in *Tender Buttons*. That is, Stein’s description of her poetic project is marked by a discourse of breakage, violence, and obsessive love, and thus echoes the paradoxical images of *Tender Buttons*’s violent domesticity. In both of these revitalizing projects, Stein asserts an interconnection between “using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing” (“Poetry and Grammar” 231). As my study reveals, Stein perceives breakage and violence not as elements of patriarchal

⁶ Also, Kreymborg insists that New York is ready for more of Stein’s work, “what with [New York’s] recent experience in cubism and Marinetti poems.”

oppression but rather as forces that facilitate change, enable aesthetic transformation, and promote creative innovation.

The second section of the chapter examines the ideological critique implicit in the dissonant images of *Tender Buttons*. In addition to defamiliarizing the domestic, Stein aims to separate domestic life from its ties to the Victorian bourgeoisie and from its heritage of cultural and sexual conformity. The speaker in “A Substance in a Cushion”—one of the first poems of *Tender Buttons*—asks, “What is the use of a violent kind of delightfulness if there is no pleasure in not getting tired of it” (10). The text quickly answers this question: “It shows what use there is in a whole piece if one uses it and it is extreme . . . the best thing to do is to take it away and wear it and then be reckless be reckless” (10). The recklessness Stein endorses here is the antithesis of the careful and rational economies of a traditional bourgeois household. Moreover, Stein opens a space within the domestic for the intense pleasures—“a violent kind of delightfulness”—central to *Tender Buttons* but carefully excluded from/controlled within the bourgeois Victorian domestic sphere. In the poems of *Tender Buttons*, Stein offers variations of these reckless, extreme, transformative delights.

In the concluding section of the chapter, I examine Stein’s paradoxical images of domestic transformation and explore the aesthetic function Stein attributes to them. Stein mentions her fascination with breakage in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, when she writes that “Gertrude Stein has a weakness for breakable objects, she has a horror of people who collect only the unbreakable” (13). In *Tender Buttons*, Stein seeks to restore intensity—however pleasurable or not—to the experience of domestic life, an

experience she perceives as dulled by habit and routine. Through a close reading of *Tender Buttons*, one can see Stein's fascination with breakage and with violence, the transformative powers of which she likens to eroticism and other intense sensations. Even as Stein chronicles the annoyance caused by violence and breakage, she highlights their invigorating energies and assigns them a central role in her project of reimagining both domestic life and poetry itself. Stein links such dissolutions to the erotic, in their similar energies as well as in their transformative power to undermine boundaries.

Breaking the Noun

In her lecture "Poetry and Grammar" (1934), Stein describes the poetic project of *Tender Buttons* through a diction of breakage, violence, hatred, and obsessive love: "Poetry is concerned with using with *abusing*, with *losing* with *wanting*, with *denying* with *avoiding* with *adoring* with *replacing* the noun. . . . Poetry is doing nothing but *using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns*" (231, italics mine). In so doing, Stein characterizes her formal experiment as a psychological allegory (a psycho-drama) of love and hate. This discussion reveals that Stein's aesthetic—her "weakness for breakable objects"—extends to her relationship with language as well as her appreciation of the domestic sphere. In a seeming paradox, Stein characterizes poetic creation as a break: "the creating it without naming it, was what broke the rigid form of the noun the simple noun poetry which now was broken" ("Poetry and Grammar" 237). The paradox of *Tender Buttons*'s violent yet revivifying images is thus compounded by an aesthetic which yokes creativity and breakage. For Stein, even though breakage and

violence—love and hate—are sometimes disruptive and upsetting, they also facilitate change, enable aesthetic transformation, and promote creative innovation.

This creative innovation is necessary, according to Stein, because our perception of language is clouded by habit and routine, as is our perception of domesticity. In “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein describes *Tender Buttons* as concerned both with refreshing our perceptions of things and with refreshing our perceptions of nouns, a project she calls “the recreation of the word” (*Primer* 18). By Stein’s account, our dulled perceptions of nouns—dulled by habit and convention—took their toll on poetry: “and slowly as everybody knew the names of everything poetry had less and less to do with everything” (“Poetry and Grammar” 233). She addresses this problem through *Tender Buttons* by “looking at anything until something that was not the name of that thing but was in a way that actual thing would come to be written” (237). Later, in another passage of “Poetry and Grammar,” Stein advocates writing a thing without using its name, and this account depicts an intense domestic experience—an intensity that evokes Georges Bataille’s concept of non-productive expenditure (a concept I will discuss in detail in the next section of the chapter). Stein writes, “everything that for me was existing so intensely that I could put it down in writing as a thing in itself without at all necessarily using its name” (242).

Despite this statement about not using names, Stein depicts *Tender Buttons* in terms of her love for nouns; yet she unmistakably interweaves expressions of this love with outbursts about her hatred of nouns, her rejection of them. She writes, “you can love a name and if you love a name then saying that name any number of times only

makes you love it more, more *violently* more persistently more *tormentedly*. [. . .] And so that is poetry really loving the name of anything” (232, italics mine). The violent, tormented love that Stein links to poetic innovation compounds the images of transformative dissolution in *Tender Buttons* because Stein maps her violent yet passionate transformations of nouns onto the domestic sphere these nouns describe. Through this dissonance, Stein furthers her lifelong project to defamiliarize the most familiar elements of existence: one’s language, the nature of selfhood, one’s perception of time, the relation of self and other, and the nature of everyday life. Stein’s revitalizing projects—both for the noun and for domesticity—involve excesses: of the energies utilized and released through the projects’ desublimations, of the attention lavished on the objects (noun and domestic object), of the violence required to overturn firmly entrenched conventions and to blur distinct boundaries.

Stein especially highlights such excesses in her description of her relationship to poetic language. Stein says of her poetic project in *Tender Buttons* that “Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun” (*Lectures* 231). The conflicted relationship Stein describes here—a relationship marked by “using . . . abusing . . . adoring”—could characterize the interpersonal dynamics of the domestic sphere as surely as the relationship of a writer to her language. Stein associates revitalized perceptions and creativity with breakage, violence, and passionate love; and she depicts this “using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing” (231) as essential to creative innovation. Stein uses *Tender Buttons* to explore both linguistic and non-linguistic

moments of adoration and abuse—of other people, of material objects, of oneself—within the domestic sphere. In so doing, Stein challenges sentimentalized portraits of the domestic sphere that represent it solely as a comforting haven from the heartless world, and she consequently presents a hurdle to Stein scholars who wish to see her as a nurturing mother of modernism or as a lesbian-feminist critic of the violence of patriarchy.

In *Tender Buttons*, Stein's deconstruction of the coherent bourgeois self, her rejection of the Victorian worldview, and her undermining of the traditional domestic sphere foreshadows not only Marinetti's project in *The Futurist Cookbook* but also Barnes's work in *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*. In arguing that Stein's project of breaking the noun and her celebration of a discordant domesticity share aesthetic affiliations with Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook*, I take issue with Marjorie Perloff who argues (in her 1996 study *Wittgenstein's Ladder: Poetic Language and the Strangeness of the Ordinary*) that Stein shares little with Marinetti besides innovative formatting. Perloff goes to great lengths to distinguish Stein's project from Marinetti's, and she asserts that "the writings of both Stein and Wittgenstein represent a side of modernism *markedly different from the Futurist and Imagist collage paradigm*" (21, italics mine). Throughout her chapter-long study "'Grammar in Use': Wittgenstein/Gertrude Stein/Marinetti," Perloff repeatedly attempts to distance Stein's project from Marinetti's, asserting that while Stein's linguistic experiments *seem* similar to Marinetti's, "The 'destruction of syntax' was, of course, also Stein's project, but, as we shall see, for her the phrase *meant something quite different*" (89, italics mine).

Finally, although Perloff acknowledges that Stein was influenced by Futurist typography, collage, and manifesto formats (112), she maintains that Stein is the greater artist and that Stein more fully explores the possibilities of language.

Instead of rejecting the shared aesthetic affinities of Stein and Marinetti, I argue that an examination of *Tender Buttons*—in conjunction with Marinetti's *The Futurist Cookbook* and Djuna Barnes's *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*—reveals Stein's fascination with the ephemerality of the material world, a fascination suspiciously Marinettian in its pleasures. (Or, is *The Futurist Cookbook* Steinian in its pleasures?) I do not contend that Stein's aesthetics were shaped by Marinetti, rather that in Stein's perception of the object and of the relation between object and subject, she shares certain preoccupations with Marinetti. Critics such as Perloff have ignored these affinities in favor of readings which stress Stein's antipathy for Marinetti and which minimize Marinetti's similarities. Like Marinetti and Barnes, Stein embraces flux—be it furthered by violence, decay, breakage, or erotic love—and she condemns stasis, even at the cost of the safety and predictability that stasis brings. Stein's privileging of flux entails a rejection of traditional bourgeois domesticity's emphasis on preservation, regulation, and control. It is in Stein's rejection of this traditional domesticity that *Tender Buttons* most resembles the work of Marinetti and Barnes. In addition, Stein's blurring of the boundaries between the domestic sphere and its inhabitants sets the stage for Barnes's grotesque domestic bodies in *Ladies Almanack* and the uncanny, disintegrating body of *Nightwood*.

Although Stein may celebrate the same intense domestic energies—even the

violent ones—that Marinetti and Barnes do, Stein’s “weakness for breakable objects” stops short of the extremity of Marinetti’s position in *The Futurist Cookbook*; neither does it resemble the hopeless domestic decay in Barnes’s *Nightwood*. Whereas the speaker in *Tender Buttons* may note the breaking of a cup in “Careless Water”—“No cup is broken in more places and mended, that is to say a plate is broken and mending does do that it shows that culture is Japanese” (21)—this breakage does not approach Marinetti’s destructive extremes: for instance, the potentially fatal mushrooms of “the wedding banquet” or the exploding nitro-glycerine nougat of “The Solid Treaty.” Stein’s examination of breakage is different in that she inquires more deeply into the consequences—good and bad—of this breakage than Marinetti ever does; she examines the costs as well as the aesthetic ramifications. Moreover, the breakage celebrated in *Tender Buttons* never verges on the despair or the decay seen in Djuna Barnes’s *Nightwood*. For Stein, breakage ultimately functions as an element of dissonance; breakage defamiliarizes the calm and the comfort of the domestic sphere, just as breaking the noun defamiliarizes a stale language: “the creating it without naming it, was what broke the rigid form of the noun the simple noun poetry which now was broken” (“Poetry and Grammar” 237). Consequently, Stein interweaves the intense and sometimes violent images of *Tender Buttons* with visions of familiar domestic comforts, and she thus uses violence and intensity as elements of dissonance within the text’s roast beef, umbrellas, and rooms. As Stein asserts in “Breakfast” in *Tender Buttons*, “no mistake is intended” in the predominance of images of violence and breakage in the text.

Rejecting Utility: Tender Buttons Critiques the Victorians

As if defamiliarizing domesticity were not challenge enough to Victorian traditions, Stein links *Tender Buttons* with the scandalous, anti-Victorian Decadents through her publishing decisions. Stein arranged for *Tender Buttons*'s 1914 publication with the new avant-garde press Claire Marie. In so doing, Stein ignored the warning of her friend and former hostess Mabel Dodge, who cautioned Stein to avoid Claire Marie and its publisher Donald Evans lest she be tainted by their reputation for "decadence" (Dodge qtd. in Wagner-Martin 117). The taint of decadence surrounding the publication of *Tender Buttons* was no doubt compounded by the book's being bound in canary-colored paper (lettered with two shades of green ink) (Sawyer 37). Stein, Evans, Dodge, and much of the British and American reading public would have understood the significance of a yellow cover. In British and American popular culture of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yellow covers visually signified immorality. This association originated in "the poisonous influence of French novels" (Hawthorne 169) and was cemented by widespread press reports that Oscar Wilde was carrying a yellow book when he was arrested for gross indecency and sodomy in 1895.⁷ Within the literary world, a yellow cover would have evoked the Wilde incident as well as the notoriously yellow book he was carrying: a copy of the infamous Decadent literary journal *The Yellow Book*. Early reviewers of *Tender Buttons* indeed make note of its yellow cover, and they clearly expect their readership to find significance in the "light lemons" (Rogers

⁷ One headline read "Arrest of Oscar Wilde: *Yellow Book* under his arm" (qtd. Beckson xxxix).

31) of Stein's "little canary-covered book" (Kreymborg). Before the reader so much as opens the book, Stein has indicated to them her rejection of Victorian morality and aesthetics through her choice of binding for *Tender Buttons*. She then elaborates this rejection—and its social critique—through the text's images of breakage and intense passion.

Through Georges Bataille's discussion of the social function of non-productive expenditure, we can better understand the social critique embedded within Stein's aesthetic of breakage, loss, and intensity. Bataille was a French philosopher, a medievalist librarian, and a contemporary of—and frequent gadfly to—the surrealists.⁸ In one of his later essays, 1933's "The Notion of Expenditure," Bataille explains that certain forms of wastefulness—"luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity (i.e., deflected from genital finality)" (118)—are antithetical to bourgeois ethics and aesthetics. He moreover claims that these expenditures inspire "*states of excitation*" (128). In *Tender Buttons*, Stein's celebration of breakage—her "weakness for breakable objects"—signals her rejection of the bourgeois "economic principle of balanced accounts" (Bataille 118). As Bataille explains, "The hatred of expenditure is the *raison d'être* of and the justification for the bourgeoisie" (124-25). In *Tender Buttons* Stein flouts the rational economies of the Victorian bourgeoisie as surely as she rejects their sexual mores through the text's endorsement of sensual intensity. Stein uses the text's imagery of

⁸ Andre Breton devotes six pages of the "Second Manifesto of Surrealism" to an attack on Bataille (see pp. 180-86). Bataille summed up his objection to surrealists in his

violence, material dissolution, and intense sensual pleasure to undermine foundational principles of Victorian bourgeois domesticity: its economies and its reliance on firm boundaries (especially those of the self). In Stein's blurring of intense experiences—violence, gustatory pleasure, sexual pleasure—and her embrace of breakage and other forms of material loss, Stein displays “the illogical and irresistible impulse” (Bataille 128) not to utilize material goods rationally. In many poems of *Tender Buttons*, Stein evokes principles of utility through a diction of “use” and “necessity.” However, she counters such concerns through the fate of the text's objects (to be discussed in depth in this chapter's final section): the endorsement of breakage in “Breakfast” and the assertion in “A Substance in a Cushion” that “the best thing to do is to take it away and wear it and then be reckless be reckless” (10). For Bataille, non-productive expenditure is based on the principle of loss, and he notes a particular role for poetry, which “can be considered synonymous with expenditure; it in fact signifies, in the most precise way, creation by means of loss” (120). If we accept Bataille's account of poetry, then it seems natural that the poems of *Tender Buttons* often dwell on such images of reckless breakage and loss.

Stein's evocation of both utility and breakage, both use and loss, suggests the ambiguity inherent in *Tender Buttons*'s domestic energies (and, according to Bataille, an ambiguity inherent in expenditure itself). The multifaceted potential of excess means that it can be misread as luxury rather than transgression, as bourgeois decadence rather than as anti-bourgeois expenditure. In highlighting both utility and breakage, Stein

response to a 1929 surrealist questionnaire: “Too many fucking idealists” (qtd. in

acknowledges and even exploits this ambiguous potential. By dwelling on questions of necessity and usefulness in some poems of *Tender Buttons*, Stein continually reminds the reader of the bourgeois domestic strictures that she so recklessly flouts elsewhere in the text.⁹ In one case, “A Mounted Umbrella” begins “What was the use of not leaving it there where it would hang what was the use if there was no chance of ever seeing it come there and show that it was handsome and right in the way it showed it” (20). The poem “More” begins with another observation about utility: “An elegant use of foliage and grace and a little piece of white cloth and oil” (20). Other poems reveal a parallel concern with necessity. “A Red Stamp” reads “If lilies are lily white if they exhaust noise and distance and even dust, if they dusty will dirt a surface that has no extreme grace, if they do this and it is not necessary it is not at all necessary if they do this they need a catalogue” (14). The poem immediately following “A Red Stamp” entitled “A Box” concentrates on this same question of “what is necessary” and focuses on the purposes served by the box in question: “A large box is handily made of what is necessary to replace any substance. Suppose an example is necessary . . . A custom which is necessary when a box is used . . .” (14). Alternately, Stein reminds her readers

Nadeau 156).

⁹ This tension between the bourgeois and the anti-bourgeois is one that, to some extent, Stein replicated in her own living arrangements. The protocols of Stein’s salon mandated that Stein spoke to visiting artists and writers while Alice B. Toklas entertained the wives. Stein presented this arrangement in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*: “The geniuses came and talked to Gertrude Stein and the wives sat with me” (81), and she jokes that *The Autobiography* should have been titled “The wives of geniuses I have sat with” (13). Moreover, even though the aesthetic discussions at Stein’s salon were quite revolutionary, other aspects bespoke Victorian convention: Stein vehemently opposed intoxication, and she would never invite someone again if he had been drunk at her

of these issues of rational, practical usage and then counters such concerns not only indirectly—through her endorsement of breakage—but also directly through her explicit endorsement of “extreme” usage: “It shows what use there is in a whole piece if one uses it and it is extreme . . .” (10, “A Substance in a Cushion”). Stein’s portrayal of material destruction offers the wasteful and destructive pleasures of non-productive expenditure.

Bataille indicates that extreme usage—“the illogical and irresistible impulse to reject material or moral goods that it would have been possible to utilize rationally”—yields intense “states of excitation” (128). Such a sense of excitation is apparent in the violent and sensual pleasures of “This Is This Dress, Aider,” the breakage in “Breakfast,” and the “violent kind of delightfulness” in “A Substance in Cushion.” Through these states of excitation, Stein links moments of ambiguous intensity—of erotic feeling, violence, attention, pleasure, emotion; and she employs this intensity to rupture a Victorian bourgeois domesticity that relies upon firm boundaries and firmly repressed feeling. In “Salad Dressing and an Artichoke,” for instance, the speaker says “Please pale hot, please cover rose, please acre in the red stranger, please butter all the beef-steak with regular feel faces” (58). The repetition of “please” may suggest a moment of personal distress, in which one would beg for assistance. Perhaps “please” is an utterance of pleasure from a sexual encounter and “acre”/“ache her” indicates the potent sensual experience. Or the “please” here may merely echo household proprieties, as the speaker makes a request about dinner preparation: “please butter all the beef-steak.” Stein exploits the linguistic ambiguity of “please” in “Salad Dressing and an Artichoke” to blur

house. She also insisted on domestic routine and domestic calm; her negative opinion of

distinctions between domestic propriety and emotional intensity, and to model a domestic sphere that exceeds Victorian bourgeois strictures of rational and restrained pleasures.

Stein reverses Victorian bourgeois domesticity not only through the intensities of *Tender Buttons*'s poems but also through the text's parody of traditional domestic literature: cookbooks, conduct manual, etiquette guides, and so on. As Djuna Barnes would do a decade later in her *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood* and as Marinetti would do in *The Futurist Cookbook*, Stein undermines Victorian domesticity by remaking the literary forms—almanac, conduct manual, household handbook, recipe book, domestic novel—that helped construct the Victorian domestic self. In *Desire and Domestic Fiction: A Political History of the Novel*, Nancy Armstrong argues that traditional domestic literature helped define ideal selfhood through its strictures about proper housekeeping, hygiene, behavior. Stein undermines the normative function of such manuals through her explicit endorsement of non-productive expenditure: her celebration of “a violent kind of delightfulness” (10) and her instruction “to take it away and wear it and then be reckless be reckless” (10). Stein parodies these functions through the text's imperative syntax, authoritative tone, and formal structure—divided into brief stanzas that mimic the entries of a recipe manual or book of household hints.

For example, in “A Red Hat,” Stein again raises issues of necessity and usage in a tone evocative of a lady's magazine or a conduct manual. The text reads, “If red is in everything it is not necessary. Is that not an argument for any use of it and even so is there any place that is better, is there any place that has so much stretched out” (17). In

Ezra Pound was cemented when he accidentally broke a chair in her sitting room.

its discussion of the appropriate use of color, this poem suggests a commentary on fashion or interior decorating. By adopting this tone of authority and associating it with questions of utility, custom, necessity, and proper placement, Stein parodies conduct manuals that adopt such a tone and that establish domestic aesthetic rules. Other lines of *Tender Buttons* are dominated by seemingly nonsensical imperatives, including striking ones from "Sugar": "Put it in the stew, put it to shame," and "Cut a gas jet uglier and then pierce pierce in between the next and negligence" (45). Margueritte S. Murphy sees in such lines "an assault on the authoritative word of the mother that takes the form of domestic guides to living ... [and an assault on] the authoritative discourse of the conventional women's world" (151). Stein, however, aims her critique not at the word of the mother or at a conventional women's world but more broadly at hegemonic structures of authority that impose rules and guidelines. Stein seems to sum up this critique in a line of "Roastbeef": "A sentence of a vagueness that is violence is authority and a mission and stumbling and also certainly also a prison" (38-39). Here, Stein's diction characterizes these would-be authorities as imprisoning, and she mocks their ineffectual, "stumbling" efforts to fulfill their self-appointed "mission."

Even as Stein celebrates "a violent kind of delightfulness" as an antidote to such imprisoning authority, she recognizes that this power can be co-opted. Like Bataille, Stein acknowledges the ambiguous potential of expenditure and embraces it nonetheless for its erotic charge, its vitality, its power to transform. Bataille explains expenditure's ambiguous potential, observing that "the wealthy classes" may employ "functional expenditure" as a means "to acquire or maintain rank" (123). In contrast, the

wastefulness of non-productive expenditure—including “luxury, mourning, war, cults, the construction of sumptuary monuments, games, spectacles, arts, perverse sexual activity” (118)—undermines “supposedly material utility” (116) and reverses a bourgeois logic of functionality.

Perhaps due to the ambiguous potential of expenditure, *Tender Buttons* is vulnerable to misreading: critics misinterpret the text’s excesses as bourgeois luxury rather than reversal of Victorian bourgeois principles of economy. Moreover, these critics often allude to Stein’s physical heaviness or her family inheritance to make their case about the text’s excesses. In “The Prose-Song of Gertrude Stein,” Wyndham Lewis alludes to both Stein’s fat and her family money. Lewis describes Stein’s work as “all fat, without nerve,” “the same heavy, sticky, opaque mass all through,” and “a cold suet-roll of fabulously-reptilian length” (*TWM* 77). This repeated allusion to Stein’s heft is accompanied by reference to her personal privilege: “Miss Stein has certainly never had any unvirtuous and mercenary intentions ...[;] she has never needed to be a best-seller, luckily for herself” (77). In these lines, Lewis misreads the excesses of Stein’s work as bourgeois indulgence, and he maps these same indulgences onto Stein’s body and her financial circumstances. These implications lead Lewis to conclude that both Stein and her work are “false ‘revolutionary’” (78).

Another contemporary critic who misinterprets Stein’s work as “an example of the most extreme subjectivism of the contemporary bourgeois artist” is the Marxist champion of proletarianism Michael Gold, who labels Stein “a literary idiot” (23). In his critique, Gold explains Stein’s literary failures as a consequence of personal privilege and

makes frequent reference to Stein's family stipend: "In Gertrude Stein, art became a personal pleasure, a private hobby, a vice. ... She had no responsibility except to her own inordinate cravings. ... [O]ne can see that to Gertrude Stein and to the other artists like her, art exists in the vacuum of a private income" (25). The "inordinate cravings" of which Gold writes are as ambiguous as the excesses of *Tender Buttons*. In this phrase, is Gold referring to Stein's eating and her resulting physique, described by Man Ray as "massive ... bulk" (89)? Or is Gold instead making veiled reference to Stein's relationship with Alice B. Toklas, a loving but discrete domestic companionship that exceeded sexual proprieties? Or are the "inordinate cravings" merely a yen for household luxuries, an inevitable consequence of "a private income from wealthy parents" (Gold 25)? Regardless, both Gold's and Lewis's arguments highlight the ambiguous potential of Stein's literary excesses: the ambiguity of expenditure means that it is vulnerable to misprision.

Defamiliarizing the Domestic: Violence in Tender Buttons

In the same summer when Stein wrote *Tender Buttons*—in which text Stein celebrates a very routine and everyday form of violence—Stein and Alice B. Toklas also enjoyed the ritualized violence of Spanish bullfights, an interest she and Alice shared with such contemporaries as Picasso and Bataille. Diana Souhami writes of the bullfights that Stein and Toklas saw that summer of 1912 in Spain: "Alice saw her first bullfight. She told the box office attendant: 'I must have the very best seats in the front row in the shade under the President's box.' Gertrude warned her when not to look, because horses

were being gored” (116). Even as Stein watched the horses being gored, she understood the psycho-sexual and social functions of such ritualized violence. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein implicitly privileges ritual (and characterizes ritual as a Spanish entity) when she praises Picasso’s “spanish quality of ritual and abstraction” (60) in his 1907 painting of her. This appreciation is one she also shared with Georges Bataille, who saw his first bullfight—and possibly witnessed “the enucleation of the eye of the matador Granero” (Stoekl ix-x)—in 1922 in Spain. Both Stein and Bataille saw the potent energy—similar to the “states of excitation” elicited by unproductive expenditure—in violent spectacles such as bullfights.

Although both Stein and Bataille write of close connections between violence—or potential danger—and domesticity, they differ in their characterizations of this danger. For Stein, the danger resides in self and in interpersonal relations, whereas for Bataille, a dangerous power inhabits the luxurious proprieties of the Victorian home. Throughout her work and especially in the language and content of *Tender Buttons*, Stein explores the many intersections of violence and domesticity. In her portrayal of the phenomena of violence and domesticity, what makes Stein’s language compelling is that she avoids the gothic or melodramatic. Instead, Stein chronicles violent or startling domestic moments in a matter-of-fact tone, indicating such moments are purely routine and are intermixed with moments of quiet comfort and intense pleasure. That is, Stein allows us to see violence in the everyday without denying its everydayness. As was discussed in the “Breaking the Noun” section above, Stein’s language figured her project as one of violent passion; Stein joins many modernists in using such violent imagery to suggest the

revolutionary nature of her project. For instance, in his introduction to his 1923 collection *Spring and All*, modernist poet William Carlos Williams describes the modernist project in such a way as to highlight its inherent violence: “The imagination, intoxicated by prohibitions, rises to drunken heights to destroy the world. Let it rage, let it kill” (CP 179).

Although some poems in *Tender Buttons*, such as “This Is This Dress, Aider” (more on this below), contain only an implication of modernist violence, many poems include unmistakable images of dissolution, breakage, and decay. In these images, Stein presents her portrait of a domestic sphere that is highly sensual and constantly in flux, yet she also acknowledges the drawbacks of material fragility. For instance, in some poems, Stein focuses on the “annoyance” (“Breakfast,” 43) caused by material dissolution. Yet even as Stein highlights such consequences, she celebrates the constant state of flux that results from domestic dissonance, and she suggests their revivifying and clarifying effects upon the domestic sphere. Often, the destruction of objects is associated with intense pleasure, a pleasure that in other poems is erotically inspired. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein indicates the sense of excitement related to her “weakness for breakable objects”:

She [Gertrude Stein] loves objects that are breakable, cheap objects and valuable objects, a chicken out of a grocery shop or a pigeon out of a fair [. . .], she loves them all and she remembers them all but she knows that sooner or later they will break and she says that like books there are always more to find. [. . .] She says she likes what she has and she likes

the adventure of a new one. (82-83)

Elsewhere in *The Autobiography*, Stein is not so matter-of-fact about this breakage. In a discussion of her *Tender Buttons*-era Paris salon, Stein mentions that Germans were unpopular at the salon because “they tended always to want to see anything that was put away and they tended to break things” (13). Although Stein’s preference for fragile objects does not make her relish the destruction of her own things, her “horror of people who collect only the unbreakable” (13) reveals Stein’s sense that these people are wrongfully avoiding one of the most essential qualities of matter. The ubiquity of these images of material transformation in *Tender Buttons*—and of the energy and pleasure to which Stein links them—reinforces Stein’s privileging of dissonant domesticity.

Stein’s celebration of dissonant domesticity is most clearly articulated in “Breakfast,” in which she outlines the key role breakage plays within the domestic sphere. “Breakfast” is long compared to many other poems in *Tender Buttons*—it occupies a little over three pages—and the poem is variously a meditation on change, a parody of a household manual, and a relationship guide. In the midst of these discourses, the poem’s speaker points both to the value of material transformation and to the costs of material impermanence. The speaker says: “A hurt mended stick, a hurt mended cup, a hurt mended article of exceptional relaxation and annoyance, a hurt mended, hurt and mended is so necessary that no mistake is intended” (43). Here, Stein draws attention away from the actual object that has been damaged by moving from the specificity of “stick” and “cup” to the generic “article,” and then to the moment when the noun drops away entirely, leaving only “a hurt mended.” In these lines, Stein draws attention to the

transformations undergone by objects—through hurting and mending—instead of a more conventional focus on the objects themselves.¹⁰ Stein further highlights these transformations through the speaker’s assertion that “hurt and mended is so necessary,” a phrase in which the “stick” or “cup” or “article” is again absent. While Stein acknowledges that damage to one’s material goods can be an “annoyance,” the final phrase of this passage—that “no mistake is intended”—anticipates and refutes any claim that the breakage of *Tender Buttons* is accidental or unwelcome. Instead, Stein asserts her aesthetic of dissonant domesticity, an aesthetic that celebrates the transitory nature of the material world, regardless of the losses incurred through this impermanence. For Stein, “hurt and mended is so necessary” because these transformations disrupt a traditionally preservative domesticity and because these disruptions help desublimize the energies held in check within traditional domesticity.

Stein most clearly indicates the clarifying effects of dissonant domesticity in “Careless Water,” a poem in the “Objects” section of *Tender Buttons*. “Careless Water” begins with the assertion that “No cup is broken in more places and mended, that is to say a plate is broken and mending does do that it shows that culture is Japanese” (21). The speaker goes on to elaborate what “it”—presumably “mending”—does: “It shows the whole element of angels and orders. It does more to choosing and it does more to that ministering counting. It does, it does change in more water” (21). These lines focus on the transformations brought about through breakage and mending, and Stein indicates

¹⁰ In her assertion that Stein’s “real subject is change” (*Am Po Rev* 41) in *Tender Buttons*, Marjorie Perloff rightly recognizes Stein’s emphasis on transformation but construes Stein’s point too narrowly as having only one subject.

that these changes help define the material world by revealing “the whole element of angels and orders.” Stein’s play on “angels” here suggests the “angles” of the plate’s fragments and reminds the reader of Victorian domesticity—with its angel in the house—from which Stein distances her dissonant domesticity. The comparisons suggested in “Careless Water,” comparisons clarified through the “angels and orders” and performed through “choosing,” are the basis for Stein’s privileging of Japanese culture.

Prior to this reference in “Careless Water,” Stein also mentioned Japanese aesthetics in the second poem of *Tender Buttons*, entitled “Glazed Glitter.” There, the speaker notes in an aside that “There can be breakages in Japanese” (9). This reference to Japanese aesthetics could allude to Stein’s brother Leo (a source of domestic conflict for Stein during *Tender Buttons*’s composition), who was notorious for forcing uninterested visitors to examine his collection of Japanese prints (*Auto* 43). More likely, Stein’s reference to Japanese culture—embedded as it is within a larger celebration of dissonance—suggests Stein’s appreciation for Japanese aesthetics in which “There can be breakages,” an aesthetic in which fecundity and decay can and do co-exist. In these images of *Tender Buttons*, Stein not only reveals a broad appreciation for domestic life—even for domestic filth, or discord, or pest-disposal—but also elucidates the aesthetic foundation for her “weakness for breakable objects.”

Stein specifically reminds her reader of the domestic pleasure that is to be found through domestic dissonance in “Breakfast,” both before and after the passage in which the speaker asserts “hurt and mended is so necessary” (43). In this poem, Stein reiterates images of dissolution, from the “colored loss” she mentions early in the poem to the

“solitary crumbling” (44) near the poem's end. These images are accompanied by others of extremity: extreme pleasure or extreme emotion. The speaker asserts that “All the pliable succession of surrendering makes an ingenious joy” (42), suggesting a pleasure accessible through flexibility and abdication of control. Again, Stein's aesthetic is in sharp contrast to that of a Victorian bourgeois domesticity premised upon stasis, rigidity, and control.

The intense emotion and powerful transformations reach their peak at the end of this poem; in these lines, Stein highlights her rejection of Victorian domestic restraint, self control, and linguistic referentiality. Throughout “Breakfast,” a voice of authority interjects, barking imperatives such as “Take no remedy lightly, take no urging intently, take no separation leniently, beware of no lake and no larder” (43). This voice reasserts itself in the final stanza of the poem, in a series of jarring imperatives:

Seat a knife near a cage and very near a decision and more nearly a timely working cat and scissors. Do this temporarily and make no more mistake in standing. Spread it all and arrange the white place, does this show in the house, does it not show in the green that is not necessary for that color, does it not even show in the explanation and singularly not at all stationary. (44)

A preoccupation of this passage is appearances: what “shows” in the house, in the green, or in the explanation. Stein undercuts this preoccupation by bracketing the stanza with images of unrestrained extremity. She precedes this stanza with another passage that blends violence with ecstasy: “a piercing shutter, all of a piercing

shouter, all of a quite weather, all of a withered exterior, all of that in most violent likely" (44). Immediately after the "Seat a knife" stanza, the poem "Sugar" begins with an allusion to violence: "A violent luck and a whole sample and even then quiet" (44). In these lines, Stein suggests domestic pleasure that causes one to shudder/"shutter" and to shout, yet this pleasure recapitulates the text's ambiguities. The repeated "piercing" may be more painful than exciting, and "shutter" may indicate not a "shudder" of pleasure but rather an act of oppression or exclusion: "shut her" up, or "shut her" in, or "shut her" out. Through this ambiguous diction and the shifting preoccupations of the poem, Stein undermines both conventional notions of domestic pleasure and conventional images of a placid domestic sphere.

The intense pleasure modeled in *Tender Buttons* is perhaps most evident and most clearly linked to an implied violence in "This Is This Dress, Aider," the last poem of "Objects." The poem is quite brief:

Aider, why aider why whow, whow stop touch, aider whow, aider stop the
muncher, muncher munchers.

A jack in kill her, a jack in, makes a meadowed king, makes a to let. (29)

This poem's ambiguities have led critics to interpret it variously as a glimpse of lesbian sexual play (Blackmer 234-35, Schmitz 1211), as a scene of rape and murder that epitomizes the fate of women within patriarchy (Ruddick 214-17), or as "a dramatization of the death of conventional literary practice" (Bridgman 130). The phonological similarity of the "name" in the poem, "Aider," to Stein's pet name for Toklas, Ada, provides some basis for biographical readings; however, biographical details should not

limit our interpretations of Stein's work, nor are biographical reading and analyses of the text's aesthetic mutually exclusive. The domesticity in *Tender Buttons* is infused with pleasure, but this is a "violent kind of delightfulness" wherein the pleasure is accompanied by moments of hesitation and then violence. We can see this amalgamation of pleasure and pain clearly in "This Is This Dress, Aider." The poem's first stanza veers from seeming cries of ecstasy—the repetition of "whow"—to hesitation, in the requests to "stop" and the inquiry "why." Even the articulation of sensual pleasure is linguistically ambiguous here: "whow" combines an ecstatic "wow" with the inquiry "how," and "whow" both includes and mimics an exclamatory "ow" of pain. Moreover, "aider" in French is the verb infinitive "to help" and is a homonym for "aidez," a call for help.¹¹ Thus, the ambiguity *and* the implied violence are apparent even in the title of the poem, before the reader arrives at the first stanza.

The violence implied by the first stanza of "This Is This Dress, Aider" becomes overt in the diction of the second stanza, more precisely in the phrase "A jack in kill her." It is this phrase which has been a focal point for accusations about the violence of *Tender Buttons*. Some critics merely ignore such images and focus narrowly on the "marvelously playful" (Allen 114) qualities of *Tender Buttons*. Others explain the text's "diction of violence and anxiety" (DeKoven *Rich and Strange* 198) as a reflection of Stein's own anxieties or as Stein's allegorical cultural critique "about the sacrificial origins of patriarchal culture" (Ruddick 192). However, these critics overlook Stein's ambiguous treatment of this violence, her celebration of its energies, and her use of this

¹¹ Thanks to Professor Mary Papke for the reminder about "aidez."

violence—as part of the text’s imagery of transformation—to introduce a note of clarifying dissonance within the domestic. Catharine Stimpson recognizes the ambiguity of “This Is This Dress, Aider,” noting that the poem depicts “an act that seems at once richly pleasurable and violent” (“The Somagrams of Gertrude Stein” 190). However, Stimpson’s insight is limited to this one poem, and she neglects Stein’s aesthetic interconnections of pleasure and violence. In fact, Stein’s diction stresses the productive function (rather than the destructive consequences) of the poem’s violent element—“A jack in kill her”—twice telling the reader what it “makes”: “makes a meadowed king, makes a to let” (29). By weaving together the seeming violence of the second sentence with the ambiguous ecstasies of the first sentence, Stein blurs the distinctions between violence and ecstasy and calls into question the reader’s ability to distinguish between the two.

Catharine Stimpson is not alone in her limiting analysis of Stein’s aesthetic. Most scholars who discuss the violent images of *Tender Buttons* overlook Stein’s ambiguous treatment as well as the revivifying aesthetic function Stein ascribes to this violence. Lisa Ruddick’s *Reading Gertrude Stein: Body, Text, Gnosis* is the most sustained consideration of *Tender Buttons*’s violence. Ruddick sees in the text “a series of ideas ... about the sacrificial origins of patriarchal culture” (192), structured into two phases: one of sacrifice in “Objects” followed in “Food” by “a phase of repair in which the sacrifice is undone” (192). While Ruddick’s close readings of individual poems are often intriguing, her argument is limited by an assumption that the text’s violence can only be the object of Stein’s critique and by a reliance on strictly gendered dichotomies: the old

father/mother, sun/moon, masculine/feminine oppositions. For example, in Ruddick's explication of a line from the poem "Cranberries"—"Count the chain, cut the grass, silence the noon and murder flies" (46)—she attributes to Stein a remarkably conventional symbolism:

The noon is the time of the father-sun's dominion; to "silence the noon" would be to overcome the father. When one silences him, "murder flies": the paternal sacrifice disappears. On the other hand, "murder flies," if one takes "murder" instead as the verb, means "kill insects." So interpreted, the phrase suggests that murder has hardly ceased. (240)

In these lines, and throughout her analysis of Stein's text, Ruddick casts the text's violence as a repressive anti-erotic force rather than as a parallel channel for similar energies. In her urge to see a feminist activism at work in *Tender Buttons*, Ruddick reduces Stein's broad celebration of domestic life. For Ruddick, the violence of *Tender Buttons* is Stein's reflection of "the way in which sacrificial ritual can interact with forms of social oppression" (258), and Ruddick can see the text's violence only as a force of oppression and repression.

Although she senses some connection between *Tender Buttons*'s eroticism and its violence, Marianne DeKoven's interpretation is limited—like Ruddick's—by her insistence on reading the violence as negative, as a force that clouds the eroticism with "disgust" (*Rich and Strange* 199). DeKoven explains the text's "diction of violence and anxiety" biographically, as a reflection of Stein's "fear of punishment for the unequivocal assertiveness of her program for that release of the twentieth-century revolution of the

word” (198). Although she characterizes the violent images as indication of Stein’s “fear,” DeKoven also recognizes that this violence may serve a function for Stein: nevertheless, “the energy required for what Stein called breaking and remaking the rigid form of the noun is a threateningly violent force; the erotic charge of that breaking is tinged with disgust” (199). In this analysis, DeKoven’s diction casts the “violent force” as a threat to the eroticism and as a contaminant that infects the eroticism with disgust. Instead, the poems of *Tender Buttons* indicate that the violence is a tool for Stein rather than a contagion against which we must be immunized.

Although Ruddick and DeKoven overlook the ambiguity of Stein’s images of violence, at least they notice these images. Other critics interpret *Tender Buttons* as an unfiltered reflection of Stein’s immediate experience of domesticity, suggesting that Stein was experiencing domesticity just as it is portrayed in *Tender Buttons*. Consequently, Stein’s imagery of violence is largely overlooked in such readings on the presumption that this violence was extraneous to Stein’s life and to the text itself. For instance, Doris T. Wight, in “Woman as Eros-Rose in Gertrude Stein’s *Tender Buttons* and Contemporaneous Portraits” suggests that Stein uses *Tender Buttons* to figure Alice B. Toklas as the erotic. She analyzes several passages from the “Objects” section of *Tender Buttons*, maintaining that Stein “seeks to personify through objects” (38) the eroticism and beauty of her relationship with Toklas. Domestic objects, Wight says, are erotically charged because of their proximity to the household affections of Stein and Toklas. In a similar reading, Marguerite S. Murphy argues that Stein eroticized domestic images to intimate “her unconventional domestic relationship with Alice B. Toklas through a

discourse strewn with sexual riddles” (384). According to Murphy, Stein needed to write a more habitable domestic sphere, to create literary images and conventions that could “value, explain, and stabilize her own domestic sphere” (400). Certainly, Stein does include sexual images in *Tender Buttons*, and sexuality has a significant role in the aesthetic that governs the text. However, such readings as Wight’s and Murphy’s overlook Stein’s broad celebration of change, flux, and transformation, and thus they disregard the importance of violence to Stein’s transformative project.

The critical reception of *Tender Buttons*’s violent images can therefore point us back to the genesis of my project: a sense that there is an unrecognized aesthetic significance to the ubiquity of violent images in modernist texts. Stein left readers many clues to her aesthetic aims: her call to abuse and adore nouns, her excitement over a new breakable object that she fully expected would later be broken, and even her detective novel *Blood on the Dining-Room Floor*—all reveal Stein’s fascination with violence, breakage, and dissolution. Yet some critics still persist in seeing only the “marvelously playful” (Allen 114) qualities of *Tender Buttons* or in reading the violence of *Tender Buttons* as Stein’s indictment of patriarchy (Ruddick). Instead, the violent images of *Tender Buttons* are merely one suggestion—among many throughout Stein’s career—that there is an aesthetic function to violence and that domestic dissonance is crucial to appreciating the adventure of domestic life. For Stein, the latest breakable knick-knack may be fragile and will surely pass out of one’s life sooner or later, but the knowledge of its evanescence makes owning it so exciting. And, as Stein suggests throughout *Tender Buttons*, so too is the excitement of domestic life: evanescent, fragile, and bound to end,

yet an irresistible adventure.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

As I have shown, the modernists were interested in domesticity as more than a transparent vehicle for formalist literary experimentation. Each of my authors has found in domesticity a realm of aesthetic value and untapped potential for desublimation. To Marinetti, the domestic sphere is a place where colonialism intersects with sexuality, gustatory pleasure, and intense anxieties. In contrast, Djuna Barnes's view of the domestic changed radically as it is represented in the two novels examined here, *Ladies Almanack* and *Nightwood*. In the former, domesticity mirrors the pleasures and excesses of the grotesque body, while in the latter the domestic sphere mirrors the disintegration of the characters and the larger society. Gertrude Stein's appreciation of domesticity is as complex and conflicted as her appreciation of language: Stein maintains a love-hate relationship with both. Moreover, in *Tender Buttons*, Stein clearly approaches domesticity using the same intellectual curiosity with which she investigates language. Stein portrays domesticity as a realm in which ambiguous violence, the potential for one's treasures to be broken, emotional upheaval, and intense physical pleasure all compound her sense of anticipation and her pleasure. All three of these authors refuse to cover up the fissures in the Victorian domestic mask of perfection; instead, they find domesticity's value concealed beneath a veneer of functionality, conformity, and harmony.

My study could be expanded in some crucial ways. First, I would like to explore the common literary and philosophical influences among these three writers. For

instance, as this project progressed, I perceived a common thread among those modernists who were intellectually interested in domesticity: specifically, they all had debts—acknowledged and unacknowledged—to nineteenth-century literary movements such as Decadence and Aestheticism. Marinetti actually considered himself a symbolist poet early in his career. I have already discussed Stein’s homage to *The Yellow Book* in the binding of *Tender Buttons*; undoubtedly, her debts to Decadence are more than cover-deep. And Barnes’s portrayal of domesticity in *Nightwood* bears a great deal of resemblance to Joris-Karl Huysmans’s novel *Against the Grain*—called by Arthur Symons “‘the breviary of the Decadence’” (qtd. in Beckson xxxi)—and Doctor O’Connor is reminiscent of Huysmans’s decaying hero Des Esseintes. In addition, Barnes’s drawings have elicited comparisons to those of Aubrey Beardsley, a writer and illustrator of the Decadent period (Herring 122). The accumulation of this evidence suggests to me that there is a common interest in Decadence among modernist remakers of domesticity. It will require a closer look at modernism and Decadence to understand fully this connection.

There are several other modernists whose work has hovered around this dissertation and who could be included in an expanded analysis; chief among these are James Joyce and Wyndham Lewis. Joyce’s *Ulysses*, particularly the “Penelope” chapter, offers rich material for any scholar wishing to investigate modernist portrayals of domesticity. Molly Bloom’s fretting about “the filthy sloppy kitchen” (747), “the face lotion I finished the last of yesterday that made my skin like new” (750-51), and “the lumpy old jingly bed” (772) is just as rich a portrayal of the domestic as those by

Marinetti, Stein, and Barnes. Wyndham Lewis's hostility towards the bourgeoisie and toward Gertrude Stein and her work has been noted elsewhere in this dissertation; but it is his seeming hostility towards the domestic sphere that would make him an interesting addition to this study. In his novel *Tarr*, domesticity is frequently used as an element of characterization—most often a negative one. For instance, the rooms of Bertha Lipmann suggest both her vanity and her overbearing nature: “Her room, dress and manner, were a sort of chart to the way to admire Fräulein Lipmann [. . .]. You felt that there was not a candlestick, or antimacassar in the room but had its lesson for you” (131). Moreover, a look at Lewis's work might cast light on the seeming misogyny of Marinetti's *Cookbook*. Lewis's work seems even more unmistakably contemptuous of women than that of Marinetti, and it would be interesting to compare their treatments of domesticity. Despite his apparent rejection of the feminine, Marinetti locates aesthetic value in the domestic sphere; looking more closely at Wyndham Lewis's work would perhaps help to complicate the gender dynamics of modernist domesticity.

Also potentially interesting, although undoubtedly difficult to study, are the food sculptures of modernist poet Mina Loy. Mina Loy was acquainted with all the modernists of my study, and all three would have been aware of her work. Loy was Marinetti's lover and briefly worked in Futurism. She attended Stein's Paris salon. In Paris, Loy was Barnes's upstairs neighbor in the rue St. Romain and was the model for the *Almanack's* Patience Scalpel. Of all Loy's work, her food sculptures seem most relevant to my project, although, like Futurist dinners and other forms of performance art, they were evanescent and thus are impossible to recapture. Loy's “glass sandwiches” (Janice

Miller's term) were comprised of piles of sugar, food waste—including fruit peelings, coffee grounds, egg shells—and other rubbish that she dug out of trash cans. According to Janice Miller, Loy's aesthetic interest in trash—especially food waste—began as early as the 1900s and culminated in her work of the 1940s and 1950s. Loy's work—especially in terms of her reclamation of that which has been classified as filth—would undoubtedly complicate my consideration of transgression, as it was defined by Stallybrass and White: is Loy's treatment of food waste as art *more transgressive* than Marinetti's treatment of industrial waste as food, or than Marinetti's fouling perfectly good food with cologne or ball bearings?

In the end, I hope that my work might silence the more egregious misunderstandings of modernist treatments of domesticity. On at least two occasions while I was working on this project, I discussed it with well-known scholars of modernism. Both scholars were intrigued by my project and thought that I had stumbled on a grand joke by the modernists. As one scholar, Charles Altieri, said upon hearing that Marinetti had written a cookbook that purported to offer Futurist food for a Futurist eater, "But of course he was kidding!" As I hope my study has made clear, these three modernists were not kidding when they looked to transform the domestic or even when they suggested an aesthetic richness to domesticity. Perhaps now scholars can reexamine modernist portrayals of the domestic with the understanding that they signify beyond formalist experiment, bashing of the bourgeoisie, or a joke at the expense of everyday life.

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