

**Writing Celebrity: Modernism, Authorial Personas, and Self-Promotion in the  
Early Twentieth Century United States**

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## ABSTRACT

Timothy W. Galow: Writing Celebrity: Modernism, Authorial Personas, and Self-Promotion in the Early Twentieth Century United States  
(Under the direction of Linda Wagner-Martin, Erin Carlston, John McGowan, Maria Deguzmán, and Janice Radway)

“Writing Celebrity” argues that the rise of a national celebrity culture at the turn of the twentieth century transformed cultural production in the United States. While most literary studies of this period focus on the relationship between elite authors and the mass market, I assert that the influence of personality marketing transcended traditional aesthetic categories and reshaped the profession of authorship for both “highbrow” and “lowbrow” writers. Against this backdrop, my work traces the impact that an emergent celebrity culture had on the careers of Gertrude Stein and F. Scott Fitzgerald. Drawing on archival documents, literary texts, and various extant publicity materials, I examine how both of these authors attempted to market distinctive personas and the various ways in which readers and critics responded to their public identities. Gertrude Stein, immediately following the runaway success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, theorized an authorial identity that exists only in the very instant of creation and instills texts with permanent value. Contrary to contemporary readings of Stein as a proto-postmodern theorist of the “open” text, readings largely based on interpretations of her early poetry, I argue that, in response to the pressures of public exposure, Stein cultivated a theory very

similar to that of contemporary New Critics. This identity formation also allowed Stein to align herself with masculine idealizations of “high” art by complicating overt signs of difference, including femininity, lesbianism, and Jewishness, from her textual persona.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, who positioned himself as a young genius in early publicity materials, attempted to refashion himself as a reflective and dedicated professional in the 1930’s. Yet, Fitzgerald’s narrative persona does not simply mimic the stereotypical high masculine author. Instead, he attempts to challenge these traditional conceptions by promoting a new, more nuanced, version of the male writer. Thus, by extending previous work on authorial self-fashioning and taking seriously these authors’ engagements with celebrity culture, my work argues for the larger importance of celebrity as an interpretive paradigm, both from a historical perspective and as a unifying concept for textual analysis.

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## *Introduction*

When F. Scott Fitzgerald submitted what would become his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, to Scribner's for the third time in late 1919, young editor Maxwell Perkins had to deliver an impassioned speech to the board, effectively resigning over the book's repeated dismissal, before *Paradise* was finally accepted for publication (Brucoli Epic Grandeur 97-100; Berg 12-14). At this point in his career, Fitzgerald had only one story published in a commercial magazine and was unknown outside the coterie of literary friends he had made during his undergraduate years at Princeton. Yet, within a year, the novel had become an essential text for many teenagers in the United States and Fitzgerald himself was being heralded as the voice of the younger generation. Similarly, Gertrude Stein labored for nearly three decades to find a major publisher for her writing, labored, that is, until writing *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in the fall of 1932. Much like *Paradise*, this book was an overnight success that turned Stein into a major public figure and allowed her to begin publishing pieces from her massive collection of manuscripts. When she returned from Paris for a lecture tour of the United States in late 1934, her arrival was front-page news in most of the urban dailies and she was flocked by interviewers and curiosity-seekers the moment she stepped off the boat.

While such stories of near-immediate national renown have become commonplace in the digital age, the speed with which Fitzgerald's and Stein's names traveled across a continent and the extensive opportunities that such sudden fame



afforded them were relatively new phenomena in the early decades of the twentieth century, phenomena made possible largely by the massive restructuring of the U.S. cultural landscape in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The rapid development of new resources and technologies that have come to be lumped under the general term “modernity” not only brought populations physically closer together, but they gave rise to production processes and forms of distribution that enabled widespread consumption of relatively homogeneous products and messages. Thus, F. Scott Fitzgerald, three weeks after the publication of *Paradise*, could script an “interview” with himself and submit it to his publishers with the hope that it might be reprinted almost simultaneously in newspapers, literary inserts, and book reviews around the country. He could, for the first time in history, anticipate submitting his opinions to millions of contemporary readers across the continental United States.

*Writing Celebrity* traces the effects that these historical developments had on the careers of Stein and Fitzgerald, two writers who followed seemingly opposite career paths. Stein followed what critics today might deem a “typical” modernist arc, spending years generating cultural capital by publishing in “little reviews” and cultivating relationships with influential critics and patrons until her breakthrough book, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, thrust her into the public spotlight. Conversely, F. Scott Fitzgerald received national recognition with the publication of his first novel and spent much of the next two decades writing for smaller and smaller audiences. Despite these seemingly divergent paths and the radically different places each writer has been afforded in twentieth century literary history, both authors shared a surprisingly similar set of concerns about the ambivalent position writers occupied in American culture and,

in the wake of their first major public successes, both engaged in very public self-fashioning efforts designed to influence popular and critical responses to their work.

## **The Mass Market, Masculinity, and Popular Culture in the Late 19<sup>th</sup> Century**

### **United States**

Much recent modernist criticism has been devoted to tracing the historical conditions that made such campaigns possible and to assessing the specific tensions that emerged as a result of these changes. The first truly national mass print markets emerged in the 1890's. Urban dailies, for one, began to reach wider audiences at this time. The invention of the telegraph in the 1840's provided the means for distributing news beyond the confines of written text and, by the early 1850's, the United States had developed one of the most complex telegraph networks in the entire world (Hochfelder 307-09). The Associated Press formed in 1848 and shortly thereafter began disseminating stories to various papers around the country. Articles from the major urban dailies were reprinted by other sources as early as 1860, a trend that only increased during the Civil War, and by the 1880's syndication had become common (Ohmann 20-21; Peterson 46).

Along with the increasing availability of standardized news stories, rapid developments in printing presses and typesetting technologies after the Civil War allowed publishers to increase copying speeds radically while also cutting costs. The invention of the halftone process, which reproduced photographs by processing them into small dots of varying sizes and densities to replicate the black and white shadings of a photograph, also allowed newspapers to become a more visual medium in the latter decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1880, the *New York Daily Graphic* was the first paper in the United

States to run a halftone; within a decade, most major newspapers were regularly using photographs alongside pictorial comic features and advertisements that had an increasingly visual focus (Mott, Revolution, 231). This more accessible format along with more formalized journalistic procedures and an emphasis on sensational stories, most apparent in Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst's "yellow" journalism during the 1890's, sent urban circulations skyrocketing at the turn of the century. In 1892, ten papers in four cities had circulations higher than 100,000. In 1914, more than thirty papers in twelve cities reached the same numbers. During this period, from 1892-1914, total circulation for all daily papers doubled. By way of contrast, national circulation went from about 300,000 in 1840 to over 15 million by the turn of the century (Peterson 46; Kasson 15).<sup>1</sup>

Alongside the rise of urban newspapers, mass market magazines became a dominant cultural force during the so-called "magazine revolution" of the 1890's, a decade in which total monthly magazine circulation nearly tripled (Mott Magazines 11-12; Ohmann 29). Though many commentators cite a few publishers' names or specific magazines to explain the change, the explosion in magazine circulations actually resulted from a series of historical shifts. Physical distribution of magazines had become increasingly easier after the United States government granted over 131 million acres to railroad companies in the 1850's and 60's. The transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869 and by 1871 companies had laid over nineteen million miles of track, an expansion project that continued steadily through the turn of the century (Peterson 4). Moreover, in 1885, the Post Office dropped rates for all second-class mailings from three

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<sup>1</sup> See also Michael Schudson News.

cents per pound to one cent per pound (Mott 1885-1905 20). As a result, publishers began to focus their efforts on increasing subscription sales. Most major magazines had mechanized subscription and renewal systems in place by the turn of the century.

Yet, instead of leading to more predictable sales numbers, the increased rationalization of the mail order process pushed many publishers to seek new venues for sales, including departments stores, which began appearing with greater frequency between 1876 and 1900, and chain stores.<sup>2</sup> Newsstands, which had originally supported only daily papers and, as late as the 1880's, were located primarily in hotels and railroad stations, also expanded to support magazine sales. By the turn of the century, there were between three and four thousand newsdealers in the country, most of whom dealt with periodicals (Tebbel and Zuckerman 140-46).

Despite these massive changes in distribution, the most significant shift in periodical publishing pertained to advertising. Almost all magazines contained some advertising in the nineteenth century. Those of the highest quality, like *Harper's*, *Scribner's*, *The Atlantic*, and *Century Magazine* carried about ten pages of ads per issue in the 1870's and 80's, though most were for books or other periodicals (Mott "Revolution" 240). However, as industrial technology developed, more and more manufacturers sought to maximize their production capacity by marketing to wider audiences. People moving to cities for new industrial jobs also found themselves in positions where home production was both marginalized and inhibited by new urban conditions, greatly increasing demand for pre-packaged home goods and day-to-day necessities. Alternatively, the rapidly increasing subset of professionals who emerged to meet the managerial demands of expanding business entities sought goods as a marker of

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<sup>2</sup> For more on these developments, see Susan Strasser [Satisfaction](#).

their newly elevated social status. Thus, alongside the plethora of new advertisements for razors, pens, and oatmeal, a whole subset of ads for the most modern leisure goods, like phonographs, cameras, and bicycles also appeared (Ohmann 176-85).

In conjunction with manufacturers increasing need to advertise, ad agencies, who largely functioned as space brokers prior to the 1880's, began to take on more tasks, from copywriting to market analysis to media selection. The J. Walter Thomson Agency, which formed in 1878, was the first ad agency that strove to meet the expanding needs of clients, but by 1890 there were a dozen major agencies competing in the largest American markets. This new group of professional advertisers was faced with the challenge of differentiating products from a rapidly expanding field, a situation that led to the rapid expansion of advertising techniques like branding, which both differentiated specific items and functioned as a quality guarantee for newly standardized products.<sup>3</sup>

The increasing need for advertising space led to a wholesale shift in the way periodicals functioned during the 1890's. Instead of relying on sales for income, a practice that led to relatively high cover prices and low circulations, publishers slashed prices to increase sales and began relying on the massive influx of advertising revenue to offset production cost losses. As a result, the prices of most magazines fell from around thirty-five to ten cents an issue and the number of advertising pages expanded exponentially between 1893 and 1900. Magazines that had only a decade before included a dozen pages of advertising slowly expanded to carry forty or fifty pages. By December,

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<sup>3</sup> In 1870, 121 trademarks were registered with the U.S. patent office, though the relatively unsophisticated state of the market at this date means there were probably many more unregistered trademarks in use. By 1906, more than 10,000 were registered, an increase that suggests the importance of branding at the turn of the century as well as the increasing legal complexity of expanding consumer markets in the United States (Ohmann 101).

1895, *McClure's* carried 150 pages of ads. In 1905, it had 200 pages (Mott "Revolution" 240; Tebbel and Zuckerman 140-46).

Editors and publishers, in turn, were forced to consider the specific constitution of their audience in order to tailor content and create more coherent periodicals. The refined product images could then be used to court specific advertisers, a process that required a significant shift in the scope of business operations. Most major publishers were conducting in-house market surveys by the early twentieth century and, in 1911, the Curtis organization hired the first market-research director, Charles Coolidge Parlin (Strasser 150).

Part of the reason periodical publication has proven so important for recent studies of mass culture at the turn of the century is because publishers, in their increasingly complex organizational structures and expanding need for information both to regulate internal processes and situate products in the marketplace, reflect the emergent corporate environment of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time, monthly magazines' emphasis on periodicity and rapidly changing content both supported and validated the desire of a newly emergent middle class to remain in touch with developments outside their increasingly narrow fields of specialization. Professionals who had been taught to value knowledge, and whose knowledge secured their position in the marketplace, could remain culturally relevant simply by dabbling in the major periodicals of the day.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ohmann's *Selling Culture* is a groundbreaking study of these developments. Janice Radway has done much to expand upon, and press the implications, of Ohmann's work. In particular, see Janice Radway "Significance".

Such trends continued into the Progressive era at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which was, most historians agree, the point at which American culture transformed from, in Robert Wiebe's words, a "society of island communities" into a "regulative, hierarchical... bureaucratic order" (Wiebe xii-xiv). This shift depended in large part on public faith that an emerging group of technical experts could organize society in a way that would prove beneficial to all people. Yet, the increasingly complex social and economic structures that were forming throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century meant that most people were left with a limited understanding of larger institutions and forces that were coming to play an increasingly central role in their lives. As Wiebe goes on to note, for many in the United States the shift towards "nationalization, industrialization, mechanization, urbanization... meant only dislocation and bewilderment" (Wiebe 12).

In addition to this more general difficulty, the shift was also particularly hard on men, for whom employment increasingly meant routine intellectual or physical labor tied to a monotonous schedule. Not surprisingly, the Progressive era is also the point at which most scholars locate the culmination of a general "crisis of masculinity," a crisis that emerges in direct response to the rise of industrialism and corporate capitalism. The traditional places in which men had affirmed their manhood were beginning to disappear from bourgeois life, necessitating the rise of compensatory spaces in which new versions of masculinity could be staged.<sup>5</sup> The rise of organized sports in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is one such space. Collegiate sports, which simultaneously reaffirmed spectators' connections with particular universities, and the intellectual achievement and upward

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<sup>5</sup> For example, see Michael Kimmel Manhood; Alan Trachtenberg Incorporation 140-81.

mobility that these institutions were increasingly coming to represent, as well as (male) physical prowess, were becoming increasingly popular. Boxing also became a popular attraction and John L. Sullivan, the heavyweight champion from 1882 until his loss to James Corbett in 1892, attracted a larger following than any sports hero to date. As John Kasson notes, it was largely Sullivan's popularity that transformed boxing from a disreputable pastime to a mass entertainment appropriate for middle-class audiences (Kasson 39-41).

These emerging male sports also reflect two major cultural shifts in the latter half of the nineteenth century: the turn towards larger and more spectacle-oriented forms of entertainment and the increasing organization of American cultural life. Boxing transformed from an underworld pursuit for gamblers and criminals to a respectable display of male prowess. Similarly, collegiate athletics transformed from disorganized intramural activities disparaged by university officials in the first half of the nineteenth century to highly organized, and well-attended, events by the turn of the twentieth. The first intercollegiate football association, which united Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, was formed in 1872. The first intercollegiate track and field association formed three years later, in 1875. Baseball also evolved from an amateur pastime to a profession in the years immediately following the Civil War, as the Cincinnati Redstockings became the first team to earn regular salaries. The National League was formed in 1876, with the American League forming as a rival in 1881. The first championship series, which would later become the World Series, was held in New York in 1884.

In addition to these male-heavy spectacles, vaudeville emerged in the 1880's, combining the variety show format popular in theaters through much of the 1800s with



more strict moral standards. Antebellum theaters, though attended by people of all classes, often carried the taint of disrespectability, in part because they served as workplaces for prostitutes and criminals but also because the economically varied audiences often became rowdy. In contrast, vaudeville theaters were clean and respectable. Performers were even known to chastise the crowd, encouraging respectful and civilized behavior.

### **“High” Art and Literary Modernism**

Alongside this spectacle-oriented mass culture that emerged in the decades immediately following the Civil War, critics have traced the rise of an alternate, and often oppositional, form of culture. Richard Brodhead convincingly argues that the upper classes consolidated after the war in part by identifying with cultural practices and forms that were not available to, or at least were not embraced by, the masses. This effort at class consolidation led to the creation of new series of cultural spaces, including museums, libraries, and concert halls, as well as new modes of appreciation. Contemplating art for these patrons became something that required concerted effort and experience, if not yet formal training (Brodhead 157). Thus, the eclecticism that characterized American culture in the early decades of the nineteenth century, when museums exhibited plants alongside paintings and concert halls mixed Handel with popular show tunes, gave way to a process of segregation. Not only were “legitimate” artistic productions isolated and linked with more rigorously defined modes of

spectatorship, but these distinctions were also institutionalized in the new centers funded and frequented primarily by patrons seeking cultural distinction.<sup>6</sup>

A similar divide became more apparent in the literary field as well. Though many critics have described the emergence of a “great divide” between high and low art in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Janice Radway’s survey of these years in A Feeling For Books is particularly useful for its emphasis on social organizations. A distinction between quality literature and frivolous writing certainly antedated the U.S. literary scene of the nineteenth century. Yet, as Radway trenchantly argues, these distinctions were “reified during the latter half of the nineteenth century and erected into two distinct sets of institutions and practices for producing, disseminating, and controlling books” (Feeling 367).

One form of text was linked with the immediate desires of the reader, who engaged in reading to fulfill particular needs. Whether pursuing pleasure or information, these consumers sought books as utilitarian objects that lacked long-term value. Accordingly, most of these texts were produced cheaply by specialized publishing houses that dealt primarily in disseminating a particular kind of information or low-cost fiction. The explosion of paperback publishers in the 1870’s and 80’s, including Street & Smith, Donnelley, Lloyd & Company, and Beadle and Adams, were a new kind of business that sought not widespread but repeat sales of their various pulp series. Accordingly, these

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<sup>6</sup> For more on the emergence of a high/low division in American art, see Richard Brodhead Letters; Lawrence Levine Highbrow; Richard Ohmann Selling Culture 149-60; Janice Radway Feeling 127-53. The shift to distinct aesthetic categories was, needless to say, not wholly new or unprecedented in the latter half of the nineteenth century, as many of these authors readily note. For a reading of these developments as a refinement and elaboration of earlier beliefs, see Joan Shelley Rubin Making 1-33.

works were not written by reputable “authors” but “hacks” whose names did not even appear on the finished texts (Radway Feeling 129-34).<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to these assembly line works of fiction, another form of text was conceived as the product of a gifted author, whose message could only be grasped through focused attention and rigorous scrutiny. Again, this conception of literature existed long before the latter decades of the nineteenth century; however, the rise of a new and what many saw as a degraded form of literature generated much anxiety about the status of the book at the turn of the century. These anxieties led in part to the emergence of new arenas in which “quality” books could be preserved (Radway Feeling 135-47).

Developing English curriculums in universities and public schools, both of which were in formative stages during the latter half of the nineteenth century, worked to formalize specific reading practices and elevate particular types of books as worthy of study. As businesses demanded more skilled workers to fill technical and managerial positions, higher education became an increasingly central part of white middle class life in the United States. In 1870, only one in sixty men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one was enrolled in college. By 1900, that number had risen to one in twenty-five (Kasson 240 fn28). The total number of undergrads rose from about 52,300 in 1870 to 237,600 in 1900, and there were nearly 600,000 college students by 1920 (Radway “Significance” 213).

Many of these institutions began to develop generalist approaches based on Matthew Arnold’s idea of literature as the best that had been thought and said. Such a

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<sup>7</sup> For more on cheap book production during this period, see John William Tebbel History; Hellmut Lehmann-Haupt Book; Raymond Shove Cheap Book; Michael Denning Accents.

stance allowed literature to be conceived as a transcendent repository of human value, in contrast to both the utilitarian values of an industrial age and the pressure for specialized education being exerted by business. As generalist approaches gave way to specialized literary study after the turn of the century, the new forms of analysis retained this sense of the literary text as a distinct, and inherently valuable, form of writing that rewarded close scrutiny (Radway Feeling 135-47).

These attitudes towards literature were also apparent in quality magazines of the day, notably *Harper's*, *Century*, *Scribner's*, and the *Atlantic Monthly*. *Harper's*, in particular, which the Harper brothers started in 1850 to maximize the use of their press when they were not printing books, emerged as a vehicle to market their volumes to an elite educated audience who could afford them. All four magazines also employed or published many of the major genteel academic critics who emerged before the turn of the century, like E.C. Stedman, Barrett Wendell, and George Woodberry.

In addition to the consolidation and institutionalization of distinct aesthetic spheres, the literary field also shared a sense of masculine crisis with other cultural arenas. However, the habitual alignment of the mass cultural sphere with femininity, which some modernist scholars note as characteristic of the early twentieth century, was again the result of long-standing developments that went back to the previous century. The tension between a feminized mass culture and a masculine elite culture was already quite apparent at mid-century, when Nathaniel Hawthorne made his famous comment about “scribbling women.” Hawthorne’s disdain arose from the notable success of many female authors. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, first serialized in 1851, was the biggest book of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, selling 1.5 million copies in its first year of

publication. Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* also sold over a million copies.

Emma D. E. N. Southworth, who wrote thirty-five books in all, was probably the best-selling author of the nineteenth century.

Yet, the link between elite literary products and masculinity was distinct enough that many of these female authors viewed their success apologetically and often described their work not as intellectual labor but as an emotional outpouring. Stowe, who had already refracted her politics through the supposedly feminized sentimental novel, famously attributed the authorship of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to God and Caroline Howard Gilman, when she published her first poem, likened the emotion to being caught in men's clothing.

In this context, Andreas Huyssen's oft-cited argument that male intellectuals at the turn of the century assumed that "mass culture is somehow associated with women while real, authentic culture remains the prerogative of men" seems far less radical (47). Loren Glass, in *Authors, Inc.*, usefully notes that Huyssen's argument, based on a study of European art, is "even more applicable to U. S. modernism, where Emersonian self-reliance and frontier individualism contributed to a modernist image of the hypermasculine male author" (Glass 18). The rise of this hypermasculine image in the early twentieth century, particularly through figures like Jack London and Ernest Hemingway, suggests its emergence also had much to do with the United States' larger transition towards a consumer economy and the emergent regulative, hierarchical, bureaucratic order of the Progressive era. Both changes led to a view of society that de-emphasized the distinct individual in favor of discernable market groups and standardized "sets" of people based on characteristics like income, age, intelligence, and ethnicity.

Thus, by the turn of the century, many of the ideas that would become central to interpretations of the modernist period had already begun to germinate in emerging literary and critical institutions. Distinct publishers, critical organs, and a growing class of literary scholars all reinforced the idea of “high” literature as a distinct, and transcendent, object requiring its own formalized procedures of study. In addition, this field, developing out of a literary tradition that associated the masculine with concentrated study and “serious” thought, was coded in opposition to both a feminized mass culture and the “low” sphere of popular writing, the domain of nameless hacks writing formulaic stories to publishers’ specifications.

### **The Rise of A National Celebrity Culture**

While most aspects of the previous story should be familiar to contemporary modernist critics, one area of late nineteenth and early twentieth century culture that has received relatively little attention is the formation of a national culture of celebrity. Celebrities have certainly existed since the earliest days of the United States and one need look no further than P. T. Barnum’s spectacles and oddities in the mid-nineteenth century to find a strikingly contemporary example of self-promotion. Barnum was a quintessential showman, emphasizing his name in every endeavor so that each success not only benefited him financially but also expanded his renown. The self-proclaimed “prince of humbugs,” a title that suggests both his own commitment to the art of pleasurable deception and his skill at public manipulation, took every opportunity to generate controversy around his projects.

For instance, in 1835, Barnum learned of a woman named Joice Heth, who was supposedly 161 years old and claimed to have been the nursemaid of George Washington. Barnum took the woman on tour as a scientific curiosity of national significance. Then, when crowds began to dwindle, he planted a newspaper article that claimed she was actually a robot. In the process of debunking his own exhibit, he effectively created another attraction and encouraged audiences to come back for a second look.

Figures like Barnum who managed to acquire broader renown early in the century were generally people who found ways to overcome the difficulties of living in a time of limited information flows, either by touring, cultivating informal social networks, or by disseminating their works, often times quite slowly, on a broad scale. Such limitations did not mean, as many contemporary celebrity theorists suggest, that “celebrity” is somehow an entirely new phenomenon in the early decades of the twentieth century. In fact, the notion of celebrity existed in quite a contemporary fashion by the mid-1800’s.

With the advent of intercontinental train travel in 1869, the decreasing costs of publication, and a steady shift towards more spectacle-oriented entertainments late in the century, individuals began to figure even more prominently in public conversations. Theatrical productions, for instance, which had always relied on the appeal of major actors and actresses, became even more dependent on the personas of performers in the 1870’s and 80’s when traveling shows became far more prominent. Given the increasing visibility of particular theater performances and performers, it is not surprising that three different papers devoted to the theater appeared in a seven-year span, the *New York*

*Dramatic News*, the *New York Mirror*, and the *Dramatic News*, published in 1875, 1879, and 1881 respectively (Mott Magazines 200-09).

Similarly, vaudeville acts, burlesque shows, and gradually professionalizing forms of sport all depended heavily on popular figures, and publicity stunts, to draw audiences. Boxer John Sullivan, for instance, not only went on a coast-to-coast tour with five other boxers in the early 1880's to promote the sport, but he also offered to fight anyone at any time during the tour for two-hundred and fifty dollars. He supposedly knocked out eleven men during the tour. By the late 1880's, Sullivan was so popular that his last bare-knuckled fight against Jake Kilrain in 1889 became something of a media circus. Newspapers carried pre-fight coverage, reporting on the fighters' training regimens and their thoughts about the upcoming fight, and speculated extensively about the outcome. After Sullivan won the seventy-five round fight, his name appeared in papers across the country.<sup>8</sup>

While such a spectacle is certainly reminiscent of more contemporary sporting events, Sullivan, as a famous public figure, was never subjected to the insistent and intense personal scrutiny that would become characteristic of twentieth century celebrity journalism. Again, the absence of such scrutiny does not mean that public media was free of such scandal. Gossip was an important part of newspaper journalism from the earliest days of the republic. Prior to the 1830's, when publishers first began to promote the idea of journalistic objectivity, papers functioned in large part as organs for political propaganda and often printed scandalous, or even libelous, details about public figures.

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<sup>8</sup> For more on Sullivan, see Michael Isenberg Sullivan; Adam J. Pollack Sullivan; John L. Sullivan Life.



Though the tone of such information may have changed with the advent of a more modern approach to journalism in the 1830's, gossip also played a prominent role in less scandal-oriented papers. On the one hand, reporters were, for the first time, sent out on beats to capture news as it happened, which helped to direct attention towards the day-to-day events that have since become the staple of daily news. On the other hand, these beats also meant reporters had to keep track of crime and court orders, as well as the activities of important members of high society.

Throughout much of the century there were also scandal "sheets," generally short-lived papers that reveled in any degrading detail that might interest the public. Blackmail and extortion were quite common with such sheets. An 1842 issue of *The Weekly Rake*, for instance, divulged that it had information about "a man in town that requested another to shave his legs." The piece concludes, "We have received a detail of the whole affair. Shall we publish it??"<sup>9</sup>

While these early gossip papers do bear some resemblance to more contemporary incarnations of the genre, the scandalous anecdotes and caricatures they contained were far from the systematic explorations of individual lives characteristic of much twentieth century celebrity media. What is more, any salacious details that did happen to emerge were still read largely by a limited and local public. Such lurid gossip did not enter the national scene until the 1890's, after Colonel William D'Alton Mann, later dubbed the godfather of gossip, took over *Town Topics*. Under his ownership, about half the magazine contained fiction, verse, and criticism. The other half was filled with salacious

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<sup>9</sup> This passage was quoted in Caldwell. For more on the history of gossip, see Roger Wilkes Scandal.

details bought from anyone who might be willing to provide inside information about New York's elite society, including disgruntled servants, telegraph operators, and delivery men. The scandals he and his network of spies uncovered not only implicated figures of national significance, from the Vanderbilts and J.P. Morgan to Alice Roosevelt, but they were also remarkably accurate. As a result, the magazine frequently gained national attention and sold copies all around the country.<sup>10</sup>

Besides moving gossip onto the national stage, Mann also developed techniques that would become staples of early twentieth century scandal magazines. With the expansion of urban areas, which brought people into increasingly close proximity to each other, and the rapid spread of media at the end of the century, the legal community was attempting to come to terms with a changing sense of public and private. Perhaps the most influential legal opinion of the period on privacy, Samuel Warren and Louis Brandeis's "The Right to Privacy," came out just one year before Mann began running *Town Topics*. Warren and Brandeis attempted to come to terms with a world in which "gossip has become a trade" by positing an "inviolable" right to both privacy and "one's own personality" (196, 205-07).<sup>11</sup> In such an inhospitable legal environment, Mann partnered with an attorney to ensure that nothing he printed was libelous and came up with ingenious ways to print scandalous hearsay without violating any laws. He always, for instance, ran the most defamatory pieces without including the subject's name; however, he would follow these anonymous pieces with an innocuous reference that

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<sup>10</sup> For more on Mann and *Town Topics*, see Andy Logan Barons; George H. Douglas Smart Magazines.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this opinion in the context of celebrity, see Loren Glass Authors 8-11. For more on the right to privacy in a legal context, see Don R. Pember Privacy; Darien A. McWhirter and Jon D. Bible Privacy.

linked a specific person with the incidents previously mentioned, so the subject of the anonymous article would be clear to readers.

The emergence and development of a national gossip trade was not the only, nor was it the most widely read, treatment of celebrity during the last decade of the century. From the earliest days of the “magazine revolution,” publishers realized that celebrity features were one sure way to increase circulation and garner larger advertising revenues. When S. S. McClure cut the price of *McClure’s* from fifteen to ten cents in 1893, the magazine initially struggled to expand its audience. The first issue sold only about 8000 copies. It was not until the next year, when McClure began running Ida Tarbell’s “Life of Napoleon” that these numbers began to rise. By the end of 1894 circulation had increased 150% (Peterson 10-11). Similarly, the first installment of Tarbell’s “Life of Lincoln” raised sales 50% in one month (McClure 221).

As a result of such successes, mass magazines consistently profiled famous people through biographical sketches, celebrity portraits, and even some autobiographical recollections. While these pieces did share a revelatory impulse with their more gossipy counterparts, they also provided a much more sympathetic approach to exploring celebrity lives. As Richard Ohmann describes it, the presentation of famous individuals strove “not to heroize a mortal, but to humanize a hero.” Accordingly, when McClure gave Tarbell the assignment to write on Lincoln, he instructed her to bring the former President back to life for readers (Ohmann 242).<sup>12</sup>

The detailed discussions of celebrity lives and histories in the monthlies proved that more expansive pieces on individual’s private lives could captivate a *national*

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<sup>12</sup> See also Theodore Greene Heroes.

audience. Thus, contrary to many film studies that posit Hollywood's star machine as the emergence of an American celebrity culture, these mass market magazines provided a framework that would be borrowed and expanded on by the film industry in the first decades of the twentieth century. I do not mean to suggest that the film industry did not significantly alter the U.S. celebrity landscape. First, the film industry's promotional efforts shifted the focus from humanizing popular figures like Lincoln and Napoleon to the overt cultivation of status. Second, by putting significant amounts of money into star promotion, the industry helped to underwrite a burgeoning market of "fanzines" and film-centered magazines that both fed and encouraged audiences' desires for "inside" information about film actors and actresses.

Prior to 1905, moving pictures were primarily featured as spectacles during vaudeville shows and at amusement parks; however, with the emergence of nickelodeons, small storefront theaters that charged a nickel for admission, the film industry began to grow rapidly. By 1909, studios regularly published the names of actors and actresses and for the first time included their names in credits at the end of films. About the same time, performers began to receive individualized publicity. Yet, as Richard deCordova suggests in Picture Personalities, the promotion of individual stars was tentative at first. In one of the first instances of individual marketing, the Imp company simply ran a photo of Florence Lawrence, who is widely considered the first film "star" for her early publicity treatment, in the corner of a movie poster. Even as stories about film stars began to appear in the industry press and newly emergent fan magazines in following years, most

of the early pieces did little more than provide details about their work and upcoming projects. Very little personal information was given (deCordova 50-97).

By about 1913, deCordova claims, discussions of performers began to focus primarily on the off-screen lives of performers. Much like the pieces in mass magazines at the turn of the century, the stories told were often couched as intimate revelations and they always purported to bring readers closer to the “realities” of on-screen figures. While these celebrity “lives” were often fictionalized and generally emphasized a performer’s on-screen persona, a task that was particularly easy given that most narrative films relied on idealized characters and performers tended to play similar characters in most of their projects, the articles worked hard to cultivate a natural air that would appeal to readers seeking inside information (deCordova 98-116).

Such “news” dominated the celebrity magazines until the early 1920’s, when a series of scandals, beginning with Roscoe “Fatty” Arbuckle’s alleged murder of Virginia Rappe in 1921 and William Desmond Taylor’s mysterious murder in 1922, shattered the illusion that performers lived the relatively pristine lives that were represented in the press. This is not to say that audiences naively believed everything they read in publicity spots prior to the early 1920’s, but that in an emerging climate of scandal, including increasingly common reports of drug use, adultery, and murder, industry press could no longer maintain credibility with their readers if they chose to ignore such matters. Thus, in deCordova’s words, “the star became a site for the representation of moral transgression and social unconventionality” (deCordova 117). In terms of the larger categories of celebrity discourse popular in the early decades of the century, this shift towards representing scandalous details as part of a performer’s intimate story effectively

combines the mass market magazine approach to recreating lives with the splashy exposes of the gossip columns. The new discourse in effect offers up salacious details to authenticate a performer's publicity.

## **Literary Responses**

The rapid development of mass culture in America at the turn of the century had an enormous impact on the profession of authorship. The expanding geographical range covered by newspapers and mass market magazines promoted national conversations about books and authors, conversations that became an important part of most major publications in the early twentieth century. The increasing amount of space devoted to texts meant that columnists and writers kept a close eye on literary developments and almost any event, from the founding of a new "little review" to changes in a classic pulp series, could receive mention. Literary supplements, which provided a direct source of information about books and authors, also became increasingly popular in the 1920's. Both the New York *Herald Tribune's Books* and the *Saturday Review of Literature* first appeared during the decade and book inserts that already existed, like the *New York Times* literary section, expanded to meet the increased demand for such information (Leick 127).<sup>13</sup>

In addition to the increasing range of conversations about the literary world, authors came to play an expanded role in the press. During the early decades of the twentieth century, it became increasingly common for authors of all levels of sophistication to give interviews, go on book tours, make public appearances, and give

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<sup>13</sup> On this point I am much indebted to Karen Leick's survey of book press in "Popular Modernism." In particular, see pp. 125-130.

lectures. The increasing importance of the author-figure can also be seen in the rapidly increasing number of writers' autobiographies being produced around the turn of the century. According to Louis Kaplan's bibliography of American autobiographies, between 1800 and 1880, only 26 autobiographies were written by journalists or authors. From 1880-1920, that number increased five-fold to 113. In the next twenty years, authors produced ten times as many.<sup>14</sup> Figures who were prominent in the literary establishment, including publishers and editors, began regularly telling their stories as well. Works like Margaret Anderson's *Thirty Years War*, which documented the founding of the *Little Review*, received attention alongside memoirs by established writers like Sherwood Anderson, Theodore Dreiser, and Ford Maddox Ford.

The increasing diversity and complexity of publicity mechanisms, rapidly expanding new venues for literary talents, including mass magazines and movies, and the growth of the both the U.S. and the international book trade all made authorship an increasingly complex occupation after the turn of the century. Not surprisingly, the same period also saw a rapid expansion of business intermediaries, professionals whose job it was to help authors and other performers navigate the legal, economic, and social complexities of the mass market. By the late 1890's, clipping services, which helped authors track their publicity, literary agencies, and press agencies had all become viable businesses. By the 1920's, gossip columns and literary reviews were so important that press agents who could develop relationships with columnists, and occasionally influence copy, often received significant advances for their services.

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<sup>14</sup> See Louis Kaplan Bibliography.

While these changes raised challenges for everyone involved in the book industry at the turn of the century, they proved to be particularly problematic for those writers and publishers committed to the idea that some art possessed an inherent, and transcendent, value existing beyond the operations of the marketplace. As many modernist scholars have documented, the unavoidable interpenetration of business and art generated a significant amount of anxiety during this period. Some publishers, like George Dolan, an early partner of Frank Doubleday, complained that good literature could not be successfully promoted. By the mid-1930's, when even "high" modernist authors like James Joyce and Gertrude Stein had published best-sellers after extensive publicity campaigns, Dolan ruefully commented in his memoirs, "the great profession of publishing has measurably degenerated into a business of mass production where each highly enterprising publisher of the era seeks by advertisement and other ultra-modern methods to outsell his contemporaries."<sup>15</sup> Doran's fear that advertising led directly to the degradation of literature was not uncommon in the early decades of the twentieth century. Henry Holt, for instance, had made a similar complaint thirty years earlier in an influential book review: "Books are not bricks, and... the more they are treated as bricks, the more they tend to become bricks" (578).

These complaints were taken up even more vocally by writers from both sides of the Atlantic in the early decades of the twentieth century. These authors, who often reveled in challenging bourgeois sensibilities, frequently couched their opposition in highly inflammatory, and distinctly quotable, language. Wyndham Lewis, for instance, in a larger rant about how family "reconstitutes itself in the image of the state," stops at the

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<sup>15</sup> This passage is quoted in Turner, Marketing 33. See also George H. Doran Barabbas 267.



end of his argument to attack “this unreal, materialistic world, where all ‘sentiment’ is coarsely manufactured and advertised in colossal sickly captions, disguised for the sweet tooth of a monstrous baby called the ‘the Public,’” (181). Ezra Pound brought the charge more directly in his famous lines, “nothing written for pay is worth printing. Only what has been written against the market” (qtd. in Carpenter 236).

### **A Reassessment of Modernist Criticism: Celebrity and Reception**

Passages like these led many early critics of what has come to be known as the era of Modernism to suggest that elite authors existed in an antagonistic relationship to the marketplace and that the Literature they produced somehow transcended the operations of that market. While this oppositional stance does exist in some forms today, many contemporary scholars, having imbibed postmodernist critiques of totalizing systems and poststructuralist disruptions of binary oppositions, have been highly critical of such a simplistic dichotomy. Most writers who reflect on this critical shift claim the transformative figure was Fredric Jameson, who, in his article, “Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture,” proposes that high culture and mass culture are interrelated and can only be understood through a historical analysis of their joint emergence under the conditions of late capitalism (133-34).

While some critics have expressed unease with the wide acceptance of such a simplistic and linear narrative (Richard Keller Simon, for instance, has pointed out an influential exchange between Clement Greenberg and Dwight Macdonald in the late 1930’s that led to their advocating a dialectical approach to high and mass cultural forms), few have attempted to deny the influence Jameson’s article has had, especially in

the sphere of what we now call modernist studies. The last three decades have seen an explosion of studies exploring the various ways in which canonical authors have engaged with and been implicated in the marketplace.<sup>16</sup> However, much as this work has complicated the traditional opposition between high culture and mass market, many scholars continue to use these terms as a shorthand way of referring to a dizzying array of social and institutional developments. Given this relatively imprecise way of negotiating such complex terrain, it is not surprising that some important changes in the modern market have been downplayed or subsumed into the more general operations of the “mass marketplace.” For my purposes, the increased cultural emphasis on, and anxiety over, celebrity personas in the early twentieth century is a particularly notable omission. By the 1920’s, there were enough products devoted to disseminating the images of, and information about, celebrities, from sports cards to gossip columns to fan magazines, that many historians and cultural scholars have unreflexively referred to the existence of a distinct “celebrity culture” during the era. Yet, in Douglas Mao and Rebecca L. Walkowitz’s recent survey of studies devoted to “the marketing of modernism” in *PMLA*, celebrity did not even merit a mention (744). Such an absence is surprising given the number of studies that suggest the relevance such an analysis would have for the field as a whole, from Catherine Turner’s work on the advertising of modernist texts in America to Bob Perelman’s often-cited study of modernist notions of “genius,” which explores both the importance these notions had for authors’ conceptions of their own work as well as the ways in which it shaped their public personas.

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<sup>16</sup> See Daniel Borus Realism; John Xiros Cooper Market Society; Kevin J. H. Dettmar and Stephen Watt, eds. Marketing; Andreas Huyssen Divide; James Naremore Modernism; Lawrence S. Rainey Modernism; Thomas Strychacz Professionalism; Catherine Turner Marketing; Jennifer Wicke Advertising; Christopher Wilson Labor.

What these and other studies suggest, on the most general level, is that celebrity discourse, even in the earliest decades of the twentieth century, was an important site for constructing meanings around texts. Aaron Jaffe, in Modernism and the Culture of Celebrity, one of the few book-length studies devoted primarily to the examination of literary celebrity, provides the most conventional reading of this discourse. Jaffe claims that such modernist authors as Eliot, Pound, and Joyce did not simply remove themselves from the scene of the mass market, but instead instantiated themselves indirectly in it by creating literary objects that bear a specific “stylistic stamp.” This stamp, or “imprimatur” in Jaffe’s terminology, served the dual purpose of distinguishing a text from others in the marketplace and of sanctioning that text, particularly as the specific name attached to it began to accumulate value in the literary sphere (20).

While Jaffe’s book provides a thorough account of one way in which modernist authors attempted to accumulate cultural capital while remaining overtly oppositional to the market, his insistence that “the publicizing function of modernist authorship must be everywhere observed yet everywhere denied” effectively reintroduces more traditional readings of the oppositional relationship between modernism and mass culture (16). By insisting that a modernist author could successfully operate in the marketplace only by turning him or herself “into a formal artifact,” Jaffe tends to follow authors’ own claims about their market activities and ignores many of the ways in which writers engaged more directly with media apparatus, promoting their own personas as well as their particular “brand names” (20). It would be difficult to argue, for instance, that T. S. Eliot agreed to appear on the cover of *Time* magazine simply to promote himself as a formally dispersed textual object.

The limited nature of Jaffe's approach is also reflected in his reading of modernist texts. For example, he cites Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" as an important attempt to theorize the author as imprimatur. This fairly conventional reading hinges on Eliot's claim that poetry is an "escape from personality," even as Jaffe ignores Eliot's paradoxical insistence that personality provides a necessary foundation for impersonal art: "only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things" ("Tradition" 10-11).

Thus, while Jaffe's analysis offers an elegant way of mediating between modernists' disavowals of the mass market and a certain subset of their own promotional activities, it in many ways refuses to engage with the very "celebrity culture" it purports to address. Perhaps more importantly, this approach also limits our understanding of the potential effects of celebrity on the reception of modernist texts. Given the famed difficulty of many modernist works, public personas functioned as far more than brand names sanctioning particular texts. They guided reader's interpretations of texts and even, in more extreme cases, could be said to replace the need to read altogether. Catherine Turner has demonstrated how advertising in the 1920's and 30's promoted texts as objects of knowledge rather than as literary works that contained inherent value. Thus, Turner argues, educated middle-class readers who were anxious about remaining "current" could reap social benefits simply by knowing about the currently fashionable literary titles rather than actually reading them.

Similarly, authorial personas functioned as an important site of knowledge production that could ultimately displace the texts upon which a writer's fame supposedly rested. For instance, when Gertrude Stein came to the United States for a lecture tour in

1934, newspapers tracked her movements and some of the major papers even ran extended commentaries on the trip. Yet, the focus was rarely on Stein's writing or the content of her speeches, which had at least nominally occasioned the notices in the first place. Her clothes, her appearance, and her affect on audiences regularly took precedence.

In addition, while people came in surprising numbers to hear Stein's lectures, very few of them actually bought her books. In one oft-told story about the tour, the author fired her tour organizer, Marvin Ross, shortly after arriving in the United States because over 1700 people had tickets for one of her opening lectures at Columbia University, far more than the 500-person limit she had specified. Yet, each of the books published in conjunction with her lecture tour, including *Lectures in America*, which included transcriptions of each of the lectures she gave, sold poorly. In other words, this bold and mysterious woman who had long been a topic of conversation in the American press, gaining such nicknames as the Mama of Dada, Mother Goose of Montparnasse, the high-priestess of the Left Bank, the Mother of Modernism, and the queen bee of the expatriate hive, had managed to generate a significant amount of interest in her persona without drawing audiences to her work.<sup>17</sup> At the beginning of *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein's memoir about the lecture tour, she explains this phenomena to her publisher, Alfred Harcourt: "Harcourt was very surprised when I said to him on first meeting him in New York remember this extraordinary welcome that I am having does not come from the books of mine that they do understand like the *Autobiography* but the books of mine that they did not understand" (*E.A.* 6).

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<sup>17</sup> For more on Stein's reception, see Seymour I. Toll "Home" 20.

## **Celebrity and Textual Production**

One danger of focusing exclusively on the reception of texts is that such a focus can lead to an overemphasis on the agency of particular individuals. It would not be difficult to take Stein's previous quote as an indication that her difficult texts were conceived as part of a larger effort to convince readers that she was, as she so often claimed to be, a "genius." By extension, the high/low aesthetic divide comes to seem like little more than a tactical move perpetrated by authors trying to find a space in a thoroughly commodified literary marketplace. The complexity of a text certainly did have an impact on the way writers were categorized by audiences, and writers from both sides of the aesthetic divide did attempt to shape the way they were perceived by audiences; however, the particular strategies employed were effective largely because the high/low divide had already become a constitutive part of the literary field. As discussed above, genteel publishers expressed similar anxieties about the market and were forced to negotiate with an emergent mass culture in their own sphere of work.

The conflict for publishers became even more acute as a new generation of men began to form their own houses in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Donald Brace, Bennett Cerf, Alfred Harcourt, Donald Klopfer, Alfred Knopf, and Horace Liveright were all forced to mediate between the increasingly complex demands of an intensely competitive literary marketplace and the genteel notions of the traditional publishing business. It was precisely such an emphasis on publishing Literature that could secure a reputation for new firms. Yet, to remain competitive, the new firms had to employ the

latest advertising and marketing techniques in order to promote both themselves and their books.

The potential contradictions are readily apparent in Alfred Harcourt's massive publicity campaign for Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Ads appeared in all of the major literary supplements proclaiming Stein's role as an "eminent American woman" at the forefront of contemporary artistic production, one with the knowledge to explain "why modern literature *is*." By implicitly constructing "modern literature" as something difficult, a phenomenon that needs explaining, Harcourt could draw on Stein's reputation as an avant-garde author as well as on the gradually accumulating cultural capital of "modern" literature in general. Yet, the ads also emphasize both the readability of *The Autobiography* and its sheer entertainment value. This memoir will be, the ads promise, both a major part of modern literature and a straightforward guide to the rarefied world of high art.<sup>18</sup>

Such an ad campaign, not to mention the more elaborate publicity staging for Stein's later lecture tour, suggests the complex interplay of personality, market conditions, and aesthetic theory in the early decades of the twentieth century, a complexity that would be difficult to admit under Jaffe's model of literary celebrity, which insists "the publicizing function of modernist authorship must be everywhere observed yet everywhere denied" (Jaffe 16). Jaffe's emphasis on the textual object also downplays the important role celebrity played in the production and circulation of texts. For many modernist authors, the cultural capital they accumulated as they produced little-read though publicly discussed texts for elite audiences provided the foundation for their

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<sup>18</sup> For an examination of Harcourt's marketing of *The Autobiography*, see Turner 111-26.

emergence into the larger cultural marketplace. Conversely, many figures in the book industry played significant roles in shaping the personas that would finally emerge before the public. While interactions among publishers, editors, and authors have been explored at some length in recent scholarship on the “marketing of modernism,” many other relationships crucial to the cultivation of a celebrity persona have only begun to receive attention, as among authors and literary agents, clipping services, journalists, and attorneys.

### **Celebrity and Authorial Self-Fashioning**

Perhaps most surprising, given the enormous body of work devoted to modernist texts, is that so few book-length studies have attempted any sustained analysis of the effect that an emergent celebrity culture had on particular authors. Hemingway is perhaps the most notable exception to this generalization, but, on the whole, it has proven enough for most scholars to cite a few particularly vituperative comments by Pound or half of Eliot’s famous dicta about poetry as an “escape from personality” in order to establish that “serious” authors expressed disdain for celebrity culture. This attitude not only misrepresents the approaches of many writers, including Pound and Eliot, but it has also allowed critics to downplay the important role the author-figure plays in modernist theorizations of the art.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, even as Eliot advocates “divert[ing] interest from the poet to the poetry” in his oft-cited essay, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” the piece as a whole is largely preoccupied with detailing the proper relationship between an author’s “personality” and

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<sup>19</sup> For more on Hemingway, see Leonard J. Leff Conspirators; John Raeburn Fame; Robert W. Trogdon Lousy. For more on Ezra Pound and authorial self-fashioning, see Rainey.



a “significant” work of art ("Tradition" 11). The impersonal process of creation, Eliot argues, requires that the creative mind function like a catalyst, in that it recombines elements from the world into something new while itself remaining “inert, neutral, and unchanged” ("Tradition" 7). The author, consequently, is irrelevant to the analysis of a work of art because the complex emotions and situations that appear have nothing to do with the “real” experiences of the author, nor were they even “chosen” by the author in any direct way.

Yet Eliot cannot totally remove authorial consciousness from the scene, as he also wants to insist on the “responsibility” of a poet to “develop or procure the consciousness of the past” through “great labour” ("Tradition" 4). So, not only does the whole article revolve around the larger irony that a poet must finally cultivate impersonality, but Eliot must finally admit in passing at the end of his argument, “there is a great deal, in the writing of poetry, which must be conscious and deliberate” ("Tradition" 10). Though he does insist that such choices be made in the interest of impersonality, he does not specify the distinction between conscious choices and unconscious formations, nor does he acknowledge how such a backdoor admission, made in the last sentences of his argument, might affect his larger goal of removing the author from the scene of the completed poem. In short, Eliot posits the ideal scientist/author figure familiar to much modernist scholarship while also allowing for a “real” author who must not only aspire to appear scientific in relation to any given work but must always actively participate in the construction of that impersonal appearance.

Given the proliferation of celebrity outlets, the spread of the mass market, and the increased commodification of literary products in the early decades of the twentieth

century, all of which threatened to erode the authority of the autonomous author, Eliot's anxiety over authorial agency is not surprising nor was it uncommon at the time. Writers and critics regularly localized value in the work of art, thereby removing the author from the scene of evaluation and cultivating an aesthetic realm whose significance supposedly existed outside marketplace assessments of either the author or his work. Yet, the same critical apparatus always retained, as scholars like Jaffe remind us, a privileged space for the god-like author-creator whose genius could be everywhere seen but never directly discussed, a distinction which also served both a branding function for the accumulation of cultural capital and an authenticating function for the literary product as a whole.

This reading of Eliot and what we have come to see as the modernist impulse remains within more conventional understandings of modernist authorship, in that the figure of the poet is finally cultivated through the medium of the poem itself. Yet, to push my example just one step further, Eliot's concern with the relationship between an artist and his or her audience did regularly extend beyond the medium of the art work, especially in his writings on mass culture. Much recent scholarship on Eliot serves to remind us that Eliot's notions of cultural hierarchy are far more complex than the stereotypical caricature sometimes found in discussions of the "great divide." At times, Eliot even figured a direct relationship between high and low, as in an early essay on Marianne Moore where he insists, "[f]ine art is the refinement, not the antithesis, of popular art." Yet, important as such dialogs are for examinations of Eliot and for modernist studies more generally, they again neglect an opportunity to broaden the discussion into the field of celebrity, particularly in the places where public renown plays a direct role in Eliot's theoretical formulations. For instance, in his much-discussed

eulogy for famous music hall singer and comedienne Marie Lloyd, Eliot figures her popularity not just as a mark of achievement but as an extension of the particular accomplishment of her art.<sup>20</sup>

Such preoccupations with artistic self-fashioning were not uncommon in the early 1920's, when both "Tradition" and the eulogy were written. As Ann Douglas summarizes, "the dangerous business of attention management and exploitation fascinated all the writers of [this] generation, whether as subject matter or life-style or both" (71). Figures as diverse as Eliot and Dorothy Parker, Marianne Moore and Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein, all wrestled with the new media apparatus and its emerging forms of promotion. Yet again, to say that many, if not all, modernist authors deliberately engaged in some market activity does not simply overturn the aesthetic categories at work or imply that the underlying conception of "pure" art, existing outside the reach of a degraded and degrading popular culture, did not function as a crucial part of the literary field in the early twentieth century. Thus, as Michael Nowlin points out in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Racial Angles, Ann Douglas presses the point a bit too far when she applies Charlie Chaplin's term "high lowbrow" as a general descriptor for a wide range of artists simultaneously seeking fame and critical acclaim in the 1920's (10). The situation was never quite as open or liberatory as this phrase suggests. The two authors I have chosen as case studies, F. Scott Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein, clearly demonstrate the difficulties that prevailing attitudes towards art posed for writers attempting to find some viable space in the modern marketplace. The year after

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<sup>20</sup> See T. S. Eliot "Essays". The essay originally appeared in the November 1922 issue of *The Dial* as part of a series of letters Eliot wrote on the cultural scene in England. For a useful re-assessment of Eliot's relationship to mass culture, see David E. Chinitz Divide.

Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, made him a household name, he wrote his agent, "My one hope is to be endorsed by the intellectually elite & thus be forced on to people as Conrad has," a striking bit of posturing for someone who had begun sending self-promotional blurbs to his publishers as soon as his first book was released (Fitzgerald and Perkins 47). Similarly, Gertrude Stein could employ and explicitly direct a literary agent to make her rich and famous, but she could not discuss such matters in the company of aesthetes.

So, on one level, it is not surprising to see an author like Stein publicly expressing anxiety in the wake of a major commercial success, as she did repeatedly after the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Yet, on another level, it would be a mistake to read such professed anxiety outside of its constitutive function. In the process of proving she can be both a commercial and a critical success, Stein must not only reassert the existence of both categories but also suggest the conflict between them. In this way, Stein's anxiety can be read not simply as a reflection of some internal struggle but as a rhetorical move that reinscribes the category of "high" art in a very public discourse as something fundamentally oppositional to that form of communication. Similarly, F. Scott Fitzgerald uses an account of his own breakdown in *Esquire*, a "slick" commercial magazine that sold luxury goods to men, in order to proclaim his own opposition to the demands of an emergent consumer society.

In short, elite authors were trapped between the lowbrow market and celebrity culture. On the one hand, writers aspiring after status did not want to be associated with the anonymous hacks of so-called "production line" books, nor did they want their output to be dictated by the whims of the marketplace. On the other hand, authors could not

allow their persona to dominate their work and propel sales, as that would ultimately undermine claims about the supposedly transcendent value of art.

### **Celebrity and Autobiography**

The theoretical and practical difficulties of fashioning an authorial persona in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century become even more overt when writers turn to openly autobiographical forms, which publicly foreground the private consciousness so frequently finessed out of the scene of true “Literature.” The genre represents, as Loren Glass rightly asserts, “the author explicitly attempting to reappropriate the public discourse that determines the authorial career”(7). Situated as it is between the poles of a public and private self, literature and celebrity, autonomous and market-driven writing, autobiography is a useful form for unpacking the contradictions of the modern literary market. Thus, I intend to explore the autobiographical work of Stein and Fitzgerald as both a theoretical and a practical intervention in the literary marketplace, a textual space that works to mediate aesthetic, literary, and market demands simultaneously. Ultimately, I want to examine not only how larger contradictions in the literary marketplace shaped individual authors’ ideas about their profession but also the ways in which those ideas were developed and manifested through direct representations of the “self.”

While Glass’s project and my own share a similar focus, my analysis will move away from his insistence on the “real” authorial self as a central element of autobiographical analysis. Indeed, one of the reasons autobiography seems particularly relevant for Glass is that, despite the efforts of contemporary theorists, the genre maintains its recalcitrant link with a “self” outside the words on the page, a situation that

in some ways parallels modernist authors' tortured attempts to remove the self from the scene of the text. In support of this idea, Glass, by way of Paul John Eakin, challenges Philippe Lejeune's widely cited work on the "autobiographical pact." In the wake of major poststructural attacks on traditional uses of the concept of authorship, Lejeune postulated that autobiography as a genre should be defined not by any demonstrable reference to an extratextual world, but simply by a text's ability to convince the reader that it refers to such a place, through, say, the author and the protagonist sharing a name. While such a reading does superficially relocate the genre's definition solely within the space of the text, it is only through a residual reliance on the notion of intention, Eakin argues, that such a definition remains effective. In short, Glass, by way of Eakin, wants to suggest that the autobiographical subject has been too easily dismissed by contemporary theorists, who disregard lingering associations, in both critical theory and popular culture, between the authorial consciousness and the text it produces.

While Lejeune's definition is certainly inadequate to the challenge laid out by leading poststructural theorists, a point which Lejeune himself has subsequently acknowledged, Eakin's criticism also falls short of contesting "both new critical and poststructuralist erasures of authorial intention and control," a point which Eakin admitted in later work (Glass 7). So, on one level, Glass's argument, which certainly deserves some consideration, suffers for its relatively abrupt treatment. On a more substantive level, the charges he is leveling seem to veer off from the larger thrust of his argument. Even if we accede the existence of a lingering critical and public desire for the "real" subject behind any autobiographical text, such an attitude does not ultimately change our view of the texts themselves. I agree with Glass's sentiment that a public

desire to link text and author is precisely what “undergirds the culture of authorial celebrity” and makes the genre useful for authors eager to shape their public personas (8). Yet, such an interpretation pertains to the reception of texts through the particular social position afforded to autobiography during the twentieth century in the United States. It does not, then, follow that we should read the autobiographical texts in question as documentation of an author’s underlying anxieties as Glass intends to do (“In this study, I have deliberately selected protomodernist and modernist texts... in order to document the degree to which celebrity troubled many American authors’ sense of their relation to their texts and audiences”-8).

Instead, I will take a more conservative path by contemporary theoretical standards and read autobiographical texts as rhetorical constructions, but I will do so not just because of the particular theoretical challenges that Glass’s work raises. Such an approach also yields new interpretations of the texts under consideration. In fact, it is precisely the gap between author and text that makes the autobiographical form particularly useful for the two authors under consideration.

As most contemporary Stein criticism will attest, she was preoccupied throughout her career with the signifying function of language, even though this fact is often neglected in studies of her autobiographical oeuvre. For instance, critics have insistently read the displacement of Stein’s first person voice onto Alice Toklas in her first major autobiography, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, as a method of distracting the reader from the ego inherent in the project. In effect, Toklas’s voice diffuses the arrogance of the work and allows for a focus on the mundane that makes an otherwise commercially motivated work palatable.

My problem with such views is that they elevate “realistic” writing and the connection between author and text over the dynamics of the text itself. The previous reading ignores the fact that the repetition of Stein’s name in the text is noticeably excessive, to the point of being almost overpoweringly comic. Critics have noted that the full appellation “Gertrude Stein” appears, on average, four times on every page. Such reiteration does not seem to me to “slip” Stein’s presence into the text in any subtle way. Instead, it raises fairly direct questions about visibility and representation, crucial issues throughout the book. The emphasis on Picasso’s portrait of Stein (itself an ambivalently de-faced work), the repeated focus on surfaces/faces/paintings, as well as, on the last page of the book, a photograph of the handwritten manuscript’s first page all unsettle any approach to the book that takes the signifying process for granted.

Similarly, after *The Autobiography* became a major best-seller, Stein wrote in several texts about the bout of writer’s block brought on by her sudden fame. Glass, like most other critics discussing the episode, takes this claim at face value and reads it as a reflection of Stein’s anxiety over her changing position in the literary market. Yet, as I will discuss at greater length in my analysis of Stein, such an admission could be read as itself a carefully calculated rhetorical move that demonstrates Stein’s awareness of the challenges the mass market poses while inoculating her from them through the very fact of her writing, which implies she has already solved the crisis that generated her block in the first place.

Fitzgerald also openly traded on his public persona in the mid-1930’s by writing a series of first-person accounts of a nervous breakdown at a particularly difficult point in his life. When Fitzgerald first published the pieces that have subsequently been dubbed



“the Crack-Up essays” in *Esquire* magazine, he had written only one novel in the previous ten years, after having published three in the first five years of his career, and spent half that time watching the once lucrative market for his short fiction slowly disappear. What is more, his wife Zelda, formerly a very public figure herself, had been institutionalized five years earlier, leaving their daughter Scottie in the hands of family friends and caretakers. While Fitzgerald’s alcoholism rendered him unfit for the daily struggles of parenthood, he did, even as the market for his work diminished, bear financial responsibility for both Zelda and Scottie’s well-being. Finally, Fitzgerald’s name, as a result of his prominent early success, had already been securely linked to the Jazz Age, rendering him to many in the public as, at best, a talented curiosity from a past age or, at worst, a stark symbol of failure, the embodiment of youthful promise unfulfilled.

As a result of, among other things, his lingering name recognition, declining reputation, and blunt admission of emotional collapse, Fitzgerald’s essays caused a minor scandal that drew commentary in papers and magazines around the country. However, when viewed in retrospect, these essays are striking not for their shocking revelations but precisely for what they do not reveal. In fact, the essays, which macho readers denounced as a particularly despicable example of self-disclosure, reveal almost no concrete details about Fitzgerald’s life beyond those that had been run in the gossip columns for over a decade. When coupled with the abstract philosophical statements and social commentary littered throughout the pieces, this sheer generality allows Fitzgerald to turn the broad

elements of his recent experience into a sweeping commentary on the state of his profession in a rapidly modernizing literary marketplace.<sup>21</sup>

### **Modernism in the Depression**

These particular examples document a continuation into the 1930's of the authorial engagement Ann Douglas noted as crucial to the previous decade. Emphasis on the staggering economic and social difficulties during the decade has often led scholars to downplay some of the larger continuities between the Depression era and the historical periods that surround it. Several scholars, however, have argued that modern American commercial culture came into being during the 1930's, in part because the perceived need to revive market demand shifted attention from the producer to the consumer.<sup>22</sup> As Roland Marchand points out in Advertising the American Dream, marketers, perhaps out of sheer necessity, tended to characterize the Depression as a change in consumer attitude, a resurgence of thrift, and not as a change in economic conditions. So methods and theories were refined, advertising taboos fell away, and product promotion became an increasingly subtle and pervasive part of American life (285-301).

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<sup>21</sup> Ruth Prigozy has made a similar argument with respect to Fitzgerald's fiction in the 1930's, claiming that during this decade he "turned to [the] past to interpret not merely an individual's life but the national experience" (119). Bruce Grenberg, to whose work I am much indebted, makes a similar argument specifically about the Crack-Up essays in his piece, "Fitzgerald's 'Crack-up' Essays Revisited: Fiction of the Self, Mirrors for a Nation." While I agree that Fitzgerald does use his own personal experience in the service of raising more general issues, Grenberg's attempt to connect the essays with the Great Depression more generally becomes strained at points, particularly because Fitzgerald so insistently positions himself as a writer, and not simply as a generic citizen, in the essays.

<sup>22</sup> For several different versions of this argument, see Jean-Christophe Agnew "Air"; Stuart Ewen Consuming; Terry Smith Modern.

Alongside these developments in the consumer marketplace, the suburbanization of American culture continued and the market for leisure goods expanded, as technology freed up more time for industrial and domestic workers alike. Moreover, spiraling unemployment, limitations on work time, and increasing supplies of consumer credit over the decade all encouraged people to find new ways to fill up their time. Books on how to occupy leisure time saw dramatic increases during the decade. According to Warren Susman, between 1910 and 1919, only about 50 titles devoted to leisure appeared. From 1920-1929, the number increased to about 200. In the period between 1930 and 1939, 450 different titles appeared (Susman Commitment 82-83).<sup>23</sup>

Finally, mass media continued to expand and dominate the public's attention over the course of the decade. Broadcast radio, which replaced the local programming of the 1920's, and talking films both became cultural institutions during the Depression. A wide variety of magazines also entered the national consciousness, from comic rags like *Ballyhoo* to consumption-oriented periodicals like *Esquire* to the visually-stunning pictorial magazine *Life*.

Book publishers fared far less well. In the 1920's, both the esteemed publishing houses and those firms that aspired to attain respect had actively competed for talented writers. In the Depression, book sales slumped so fast that traditional houses began printing in new genres, like the detective novel or proletariat fiction, in an attempt to remain viable. Such a change marked a radical shift in policy for some publishers and,

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<sup>23</sup> In part as a result of these shifts, Jean-Christophe Agnew notes, Americans came to see their lives more and more in terms of the commodities they purchased, so that, by the 1940's, the United States could go to war on "conspicuously private, consumptionist themes." As one wartime G.I. was reported to have said, "I am in this damn mess... to help keep the custom of drinking Cokes" (14).

from one perspective, exacerbated the gradual fragmentation of the industry. Earlier tensions between “quality” and mass market publishers had already shifted in previous decades with the emergence of a new stratum in American culture, the middlebrow. Janice Radway, in *A Feeling for Books*, defines the middlebrow as a distinct material and ideological form that combines elevated notions of culture with production and distribution apparatuses typically associated with lower forms of art (*Feeling* 128). This new cultural formation was supported by consumers who both eschewed crass lowbrow art and the deliberately confounding highbrow products of the avant-garde. They were people for whom culture was important but who did not have the time or inclination to devote themselves to it. Thus, over the course of the 1910’s and 20’s, products began to emerge that promised the allure of culture in readily consumable forms.

One of the earliest such instances came in the form of “Dr. Eliot’s Five-Foot Shelf of Books,” which was first published by P. F. Colliers & Son in 1910. The Shelf, a collection of supposedly essential works selected from a range of academic disciplines (history, philosophy, science, politics, literature, and the arts), combined the notion that a corpus of great texts could serve as the foundation for a cultivated citizen while also trading on the reputation of long-standing Harvard President Charles W. Eliot and presenting these important works in a readily-displayable form. Thus, a purchaser could acquire some cultural capital simply from owning and displaying the books. Finally, advertisements for the Shelf tended to play on the readers’ anxieties and they repeatedly emphasized fears of social inadequacy. The ads commonly suggested that failure to read the works would result in social embarrassment and even romantic failure.

New commodities that promoted the allure of culture appeared throughout the early 1920's, including history and philosophy "outlines," slick magazines like *Vanity Fair*, and symphonic radio shows.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps the most significant institutional development in the emergence of the middlebrow was the beginning of the Book of the Month Club in 1926. The Club employed a panel of judges who selected the books that would subsequently be distributed to members. All these new products suggest that the traditional "brow" dichotomy was inadequate to encompass the needs and aspirations that were being created by consumer culture for a rapidly growing American middle-class. From this perspective, then, the economic problems that faced publishers during the Depression can be seen as exacerbating a existing shift away from such a strict ideological divide. Indeed, the ambivalent embrace of market operations by the new class of publishers in the 1910's and 20's can also point to such a trend.

Yet, as publishing historian John Tebbel points out in his seminal study of book publishing in the United States, the structure of the publishing industry remained largely unchanged until after World War II, when the previously family-owned and relatively autonomous publishing houses became more directly engaged in the corporate world and a series of mergers and expansions began to radically reshape the industry (History 724). Thus, one of the main institutional bases for the original high/low split remained, if in a somewhat less stable form, throughout the 1930's. Similarly, difficult economic conditions tended to foster, at least in business matters, a reliance on established forms

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<sup>24</sup> For more on the emergence of the middlebrow, see Radway; Janice Radway "Scandal"; Rubin. Radway defines the middlebrow in Feeling as a form that combines particular notions of culture with production and distribution apparatuses typically associated with lower forms of art. Such a definition is particularly useful for locating the middlebrow as both a material and an ideological form (128). For more on *Vanity Fair* as a form of middlebrow production, see Michael Murphy "Pop Decadence". For more on the advertising of Dr. Eliot's Five-Foot Shelf of Books, see Turner 17-19.

and products. Publishers and marketers were far more willing to rely on traditional aesthetic categories than try to cultivate wholly new perspectives. As we saw in Harcourt's campaign for Stein's first autobiography, struggling publishers continued to reinforce the notion that highbrow art was a distinct type of cultural product that required its own critical practices.

In addition, many literary critics, who were faced with fewer outlets for publishing and a rapidly declining book market, were willing to promote books in exchange for the publicity that their own blurbs could bring them. Critical praise was often featured prominently on book jackets and in advertisements during the period (Rubin 90). Thus, publishers and marketers could court particular sentiments that would accord with larger ad campaigns and give particular books the appearance of critical legitimacy.

These continuities in the book market were also supported by a certain degree of stability in "highbrow" writing. As Linda Wagner-Martin trenchantly argues, writers who had produced avant-garde literature in the 1920's did not radically alter their approach during the Depression. The themes figures like William Faulkner and John Dos Passos engaged may have shifted, but many aspects of their technique proved to be far less malleable. In addition, many writers beginning work in the early years of the Depression retained a typically modernist self-consciousness about form and borrowed important stylistic traits from earlier writers, like the use of direct and simple language, an emphasis on concrete visualized detail, and the absence of overt editorializing (Wagner-Martin Mid-Century ix-x, 1-15).

This latter trait also helps to account for the notable lack of ideology in early proletariat fiction. While many writers sought to portray the hardship and deprivation spreading throughout the United States, they rarely depicted unionization or other forms of political unification as a way to improve conditions. Alfred Kazin, who had been an emerging literary figure in the early 1930's, aptly summarized the situation when he said that he and the other young writers of the period "wanted to prove the literary value of our experience, to recognize the possibilities of art in our own lives, to feel we had moved the streets, the stockyards, the hiring halls into literature- to show our radical strength could carry on the experimental impulse of modern literature" (qtd. in Susman, *Culture as History*, 178). Kazin's emphasis on the notion of literature at the expense of political engagement reflects just how relevant traditional aesthetic dichotomies still were during the 1930's.

Yet, as my previous discussion of Stein and Fitzgerald suggests, writers' continued reliance on a concept of transcendent art does not mean that artists refused to engage with the mass market or the expanding mechanisms of celebrity culture. In this regard, my work challenges the claims of Marc Conroy, one of the only scholars working on literary celebrity specifically in the context of the 1930's. In his book, *Muse in the Machine*, Conroy comments, "it is really in the thirties that the fragile partnership between literati and mass culture is most dramatically frayed" (10). Such a claim seems surprising, given that, as Conroy himself notes, so many writers were employed by Hollywood and/or engaged in journalistic endeavors during the decade. Conroy dismisses such complicity by claiming a psychological distinction between print and electronic media, a gap that supposedly allowed writers to imagine themselves involved in "an

entirely different enterprise” (10). Not only does this explanation fail to account for many of the non-literary print projects in which writers engaged during the decade, but such a generalization is a clear distortion of the wide array of attitudes writers expressed towards electronic media. Fitzgerald, for one, ran the gamut from admiration to disgust with talking pictures during the course of his career, depending on his momentary level of involvement with the major studios.

Additionally, Conroy’s view, which is supported primarily by his reading of fictional critiques of consumerism, particularly the cynical satires of Nathanael West, fails to account for the pressure that economic instability placed on publishing houses and other literary outlets. Such pressure made it far easier for writers to leverage past successes and trade on existing cultural capital than to try to cultivate new name recognition in the marketplace. Indeed, Arnold Gingrich helped establish *Esquire* as a major periodical in the decade by acquiring as many celebrity writers as he could and splashing their names across the cover of the magazine. Gingrich, despite bearing the title of editor, rarely turned away pieces by famous authors and did almost no work on their manuscripts, at least in the early years of the magazine. Finally, it would also be hard to explain the runaway critical and commercial success that books like *Ulysses* and *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* enjoyed, both after reasonably well-funded marketing campaigns, if the “literati” had in fact begun a wholesale revolt against mass culture during the 1930’s.

In order to unpack some of these difficulties, I have chosen to examine two authors’ struggles to engage with celebrity both in and through their work, Gertrude Stein



and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In the first chapter, I trace Stein's immediate response to fame by examining a series of publicity pieces and literary texts that she produced immediately after the publication of *The Autobiography*. Taken together, these texts reveal Stein's attempt to publicly theorize an authorial identity that exists only in the very instant of creation and instills texts with permanent value. Contrary to contemporary readings of Stein as a proto-postmodern theorist of the "open" text, readings largely based on interpretations of her early poetry, I argue that, in response to the pressures of public exposure, Stein cultivated a theory very similar to that of contemporary New Critics. This identity formation also allows Stein to align herself with idealized masculine conceptions of "high" art by erasing overt signs of difference, including femininity, lesbianism, and Jewishness, from her textual persona.

Yet, in opposition to most forms of New Critical philosophy, I argue that Stein did not ultimately work to isolate the subjective consciousness and locate aesthetic value in the text in order to "escape" personality or literally remove herself from the scene of the text. On the contrary, Stein takes inherent textual value as a liberatory fact that opens up the possibilities for textual play and she uses her own subjective isolation as grounds on which to freely engage in market activities. My second chapter on Stein reads her next major autobiography, *Everybody's Autobiography*, as both the development and embodiment of these theories, a book that revels in the practical contradictions that arise from her newfound confidence to act as both elite writer and public promoter. In terms of the "great divide," then, I read this book not as an attempt to mediate between high and low so much as to occupy both poles at the same time.

If Stein's second autobiography sold few copies and ultimately failed to reach a wider audience, F. Scott Fitzgerald fared far less well with the publication of the Crack-up essays. Chapter Three sets the stage for my analysis of these pieces by examining the public persona Fitzgerald cultivated during his two decades as a professional writer. Unlike Stein, who worked for thirty years before producing a best-seller, Fitzgerald became the voice of the young generation with his first book, *This Side of Paradise*. During the early years, he attempted to cultivate the persona of a brash young genius who merely had to sit at a typewriter to produce lasting fiction. However, by the end of the decade, Fitzgerald's stream of fiction had slowed to a trickle and the previously noted combination of alcoholism and family problems, along with a host of related psychological and emotional difficulties, led Fitzgerald to attempt to recraft his persona as a serious and reflective author.

In the fourth chapter, I read Fitzgerald's Crack-up essays not as a confession of a "real" breakdown, but as a meditation on the process of breaking down. This reflective stance, especially when coupled with the narrator's insistence on his status as a serious artist, helps to position these essays as serious "literary" reflections in direct opposition to otherwise tawdry and effeminate public confessions. Yet, Fitzgerald's narrative persona does not simply mimic the stereotypical high masculine author. Instead, he attempts to challenge these traditional conceptions by promoting a new, more nuanced, version of the male writer. It is ultimately Fitzgerald's attempt to position himself both within and against reigning notions of masculine authorship that led so many men, including *Esquire* readers, male writers, and men working in the literary field more generally, to attack the articles for being both effeminate and weak.

So both writers, contrary to the stereotype of liberal-minded writers in the 1930's, show a lingering desire to retain a central authorial consciousness that can withstand the challenges posed by their changing circumstances, even as that consciousness comes into contradictory relationships with others and the outside world. What is more, they both embrace positions as celebrity authors and engage in a discourse of anxiety that functions to reinforce conventional distinctions even as Stein and Fitzgerald sought to move beyond the limitations such distinctions imposed. Thus, by extending previous work on authorial self-fashioning and taking seriously these authors engagements with celebrity culture, my work argues for the larger importance of celebrity as an interpretive paradigm, both from a historical perspective and as a unifying concept for textual analysis. The emergence of a whole subset of cultural artifacts devoted primarily to disseminating information about stars, real and potential, raised many challenges for writers who were supposed to view their work primarily in terms of the isolated mind. Yet, the complex ways in which writers like Fitzgerald and Stein responded, especially when coupled with the interpretive challenges raised by the public reception of their efforts, suggest a fruitful area of inquiry that remains largely untouched by modernist scholarship.

## *From Toklas to Everybody: Gertrude Stein Between Autobiographies*

### **Gertrude Stein and Her Critics**

In the fall of 1932, Gertrude Stein, at the age of fifty-seven, began work on what was to be her first best-seller, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. After thirty years of writing, Stein had managed to publish only four books in the United States, one of which she paid to publish herself.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, *The Autobiography* sold its entire first printing, more than 5,000 copies, nine days in advance of its official publication date and inspired a tremendously successful six-month lecture tour in late 1934 ("Publisher's" viii). The tour was pivotal for Stein not only because it marked her ascendancy to a new level of literary significance, but also because it occasioned her first trip to North America in nearly three decades. The following year, she began to write *Everybody's Autobiography*, an account of her recent experiences as a celebrity that centered on the U.S. tour.

Between these two autobiographies, Stein wrote a series of essays and books reflecting on her career, aesthetics, and the nature of contemporary celebrity. These texts include "The Story of a Book," a blurb she wrote for the Literary Guild in 1933 when *The Autobiography* was chosen as a fall selection; *Four in America*, an obscure biographical exploration of four famous Americans composed during 1933 and 1934; a series of lectures she gave on her American tour, subsequently published as *Lectures in America* in 1935; and the book-length philosophical meditation, *The Geographical History of*

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<sup>25</sup> Stein biographers have traced her earliest works to the winter of 1902. For example, see John Malcolm Brinnin *Third Rose* 41, 44-45; James R. Mellow *Charmed Circle* 115; Linda Wagner-Martin *Favored Strangers* 57. For an account of Stein's early publishing history, see Bryce Conrad "American Marketplace".

*America or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind*, published in 1936. Given the relative obscurity of Stein's early poetic experiments and her own resistance to direct explication, these later writings have proven to be invaluable for critics. However, despite the centrality of these pieces to discussions of Stein's oeuvre, very little work has been done exploring the relationships among the texts. Many scholars have been content to borrow Stein's language without considering either the context in which statements first appear or their larger implications for Stein's work.

One negative consequence of this tendency is that critics have taken many of Stein's statements at face value and circulated them as if they were simple facts, not part of a complex process of self-historicization. For instance, most critics dealing with Stein's work in the 1930's discuss the writer's block Stein claims to have suffered after writing *The Autobiography*; some celebrity scholars have taken this episode as a seminal moment in Stein's supposedly tortured transition to literary fame. However, the story of her presumed writers block becomes much more complex when Stein's actual work during the period is taken into account. Laurel Bollinger, relying on the Yale Catalog of Stein's manuscripts, claims that the actual number of texts Stein generated in the months after finishing *The Autobiography* compares favorably to her production in other years. The primary difference, Bollinger says, is that many of these texts were letters or short articles and not the experimental literary pieces Stein valued most (255 fn1).

Ulla Dydo, in *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises*, concludes that Stein suffered from a block of sorts; she then provides a related assessment of the period. Dydo asserts that Stein did produce little new literary work between December 1932 and April 1933, but she also points out that, in addition to any other writing that may have been

done during this time, Stein was both preparing *The Autobiography* for publication and working on the typescripts of pieces she had written the previous summer (Rises 551-3). So, while Stein did seem to be producing less of a certain kind of work, it is not entirely clear whether the slowdown was caused by psychological difficulties, changing circumstances, or simply the practical demands of mass-market publication.

To complicate matters further, Stein's own claims about her writer's block are contradictory. In "And Now," a short article published in *Vanity Fair* just before Stein left for the United States, she discusses her inability to write and attributes it vaguely to "success" ("And Now" 280). By the time Stein submitted this article for publication in mid-1934, she could certainly consider *The Autobiography* a "success," but what this word means in an earlier context, at the time of her supposed writer's block, is not quite so clear. Did "success" come when Stein finished writing, perhaps because she was personally satisfied with her work or, more directly, because she was aware of the potential popularity of the book? Or did "success" come only as a result of outside approval? Her agent, William Aspinwall Bradley, read and praised the manuscript in late November 1932, which would accord with Dydo's analysis of the manuscripts. However, Alfred Harcourt, who was ultimately to become the publisher, did not receive the manuscript for another month and did not agree to publish it until January 1933, well after Stein's supposed writer's block began.<sup>26</sup> Stein would have had to wait until May of 1933, when *The Atlantic* began serializing the book, to assess the general public's response.

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<sup>26</sup> Dydo discusses the publication of Stein's manuscript in some detail. See *Rises*, 543-50. For relevant correspondence, see Donald Gallup, ed., Flowers 259-63.

In an equally obscure passage, Stein claims that her writer's block ended when the "dollar fell and somehow I got frightened" ("And Now" 280). Again, this statement could be made to accord with the extant manuscripts. The United States abandoned the gold standard in April 1933, a move that led to a series of unpredictable fluctuations in currency values during the late spring. It was at about this time, Dydo claims, that Stein began producing new work again. However, in *Everybody's Autobiography*, when Stein repeats her claims about writer's block, she says that she did not resume writing again until starting her play *Blood on the Dining Room Floor* at the end of the summer (E.A. 86).

Such vagueness, not uncommon in Stein's writing, reflects her tendency to prioritize aesthetic and formal concerns over historical ones. Accordingly, the idea of writer's block is not used indiscriminantly throughout her writing during this period, but is employed primarily as part of her second autobiography. "And Now," while published as an independent article, is actually the remnant of Stein's effort to write what she referred to as the "Confessions of the writer of the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas," an early precursor to *Everybody's Autobiography* (Dydo Rises 572).

Stein also employs the trope of blockage similarly in "And Now" and *Everybody's Autobiography*. She does not want to show, as F. Scott Fitzgerald did in "The Crack-Up," the psychological effects of a breakdown on her writing process nor does she attempt to detail her own tentative steps towards a resolution to the problem. Instead, she emphasizes the act of *reflection*, which is to say she depicts herself, in a characteristically even tone, as someone who has overcome the problem and not as someone still consumed by it. This position allows Stein to navigate between what Pierre

Bourdieu has called “the field of restricted production,” in which artists produce for a coterie of elite consumers, and “the field of large-scale production,” in which artists produce for a more generalized “public” (115). On one hand, Stein is crafting pieces that are intended for a mass audience. On the other, her supposed psychological difficulty with this process reflects a commitment to the values of the avant-garde, even as the posited state of resolution implicitly assures her audience that these issues have no bearing on the piece at hand. Put more simply, the trope of writer’s-block-overcome allows Stein to emphasize her status as an elite artist who has strong reservations about the literary marketplace while she is simultaneously writing pieces that will be marketed to a broad reading public.

So, regardless of whether or not Stein actually found herself unable to write in the wake of “success,” she seemed to be well aware of the complexities of her situation and, before leaving on her U.S. tour, had already begun modifying her self-presentation to cultivate the image of a celebrity genius. This depiction of Stein contrasts with the image of the author that emerges from most contemporary celebrity studies involving Stein, which take her writer’s block as an historical given and depict her as someone searching for the terms to define her predicament. As Loren Glass puts it in his study of American literary celebrity, “[Stein] felt strangely as if she had become someone other than who she had been before” (1). I do agree that Stein’s celebrity raised serious theoretical and practical concerns for her and, in the remainder of this section, I will argue that the texts Stein wrote immediately after *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* develop an aesthetic theory that confronts the legacy of her first major success. Yet, Stein is hardly an innocent artist lost in the wonderland of modern celebrity culture. She had spent the



previous two decades promoting her work in three different countries through a wide variety of means. She cultivated relationships with famous artists, writers, publishers, and editors. She sent copies of her books to popular reviewers and critics. She even began writing “portraits” of famous or influential acquaintances, in part to help her work gain wider visibility.

As V.F. Mitrano points out, when Stein began writing portraits in 1910, she was attempting to move beyond her reputation as a supporter of avant-garde artists in order to secure patronage for her own literary endeavors (58). For instance, in 1911, she wrote her well-known portrait of Mabel Dodge, a wealthy patron of the arts who had visited Stein’s studio the year before. Dodge liked the piece enough to have it published in a private edition, which she circulated among her friends in Europe and New York. Dodge also wrote the first major explication of Stein’s writing in conjunction with the Armory Show, an art exhibit designed to increase the visibility of contemporary French, German, and Spanish artists in the United States. Dodge’s essay, entitled “Speculations, or Post-Impressionists in Prose,” was first run in the March 1913 issue of *Arts and Decoration* and then re-run, along with Stein’s portrait, in the June issue of Arthur Stieglitz’s *Camera Work*. Stein had similar success a few years later with her portrait of art critic Henry McBride, who also had the piece printed in a private edition and helped to secure its publication in *Vanity Fair* (Wagner-Martin “Favored Strangers” 108-09, 40).

Though Stein would continue to have difficulty finding a publisher for her work until she wrote *The Autobiography*, her efforts at self-promotion were in other respects quite successful. Her salon was an essential stop for writers and artists visiting Paris throughout much of the early twentieth century, her work appeared in a variety of little

reviews, and her name frequently circulated in the popular press. Numerous parodies of her work appeared throughout the 1910's and 20's and many major literary figures felt compelled to notice her, even if only to dismiss her efforts as insignificant.<sup>27</sup> For instance, both H. L. Mencken and Elinor Wylie listed her as one of the "ten dullest authors" in a 1923 *Vanity Fair* symposium, and T. S. Eliot, reviewing her lecture "Composition as Explanation" in 1927, said, "her work is not improving, it is not amusing, it is not interesting, it is not good for one's mind.... If this is of the future, then the future is, as it very likely is, of the barbarians. But this is a future in which we ought not to be interested" ("Dullest" 76; Eliot "Charleston" 595). The fact that a writer who was commonly considered unreadable could enter discussions of literature in a wide range of newspapers and magazines is a testament to the cultural capital Stein had begun to generate early on in her writing career; such public pronouncements certainly did not escape Stein. She employed a New York clipping service to help keep track of the various discussions about her and her work in the press (Tischler 12).

So, while some celebrity theorists follow Stein's own self-representations in the mid-1930's and depict her as a media ingénue, such a characterization hardly seems appropriate for the woman publisher Bennett Cerf referred to as "the publicity hound of the world" (102). In fact, much of the confusion over Stein's attitudes towards celebrity can be accounted for by addressing the context of her various statements on the subject. Stein not only understood the profound difference between the fields of large-scale and restricted production, but she strategically altered her attitude toward her work in different circumstances. For instance, as Ulla Dydo notes, Stein frequently gave

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<sup>27</sup> For a useful discussion of Stein parodies, see Kirk Curnutt "Parody". For a discussion of Stein's reception more generally, see Karen Leick "Popular Modernism".

acquaintances the impression that she had no concern for publishing or selling her work, as when she wrote Henry McBride, who saw success as a corrupting influence on artists, to deny that she had any intention of writing a popular autobiography (Rises 413-14). Not only was this particular letter to McBride written just a few years before Stein actually began *The Autobiography*, but, at the time she wrote it, she had already given literary agent William Aspinwell Bradley the explicit directive to make her rich and famous. At the same time, she was advising such young writers as Paul Bowles about the importance of cultivating large audiences, which meant avoiding the restrictive circulation of “little and modern mags,” advice that certainly contradicted her own supposed commitment to non-commercial art (qtd. in Rises 419-20).

Beyond decontextualizing and thereby complicating the biographical details of Stein’s life, many scholars have also employed her theoretical claims without considering either her own rhetorical savvy or the larger context in which those claims were made. Stein herself encourages such a response by making seemingly universal proclamations about her life and work. For instance, in Stein’s lecture “Portraits and Repetition,” she characterizes her career as the search for an art form appropriate to the “composition” of her time period and concludes the discussion with the sweeping generalization: “it is true there is something much more exciting than anything that happens and now and always I am writing the portrait of that” (Lectures 312). While it might be tempting to cite such a statement as defining the trajectory of Stein’s career, her previous lecture, “The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*,” re-traces the same ground only this time emphasizing her early desire to create a history of everyone. She concludes, “When I was up against the difficulty of putting down the complete conception that I had of an

individual... I was faced by the trouble that I had acquired all this knowledge gradually but when I had it I had it completely at one time.... And a great deal of *The Making of Americans* was a struggle to do this thing, to make a whole present of something that it had taken a great deal of time to find out.... That then and ever since has been a great deal of my work and it is that which has made me try so many ways to tell my story” (Lectures 147).

The view of Stein’s work presented in “The Gradual Making,” written at approximately the same time as “Portraits and Repetition,” helps to demonstrate what Stein referred to in an earlier lecture as “beginning again and again” (Masterpieces 29). Her goal in these lectures is not to uncover one overarching *telos* for all of her previous writing, but to describe and re-articulate the various interrelated processes that, in retrospect, can be seen operating in her earlier books. Thus, the reader is provoked to understand the major currents of her thought while also considering the potential contradictions and discrepancies that arise among her various accounts.

Given the complexity of Stein’s method and the intricate portraits of her thought that emerge, the tendency among critics to employ Stein’s statements selectively has led many to misrepresent her claims or, more problematically, to misread the texts themselves. In their more innocuous forms, such readings simply misconstrue Stein’s ideas or extend them beyond their relevant context. For instance, Neil Schmitz, in a fascinating article examining the “mode” of *Tender Buttons*, claims, “In *Four in America* [Stein] herself distinguished two primary modes of composition: ‘writing what you are writing’ and ‘writing what you intended to write.’ These modes were not absolute; they

represented a bias, an intention, but in her distinction she placed herself emphatically within the former” (1217).

Yet, contrary to Schmitz’s assertion, Stein’s tendency to prioritize one pole over the other becomes most apparent during her American lectures, which were written several months after *Four In America*. In the later work, she discusses the difference between an author’s serving God or mammon and the positive emphasis is clearly placed on serving God (Lectures 17). However, in *Four In America*, as Charles Caramello points out, Stein does not lean “emphatically” in either direction, but openly declares her desire to write in both modes at once (188). Interestingly, despite his more detailed reading of Stein’s later theories, Caramello ultimately makes the same incorrect generalization that Schmitz does, only he does so by extending his argument in the opposite chronological direction. He implies that Stein continued to embrace both poles equally throughout her critical analyses in the 1930’s and, without accounting for Stein’s shift in terminology, equates writing what you are writing/writing what you intended to write with the God/mammon split. Both critics, then, dehistoricize Stein’s aesthetic theory and ultimately leave readers with the impression that she adhered to one stable set of ideas throughout her career.

While these interpretations tend to misconstrue Stein’s larger theoretical project in the 1930’s, other uncontextualized readings go so far as to misread her specific formulations. For instance, in one of her first books, *The Making of Americans*, Stein famously declared, “I write for myself and strangers” (Making 212). This claim has been important for critics who want to read Stein’s work from the 1930’s as radically inclusive. For instance, Juliana Spahr, in *Everybody’s Autonomy*, claims that Stein’s

multilingual environment inspired her early grammatical experimentation and, at least in part, led her to create “multivalent” texts, which is to say texts that do not lead readers “to a neat box of a conclusion” but instead “encourage dynamic participation” in the process of meaning creation (6). Spahr then attempts to read *Everybody’s Autobiography* as itself an openly inclusive work and a defense of this earlier approach, a claim she links with Stein’s earlier declaration: “In this section I examine Stein’s claims that her writing is for everybody. Or as Stein phrases it, ‘I am writing for myself and strangers’” (32). Barbara Will, while examining ambiguities in Stein’s use of the term “genius,” makes a similar connection: “Stein writes in *The Making of Americans*, ‘I write for myself and strangers.’ Thirty years later in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, she states that her story, the story of a ‘genius,’ is potentially the story of ‘everybody’” (9).

What both these critics neglect to notice is Stein’s changing attitude towards this phrase, and her audience more generally, during the 1930’s. Stein cites the passage from *The Making of Americans* with approval early on in the decade, in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (1932) and “The Story of a Book” (1933). However, by the time she delivered the lecture, “What Are Master-Pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them,” at Oxford and Cambridge Universities in February 1936, she had come to disavow her earlier claims, saying, “I once wrote in writing *The Making of Americans* I write for myself and strangers but that was merely a literary formalism for if I did write for myself and strangers if I did I would not really be writing because already then identity would take the place of entity” (*Masterpieces* 86).<sup>28</sup> I will later discuss Stein’s attempt to

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<sup>28</sup> Stein did make another reference to “myself and strangers” in her short article for *Cosmopolitan*, “I Came and Here I Am,” which was published in February 1935. This is the latest reference I have found that employs the phrase as a useful descriptor. However, this particular instance does not entirely fit with the others because she is referring to broadcasting and not her

theoretically isolate herself from her audience; here it is sufficient to say that Stein is renouncing her previous formulation because it suggests a form of writing based on “identity.” Stein uses this term to represent forms of self-knowing that are tied to the recognition of others. In contrast, “entity” is an object or form of self-awareness that contains its own essence, which is to say it is not dependent on the opinions of others. Creating a text that is linked to “entity” then- the ideal text for Stein- is to be true to one’s own essence without the necessary falsifications of the external world.

After dismissing the theoretical importance of the audience in “What Are Masterpieces,” Stein began editing her previous claims in *Everybody’s Autobiography* (1937). For instance, in “The Story of a Book” (1933), Stein talks about the process of having her manuscript enthusiastically accepted for publication. She not only quotes “myself and strangers” from *The Making of Americans*, but she also says that having finally reached these strangers leaves her feeling “unburdened” (“Story” 62). Almost all of this article is incorporated into *Everybody’s Autobiography*, but the direct reference to “myself and strangers” has been deleted.

Moreover, when she does directly address the topic of her audience in the second autobiography, she is openly dismissive and asks if the term “strangers” is even applicable to her now that she is a celebrity: “In writing *The Making of Americans* I said I write for myself and strangers and then later now I know these strangers, are they still strangers, well anyway that too does not really bother me, the only thing that really bothers me is that the earth now is all covered over with people and that hearing anybody

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own writing. She says, “In writing in *The Making of Americans* I said I write for myself and strangers and this is what broadcasting is. I write for myself and strangers.” Gertrude Stein “I Came” 71.

is not of any particular importance because anybody can know anybody” (E.A. 104). Stein is doubly dismissive of the idea of writing for “myself and strangers” in this passage, first because, as a result of her celebrity tour, she has met and spoken with many of the people buying her books. Second, Stein suggests that her previous conception of writing as a means of communication with other people is irrelevant in the contemporary era where people are free to travel almost anywhere and communicate with whomever they want. As a result, Stein is less interested in her own relationship to her audience and instead focuses her attention on an abstracted view of human interactions, interactions that constitute one important element of, to use Stein’s term, the contemporary “composition.” She even directly attributes her change in attitude to shifting historical conditions, claiming, “at that time [of writing *The Making of Americans*] I did not realize that the earth is completely covered over with every one. In a way it was not then” (E.A. 102).

Even the most persistent elements of Stein’s theories, like her repeated insistence on the historical dimensions of her own thought, are elided in some critical appropriations. For instance, Catherine Parke asserts that Stein saw sentimentality as “mistaken and dangerous” (554). As a result, Parke claims, Stein not only sought to avoid sentimentality in her own work, but also remained “suspicious” of nineteenth century novels that rely on it in a way that “distort[s] a wholesome and grown-up connection between writer and reader” (563-64). However, Stein’s feelings about sentimental writing had little to do with any absolute aversion to sentimentality or an inherent dislike of its particular features. As she makes clear in her lecture on the history of English literature, sentimentality arose out of specific conditions in the nineteenth century and, as such, was



appropriate to that time and place. Even in “A Transatlantic Interview,” which Parke cites to show Stein’s linking nineteenth century literature with a supposedly distasteful violence, Stein does not treat this literature in a negative way. She simply cites earlier audiences’ “violent interest” in characters as a way of emphasizing what she sees as the relative unimportance of character in twentieth century novels. Stein even goes so far as to call the twentieth century novel unsuccessful as a direct result of its disregard for character (Stein “Transatlantic Interview” 21-2).

As we have seen, the critical tendency to appropriate and decontextualize Stein’s theoretical claims, a tendency encouraged by Stein’s own powerful rhetoric and sweeping historical scope, have led to numerous complications in recent studies of her work. In particular, critics have understated the degree to which Stein’s ideas developed throughout the decade, especially with regard to the nature and function of literature itself. Part of the difficulty is that, as with “myself and strangers,” Stein repeats key words, phrases, and anecdotes throughout her career, often, but by no means always, recalling their original context and meaning in her later works. Thornton Wilder, in his introduction to *Four In America*, first suggested that future critics take up the challenge implicit in such a technique: “There are hundreds of [locutions] which may strike a first reader as incoherent expressions thrown off at random; but they are found recurrently distributed throughout her work. The task of her future commentators will consist in tracing them to their earliest appearances embedded in a context which furnishes the meaning they held for her. Thereafter they became bricks in her building, implements in her meditation” (F.I.A. xxi-xxii). While I obviously agree with the spirit of this statement, I would add the caveat that commentators must be equally sensitive to both the changes

that occur in Stein's usages and the particular moments at which various elements recur. As with the story of her supposed writer's block, Stein is especially sensitive to rhetorical context and is well aware of the larger conditions in which she operates.

So, in short, Stein's work in the 1930's is not simply a public declaration of long-held theories or a historical account of her past work, but a deliberate self-historicization that, in part, responds to the market pressures initiated by the widespread success of *The Autobiography*. Stein's ideas are particularly difficult to trace in any straight-forward, linear way, both because of her own technique, which employed repetition as a fundamental principle, and because she spoke insistently in the present tense, emphasizing her current knowledge over the historical contours of her own shifting positions. However, I intend to read Stein against her own grain, as it were, and trace the theoretical changes that preceded and ultimately paved the way for her second major memoir, *Everybody's Autobiography*. My approach will also help to counteract the ahistorical tendency present in much Stein criticism and place some of her most important works from the mid-1930's into dialogue with each other.

In the following sections, I argue that the texts Stein wrote between her first two major autobiographies develop a theory that ultimately isolates both authors and their work from external influence. By privileging interiority, Stein constructs a mode of authorship that is dedicated to high art ideals while also remaining free, as a direct result of its metaphysical isolation, to operate in the marketplace. This theoretical work established the grounds on which Stein constructed her second memoir, which purports to solve her difficulties by incorporating the structural contradictions of the contemporary marketplace into the work of art itself. In other words, Stein does not choose to pursue

either the aesthetic, and ascetic, purity of the avant-garde or the ample rewards associated with modern celebrity. Instead, she embraces both goals simultaneously and, in the process, attempts to create an autobiographical masterpiece that is itself simultaneously easy and difficult, a memoir for her popular fans as well as a profound philosophical meditation on the nature of contemporary life.

**Chapter 1:**  
***The Celebrity Speaks: Gertrude Stein's Aesthetic Theories After The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas***

**The First Year of Fame**

In the following section, I will examine Stein's initial response to the sudden success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1933 and early 1934. In her first published piece as a best-selling author, "The Story of a Book," Stein depicts herself as anxious about the fate of her memoir and openly declares her desire for the book to be both a critical and a popular success. This anxiety is particularly significant because it suggests Stein's lack of control over her own aesthetic destiny. Stein's next book, *Four In America*, attempts to mediate this anxiety by removing the audience from the scene of aesthetic valuation. Stein argues that an author's mode of composition ultimately instills an object with "vitality," an arational form of value that requires no explicit interpretive mechanism and that exists outside the changing social conditions of the text's construction. She thereby affords herself a theoretical platform from which to dictate the ultimate value of her works because only she has direct access to her compositional methods.

The final text I will look at, "And Now," is actually a revised draft of what was meant to be Stein's second autobiography. As Stein attempts to engage her audience not as an obscure avant-garde writer from Paris but as a best-selling memoirist, she steps back from her previous focus on the internal process of artistic creation to address the

boundaries of consciousness itself. Whereas in *Four* she had assumed that her writing emerged from the inviolate space of her mind, the prospect of considering a larger audience for her second autobiography leads her to the troubling possibility that simply knowing an audience exists can disrupt the writing process that ultimately instills value in a text.

One of the first articles Stein wrote after *The Autobiography* was “The Story of a Book,” a short piece she was obligated to produce for the Literary Guild when *The Autobiography* was chosen as a fall selection. While this short introduction to her famous memoir might seem like little more than a standard publicity release, it is interesting for being one of the first published pieces in which Stein directly discusses her own writing. It also contains a slightly different perspective on the author than typically appears in discussions of her work during this period.

Stein begins by telling the now-famous story about the way beautiful fall weather in Bilignin, the French province where Stein and Toklas spent their summers, kept the women there through early November, thereby giving her enough time to write *The Autobiography*. She then goes on to discuss her agent’s response to the book, employing a dichotomy between ‘real’ art and mere popular literature. Bradley, she claims, had always liked her work, but was disappointed that none of her books had been more than “what the French call a success d’estime.” He assures her, though, that her new memoir will be both a “conspicuous success d’estime” and a best-seller, to which Stein responds, “I was pleased” (“Story” 61).

Stein's desire to have this book be both a popular and an artistic success should not be surprising given my previous sketch of Stein's opportunistic attitude towards such distinctions. She could proclaim a high-minded apathy towards selling books to people like Henry McBride while at the same time employing a well-known literary agent and starting her own publishing house, the Plain Edition, to release books that could find no other publisher. However, Stein's bold declarations about her art are easy to take out of context. For instance, during the last decade of her life, Stein occasionally made dismissive remarks about her first autobiography. The most commonly cited comment comes from "A Transatlantic Interview," conducted shortly before Stein's death in 1946: "I had a certain reputation, no success, but a certain reputation, and I was asked to write a biography, and I said 'No.' And then as a joke I began to write the *Autobiography of Alice Toklas*" ("Transatlantic Interview" 19). While such an attitude would seem to be just one more piece of evidence supporting a depiction of Stein as a hardened modernist dismissing popular literature, this attitude does not reflect Stein's only assessment of *The Autobiography* and, as we shall see, it is a perspective that does not fully emerge in her writing until later in the 1930's.

In "The Story of a Book," Stein not only avoids the "either/or" implications of a traditional high/low aesthetic split by simultaneously embracing both popular success and critical esteem, but she also shows herself to be deeply concerned with the reception of *The Autobiography*, a position that an elite artist would be loathe to adopt.<sup>29</sup> Stein claims that, while writing her previous books, she spoke openly to everyone about her new

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<sup>29</sup> Henry McBride's attitude towards the *Autobiography* provides an interesting counterpoint: "It was apparent, with the very first chapter in the *Atlantic*, that the book was doomed to be a best seller. (Doomed, is my word for it, not yours. I don't like giving you up to the general public and sharing you and Alice with about a million others)" (Gallup, *Flowers* 270-1).

projects, a reflection of the confidence she typically showed. Stein admits, however, that she mentioned this book to only two people and simply told them that she “was doing something and perhaps it might be interesting.” Then, with the manuscript finally finished, she eagerly asks Toklas, “do you think it is going to be a best seller, I would love to write a best-seller,” a question which Toklas prudently avoids answering. It is not until the manuscript has been typed and submitted to her agent that Stein, “to [her] delight,” finally receives the response from him that quells her anxieties (“Story” 61).

Of course, the reader, originally a potential customer in the Literary Guild, is immediately reassured, through testimonials from Stein’s agent, her publishers, and the editors of the *Atlantic Monthly*, that *The Autobiography* is both brilliant and entertaining. The fact that she shows herself to be in need of such reassurance is particularly striking, especially given Stein’s egotistical reputation and the large body of scholarship devoted to exploring her confident assertions of genius. Stein is not, for once, telling people what to think, but is anxiously awaiting their assessment of her work.

While such posturing might be dismissed as purely a function of marketing her book, both Stein’s attempt to bridge conventional artistic categories and her traces of uncertainty re-appear in her next book, *Four in America*. In this work, Stein develops her previous ideas into a theory of artistic production that isolates the mind of the author from the minds of readers and then links value to the creative process itself. Thus, as Stein shifts gears to face a general audience through her new book, she also attempts to dictate the terms on which her work *should* be received.

According to Ulla Dydo, *Four* was most likely written throughout the fall of 1933 and the spring of 1934, which places its composition roughly between the book publication of *The Autobiography* in September 1933 and the composition of her lectures for the United States tour during the summer of 1934. It is the first new full-length work Stein attempted to have published after the widespread success of her memoir and, despite its repeated rejection by publishers, she hailed it as one of her “major” works.<sup>30</sup>

*Four in America* examines the lives of four significant Americans in relation to four potential lives that they might have lived. Stein juxtaposes Ulysses S. Grant the general with his fictional counterpart Hiram Ulysses Grant the religious leader. She then examines Wilbur Wright as both the inventor of the airplane and a painter, Henry James as a novelist and a general, and, finally, George Washington as a general and a novelist. While these difficult meditations cover a wide range of topics, Stein uses the lives of these famous men in part to interrogate celebrity in America; she repeatedly questions how people are represented in larger cultural economies (“Think not only of why he has a name but why name does rhyme with fame.... Think only of how to think of nothing else”-193). She also explores the ways in which fame might reflect or even create internal difference (“The thing always worries me is how you whose name everybody knows is different from those whose name nobody knows”-66).<sup>31</sup> Finally, Stein uses a self-

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<sup>30</sup> Harcourt, Brace and Company, who had published *The Autobiography* and an abridged version of *The Making of Americans*, rejected *Four* in May of 1934. Even though no other publisher would put it out in time for the American tour, as Stein wanted, she remained committed to the work. For example, see her comments to Carl Van Vechten in Edward Burns, ed., *Stein and Van Vechten* 329.

<sup>31</sup> Grant, Wright, James, and Washington all exhibit more or less the same characteristics in their “lives” as they did in their real lives, even though these characteristics do not necessarily guarantee them the same degree of success in their fictional professions. For instance, Hiram Grant might prove to be a religious *leader*, but Wilbur Wright will not be “remarkable” as a



conscious reflection on her own reconstruction of these “lives” to explore the creative process and the relative value of such “biographies,” which are parallel in many ways to Stein’s previous endeavor, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

The larger dualities that run throughout this book (real/constructed lives, famous/non-famous people, internal/external identities) are most directly brought to bear on the craft of writing in the third chapter, “Henry James,” where the discussion revolves around two different kinds of writing, exemplified for Stein by the difference between Shakespeare’s plays and his sonnets. Works that were “written as they were written,” including Shakespeare’s plays, are spontaneously constructed and so, she claims, have a “lively” sound. Such writing is opposed to pieces like the sonnets that are “written as they were going to be written.” This latter category covers writing that is planned or otherwise prepared in advance and, as a result, has a smooth sound (F.I.A. 130).

One crucial element of this distinction is that this split is located entirely in the mind of the writer. Much as Stein has chosen to explore a decidedly social phenomenon like celebrity by retreating into a reflection on her own idiosyncratic examination of the lives of famous men, she suggests that the primary distinction between “writing as it is written” and “writing as it is going to be written” lies in the dichotomy between spontaneous work and writing a piece that has somehow been *planned*. “Planning,” a word not clearly defined in the text, is employed in several different forms. It is often associated with Henry James and refers both directly and indirectly to the forethought that went into creating his intricately structured texts. The word is also used to refer to

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painter (F.I.A. 97). So, while fame itself might prove to be ephemeral or unpredictable, internal characteristics are relatively stable. Such a perspective may have been comforting for Stein, who worried about both what her sudden fame meant for all of the previous, and unrecognized, books she had written, and also what effect that fame might have on her writing in the future.

forms of writing that have been written, in various other ways, *in advance*. For instance, Stein claims to have discovered the distinction between planned and spontaneous writing while transposing Georges Hugnet's poem *L'Enfances*, a situation where the model for her own text was quite literally created beforehand. Yet, in all of its various usages, the word "planning" provides a clear opposition to spontaneous writing and affords Stein a basis for the other, less familiar distinctions she draws between planned "writing as it is going to be written" and the spontaneous "writing as it is written." For instance, "writing as it is going to be written" makes a smooth sound because planning eliminates the unexpected from the writing process. Thus, "writing as it is going to be written" is figured as the form that, through its very familiarity, leads to immediate audience satisfaction.<sup>32</sup>

While Stein does introduce the idea of "value" in her discussions of these two forms of writing, she does not attempt to make this value distinction absolute. More specifically, she claims that Shakespeare's plays, her example of "writing as it is written," are *seen* while his sonnets are *heard* and "[a]nything seen is successful. A thing heard is not necessarily successful" (131). It is important to note that the accomplishment of the spontaneously produced plays does not preclude the sonnets, despite their being planned in advance and "heard," from being successful too: "Any sound heard well any sound heard is heard. Any sound heard if it is heard is successful" (F.I.A. 131).

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<sup>32</sup> It is interesting to note that the "smooth" sound of "writing as it is going to be written" is juxtaposed with the "lively" sound of "writing as it is written." While Stein's linking of familiarity and positive audience reception might suggest that she adheres to something like Benjamin's shock aesthetic, her own term is far less confrontational and does not rise to the level of ideological critique. Her focus is on establishing an arational form of value that will ultimately allow her to deem her own works to be timeless masterpieces.

So, despite the fact that Stein seems to be favoring spontaneous writing by claiming that it is always successful, she is far from setting up a clear opposition between the two forms. She even goes so far as to say that *both* are “common” types of writing employed by many authors (F.I.A. 122). This claim is particularly important in that any distinction she might claim for her own work, or for certain texts written by Shakespeare and James, cannot come simply from employing one mode of writing or the other. For works of art that are truly distinct, she must posit an alternate form, one not widely used by others. Thus, she says, “I did not choose to use either one of two ways but two ways as one way” (F.I.A. 123). This position, in its deliberate melding of smooth and lively sounds, planned and spontaneous writing, satisfying the expectations of others and ignoring them altogether, echoes Stein’s earlier claim from “The Story of a Book” that *The Autobiography* could ultimately be both a best-seller and a “success d’estime.”

It also represents part of her theoretical effort to bridge the gap between popular literature and successful writing, even as critics and reviewers sought to differentiate her best-selling memoir from her more enigmatic works. For instance, Ellery Sedgwick, the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, supported excerpting Stein’s book in the magazine despite having repeatedly rejected her earlier work. He told her, “During our long correspondence, I think you felt my constant hope that the time would come when the real Miss Stein would pierce the smoke-screen with which she had always so mischievously surrounded herself.... Hail Gertrude Stein about to arrive” (qtd. in Gallup “Atlantic” 124).

However, at the time of writing *Four in America*, Stein had not yet given up hope that her memoir might one day be read alongside books like *Tender Buttons* or *The*

*Making of Americans*, a point that many critics have overlooked when considering *Four*. Given Stein's blithe statements about *The Autobiography* in subsequent years and the stricter dichotomies that emerge in some of her later theoretical writings, many readers have been quick to dismiss the subtle distinctions that Stein makes here. Even Thornton Wilder, who, in his introduction to the first edition, openly acknowledges Stein's lack of "disapproval" for "writing as it was going to be written," evinces a need to qualify her assertions: "She appears to be reconciled to [writing as it was going to be written], it is the way in which the majority of all books have been written" (Stein *F.I.A.* xxiii). Again, this statement directly contradicts Stein's formulations in the book. "Writing as it was written," while it may always lead to successful texts with lively sounds, is no less common or, for Stein's purposes, more important than "writing as it was going to be written."

Yet, Stein's attempt to theoretically distinguish her work depends on more than her claim to mediate this dichotomy. As I have stressed above, it is important for Stein that the determining factor behind the two different forms of writing depends entirely on the author's creative process.<sup>33</sup> In this way, a writer can determine what type of effect his or her text will finally have simply by changing the approach used in writing it. Stein, by extension, is free to categorize both her economically unsuccessful texts and *The Autobiography* however she sees fit because the true measure of "success" depends on how she constructed the particular piece in question.

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<sup>33</sup> I do not mean to suggest that Stein came to fixate on the process of artistic creation for the first time in the wake of *The Autobiography* or that she developed this approach to writing entirely as a result of her celebrity. Stein had, throughout her career, emphasized the importance of the artist's mind in the process of writing. However, her public declarations of these ideas in the early 1930's, and the particular forms that these declarations took, do seem directly related to her changing circumstances.

Still, it is not enough for Stein to assert her own authority over texts without also accounting for the role that readers might play in such a process. Stein, in accordance with her larger effort to internalize value, deftly avoids any complications by isolating her consciousness, in a fairly typical modernist fashion, from the minds of all others. In this way, she does not have to consider potential interpretations of her work because others' readings will always remain fundamentally distinct from her own ideas. She says, "Clarity is of no importance because nobody listens and nobody knows what you mean no matter what you mean.... But if you have vitality enough of knowing enough of what you mean somebody and sometime and sometimes a great many will have to realize that you know what you mean and so they will agree that you mean what you know, what you know you mean, which is as near as anybody can come to understanding anyone" (F.I.A. 127-28). Bob Perelman reads this passage as a reflection of Stein's attitudes towards her own genius and suggests that Stein believes her work to be, on some fundamental level, inaccessible to the non-geniuses of the world (150). However, there is nothing in the context of this statement that suggests Stein means it so selectively and, in light of her larger aesthetic aims in this book, it makes more sense to read Stein's claim as a general statement about the human condition.

In fact, Stein made similar statements about the radical isolation of the human mind throughout her career in a variety of different contexts. In the March 1933 issue of *transition*, for instance, co-founder and editor Eugene Jolas printed a statement about the suppression of individuality along with various artists' responses to it. Stein replied, "I don't envisage collectivism. There is no such animal, it is always individualism, sometimes the rest vote and sometimes they do not, and if they do they do and if they do

not they do not” (Stein Writing 53). What distinguishes this response from many of the others, as well as Jolas’s own dramatic assessment of what he calls the “crisis of man,” is Stein’s matter-of-fact tone. Her statement is not an impassioned defense of the individual, or even a reasoned assessment of the realities of group identification. It is a rather blunt dismissal of the very idea of collectivism. For Stein, each person is unavoidably trapped within the confines of his or her own consciousness without any ability to escape or truly reach “the rest,” a term that, in itself, reflects Stein’s sense of distance from other human beings.

She would reiterate this claim in an equally forceful manner thirteen years later, during the final interview of her life: “Nobody enters into the mind of someone else, not even a husband and wife. You may touch, but you do not enter into each other’s mind” (Primer 30). As a result of this view, Stein frequently used the term “contact,” as opposed to a word like connection, to suggest the limited way in which two people, even in the most intimate of relationships, could interact. In fact, “contact” is precisely the term Stein used in “The Story of a Book” to describe her relationship with the reading public,<sup>34</sup> who, as she would say several months later in *Four in America*, could come to know, at best, only that Stein understood what she said.

One important consequence of this formulation for Stein is that it precludes evaluating art based on meaning. Since, according to Stein, no one can ever know what other people are thinking, much less what ideas they derived specifically from a work of art, it is impossible to generalize any particular interpretation beyond the individual consciousness that generated it. It then follows that, as an author, she does not have to be

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. “It can easily be realized that after these years of faith that there is and was a public and that sometime I would come in contact with that public” (Writing 62).

concerned with “clarity.” However, Stein had no intention of keeping manuscripts piled up in a drawer for her own personal assessment either. It is for this reason that “vitality” becomes a crucial term in the previous quote. For Stein, acknowledging a text’s vitality, in opposition to the “clarity” of its expression, does not require a reader to understand the particular “message” of the work. Instead, it appeals to some aspect of cognition that operates outside of logical “understanding,” existing at an undefined pre- or a-rational level, and can thus be used as a basis for aesthetic valuation in a world populated by irrevocably distinct consciousnesses.<sup>35</sup> From this perspective, Stein’s refusal to define “vitality” or directly examine its presence in particular texts can be seen not simply as willful ambiguity on her part, but as a reflection of the necessarily impossible task of putting into language something that cannot ultimately be subject to direct “understanding.”

Stein reasserts the limited role of understanding, and connects it directly to her own text, when, shortly after introducing the concept of “vitality,” she stops to entreat the reader: “There are two ways to write, listen while I tell it right. So you can know I know” (F.I.A. 130). Stein, quite ironically, can expect no more from her readers than that they be convinced by the sheer force of her words on the page. If she is able to construct her texts through the proper procedure, that is, through her rare ability to fuse “writing as it is written” and “writing as it is going to be written,” then she will ultimately be able to convince “a great many” of her knowledge, even if that knowledge is ultimately

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<sup>35</sup> This interpretation elucidates many of Stein’s seemingly cryptic statements about art in the text. She says, for example, that Shakespeare’s sonnets and his plays “not being the same is not due to their being different in their form or in their substance. It is due to something else” (F.I.A. 119).

uncommunicable.<sup>36</sup> The end result of these formulations, then, is a creative process and an aesthetic system centered on the mind of the author itself.

Of course, the lack, from a metaphysical perspective, of any specific “content” in Stein’s texts radically transforms the nature of the interpretive process, an implication Stein readily, and paradoxically, acknowledges in her work: “An interlude. This does not really distract my mind from the very great the very vital subject of what is a painter not only while he paints but when he has painted and how would Wilbur Wilbur Wright have this in common. Nobody need yield to that in not making a mistake. There is no mistake, not anything is a mistake in which they mean I mean” (F.I.A. 89). In other words, readers can impute any meaning they want to Stein’s text and nothing they say can be considered, in Stein’s sense, incorrect (“not anything is a mistake in which they mean I mean”). Moreover, though the exact referent for “that” in “nobody need yield to that” is not clearly defined in the text, the word certainly refers to some element of Stein’s previous text, which means that she has interrupted her own writing, in part, to invite readers to ignore what she has just said. The process of interpretation, that is, readers’ “not making a mistake,” can proceed “correctly” even beyond the confines of the primary text itself.

Many critics take the seemingly “open” nature of Stein’s texts as a reflection of her desire for communion through textuality. I have already suggested that Juliana Spahr and, to a lesser extent, Barabara Will, rely on such a concept, but the most comprehensive argument in this line is Harriet Scott Chessman’s *The Public Is Invited to Dance*.

Chessman argues that Stein’s works employ various dialogic forms in part to “ask for the

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<sup>36</sup> It is possible to read Stein’s position in *Four in America* as an elaboration of her famous quip from *The Autobiography*: “no artist needs criticism, he only needs appreciation. If he needs criticism, he is no artist” (235).



active and intimate presence of a reader” in the text (2). While such a reading could certainly be applied to many, if not, as Bob Perelman points out, all of Stein’s works, Chessman goes on to suggest that these open dialogues are intended to “shape us into readers who come to her writing as equal lovers or intimate acquaintances, separate but always open to the possibility of ‘coming together’” (Perelman 140; Chessman 8). As previously noted, Stein explicitly argues against the idea that two people can cognitively ‘come together’ through her work. She certainly does not lament the fact that readers can and will freely interpret her texts in an infinite number of ways, but such readings can never form the basis of any intimate connection. Instead, it would probably be more apt to characterize each reader’s engagement with a given text as an isolated and internal process, a process that is never linked to Stein herself or any shared “meaning” in the text, even on a level of pure potential.

However, Stein’s effort to distance the audience from the scene of value creation is not absolute in *Four in America*. Even though Stein places the final authority for creating “interesting” texts in the mind of the author, she does introduce some uncertainty into the process. The two different forms of writing both sound different once they are on the page, Stein claims, but “the words next to each other that sound different to the eye that hears them or the ear that sees them... do not necessarily sound different to the writer seeing them as he writes them” (F.I.A., 125). So, despite the fact that the author’s approach to writing determines the “vitality” contained in the final text, the writer is not entirely in control of this process and requires a subsequent analysis of the completed text in order to truly assess its value. Such a view does not require any particular audience, as Stein herself can presumably re-read her own words to determine their impact, but even

such a small degree of uncertainty, evident also in “The Story of a Book,” decenters the authority Stein is seemingly bestowing upon herself as the creator of a vital art.

This gap also reflects Stein’s larger commitment to the autonomy of the aesthetic object in *Four in America*, a position indirectly evident in the other aspects of her theory. For example, when Stein is discussing the relationship between “writing as it is written” and “writing as it is going to be written,” she wonders whether the difference between the two forms results solely from the author’s intentions or if those different intentions are actually evident in the words on the page. She finally concludes that the words on the page contain some notable mark of the creative process: “if the writing and the writer look alike... the words next to each other make a sound. When the same writer writes and the writing and the writer look alike but they do not look alike because they are writing what is going to be written or what has been written then the words next to each other sound different” (F.I.A. 124-5).

This distinction is crucial because, given Stein’s epistemological perspective, readers could not be trusted to impute motives to an author based on textual evidence, regardless of how much information is available. For any detectible distinction to exist, it must be located in the words themselves. So the emphasis here is not only on the type of writing an author is attempting to do, but is also on the sound that a particular mode of authorship produces in the words themselves, which, Stein repeatedly says, does not have anything to do with meaning or “sense.” It is the particular “intensity” of the words that matter (F.I.A. 130).

Stein’s uncertainty about the effect of her words as she writes them reveals a similar commitment to the autonomy of the art object. If vitality is located inside the

words themselves and meaning is wholly relative, then the work of art, once it is completed, is presumably independent from anyone who might read it, even its creator. Though Stein does not elaborate on this idea in *Four in America*, as she would later during her lecture tour, she does clearly believe that the words on the page, and not anything in her particular consciousness, somehow determine the degree of intensity present in a text.

Thus, while Stein does not allow herself total control over the process, she has erected a theoretical apparatus that positions the author as the ultimate determiner of aesthetic value. If that value ultimately resides in the art object itself, free from the constraints of interpretation and, presumably, historical change, it is finally a result of the particular mode of writing used to create a text. However, taking these theories from a relatively dense, highly philosophical work and implementing them in the form of a second, potentially popular, autobiography raised another issue for Stein. She had repeatedly stated that her own consciousness was irredeemably distinct from other minds, thus isolating herself at the scene of creation, but what if the creative process could be altered by her own subjective awareness of potential readers?

At the same time Stein was working on *Four In America* in late 1933 and early 1934, she was toying with the idea of writing a second autobiography.<sup>37</sup> She knew the potential market value another book would have and, in her private correspondence, she attempted to use the promise of a new memoir to get her other finished works published. William Heinemann was offered English publication rights for the new book provided he

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<sup>37</sup> The following brief history of “And Now” relies heavily on Ulla Dydo’s analysis of Stein’s manuscripts in *Rises*. See, in particular, pp. 569-606.

put out reprints of *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans*. Stein also insisted that her agent offer the memoir to Alfred Harcourt, who had published the first autobiography, only as part of a package including both *Four in America* and an unspecified book of portraits. No contracts were drawn up at the time for either *Four in America* or Stein's second autobiography.

Yet, Stein did begin writing the book at some point during late 1933 and early spring of 1934: a notebook from that time bearing the title, "Confessions," still exists. The project was ultimately abandoned, probably around the time Stein committed to doing an American tour and needed to begin preparing her lectures. However, she did send one heavily revised excerpt to her agent in May 1934, shortly after she finished work on *Four in America*.<sup>38</sup> The short piece, re-titled "And Now," was published in the September issue of *Vanity Fair*, just two months before Stein arrived in the United States.

"And Now" is interesting in part because it shows what *Everybody's Autobiography* might have looked like if it had been written several years earlier. It also provides an interesting theoretical transition between *Four In America* and Stein's lectures, which, with the exception of "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*," were written in the summer of 1934. As might be expected of a piece revised shortly after the completion of *Four*, "And Now" picks up on many of the ideas she circuitously explored in that text. However, Stein changes the focus of her position in the latter article by problematizing fame, a shift that anticipates the new direction her theories would take in subsequent years.

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<sup>38</sup> The difficulty Stein had writing this piece, and the "Confessions" as a whole, is suggested by her inclusion of an anecdote about Cézanne, who, after his first "serious public recognition" at an autumn salon, supposedly produced a series of canvases that were "more than ever covered over painted and painted over" (280).

The article begins with a brief description of what is supposedly Stein's new memoir, which covers, she says, "what happened from the day I wrote the autobiography to today" ("And Now" 280). She then immediately proceeds to explain the challenge posed by her sudden "success": "I lost my personality. It has always been completely included in myself... and here all of a sudden, I was not just I because so many people did know me. It was just the opposite of I am I because my little dog knows me" ("And Now" 280). Here, Stein sets up the central distinction operating in this essay, between her autonomous "inside" and "the rest," and suggests that fame had eroded the boundary between these two categories.

This perspective provides a strong contrast to *Four in America*, where Stein's position relied on a relatively stable internal sphere. Ulysses S. Grant, Wilbur Wright, Henry James, and George Washington would all, according to Stein's assessment, continue to express the same characteristics regardless of their particular profession. By extension, the reader is led to infer that Stein herself remains essentially the same person regardless of whether she is producing best-sellers or "successes d'estime" or not writing at all. Thus, she can focus on different approaches to writing because the mind that creates ultimately remains inviolable behind the text.

In contrast to the independent, self-governing mind of *Four in America*, "And Now" suggests that it is not enough to isolate the artistic consciousness from other minds because the mere awareness of an audience can alter an author's approach to writing. Such an awareness can, in Stein's words, "cut off your flow" so that "the syrup does not pour" (F.I.A. 280). It is for this reason that Stein shifts her focus from an internal distinction between two forms of writing in her previous book to a more traditional

internal/external dichotomy in this article. She must now secure the boundaries of her own consciousness before returning to a discussion of the mechanisms by which that consciousness produces art.

However, Stein does not simply opt for the position of the elitist aesthete and declare herself immune from the potential corruptions of the outer world. Instead, she admits, “I could not write and what was worse I could not worry about not writing” (“And Now” 280). The attention she receives, combined with the sudden influx of money, displaces writing from the center of her life, she claims, for the first time in thirty years. Yet, when the value of the dollar suddenly drops, Stein is reminded of the ephemerality of economic value and puts aside the joys of earthly fame for the lasting pleasures of artistic creation: “there is no pleasure so sweet as the pleasure of spending money but the pleasure of writing is longer. There is no denying that” (“And Now” 280).

While it is tempting to take Stein’s recommitment to her work as a proclamation of allegiance to so-called “high” art, such a distinction would misrepresent Stein’s primary focus in the article. One of the major purposes of structuring her aesthetic theory in the way she has is precisely to avoid such distinctions, which are invariably related to external market conditions. If Stein can accurately be said to “re”-commit to anything, it is here a turn back to her own internal creative process, a move reflected in the way she characterizes her choice. Her final decision is not between inside and outside, but between two different forms of pleasure. Once she chooses writing, the choice between inside and outside, as we have seen from her previous statements about art, has already been made. Her own internal process is what instills vitality in the work of art. Without the integrity of that process she is producing ephemeral texts.

Loren Glass, in his perceptive examination of *Everybody's Autobiography*, reads Stein's response to fame differently. He says, "Although she had always desired publication and recognition, Stein understood that her newfound celebrity troubled the distinction between art and commerce, between symbolic and economic capital.... Stein tries to forge a relation between these apparently incommensurable values" (117). My reading, however, suggests that forging a "relation" is precisely what Stein is trying to avoid. By constructing a theory of the literary text that hinges upon the inviolate creative process of the author, Stein is also effectively internalizing the attribution of value. Both the elite critics bestowing cultural capital and the consumers who can provide economic capital are irrelevant to Stein's formulation or, to put it in a form more reflective of modernist criticism, Stein is no less afraid of critical influence than she is of mass market contamination. In this way, Stein can insist that both factions should, again, in theory, like her work because she has constructed her texts in the correct frame of mind and has accordingly filled her words with vitality.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, as noted earlier, Stein rhetorically mediates between the two aesthetic camps by employing the trope of writer's-block-overcome. The acknowledgement of her past anxiety reinforces her modernist credentials as she has decided to remain committed to her own aesthetic process. However, her commitment is also the ground on which she can freely enter the marketplace. Nothing she does outside of the creative process can

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<sup>39</sup> Glass's formulation refers specifically to *Everybody's Autobiography*; however Stein's internalization of value and her concomitant effort to appeal to both elite and everyday consumers remains constant throughout her works in the mid-1930's. My discussion here is limited to Stein's own theoretical formulations, as is much of Glass's chapter. Stein's career path in market terms follows a much more familiar pattern, from generating cultural capital through her involvement in art circles and small circulation publications to the translation of that capital into the widespread success of her first memoir.

disrupt the value that is located inside her texts, so there is no reason why she should not go on a lecture tour promoting her work or appear in publicity photos. For this reason, Stein does not need to disavow her enjoyment of wealth nor does she need to adopt a condescending attitude in order to reinforce her distance from the marketplace. What is more, by suggesting that she has overcome these difficult issues without overtly proclaiming allegiance to either elite or common taste, she implicitly reassures both audiences that any anxieties they have over her recent work are baseless, despite the potential difficulties both audiences might have had reading a short autobiographical piece in a middlebrow slick magazine like *Vanity Fair*.<sup>40</sup>

As a result of her choice to recommit to her internal process of art, Stein claims that she has moved past her writer's block: "I write the way I used to write in *The Making of Americans*, I wander around. I come home and I write.... Just at present I write about American religion and Grant, Ulysses Simpson Grant, and I have come back to write the way I used to write and this is because now everything that is happening is once more happening inside.... And so the time comes when I can tell the history of my life" ("*And Now*" 281). Initially, Stein is speaking of the physical process of writing, but her repetition of the phrase "write the way I used to write," especially in conjunction with a difficult book like *Four in America*, suggests that she means to connect her present work with the past texts that established her standing as an avant-garde writer. Moreover, by claiming that she has returned to her original state of self-containment, the driving force behind aesthetic value for Stein, she can implicitly claim that her work is no less valuable now than it used to be.

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<sup>40</sup> For an interesting reading of *Vanity Fair*'s attempts to promote a modernist art that seemed opposed to mass market promotion, see Murphy.



Of course, this position implies that there is no significant difference between her popular writing, like “And Now,” and her supposedly more complex works, like *Four in America* or *The Making of Americans*, both of which she links with her current piece. Similarly, because *The Autobiography* was itself written before the confusion that disrupted her creative process and her second memoir is going to be written now that she has regained her composure, both of these pieces can also be numbered among her important works. So, though Stein clearly understood the conditions of the literary marketplace and was willing to operate under the prevailing system in order to secure the publication of her many books, she seems to be simultaneously working out a theory, in both her so-called “popular” and “difficult” works, that will allow her to attribute value to all her writing. It is an attitude that would gradually begin to change in Stein’s next major work, the *Lectures in America*.

### **The Lectures**

In the following section, I will examine how Stein’s attitude towards her work changed as she prepared to face her newfound audience on the United States lecture tour. Her first attempt to face this audience in drafts of a second autobiography led her to reflect on the subjective boundary between readers and the writer’s creative processes. In the lectures, she extends her initial ideas by emphasizing both the autonomy of the art object and the closed nature of the aesthetic process, thereby further distancing the audience from the process of instilling value in texts. She also recasts her former distinction between “writing as it is going to be written” and “writing as it is written” into new terms (“serving God” and “serving Mammon”) that emphasize the author’s

relationship to his or her audience. Ultimately, she claims that authors must commit to their own internalized process of creation and write without regard for the expectations of others in order to create a text that will be timeless.

I conclude my discussion by contrasting these formulations with more contemporary approaches to Stein, which typically portray her as a proto-postmodernist who valorizes the audience's experience of art and "open" textual play. Rather, Stein's theories were publicly developed in response to her own sudden fame and work primarily to ensure authorial control over textual value. While these ideas emphasize the unity of the art object and allow for readers to freely interpret her texts, they simultaneously emphasize the text itself as the location of a "true" aesthetic value.

By mid-July of 1934, Stein had committed to going on the six-month lecture tour and she wrote the bulk of her talks over the course of the summer.<sup>41</sup> These pieces, published together as *Lectures in America* at the end of her tour, have proven to be an invaluable source for critics exploring Stein's work and her larger aesthetic goals. They are easily the most widely discussed of Stein's theoretical texts from the mid-1930's and, as such, deserve far more attention than I can give them here. In order to keep my discussion focused, and to avoid redundancies, I do not intend to elaborate on all of her ideas. Instead, I will discuss the aspects of these texts that take up the concerns of her previous works, placing particular emphasis on the development of her thought. I have already indicated several aspects of Stein's theories that remain relatively constant, such

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<sup>41</sup> The only major exception to this dating is "The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*." Stein had written the first half of this lecture several months earlier, when she was invited by the American Women's Club in Paris to speak about the abridged version of *Making* that had been published by Harcourt in February. Her speech was given on March 23, 1934.

as her belief in the fundamentally isolated nature of individual consciousness, and, rather than produce examples or lengthy reiterations to show the stability of these ideas, I will leave them aside unless they are further developed or challenged in the lectures.

As in each of Stein's texts discussed above, the first lecture in this collection, "What is English Literature," sets up a new dichotomy, between "serving God" and "serving Mammon," to help explore the predicament of the contemporary artist. This new set of terms is particularly interesting because, unlike in "And Now," Stein uses it to revisit ideas from her previous texts. For instance, she recasts her consideration of the difference between having an internal or an external focus during the creative process when she says, "When I say god and mammon concerning the writer writing, I mean that any one can use words to say something.... he may use those words directly or indirectly. If he uses these words indirectly he says what he intends to have heard by somebody who is to hear and in so doing inevitably he has to serve mammon.... Now serving god for a writer who is writing is writing anything directly it makes no difference what it is but it must be direct, the relation between the thing done and the doer must be direct" (Lectures 23-4). On its most basic level, these new terms codify the split Stein discusses in "And Now." Writers must commit either to writing indirectly in hopes of pleasing an outside audience or to addressing their own creative productions directly. This choice will finally determine the type of writing that emerges.

Later in the piece, Stein also incorporates terms that would seem to approximate those she used in *Four in America*: "The writer is to serve god or mammon by writing the way it has been written or by writing the way it is being written.... If you write the way it has already been written... then you are serving mammon, because you are living by

something some one has already been earning or has earned” (Lectures 54). Stein strengthens the connection between the two works by referring her audience to the Henry James section of *Four in America* and then introducing this final distinction after a discussion of James’s contribution to literature. These references, given that Stein’s earlier book was not yet available for publication, can be seen in part as a fairly overt marketing tactic. However, the conflation of the two texts also allows Stein to appropriate the ideas of the earlier work for her present concerns.

The difference between Stein’s earlier formulations and the two types of writing outlined here is aptly characterized in the shift from her earlier phrase, “writing as it is *going to be* written” to her current expression, “writing the way it *has been* written.” In the previous book, Stein focuses on the way in which an author addresses the writing process. Accordingly, “going to be” emphasizes the future product that is yet to emerge from the writer’s mind and refers directly to the “planning” that will secure a particular textual effect.

Part of the reason for this perspective is that the split Stein focuses on in *Four in America* arose, she claims, from her translation of Georges Hugnet’s poem *L’Enfances*. She attributed her insight about “writing as it was going to be written” to the process of transforming another writer’s completed work into her own words. As a result, she is primarily concerned with the difference between following one’s own artistic impulses or the ideas of another author and she never directly questions the purity of her own internal motives. However, in “And Now” and the lectures, she begins to take seriously the possibility that her own motives might be compromised by an internalized sense of the audience’s expectations. If her own motives could be corrupted, Stein might be tempted

to write, consciously or not, in ways that had been proven to appeal to her audience, which is to say “writing that has already been written.”

While this distinction might seem trivial, the implications of Stein’s shift in focus lead directly to several larger differences between *Four in America* and the lectures. Stein’s use of a more traditional inside/outside split to characterize the fear of contamination anxiety places her within a deeply entrenched set of modernist aesthetic values that valorize individual creativity over market success. Plus, her own somewhat uncharacteristic use of Biblical terminology marks one choice, “serving Mammon,” as clearly negative. Thus, Stein is pressured through the rhetoric of her own formulations to avoid the combination strategy that she employed in *Four in America*. She even criticized her good friend Bernard Fäy in personal correspondence for attempting what she sees as a similar maneuver. She writes, “what bothers me is that you to me use your lectures to make you, and in doing so, if you did it completely well alright but doing it partly is again serving god and mammon which cannot be done” (qtd. in Dydo Rises 626). This letter, written the September after Stein and Toklas returned from the United States, reflects the larger imperative to keep both sides of this equation distinct, as even “serving Mammon” is ranked above attempting to serve both.

However, the shift away from “choosing both” is not the only distinction between *Four in America* and the lectures. In *Four in America*, Stein figured the distinction between “writing as it is written” and “writing as it is going to be written” as an authorial choice and both forms of writing were depicted largely in terms of intentional processes, even if the author was forced to consult the final text to see how effective he or she had been. Conversely, in “What is English Literature,” Stein claims that the so-called

“choice” of positions is itself foreordained: “And now about serving god and mammon... really there is no choice. Nobody chooses. What you do you do even if you do not yield to a temptation” (Lectures 54). Again, this position serves to insulate Stein from both charges of market contamination and aesthetic failure because it takes the choice entirely out of her own hands. Even if we were to categorize *The Autobiography* as a “popular” book, distinct from Stein’s other writing, and read its style as some type of concession to public tastes, this notable shift in form could not be dismissed as a product of her own desire for fame, at least not according to the position she describes in “What is English Literature.”

While this formulation provides a strong defense against critics who would impugn Stein’s intentions, its implications for re-valuing Stein’s work are less clear. Stein could use this larger mandate, as she did in “And Now,” to stress the cognitive unity that produced her works and proclaim that she is simply predisposed to serving God. As such, *The Autobiography*, despite any appearances to the contrary, could be nothing less than another brilliant Stein text. However, Stein seems to take another approach in the lectures, one that begins to move her away from the implied acceptance of *The Autobiography* in both *Four in America* and “And Now.”

Critics have noted that Stein talks very little about *The Autobiography* in her lectures, which is surprising given that the success of this book was one of the forces behind her lecture tour. Instead, she uses her talks and the publicity afforded to her on the trip to promote less popular books, books that might otherwise have been overshadowed by the runaway commercial and critical success of *The Autobiography*. As Bryce Conrad points out, Stein chose to illustrate her lectures with passages selected almost exclusively

from works that were then available in America, including the libretto of *Four Saints, Portraits and Prayers*, *Geography and Plays*, and *The Making of Americans*, which Harcourt released in an abridged version during Stein's tour (Conrad 228 fn37).

While Stein's silence by itself is difficult to interpret, her one substantive reference to *The Autobiography* in the lecture "Portraits and Repetition" suggests that she has come to consider her memoir as something less than a masterpiece. In this lecture, Stein traces her various efforts throughout the 1910's and 20's to capture the essence of existence in her portraits. After two decades of pursuing this project in a wide variety of forms, Stein says, "I got a little tired, all that had been tremendously exciting, and one day then I began to write *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. You all know the joke of that, and in doing it I did an entirely different something... that had come out of some poetry I had been writing, *Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded*. However the important thing was that for the first time in writing, I felt something outside me while I was writing, hitherto I had always had nothing but what was inside me while I was writing" (Lectures 204-05).

This statement marks a significant shift in Stein's discussions of the period. She had previously addressed her translation of Hugnet's work, which was given its wry title after the collaboration led to a falling out between the two writers, in *Four in America*, where she claimed the translation process first made her aware of two different modes of writing. While this process certainly changed her perception of writing, the account does not dwell much on the external value of the two texts produced from this collaboration. As such, the translation simply marks an interesting development in Stein's thought and is not treated in an explicitly negative fashion. When she went on to problematize her

writing from this period in “And Now,” she passed over the episode with Hugnet altogether and linked her internal confusion directly to “success.”

In “Portraits and Repetition,” Stein is shifting her assessment again and blames the earlier work for her confusion. As a result, *The Autobiography* has become a product of, rather than the catalyst for, the difficulties that disrupted Stein’s writing process and, presumably, also ruined the quality of her work. Stein continues, “I wrote the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and told what happened as it had happened.... what happens is interesting but not really exciting.... It is true there is something much more exciting than anything that happens and now and always I am writing the portrait of that” (Lectures 205-06). Here, Stein not only distinguishes *The Autobiography* from much of her other writing, including the work that she is “now and always” doing, but she also suggests, without repudiating the work altogether, that it is not as good as her other efforts. Her own exhaustion and confusion ultimately led her to create a work that retold the past without being able to extract any of the inner vitality that would make the work truly “exciting.”

So, by the time she writes the lectures, Stein has come to focus on an inside/outside dichotomy and is insisting that in order to “serve God” writers must commit to their own internal process of creation, a step she had taken for granted in *Four in America*. She also extends her previous formulations, in a way not inconsistent with them, beyond the process of writing itself: “Now serving god for a writer who is writing is writing anything directly.... the relation between the thing done and the doer must be direct. In this way there is completion and the essence of the completed thing is



completion” (Lectures 24). The idea of completion, absent from the previous works under discussion, appears throughout the lectures and, as in the above quote, takes on several important meanings. First, the “completed thing” refers to the creative process itself, meaning that an author must work without considering an external audience so that the mind can be directly expressed in writing. It becomes, in effect, a closed process whereby the writer pours his or her thoughts onto the page.

Second, the “completed thing” refers to the final product of this closed process, the autonomous artwork itself. While Stein had previously removed any impact a reader might have on one of her texts and had embedded vitality in the words themselves, she did not specifically address the relationship between a text and the objects it necessarily depicted. Stein returns to this issue in her lecture, “Pictures,” and brusquely severs all connection between art and the world. Though this sentiment is not uncommon among modernist authors, Stein’s widely quoted formulation of the idea is certainly one of the most emphatic statements from the period. In a discussion of her early experiences with paintings, she says, “there is a relation between anything that is painted and the painting of it. And gradually I realized... that the relation was so to speak nobody’s business.... It could be the oil painting’s business but actually... after the oil painting was painted it was not the oil painting’s business and so it was nobody’s business” (Lectures 79). Stein’s resolute dismissal of the relevance of signification leaves the painting as a formally contained object that embodies the painter’s mind at one particular point in time, meaning that, after the oil painting is completed, it does not even bear a direct connection to the artist.

One benefit of this formulation becomes apparent in “What is English Literature,” when Stein digresses to consider the implications of completeness: “you cannot explain a whole thing because if it is a whole thing it does not need explaining, it merely needs stating” (Lectures 44). Stein, who, as I have previously argued, refuses the relevance of interpretation for a work of art, pushes her point one step further here to suggest that a work of art does not need commentary or, by extension, criticism. Echoing the major New Critical doctrine that Cleanth Brooks would later call “The Heresy of Paraphrase,” Stein suggests that a complete, nonreferential object cannot be transposed into any other form without becoming a completely different entity. It is for this reason that critic Michael Szalay, in an apt characterization, claims that Stein is ultimately committed to “the self-defining autonomy of identity” (470).

Of course, Stein’s lectures are themselves a form of criticism or, at the very least, commentary on her work, a potential logical contradiction that she both acknowledges and attempts to address. In most of her discussions, she avoids explicating specific works, instead limiting her discussions to abstract ideas and personal experiences. In this manner, her approach largely coincides with Brooks’s own writing. He eschews discussions of “meaning” through a focus on what he calls “essential structure,” tension, and balance. In addition, both writers frequently employ comparisons with non-verbal arts to de-emphasize the importance of content to aesthetic discussion.

However, even with this carefully modified approach, Stein still acknowledges the relative unimportance of her own critical formulations. She concludes “Pictures,” the first lecture given in the United States, by directly qualifying the significance of everything she had just said: “All this is very important because it is important. It is

important not for the painter or for the writer but for those who like to look at paintings” (Lectures 90). Since an artist who is “serving God” must not be influenced by the comments and interpretations of others, her theories can do little more than educate other aestheticians considering the nature of contemporary art. As such, they are of value only outside the active moment of creation itself.

Such an attitude differs markedly from Stein’s earlier statements in *Four in America*, where she held out the possibility that her analysis could be of use to writers: “If you know these things and you can know these things then you can write as if you knew... if you do not know these things although the time will or will not come that you will know these things, then you write as one who has been allowed to know these things without knowing them” (F.I.A. 126). Again, Stein’s approach in this text does not evince the same need to safeguard the internal purity of the artist and focuses primarily on the mode of writing used to create a text. As a result, knowing the difference between “writing as it was written” and “writing as it was going to be written,” two distinct processes that, at this point in her theorizations, depend more on the actions a writer takes to create a text than on less tangible forms of intellectual commitment, can help writers to approach their own process differently.

Despite this larger change in attitude, Stein redeploys *vitality*, her crucial term for denoting value in “Henry James,” in the lectures. This term, again, allows Stein to circumvent her own dismissal of interpretation, criticism, and even commentary by positing an arational quality by which a text can be judged. Stein had long been interested in the idea of human nature and, as early as her 1926 lecture, “Composition As Explanation,” had suggested that beneath contemporary “composition,” people share a

common humanity: “composition is the difference which makes each and all of [a generation] then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all alike” (“Composition” 26).

“Vitality,” then, allows Stein to tap into some aspect of this nature. It opens the way for her not only to evaluate individual works of art but also, by suggesting some constant form of human response, to theorize about the existence and qualities of masterpieces. In her lecture “Pictures,” she says, “That the oil painting once it is made has its own existence this is a thing that can of course be said of anything. Anything once it is made has its own existence and it is because of that that anything holds somebody’s attention. The question always is about that anything, how much vitality has it and do you happen to like to look at it” (Lectures 61). Stein distinguishes between the vitality of the text and personal taste, acknowledging that not everyone will like every text no matter how vital it may be. Yet, distinct from the question of subjective preferences, vitality is the one pertinent characteristic that can be assessed in all art, and assessed, presumably, without deforming the work itself through explanation.

Stein developed the ideas from her lectures a bit further when, late in the tour, she was invited to teach a two-week course on narration at the University of Chicago. These talks, later published under the title *Narration*, were written shortly before the course began on March 1, 1935 and, in terms of her theoretical approach to art, they primarily recast her ideas from the lectures. However, in the last lecture, Stein’s focus changes slightly and, anticipating her famous lecture on masterpieces, she openly wonders how to

determine what books will “last” before history has elevated them to the status of classics.

In approaching an answer to this question, she chooses to focus on the audience, an unsurprising move given the centrality of the audience to her previous formulations (“And anyhow what has an audience to do with it. Well in a way everything”-53). Stein begins by reiterating that “no one really not any one knows what any one means by what they that is that one is saying,” a point she applies not just to “saying” but also to writing, as “any one can say that they do not write for an audience and really why should they since anyway their audience will have its own feeling about anything” (*Narration* 55-6). While this position is nothing new for Stein, she presses the implications further in *Narration* and suggests that the only true audience an author can have is him or herself. In addition, since a work of art becomes an independent entity after creation, writers can only truly be their audience during the process of production: “the writer writing knows what he is writing as he recognizes it as he is writing it and so he is actually having it happen that an audience is existing... As he is a writer he is an audience” (*Narration* 56).

Stein’s attempt to usurp the audience function for the writer seems like a logical outgrowth of her previous ideas. Yet, such an absolute insistence on removing the audience from the scene of production also makes the process of lecturing in front of a group of people potentially problematic. Stein had long been aware of the difficulties of theorizing about public performances and, as early as the “Wilbur Wright” section of *Four in America*, she began grappling with what it meant to be an actor producing art in front of a group of people, though such considerations were never brought to bear on the process of lecturing.

In her lectures for the United States tour, Stein broached the issue of her own performances several times, but, again, she did not attempt to untangle the implications of her work. For instance, she opens “The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*” by saying, “I am going to read what I have written to read, because in a general way it is easier even if it is not better and in a general way it is better even if it is not easier to read what has been written than to say what has not been written. Any way that is one way to feel about it” (Lectures 135). Her apparent unwillingness to clarify the distinction between speaking spontaneously and reading prewritten texts reflects her general attitude throughout the lectures, where, even in a lengthy lecture on acting, she does not extend her ideas to a consideration of the lectures themselves. Such a lack of consideration is surprising given that Stein had serious concerns about the effect her physical environment would have on the speeches. In order to mitigate any potential interference with the communication process, she ultimately insisted that her audiences be capped at 500 people and that she be alone on the stage while speaking.

It was not until after Stein had been traveling around the country for several months that she finally stopped to consider her own activity as a form of performance. In her final lecture to the students at the University of Chicago, she claims that speaking is a different situation than writing because of the “physical exciting” involved, meaning that a speaker is forced to hear his or her own voice (he “hears what his audience hears,” to use Stein’s gendered terminology), and, as a result, cannot focus on the essence of the words themselves (“[there is no] real recognition... of what you talk as you talk”)

(Narration 56, 53-4). As such, speaking “destroys the physical something that a writer is” (Narration 56).<sup>42</sup>

Stein then goes on to claim, both as a response to her initial question about timeless art and as an implicit denunciation of public speaking, that true literature can be created only by focusing the creative part of the brain and its reflective capacities, here characterized as the “audience” function, on the process of creation itself: “that audience [for literary works] has to be there for the purpose of recognition as the telling is proceeding to be written and that audience must be at one with the writing, must be at one with the recognition, and can that be true of the historian or the newspaper man. No” (Narration 60). At this point, very near the end of her argument, Stein has advanced to speaking of author and audience as one entity, a point underscored by her reference to historians and journalists, that is, to the people creating texts and not actual audiences.<sup>43</sup>

One implication of Stein’s insistence on the author’s concentration during the act of writing is that the entire mind is focused on the present. No part of the brain should yield to outside influence or be caught up in the process of remembering, which is the challenge that historians face. Stein says, “an historian who knows everything really knows everything that has been happening how can he come to have the feeling that the

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<sup>42</sup> Stein also addresses a third option, reading aloud what one has written, but she suggests that that process, too, is complicated by the physical act of presentation: “if you are reading what you are lecturing then you have a half in one of any two directions, you have been recognizing what you are writing when you were writing and now in reading you disassociate recognizing what you are reading from what you did recognize as being written while you were writing. In short you are leading a double life” (Narration 57).

<sup>43</sup> Stein plays on the differences and similarities between one and two during the lecture, particularly in reference to the split between the creative and audience functions of consciousness. For instance, in reference to writers, she says, “One is not one because one is always two that is one is always coming to a recognition of what the one who is one is writing that is telling” (Narration, 57).

only existence the man he is describing has is the one he has been giving him. How can he have this feeling, if he cannot then he cannot have the recognition while in the process of writing, which writing really writing must really give to the one writing” (Narration 61). This passage clarifies two important elements of Stein’s theory. First, it reveals that that “really writing,” as a consequence of the author’s total concentration on the immediate present, comes to be felt by the writer as a wholly *original* creation. If he or she admits external influences or incorporates the reconstructions of memory, then the pure creation will presumably give way to an indirect, planned, or derivative product.

Second, the above passage also draws attention to the feeling the author receives during the process of writing, which marks a major shift from Stein’s earlier works. In *Four in America*, Stein insists that authors cannot know what kind of writing they are producing while they are working. She now eliminates that slight uncertainty from the process and allows the author herself to have direct awareness of the success or failure of her texts.

This formulation not only clarifies some of the ambiguities in Stein’s previous theories, but it also provides the grounds for her last major defense of *The Autobiography* before she dismisses it as a misguided effort in *Everybody’s Autobiography*. At the end of her lecture, Stein says, “You see that is why making it the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas made it do something, it made it be a recognition by never before that writing having it be existing” (Narration 62). It is important to note that Stein attributes the aesthetic success of this book precisely to her displacement of perspective, that is, her “making it” the autobiography of another person. By putting her own history in the mouth of this textual Toklas, Stein was able to create a new story that did not simply



attempt to reconstruct her own knowledge of the past from the present moment, and she was thereby able to attain a recognition of her words as they were being created in the process of writing.<sup>44</sup>

Stein's roundabout argument praising the present moment of writing at the expense of fidelity to historical details also provides her with an implicit defense against charges of inaccuracy, like the ones leveled against her by many of her former friends in a special issue of *transition*. Published in February 1935, at approximately the time Stein began writing her *Narration* lectures, the "Testimony Against Gertrude Stein" criticizes her for misrepresenting aesthetic conditions in the early part of the twentieth century. Stein's position, couched in a larger exploration of timeless art, implies that considerations of historical accuracy are irrelevant to the creation of "real" writing and that they are consequently of little significance to her. Moreover, her increasingly emphatic insistence on the hermeticism of artistic creation provides her with protection not only from the encroachment of the public but also from those who would attempt to use her work as a conduit to the author herself. This pattern of internalization would continue in Stein's work, though in a distinctly modified form, long after the lecture tour had ended.

My analysis of Stein's theory up to this point stands in stark contrast to the most common interpretation of Stein's work, which places her in a direct relation to postmodern poetics, particularly the form embodied by the so-called

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<sup>44</sup> Of course, Stein's previous, and future, ambivalence about the artistic merit of *The Autobiography* undercuts her current claim that she achieved an immediate recognition in the moment of writing.

L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E movement of the late 1970's. Though the link owes much to the poets' own invocations of Stein, academics working in this vein most frequently return to Marjorie Perloff's analyses in both *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* (1981) and, more recently, *21<sup>st</sup> Century Modernism: The "New" Poetics* (2002). The essential link between Stein's work and that of more contemporary poets, Perloff argues, is that both "us[e] material form... as an active compositional agent, impelling the reader to participate in the process of construction" (*'New' Poetics* 26). Jennifer Ashton divides this statement into two major tenets that run throughout Perloff's analysis.<sup>45</sup> First, Stein's poetry deliberately disrupts the referential function of language in order to open up the text as a space of indeterminate meaning, thereby emphasizing the intractable materiality of the signifier itself over some supposedly essential meaning that the text conveys. Second, given that a poem will be interpreted in an endless number of ways, the reader in effect adopts the role of author and, in the process of reading, "creates" the text by constructing one specific meaning configuration for the poem.<sup>46</sup>

While Perloff's larger argument is certainly more complex than I have made it here, these two crucial elements- the emphasis on the materiality of words over their referential function and the necessity of active reader participation in meaning creation- have been taken up by many other Stein critics and writers, including, as we have seen, Julianna Spahr through her conception of "multivalent texts." Stein herself, according to

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<sup>45</sup> The following discussion owes a debt to the work of Jennifer Ashton, who has been critical of Perloff's reading of Stein for some years, even though, as will become apparent, I disagree with Ashton over several crucial points. See Jennifer Ashton "Critique"; Jennifer Ashton "Anyone"; Jennifer Ashton "Literalism".

<sup>46</sup> Perloff is more concerned with tracing the 'indeterminate' tradition in her earlier book and spends more time detailing the specific modes and methods involved. See Marjorie Perloff *Indeterminacy* esp. 4-44.

my previous reading, even seems to agree with both these points, at least as independent ideas. When Charles Bernstein, a poet whose name comes up repeatedly in discussions of L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, writes in his 1992 book, *A Poetics*, “the poem said any other way is not the poem,” he could very well be paraphrasing Stein’s claim that an art work “does not need explaining, it merely needs stating” (qtd. in Ashton “Literalism” 388). Similarly, Stein openly and repeatedly acknowledges that readers can make whatever meaning they want out of her texts. However, as Ashton rightly asserts, Stein is not committed, as many postmodern poets are, to art as an object of experience, which is to say an art that takes on value only through each individual reader’s experience of the text. Instead, as we have seen, Stein believes that an essential value exists in the language of the autonomous work, a position more akin to the “closed” poem theorized by New Critics than supposedly “open” postmodern texts.

Yet, Ashton’s disagreement with Perloff rests, in part, on her belief that Stein’s theories are “at odds” with several major tenets of the New Criticism. She claims that Stein’s commitment to the autonomy of art comes into conflict with two other common New Critical views, namely, “that the poem must not mean but be, and that paraphrase is heresy” (“Literalism” 7). These latter two views, Ashton claims, imply that the text is an object to be experienced as opposed to a work that can be interpreted, a position that seems to deny the possibility that a poem could contain some essential meaning. However, Stein does, at least in the lectures, ascribe to the view that a true work of literature “merely needs stating.”

As argued above, Stein manages this potential difficulty through her concept of “vitality.” This term allows her to disconnect the value of art from the production of

meaning, thereby allowing her to declare that an art work is beyond criticism while saying that it is also capable of being judged by a universal standard, even if that standard itself cannot be put into precise analytic terms. It is only by overlooking this distinction that Ashton can quote from Stein's 1936 lecture "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them?" without commenting on the irony of Stein's argument: even as Stein is declaring art to be independent of readers' assessments, she is trying to explain how a work can be judged, presumably by a large number of people throughout time, as a master-piece. As a result, the term "vitality" also allows Stein to acknowledge that her work is endlessly interpretable precisely because those interpretations have nothing to do with the true "essence" of her art. The "vitality" exists in the text itself and is not itself subject to the process of meaning creation, or of changing historical interpretation, even as different generations might attempt to explain "vitality" itself in different ways.

The distinction that I would like to draw between my own reading of Stein's position in the lectures and Perloff's interpretation of her poetry then lies in the relationship between the two major tenets Perloff has explored. While, as Ashton says, "indeterminacy would... seem to be a necessary consequence of... 'anti-absorptive' poetics" (Ashton "Critique"), Stein sidesteps this issue by employing a third term that is connected to the words but lies outside the interpretive process. It is for this reason that she can espouse both tenets of a postmodern poetry while not herself ascribing to the "objecthood" of art that is foundational to that view. It is also the reason Stein can espouse the "Heresy of Paraphrase" with such seemingly divergent figures as Bernstein, Cleath Brooks, and Archibald Macleish.

This position does not simply mean that Stein should be labeled, in Lisa Siraganian's words, "an expatriate New Critic in avant-garde clothing, promoting the autonomous poetic object" (Siraganian 665). Siraganian challenges the label of New Critic for Stein because her theoretical focus is different from that of most critics of her time. For instance, Wimsatt and Beardsley's formulation of the "Affective Fallacy" posits that a poem's meaning "disappears" in the presence of readerly emotion. Conversely, for Siraganian, Stein's lectures suggest that "the meaning of a poem is entirely indifferent to the reader's emotion, or, for that matter, indifferent to any type of judgment the reader could deliver" (665). As should be apparent from my previous discussion, I both agree and disagree with this statement. While I concur with Siraganian's central point that Stein disregards the reader in her conception of the art work, I would argue that Stein is equally dismissive of the concept of "meaning" in relation to art.

I also believe that Stein's theoretical focus is not the only grounds for eschewing such a loaded label as "New Critic" when it comes to Stein's work. The theoretical position I have outlined above comes from a consideration of works done, in part, as a response to her sudden celebrity in the early 1930's. Though Stein shared many of the theoretical commitments outlined above earlier in her career, she had by no means formulated a coherent theory of art before embarking on her major theoretical projects in the 1930's, as can be seen through the development of her thoughts in these works. Thus, it would be historically inaccurate to pull a statement from one of Stein's lectures and use it to govern interpretations of her early writing without any further consideration of context or external circumstances.

I do not mean to suggest that interpretive procedures for Stein's work should be constructed out of a contextualized account of her own theories. As astute critics like Perloff have shown, Stein's early poetry does employ devices, forms, and ideas that could accurately be termed, or easily modified to encompass the term, "postmodern." The problem I would like to address arises when critics mine Stein's later writings for statements and ideas that seem to correlate with their analysis of her work so that they can claim Stein explicitly agrees with their interpretations.

Given this caveat, Stein's work in the early 1930's evinces a clear tendency to isolate the creative process and, in turn, to separate the text from the outside world. By the time of writing the lectures, she has not only isolated herself from the psychological pressures of being a famous author but she has also extricated audience interpretation from the "essence" of the art work. She does acknowledge readers' freedom to construct meanings and, at times, even seems to revel in the creative freedom provided to her audience, as when she playfully invites them to interpret *Four in America* without regard for her text. However, her primary emphasis in both *Four in America* and the lectures is the creative process itself. She has also begun to explore the grounds on which works of art can be judged, a preoccupation that stems in part from the success of *The Autobiography* and is manifest in Stein's various recraftings of that text's creation.

## ***Chapter 2:***

### ***After the Tour: Naturalized Aesthetics and Systematized Contradictions***

#### **From Theory to Practice: Laying the Groundwork for the Next Autobiography**

As Stein's lecture tour reached its conclusion and many of her newly published books continued to sell poorly, Stein fell under increasing pressure from her agent and publisher to produce another memoir. Before beginning, however, she set out to formalize her ideas in a philosophical treatise entitled *The Geographical History of America*. This book simplifies her previous formulations by recasting the opposition between the process of producing derivative art with an external focus and creating original, internally-motivated works into the essentialized terms, Human Nature and the Human Mind. One significant consequence of this formulation is that it places emphasis on the competing and irresolvable tension between these two states in any given person. Thus, artists will always be forced to wrestle with the prospect of creating inferior art based on their perceptions of the audience's expectations.

This book, and another lecture she gave at the time, "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them?," also show an increasing preoccupation with the logistics of creating a publicly recognized "master-piece," which is to say a book that can be embraced by both the critical elite and popular audiences. Stein's insistence on the link between textual value and the internal creative processes of the author, however,

prevents her from making any prescriptive statements about the content or form of specific texts. Instead, she emphasizes the potential contradictions her theories raise for authors, an approach that allows her to navigate between her own detailed theories of textual production and the seemingly impossible task of setting out to create a “master-piece.”

These theories lay the groundwork for Stein’s second memoir, *Everybody’s Autobiography*, published in 1937, which foregrounds the contradictions inherent in presenting a supposedly private, internal self to a public audience. This approach allows Stein to claim a public voice while simultaneously distancing herself from celebrity media outlets, which insist on the production of stable and marketable personas. In place of such a persona, Stein inserts a contradictory voice that speaks in the continuous present even as it draws attention to larger historical structures and categories, a voice that recounts past experiences while simultaneously questioning the validity of historical knowledge. Finally, *Everybody’s Autobiography* represents an attempt to create a new textual form that can embody the struggles of her own creative process while remaining familiar and accessible to a wide range of readers.

Throughout the early stages of her United States tour, Stein continued to haggle with Harcourt over the publication of her other books. Her agent, W. A. Bradley, had proposed as early as February 1933 that Harcourt reprint *Three Lives* along with *The Autobiography* and also distribute the leftover copies of books Stein had attempted to sell under her own publishing imprint, the Plain Edition. Harcourt was less than enthusiastic



about the idea and put off publishing anything else until after *The Autobiography* had been distributed.

However, Stein was not willing to commit her entire publishing future to Harcourt simply because he had agreed to print *The Autobiography*. At the same time that her agent was pressing Harcourt to put out more works, Stein was working to cultivate a relationship with Bennett Cerf, one of the founders of Random House. Their association began with the assistance of Carl Van Vechten, one of Stein's close friends who had published several books with Random House in the early 1930's. According to Cerf's memoirs, Van Vechten had first suggested that he seek out Stein in order to reprint some of her older works. After the initial success of *The Autobiography*, Cerf agreed and immediately added *Three Lives* to The Modern Library, a dollar reprint series put out by Random House. He also agreed to publish a new collection, *Portraits and Prayers*, in November, to coincide with the beginning of the lecture tour, and the libretto of *Four Saints in Three Acts*. The libretto came out in February 1934, at the time of the opera's New York debut (101-08).

Cerf and Stein were on such good terms by the time of the lecture tour that, when Stein first arrived in New York, Cerf and Van Vechten were two of the first people to meet her at the dock. Cerf, speaking of the early weeks of the lecture tour, says that Stein "just took me over, and for the two or three weeks she was in New York, I was her slave. She ordered me around like a little errand boy" (102). However, despite their budding relationship, Stein continued to offer proposals to Harcourt, who, largely to pacify Stein, finally agreed in October to put out an abridged version of *The Making of Americans*.

(The day she signed the contract, Cerf wrote her offering to publish the work in its entirety.)

With the exception of *Three Lives*, none of Stein's books sold particularly well on the tour. Donald Brace, Alfred Harcourt's partner, told Bradley that the sales of *The Making of Americans* were only one-quarter of *The Autobiography's* and that the latter book had actually slowed sales of her popular memoir (Turner 125). As a result, Harcourt finally cut ties with Stein and Cerf stepped in to become her primary publisher in the United States. He promised to publish whatever she wanted to see in print, whether it had market potential or not (Hobhouse 176).<sup>47</sup>

The first book Stein sent to Cerf after her tour was a complex meditation on art and life with the unusual title, *The Geographical History of America; or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind*. Cerf, despite the unorthodox nature of this difficult text, remained true to his promise and published it to both lackluster reviews and low sales.<sup>48</sup> It was the last major work Stein would complete before beginning her second memoir, *Everybody's Autobiography*.

*The Geographical History*, like many of Stein's previous works, sets out through a series of examples, exploratory discussions, and digressions to examine the meaning of two primary terms, in this case, human nature and the human mind. These two terms in large part restate the distinction Stein made between "serving God" and "serving

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<sup>47</sup> My account of Stein's publishing history has been drawn from a variety of sources. For useful secondary accounts of these events, and Stein's lecture tour more generally, see Wagner-Martin 208-20; Mellow 379-415; Ulla E. Dydo *Rises* 543-50. For published correspondence pertaining to the tour, see Edward Burns, Ulla E. Dydo and William Rice, eds. *Letters* 3-26; Gallup, ed., 280-99; Burns, ed., 265-432.

<sup>48</sup> For several examples of the negative criticism that *The Geographical History* received, see Kirk Curnutt, ed., *Response* 100-03.

Mammon.” However, this book takes Stein’s previous examination of authorial intention and recharacterizes her two positions as essential features of all human beings. “Human nature,” like an author who “serves Mammon,” is repeatedly linked with constructs that distort knowledge of the immediate present, including memory and “identity,” a term Stein uses to refer to the sense of self cultivated through the recognition of others in opposition to one’s own immediate perception of the self. The “human mind” roughly equates to serving God, in that it exists in a timeless present and simply writes what it is thinking without conscious reflection on external or historical considerations. One consequence of this formulation, already implicit in her *Narration* lectures, is that the human mind, and any text it produces, cannot be evaluated based on accuracy or correctness: “Write and right. Of course they have nothing to do with one another. Right right left right left he had a good job and he left, left right left” (Geographical History 483). This passage is important not only because it explicitly disconnects writing and being “right,” but also because it implicitly devalues the search for what is “right” by linking it with regimental militarism. The attempt to find such metaphysical truths stands in direct opposition to the spontaneous and playful activity of the human mind, a form of activity that generates its own knowledge in the process of writing.

While these ideas should all be familiar from Stein’s earlier writings, her transposition of “serving God” into bodily terms shifts the emphasis away from the relationship between, as she said in the lectures, the “doer” and the “thing done.” It also renders adjectives like “direct” and “indirect,” which Stein had previously used to describe this relationship, largely superfluous because “real” writing can now be simply defined as any writing emerging from the human mind. This formulation also allows

Stein to elide many of her previous arguments, for “vitality” and the autonomy of the art work to name just two relevant examples, by re-characterizing them as by-products of the operation of the human mind. I do not mean to suggest that there is necessarily a contradiction or gap between her current and previous accounts. The new formulation simply traces the vitality of the text to its source in the human mind, a progression which allows her to impute the atemporal universality of that mind to the final text itself. In other words, Stein no longer needs to claim that a writer working in the correct frame of mind with total concentration on the present will impute vitality into a text that can be felt by all people. Instead, she can simply say, “the human mind is the mind that writes what any human mind years after or years before can read, thousand of years or no years it makes no difference” (*Geographical History* 407).

Yet, the cost of such simplicity is that the human mind often seems like little more than a mystification. Given the parameters that define this entity, it would be impossible to describe the human mind in any but the most abstract terms, and even these terms would ultimately prove to be inadequate. In her many attempts to characterize the human mind throughout *The Geographical History*, Stein can only defer to the present (“there is no knowing what the human mind is because as it is it is”-421) and stress the process of perpetual change (“there is no such thing as the habit of the human mind...not even the habit of being the human mind of course not”-415). It becomes, in effect, the endpoint of rational analysis, the one process that ultimately resists logical exploration.

Moreover, when Stein asks if the human mind can be glimpsed in the body of a text it has written, she simply, and tautologically, dismisses the possibility by saying, “[writing] cannot sound like writing because if it sounds like writing than anybody can

see it being written, and the human mind nobody sees the human mind while it is being existing” (Geographical History 450). However, despite the seemingly obscure nature of this text, Stein’s new position does not significantly alter her theories about the creative process. The human mind produces an autonomous text that can be recognized by other human minds even though it leaves no definable or analyzable trace of its existence in the words themselves.

Furthermore, Stein maintains a similar attitude towards the relationship between the author’s mind and the external world. With regard to the audience, Stein is, again, quite explicit in her dismissal, saying, “when a great many hear you that is an audience and if a great many hear you what difference does it make” (Geographical History 384). She also reiterates that the mind must create texts without regard for any potential readers: “The words spoken are spoken to somebody, the words written are except in the case of master-pieces written to somebody” (Geographical History 465).

And yet, while Stein’s previous works provide a useful basis for explaining this book, her latter text cannot be entirely subsumed into the former ones, as Stein wryly asserts when she dismisses the idea of god: “It is the habit to say that there must be a god but not at all the human mind has neither time or identity and therefore enough said” (Geographical History 451). The author, according to this text, no longer needs to “serve God” because God, who has traditionally been characterized as an infallible, atemporal entity working beyond the reaches of human consciousness, has now been incorporated as a process that exists in every human brain. What is more, the human mind has effectively usurped and naturalized what Stein had implicitly characterized as the higher calling of the “true” artist.

It would not even be entirely accurate to generalize “serving God” and the “human mind” as comparable steps in Stein’s internalization of the aesthetic process because, in her later formulation, the individual always contains both the human mind and human nature. Stein does insist throughout *The Geographical History* that these two categories bear no relationship to each other, thereby securing creative independence for the human mind, but much of the tension in the book is generated by the fact that Stein cannot simply dismiss human nature.<sup>49</sup> Despite the relatively obvious conclusion that Stein wants to reach-- namely, that the human mind creates great works of art-- the book as a whole can never shake the specter of human nature and ultimately ends on an ambivalent note. She concludes, “identity is not there at all but it is oh yes it is... Do they put up with it. Yes they put up with it. They put up with identity. Yes they do that. And so anything puts up with identity” (*Geographical History* 488).

However, Stein does not simply bemoan the ambivalent state of living between two contradictory poles. Throughout the text she both emphasizes this condition and plays with the potential difficulties that it raises for her formulations. For instance, she has gone to great lengths to extrapolate a theory that supposedly covers all of human kind in her historical moment, and yet she also suggests that the literal content of her ideas is irrelevant. If this text is in fact the product of Stein’s human mind, then other minds will

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<sup>49</sup> Stein begins *The Geographical History* by questioning whether there is a relationship between the two primary terms and, early on in the book, she poses the same question many times. However, about halfway through the book, Stein’s interrogative mode gives way to a series of relatively straightforward assertions: there is no relationship between human nature and the human mind. For relevant examples, see pages 422, 427, 430, 449, 455, and 457. While the excessive repetition of this claim reflects the meditative nature of the work, it could potentially be read as a suggestion of uncertainty. However, Stein’s attitude in the latter half of the book, especially when seen in the context of the larger theories at work there, suggests that the human mind and human nature have something closer to an independent coexistence than some form of co-dependency or interrelationship.

recognize it as a valuable work regardless of what it actually says. This position frees Stein to assert, “It is so easy to be right if you do not believe what you say” (Geographical History 457). Similarly, Stein contradicts her own claim that “write” and “right” are unrelated by specifically defining a process for the human mind, giving it, if nothing else, a correct form of operation. She paradoxically enunciates a larger truth in the text, all the while using a repeated play on “write” and “right” to both clarify and draw attention to the problems inherent in her larger formulations: “The human mind has no resemblances if it had it could not write that is to say write right” (Geographical History 396).

In this way, Stein’s text as a whole reflects her attitude towards the opposition she has established. In a section titled “Autobiography number one,” Stein concludes, “not to solve it but be in it, that is what one can say of the problem of the relation of human nature to the human mind, which does not exist because there is none there is no relation” (Geographical History 455). By placing this declaration under the heading of autobiography, Stein suggests that she is talking about her own experiences living with the human mind and human nature. The contradictory form of her statement emphasizes that, even though the two states may be entirely separate, a human being must always exist in their midst, or, perhaps more accurately, must endlessly vacillate between them.

However, Stein also emphatically declares that “autobiographies have nothing to do with the human mind,” presumably because they involve memory and identity, which are both part of human nature (Geographical History 389). Perhaps the heading then suggests that the entire section was constructed by Stein’s human nature and should thus be considered metaphysically suspect. Yet, Stein’s larger categories are not, as we have

seen, content distinctions, which leaves open the possibility that the passage does not have to be read under erasure. In short, Stein does not attempt to solve the contradictions she has created, nor does she attempt to minimize the difficulties of living with such contradictions. There is simply no resolution and the human mind will continue to wander and play with little regard for resolution anyway.

I do not mean to suggest that this is the first time in Stein's major works from the 1930's that irony and contradiction play significant roles. Throughout the previous chapter, I argued that the contradiction between internalizing and universalizing value was a generative force behind Stein's writing in the 1930's. Moreover, even though I have not spent much time on Stein's linguistic games in my discussions of her works, a playful engagement with contradiction and irony is a feature of almost every Stein text. However, the change in Stein's formulations here foregrounds such complexities in a way that the other texts I have been examining from the mid-1930's did not. She is not simply combining two equal and largely unproblematic terms as she did in *Four in America*. Nor is she attempting to maintain the strict division of the lectures. She is, in effect, combining these approaches in a simultaneous embrace of two highly oppositional terms, creating a tense and playful meditation that dwells at the interstices of two states that perhaps never intersect.

After completing *The Geographical History*, Stein traveled to England and gave a lecture before the English Clubs at both Oxford and Cambridge Universities entitled, "What Are Master-pieces and Why Are There So Few of Them?" Critics have gravitated towards this work because it echoes ideas Stein had been playing with throughout the



decade in a compact and direct form. In the terms I have outlined above, it largely reiterates Stein's ideas from *The Geographical History*, which is not surprising given the chronology of its composition. The lecture juxtaposes human nature and the human mind, as well as identity and entity, Stein's term for any thing that is wholly self-contained and free from external influence. It also connects the latter categories with the creation of masterpieces, a move that pushes her lecture beyond the earlier formulations that did not explicitly link a particular form of writing to the production of great literature.

Yet, this potentially arrogant formulation, which suggests that Stein possesses the key to creating great literature, is not, in practice, quite as bold as it sounds. At this point, Stein has so completely isolated her process of creation in the unknowable reaches of the human mind that such a claim entails little more than commitment to a few general creative principles. What is more, Stein's insistently internal focus and the generality with which she must explain the operation of the human mind makes any discussion directed outside the author, say, on the qualities of texts themselves, much more problematic.

This problem appears in *The Geographical History* when Stein considers how masterpieces relate to their own historical period. In her 1926 lecture, "Composition as Explanation," Stein suggested that true artists are defined by their ability to capture the essence of the contemporary moment in their work before any one else has come to express such an understanding. However, a true masterpiece cannot simply encapsulate one particular moment in time; it must, at least potentially, remain relevant to all readers through different ages, much as such writers as Homer and Shakespeare remain pertinent

to contemporary readers.<sup>50</sup> Stein's new formulations, which emphasize only the wandering of the human mind in a perpetual present, leave little room for negotiating this difficulty and Stein is ultimately forced to acknowledge the contradiction: "everybody says that is what a master-piece does but does it. Does it say what everybody sees, and yet it does but is not that what makes a master-piece not have it be that it is what it is" (*Geographical History* 459).

Stein raises similar issues in "What Are Master-pieces," but she seems no closer to mediating between theoretical processes and textual characteristics. For instance, Stein posits that the human mind remains in perpetual motion, but master-pieces, because of their textual nature, must begin and end. With no easy way to bridge this gap, Stein playfully concludes, "Well anyway anybody who is trying to do anything today is desperately not having a beginning and an ending but nevertheless in some way one does have to stop. I stop" (*Masterpieces* 89).<sup>51</sup> She also discusses, to give another example, the potential difficulty of creating from the human mind, meaning that the author is existing without time and identity, while elaborating on these very things in writing, a problem that folds back again into the tension between "timeliness" and timelessness in true works of art.

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<sup>50</sup> It is during a discussion of masterpieces and timelessness in *The Geographical History* that Stein makes her famous proclamation, "Think of the Bible and Homer think of Shakespeare and think of me" (407).

<sup>51</sup> Michel Foucault's comments on beginnings in his lecture, "The Discourse on Language," provide an interesting reflection on Stein's formulations. Stein's mistrust of beginnings arises from her belief in the ahistorical nature of the human mind. According to her formulation, any material or historical necessity, like the necessity to begin or end, is a distortion of this entity. Foucault, in a similar fashion, bemoans the process of beginning, but he uses these statements to elaborate on anxieties about the historical nature of discourse, anxieties implicitly present in Stein's text. See Michel Foucault "Discourse" 148.

Stein enumerates these difficulties in part to reiterate the elusiveness of her objects. In this lecture, she has taken on the problematic position of explaining a process that exists outside the scope of rational analysis and a product that can only be deformed by interpretation. In addition, she highlights the problems faced by contemporary authors who are, if we are to believe Stein's formulations, consciously or unconsciously struggling with all these difficulties in their attempt to create lasting art. The sheer number of problems Stein attempts to express and consider provides ample justification for her insistence, even as she purports to be explaining the process of creating great literature, that there are in fact very few masterpieces.

This reading of *The Geographical History* and "What Are Master-pieces" again challenges interpretations of Stein's work that attempt to emphasize the communal nature of her writing. For instance, Harriet Scott Chessman only mentions this late lecture in a footnote, where she acknowledges that Stein sees herself as "constructing... 'master-pieces' in pure isolation from an audience." However, she goes on to dismiss the piece because "this late essay must be placed in the context of Stein's own difficulty with the fact of her sudden success from *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which was written precisely from a position of 'identity.' Stein's defensiveness about the relatively small audience held by her more experimental texts seems to infuse this account of how unimportant audience has been to her" (209 fn57). First, it is unclear from Chessman's brief dismissal why Stein would only, in this one lecture three years after the publication of *The Autobiography*, have had difficulty with "the fact of her sudden success." As I have demonstrated above, Stein's texts throughout the 1930's not only posit an author working in isolation from an audience, but they also directly link the value of literary

works to that state of mental isolation. As Stein says in *The Geographical History*, “there is no connection no relation between reading and the human mind” (*Geographical History* 389). Perhaps she best summed up the centrality of subjectivity to her aesthetic theories in a letter to Edmund Wilson, where she claims, “all literature is to me me, that isn’t as bad as it sounds” (qtd. in Dydo *Rises* 7).

Second, Stein did not simply dismiss *The Autobiography* as irrelevant, but in fact worked to cultivate theories that allowed her to claim this text as an original and important work just one year before delivering “What Are Master-pieces.” To imply that Stein’s struggles with fame led to a simple denunciation of *The Autobiography* and one reactionary lecture is, I think, to mischaracterize her work from the period. By the time of writing “What Are Master-pieces,” Stein has forcefully reiterated that each consciousness is entirely isolated from every other consciousness and the only possible form of interaction is “contact,” a term with very different implications from Chessman’s “coming together.” What is more, Stein at this stage in her writing is far from a celebratory embrace of her audience. She has conceived of a world where people exist between an externally and historically imposed sense of identity and the unencumbered present moment. The practical difficulties that such a position creates also loom large as Stein prepares to work on another autobiography, one that will avoid the pitfalls of human nature and become a “master-piece.”

However, in accordance with her recent theories, her text must not simply reflect the human mind, but the conflicted state of living between entity and identity. Along similar lines, she must also attempt to navigate the implicit challenge of her theories and create a text that is both aesthetically successful and “interesting” to a wide range of

readers, regardless of their typical reading “level.” Stein, as might be expected, was not ultimately successful in navigating this last divide. Despite the continued popularity of her first autobiography, sales of the second book were so poor that Random House printed only one edition of 3,000 copies and never went back to press (“Publisher's” viii). Critics have traditionally responded to Stein’s autobiographies in a similar way. *The Autobiography* has amassed a provocative and wide ranging critical literature, while *Everybody’s Autobiography* has received relatively little attention. Many scholars treat it as if it were, at best, “a kind of postscript” to the first work and, at worst, a marginal effort designed to cash in on the success of her lecture tour (Jelinek 145).

In the following section, I examine how *Everybody’s Autobiography* might encourage such a critical response in its explicit invocation of the first book; however, I claim that it does so to deliberately distance itself from *The Autobiography* in range, scope, and formal intention. Beginning with a discussion of its unorthodox title, I examine specifically how *Everybody’s Autobiography* simultaneously employs and works to undermine its connection with the first text in order to lay the groundwork for a more detailed assessment of the book’s form and structure. I then move on to examine Stein’s account of the difficulties that arise from *The Autobiography*’s publication, in particular her characterization of celebrity as a threat to personal autonomy. Ultimately, I propose that she attempts to solve this problem by retreating, both formally and literally, to an insistently illogical space of contradiction where her work can deflect attention from a seemingly all-encompassing celebrity media apparatus to the unified, though never static, work of art itself.

My goal in providing this reading of Stein's second autobiography is, in part, to draw attention to the complexity of this frequently neglected text. I would also like to provide a specific example of how Stein's theoretical work during the decade translated into a text that was ostensibly constructed for a mass audience. The text that emerges is, as Marianne DeKoven says of Stein's writing in the 1930's more generally, "not a repudiation of or release from experimental writing," but is instead a "rapprochement of the experimental with the conventional" (Language 150). As DeKoven suggests, Stein's attempt to embrace both sides of a dichotomy is not new to her work in the late 1930's. It is not even limited to her work in the 30's more generally. For instance, in "Arthur A Grammar," a poetic essay written in the late 1920's, Stein explores the tension between "grammar" as a rule-bound system that channels thought into predetermined patterns and writing in a way that confounds traditional grammatical systems. Throughout the article, Stein plays with the idea that she needs to employ grammatical constructions in order to critique grammar and, rather than simply promote a playful approach to language in the piece, she claims "Arthur a grammar can be both" ("Arthur" 81).<sup>52</sup>

*Everybody's Autobiography*, however, engages with a different series of practical and theoretical concerns than those Stein frequently discussed earlier in her career. The issues that she deals with in this book have arisen from the specific context of her lecture tour and the general theoretical framework outlined in her previous texts. It is, in many

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<sup>52</sup> Stein employs a similar approach in "Patriarchal Poetry," where she juxtaposes her own playful poetic language with patriarchal language, but ultimately concludes that some elements of patriarchal poetry could be salvaged. For a more extended reading of this article, see Laurel Bollinger "Interrupted" 231-42. Susan Schultz makes this argument again with respect to "Stanzas in Meditation," which she reads as a necessarily failed attempt to eliminate the audience from writing. See Susan M. Schultz "Self-Advertisement". Many critics also read *The Autobiography* as a text that negotiates a wide variety of contradictions. For one provocative example, see James Breslin "Gertrude Stein and the Problems of Autobiography".

respects, an attempt to push the ideas she had previously developed in new directions and elaborate on the implications of the work she had accomplished over the previous four years.

### **Everybody's Autobiography and the Art of Contradictions**

Barbara Mossberg, in an essay exploring linguistic detachment in the work of Emily Dickinson and Gertrude Stein, claims, "The titles of Stein's autobiographies are oxymoronic, self-canceling and for that reason compelling" (245). Though "The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas" only becomes "oxymoronic" when we take Stein's authorship of the text into account, Mossberg's unconscious association of title and literary gesture reflects the influence that this one trope has had on scholarly explorations of the book. From the earliest narrative studies to more recent analyses of identity and sexuality, critics have almost universally incorporated, and frequently constructed entire theories out of, Stein's playful authorial inversion.<sup>53</sup>

The pervasive influence of this move is also reflected in Mossberg's reading of the willfully ambiguous title, "Everybody's Autobiography," as a re-inscription of problematized authorship, even though many potentially productive readings could de-emphasize the phrase's apparent contradictions. For instance, "Everybody's" could be read as a contraction, which would relate it not only to the book's thematic concern with creation but also to contemporary autobiographical theories that explore the narrative

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<sup>53</sup> For an early, predominantly theoretical, exploration of Stein's autobiographies, see S.C. Neuman Problem of Narration. For provocative readings of Stein's lesbianism, see Karin Cope "Moral Deviancy"; Catharine R. Stimpson "Paradox of the Happy Marriage".

construction of identity.<sup>54</sup> Alternatively, the title could be read as the articulation of a collective identity, presumably available to individuals through an exploration of the ‘self.’ Such a reading would draw useful connections between this book and some of Stein’s other contemporaneous works, like *The Geographical History of America*.

Grouping these two titles together under the assumption that they function in similar ways also obscures the hyperbolic tone that is unique to “Everybody’s Autobiography.” Taken literally, Stein is not only claiming to speak on behalf of all humanity, but she is also purporting to embody and represent the consciousness of all people. However, from an opposing, and equally plausible, perspective, this title could be read as an attempt to de-centralize the authority inherent in such a claim. Autobiography is traditionally defined, in part due to its dependence on language, as a solitary enterprise, that is, as the expression of an individual consciousness interacting with the material world.<sup>55</sup> Yet here, the subject of representation can be neither unified nor material. The reader begins, as it were, from the imagined space of a heterogeneous collectivity. It is this double movement, the projection of the self outward coupled with the consequent refinement of that projection into a problematically singular vision, that makes the title seem doubly self-canceling, first in its apparent negation of a literal, unified self, and second in its challenge to the premises of autobiographical form.

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<sup>54</sup> See Paul John Eakin "What Are We Reading". This interpretation could be pushed even further if the title is read as ‘Every/body is autobiography,’ which would shift the emphasis to physical bodies and processes of inscription.

<sup>55</sup> Philippe Lejeune’s famous definition of autobiography shows a particularly strong individualistic bias: “Definition: Retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning his own existence, where the focus is his individual life, in particular the story of his personality.” See Philippe Lejeune "Autobiographical Pact" 4. Only recently have critics begun to explore the theoretical implications of joint authorship. For example, see Paul John Eakin *Ethics of Life Writing*.



I emphasize the complexities that the title “Everybody’s Autobiography” could potentially generate in part to set the stage for what I see as a text structured around contradictions. However, these ambiguities are also important because several recent critics have characterized Stein’s book as a largely unproblematic attempt to tell the story of everybody. For instance, Juliana Spahr, as previously mentioned, attempts to read *Everybody’s Autobiography* as an explicitly inclusive work and a defense of Stein’s earlier experiments with “open” poetry: “Stein attempts to write an autobiography that invokes this flexibility [of pronouns] by emptying out the self of autobiography to acknowledge and encourage instead the everybody of autobiography” (38). As I have suggested above, any one-dimensional approach to this work will necessarily elide many significant facets of the text. In fact, one of the biggest problems Stein faces in this autobiography is that no matter how much she attempts to fragment, abstract, or generalize her identity on a theoretical level, the cultural and economic capital that accrues from the expression of such theories will always come back to the author. Put differently, the autobiography of everybody will always be “by Gertrude Stein,” an inequality Stein calls attention to explicitly throughout the text, as in her famous lines, “[i]n America everybody is but some are more than others. I was more than others” (*E.A.* 173).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Barbara Will, in her book *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of “Genius,”* attempts a similar reading of *Everybody’s Autobiography*, claiming that “[Stein’s] story, the story of a ‘genius,’ is potentially the story of ‘everybody’” (9). However, Will’s reading is far more attuned to the nuances of Stein’s text and devotes slightly more attention to what she sees as Stein’s “anxiety about the de-personalizing and de-hierarchizing effects of the story which [she] is engaged in telling” (154). My own reading differs in that I see Stein as profoundly aware of the complexities of her own position and *Everybody’s Autobiography* as her attempt to work with such difficulties.

When viewed from this perspective, the complex significations of Stein's title reflect the larger problems that pervade this book and offer a challenge to readers looking for a repeat performance of *The Autobiography*. "Everybody's Autobiography" does not just recall the problematized authorship of the first book but employs it as an ironic sign that may well undermine the very project it designates. Similarly, this contradictory trope raises a complex of identity-related issues, the very issues which have come to dominate critical readings of *The Autobiography*, while at the same time it undercuts any expectation for a repeat performance through both the visibility of the gesture and its literal impossibility.

This apparent desire to avoid redundancy becomes a central thematic concern early in the text when Stein considers the concept of originality. In a discussion of Picabia's art, she claims, "I do not care about anybody's painting if I know what the next painting they are painting looks like. I am like any dog out walking, I want it to be the same and I want it to be completely unlike" (*E.A.* 100). This passage and the larger discussion of which it is a part reflect Stein's tendency to speak of art in abstract or metaphorical terms.<sup>57</sup> Throughout the book, she discusses, criticizes, and evaluates painters, though never once does she physically describe either their technique or their work as a whole.<sup>58</sup> Here, Stein chooses to address Picabia's work not in terms of its literal

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<sup>57</sup> Coincidentally, it is precisely this tendency to treat art abstractly that allowed Stein to make the now famous comparison between her own writing and Picasso's early Cubist paintings. Of all the work done analyzing her comparison, Marianne DeKoven has provided some of the most consistently insightful and provocative analyses in this area. For example, see Marianne DeKoven "Literary Cubism".

<sup>58</sup> Cf. "there has just been recently an exhibition of Spanish painting here... they do do more than can be done, which carries them so far that they are not there, but certainly twentieth-century painting is Spanish, they do it but it is never begun. That is what makes the painting Spanish today" (32).

content, which will always change from picture to picture, but the formative ideology behind the work itself. It is presumably this kind of theoretical redundancy that must be avoided in order to create interesting works of art repeatedly. Yet Stein undercuts the pretension of this intellectual posture by comparing her own sensibilities to those of a dog, suggesting that, despite appearances, her underlying tastes are at the very least common, if not altogether simple.<sup>59</sup> She merely wants more of what she likes, but if it is exactly the same, then it will ultimately be unsatisfying. “That,” she says, generalizing at the end of the book, “is what they meant when they said that it turns to dust and ashes in your mouth” (*E.A.* 325).

This difficult relationship between a text and its predecessors is, as we have seen, partially inscribed in *Everybody's Autobiography* through its title. It is a playful re-signification that anticipates, addresses, and, perhaps most importantly, undermines the audience's expectations. The reversed phrasing of the title seems to function in a similar manner. *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* is a passive construction that de-emphasizes Stein's ownership of the story in favor of the “autobiographical” text itself.<sup>60</sup> The converse, possessive form highlights not only the subject, but also its claim on the text. So, if one reads the titles allegorically, the problematics of authority over image and the ownership of one's own life-story seem to have moved from the thematic subtext of an otherwise “breezy” autobiography to a central literal position inside the story itself, a

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<sup>59</sup> Stein frequently uses dogs to examine the nature of human behavior, both in this book and in other works of the period. She makes the metaphorical value of dogs explicit at the end of *Everybody's Autobiography* when describing a conversation with Thornton Wilder: “We talked about the passage of time about the dogs and what they did and was it the same as we did” (310).

<sup>60</sup> For an examination of ownership and identity in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, see Leigh Gilmore “Lesbian Autobiography”.

story that fittingly attempts to interrogate the relationship between image and identity in a rapidly evolving media culture ("Publisher's" vii).

The book further draws attention to and simultaneously distances itself from *The Autobiography* by framing the text with references to it. The book opens with a brief anecdote about the difficulties of international publication: "In the first place she did not want it to be Alice B. Toklas, if it has to be at all it should be Alice Toklas and in the French translation it was Alice Toklas in French it just could not be Alice B. Toklas but in America and in England too Alice B. Toklas was more than Alice Toklas. Alice never thought so and always said so. That is the way any autobiography has to be written" (E.A. 1). On a literal level, Stein again directs attention to both the problematics of signification and the instability of autobiography by emphasizing the apparent gap between "external" significations and the "inner" self that is taken to be the object of representation. For Alice, the name is just an empty sign that has no bearing on her true identity, so the text should use her familiar appellation.

The intricacies of Stein's language also work to undercut the publishers' debate by drawing attention to the form of the passage. For example, the excessive repetition of Alice's name along with the homophonous link between "B" and "be" highlight the commodification of her identity and the resulting fetishization of her be-ing into a concrete and thus salable referent, here the letter B, but also, by extension, *The Autobiography* itself.

The importance of referentiality is further undermined by this passage's playful emphasis on the materiality of the signifier. First, translation itself focuses on material signs because, in an ideal communication system, that is the place where change is

affected. The underlying referents themselves are never at issue. However, in this case, Alice Toklas “translated” into French remains simply Alice Toklas.<sup>61</sup> Secondly, Stein’s use of the ambiguous word “more” allows her to engage with both the larger philosophical issues of identity and the materiality of the words themselves, as “Alice B. Toklas” is literally more than “Alice Toklas.”

Finally, the demonstrative pronoun “that,” severed from any specific referent, seems designed to symbolize, right at the beginning of the book, the overdetermined nature of the autobiographical form. The most immediate referent for “that” is the preceding paragraph, which could suggest that autobiography itself, according to the previous reading, is nothing more than a word game that is unable to capture any “true” identity.<sup>62</sup> Alternatively, “that” could refer specifically to the publisher’s dilemma, emphasizing that all artistic endeavors are enmeshed in both textual histories and socio-cultural processes that modify their final form.<sup>63</sup> It could also refer more generally to the discursive form of the opening, with the implication being that all autobiography is indebted to memory, another issue that Stein takes up repeatedly in the text.<sup>64</sup> Though the exact content of the referent cannot be determined, all of these possible readings point, in

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<sup>61</sup> Ironically, it is only in her native language that Alice Toklas must be modified to achieve an appropriate degree of presence, perhaps a subtle indication of Stein’s own feelings about their return trip to America.

<sup>62</sup> Mossberg reads this sentence in a similar way and argues that “autobiography is a process of transforming objective truths” (246). While the general sentiment of this passage may be comparable to my reading, I have difficulty with its metaphysical implications because it seems to suggest that some definable self exists prior to its autobiographical representation, a self that is consequently being deformed in the process of signification.

<sup>63</sup> For a discussion of cultural difference in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, see Shawn H. Alfrey “Oriental”.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. “you are never yourself to yourself except as you remember yourself and then of course you do not believe yourself. That is really the trouble with an autobiography” (70).

some form, to both the fundamental unreliability of autobiography and the elusiveness of language.

While *Everybody's Autobiography* begins by implicitly acknowledging its link to *The Autobiography*, particularly through an emphasis on their shared interest in the implications of traditional autobiographical form, it ends by very explicitly positioning itself in relation to its predecessor: "I would simply say what was happening [in *Everybody's Autobiography*] which is what is narration.... And now I almost think I have the first autobiography was not that, it was a description and a creation of something that having happened was in a way happening not again but as it had been which is history which is newspaper which is illustration but is not a simple narrative of what is happening not as if it had happened not as if it is happening but as if it is existing simply that thing. And now in this book I have done it if I have done it" (E.A. 312). This passage reflects Stein's long-standing commitment to undermining generic conventions, as is evidenced by her unusual categorical confluences (autobiography/history/newspaper/illustration) as well as her more conventional combination of description and creation. Yet, she is also drawing a broad *formal* distinction between the two works in question. Literal content does not enter into this discussion at all. Instead, she wants to focus attention on the way that any given experience is transcribed in language.

Interestingly, some critics dismiss the issue of style in relation to Stein's prose autobiographies, in no small part because Stein herself occasionally differentiated them from her other work. For example, Ulla Dydo takes up the distinction Stein made, in correspondence with her agent, between her "audience writing" and her "real kind of

books.” Dydo, in order to characterize the difference between *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and *Stanzas in Meditation*, defines the latter category, and by extension the *Stanzas*, as “a literature of word compositions rather than a literature of subject matter” (“Other” 4). However, her intention is not simply to examine the formal elements of Stein’s poetry, so the subject matter/formal compositions distinction must be slightly modified: “Not that the compositions lacked subject matter, but Stein believed that subject matter had no existence apart from its shape in compositions” (“Other” 4-5). By suggesting that the complex inter-relation of subject and form is relevant only in Stein’s “compositions,” Dydo is essentially erasing the boundaries that she claims distinguish the “real” works while at the same time attempting to maintain the integrity of the other category, “audience writing.”<sup>65</sup>

I do not want to diminish the difference between Stein’s different modes of writing, nor dismiss the categories that she is using, but, as her formal declaration at the end of *Everybody’s Autobiography* demonstrates, Stein is evidently concerned with the “shape” of both these autobiographies. In fact, as Dydo herself notes, the difficult relation between audience and author “worried” Stein for the rest of her career and did much to shape her theories about narrative and writing (“Other” 19). For example, Stein concludes her lecture “Poetry and Grammar” by saying, “I am working at [narrative] and what will it do this I do not know but I hope that I will know” (Lectures 246). She then went on,

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<sup>65</sup> Dydo maintains this difficult position throughout the essay and, in her concluding remarks, reiterates it by saying, “Again and again in the *Stanzas* [Stein] describes what she sees, trying not to turn her back to it. In the *Autobiography* she renders the appearance and the public image, with the sort of peace-loving statements an audience likes to hear” (18). In other words, Stein’s poetry attempts to capture the difficulties of “really” seeing through formal innovation, whereas the autobiographical work is designed to convey information in a direct and straightforward way.

after preparing her other talks for the American tour, to write four more addresses for University of Chicago on the subject of narration.

Ten years later, in the “Transatlantic Interview,” Stein reflects on these concerns: “The bulk of my work since [the mid-1930’s] has been largely narration. I think *Paris France* and *Wars I Have Seen* are the most successful” (“Transatlantic Interview” 103). This quotation demonstrates not only the changing nature of Stein’s narrative theories, which ten years after the *Lectures* were still developing, but also the importance of autobiographical works to her formal development.<sup>66</sup> Consequently, I agree with Dydo’s claim that Stein sees form and content as inextricably linked, but I would apply this claim to all of her work, even the so-called “audience writing.” What is more, by the time of writing *Everybody’s Autobiography*, Stein has come to characterize the success of her work specifically in terms of its ability to approach theoretical difficulties in a formally innovative way, which means, in this case, that she would like to re-address her theories of identity and language but avoid wholly replicating either the form or the ideological content of her previous works.

In order to examine Stein’s complex position in this text, I begin with what, in a traditional autobiography, might have been one of its most emotionally charged moments: Stein’s return to the site of her old family home in East Oakland, California. After summing up the entire trip in once sentence, Stein moves on to discuss a nameless interlocutor who had asked her whether or not she found America changed. In a typical

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<sup>66</sup> Both *Paris France* and *Wars I Have Seen* have traditionally been considered part of Stein’s autobiographical oeuvre, and most commentators consider *Wars* to be her third major autobiography. For example, see Wagner-Martin 243-44.



move, she does not choose to speak directly about her old neighborhood, or even the landscape more generally, but instead focuses on larger theoretical issues: “of course it had not changed what could it change to. The only thing that makes identity possible is no change but nevertheless there is no identity nobody really thinks they are the same as they remember” (*E.A.* 72). For Stein, true identity is always an impossibility because it relies on the presumption of a static and knowable past that can be used as the basis for identity claims, a presumption that discounts not only the partial knowledge of an entity engaged in acts of definition, but also, in this particular case, the continuing existence of the thing being defined. Thus, any given designation is doubly incomplete because, even in the very moment of formulating an identity, a new being will have already emerged. From this perspective, “America” either represents a fixed and knowable concept that, by definition, cannot change, or it is simply an empty signifier that can potentially take on new meanings with each articulation. In either case, “America” does not ever fully encompass its object, leaving traditional communication systems with only one stable element: the materiality of the words themselves. Thus, the concrete signifier can be seen throughout Stein’s text as a static object epistemologically unsuited to its fluid environment and as a larger symbol of linguistic insufficiency.<sup>67</sup>

This logical difficulty at the core of representation, an idea Stein had been playing with in different forms throughout her career, begins to raise serious concerns for her when, following the publication of *The Autobiography*, she becomes an object of media scrutiny. First, entertainment marketers, including her own publicists, begin creating

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<sup>67</sup> For a more detailed theoretical discussion of Stein’s theories of representation, see Alan R. Knight “Explaining Composition”. For trenchant arguments about Stein’s language in the context of her early experimental texts, see Cyrena N. Pondrom “Achievement”; Wendy Steiner Resemblance.

different and often competing versions of “Gertrude Stein” as they promote her upcoming lecture tour. Their threat is symbolized by the electric sign Stein encounters shortly after arriving in America: “it said Gertrude Stein has come and that was upsetting.... it does give me a little shock of recognition and nonrecognition. It is one of the things most worrying in the subject of identity” (*E.A.* 180). Given Stein’s theories of signification, this sign represents more than simply the publicists’ ability to create and circulate images independently of her. The words themselves symbolize the media’s need for a fixed and knowable “Gertrude Stein” that can be marketed to the reading public. As such, her name and likeness are being used to solidify a limited, and limiting, public identity that stands in direct opposition to the metaphysically unrepresentable person she had been attempting to fashion in her work.

Secondly, Stein’s newfound audience begins to complicate her writing process, a situation that, interestingly, she also characterizes in terms of her sense of self: “when [the outside world] does put a value on you then it gets inside or rather if the outside puts a value on you then all your inside gets to be outside” (*E.A.* 48). On the one hand, Stein fears that internalizing readers’ impressions and expectations will inevitably modify her own self-conception, in effect allowing the “outside” to get “inside.” Conversely, both her identity and the literary process that seems so central to it are now matters of concern for the general public, and thus are open to “outside” speculation and re-definition. Again, Stein’s primary anxiety stems from the fact that she is losing control of her “self” amidst larger systems of public discourse, a situation she seems ill-equipped to deal with immediately following the publication of *The Autobiography*.

The point I would like to emphasize here is not just that external systems of representation constrain Stein, but that these systems have a particularly strong effect on her because she has theoretically renounced the ability to make accurate or enduring statements about her own identity. As such, she has no way of reclaiming the authority of self-representation without compromising her belief in a fluid self that exists beyond the “violence” of signification. Even autobiography does not offer an easy way out, as traditional forms of the genre simply reinforce the importance of public image management and its concomitant need for coherent and salable identities.

So, as the integrity and autonomy of Stein’s “internal” world breaks down, she suffers from writer’s block, one of the primary difficulties in *Everybody’s Autobiography*.<sup>68</sup> Stein’s loss of control also leads her to shun people who might influence either her public image or her writing. For example, Stein repeatedly rebuffs her agent’s attempts to hire her a manager for the lecture tour, as she does not want “to go anywhere without... knowing where and doing there what anybody would want [her] to do there whether afterwards [she] wanted to or not” (*E.A.* 127). Eventually Stein fires him as a result of the ongoing dispute. Similarly, she mentions refusing to sign a contract promising another autobiography because she is unwilling to give up total creative control of her work. This dispute concludes with the blunt proclamation, “I would not sign a contract to do anything” (*E.A.* 133). Stein’s bravado seems slightly absurd, since we know that she did not single-handedly orchestrate her whole lecture tour and she obviously did not refuse to write a second autobiography. However, these gestures do

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<sup>68</sup> Stein tellingly uses the same internal/external opposition to explain both the limiting effect of her audience and the onset of her writer’s block: “I had written and was writing nothing. Nothing inside me needed to be written.... there was no word inside me that could not be spoken and so there was no word inside me. And I was not writing. I began to worry about identity” (66).

reinforce our sense of Stein as a woman struggling to maintain control over her life and writing.

And yet, even though Stein's pretense of authority does seem to return some semblance of the control she has lost, it does not by itself provide her text with the innovative perspective that would justify its creation. As I have previously argued, she is not simply interested in presenting solutions to the problems she introduces in her text, but is always equally concerned with how those solutions are incorporated into language itself. To understand one of the ways in which Stein attempts to formally address her difficulties, I would like to briefly examine the role of referentiality in *Everybody's Autobiography*, in part because it is one of the most commonly discussed features of Stein's work, but also because it is Dydo's primary point of distinction between "audience" and "real" writing.

As several of the quotations that I have previously cited suggest, representation in *Everybody's Autobiography* is a significantly more complex issue than it might appear at first glance. Nancy Blake provides a useful account of Stein's descriptive style in this book: "Stein banishes the adjective. She describes nothing. Or if she must do so, she will employ only the most banal of terms" (138). Such an approach is particularly striking given that the text is ostensibly an account of her first trip to America in thirty years. This is certainly not a typical "travel book," which David E. Johnson has called the form of "writing most preoccupied with sites and with... sight-seeing" (2). In fact, Stein spends more time cataloguing the people and places she visits than she does describing them. Often, no physical descriptions are offered at all and, whenever something is described, Stein undercuts any distinctive details in the image.

For instance, early on in the autobiography, she begins a story about receiving a phone call from David Edstrom: “David Edstrom was the big Swede who was a sculptor and was thin when I first knew him and then enormously fat” (*E.A.* 4). The only visual cues we receive relate to Edstrom’s size and, without any further details, they do not even give us a clear picture of his physical dimensions. She also destabilizes the temporality of this description, which ultimately makes the reference significantly more obscure. First, Edstrom himself is not given a specific size at a particular moment in time but rather a range of sizes extending over years. Second, the authorial perspective complicates the sequence of events. Stein is speaking in the present, or at least the moment in which she is writing, but is reflecting back to a man she saw repeatedly in the past. Then she begins an anecdote from an indeterminate point during her trip to America, an altogether different moment in the past, which does not involve the sculptor’s size in any way. In short, when the story begins, any direct reference to this man as another human body interacting with Stein has been stripped away and the reader is left with little more than the signifier “Edstrom” to mark the absence.<sup>69</sup>

This example is not intended to suggest that Stein discounts the importance of the human body. In fact, Stein’s exclusive focus on Edstrom’s stature serves to call attention to his form even as she disrupts its appearance in the text. However, much as she challenges the signifying function of language, Stein here refuses to reify the sculptor’s mobile and changing body in order to fix his identity on the page. What is more, she

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<sup>69</sup> Though I have discussed only one example, almost any reading from the text would underscore both the generality of Stein’s language and the lack of sustained narrative. For instance, Stein sums up their entire trip to Cleveland by saying, “Well we went on to Cleveland and that was pleasant too and it was the first American city where the streets were messy they said there was a reason but I do not remember the reason” (236).

“remembers” him in the first place because “he used to complain so that I like everybody in character” (*E.A.* 4). As such an attitude could potentially problematize her more recent theories of identity, Stein immediately dismisses this earlier position, claiming that character no longer “excites” her. Yet, again demonstrating her whimsical sensibility, she does not entirely refute this position and even implies that there may be some important truth in her earlier beliefs. She has simply chosen not to explore them anymore. So, while the repeated references to Edstrom’s size might seem unrelated to a passing comment about Stein’s earlier psychological theories, this juxtaposition serves to link the continuous development of the human body with both Stein’s refusal to look for underlying identities and her own personal sense of play.

In addition to these bodily disruptions, Edstrom’s appearance is further undermined by the overall pattern of repetition in the text. By the time he is described on page four of the book, Stein has already mentioned fourteen other individuals, not including herself, and she goes on to mention thirty-three different people in the first seven pages. Many critics have argued, with respect to *The Autobiography*, that Stein’s repetitive use of proper names is designed to make her seem more prominent, “the focus of a coterie of luminaries” (Bloom 84). However, in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, the sheer number of people, and the seeming lack of selectivity about who is included, make individuation difficult. Unlike in *The Autobiography*, where insignificant characters are generally not given proper names, Stein adds to the sense of displacement in this book by identifying people much less systematically. For instance, after arriving at Bryn Mawr, she sums up the entire faculty by saying, “The male professors were bearded, one of them promised me a photograph” (*E.A.* 187). Conversely, she spends a great deal of time in the

early chapters detailing each of a long succession of servants that have worked for her, some of whom are named and some of whom are not. When coupled with the limited focus on individual characters and the temporal shifts that disrupt both chronology and continuity, most characters in the book, famous or not, appear much like David Edstrom, contextually detached and physically displaced.<sup>70</sup>

This flow of names through Stein's text can certainly be read as a reflection of her experiences on the lecture tour. She spent over six months traveling around America, all the while giving talks, attending dinners, and visiting with friends and strangers. Yet Stein suggests that the strange combination of connection and isolation she feels on her trip also results from the current state of the world: "the earth is all covered over with every one there is really no relation between any one and so if this *Everybody's Autobiography* is to be the Autobiography of every one it is not to be of any connection between any one and any one because now there is none" (*E.A.* 102). While the paradox of universal isolation is itself a fairly common modernist conception, Stein pushes it in a new direction here by suggesting that such a condition not only undermines traditional narrative strategies but also fundamentally alters the focus of her work.

Yet even as Stein touts a radical shift in autobiographical writing and works to deny the reader any easy sense of "immersion" in the text, it is not entirely accurate to say that she rejects the referential function of language in this book. Many of the details that she gives are verifiable and thus would seem to point to a world outside of the text. David Edstrom is indeed a sculptor that Stein knew, and she did see him while in America. Moreover, Stein's work creates the appearance of a traditional, and thus

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<sup>70</sup> For a more detailed examination of Stein's attitude towards embodiment, see Susan McCabe "Delight in Dislocation".

supposedly referential, autobiography. The whole book is structured around her trip to America, an account which moves chronologically from “Chapter 1: What Happened After the Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas” through “Chapter 4: America” to “Chapter 5: Back Again,” and though, as we have seen, her anecdotal accounts frequently create chronological ruptures in the text, the overall pattern of narration does roughly follow a chronological sequence.<sup>71</sup>

Finally, Stein creates the impression of a direct and coherent autobiographical account by employing a conversational style. Through simple language and a recurrent emphasis on the narrator in the process of speaking, Stein sets up this text like a conversation, situated in the present tense, between narrator and reader.<sup>72</sup> For example, she initially “remembers” Edstrom’s story because of an anecdote about wooden umbrellas and disrupts her reminiscing to inform the reader that it “does remind me of David Edstrom but I have been reminded of him after I was reminded of Dashiell Hammett” (*E.A.* 2). She then goes on to recount these anecdotes in the specified order, faithful to both her audience and a coherent, if not altogether temporal, arrangement.

Yet even this small degree of organization does not exist entirely without complications. While such simple language and a pattern of direct address might seem to

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<sup>71</sup> S. C. Neuman, following Stein’s own theoretical formulations, claims, “the entire thrust of [Stein’s] literary theory and practice was towards the elimination of consciousness of time and particularly of the past” (19-20). This statement, employed in various forms by many critics, certainly seems hyperbolic in light of the various temporal markers that appear throughout *Everybody’s Autobiography*. While Stein herself might claim to be unaware of history and work to confuse narrative sequence in this text, her explicit organizational cues certainly evoke the past and could potentially provoke a totally different awareness of time for her readers.

<sup>72</sup> Though many critics have commented on the theoretical premises underlying Stein’s use of the “continuous present,” much less attention has been paid to the specific ways in which this style shapes her texts. For a theoretical account of the “continuous present” in Stein’s autobiographies, see Shirley Swartz “Generic “Continuous Present””. For an examination of Stein’s “continuous present” in relation to 20<sup>th</sup> century scientific thought, see Robert Chodat “Sense, Science”.



give the reader a stable position in the present tense moment of the text, Stein never particularizes the location of this moment, nor does she directly attribute any actual presence to her narrative voice. As such, the “continuous present” operates not as a specific site within the text from which she can deploy her anecdotes, but rather as an elusive counterpoint that disrupts the temporal continuity of the past tense narrative and enhances the reader’s alienation from the bulk of the narration. What is more, the specific temporal location of the present tense is itself continuously changing with the passage of time, which only complicates the intricate tapestry of events that unfold throughout the text.

In short, a deliberate slippage occurs, as Stein employs conventions that suggest her book is a straightforward transcription of events while she simultaneously alienates readers by stripping words of context, specificity, and, to a certain extent, progression.<sup>73</sup> By embodying this contradiction in the very form of her text, Stein draws attention to both the words themselves and readers’ assumptions about the referential function of language. Much like the seemingly absurd “America” quip discussed previously, Stein’s formal presentation of people and events does not convey details so much as it foregrounds the ways in which language can fail to transmit conventional meanings.

I have elaborated Stein’s approach to representation in part to bolster my previous claim that Stein, even in her “audience writing,” is always concerned with the interplay of form and meaning. However, I have also chosen to emphasize the particular difficulties

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<sup>73</sup> Many critics have examined Stein’s detachment from a psychoanalytic perspective; however, it would be interesting for such a reading to consider not just the effects of certain textual moves but also Stein’s broader linguistic theories, as the emotional distance she creates works to highlight the artificiality of representation as well. Moreover, Stein’s larger tendency to subsume interpersonal issues into aesthetic and formal theories deserves more serious consideration.

raised by her formal play in order to place these strategies within a larger pattern of contradictions that emerge throughout the text. After all, Stein has written an autobiography in part to declare that the genre, as it has traditionally been conceived, is logically incoherent.

Similarly, Stein, alongside what are essentially a series of logical critiques of traditional linguistic systems, even goes so far as to problematize the value of logic itself. She repeatedly suggests that causation is, if not impossible to trace, at least something far too complex for direct explanation. Lightning, with its connotations of ephemerality and apparent arbitrariness, becomes her symbol of the incomprehensible present moment. As Stein explains early in the text, “lightning never strikes twice in the same place and that is because the particular combination that makes lightning come there has so many things make it that all those things are not likely to come together again” (*E.A.* 16-17).

Following the logic of this statement, Stein frequently refuses to provide causal connections and often raises issues only to deny the reader any direct explanation. Just prior to her statement about lightning, she wonders why one of her friends became a painter and simply concludes, “there is no reason not and there is no reason to” (*E.A.* 16). She then goes on to claim that “generally speaking you have to be small” in physical size to be a painter, a claim which she does not attempt to justify or explain in any way (*E.A.* 17).

This denial, or perhaps more properly, this refusal of causation also leads Stein to dismiss the need for sequential order. My earlier discussion of representation reveals some of the ways she undercuts progression and causation in her anecdotal accounts of

America.<sup>74</sup> However, Stein is, at several points in the text, even more direct in her insistence on disrupting sequence. In what is perhaps one of the most famous passages from *Everybody's Autobiography*, she claims that, when counting, "you should never say three or even two, you should keep strictly on a basis of one" and always count "one one one" (E.A. 157-58). Stein's method of counting is analogous to her sense of temporality in the text, which is rooted in the idea that neither memory nor theories of cause-and-effect are sufficient to establish a connection between the present and other points in the past. Hence, each moment must ultimately be seen as a discrete point that is, in some sense, unrelated to any other instant in time.

This interpretation also reveals another potential contradiction with Stein's sense of time. If the current moment is unconnected to any previous point, then each instant is unique, but also, in theory, equivalent to any other. Thus, each new moment must repeatedly be signified with the same term, "one," rather than, say, some random array of numbers like "one, seven, four."

On one level, then, all of these various elements, including temporality, causation, sequence, representation, and even Stein's literal dismissal of authority help to create a sense of unlimited freedom in the textual space of *Everybody's Autobiography*. Yet, on another level, this supposed openness is beset by ironies and contradictions that only proliferate as the narrative progresses. For instance, Stein needs to assert her own authority in order to denounce the influence of outside forces and thus must always reintroduce a delimiting power dynamic into the textual space. She must also erect a logical framework and marshal coherent, if often roundabout, arguments for establishing

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<sup>74</sup> Kurt Curnutt, drawing on a similar sense of Stein's disruptive narrative techniques, refers to this autobiography as a "haphazard picaresque" (304).

an alogical “narrative” that emphasizes the slipperiness of language itself. Finally, the arbitrary sense of time exists in relation to a series of deliberately placed organizational cues and the ultimately repetitive and predictable movement of the present, that is, Stein’s “one one one.”

In this web of contradictions and logical puzzles, “Gertrude Stein” becomes nearly impossible to locate throughout *Everybody’s Autobiography*. She comes to exist as nothing more than a textual voice reverberating through past events reconstituted in a present moment that escapes definition or explanation. Amidst such contradictory significations, the narrator becomes a philosopher of riddles and off-hand statements that seem to necessitate no proof because they are made without regard for causation, even as they collectively allude to an underlying logic that both justifies and threatens to undermine the whole project. Ultimately, it is an identity that is both fixed in language but never stable or definable, a linguistic flash of lightning that always exists in the present tense and is never logically bound by any accumulating “inside.” In this way, Stein is able to dismiss the threat an audience poses to her creative “inside” because she has not only undermined the processes of unproblematically representing an historical self, but she has also theoretically evacuated, without altogether eliminating, the space where such a self may have existed.

The sense of ambivalence that comes to dominate *Everybody’s Autobiography* creates a narrative full of recognizable words, arguments, and situations that somehow seem to deny readers their “real” meaning.<sup>75</sup> This difficult position has many

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<sup>75</sup> Stein’s awareness of the potential obscurity of everyday language could offer another useful connection between her work and that of Ernest Hemingway, who was briefly a member of her artistic circle. For useful accounts of Stein’s influence on Hemingway, see Charles Harmon Cagle “Cezanne Nearly”; Susan J. Wolfe “Insistence and Simplicity”.

metaphorical applications to the narrative, as Stein, who claims to be already in the midst of an identity crisis created by her new celebrity persona, finds herself in a country that is both familiar and radically different from anything she has ever seen before. However, as I have demonstrated, Stein's approach is also a formal methodology, one designed to depict events as things "existing" and not "as they had been which is history." She does this both literally with an ambivalent narrative voice that presses relentlessly into the present and figuratively by utilizing contradictions that never seem to settle on the page. Trapped in a media environment where even the denial of autobiographical identity can be seen as an intervention in celebrity discourse, Stein attempts to confound the all-consuming logic of this system by incorporating both poles simultaneously. In effect, Stein attempts to simultaneously adopt the role of avant-garde writer and popular author by creating a book that is both easy and difficult, equal parts celebrity autobiography, philosophical meditation, and formal language experiment.

In this way, Stein confounds not only those readers who would quickly relegate her to one side of the "great divide," but also those who might too easily dismiss the material and theoretical challenges she faces. Stein's textual strategies certainly afford her enough freedom to write this second autobiography, but they also leave her perpetually trapped between two poles in the literary marketplace. As a result, despite Stein's characteristically even tone, this book is significantly darker than her first autobiography. She repeatedly discusses the necessity of death and the inevitable downfall of civilizations. She talks, at some length, about several unsolved murders. She even brings up her estranged brother Leo, whom she had largely ignored in *The Autobiography*.

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The ending of this book, as Richard Bridgman points out, is also strikingly ambivalent (283-4). After traveling to England for a ballet adaptation of Stein's play *They Must. Be Wedded. To Their Wife.*, another major triumph for the author, Stein and Toklas return to Paris, now a depressing city preoccupied with the possibility of war. On the flight home, Stein is overcome with fear at the sight of a mysterious fog that seems to run down the middle of the English Channel. Then, without any further discussion of either her fear or the fog, the plane lands and the book closes on a note of resigned affirmation: "perhaps I am not I even if my little dog knows me but anyway I like what I have and now it is today" (E.A. 328).

The fear and uncertainty that linger at the edges of Stein's otherwise playful autobiography, apparent in this last instance as she travels between a site of public acceptance and the private residence where her experimental texts are created, have received little critical attention, despite the fact that they recur in other works during the 1930's. As we have seen, one of Stein's most forceful theoretical meditations from this period, and not surprisingly the book she completed just prior to writing her second autobiography, *The Geographical History of America*, has a similarly ambivalent conclusion. In this work, Stein has a clear preference between the two poles, but knows that she can never escape entirely into the placid existence of the Human Mind.

Still, Stein is not simply the victim of her own ambivalent formulations as she manages to cultivate her multifaceted persona by existing between the poles of celebrity discourse. For instance, Kirk Curnutt, in an analysis of the trope of authenticity in *Everybody's Autobiography*, demonstrates how Stein feigns ignorance of common publicity techniques, as when she has a photographer define the term "layout," in order to

depict herself as free from market influence ("Inside and Outside" 305-06). Yet, Stein adopts a similar naïve pose to insulate herself from charges of being a pretentious highbrow author, a very real danger for her when she first arrived in the United States. The wariness with which many approached Stein for the first time is evident in newspaper reports about her from the early days of the tour. For instance, Lansing Warren, who interviewed her for the *New York Times Magazine* shortly before she left for the United States, begins his piece by emphasizing popular preconceptions of the author. He refers to her repeatedly as a "Grecian sibyl" and discusses his own hesitancy to visit another "eccentric studio" typical of "Parisian bohemian life." However, his apprehensions quickly fade in front of the "quiet comfort, neatness, and order" of her studio and the charms of the woman herself (9). In *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein attempts to cultivate the same sense of openness by blithely ignoring social customs that would set her apart from others and refusing to distinguish among the various people she encounters on her travels, whether they be professors or mechanics or police officers. She even requests to ride up front with the chauffeurs so that they can talk along the way (E.A. 221).<sup>76</sup>

Thus, unlike many modernist authors, Stein has not only constructed a persona that insulates her from the corruption of crass materialism, but one that also distances her from the rarefied airs of the avant-garde. It is a complex construction that allows her to become, as Laurel Bollinger says, "the dual figure who writes the successful novel and also the solitary genius who writes the experiments in language. She need not choose one

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<sup>76</sup> Stein adopted a similar stance throughout the mid-1930's. For instance, in an interview with the *New York Herald Tribune*, Stein said, "I like ordinary people who don't bore me. Highbrows, you know, always do" (qtd. in Mellow 409).

over the other” (254-5).<sup>77</sup> Of course, as Stein reveals indirectly throughout her text, it is not always an easy position and it certainly comes with its own set of costs.

Still, it is her effort to write these contradictory notions of authorship into the form of an autobiography that supposedly gives her the inspiration to escape her writer’s block and craft a sequel to *The Autobiography*. The threat of redundancy looms large over this book, in part because its subject matter, the lecture tour, is dependent on the popularity generated by her previous book and in part because she is elaborating on themes introduced in her last text. Yet, Stein’s formal and theoretical innovations lead her to create a new textual space that embodies the seemingly irresolvable tensions generated by the publication of *The Autobiography* and draws attention, again and again, to the philosophical difficulties underlying conventional modes of representation.

Given this reading of the text, I would like to return one last time to the title and view it as equally bound up in the larger pattern of contradictions that structure this narration. “Everybody’s Autobiography” is a productive disruption under which the text as a whole operates. It immediately raises a wide range of methodological issues that perhaps do not exist at all and, in its compelling refusal of resolution, helps to unify a work that rejects stasis on literal, narrative, and theoretical levels. It also draws attention to issues of image, power, and agency at the beginning of a text that relentlessly interrogates autobiography as a way of both re-claiming the authority of self-representation and transcending the need for it. Lastly, it represents Stein’s attempt to create a new textual form, one that seems familiar and accessible, but is simultaneously a critique of the assumptions inherent in that familiarity. According to this reading, Stein’s

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<sup>77</sup> Laurel Bollinger also sees Stein as embracing duality in the wake of *The Autobiography*. However, she glosses over much of Stein’s work during the 1930’s, including *Everybody’s Autobiography*, and claims that this shift culminates with the novel *Ida* in 1941.



text does, after all, rely on the apparent difficulty of its title and, more particularly, the specifically oppositional form that these difficulties can take. However, before subsuming *Everybody's Autobiography* entirely into larger patterns in Stein's oeuvre or even just into the binary arrangements present in her autobiographies, I would also like to suggest that it is Stein's uncompromising use of contradiction that sets this text apart from the others and ultimately allows her to find a new space for writing in an environment that had suddenly embraced but also strangely impeded her production of complex "literary" texts.

## *The Crack-Up of F. Scott Fitzgerald*

### **F. Scott Fitzgerald and His Critics**

F. Scott Fitzgerald's short autobiographical sketch, "The Crack-Up," first appeared in the February 1936 issue of *Esquire* without advance publicity of any kind.<sup>78</sup> This silence is surprising in part because of the sensational nature of Fitzgerald's piece, which explores his psychological state in the period leading up to and immediately following what he obscurely refers to as a collapse of his "nervous reflexes" ("Crack-Up" 71). The lack of publicity is also perplexing because Arnold Gingrich, the editor of *Esquire*, frequently used controversy to stimulate magazine sales. In one instance, he ran an announcement informing readers that Langston Hughes had submitted a short story called "A Good Job Done." The announcement explains that this piece is about a wealthy white man named Mr. Lloyd who falls in love with "one of these golden browns," which leads to a confrontation between Mr. Lloyd and "a tall black good looking guy." Just in case the inflammatory nature of racial conflict and potential miscegenation might be lost on some readers, Gingrich adds, "this is the kind of story that no commercial magazine would touch with a ten foot pole" (Gingrich "Three Characters"). He then asks the largely affluent white male readership of *Esquire* to vote on whether or not such a work should

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<sup>78</sup> Fitzgerald's "The Crack-Up" was the first of a three-part autobiographical series. The next two pieces, "Pasting It Together" and "Handle with Care," were published in March and April of 1936 respectively. I will follow scholarly convention in referring to the three-part series collectively as The Crack-Up essays. I will also follow scholarly convention in pointing out that when Edmund Wilson first collected these three pieces in *The Crack-Up*, he transposed the titles, and only the titles, of the last two pieces. In subsequent printings of Wilson's book, however, the error was corrected, a point overlooked by some scholars who have noted the change and then incorrectly reversed the corrected titles in their work.

be published.<sup>79</sup> Confrontational responses to this query appeared in the magazine for the next three months until the story was finally published in April 1934.<sup>80</sup>

Despite this flair for the sensational, Gingrich evidently did not see much commercial value in Fitzgerald's revelations. After having run six largely unremarkable and, more importantly, unremarked pieces by Fitzgerald over the previous two years, including two articles that offered fragmented and impressionistic details of his life with Zelda,<sup>81</sup> Gingrich explained to readers, "we thought the whole idea of a series of self-revelatory sketches was lacking in general interest" (Gingrich "Backstage" 28). In private correspondence, he was much more critical of Fitzgerald's public reputation, claiming that "at [the time of publishing "The Crack-Up"]", sixteen years after [Fitzgerald's] fame, a lot of people thought he was dead" (qtd. in West "Esquire" 155).

Yet, in spite of this apparent lack of interest in Fitzgerald's work, the response to his Crack-Up pieces was immediate and passionate. Fitzgerald was flooded with

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<sup>79</sup> For information about *Esquire's* circulation, see Arnold Gingrich Nothing but People 140. For scholarly analyses of these numbers, see Tom Pendergast Creating the Modern Man 220-21; Hugh Merrill Esqy 51, 54, 58-60.

<sup>80</sup> In order to give a sense of this "debate," I would like to provide one set of examples from the February 1934 issue, that is, the issue immediately following the initial call for responses. One reader, citing Voltaire, implies that freedom of speech is worth dying for and characterizes any man who feels otherwise as "effete." In opposition, a man from Oklahoma claims, "The World War gave negroes delusions of equality and strength that culminated in a race riot in this town and it took the city incinerator days to burn the black bodies... Don't you think having the only nigger in Congress is enough of an embarrassment to the administration without Chicago starting something that it may cost men and millions to stop" ("The Sound and the Fury" 12).

<sup>81</sup> The two articles explicitly about Scott and Zelda were "'Show Mr. and Mrs. F. to Number-'" (published during May and June 1934) and "Auction-Model 1934" (July 1934). Both were run with a joint by-line crediting Scott and Zelda. I have chosen to emphasize Scott's authorship above because his name would have been more recognizable to the male readers of *Esquire*. However, scholars agree that Zelda was the primary author of these pieces, which were revised by Scott prior to publication. In his biography of Fitzgerald, Matthew J. Bruccoli compares a portion of Zelda's original text to Scott's revised version in order to show how he "polished" her prose and worked to make larger thematic points more explicit for readers. See Matthew J. Bruccoli Epic Grandeur 385.

correspondence from old friends, other writers, and even complete strangers, letters that covered a range of emotions from genuine sympathy to thinly-veiled contempt.<sup>82</sup>

*Esquire*, which had encouraged reader participation from the very first issue, was also inundated with responses. In the June 1936 issue, Gingrich recanted his initial skepticism about the articles and admitted, “Seldom has as much interest been aroused by anything printed in our pages” (Gingrich “Backstage” 28).<sup>83</sup> What is more, the discussion was not limited simply to Fitzgerald’s acquaintances or readers of the magazine. Cultural critics and journalists from around the country felt compelled to assess the pieces, both publicly and privately. Perhaps the most incisive commentary came from E. B. White, who, in the *New Yorker*’s “Talk of the Town” column, glosses Fitzgerald’s first piece as “picturesque despondency” and then places it in the context of *Esquire*’s liquor, clothing, and automobile ads, all of which, White claims, convey the message that “now if ever in the history of the world a man should be at peace in body and spirit” (White 11).

In addition to all of the attention these pieces received during Fitzgerald’s lifetime, and no doubt as a direct result of it, they have also attracted a significant amount of attention from scholars. Since one of my concerns will be the relationship between Fitzgerald’s work, particularly the Crack-Up essays, and public perceptions of them, I

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<sup>82</sup> Scott Donaldson’s article “The Crisis of Fitzgerald’s ‘Crack-Up’” provides a detailed summary of published and unpublished responses to the Crack-Up essays. Much of this article is also incorporated into his provocative biography of Fitzgerald, *Fool for Love: F. Scott Fitzgerald*.

<sup>83</sup> Gingrich’s confession seems designed to spark interest in Fitzgerald’s second series of autobiographical pieces that began running in the next issue. (The above quote is followed by the line, “So there’ll be more soon.”) However, Gingrich expressed similar sentiments in a variety of other places as well. In a letter to his father, who disliked the first two pieces, Gingrich says, “I felt very much as you did about the Scott Fitzgerald series but this is a case where my misgivings proved to be wrong as these articles have been enormously popular. I myself saw no sense in such a parade of futility,” Gingrich archives: (Box I, Personal Correspondence 1936, Letter to his father John, on March 25, 1936).

would like to begin by briefly outlining several major critical approaches to these pieces. This examination should not only help to make clear exactly where my own reassessment is positioned in relationship to other scholarship in the field, but it will also establish several of the larger themes that will be important later in my analysis.

Immediately after Fitzgerald's death in December 1940, critics were primarily concerned with re-assessing his life and work. Following the 1945 publication of *The Crack-Up*, a collection of Fitzgerald's articles, select correspondence, and various entries from his notebooks edited by Edmund Wilson, critics primarily focused on how these autobiographical pieces could be fit into the larger narratives that were being constructed around the author. One of the most popular versions of Fitzgerald's story, a story that still circulates in various forms today, heralded him as a tragic hero. It goes something like this: Fitzgerald's first book, *This Side of Paradise*, published in 1920, catapulted him to fame as the voice of a younger generation disillusioned by the war and distanced from the seemingly outdated values of their parents. After several collections of short stories and another novel, Fitzgerald reached his artistic peak in 1925 with *The Great Gatsby*. After this point, life became increasingly difficult as his nearly constant drinking grew more and more debilitating, his relationship with his wife Zelda worsened, and he was forced to pump out artistically worthless short stories to pay bills. Zelda's first hospitalization in 1930, for what was later diagnosed as schizophrenia, marked the end of Fitzgerald's golden years and the beginning of the final decade of his life, years marred by alcoholism, depression, and poverty.

In 1934, nine years after the appearance of *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald finally published his fourth novel, *Tender is the Night*. The novel had three printings, sold roughly 15,000

copies, and was not poorly reviewed by critics, but it was neither the critical darling nor the runaway success that the author needed to boost his emotional and economic condition. Ultimately, he made only about \$5000 from *Tender is the Night*, not nearly enough to pay back the debts he had accrued with his publishing house (Scribner's), his publisher (Max Perkins), his agent (Harold Ober), the many clinics that treated Zelda throughout the 30's, the various people and institutions that took care of his daughter Scottie, and his mother. An overwhelming sense of failure sent Fitzgerald into an alcoholic depression for the next two years that culminated with the publication of "The Crack-Up" in February 1936. These essays marked a turning point, an admission of his failure and subsequent breakdown that allowed him to recommit himself to the craft of writing. He moved to Hollywood in 1937 and got a steady job as a scriptwriter for MGM. He sobered up, paid back some of his debts, got involved in a serious relationship with British columnist Sheilah Graham, and finally began work on a new novel about Hollywood, a book that he thought would be the crowning achievement of his career. Tragically, his magnificent comeback was cut short by the stroke that took his life in December 1940.

Perhaps the most famous piece written on Fitzgerald in the first phase of his critical reassessment, Lionel Trilling's "F. Scott Fitzgerald," supports precisely such a reading of the Crack-Up articles and of Fitzgerald's later years more generally.<sup>84</sup> Trilling claims that Fitzgerald's confessions reveal his "heroic awareness" of both "the lost and

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<sup>84</sup> I am citing from the essay that appears in *The Liberal Imagination*. However, this text, published in 1950, uses material from two earlier pieces Trilling had written on Fitzgerald, an introduction he wrote for the New Directions edition of *The Great Gatsby* in 1945 and a review of *The Crack-Up*, also from 1945, published in *The Nation*. For more information on this article, and other secondary materials on Fitzgerald, see Jackson R. Bryer [Critical Reputation](#).

the might-have-been” as well as the “exemplary role” that he might strive to fulfill during what would turn out to be the last years of his life. In this view, the sheer spectacle of the writer’s failures (Trilling avoids any direct reference to alcoholism) could only serve “to augment the moral force of the poise and fortitude which marked Fitzgerald’s mind in the few recovered years that were left to him”(243-44). Trilling then goes on to systematically dismantle some of the most prevalent criticisms of Fitzgerald’s writing, setting up his final effusive praise for *The Great Gatsby*, presumably the culmination of Fitzgerald’s career and a lasting monument to his talent.

The appeal of this larger story seems obvious: spectacular success, a decadent fall, the triumphant return, which is engineered primarily through the exercise of an indomitable individual will,<sup>85</sup> and the final tragic death, a stroke which could be seen as just one more lingering punishment for, and a warning against, years of alcoholic waste. Such an arc not only makes for a good story, it also accords closely with a major historical paradigm frequently applied to the 1920’s and 30’s as a whole. Marc Dolan, in his *Modern Lives*, glosses this pattern as youthful exuberance, narcissistic decline, bored decadence, and finally the “nervous collapse” that was the Great Depression, a pattern that, not so coincidentally, he sees running through many of Fitzgerald’s autobiographical pieces in the 1930’s (134).

As appealing as this dramatic and relatively linear narrative is, it has been resisted by many critics and biographers who have attempted to cull truth from the legend,

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<sup>85</sup> Trilling praises Fitzgerald’s individualism and admiringly cites his willingness “to blame himself...even though at the time when he was most aware of his destiny it was fashionable with minds more pretentious than his to lay all personal difficulty whatever at the door of the ‘social order’” (245).

primarily by showing the failures of Fitzgerald's later years alongside his successes.<sup>86</sup> For example, after writing the Crack-Up essays in the winter of 1935, Fitzgerald's life remained relatively unchanged for over a year, as he continued to drink and actively resisted his agent's suggestions that he look for steady work in Hollywood. Then, after he finally signed a contract with MGM in July of 1937, he worked for eighteen months and received only one on-screen credit for his writing. His contract was not renewed at the end of 1938. Furthermore, Fitzgerald's "poise and fortitude" did fail him from time to time during his final years and he resorted to drinking on several occasions, often with disastrous consequences.<sup>87</sup>

However, these details only appeared tangentially in the years immediately after Fitzgerald's death, when most critics took to debating his literary merit. William Troy, speaking of Fitzgerald's omissions from the Crack-Up essays, said, "In the etiology of the FSF case, as the psychologists would say, the roots run much deeper, and nobody cares to disturb them much at this early date" (Troy, 28). Scholar Alfred Kazin pushes the case further by suggesting that Scott employed the form of the guilty confession to

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<sup>86</sup> Such efforts to challenge this narrative have only served to perpetuate its appearance in the critical literature. And while I too have resurrected this story in my own work, I do not simply mean to support or discredit it, but to emphasize the political and rhetorical functions it has served for both those who support and those who challenge it.

<sup>87</sup> Perhaps the most famous of Fitzgerald's relapses took place during a free-lance film job in early 1939. He was hired by United Artists to help improve the script for a movie called *Winter Carnival*. The plot revolved around the winter carnival at Dartmouth, and in February he traveled to the university with fellow script writer Budd Schulberg. On the plane, Budd convinced Fitzgerald to share a bottle of champagne with him, which led to a three-day bender that got both writers fired. The whole experience was later memorialized in Schulberg's novel, The Disenchanted, which was based, in part, on their trip to Dartmouth. For an account of Fitzgerald's difficulties during his final years, see Brucoli 432-94. For a concise history of Fitzgerald's work in Hollywood, see Alan Margolies "Hollywood". Sheilah Graham, Scott's partner during his final years, has also written extensively of her time with him. In particular, see Sheilah Graham Beloved Infidel; Sheilah Graham Rest of the Story.



emphasize his emotional revelation and draw attention away from the larger issues underlying his breakdown. Yet, Kazin does not dwell on Fitzgerald's problems in the article, nor does he challenge the larger narrative of redemption that began to surround Scott during the 1940's.<sup>88</sup> When discussing the Crack-Up essays, he comes to much the same conclusion as Trilling, claiming that these pieces mark the point at which "He who had never given himself freely to art now did" (180).<sup>89</sup>

It was not until after the publication of Schulberg's *The Disenchanted* in 1950 and the first comprehensive biography of Fitzgerald, Arthur Mizener's *The Far Side of Paradise* in 1951, that the darker elements of Fitzgerald's final years began to appear regularly next to his successes, forcing many critics to reassess more sanguine readings of the Crack-Up essays. More and more during the 1950's and 60's, these pieces came to be characterized as just another failed commitment from Fitzgerald's depression years.<sup>90</sup> For example, novelist Wright Morris, writing in 1958, says that, while Fitzgerald might have dedicated himself to his craft at the end of "Handle with Care," he ultimately "had been suckled too long on the sweep pap of life, and the incomparable milk of wonder, to be more than a writer in name only, resigned to the fact" (29). Similarly, James Miller, in

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<sup>88</sup> For an interesting and concise summary of larger trends in Fitzgerald's critical reception, see Jackson R. Bryer "The Critical Reputation of F. Scott Fitzgerald".

<sup>89</sup> Kazin's depiction of the Crack-Up is certainly darker and more tentative than Trilling's portrayal. For instance, he reads "Handle with Care" literally and suggests that Fitzgerald's ultimate commitment to art is a means of survival only, not a "heroic" revelation. However, his piece does ultimately accord with the larger "tragic hero" story outlined above.

<sup>90</sup> I think it is important to note here that the availability of knowledge about Fitzgerald does not seem to be an overriding factor in the critical positions I am laying out. That is, I do not believe a critic like Trilling would have been less laudatory had he been privy to more negative details about Fitzgerald's life. The letters collected in *The Crack-Up* alone contain enough information to suggest that the end of Fitzgerald's life was not as "heroic" as Trilling claims. And a critic like Edmund Wilson, who attended Princeton with Fitzgerald, certainly knew enough about these final days to challenge such a view if he felt so inclined.

his 1964 book exploring the craft of Fitzgerald's writing, claims that the Crack-Up essays must be seen as "embarrassing because [Fitzgerald] is obviously still keenly involved in a losing emotional struggle to become cured" (128).

For my purposes, the most interesting facet of this wide body of criticism is that it presents only one very literal reading of Fitzgerald's Crack-Up essays. Despite otherwise wide discrepancies in opinion, tone, and philosophical orientation, every one of these critics reads these pieces as a personal revelation of failure and a public declaration of change. Such uniformity of opinion might seem less surprising given that much of this work attempts to understand Fitzgerald's writing in relation to the biographical details of his life. However, even on the biographical terms in which most of these criticisms operate, there is ample evidence to suggest that Fitzgerald did not envision these essays as a straightforward confessional narrative.

In his own ledger, which lists both published writings, organized by year of publication, and the amount Fitzgerald was paid for each piece, he listed the Crack-Up essays under the heading of "Biography" (Sklar 309). Similarly, Arnold Gingrich notes that "'sketches' was the [term] Scott always used to refer to such things as the now-famous Crack-Up series of 1936" ("Introduction" xi-xii). In his ledger, Fitzgerald employed the term "sketches," as opposed to stories or articles, to refer to pieces that outlined a specific type of person. For instance, Zelda did a series of articles for *College Humor* magazine in 1929 that described different types of women, like the "Poor Working Girl," or the "Girl with Talent." Scott listed these in his ledger under the heading, "Zelda's sketches." This label suggests that, while the Crack-Up essays might certainly have come out of his own personal experience and employed details from his

life, he did not necessarily see them as a pure revelation of his character or as a simple transcription of his desires.

Moreover, the assumption that the Crack-Up articles were conceived as a declaration of action, that is, as a re-commitment to writing serious literature, is belied by the very process of their construction. Fitzgerald wrote the first article at least a month before the second two, and, early on in “The Crack-Up,” he dismisses the idea of extending his discussion further, saying, “What was to be done about [the crack-up] will have to rest in what used to be called the ‘womb of time’” (“Crack-Up” 72). What is more, Fitzgerald not only immediately denied in personal correspondence that these pieces reflected a major breakdown<sup>91</sup>, but, as soon as they began to receive attention, he approached the *Saturday Evening Post*, who paid contributors significantly more than *Esquire*, about doing a similar series for them (Piper 240).<sup>92</sup>

Fitzgerald’s desire to spin his series off into a larger body of work was in no way unusual for him or for other writers in the 1930’s, a time when editorial budgets were decreasing and a series of stories could guarantee a paycheck from month to month. These projects also created an extra source of income, as the stories could easily be put together and published in a collection. Between 1931 and 1932 alone, seven new series of short stories appeared in the *Saturday Evening Post* and several long-running audience favorites began showing up with greater frequency (Potts 74). Fitzgerald himself, from

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<sup>91</sup> He wrote to a former lover, Beatrice Dance, in March 1936, “For myself don’t take that little trilogy in *Esquire* too seriously.” See Matthew J. Bruccoli and Margaret M. Duggan, eds. *Correspondence* 427-28.

<sup>92</sup> The *Post* ultimately declined, but he did write another set of melancholy reflections for *Esquire*. The three pieces, “An Author’s House,” “Afternoon of an Author,” and “An Author’s Mother,” were published in July, August, and September of 1936 respectively.

early on in his career, had attempted to spin off both articles<sup>93</sup> and stories<sup>94</sup> into longer sequences, and often toyed with the idea of putting out more collections of his work. In March 1936, he even suggested grouping some of his autobiographical pieces into a collection to capitalize on interest in “The Crack-Up.”<sup>95</sup> None of this historical information is meant to suggest that Fitzgerald was not emotionally invested in his essays, or that they did not reflect some aspect of his personal experience. However, his casual treatment of these pieces and his willingness to revisit the grounds of what would seem to be a personal tragedy for money and public visibility clearly undermine the image of a writer recommitting to some set of pure artistic values.

Contemporary autobiographical critics in the United States, following the poststructural turn of the late 1960’s, would seem to agree with Fitzgerald and largely ignore the biographical impetus of the early critical studies. Instead, these critics see autobiography as a socially constructed genre that deploys recognizable conventions to order the chaos of human experience. Thus, more recent studies of the Crack-Up tend to examine the rhetorical conventions employed by both Fitzgerald and the author-persona

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<sup>93</sup> Fitzgerald spun off the success of his “How to Live on \$36,000 a Year,” first published in 1924, into two other articles, “How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year” and “The High Cost of Macaroni.” The latter article, alternatively titled “What Price Macaroni” in correspondence with his agent, ultimately went unpublished. For the short history of “Macaroni,” see Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed., *As Ever* 67n., 78, 79n., 81, 89, 91.

<sup>94</sup> Scott began his first story sequence in 1928, a series for the *Saturday Evening Post* about a young man named Basil Duke Lee who appears similar in many respects to a young Fitzgerald. He followed these stories with a series about Josephine Perry, a young woman roughly based on Ginevra King, one of his early love interests. Throughout the 1930’s, Scott attempted to publish another series, but failed repeatedly. His attempts included story sequences about an intern (1932), a French count in the 9<sup>th</sup> century (1934), a single father and his daughter (1935), and a nurse nicknamed Trouble (1936). The only series he was able to extend to any length, 17 short pieces about a studio hack named Pat Hobby (1940), was published by *Esquire*, which accepted nearly everything Fitzgerald submitted.

<sup>95</sup> See John Kuehl and Jackson R. Bryer, eds. *Dear Scott* 227-30.

that these pieces create. The relationship between author and text along with the whole host of theoretical issues that positing such a relationship entails have largely been left for biographers and literary historians.

Yet, despite a thorough theoretical critique of previous approaches to the Crack-Up essays and a steadily increasing body of historical analysis detailing Fitzgerald's complex attitudes towards his writing, many contemporary critics draw similar conclusions about these pieces and thereby reinforce traditional understandings of Fitzgerald's life and work. For example, A. Banerjee's performative reading of the Crack-Up might differ in tone and theoretical perspective from Trilling's early homage, but the underlying assessment of Fitzgerald's life remains fundamentally unchanged.<sup>96</sup> Banerjee says, "Fitzgerald underwent a chastening experience [writing the Crack-Up articles] in the sense that he was able to analyse his past as a writer in the context of the demands of the present. He came to realize that he would have to change according to the changing circumstances of his life" (48). Here, the impetus for change and the vision of life on which it is based emerge in the process of writing rather than simply appearing in print as a fully-formed product of consciousness. Moreover, Fitzgerald's supposed goal is characterized as a fluid target perpetually re-created in response to changing material conditions, not as a static ideal that would function like a beacon in the final years of his life. However, both Trilling's and Banerjee's essays ultimately work to perpetuate a

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<sup>96</sup> While Trilling and Banerjee's approach may seem the same when viewed from the larger perspective of the biographical narrative, I do not mean to suggest that these two critics are employing this narrative for the same reason or to attain similar effects. However, elaborating on the particular tactics and aims of critics writing nearly fifty years apart would take me far outside the scope of my argument.

larger vision of Fitzgerald's life that accords quite closely with the general narrative I have previously outlined.

Kirk Curnutt takes a more rhetorical approach to the Crack-Up essays, but again, his analysis begins with the assumption that Fitzgerald is employing the "clean break," a device predicated on an individual's supposedly autonomous "power of self-transformation" (Curnutt "Clean Break" 299). Curnutt argues that the angry initial response to these articles stems from the fact that this rhetorical device conflicts with the conventions of celebrity journalism, a form of writing requiring the construction of stable images that audiences can trust. As a critic focusing on the rhetorical strategies employed in the Crack-Up, his willingness to fashion an argument around a literal reading of the text seems surprising, especially since such a reading requires him to disregard many features of the text. For instance, he notes that the narrator of "The Crack-Up" criticizes "Hollywood" endings, but is subsequently forced to acknowledge that his own reading of the text, which concludes with the narrator asserting "total power of self-control and self-determination" through the clean break, posits an equally sensational conclusion. Fitzgerald only needs to commit to his new life and the previous failures will simply fall away. Curnutt dismisses the contradiction as "curious." He then writes off the stoic tone of the ending, which again directly contradicts a "triumphant" reading of the text and, Curnutt admits, was striking enough to draw commentary from the readers of *Esquire* ("Clean Break" 307-08).

Similarly, he must dismiss the text's "relentless sarcasm" as an "emotional hedge" that allows Fitzgerald's persona to enact a search for authentic self-expression without having to commit to any of the modes he "briefly inhabit[s]." Thus, when the narrator

spends too much time discussing contemporary affairs, he must parody “his own self-absorption by portraying himself [in parenthetical asides] as a pontificating public speaker who bores his audience” (“Clean Break” 307 fn10). This reading is plausible up to a certain point. The narrator clearly wants to distance himself from the persona of a lecturer. Yet, from a rhetorical perspective, such a move does not simply clear the path for another voice, one which might be the “proper form of expression” that the narrator is seeking (“Clean Break” 307 fn10). Instead, the denial itself, along with a noted proclivity for digressing into tedious lectures, must be seen as part of the larger figure being created in the Crack-Up essays.

In fact, Fitzgerald, who would later write his daughter that “he really just wanted to preach to people in some acceptable form,” has constructed pieces that are, in many ways, much closer to distanced reflections than they are to traditional forms of celebrity confession. The narrator consistently refuses to reveal salacious details or assign blame for his breakdown. Moreover, he anticipates and actively resists potential autobiographical readings of the text. For instance, he claims that alcoholism could not be the cause of his problems because he has not had a drink in six months. While this claim is not literally true, it does at the very least attempt to shift focus away from common associations with Fitzgerald’s personal life and redirect attention to the specific claims being presented in the essays. To make this emphasis even more clear, the narrator repeatedly proposes various “theses” that he then explicitly tests against his own experiences.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. “Moreover, to go back to my thesis that life has a varying offensive, the realization of having cracked was not simultaneous with a blow, but with a reprieve” (“The Crack-Up” 71).

The three articles as a whole are structured as a “brief history” that systematically explores the narrator’s breakdown.<sup>98</sup> “The Crack-Up” begins with a few propositions and a brief history of the narrator’s early life before moving on to draw a psychological portrait of him during the periods immediately preceding and following the crack-up. “Pasting It Together” picks up where the first essay left off, dealing primarily with a period of “vacuous quiet” following his immediate responses to the crack-up (“Pasting” 76). In this relatively calm state, the narrator is able to reflect rationally on his own life and his current state of existence. “Handle with Care” concludes the trilogy by explaining the narrator’s supposed plan for moving forward in a world that now seems hostile and threatening to the author-figure.

It is important to make the systematic focus and argumentative nature of these pieces explicit in part because many critics, perhaps reflecting traditional literary disdain for such seemingly lowbrow celebrity-driven texts, tend to dismiss precisely these elements of the Crack-Up essays. Milton Hindus, for instance, assumes these pieces are to be read entirely “as confession” and that they suffer because they are littered with so many “intellectual generalizations” that “rhetoric... seeps in whenever true feeling fails” (90). Alternatively, Henry Dan Piper disregards any structural trends that might emerge from the collective work by claiming that the latter two essays “covered pretty much the same ground as the first, but with more humor and detachment” (237).

By reading these pieces not simply as a sensationalized confession, but as an attempt to explore the psychological and theoretical undercurrents of a generalized

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<sup>98</sup> As noted above, these pieces were probably not conceived initially as a single unit. However, the larger pattern of the pieces suggests that Fitzgerald did consider their overall structure when writing the last two articles.



nervous breakdown, what Marc Dolan calls the “quasi-Platonic standardized form of [the] ‘crack-up’” begins to make more sense (143). The narrator’s distant tone and inclination for generalities are much better suited to reflection or interrogation than to tawdry revelation.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, his vague commentary on a past full of “too much anger and too many tears” should not necessarily call to mind the now quite detailed biographical picture we have of Fitzgerald in the 1930’s (“Crack-Up” 71). Instead, it draws attention to very absence of personal details and could be seen as a reference to any number of issues explicitly mentioned in the text, like the narrator’s anguish over America’s rapidly eroding cultural landscape or the sense of persecution he seems to feel in relation to his profession. While most critics read this phrase as an evasion on Fitzgerald’s part, the sheer frequency with which it appears in discussions of these essays (James Mellow even uses it as a chapter title in his biography of Fitzgerald) indicates its suggestiveness, especially in light of the narrator’s thesis, which he immediately reiterates after “too many tears” in the text: when it comes to breaking people down, “life has a varying offensive” (“Crack-Up” 71).

The Crack-Up essays lack of sensational self-revelation also allows them to avoid the melodramatic emotional spectacle of the popular confession, even as they implicitly valorize public scrutiny of highly personal material. By abstracting and rationalizing his “admissions,” the narrator is able to adopt a hardened masculine pose, placing his own inner self as the object of an unflinching male gaze, and ultimately challenge

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<sup>99</sup> Occasional asides, as in the aforementioned “lecturer” comments, also work to distance the narrating voice from the immediacy of the “crack-up.” The first essay in particular is full of present tense commentary, such as the narrator’s repeated insistence that the “story” is over, though the essay continues, and his willingness to judge the situation as it unfolds in the text (“All rather inhuman and undernourished, isn’t it?”) (“The Crack-Up” 72-73).

stereotypical notions of stoic manhood, embodied in the essays by William Ernest Henley's paeans to the "Unconquerable Soul." Such posturing seems designed to insulate Fitzgerald's work from charges of both effeminacy and triviality and it reinforces the larger cultural and social criticisms in the essays by linking his very visible personal struggle with the larger conditions that engendered it.

Before elaborating further on the Crack-Up essays, I would like to briefly examine some of Fitzgerald's other autobiographical writings in order to provide a larger rhetorical context for my reading. I will begin by briefly surveying the brash-young-genius persona that appears in much of Fitzgerald's early publicity and then look at how this figure changed in the years leading up to the Crack-Up essays. This examination reveals that Fitzgerald's interrogation of struggle and failure is not so radical a departure from his other work as it might at first seem and, by itself, does not explain the animated responses that these pieces received from some readers. Instead, we must look at the gendered subtext of the narrator's specific attempts to negotiate with the difficulties of his profession and the particular form of masculine subjectivity he attempts to inhabit in order to understand why a predominantly middle-class white male readership and other white male professional writers would react so strongly to what most might normally have dismissed as celebrity fluff.

**Chapter 3:**  
***On the Limitations of Image Management: The Long Shadow of “F. Scott Fitzgerald”***

**The Construction of a Persona (1920-1926)**

Many critics have noted Fitzgerald’s insistent attempts, particularly early in his career, to manage his image. A quick glance through any of his volumes of business correspondence will offer numerous examples of these efforts.<sup>100</sup> He was particularly concerned with production issues, making suggestions to his publishers about everything from layouts and fonts to bindings and the use of blurbs on dustjackets. He worried about the timing and manner of publication, including forms of serialization, the use of book clubs, and even the size of his volumes. Finally, he suggested marketing tactics that would maximize the sale of his books and he even wrote some of his own ad copy.<sup>101</sup>

Beyond issues of production and distribution, Fitzgerald wrote dozens of

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<sup>100</sup> The two main published collections of Fitzgerald’s business letters are Bruccoli, ed; Kuehl and Bryer, eds. However, several other collections of Fitzgerald’s correspondence have important letters left out of these collections. For example, *The Correspondence*, contains a much quoted letter to Max Perkins, not included in *Dear Scott*, where Fitzgerald complains that reporters “twist [my words] to make an idiot out of me” Bruccoli and Duggan, eds. 92. See also Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed., *Life in Letters*; Andrew Turnbull, ed., *Letters* 137-291, 391-408.

<sup>101</sup> During the months just prior to the publication of any of his books, nearly every letter he wrote to Max Perkins contained suggestions about publishing or marketing. His letter on February 5, 1934, shortly before the book publication of *Tender Is the Night*, provides a representative example. First, he reminds Max that the indentations and the layout of his name on the cover should correspond with all of his other books. Then, he warns against playing up the fact that the book is largely set in resorts on the Riviera, as it would only feed misconceptions of his work as trivial. He also discourages the use of blurbs, as “the public is very, very, very weary of being sold bogus goods.” Finally, he suggests mentioning that several scenes were cut in the magazine serialization, to entice people who already read the abridged version in *Scribner’s* magazine. See Kuehl and Bryer, eds. 191-92.

autobiographical, or seemingly autobiographical, pieces for popular magazines, gave numerous interviews, scripted several “interviews” of his own, and participated in many well-publicized spectacles that made, intentionally or not, good copy for the gossip columns.

Out of all of the public exposure Fitzgerald received during the early years of his career, several major themes emerge.<sup>102</sup> First, he is insistently associated with the “younger generation.” This alignment stems, in part, from the enormous success of *This Side of Paradise*, a novel about the moral, social, and intellectual development of Amory Blaine, a Princeton student who is searching for the means to fulfill the rarefied destiny he is certain awaits him. The book, frequently noted for its unapologetic descriptions of the modern young women known as “flappers,” received so much attention that its title was used in articles and interviews throughout the 1920’s to identify Fitzgerald, a simple signifier that communicated both his success as an author and his connection with the youth of the United States.<sup>103</sup>

If this conflation of name and text was partially a journalistic expedient, it certainly helped Fitzgerald’s publishers, who attempted to capitalize on both his youth and his youthful subject matter. When Scribner’s began publishing *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald was advertised as “the youngest writer for whom Scribners have ever published a novel” (Berg 19), and, when he signed a contract with the Hearst

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<sup>102</sup> Several scholars have done excellent work examining the publicity surrounding Fitzgerald’s early career, and the first half of this section is indebted to their research. In particular, Kirk Curnutt, Scott Donaldson, and Ruth Prigozy, whose works will be cited throughout this chapter, have provided the foundation upon which my reflections are based.

<sup>103</sup> For examples of several interviews from the late 1920’s where Fitzgerald is identified primarily by his “flapper” novel, see Matthew J. Bruccoli and Jackson R. Bryer, eds. Miscellany 274-81.

Corporation, he and Zelda appeared on the cover of *Hearst's International* with a caption calling him the “best-loved author of the young generation” (Curnutt "Clean Break" 316).

Fitzgerald, in a similar fashion, worked hard to strengthen the association between his name and the collegiate characters depicted in his first published book. This effort is particularly surprising given Scott's own tumultuous career at Princeton University. He first applied for admission in the fall of 1913, but was initially rejected because of low scores on the entrance exams.<sup>104</sup> However, he traveled to the university before the semester began for a personal interview and was able to convince administrators of his merit. He was ultimately enrolled on the condition that he pass make-up exams in four subjects (algebra, Latin, French, and physics).

For the next two years, Fitzgerald spent much of his time focusing on social and literary endeavors and only fell further behind in school. On January 3, 1916, he was finally required to withdraw because of “scholastic deficiencies,” though he did later convince the Dean to place a notice of voluntary leave (for health reasons) in his record (qtd. in Bruccoli Epic Grandeur 60). Scott returned for a second Junior year in the fall of 1916, but he flunked two of six courses (history and chemistry) and was marked absent for a third (philosophy). He was spared a similar fate the next semester when, in April 1917, the United States entered World War I. Scott enlisted in a short training program that provided credit for the classes he did not complete, allowing him, for the first time in his college career, to pass all of his courses. He then took his officer's exam and spent the summer writing, reading, and drinking, until his commission finally arrived in

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<sup>104</sup> For more detailed accounts of Fitzgerald's years at Princeton, see Bruccoli 41-79; Andre Le Vot Fitzgerald 30-55.

October 1917. Fitzgerald did not complete his college education; he never received an undergraduate degree.

Despite this spotty academic record, Fitzgerald would insistently associate himself with the university throughout his career.<sup>105</sup> He discussed it during interviews, depicted it as a crucial part of his life in autobiographical reflections,<sup>106</sup> and always returned when invited for lectures or talks. Fitzgerald even went back to Princeton in late February 1920 so that he could be on campus when *This Side of Paradise* was published (Brucoli Epic Grandeur 111).

This association served several crucial purposes for Fitzgerald in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the time, college was becoming an increasingly important part of everyday life for white middle-class families, as new industries required a whole host of so-called “brain workers” to manage increasingly complex production and distribution processes. This new group of employees, frequently referred to as the professional-managerial class, included such professionalized workers as engineers, accountants, and mid-level corporate managers, as well as their educated counterparts in government and other major institutions.<sup>107</sup> Richard Ohmann, in his detailed study of the professional-managerial class at the turn of the century, estimates that in 1880, about one-

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<sup>105</sup> Though there is certainly evidence to suggest that Princeton played a crucial role in Fitzgerald’s own self-conceptions, I am primarily concerned here with its elaboration in relation to the larger persona Fitzgerald attempted to construct.

<sup>106</sup> Fitzgerald was insistent enough about his relationship to Princeton that one writer, summarizing important facts about Fitzgerald in 1928, still listed Princeton as one of his “greatest interests in life.” See Charles G. Shaw “Fitzgerald”.

<sup>107</sup> Much work has been done analyzing and debating the emergence of the professional-managerial class. For Barbara and John Ehrenreich’s seminal article, “The Professional-Managerial Class,” as well as a series of articles discussing the evolution of the middle class at the turn of the century, see Pat Walker, ed., Labor and Capital. See also Stuart Blumin Emergence.

fifteenth of the workforce, or approximately one million people, filled such roles. By 1910, the number had risen to over three and a half million, roughly one-tenth of all workers (119). These trends did not abate: between 1910 and 1940, for example, the number of practicing accountants multiplied seven-fold, from 39,000 to 288,000, the ranks of engineers grew from 77,000 to 297,000, and the number of university professors rose from 16,000 to 77,000 (Augspurger 14).

As these professions expanded, members developed highly rationalized accrediting procedures that typically relied on specialized courses of education. In part as a result of these growth trends, formal schooling became an increasingly regular part of white middle-class life in America and the number of students attending college expanded rapidly. In 1870, only one in sixty men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-one was enrolled in college. By 1900, that number had risen to one in twenty-five (Kasson 240 fn28). The total number of undergrads rose from about 52,300 in 1870 to 237,600 in 1900, and there were nearly 600,000 college students by 1920 (Radway "Significance" 213).

As a result, Fitzgerald's work can be seen to reflect the interests of a distinct group whose education and aspirations for professionalism distinguished them from other social classes. For these students, the university, which provided both a common base of knowledge and a distinct locus for shared experiences, became an increasingly important part of their lives.<sup>108</sup> This new faction of "youth" was becoming increasingly visible to

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<sup>108</sup> Many critics have argued that the rise of the university system was central to the development of the concept of "youth" around the turn of the century. For a detailed reading of the emergence of a "youth" subculture in America, see Joseph F. Kett Rites of Passage 245-72; Marc Dolan Modern. For an interesting application of this work to Fitzgerald's writing, see Kirk Curnutt "Age Consciousness".

the public through both the increased attention of marketers, who wanted to capitalize on such a rapidly growing consumer group, and an array of rapidly expanding public discourses covering everything from child development and moral upbringing to the shifting institutional structure of the United States.<sup>109</sup> Thus, Fitzgerald's own personal association with Princeton not only gave him credibility to represent the younger generation, but it also made him valuable to those supposed "outsiders" looking for a symbolic means to understand the new subculture.

Fitzgerald, however, does not simply write about college life in general, nor does he specifically associate himself with an ascendant class of professional white men. Instead, he links himself primarily to elite Eastern universities, writing about Princeton in both *This Side of Paradise* and his own publicity materials. These aristocratic institutions, which admitted a significant number of students from expensive private prep schools, permitted Scott to write about student life with the authority of recent experience while also retaining an aura of personal distinction.<sup>110</sup> This difficult position helped Fitzgerald inhabit his seemingly contradictory public role as a representative example of the brash and vaguely immoral younger generation, but also, the second major theme that runs through much of his early publicity, a brilliant young artist who was unique in his ability to capture the vicissitudes of contemporary youth.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> For the standard work on the development of advertising in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, see Roland Marchand *Advertising*. For a work that treats earlier decades, primarily the 1880's through the 1920's, see Daniel Pope *Making of Modern Advertising*. See also Ohmann 81-117.

<sup>110</sup> Fitzgerald even went so far as to claim himself an alumnus of the university. See Francis Scott Fitzgerald "How I Would Sell" 167.

<sup>111</sup> Fitzgerald was certainly not the first author to write about young adults in the early decades of the twentieth century, though the various reasons for his own ascendant rise as the spokesman of



Fitzgerald helped to promote the impression that he was at the elite edge of the university set by dressing in what biographer Matthew Bruccoli has appropriately called the “Brooks Brothers collegiate style” (Epic Grandeur 115). Fitzgerald wore outfits that were clearly recognizable as the latest in college fashions, even going so far as to carry, in his younger days, a walking cane. Yet, he never appeared in anything that veered too far from the latest fashion ads, meaning that his clothes were both comfortably familiar and available, at least in theory, to his readers.

His outfits and general appearance were such an important part of his public image that, when photos could not accompany his press pieces, interviewers regularly described both his youthful appearance and his stylish clothes. They even occasionally went beyond the bounds of accurate reportage to capture Fitzgerald’s stereotypical, but always remarkable, features. One journalist described the five-foot seven inch, one hundred forty pound Fitzgerald as if he were a hulking young Adonis: “Tall, blond, broad-shouldered, he towers above his petite wife” (“Home Is the Place” 258).

While there is no way of knowing how much Fitzgerald influenced others’ portrayals of him, Ruth Prigozy reads the repetitive pattern of his interviews as an indication that he did have some control over these pieces (“Culture of Celebrity” 7). She also suggests that the format seems designed to promote the impression that Fitzgerald was a young genius. Each interview would begin with a few brief questions about flappers, setting the author up to deliver a seemingly spontaneous speech that, as one interviewer described it, “came in such a rush of words, in such a tumbling of phrase

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the younger generation are far too complex to begin speculating about here. In any case, his own association with this group seems to be a crucial factor not only because it helped to generate an aura of authority around his work but also because it allowed him to speak with authority outside of his fiction.

upon phrase that neither objection nor appeal was possible. It was a rush of words which only a powerful feeling could dictate” (Salpeter 274). These pieces not only reflect Fitzgerald’s supposed authority as the spokesman of the younger generation, but, Prigozy argues, they also work to enhance his reputation as an “expert” on contemporary morals and lifestyles. Thus, Fitzgerald’s expertise is not only rooted in his own personal experiences or his membership in a particular “youth” subculture. He is also distinguished by the keen intellect that allows him to discuss subjects as disparate as marriage, classical writers, the contemporary state of communism, and even the future of the human race, with spontaneous ease (and supposed brilliance).

Even when Scott and Zelda moved back to his hometown, St. Paul, Minnesota, for the birth of their child in 1921, local interviews tended to follow much the same pattern. For example, Thomas Boyd wrote a piece on Fitzgerald for the St. Paul *Daily News* in March of 1922 that purports to go beyond “that which was appearing in the literary supplements and magazines” (“Hugh Walpole” 245).<sup>112</sup> However, he begins by describing Fitzgerald’s features and concludes, “His were the features that the average American mind never fails to associate with beauty. But there was a quality in the eye with which the average mind is unfamiliar” (“Hugh Walpole” 247). He then goes on to mention a series of contemporary literary figures, allowing Fitzgerald to speak spontaneously on each one. Finally, he describes Fitzgerald’s writing habits, emphasizing his sincerity, enthusiasm, and, of course, the power of his creative brain.

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<sup>112</sup> Fitzgerald became good friends with Thomas Boyd and recommended his first novel, Through the Wheat, to Max Perkins. Scribner’s published it in 1923. However, extant correspondence suggests that their relationship was largely professional at the time Boyd published his piece.

These details about Fitzgerald, recurring in interview after interview, all enhance his image as a brilliant young man trying to harness his genius. The speed and naïve enthusiasm with which he supposedly speaks not only underscores the truthfulness of the image depicted, but it also serves to emphasize the immediacy of his thoughts. The Fitzgerald that emerges in these articles does not have time to reflect. He is simply a passionate young man explaining how he feels.

This attitude carries over to his writing as well. For instance, Boyd explains, “His writing is never thought out... Most of the time words come to his mind and then spill themselves in a riotous frenzy of song and color all over the page” (“Hugh Walpole” 253). Again, this description allows Fitzgerald to seem at once natural and exceptional. The subtext of this description is that Fitzgerald’s work cannot simply be a mindless transcription of his own (drunken) youth, the kind of writing any hack could perform. It is as vibrant and alive as the young man himself.

The most forceful assertions of Fitzgerald’s genius came from the author himself. He began constructing his public narrative, along with the accompanying persona, as soon as *This Side of Paradise* was published. In one instance, he scripted an interview with himself and had it distributed to newspaper columnists through his publisher. Heywood Broun ran a portion of the piece in his “Books” column for the *New York Tribune*, attributing the interview to Carleton R. Davis.<sup>113</sup> Later that year, Fitzgerald excerpted the best lines from this interview and put them, along with a large picture of

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<sup>113</sup> The piece, along with a brief note about its publication history, is collected as “An Interview with F. Scott Fitzgerald” in Matthew J. Bruccoli, ed., *On Authorship* 33-35. This “interview” follows the typical pattern of Fitzgerald publicity. First, the “interviewer” describes Fitzgerald’s appearance, which he finds unexpectedly striking. Then, he poses a few simple questions that Fitzgerald answers with spontaneous wit. Finally, as Fitzgerald’s enthusiasm takes over, the interviewer fades into the background to document the author’s enthusiastic burst of words.

himself, on an insert that was distributed to the American Booksellers Association. Several of the lines from these pieces, which reflect the young genius persona discussed above, have been quoted often enough to enter Fitzgerald lore. Fitzgerald claims, “to write [*This Side of Paradise*] took three months; to conceive it-three minutes; to collect the data in it-all my life” (Brucoli On Authorship 35).<sup>114</sup> Fitzgerald also contributed to a column in *The Editor* that featured contemporary authors talking about their writing. This shift in focus from text to author suited Fitzgerald’s publicity aims perfectly, and, in a typical moment of bravura, he uses his experience writing “The Ice Palace” to explain the “theory that, except in a certain sort of naturalistic realism, what you enjoy writing [and thus write quickly] is liable to be much better reading than what you labor over” (Brucoli On Authorship 37).

The most comprehensive elaboration of Fitzgerald’s persona came in an autobiographical piece he did in a *Saturday Evening Post* column called “Who’s Who-and Why.” The article is essentially an outline of Fitzgerald’s early years constructed to show his life as “the struggle between an overwhelming urge to write and a combination of circumstances bent on keeping me from it” (Mizener Afternoon 83). At each phase of his development, Fitzgerald explains, his literary ambitions were thwarted by a different disruptive force, including secondary school teachers, World War I, and economic necessity. In each case, Fitzgerald refuses to accept blame for any of the delays that he implies prevented him from becoming a famous author more quickly, an approach that makes his ascension to fame seem inevitable and his character, faultless. He does not even mention Scribner’s rejection of his first draft of *This Side of Paradise*, only that he

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<sup>114</sup> This statement is not literally true. Fitzgerald redrafted the novel two times over a period of several years before Scribner’s finally accepted it for publication.

wrote a novel “on the consecutive week-ends of three months” while in the army (Mizener Afternoon 85). The revision of this draft, written several summers later in St. Paul, is treated as an entirely separate book. In fact, according to Fitzgerald, the only real rejection he receives is when a handful of short stories, “the quickest written in an hour and a half, the slowest in three days,” get repeatedly rejected by popular magazines (Mizener Afternoon 85). However, Fitzgerald is ultimately redeemed when, after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, he notes that one of his stories is accepted by the same magazine that had previously rejected it.

In short, most of the major elements of the Fitzgerald legend seem to have fallen in place only six short months after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*. Over the next few years, as Fitzgerald’s antics kept his face in the newspapers and reinforced his image as a debauched young man, many of the articles written about him reiterated the other elements of the legend: his quick mind, his impressive talent, and his profound understanding of American youth. Perhaps the most surprising element of Fitzgerald’s publicity is that the stories changed so little. For years, “interviewers” took biographical details from Fitzgerald’s original “Who’s Who” article, sometimes almost verbatim, and published the author’s own well-worn anecdotal accounts as if they were breaking news.<sup>115</sup>

The success of this powerful media campaign can be seen in highbrow critics’ responses to Fitzgerald’s first two novels. Reactions to *This Side of Paradise* were incredibly diverse in tone and content, ranging from the lavish praise of H. L. Mencken,

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<sup>115</sup> For a particularly egregious example published in 1924, four years after “Who’s Who,” see Charles Baldwin’s “F. Scott Fitzgerald,” collected in Brucoli and Bryer under the title “I Am a Pessimist, A Communist (With Nietzschean Overtones), Have No Hobbies Except Conversation- And I Am Trying to Repress That,” 267-70.

who calls the book “a truly amazing first novel-original in structure, extremely sophisticated in manner, and adorned with... brilliancy,” to the ambivalence of R.V.A.S., who applauds *Paradise* as “fundamentally honest,” but finds “the intellectual and spiritual analyses...sometimes tortuous and the nomenclature bewildering” (Bryer Critical Reception 22-23, 28).<sup>116</sup> By the time *The Beautiful and Damned* was published, however, in March 1922, critics had largely reached a consensus about Fitzgerald’s work: the always-lively Fitzgerald certainly had natural talent, but he had not worked hard enough to master his abilities.

Gilbert Seldes, writing in *The Dial*, asserts that Fitzgerald’s flippant attitude towards art and his intellectual failures override his natural talent and severely damage the book.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, Henry Beston, in the *Atlantic Monthly*, writes, “The present endeavor marks no advance [over *This Side of Paradise*] in either method or philosophy of life,” though “the book is alive, very much alive” (Bryer Critical Reception 129-30). John Peale Bishop, an established poet and friend, wrote a particularly scathing review of the book. He begins by claiming that the protagonist, Anthony Patch, is “a figure through whom Mr. Fitzgerald may write of himself,” and then launches into a series of attacks on Patch/Fitzgerald, mentioning, among other problems, his “inherent laziness” and his “illusion that he is rather superior in intellect and character to the persons about him.”

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<sup>116</sup> For the original publications, see H. L. Mencken “Untitled Review”; R.V.A.S. “Untitled Review”. Bryer’s Critical Reputation compiles reviews of Fitzgerald’s published works from *This Side of Paradise* to the posthumous publication of *The Last Tycoon* in 1941. Bryer’s introduction to the volume also provides a useful survey of trends in the criticism of Fitzgerald’s works during his lifetime.

<sup>117</sup> Seldes says, “he is this side... of a full respect for the medium he works in; his irrelevance destroys his design” and, what is more, the work generally suffers from “a carelessness about structure and effect” Jackson R. Bryer, ed., Critical Reception 109.

This belief, however, is not true, according to Bishop, because Patch/Fitzgerald is merely the sort of man who “spent his time among many books without deriving from them either erudition or richness of mind.” Finally, after listing a series of more general problems with the book, he concludes, “these are flaws of vulgarity in one who is awkward with his own vigor” (Bryer Critical Reception 71-74).

The uniformity of these more negative pieces is startling, especially given the wide variety of responses to *This Side of Paradise*. Even more surprising is the fact that, in just two short years, this particular group of critics, many of whom railed against the ever-expanding celebrity media outlets and bemoaned the credulity of undereducated audiences, had come to an implicit consensus about Fitzgerald that rested on his media-generated persona.<sup>118</sup> The only significant difference between their accounts pertained not to the image itself, but the values employed in discussing it. These critics all seemed to agree that Fitzgerald did, as he repeatedly claimed, have a natural felicity with words. It was evident in his ability to imbue even such a tragic tale as *The Beautiful and Damned* with life and vigor. Yet, for men who used education and an aura of sophistication to garner both cultural and financial capital, Fitzgerald’s supposed facility with words was not something, in and of itself, worthy of praise. They valued instead the industrious learning and knowledge of tradition that set them apart from more popular and, in some circles, less respected writers. Fitzgerald’s (public) disdain for just such labor, then, is

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<sup>118</sup> Of course, I do not mean to suggest that Fitzgerald’s publicity exerted a simple deterministic force on critics. What I am interested in here is the way in which certain readings of Fitzgerald’s life and work gained larger purchase in this particular historical context.

precisely what prevents his work from being considered True Literature, a title that highbrow critics considered themselves uniquely able to confer.<sup>119</sup>

This perspective helps to explain why, when Fitzgerald published his next novel, *The Great Gatsby*, in 1925, critics were attracted to the notion of “double vision” as a way of explaining his artistic success.<sup>120</sup> In this context, “double vision” refers to the way Fitzgerald was supposedly able to participate in America’s crass consumer culture and live a life of public revelry while still viewing his environment with enough critical distance to write insightfully about it. As William Rose Benét succinctly states, “for the first time Fitzgerald [in *The Great Gatsby*] surveys the Babylonian captivity of this era unblinded by the bright lights” (qtd. in Bryer “Introduction” xix). The brash youth had finally worked hard enough and gained the knowledge necessary to harness his previously unwieldy talent. The effectiveness of Fitzgerald’s publicity also helps to elucidate why this concept, which Malcolm Cowley would later famously use to explain Fitzgerald’s entire oeuvre, was widely applied to the author himself and not treated as a quality of his writing.<sup>121</sup> At the time, the man and his text were so easily conflated that critics came to understand *The Great Gatsby*’s success not simply in terms of literary

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<sup>119</sup> Perhaps the most famous account from this period came from another of Fitzgerald’s Princeton acquaintances, Edmund Wilson, who also said the book was “animated with life” and acknowledged that Fitzgerald had “an instinct for graceful and vivid prose,” while also claiming, “[Fitzgerald] has been given imagination without intellectual control of it; he has been given the desire for beauty without an aesthetic ideal; and he has been given a gift for expression without very many ideas to express” (Wilson, *Shores of Light*, 27). Less than a year before, Wilson wrote Fitzgerald a letter criticizing America’s “commercialism” and the “ease with which a traditionless and half-educated [American] public... can be impressed, delighted, and satisfied” (Wilson, *Letters on Literature*, 64).

<sup>120</sup> I am indebted to Bryer’s “Introduction” for pointing out the emergence of this idea in *Gatsby* criticism. See page xix for more elucidation, and examples, of this point.

<sup>121</sup> See Malcolm Cowley “Third Act”.



effect, as, say, the consequence of telling a story through the refracting agency of a removed narrator, but as a measure of personal improvement. Thus, the end product is not just a triumph for literature, or even for Fitzgerald's art. It marks a great *personal* success and, according to Gilbert Seldes, proves that Fitzgerald has put "bad and half-bad things behind him" (Bryer Critical Reception 241).

### **The Fallout of Celebrity (1926-1940):**

Shortly after the publication of *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald's personal and professional life, as well as his pattern of publicity, grew increasingly complex. From March 1920 until February 1926, Fitzgerald had published three novels, three collections of short stories, and one play, *The Vegetable*, which was put out in written form and then had a brief run at Nixon's Apollo Theater in Atlantic City. He had published some forty stories, many of them in the most popular magazine of the period, *The Saturday Evening Post*. He wrote several dozen articles, book reviews, and a handful of poems, and he had participated in dozens of interviews that ran in newspapers and supplements around the country. Of course, this list of Fitzgerald's activities does not include the countless articles about Scott and Zelda that were run during those years, detailing their wild, and presumably drunken, antics, nor does it count offshoots of Fitzgerald's work like film and theatrical adaptations, the reproduction of his stories in collections or anthologies, and critical commentary on his work.

By way of contrast, in the eight years after *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald did not put out another novel, largely gave up reviewing, and wrote only a handful of articles. His one consistent market during this time was the *Saturday Evening Post* and, by the late 1920's, it provided nearly all of his income.<sup>122</sup> Fitzgerald remained loyal to the *Post* in these

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<sup>122</sup> In calculating Scott's earned income, I deducted both Zelda's earnings and advances against his future novel, which functioned more like loans than payments on future earnings. In 1927, Scott's earned income was \$22,935.81, of which \$15,300 came from *Post* fiction, amounting to roughly 67%. In 1928, that proportion rose, as his income increased slightly to \$23,423.93, but his *Post* earnings shot up to \$22,050, or 94% of the total. For the next four years, the *Post* would dominate Scott's earnings. In 1929, total earned income was \$30,018.18, with \$27,000 from *Post* fiction (90%). 1930: \$25,638.13 total, \$25,200 from *Post* fiction, or about 98%. 1931: \$37,554.85 total, \$28,800 from *Post* fiction (77%). 1932: \$15,343.40 total, \$14,605 from *Post* (95%). 1933: \$16,208.03 total, \$7,650 from *Post* (47%). 1934: \$13,550.35 total, \$8100 from

years and made more money than he ever had in his career. As the Great Depression lingered on and Fitzgerald's near constant drinking made writing more and more difficult, he appeared less frequently in the *Post* and the amount he was paid for each piece decreased significantly. By the time he published *Tender Is the Night* in 1934, he had gone from publishing seven or eight *Post* stories a year to publishing two or three, and by the end of the year, Fitzgerald's main supporters at the magazine had begun to disappear. George Horace Lorimer, who had run the *Post* since shortly after Cyrus Curtis bought it in 1897, liked much of Fitzgerald's work, but after Curtis died in 1933, Lorimer became more and more involved in the *Post*'s parent company and in politics more generally. Also, Thomas Costain, an associate editor who had backed Fitzgerald's fiction, left in 1934 to work for Twentieth Century Fox. During the remaining six years of his life, Fitzgerald would sell only four more pieces to the *Post*.<sup>123</sup>

So, in 1934, when *Tender Is the Night* failed to revive his career, Fitzgerald had to seek out new markets for his talents. He approached Princeton about doing formal lectures on writing and tried selling several movie scripts, including a version of *Tender*. He experimented with ideas for a musical review and several plays. He began a short-lived story sequence about a ninth-century French count supposedly modeled on Ernest Hemingway. He also put together *Taps at Reveille*, a collection of previously published stories that would prove to be last book he published during his lifetime. Scribner's ran only one printing of *Taps*, totaling 5100 copies.

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*Post*, (60%). 1935: \$16,503.13 total, \$5400 from *Post* (32.7%). 1936, the last year he sold stories to the *Post*: \$10180.97 total, \$5000 from *Post* (49.1%). For more details, see Francis Scott Fitzgerald Ledger.

<sup>123</sup> The best source of information on Fitzgerald's short story writing is Stephen W. Potts Magazine Career. For historical information on *The Saturday Evening Post*, see John William Tebbel Lorimer. For a more contemporary cultural history, see Jan Cohn Creating America.

The only steady source of income Fitzgerald could find in the mid-1930's turned out to be *Esquire*. Arnold Gingrich, who was referred to as a "headhunter" of celebrity writers, had grown up reading Fitzgerald's fiction and believed that the author had enough name recognition left to be of value to his new magazine. Over the next six years, Gingrich would publish nearly everything Fitzgerald sent to him and, as a matter of policy, did very little actual editing of material.<sup>124</sup> From Fitzgerald's perspective, *Esquire* was also an excellent venue because it ran pieces that were typically only one to two thousand words, significantly less than the six or seven thousand word stories that the *Post* preferred. On the down side, Gingrich paid only \$250 per contribution and only 600,000 people regularly bought *Esquire* in 1935, which was significantly less than the three million subscribers the *Post* had during its peak years. Still, as other opportunities became more and more remote, Fitzgerald became a regular contributor to *Esquire* and in the last six years of his life would publish only a dozen stories in other places.

In short, Fitzgerald's visibility decreased throughout the 1930's, as he published less and less, and what he did publish circulated among fewer people. His two books from the decade, *Tender Is the Night* and *Taps At Reveille*, sold fewer copies than any he had ever written and he spent a large portion of the decade struggling to find viable new projects.<sup>125</sup> The resulting decrease in his income after 1931, coupled with his rapidly

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<sup>124</sup> The best source on *Esquire*'s early years is still Gingrich's Nothing but People. For several contemporary accounts that add a few details to Gingrich's book, see Merrill; Douglas.

<sup>125</sup> Fitzgerald's novels, as was typical at the time, sold far better than his short story collections. *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned* each sold approximately 50,000 copies in their first year of publication. *The Great Gatsby* sold its initial run of 20,870 copies and had a second printing of 3000 in the same span of time. By contrast, *Tender Is the Night* sold only about 15,000 copies. Scott's first collection of short stories, *Flappers and Philosophers*, sold more than 15,000 copies in its first several months of publication, but sales slowed quickly. *Tales*

deteriorating family life, also limited his public visibility. Zelda, first hospitalized in April 1930, was diagnosed with schizophrenia and spent the decade in and out of institutions, a situation that was both financially and emotionally difficult for Fitzgerald.<sup>126</sup> He had charge of Scottie, whom he was in no condition to raise alone. The string of nurses and friends who helped him take care of Scottie, as well as the more typical needs of a college-bound teenager, sapped his resources even further.

Ultimately, without Zelda, who had played a significant role in many of his public appearances, and with a growing pile of debts, Fitzgerald spent an increasing amount of time lost in alcoholic depression. There were no more wild antics or zany pictures to be splashed throughout the gossip columns, nor were there many interviewers waiting to get the inside scoop on Scott's latest project. As Ruth Prigozy points out, when Scott managed to appear in the news at all, it was mostly small pieces run by local papers in the various towns and cities where he lived throughout the 1930's ("Culture of Celebrity" 13).

In addition to Fitzgerald's gradual disappearance from the public spotlight, he also stopped writing the promotional pieces and topical articles on "flappers" that had helped to establish him in the early 1920's. Given the downward trajectory of his career, it might be easy to assume that public and editorial indifference were the main causes of this shift; however, there is no evidence to suggest that, after Zelda's illness, Fitzgerald even tried to write such pieces. He was commissioned by *McCall's* in 1929 to write an

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*of the Jazz Age* quickly sold its first 8000 copies and ran through two smaller printings in its first year. *All the Sad Young Men* sold 16,170 copies in the same amount of time. In contrast, *Taps* sold less than 5100 copies. For more information on Fitzgerald's sales, see James L. W. West "Professional Author" 56-61. Also, see Brucoli 133, 45, 62, 68, 217, 31, 391.

<sup>126</sup> For an interesting examination of Zelda's life and illness that challenges this diagnosis, see Linda Wagner-Martin Zelda 120-96.

article on the current state of the flapper and he edited a few pieces, originally written by Zelda, about their own lives for publication in *Esquire*,<sup>127</sup> but the author seems to have largely moved away from such work after the publication of *Gatsby*. This change seems even more significant in light of the fact that Arnold Gingrich would publish whatever Fitzgerald submitted, so, if he had been interested in writing regular pieces about topical matters, especially gender or relationship issues, *Esquire* would most certainly have been willing to publish them.

Fitzgerald initially moved away from such pieces for partly economic reasons, as he stopped writing them around the time his short stories began commanding prices of \$1500 to \$2000, far more than the \$1000 he was receiving for articles from magazines like *Ladies' Home Journal* or *Woman's Home Companion*. However, economics alone does not explain why Fitzgerald did not return to these types of pieces, especially when his visibility in the public sphere was decreasing and his income from short stories was rapidly shrinking. A quick glance over his business correspondence from the 1930's shows that he was no less concerned about other dimensions of his public presentation during the decade. He continued to assail Scribner's, through his friend and editor, Max Perkins, for everything from conservative advertising to the firm's disapproval of inexpensive editions, and he attempted to control as many of the aesthetic details of his books as he could. For instance, in the months before publication of *Tender Is the Night*, he worried about everything from advertising and review copies to the dust jacket itself,

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<sup>127</sup> The flapper piece, titled, "Girls Believe in Girls," was ultimately rejected by *McCall's* and sold to *Liberty* for \$1500. For more information about the series of events surrounding this story, see Bruccoli, ed., 156-62.

which he famously complained should not be in red and white, as those colors evoked the Italian Riviera and not the Cote d'Azur.<sup>128</sup>

Instead of seeing this shift away from certain forms of writing and particular venues for nonfiction work as further evidence of Fitzgerald's slow decline, a perspective premised on the dubious assumption that he was casually dismissing mechanisms which had proven to be effective publicity tools in the past, I propose to read this trend as part of a larger move toward a more restrained public persona in the 1930's. I do not mean to suggest that Fitzgerald was completely happy and in control of both himself and his writing during the 1930's. His bouts of depression are well documented, as is his near constant drinking throughout much of the decade.

These problems do not mean, however, that his writing can simply be reduced to a reflection of some "essential" depressed inner self. Such an approach deprives Fitzgerald of agency and disregards the fairly stable image that emerges in his nonfiction writing over the course of the decade. It also overlooks both the various ways in which he shaped the particular materials at hand and the complex source material that underlay much of his writing. The latter issue became a bone of contention between Fitzgerald and Hemingway following the publication of *Tender Is the Night*. Hemingway, who disliked the book in part because he felt it was an unfair depiction of their mutual friends Sara and Gerald Murphy, wrote Fitzgerald insisting that he needed to "write truly" and not create "damned marvelously faked case histories."<sup>129</sup> Fitzgerald, in his six-page reply, points out that his characters are composites, not attempts to "truly" capture the characters of the

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<sup>128</sup> For some more of Scott's specific complaints, see Kuehl and Bryer, eds. 186-95.

<sup>129</sup> For the exchange between Fitzgerald and Hemingway, see Matthew J. Bruccoli *[Dangerous Friendship](#)* 171-75.

Murphys and that writers since before Shakespeare have been successful in creating imaginary fusions. Several months later, he made a similar point to Sara Murphy herself, claiming that “it takes half a dozen people to make a synthesis strong enough to create a fiction character” (Brucoli Life in Letters 288).

The issue would surface again with the publication of the Crack-Up essays, which Hemingway dismissed as “whin[ing] in public” (Baker 438). In reality, the historical antecedents of these essays are incredibly complex and can be traced throughout Fitzgerald’s life. As with *Tender Is the Night*, the author tended to draw heavily on his experiences with Zelda and her doctors for information about mental illness and many of the couples’ letters from the early 1930’s reveal interesting parallels with Fitzgerald’s later pieces. For instance, Zelda, throughout her confinement, wrote to Fitzgerald about her struggle to preserve a sense of identity and maintain an emotional investment in her life, two major characteristics of the narrator in the Crack-Up essays.<sup>130</sup> Zelda also wrote him several times about her inability to tolerate the presence of other people,<sup>131</sup> a problem prevalent in Fitzgerald’s essays and an issue he had already been considering for over a decade. When Scott’s close friend Monsignor Cyril Sigourney Webster Fay died of pneumonia in 1919, he wrote a letter to their mutual friend Shane Leslie, claiming that as

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<sup>130</sup> In one of her more despairing, though not altogether atypical, moments, Zelda wrote, “I am sorry too that there should be nothing to greet you but an empty shell. The thought of... the suffering this nothing has cost would be unendurable to any save a completely vacuous mechanism. Had I any feelings they would all be bent in gratitude to you and in sorrow that of all my life there should not even be the smallest relic of the love and beauty that we started with to offer you at the end... I love you anyway-even if there isn’t any me or any love or even any life” (Brucoli Life In Letters 285).

<sup>131</sup> For example, in late 1930, Zelda wrote, “I was nervous and half-sick but I didn’t know what was the matter. I only knew that I had difficulty standing lots of people” (Fitzgerald Dearest Zelda 71).



a result of the death he was “beginning to have a horror of people” (qtd. in Bruccoli Epic Grandeur 92). Biographer Matthew Bruccoli sees this letter, in which Fitzgerald claims he wants to follow Monsignor Fay’s path and join the priesthood, as “mostly a pose for Leslie’s benefit” (Epic Grandeur 92).

So, while the historical and personal antecedents for Fitzgerald’s Crack-Up essays are extraordinarily complex, I think it is crucial to move beyond simplistic readings of these pieces as an expression of his internal state, or even as a constructed reflection on that state, to see how they operate rhetorically as part of a larger persona being created throughout his nonfiction writing in the 1930’s. In fact, Fitzgerald frequently expressed a desire for a new public image, one free of the complications generated by all his past publicity work. In one famous story about the genesis of the Crack-Up essays, editor Arnold Gingrich says he visited Fitzgerald to ask about new work when the author’s debt to the magazine became so large that the accountants began asking questions. He found Fitzgerald drunk and depressed, upset because he no longer wanted to write what he called “stories of young love” for the *Saturday Evening Post*. Gingrich, in a desperate attempt to get the author writing again, suggested that he do a piece about his inability to produce this kind of text. The next piece he received was “The Crack-Up.”<sup>132</sup>

While elements of this story are certainly questionable, Fitzgerald’s complaint was a common one. Towards the end of his life, he even talked Gingrich into running some of his pieces under the pseudonym Paul Elgin, so, he claimed, he could see readers react to his work and not his name. His professed goal was to write a story so good that

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<sup>132</sup> Gingrich retells this story in several places. For several widely available examples, see Gingrich 241-43; Arnold Gingrich “Whoever” 322-25.

Elgin would receive a fan letter from his daughter Scottie.<sup>133</sup> In a similar attempt to break with the past, Fitzgerald told his editor, Max Perkins, that *Tender Is the Night* would be his last work on the boom years. He also suggested the book's publicity emphasize that, compared to his *Post* work, this is "quite definitely... a horse of another color" (Fitzgerald and Perkins 187).

Fitzgerald's desire to break free of his past is also reflected in the new autobiographical persona that he constructed throughout the decade. Many critics have commented on the apparent rhetorical shift in his later non-fiction writing, however few efforts have been made to specify the nature of the changes. The words "introspective" and "retrospective" are frequently used to characterize his later work; however many of his most topical pieces had already adopted precisely these poses to enhance their effectiveness. Most of his articles on male and female flappers, for example, involve a historical analysis that is not much different from more critically acclaimed pieces like "Echoes of the Jazz Age" or "The Lost City." One article, titled "What Became of Our Flappers and Sheiks?", which was published shortly after *The Great Gatsby*, even employs a removed narrative persona to comment on the action from a more reflective position. He also frequently reflected on his own life, or at least what he presented as such, in his early work. Articles like "Wait Till You Have Children of Your Own!", in which Fitzgerald looks back on the child-raising techniques of his parents' generation and outlines his own plan for parenting, gain emotional force from the narrator's personal investment in the topic at hand.

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<sup>133</sup> For Gingrich's version, see Gingrich 288-89. Also, see James L. W. West "Esquire" 157-58.

In other words, the apparent shift many critics note in Fitzgerald's later writings does not stem from any radical deviation from his early work. Instead, it seems to be a by-product of the sheer consistency evinced by his later nonfiction texts. While he did appear melancholy, reflective, and introspective in some of his early work, by the early 1930's, his autobiographical writing would consistently adopt these characteristics. From "Echoes of the Jazz Age," an article written in 1931 that examines the previous decade from the perspective of someone who feels he has left a piece of himself behind, to "Early Success," one of his last autobiographical pieces and another wistful recollection of the early 1920's, Fitzgerald repeatedly assumes the pose of someone who is trying to assess the present through an understanding of the past. Just as he had previously presented a unified portrait of himself as a genius writer, Fitzgerald now seems to have adopted a new pose, one that is predicated on its very distance from the earlier persona.

Scott Donaldson, reviewing Fitzgerald's nonfiction, characterizes the later writings similarly, claiming they are different in part because the speaker drops the air of expertise so prevalent in early articles and interviews ("Nonfiction" 174). While this assessment captures the sense of remove noted above, I think, again, it does not describe the difference. Certainly, the brazen "Fitzgerald" of 1923 who could proclaim, "all women over thirty-five should be murdered," is a different character than the narrator of "Echoes of the Jazz Age," who circumspectly asserts, "the general decision to be amused that began with the cocktail parties of 1921 had more complicated origins."<sup>134</sup> The latter speaker, however, still claims the authority to pass judgment on a decade, even if from

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<sup>134</sup> The first quote comes from an interview Fitzgerald did with B. F. Wilson for *Metropolitan Magazine*. It is collected in a slightly abridged form under the title "All Women Over Thirty-Five Should Be Murdered" in Bruccoli and Bryer, eds. 263-66.

the more removed space of a nostalgic historian. Denying that agency feeds into the larger vision of Fitzgerald in the decade as a man mired in sadness and loss. It also misrepresents the rhetorical position that the author is constructing for himself. Along similar lines, when Fitzgerald claimed to possess “the authority of failure” in his notebooks, he was not simply berating himself for being unsuccessful (F. S. Fitzgerald “Notebooks” 318). He was claiming a particular position from which he could continue to assert his “authority.”<sup>135</sup>

Shortly before writing the Crack-Up essays, supposedly his most profound admission of failure, Fitzgerald could still tell his typist and confidant Laura Guthrie, “I have no patience and when I want something I *want* it. I break people. I am part of the break-up of the times” (qtd. in Turnbull Fitzgerald 265). This unusual ending juxtaposition links Fitzgerald’s perverse pride in his ability to inflict harm on others with the pervasive “break-up” of the Great Depression as well as, presumably, a larger moral collapse that connects him with the “times.” Fitzgerald is placing himself in the position of one who is cracking up, but his collapse is not passive, nor can it be called a “failure” in any simple sense of the word.

This new sense of authority becomes an essential part of Fitzgerald’s larger attempt to distance himself from the past. For instance, “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” first published in 1931, examines what Fitzgerald sees as the significant cultural events of the 1920’s, but it also declares the Jazz Age “as dead as were the Yellow Nineties in 1902” (Crack-Up 13). Following this opening proclamation, the narrator links this period with historical events (the May Day riots in 1919 to the stock market crash in October 1929) and charts the unfolding chronology of the decade, from the “peak of the younger

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<sup>135</sup> For a similar reading of this phrase, see Morris Dickstein “Failure” 313.

generation” in 1922 to the “orgy” of the elders in 1923 through the “wide-spread neurosis” of 1927 (F. S. Fitzgerald Crack-Up 15, 19). These dates not only underscore the supposed knowledge and authority of the narrator, but they give concrete boundaries to a period that is typically defined more by its animating spirit than any set frame of time. Thus, “the utter confidence which was [the Jazz Age’s] essential prop” can be said to pass as certainly as an October afternoon, creating a sense of finality absolute enough to admit some nostalgic rumination, even though, as the narrator points out, this piece is being written only two years after the supposed close of the Age. The periodizing title itself works in much the same way, simultaneously delimiting a particular period of time and emphasizing its difference from the hardship and deprivation of the early Depression.

Besides telling his readers about the specific contours of the past decade, the narrator also frames the text with commentary about his own sense of personal loss, effectively distancing the present speaker from his previous self. He begins, “the present writer already looks back to [the Jazz Age] with nostalgia. It bore him up, flattered him and gave him more money than he had dreamed of, simply for telling people that he felt as they did” (Crack-Up 13). Perhaps the most surprising element of this quote, in light of Fitzgerald’s previous publicity efforts, is the way in which it trivializes the narrator’s early self. The work that once seemed to be the product of brilliant insight and a powerful natural intellect, now, eleven years later, appears to be not much more than a well-crafted expression of his own emotions, emotions that happened to resonate with a larger public.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Later in the essay, the narrator will explicitly scoff at the naiveté of an age that treated writers, like Fitzgerald himself, as “geniuses on the strength of one respectable book or play” (Crack-Up 22).

This pose of an older, more mature self dispelling the illusions of naïve youth works to frame a larger historical analysis that operates in much the same way, with a knowledgeable narrator setting the record straight on a decade that is both too close and too far removed from present concerns for most to assess. The narrator then concludes the essay by returning attention to both his own longing for and current remove from the Jazz Age, claiming, “it all seems rosy and romantic to us who were young then, because we will never feel quite so intensely about our surroundings any more” (Crack-Up 22). This position, among other things, works to emphasize his distance from the passionate, and naïve, days of his youth, and it helps to establish a mature voice whose supposed experience underlines the previous discussion.

Fitzgerald’s next major autobiographical piece, “My Lost City,” takes his rhetorical distance from the brash young genius further by recasting the original myth of *This Side of Paradise*. The narrator is no longer bragging about how fast he writes novels or laying down proclamations about “contemporary Literature.” Instead, he glosses over writing his first book, an episode central to his early persona, with an ellipsis and does not even mention the title of the book: “Hating the city, I got roaring, weeping drunk on my last penny and went home.... Incalculable city. What ensued was only one of a thousand success stories of those gaudy days” (Crack-Up 26). This omission essentially erases Fitzgerald’s justification for his own celebrity, and the countless number of stories circulated about his first novel, and it helps to create the impression of a far more random series of events. Success, no longer a natural outgrowth of his unique genius, has become so commonplace that the narrator nearly attributes it directly to the “gaudy days” of the early 1920’s.

What is more, he does not appear in the guise of the spontaneous, quick-witted celebrity often found in his pajamas by interviewers, but as a reticent, even confused outsider, uncertain about both the role he was previously asked to play and the duties that such a role entailed. The narrator explains, “for just a moment, before it was demonstrated that I was unable to play the role, I, who knew less of New York than any reporter of six months standing... was pushed into the position not only of spokesman for the time but of the typical product of that same moment” (Crack-Up 27).<sup>137</sup> This rhetorical positioning subtly stretches the speaker’s distance from his old persona because he is not only demonstrably removed from his naïve young self, but that self, it turns out in retrospect, was always remote from his persona as well.

One advantage of creating such distance is that the speaker can simultaneously exploit the lingering value of Fitzgerald’s previous publicity and, at the same time, distance himself from it. Throughout the article, he discusses a host of scandalous antics, from disrobing in public to a fight with a police officer to his famous ride with Zelda through the streets of New York on the roof of a taxi. He also wryly suggests that, even at the time, he rarely remembered doing the things he read about in the papers. Whether the stories were publicity stunts or simply drunken escapades is never specifically addressed, but, in either case, the triple layering of present speaker, past speaker, and public persona works to emphasize the relative maturity, as well as the intellectual development, of the current narrator.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> The narrator goes on to dismiss his public interviews and articles, saying that he and Zelda “were quoted on a variety of subjects we knew nothing about. Actually our ‘contacts’ included half a dozen unmarried college friends and a few new literary acquaintances” (Crack-Up 27).

The persona that emerges from Fitzgerald's autobiographical works in the 1930's is an intensely introspective figure searching the past to help clarify and explain the losses of the present. The narrator also has an aura of authority that does not emanate from his innate genius but from the hard-learned lessons of experience. Along similar lines, Fitzgerald frequently depicts himself as an ordinary man struggling with the problems of his craft. In 1934, he wrote an introduction to the Modern Library edition of *The Great Gatsby* that claims, "the present writer has always been a 'natural' for his profession, in so much that he can think of nothing he could have done as efficiently as to have lived deeply in the world of imagination. There are plenty other people constituted as he is" (Brucoli On Authorship 140). Unlike in his early years, when words simply spilled from his brain to the page, Fitzgerald's "talent" here is no longer directly connected to writing. It is predicated on an active imagination. Moreover, this supposed ability, already undermined by the quotation marks around 'natural,' does not even set him apart from other writers.

Surprising as this modesty is in the context of an introduction to a reprinted novel, it seems even more out of place, given Fitzgerald's history of bravado, in interviews. In one conversation with a reporter from the *Montgomery Advertiser*, Fitzgerald made an off-hand comment about, as the interviewer characterizes it, the "foolish gesture" of prohibition and the potential problems this law raised for the government. While his comment itself is reminiscent of the brash young man of the previous decade, what sets

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<sup>138</sup> The narrator refers to his early self as acting with "theatrical innocence" because he was the observed but not the observer. This sense of acting but never really being in control, as one who is merely playing a role, aptly characterizes the young narrator in the piece (Crack-Up 29). A similar emphasis on both public visibility and lack of a certain type of agency appears in another crucial description of his early years: "I had as much control over my own destiny as a convict over the cut of his clothes" (Crack-Up 25).



this statement apart is that it is immediately followed by a series of qualifications:

“Understand now, I’m purely a fiction writer and do not profess to be an earnest student of political science... and all the writers, keenly interested in human welfare whom I know, laugh at the prohibition law.... All of my writer friends think and say the same thing” (Brucoli and Bryer 285). Here, Fitzgerald is no longer the natural genius with license to discourse on any topic that crosses his mind. He is merely a writer who is, in a stunning admission, perhaps less than qualified to pass judgments on “political science.” A few mildly inflammatory opinions, once the staple of any Fitzgerald interview, now require far more corroboration than personal experience alone can provide. The collective authority of his “writer friends” must be summoned, and reiterated, before the next slightly provocative topic, Communism, can be addressed in equally qualified terms.

Perhaps the most direct depiction of Fitzgerald’s new position as a writer appears in “One Hundred False Starts,” a humorous piece detailing the various unfinished projects that fill his notebook. This article takes as its subject the countless pages he must write or, in the racing metaphor that dominates the piece, the “days and days” he must “crouch” in order to create the mere handful of publishable stories attributed to his name (Mizener Afternoon 130). The overriding irony of the piece, that is, Fitzgerald’s ultimate ability to take these failures and create a highly amusing story out of them, not only enhances the humor of the piece but also helps to undercut the darker implications that could be read into Fitzgerald’s many “false starts.” He is not a washed up alcoholic stuck in a pattern of failure, but a fairly typical writer struggling with the difficulties of his craft. In fact, after reiterating that he is “in every sense a professional,” Fitzgerald concludes the piece by praising both hard work and the extensive experience, gained

through false starts as well as successful writing, necessary to make that work productive (Mizener Afternoon 131).

Ultimately, the narrator of “One Hundred False Starts” suggests that this new outlook has changed both the writer himself and the kind of pieces he is capable of writing. One of his notebook entries, “Article: Unattractive Things Girls Do, to pair with counter article by woman,” recalls an earlier set of pieces he did with Zelda for *McCall’s* in response to the question, “Does a Moment of Revolt Come Sometime to Every Married Man?”<sup>139</sup> From his current position, the narrator cannot even put the question into proper perspective and he narrows the title from universal female characteristics to those reflecting “a great majority” of women to “a strong minority.” He finally gives up the article fragment as a remnant of a distant “gilded age,” a decision that takes on even greater significance in light of the fact that Fitzgerald rarely attempted anything like his earlier pieces in the 1930’s (Mizener Afternoon 128). So, much like in his other supposedly non-fictional pieces from the 1930’s, this narrator is not only distancing himself from a recognizable past, but he is formulating that gap as an uncrossable boundary and is, by extension, depicting himself as a fundamentally different figure from the one who previously appeared in the popular magazines.

Again, this perspective, while prevalent in many of Fitzgerald’s nonfiction pieces from the 1930’s, cannot be used to mark a distinct shift in his work during the period because he had been fascinated by both the potential benefits and the dangers inherent in a doctrine of fundamental change from the earliest days of his career. He often

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<sup>139</sup> For the original articles, see Francis Scott Fitzgerald and Zelda Fitzgerald “Revolt” 21, 36, 82. The pieces are also collected separately. Scott’s reply was included in Bruccoli and Bryer, eds. 184-86. Zelda’s version is collected in Zelda Fitzgerald Collected Writings 395-96.

characterized his own life in terms of irrevocable shifts, as when, in his ledger entry for the year 1919, he wrote, “The most important year of my life. Every emotion and my life work decided” (qtd. in Bruccoli Epic Grandeur 98). The finality of this judgment is as striking in scope as it is myopic in vision, and it reflects a perspective that would recur in Fitzgerald’s work until the end of his life, when he characterized Monroe Stahr, the hero of his final, posthumously published novel, as the last tycoon.<sup>140</sup>

These continuities in Fitzgerald’s later work help to characterize the change that so many critics have glossed or subsumed into the larger narrative of Fitzgerald’s life. Instead of seeing the difference in terms of the emergence of some specific characteristics or merely as the result of Fitzgerald’s declining capabilities, his writing in the 1930’s can be far more easily characterized by the *consistency* of several elements, particularly in relation to the narrative persona he develops across the body of his work. He seems to be cultivating a new persona as a wholly different kind of writer, one far more devoted to his craft than the youth who effortlessly turned out pages for an adoring fan base.

Given that the marketplace for fiction is becoming increasingly less stable as the Depression wears on and Fitzgerald himself is producing fewer saleable pages of material, these efforts to reinforce the elements of his image that suggest he is a competent writer make a certain kind of commercial sense. In comparison with his early publicity blitz, however, a handful of articles published in magazines with relatively small circulations did little to change larger perceptions of the writer. His very inability to

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<sup>140</sup> Fitzgerald’s notes for the novel contain many titles, including *Stahr: A Romance* and *The Last of the Tycoons*. The novel was originally published, under Edmund Wilson’s hand, in 1941 as *The Last Tycoon: An Unfinished Novel Together With “The Great Gatsby” and Selected Stories*. Matthew Bruccoli later re-edited Fitzgerald’s final passages and notes under another of Fitzgerald’s titles, *The Love of the Last Tycoon: A Western*.

promote himself as a more “serious” writer through many of the methods that helped circulate his name and image in the first place seriously hindered the recuperation of his reputation in the 1930’s, even if it may have ultimately contributed to his later revival. In short, despite a fairly consistent effort to cultivate the persona of a more serious and sedate writer, the image of the young genius from Princeton would follow Fitzgerald, in various forms, for the rest of his life.

Many of the interviews Fitzgerald conducted throughout the 1930’s document this conflict between the new writer and the old persona. Most of these pieces still associate him directly with *This Side of Paradise* and organize their discussions around questions about “flappers” and “youth” in America.<sup>141</sup> Yet, many of Fitzgerald’s comments pertain directly to writing and, in place of the flip comments of his youth, he now offers sedate advice. In one interview he lectures, “The American people are just beginning to wake up to the fact that success comes hard” (Brucoli and Bryer 288). He then goes on to chastise writers for getting caught up in larger struggles and leaving behind their “detached viewpoint,” an ironic comment for an author who cultivated a reputation in part by portraying *This Side of Paradise* as, more or less, a record of his immediate experiences. This commitment to a more disciplined writing process is also reflected in comments Fitzgerald makes about his own work ethic. For instance, he talks about spending fifteen consecutive nights in the emergency room of a hospital in order to write one short story, “Zone of Accident” (Brucoli and Bryer 292).

In interviews where he does discuss topical matters, Fitzgerald’s commentary is equally far removed from the outspoken proclamations of his youth. One piece,

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<sup>141</sup> Several of Fitzgerald’s interviews from this period are collected in Brucoli and Bryer, eds. 284-99.

published in 1935, provides a brief commentary on the six different generations that have, by his count, supposedly existed since 1916. Fitzgerald, in direct opposition to some of his earlier comments from ““Wait Till You Have Children of Your Own!’,” concludes by advising parents to teach children the “old truths” and infuse them with traditional “character” (Brucoli and Bryer 294).

This inability to develop a new image was not entirely negative for Fitzgerald, in part because his name occasionally resurfaced in popular references to the Jazz Age. If such mentions often ignored his continuing existence and referred only to a handful of early accomplishments, they did help him remain visible to the larger public.<sup>142</sup> However remote this success may have seemed, Fitzgerald was also able to cash in on these old associations in times of desperate need. In July 1937, a time when he was regularly earning only \$250 for a short story and had made less than \$3500 in six months, Fitzgerald was still able to land a contract with MGM paying \$1000 a week. His first job, not surprisingly, was to help patch up the script for *A Yank in Oxford*, a movie about a young American college man in England.

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<sup>142</sup> Any discussion of Fitzgerald’s personal feelings about these references would take me far outside the scope of my argument. I will merely say that evidence suggests he was quite ambivalent about his lingering persona. On one hand, he still clearly felt pride in these notices and kept collecting such clippings, many of which recalled his ability to capture the mood of the younger generation in *This Side of Paradise*, until his death. For relevant selections from Fitzgerald’s scrapbooks, see Matthew J. Brucoli, Scottie Fitzgerald Smith and Joan P. Kerr, eds. *Egoists* 204-5. On the other hand, Fitzgerald was not always pleased by these mentions, in part because they conflicted with his efforts to construct a more “literary” image. In a semi-autobiographical piece published in late 1936, “Afternoon of an Author,” the narrator stops to listen to music and bitterly remarks, “so long since he had danced, perhaps two evenings in five years, yet a review of his last book had mentioned him as being fond of night clubs; the same review had also spoken of him as being indefatigable. Something in the sound of the word in his mind broke him momentarily and feeling tears of weakness behind his eyes he turned away. It was like in the beginning fifteen years ago when they said he had ‘fatal facility,’ and he labored like a slave over every sentence” (*Afternoon of an Author* 181).

The flip side of Fitzgerald's lingering association with the past was that many of his contemporaries dismissed him. As Budd Schulberg, who worked with Fitzgerald on *Winter Carnival*, later said, "My generation thought of F. Scott Fitzgerald as an age rather than as a writer, and when the economic strike of 1929 began to change the sheiks and flappers into unemployed boys and underpaid girls, we consciously and a little belligerently turned our backs on Fitzgerald" (qtd. in Prigozy "Culture of Celebrity" 15). Moreover, when Schulberg, who had long been an admirer of Fitzgerald's fiction, first learned they would be collaborating together, he was surprised to learn Fitzgerald was still alive (Brucoli *Epic Grandeur* 449). And Schulberg was not alone. As noted previously, Arnold Gingrich, despite his personal dislike of the Crack-Up essays, thought any publicity could help a man most people thought was dead. Even Fitzgerald's future partner Sheilah Graham would claim that she had, at first, associated his name only with the 1920's.<sup>143</sup>

Those who still read Fitzgerald's writing in the 30's did not frequently have a much higher opinion of him. In part because Fitzgerald had forged such a close relationship between his person and his writing, and in part because of the retrospective viewpoint adopted in much of his later writing, many people began to see him not as a serious writer struggling with his craft but as a literary failure. The Crack-Up essays would, as we have seen, prompt many such readings of Fitzgerald's life during the period, and the publicity they generated only enhanced the view that he was little more than a washed up rummy. This attitude took its most public, and its most scandalous, form several months after the final Crack-Up essay appeared in *Esquire*.

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<sup>143</sup> I am indebted to the work of Ruth Prigozy for this point. For other examples and quotes about Scott's growing obscurity, see Ruth Prigozy "Culture of Celebrity" 13-15.

In September 1936, journalist Michel Mok traveled to the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina, where Fitzgerald had been staying since July, to do a piece on the author. Fitzgerald was in no condition to do an interview. In July, he had broken his arm in a diving accident and had to spend ten weeks in a body cast. To make matters worse, he fell in the bathroom late at night and, as a result of the fall, developed a form of arthritis in the arm. The cast also largely prevented him from going, or at least provided him with an excuse for not going, to visit Zelda, who was institutionalized at Highland Hospital in the nearby town of Asheville. Her immediate presence served as yet another reminder of how far he had fallen from his early years of easy money and widespread publicity. Finally, Fitzgerald's mother, with whom he had had an ambivalent relationship throughout much of his life, died in early September. Fitzgerald was medicated, drinking heavily, chronically depressed, and possibly ill when Mok came to his hotel room for the interview, which, not incidentally, was on September 24, the author's 40<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>144</sup>

As might be expected, the piece Mok wrote reads like a nightmare version of Fitzgerald's early interviews.<sup>145</sup> In the first half of the article, Mok describes Fitzgerald's current state, referring to his incessant drinking, "his twitching face with its pitiful expression of a cruelly beaten child," and his addled conversation. This man is no longer, Mok explicitly informs readers, the spontaneous genius spouting off witticisms and prophecy for an adoring audience. He refers to Fitzgerald as "an actor," pointing out the transparency of the author's poses, and glosses over much of his "long, rambling, disjointed talk," which sounds like the Crack-Up essays but is "not nearly as poetic."

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<sup>144</sup> For more on the events leading up to the interview, see Bruccoli 404-7.

<sup>145</sup> For a slightly condensed version of Mok's article, see Michel Mok "Miscellany". For the original article, see Michel Mok "Other Side".

Then, the second half of the article has Fitzgerald recounting, in that same rambling, disjointed fashion, the legend of his youth, including many of the same events that had circulated since his early “Who’s Who” piece. The contrast is devastating, and by Fitzgerald’s own account, he swallowed an overdose of morphine after reading it.

As we have seen, this association of Fitzgerald with drunken failure would come to dominate later criticism of his work in the 1930’s. Yet, as much as this article attempts to highlight changes in the author, it does, when viewed from the perspective of Fitzgerald’s reputation, point to the lingering interest in his earlier persona.<sup>146</sup> Mok’s overt maliciousness is not directed at Fitzgerald the man, nor does he attempt to criticize any of the author’s books. Instead, he attacks Fitzgerald’s image, and, in the sheer force of the attack, he reveals that, nearly two decades after the publication of *This Side of Paradise*, this image was still relevant enough to invite a public flogging. Surprisingly, Mok’s piece, which originally ran in the *New York Post*, generated enough interest to be picked up and excerpted in *Time* magazine’s “People” column a week later.<sup>147</sup>

In the context of this complex blending of stability and fluctuation, of uncritical praise and unapologetic condemnation, of success and failure, the Crack-Up essays take on an added poignancy. Throughout the 1930’s, Fitzgerald looked to recast his career outside the confines of the Jazz Age from the position of one reflecting on the nature of change itself, and these essays are at once a meditation on his profession and an

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<sup>146</sup> Fitzgerald’s famous remark, “there are no second acts in American life,” succinctly captures the lingering association of his name with the Jazz Age.

<sup>147</sup> Fitzgerald, in correspondence with Marie Hamm, one of his early love interests from St. Paul, claimed that the article was “an entirely faked-up picture of me as I was at forty. None of the remarks attributed to me did I make to him. They were taken word by word from the first “Crack-Up” article” Turnbull, ed., 545-47.



exploration of the enormous psychological costs that often accompany such major shifts in perspective and positioning. In a larger theoretical sense, they are about how a “life” can be shaped within the dictates of celebrity discourse and an expanding cultural marketplace. Yet, on a much smaller level, they are simply one more part of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s ongoing project to manage his own reputation by whatever means were available to him.

## ***Chapter 4:***

### ***The Crack-Up Essays: Masculine Identity, Modernism, and the Dissolution of Literary Values***

In the following chapter, I argue that Fitzgerald retools the divide between his current identity and his past persona in order to cultivate a slightly different image of himself. Unlike his earlier essays from the 1930's, which depict the young Fitzgerald as naïve and out of place, the narrator of the Crack-Up idealizes many aspects of his earlier self. The gap between the two figures, then, is not a mark of the current narrator's maturity, but is instead a reflection of the negative impact society has had on him in the intervening years. Changing economic and social conditions have left the contemporary narrator trapped between the chaotic "multiplicity" of existence and a pressure towards standardization in the literary field, opposing tendencies that he rhetorically combines in the figure of a simultaneously smothering and hyperproductive "feminine" impulse.

By combining these threats under the banner of the feminine, the narrator is able to seek rhetorical and artistic refuge in a masculine pose that draws on traditionally gendered aesthetic hierarchies while also attempting to redefine the boundaries constraining male artists. So, in contrast the many critical readings that characterize the Crack-Up as a heroic recommitment to the craft of writing, I argue that the narrator of these essays is not the now-familiar isolated masculine genius of modernist literature. He is, instead, an emotionally engaged writer devoted to the arduous process of producing

Literature. Reading Fitzgerald's essays in masculine terms not only helps to explain the gendered subtext of many facets of the Crack-Up essays, but it also sheds light on the antagonistic reactions Fitzgerald's pieces inspired in many of his fellow male writers, most of whom were put off by his effort to fashion a new space of literary masculinity.

### **The Crack-Up, Contradictions, and Fitzgerald's Narrative Persona**

In November of 1935, Fitzgerald left the cold Baltimore winter behind and traveled alone to North Carolina. He had visited the state several times during the past year, partly because the weather was more favorable for his health. On this particular trip, he went to the Skyland Hotel in Hendersonville. A frequently cited passage from his notebooks describes the initial conditions of his stay: "Monday and Tuesday I had two tins of potted meat, three oranges and a box of Unedas and two cans of beer. For the food that totaled 18 cents a day... It was funny coming into the hotel and the very deferential clerk not knowing that I was not only thousands, nay tens of thousands in debt, but had less than 40 cents cash in the world and probably a \$13. deficit at my bank" ("Notebooks" #1598). It was in this condition that Fitzgerald sat down to write "The Crack-Up." The next two essays in the series were written a month later, shortly before the author returned home to Baltimore and checked into Johns Hopkins, another semi-regular stop for Fitzgerald at the time. He went to the hospital over a half dozen times in the mid-30's to manage tuberculosis and to reduce his alcohol consumption.<sup>148</sup>

It would not be improbable to suggest that these bleak circumstances provided Fitzgerald with material for the persona he would construct in the Crack-Up essays. The

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<sup>148</sup> Fitzgerald stayed in the hospital from January 14-16. For more details on this period in Fitzgerald's life, see Brucoli 400-07.

narrator, who claims to be suffering “a crack-up of all values,” spends the first several pages of the opening piece attempting to explain his “thesis that life has a varying offensive,” meaning that life can destroy individuals in any number of ways (Crack-Up 80, 71). He discusses external and internal blows; attacks on the nerves, the mind, and the body; and the difference between sudden damages and lingering effects. He talks about both “common ills” and larger metaphysical difficulties, going so far as to assert the fundamental “futility of effort” (Crack-Up 70). He even illustrates compensatory mechanisms that neither help to correct problems nor prevent further damage from occurring.<sup>149</sup>

To simply dismiss this bleak outlook as the by-product of a real alcoholic depression, however, is to ignore the larger rhetorical uses that Fitzgerald makes of this perspective. The very fact that he posits a “thesis,” along with his insistence on discussing the causes of his “crack-up” in abstract terms, reveals something of the larger intellectual nature of his endeavor. It is possible to dismiss, as many critics have, the posturing of these essays as little more than the evasions of an alcoholic who cannot deal honestly with his problems but who is too damaged to write about anything outside of his immediate personal experience. Nevertheless, such a perspective, reflective of an earlier critical culture that tended to de-value autobiographical writing as somehow less “literary,” neglects the narrator’s complex engagement with his own assertions of gloom.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> For a meditation on the difficulty of approaching such a text from a removed critical perspective, see Gilles Deleuze Logic 154-61.

<sup>150</sup> Many recent autobiographical theorists, following in the wake of poststructural attacks on traditional uses of the concept “author,” have been highly critical of approaches to life writing

Fitzgerald's narrator does not merely indulge in the details of his own impotence for the readers' voyeuristic pleasure, but he instead constructs a related thesis that complicates the significance of his already abstracted "revelations." At the beginning of the first essay, after a description of the ways in which life assaults the individual, the narrator pauses to make what he calls "a general observation." He says, "the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise. This philosophy fitted onto my early adult life" (Crack-Up 69). By choosing to emphasize individual agency, and the difficulties inherent in functioning in the necessary contradictions of existence, the narrator effectively splits his story into three distinct frames. First, there is the "early adult" years, wherein he understood the futility of existence while still maintaining a seemingly "limitless capacity for toil" (Crack-Up 79). Then, there is the listless crack-up period followed by what is presumably a return to activity, ironically represented by the Crack-Up essays themselves.

Such a perspective also suggests that these meditations will provide no easy solution to the larger problems of life. Neither logic, nor strength, nor sheer determination will be enough to save the narrator from the many unpredictable assaults on his mind, his

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that stress the importance of verifying historical truths. Much work has been done in recent decades examining both the textual practices and the cultural histories that have shaped contemporary attitudes towards life writing and what Kirk Curnutt refers to as "the genre's façade of unmediated facticity" ("Clean Break" 300). However, such discussions would take me far outside the focus of my own project. The two most influential theoretical critiques of "authorship" have been Roland Barthes "Death"; Michel Foucault "Author". For influential studies that adapt these ideas specifically to the study of autobiography, see Paul John Eakin Making Selves; Robert Folkenflik Culture; James Olney Essays.

body, and his spirit. The best he can hope for is to remain active in a hostile and unyielding world.

Given this perspective on life, the narrator's reactions to adversity make some sense. In order to retain some semblance of order and control in his life, every time the narrator receives bad news he retreats from the outside world. The most obvious withdrawal occurs after the narrator realizes he has "cracked" and he travels "a thousand miles to think it over. I took a dollar room in a drab little town where I knew no one" (Crack-Up 80). Yet, this escape is only one of several significant retreats that occur throughout the essays. In the first piece, shortly before the narrator realizes that he has cracked, his doctor reports what he vaguely describes as a "grave sentence" (Crack-Up 71). As a result of this random and unpredictable blow, the narrator retreats from the world he knows to an isolated spot where he alternates between sleeping and making "hundreds of lists."<sup>151</sup>

These lists provide another means of organization and control for the narrator, who, ironically, does not simply discuss his tendency but replicates it in the text, saying he made lists of "of cavalry leaders and football players and cities, and popular tunes and pitchers, and happy times, and hobbies and houses lived in and how many suits since I left the army and how many pairs of shoes..." (Crack-Up 71-2). The excerpt does not even reproduce half the text he devotes to this particular list, but it provides a

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<sup>151</sup> In an interesting biographical parallel, many scholars have noted Fitzgerald's lifelong tendency to keep records and lists. As early as age fourteen, he began keeping the *Thoughtbook of Francis Scott Fitzgerald Key*, a diary of his romantic and social adventures. He also had a habit of making lists out of random events in his life. For instance, critic and Fitzgerald biographer Arthur Mizener notes that Fitzgerald used to keep lists of the various "snubs" he had suffered Arthur Mizener, ed., Afternoon 169. The latter list is also addressed in Edward J. Gleason "Flame" 220. For more on Fitzgerald's tendency to make lists, see Brucoli 27, 143, 220.

representative sample of the random events and objects that the narrator tries to organize upon learning that he is seriously ill. The irony of creating a list out of his lists also draws attention to the way in which these essays as a whole participate in a similar process of organization. All three essays contain various catalogs that ultimately reflect the narrator's need to bring order to a life threatened by the dissolution of a psychological crack-up.<sup>152</sup>

This reading suggests that the chaos plaguing the narrator is a function of existence itself, which is both a crucial issue in the text and a recurring motif in Fitzgerald's work, particularly in his nonfiction writing from the 1930's. For instance, after the Ring Lardner's death in September 1933, Edmund Wilson commissioned Fitzgerald, who had become good friends with Lardner in the early 1920's, to write a piece about him for the *New Republic*. Fitzgerald concluded that Lardner was incredibly talented but never achieved greatness as a writer because he had spent his formative years working as a sports reporter, an occupation that left him with a very narrow view of the world and a limited standard by which to judge it. As a result, Lardner was unable "to apply that standard to the horribly complicated mess of living, where nothing, even the greatest conceptions and workings and achievements, is else but messy, spotty, tortuous" (*Crack-Up* 37). Fitzgerald used a similar vision of life to good dramatic effect in an article he wrote the next year called "Sleeping and Waking." In this piece, he describes his own difficulties with insomnia, a description that rests on his vision of sleep as a biological mechanism so complex that it "can be spoiled by one infinitesimal incalculable

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<sup>152</sup> The presence of these lists also reflects the difficulty of the narrator's "solution," which does not entail a reprieve from the complexities of life but rather a standoff with them. Even the "recovered" author of these pieces continues to search for an impossible order.

element” like a change in the weather, a bodily adjustment, or even a small fly (Crack-Up 65).

Of course, while the underlying problem in each case remains the general conditions of existence, which are characterized by their variable assaults and logical difficulties, such conditions always manifest themselves in historically specific ways, or, in the case of the Crack-Up essays, at least as specifically as the generalized tone of the pieces would allow. For instance, while describing his own sense of impotence as the things he values are slowly stripped away from him, the narrator laments that talking films, which he sees as a far less “supple” medium than the novel, have displaced interest in serious literature. He concludes, “this was something I could neither accept nor struggle against something which tended to make my efforts obsolescent, as the chain stores have crippled the small merchant, an exterior force, unbeatable” (Crack-Up 78). This metaphor not only pits the individual writer against both what he calls the “communal” art of scriptwriting and the mass-market machinery of the Hollywood film industry, but it also locates him squarely in the past, as opposed to the newer form of entertainment represented by the “talkies.”

As an independent creative artist, the narrator is positioning himself in opposition to the rise of a rationalized capitalist society that displaces individual agency and replaces truly creative work with systematized “creative” productions. He is similarly critical of audiences who replace the more difficult task of studying “true” art works with the easy embrace of formulaic productions and who sacrifice individual judgment for the opinions of others. Thus, middlebrow outlets like the Book-of-the-Month Club, which ship books to club members based on the opinions of a panel of “experts,” are implicitly condemned



even as the narrator admits that they are still a viable mode of distribution (“People still read, if only Professor Canby’s book of the month”-78).<sup>153</sup>

The narrator’s use of the term “obsolescence” to capture his sense of personal and temporal displacement also connects the specific example in question with larger tendencies in American consumer culture. As mass production processes developed and expanded over the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, creating a rapidly increasing quantity of salable products, advertising agencies emerged as a powerful new force in the cultural landscape. By the turn of the century, advertising expenditures began to skyrocket. Ad volume in the United States rose from \$190 million in 1890 to \$682 million in 1914. By 1919, businesses spent almost \$1.5 billion on ads, a figure that doubled again over the next ten years. In 1928, the year before the Great Depression, ad volume totaled almost \$3 billion (Marchand 6).

With these massive increases in scale, advertising firms not only worked to promote individual products or brands, but they also attempted to alter consumer attitudes about spending more generally. Though terms like creative or progressive obsolescence were still used in favor of the now more familiar form, planned obsolescence, by the early 1920’s advertisers widely embraced the idea that people could be encouraged to buy more if their attention was directed away from the functionality of goods and relatively stable concepts like utility towards the more malleable notion of style, which could be updated regularly regardless of underlying changes in the products themselves. Fitzgerald, who had raced to fame as the spokesperson of the young generation only to watch the slow rise of new generational spokespeople and eventually the sudden

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<sup>153</sup> For more on the emergence of the middlebrow in American culture generally and the Book-of-the-Month-Club more specifically, see Radway; Rubin.

emergence of the Depression era, a time when he was still frequently recalled as the “Chronicler of the Jazz Age,” could certainly have related to such cultural shifts. In one frequently cited note from his final, unfinished novel, Fitzgerald wrote, “There are no second acts in American life” (Last Tycoon 163).

While such a grim outlook might seem to accord well with the larger tone of the Crack-Up essays, the darker aspects of a disposable culture were always linked with more positive values. Advertising scholars of the era point out that efforts to promote new styles were always linked to ideas of modernity, that is, they pushed people to remain at the cutting edge of cultural progress, whether it be by owning the newest gadgets, participating in the most recent fads, or trading in old items for more contemporary styles.<sup>154</sup> As such, they could embrace rapid turnover of consumer goods while avoiding overt references to waste.

This emphasis on remaining current in material culture had a concomitant emphasis in the cultural field, where artists had long been emphasizing newness in both formal and literal terms, which is to say, writers who aspired to create “high” art were encouraged to develop new styles and forms to capture the particular essence of the current moment. William Troy, in an article reassessing Fitzgerald’s work after the release of Wilson’s *The Crack-Up* in 1945, has perhaps best captured this intersection of time, order, and craft in Fitzgerald’s writing. He says, “there was Fitzgerald’s exasperation with the multiplicity of modern human existence-especially in his own country. ‘It’s under you, over you, and all around you,’ he protested, in the hearing of the

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<sup>154</sup> In addition to Marchand’s important book, see also Pope; Martha L. Olney Buy Now. For a useful article relating consumption to Fitzgerald’s work more specifically, see Kirk Curnutt “Consumer”.

present writer, to a young woman who had connived at the slow progress of his work. 'And the problem is to get hold of it somehow.' It was exasperating because for the writer, whose business is to extract the unique quality of his time, what Baudelaire calls the quality of *modernité*, there was too much to be sensed, to be discarded, to be reconciled into some kind of order" (60). In these terms, Fitzgerald's difficulties with the "multiplicity" of life make him seem profoundly more troubled than the typical struggling author, in that he is not only struggling to pare down his text to create an organic work of art. Rather, he is mired in the elements of his life that will ultimately become the content of his next work.

In the previous example from the Crack-Up essays, the narrator is stuck at an equally difficult point. Whether or not he can muster the energy to work on a new book seems entirely irrelevant in the face of larger and more ominous cultural shifts. It is not simply a question of producing sufficiently new art or, from a larger cultural perspective, being *perceived* as one who creates cutting edge literature, but of finding an entirely new mode of creative activity. However, in a testament to the importance of the concept of "newness" in this particular cultural moment, the narrator does not attempt to rehabilitate his inability to adapt to the "modern" by challenging the importance of "newness." Instead, he turns the table by insisting that his own alienation might ironically be the hallmark of the new era: "My self-immolation was something sodden-dark. It was very distinctly not modern-yet I saw it in others... I had watched when another, equally eminent, spent months in an asylum unable to endure any contact with his fellow men. And of those who had given up and passed on I could list a score" (Crack-Up 81). The narrator's feelings may not literally be "modern," but it is precisely this sense of existing

out of time, of being trapped between two incompatible ages, that connects him with others. The state of modernity might be, he implies, to be constantly in danger of being unmodern, a condition fraught with the anxieties documented in these essays.

This contemporary manifestation of the underlying “multiplicity” of life, which again demonstrates the inevitability of existing in logical contradictions, has one interesting implication in light of Fitzgerald’s previous nonfiction work from the 1930’s. The author’s young counterpart from the 1920’s is no longer being cast in a simply nostalgic frame but is being repositioned in a complex and somewhat idealistic manner. This speaker is not the narrator of “Echoes” for whom the past “seems rosy and romantic... because [he] will never feel quite so intensely about [his] surroundings any more” (Crack-Up 22). The sadness that emerges in these final lines stems from the gap between the more worldly speaker and his naïve young self, who lived life with gusto and was foolishly convinced that the younger generation was about to take over the world. The narrator of “The Lost City” takes a similar approach, fondly recalling the young man he once was but ultimately bemoaning the loss of his earlier beliefs. He concludes by lamenting the loss of his “splendid mirage,” a phrase that recalls the appeal of his former life while also asserting the illusory nature of his previous beliefs (Crack-Up 33).

In the Crack-Up essays, Fitzgerald adopts a similar pose, reflecting on a past that no longer seems tenable. The problem, however, is not that he has outgrown his previous attitudes, but that the contemporary world is not amenable to his former ideals. In these terms, one of the contributing factors to the narrator’s breakdown is precisely that he *cannot* let go of his previous aspirations, like his dream of “being an entire man in the Goethe-Byron-Shaw tradition,” and much of his psychic pain stems from a desire to

reclaim parts of his former life even as they become increasingly problematic to sustain (Crack-Up 84). As a result, many of the young author's traits and ambitions are described in largely positive terms, terms that enhance the emotional effect of the story by raising the stakes for the present tense speaker.

Given that this tension between past and present, between the young narrator and his contemporary counterpart, plays such a crucial role in the larger narrative structure of this piece, I would like to assess a bit more specifically the way in which the young Fitzgerald is characterized throughout these essays. The most obvious characteristic of the narrator's early self is that, unlike the current speaker, he was presumably strong enough to pursue an idealistic identity in a world where such ambitions were rapidly becoming outmoded. After proposing that a "first-rate intelligence" can function while fully aware of the contradictions inherent in those actions, the narrator offers up his early self as an example. In a typically modest reference to his early success, he says that, as a result of seeing "the improbable, the implausible, often the 'impossible,' come true," the young writer came to believe that "life was something you dominated if you were any good" ("Crack-Up" 69). From one perspective, this is simply another way of describing the arrogant tone prominent in many of Fitzgerald's early publicity pieces. Yet, at the same time, this perspective not only admits such achievements were, at best, 'improbable,' but it also suggests that the young Fitzgerald was fully aware of the unlikelihood of his own success. Such a characterization is a distinct change from most of his other nonfiction writings, in that it does not dismiss the young Fitzgerald as naïve, foolish, and out of place. His previous confidence, he now asserts, always existed in

tension with an awareness of its improbability, thereby making his earlier self an ideal that the current writer can admire.

The narrator also emphasizes his previous ability to operate amidst contradictions. For instance, when listing characteristics that have been stripped away by his breakdown, he includes “a passionate belief in order, a disregard of motives or consequences in favor of guess work and prophecy, a feeling that craft and industry would have a place in any world” (Crack-Up 78). The middle term of this list stands out in contrast to the others. While an emphasis on order and hard work suggests that the author is performing strenuous mental labor, labor that could be associated with the hard task of tracing historical motives and consequences, he simultaneously dismisses such efforts in favor of “guess work.” Such a shift, however, does not simply overrule his faith in order, as this move amounts to little more than a shift in terms. Whether he is working diligently to trace cause-and-effect chains around historical events or is simply guessing about larger structures, his efforts are still in the service of constructing larger textual orders.

Yet, the underlying multiplicity of life ensures that chaos will always haunt the narrator. For instance, the narrator first realizes that he has “cracked” not after receiving the “grave sentence” from his doctor or even during his subsequent period of list-making, but when he inexplicably recovers. He concludes, “suddenly, surprisingly, I got better. And cracked like an old plate as soon as I heard the news” (Crack-Up 72). Thus the “crack-up” is not directly, or at least not easily, linked to the narrator’s actual health, as both the onset and the end of illness prove to be equally disarming blows. What is more, upon realizing that he has cracked, the narrator discovers that he has been emotionally bankrupt for the past two years, leaving him, in effect, a helpless bystander to the gradual

dissolution of his life. Not only is he unable to predict or otherwise deflect the blows that life rains down on him, but he cannot even accurately assess the effects that those blows have. So if Fitzgerald's emphasis on irrationality and the unpredictability of events does, as many critics have pointed out, serve to undermine the potential connection between his biographical problems and the issues he explores in these essays, it also, from a narrative perspective, effectively redirects attention towards the impossible struggles that the narrator faces (Crack-Up 71).

Logic itself can offer little comfort in such conditions, but still the narrator is compelled to press on with both his self-diagnosis and his efforts to understand the larger world in which he lives. From this perspective, the lists he compulsively creates function as symbols of both his own drive to master the conditions of existence and the inevitable failure of that project, a contradiction that, in turn, makes the logical action of creating the lists necessary for his psyche while the lists themselves become psychically expendable. Accordingly, he tears up each one as soon as he has finished with it (Crack-Up 71).

Given this ambivalent attitude towards logic and the vibrant energy displayed by the young man who proposes to "dominate" life even as he realizes the futility of such an attitude, it should not be surprisingly that the contemporary writer envisions his earlier self working from a strong emotional, as opposed to intellectual, center. In another interesting use of contradiction, he recreates the Cartesian pursuit of truth, isolating himself from the outside world to seek out the irrefutable fact about himself, only to discover, ironically, that "I had no particular head to be bowed or unbowed... 'I felt- therefore I was'" (Crack-Up 80). This appropriation of the cogito, which implicitly

reaffirms the value of his logical search, in order to prioritize emotional responses that he did not realize were missing until he began to logically assess his condition suggests again the difficulty of putting the complex circumstances of life into purely analytic terms.

The narrator follows this statement with an example intended to emphasize the distinction between logic and emotion. He says, “At one time or another there had been many people who had leaned on me... The dullest platitude monger or the most unscrupulous Rasputin who can influence the destinies of many people must have some individuality, so the question became one of finding... the leak through which, unknown to myself, my enthusiasm and my vitality had been steadily and prematurely trickling away” (Crack-Up 80). In this unusual assessment, the narrator links the ability to connect with others to “individuality,” a trait apparently largely unrelated to what one actually thinks. Put simply, a person’s individuality does not depend on whether he or she is as wily as Rasputin or as banal as the platitude monger. It resides in what the narrator variously characterizes as “heart,” “enthusiasm,” “vitality,” and “feeling,” that is, the emotional drive that kept his younger self struggling on in the face of contradictions. This attitude, then, becomes central not only to his own activity in the world, but to other’s feelings about him.

The narrator asserts that the opposite was true for him as well. He claims that he repeatedly identified himself with “all classes that I came in contact with,” but then goes on to describe that connection solely in terms of an empathetic emotional response: “I was always saving or being saved-in a single morning I would go through the emotions ascribable to Wellington at Waterloo. I lived in a world of inscrutable hostiles and



inalienable friends and supporters” (Crack-Up 71). This connection, which the narrator seems to acknowledge in the final hyperbolic sentence is quite irrational, reflects both that narrator’s romantic outlook on the world, a world in which someone is always “saving or being saved,” and the dominant position that such emotional responses play in his life. He lives not by attempting to mediate extremes or by cultivating a workable synthesis out of opposing positions, but by vacillating between two oppositional poles.

On one level, this larger description could be read as a fairly commonplace, if somewhat convoluted, description of the writing process, where an author is one who can understand other people’s emotional states and generalize them in such a way that they are made accessible to a larger audience. Yet, on another level, this perspective entails a significant amount of emotional hardship for the writer, who does not simply examine the lives of others or assess larger social current from a removed perspective, but begins by connecting emotionally with everyone around him.<sup>155</sup> Such a perspective provides further insight into why the exhausted narrator perpetually runs from other people and attempts to isolate himself in the more peaceful and organized, if ultimately inadequate, realm of logic.

So, in short, the young narrator, despite being fully cognizant of the tensions inherent in his fame and the limitations of his own mind, confidently asserts a vitality that is the true mark of his individuality. While this figure is, in its broad outlines, similar to the one who appears in Fitzgerald’s other nonfiction pieces from the period, there is, as

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<sup>155</sup> Fitzgerald makes a related claim in his earlier nonfiction piece, “One Hundred False Starts” (1933), where he claims that all of his stories begin with an emotion: “If a friend says he’s got a story for me and launches into a tale of being robbed by Brazilian pirates... I can well believe there were various human emotions involved; but... I can’t feel them. Whether it’s something that happened twenty years ago or only yesterday, I must start out with an emotion—one that’s close to me and that I can understand” (132).

noted above, a subtle shift in the specific characterization of his alienation from the world. In other pieces, the young Fitzgerald is depicted as one who is being asked to play a role he neither understands nor seems capable of fulfilling. In the Crack-Up essays, Fitzgerald's problematic position results from contradictions that seem to spring up all around him. As a result, his willingness to face such conditions and "still retain the ability to function" becomes admirable, rather than merely a reflection of his own limited awareness.

### **The Narrator as "Literary Man"**

While Fitzgerald's younger self in the Crack-Up essays can be easily distinguished from other incarnations found in Fitzgerald's Depression-era autobiographical writings, the contemporary narrator appears in the far more familiar guise of the committed artist. He begins by informing readers that he is both a serious professional and a "successful literary man" (Crack-Up 69), two details that stand largely unchallenged throughout the essays. In fact, for an analysis of a writer's breakdown, the narrator provides surprisingly little information about his current position in the profession, an elision that could lead readers to associate the contemporary author with what, from a biographical perspective, would have to be considered past successes.

Similarly, despite the Cartesian pretext of a man doubting everything in search of fundamental truths, the narrator's commitment to authorship remains largely unquestioned. After he decides that the only way to deal with his crack-up is by making a "clean break" from obsolete aspects of his life, which explicitly includes his willingness to be "kind, just, and generous," he summarily declares, "I must continue to be a writer

because that was my only way of life” (Crack-Up 81-2). From a historical position nearly seventy years after Fitzgerald’s death, on the far side of several dozen biographies, such a commitment might seem like a positive decision. By 1936, the author was a nearly bankrupt alcoholic whose avenues of publication were rapidly disappearing. However, for contemporaneous readers, many of whom might have known little more about Fitzgerald than what they had read in newspapers during his heyday as a celebrity author, this claim would certainly have lacked some of the weight it contains in hindsight.

Additionally, the retrospective Fitzgerald created by scholarship differs significantly from the figure who emerges in these essays. Not only does the narrator subtly elide himself with the successful young writer he used to be, a position that might not have seemed too far off the mark for readers who had probably heard of Fitzgerald’s novels and had seen his by-line appear regularly in some of the most popular magazines of the era, but he also puts a relatively positive spin on his current material circumstances. The narrator never complains about his own financial position in the essays and he suggests that his early success placed him in the “leisure class.” He talks about having servants, which certainly would have placed him in the upper economic strata of society during the 1930’s. He even talks about traveling “a thousand miles” simply to find a peaceful place to think (Crack-Up 80).

From this perspective, the narrator’s claim that he “had not tasted so much as a glass of beer in six months” can be seen not simply as a case of alcoholic denial, a charge frequently leveled by biographically-oriented critics, but as a way of bolstering his image as a successful and hard-working writer (Crack-Up 71). Charles Sweetman, in his essay on the *Crack-Up* trilogy, takes this point a step further and suggests that Fitzgerald may

have even downplayed his own drinking out of a “fear of harming his reputation among magazine editors and Hollywood producers” (13). While such a claim might certainly be true, I would also like to reiterate that this persona is not new to these particular essays, but is part of a larger image Fitzgerald had been constructing in his other nonfiction writings throughout the decade.

Micahel Nowlin summarizes the appeal of the professional persona for writers striving to attain elite status. He says, “[literary] professionalism could connote, in effect, the masculine career and possession of special knowledge and competence justly conferring prestige, stability, and a salary not necessarily reflective of competitive market values” (6).<sup>156</sup> For Fitzgerald, whose cultural capital was steadily decreasing throughout the 1930’s, the persona of a competent and knowledgeable professional was useful then both to counter attacks on his personal habits and to isolate aesthetic value from the operations of the marketplace. Yet, Nowlin ultimately downplays the appeal of this position for Fitzgerald, claiming that the author “seldom characterized himself as a professional” (6). In support of this statement, he cites the late essay, “Early Success,” where Fitzgerald explicitly refers to himself as a “professional” and claims “no decent career was ever founded on a public,” as an exceptional example designed to bolster the author’s reputation after he had signed a contract with MGM (6).

In contrast, I would assert, as demonstrated earlier in the chapter, that Fitzgerald repeatedly depicted himself as an author committed to the production of quality fiction and referred to himself as a literary “professional,” explicitly or implicitly, in nearly

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<sup>156</sup> Nowlin acknowledges the alternative negative connotations of literary “professionalism” as well: “The label ‘professional writer’... could readily connote something all-too-ordinary-one’s membership in a class of largely white, middle-class, well-salaried mental-laborers working in the service of the state or big business” (7).

every nonfiction essay he wrote during the 1930's. From his claim to be "in every sense a professional" in "One Hundred False Starts," to the typical "sedentary work-and-cigarette day" of "Sleeping and Waking," to his depiction of the frail author struggling to find the energy to work on his story in "Afternoon of an Author," Fitzgerald insistently creates narrators that are committed to the craft of writing and struggle, sometimes against great odds, to continue producing good stories. While such depictions are relatively few in number when compared with the publicity pieces done on and by Fitzgerald in the 1920's, the consistency with which he emphasized his commitment to writing in the 1930's suggests that Fitzgerald relied a bit more heavily on notions of literary "professionalism" than previous commentators have acknowledged.

One element that makes the Crack-Up essays stand out within this larger pattern is that the narrator suggests that his earlier self was equally committed to the profession. This young man did not fritter away his collegiate years in drunken escapades or neglect his studies for extracurricular pursuits. He "took a beating on poetry" and, after learning all he could, he "set about learning to write" (Crack-Up 76). What is more, Fitzgerald's struggles at Princeton are here chalked up to the early onset of tuberculosis, a claim that both distances his recurring illness from his current drinking habits and relieves him of responsibility for his academic troubles. In this version of the story, the narrator loses his position at the university simply because he needed too much time for recuperation and, as usual, the conclusion of his college career is not mentioned at all.

When examining his life after college, the narrator places a similar emphasis on writing. Reflecting on the years between his first novel and the crack-up, the narrator says that he largely ceased to consider the larger world, opting instead to rely on the guidance

and expectations of others. However, the one area he exempts from this judgment is his writing, meaning that, in the previous twenty years, he “had done very little thinking, save within the problems of [his] craft” (Crack-Up 79). This depiction of Fitzgerald, as a young man who is largely torpid except when animated to work through the technical difficulties of his “craft,” is vastly different from the figure in “Who’s Who,” who could care less what he is doing so long as he can make a “mark” on the world. In this piece, the young Fitzgerald decides to publish a book of poetry because “I had read somewhere that every great poet had written great poetry before he was twenty-one” (Mizener Afternoon 84). Far from struggling to “learn what it was all about,” as he says in the Crack-Up essays, this man spends one year fixating on poetry because he wants to be considered a “great poet.” The previous year he had been obsessed with musical comedies and the following year he decides to write an “immortal novel” (Mizener Afternoon 84). Such a figure, concerned as he is with creating a lasting reputation, could hardly be bothered to worry about the craft of fiction, much less the specific form of the novel, which, again, the Crack-Up narrator reveres as “the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to another” (Crack-Up 78).

In short, there is little trace of the brash but talented youth churning out 7000 words a day between parties. The new version of the young Fitzgerald is confident but alert to the contradictions inherent in his attitudes and actions. He is also a committed writer whose “heart” both guides him and allows him to connect with people from “all classes” (Crack-Up 71). This depiction is important in part because it marks a subtle change from the persona Fitzgerald constructs in nonfiction pieces early in the decade, even as it reiterates many key elements of that public identity. It is also important because

the tragedy of the “clean break” arises from his lingering desire to retain elements of this previous life. Thus, the young persona can function as a guide to the effects of the narrator’s crack-up and thereby provide a useful frame through which to view the conclusions reached in these essays.

### **“Being a Writer Only”: Solutions and Contradictions**

In contrast to the complex rhetorical position that the narrator outlines during these essays, a position that is fraught with contradictions arising from the “multiplicity” of existence, he proposes a relatively simple solution in the final essay, “Handle with Care”: “sheer” away the past self, along with all ideals that conflict with the modern world, and focus on “being a writer only.” This new figure, the narrator claims, will look out only for himself and will not waste any time helping others unless doing so will forward his career in some way.

The final essay concludes with a long description of what such a transformation would entail for the narrator. He claims that he will hire a lawyer to teach him how to speak with a “polite acerbity that makes people feel that far from being welcome they are not even tolerated and are under continual and scathing analysis at every moment.” He will also work on developing a slavish smile and a vocal tone that “will show no ring of conviction except the conviction of the person I am talking to.” The narrator then concludes the essays by referring to himself as a “correct animal” who “may even lick your hand,” if, that is, “you throw [him] a bone with enough meat on it” (Crack-Up 82-4).

As the heavy sarcasm of this description should suggest, such an approach to the world hardly seems like a viable solution, especially for a man who has defined the

essence of his being in emotional terms (“I felt therefore I was”) and whose art itself is dependent upon his emotional connection with other people. One of the ironies of the narrator’s final position is that, rather than correct or improve the nightmarish state of isolation he bemoans in the first essay, this “solution” effectively embraces it as a necessary condition of existence. The final essay even closes with a passage that echoes an earlier description of his illness. In the first essay, he explains, “I saw that even my love for those closest to me was become [sic] only an attempt to love, that my casual relations-with an editor, a tobacco seller, the child of a friend, were only what I remembered I *should* do, from other days” (Crack-Up 72). In “Handle With Care,” he describes his new life as “a writer only”: “I do not any longer like the postman, nor the grocer, nor the editor, nor the cousin’s husband, and he in turn will come to dislike me” (Crack-Up 84). This concluding passage also reiterates the fundamental importance of human involvement for the narrator, who portrays the difficulty of his new life entirely in terms of his lack of meaningful human interaction. In these terms, removed from some of the baggage of Fitzgerald’s biography, such an ending hardly seems like a celebratory recommitment to the values of authorship. It is, at best, a man crawling up inside himself to avoid the pain and unpredictability of a world that no longer shares his values.

Another one of the ironies of the narrator’s final position is that a man who is supposedly committing himself wholeheartedly to a difficult craft has absolutely nothing to say about that craft. Instead, the entire concluding rant is about the narrator conniving for advancement in the *business* of authorship, a view that directly contradicts the heroic author-figure later critics have so regularly found in this essay. What is more, all of the traits the narrator must shed in order to survive in his increasingly crass and materialistic



environment are generally positive. He can no longer be kind, just, or generous. He will not strive to emulate St. Francis of Assisi any more. He must give up the dream of being an “entire man.” Thus, the reader is being rhetorically positioned against the figure who emerges at the end, or at the very least against the environment that creates such men, and is instead being aligned with the strong figure who can stand up against such cynicism, even if it is ultimately a losing battle.

Even the progression of the essays’ titles reinforces a literal reading of this conclusion as wholly problematic. From “The Crack-Up,” to “Pasting It Together,” probably a reference to the conclusion of Eliot’s “The Waste Land,” a poem Fitzgerald knew well, to “Handle With Care,” these names reveal the final figure to be a pastiche so poorly assembled that he may actually be a danger, both in the sense that he could collapse at any moment and in the sense that he could lash out unpredictably. (Fitzgerald concludes the pieces by describing himself as a wild animal.)

While it is necessary to acknowledge these darker facets of “Handle With Care” in order to contest more literal interpretations of the essay, it is important to note the process of revitalization that occurs for the narrator as well. The narrator begins the final piece by wondering how “my enthusiasm and my vitality had been steadily and prematurely trickling away,” but, rather than provide a direct answer to this question, he instead demonstrates the return of vitality through his gleefully scathing portrait of the life of a “writer only.” First, the narrator decides to “outlaw” all giving, a decision which leaves him feeling exuberant. Then, after listing many of the mundane responsibilities that currently dominate his life, he imagines himself as a “beady-eyed,” self-absorbed

careerist who could easily refuse such menial labors, a thought that prolongs his “heady villainous feeling” (Crack-Up 82).

Before the narrator even gets to the most open and direct attacks on the personality he is supposedly adopting, the satirical nature of his pronouncements should be obvious, as should the further irony of this conclusion. The narrator’s strength is returning, but not directly as a result of his commitment to art. It comes from his critique of the literal position he is describing. Thus, it is possible to read this concluding portrait as the narrator’s refusal to accept what he sees as a new order emerging in the literary field and as his recommitment to a set of values that have supposedly become obsolete.<sup>157</sup> He has come around to embracing the contradictions that, at the beginning of the essays, he is, or at least ironically purports to be, unable to face. After surmising that the increasingly business-like climate of the literary world has endangered those who would claim to pursue True Art, he opts to openly mock such a world rather than participate, which is itself, ironically, an effective mode of participation. When viewed from such a perspective, the narrator’s opening “observation” about contradictions comes to seem much more like an epigraph for his former/new mode of existence than an epitaph for the young man who once faced the world with strength and courage.

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<sup>157</sup> In a letter to Mrs. Laura Feley on July 20, 1939, Fitzgerald provides a similar gloss on the essays, though with far more retrospective melancholy than can be read into “Handle With Care.” He says, “I don’t know whether those articles of mine in *Esquire*-that ‘Crack-Up’ series-represented a real nervous breakdown. In retrospect it seems more of a spiritual ‘change of life’-and a most unwilling one-it was a protest against a new set of conditions which I would have to face and a protest of my mind at having to make the psychological adjustments which would suit this new set of circumstances. Being an essentially stable type I managed to cling on until there was a mixture of the patient’s adjustment to the situation and the situation’s adjustment to the patient” (Letters, 589). Of course, these comments are only one of a wide range of positions Fitzgerald took on these essays in his final years.

So, if the narrator of these pieces is in the middle of an emotional and psychological crisis, he does not seem to be able to start over either. The conniving materialistic writer he would need to become in order to end his crisis is no less abhorrent to him than the mental torture of his current existence. However, in his highly satirical portrayal of the “pure” writer that he is supposed to become, at least according to the Fitzgerald mythology, he derives a new strength of purpose and can press on as a man he knows is doomed to obsolescence. In other words, he is reasserting himself as a serious writer, but not, ironically, in the literal manner most critics would like to suggest. He is contending to remain the devoted professional author he has always been, at least according to this particular piece.

### **Creative Freedom and Masculine Crisis**

In contrast to the grim defeatism that seems to conclude the Crack-Up essays, the previous analysis reveals that Fitzgerald had been constructing a more conscious artist persona throughout the decade, one that emerges quite clearly as a younger version of himself in the Crack-Up essays. This persona is, unlike the supposedly-broken contemporary narrator, strong enough to cultivate a place in the world and maintain his individuality, particularly through the uniqueness of his own affective responses, despite a constant barrage of “common ills-domestic, professional, and personal” (Crack-Up 70). This early figure is, in effect, free to cultivate his own personality, at least within the framework of a literary text, while remaining fully aware of the contradictions and difficulties that will inevitably arise from the act of creation itself.

It is precisely this sense of creative freedom that defines the profession of authorship in the Crack-Up essays. At two separate points that effectively bookend these essays, he compares his line of work with other occupations and concludes that writing is distinguished, at least in part, by its lack of boundaries. In his concluding remarks, which are ironically given at the exact same point that he is submitting to the dictates of the literary marketplace by becoming a “beady-eyed” careerist, he says that doctors commit to helping people and soldiers fight to enter Valhalla, but “a writer need have no such ideas unless he makes them for himself” (Crack-Up 84). Similarly, he opens the first essay by explaining the appeal of the profession for him as a young man. He says, “you were never going to have the power of a man of strong political or religious convictions but you were certainly more independent” (Crack-Up 70). In both cases, writing is distinguished from other professions because it depends only on the creativity of the author. There are no larger convictions or expectations to limit one’s production.

Given this idealization of the writing process, it is not surprising that Fitzgerald repeatedly figures his breakdown as the gradual erosion of personal freedoms. First, the narrator fears that the cinema, a “mechanical and communal art,” was usurping the space of literature in American cultural life. Such a shift would relegate true literary talents to dependent roles on scriptwriting teams or, even worse, editorial jobs fixing the work of others. Second, in addition to these larger cultural constraints, the narrator describes his profession as little more than a series of personal obligations. He does not talk about the actual act of writing at all, even after he has committed himself to being “a writer only.” Instead, he merely complains about others who want his help and outlines how he will manipulate people to enhance his reputation. Finally, beyond larger cultural and

professional obligations, the social roles that the narrator is required to play have become an increasing burden on him as, he realizes in retrospect, he runs out of emotional capital. Unable to participate in his world and yet initially unwilling to cast off his obligations, the narrator is trapped by routines that further drain his assets.

The narrator's desire for a freedom beyond the constraints of American culture, his profession, and his current social location reach their endpoint in his anxieties about the essentially random nature of existence itself. He wants to occupy a position that is radically free, even as he constantly appeals to the predefined roles that exist within larger sets of prescribed values. From the opposite end of the spectrum, he compulsively orders the fragments of his own existence while also bridleing at any larger orders imposed on him, though these orders have conditioned his agency in the first place. In short, the narrator wants to avoid the contemporary social obligations of being a writer, but he cannot imagine himself in any other profession, nor does he attempt to envision his profession differently than it is currently constituted.

Thus, the narrator is struggling against two opposing forces. On one side, he faces the random ever-proliferating universe that threatens to invalidate any rational activity. On the other, he faces the danger of overly systematized human activity, which itself threatens to smother or enslave the otherwise distinct, independent individual. As many critics have pointed out about the era's larger debates over standardization and individuality, such discussions are typically written in strikingly gendered terms. In the current context, Janice Radway's examination of gender, standardization, and the literary field in *A Feeling for Books* has proven particularly useful.<sup>158</sup> While her argument is far

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<sup>158</sup> Radway and most other scholars working in this line acknowledge a debt to Andreas Huyssen's important work on gender in *After the Great Divide*. In particular, see pp. 44-81.

too complex to be summarized here, what is immediately relevant for my purposes is her claim that not only was the “singular, individuated, adult subject and his literary apotheosis, the vigorous, virile, wholly original writer” opposed to a feminized “mass-produced, machine culture,” but that the latter forms of cultural production were connected more specifically with an “organic, fertile, maternal force run wild.” This seemingly counterintuitive metaphor emphasizes the danger inherent in such degraded cultural forms, which threaten to erode the boundaries distinguishing mass culture from the sacred work of art by de-emphasizing elements essential to highbrow conceptions of art, elements like “origin, creation, inspiration, and source.” These forms of production, which “insisted on and made visible prior production,” forced artists and critics to emphasize their distance from feminized mass culture as a way of both reinforcing the difference of the individuated subject and asserting their authority as elite figures removed from such degraded cultural forms (*Feeling* 212-20).

Radway’s analysis helps to explain why Fitzgerald could so easily alternate between what appears, from a purely rational standpoint, to be two opposed problems: the underlying “multiplicity” of existence and the gradual standardization/degradation of contemporary culture. Both problems could be subsumed under a larger opposition between the rational masculine individual and the boundless female impulse, an opposition that appears throughout Fitzgerald’s nonfiction work. In some cases, Fitzgerald directly connects the feminine with the difficulty of rational containment. In an interview with Harry Salpeter in the mid-1920’s, Fitzgerald claims that Americans were traveling to France because America is “too big to get your hands on. Because it’s a woman’s country. Because it’s very nice and its various local necessities have made it

impossible for an American to have a real credo.” He then goes on at some length about how people in the United States have not been able to think enough in order to have “great dreams,” which means, he concludes, that people do not like to think about a man like Jefferson Davis. Davis “opens up things that we who accept the United States as an established unit hardly dare to think about.”

This conflation of the feminine, the overwhelming nature of contemporary life, people’s general inability to develop coherent principles, and finally an underside of American life that could threaten to destroy the unity of the whole country creates a dark and desperate backdrop for Fitzgerald’s final statement of hope. He wishes that the country could be saved by the birth of a new hero, one who is explicitly male and will certainly “not be educated by women teachers.” What is more, this new hero will be both independent and inherently masculine enough, if he can avoid being corrupted by feminine teachings, to need no father (Brucoli and Bryer 276-77).

This refiguring of the Christ story, which posits the new “hero” emerging from a lowly “immigrant class” to a mother who knows the special destiny of her hyper-masculine son, suggests that the true evil from which contemporary Americans must be saved is the suffocating feminine impulse, a force barely controlled enough to maintain the integrity of the country. Moreover, the true inheritance of this fatherless boy, the essential godliness bestowed upon him at conception, seems to be masculinity itself. If it can be protected until he comes of age, he may just have a chance to redeem the United States by purging the feminine aspect that threatens the very formation of principles.

While this example may be more elaborate than most, its quasi-hysterical tone was characteristic of Fitzgerald’s publicity pieces in the 1920’s. In one of his last pieces

from the decade, “Girls Believe in Girls,” published in the February 1930 issue of *Liberty*, Fitzgerald makes an equally strong case for the danger of standardized feminine culture. He says, “the man of intelligence either runs alone or seeks amusement in stimulating circles- in any case, he is rarely available [to women]; the business man brings to social intercourse little more than what he reads in the papers... so that, in the thousand and one women’s worlds that cover the land, the male voice is represented largely by the effeminate and the weak, the parasite and the failure” (Brucoli and Bryer 208). Here, the independent, rational man remains separate from both the standardized ideas emerging from widely available newspapers and ominously pervasive “women’s worlds.”

This latter phrase refers specifically to the rapid expansion of cultural spaces for women in the early twentieth century, spaces which Ezra Pound, in a similar diatribe, saw as receptacles for an American literature bereft of the masculinity inherent in true poetic “virtu.” Such effeminate writing is, Pound claimed, “left to the care of ladies’ societies, and of ‘current events’ clubs, and is numbered among the ‘cultural influences’” (qtd. in Lentricchia). Fitzgerald’s broad reference figures the rapid expansion of such spaces as symptomatic of the larger danger inherent in a sprawling, suffocating feminine force.

Furthermore, the effeminate man, already rendered parasitical and weak for his association with the noncreative world of “business,” not only gets his ideas in the readily digestible form of mass circulation newspapers, but he lacks even the little bit of intellect necessary to sort through these basic texts. Such a position locates him intellectually in the same sphere as the women in Pound’s book and “current event” clubs, who, simply by nature of their feminine minds, lack the penetrating masculine insight to glean true



knowledge from literature. Again, Fitzgerald ultimately associates this rise of the feminine, in both its distinct cultural forms and its infiltration of the masculine sphere, with the larger disintegration of a society characterized by “its confusion and its wide-open doors,” a place that “no longer offers the stability of thirty years ago” (Brucoli and Bryer 210).

Fitzgerald’s references to the uncontainable and smothering evil of the feminine sphere lost some of their intensity in his nonfiction work during the 1930’s, as his new persona seemed to necessitate a less frenzied tone. However, the twin dangers conflated and somewhat confused under the larger banner of the feminine continue to reappear throughout the decade, as in his idolization of the mellow monasticism of Edmund Wilson’s study in “The Lost City,” the contemptible rise of feminized culture depicted in “Echoes of the Jazz Age,” and his opposition between the “beautiful muscular organization” of masculine sports and the “horribly complicated mess of living” in “Ring” (*Crack-Up* 25-26, 19, and 37 respectively). Perhaps the most significant shift in Fitzgerald’s approach towards this dichotomy stems not from his attitude towards the dangers implicit in these feminine forces, but from his own persona. As we have seen, in the 1930’s, Fitzgerald comes to rely far less on his inherent literary genius and far more on a discourse of professionalism. The latter position allows him to emphasize hard work and acquired knowledge, traits that were useful in both the field of large-scale production, as they assured publishers and movie executives of his ability to continue producing salable works, and also the field of restricted production, where his competence provided access to a form of quality that existed independently of market demands.

In the Crack-Up essays, Fitzgerald attempts to counter both faces of the pernicious feminine threat by insisting on his role as a professional male writer. The masculine subtext that surfaces immediately in the first essay could suggest that Fitzgerald began this piece with his male *Esquire* audience specifically in mind. Given the significantly different publication standards of *Esquire*, which required much shorter stories than most major periodicals and the relative lack of editorial oversight Gingrich provided, it seems reasonable to assume that Fitzgerald knew who would ultimately be reading his work.<sup>159</sup>

In any case, the narrator begins these pieces as a man talking to men. First, he sets out to shock the sensibilities of presumably privileged males with his brazen opening line (“Of course all life is a process of breaking down”). Then he associates himself with his male audience by adopting both a tone of familiarity and a second person point of view (“[the big blows] you remember and blame things on and, in moments of weakness, tell your friends about”). Finally, he caps off the opening passage by identifying his generalized subject as a male and aligning his concerns more specifically with the condition of the male psyche (“you realize with finality that in some regard you will never be as good a man again”).

Following this series of general observations, the essay moves into a broad portrait of the writer’s background, a description that marks him explicitly as a “literary man.” Moreover, the narrator insistently relates his work, both literally and metaphorically, to other respectable male professions. Doctors, soldiers, politicians, and

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<sup>159</sup> Stephen W. Potts, in his study of Fitzgerald’s short fiction, claims that Fitzgerald did not typically “write down” to the standards of a particular magazine, but he did have to adapt his style to the different editorial demands of *Esquire*. See Potts 82-90.

religious leaders are just a few of the predominantly male circles to figure into these essays.

The narrator also repeatedly emphasizes the ongoing struggle of his day-to-day responsibilities, one area where smothering feminine dependence directly intrudes on his creative freedom. The topic was a particularly difficult one for Fitzgerald, who had, in both personal exchanges and nonfiction writing, repeatedly emphasized the implicitly male burden of being financially responsible for a household. For instance, in one early piece for *McCall's*, where both he and Zelda, along with fifteen other notable people, were asked to respond to the question “Does a moment of revolt come some time to every married man?”, Fitzgerald bemoans “that ghastly moment once a week when you realize that it all depends on you-wife, babies, house, servants, yard and dog. That if it wasn’t for you, it’d all fall to pieces like an old broken dish. That because of those things you must labor all the days of your life” (Brucoli and Bryer 185). The cracked plate metaphor so neatly links Fitzgerald’s professional endeavors with the pressing exigencies of the domestic sphere, which could shatter irreparably without sufficient male support, that he would use it several times throughout his career.

Most notably in this context, the narrator uses it as a focal image at the beginning of “Pasting It Together,” the second of the three Crack-Up essays. In this instance, the narrator himself has become a “cracked plate” that can still be used but is no longer fit for company. The narrator then claims that such an unvarnished lament, free of any redemptive heroics, is necessary because “there weren’t any Euganean hills that I could see” (Crack-Up 75). As Ronald Gervais convincingly argues, based on both the content of Fitzgerald’s essays and other allusions to the poem in his correspondence, this passage

most immediately refers to Shelley's "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills," a poem in which the narrator bemoans the misery of life but is inspired by the beauty of the hills to imagine a redeemed society. For Fitzgerald's narrator, there is no idyllic retreat from the agonies of life, not even through the poetic imagination (Gervais 139-40).

Moreover, the image of the cracked plate, which replaces traditional heroic references to the "Unconquerable Soul" with a single domestic object, succinctly encapsulates the reduced aspirations and the diminished vision of Fitzgerald's narrator. He cannot even begin to imagine something as large as a redeemed society. It is enough for him to simply face himself, honestly and openly, and admit whatever he happens to find there.

It is important to note, given the narrator's insistence in these essays on his ability to continue writing, that he does not seem to seriously entertain the idea of running away from his vaguely defined "responsibilities," nor does he finally question his ability to serve. He is still fit to hold "crackers" and "leftovers," perhaps the metaphorical equivalent of the short texts he has been working on since completing *Tender Is the Night* two years earlier. What is more, while he has unquestionably been worn down by experience, it is ironically the damage suffered that provides him with material to continue working, just as his supposed breakdown provides the subject matter for these particular pieces.

It is around precisely such notions of masculine responsibility that other macho professional figures like Arnold Gingrich were able to rally in support of the author. For instance, in his introduction to the collected Pat Hobby stories, all of which were originally published in *Esquire*, Gingrich dismisses the claim that these pieces are

inferior because they were done for money. However, rather than simply argue for the merit of these stories, he outlines Fitzgerald's demanding work habits and his scrupulous attention to detail. The defense concludes with the claim that all of Fitzgerald's work was done for money, the good and the bad, so to distinguish these particular pieces on that basis seems absurd. Of course, the obligations that Gingrich imagines driving Fitzgerald all stem from his wife, Zelda: "From 1920 on [Fitzgerald] wrote for money-enough to marry Zelda in the first place and to afford her, and the wild life they led together until 1930. And after that, he wrote for money enough to meet the strain of her fantastically expensive treatments for mental illness" ("Introduction" xxii-xxiii).<sup>160</sup>

While Fitzgerald's comments often veered into open misogyny and he certainly employed the gendered constructions common to his age, he did not embrace more extreme masculine stereotypes, which were, in the literary field, often associated with his one-time friend and lifelong acquaintance, Ernest Hemingway. For instance, in "Echoes," published shortly before Gertrude Stein and Ernest Hemingway's personal dispute received public attention through the pages of Stein's memoir, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Fitzgerald approvingly quotes Stein's commentary on an unnamed "he-man": "'And what is a He-man?' demanded Gertrude Stein one day. 'Isn't it a large enough order to fill out to the dimensions of all that 'a man' has meant in the past? A He-man!'" (*Crack-Up* 17).

This quote takes on particular importance in the context of the *Crack-Up* essays, where Fitzgerald is not only struggling to live up to his own idealistic vision of his past

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<sup>160</sup> Fitzgerald's male friends and acquaintances frequently blamed his difficulties on Zelda, which also led early biographers to depict her in quite unflattering terms. For one particularly scathing take on Zelda's effect on her husband, see Ernest Hemingway *Feast* 147-93. For a more balanced assessment of the relationship between the two, see Wagner-Martin.

self but also to a larger male intellectual tradition. As Donaldson points out, these essays, perhaps more than anything else Fitzgerald had ever written, are littered with references to famous writers and thinkers, ranging from Descartes to Wordsworth to Tolstoy to Lenin ("Crisis" 180-81). Donaldson interprets these myriad references as a symptom of Fitzgerald's desire to find a suitable model on which to base his essays. Given the outlines of Fitzgerald's larger persona in these pieces, I read these names quite differently. Fitzgerald is reinforcing a general aura of competence by demonstrating his knowledge of these important figures and, as with his Euganean hills reference, his allusions are involved enough to demonstrate more than a passing familiarity with some of these men and their ideas. Fitzgerald is also implicitly holding up his own struggle, and his own confessional writing, as part of a longer literary tradition. He is not simply wallowing in a shamefully revelatory celebrity expose, but is, in fact, joining a line that goes back at least as far as St. John of the Cross.

Fitzgerald takes up this underlying conflict between the stoic he-man impulse in the literary field and his own revelatory discourse at several points during the Crack-Up essays. For instance, the previous reference to Shelley's "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills" is couched in a larger dismissal of "those to whom all self-revelation is contemptible, unless it ends with a noble thanks to the gods for the Unconquerable Soul" (Crack-Up 75). The narrator's reference to an "Unconquerable Soul" specifically recalls William Ernest Henley's "Invictus," a poem that may have been written after Henley had his foot amputated. The narrator of this short piece repeatedly asserts his resilience to adversity, from an opening paean to the gods for his "unconquerable soul" to the concluding lines, "I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul" (15-6).

For Fitzgerald's narrator, Henley's idealistic retreat into the refuge of the "unconquerable soul," similar to Shelley's romantic elevation of the Euganean hills, is an explicit refusal to face what Henley calls "this place of wrath and tears" (9). The narrator asserts, to the contrary, that a man must be able to look unflinchingly at the suffering of life and press on anyway, a rhetorical move that, much as he had done with modernity, turns the tables on a reigning standard of masculinity while simultaneously appealing to that standard. The narrator is, in effect, implying that he is more manly than his stoic counterparts precisely because he is willing to face, and display, his own losing struggle against the world as it happens, without recourse to any heroic idealizations.

The narrator similarly weaves a series of masculine metaphors throughout the essays, relying in particular on images that refer to sports and war, as when he refers to his ego as an "arrow shot" or compares the silence following his crack-up to "standing at twilight on a deserted range, with an empty rifle in my hands and the targets down" (Crack-Up 70, 77-8). Yet, at the same time, the two major disappointments of his life are, as he tells us at both the beginning of the first essay and the end of the last, failing at football in college and not going overseas during World War I. These references, appearing within a broader framework of failure, do not simply point to masculine rites of passage but also function as a potentially emasculating reminder of the narrator's inability to secure his status through such conventional paths. However, when this reversal is combined with the narrator's larger reassertion of masculinity, itself embodied in the text that represents his willingness to continue writing in the face of unbeatable odds, this series of metaphors again twists into a reflection of the narrator's larger claim to manhood, except that the claim is now rooted in his willingness to reveal past failures

and anxieties. While many critics have subsequently condemned Fitzgerald's essays on precisely these grounds, saying that they do not honestly appraise his situation as it has been revealed through the biographical record, such attacks only reinforce the rhetorical position that the narrator adopts. Even many of the harshest critics of these essays have been drawn into Fitzgerald's drama of self-revelation and stage their critiques primarily within that larger narrative construction.

The narrator's complex symbolic system, which employs a familiar set of masculine tropes only to challenge and then ironically reaffirm their social significance, also helps him to avoid the connotations of standardization often linked with his particular choices of models, war and sports. Whereas the narrator invokes these two arenas as culturally sanctioned spaces in which a man, through strong will power and a commitment to discipline, can prove his mettle, both arenas potentially suggest a perverse form of over-discipline that turns men into mindless cogs in a larger machine. As noted above, Fitzgerald himself leveled a related charge at Ring Lardner in "Ring," claiming that the author had been educated primarily by "a few dozen illiterates playing a boy's game" and thus could only see the world in the most simple terms, as "a business of beautiful muscular organization" (Crack-Up 36-7). The narrator of the Crack-Up essays, who both rails against standardization and insists on the importance of conscious reflection, avoids such charges by openly insisting on his failure in these traditional domains, even as he hedges his bets by simultaneously implying, through his own pain at losing out in these arenas, his desire to be blessed with the laurels of conventional masculinity.



According to this logic, Fitzgerald would repeatedly depict himself, usually with the same touch of ironic self-awareness he brought to the Crack-Up essays, as a lone warrior, the single arrow of ego or the man on an empty shooting range. The latter scenario is one Fitzgerald had used in a slightly different form the previous year when writing an introduction for the Modern Library reprinting of *The Great Gatsby*. In a brief passage that explicates what it means to be a writer, which he defines as “giving expression to intimate explorations,” he suggests that all writers “have a pride akin to a soldier going into battle; without knowing whether there will be anybody there, to distribute medals or even to record it” (Brucoli On Authorship 140-41). Again, Fitzgerald suggests that a writer shares many attributes with a soldier but is more manly because the act of creation is always a struggle one begins alone, with, as he says in “Handle With Care,” “no such ideals [as a soldier has] unless he makes them for himself” (Crack-Up 84).

In the end, an emphasis on the unvarnished clarity of vision allows Fitzgerald to emphasize the interiority of the writer in his isolated struggle with the blank page. Yet, such a view not only elides the many friends and business acquaintances whose material assistance and personal sacrifices made Fitzgerald’s writing possible, but it also ignores the “high” art ideal underlying his position in the Crack-Up essays, that of a heroic male writer laboring in the call of True Art. Several prominent critics have attempted to downplay the importance of a traditional high/low aesthetic hierarchy in Fitzgerald’s work.<sup>161</sup> For instance, biographer Matthew J. Brucoli, in his introduction to a collection

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<sup>161</sup> A useful survey of Fitzgerald’s relationship to the “great divide” can be found in Michael Nowlin’s introduction to Fitzgerald’s Racial Angles. My brief discussion here is much indebted to his work.

of Fitzgerald's work about authorship, argues against the commonly expressed view that Fitzgerald wasted his talent writing popular stories for money when he could have been producing "real" art, a position Brucoli associates with "professors and the Fitzgerald groupies." In contrast, Brucoli asserts, "Fitzgerald functioned for twenty years as a professional writer and as a literary artist-but he did not have two separate careers. He had one career to which everything he wrote connected" (Brucoli On Authorship 11-2).

I agree with Brucoli's underlying point that critics should not base aesthetic standards on the perceived intentions of an author. However, what his argument neglects is that the so-called "great divide" in modernist theorizations of art arises not simply from reflective academics but also from writers and critics in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century who were struggling to come to terms with a wide array of historical forces, including significant shifts in the structural development of the literary market itself.<sup>162</sup> Even as an undergraduate at Princeton Fitzgerald consistently used these terms to conceptualize the literary field and employed what was, in effect, a high/low divide to discuss his work. For example, he once told visiting poet-in-residence Alfred Noyes that he could "write either books that would sell or books of permanent value," though he was not sure which path to follow (qtd. in Berg 18). Not only does this formulation suggest that authors can choose only one of two mutually exclusive goals, but it limits a certain kind of aesthetic "value" to a form of art that exists somehow beyond the marketplace.

In these terms, Brucoli's insistence that all of Fitzgerald's work should be considered part of one "professional" career because the author "never expected to starve

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<sup>162</sup> My own short-hand for the dizzying array of historical changes taking place at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been derived from a number of sources. Some of the most important include Daniel Boorstin Americans; Walter Benn Michaels America; Ohmann; Radway; Mark Seltzer Bodies; Michael Warner "Mass Public".

for his art” seems to miss the point, at least from a theoretical perspective (On Authorship 12). Of course Fitzgerald had only one writing career, but this basic fact does not mean critics should ignore the rhetorical attitude he takes towards that career, especially when it reflects the concerns of many contemporary writers and critics as well as sheds light on the underlying conditions of the literary marketplace. Fitzgerald was in many ways incredibly savvy about how the field functioned; he used that knowledge to a variety of ends throughout his career.

For instance, he repeatedly insisted to critics that he was a serious writer committed to producing Literature, but he could also turn around in a script dispute with producer Joseph Mankiewicz and proclaim, “For nineteen years, with two years out for sickness, I’ve written best-selling entertainment” (“Life in Letters” 343). This appeal to an aesthetic practice defined in terms of its popularity is precisely the kind of claim that would have been denounced by the Fitzgerald who, after the publication of *Tender Is the Night*, wrote to H.L. Mencken, “I would rather be an artist than a careerist. I would rather impress my image (even though an image the size of a nickel) upon the soul of a people than be known... I would as soon be as anonymous as Rimbaud... and that is no sentimental yapping about being disinterested. It is simply that, having once found the intensity of art, nothing else that can happen in life can ever again seem as important as the creative process” (Turnbull Letters 510).

This appeal to the “intensity” of the creative process was a familiar one at the time and highbrow critics did not hesitate to equate the creation of true art with the divine itself. For instance, critic Waldo Frank once griped in the *New Republic* that writers who sought fame had mistakenly set their sights too low, “For to have heard clear, even once,

the word of God is to have heard it forever” (Frank 47). It is precisely such divine promise that allows the narrator of the Crack-Up essays to convincingly assert, “within the practice of your trade [as a writer] you were forever unsatisfied-but I, for one, would not have chosen any other” (Crack-Up 70). The narrator, as his life crumbles around him, will put everything into question and sacrifice anything in order to press on with life-anything, that is, but his profession.

Fitzgerald’s previous statements, in addition to underlining his heroic commitment to the ongoing process of writing, also reflect the centrality of intention to this particular pose. The distinction he made to Mencken hinges in large part on the type of product he would like to create. If he remains committed to his own interior vision and attempts to “impress [his] image,” then he is being an “artist.” However, if he attempts to cater to popular tastes in an effort to acquire fame, he is simply a “careerist.” Fitzgerald makes essentially the same argument in his 1934 introduction to *The Great Gatsby*, a text that is itself in part a promotional tool, albeit a critically approved one, for a new edition of the book. Fitzgerald says, “never before did one try to keep his artistic conscience as pure as during the ten months put into doing it. Reading it over one can see how it could have been improved-yet without feeling guilty of any discrepancy from the truth... or rather the *equivalent* of the truth, the attempt at honesty of imagination” (Brucoli On Authorship 140).

Such a view not only sets up a theoretical ground on which Fitzgerald can justify claiming the status of a “true” artist while also marketing his work *after it has been written*, but it also allows him to eschew the negative connotations of his professional stance. As Michael Nowlin points out, the “professional” label “could readily connote

something all-too-ordinary- one's membership in a class of largely white, middle-class, well-salaried mental-laborers working in the service of the state or big business" (Nowlin 7). Fitzgerald's primary commitment to the God of art allows him to focus on his own personal struggle and elide the material grounds of his occupation. He becomes not simply a writer working in the service of capital through his relationship to magazine and book publishers but a heroic male writer struggling against unbeatable odds to improve his craft and create a few works of inherent, and "permanent," value.<sup>163</sup>

### **Masculinity and the Negative Response to the Crack-Up**

Following conventional readings of the Crack-Up essays, it is surprising that the Crack-up trilogy managed to cause so much controversy, especially among Fitzgerald's fellow writers. The essays' larger vision of a professional writer struggling simultaneously against life and the dictates of his craft was nothing new in Fitzgerald's work. As we have seen, this persona was part of a larger pattern that connected most of his nonfiction work in the 1930's. Even the overriding emphasis on failure could also be found in a piece like "One Hundred False Starts," which addresses, albeit in a somewhat lighter tone, the countless failures that accompany any notable success.

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<sup>163</sup> As Janice Radway points out, writers and critics who ascribed to such "high" ideals were rarely clear on whether their distinction came from study, a position that would make their skills transferable to others, or from some inherent talent. Fitzgerald does, indirectly, share in a bit of this confusion by claiming, at least in the 1930's, that hard work was important while, at the same time, reflecting on the "impersonal and objective nature of [his] talent," a phrase Matthew Bruccoli uses as part of the epigraph to his influential biography Some Sort of Epic Grandeur. He reifies talent in a similar way in the Crack-Up essays when he refers to himself as a "caretaker" of his own abilities (71). However, Fitzgerald regularly associated hard work, as he does in the Crack-Up essays, with the unresolvable conditions of living and not simply with the creation of valuable art, thereby avoiding the more direct conflict between these two positions that surfaced in the work of other writers. For Radway's elaboration of these ideas, see Feeling 253-60.

Similarly, the larger, though certainly more vague, political implications of Fitzgerald's essays did not pose a problem for other writers, as many of his acquaintances were, in the 1930's at least, actively critical of the larger economic and social systems that had brought the world to a crisis point. Finally, the troubled view of life that unfolds throughout the Crack-Up essays was not significantly different from the despondent view expressed by many other writers during the 1930's. Hemingway, who was highly critical of the Crack-Up pieces, outlined a similar vision in a letter to Fitzgerald several years earlier when commenting on *Tender Is the Night*: "Forget your personal tragedy. We are all bitched from the start and you especially have to be hurt like hell before you can write seriously. But when you get the damned hurt use it-don't cheat with it. Be as faithful to it as a scientist" (F+Hem, 172). Here, Hemingway insists on downplaying personal details in favor of a broader aesthetic vision, the inevitability of death and failure, the importance of professional integrity, and the necessity of maintaining an unflinching, implicitly masculine, rational gaze in the face of intense personal struggles, all of which feature centrally in Fitzgerald's essays.

However, when read in terms of the gendered aesthetic hierarchies that suffused literary discussions in the early twentieth century, Fitzgerald's essays do pose a significant challenge to other men working in the literary field. Not only do the articles directly attack those "to whom all self-revelation is contemptible," the unnamed people who idolize "Henley's familiar heroics," but by extension they attempt to reconstitute a celebrity confession, that notorious instrument of America's feminized mass culture, in a sensational mass market magazine as a valid expression of literary masculinity. In short,

Fitzgerald is openly struggling against the boundaries of what it is acceptable for a man to say under the banner of a culturally sanctioned masculinity.

Such a reading also helps to explain the discrepancy between the responses of Fitzgerald's contemporaries and those critics writing after his death and, more importantly, after his canonization as a Great Author. Few, if any, contemporary responses, from readers of *Esquire* to fans of Fitzgerald's work to his associates and friends, show admiration for his "heroic awareness," to use Trilling's phrase. Instead, readers tended to take his declarations of psychological and spiritual crises at face value, by turns supporting, cajoling, urging, and criticizing him. Perhaps more directly, the two men most involved in the business of selling Fitzgerald's work, Max Perkins and Harold Ober, both came to feel the essays had a significant *negative* impact on his reputation. Ober, who initially expressed admiration for the essays ("No one who had cracked up and stayed that way could possibly write as well as this"- As Ever 245), even wrote late in the summer to discourage Fitzgerald from continuing the series. After spending several months struggling to convince the representatives of various Hollywood studios that Fitzgerald could still perform adequately as a scriptwriter, he wrote the author a brief note about the negotiations, concluding with the blunt assertion, "I think those confounded *Esquire* articles have done you a great deal of harm and I hope you won't do any more" (Bruccoli As Ever 279-80).

While such responses might seem surprising from the perspective of later critical assessments, such an attitude reflects the larger trajectory of Fitzgerald's career in the mid-1930's. The author was repeatedly connected with the distant glamour of the 1920's and simply did not produce enough work, or grab enough headlines, to significantly

modify the public's opinion of him during the 1930's. In such a context, Fitzgerald's scattered meditations on his past persona and the difficulties of producing quality writing only worked to reinforce the sense that the author's best writing was behind him. By 1936, even those critics and writers who knew that Fitzgerald possessed a keen literary mind had a hard time seeing the Crack-Up essays as anything more than an embarrassing admission of failure or a desperate grab for attention.

For instance, John Dos Passos wrote late in the year to ask about a shoulder injury that had been troubling Fitzgerald since July. Yet, after a brief series of pleasantries, he launched into a page-long diatribe about the Crack-Up essays, opening with, "Christ, man, how do you find time in the middle of the general conflagration [of the Depression] to worry about all that stuff? If you don't want to do stuff on your own, why not get a reporting job somewhere" (Crack-Up 311). Dos Passos's continued willingness to impugn these pieces, which had begun appearing on newsstands at least nine months before this letter was written, suggests something of the ire the Crack-Up essays provoked, particularly among middle-class white male professionals and contemporary male writers. Fitzgerald's editor, Max Perkins, who referred to the essays as the author's "indecent invasion of his own privacy," disliked the pieces so much that when Edmund Wilson tried to get Scribner's to publish them in collected form ten years later, in part as a way to keep Fitzgerald's name available to the literary public five years after his death, Perkins refused (Brucoli "Perkins-Wilson" 65). Despite the fact that Scribner's had published every book Fitzgerald put out during his lifetime, as well as Wilson's posthumous collection containing the extant fragments of Fitzgerald's final, uncompleted



novel *The Last Tycoon*, Wilson had to go to New Directions in order to get *The Crack-Up* published.

Such responses were not atypical. Most literary professionals writing to Fitzgerald in the early months of 1936 focused not on the author's supposedly resilient conclusion, as many later critics would do, but on his declaration of illness. Figures as various as Ernest Hemingway, John O'Hara, John Dos Passos, Burton Rascoe, Gilbert Seldes, and Julian Street all wrote letters encouraging Fitzgerald to get past his difficulties and continue writing.<sup>164</sup> To give just one particularly direct example, Dos Passos, in an earlier letter, wrote, "I... wish like hell you could find some happy way of getting that magnificent working apparatus of yours to work darkening paper; which is its business" (qtd. in Donaldson "Crisis" 174). Read on its simplest level, such a comment neglects the developments in the final essay of Fitzgerald's *Crack-Up* trilogy and it misses, as many respondents at the time did, the larger irony that this depressed persona had become a potent new source of material for Fitzgerald. The first three essays alone managed to generate enough publicity that Simon and Schuster attempted to pull the author away from Scribner's to do an autobiographical collection with them.

Still, given both the melancholy tone present throughout much of the *Crack-Up* essays and his supposedly depressed mindset while writing, Dos Passos's phrase, "some happy way" can easily be interpreted as a dismissal of these pieces. Such a reading would suggest that Dos Passos is not simply encouraging Fitzgerald to write, but is instead urging him to produce something different from the *Crack-Up* essays. This interpretation is born out by Dos Passos's other comments at the time, including the previously cited

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<sup>164</sup> I am indebted to Scott Donaldson's work for the previous point. His article, "Crisis," remains the best survey of responses to Fitzgerald's *Crack-Up* essays. In particular, see p. 171-76.

letter in which he launches a much more direct attack on the Crack-Up essays. Yet, what makes this assessment interesting, and relevant to many of the other negative responses Fitzgerald received in the months after publishing the Crack-Up essays, is not simply its more overt invocation of conventional aesthetic categories, but the insistently gendered terms used to elaborate them. After writing off Fitzgerald's essays as little more than an admission of impotence ("If you don't want to do stuff on your own..."), Dos Passos describes the contemporary state of authorship in terms of a violent, if largely abstract, combat, where the ideal soldier/writer must enter the "general conflagration" to struggle against both the "murderous forces of history" and "the big boys," who, he claims, are constantly threatening to "close down on us" (311).

In such a charged, masculine environment, Fitzgerald's work, which amounts to little more than "go[ing] to pieces" in print, represents the kind of mindless popular work that should be avoided by serious artists. It is, to use Dos Passos's vaguely sexual terminology, equivalent to "spilling" one's creative energies, which is even more abhorrent given that Fitzgerald is willing to waste his energy "for Arnold Gingrich." Dos Passos does not press this connection further, but the link serves to connect Fitzgerald's work with both vaguely homosexual and materialistic impulses, positioning him as an author working to please other men and not pursuing the imperatives of his creative vision. In contrast, Dos Passos implicitly champions "do[ing] stuff on your own," which is to say, creating literary texts independently of, and thus as an implicit challenge to, the "big boys'" efforts at ideological control. Such writing also allows the author the freedom to turn their "elegant and complicated... machinery" against the tyrannical forces of repression.

Somewhere in between these two extremes lies journalism, a suggestion that carries much rhetorical baggage in the early decades of the twentieth century. As Christopher Wilson has trenchantly argued in *The Labor of Words*, the “ideal of reportage” began to take over the literary field during the early twentieth century in direct opposition to what was frequently characterized as an effeminate and attenuated literary writing. Authors increasingly strove to distance themselves from associations with an effete bookishness by adopting the pose of uncompromising reporters dredging through “the muck of American life” and many male writers from the period, including Crane, James, Dreiser, Hemingway, and Dos Passos himself, spent time working as reporters in their youth (17). Thus, Dos Passos’s suggestion, part of what he fittingly refers to as his “locker room pep talk,” can be read as a call to a specifically masculine form of engagement, one which would allow Fitzgerald to employ his talent in a more direct, if somewhat less artful, challenge to the powers-that-be.

What is particularly interesting about the aesthetic structure Dos Passos sets up in his letter to Fitzgerald is that it places so much emphasis on the *form* of Fitzgerald’s essays. He even concludes his discussion by suggesting that Fitzgerald could safely use the same material, so long as he fictionalize it: “if you want to go to pieces I think it’s absolutely O.K. but I think you ought to write a first rate novel about it” (311). While Dos Passos does not specifically distinguish between autobiography and the superficially revelatory style of the Crack-Up essays, other people picked up the same charge more directly.

For instance, when Fitzgerald began toying with the idea of creating an autobiographical compilation that would include the Crack-Up essays, Max Perkins

immediately discouraged the project. Instead, he suggested that Fitzgerald begin work on “a reminiscent book, - not autobiographical, but reminiscent.” Perkins then goes on to flatter Fitzgerald by saying that critic Gilbert Seldes approves of the idea, before he finally closes in on the true target of his criticism: “I do not think the *Esquire* pieces ought to be published alone. But as for an autobiographical book which would comprehend what is in them, I would be very much for it” (Fitzgerald and Perkins 228). In the last instance, Perkins, like Dos Passos, is willing to accept a work that uses the underlying ideas of the Crack-Up essays and he is even willing, in direct contradiction to his initial judgment, to accept a book that is fundamentally autobiographical, so long as it is ultimately a reflective assessment and not an embarrassing confessional revelation like the Crack-Up.

I have chosen these two examples in particular because they elaborate many of the ideas that remain implicit in other critiques of the Crack-Up. Many professionals in the literary field, from critics to writers to members of the managerial class, leveled charges that Fitzgerald had violated both his masculinity by complaining about life in an autobiographical format and his artistic integrity by putting out such a piece in the first place. Much has been made about Hemingway’s numerous references to the pieces, including his characterization of them as “whin[ing] in public” and his repeated mentions of Fitzgerald’s disgraceful “shamelessness of defeat,” one of which is followed by the assertion that Fitzgerald simply needs to do some “noncommercial, honest work.”<sup>165</sup> All of Hemingway’s animosity culminated with the now-famous reference to Fitzgerald in

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<sup>165</sup> The relationship between Fitzgerald and Hemingway has been well documented in Matthew Brucoli’s Fitzgerald and Hemingway. For their relationship during the Crack-Up period, see p. 179-207. The above references can also be found in Carlos Baker, ed., Selected Letters 437-8, 44.

his short story, “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” which ran in *Esquire* the same month that Fitzgerald published “Afternoon of an Author,” another semi-autobiographical piece about a physically and mentally exhausted writer.<sup>166</sup>

Yet, as dramatic as Hemingway’s references are, similar comments appeared in a wide variety of places, from the *San Francisco Chronicle*’s charge that Fitzgerald was “being a bit too sorry for himself” (qtd. in Donaldson “Crisis” 172) to the pages of *Esquire*, where one respondent openly scoffed at Fitzgerald’s weakness: “his pearl: VITALITY. I agree with him. It’s too darn bad he hasn’t got it!” (Green). Even Gilbert Seldes, who was far more sympathetic to popular culture than most, had a hard time accepting Fitzgerald’s confession as a significant piece of work. In response to Fitzgerald’s desire to publish a collection of autobiographical works featuring the Crack-Up, Seldes wrote Fitzgerald advocating, like Perkins, a reminiscent collection. After several paragraphs that explain the value of an integrated text, the letter concludes with an uncharacteristically rambling paragraph that attempts to deal with the Crack-Up pieces directly. Seldes begins by praising the essays for their “thoughtfulness,” but then suggests that this virtue is the very reason they should not be included in a collection, as Fitzgerald could use his newfound creative energy to start a reflective autobiography. Such a work, he claims encouragingly, would be “of supreme importance,” presumably in a way that the Crack-Up essays are not (Brucoli and Duggan 436).

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<sup>166</sup> In Hemingway’s story, a dying writer “remembered poor Scott Fitzgerald and his romantic awe of [the rich] and how he had started a story once that began, ‘The very rich are different from you and me.’ And how someone had said to Scott, Yes they have more money. But that was not humorous to Scott. He thought they were a special glamorous race and when he found they weren’t it wrecked him just as much as any other thing that wrecked him.” For more about this reference, including Maxwell Perkins’s claim that this passage actually referred to a comment Hemingway had made, see Brucoli 189-92.

Not everyone responded similarly to Fitzgerald's essays. Yet, the consistency with which such criticisms appear among a subset of male respondents and the extent to which these arguments dominate the more extreme negative responses suggest their importance for understanding the controversy surrounding the Crack-Up essays, especially with regard to the form that these essays took. Kirk Curnutt, whose article "Making a 'Clean Break'" is perhaps the most sustained attempt to assess the Crack-Up's reception in historical terms, advances this argument by working somewhat counter-intuitively to connect Fitzgerald's pieces with a decidedly feminized form of confessional writing popular during the 1920's and 30's.

The confessional form in question, though it had existed long before the twentieth century, returned to prominence through *True Story Magazine*, first published by Bernarr MacFadden in 1919. MacFadden's magazine published first person accounts, always under the pretext that they were true stories, about the various misfortunes that befell young women. What links these stories, Curnutt argues, with something as seemingly different as Fitzgerald's Crack-Up essays is the form that both types of writing take. The salacious narratives of the confessional magazines were presented as cautionary tales, with narrators who had supposedly learned from their mistakes and come to renounce the past indiscretions that ultimately constituted the bulk of their stories. Thus, both the typical confessional tale and Fitzgerald's story, which, in Curnutt's reading, revolves around the narrator's decision to renounce his previous identity for a new mode of existence, are structured around the idea of a "clean break," that is, "the determined abandonment of a self-image that one no longer chooses to perpetuate." As such, Curnutt claims, the appeal of such stories is that they promote the "illusion that we can purify

ourselves of undesirable behavioral tendencies through resolution and will power” (“Clean Break” 299).

While Curnutt’s article uses this historical connection to suggest some of the implications of Fitzgerald’s formal choices, he never addresses the specifically gendered nature of the confessional magazines. *True Story Magazine* was, from the outset, edited to appeal to a working class female audience by using heroines that these readers could identify with and by depicting events that could have occurred in their lives. In short, it attempted to recreate a young woman’s world, though always with an emphasis on the more sensational aspects of life, that is, by highlighting, as one magazine historian tersely stated, “violence, overpowering sex drives, and broken homes” (Peterson 10).

It is perhaps telling of the specifically female dimension of this world, as well as the gossipy tone of these stories, which one confession writer characterized as “the warm breathlessness of a girl confiding to a friend across the table,” that Mary Macfadden, Barnarr’s wife, ultimately received credit for creating *True Story*. She outlined the story most specifically in her memoir, *Dumbbells and Carrot Strips*, where she claims that the idea came from reading the confessional letters sent to them by readers of Barnarr Macfadden’s *Physical Culture* magazine. Realizing these pieces were entertaining and salable in their own right, she supposedly approached Barnarr, saying, “These are true stories. They come from the following you have attracted.... Let’s get out a magazine to be called *True Story*, written by its own readers in the first person. This has never been done before” (218-19).

True or not, the story certainly conforms to the magazine’s image as an entertaining but, at least initially, honest look at the lives of working class women. This

basic perspective turned out to be so successful that *True Story* immediately spawned a number of imitators, all publishing comparable stories under suggestively similar titles like *True Experiences* and *Intimate Stories*. Despite the increased competition, *True Story* was selling 850,000 copies per issue within five years and, by 1927, was challenging *Ladies' Home Journal* and *McCall's* for leadership in the women's field by selling over two million copies of each issue (Marchand 53-54). By 1950, the field had grown so much that eighteen separate confession magazines sold over seven million copies per issue (Gerbner 29).

As might be expected, the rapidly increasing market for such magazines coupled with their often salacious content led many, even in the mainstream press, to disparage both this lowbrow fodder and those people foolish enough to read it. The *Saturday Evening Post* once referred to the audience for such magazines as "Macfadden's anonymous amateur illiterates" (qtd. in Gerbner 29). Public opinion was so negative that, despite impressive sales numbers, publishers had an incredibly difficult time procuring advertising. The problem arose in part because advertisers had little respect for a lower class female readership but also because few businesses wanted their goods linked in the larger public mind with so contemptible a product (Tebbel and Zuckerman 194-95; Gerbner 30). The situation was bad enough that publishers had to convince advertisers not that they offered the best available market for certain products, but that their audience should be considered a viable market in the first place. A quick glance at titles of trade publications, like *The Women that Taxes Made; An Editor's Intimate Picture of a Large but Little Understood Market*, put out by the editor-in-chief of *True Story Women's* Group, or "On the Subject of Social Class and its Relation to Magazines," written by the



director of research for Macfadden Publications, suggests just how far such magazines were from being considered legitimate outlets (Gerbner 30-31).

Given that one of the most popular forms of public confession in the 20's and 30's was an explicitly feminized, widely disdained lowbrow product, it is not surprising that Fitzgerald's own first person revelations attracted similar associations, especially from those men whose very occupations potentially placed them outside, or on the edges of, traditional spheres of masculinity.<sup>167</sup> To make matters worse, the success of confession magazines led advertisers to employ the form as an alternative to more traditional sloganeering. By the late 1920's, ads for everything from condensed milk to pens to dress shoes ran scandalous headlines over pseudo-confessions that revealed the virtues of everyday items.<sup>168</sup> Thus, Fitzgerald's use of the confessional form ran the added risk of associating his work directly with ad copy and indirectly with the feminized banality of the mass market, a connection that, as we have seen, E. B. White made explicit in his critique of the "picturesque despondency" of Fitzgerald's pieces.

Yet, if, as Curnutt argues, the central connection between Fitzgerald's work and confessional discourse resides in their formal similarities, particularly in their shared use of the "clean break," then my own reading of these essays allows us to read Fitzgerald's

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<sup>167</sup> Fitzgerald himself at times associated his literary talent with femininity, as when he told confidante Laura Guthrie, "I don't know why I can write stories. I don't know what it is in me or that comes to me when I start to write. I am half feminine-at least my mind is" (Turnbull, Scott Fitzgerald 259).

<sup>168</sup> Kirk Curnutt cites one ad that boasts the headline, "Because I confessed, I found the way to happiness." The accompanying copy reveals that the confession in question pertains to the narrator's ineptitude in the kitchen, an admission that led her to receive a copy of the Eagle-Brand Condensed Milk cookbook, which, in turn, helped her land a husband ("Clean Break" 313). Curnutt's example, and the support for his point in general, are drawn from Roland Marchand's important study, *Advertising the American Dream*. See esp. 56-58.

pieces as a critique of the confessional form, or at least the larger claim to total self-control that underlies it.<sup>169</sup> While, on one hand, the narrator does resist various forces that threaten to restrict his own independent functioning, as communal script-writing does, he also acknowledges his own difficult position within the social order. Both the narrator's commitment to a potentially outmoded identity and his raging satire at the end of the essays gain force and poignancy because they acknowledge the impossibility of the narrator extracting himself from the more general conditions that plague him. It is, ultimately, the acceptance of struggle, along with the inevitable contradiction of "be[ing] able to see that things are hopeless and yet be[ing] determined to make them otherwise," that drives these three pieces.<sup>170</sup>

Fitzgerald's essays come to a far different conclusion than the typical confession story. As George Gerbner points out in his early study of confession magazines, such stories counteract the subversive potential of having a sympathetic lower class woman rebel against social norms by insistently "making her act of defiance a crime or a sin; [by] making her suffer long and hard; [by] making her, not society, repent and reform; [by] permitting her only to come to terms, and not to grips, with the 'brutal world' in which

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<sup>169</sup> Fitzgerald maintained a complex attitude towards the trope of the "clean break" throughout his writing career. While any kind of general survey of the topic is far too complicated to go into here, it is relevant to my argument that his fascination with the idea of absolute shifts carried itself over into a related interest in the proletariat revolution central to early Marxism. While Fitzgerald did often refer approvingly to Marxist philosophy, in the Crack-Up essays he repeatedly dismisses, much as he dismisses the easy escape of the "clean break," the relevance of Marxism. For instance, he concludes the second essay with the ominous declaration, "I have the feeling that someone, I'm not sure who, is sound asleep-someone who could have helped me to keep my shop open. It wasn't Lenin, and it wasn't God" (79-80).

<sup>170</sup> Fitzgerald expressed a similar attitude in correspondence about the essays. For instance, when Marie Hersey Hamm, Fitzgerald's first girlfriend, wrote him late in 1936 enjoining him to embrace life, the author condescendingly replied, "Thank you for your thoughtfulness in trying to cheer me up. However, child, life is more complicated than that" Turnbull, ed., 545.

she lives” (Gerbner 35). In contrast, Fitzgerald’s essays, as I have previously argued, draw strength from their willingness to critique the world that the narrator feels has, in many ways, victimized him. It is only through his relentless search for answers and solutions, sustained by the endless multiplicity of the very world he seeks to understand, that he can finally achieve some sense of authority in the world. So, if he cannot ever finally “come to grips” with his environment, he can at least do a little more than “come to terms” with it.

Similarly, by folding a critique of traditional masculinity into the confessional form, Fitzgerald challenges the masculine boundaries that have been drawn around the literary sphere while implying that such a challenge is, in turn, a reflection of his manly resolve. It is, in essence, an attempt to recoup the very position he overturns, only, at least in Fitzgerald’s view, on a more sophisticated level. He proposes that the psychological and emotional recesses of the self should remain open to the penetrating masculine gaze of the scientist and, furthermore, that this unflinching examination of life is no less worthy of textual space than any of the other areas of life that modernists, partially under the rubric of a masculine reportage, found worthy of print.

And if Fitzgerald’s abbreviated and elliptical argument for a more expansive view of literary masculinity was not clear enough, the subheadings run under the titles of his essays placed a heavy emphasis on both the manliness of the narrator (“Handle With Care / Vivisection of a hardening soul by one who had no use for anesthesia”), and the literary pretense of the pieces (“Shoring up the fragments against the ruin left in the wake of that psycho-physical storm: a crack-up”). The reference to T.S. Eliot’s “The Waste Land,”

which was already implicit, if slightly less direct, in Fitzgerald's title, also works to compliment Fitzgerald's troubled vision of both contemporary America and himself.

Finally, it is Fitzgerald's tendency to turn his personal revelation into a study of abstract theses, in a variety of different forms, that formally distances his pieces from the feminized lowbrow products they in other ways resembled. By retaining some semblance of analysis throughout his pieces, Fitzgerald is able to bolster his claim that such work is not simply a cheap grab for attention or an egotistical exercise. It is, at least in part, a serious exploration of the circumstances surrounding his emotional collapse.

To see that Fitzgerald himself at times invested these essays with the seriousness I have read into them takes little more than a look at his correspondence, particularly in the months shortly after they were written. Yet, nowhere is his purpose more evident than in the plan for his autobiographical collection. In a letter written to Max Perkins in April 1936, Fitzgerald revisited his proposal for a compilation and outlined the pieces he would include. His list, which begins with the promotional "Who's Who" and a short piece on Princeton from *College Humor* magazine, progresses towards more reflective essays like "My Lost City" and "Echoes of the Jazz Age," an organization that, as Marc Dolan points out in his analysis of the Crack-Up essays, suggests "a redemptive passage from prior callowness into a wider, wiser consciousness" (Dolan 206 fn10). The proposed book would conclude/culminate with the Crack-Up essays (Kuehl and Bryer 228-30).

However, despite the potential to read these pieces as a serious and thoughtful meditation, most of his contemporaries interpreted them as a relatively straightforward expression of emotion, hence the outpouring of both sympathy and contempt as readers measured the appropriateness of his public revelations. In fact, many readers accepted the

new persona they saw in the Crack-Up essays, even as they disagreed over the exact nature of the changes Fitzgerald was supposedly attempting to document.

Of course, the term “new” is a bit misleading in such a context, given that “Fitzgerald” does not simply spring into existence as a product of the author’s most recent rhetorical constructions. The dominant image of Fitzgerald-the-failing-author that emerged in discussions of the Crack-Up, an image that had been slowly developing throughout the decade, was as dependent on his previous fame as the voice of the Jazz Age and his other work during the decade as it was on the contents of these much-debated essays. Moreover, the somewhat pathetic Fitzgerald that emerges in discussions of the Crack-Up essays, a figure alternatively pitied and scoffed at by friends and strangers alike, is quite different in many respects from the both the narrative persona I have constructed above and the Fitzgerald image that would emerge in later discussions of these articles.

Ultimately, the canonization of Fitzgerald in the 1940’s would entail revising these earlier accusations of effeminacy and triviality, in large part by re-reading Fitzgerald’s essays as a display of his “heroic awareness.” Interestingly, this appeal to a particular form of masculine strength, already explicit in Fitzgerald’s essays, was coupled not with Fitzgerald’s own emphasis on internal scrutiny and emotional connection but with a fairly blatant misreading of his claim to be “a writer only.” Thus, critics could simultaneously elevate Fitzgerald and support the besieged position of the elite male intellectual by selectively reading his pieces in a way that supported their claims to authority. Instead of seeing these essays as Fitzgerald’s attempt to change his ways and commit to a traditional mode of elite male authorship, a reading that downplays the

effeminate “whining” of Fitzgerald’s articles in favor of an assertive, declarative purpose, it seems far more plausible to read them as a vow to remain unchanged, a vow that implicitly affirms his passionate engagement with the world. The energy to maintain such involvement comes directly from the narrator’s ability to criticize the world and the conventions that had been wearing him down, including the hardened stoicism of conventional masculinity.

So, if later critics like Trilling and Kazin were ultimately unwilling to pursue some of the more radical implications of Fitzgerald’s writing, their rereading of his work suggests the lingering attraction of a particular form of elite male authorship even as it reflects the failure of Fitzgerald’s essays to galvanize resistance to the boundaries that such a form of authorship entailed. Fitzgerald’s attempt to work within the traditionally feminized form of the public confession ultimately undermined both his effort to forge what he perceived as a more complex position for men in the literary field and his desire to find a marketable new persona through which he could continue working. While his persona was ultimately forged out of the contradictions inherent in widely circulated conceptions of the literary field itself, along with many of the misogynist associations that these conceptions entailed, Fitzgerald did finally attempt to cultivate a synthesis by positing a space in which such contradictions could exist in simultaneity. This conception did not specifically admit the feminine so much as it posited a form of masculinity strong enough to venture into traditionally feminine spheres. Yet even this subtle challenge proved enough to disturb his contemporaries and affect the image of the man who would be canonized in subsequent decades by predominantly white male critics.

## *Epilogue*

Authorial self-fashioning in the context of an emerging celebrity culture is a far more complex subject than many previous critics have been willing to acknowledge. Of particular importance, given the binary structure of most recent studies of the modernist marketplace, is that such work was never limited to one sphere of artistic production. While the terms under which authors cultivated personas for elite audiences certainly differed from those for larger publics, both types of work required writers to promote their own visibility and develop some type of public face, one that would, for the most successful authors, be forced to mediate between different fields of production and seemingly opposed sets of values.

Such values, which were fostered and encouraged by various literary institutions that had been developing since at least the mid-nineteenth century, did exert real pressures on authors who were struggling to acquire cultural or economic capital in the literary field. Both Fitzgerald and Stein worked to a certain extent within the confines of the aesthetic structures that they inherited in the early decades of the twentieth century. Their efforts, however, were equally engaged with the promises and pitfalls of public visibility. If standardized lowbrow texts excluded the personality of the author, a situation

which modernist “geniuses” certainly wanted to avoid, too much personality would undermine the value of the sacred artwork and undercut, in turn, a writer’s claim to public visibility. Conversely, too little publicity in an era of increasingly international media would leave a writer’s persona and the public reception of his or her work entirely in the hands of others.

Critical neglect of this dimension of Stein’s and Fitzgerald’s work has led to some significant misreadings of their texts. In Stein’s case, decontextualized and ahistorical readings of her work from the 1930’s have led many to claim that she was, from a *theoretical* perspective, a proto-postmodernist. For Fitzgerald, the amount of attention given to his promotional efforts in his early years, coupled with much subsequent interest in the biographical details of his life, have led critics to misread the Crack-Up essays as an attempt to commit to life as a “writer only.” The gradual disappearance of the wild young genius from the public spotlight and the author’s steady and increasingly sensational decline throughout much of the 1930’s have tended to overshadow his rather sedate, though consistent, efforts to reposition himself in the literary marketplace long before the Crack-Up essays appeared in 1936.

Both authors’ efforts to position themselves in a contradictory stance that would maintain the centrality of their own subjective consciousness while simultaneously acknowledging the need to engage in an unpredictable world and an ever-expanding consumer marketplace disrupts typical readings of modernist authorship. Though both authors aspire to maintain associations with elite modes of artistic production, neither reduce themselves to the dispersed textual presence theorized in much modernist scholarship. Stein did associate “genius” with masculinity and frequently downplayed



overt marks of difference in her textual persona. Yet, she never removed her own voice from texts nor did she shy away from constructing a public persona that would function in relation to her work. Fitzgerald would go even further in his efforts by attempting to explicitly challenge the position afforded to him as a male author in the 1930's. If his effort to fashion a more complex form of masculinity were ultimately rejected by his peers, the Crack-Up essays still stand as a significant attempt to negotiate between presence and absence, effeminate confession and manly writing, promotional drive and Literature.

Both efforts also stand in sharp contrast to typical readings of Depression-era literature, which highlight the search for community in an era of dramatic economic upheaval. Alongside these changes, Stein and Fitzgerald emphasize the continuities of life in the 1930's, including the growth of consumerism and the increasing consolidation of national media networks. Thus, rather than championing a liberatory community in relation to dehumanizing industrial and bureaucratic capitalist orders, both authors emphasize the importance of maintaining some form of subjectivity in relation to a marketplace that threatens to disperse individuality.

The contradictory stances that both authors adopt reveal much about the complex circumstances of writing during the Great Depression, an era where the overabundance of production met widespread deprivation and increasing information flows left many people feeling out of touch with their world. The publishing industry itself sat precariously between an older genteel tradition of letters and the corporate world that would fully assert itself in the sweep of publishing house mergers and expansions after

World War II. Stein and Fitzgerald both reflect and, to a certain extent, revel in these oppositions, reinforcing older ideals even as they explore the opportunities for change.

The work of both writers also reflects the important role that celebrity culture had come to play for authors, both in the increasingly complex marketing process for literary works and in the construction of texts themselves. Stein and Fitzgerald wrestled throughout their careers with the meaning that such changes had for traditional conceptions of authorship and literary quality even as they expended great effort promoting themselves and their work to as many people as possible. Their complex material and ideological engagements not only suggest the need for more research in this area, but they also point to new ways in which binary models of modernist culture can be expanded to reflect the complex position of writers in the early twentieth century.

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