CHAPTER 4

SECRETS AND SUBCULTURES, 1900–1940

THE PRECEDING CHAPTER described how, during the nineteenth century, the identity category "homosexual" emerged in tandem with another new identity: the avant-garde artist. This chapter explores the immediate results of this fusion. The consequences of the association of sexual and artistic identity were profound, so it is important to reiterate that this text is not comprehensive. A complete account of the twentieth-century artists who were or were thought to be homosexual, or who documented aspects of homosexuality in the avant-garde, or who reacted against associations of art and homosexuality by aggressive displays of homophobia or heterosexuality would come close to a chronicle of modern art in its entirety. Rather than claiming comprehensiveness, this chapter offers case studies that reflect broad patterns in the twinned development of art and of homosexuality.

Because the links between art and homosexuality emerged in medical and legal texts, these ideas first affected the educated middle classes. Even for the educated, however, the idea of homosexuality as an identity—rather than a behavior—was slow to take hold. Octave Mirbeau's 1907 travelogue novel *La 628-E8* (the title is the license number of his car) includes a diatribe about the emergence of civil rights groups for homosexuals in Germany, which the French narrator denounces in nationalist terms:

> When we were immoral . . . we were so easily, happily. Those Germans are such tactless tasteless pedants. . . . It's not enough for them to be pederasts like everyone else. . . . They invented *homosexuality*. . . . Where

> will science find itself next? . . . Now instead of men just having sex with each other as a vice, perfectly simply, they are *homosexuals* and do so with pedantry.

Among academics, records from a typical American university show that administrators' responses to homosexual behavior shifted from moral assessment of acts to diagnosis of personality types only in the 1940s, and then because of the military's adoption of psychological screening for prospective soldiers. By 1947, however, university officials were using phrases like "he can be described as being aesthetic in temperament and somewhat effeminate in speech and manner" to identify homosexual students.

Once the connections between aesthetic sensitivity and homosexuality were established, their effects were far-reaching. The eminent psychiatrist Clements C. Fry, in his studies of soldiers during World War II, found that homosexuality did not make men unfit for military service, and he challenged "the rationality of the rules" that discharged homosexuals, but he also wrote, in his capacity as head of the new "Division of Mental Hygiene" in the health services department at Yale, that "within the university they acted as a magnet, attracting other homosexuals and exercising an influence over those who were not consciously homosexual or whose sex lives were unorganized. . . . They constituted a threat to others." Fry noted that this was a problem especially for "a boy with intellectual and artistic ambitions" who finds "mutual interests among homosexuals." In the 1950s, both Harvard and Yale privileged athletes among the applying students; Harvard rated applicants for their perceived "manliness," lest, in the words of the university's admissions director, their students gain a reputation as "pansies" or "decadent esthetes." In New York in the 1930s, recalled the painter Paul Cadmus, "the word homosexual was never used; they just said, 'He's an artist.' And artists were forgiven a lot." This tolerance did not extend far outside Cadmus's social circles, however. By the 1940s, the heterosexual Robert Motherwell was refused eligibility for military service on the grounds of homosexuality, despite his protestations and the fact that he was married, simply on the evidence that he was a painter and lived in the artist's district of Greenwich Village. By the mid–twentieth century, associations of homosexuality with artists were firmly rooted in middle-class consciousness.

ECHOES OF AESTHETICISM

Because new conceptions of art and homosexuality spread slowly, their relationship during the first decades of the twentieth century often followed nineteenth-century patterns. The career of the publisher and photographer Fred Holland Day (1864–1933) exemplifies the influence of Aestheticism outside England and into the twentieth century. Day was part of a circle of artists and writers in Boston, Massachusetts, who were fascinated by the British Aesthetes. Between 1893 and 1899, his publishing firm, Copeland

and Day, issued American editions of *The Yellow Book* and Wilde's *Salomé* with Beardsley's images as well as illustrated books by Americans working in the Aesthetic style. Like British Aesthetes, Day staged his home as a reflection of his identity, displaying among his art and souvenirs a photograph of Edward Carpenter and a sheet of paper bearing Wilde's autograph tied with a yellow ribbon to the pencil Wilde had used to sign it.

Day's Aesthetic ambitions are evidenced in his meticulous experimentation with photographic papers and processing as he attempted to match the visual richness of painting. He also followed the Aesthetic precedent of *The Studio*'s editor Gleeson White by publishing von Gloeden's photographs in American magazines. Day criticized what he saw as Gleeson White's apologetic commentary, and in 1898 published his more confident manifesto, "Photography Applied to the Undraped Figure," claiming as precedent "the days of the simple purity and beauty of Greek Art, reflected from the purity and beauty of Greek life." Day illustrated his argument with his own photographs of nudes—several, despite the article's title, draped in exotic costume, but all male with the exception of one included as an example "of what not to do" in posing the model. Like von Gloeden and Rolfe, Day used props to invoke the Greco-Roman past in his photographs, extending his references to Mediterranean civilizations to include North African costumes for his black models (Figure 4.1). Also in 1898,

Figure 4.1. F. Holland Day, *An Ethiopian Chief*, as illustrated in his 1898 article "Photography Applied to the Undraped Figure."

Figure 4.2. F. Holland Day, *Study for the Crucifixion* (1898), Library of Congress.

Day courted controversy by exhibiting, as a study for a figure of the crucified Christ, a male nude with visible genitals (Figure 4.2). This misty Christ echoed the pose of *The Dying Slave* by Michelangelo (Figure 2.10), whom Symonds's recent biography had made the exemplar of the fusion of homosexual sensibility with artistic greatness.

Where European photographers traveled to the Mediterranean to find their "primitive" ideal of masculine beauty, however, Day found his models in the thriving black and immigrant neighborhoods of Boston. Like von Gloeden, Day forged long-standing relationships with the men who posed for him, helping J. Alexandre Skeete, the Guyanan immigrant who modeled for *An Ethiopian Chief*, establish his own artistic career. Day's best-known protégé was Kahlil Gibran (1883–1931), who went on to become a celebrated author of mystical-philosophical texts. Gibran was a thirteen-year-old recent immigrant from Lebanon when his art teacher asked Day to assist with the education of this promising student. In addition to photographing Gibran in a hodgepodge of exotic costumes, Day read to him, lent him books, encouraged him to copy from his art collection, involved him in the design of Copeland and Day publications, and later sponsored exhibitions of his drawings. By the time Gibran was twenty-one, he addressed Day as "my brother" in his letters.

Day's relationships with his models are poorly documented and undoubtedly varied in individual cases. His later photographs are frank in their homoerotic themes (Figure 4.3), but it is simplistic to imagine that sex completely explains—or completely corrupts—his intellectual and emotional engagement with Mediterranean cultures. Like Symonds and Carpenter in England, Day was inspired by Whitman's ideals to mingle erotic and altruistic impulses in a complex dynamic that combined substantial financial support for institutions that educated poor immigrants (helping them to become more like him) and his own often-remarked adoption of Arab costume (allowing him to become more like them). Both impulses, however, express Day's identity as an Aesthete who relished and cultivated what the mainstream of his own culture would reject.

Equally complex is Day's series of over 250 Crucifixion photographs, among them the Michelangelesque nude that scandalized Bostonians. Using a remote-controlled camera, Day himself modeled for many of his Crucifixions, growing his hair and beard to look the part of Christ. These images have prompted numerous explanations: his campaign to assert photography's aesthetic status as art by claiming a traditional subject of painting; his grief over Beardsley's recent humiliation and death, which Aesthetes saw as a kind of martyrdom; his admiration for the mysticism of another of his idols, the poet William Butler Yeats; his interest in the intense Catholicism of his close friend, the poet Louise Guiney; his participation in the "secularized religiosity" that characterized the Arts and Crafts Movement at the time; his friendship with the Episcopalian nun who ran Boston's Children's Hospital; and, finally, his participation in what one historian calls "the age-old sexual rituals of trust . . . that it would be crude in this case to call sadomasochistic." That these motives could be intertwined is evidenced by Day's determination to organize a controversial requiem mass in Boston for Beardsley, the Aesthetic illustrator of *Salomé*, Wilde's poetic rendition of biblical torture.

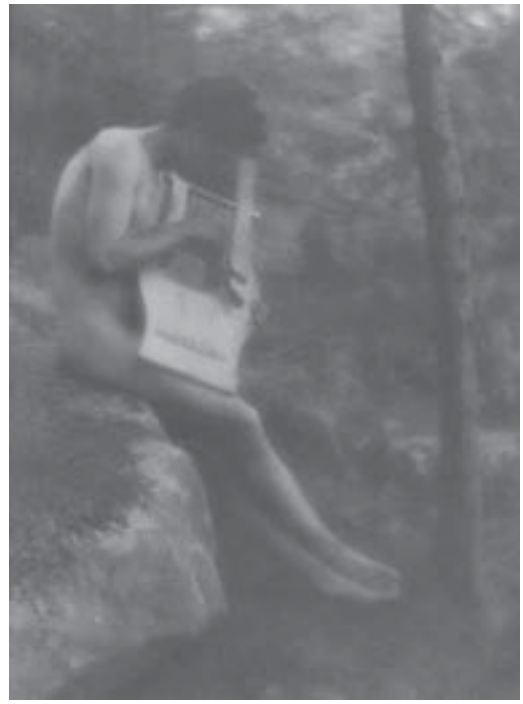

Figure 4.3. F. Holland Day, *Orpheus*, also known as *Nude Youth with Lyre* (1907), Library of Congress. Day's Orpheus series invokes the singer of classical myth, who, bereft of his female lover, turned to the love of boys and was beaten to death by jealous Maenads. This story prompted medieval writers to cite Orpheus as the inventor of pederasty.

Into this mix of elements of Day's fascination with the Crucifixion must be added his identification with Mediterranean culture in general, and with Gibran in particular. Day commissioned Syrian craftsmen to make his cross and nails as authentic as possible and created for his ancillary figures costumes he told reporters were like those "used at the time of the actual crucifixion, and procured from designs furnished by archeological investigation." Gibran, who assumed the voice of Christ in some of his writings, undoubtedly told Day, as he did his other American patrons, how as a boy in Lebanon he stoically endured the painful re-breaking of a poorly healed broken shoulder and the subsequent immobilization of being tied to a cross for the forty days it took to heal. The dramatic story of Gibran's modern-day crucifixion could only have reinforced Day's Aesthetic ideal of the outsider as simultaneously exotic, beautiful, and ennobled by suffering.

Day's photographic reenactments of the biblical Crucifixion exemplify the ways new ideas of minority sexual identity interacted with ethnic, religious, and artistic forms of identity at the turn of the century. Day's Crucifixion pictures drew mixed reviews from American critics, but they were widely attacked when they were exhibited in 1900 in London, where journalists were more attuned to associations between Aestheticism and homosexuality. The *British Journal of Photography*

described Day as "the leader of the Oscar Wilde school," condemning his pictures as a "flagrant offence against good taste."

AVANT-GARDE CONTINGENTS

While Day and his Boston circle demonstrate Aestheticism's lingering global reach, European cities continued to attract artists from around the world to new avant-garde subcultures. Far from the oversight of families at home, foreigners found in European cities communities of outsiders where artistic and sexual nonconformity overlapped. In Paris and Berlin, bars, restaurants, and nightclubs catering to foreigners and the avant-garde became highly visible aspects of these subcultures. Local responses to these businesses ranged from thrilled participation to outraged condemnation, with varying degrees of voyeurism in between. Images of lesbians in Paris nightclubs appear as early as the fin-de-siècle drawings by Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec (1864–1901) and Pablo Picasso's (1881–1973) painting titled (after the name of a notorious nightclub) *Le Moulin de la Galette* (1900). Such sites of commercial sexual display became common in Western cities during the 1920s, when the economic and social upheavals following World War I propelled a wide range of challenges to political and cultural conventions. Young adults, disillusioned by battlefield carnage and home-front economic hardship, flocked to cities where they experimented with radical politics, informal manners, androgynous fashions, and sex. The growth of illustrated magazines during the 1920s offered unprecedented visibility to these urban youth cultures, defining and publicizing new social mores for audiences vastly increased in size and diversity. Fueled by journalistic fascination, episodes like the much-publicized "Pansy Craze" for camp and drag performers in New York nightclubs in the late 1920s magnified the ambivalent dynamics of fascination, horror, and voyeurism that characterized paintings and prints of Paris nightclubs in the 1890s.

Figure 4.4. Jeanne Mammen, *Costume Ball*, published in Curt Moreck, *Führer durch das "lasterhafte" Berlin* (Guide to "wicked" Berlin) (Leipzig: 1931). © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

Having lost the war, Germany was particularly hard-hit by the emotional and economic upheavals of the 1920s. Berlin emerged as a center of sexual experimentation with a variegated sex industry that attracted many foreigners. Its clubs for homosexuals and cross-dressers are memorably described in Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* (which became the basis for the musical and movie *Cabaret*), and were illustrated by numerous artists, including Jeanne Mammen (1890–1976) (Figure 4.4).

Mammen's images appeared in both commercial guides to Berlin's sex clubs and sober studies of contemporary sex culture published by the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute of Sexology), which was founded in Berlin in 1919 by Magnus Hirschfeld. Paris's thriving commercial sex culture was also illustrated in books and magazines. In 1923, Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) published a book of drawings that included seventeen scenes titled "Le mauvais lieu" (The bad place), depicting bars populated by cross-dressers, same-sex couples, and titillated observers (Figure 4.5). In the 1930s, the Hungarian immigrant Brassaï (born Gyula Halász, 1899–1984) documented the seedy nightclubs, bars, and brothels of Paris in photographs characterized by an elegance and emotional complexity that transcends the pejorative titles and commentary that, to the dismay of his models, accompanied the images when they were published (Figure 4.6).

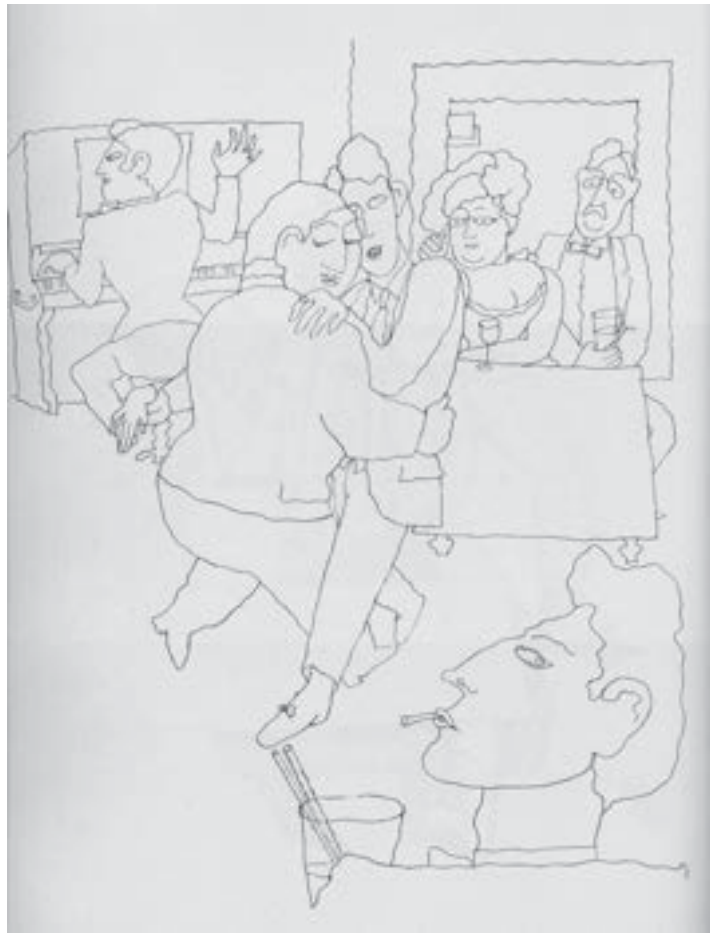

Figure 4.5. Jean Cocteau, "Le mauvais lieu," published in *Dessins* (Paris: Librarie Stock, 1923). © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ ADAGP, Paris.

In addition to attracting artists as subject matter, communities of sexual outsiders in major European cities in the first decades of the twentieth century influenced the development of modern art in ways less immediately visible, but arguably more lasting. In Paris, prominent avant-garde contingents formed around the charismatic American lesbians Natalie Barney (1876–1972) and Gertrude Stein (1874–1946). Like the "white marmorean flock" of American women in mid-nineteenth-century Rome (discussed in chapter 3), these communities were structured by various identities—sexual, artistic, linguistic, national—that reinforced one another to bind the group's members together and define their dissent from the mainstream. The balance of these elements differed between the groups. Stein's circle was more associated with stylistic innovation and American-ness, while Barney's was more explicitly lesbian and broadly anglophone. These categories overlapped, however, so that the heterosexual American writers clustered around Stein found themselves in homosexual company, while French Aesthetes like Jean

Figure 4.6. Brassaï, *Faux Couple* (The false couple) (1932), published in *Le Paris secret des années 30* (later titled *Fat Claude and her girlfriend at Le Monocle*). © Estate Brassaï-RMN Photo: Jacques Faujour. Photo credit: CNAC/MNAM/Dist. Réunion des Musées Nationaux / Art Resource, NY ART191426. The title given this picture on publication belies the intimacy of this image of two women.

Cocteau were introduced to anglophone audiences through their connections to Barney. It is impossible to isolate the role of sexual identity in creating and sustaining these avant-garde groups, which were crucial to the development of modern art. But that is the point: homosexuality as a form of identity was inextricably linked with the development of avant-garde art in the twentieth century.

Like their slightly older male counterparts in Boston, the women around Natalie Barney followed the precedent of the British Aesthetes. In her autobiography Barney claimed as her "first adventure," at an age when she was "hardly out of diapers," a meeting with Wilde during his American tour. Running across a hotel lobby "to escape a pack of vacationing children," she said, she was plucked from "my terrified course" by Wilde. "I was reassured by his eyes which had sympathetically witnessed my flight, by his hair which was as long as mine, and especially by his voice which swept me into a story." Barney's belief in Aestheticism as a bond among artistic outsiders is encapsulated in this account. Much later, it was rumored that when her father demanded that she marry, she embarked on a romance with Wilde's notorious lover Sir Alfred Douglas. Whatever the truth of this story, her family ultimately allowed her to live unmarried in Paris, where her lovers included Dolly Wilde, Oscar's niece. Acting on an Aesthetic determination to, in her words, "find or found . . . a society composed of all those who seek to focus and improve their lives through an art that can give them pure presence," Barney created a community characterized by all the hallmarks of Aestheticism: eccentric elegance in dress, meticulous interior decor, love of erudite poetry, cultivation of wit, and indulgence in sensations beyond the bounds of conventional morality, including those associated with drugs and homoeroticism.

Barney's circle was distinguished from other Aesthetes by the predominance of women and the concomitant importance of lesbian eroticism to the group's social dynamics and its art. In 1900 Barney published a book

Figure 4.7. Natalie Barney photographed by a friend (1905), private collection. The contrast with Picasso's 1906 portrait of Gertrude Stein (Figure 4.12) exemplifies the different forms of modernism associated with different forms of lesbian identity in the early twentieth century.

of poems on lesbian love, and she and her friends photographed one another cavorting naked in nature (Figure 4.7). With their soft focus, self-consciously artistic poses, and panoramic format that contextualizes the nude as a feature in the landscape, these photographs register the precedents of Aesthetic photography as well as associations of lesbian eroticism with artistic sensitivity. Searching for a specifically lesbian creative heritage, Barney studied Greek in order to read Sappho's poetry in the original. In 1904 she moved briefly to the island of Lesbos with her lover, the poet Renée Vivien (born Pauline Tarn), who had published the first explicitly lesbian translation of Sappho the year before. Two writers in Barney's group produced novels based on their romances with her: Liane de Pougy's 1901 best-seller, *Idylle Saphique,* and Vivien's *A Woman Appeared to Me* (1904). Barney proposed for her own tombstone the epitaph: "She was the friend of men and the lover of women, which for people full of ardor and drive is better than the other way around."

Despite her temporary expatriation to Lesbos, Barney's headquarters remained Paris, "the only city where you can live and express yourself as you please," she said. Barney's Paris home, a seventeenth-century house in an artsy neighborhood on the Left Bank, became, like Leighton's or Moreau's, an expression of identity. Its large garden featured a neoclassical temple inscribed on its pediment "A L'AMITIE" (to friendship).

That *amitié* is a feminine noun made this motto especially appropriate to the rituals honoring female deities that Barney staged as part of her effort to re-create a circle of creative women lovers like the one she believed flourished around Sappho.

Such extravagance attracted journalists' attention. Beginning in 1910, the Decadent writer Rémy de Gourmont cast his introspective biweekly essays in the journal *Mercure de France* as letters to Barney, whom he addressed as "The Amazon," a reference to the female warriors of Greek mythology and slang for women who adopted masculine dress and behavior. "There are male wills in female bodies," Gourmont asserted; "I am relying upon that to reach your essential sympathy." Gourmont used the idea of dialogue between the gender-transcending Amazon and a man who professed to "something feminine in his nervous texture" to speculate about such broad topics as sympathy, pleasure, and chastity (this last included an affirmation of the sexual relationship between the poets Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine). "I rely greatly on you and on your Amazonian way of looking at things and producing a fresh vision of them," he wrote. Barney published her own essays as *Thoughts of an Amazon* in 1920, and her 1929 memoirs were prefaced with a diagram of her house and garden that mapped all her friends in relation to this extraordinary place. By 1932 Barney's circle was so well known that the Paris humor magazine *Pour Rire* published an insider's account that, describing Sappho as the "Eve of liberated women," announced: "There is no point in looking for Sappho in Mytilene [the major city of Lesbos]. She is an artist. Therefore she moved to Paris."

One literary portrait of Barney contributed significantly to the popular image of the lesbian "type" for much of the twentieth century. Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) was intended to arouse sympathy for what she called, in a letter to the sexologist Havelock Ellis, "the pitiful plight of inverts." Sexology's influence pervades the novel, beginning in Ellis's preface praising the book's "social and psychological significance" and continuing through references to characters reading Ulrichs and Krafft-Ebing. The plot of the novel follows its central character, Stephen—her masculine name reinforces the idea of "inversion" as an inherent condition instilled by parents who were insufficiently attentive to normative gender roles—as she flees the hostility of her native England for Paris. There she is introduced by an effeminate English author of fashionable plays to a Parisian circle presided over by the Barney-like Valérie Seymour, an Aesthete whose philosophy, according to the Wilde-like guide, is that "in this ugly age one should strive to the top of one's bent after beauty." In contrast to the pathetic images of other male and female "inverts" Hall sketched to arouse readers' sympathy, Seymour stands out as strong and charismatic: "every one felt very normal and brave when they gathered at Valérie Seymour's. There she was, this charming and cultured woman, a kind of lighthouse in a storm swept ocean," who enabled "the poor spluttering victims" of shipwrecked lives to

"strike boldly out for the shore, at the sight of this indestructible creature."

Despite Hall's pleas for sympathy, the reception of *The Well of Loneliness* repeated aspects of the Wilde trials. British courts found the book obscene, not because it described sexual attraction between women, but because it did so, in one judge's words, without presenting these "horrible tendencies" as "in the least degree blameworthy." The conservative *Sunday Express* editorialized against the book, claiming, "Literature has not yet recovered from the harm done it by the Oscar Wilde scandal," and warning, "I would rather give a healthy boy or a healthy girl a phial of prussic acid than this novel. Poison kills the body, but moral poison kills the soul." As with the Wilde trials, the highly publicized prosecution of *The Well of Loneliness* helped disseminate the ideas the authorities claimed to want to suppress. By the time the courts ordered the destruction of the unsold stock, 5,000 copies of *The Well* had already been purchased in Britain. With sales boosted by controversy, the book remained available in France and the United States, where courts rejected attempts to suppress it. Translated into eleven languages, more than a million copies were sold in Hall's lifetime. *The Well of Loneliness* was so well known that it was satirized in novels—Compton Mackenzie's *Extraordinary Women* and Lord Berners's *The Girls of Radcliff Hall* among them—and in a booklet titled *The Sink of Solitude*, where the echoes of Aubrey Beardsley in the style of the illustrations reinforced the connections between lesbianism and Aestheticism (Figure 4.8). This booklet, though it mocked Hall, focused its satiric energy on her self-publicizing persecutors, noting that the sensationalistic attacks on her book meant that "millions of shop, office and mill girls have been led to ask the furtive question: What is Lesbianism?"

Figure 4.8. Beresford Egan, "St. Stephen in the Lion's Den" and "Sappho and the Latter Day Adolescents," illustrations for *The Sink of Solitude* (London: Hermes Press, 1928).

The ways this question was answered by *The Well of Loneliness*—and by the photographs of Radclyffe Hall that filled the papers during the trial—powerfully conditioned popular perceptions of homosexuality

among women, including its associations with aestheticism and masculine dress. Even the term *lesbian,* which now emerged from the welter of turn-of-the-century medical nomenclature for female homosexuality, reflects the Aesthetes' association of modern sexual identity with a "poetic" sensibility reaching back to Sappho. Scientific texts reinforced connections between Aestheticism and lesbianism; Ellis linked the "congenital anomaly" of lesbianism to "women of high intelligence," and other sexologists associated homosexuality with art. Taking such ideas to heart, the women in Barney's circle developed their talents as writers and artists.

The most prominent visual artist in the group was, like Barney, an American expatriate, the painter Romaine Brooks (1874–1970). Brooks's portraits of the women in Barney's circle supplanted conventional eroticized visions of lesbians (such as Courbet's paintings, discussed in chapter 3) with images of modern lesbian identity. Brooks claimed to dislike *The Well of Loneliness*, but her representations of modern lesbian identity, like Hall's characterization of Stephen, followed sexologists' definitions of the "invert" whose costume and comportment manifest attributes of the opposite gender. In Brooks's 1924 portrait of Hall's lover Una Troubridge, herself an amateur artist, the contrast of the figure's masculine tuxedo-like outfit, monocle, and short hair with her feminine lipstick, earrings, and lapdogs is so extreme that some viewers interpreted it as caricature (Figure 4.9). The harmony of grays, typical of Brooks's art, announces an Aesthetic claim to subtle artistic sensitivity, and critics compared her paintings to the prose of both Proust and Wilde. Although this painting was exhibited in New York and Paris in 1925, it was refused in London, where Troubridge's notoriety for leaving her aristocratic husband for Radclyffe Hall heightened the image's provocative impact. Brooks herself wrote about it to Barney: "Una is funny to paint. Her get-up is remarkable. She will . . . cause future generations to

smile." Like Brooks's dismissal of *The Well of Loneliness*, however, such comments are risky to accept at face value, for part of the Aesthetic stance was to remain wittily aloof from earnest self-revelation, and Troubridge's androgynous outfit and hairstyle resemble Brooks's own.

Sexology's influence on Barney's circle of well-read women is also evident in the work of Djuna Barnes (1892–1982). Barnes, another American, began her career as a journalist and illustrator proficient in a variety of styles. Before moving to Paris around 1920, she produced a pamphlet of poems, *The Book of Repulsive Women*, with pictures imitating Beardsley's style and poems describing fantastical half-breeds who blur boundaries between races and between humans and animals in ways analogous to the sexologists' descriptions of homosexuals as blurring boundaries between the biological categories of male and female. Barnes's 1928 booklet, *The Ladies Almanack*, was a ribald gift to her newfound community in Paris, satirizing the prose and pictures in old almanacs to caricature the women in Barnes's circle (Figure 4.10). Una Troubridge was Lady Buck-and-balk, who "sported a Monocle and believed in Spirits," while Barney was Evangeline Musset, who "had been developed in the Womb of her most gentle Mother to be a Boy, when therefore, she came forth an Inch or so less of this, she paid no Heed to the Error." This manlike woman "was in her Heart one Grand Red Cross for the Pursuance, the Relief and the Distraction, of such Girls as in the Hinder Parts, and their Fore Parts, and in whatsoever Parts did suffer them most."

Figure 4.9. Romaine Brooks, *Una, Lady Troubridge* (1924), oil on canvas, Smithsonian American Art Museum. Photo credit: Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC/Art Resource, NY.

Barnes's clever *Almanack*, anonymously published in a very small edition, was hardly known outside her circle. Her success came with a 1936 novel, *Nightwood*, which was loosely based on her unhappy affair with the artist Thelma Wood and drew heavily on her experiences among the expatriate lesbians in Paris. Eschewing the proselytizing earnestness of *The Well of Loneliness* in favor of an avant-garde prose style, *Nightwood* piqued the reading public's fascination with lesbian subculture without challenging expectations that lesbians must suffer. This combination made Barnes a famous writer, and after *Nightwood* she produced very little visual art. A portrait from the 1940s, however, suggests that she did not lose her taste for satire (Figure 4.11). Cordelia Coker Pearson Pearson fell in love with Barnes after reading *Nightwood* and commissioned the portrait in order to meet her. Like Brooks, Barnes professed annoyance at her sitter, mocking this female dandy's determination to be painted in masculine riding clothes, and the

Figure 4.10. Djuna Barnes, page from the *Ladies Almanack* (1928). This page, opening the section on the month of March, illustrates the Good Dame Musset's proposal that women who violate the honor of their female lovers might be summoned to fight duels: "A strong Gauntlet struck lightly athwart the Buttock would bring her to the common Green, where with Rapier or Fowling-Piece, she might demand to take her Satisfaction."

portrait, in which a huge head contrasts with spindly legs and tiny bowler hat, veers strongly toward caricature. As with Brooks, however, Barnes's professions of contempt or amusement protected the artist from imputations of identification with her provocative sitter or with the community of sexual outsiders Pearson represented.

Overlapping with—but distinct from—Barney's band of Aesthetes, another circle in the Paris avant-garde revolved around another American lesbian, Gertrude Stein. Stein lived near Barney and the two were friendly rivals. While Barney's circle embraced a lesbian identity associated with fin-de-siècle Aestheticism, however, Stein was the center of a group composed primarily of heterosexual men on the cutting edge of modernist art and literature. Because Stein favored modernist abstraction over Aestheticism, critics sometimes minimize the importance of homosexuality on her work. Stein's writing pioneered modernism's abstract, fractured prose styles; her parties brought together the leaders of the French and American avant-gardes; and her patronage was crucial to many struggling artists, including both Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. All of these accomplishments were influenced in important ways by her sexual identity.

Like the expatriate women in Barney's community, Stein moved to Paris to escape what she experienced as the stultifying sexual norms of middle-class femininity in America. "It was not what France gave you but what it did not take away from you that was important," she said. Also like the women in Barney's circle, Stein was well versed in sexology, having studied psychology in college and trained for a time as a doctor. Stein's application of the new medical theories of sexuality differed from Barney's, however. Where Barney allied herself with lesbians, Stein identified herself with men, cutting her hair short and leaving her "wife," Alice B. Toklas, to oversee the housework and socialize with other artists' wives and girlfriends. "Pablo and Matisse

have a maleness that belongs to genius," Stein wrote. "Moi aussi [me too], perhaps." Picasso's 1905–06 portrait of Stein is anomalous among his images of women for its emphasis on her physical mass and intellectual power, both associated in his art with men (Figure 4.12). For Stein, this was "the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me." She noted happily that she grew more closely to resemble the portrait as she aged.

Despite their differences, Stein's model of lesbian identity, like Barney's, exerted a powerful influence on the women in her circle, prominent among them two American art collectors, the Cone sisters, Etta (1870–1949) and Claribel (1864–1929). Etta's diaries imply an early romance with Stein, and her letters to Stein frankly discuss her attraction to women. Many contemporaries, however, saw Stein as closer to the intellectual Claribel, a friend from medical school who became a prominent medical researcher and administrator. So close was their identification that Stein's 1912 essay *Two Women*, nominally a word portrait of the Cone sisters, is often read as describing Stein's own relationship with Toklas (Text 4.1).

The Cones collected in a style and on a scale that rivaled Wilde's fictional Dorian Gray, filling their adjoining apartments in Baltimore with

Figure 4.11. Djuna Barnes. Portrait of Cordelia Coker Pearson (1947), location of original unknown, photograph in the Papers of Djuna Barnes, Special Collections, University of Maryland Libraries.

THE FINAL PARAGRAPHS FROM GERTRUDE STEIN'S *TWO WOMEN*, WRITTEN 1908–1912, PUBLISHED IN 1925

They were together and they were both being living then. They were not together and they were both being living then. The older was being living then. The younger was going on being living then.

The younger one was always remembering that they were both being living. The older was not ever forgetting that they were both being living. The younger was knowing that the older was being living, was knowing that she herself was needing going on being living. The older was knowing that the younger was going on being living, that she was needing this thing, she was knowing that she herself was being living.

Figure 4.12. Pablo Picasso, *Gertrude Stein* (1907), oil on canvas, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bequest of Gertrude Stein, 1946. Painting © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

lace, embroidery, exotic textiles, and ornaments of silver and gold. Under Stein's guidance, this environment became the setting for a collection of modern French art that is often noted as one of America's finest (Figures 4.13, 4.14). What is not noted about the Cone collection is how their selections of art by Matisse, Picasso, Gauguin, and Renoir focused on images of women. Female nudes, women in fashionable clothes, and a remarkable series of ten Matisse drawings of the strong-jawed sisters (strikingly resembling Picasso's earlier portrait of Stein) combined to suggest a spectrum of possibilities for modern womanhood, from the sensual "primitive" to the fashionable lady or the serious intellectual.

For the Cones, collecting was an expression of identity. Bearing the signs of exoticism on their own bodies, they wore items from their collection—Asian and North African textiles and jewelry—to social events in their home city of Baltimore. Their collection was also a pedagogical resource; they opened their home to scholars, lectured on modern art, and lent work to museums. Promoting the modernism revealed to them by their friend Gertrude Stein was not simply an aesthetic preference for the Cones. It was connected to new ways to think about women, issues like "philanthropy and women suffrage—questions that have put old Baltimore in a state of real turmoil," as Etta wrote to Stein. Claribel's will directed her sister to donate her collection to the Baltimore museum "in the event the spirit of appreciation of modern art in Baltimore becomes improved."

Like the Cones' collection begun under her auspices, Gertrude Stein's work is conventionally studied as an expression of modernism rather than of sexual identity. This is a false distinction, however, for lesbian identity was modern; the remarkable number of expatriate anglophone women in the early-twentieth-century Parisian avant-garde attests to how the identities of the modernist and the lesbian were intertwined. Lesbianism was also crucial to the development of Stein's modernist prose. Her first novel, *Q.E.D.*, written immediately after she arrived in Paris in 1903, was a stylistically conventional story about a love triangle among women very much like a frustrated affair that had prompted Stein to leave America. Each woman in Stein's novel represents a variation of lesbian identity: the "English handsome girl," her older aristocratic-seeming lover, and a sensible middle-class young lady much like herself. Not daring to publish this frank narrative, which included quotations from her own letters, Stein diverted her interest in outsider identity toward African-Americans. Her short novel *Melanctha*, written while Picasso was painting her portrait in 1905–1906 but not published until

Figure 4.13. Claribel Cone's apartment, photographed in 1941 by Mitro Hood. Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art (CEHOMES.19). This view shows four of Matisse's ten drawings of the sisters surrounding Félix Vallotton's 1907 portrait of Gertrude Stein, similar to Picasso's portrait from the same era.

1909, recasts the plot of *Q.E.D.*, heterosexualizing the love affair and setting it in the African-American community. Stein's evocation of black American speech presages the repeating, elliptical patterns that came to characterize her modernist prose style, rooting it in an exotic primitivism often compared to Picasso's borrowings from African masks, but also related—and this is never noted—to the Aesthetes' identification with outsider cultures.

SEXUALITY AND RACE

The relationship between minority racial and sexual identities were—and are—controversial in assessments of modernism, especially in the American context, where the same cities that fostered communities of avant-garde artists were also home to large populations of recent immigrants and racial minorities. The paradigmatic site of interaction between these groups was New York, where in the 1920s avant-garde whites flocked to nightclubs in Harlem, while black intellectuals experimented with modernist styles of prose and visual art, creating the "Harlem Renaissance." This rich mixture produced some of the definitive

Figure 4.14. Etta Cone's apartment, photographed after 1936, Dr. Claribel and Miss Etta Cone Papers, Archives and Manuscripts Collections, The Baltimore Museum of Art (CH.25). This view shows two paintings of fashionable women and a sculpture of a reclining female nude, all by Matisse.

art of the twentieth century (jazz especially), some remarkable acts of interracial collaboration, some blatant acts of exploitation, and a great deal of controversy—all of which historians continue to debate today. For white avant-gardes in the twentieth century, black cultures replaced Mediterranean cultures as the locus of the "primitive," simultaneously exotic and alluring, frightening and inferior. To white eyes (and ears), the black culture visible in Harlem nightclubs seemed to allow a spectacular freedom of self-expression. Radio broadcasts from the Cotton Club and illustrations in mass-circulation magazines like *Vanity Fair* created audiences for the risqué looks and sounds of Harlem far beyond New York. Cross-dressing and other forms of gender-bending display were part of Harlem's appeal, culminating each year in a drag show known as the "Faggot's Ball," which was the largest event of its kind in New York in the twenties. One history of the Harlem Renaissance concludes that the "identification and feeling of kinship" white homosexuals found with blacks provided "the beginnings of homosexual 'minority consciousness.'"

Black communities responded ambivalently to the white avant-garde's attention. On one hand, it offered African-Americans unprecedented opportunities for respect and remuneration. Black political organizations sponsored art exhibitions and awards to encourage and publicize black artists. Black political leaders resisting stereotypes of blacks as uninhibited and instinctual, however, condemned art that seemed to justify such ideas, and were especially critical of blacks who joined homosexual networks in the white avant-garde. One black newspaper warned against consorting with white homosexuals: "The discarded froth of Caucasian society cannot lift them or their race in the respect and confidence of the Caucasian world." Recent surveys of African-American art often perpetuate this attitude, ignoring issues of sexual identity in the careers of leading Harlem Renaissance artists, such as the sculptor Richmond Barthé, whose sensual

Benga figure, suggestive of both African ritual and modern dance, capitalizes on modernists' associations of black culture with artistic and sexual self-expression (Figure 4.15). Many of the black singers, dancers, writers, and artists who created the Harlem Renaissance, however, flouted the politicians' warnings, forging homosexual networks and using sexual deviance to gain the attention of white audiences. After the singer Ma Rainey was arrested in 1925 for throwing a women's party with a strip show by her backup singers, she advertised her "Prove It on Me Blues" with a picture of a woman in masculine dress flirting with two flappers under a policeman's watchful eye. Richard Bruce Nugent (1906–1987), an author and illustrator, provoked black politicians in 1926 with his "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," a prose poem comparing the narrator's attraction to a man and a woman in the artistic milieu of the Harlem Renaissance. An illustration Nugent painted to accompany this story (Figure 4.16) evokes Cocteau's style. Unpublished until recently, it was owned by Alain Locke, who was publicly one of the intellectual leaders of the Harlem Renaissance and, far more discreetly, a member of Harlem's homosexual networks.

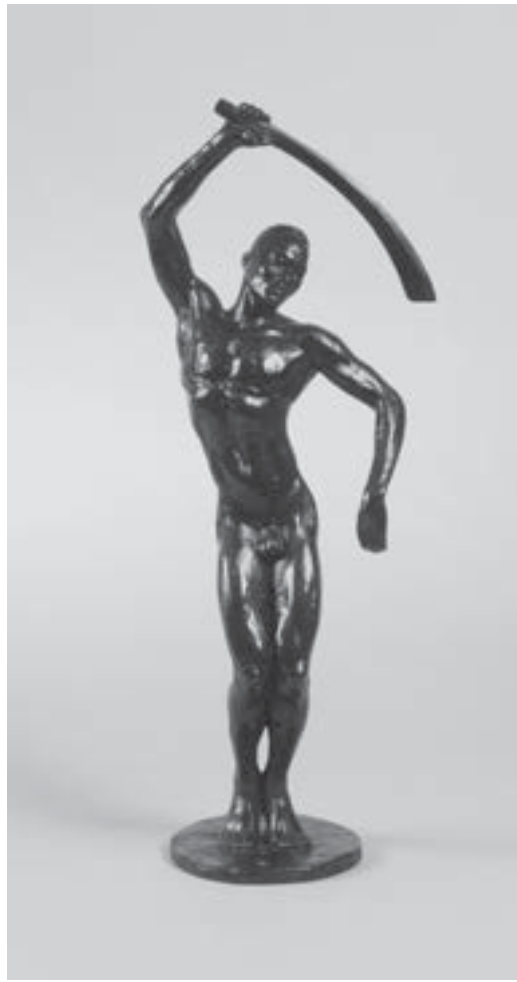

Figure 4.15. Richmond Barthé, *Benga: Dance Figure* (1935), bronze. Newark Museum, Newark, N.J. Photo credit: The Newark Museum / Art Resource, NY.

Despite the exoticizing assumptions of white audiences, the sexual and artistic mores of the Harlem Renaissance did not develop independent of the history sketched in this book. Black writers often invoked Aesthetic precedent in their fusion of artistic and sexual experimentation. Nugent, describing the narrator's desire to kiss the man he calls Beauty in "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," wrote, "Alex wondered why he always thought of that passage from Wilde's *Salomé*. . . when he looked at Beauty's lips" (ellipsis in original). Nugent later produced a series of illustrations for *Salomé*. Locke registered the continuing importance of nineteenth-century models of sexual identity when he criticized Nugent's aestheticism, saying, "Whitman would have been a better point of support than . . . Wilde and Beardsley." In his 1932 novel *Infants of the Spring*, Wallace Thurman, who shared rooms with Nugent, presented a bitter view of Harlem's black artists and white patrons, with Nugent thinly veiled as the character Paul Arbian, a painter of "nothing but highly colored phalli," who commits suicide in the last chapter. The continuing importance of Aesthetic precedent is clear in the suicide scene, where Arbian's blood obliterates the manuscript of the novel he had been struggling to write, leaving only the dedication, which reads:

To Huysmans' Des Esseintes and Oscar Wilde
Ecstatic spirits with whom I Cohabit
And whose golden spore of decadent pollen
I shall broadcast and fertilize.

Stigmas still attached to homosexuality have prolonged debates over the interaction of racial and sexual identity in the early twentieth century, as long-suppressed information gradually emerges to challenge accepted historical accounts. Thurman, despite substantial evidence (including a police record) to the contrary, vehemently denied his homosexuality. Perhaps the most controversial case, however, concerns Carl Van Vechten (1880–1964), a white author and photographer well known for promoting American modernists, Romaine Brooks and Gertrude Stein among them. Van Vechten was famous—and, as the century progressed, increasingly admired—for supporting African-American writers, musicians, and artists, many of whom he photographed as dignified intellectuals. These portraits differed strongly from the demeaning racial stereotypes prevalent at mid-century, and circulated widely in magazines, especially during and after the civil rights movement. Van Vechten's commitment to breaking down racial boundaries in the United States is clear in the disposition of his archives. Art historian Jonathan Weinberg points out that Van Vechten left his substantial collection of African-American literature to Yale University "because it was a white Ivy League institution, while he gave his collection of music, made up mostly of material by and about white composers, to Fiske University, a black college. The idea was for whites to study black culture and blacks to study white culture." When, twenty-five years after Van Vechten's death, part of his Yale archives were opened to the public, historians were forced to confront how deeply this happily married, socially prominent figure actively participated in networks of homosexual dancers and other performers. For some, Van Vechten's frank letters, bawdy scrapbook collages (Figure 4.17), and photographs staging black and white nude men in scenarios ranging from worship to violence (Figure 4.18), discredit the motives and meanings of his support for black artists and intellectuals. For others, these documents offer an affirmative record of erotic and emotional ties between black and white men in a circle of ambitious modernists in mid-century New York.

Figure 4.16. Richard Bruce Nugent, *Smoke, Lilies, and Jade* (1926), Howard University Gallery of Art.

Like Fred Holland Day's Aestheticism, Van Vechten's identifications with modern art and with nonwhite artists relate in complex ways to

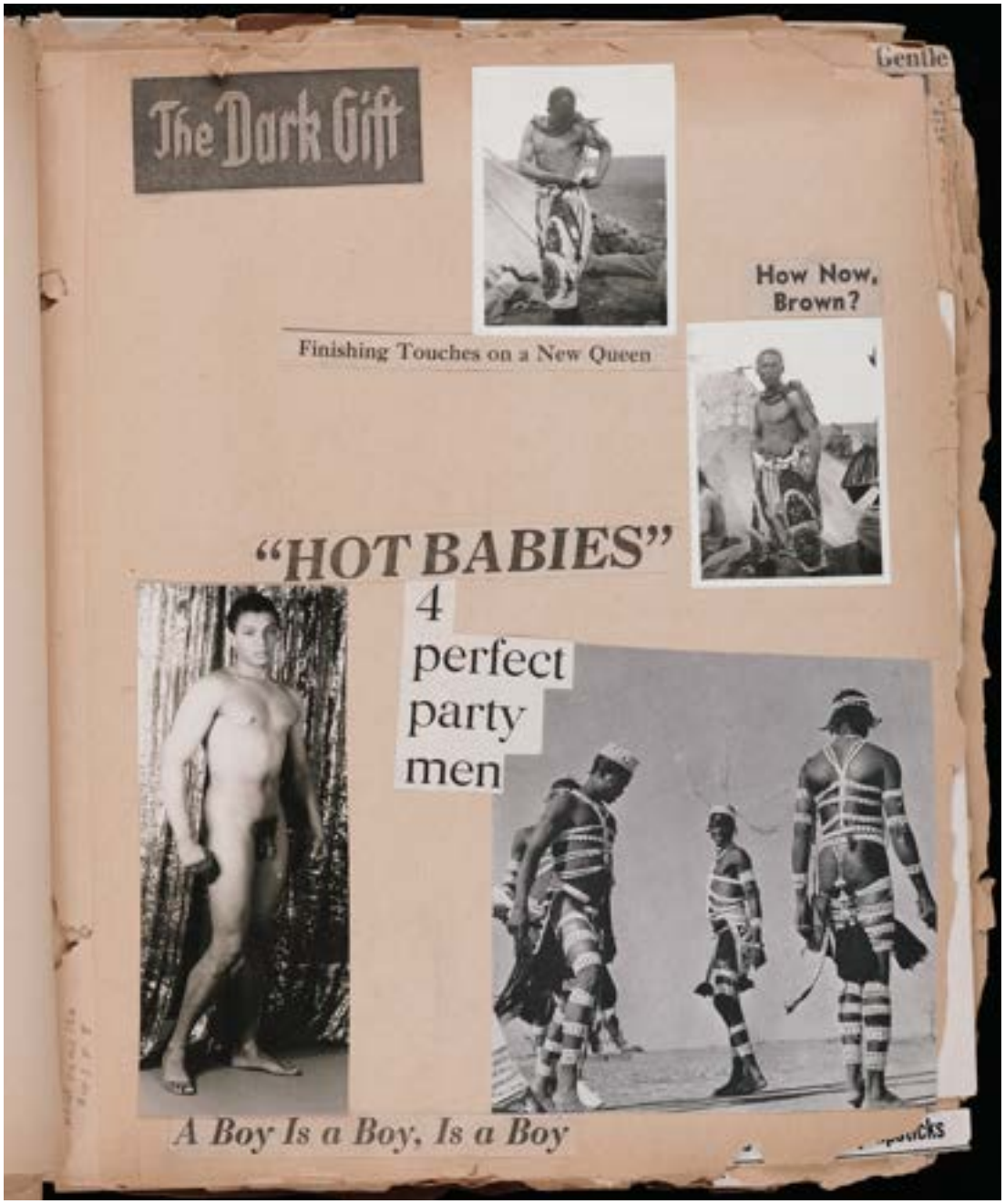

Figure 4.17. Page from Carl van Vechten's scrapbooks, Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, © Estate of Carl Van Vechten.

Figure 4.18. Carl Van Vechten, untitled photograph of Hugh Laing and Allen "Juante" Meadows (c. 1940), Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, © Estate of Carl Van Vechten. The tinselly theatrical backdrop suggests a metaphorical or symbolic meaning for the men's stance, poised between combat and embrace.

issues of sexual identity. How viewers today assess their legacy—and the broader issues of primitivism and sexual identity in the history of modernism—will reflect our own priorities and identifications. On one hand, white modernists like Van Vechten (and Stein and Picasso) clearly appropriated black styles—which they perceived as new, energetic, and sensual—for their own benefit. On the other, their interest in black culture—manifest in the financial and critical support Van Vechten and others gave individual black artists—helped to power the Harlem Renaissance and inaugurate a widespread appreciation of African art. Similarly, the potential for exploitation in sexual relationships between whites and blacks should be balanced against the support offered by the predominantly white homosexual networks of Greenwich Village to blacks whose sexuality alienated them from Harlem's political leadership. At least occasionally, some inkling of Carpenter's and Whitman's belief that homoerotic attraction could overcome barriers between classes and races seems to have been realized in the rich social and aesthetic ferment of New York between the wars. Recently, the African-American scholar James Smalls has analyzed the potential for empowerment he finds in Van Vechten's erotic violation of racial and sexual taboos, insisting, "This is not a form of self-hatred or internalized racism, but represents one way in which the black man can use for empowerment a fantasy that may or may not be his own."

STRATEGIES OF CODING: ABSTRACTION AND SYMBOLS

If the ongoing debates over homoeroticism in the Harlem Renaissance reflect unresolved anxieties over the relationship of racial and sexual identity to one another and to the history of modernism, at least these issues are now openly debated. This is less true in histories of abstraction, often considered the hallmark of modern art. Although the

development of abstraction is tightly bound to the history of homosexuality, these connections are often suppressed.

"Pablo is doing abstract portraits in painting. I am trying to do abstract portraits in my medium, *words*," Gertrude Stein proclaimed. While—or because—Stein's prose style was famous during her lifetime, proscriptions against the too-frank association of the avant-garde with homosexuality meant neither she nor her work was ever publicly associated with lesbianism—this despite her account of her domestic partnership in her 1933 book, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, which was much discussed as a memoir of Paris art circles. Since Stein's death, however, her prose style has been analyzed as an expression of lesbianism. Stein's grammar and syntax flout conventional rules, breaking up words' "sleepy, family habits," as poet Edith Sitwell put it as early as 1925. Critics today extend the implications of this observation, noting how Stein groups words in ways that break laws (of grammar) and challenge conventions, often with sexual connotations. From this perspective, Stein's "abstract" prose can be analyzed as a code that let her explore forbidden subjects too forthrightly revealed in her early unpublished texts. Natalie Barney, in a foreword to a posthumously published collection of Stein's writings, invited readers "into Miss Stein's game of blindman's buff, or blindman's bluff, in which the reader is blindfolded—obscurity being the better part of discretion as to who is who."

The visual art produced in Stein's circle also deals with codes. Picasso's abstract paintings, for instance, often include coded references to various girlfriends, which scholars and journalists eagerly explained. Their reluctance to conduct such analysis concerning gay and lesbian artists reflects anxieties that modern art is diminished by association with homosexuality, or that the artists will be reduced to a single stereotype or seen as completely motivated—and thus explained—by their sexual identity in ways that do not threaten heterosexual figures like Picasso. This dynamic affects not only histories of individual artists, but studies of abstraction in general. The idea—radical in the early twentieth century—that art need not mimic the look of a single scene witnessed at a single instant from a single point of view appealed to many artists for many reasons. Some expatriate artists' experience of linguistic difference attuned them to the visual arbitrariness of textual signification. Other artists were attracted to abstraction as a way of representing new ideas, such as scientific theories of a fourth dimension or emotional states associated with color. One important—but underexamined—aspect of the history of modernism is the relationship between abstraction and the coding of sexual identity.

An interest in coded communication animated many of the modernists in Stein's circle, among them the painter Marsden Hartley (1877–1943). On his first visit to Stein's home in 1912, Hartley admired her collection of cubist paintings, which he sketched in letters that reveal his fascination with Picasso's use of symbols: "names of people and words

like jolie or bien and numbers like 75." Hartley's memoirs recall that the first sight of this art made him feel "like a severed head living of itself by mystical excitation" and speculate that "maybe Gertrude lived by disembodiedness." Hartley's description links the idea of codes with an ability to transcend bodies that, for both him and for Stein, were encumbered with stigmatized sexual desires. This suggestion is buttressed by the paintings Hartley made under the influence of Stein and cubism: a series of abstract "portraits of moments" using invented symbols. Hartley gleefully reported that Stein praised his abstractions as more advanced than Picasso's in their use of color and, more importantly, that Picasso himself "said to Gertrude that he could not understand it . . . pointed to it and said 'Where are the eyes and the nose' etc."

Hartley's success in constructing codes that escaped embodiment and baffled even sophisticated viewers informed his next paintings: abstract portraits of a German army lieutenant he met in Paris, who became, in Hartley's words, "the one idol of my imaginative life" (Figure 4.18). In 1913, Hartley followed his idol to Berlin, where his fascination expanded to a love of the capital's military display. His memoirs recall the "sexual immensity" of the spectacle of the imperial guards dressed in "white leather breeches skin tight." Hartley's letters of this time exude admiration for both Germany's "masculine ruggedness and vitality" and his friend, a "true representative of all that is lovely and splendid in the German soul and character . . . this fellow at the age of 24 perfectly equipped for a life of joy and strength and beauty." This was written just after Hartley's lieutenant was killed, early in World War I. Hartley responded to this trauma with a series of abstract paintings combining details from German military uniforms with his own and his beloved's initials. Exhibited in New York in 1916, these paintings aroused controversy for seeming pro-German. Recoiling from this controversy, Hartley asserted his neutrality and refused to explain his abstractions, saying, "There is no symbolism whatsoever in them," and "Pictures that I exhibit are without titles and without description. They describe themselves."

Hartley remained fascinated, however, with ideas of coding and symbolism. His 1921 essay titled "Dissertation on Modern Painting" asserted, "Symbolism can never quite be evaded in any work of art because every form and movement that we make symbolizes a condition in ourselves." By this principle, both symbols and abstract marks are expressions of identity. In recent years, art historians have used memoirs to decode personal references—initials, numbers, military insignia, etc.—in his portraits (although some of his paintings remain enigmatic). It might be argued, however, that this project to restore these images' status as portraits misses what is most important about them: that Hartley's Berlin paintings turned to abstraction in order to announce his love in a language at once disembodied and indecipherable.

As a strategy to express a stigmatized sexual identity, abstraction offered an alternative to the alienation of the Aesthetes. The Aesthetic

style—ironic, witty, elegantly aloof—distanced artists from the figures they depicted. Proust, for example, said of the homosexual characters in his novels, "You can tell anything, but on the condition that you never say: *I*." In contrast to the Aesthetes' stylistic suggestion of refined indifference toward what they depict clearly, Hartley's exuberant colors, vigorous paint strokes, and frontal presentation convey a sincere personal commitment to his images, but his code makes it unclear what they depict. Stein's interest in Hartley's coded abstractions is registered by the prominence of a character named "M—N H—" (itself a relatively simple code) in an experimental 1913 play that anticipates the un-narrated style of much of her later writing. M—N H—'s opening line is "A cook. A cook can see. Pointedly in uniform, exertion in a medium. A cook can see." This far more complex code cannot be definitively deciphered, though its elements—a determination to see, seeing or making points by uniforms, exerting oneself through a medium whether paint or code—all relate to Hartley's art. In sharp contrast to Proust's admonition against seeming to identify with what one depicts by saying *I*, Stein titled her abstract play "IIIIIIIII," and Hartley published the M—N H— speeches in the catalog to his New York exhibition in 1914. In this sense, Hartley's abstractions and Brooks's Aestheticism exemplify opposite end points—his obscure, hers aloof—in the spectrum of artistic depictions of homosexual identity in the first decades of the twentieth century.

If Brooks and Hartley represent end points on this spectrum, many other artists could be located in between. Charles Demuth (1883–1935), for example, was part of Stein's Paris circle of expatriate Americans, and he became close friends with Hartley. His own art and identity, however, remained closer to Aestheticism than to modernist abstraction. Hartley described Demuth as an Aesthete, citing his "quaint, incisive sort of wit with an ultrasophisticated, post eighteen-ninety touch to it" and "wistful comprehension of what many a too tender soul has called infectious sin." Demuth admired both Wilde and Huysmans, and tried unsuccessfully to meet Proust. Many of his early watercolors illustrate erotic episodes from nineteenth-century novels, focusing on heterosexual trauma or debauchery. These meticulously elegant illustrations of scenes imagined by other men follow Aesthetic conventions by denying too close an identification between the artist and his subject matter.

Though Demuth never adopted the brushily earnest self-presentation of Hartley's abstractions, he too was fascinated by the way visual codes simultaneously express and veil their meanings. A group of paintings Demuth called "posters" (even this nomenclature is a kind of a code, masking their status as unique paintings) were recognized by reviewers when they were first exhibited in the 1920s as rendered "in a code for which we have not the key." Like Hartley's paintings, Demuth's "posters" aspired to disembodiedness, for these portraits used symbols to evoke their subjects. Demuth's poster portraits depict painters and writers in his avant-garde circle in New York, with one exception: a

Figure 4.20. Charles Demuth, *Calla Lilies (Bert Savoy)* (1926), oil on board, Carl van Vechten Gallery of Fine Arts, Fisk University, Nashville, Tennessee.

well-known vaudeville and nightclub performer, the female impersonator named Bert Savoy (Figure 4.20). Savoy's inclusion in Demuth's portrait series emphasizes how the identities of avant-garde artist and androgynous homosexual overlapped at this era. Unlike the artists' portraits coded with texts and numbers, however, Savoy is represented simply by an image of calla lilies springing from a shell. We can speculate about how this code works: impersonation may be suggested by the glossy artificiality of the flowers against the flat background; androgyny is implied both by the phallic flowers springing from the vaginal shell, and by the shape of the lilies, with curvaceous blossoms surrounding a phallic spadix. Both the flat background and the lily appear in Demuth's other works without these associations, however, and, as one reviewer noted, "It almost seems a pity to give at once the acceptable explanation of the picture." What was—and remains—most interesting about these "portraits" is the idea of coding identity in symbols that separate appearance from meaning, destabilizing the relationship between seeing and knowing.

The issues raised by Demuth's poster portraits and Hartley's abstract portraits have aesthetic implications beyond the coding of sexual identity. Yet it is significant that artists who were forced to hide their sexual identity became such early and astute investigators of the dynamic of coding, which divides audiences into "insiders," who feel they understand the work, and "outsiders"—in the case of these paintings the vast majority of viewers—who know that something is being signified but would be hard-pressed to explain exactly what it is. Such codes in art correspond to aspects of emerging sexual subcultures at this period, in which sartorial codes (red neckties, for instance) or code phrases (the term *gay,* for example, or calling men by women's names) allowed communication among insiders in public contexts. While recognizing the importance of such codes, it is important not to overrate their legibility. Even for men like Demuth and Hartley who moved in homosexual networks, codes were far from certain—a red necktie did not guarantee sexual community, and the risks of acting on a misreading were high. Rather than understanding their coded works as signaling clearly to a coterie of insiders, we might more accurately understand these paintings as experiments in ambiguity, reflecting their makers' experience of

uncertainty about the meanings of signs. Demuth's letters reveal his deep ambivalence about viewers' reactions to his poster portraits:

> I'll make them look at them until they see that they are, so called, pictures. I wish I could afford to work without ever showing it. I think they don't deserve to see our work; most of them anyway. I wish we could all "strike."

Here Demuth moves from wanting to force audiences to recognize his work immediately to assertions of antagonism toward the public, which grow quickly more vehement as they shift from yearnings for invisibility (not showing) to fantasies of solidarity and political action modeled on labor activism. The incoherence of this outburst by a man who prided himself on his writing suggests the force of Demuth's conflicted desires to be accepted by and to retreat from a society he resented for stigmatizing him, a conflict resolved in a fantasy of collective movement for social change. To simply decode Demuth's symbols overlooks this complex dynamic of appeal and antagonism, in which the limited readability of codes helps define minority identities, whether avant-garde or sexual—or both.

Figure 4.21. Charles Demuth, *Distinguished Air* (1930), watercolor and graphite, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

This complexity is the subject of one of Demuth's watercolors, a late work that returns to his early practice of illustrating fiction. *Distinguished Air* was inspired by a short story of that title by his friend Robert McAlmon, which describes the sexual underworld of Berlin (Figure 4.21). Rather than depicting a scene from the story, which takes place in a bar, Demuth borrowed the title for his own scenario set in a gallery of modern art. Here a diverse audience gathers around a caricatured sculpture by Constantin Brancusi (1876–1957), an artist who exemplified avant-garde antagonism toward social and legal convention. Brancusi's *Bird in Flight* was the subject of a notorious trial in 1927, when American customs officials, reacting to its

abstraction, ruled that it was not art (and hence subject to import taxes on the value of its bronze), and his *Princess X* was removed from a 1920 Paris exhibition because of its phallic shape. Demuth here melds *Princess X* with another of Brancusi's well-known sculptures, *Mademoiselle Pogany*, emphasizing the phallic overtones of the sculptor's images of women. The phallic charge of this abstract portrait is juxtaposed in Demuth's watercolor to a male couple: a top-hatted gent and a sailor with their arms intertwined. The sailor also attracts the attention of the man in the heterosexual couple, who turns from the phallic sculpture to stare at the corresponding anatomy of the sailor. His female companion looks past the art at the disheveled elegance of a woman in evening wear who, apparently enthralled by the sculpture, holds a fan to her crotch, where the sailor's eyes seem to stare. This web of glances questions the reliability of appearances and the purposes of vision. To assert definitive answers misses the point. Abstract art is here central to a network of ambiguous codes that include the signifiers of homosexuality.

THE LIMITS OF THE AVANT-GARDE

Demuth, late in his career, produced—but did not exhibit—a number of watercolors unambiguously depicting men having sex in the woods, on the beach, in bedrooms. His secreting away of such art belies common myths of a freewheeling avant-garde that never hesitated to shock the public by championing freedom of personal and aesthetic expression. Although some avant-garde circles afforded some leeway for expressions of homosexuality, acting on that opportunity always entailed risk. Both Hartley and Demuth, for instance, were pejoratively portrayed in literature produced by their avant-garde circles. Their names and details of their lives were combined in Eugene O'Neill's 1926 play *Strange Interlude* to create the character Charles Marsden, a stereotype of the repressed homosexual marked by an "indefinable feminine quality." Negative imputations of femininity also crept into assessments by critics. Demuth's paintings were described as "overdelicate" and "perverse," while his exhibited watercolors were reviewed as "limited" by an "almost feminine refinement." Even the seeming nonsense of the Dada movement had a dangerous edge. When the avant-garde journal *New York Dada* offered its send-up of the sports and society gossip pages of conventional newspapers in 1921, an article under the headline "Pug Debs [Pugilist Debutantes] Make Society Bow: Marsden Hartley May Make a Couple—Coming Out Party Next Friday" promised that

> Master Marsden will be attired in a neat but not gaudy set of tight-fitting gloves and will have a V-back in front and on both sides. He will wear very short skirts gathered at the waist with a nickel's worth of live leather belting. His slippers will be heavily jeweled with brass eyelets. . . . He has always been known as a daring dresser.

The article concludes by pairing Hartley with another avant-garde artist, Joseph Stella: "Master Marsden will give his first dance to his brother pug-deb Joseph, which will probably fill Marsden's card for the evening."

Dada's apparent nonsense, like the veiled allusions of critics or colleagues, functioned as a code that could be used to hint at sexual secrets, with the potential for devastating social and legal consequences. Some in the avant-garde deployed such allegations of homosexuality strategically, jockeying for position by associating their rivals—whether specific artists, or competing groups or styles—with femininity and homosexuality. This pattern is particularly noticeable in the history of modern design and decorative arts, professions already feminized by their association with household furnishings and linked to the Aesthetes' practices of collecting and self-expression through extravagant domestic display. When, in London in 1912, Wyndham Lewis broke from a consortium of artists promoting modernist aesthetics in interior design to found his own competing Rebel Arts Centre, he published a letter attacking his former colleagues at the Omega Workshops as a "party of strayed and Dissenting Aesthetes" that he claimed to have joined only because they needed "as much modern talent as they could find, to do the rough and masculine work without which they knew their efforts would not rise above the level of a pleasant tea party." Long after the Omega closed, Lewis continued to battle its founders, complaining about the lingering effects of "the aesthetic movement presided over by Oscar Wilde" and "the part that the feminine mind has played—and minds as well, deeply feminized, not technically on the distaff side—in the erection of our present criteria." More famously, the International Style architect Le Corbusier (born Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, 1887–1965) in his widely reproduced manifestos of the 1920s promoted his high-tech designs over old-fashioned styles he cast as lingering manifestations of aestheticism. Echoing the journalistic diatribes against Wilde, Le Corbusier attacked conventional architectural schools as "hot-houses where blue hortensias and green chrysanthemums are forced, and where unclean orchids are cultivated," and compared the contaminating influence of their graduates to "a milkman" who sold "his milk mixed with vitriol or poison." The houses produced by such architects, Le Corbusier claimed, were "moth-eaten boudoirs" that threatened the masculinity of male dwellers, leaving them "sheepish and shrivelled like tigers in a cage." Le Corbusier's rhetoric exploited growing associations of art and design with homosexuality to promote himself as the exception: an architect whose white-box modernist style allied him with "healthy and virile engineers," rather than with artists or interior designers.

Similarly, the novelist Ernest Hemingway used increasingly homophobic rhetoric to distinguish himself from the other men in Stein's circle of American expatriates, rather improbably attributing several of these remarks to Stein in his memoir *A Moveable Feast*. The flagrant and

often abusive womanizing by some heterosexual men in Stein's circle—an unwitting parody of Hemingway's claim that Stein said homosexuals "are always changing partners and cannot really be happy"—can be seen as overcompensation for these men's participation in circles stigmatized as homosexual. Similar impulses underlie the widespread critical celebration of Picasso's exploitative treatment of women. The often-repeated jest that the innovative Picasso changed his style when he got a new woman or new dog reasserts the heterosexual virility of this figurehead of the avant-garde, deflecting suspicion from an entire class of artists and critics. The violent misogyny that frequently accompanied such assertions of heterosexual virility among avant-garde artists—and, feminists like Carol Duncan have argued, within the visual dynamics of avant-garde art and its exhibition—must be counted among the most pernicious effects of the linkage between avant-garde and homosexual identity.

Homophobic reaction to associations between art and homosexuality had other ramifications, including the eventual withdrawal of artists like Demuth and Hartley from urban avant-garde circles; both artists ended their careers in the rural areas they came from. Perhaps the most significant result of proscriptions against explicit articulations of homosexual identity was the secreting of bodies of work by artists who did not display what they were moved to create. Recent research has uncovered evidence of double careers—one for public exhibition, another secret body of explicitly homoerotic imagery—among a number of prominent modernist artists, including not only Demuth and Van Vechten but also the Russian Pavel Tchelitchew (1898–1957) and the British Duncan Grant (1885–1978). Because artists' anxious friends or relatives often destroyed their homoerotic art—this was the case for some of Demuth's most sexual work—we will never be able fully to measure the extent of this practice. The double careers of homosexual artists, however, illuminate the early-twentieth-century experience of homosexual identity at a time when the phrase "double life" was often used to describe an existence in which individuals balanced distinct social networks, one involving a career and often a family, and the other a sex-based set of friends and gathering places.

Duncan Grant, one of the principal artists of the Omega Workshops, for instance, struggled to balance his identities as an artist and a homosexual. Early in his career, Grant's paintings were acclaimed by the proponents of "formalist" aesthetics. Because formalism made form and color, rather than subject matter, the basis of aesthetic quality, it discouraged imagery likely to be perceived as distracting or controversial. The formalist critic and artist Roger Fry (1866–1934) wrote, "I find that in proportion as a work of art is great it is forced to discard all appeal to sex," excusing the frequent appearance of nudes in art with the claim, "the plasticity of the human figure in general is peculiarly stimulating to the pictorial sense." Far from being prejudiced against homosexuality, Fry accepted same-sex relationships among his friends, including Grant, and focused his disapproval on art made for heterosexual arousal. Grant,

Figure 4.22. Duncan Grant, *Bathers by the Pond* (1920–21), oil on canvas, Pallant House, Chichester, © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. Although authorized as art by Grant's elegant evocation of Seurat's poses and pointillist style, this painting was still too risky for Grant to exhibit during his lifetime.

dismissed as "weak and lady-like" in Wyndham Lewis's competitive gibes, welcomed Fry's approval. Adopting Fry's formalism, Grant discussed his art in terms of colors and forms, and, in his paintings, channeled his impulses to visualize homoeroticism into variations on the theme of male bathers authorized by such earlier modernist painters as Paul Cézanne (1839–1906) and Georges Seurat (1859–91) (Figure 4.22). The constraints of formalism are suggested, however, by the existence of many explicitly erotic watercolors and drawings, which Grant kept secret during his lifetime. Ultimately, both Grant's private and public work were inhibited by the schism between them. The repetitious landscapes and floral still lifes that became the mainstay of his work by mid-century betrayed his growing boredom with the limitations on exhibitable art, contributing to a widespread perception that his skills diminished following his stylistically imaginative early career. And Grant's more fanciful erotica was often undercut by its furtive and hasty production, often in ballpoint pen on scraps of paper. At Grant's best, however, the two modes were united in art that combines sexual exuberance with dancing lines and splashes of color (Figure 4.23).

Although Grant's homosexuality was accepted by his friends and is today widely acknowledged, it could not be publicly affirmed until 1967, when the law under which Wilde was prosecuted was repealed. In that year, Grant assented to the disclosure of his homosexuality in a biography of his cousin, the historian Lytton Strachey, though he still worried that, at age eighty-two, he would be arrested. These facts are worth emphasizing to counter tendencies today to overlook how significantly the double life affected the lives and work of artists whose homosexuality is—as in Grant's case—now well known.

Figure 4.23. Duncan Grant, undated watercolor sketch of embracing figures, private collection. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. The bodies of the figures joined in erotic embrace here erupt in the kind of colorful floral still life for which Grant was publicly known.

THE AVANT-GARDE AND THE OPEN SECRET

Historians struggle over the implications of the anonymous publications, inscrutable codes, and secret bodies of art that characterize the early-twentieth-century avant-garde. The avant-garde's first chroniclers—usually part of the communities they described and reluctant to unleash homophobic opprobrium on their friends or themselves—often covered up evidence of homosexuality. The omissions and falsehoods in these first hand accounts, nevertheless, misrepresented crucial elements of the history they claimed to record. In the last quarter of the twentieth century, often working courageously in the face of continuing pressures to suppress this history, a generation of scholars explored the relevance of homosexuality to the lives and work of many avant-garde artists. Motivated by commitments to tell the truth about sexuality and to create an affirmative chronicle of accomplishments by homosexuals, however, the work of scholars of this generation, especially when taken together, risks exaggerating the avant-garde's openness about homosexuality. Efforts to decode allusions to homosexuality in early-twentieth-century art and artists' biographies should not obscure the repression homosexuals faced within the art world and the concomitant importance of secret-keeping to the founding and functioning of the avant-garde. The secret of homosexuality was crucial, not just to individual artists, but to the production and reception of avant-garde art in general.

Homosexuality, as this chapter has already suggested, was an essential element in creating and sustaining the avant-garde. Important avant-garde alliances, such as the friendship between Hartley and Demuth, were grounded in the experience of sharing and keeping secrets. These bonds shaped particular artists' careers and larger avant-garde groupings. Homosexuality, thus, helped create the avant-garde; it also helped create audiences that sustained the avant-garde by rewarding artists who tantalized them with secrets. In the opening scene of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (discussed in chapter 3), one Aesthete observes, "I have grown to love secrecy. It seems to be the one thing that can make modern life mysterious or marvelous to us." Like many of Wilde's apparently flippant comments, this one points to a profound truth: from mystery novels to tell-all biographies, modern audiences love secrets. One fundamental appeal of avant-garde art was that it dealt in secrets, simultaneously shocking audiences by suggesting what

was usually unspoken and wrapping itself in various stylistic guises of inscrutability. Homosexuality, inscribed by sexology as the secret status of the artist as a "type," became the paradigmatic secret of avant-garde art. Its status as an "open secret"—constantly suspected and hinted at, but never frankly acknowledged—is among the defining characteristics of the modernist avant-garde.

The dynamic of the open secret helps answer a fundamental question about modernism: why, unlike patrons in earlier eras, did the bourgeoisie support art that seems to challenge its audience's values? One reason seems to be that, while some middle-class values—sexual propriety, respectful address, good craftsmanship, value for money—are undermined by modern art, the forms of this challenge reinforce the most fundamental of all capitalist values: individualism. In a culture that exalts individualism as an ideal for a middle class that, in fact, lives and works largely according to prescribed patterns, engagement with avant-garde art allows audiences to indulge in vicarious individualistic transgression without risking loss of authority. One strategy for maintaining authority—conscious to varying degrees—is for audiences to feel they know the secret of the avant-garde artist who challenges them, or of the avant-garde in general. Sexology allowed the bourgeoisie to believe that secret was homosexuality. Bourgeois audiences encouraged avant-garde artists who titillated and provoked their sense of the outrageous without—and this is crucial—articulating homosexual identity explicitly, since that would rob audiences of the authority they derived from the sense that they held privileged information. Ultimately, this performance of secret-keeping, in which both sides cannot acknowledge the open secret, undercuts the avant-garde's claims to radicalism, for its perpetual rehearsal of homosexual shame and heterosexual privilege reinforces the sexual norms that avant-garde art seems superficially to challenge.

These ideas have been examined—most influentially by Eve Sedgwick and D. A. Miller—in relation to avant-garde literature, with Wilde and Proust as important case studies. Wilde, the quintessential embodiment of the Aesthete-as-homosexual, personifies both the attractions and the peril of this dynamic. His brilliant career of provoking an attentive public collapsed after the too-explicit revelation of his humiliating secret. Proust more successfully sustained a career as an avant-garde author, but at the enormous personal cost of increasingly intense hypochondria, a condition that can be understood both as substituting various fantasized illnesses for the medical condition that cannot be named and as a strategy of withdrawal from the risks of interaction with the public.

Analogous dynamics, operating on a broader social level, mark the history of homosexuality in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century. From the clubs of Berlin to Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexology, Germany by the 1920s fascinated the world with increasingly open expressions of homosexuality. Then, in the 1930s, the Nazis exploited the visibility

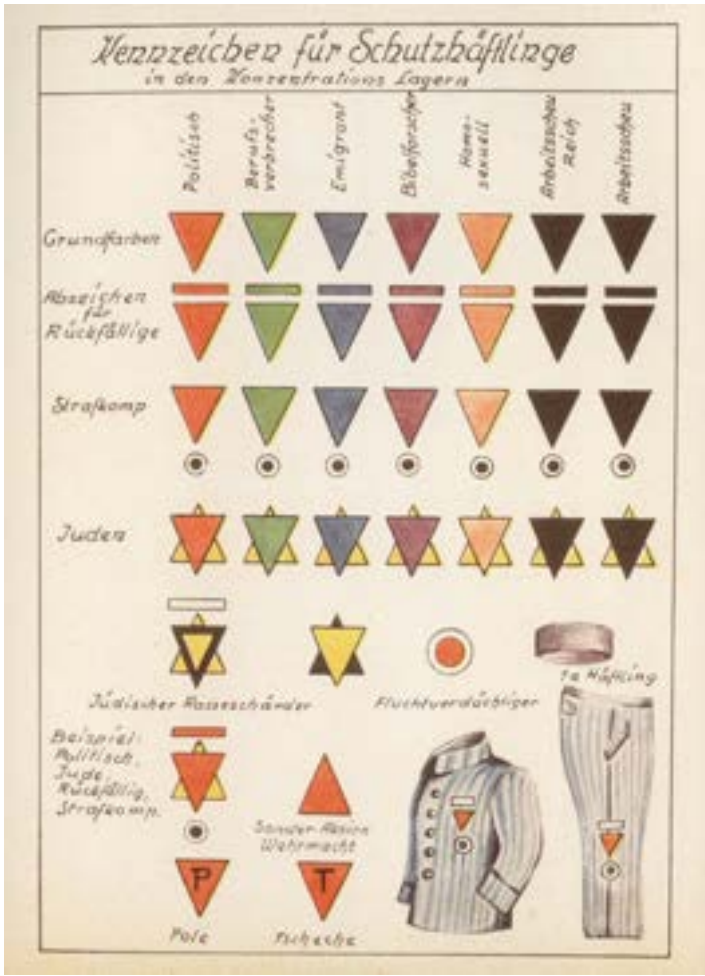

Figure 4.24. Chart from the Nazi concentration camp at Dachau showing the codes and colors used to mark the prisoners' uniforms. The categories across the top are political dissidents, professional criminals, immigrants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the asocial. The secondary codes, from top to bottom, read: base-color, mark for second offenders, prisoner of a penal group, mark for Jews, and special marks—the last category includes Jewish

of homosexuality to galvanize popular support, presenting themselves as agents of old-fashioned morality and deploying accusations of homosexuality to intimidate dissenters both inside and outside their own party. In 1933, as they were consolidating power, Nazi troopers attacked the Institute of Sexology, ransacking its offices and burning its extensive library in highly publicized bonfires—Hirschfeld watched the burning of his research collection in a movie newsreel in France. Under the Nazis, German laws were revised following the English model to criminalize a wide range of "indecent" behaviors between men. Applying the new laws retroactively, the Nazis quadrupled the rates of prosecution for homosexual offenses. By 1935, a quarter of the men held in German jails and concentration camps were homosexuals. Between 1937 and 1939 almost 95,000 men were arrested for homosexual offenses. A chart of the codes used to identify prisoners in concentration camps documents the Nazis' application of scientific ideas about classification of human types: the pink triangle labeled homosexual men as a category comparable to political dissidents, professional criminals, immigrants, Jehovah's Witnesses, and the "asocial" (Figure 4.24). These behavior-based categories differed from—but could overlap with—the "racial" categories the Nazis used to define Jews and Gypsies. Although homosexuals were not targeted for an organized campaign of extermination, many died from overwork, torture, or medical experimentation into cures for their condition. Those who did not die were re-imprisoned after the war, as both East and West Germany retained Nazi-era laws against homosexuality and accepted Nazi legal findings as proof of culpability.

No one in the 1920s could predict the horrific risks run by Germans who, in the apparent freedom of the inter war years, identified as homosexuals. The potential for legal harassment and social humiliation, however, hovered over homosexuality everywhere. Strategies of anonymity, coding, and dissimulation, therefore, characterized even artists now

often used to exemplify the shocking sight of homosexuality within the early-twentieth-century avant-garde. Take, for example, Jean Cocteau and Jeanne Mammen, whose illustrations of homosexual nightlife opened this chapter. Although Cocteau today is well known for his homoerotic drawings and writings, his love poems were published with the gender of the beloved changed to a woman. Cocteau's *The White Book* (1928)—a semifictional memoir of eroticism, suicide, and betrayal—today is known for its conclusion condemning society for refusing to accept homosexuality as "one of the mysterious cogs in the divine masterpiece" and, instead, making "a vice of my honesty" (Text 4.2).

But Cocteau denied authorship of this text, and the first edition of only thirty-one copies appeared without even the name of a publisher. Second and third editions (just 450 and 500 copies, published in 1930 and 1949, respectively) remained anonymous, but contained illustrations in Cocteau's signature style (Figure 4.25). In Cocteau's illustrations, representation merges with abstraction, as images of the viewer blend with the body—or bodies—of the viewed, frustrating any attempt definitively to identify or distinguish the artist or the reader with homoerotic desire. A similar ambiguity marks his handwritten preface, which coyly asserted, "So highly do I esteem this book that, even if it were mine, I would not

Figure 4.24. (*Continued*) race mixers, other race mixers, escape suspects, Poles, Czechs, and army veterans. Homosexuals (in the second column from the right) were wedged between Jehovah's Witnesses and the asocial as enemies of the state.

THE FINAL PARAGRAPHS FROM JEAN COCTEAU'S *THE WHITE BOOK*, PUBLISHED ANONYMOUSLY IN 1928 (TRANSLATED BY CHRISTOPHER REED)

It doesn't matter, I will depart, leaving behind this book. If it is found, it should be published. Maybe it will help explain that in exiling myself I am not exiling a monster, but a man whom society would not allow to live because it considers one of the mysterious cogs in the divine masterpiece to be a mistake.

Instead of adopting the gospel of Rimbaud: *Now is the time of assassins*, the young would do better to remember the phrase: *Love is to be reinvented.* Dangerous experiences the world accepts in the realm of art because it does not take art seriously, but it condemns them in life.

I understand very well that a termite's standard, like the Russian ideal, which aims for the plural, condemns the singular in one of its highest forms. But they will never restrict certain flowers and certain fruits to being inhaled and consumed only by the rich.

A vice of society makes a vice of my honesty. I remove myself. In France, this vice does not land one in jail because of the habits of Cambacérès and the longevity of the Napoleonic Code. But I do not agree to be tolerated. That wounds my love of love and of liberty.

[The reference in the last paragraph is to rumors that proposed a personal motive for the lawyer who drafted the Napoleonic Code, which (as noted in chapter 3) decriminalized homosexuality.]

Figure 4.25. Jean Cocteau, illustration from *The White Book* (1930). © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

consent to sign it because it takes the form of autobiography and I am waiting to write my own, which will be much more singular." The 1957 English-language edition carried another preface ambiguously refusing responsibility for the text: "be not uneasy if you find it in you to attribute this book to me. I'd be not the least bit ashamed of it. And I simply beg the unknown author's forgiveness for thus taking unfair usurping advantage of his anonymity." Acknowledging his authorship of the illustrations, however, Cocteau equally evasively cited them as "patent evidence of the fact that if I do not specialize in a taste for my own sex, I do nevertheless recognize one of the sly helping hands fond nature is wont to extend to humans." Cocteau never allowed an edition of *The White Book* to appear under his name, but he included it in a bibliography of his works. Unlike the persecuted Wilde and the reclusive Proust, Cocteau's clever exploitation of the open secret enabled him to conclude his career as an active and honored author, filmmaker, and artist, with commissions in his last years to design murals for Catholic churches in France and England.

Similar forces affected the career of Jeanne Mammen. Having made a name for herself with homoerotic imagery in the 1920s, Mammen found herself unemployable when the Nazis came to power in 1933 and a prominent gallery promptly canceled a contract to illustrate a German translation of Pierre Louÿ's 1894 book of poems *Songs of Bilitis*, describing Sappho's Lesbos. Mammen's unfinished set of illustrations abandon the text's classical setting, depicting instead a range of scenes from contemporary lesbian life (Figure 4.26). The delicacy and elegance of Mammen's images transcended the usual voyeuristic sensationalism, but the cancellation of this promising project ended her career as an illustrator. During World War II, Mammen peddled used books on the streets of Berlin to survive. In the postwar years, when she resumed her career as a painter, she dismissed her earlier work as unimportant, and abandoned illustration for oil painting in abstract styles. Mammen's unfinished series of illustrations of modern lesbian life remains a testament to the obstacles artists faced in forthrightly representing homosexuality.

The artists for whom the dynamic of the open secret worked best, of course, were those who were not homosexual and therefore could more freely exploit signifiers of sexual deviance to provoke their audiences. This dynamic is clear in the career of Marcel Duchamp (1887–1968). Duchamp is famous for his "Assisted Readymades": found objects manipulated or changed ("assisted") and then exhibited as art. These works are central to

the development of the avant-garde—a panel of art-world insiders recently ranked Duchamp's *Fountain* (1917) as the most influential work of twentieth-century art—and accordingly have been almost endlessly analyzed and debated. Studies of Duchamp's non-art artworks center on issues of aesthetics and originality, however, rarely noting how his Assisted Readymades consistently hint at homosexuality to heighten their transgressive charge. *Fountain*, a urinal turned on its side, clearly raises the possibility of finding aesthetic pleasure in public toilets and male urination. Another well-known work, his *L.H.O.O.Q.* (1919), is a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* with a drawn-on mustache, beard, and bawdy title: the sound of the letters in French can be understood as "elle a chaud au cul," a colloquial expression that translates roughly as "she's got a hot ass." While this could be interpreted as heterosexual graffiti, Duchamp chose for this image (an aroused and/or arousing mustachioed androgyne) a figure doubly associated with the history of homosexuality. The mysterious *Mona Lisa* fascinated Aesthetic and Decadent writers, while Leonardo was Freud's famous paradigm of the artist as homosexual (discussed in chapter 2), a precedent Duchamp acknowledged. Duchamp extended his play with transvestism and androgyny by himself adopting the feminine pseudonym Rrose Sélavy, a pun on the sentiment "eros c'est la vie" (eros is life) with echoes of Gertrude Stein's catchphrase "a rose is a rose is a rose." Duchamp used this female name to sign several of his writings and Assisted Readymades, and twice had himself photographed in drag as Rrose Sélavy in 1921, when cross-dressing was strongly associated with homosexual nightclubs. These photographs appeared both individually and incorporated into Duchamp's art. One graced a label Duchamp made for a bottle of "Eau de Voilette," a wordplay on perfumed "violet water" that reverses the vowels to mean "veil water," with all the associations of masking that veils imply (Figure 4.27).

Figure 4.26. Jeanne Mammen, *In the Morning* (1931), lithograph, one of seven extant images from a planned set of twelve, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris.

A photograph of Duchamp's "Eau de Voilette" appeared on the cover of the avant-garde art magazine that satirized Hartley as a "pug deb." This juxtaposition exemplifies both the centrality and the complexity of the "open secret" dynamic in avant-garde art. Duchamp's success in exploiting—without becoming defined by—transgressive sexuality made his art an inspiration to subsequent generations of avant-garde artists and theorists. But it is important to recognize that, as an expatriate (a Frenchman in New York) known for his numerous heterosexual affairs and two marriages (both to socially prominent women), Duchamp could afford to play with gender-deviance and allusions to homosexuality without risking categorization as homosexual.

Figure 4.27. Marcel Duchamp, *Belle Haleine, Eau de Voilette*, as depicted on the cover of *New York Dada* (1921), with portrait photograph by Man Ray. © 2010 Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York/ADAGP, Paris. The initials RS—for Rrose Sélavy, Duchamp's female persona—appear on the bottom of the label under the portrait of Duchamp in drag.

Generally overlooked in accounts of Duchamp's avant-gardism, moreover, is the way that, as he grew famous and was cast as a father figure by the notoriously homophobic Surrealists in the 1940s, his art's play with androgyny transformed into patterns of heterosexual misogyny characteristic of surrealist fantasies of eroticized violence against women's bodies. Duchamp's late works include a 1947 book cover featuring a squishy rubber breast that seems to be cut off a woman's body. His small bronzes of the 1950s, *Female Fig Leaf* and *Objet dard* (a pun on *objet d'art,* "art object," but also on *dard,* French slang for penis), look like implements of heterosexual domination. Duchamp's famous *Etant donnés* (this ambiguous title, literally "being that are given," is usually translated simply as Given), was created secretly between 1946 and 1966 and permanently installed at the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Viewers look through a peephole in a massive, ancient-looking door to see the body of a naked, headless female mannequin splayed on a bed of twigs as if raped and murdered. George Segal (discussed in chapter 6), a younger sculptor in Duchamp's New York circle, described *Etant donnés* as a murdered Mona Lisa, her cryptic smile transferred to a "smirking" vagina. Several others of Duchamp's late works clearly repudiate the androgyny of *L.H.O.O.Q.* and Rrose Sélavy. A 1962 photograph of the artist posing with a reproduction of the *Mona Lisa* bears a scribbled mustache and beard on Duchamp's face above the inscription, "Dear Rose, Here's one on you, oui?" Duchamp officially killed off his female alter-ego in 1965 by mailing invitations to the private view of his retrospective exhibition that bore the image of an unadulterated *Mona Lisa* with the title *Shaved L.H.O.O.Q.* and commissioning a funerary urn for Rrose Sélavy, which he filled with ashes from the after-dinner cigar—symbol of phallic privilege—that he smoked at a dinner given in his honor.

THE OPEN SECRET AND MASS CULTURE

As beliefs linking homosexuality and art spread through the middle classes during the twentieth century, the dynamic of the open secret animated not only the avant-garde, but also more popular forms of visual culture. Alan Sinfield has analyzed this dynamic in relation to the plays of Noël Coward, popular from the 1920s onward. The careers of certain celebrities—for example, the flamboyant American pianist known as Liberace—also exemplify the appeal of the open secret. This dynamic also animated the advertising and fashion imagery generated

Figure 4.28. J. C. Leyendecker, illustration for Arrow Shirt Collar advertisement (1910). © 2010 National Museum of American Illustration, Newport RI, *www.AmericanIllustration.org*. Photo courtesy Archives of the American Illustrators Gallery, New York, *www.AmericanIllustrators.com*. This masterpiece of subliminal suggestion uses phallic golf bags to eroticize the two male figures, while the dog leaping on the woman implies a panting physical affection that attaches itself to the reciprocal desiring gazes of the men supposedly inspired by their collars.

for the rapidly expanding and highly competitive medium of illustrated magazines. Carl Van Vechten's scrapbooks, created in the 1950s from materials gathered since the 1930s, might be seen as a pioneering—if informal—study of this phenomenon. His juxtapositions of sober-sided articles warning about homosexuality with sexy pictures from sports pages and travel features, suggestive headlines and advertising taglines, all interspersed with his own explicitly homoerotic photography, make a vigorous case for how energetically magazines and newspapers invoked homosexuality to both titillate and discipline readers.

These trends went back to the first decades of the twentieth century, when new mass-market illustrated magazines created a demand for images that looked innovative, stylish, and provocative. Among the first sensations of visual mass culture was the Arrow Collar Man, invented in 1905 by illustrator J. C. Leyendecker (1874–1951) (Figure 4.28). Based on the handsome Charles Beach, Leyendecker's companion for fifty years, this fictional figure was receiving up to 17,000 fan letters, some containing proposals of marriage, every month by the 1920s. Such statistics were widely cited to offer a reassuring heterosexualization of these images of attractive men eyeing one another, which circulated through middle-class homes in magazines. Infusing the products they advertised with the allure of daring modernity, Leyendecker's eye-catching men, depicted as both desiring and desirable, set a standard for advertising and fashion imagery. The use of "gay" to mean homosexual was documented in slang dictionaries by the 1930s and was common enough to be ad-libbed by Cary Grant in the 1938 film *Bringing Up Baby,* when he responds to a question about why he is wearing a woman's bathrobe by shouting, "I've just gone gay all of a sudden!" So it is significant that, by the 1930s, ads for Arrow underwear showed two handsome men in a locker room admiring each other's briefs

Figure 4.29. Cannon bath-towel advertisement, number 6 in a series published in various magazines in 1944.

with the headline "And now the Shorts with the Seamless Crotch go Gay! (BUT NOT TOO GAY)" and copy below extolling the products' new range of colors "that makes men blush in the locker room." By the 1940s, products from powdered drinks to bath towels grabbed viewers' attention with headlines shouting double entendres. "To Wake Up GAY in the Morning!" consumers were advised by Ovaltine to "Just Try This at Bedtime Tonight!"—a tagline calculated to convey simple cheerfulness to some while imbuing a rather pedestrian product with clever daring for more sophisticated customers. Following a strategy initiated by Ivory Soap during World War I, a series of World War II–era Cannon Towels ads deployed scenes of homoerotic display in communal baths and showers (Figure 4.29). Prominently placed in mass-circulation news and women's magazines, these images targeted women on the home front in a dynamic comparable to the way Ingres' *Turkish Bath* (discussed in chapter 2) multiplies bodies in homoerotic profusion for the delight of viewers presumed to be heterosexual. These advertisements exemplify the workings of the open secret in the way they attract attention and suggest daring sophistication by allusions to the taboo, without affirming—or even explicitly acknowledging—homosexuality.

Figure 4.30. Cecil Beaton, ballet film improvisation starring Nathalie Paley and Victor Kraft. Picture courtesy of Sotheby's Picture Library/ Cecil Beaton Archives. This photograph, published in British *Vogue* in 1935, exemplifies the careful compositions that emphasize the artist's aesthetic sensitivity, while the texture of the draperies that echo the gesture of the male dancer emphasizes the sensuality of his muscled arms.

As popular magazines turned increasingly to photography, similar dynamics propelled the careers of celebrity and fashion photographers, among them the English Cecil Beaton (1904–1980) and the American George Platt Lynes (1907–1955). Fashion and arts magazines used these photographers' pictures to fascinate audiences with the spectacle of modernity: modern socialites, modern clothes, modern furnishings, modern artists and performers, all presented in a modern way. Outside upper-income brackets and major urban centers, however, such spectacle was as close as most readers were likely to get to the glamorous, modern culture these magazines depicted; the dynamic of the "open secret" seems to have functioned in this context to neutralize feelings of envy and intimidation that commingled with readers' admiration

Figure 4.31. George Platt Lynes, *Pose from 'Orpheus'* (1948). © Estate of George Platt Lynes.

and desire. Stereotypes attributing homosexuality to male fashion designers, interior decorators, and choreographers flourished along with the journals promoting their work. Like other stereotypes, these had ambivalent effects, repelling some, but attracting others—like Beaton and Lynes—to careers in this new field. Both Beaton and Lynes developed prodigious technical skills and were sought after by major magazines (Figure 4.30). Both imbued their subjects with an eye-catching novelty achieved by the careful manipulation of modern styles, especially the unexpected juxtapositions characteristic of surrealism. Both moved in international circles that included many of the artists already discussed in this chapter—both photographed Gertrude Stein and Jean Cocteau, for instance—and both were involved with theater and ballet, using images of dancers in the poses and costumes of modernist dance to expand the range of acceptable public representations of the male body.

Beaton countered imputations of homosexuality with public performances of heterosexual courtship, including a carefully rumored affair with film star Greta Garbo. Privately, however, he, like Carl Van Vechten, compiled bawdy scrapbooks, pasting cutouts of bodybuilders into high-style interiors; these remain sealed from public view a quarter century after his death. Like Cocteau, Beaton tantalized the public with Aesthetic mannerisms and coy revelations. In 1958, reminiscing in *Vogue* about his first picture for that magazine, a photograph accompanying a review of a seventeenth-century play staged by undergraduate men at Cambridge University, he described it as "a slightly out-of-focus snapshot of Webster's Duchess of Malfi (portrayed by the distinguished English don Mr George Rylands), standing in the subaqueous light outside the men's lavatory of the ADC Theatre in Cambridge." Readers were left to infer what they would from this scenario of two young men, both now middle-aged bachelors well known for their careers in the arts, one photographing the other in drag in this setting.

Where Beaton left homoeroticism on the level of suggestion, Lynes consistently challenged the boundaries between imagery sanctioned for publication and franker expressions of homosexuality. Staging homoerotic scenes at night on the expensive sets he commissioned for fashion

shoots during the day, or restaging publicity images for ballet companies with the poses and props of the performances but with the male dancers naked, Lynes conferred his elegant style on highly sexual images (Figure 4.31). Lynes limited the circulation of his most erotic work during most of his lifetime, but in 1942 the death in battle of a beloved studio assistant turned his work toward modes both more emotional and less discreet. A haunting 1943 portrait of Marsden Hartley, with whom Lynes shared both a studio and the experience of losing an idealized lover to war, pushed beyond the norms of celebrity portraiture (Figure 4.32). The connections linking the crumpled figure of the painter, his massive shadow, and the indistinct figure of a brooding young man suggest what could not be explicit: the mourning of an older man for a deceased younger lover. At the same time, Lynes gave up fashion photography and began publishing his erotic images—sometimes under pseudonyms—in European magazines. He also abandoned discretion in his erotic life, jeopardizing his friends' reputations and scaring away commercial clients. Before his death in 1955, Lynes destroyed the negatives for his exhibited and commercial work. But, like Van Vechten, Lynes left posterity a surprise, turning over the negatives and prints for hundreds of the nudes he considered his best work to the American sexologist Alfred Kinsey. Collected as scientific evidence of homosexuality, these photographs today reveal the range of both Lynes's talent and the international networks of avant-garde artists, writers, dancers, and choreographers involved in the creation of these homoerotic images.

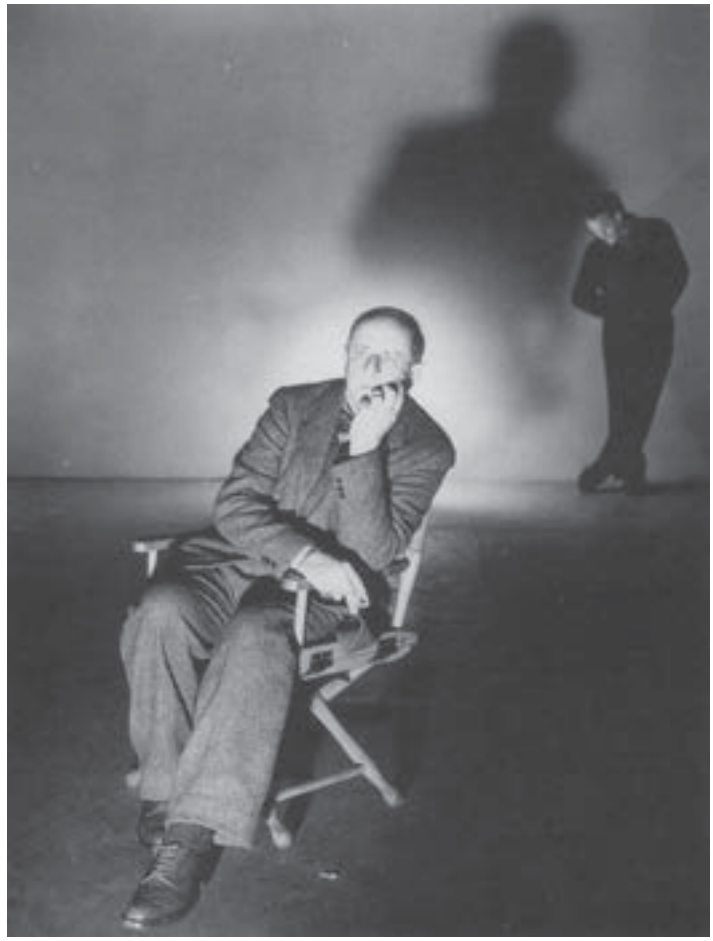

Figure 4.32. George Platt Lynes, *Marsden Hartley* (1943). © Estate of George Platt Lynes.

Lynes's life and career encapsulate many of the connections between art and homosexuality during the first half of the twentieth century. Aspects of his art—especially his staging of classical myths—extend the Aesthetic legacy of Fred Holland Day, with whom this chapter began. Lynes's participation in both the international avant-garde and mass-circulation pictorial magazines, however, included him in two of the

Figure 4.33. George Platt Lynes, *Nude Model in the Photographer's Studio Office* (c. 1940). © Estate of George Platt Lynes. This image foregrounds the erotic imagery Lynes circulated among his friends against a background of his published portraits and fashion photographs.

most important new manifestations of art in the twentieth century. Inspired and enabled in his career by friends and lovers, Lynes personifies the growth of homosexual networks within the avant-garde. His concealment of his homoerotic imagery reflects the limitations on expressions of sexual identity outside his immediate social context and the concomitant importance of secrecy to the visual culture of modernism (Figure 4.33).