

LT. CLAGGETT WILSON, QUEER MASCULINITY, AND THE FORMATION OF
AMERICAN MODERNISM

A Dissertation presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of
Missouri—Columbia

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Art History)

by

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MAY, 2017

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For Mary and Frances Conley, with all my love.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this dissertation has been possible thanks to the encouragement and assistance of many individuals and institutions. I am above all indebted to my advisor Kristin Schwain, whose keen editing eye, wisdom, kindness, and unwavering support were invaluable in the success of this project. I am also immensely grateful to my committee members, James van Dyke, Michael Yonan, and Elisa Glick, who challenged me, lent their expertise and guidance, and held my work to a high standard, inspiring me to do the same. My gratitude also extends to the entire faculty of the Department of Art History and Archaeology at the University of Missouri for partly funding this project with the Herbert Schooling Dissertation Fellowship and for providing me with the opportunity to talk about my research at the annual Schooling lecture. The department's staff, including June Davis, Linda Garrison, and Nancy Alexander, has also generously given time and energies to ensure not only my academic success, but also that of my peers. Additionally, I am deeply grateful to David Lubin at Wake Forest University for sharing his thoughts about Claggett Wilson's work and for extending his enthusiasm for my project.

I was fortunate to receive a Dissertation Fellowship in American Art from the American Council of Learned Societies, with the funding of the Henry Luce Foundation, which enabled my travel research and gave me a year to focus. This manuscript is far better for it.

Many institutions shared their holdings with me, including the Archives of American Art, the Brooklyn Museum and Archives, the Frick Museum, the Library of

Congress, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the National Museum of American Art, the National Portrait Gallery, the New York Performing Arts Library, Ten Chimneys Foundation Archives, Wisconsin State Historical Society, and the Yale Archives. Thank you, especially, to the Brooklyn Museum Archives for taking the extra time to scan materials while the facility was closed for renovations.

This project is indebted to Claggett Wilson Read, the great nephew of Claggett Wilson, who generously welcomed me into his home to comb through his private collection of the artist's art and ephemera, made me lunch to sustain my efforts, and shared his personal remembrances. This project would have been all but impossible without this opportunity and I am forever grateful.

Thank you, too, to my friends Meghan McClellan, Laura Greeley, Donald Eugene Elder III, and Megan Peiser, who patiently endured out-loud brainstorming and gifted their thoughts over coffee and wine. My mother, Laura Geier, my father and step-mother, David and Linda Eaton, and my siblings, Kyle Eaton and Andrea Beaman, have financially and emotionally supported my study of art history through the years—they attended my public talks, listened to my joys and grievances, and surprised me with “art days,” filled with visits to art museums of my choosing. Finally, I could not have completed this project without my wife Mary Conley's practical support, constant encouragement, and love.

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Lt. Claggett Wilson, Queer Masculinity, and the Formation of American Modernism

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ABSTRACT

An American artist best known for a 1919 watercolor series that depicts scenes of the First World War, Claggett Wilson's varied oeuvre includes watercolors, oil paintings, stage sets, costumes, murals, and decorative interiors. Through skilled social-networking, self-promotion, and a willingness to reach outside the discipline boundaries of fine art, Wilson successfully navigated the interwar art world, securing exhibitions, garnering critical favor, and attracting prominent commissions and benefactors. Whether rendering the theater of operations or crafting spaces within which inhabitants performed fashioned identities, his decades-long career was heavily influenced by his involvement within various New York art and theater scenes and his familiarity with contemporaneous queer culture. This dissertation culls the archives to reconstruct the life of this now-forgotten artist, calling attention to his performative stance as an ideal soldier and aesthete. Additionally, this dissertation provides a framework for situating Wilson's art through close studies of his most discussed bodies of work, which include war scenes, paintings of Basque sailors, and the mural program and interior design of Ten Chimneys in Genesee Depot, Wisconsin. I argue that Wilson's art was at once conservative in its upholding of certain national, racial, and class values, while at the same time sexually rebellious, pushing against contemporary norms of bourgeois respectability. His visual humor employed a range of references, from historical aesthetic styles to contemporary

racial stereotypes and political events, and spoke to particular interpretive communities that became increasingly narrow as his artistic projects moved from the New York art scene to midwestern domestic interiors and back.

Introduction:

“How the ‘Debs’ Shocked Society with ‘Solomon Song’”

In May of 1922 a newspaper out of Buffalo, New York published a story chronicling a scandal that had recently rocked the state’s debutante scene. Beginning innocently enough, the tale opens on a well-to-do family reading together in their New York home, the father perusing a *Wall Street Journal* and the “Deb” daughter reading *The Younger Set*, a small illustrated periodical put out by a group of influential Northeastern women (formerly “Debs” themselves) for the edification and enjoyment of well-educated and moneyed young women. Without thinking much of it, the father and daughter traded their respective reading materials, and from here is where the trouble sprang. “Great Heavens! I make allowances for the spirit of the times,” the father barks, “But this... is rather too much!”¹ The offending pages that attracted so much ire from this protective New York parent contained reproductions of Claggett Wilson’s recent *Songs of Solomon* watercolor series that Chamberlin Dodd had exhibited in the second-floor drawing rooms of his gallery at East Fifty-Second Street and Madison Avenue in New York City earlier that year.

Fresh from a critical triumph that followed the exhibition of twenty-six watercolor scenes of the First World War, Wilson offered up his new paintings, which a critic for *The New York Times* described as “brilliant in the splendor of Oriental color and rich in

¹ “How the ‘Debs’ Shocked Society with ‘Solomon’s Song’: Artistic but Very Scantily Clothed Biblical Ladies and the Trouble That Started When the Smart Set’s Girl Editors Dared to Put Them in Their New Magazine,” *The Illustrated Buffalo Express* (May 28, 1922).

the deep blue of Palestine nights,” as lyrical interpretations of an Old Testament theme.² Though the current location of Wilson’s *Songs of Solomon* paintings is unknown and the original article published in *The Younger Set* is lost in the dustbins of history, *The Illustrated Buffalo Express* reprinted a few of the contested paintings and other images from the series survived as photographs in the artist’s papers.³ The scenes, which sadly now exist only in black and white, feature mostly nude, waif-like, and somewhat androgynous women that Wilson portrayed with the serpentine lines and ornamental flair of nineteenth-century Decadents (Figure 1, 2, 3, & 4). The women in the series recline, stretch, and sit pensively in vague, decorative, and reportedly vibrant surroundings. Engaging in a long tradition in Western biblical art, Wilson’s exercise in eroticism is scarcely veiled by his paintings’ religious association. In *He brought me into the banqueting-house and his banner over me was love... stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples for I am sick with love*, for example, Wilson pictures a woman with closed eyes and parting lips, betraying a moment of female ecstasy that may have reminded viewers of Bernini’s St. Theresa. Chipping away at the images’ pious cover, Wilson’s intellectual contemporaries hotly debated the religiosity of the biblical verses themselves. Are the bible’s *Songs of Solomon*, the Buffalo article poses, of “deep religious significance,” or are they “merely a collection of impassioned love lyrics” and their illustration therefore inappropriate for the gaze of unmarried young ladies? Engaging in a

² “‘SOLOMON SONG’ PAINTINGS: Claggett Wilson’s Twenty Pictures Shown at Dobbs Studios,” *The New York Times* (Jan. 31, 1922): 13.

³ Incidentally, Wilson met Chamberlain Dodd in 1916 on a passenger ship heading to Spain: “Mr. Dodd knows many people that I know and knew Harry [Wilson] fifteen years ago.” Claggett Wilson to Lucille Douglass, 19 June 1916. Lucille Douglass Papers, Department of Archives and Manuscripts of the Birmingham Public Library. Copy in the Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

popular biblical debate of the time, *The New York Herald* published a story asking “Are Solomon’s Songs only Love Lyrics After All?” in March of the same year, which offered an overview of the various scholars who had recently weighed in and was accompanied by reproductions of Wilson’s paintings and illustrations by Gilbert James.⁴

Though his works were apparently controversial, Wilson was not without allies. In the face of the “storm of criticism” that developed, the influential high society women of *The Younger Set*’s advisory board and editorial staff, including Anne Harriman Vanderbilt and Irene Langhorne Gibson, respectively the widow and wife of W. K. Vanderbilt and Charles Dana Gibson, jumped to the series’ defense. For her part, Peggy Taylor, the author of the original *Songs of Solomon* review and wife of well-known New York surgeon Dr. Fenton Taylor, characterized the complainants as “Sunday-schoolish and mid-Victorian.” The daughter in the Buffalo article’s family drama, we are told, took the side of Taylor, stating that her old-fashioned parents simply “didn’t know when art is art.”⁵

Claggett Wilson, the man at the center of the drama and the focus of this dissertation, was an American artist whose professional career spanned the 1910s through the 1940s and included the production of oil paintings, stage sets, costumes, murals, interior design, and the decorative arts. While concentrated on a single artist, this project will not be a traditional monograph in the sense that it is not intended to present a comprehensive or definitive picture of Wilson’s biography and visual production. Instead, I offer a discussion of Wilson’s self-fashioned identity and three thematic,

⁴ “Are Solomon’s Songs only Love Lyrics After All?” *The New York Herald* (Mar. 26, 1922): 7.5.

⁵ “How the ‘Debs’ Shocked Society.”

critical vignettes focused on his most widely received bodies of work. Moreover, though this project on Wilson is the first of its kind, my goal here is not to neatly insert his work into the canon of early twentieth-century American art in its current form; rather, I present the trajectory of his career to prompt a reconsideration of the ways in which the canon itself has been formed and circumscribed.

Queer Coding as a Way of Seeing

Wilson's creative years were long and varied, but his *Songs of Solomon* series and the conflict around it brings to light many of the hallmarks of his art and professional strategy. First, I will show, Wilson's *Songs of Solomon* paintings, like the bulk of his oeuvre, necessitate that scholars historically reckon with the erotics of his chosen themes, a task that is often more complicated than it may initially seem. In scenes wherein sex is not explicitly depicted, what makes an image erotic and in what cultural contexts might we better understand its reception? In the case of "The Debs," what made Wilson's *Songs of Solomon* paintings so unacceptable to some of *The Younger Set*'s white upper-class readers? The subsequent Buffalo article provides few clues apart from pointing to the figures' nudity as the crux of the dispute. A few decades earlier, in 1886, American artist Thomas Eakins was famously fired from the Art Students' League of Philadelphia for removing the loincloth of a male model in front of a group of female students.⁶ By the 1920s, however, perspectives on women's engagement with the nude in art had softened. Peggy Bacon's *The Whitney Studio Club (Frenzied Effort)*, a drypoint print of a New

⁶ Kristin Swinth, *Painting Professionals: Women Artists and the Development of Modern American Art, 1870-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001) 23.

York life drawing class, illustrates this shift. Bacon pictures a tightly-packed crowd of male and female artists, the latter ranging from young bohemian types to women cut from a more conservative cloth, all circled around a naked female model (Figure 5).⁷ At any rate, a young woman living in New York would have had no shortage of nude paintings of religious and mythological subject matter available to her for view in local museums and galleries. Still, Americans were generally more prudish about nudity than their European counterparts and there are important differences between viewing a nude in the institutional context of a museum and the more intimate, physical engagement afforded by a periodical. In the pages of *The Younger Set*, the debutantes could view Wilson's erotic scenes in the seclusion of their bedrooms where they were free to indulge in private thoughts and behaviors. Was the material context of *The Younger Set* at the heart of the issue or was there something inherently threatening about Wilson's scenes in particular? Although nude representations certainly may have still shocked many corners of New York society in 1922, particularly when magnified by *The Younger Set's* context, I posit that the parents' objection may have been multifold.

For one, Wilson's *Songs of Solomon* images, like most of his work, engage in a homoerotic discourse that may have been variably visible depending upon the viewer. Apart from their long hair and slight bust, the lithe young women that Wilson so delicately renders in this series could as easily pass as ephebe young men. But more than this, the very style that Wilson employs in this series was by the early twentieth century acutely tied to same sex desire. Wilson's graphic and ornamental use of line is not unlike that employed by the British Decadent artist Aubrey Beardsley and, for gay men in the

⁷ That said, it is likely that the dynamics of female viewership of nude models in an art school context would have been altered by the gender of the model.

early twentieth century, the employment of Decadent tropes was increasingly dangerous, implicitly associated with queerness in the shadow of Oscar Wilde's trial.⁸ Art Historian Bram Dijkstra has argued that the elision of Decadent aesthetics and queerness results from an "evolutionary fantasy" loosely rooted in Darwinian thought that posited the Decadence as a perversion of culture that is cleansed over time.⁹ With the association fairly entrenched by the twentieth century, it is possible that the very style with which Wilson illustrated his scenes may have been wed in viewers' minds with visions of loosened morality.

What would it mean for Wilson's art to engage in homoerotic discourses in the early decades of the twentieth century and to what extent were his references visible to different audiences? First, I want to clarify the language I will be using throughout this discussion. Although the word *homosexual* was in limited use during the years covered by my dissertation, I have not employed it here except in the incidence of quotation due to its unavoidable medicalizing connotations. I likewise avoid *invert*, *Uranian*, *similsexualist* and, of course, *pervert* and *degenerate*, for their similarly problematic associations, as they are terms also sometimes applied to queer men in medical texts and police reports of the period. Instead, I am favoring the language utilized by city-dwelling

⁸ Catherine A. Davies, *Whitman's Queer Children: America's Homosexual Epics* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012) 43; Christopher Reed also discusses this association, noting that calling a man an "aesthete" was nearly synonymous in the early twentieth century with calling him gay.

⁹ Bram Dijkstra, *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 204; Eve Kosofsky Segwick has also noted the "peculiarly close, though never precisely defined, affinity between same-sex desire and some historical condition of moribundity called 'decadence,' *Epistimology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 128.

queer men in the United States to describe themselves. Cultural historian George Chauncey has been helpful for addressing this linguistic question and has been influential throughout the conception and writing of this dissertation for establishing a historical framework within which to situate Wilson and his queer male contemporaries. In his book *Gay New York*, Chauncey explains the etymology and implication of terms in use during the era, noting that “*fairy* (as a noun) and *queer* (as an adjective) were the terms most commonly used by ‘queer’ and ‘normal’ people alike to refer to ‘homosexuals’ before World War II,” the former generally on the basis of effeminacy rather than sexual attraction.¹⁰ The term *queer* has been particularly useful to this project in its ambiguity, in its potential to include men whose sexualities may include attraction to women. Though perhaps a bit ahistorical, I also favor the term *queer* for its current political punch.

I have also opted to use the word *gay*, finding its general spirit and coded nature during this time period highly appropriate to describe Wilson’s self-fashioning and visual production. Though not a part of common parlance in the 1920s and 1930s, the term *gay*, outwardly meaning happy and carefree, winkingly functioned in metropolitan centers during these years as a code word that allowed gay men to identify each other in relative safety. Unlike *fairy*, the word *gay* was defined “primarily on the basis of [a man’s] homosexual interest rather than effeminacy.”¹¹ It is difficult to say when Wilson became himself aware of *gay*’s double meaning, but certainly he seemed to be in on the joke when he employed it in a high comedy drawing room play titled *Jin Jin: A Comedy in Three Acts* that he privately authored and had copyrighted in 1950. In his play, Dr.

¹⁰ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Makings of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994) 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 17, 21.

Fraulein Geheimrat Frieda Schonschnitte, described as a hermaphroditic Austrian psychoanalyst, calls effeminate, fair-haired Teddy “a gay young man on the town” to which he feigns surprise: “Who? Me?” Cue audience laughter. In any case, the use of gay as a coded term was a favorite device of Noël Coward, a playwright and acquaintance of Wilson’s, and was generally popular in Britain and the United States among theater circles, of which the artist was a part.¹²

The increasingly-frequent usage of words like *gay* and *queer* as categorical labels to describe men engaged in same sex activities helped to shape the modern idea of queerness as an essential identity rather than a behavior. Still, it is important to note that the idea of sexual orientation as an immutable fact was only beginning to form in popular imagination in the years following the First World War and this “minoritizing model of identity” coexisted and often comingled with a more “universalizing model” that viewed same sex desire “as one aspect of the wide spectrum of sexual possibilities inherent in everyone.” In his study of gay themed novels of the 1930s, literary scholar Joseph Allen Boone finds that authors applied these models, which are seemingly mutually exclusive, in sometimes haphazard and overlapping ways.¹³ With this in mind, though *gay* was increasingly understood as a category during Wilson’s lifetime, it is important to acknowledge that gay men and lesbians were not somehow arbitrarily partitioned off from the rest of society; rather, as art historian Jonathan Katz has noted, we should

¹² Alan Sinfield, “Private Lives/Public Theater: Noël Coward and the Politics of Visual Representation.” *Representations*, n. 36 (Oct. 1991): 55.

¹³ Joseph Allen Boone, *Libidinal Currents: Sexuality and the Shaping of Modernism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 253.

envision queer and “straight” culture as engaging in “a complexly shared erotic history.”¹⁴

Given the unfixedness of queer identity as a category at this time, approaching a working concept of homoerotic art is equally challenging. Although many scholars have productively employed camp as a theoretical framework for discussing particular trends in queer culture, and while I recognize it as a potentially fruitful direction for interpreting Wilson’s art in particular, I do not significantly build upon that literature here.¹⁵ Art historians Jonathan Weinberg, Christopher Reed, and Richard Meyer, as well as theater historian Alan Sinfield, inform my understanding of the intersection of queerness and visual culture. In *Male Desire: The Homoerotic in American Art*, American art historian Weinberg notes that, though scholars sometimes use the word *homoerotic* as a way to “elude to homosexual content” in art without directly suggesting a particular maker’s sexuality, the *homoerotic* cannot be wholly divorced from gay culture or the politics of queer oppression during the time in which an image is produced.¹⁶ In this contextual vein, Weinberg discusses the historically necessary practice of coding during the first half of

¹⁴ Jonathan D. Katz, *Hide/Seek: Differences and Desire in American Portraiture* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books in Association with the National Portrait Gallery, 2010) 17.

¹⁵ For discussions about camp, see Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” *Partisan Review* (1964), reprinted in *Against Interpretations* (New York: Delta, 1979), David Bergman, Ed., *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), and Fabio Cleto, Ed., *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999).

¹⁶ Jonathan Weinberg, *Male Desire: The Homoerotic in American Art* (New York: H.N. Abrams, 2004) 9; In her book *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts*, Amelia Jones complicates the idea that art historians can separate an art object from its creator, arguing that “there is no ‘object itself’ that is not entangled in what we believe about the artist or agent we believe to have produced it, whether or not we read, ask, or otherwise research about the artist’s biographical trajectory or identifications” (New York: Routledge, 2012) 137.

the twentieth century, most famously exemplified in social practice by the wearing of a red tie and in art by the work of Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, and Paul Cadmus. In the early twentieth century, Weinberg writes, queer individuals and cultural producers engaged in a sort of visual and verbal play wherein they exhibited multivalent signs that, when perceived by an insider, hinted at the coder's sexuality while never absolutely affirming it. Here, and in his book *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley*, Weinberg provides a nuanced account of this practice, noting that such codes were necessarily indirect and imperfect and should not be understood as a consistent iconography. Though complicating the idea of literal coding, the majority of the images that Weinberg chooses for his book *Male Desire* are representations of traditionally beautiful male bodies, many of them nude. They are, in other words, pretty straightforwardly erotic and the object of the subject/viewer's desire is readily apparent. Arguing that the erotic is by definition subjective and corporeal in character, Weinberg ultimately takes a sort of *I know it when I feel it* approach to determining the homoerotic potential of imagery.¹⁷

Though useful, Weinberg's strategy for accessing an artwork's queer affect is too limiting for the purposes of this project, I would argue, in that it potentially overlooks moments where coded sexual references are too esoteric or too atrophied by the abating effects of time to *feel*, evading easy recognition by today's viewers. In contrast to Weinberg, in *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas*, Reed charts the diverse forms that queer visual culture has taken in different moments and cultures into a "matrix of

¹⁷ Weinberg, *Male Desire*, 11.

continuities and disjunctions between various ideas of art and homosexuality.”¹⁸ Though schematic, Reed’s conception of queerness in art is nonetheless comparatively open, ranging from literal representation, as in “depictions of homoerotic acts or of the people associated with them,” to the wholly inexplicit and almost inscrutable, as in references and styles that are indirectly associated with same-sex interactions.¹⁹ Images falling into this latter group may be resistant to reading by Weinberg’s method. After all, not all codes were as pervasive at the time or remain as recognizable today as red ties. Indeed, given the variability of such coded signs, Reed echoes Weinberg’s warning to scholars about overestimating the legibility of homoerotic symbolism. The readability of these references is somewhat of a moving target, as coded meanings are often unspoken and in rapid flux, only comprehensible during narrow windows of time and in specific contexts. Togas and lyres, after all, were not originally in of themselves homoerotic, though they came to signify that for the Aesthetes of the 1890s.²⁰

Following Weinberg and Reed’s insights on coding as a particularly slippery social phenomenon, I too want to complicate the idea that coding in art necessarily constituted a sort of “this” means “that” exchange. First, to continue a conceit employed above, while not all red ties are coded and there is danger in overeager interpretation (for queer men of the 1920s and 1930s, misinterpretation could result in violence), it is also important to note that things, people, and concepts may accrue new cultural meanings that speak regardless of an artist’s intentions. In other words, it is possible, and valid, to

¹⁸ Christopher Reed, *Art and Homosexuality: A History of Ideas* (Oxford University Press, 2011) 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

interpret art against the grain, to situate and read images in the contexts amid which they were originally received. Second, to say that a viewer lacked literal comprehension of a coded reference's specific associations is not to say that codedness itself went unobserved nor does it necessarily deny the viewer's pleasure in encountering it. Steeped in the cultural climate of their time, viewers may have recognized queerness in artworks without being able to articulate precisely why. If the flow of knowledge in the queer community in early twentieth-century United States was to an extent predicated on doublespeak and subterfuge, it is easy to imagine that such conditions may have generated an alternate way of seeing or experiencing the world among some individuals. More specifically, I would argue, the prevalence of coding as a practice may have indeed fostered among queer men, in particular, a way of interfacing with cultural data as superficial vectors for an expanding chain of potential referents. To think about this worldview, which is made manifest in Wilson's art and reception, I rely on the insights of theater historians to offer an interdisciplinary look at the ways in which practices in the visual arts overlapped with contemporaneous stage trends. Whether depicting the theater of operations in his war scenes or crafting dramatic interiors within which inhabitants could perform carefully fashioned identities, Wilson's work was heavily influenced by his involvement in New York theater and its aesthetic and discursive strategies. In particular, Wilson's artistic style overlaps with comedic devices employed by high comedy playwrights like Coward, who couched queer references in layered erudite humor. Importantly, audiences came to Coward's drawing-room plays already prepared to decode his double-edged dialogue. Wilson's art, I would suggest, anticipates a similarly engaged audience.

To go further, coded innuendos should not be assumed as wholly invisible to those who are not themselves queer. Theater historian Alan Sinfield clarifies this point, arguing that the complex system of queer coding that flourished in the 1920s and 1930s operated in partnership with the *open secret*—first articulated by D.A. Miller in “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets” and further theorized by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Epistemology of the Closet*—wherein queer sexuality was “ambiguously poised on the public/private boundary,” always “hover[ing] on the edge of public visibility.”²¹ While, epistemologically speaking, individuals can only recognize information that their own worldviews allow, the visibility of homoerotic codes cannot be accurately understood as queer viewers and straight viewers sorted into tidy in-groups and out-groups. Reed concurs, adding that while the specific meanings of artists’ symbols may have escaped them, the general art-viewing public sometimes quietly recognized acts of queer coding and their feeling of being uniquely in-the-know about the avant-garde’s secret both gave viewers tantalizing thrills and, at the same time, reinforced a narrative of queer shame.²² Keeping this dynamic in mind, Reed writes that the system of coding so prevalent among queer artists of the early twentieth century should not be conceived of as a separate sphere of operations from mainstream modernism; rather, he argues, the mandate of secret-keeping helped to shape the avant-garde itself, as keeping “the secret of homosexuality was crucial, not just to individual artists, but to the production and

²¹ Sinfield, 50; D.A. Miller, “Secret Subjects, Open Secrets” (192-220) in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

²² Reed, 137.

reception of avant-garde art in general.”²³ Although, certainly, coded homoerotic references in art ran counter to the normative American values of Wilson’s day, Reed’s assessment of the avant-garde’s relationship with queerness raises important questions about the actual political reach of such subversions.

To acknowledge the relative willingness of some gay men to boldly make visible their sexuality in the years before World War II is not to say that they lived above persecution; rather, freedom and oppression can be understood as a dialectic. Indeed, in *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1*, Michel Foucault discusses the simultaneous loosening of sexual strictures and rise of sexual oppression that took place in the twentieth century, arguing that the open secret both produces and undermines structures of power: “silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its holds and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.”²⁴ These “areas of tolerance,” it must be said, were not distributed equally through society. Opportunities for openness afforded to the economic and intellectual elite, particularly in the northeast, were not necessarily conferred to individuals of the middle and laboring classes. Calling on Foucault, Meyer in *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Representation in Twentieth-Century American Art* characterizes the queerness in art as a manifestation of social constraint, a visualization of the moment where the acceptable butts up against the unacceptable or, even, the inconceivable:

the relation between homosexuality and modern art must be charted as a dialectic between historical possibility and constraint, between public discourse and private knowledge, between the visual image and that which lies beyond the boundaries of

²³ Ibid., 136.

²⁴ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Volume 1* (New York: Random House Inc., 1978) 101.

the imaginable at any given moment.²⁵

As such, Meyer's book highlights notable moments in censorship and silencing.

Following Meyer's lead, in evaluating the criticism surrounding Wilson's work, I sometimes allow silence to speak as loudly as that which is acknowledged, recognizing that the negative space created by curious omissions may help to elucidate that which was unspeakable at the time. Meyer's thoughts are particularly helpful for thinking about the ways in which sexuality shapes and delimits the reception of art and the building of canons.

Regarding Otherness

Keeping the potential weight of silence in mind, we return to the particular dilemma of the "Debs." Though unarticulated in the Buffalo article, I also want to argue that part of the discomfort felt by this group of viewers may have been spurred by the intersection of sexuality and the ethnic otherness of Wilson's models. Clarifying this theme, the caption for a full-page reproduction of one of his *Songs of Solomon* images in *The Atlanta Constitution* reads:

A Rose of Sharon: One of the recent sensations of the world of pencil and brush has been Claggett Wilson's water colors based on the Songs of Solomon. In them the artist has sought to present the girl of Judea with the greatest possible fidelity to spirit and fact. For a year and a half he observed Jewish women, studied them in the Ghetto, among merchants, among artists, in their homes. At length he hit upon a type.²⁶

²⁵ Richard Meyer, *Outlaw Representation: Censorship & Homosexuality in Twentieth Century American Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 22-23.

²⁶ "A Rose of Sharon," *The Atlanta Constitution* (May 14, 1922): A1.

United States viewers would have been well aware of Solomon and the “daughters of Jerusalem’s” Jewish heritage, to be sure, but Wilson’s intensive focus on unabashedly sensual, nude Jewish bodies may have been disquieting to some gentile readers. While other reviews refer to the works’ Jewish subject matter and generally Orientalized style, the Buffalo article leaves this facet of the series wholly unavowed, focusing instead on the fact of nudity.²⁷ While Wilson’s careful study of Jewish physiognomy corresponds with colonialist practices of reifying the otherness of subjugated peoples through a pseudo-scientific lens, his *Songs of Solomon* paintings, at the same time, present beautiful representations of Jewish bodies at a time when anti-Semitism was on the rise in Europe and the United States.²⁸ The *Songs*’ comparatively celebratory tone becomes clear when considered in relation to a favorite theme of Western art, Salome, a Jewish femme fatale whose sexuality is toxic and who is ultimately punished. In contrast, Wilson chose to focus on the erotic encounter between Solomon and his beloved, a romance that appears in the bible as reciprocal, unapologetic, and loving. With this relatively positive portrayal in mind, it is perhaps worth noting that Adolph Lewisohn, a powerful Jewish mining magnate and Wilson’s most reliable patron, purchased several of Wilson’s *Songs of*

²⁷ “‘Solomon Song’ Paintings: Claggett Wilson’s Twenty Pictures Shown at Dobbs Studios,” *The New York Times* (Jan. 31, 1922): 13; “Claggett Wilson at Dodds’,” *American Art News*, 20, n. 17 (Feb. 4, 1922): 12.

²⁸ As Karen Brodtkin Sacks points out in her book *How Jews Become White Folks and What That Says About Race in America*, the “late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth centuries saw a steady stream of warnings by scientists, policymakers, and the popular press that ‘mongrelization’ of the Nordic, or Anglo-Saxon, race—the real Americans—by inferior European races (as well as inferior non-European ones) was destroying the fabric of the nation,” and “the 1920s and the 1930s [were] the peak of anti-Semitism in the United States,” (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 25-26.

Solomon paintings and even presented one to The Metropolitan Museum of Art for their consideration.²⁹

Wilson's focus in *Songs of Solomon* on Jewishness as a type brings me to a second hallmark of his art, which is not unrelated to the first: the appropriation of race, ethnicity, or national identity as a strategy for encoding queerness, testing sexual mores, and perhaps intimating a sort of outsider camaraderie. In this series, I would argue, Wilson makes use of the historical alliance between Jewishness and queerness as a means of commenting on his own status as a gay man within the hegemonic social structures of early twentieth-century United States. In *The Image of Man*, historian George L. Mosse argues that Jewish men, Gypsies, and gay men have, since the nineteenth century, been grouped together as outsiders, men whose bodies "could not live up to the manly ideal because in some manner they were considered sick or unmanly."³⁰ Stereotypes about queer men as effeminate and physically degenerate were applied to Jewish men and "a cluster of nineteenth-century stereotypes of the Jew came to circle around the homosexual as well."³¹ In her essay "Queers Are Like Jews Aren't They?," Janet L. Jakobson suggests that in addition to policing the boundaries of masculinity, the "longstanding... implicit and explicit [association] of homosexuals and Jews" is partly based on socio-economic anxieties, rooted in the belief that these groups are "small but overprivileged minorit[ies] with both financial capital and political influence well in

²⁹ "List of Accessions and Loans," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 17, n. 4 (Apr., 1922): 94.

³⁰ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 66, 83.

³¹ Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellgrini, "Strange Bedfellows: An Introduction," in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, edited by Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellgrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 4.

excess of either numbers or justified expectation.”³² The anxieties surrounding this association came to a head and were deepened by the much-written-about Dreyfus Affair from 1894-1906 in which Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish Frenchman, was falsely accused of passing information to Germany. A colliding barrage of anti-Semitism and homophobia marked the press that surrounded the trial, with much of the focus on phony narratives that implicated Dreyfus and those around him in same sex liaisons in addition to speculation about his purportedly sparse facial hair and elaborate grooming practices.³³ Although the association of Jews and queer men was historically used as fodder for the continued oppression of both groups, it is notable that the narrative was not strictly enforced from the top down; indeed, gay men also perpetuated this imagined alliance. Xavier Mayne—an American author who wrote under a pseudonym to promote gay tolerance—alleged in 1908 that Jews had an “inborn tendency to [similsexualism],” and that “the Jew, always erotic in temperament, is so frequently Uranian, or uranistic, that there is a sort of psychiatric proverb—‘so many Jews, so many similsexualists.’”³⁴ Though initially fueled by prejudice, the discursive association between Jewishness and queerness became part of queer men’s erotic imaginings and was used as evidence of the normality of same sex attraction by attesting to the pervasiveness of such desires within every race, ethnicity, and creed.

³² Janet L. Jakobson, “Queers Are Like Jews, Aren’t They? Analogy and alliance politics,” in *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*, edited by Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz, and Ann Pellgrini (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003) 65.

³³ Christopher E. Forth, *The Dreyfus Affair and the Crisis of French Manhood* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2006) 46-47.

³⁴ Xavier Mayne (pseudonym of Edward J. Stevenson), *The Intersexes: A History of Similsexualism as a Problem in Social Life* (Printed Privately in Naples, 1908) 76.

Given the degree to which this stereotype proliferated in Western culture, it is not hard to imagine that the association might have inflected Wilson's representations of Jewish figures, consciously or otherwise. Moreover, the union of Decadent styles with Wilson's focus on sensual Jewish bodies would have magnified the works' potential transgression. Not reproduced in any public reviews of his *Songs of Solomon* to my knowledge, Wilson's series also contains a three-quarter view nude representation of Solomon, long-windedly titled after the verse that inspired it: *Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me; my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of their vineyards; but mine own vineyards have I not kept*. Here, Wilson renders Solomon with dark skin and an exaggeratedly muscular torso, striding through a vineyard with his genitals obscured only by shadow (Figure 6).³⁵ A theme also employed by contemporary American artists Marsden Hartley and Richmond Barthé, the laboring male body in the context of the 1920s was ripe with homoerotic associations. Though none of Wilson's critics explicitly noted homoerotic connotations in his *Songs of Solomon* paintings, Henry McBride, a prominent art critic and friend, tellingly compared Wilson's *Songs of Solomon* series to the work of Swiss expatriate Paul Thevenaz.³⁶ Though on one level readers may assume McBride is noting an aesthetic resemblance, as both artists employ line and pattern in decorative ways, others may recognize a similar erotic current in the art of Thevenaz, who was likewise a white

³⁵ This painting was shown at Chamberlain Dodd and, according to markings on the verso of a reproduction in Wilson's private papers, at a second exhibit in Baltimore. This photograph is now in the Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

³⁶ Henry McBride, "The Song of Solomon By Claggett Wilson," *The New York Herald* (Feb. 5, 1922): 8.

queer artist arguably engaged in racial and ethnic fantasy, as in the drawing *Portrait of a Negro* (Figure 7).³⁷

Can references to national, ethnic, or racial demographics of which an artist does not claim membership communicate a desire to queer sexual boundaries? Not an uncommon strategy, Reed notes that white gay artists sometimes “camouflaged their homosexuality with other forms of minority identification” in their efforts to “generat[e] complex symbols that masked too-obvious forms of self-revelation.”³⁸ But what does it mean for Wilson to exploit attitudes that have also been used to oppress racial and ethnic minorities? In this regard, I am influenced by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Kobena Mercer whose writings on intersectionality demonstrate that the social mechanisms of oppression cannot rightly be untangled, that racism cannot be understood without an understanding of sexual politics and vice versa.³⁹ The writings of Mercer on photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, in particular, are useful for thinking about the complicated power dynamics at play in the representation of an eroticized racial other. As I will elaborate upon in my third chapter, Mercer notes that dominance of the subject over the object in representation is to some extent disarmed by desire, especially, as in the case of Mapplethorpe, when the desiring subject is likewise from an oppressed category.⁴⁰

³⁷ Adding another similarity between their careers, Wilson and Thevenaz were both involved in theater costume design.

³⁸ Reed, 153.

³⁹ See, for example: Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁴⁰ Kobena Mercer, “Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary” (1989), in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, edited by Kobena Mercer (New York: Routledge, 1994) 193.

Still, it is important to be cautious here. As cultural theorist Katrin Seig asks in her book *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany*:

Does the shifting of race and desire out of alignment with a politics of heterosexuality accord white, homosexual authors a privileged place from which to interrogate the modernist binaries of civilized and primitive, rationality and sexuality, alienation and authenticity?⁴¹

When channeled through Wilson's marginalized gaze, can the discursive association between Jewishness and queerness transform into political alliance? To what extent should Wilson, as a gay man, get a pass for his engagement with ethnographic discourses? These questions are, perhaps, never fully resolvable and conflicting readings of his images as colonizing or socially radical may indeed ring true concurrently.

In this dissertation I position Wilson's work as at once sexually defiant and yet conservative in his allegiance to nationalist rhetoric and potentially problematic in his interactions with racial and ethnic minorities. Though not all of Wilson's work that is under discussion in this project conforms to the sexual dynamics that I identified in *Songs of Solomon*, the artist's complicated relationship to both racial otherness and his own whiteness will be explored in each chapter to a varying degree. In negotiating this complex terrain, I look to the writings of art historian Donna M. Cassidy as a model. In *Marsden Hartley: Race, Region, and Nation*, Cassidy couches her discussion of Hartley's art and politics within the dominant racial discourses of the 1920s and 1930s to present a nuanced account of an imperfect individual and body of work. Reflecting on his paintings of laborers in rural Maine, Cassidy discusses the homoerotics at play while at the same time pointing to the probable influence of the international rise in art centered on

⁴¹ Katrin Seig, *Ethnic Drag: Performing Race, Nation, Sexuality in West Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2002) 188.

isolationist Volk imagery. While unpacking Hartley's known (though not often acknowledged) sympathies for Nazism, she argues that his views were, at the same time, not altogether inconsistent with mainstream understandings of race among white Americans of the day. Of the radicality (or otherwise) of Hartley's art, she concludes:

A commitment to conservative politics did not preclude an artist's involvement with modernism, and a commitment to modernist aesthetics did not preclude artists like Hartley from producing work shaped by reactionary social, political, or racial values. Modernism was not simply forward looking and progressive but could be conservative and nostalgic, as is evident in Hartley's engagement not only with race but with region and the historical past as well.⁴²

Indeed, as politically radical art can come in aesthetically traditional trappings, so too can conservative politics be reinforced by formal innovation, as is demonstrated by the reactionary stance of the Italian Futurists.⁴³ Though contemporaries described Wilson as a modern artist, as with Hartley, we should by no means seek a perfect avant-garde hero here.

The Formation of Wilson's American Modernism

Returning one last time to the *Songs of Solomon*, the exhibition and reception of this series illuminates a third hallmark of Wilson's career: his cultivation of smart social connections to both further and safeguard his professional status. Wilson's career, as I will argue, calls attention to the persistence of a European-inspired model of art

⁴² Donna Cassidy, *Marsden Hartley: Race, Religion, and Nation* (Durham, NH: University Press of New England, 2005) 286.

⁴³ Walter Adamson discusses the complicated relationship between aesthetics and political avant-gardism in *Embattled Avant-Gardes: Modernism's Resistance to Commodity Culture in Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

production and reception in the early twentieth-century American scene that fostered and relied upon cosmopolitan, Salon-style communities of artists, intellectuals, and patrons. This dynamic will be discussed at more length in Chapter One. In the early 1920s, for example, Wilson became acquainted with a prominent group of independently-wealthy women in New York that included Elsie de Wolfe (an actress and interior decorator), Anne Morgan (author, philanthropist, and daughter of J.P. Morgan), Elisabeth “Bessie” Marbury (a leading theatrical and literary agent), and Anne Vanderbilt (philanthropist and widow of W. K. Vanderbilt), who had famously been four of the primary founders of the Colony Club in New York, the city’s first women-only social club.⁴⁴ With Vanderbilt subsequently adding a fourth leg to the friend group, the United States press dubbed the women the Versailles Triumvirate after their estate Villa Trianon in Versailles, France over which they shared ownership.⁴⁵ Notably, de Wolfe, Morgan, and Vanderbilt all came to a private viewing of Wilson’s *Songs of Solomon* when the paintings were shown at Chamberlain Dodd’s—incidentally, Adolph Lewisohn and his daughter Clara Rossin, the artist’s most consistent patrons, were also in attendance.⁴⁶ An influential voice in New York society, Vanderbilt was on the board of *The Younger Set*, where she likely helped to secure the inclusion of the *Songs of Solomon* in the magazine’s pages and came to Wilson’s defense when the ensuing controversy unfolded.

⁴⁴ Colony club architect Stanford White and Elsie de Wolfe the interior decorator, Alfred Allan Lewis, *Ladies and Not So Gentle Women: Elisabeth Marbury, Anne Morgan, Elsie de Wolfe, Anne Vanderbilt, and Their Times* (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 209.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 225.

⁴⁶ “‘SOLOMON SONG’ PAINTINGS: Claggett Wilson’s Twenty Pictures Shown at Dobbs Studios, *The New York Times* (Jan. 31, 1922): 13.

It is perhaps notable that the female foursome were not themselves unaccustomed to sexual controversy. The women lived in a cluster of apartments in the Sutton Place neighborhood in New York and rumors of sapphic couplings swirled around them. The rumors were not without foundation, as Marbury lived fairly openly as a self-identified lesbian and she and de Wolfe shared a home for decades, lifting the pair, along with Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, to a somewhat legendary status among early twentieth-century queer women.⁴⁷ As is identified by Eleanor Fitzsimmons in her recent book *Wilde's Women: How Oscar Wilde Was Shaped by the Women He Knew*, powerful women in society have historically sometimes used their influence to protect and advance the careers of queer men in the arts, as Vanderbilt does here for Wilson.⁴⁸ Though at times pushing against social boundaries regarding sexuality, it is possible that Wilson's coded references to queer culture would not have greatly endangered his success among certain crowds in the New York art scene. Rather, to an extent, sexual rebellion was regarded in New York as a sort of testament to one's modernity, particularly in Greenwich Village bohemian artist circles.⁴⁹ Indeed, in spite of (or perhaps partly due to) Wilson's fairly explicit romantic interests toward men and propensity toward the homoerotic in art, this group of powerful women, along with the Lewisohns, the Rossins, and critics Helen Churchill Candee and Henry McBride, were instrumental allies in the

⁴⁷ Lewis, xiii.

⁴⁸ Eleanor Fitzsimmons, *Wilde's Women: How Oscar Wilde Was Shaped by the Women He Knew* (New York: Overlook Duckworth, Peter Mayer Publishers, Inc., 2016); Interestingly, Marbury was actually the literary agent of Oscar Wilde in the late nineteenth century, in charge of managing his copyrights in the United States market, and, as such, the potential associations between queerness and the Aesthetes of the Decadent era would have not likely escaped she or de Wolfe's attention.

⁴⁹ Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) 298.

artist's professional trajectory in the 1920s and 1930s. Then, after the eventual decline of his fine art career, in the later 1930s and the 1940s, Ettie Stettheimer (novelist and sister of artist Florine Stettheimer) as well as Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne (Broadway actors) would take on major roles in Wilson's support system.

Though Wilson's art may have seemed too decorative, too literary to fit into later narratives of Modernism with a capital "M," the idea of modern art in the context of early twentieth-century United States was loosely conceived as artists playing with notions of figure and abstraction. In his book *What Was Contemporary Art*, Richard Meyer conceives of contemporary art not as a distinct cultural period, but a perpetually moving target. He notes that the contemporary, what is considered modern or of-the-moment in art, occupies an "unstable space." Because the closeness of the contemporary elides systematic overview, it is a precarious and fluid thing.⁵⁰ Exacerbating this hermeneutic dilemma, Wilson's career transpired during an era in which the institutions of modernism that would solidify in the mid-twentieth century, were only beginning to form. The American art world, as Wilson first encountered it, was largely predicated on complex and informal social networking. By the time a more concrete definition of modern art coalesced, Wilson would find himself no longer fitting the mold. His art faded from the scene, was eventually forgotten, and, with the exception of David Lubin's recent work on art of the First World War from the perspective of artists from the United States, Wilson's career now belongs to the footnotes of American art scholarship. In looking to reconstruct Wilson's professional history and revisit his oeuvre with the benefit of retrospection, this dissertation follows Meyer's rally cry that "our conception of

⁵⁰ Richard Meyer, *What Was Contemporary Art?* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2013) 14.

‘contemporary’ in a given moment” can no longer be reserved exclusively for those artists whose work is most highly valued by the market, the museum... or the PowerPoint presentations of art historians.”⁵¹ While no longer part of the conversation, Wilson, who appeared with great regularity in newspaper art columns and the pages of popular periodicals in the 1910s through the 1930s, was deeply ensconced and prominently placed within his contemporary art world. A closer look at his diverse body of work helps to illuminate its contours.

Building on important studies such as *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* by Wanda Corn and *Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism* by Heather Hole, among others, an examination of Wilson’s career necessitates an expansive view of the American scene.⁵² By engaging with transatlantic styles and narratives in his art and employing a cross-disciplinary approach more commonly associated with European movements like Surrealism and Cubism, Wilson’s oeuvre speaks to the enduring presence of a transatlantic exchange of ideas even in as Modernists associated with Alfred Stieglitz’s second circle increasingly claimed to craft a resolutely American vision. According to Corn, America’s earliest avant-gardists were organized, not around style, but “around different interpretations of Americanness.”⁵³ Arguing for a history of American modernisms in the plural, Corn

⁵¹ Ibid., 16.

⁵² In addition to Cassidy, Corn, and Hole named above, a number of scholars have created an expansive picture of modern American art scene, including Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001); Wanda M. Corn, *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Heather Hole, *Marsden Hartley and the West: The Search for an American Modernism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

⁵³ Corn, xviii.

organizes the avant-garde art scene in New York in the early twentieth century into two primary groups: “The Transatlantics” (artists openly engaged with Euro-American discourses and aesthetics) and “The Rooted” (American artists who, following Alfred Stieglitz and critic Paul Rosenfeld’s prescriptive nationalist visions, rejected European influence, crafted trademarked and media-specific styles, and aspired to portray genuine American character through their art). The fantasy of American artists somehow operating in seclusion from European contemporaries with which “The Rooted” indulged, were, of course, always more bluster than reality, as scholarship of the last few decades has shown. Indeed, an exploration of Wilson’s work complements and helps to enrich existing scholarship on modern artists like Florine Stettheimer, who, like Wilson, moved seamlessly between various artistic pursuits (painting, theater, and interior design) and who never eschewed European aesthetic styles or modes of patronage.

Finally, this project strives to come to a better understanding of the social conditions under which American modernism was forged—namely, the roles that race, class, gender, sexual orientation played in its formation. While not always a dominant theme, for me this question is one of the major vehicles that propel this dissertation forward. Although femininity, racial and ethnic otherness, and queerness have been historically viewed as Modernism’s others, Wilson’s career—held afloat by influential women, vocal queer men, and Jewish financial backing—makes clear that the modern art world was, to an extent, built in the margins by figures whose wealth and position gave them latitude not necessarily afforded to others of their gender, sexuality, and/or ethnicity. This thread serves as a counter-narrative to the now-waning conception of

Modernism as a successional parade of hyper-virile, white, male geniuses that might be otherwise reinforced by an artist reclamation project such as this.⁵⁴

In Chapter One I examine Wilson's self-presentation as both a soldier and an aesthete and detail the artist's navigation of the art world starting with his education at the Academie Julian and Art Students League in the first decade of the twentieth century and rise to prominence in the 1920s through the decline of his career in the 1930s and eventual death in 1952. Following the lead of Wanda Corn, whose recent work makes clear the importance of looking at an artist's performance of self in understanding their visual production and career, as well as the ideas of Steven Watson, whose writing eschews a zoomed-out vision of the New York art scene in favor of a tightly-cropped history of on-the-ground social interactions and networking, I examine the role that Wilson's upper class posturing played in the production and reception of his work. To what extent did Wilson's persona and the securing of beneficial social connections serve to expand his professional reach and protect him and his most sexually daring work from censure?

In Chapter Two I discuss Wilson's twenty-six watercolor paintings of the First World War and the soldierly persona that he adopted during and after his time as a Marine. Though, until recently, very little scholarship has focused specifically on fine art

⁵⁴ The role of race in the formation of American Modernism has been increasingly explored in recent years by scholars including Jacqueline Francis in *Making Race: Modernism and 'Racial Art' in America* (University of Washington Press, 2012) and Lauren Kroiz in *Creative Composites: Modernism, Race, and the Stieglitz Circle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012).

about the war from the perspective of the United States, David Lubin’s recent scholarship and exhibition on the topic has demonstrated the importance of that imagery in reaching a more fully articulated vision of early-twentieth-century American visual culture. I situate the series’ reception within multiple contemporaneous discourses, including heightened wartime nationalism, hegemonic attitudes about whiteness, the gendering of the decorative, and the potential homoeroticism of the soldier’s body. Making careful distinction between his modernist take on the war and the illustrations offered up by the United States War Department, American critics celebrated Wilson’s patriotism and frontline status and made a case for his works’ future canonization. Though exhibited without controversy, Wilson subversively employed theater humor strategies like double entendre to add wit and eroticism to otherwise gruesome scenes. This chapter will address to what extent and to whom his queer references were visible to his postwar audience and will begin to speak to the impact Wilson’s homoeroticism may have had on the eventual recession of his career and legacy.

Chapter Three centers on Wilson’s paintings of Basque sailors, a subject to which he returned frequently throughout the 1920s. Most intriguingly demonstrated by *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* (1923)—an oil on canvas painting of Broadway star Alfred Lunt in Basque costuming—Wilson’s depictions of romantic young Basque fishermen are inflected both by primitivizing tropes about Basque masculinity and popular gay fantasies about “rough trade” in the United States. On the one hand, these works spoke to prevailing colonialist beliefs about Basque people in a way that would have been agreeable to general white audiences of the day. They also, on the other hand, especially in the case of *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*, functioned as a coded sexual message

readable by his close acquaintances and urban queer audiences more broadly. Further couching the works in the context of racial attitudes held by white intellectuals in 1920s New York, this chapter examines the politics of fantasy at the intersection of race and sexuality.

Finally, Chapter Four focuses on Wilson's mural and decoration program at Ten Chimneys, the country estate of Broadway stars Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne in Genesee Depot, Wisconsin. From around 1934 through the early 1940s, Wilson helped the couple reimagine their Midwestern home, transforming it into a retreat for New York's theater elite and, overlappingly, a gathering place for the couple's queer friends. Loosely inspired by the concept of a gentleman's farm, Ten Chimneys, as Lunt and Fontanne dubbed their home, is a delightful pastiche of Medieval Swedish, French Restoration, and Rococo Revival styles scattered with erotic, gender-subverting visual jokes. In this chapter, I rethink the home's entertainment areas as stage sets wherein dramatic and sexually rebellious social scenes might unfold and endeavor to supplement existing scholarship on queer coding in the visual arts by connecting these strategies to contemporary high comedy theater practices like double entendre and hokum.

Chapter One

“A brute of a man in a tail coat”: Claggett Wilson’s Life and Persona

“Clagg” Wilson was known to his friends as a verbose letter writer; an amateur humorist; a keen sartorialist; a man who was at once selfless and exacting; a stalwart yet sensitive fellow, both imposing and delicate; a posh aesthete with a stockpile of pulp novels; and a man deeply concerned with proper etiquette while at the same time reveling in the deliciously wicked.⁵⁵ A fascinating character indeed, the popular presses delighted in describing Wilson’s appearance and temperament for their readers, paying special attention to the apparent tension between his manifestly masculine stature and his cultivated aristocratic manner. In a blurb from 1928 *Time* magazine describes the artist as “darkly massive, fastidious, redolent of success. He suggests no garret-dweller, speaks in a deep voice of suave enthusiasms. He is not easy to classify.”⁵⁶ An accompanying photograph shows the artist, then forty-two, in a pin-stripe day jacket with wide lapels, the stiff white straight collar that Arrow Collars had made popular, and a fedora. “No garret-dweller, he” is reiterated below to reassure *Time*’s middle-class readers that Wilson, though an artist, is no shaggy-haired bohemian living in a Greenwich Village attic (Figure 8). The artist’s considerable size and, it seems, confoundingly incongruous presence was also of great fascination to a Boston reporter circa 1928:

A physique he certainly has... although not so colossal as Primo Carnera, the Italian boxer, he would nonetheless have made an excellent understudy to Victor

⁵⁵ Fairly large for the time period, Wilson’s military registration card lists his height at 6 ft. and weight at 185 lbs. In the Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

⁵⁶ “Dollar and scents,” *Time*, 12 (17) (Oct. 22, 1928): 35; Garret-dweller is an idiom that more or less equates today to “starving artist.”

McLaglen, the huge hard-boiled top sergeant in *What Price Glory*... There is something rather fascinating about watching and hearing Wilson give a lecture on some ultraprecious subject... a brute of a man in a tail coat, cupping one hand, looking up at the ceiling in rapt intensity... using the most pristine, pearl-like words that ever came out of any aesthete's mouth.⁵⁷

Such effusive descriptions of Wilson as both hyper masculine while at the same time cutting a figure of dandified elegance sometimes went hand in hand with praise for his works, the two characterizations presented as humorously paradoxical.

Typically, as an art historian concerned with couching visual works within larger cultural contexts, the topics of an artist's individual biography and intention feature far less heavily in my scholarship than do the social and artistic discourses with which the artist participates, sometimes unknowingly, and what those discourses might reveal about the beliefs and organization of the publics that receive and propagate them. There are potential limitations to biography: real concerns that privileging the private minutiae, intimate conversations, and personal stakes in visual production may veer toward the apolitical. At the same time, the current dearth of published writing detailing Wilson's background or public personality renders deeper explorations difficult, offering no established armature to support further interpretation of his oeuvre. Rather than reducing Wilson's imagery to insular expression, the narratives included here help to shed light on the contours of the art world of which he was a part so that we may better situate the production and reception of his complex, shifting, and flawed body of work. As Steven Watson articulates in *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde*, the American art world in the years preceding the advent of Modernist institutions is more

⁵⁷ Press Clipping probably from the *Boston Evening Transcript*, c. 1928. Claggett Wilson website, created and maintained by Claggett Wilson Read, "Memoirs & Articles," www.claggettwilson.com (accessed on January 6, 2016).

readily understood at the micro level, as “a loose skein of tangled social circles.”⁵⁸ As such, I shall trace the messy trajectory of Wilson’s career by way of his navigation through this complicated social web, with special attention paid to education, exhibition history, the cultural discourses that shaped him, and his cultivation of personal and professional associations. With sparse foundational work to build on, I have done my best to cull the archives and piece together a coherent account of Wilson’s life, career, and connections from scattered primary source material. Building on this information, I will also address the question of Wilson’s artistic persona and the ways in which it served him socially and professionally. Recent scholarship such as Wanda Corn’s exhibition and book *Georgia O’Keeffe: Living Modern* explores the ways in which modern artists in early twentieth-century United States curated manners of dress and attitudes as a way to market themselves and foreground their artistic aims.⁵⁹ This chapter takes seriously Corn’s argument in *The Great American Thing* that artists’ lives are “cultural texts” and their choices in terms of dress, lifestyle, and social interactions were “not just individual acts but also cultural ones.”⁶⁰ In this chapter, I will argue that Wilson’s public identity was central to his work’s reception, as early twentieth-century American art critics endorsed, and their audiences happily consumed, performative versions of him as both the American war hero and the aristocratic aesthete.

Wilson’s upper-class posturing, I will suggest, is at least in part a protective social camouflage, rendering acceptable certain aspects of his lifestyle and interests that might

⁵⁸ Steven Watson, *Strange Bedfellows: The First American Avant-Garde* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991) 8.

⁵⁹ Wanda M. Corn, *Georgia O’Keeffe: Living Modern* (New York: Prestel Publishing, 2017).

⁶⁰ Corn, *Great American Thing*, xix-xx.

be otherwise interpreted as deviant in a middle-class context. Not solely protective, however, Wilson's performance was also highly productive: integral to his creative process, evidence of his business savvy, and indicative of a real desire to procure membership within and contribute to shaping exclusive social and artistic communities in early twentieth-century New York. Specifically, Wilson sought out connections with socially elite individuals and groups—like art critic Henry McBride, modernist patron Adolph Lewisohn, the powerful women of the so-called “Versailles Triumvirate” (Elsie de Wolfe, Anne Morgan, Ann Vanderbilt), Broadway stars Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, and the multi-hatted Stettheimer sisters, all of whom enacted allegiance to modern rebrandings of the salon-style intellectualism and exaggerated aristocratic sophistication of previous centuries. For Wilson, these personal connections parlayed continued employment, regular exhibition, mass media promotion, critical praise, and financial stability. Ultimately, a consideration of Wilson's ephemera and the narratives told by and about him is critical in order to unpack the artist's public appeal in later chapters. Wilson's public and private autobiographical narratives, calculated allegiance to upper-class decorum, and cultivation of elite connections, ultimately may illuminate ways that he—and likeminded artists in the early twentieth century—found ways to succeed the burgeoning modern American art scene.

Family, Frameworks, Flirtations before the War

Claggett Wilson (né Charles Claggett Wilson) was born in 1886 in Washington D.C., the youngest of the four children of Charles Clinton Wilson and Mary Elizabeth

Wilson.⁶¹ Though the Wilsons were a middle-class family, as Charles worked as an auditor for the Treasury Department and earned only a modest salary, the children had upwardly mobile ambitions.⁶² What the family may have lacked in income at this time, they made up for in social respectability and closely held perceptions of birthright, able to trace their deep-rooted family tree back to prominent military and religious figures in early American history.⁶³ The Wilsons understood their social standing, as Claggett once colorfully phrased it, as a family of “blue blood running to purple.”⁶⁴ Described as a group, the Wilson children moved in prominent social circles, sought education from prestigious institutions, garnered respect as military officers, and married above the economic conditions they inherited from birth. It is important to note that these successes fell squarely along traditionally gendered lines. Colonel Henry C. Wilson, the oldest of the four siblings, found a career as an esteemed engineer for the Coast Artillery Corps and National Guard, serving in both the Spanish American War and First World War; was President of the Coast Artillery Reserve Officers Association in New York; was elected to the Board of Governors of the United Service Club in 1915; and was a

⁶¹ Official Military Personnel File for Claggett Wilson (service number 000091656), Department of Defense, Department of the Navy. U.S. Marine Corps. Though his military file lists 1886 as his birth date, other sources have indicated he was born in 1887; “Internment of the Late Mrs. Wilson,” *Evening Star*, Washington D.C. (Feb. 14, 1907): 16.

⁶² “Funeral of Charles Clinton Wilson,” *Evening Star* (Apr. 20, 1910): 22. The Official Register for the United States for the Department of the Interior for 1899 lists Charles Clinton Wilson’s yearly salary at \$1,800.00 (with inflation this translates to, roughly, \$50,000 in 2016).

⁶³ Wilson names “Bishop Claggett,” presumably Thomas John Claggett, first Bishop of the Diocese of Maryland, and Col. Joseph Young, a well-known land speculator in the nineteenth century, as ancestors: Claggett Wilson to Helen Wilson Read Eckel, 25 October 1948. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

⁶⁴ Claggett Wilson, “Horse Nonsense: an autobiographical sketch.” Unpublished Manuscript, n.d. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection; for clarity, I will use “Claggett” in this section to distinguish him from the other members of his family.

prominent figure in the Freemasons.⁶⁵ Claggett's sisters, Charlotte May Wilson and E. Elizabeth Wilson married, respectively, William Frye White, a successful lawyer and grandson of Senator William Pierce Frye of Maine, and Samuel McMillan, a real estate mogul and New York state Senator.⁶⁶ Elizabeth's marriage was reportedly a cruel one and in August of 1918 she filed a divorce suit against McMillan, whose large estate was worth \$500,000. Joining his sister in the unhappy spotlight, *The New York Times* informed readers that Claggett would provide testimony on his sister's behalf from the front lines, the first U.S. soldier of the war to do so.⁶⁷ In the wake of a highly public severing, mired in scandal and abuse allegations against McMillan, Elizabeth emerged financially independent. She would not remarry.

Claggett was admitted into Princeton but dropped out immediately in 1905 to pursue a fine arts education at the Academie Julian in Paris and the Art Students' League, both schools that fostered generations of avant-garde artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁸ At the Academie Julian, Wilson studied under academic artist Jean Paul Laurens and Impressionist George Henri Carré and exhibited at the Paris Salon.⁶⁹ During his time abroad Wilson also traveled extensively throughout France and

⁶⁵ "FREEPORT SHOCKED BY DEATH OF COL. HENRY C. WILSON, THE 'BELOVED BUDDY' OF LEGION: Leading Citizen of Village Dead After a Week's Illness—Had Brilliant Career As Soldier—Mourned by Village As a Whole—Active in Community Affairs," *The Daily Review* (Dec. 15, 1922): 1; "Gen. H. Oden Lake Heads United Service Club," *Evening Star* (Feb. 22, 1915): 4.

⁶⁶ "Society," *Washington Times* (Aug. 24, 1902): 7; "Marriage Licenses," *Evening Star*, Washington D.C. (Dec. 15, 1909): 9.

⁶⁷ "Take Soldier's Testimony in France," *The New York Times* (Aug. 9, 1918): 12.

⁶⁸ "Auburn Squirrel-Islanders Enjoy Skit on Claggett Wilson," *Lewiston Evening Journal* (May 1, 1933): A-12; Michael Barton, "WAR ART: Claggett Wilson," *Stand To!: the Journal of the Western Front Association*, n. 85 (Apr./May, 2009): 16.

⁶⁹ Columbia University, *Announcements of Teachers College* (1916): 16.

Spain to see the works by *the masters*, a practice—though rooted in the upper-class tradition of the Grand Tour—that was increasingly affordable and open to white middle-class men of ambition.⁷⁰

Although Wilson first enrolled at the Art Students' League 1905, his travels ensured that he received only intermittent instruction until 1908, when he relocated to New York to become a fulltime student under Impressionist F. Luis Mora.⁷¹ Mora's instruction of Wilson is noteworthy, not so much for his painterly aesthetic, but for his interest in Spanish subjects and styles, which seems to have left a lasting impression on the younger artist.⁷² During his tenure as a pupil at the League he was a peer of Georgia O'Keeffe. While never very close, the two moved within the same social world and Wilson often expressed great admiration for O'Keeffe's work and formed a lifelong acquaintanceship with her, writing in 1923, for example, to compliment her recent exhibition, floridly musing that her "happy" paintings "fit the morning outside."⁷³ Indeed, it is clear that Wilson was greatly stirred by O'Keeffe's style, as art critic Henry McBride

⁷⁰ "As the nineteenth century wound to a close... European travel became accessible to men... who were not even from moderately wealthy families, but whose personal aspirations gave a high priority to saving the necessary funds for passage and expenses," Steven Watson and Catherine Morris, eds., *An Eye on the Modern Century: Selected Letters of Henry McBride* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000) 30.

⁷¹ Barton, 16.

⁷² Helene Barbara Weinberg, *American Impressionism & Realism: A Landmark Exhibition from the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (Sydney, Australia: Art Exhibitions Australia Ltd. and Queensland Art Gallery, 2009) 260.

⁷³ Claggett Wilson to Georgia O'Keeffe, 26 January 1923. Alfred Steiglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Papers, YCAL MSS 85, box 219, flr. 3913, Yale University Library; he wrote again in 1946 to express regret at having missed her at their class reunion: Claggett Wilson to Georgia O'Keeffe, 15 May 1946, Alfred Stieglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Papers, YCAL MSS 85, box 223, flr. 3981, Yale University Library.

tells us that the artist “rushed home from [her] show [at Anderson Gallery] to put the emotions roused by it into literature.”⁷⁴

During his time at the Art Students’ League he likely also met and befriended the far lesser known artist Douglas Robbins—affectionately known to him as “Dougy”—who would become Wilson’s lifelong friend, his regular plus one at parties, his sometimes travel companion, and eventual romantic partner in the 1930s and 1940s (Figure 9).⁷⁵ A short blurb about current Art Students’ League happenings published in *American Art News* in December of 1908 notes Wilson’s permanent relocation to New York and also lauds Robbins’ “especially noticeable” attire at the League’s Leap Year dance, an event wherein “the girls... appeared in Tuxedo or full dress coats” while “the men struggled with their trains, hats and curls.”⁷⁶ Given Wilson’s penchant for both costumes and parties—he was, after all, the chairman of the decoration committee for an extravagant League party in April of 1909—his attendance at the Leap Year event is likely and it is tempting to imagine, albeit impossible to prove, that “Clagg” and “Dougy” might have first encountered one another at the dance in full drag attire.⁷⁷ Though many in his family

⁷⁴ Henry McBride, *The New York Herald* (Feb. 4, 1923), reproduced in *Henry McBride, The Flow of Art: Essays and Criticisms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997) 168.

⁷⁵ John Hale, interview by Thomas H. Garver, July 1, 1998, transcript, Ten Chimneys Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI; Florine Stettheimer’s diary entry from January 28, 1944 names Claggett Wilson, Douglas Robbins, Carl Sprinchorn, and Henry McBride as party guests at art dealer Martin Birbaum’s gathering and private showing of his collection, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 7, flr. 125, Yale University Library.

⁷⁶ Front Matter, *American Art News*, 7, n. 11 (Dec. 26, 1908): 2.

⁷⁷ “ART STUDENT’S AWARDS: List of Successful Competitors for Prizes and Scholarships,” *The New York Times* (May 13, 1909): 2; Wilson and Robbins are hereafter referenced often in tandem, their names appearing in society pages side by side. See: “PLOT TO KILL KEMAL THWARTED IN SMYRNA: Ex-Deputy and Other Prominent Turks Are Caught and Bombs and Arms Are Seized,” *The New York Times* (Jun. 19, 1926): 17; and *The New York Times* (Nov. 4, 1942): 28.

never fully acknowledged his sexuality, and his niece Helen Wilson Eckel often repeated the assertion that Wilson was secretly dating a famous starlet (a fantasy, no doubt, invented by Wilson himself), the artist was not particularly reticent about this part of his life with his friends and non-familial acquaintances.⁷⁸

Wilson graduated from the Art Students' League sometime around 1910 and thereafter enjoyed a fairly successful prewar career as a professional artist. His work was on display several times at Montross Gallery, a prominent gallery on Fifth Avenue much "in the mold of the nineteenth-century art dealer[s]," and his painting *Moorish Girl* was accepted into the American section of the Armory Show in 1913.⁷⁹ Wilson's *The Bull Fighter* was included in the opening show for Daniel Gallery in December of 1913, a modernist gallery that had fashioned itself after Stieglitz's 291, where his work was exhibited alongside Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, Guy Pène du Bois, among other modern artists of the day.⁸⁰ A description in *American Art News* characterizes the show as "an exhibition of modern paintings by a group of artists whose work stands for individuality and who have been able to express their ideals with artistic skill."⁸¹ Advised by artist Rockwell Kent and financially backed by his family of saloon-keepers, owner

⁷⁸ Recollection by Claggett Wilson Read, Claggett Wilson's great nephew, to the author, September 1, 2015.

⁷⁹ "Front Matter," *American Art News*, 12, n. 2 (Oct. 18, 1913): 6; "Front Matter," *American Art News*, 12, n. 27 (Apr. 11, 1914): 6; Watson, *Strange Bedfellows*, 184; Milton Brown, *The Story of the Armory Show* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1963) 300; *Henri Matisse Exhibition catalog January 20th-February 27th, 1915* (New York: Montross Gallery, 1915); *Cézanne Exhibition catalog, through January 1916* (New York: Montross Gallery, 1915); *The Bahr Collection of Early Chinese Paintings, Pottery and Bronzes exhibition catalog, November 9th-December 9th, 1911* (New York: Montross Gallery, 1911).

⁸⁰ Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscapes with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 117.

⁸¹ "Front Matter," *American Art News*, 12, n. 11 (Dec. 20, 1913): 6.

Charles Daniel prepped the exhibition space to mirror the aesthetic of modern primitivism that would often be on display there, decorating the gallery's walls with simple monk's cloth rather than the red-plush fabric that many New York galleries used at that time.⁸²

Perhaps most remarkable among his prewar achievements, Wilson was given a one-man exhibition at Daniel Gallery in April of 1914 where he showed primarily paintings of Dutch and Spanish subjects, like *En Fiesta*, and received a good deal of press, albeit not all positive (Figure 10). A reviewer for *The New York Times* gave the show a mixed review, calling the works “bold” with “an effect of vitality,” but cautions that the show at times “degenerate[s] into sentimentality.”⁸³ A reviewer for *The New York Press* writes about the exhibition more favorably, calling Wilson “one of those rare painters who has a feeling for decoration and subtle humor.”⁸⁴ Despite his work's noted “sentimentality” and his “feeling for decoration,” descriptions that would soon come to be seen as foreign to modern art, Wilson's early relationship with Daniel Gallery is notable in that his work at this time was regularly exhibited within a vanguard context. Moreover, given that Charles Daniel was Charles Demuth's first art dealer, Wilson's connection to the gallery is also significant with regard to Daniel's apparent tolerance of

⁸² Zabriskie Gallery, *Charles Daniel and the Daniel Gallery, 1913-1932: exhibition catalog for Zabriskie Gallery, New York* (Horsham, PA: Becotte & Gershwin and Zabriskie Gallery, 1993) 6; Watson, *Strange Bedfellows*, 184.

⁸³ “ART AT HOME AND ABROAD: Because of the War Art Lovers Must Now Turn Their Attention to American Collections of Let Art Alone Until Peace Comes,” *The New York Times* (Oct. 18, 1914): 11.

⁸⁴ “Familiar Works of George Inness, T. W. Hewing, George Bellows and Child Hassam On View—Claggett Wilson Has a ‘One Man Show’ in the Daniel Gallery Which Proves His Ability,” *The New York Press* (Apr. 19, 1914): 4.

queer material. Daniel, it was rumored, “surreptitiously” showed Demuth’s racier scenes to any “interested parties.”⁸⁵

From 1913 to 1917 Wilson was also a teacher at Columbia University in New York in the Household Arts, School of Architecture, and Fine Arts departments.⁸⁶ At this time Columbia University was a haven for cutting edge artists, with teachers such as Arthur Wesley Dow, who was forerunner of Bauhaus in his emphasis on design fundamentals and wrote extensively on the subject of encouraging students toward self-expression over imitation in art.⁸⁷ Wilson made a strong impression at Columbia. By the 1910s, after spending time among his sisters’ well-to-do in-laws and exposing himself to high culture abroad, the artist developed a refined taste for art, fashion, and furnishings. He modeled his language and mannerisms after the elite personages to whom he had become acquainted, transforming himself into the ideal aristocratic aesthete. A Columbia University colleague, struck by Wilson’s poshness, remarked in an unpublished memoir that his “suave manners knocked us for a loop. He was our dream of that sophisticated outer world we aimed to reach some day.”⁸⁸ Wilson, ever a performer, would spend the rest of his life cultivating the aristocratic persona of a Southern gentleman, and, in 1917,

⁸⁵ Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender, Constructing Theory: The Alfred Stieglitz Circle and the American Formalist Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002) 193.

⁸⁶ “CLAGGETT WILSON, MURAL PAINTER, 64: Artist Who Interpreted ‘Song of Solomon’ in Paintings Dies—Also Was Stage Designer,” *The New York Times* (Wednesday, May 21, 1952): 27; listed in the Household Arts in *Columbia University Quarterly*, 17 (Jun., 1914): 298; listed as a drawing assistant in Architecture in the *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: School of Architecture Announcement, 1916-1917* (New York: Columbia University, 1917) 3; listed as a teacher in the Fine Arts in *Columbia University Bulletin of Information: 1916-1917*, 17, n. 13 (Mar. 3, 1917): 43.

⁸⁷ Arthur Wesley Dow, “Constructive Art-Instruction,” *Teachers College Bulletin*, Forth Series, n. 10 (Jan. 18, 1913) 7.

⁸⁸ Jane Betsey Welling, “The Art of it All,” in *New Waves of Research in Art Education*, edited by Mary Stokrocki (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 1995) 105.

he even co-opted the title “Esquire” after his name to suggest a more noble upbringing than his father’s career could have afforded.⁸⁹ The title appears in an article by his friend Helen Churchill Candee—writer, feminist, interior decorator, and famed Titanic survivor—who cites Wilson as the owner of a *Duke of Osuna* portrait by Francisco Goya (Figure 11).⁹⁰ Though it is almost assuredly a forgery and it remains unclear how the artist might have come to acquire such a work to begin with, it is telling that the “Goya” he purported to own was specifically one that communicated nobility. Such grandiose associations were important to the artist’s self-fashioning. After all, Wilson decided as a young man to adopt his middle name “Claggett” as his primary moniker, thus assuming a name with a high society tenor linked to the most renowned member of his family tree, Bishop Thomas John Claggett (1743-1816), the first Bishop of the Diocese of Maryland.⁹¹

The War and Its Aftereffects

It was during his tenure at Columbia that Wilson learned of and ultimately left for the First World War. In his autobiography, John Erskine, an English professor and colleague of Wilson’s at Columbia, recounts the confused reactions of the university faculty and leadership upon the outbreak of war in Europe. In the summer of 1914,

⁸⁹ Claggett Wilson’s niece Helen Wilson Read Eckel described her uncle: “he always seemed to have that air of a Southern gentleman...” he “mingl[ed] with the rich and famous and be[came] himself both rich and famous” in an unpublished address at Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI, 21 October 2006, transcript. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

⁹⁰ Helen Churchill Candee, “Certain Goyas in America: Francisco Goya y Lucientes, 1746-1828,” *Scribner’s Magazine*, 62, n. 4 (Oct., 1917): 430.

⁹¹ Claggett Wilson to Helen W. Read, 25 October 1948. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

Erskine and Wilson collaborated on a pageant in celebration of British philosopher Roger Bacon. The university abandoned the project, however, when muddled news of conflict abroad left Americans unsure about with which of the combatant nations their sympathies should lie. Wary against showing untimely favor toward the British, the pageant committee quietly dispersed the program “as a mournful souvenir.”⁹² According to Erskine’s recollection, the quick pace of the unfolding discord bred uncertainty among his Anglo-American colleagues who “found it hard to throw overboard [their] traditional respect and friendship for Germany.”⁹³ Indeed, historian David M. Kennedy has noted that Americans “profoundly disagreed about the conflict and about America’s relation to it,” and only arrived at a concurrence in 1917 when Germany’s U-boat strikes rendered neutrality politically untenable.⁹⁴ Once war was underway, however, such uncertainty became socially unacceptable. The U.S. moved rapidly to ramp up both its military preparedness and its propaganda machine. Reflecting in his memoir on this shift in public opinion, Erskine characterizes pacifism as a peacetime luxury. To be sure, Columbia University officials came down hard on the side of national loyalty, firing multiple faculty members suspected of harboring antiwar sentiments.⁹⁵ According to cultural historian Christine Stansell, though New York had “initially been an antiwar stronghold,” the tide changed swiftly as soldiers and sailors stationed there “led roving mobs looking

⁹² Erskine wrote the text and Wilson designed the costumes and illustrated the pageant book, published by the Columbia University Press in September 1914: John Erskine, *A Pageant of the Thirteenth Century for the Seven Hundredth Anniversary of Roger Bacon, Given by Columbia College*, illustrated by Claggett Wilson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1914).

⁹³ John Erskine, *The Complete Life* (New York: J. Messner, Inc., 1943) 241, 248.

⁹⁴ David M. Kennedy, *Over There: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980) 11.

⁹⁵ Erskine, *The Complete Life*, 254, 252.

for radicals” and Columbia “turned into a nest of patriotic zeal.”⁹⁶ In this sense, the microcosm of Columbia mirrored U.S. national policy of mandated patriotism, best exemplified by the so-called Sedition Act of 1918, an amendment to the Espionage Act that outlawed criticism of the United States government and military.⁹⁷ The Espionage Act had far-reaching censorious affects, with known pacifist publications like *The Masses* buckling as news dealers refused to stock them.⁹⁸

Like many of his students and colleagues at Columbia as well as many artists and intellectuals throughout the nation, Wilson answered his nation’s call to arms, seduced, perhaps, by Theodore Roosevelt’s description of war as the “Great Adventure.”⁹⁹ In June of 1917, just two months after the United States announced their entry into the war, Wilson paused his art world successes to volunteer as an officer for the Marine Corps, hoping to put his French language fluency to good use. In October of 1917, Wilson made the news, as New York papers reported that he and Sgt. Walter E. Clevestine of Philadelphia were honored as the first marines in France to carry the American flag at the review of their division by the commanding general.¹⁰⁰ He received his official assignment to active duty on April 11, 1918 with the 5th regiment where he participated in the Aisne-Marne Defensive and acted as a liaison between his regiment and Brigadier

⁹⁶ Christine Stansell, *American Moderns: Bohemian New York and the Creation of a New Century* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2000) 315.

⁹⁷ Kennedy, 80.

⁹⁸ The government also indicted the editors and owners in November of 1917, David Lubin, *Flags and Faces: The Visual Culture of America’s First World War* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015) 4.

⁹⁹ Kennedy, 184.

¹⁰⁰ “NEWS FROM MILITARY CAMPS WHERE BROOKLYN BOYS TRAIN,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Oct. 18, 1917): 8.

General Jean Degoutte of the French Army.¹⁰¹ Just a couple weeks into the artist's involvement, William T. Hutchinson—a fellow Marine—optimistically and all-too-hastily repeated Roosevelt's earlier romanticization of the war, musing in his journal on April 24, 1918 that his friend Claggett Wilson "was in the big fight... and had more adventure than we are likely to get here for the rest of the war."¹⁰² Apparently also partaking in this romanticized vision of war, Wilson purchased a nostalgic souvenir "from a wounded French soldier," a tangible reminder of his time in the Western Front in the form of a "Silver ring set with a fragment of glass from a shattered window of Reims cathedral."¹⁰³

Then, in June of 1918 Wilson was wounded and gassed in The Battle of Bois de Belleau, where he, according to his later recollection, languished in the woods for days before his evacuation to a base hospital in Dijon France (Figure 12).¹⁰⁴ Both the New York presses and the artist himself would later play up this chapter of his war narrative. Billie Hall for the *New York Tribune*, for example, recounts a harrowing tale that Wilson shared at an Adventurers' Club dinner in 1921:

Following [a tale of war correspondent adventure] was an officer who had been in the A.E.F., and who came through one of the Hun drives one of a tiny handful of survivors. I could feel the hair rising on my head when he told me how he lay

¹⁰¹ By this point the 5th regiment had been reassigned to the 4th Brigade of Marines. Official Military Personnel File for Claggett Wilson.

¹⁰² William T. Hutchinson quotes a journal entry from April 24, 1918 in a letter to Claggett Wilson, 29 October 1928. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

¹⁰³ Columbia University, *Teachers College Record*, 19 (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1918): 397.

¹⁰⁴ Official Military Personnel File for Claggett Wilson; recollection of Wilson's injuries recounted by Alexander Woollcott Woollcott, Alexander and Henry McBride, *The War Paintings of Claggett Wilson* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1928) 2.

helpless in a shell hole, which was his only protection from the raging steel, for three horrible days and nights. You all know him. He is Claggett Wilson.¹⁰⁵

Though his injuries were evidently considerable, Wilson returned to active service after only one month of convalescing at which time he was put to work as Aide-de-Camp to General W.C. Neville of the 4th Brigade for the St. Mihiel Offensive and Meuse-Argonne Offensive. After the war's end, he was "detached... from further duty" and returned to the United States where he received an honorable discharge in 1919.¹⁰⁶ For his service, Wilson received The Navy Cross, The Silver Star, The Croix de Guerre, and the French Cross of Lorraine. A tale brought about by the brutality of machine warfare and real suffering, a romanticized version of Wilson as a war hero became a hugely important part of his public personality and a particularly attractive refrain among art critics, something I discuss at length in my second chapter.

Following the war, photographs show that Wilson would occasionally walk with the aid of a cane and letters suggest that the physical complications caused by mustard gas exposure plagued him for the remainder of his life. On February 23, 1919, Wilson petitioned the military for honorary discharge on the basis of financial hardship, urging that continued service would "seriously affect immediate future both as to [his] finances and the building up of [his] business."¹⁰⁷ What exactly is meant by his "business" in 1919 is unclear, but it may describe dealings extracurricular to and more fiscally-generating than his participation in the New York gallery scene, perhaps his mural work for private residences. Regardless, Wilson immediately set about the task of relaunching his art

¹⁰⁵ Billie Hall, "The Adventures Plus One," *New York Tribune* (May 8, 1921): F2.

¹⁰⁶ Official Military Personnel File for Claggett Wilson.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

career and he achieved real and swift success in this regard with his war series, the enthusiastic reception of which I discuss at length in the second chapter. During the early years of the 1920s, Wilson was particularly active, attaining multiple solo exhibitions and participating in numerous group shows, including the 1921 Art Independents show on the Wardorf Astoria roof, notable in American Art History for Florine Stettheimer's uncharacteristic participation.¹⁰⁸ However, though both his war series shown in 1920 and his Songs of Solomon series from early 1922 earned him critical attention and, especially for the former, praise, these gallery shows likely earned him only limited financial gains. Seemingly confirming Wilson's 1919 economic lament to the military, the New York State Census of 1921 shows Wilson residing at The Vermeer Studios on Park Ave., Ella Mabel Clark's low-income accommodation for artists.¹⁰⁹ Wilson's continued upper-class posturing, it seems, served to obfuscate the artist's actual financial situation during these early postwar years.

Making Connections

Nonetheless able to impress the New York rich and culturally elite, Wilson made several beneficial connections in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Sometime just before leaving for the war in 1917, for example, Wilson became acquainted with Henry McBride—an American art critic for *The New York Sun*, *The New York Herald*, the Greenwich Village-seated avant-garde journal *Dial*, and editor to *Creative Art*

¹⁰⁸ "ART INDEPENDENTS HANG CUBISTS HIGH," *The New York Times* (Feb. 24, 1921) 13.

¹⁰⁹ Christopher Gray, "An Early Haven for Artists," *The New York Times* (Dec. 2, 2007).

magazine.¹¹⁰ This multi-decade friendship served the artist well, as McBride regularly featured Wilson's work in his many popular columns. Among the earliest supporters of American modernism and arguably the most influential New York art critic of his day, McBride's entertaining reviews combined a "rather serious aspect" with a "delicately satiric gaiety."¹¹¹ An early and vocal supporter of avant-garde art in the United States, McBride was also, according to Elisabeth Luther Cary's written dedication upon his retirement from *Creative Art* in 1932, a "moralist," a strong voice against the over-commercialization of the art world and, to be sure, a nationalist who advocated for *American* modernists in particular.¹¹² McBride is further described and caricatured in *Creative Art's* dedication as a sort of lovable curmudgeon, the so-called "Chief Apostate of the Press" who, though kind, did not retreat from confrontation (Figure 13). Historian Steven Watson highlights McBride's relatable public character as part of his writings' appeal to the broader audience reading his *Sun* reviews on Sunday mornings and to artists, in particular:

[McBride] was a mediator between [readers] and the perplexing phenomenon of modern art; to the art world he was like a genial uncle whose support was unreserved and all-embracing... he made the *Sun* reader feel as if he were seated next to an entertaining dinner companion who could chat about the guests' couture... tell amusing art world anecdotes, and deliver light but precise descriptions of artworks.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ According to McBride's later account of their meeting, the two first connected over a "mutual enthusiasm for 'The Land of Joy,'" a Spanish theatrical production with elaborate musical and dance numbers. This play came out in 1917, and for this account to be accurate, Wilson would have had to see the play sometime before heading abroad in late 1917: McBride, *The War Paintings of Claggett Wilson*, 6.

¹¹¹ Watson, 184; Elisabeth Luther Cary, "Henry McBride," *Creative Art: A Magazine of Fine & Applied Art* (Dec. 1932): 281.

¹¹² Luther Cary, 282-283.

¹¹³ Watson, *Strange Bedfellows*, 184-185.

As he was for many young American artists of the day, McBride was an advocate for Wilson, repeatedly singling the painter's work out in his columns and writing a foreword for the publication of Wilson's war series.¹¹⁴

Though certainly beneficial for Wilson, his friendship with McBride went far beyond professional pretense. The two corresponded regularly about their lives, attended social happenings in tandem, and traded banned books with erotic themes (sometimes much to McBride's dismay), including one illustrated French book titled *Thirty-Six Inches of Adventure* that details the journey of an anthropomorphized sperm cell on a journey from testes to ovum. Wilson "say's its from the French" [sic], McBride groans to his friend Malcom MacAdam, "somehow I fear the worst."¹¹⁵ Indeed, McBride repeatedly sent updates to MacAdam about his and Wilson's recent forays into risqué pulp literature:

I sent you off a week or so ago, a book written by Frieda Lawrence, the wife of D.H. Lawrence, which I thought you might like... It wasn't exactly your Christmas present, for I had another book bought for you, which turned out to be so indecent that I decided I oughtn't corrupt you to that extent and so I'll send it

¹¹⁴ Henry McBride, "Interesting Exhibitions of the World of George Biddle, W. Scott Pyle, Claggett Wilson, Gastone Lachaise, Samuel Weiss, and Max Kuehn," *The Sun and the New York Herald* (Feb. 8, 1920): s. 3, p. 7; Henry McBride, "The Independent Show," originally published in *New York Herald*, republished in *El Palacio, Semi-Monthly Review of the Arts and Sciences in the American Southwest*, X, n. 9 (Apr. 1, 1921): 5; Henry McBride, "Modern Art," *The Dial* (Jul. 1925): 84; Henry McBride, "The Salons of America Put on a Gay and Entertaining Show by Younger Artists: 'Take it or Leave it' Apparently the Slogan of these Under Dogs," *The New York Sun* (Apr. 26, 1930): 8; McBride writes to Alfred Lunt asking him to write a profile of Claggett Wilson to publish in *Creative Art* magazine: Alfred Lunt to Henry McBride, 28 January 1932, McBride Papers, NMcB11. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art; McBride, *The War Paintings of Claggett Wilson*.

¹¹⁵ Henry McBride to Malcolm MacAdam, 21 April 1931, McBride Papers, NMcB5. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

to Clagg Wilson... it wasn't well written but just naughty. Clagg seems to relish such things.¹¹⁶

Both living relatively openly for the day as queer men (or perhaps more accurately as openly not-straight, as the case may be with McBride), Wilson and McBride relied on such circuitously exchanged word-of-mouth to guide their popular culture consumption.¹¹⁷ Described by McBride, Wilson had a salacious sense of humor and was over-the-top in both his aesthetic tastes and displays of affection. In his letters to MacAdam, McBride routinely extolled Wilson's comedic prowess and nodded toward the artist's lewd tendencies, once hinting at joke by Wilson that was so bold that he "wouldn't dare trust it to the mails."¹¹⁸ A source of surprise and entertainment, Wilson once sent McBride a Valentine that was so extravagant—"An extraordinary affair that... unfolded and stood upright with a perspective of cupids"—that the critic readdressed it from himself to Ettie Stettheimer as a gag.¹¹⁹

As silly as it may seem, Wilson, to an extent, built his career on the foundation of savvy friendships forged by his ability to trade in clever dinner party conversations, entertaining gifts, and dirty novels. As noted by Watson, before the full cementing of Modern art institutions in the United States, New York artists and intellectuals forged a movement through informal social networking, the most structured form of which took place at *salons*, social gatherings of "the enlightened rich and the bohemian poor"

¹¹⁶ Henry McBride to Malcolm MacAdam, 23 October 1936, McBride Papers, NMcB5. Microfilmed at Archives of American Art.

¹¹⁷ Watson, *An Eye on the Modern Century*, 27.

¹¹⁸ Henry McBride to Malcolm MacAdam, 15 February 1932, McBride Papers, NMcB5. Microfilmed at Archives of American Art.

¹¹⁹ Henry McBride to Malcolm MacAdam, 15 February 1931, McBride Papers, NMcB5. Microfilmed at Archives of American Art.

wherein attendees were expected to converse charmingly about politics, psychoanalysis, fashion, feminism, and sexuality.¹²⁰ Even after the Armory Show fostered broader interest in modern art in America, *American* modernism in particular still held a subordinate role in art institutions of the following decade and almost no artists who engaged in newer styles were able to make a living through their art alone.¹²¹ As such, for impoverished artists looking to make connections with individuals of means and/or influence, socializing was key. In the performative space of the salon, at once public and private, you could be poor but you could not be boring. The tradition of the salon, though instrumental to the development of the avant-garde in New York, was a holdover from centuries past, a favorite aristocratic pastime formed during the early Enlightenment years. Indeed, the nascent avant-garde community in the United States, though positioning itself against the “old order,” nonetheless continued to rely upon the social conventions and wealth of the nineteenth century.¹²²

Perceived character in this demanding social climate was of the utmost importance. Discussing the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, art historian Sarah Burns argues in her book *Inventing the Modern Artist* that American artists, necessarily adapting to the growing commercial demands of the art market, were keenly aware of their personal image and often self-consciously constructed public stances when vying

¹²⁰ Watson, *Strange Bedfellows*, 8-9.

¹²¹ “American modernists [of the 1910s and early 1920s] found selling their work [was] even more difficult than locating places to display it”; Even though Modernism slowly trickling into museums around US in the 1920s, “these triumphs did not win modernists a dominant position in the institutional art world” in George H. Roeder Jr., *Forum of Uncertainty: Confrontations with Modern Painting in Twentieth-Century American Thought* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980) 49-50, 61.

¹²² Watson, *Strange Bedfellows*, 8.

for favor from galleries, patrons, and critics. Galleries, patrons, and critics, in turn, promoted and reframed the postured stances of the artists whose work they were representing, collecting, and debating. In this process of artistic posturing and reposturing, the modern art world “continually contested, appropriated, and reshaped” the very category of “artist” itself.¹²³ Never quite nailed down, the artist as a concept metamorphosed into a heap of romanticized associations, curated for ultimate appeal. These included, according to Burns, “possessed of a powerful personality,” “sensitive,” “marginal,” “yet simultaneously materialistic,” “sociable and socially adept,” “gentlemanly,” and “urbane.”¹²⁴

Many of the stereotypical traits that coalesced in the nineteenth century to communicate “artist” to United States audiences, including sensitivity and urbanity, became refrains in both Wilson’s self-positioning and critical reception. Coming from a respectable but comparatively modest class background, it is worth noting again that Wilson’s hyperbolically aristocratic persona was deliberate and carefully self-policed.¹²⁵ Both fashionable and, initially, fiscally aspirational, Wilson’s self-presentation is not unrelated to the dandy of fin-de-siècle Europe, a stance that had become increasingly

¹²³ Sarah Burns, *Inventing the Modern Artist: Art and Culture in Gilded Age America* (New Haven, CT: Yale university Press, 1996) 2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹²⁵ As made clear by art historian Kathleen Pyne’s account of the carefully negotiated personas of Georgia O’Keeffe and her female contemporaries in the Stieglitz circle, the category of the artist as described by Burns continued as a contested space in the twentieth century and Wilson was thus far from unique among his peers in his posturing, self-promotion, and jockeying for association with important figures in the art world: Kathleen Pyne, *Modernism and the Feminine Voice: O’Keeffe and the Women of the Stieglitz Circle* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

popular among New York artists in the 1910s.¹²⁶ Indeed, in his war painting *Flower of Death*, Wilson specifically calls upon late nineteenth-century critic Charles Baudelaire whose “Heroism of Modern Life” famously envisions the ideal avant-garde artist as a dandified flâneur ostensibly immune to financial concerns and un beholden to hegemonic politics.¹²⁷ Cultural historian Susan Fillen-Yeh notes that the dandy’s status as a social “shifter,” a figure whose class status is resistant to precise identification, provides those who adopt this persona with “a new, if tenuous and chancy, social mobility.”¹²⁸

Well-practiced, Wilson was skilled at negotiating the social requirements of upper-class New York society. Sometime around 1920 Wilson became friendly with Adolph Lewisohn, a wealthy investment banker, mining magnate, and an early patron of both European and American modernists.¹²⁹ This association proved over time to be one of Wilson’s most professionally important connections. In his history of Jews in New York, Stephen Birmingham paints a lively image of Lewisohn (a German Jewish immigrant to the United States) as a “little round figure” with “polished bald head” and “comically thick spectacles” who maintained a conspicuous “playboy” lifestyle, throwing “unwieldy parties, surrounded by his fawning retinue” and spending “\$300 a month for

¹²⁶ Susan Fillin-Yeh, “Dandies, Marginality and Modernism: Georgia O’Keeffe, Marcel Duchamp, and Other Cross-Dressers,” *Oxford Art Journal*, 18, n. 5 (1995) 34.

¹²⁷ Charles Baudelaire. “Heroism of Modern Life,” in *Selected Writings on Art and Literature*, trans. by P.E. Charvet (New York, Viking 1972) 395-422.

¹²⁸ Fillen-Yeh, 36.

¹²⁹ Stephan Bourgeois, *The Adolph Lewisohn Collection of modern French paintings and sculptures, with an essay on French painting during the nineteenth century and notes on each artist’s life and works* (New York: E. Weyhe, 1928); Samuel Adolph Lewisohn, *Painters and Personality: A Collector’s View of Modern Art* (New York: Harper, 1948).

shaves alone.”¹³⁰ A fixture in the New York social scene, Lewisohn held elaborate dinner parties at both his Manhattan residence at 881 5th Avenue and his sprawling estate in Ardsley, NY, about 20 miles north of the city (Figures 14 & 15).¹³¹ At these events, Birmingham tells us, the mining magnate “preferred creative people” over business types, “writers, painters, singers, dancers, actors... ‘unknowns,’ whose talents he could discover and help promote.” For struggling artists, Lewisohn offered financial assistance and even sometimes housing in exchange for “pleasant company.”¹³²

Lewisohn, it seems, viewed Wilson, who was fresh from the war, as one of these struggling but sociable artists whose career he could aid through monetary assistance and the exercise of social influence. Lewisohn regularly purchased Wilson’s art and on multiple occasions contacted galleries and museums on the artist’s behalf, lending works from his own collection and submitting select paintings from the *Songs of Solomon* and Basque sailor series to the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.¹³³ Despite the economic power disparity, Lewisohn’s family folded Wilson into their social world and they frequently attended posh gatherings and exhibition openings together.¹³⁴ Other

¹³⁰ Stephen Birmingham, *Our Crowd: The Great Jewish Families of New York* (originally published in 1967) (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996) 267, 359, 6.

¹³¹ According to Birmingham, Lewisohn also had homes in Elberon, NJ and at Prospect Point on Upper Saranac Lake in upstate New York, 359, 356.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 357.

¹³³ “List of Accessions and Loans,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 17, n. 4 (Apr., 1922): 94; “Front Matter,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 17, n. 6 (Jun., 1922): 122; Augusta Owen Patterson, “ARTS AND DECORATION,” *Town & Country* (May 1, 1922): 42; Augusta Owen Patterson, “ARTS AND DECORATION,” *Town & Country* (Feb. 15, 1923): 94.

¹³⁴ The Lewisohns and the Rossins attend Wilson’s *Songs of Solomon* exhibition at Chamberlain Dodd’s, “‘SOLOMON SONG’ PAINTINGS: Claggett Wilson’s Twenty Pictures Shown at Dodd’s Studios,” *The New York Times* (Jan. 31, 1922) 13; Wilson attends a gathering with Fred Lewisohn (Adolph’s son), “FANTASY TO BE GIVEN TO AID LOUVAIN FUND:

artists and society figures in Wilson's circle associated with or sought assistance from Lewisohn, including the Stettheimer sisters (who were loosely related to the Lewisohn family) and Maine modernist Carl Sprinchorn (who wrote the wealthy patron in 1925 to ask for financial backing and offer works for sale).¹³⁵ It is almost surely through the Lewisohns' connection to the Guggenheims, another prominent Jewish American mining family in New York, that Wilson also became acquainted with Solomon R. Guggenheim, who commissioned the artist in 1926 to paint murals at his Port Washington estate (Figure 16).¹³⁶ Though interested in new art, the Lewisohns were "cut in the nineteenth-century robber baron style," more or less loyal to the class paradigms and gilded taste of American businessmen of the previous century.¹³⁷ Wilson's good manners and aristocratic airs must have impressed them. His ability to charm, to amuse, the way he moved seamlessly within elite circles, enabled him to make connections that he could parlay into new and ever-multiplying connections and career opportunities. Because Wilson's career was in some part built by casual social connections, it is unhelpful to speak binaristically of a public performative Wilson for the presses versus a private

Miss Mary Cass Canfield's 'Lackeys of the Moon' Will Be Presented Next Sunday," *The New York Times* (Feb. 13, 1924): 19; Adolph Lewisohn places Wilson on the President Harding welcoming committee for the "Lighthouses for the Blind" event to be held at his Manhattan home: "Mrs. Harding Aids Drive, Endorses \$2,000,000 Campaign for Blind Lighthouses," *The New York Times* (May 18, 1921): 14; and "President Harding Endorses Campaign to Help the Blind," *Arizona Republican* (Apr. 25, 1921): 14; Watson, *Strange Bedfellows*, 255.

¹³⁵ "Yesterday we were at Lewisohn's to view his gallery under Marie's supervision," Ettie Stettheimer Diary, 2 March 1919, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 7, flr. 130, Yale University Library; Adolph Lewisohn to Carl Sprinchorn, 23 October 1925, Carl Sprinchorn Papers, reel 3010. Microfilmed at Archives of American Art.

¹³⁶ Augusta Owen Patterson, "THE DECORATIVE ARTS," *Town & Country* (Jun. 15, 1926): 42-43.

¹³⁷ Nicholas Fox Weber, *Patron Saints: Five Rebels Who Opened America to a New Art, 1928-1945* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1992) 53.

authentic Wilson shared with friends; rather, the artist's social life was private as well as public, his personality actual as well as postured.

Lewisohn's son-in-law and daughter, Alfred and Clara Rossin, also patronized and offered financial support to Wilson. Clara, in particular, helped to facilitate the artist's valuable acquaintance with W.H. Fox, the director of the Brooklyn Museum.¹³⁸ In addition to coordinating with Fox to organize a traveling exhibition of Wilson's Basque sailor paintings, Clara Rossin also donated funds to the Brooklyn Museum for the purpose of purchasing the artist's work.¹³⁹ In 1924 the Rossins commissioned Wilson to paint a mural for their music room, where he would later attend a fancy soirée in celebration of a new sonata by Ernest Bloch, also attended by Adolph Lewisohn, Alexander Archipenko, Gela Forster, and Georgia O'Keeffe.¹⁴⁰ Perennial patrons, it was, in fact, the Rossins who somehow eventually came to own the bulk of Wilson's war paintings, donating them to the Smithsonian in 1981.¹⁴¹ At the time of his death in 1952, Wilson was still receiving payments as a beneficiary to a trust that the Rossins established.¹⁴² Clara Rossin was one of several powerful women with influence in the

¹³⁸ Claggett Wilson wrote a letter to W.H. Fox, postmarked from Ondarroa, Spain, 24 July 1927, Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives; W.H. Fox to Claggett Wilson, 10 August 1927, Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

¹³⁹ Clara L. Rossin to Fox, 21 January 1924, Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

¹⁴⁰ "Bloch's Sonata Played: 'Poeme Mystique' given for the first time in Rossin Home," *The New York Times* (Jan. 25, 1925): 31.

¹⁴¹ Smithsonian American Art Museum official Website, "Collections," <http://americanart.si.edu/collections/search/artwork/?id=27764> (accessed on May 24, 2015).

¹⁴² New York County Surrogate's Court Estate Records for Claggett Wilson, 2 June 1951. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

New York art scene, like interior decorators Elsie de Wolfe and Helen Churchill Candee, whose connections Wilson relied heavily upon during his career.

In/visible Queerness

From 1921 through 1926 Wilson kept up a romantic correspondence with Wilbur Underwood of Washington D.C., a Decadent poet from an older generation who was, perhaps not coincidentally, friends with the Churchill Candee and de Wolfe families (Figure 17).¹⁴³ Though not particularly important for his professional development, Wilson's attachment to Underwood helps to establish a context for his decorative aesthetic, dark humor, and aesthete self-posturing. Most famous for writing *A Book of Masks* (1907, dedicated to Aubrey Beardsley), and *Damien of Molokai* (1909), Underwood modeled his writing after Charles Baudelaire and other fin de siècle poets associated with the Decadent movement (also known as the Aesthetes).¹⁴⁴ Both Wilson and Underwood seemingly reveled in the historical association between Decadent styles and queerness that I discussed in my introduction, and the former wrote the latter rapturous love letters inspired by his reader's own poetic voice. "Semiramis~ Chrysis~ Sapho," Wilson opens a letter dated December 11, 1921, comparing Underwood to three troubled female lovers from western myth before writing:

¹⁴³ "Gossip of the Players," *The New York Times* (May 28, 1903): 9; "In Washington Society," *The New York Tribune* (Jun. 17, 1911): 6.

¹⁴⁴ Underwood saved the article: "Baudelaire and the Decadence," *The London Times: Literary Supplement* (April 7, 1921), in Wilbur Underwood Papers, box 6, Correspondence with Claggett Wilson, 1921-1930. Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

That the wanton gods not only made you but in a wantoner mood allow you to rove up and down our land. The strain of an indecent song~but what a lascivious one!~the perfume of a dreadful flower~but so suggestive!~came you to our town and thro our streets you wafted and caused a thousand sighs to join in chorus and fluttering eye-lids hail you in salute...

Secret wishes! Desires, wanted and taken!

All a sudden blaze of golden, orange lightening 'gainst a ruddy sky and strong songs from out a scarlet mouth~and the Sons of Mars and the Sons of Salt-limbed Neptune rejoiced~for the red-lipped smile and sad-brown eyes and gentle voice~they understood~they understood!!¹⁴⁵

With the dark erotics and melancholic tone of the Symbolist poets, Wilson's meditation on Underwood's "scarlet mouth" and "sad-brown eyes" revels in the morbid, the "indecent" and forbidden "perfume of a dreadful flower" that all the more induces "a thousand sighs to join in chorus." In the visual arts, the Symbolists were associated with Aesthete artists like James McNeil Whistler, Aubrey Beardsley, and Dante Gabriel Rossetti. It was during his correspondence with Underwood that Wilson also produced the *Songs of Solomon* series, easily the most Decadent work in his oeuvre, replete with Beardsley-esque serpentine lines and patterns suggestive of peacock feathers (Figures 3 & 4).

Like Decadent literature and art in early twentieth-century United States, Wilson's performance as an upper-class aesthete was also flirting with the edge of visible queerness. Marked by stereotypes accrued during the nineteenth century, the concept of the aesthete, in early twentieth-century American usage, generally described a sensitive man in possession of an exceptionally keen eye for beauty who may or may not be an artist. Though the aesthete may share certain characteristics with the dandy—in Wilson's

¹⁴⁵ Claggett Wilson to Wilbur Underwood, 11 December 1921, Wilbur Underwood Papers, box 2, Correspondence with Claggett Wilson, 1921-1930. Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

case, we might look at his manner of dress and his tendency toward counter-cultural vulgarity—the aesthete’s emotional aspect sets him apart (Figure 18).¹⁴⁶ Indeed, clarifying the distinction between the often-overlapping categories of the unaffected dandy and the wandering flâneur, Baudelaire writes that “the dandy aspires to insensitivity,” he is “blasé, or pretends to be, for reasons of policy and caste.”¹⁴⁷ Though overlapping categories, the aesthete’s effeminate tendency toward sensitivity, it was believed, both heightened his abilities to connect with the world in emotional and artistic terms and denoted him as other. According to Mary W. Blanchard, the aesthete as an adopted stance, which was popular in America as early as the 1870s, existed from the start “in dialectical relationship to the more persistent and visible ideal in American culture, the man as soldier.”¹⁴⁸ Because of his failure to live up to the mainstream masculine ideal, he often existed in American thought as a queer character of sorts. Like the dandy, though the term is not reducible to a synonym for a gay man, the figure of the aesthete has strong historical and discursive ties to queerness. In “Apology for Aesthetes” from 1933 American philosopher Van Meter Ames writes that one would be “amiss” to tell aesthetes that “they ought to be like other folk” in terms of procreation or other bourgeois responsibilities, because “some cannot be happy except as artists.” Proceeding in what reads like a double-speak defense of gay men, he writes:

¹⁴⁶ According to Ellen Moers, dandy in the most generalized sense describes “a well-dressed man about town.” There is a shift with Baudelaire, she notes, that positions the dandy artist as counter-cultural figure who finds morality in beauty and accepts the sinful, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* (New York: The Viking Press, 1960) 11, 281.

¹⁴⁷ Baudelaire, *Painter of Modern Life*, 9.

¹⁴⁸ Mary W. Blanchard, “The Soldier and the Aesthete: Homosexuality and Popular Culture in Gilded Age America,” *Journal of American Studies*, 30, n. 1 (Apr. 1996) 26.

Aesthetic individuals, on account of their minority and peculiarity, often feel unhappily that they are mistakes of evolution, and they have no right in a world where they do not fit... Instead of trying to anesthetize himself to get rid of the private enjoyments that give him secret happiness, he should be an aesthete unashamed.¹⁴⁹

Though aesthetes as tastemakers were a celebrated category among the upper class and intelligentsia, Ames's article suggests that, for many, there was something potentially insidious about such men, something incompatible with dominant patriarchal American society.

Indeed, in popular writings of the early twentieth century there is a perceptible slippage between sensitivity, artistic sensibility, and queerness. In 1906 Edward Carpenter, a British philosopher, published a revised edition of his highly popular book *Coming of Age: A Series of Papers on the Relation of the Sexes* (1896), now including a chapter called "The Intermediate Sex" that challenged conventional beliefs about gay men and lesbians. Of gay men who present a more traditionally masculine appearance, Carpenter states:

Such men... are often muscular and well-built, and not distinguishable in exterior structure and the carriage of body from others of their own sex; but emotionally they are extremely complex, tender, sensitive, pitiful and loving... they have often... the artist-nature, with the artist's sensibility and perception.¹⁵⁰

The cultural association between creative-types and gay men became so engrained that calling someone an "aesthete" or referring to them as "artistic" could even function as an oblique means of signifying queerness.¹⁵¹ Broadway playwright, Eugene O'Neill, leans

¹⁴⁹ Van Meter Ames, "Apology for Aesthetes," *International Journal of Ethics*, 44, n. 1 (Oct. 1933) 60, 61, 63.

¹⁵⁰ Edward Carpenter, *Love's Coming-of-Age: A Series of Papers on the Relation of the Sexes* (1896) (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1948) 143-4.

¹⁵¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 54.

into this connotation in his 1926 play *Strange Interlude* with the character of Charles Marsden, a sensitive and sexually ambiguous novelist based in name and character on a fusion of Marsden Hartley and Charles Demuth.¹⁵² According to Christopher Reed, Hartley even once exploited this association, referring to “Demuth as an Aesthete, citing his ‘quaint, incisive sort of wit with an ultrasophisticated, post eighteen-ninety touch to it’”¹⁵³ Queer-themed novels of the 1930s further codified early twentieth-century stereotypes about gay men as both artistic and sensitive in the American popular imagination. In *Better Angel* (1933), a coming-of-age novel about a young gay artist, author Richard Meeker describes the main character as follows: “From his mother Kurt got, in multiplied measure, the love of beauty and the sensitiveness that set him apart from his companions—so apart that sometimes he wished himself violently otherwise.”¹⁵⁴ However, it is worth repeating that reactions to artistic tendencies would have pivoted on the class status of the various actors in a given exchange. Kurt’s delicate nature, for example, which attracted ire from his middle-class peers, would have generated less skepticism among upper-class men, for whom hard labor was unnecessary and an interest in high culture was expected.

While the aesthete is not necessarily always an upper-class figure, Wilson’s decidedly aristocratic iteration of the type, I would argue, would have helped to camouflage or render permissible certain tendencies in his artistic nature and purportedly “sensitive temperament” that might have been otherwise interpreted as queer or

¹⁵² Reed, 132; incidentally, Lynn Fontanne played Nina Leeds, the female lead in *Strange Interlude*, at its first public performance in 1928.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 129.

¹⁵⁴ Richard Meeker, *Better Angel* (1933) (Los Angeles, CA: Alyson Publications, 2000) 12.

unmasculine.¹⁵⁵ As historian George Chauncey points out in his important study of gay life in New York during this period:

Forms of speech, dress, or demeanor that might be ridiculed as womanly, effeminate, or inappropriate to a real man in one cultural group might be valued as manly, worldly, or appropriate to a cultured (or sensitive) man in another. This made it possible for men to try to recast gay cultural styles that might be read as signs of effeminacy as signs instead of upperclass sophistication.¹⁵⁶

Theater historian Alan Sinfield, too, has noted this discursive overlap, arguing that “for men in a position to draw upon this nexus” of postures and stakes that artists and queer men shared, the multivalence of such conceits provided social protection. Sinfield writes: “This partial convergence of subcultural formations—leisure-class, aesthetic, bohemian, homosexual—afforded a confident, complex, and partly malleable nexus within which homosexuality might rest *unavowed*—perhaps implicit, perhaps invisible.”¹⁵⁷ The social protection provided by this obfuscation allowed Wilson to navigate society safely and, amid certain contexts, codes, and crowds, to be at the same time radically transparent about his sexuality. In other words, Wilson’s courtly persona served dual purposes, simultaneously veiling and unveiling his sexuality as well as enabling him to navigate more comfortably in elite social circles. To be sure, it is safe to say that Wilson’s muscular stature and heroic military reputation would have also helped in this regard.

Wilson’s stance also potentially foregrounds the sort of quiet queer subversion with which he engages in his work. My arguments to that end will unfold in the following chapters. Both Elisa Glick and Jonathan Dollimore, among other queer theorists, have

¹⁵⁵ Helen Churchill Candee, “Claggett Wilson’s War Pictures, An Appreciation,” *Arts & Decoration* (Feb. 20, 1920): 238.

¹⁵⁶ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 106; Reed also notes this coded use of “artistic” or “aesthete,” 3.

¹⁵⁷ Sinfield, 52.

persuasively argued that queer style is not an empty sensibility or sartorial whim that constitutes “an abandonment of politics,” but rather is at times the very “site of political engagement.”¹⁵⁸ This is not to say that queer figures are always and necessarily revolutionaries who undercut the inequalities found in capitalist systems; rather, as Glick points out, the queer dandy is often treated as a “privileged emblem” within those systems.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, apart from his sexual politics, Wilson was not particularly radical. He actively perpetuated colonialist narratives and it is known that he was politically conservative in his later years, a revelation that disappointed his friend Florine Stettheimer in 1940 when she learned that he voted against incumbent Franklin D. Roosevelt: “Mc.Br. & Clagg for Wilke oh horrors!”¹⁶⁰ Still, Wilson’s upper-class posturing enabled him to be bold about his sexuality at a time when it was dangerous to do so, to successfully navigate established structures of wealth distribution in the art world, and to produce and exhibit queer-themed art that continually flew under the radar of would-be censors.

Venturing Away from the Center

Wilson’s financial situation and family obligations began to change under sad circumstances in late 1922, when his older brother, Col. Henry Clinton Wilson, died of an

¹⁵⁸ Elisa Glick, *Materializing Queer Desire: Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol* (Albany: State: University of New York Press, 2009) 16.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶⁰ Florine Stettheimer’s Diary, 24 October 1940, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 7, flr. 122. Yale University Library.

undisclosed illness.¹⁶¹ Because Henry's wife had passed away years earlier, Henry Sr. made the decision to leave his son, Henry Clinton Wilson Jr., in Claggett's custody (Figure 19). Writing again to Wilbur Underwood, Wilson expresses grief and surprise at these developments:

My brother died last Thursday and I have just gone thro his frightful last sickness and the harrowing experience of taking him to Washington and a big military funeral at Arlington... I am all sort of crushed... I am left with his Long Island house and six year old youngster~!!¹⁶²

Either not feeling himself keen or independently equipped to raise his nephew alone, Wilson took a temporary hiatus from his New York life to relocate both him and his new ward to Boston, MA where his sister Charlotte Wilson White could aid in Henry Jr.'s care. Though Wilson was technically Henry's guardian, the child resided in Charlotte's Medford, MA home, where he was raised alongside her other children.¹⁶³ For the next several years Wilson maintained a studio apartment in Boston, but his physical presence must have been fairly intermittent as he frequently took extended forays to both New York and abroad.

Henry Sr.'s left the majority of his estate to his young son, so when young Henry Jr. tragically followed his father, dying of an unnamed disease in late 1925, Claggett would have inherited, along with his sister Charlotte, much of the boy's large estate

¹⁶¹ "FREEPORT SHOCKED BY DEATH OF COL. HENRY C. WILSON, THE 'BELOVED BUDDY' OF LEGION: Leading Citizen of Village Dead After a Week's Illness—Had Brilliant Career As Soldier—Mourned by Village As a Whole—Active in Community Affairs," *The Daily Review* (Dec. 15, 1922) 1.

¹⁶² Claggett Wilson to Wilbur Underwood, 18 December 1922, Wilbur Underwood Papers, box 2, Correspondence with Claggett Wilson, 1921-1930. Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress.

¹⁶³ Claggett Wilson Read provided this information on September 1, 2015. Moreover, on the verso of a photo of Henry Clinton Wilson Jr., his cousin Helen Wilson Eckel writes "my precious 'brother' who passed away." In the Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

valued at \$175,000.¹⁶⁴ This money would thereafter allow Wilson to keep up a certain lifestyle and image about himself, allowing him to blend more seamlessly into the high society that he clearly preferred. Whereas before Wilson's upper-class posturing may have been more show than actuality, he now had the means to travel at will, live fairly extravagantly, and relinquish any concerns about making a living through his art. In 1931, at the start of the Great Depression and after Charlotte's death, Claggett set up a room in her old home to help "mother" his niece, who was sixteen at the time and interested in interior design.¹⁶⁵ For the next few years, Wilson was a fixture in Boston society, giving lectures about his travels, exhibiting his art, helping to organize tableaux vivants, serving as master of ceremonies for elaborate parties, and working as a contributing arts editor for *The Writer* literary magazine.¹⁶⁶

Though he never fully abandoned the art world in New York (and he moved back in the later 1930s), the artist left the city often and reveled in that leaving. Wilson spent most of his summers at his family's cottage in Maine. Charlotte and William Frye White kept a vacation retreat on Squirrel Island, an island whose local lore largely revolves around tales of pirates and other seamen.¹⁶⁷ Beginning in his young adulthood, Wilson

¹⁶⁴ "Administrators Named For Boy's \$175,000 Estate," *The New York Herald* (Jan. 5, 1926): 35.

¹⁶⁵ Helen Wilson Read Eckel, "Fond Memories of Claggett Wilson," unpublished address at Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI, 21 October 2006, transcript. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

¹⁶⁶ "Table Gossip," *Daily Boston Globe* (Dec. 13, 1931): A64; "Table Gossip," *Daily Boston Globe* (Nov. 13, 1932): A53; "Table Gossip," *Boston Daily Globe* (Jan. 3, 1932): A61; "Claggett Wilson Speaks at Women's City Club," *Daily Boston Globe* (Feb. 27, 1934): 161; "Boston Snapshots," *The Christian Science Monitor* (Apr. 13, 1934): 4; "Mrs. Storrow at Garden Party," *Daily Boston Globe* (Feb. 4, 1934): C7.

¹⁶⁷ "The World of Society," *Evening Star* (Jun. 27, 1907): 6: "Mr. and Mrs. William Frye White, with their two little daughters, are now at Squirrel Island, ME., where they have taken a

kept a small attic room above his sister's home there, where he reportedly sought solitude while painting his war scenes.¹⁶⁸ Regularly involved in the social happenings on the island, Wilson was in charge of the Squirrel Island Pageant in the summer of 1921, the principal feature in the celebration of the semi-centennial of the purchase of the island.¹⁶⁹ Echoing the modernist primitivism that attracted Paul Gauguin to Breton, droves of artists to the Southwest United States, and Marsden Hartley to rural Maine, Wilson heralded Squirrel Island as a sweetly simple and idyllic retreat from the fast-paced congestion of New York.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, in a letter to the architect Charles Dornbusch on July 30, 1938, Wilson relishes in his escape from the “dark, dank and steaming” city, describing the Squirrel Island as “crisp, fresh and deliciously cool with a golden sun and a dazzling blue sea” in comparison.¹⁷¹ Wilson reiterated this affection for the landscapes of Maine late in his life in a letter from December of 1944 to Carl Sprinchorn, Maine modernist and close friend of Hartley, writing:

Carl, of all our friends I consider you the most sensible for getting out of this enervating Hell box of a city and going to Maine to seek those things which cannot be found here ~ never mind the French tapestries and the Picassos and the Japanese prints ~ perhaps, after all, they are not for those who, like you, have work to do ~ certainly, finer things are to be found in the shifting pageant of Nature all about you up there ~¹⁷²

cottage for the summer. They were also accompanied by Mrs. White's brother, Charles Claggett Wilson.”

¹⁶⁸ Barton, 19.

¹⁶⁹ “Squirrel Island Pageant,” *Lewiston Daily Sun* (Jul. 11, 1921): 6.

¹⁷⁰ Donna M. Cassidy's *Marsden Hartley: Race, Region, and Nation* discusses this aspect of Hartley's Maine work at length (Hanover, NH: University of New Hampshire Press, 2005).

¹⁷¹ Claggett Wilson to Charles Dornbusch, 30 July 1938, Lunt and Fontanne Papers, 5/85-3-410M, Reel 8. Microfilmed at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

¹⁷² Claggett Wilson to Carl Sprinchorn, 27 December 1944, Sprinchorn Papers, Reel 3010. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

As the above letters attest, this interest in Maine—its landscapes and its peoples—spanned decades, leading him to dedicate at least one canvas, a painting titled *Maine Fisherman* (c. 1929), to the local fishermen (Figure 20).

Wilson applied this primitivist lens to international travel as well. Rather than filling his travel sketchbooks with master studies, Wilson typically preoccupied himself with academic nudes and studies of racial and ethnic *types*, laborers, and performers, like Basque fishermen, Spanish bullfighters, and, maybe, drag queens (Figures 21 & 22). In addition to his paintings of Basque sailors, the racial and sexual politics of which I explore in the third chapter, he produced erotically-charged Turkish bath scenes that are fairly similar to Demuth's of the same subject (Figures 23, 24, & 25).¹⁷³ Though undated, untitled, and almost surely unexhibited, Wilson very likely painted his bath scenes during his 1926 visit to Turkey when he accompanied by Douglas Robbins.¹⁷⁴ It is likewise unverifiable but tempting to speculate that he may have seen Demuth's 1918 version through their shared connection to the Daniel Gallery prior to creating his own.

Late Career, Friendship with the Stettheimer Sisters, and Death

Though still occasionally exhibiting canvases, Wilson's career shifted in the late 1920s and 1930s toward an increased focus on contributions to theater and interior

¹⁷³ Notably, whereas Wilson's scenes may in fact depict a Turkish bath, Demuth's scenes almost certainly picture a bathhouse in New York.

¹⁷⁴ "PLOT TO KILL KEMAL THWARTED IN SMYRNA: Ex-Deputy and Other Prominent Turks Are Caught and Bombs and Arms Are Seized," *The New York Times* (Jun. 19, 1926): 17.

design. Already an accomplished muralist by the early 1920s, the artist was no stranger to working in multiple visual arenas. Known for his expertise in interior design, Wilson received frequent commissions from moneyed New Yorkers.¹⁷⁵ In 1936, he was in charge of redecorating the Theatre Guild's party room on Fifty-Third St. in New York and exhibited work at the Decorators Club Gallery on Fifth Avenue.¹⁷⁶ The most notable successes among both his theater and interior design careers originated from Wilson's relationship with Broadway stars Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne. The couple enlisted him to design the costumes and sets for their rendition of *The Taming of the Shrew*, to redecorate their Upper East Side apartment in 1937, and to complete an elaborate renovation of their rural estate in Genesee Depot, WI, known as Ten Chimneys, in the late 1930s and early 1940s.¹⁷⁷ Ten Chimneys, which I explore at length in the fourth chapter of this dissertation, constitutes a magnum opus of sorts during Wilson's late career and results in his final significant appearances in the press during his lifetime. During the 1930s and 1940s, Wilson also regularly lectured in New York on his fields of expertise, including a lecture on color at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a lecture about

¹⁷⁵ "4 New Apartments," *Town & Country* (Apr. 1938): 83; Christine Ferry, "Swedish Primitive in the Game Room of Mr. and Mrs. H.K. Chamberlain," *Country Life and the Sportsman* (Jul., 1938): 32-33.

¹⁷⁶ Lewis B. Funke, "NEWS AND GOSSIP OF THE RIALTO," *The New York Times* (Mar. 17, 1946): 2.1; Walter Rendell Storey, "MURALS SEEN AS ONE WITH THEIR SETTINGS," *The New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 1, 1936): 14.

¹⁷⁷ Margot Peters, *Design for a Living: Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2003) 140; Jared Brown, *The Fabulous Lunts: A Bibliography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne* (New York: Atheneum, 1986) 239.

mass-produced mural decorations at the American Institute of Decorators, and a talk reflecting on being a working artist to students at Art Students League.¹⁷⁸

Although he no longer enjoyed the artistic prominence he did in the 1920s, Wilson remained socially active in the New York art world during the later decades of his life. Most notably, he regularly attended gatherings at the homes of the Stettheimer sisters. The Stettheimers—Florine, Ettie, and Carrie—had hosted one of the preeminent New York salons since the 1910s when their elaborate parties were home to a diverse group of transatlantic art world troublemakers, including Dadaists Francis Picabia and Marcel Duchamp. Born to a wealthy German-Jewish banking family, the three sisters never married and this, in addition to their wealth, gave them a wider social latitude.¹⁷⁹ Serving as artistic muse and as court artist to the sisters’ retinue, Florine painted large, theatrical party scenes in the style of eighteenth-century *fêtes galantes*, cheerful landscapes populated by lithe visions of her friends. Given that the guest lists were international and widely diverse in their aesthetic preferences, the Stettheimer salon was less artistically prescriptive and nativist in tone than the gatherings over which Alfred Steiglitz famously presided. As art historian Elisabeth Sussman notes, the salon was a broad “microcosm of New York’s artistic life”—with all its varied and overlapping aesthetics and intellectual sites—and was “dedicated to a generalized sense of modernity,

¹⁷⁸ “Museum Events,” *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 32, n. 3 (Mar., 1937): 78; Mary Roche, “Decorator’s Field Seen Growing Fast,” *The New York Times* (May 7, 1946): 18; “13 Honor Art Pupils Get Scholarships; First Medals Since War Also Bestowed,” *The New York Times* (Jun. 27, 1946): 23.

¹⁷⁹ Elisabeth Sussman, “Florine Stettheimer: Still Lives, Portraits and Pageants 1910-1942,” in *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, edited by Elisabeth Sussman and Barbara J. Bloemink, et. al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996) 3.

but not to any of its particular persuasions.”¹⁸⁰ Though he was acquainted with the Stettheimers in the 1920s, it is difficult to say precisely when Wilson began attending Stettheimer happenings and his name does not appear in Ettie’s letters and Florine’s party guest lists until 1935.¹⁸¹ By that time, the habitual set of Stettheimer salon goers had grown to include Carl Van Vechten, Henry McBride, Ralph Flint, Pavel Tchelitchew, Sherwood Anderson, Charles Henri Ford, Monroe Wheeler, Glenway Wescott, Kirk Askew, and Virgil Thomson.¹⁸² Usually attending alongside Henry McBride, Wilson was a regular member of this later Stettheimer crowd.

Though central figures in the avant-garde scene in New York, the Stettheimer sisters were in many ways old fashioned. So much so, in fact, that Henry McBride once declared them “Julie de Lespinasse, Mme. du Deffand and Mme. de Stael in modern dress.”¹⁸³ Their home and general sensibility were, according to Steven Watson, continental and highly aristocratic. Their gatherings were formal, gastronomically elaborate, and fashionable attire and finely-honed manners were understood requisites. Though many of the guests were American, “an Old World atmosphere prevailed” and “conversations [were] frequently conducted in French.”¹⁸⁴ If the occasional bohemian

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 6.

¹⁸¹ Wilson produced miniature paintings for Carrie Stettheimer’s dollhouse c. 1925; Both Wilson and Stettheimer, for example, exhibited their work at the Independents show in 1921: “ART INDEPENDENTS HANG CUBISTS HIGH,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 24, 1921): 13; “Clagg” and “H. Mc.B.” listed among party attendees in Florine’s diary entry from May 5, 1935 in a guest list that also included Natalie Barney and Muriel Draper, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box n. 6, flr. 119. Yale University Library.

¹⁸² Elisabeth Sussman, “Florine Stettheimer: A 1990s Perspective,” in *Florine Stettheimer: Manhattan Fantastica*, edited by Elisabeth Sussman and Barbara J. Bloemink, et. al. (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1996) 52.

¹⁸³ Watson, *Strange Bedfellows*, 252.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 253.

from Greenwich Village strolled in, McBride tells us that he was unlikely to receive another invitation.¹⁸⁵ Thanks to his cosmopolitan and cultured manner, Wilson was an easy fit for the Stettheimers.

Though in some ways elitist, their salon was, at the same time, a place of refuge for queer male artists. As described by art historian Cécile Whiting, Florine, regarded as a muse, pulled a group of male aesthetes into her orbit and created a space wherein taste and good humor supplanted traditional standards of morality.¹⁸⁶ Elisabeth Sussman explains Florine's pull as "eccentric standoffish elegance," an "American female version of... dandyism that appealed to many gay admirers."¹⁸⁷ Florine's purported androgyny fed into this perception of her, leading her contemporary Parker Tyler to suggest that she possessed "something purely formal and beyond the sexes" and Marcel Duchamp to remark that she "had no female body under her clothes."¹⁸⁸ Focused around this modern *femme savante*, the Stettheimer salon was a space that accepted non-normative sexualities and celebrated femininity in men. Art historian Matthew Adams writes that there is historical precedence at play here, as "salons have often encouraged a flattening-out of social hierarchies, not only in terms of class and wealth but also in terms of gender and sexuality."¹⁸⁹ In the case of Wilson, the relative openness of the Stettheimer salon would

¹⁸⁵ Henry McBride, "Artists in the Drawing Room," *Town & Country* (Dec. 1946): 95.

¹⁸⁶ Cecile Whiting, "Decorating with Stettheimers and the Boys," *American Art*, 14, n. 1 (Spring, 2000): 24-49.

¹⁸⁷ Sussman, "A 1990s Perspective," 56.

¹⁸⁸ Parker Tyler, *Florine Stettheimer: A Life in Art* (New York: Farrar, Straus, 1963) 11, 86.

¹⁸⁹ Matthew Adams, "The Stettheimer Salon," in *Florine Stettheimer*, edited by Matthias Mühling, Karin Althaus, and Susanne Böller (Munich, Germany: Lenbachhaus & Hirmer, 2014) 95.

have afforded the artist both aesthetic and sexual freedom. Indeed, Wilson brought Douglas Robbins, his romantic partner from the late 1930s until his death, to at least one Stettheimer party, and included him in written updates to Ettie.¹⁹⁰

The sisters frequently invited Wilson into their homes for private dinners and grander events like Thanksgiving and the sisters' respective birthday parties.¹⁹¹ He also sometimes accompanied the sisters to art world engagements. In 1938, Ettie wrote to artist Carl Sprinchorn, telling him that Carrie and Florine attended a museum opening with Robert Locher (an illustrator and interior decorator) and Claggett Wilson and they all had a rather unpleasant time. The size of the crowd in addition to the show's reportedly poor lighting and haphazard hanging "took them some days to get over...[not] a seat to sit on and 6000 people in there."¹⁹² Wilson also joined the Stettheimers for an intimate viewing party in 1944 hosted by Martin Birnbaum, prominent New York art dealer and critic, along with McBride, Sprinchorn, and Douglas Robbins.¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ A letter from Claggett Wilson to Ettie Stettheimer, 4 June 1946, forwarded from Ettie to Carl Sprinchorn, Sprinchorn Papers, Reel 3010. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

¹⁹¹ Florine Stettheimer's diary entry from April 13, 1940 notes dinner with Ettie, Henry McBride, and Claggett Wilson, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 6, flr. 119. Yale University Library; Florine Stettheimer's diary entry, Nov. 21st, Thanksgiving, 1940, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 7, flr. 122. Yale University Library; Wilson attends Carrie's birthday party, Florine Stettheimer's Diary, 23 July 1942, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 7, flr. 123, Yale University Library; Florine Stettheimer lists Wilson among attendees at her birthday part in her diary entry from January 1, 1943. The guest list also includes Marcel Duchamp, Georgia O'Keeffe, Monroe Wheeler, Virgil Thomas, Charles Henri Ford, and Eva Gauthier, among others, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 7, flr. 125. Yale University Library.

¹⁹² Given the timing, the exhibit was perhaps "Three Centuries of American Art" at the Museum of Modern Art, Ettie Stettheimer to Carl Sprinchorn, 14 June 1938, Sprinchorn papers, Reel 3008. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

¹⁹³ Florine Stettheimer's Diary, 28 January 1944, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 7, flr. 125. Yale University Library.

As she often did with close friends, Florine included Wilson in one of her paintings, featuring him prominently in *The Cathedrals of Wall Street*, the third large panel out of a four-scene celebration of culture in the United States (Figure 26). Rather than including him in *The Cathedrals of Broadway* (1929) or *The Cathedrals of Art* (1942) panels, Stettheimer instead represents Wilson at the New York Stock Exchange alongside politicians, fellow soldiers, and representatives of major financial institutions. The implication of that choice either suggests that she understood him as an individual well-versed in the ways of wealth and influence, or, given that this is the most patriotic of her panels, that she saw Wilson's military career as representative of American greatness. Both readings are probably appropriate here. Wilson appears in Marine garb in the lower right quadrant of the canvas, positioned close to Florine herself, who wears a red dress and holds a red, white, and blue bouquet of flowers. Florine highlights Wilson's standing in the scene through both size and proximity. He is the tallest actual person in the scene, dwarfed only by a gilt statue of George Washington, and is set apart from Florine by only one figure, a formulaic "Indian" who seems to function as an allegorical embodiment of American character. Breaking from the more formal stance of the other military men in the scene, Wilson echoes the body language of the Native American beside him by crossing his arms. More subtly, he also throws his weight onto his left hip in a swish gesture that, though appearing more relaxed, may be descriptive of his war injury. Wilson's posture distinguishes him from the comparative rigidity of his fellow soldiers and, perhaps, at the same time, alludes to the modernist primitivist stance that he exhibits in much of his art. Whereas Florine pictures herself largely separate from the economic spectacle represented here, partitioned off from this world by the sash on her bouquet and

the Native American who stands guard to her right, Wilson flirts with its edges. Slightly distanced from the hubbub by negative space and gold markings at his feet, he attentively watches the patriotic ceremonies unfold before him.

Wilson had a relationship with each of the three sisters. The eldest, Carrie, who adopted the mundane duties of running the Stettheimer household after the death of their mother, and who largely took a backseat to the cultural exploits of her two sisters, sought Wilson's assistance in creating art for her now-legendary dollhouse.¹⁹⁴ Made over the span of several decades, Carrie meticulously handcrafted twelve elaborately furnished miniature rooms inspired by the sisters' large family home on Alwyn Court.¹⁹⁵ In addition to visions of elegant Rococo-inspired spaces, Stettheimer's dollhouse also included a modernist gallery populated by miniature works produced by the sisters' artist friends, including Marcel Duchamp, Marguerite Zorach, Alexander Archipenko, Albert Gleizes, and Gaston Lachaise, among others (Figure 27). Sometime in the 1920s, Wilson gave Carrie a tiny painting titled *Basque Sailors* for her gallery and a religious icon painted in gouache on gold ground for the second floor bedroom decorated in Indian Chintz (Figures 28 & 29).¹⁹⁶ Not intended as a toy for children, the family donated the dollhouse posthumously to the Museum of the City of New York, where it went on display in 1945.¹⁹⁷ Though no longer exhibited in the dollhouse, Wilson's *Basque Sailors*

¹⁹⁴ Ettie Stettheimer, "Introductory Foreword," Pamphlet for the Dollhouse (1947) 3. Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. IV, box 10, flr. 172. Yale University Library.

¹⁹⁵ Sussman, "A 1990s Perspective," 44.

¹⁹⁶ Sheila W. Clark, *The Stettheimer Dollhouse* (San Francisco, CA: Pomegranate, 2009) 39, 62.

¹⁹⁷ Stettheimer, "Introductory Forward," 6.

painting was included in earlier iterations of the gallery and featured in the museum's 1947 pamphlet.¹⁹⁸

Like many artists in the Stettheimer circle, Wilson was probably closest with Ettie, a novelist whom Sprinchorn called “the most formidably cerebrated of the 3.”¹⁹⁹ Ettie was also the most outgoing of the sisters—she was a conversationalist who took the lead at parties.²⁰⁰ Though not always discussed at length in scholarship about the Stettheimers, Ettie loomed large in the lives and memories of the artists and intellectuals with whom the sisters associated. Sprinchorn dedicated several pages of his unpublished memoirs to ruminating on Ettie's presence, sartorial and otherwise, recounting, for example, her “little round box like cap[s] set straight and flush to the coiffure” that created a “silhouette one could hardly disassociate her with.”²⁰¹ For his part, Parker Tyler described Ettie in his biography of Florine as possessing a “levelness of gaze, italicized by the unrelenting closeness of her brows... suggest[ing] a criticism of the world that portends little indulgence for it.”²⁰² Whereas Florine was a muse and Carrie was an organizer of sorts, Ettie in the 1930s and 1940s was a determined friend and motherly figure for the aging artists in the Stettheimer circle. In this caretaker role, Ettie, a prolific letter writer, mailed tinned foods and money to her friends and acted as a sort of town

¹⁹⁸ Stettheimer Doll House pamphlet, 10.

¹⁹⁹ Notes for Autobiography, Carl Sprinchorn Papers, Reel 3011. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

²⁰⁰ Sussman, “A 1990s Perspective,” 45.

²⁰¹ Notes for Autobiography, Carl Sprinchorn Papers, Reel 3011. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

²⁰² Tyler, 140.

caller, taking it upon herself to track and report on everyone's health.²⁰³ Extolling her generosity in this respect, McBride writes to Dr. and Mrs. Everett S. Barr in 1951 that he will miss Ettie while she travels, as "she seem[s] to think it part of her responsibility to look after me."²⁰⁴ O'Keeffe writes to McBride in 1955 complaining, "I hear no news of you as Ettie is punishing me."²⁰⁵ Protective of her family and friends, Ettie even sent a bevy of threatening letters to The Museum of the City of New York in 1952 about the poor lighting used in the display of Carrie's dollhouse.²⁰⁶

Ettie took on an increasingly important role in Wilson's life starting in the early 1940s, when his deteriorating health meant that he could no longer complete much work. Speaking in 1938 while furnishing the Lunts' Ten Chimneys estate, Wilson writes to architect Charles Dornbusch about chronic pain resulting from mustard gas, joking that he needs to rush back to New York "for a five weeks treatment to try and straighten out [his] own (corporeal) interior decorations which seem to have gone mighty goddam rococo not to say surrealist" [sic].²⁰⁷ Always charmingly, if not gratuitously, baroque in his bodily gripes, Wilson complained to Ettie that the doctors "may yet take me apart and

²⁰³ Henry McBride to Max Miltzloff, 8 September 1948, McBride Papers, NMcB6. Microfilmed at Archives of American Art; Ettie Stettheimer writes to Carl Sprinchorn, 4 October 1947, letting him know that she is sending him five hundred dollars, Sprinchorn papers, Reel 3008. Microfilmed at Archives of American Art.

²⁰⁴ Henry McBride to Dr. & Mrs. Everett S. Barr, 23 November 1951, McBride Papers, NMcB6. Microfilmed at Archives of American Art.

²⁰⁵ Georgia O'Keeffe To Henry McBride, 25 February 1955, McBride Papers, NMcB11. Archived at Archives of American Art.

²⁰⁶ Ettie Stettheimer to Mr. John Walden Myer, Director of the Museum of the City of New York, 10 February 1952, Stettheimer Papers, Correspondence with Museum of the City of New York, YCAL20, n. I, box 3, flr. 58. Yale University Library.

²⁰⁷ Claggett Wilson to Charles Dornbusch, 16 November 1938, Lunt and Fontanne Papers, 5/85-3-410M, Reel 8. Microfilmed at the Wisconsin Historical Society.

distribute the pickings as they used to do with the relic-bones of the saints in other times.”²⁰⁸ In 1944, with the aid of Ettie and sculptor Gela Forster (wife of fellow sculptor Alexander Archipenko), Wilson began treatment under a doctor in New York who placed him on a strict diet of rice and stewed fruit. Sometimes lovingly prepared by Ettie, this dietary regiment would remain a primary part of his treatment for the following decade.²⁰⁹

Wilson, who was reportedly going blind near the end of his life, died on May 19, 1952 at just sixty-four years old.²¹⁰ When he died he left his nieces over sixty thousand dollars worth of cash and stocks as well as a cache of vintage collectables, largely consisting of naval memorabilia, worth a little over two thousand dollars.²¹¹ A huge amount, to be sure, that with inflation equates to about half a million today. Employing an interesting choice of words, a friend Peggy Taylor wrote her condolences to Wilson’s niece: “how lovely to think he spent his last day happy and gay with Douglas.”²¹² Still looking out for her close friend, Ettie circulated Wilson’s obituary from *The New York*

²⁰⁸ Claggett Wilson writes to Ettie Stettheimer from Dayton Ohio, forwarded from Ettie to Carl Sprinchorn, Sprinchorn papers, Reel 3010. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

²⁰⁹ Claggett Wilson to Carl Sprinchorn, 27 December 1944, Sprinchorn Papers, Reel 3010. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art; Angela Archipenko was better known in the art world under her pseudonym Gela Forster. Here, Ettie affectionately calls her “Ela,” in Ettie Stettheimer to Isabel Lachaise, 22 November c. 1947, Lachaise Papers, Reel 326. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

²¹⁰ Helen Wilson Read Eckel, “Fond Memories of Claggett Wilson,” unpublished address at Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI, 21 October 2006, transcript. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection; “Claggett Wilson, Mural Painter, 64,” *The New York Times* (May 21): 1952.

²¹¹ New York County Surrogate’s Court Estate Records for Claggett Wilson, 2 June 1951. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

²¹² Peggy Taylor to Helen W. Read on Claggett Wilson’s passing, 21 May 1952. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

Times among his art world associates. O’Keeffe kept her copy, perhaps out of affection, or possibly as a laugh, as the paper incorrectly printed a photograph of an older Alfred Lunt instead of Wilson (Figure 30).²¹³ The joke, though indicative of an art world that had left him behind, would likely have tickled Wilson as well. By the time of his death, Wilson had fallen out of the public eye and he was no longer a household name in New York City.

Conclusion

Throughout his career as a figure in the New York scene, Wilson was regarded alternately as a virile war hero and a dandified aesthete. Wilson’s upper-class posturing, in particular, helped him make valuable social connections starting in the late 1910s and early 1920s, including McBride, Lewisohn, Rossin, among others. Though moving in modern art circles, Wilson’s aristocratic air allowed him to move easily within an early twentieth-century art world that was still very much rooted in the decorum, old-world attitudes, and wealth of the previous century. Wilson was not alone in crafting sellable versions of himself; rather, sociability was key for success for artists in the years before avant-garde institutions fully formed. Moreover, Wilson’s diverse career that included interior design work, theater, and the decorative arts, helps to paint an image of the working artist in twentieth-century United States as a savvy and flexible entrepreneur who, like his European colleagues, is happy to dabble in multiple visual arenas.

²¹³ “Claggett Wilson, Mural Painter, 64,” press clipping, Alfred Steiglitz/Georgia O’Keeffe Papers, YCAL MSS 85, box 215, flr. 3798. Yale University Library.

Wilson's persona, at once a smart business move and a veil that both obscured and teased his sexuality, was a viable tool for navigating the art world safely. His formal, well-mannered exterior helped to make it possible for Wilson to create and exhibit the sexually subversive art that I discuss in the following chapters. A closer look at Wilson's oeuvre will help to unpack the subversive potential of his chosen persona—at once dictated by and destabilizing to larger cultural and sexual apparatuses. However, it is important to reiterate that, beyond his sexual subversion, Wilson was hardly politically avant-garde. If one is in search of a shiny narrative of modernist heroics, Wilson is an imperfect candidate. Instead, a look at his career elucidates the complexities of politics among artists in the early years of the American modern art world. Ultimately, through his subtly subversive art, his thoughtfully crafted persona, and his cultivation of allied intimates, Wilson built a world for himself that protected his interests and welcomed his aesthetic.

Chapter Two

Painting the Vanguard Queerly: Wilson's Watercolors of the First World War

Homoeroticism [is] always close to the surface of nationalism—George Mosse²¹⁴

In 1919 Lt. Claggett Wilson painted and subsequently exhibited a series of twenty-six watercolor paintings that chronicled his experiences in the First World War. The scenes vary in both their aesthetic strategy and content, but all share a visual affinity with stage sets, reflect the artist's sense of humor, and underscore his sharp ability to imbricate historic and contemporary styles. Writing in early 1920, Helen Churchill Candee, a critic for *Arts & Decoration*, declared Wilson's war series to be America's "greatest contribution in memory of the Great war."²¹⁵ Similarly, Augusta Owen Patterson of *Town & Country* boldly proclaimed, "it would be more of a privilege to own" a painting from this series "than to own a Rembrandt."²¹⁶ Years later, reflecting on the works in 1928, renowned cultural critic Alexander Woollcott mused "I hope that these... documents of Claggett Wilson's will be hung one day in some Valhalla, where the next generation can look at them—look at them good and hard."²¹⁷ These three

²¹⁴ George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985) 67.

²¹⁵ Helen Churchill Candee, "Claggett Wilson's War Pictures, An Appreciation," *Arts & Decoration* (Feb. 20, 1920): p. 238.

²¹⁶ Augusta Owen Patterson, "Arts and Decoration," *Town & Country* (Feb. 1, 1920): 32.

²¹⁷ Alexander Woollcott and Henry McBride, *The War Paintings of Claggett Wilson* (New York: J.H. Sears & Co., 1928) 4.

statements, all of which seem to predict the future canonization of Wilson's war group, are especially striking today given their relative absence from American art history.

The only scholar to publish significant art historical scholarship on this series to date is David Lubin. In his 2016 book *Grand Illusions: American Art and the First World War*, Lubin positions Wilson prominently and praises his work as America's "closest equivalent" to the "brilliance and depth" of Otto Dix, who was, he states, "[t]he greatest visual artist, anywhere, to emerge from the killing field of the First World War."²¹⁸

Building on Lubin's observations, I will take seriously the contemporary critics who declared Wilson's series the ultimate American expression of the First World War. Upon their exhibition in 1920, his war paintings resonated with both the American public and its arbiters of taste, garnering praise from fashionable magazines like *Town & Country* and *Vogue* as well as more critical publications like *The New York Times* art section.²¹⁹

Marsden Hartley's abstract war paintings, by comparison, which arguably grew to be the nation's most canonical paintings from the Great War, were all but ignored by the popular presses, seen and discussed primarily in small Modernist circles until the mid-twentieth century (Figure 31).²²⁰ As such, an examination of Wilson's war paintings and

²¹⁸ David M. Lubin, *Grand Illusions: American Art and the First World War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016) 180; Lubin recently published more thoughts about Wilson in "Claggett Wilson: The War Portfolio of 1919," *American Art*, 31, n. 1 (Spring, 2017): 46-71.

²¹⁹ Augusta Owen Patterson, "ARTS AND DECORATION," *Town & Country* (Feb 1, 1920): 32; "NOTES ON CURRENT ART," *The New York Times* (Feb. 8, 1920): 10.

²²⁰ As Lubin notes in *Grand Illusions*, though Stieglitz held a solo exhibition for Hartley's war motif series at Gallery 291 in April 1916, "the response proved cool. Reviewers wrote respectfully of Hartley, recognizing the integrity and verve of the War Motif paintings, but these were, after all, tributes to the German officer corps at a time when America was veering toward war with Germany," 9; An article in *The New York Times* art section, for example, features a description of Hartley's war paintings from a reviewer who saw them in Berlin. This article does not publish a reproduction: "AMERICAN ARTIST ASTOUNDS GERMANS: Marsden Hartley's Exhibition in Berlin Surprises, Pains, and Amuses," *The New York Times*

their reception will help to illuminate how the American public writ large understood the war, the soldiers' experiences of it, and in what modes they desired to see its scenes represented.

Art critics placed special emphasis on Wilson's identity as a soldier, and, by extension, characterized his war paintings as scenes borne from true experience. Though they privileged his soldierly status, writers were careful to distinguish between Wilson's modernist impressions of the war and the comparatively descriptive images generated by official military artists, the former regarded as genuine visions of the front and the latter as mere illustration. The aura of authenticity surrounding Wilson's scenes would have allowed Americans—for many of whom the brutality of the front was only a distant specter—to view a 'truthful' account of the war's horrors tempered by the delicacy and gentle humor of his aesthetic. The artist's formal experimentation did not, in his reviewers' estimation, tarnish their faithfulness. The paintings, I would argue, carried the weight of truth not through their exactitude, but, rather, by dint of Wilson's apparent concurrence with ideologies already closely held by his white, middle to upper-class audience. By narrowing his scope to conflicts in which the American military seemingly emerged as a force of heroic liberation and through his total erasure of the black soldierly body and, indirectly, the racial tensions that plagued the U.S. troops, Wilson's scenes reinforced conservative attitudes about the war already prevalent among the American public.

In addition, I will call attention to how contemporary critics, motivated by nationalist sentiments, overlooked, failed to see, or decided to ignore scenes that

(Dec. 19, 1915): X4.

challenged prevailing attitudes toward the war. Namely, Wilson's adherence to conservative narratives of the war would have helped to camouflage his pervasive use of a queer aesthetic sensibility and humor throughout his war series. In scenes such as *The Billet at Bouy*, *Boudoir of Madame La Comtesse H.....*, *Bacchus Survivor*, and *Encounter in the Darkness*, Wilson makes use of 'feminine' ornamentation and subtly subversive theater strategies like double entendre to queer the brutally 'masculine' spaces of war (Figures 32, 33, 34, and 35). In these moments, Wilson brazenly invites censure, allowing potentially problematic themes to rub up against dominant cultural narratives. I will argue that because the military uniform symbolically transforms the wearer into an embodiment of a nation's most closely regarded ideals, representations of military men appear to the heteronormative gaze to be always already respectable.²²¹ This assumption of normativity widened Wilson's representational latitude, enabling him to re-envision the war through a queer lens and, in the case of *Encounter in the Darkness*, to illustrate a gay sexual encounter almost explicitly.

Finally, at the end of this chapter, I will start to take on the question of whether Wilson's sexual openness may have led to the series' eventual downfall. Because Wilson was fairly open about his queer identity and he often employed homoerotic tropes in his work, it is tempting to draw a causal link between his sexuality and the later historical erasure of his career. The reality, however, is far more complicated than such a sketch assessment suggests. Perhaps the foremost explanation for the disappearance of his work is a general apathy toward visual representations of the First World War that was almost monolithic in the United States by 1920. This fails to explain, however, why subsequent

²²¹ This is an issue discussed at length in Jennifer Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression* (Oxford, NY: Berg, 2005).

scholars never revisited the pervasive series and this chapter's conclusion will begin to unpack various, overlapping factors that would have rendered Wilson's work discursively and aesthetically unacceptable to later scholarly audiences.

The Postwar Reception of Wilson's Series and His Official War Art Rivals

Like many prominent artists and thinkers of his race and social class, Wilson espoused the hope that the United States' entrance into The Great War would usher in an era of artistic productivity and vitality.²²² Writing to a colleague at the Columbia Teachers College in 1918, the artist describes his battlefield experience as a horrifying yet romantic "mosaic" of clashing stimuli, a trying episode that would inspire and reinvigorate his art:

This life has, I think, given me a new and certainly stronger vision than ever I thought I should have—a vision, clear and direct, which I am eager and full of, to put on canvas or otherwise reflect as I may feel... what the Great War is doing for me, it has done, is doing, and will do for many others; one need not be under fire nor live the strange life of the front to feel its scourging purification for it extends everywhere and is for us all.²²³

While certainly Wilson's account of war as a "scourging purification" echoes the volatile language of early twentieth-century European Modernists, most famously exemplified by Filippo Tommaso Marinetti's call to arms in his 1909 *Manifesto del Futurismo*,

²²² According to Modris Eksteins, "most intellectuals... responded to ingrained national loyalties and conducted themselves accordingly. If they were not able to enlist because of age or health, they joined the effort in other ways, as propagandists, war artists, ambulance drivers, or orderlies," *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin Co., 1989) 208-209.

²²³ Claggett Wilson writes from France to Professor Dow to thank his Columbia colleagues for sending a box of sweets, 15 March 1918, *Teachers College Record*, v. 19 (New York: Teachers College, Columbia University, 1918): 408.

American audiences were also well acquainted with such notions. Brander Matthews, a Columbia literature professor, for example, wrote in an editorial for *The New York Times* in 1914 that “From the present European war may date a great creative epoch... great wars have exerted a quickening influence upon literary production. Society is stirred to its base by such conflicts.”²²⁴ An editorialist for the *American Magazine of Art* concurred in 1917:

there are those who believe that from the ashes of the past will rise a new art, purer, higher purposed, more sincere than that we have known in our generation...and let us hope it may be so. Such belief is not unreasonable for it is only when we come very close to the great realities, the great fundamental things of life that we realize how immensely valuable art is.²²⁵

Though artists and critics in the United States generally avoided the aggressive bravado sometimes wielded by their continental Modernist contemporaries, such publications make clear that nations on both sides of the Atlantic shared the idea that war could induce positive cultural developments.

It was in this eager spirit that Wilson painted his war series from late 1918 to early 1919 and the details of its creation, as recounted in subsequent reviews, reads at times like a mythic origin story. Wilson enlisted almost immediately after America’s war declaration and received his assignment abroad in late 1917. Though not an official war artist, he occupied himself during his tour of duty by sketching on “scraps of paper,

²²⁴ “WAR WILL PROBABLY BENEFIT WORLD’S LITERATURE, DECLARES PROF. BRANDER MATTHEWS OF COLUMBIA: Great Clashes Between Nations Have Especially Stimulated the Drama, According to Noted Authority on English, Who cites Days of Antiquity and the Elizabethan Era as Proofs of His Contention,” *The New York Times* (Sep. 13, 1914): 6.2.

²²⁵ “The War and Art,” *The American Magazine of Art*, 8, n. 7 (May 2017): 286.

between the throwing of grenades.”²²⁶ Notably, exhibitors later displayed these sketches alongside the more finished paintings as testimony to the series’ directness (Figures 36 & 37).²²⁷ Then, while stationed in Germany in late 1918, “when peace gave more leisure,” he began painting war scenes in earnest. Alas, according to Wilson’s account, a thief absconded with his “precious vintage” on the voyage home, never to be recovered. Rather than accepting this as a loss, Wilson reportedly sequestered himself at his family’s retreat in Maine and repainted the scenes from memory.²²⁸ Having completed the paintings for the second time, Wilson excitedly telephoned critic Henry McBride and insisted that he should come see his most recent work. McBride, from his own recollection of the encounter, was stunned by the notion that his friend, whose oeuvre had been hitherto ostensibly cheerful in subject matter, had produced such vivid and brutal representations of the war.²²⁹

Wilson’s twenty-six scenes range widely in content, including war-ravaged landscapes and bodies, the crouching squalor of trench warfare, heated moments of hand-to-hand combat, reverberating shell blasts, men ensnared by inescapable webs of barbed-wire, theatrically-lit military hospitals, ethereal allegoric embodiments of France rising from the earth like medieval icons, and even a sweet self-portrait set in a domestic interior on the European front. Hands feature prominently throughout the series, most

²²⁶ Helen Churchill Candee, “Claggett Wilson as a War Painter,” *The Spur* (Feb. 1, 1920): 37.

²²⁷ “MARINE PORTRAYS VIVID EXPERIENCES: Paintings of Wilson Create Favorable Comment From Many Critics, *The Brooklyn Standard Union* (Aug. 8, 1920): 17.

²²⁸ This family retreat in Maine probably refers to the vacation home of his sister, Charlotte May Frye; Harriet Hungerford, “The War Series of Claggett Wilson,” *Art & Archaeology*, 4, n. 5 (May, 1920): 240.

²²⁹ Woollcott and McBride, 6.

explicitly in scenes like *Saviors of France*, wherein disembodied hands float above the horizon, symbolically enumerating the spirits of fallen soldiers (Figure 38). In several instances, hands are crudely amputated, as in *Stragglers: French Wounded in the Retreat of Château-Thierry* and *Runner Through the Barrage: Bois de Belleau, Château-Thierry Sector...* (Figure 39 & 40).²³⁰ Moreover, nearly every broken tree limb in the series is anthropomorphic, appendages pitifully and pleadingly craning toward some unknown ally. In his essay for the 2016 exhibition catalog for *World War I and American Art*, Lubin connects Wilson's proliferation of broken branches to an overall theme of injury.²³¹ Mirroring his shifts in content, Wilson freely moves from one aesthetic mode to another, jumping from blunt, nearly-nonfigurative abstraction suggestive of Italian Futurism in *Flower of Death* to bookish eighteenth-century quotation in *Boudoir of Madame La Comtesse H.....* and *Bacchus Survivor* (Figures 41, 33, and 34). Painted in watercolor, certain panels take on a graphic quality where thin washes of color allow the hard-edged lines of the graphite underdrawing to peek through, almost-cartoonishly outlining the shapes.

The first exhibition of the paintings was in February of 1920 at Messrs. M.

²³⁰ Though I do not discuss it at length here, Wilson's repeated iteration of hand imagery, and, specifically, amputated hands, seems a potentially rich subject for research. A good place to start such an inquiry would be to look at Peter Springer's comprehensive analysis of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Self-Portrait as a Soldier* in relation to iconography of the amputated hand in the popular culture of Germany during the First World War: *Hand and Head: Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's Self-Portrait as Soldier* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²³¹ David Lubin, "Lies that Tell the Truth: American Artists in the Crucible of War," in *World War I and American Art*, edited by Robert Cozzolino, Anne Claussen Knutson, David M. Lubin, et. al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016) 37-38.

Knoedler & Company Gallery on Fifth Avenue and Forty-Sixth St. in Manhattan.²³²

Earning a one-man-show from Knoedler Gallery, one of the oldest and well-respected art houses in New York, was an impressive achievement for Wilson. The gallery's inventory typically favored European masters, but also "encourag[ed] native art" and sometimes ventured into controversial modern art.²³³ It was Knoedler's that infamously held Florine Stettheimer's one-woman-show in 1916, the critical fallout of which ensured that it would be the first and last such exhibition in her lifetime.²³⁴ By several accounts Wilson's war show at Knoedler's "created a sensation" in the New York art scene and the popular press.²³⁵

In the critical response that followed the series' introduction, Wilson's works were evaluated not only on the basis of artistic merit, but also on how their content negotiated and coincided with prevailing American myths about the war's meaning. Despite the variety of scenes and aesthetics, an examination of the contemporary reviews of its debut at Knoedler's Gallery, reveals distinct patterns, as critics noticeably privilege certain images and narratives above others. Parsing out these themes (which repeat throughout numerous publications intended for a large, but primarily white, educated, and middle- to

²³² Messrs. M. Knoelder & Company, *Messrs. M. Knoelder & Company Announce an Exhibition of Paintings by Claggett Wilson at their Galleries: February 2nd to February 14th*, exhibition catalog, 1920.

²³³ Malcolm Goldstein, *Landscapes with Figures: A History of Art Dealing in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 36, 38, 172; A reviewer in 1917 declared art from a recent exhibition at Knoedler's Gallery "unfit to be seen outside of the circle of an exhibition of modernistic sex degenerates... the art cult of the modernistic degenerates of Europe," in "The Annual Exhibition at Knoedler's," *The Art World*, 2, n. 4 (Jul. 1917): 378.

²³⁴ Sussman, "Still Lives, Portraits and Pageants 1910-1942," 4.

²³⁵ "MARINE PORTRAYS VIVID EXPERIENCES: Paintings of Wilson Create Favorable Comment From Many Critics, *The Brooklyn Standard Union* (Aug. 8, 1920): 17.

upper-class audience) provides a glimpse at how the average viewer understood these works. One especially pervasive narrative, and one that is certainly reinforced by the frequent retelling of the series' creation, paints Wilson as the ultimate soldier-artist whose firsthand experience fighting on the front lines provided him with insight to which civilian artists, and even official war artists, were not privy. To be sure, Wilson was the most prominent fine artist in the American scene to produce war art from personal experience on the battlefield. In the works' first publication, for example, a critic for *Harper's Bazaar* writes that Wilson "needs no official certificate to prove that he was in the thick of the fighting" because "[h]is drawings bear ample witness to that."²³⁶ In her laudatory review of the war series for *Arts & Decoration*, Helen Churchill Candee follows a similar thread, declaring that Wilson's trials during the war "were burned into the consciousness of the soldier-artist; became forever a part of his being," resulting in images "as vivid as life, and as truthful."²³⁷ A reviewer for *The New York Times* likewise affirmed the works' experiential veracity:

In spite of the fact that... he makes things beautiful... in spite of his ability to trail a tangle of barbed wire across his composition in a lovely embroidery of slim, black lines and make upreaching hands look like a 'sea of pale lilies,' to use his own phrase; in spite of his completely artistic treatment of reality, his war is more real than anything yet seen commemorating its horror.²³⁸

As this quote suggests, this is not to say that Wilson's art represented a rote regurgitation of the facts. Wilson's war scenes do not presume documentary status, as they were twice removed from the original subject—images based on the artist's recollection of images

²³⁶ "Through the Eyes of a Marine: Claggett Wilson," *Harper's Bazaar*, 55 (Feb. 1920): 90.

²³⁷ Helen Churchill Candee, "Claggett Wilson's War Pictures, An Appreciation," *Arts & Decoration* (Feb. 20, 1920): 238.

²³⁸ "NOTES ON CURRENT ART," *The New York Times* (Feb. 8, 1920): 10.

that he had also painted from memory. Rather, critics lauded the series' ability to evoke the *feeling* of war, or, more accurately, how they believed the war felt. For contemporary reviewers, Wilson's firsthand experience fighting as a soldier granted his art an authenticity that was categorically foreign to artists who had watched behind the safety of the frontlines.²³⁹

Indeed, reviewers made careful distinction between Wilson's paintings and illustrations produced with documentary intentions. His works, wrote Churchill Candee "are not War pictures" in the sense that his paintings are unlike those to which her readers were hitherto familiar that "portray merely the physical effects of war-torn earth, trenches, camions, conflicts, billets," that "informed, but... gave no sensations." In contrast, she asserts, Wilson "seeks to find the soul of a situation," to portray "the animating spirit from which human conduct springs."²⁴⁰ Succinctly expressing like sentiments in her *Town & Country* review from 1920, Augusta Owen Patterson proclaims: "[t]hank heaven one artist has come back from the war with something besides portraits and khaki illustrations."²⁴¹ Though not plainly stated, both Churchill Candee's description of sensationless "War pictures" and Owen Patterson's snubbing of "khaki illustrations" undoubtedly amount to damning appraisals of official military art.

With the help of "Gibson Girl" creator Charles Dana Gibson and his Division of Pictorial Publicity, the U.S. Armed Forces selected and dispatched eight official military

²³⁹While few apart from Lubin have written about Wilson or his art since his death, those who have, such as Kevin Nibbe in his dissertation on United States war art, largely follow similarly romanticized narratives, *The Greatest Opportunity: American Artists and the Great War, 1917-1920* (dissertation, University of Texas, Austin, 2000).

²⁴⁰ Helen Churchill Candee, "Claggett Wilson's War Pictures, An Appreciation," *Arts & Decoration* (Feb. 20, 1920): 238.

²⁴¹ Augusta Owen Patterson, "Arts and Decoration," *Town & Country* (Feb. 20, 1920): 32

artists to the Western Front, including Harvey Thomas Dunn, George Matthews Harding, and Harry Everett Townsend.²⁴² Charged with the task of documenting the war effort, these artists, known as the AEF Eight, largely produced images—like Townsend’s *Soldiers of the Telephone*—that were aesthetically homogenous, lacking in emotional intensity, and, especially in comparison to Wilson’s series, restrained in their rendering of combat, injury, and death (Figure 42). Perhaps an inevitable result of Gibson’s central role, the DPP overwhelmingly employed popular illustrators over fine artists. Gibson unveiled the DPP’s selected artists and their goals in an introductory speech on February 21, 1918, stating that their coverage of the war would be “entirely in line with the kinds of work they have been doing, that is, paintings of landscapes, etchings of ruins, portraits, uniforms, customs of the country, battle scenes, etc.”²⁴³ Conforming to these objectives, the War Department’s officially sanctioned art posed challenges neither to aesthetic norms nor traditional content.²⁴⁴

The AEF Eight’s relatively unimaginative program is not unrelated to the contemporaneous resurgence of classically inspired art in Europe, as discussed by Kenneth Silver in the French scene, wherein artists utilized traditional artistic modes that ostensibly furthered the nationalistic vision of their respective governments.²⁴⁵ Like their European colleagues, American artists, critics, and patrons of the day increasingly viewed

²⁴² Alfred Emile Cornebise, *Art From the Trenches: America’s Uniformed Artists in World War I* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991) 8, 12.

²⁴³ Transcript of Gibson speech, February 21, 1918, copy in AEF GHQ, G-2D, Record Group 1920, file 301, National Archives, cited in Nibbe, 219.

²⁴⁴ As noted by Lubin in *Grand Illusions*, official artist Harvey Dunn seems to stand as an exception to this. His war works are decidedly more expressive than that of his peers, 174.

²⁴⁵ Kenneth E. Silver, *Espirit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press) 1989.

radically abstracted art movements like Cubism as Germanic phenomena that were both incompatible with wartime politics and somehow symptomatic of the very conditions that made the war come to pass. Writing for *Dial* in early 1918, for example, Laurence Binyon stated “the trend of violent, savage art, depicting violently angular figures... seems to have anticipated the atmosphere of war before the war itself exploded.”²⁴⁶ One of the most prolific and conservative American art critics of the day, Royal Cortissoz, too, argued in 1919 that Modernist art trends could be viewed in hindsight as a prefiguration of global unrest:

...painters, sculptors and architects were expressing a vulgarity of soul so profound as to be symptomatic of nothing more nor less than moral rotteness... There you have the true origin of the German atrocities, and I speak now of those committed upon the insensate bodies of works of art.²⁴⁷

Faced with such attitudes toward abstraction, American artists representing the front generally avoided the sort of pictorial fragmentation that avant-garde artists in Europe sometimes called on to mirror the mechanized and chaotic aspects of modern warfare, favoring instead more conservative compositional methods that artists employed in service of wars past. The War Department’s conventional visual program was also, at least in part, a product of wartime censorship that promoted “a reassuring view” of the war and, in the case of photography, altogether barred the publication of American casualties.²⁴⁸

Declared insipid and uninspiring, the body of illustrations produced by the eight

²⁴⁶ Laurence Binyon, “And What of Art?” *Dial* (Jan. 31, 1918): 94.

²⁴⁷ Royal Cortissoz, “British and French Art in the War: Two Exhibitions of Paintings and Drawings Done at the Front,” *New York Tribune* (Feb. 9, 1919): 2 II.

²⁴⁸ George H. Roeder Jr., *The Censored War: America Visual Experience During World War Two* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993) 29, 8.

official war artists tanked in the public's eye and did little to change their perception of the war. Simplifying the matter, contemporary critics blamed the poor showing of official United States war art on Gibson for his apparent allegiance to illustration and tradition over fine art and innovation, which, in their estimation, had resulted in a clinical and utterly boring body of images. The critics' frustration came to a head in late 1918 when The Allied War Salon debuted at the American Art Association in New York. It was a massive exhibition organized by Albert Eugene Gallatin that unfavorably juxtaposed war works produced by artists from the United States with those made by artists employed by allied European nations and Canada, such as Sir William Orpen, Christopher R.W. Nevinson, and Paul Nash.²⁴⁹ Under the auspices of the Division of Pictorial Publicity and the Committee on Public Information, the U.S. government organized the exhibition and all profits went to The Art War Relief fund.²⁵⁰ Because popular magazine publishers had reproduced the American images so infrequently, The Allied War Salon was the AEF Eight's primary public introduction and viewing.²⁵¹

In their reviews of the show, critics repeatedly and resolutely denounced Gibson's program as a failure. McBride, for instance, writes that Gibson's choice to send illustrators was "a great mistake" and that "[e]ven as drawings suitable for publication in the press the pictures were not a success, as is shown by the very small number that the

²⁴⁹ The Corcoran in D.C. also showed the exhibition for two weeks in November 1918, Albert Eugene Gallatin, *Allied War Salon: Exhibition December 9 to 24, 1918* (exhibition catalog, American Art Galleries, 1918) 6.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, n.p.

²⁵¹ Many Americans in New York had already experienced war art at the Avenue of the Allies, where paintings added to the spectacle as store windows were converted into exhibition space for artists including Augustus Vincent Tack, George Bellows, Gifford Beal, George Luks, and Mahonri Young. Albert Eugene Gallatin, *Art and the Great War, With One Hundred Illustrations* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1919) 12-13.

magazines were willing to take... they were, as a collection, distinctly disappointing.”²⁵² Even The Allied War Salon’s organizer, Gallatin, ceded to these critiques, reflecting in his 1920 book *Art and the Great War* that the government’s choice “not to send painters, but illustrators who had the capacity for recording... and whose work was suitable for reproduction in the press” was “most regrettable and a serious reflection upon the vision and intelligence of those responsible.” He goes on to call the AEF Eight’s output “rather commonplace” and when placed “[a]longside the paintings and drawings by... the British and Canadian Governments, they appear very feeble indeed.”²⁵³ Cortissoz agreed—albeit praising George Bellows and George Luks whom he notes as creating war art of merit independent of the War Department—and concluded that United States’ showing at The Allied War Salon sounded the death knell for any lingering notions that war might have left a positive mark on American art:

Now that [war] is ended we see that it has exercised no mystical talismanic influence. The artists of the world have suffered no ‘laying on of hands,’ and have received no new and strange inspiration, they have been in no wise transformed by contact with the great theme.”²⁵⁴

As Cortissoz’s quote illustrates, the unpopularity of the work produced by the DPP’s official artists helped to foster a climate of critical apathy toward American war art in general.

²⁵² Henry McBride, “NEWS AND COMMENT IN THE WORLD OF ART,” *The Sun* (May 18, 1919): 7.12.

²⁵³ Gallatin was the Chairman of the DPP’s Committee on Exhibitions, “Art and the War,” *The Nation*, 110 (Feb. 28, 1920): 271; This passage is decidedly different in tone than his laudatory rhetoric in his catalog for the exhibition, which read: “American painters and illustrators... it is gratifying to know, came forward with an eagerness to serve the country that was not excelled by any other group,” 2.

²⁵⁴ Cortissoz states that the art of the DPP is notable only insofar as the works may serve as documents. “They are not, as drawings, as works of art, at all distinguished,” he concludes Royal Cortissoz, “The Allied War Salon,” *New York Tribune* (Dec. 10, 1918): 9.

Comparing individual scenes such as, for example, Wilson's *Stragglers—French Wounded in the Retreat of Chateau Thierry* and Harding's *An American-French conference in a wine cellar; Chateau-Thierry* from 1918, which Gattalin reproduced in his exhibition catalog, the thematic and formal disparity is clearly pronounced (Figures 39 & 43). Wilson's *Stragglers* features a group of French war casualties languishing in the wake of a battle. With his mouth slightly agape in disbelief, the scene's central figure has ripped off his shirt and jacket to expose a mangled forearm. The soldier, surrounded by dead and dying comrades, tries in despair to use a scrap of his shirt to bandage and stabilize his limb, which is now hanging, grossly contorted, stripped of skin, and dripping with dark red blood. Rendered expressively in loose washes, the color is more emotive than it is descriptive of nature. Wilson has envisioned the ground as a violet wasteland and the sky as a field of curling emerald, purple, and cobalt billows that uncomfortably vacillate in the viewer's mind between ordinary clouds and explosive fallout. In *Grand Illusions*, Lubin partly credits Wilson's striking aesthetic to the artist's modernist training at the Académie Julian in Paris that "had been the training ground for Nabi ('prophet') artists of the previous generation... favor[ing] simple designs, dynamic compositions, sharp lighting contrasts, and broad flat planes of vibrant color, sometimes thrown together in jarring juxtapositions."²⁵⁵ Alternatively, Harding's drawing, which depicts a meeting between allied French and American forces, is a relaxed scene that shows soldiers in no apparent danger. Though a lit candle ominously casts shadows against the back wall and animates the concerned expression creeping across the central American figure's youthful face, Harding's neutral title and inclusion of a peacefully sleeping

²⁵⁵ Lubin, *Grand Illusions*, 181.

Frenchman works against the potential tenebristic drama of the scene. Rather than heightening the image's emotional intensity, Harding uses color here merely to clarify figures' national and branch affiliations. Moreover, though two French soldiers on the far right of the composition appear injured, their wounds already have bandages and are shown recovering in relative safety. No blood is visible. In stark relief with Harding's scene, Wilson's painting tugs on viewers' emotions, portraying the war in visceral and affective terms.

Indeed, critics were not alone in their frustrations with America's official war art. According to historian George H. Roeder Jr., by the end of the war U.S. audiences at large had grown disenchanted with the proliferation of sanctioned, sanitized, and "transparently upbeat depictions of the wartime experience."²⁵⁶ Certainly, popular magazines' lack of interest in publishing examples from the War Department's official visual program is indicative of the public's disenchantment. Though losses were proportionally high while their involvement lasted, few Americans "saw sustained or repeated battle" like Wilson did and "none was subjected to the horror and tedium of trench warfare for years on end" as had the typical European soldier. Nevertheless, public appetites demanded scenes of battle, especially scenes of valiant American soldiers charging "Over the Top" toward an almost certain death.²⁵⁷

With the public eager for (and yet officially denied) representations that spoke to the action-packed war they envisioned—a war of daring exploits in the European countryside and dauntless heroism in the face of imminent injury and death—it is easy to

²⁵⁶ Roeder, 7.

²⁵⁷ Kennedy, 205.

see how Wilson's dramatic war series answered that call in ways that the official artists did not. A thematic breakdown of the artworks that Gattalin included in The Allied War Salon by artist George Matthew Harding, who is fairly representative of the AEF Eight, and the scenes that Wilson represents in his series helps to illustrate this dichotomy. Within Harding's group of twelve works at the Salon, six scenes focus on the routine movement of troops, supplies, and information; three illustrate troops at rest; two scenes show wounded and convalescing soldiers receiving medical care; and one depicts a meeting between American and French officers.²⁵⁸ In contrast, of Wilson's twenty-six scenes, eleven images picture actual combat, seven depict traumatic injury and death on the front lines, three illustrate war savaged landscapes, two focus on First Aid stations, and only one scene each depict troop movement or a soldier at rest.²⁵⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, looking at the difference in tone between Wilson's laudatory reception and the harsh critical appraisal of the AEF Eight, it becomes clear that Wilson's war scenes possessed for many American viewers an emotional intensity, aesthetic aim, and an authenticity that critics felt the official art lacked. Drawing on metaphor and affect, Wilson's paintings also offered potential catharsis by beautifying and affirming the justness of America's military engagement.²⁶⁰ Indeed, Cortisoz

²⁵⁸ Gallatin, *Allied War Salon*, 23.

²⁵⁹ A painting titled either *Against the Dawn* or *The Blanc Mont Fight* (titles culled from Knoedler's catalog) completes the 26 scenes, but is lost and I have not been able to locate a reproduction. One of these two scenes is reproduced in *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* under the title *Shell Explosion*, Hamilton Easter Field, "CLAGGETT WILSON AT KNOEDLERS," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Feb. 1, 1920): 8.

²⁶⁰ Nibbe includes a short chapter on Wilson's war series in his insightful and ambitious dissertation on American war art. Due to a lack of searchable digital archives at the time of his project, Nibbe's arguments about the series are based almost exclusively on close looking. Still, Nibbe too recognizes the cathartic potential of Wilson's paintings: "These works had great value as propaganda pieces, acting to console and inspire those sickened by the massive

declared Wilson's scenes as some of the only war art in the United States that had "prove[d] very exhilarating."²⁶¹ However, while certainly more radical in form, depiction of combat, and affective impact than the work of his government-endorsed colleagues, Wilson's paintings do little to overtly challenge wartime nationalist sentiments.

Wilson's Nationalist Conservatism

Wilson's political conservatism in this regard is on clear display in his repeated depiction of highly mythologized conflicts, especially the battle of Belleau Wood that had, by 1919, become a patriotic rallying point. The battle of Belleau Wood was lauded in the press as an American triumph wherein the U.S. Marines bravely halted the Teutonic march to the French capital. It was during this battle, according to apocryphal sources, that the German troops dubbed the Marines "Devil Dogs" because of their tenacity in battle.²⁶² In his public report of the clash, Josephus Daniels, the Secretary of the Navy, proudly trumpets the exploits of his "American Boys":

In all the history of the Marine Corps there is no such battle as that one in Belleau Wood. Fighting day and night without relief, without sleep, often without water, and for days without hot rations, the Marines met and defeated the best divisions that Germany could throw into the line... The heroism and doggedness of that battle are unparalleled.²⁶³

losses...suffered for little gain," 323-324; Lubin also discusses the cathartic impact of Wilson's work in his article on the series in *American Art*.

²⁶¹ Royal Cortissoz, "Some Instructive Contrasts in Current American Art," *New York Tribune* (Mar. 21, 1920): 3.

²⁶² Carl Andrew Brannen, *Over There: A Marine in the Great War* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1996) 26.

²⁶³ "DANIELS TELLS HOW MARINES SAVED PARIS: Stopped Foe and Began Attack That Ended in Victory, Says Secretary in Report. FIGHT AT BELLEAU WOOD:

By the time Wilson's works debuted in 1920, Belleau Wood had become a tourism hot spot, attracting military enthusiasts and U.S. Boy Scout troops, promised "the opportunity of a lifetime" to see these historic locations "made famous by American troops."²⁶⁴

Wilson, who indeed had fought and was badly wounded in Belleau Wood, focused on this battle more than any other, explicitly dedicating at least five scenes to its portrayal. Critics took note and played up this facet of his war story, with *The Brooklyn Standard Union* declaring: "[Wilson's] fiery nature... demanded action and he was transferred to front line duty on his own supplication, getting into some of the bitterest engagements of the renowned 'devil dogs.'"²⁶⁵ Wilson's "devil dog" status helped to solidify him in his public's mind as an ideal soldier and a hero of mythic proportions.

In *Salad—A Cleaned-Up Machine-Gun Nest, Bois de Belleau*, for example, Wilson pictures two American Marines who triumphantly rise over a steep horizon to survey a group of defeated Germans (Figure 44). The metal handle on the machine gun ammunition box is swiveled upward into an omega shape, signifying a decisive end for these adversaries. A blood-soaked and likely dead German soldier returns the viewer's gaze, his open eye barely visible amongst a twisted mass of fragmented bodies, tree limbs, and metal. It is no coincidence that this gruesome scene and irreverently de-humanizing title describe only foreign bodies, as the reverse would have been all but

American Boys, Bare-Chested, Wiped Out Machine-Gun Nests in Heroic Charge," *The New York Times* (Dec. 9, 1918): 4.

²⁶⁴ "The British Boy Scouts Invite You," *Boys Life* (Jun. 1920): 65.

²⁶⁵ "MARINE PORTRAYS VIVID EXPERIENCES: Paintings of Wilson Create Favorable Comment From Many Critics, *The Brooklyn Standard Union* (Aug. 8, 1920): 17.

unthinkable for American audiences.²⁶⁶ Though Wilson depicts American casualties in some scenes, he attentively places these bodies in comparatively ennobling contexts, as in *Runner Through the Barrage—Bois de Belleau*, which portrays a U.S. soldier still erect, emotionally scarred but almost divinely floating on despite severe injuries (Figure 40).²⁶⁷ While it is more than probable that the Battle of Belleau Wood loomed large in Wilson's own memory of the war, the popularity of this subject could not have escaped this well-read artist's attention. Regardless of Wilson's intentions, critics locked on to the artist's status as a Bois de Belleau Marine and touted that fact in their reviews. Certainly, as Lubin points out in his recent article on the series, the title "Salad" invites dark laughter.²⁶⁸ However, while it is tempting to read Wilson's wording therein as a satirical indictment of the war, especially when considered in relationship to the dead German's chilling stare, the critical literature does little to bear this out and "the Marine" remained a proud part of Wilson's persona for the remainder of his life. Moreover, Wilson produced an illustration of a similar scene in the *Belleau Woods Post* in November of 1920 for Marines who had served in France, here for an explicitly government-endorsed context (Figure 45).

In addition to limiting his brush to battles of patriotic significance, Wilson

²⁶⁶ Americans appreciated representations of Germans as conquered or as barbaric inhuman caricatures. Bellows lithographic war series focused largely on atrocities committed by Germans on European nations with which Americans most strongly sympathized. Bellows' *War Series*, like Wilson's, was interpreted by American viewers to be more or less in line with current nationalist sentiments and was "published in magazines like *Vanity Fair* and *Colliers*" with some even "selected to be part of the [Committee on Public Information] propaganda campaign and were used to publicize the Fourth Liberty Loan" in Nibbe, 58.

²⁶⁷ In Lubin's "Claggett Wilson" article for *American Art*, he convincingly suggests that this image may illustrate "shell shock" or even Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, 53.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

whitewashes his representations of the American military, altogether erasing the presence of black soldiers on the front. Needless to say, this is a patent disregard for historical fact. Wilson himself wrote to his friend and Columbia colleague Robert Paul Gray about a black soldier singing “Just a Baby’s Song at Twilight” while stationed in Germany in early 1919.²⁶⁹ But, more to the point, the 396th Infantry regiment, an all African-American unit out of Harlem (the so-called ‘Harlem Hellfighters’), fought with distinction in the Battle of Belleau Wood and earned special commendations from the French government and pervasive praise in the American presses.²⁷⁰ In his 1919 history of African-American service in the Great War, William Allison Sweeney writes at length about Henry Johnson of the 396th, who was the first American service member that the French awarded with the Croix de Guerre. Johnson’s picture, Sweeney tells us, “[was] nearly as well known in Upper Harlem as [was] that of General Pershing elsewhere in the country.”²⁷¹ While New York papers routinely published stories extolling the brave deeds and happy homecomings of Harlem regiments, representations of black soldiers almost never appeared in the United States’ official war art and propaganda. Moreover, accounts detailing the rampant racial discrimination in the military, namely stories of violence instigated by white soldiers seeking more stringent segregation policies, were almost exclusively the domain of the black presses.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ Claggett Wilson to Robert Paul Gray, 19 February 1919. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

²⁷⁰ William Allison Sweeney, *History of the American Negro in the Great World War: His Splendid Record in the Battle Zones of Europe* (Chicago: G.G. Sapp, 1919) 77.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

²⁷² Jennifer D. Keene, *Doughboys, the Great War, and the Remaking of America* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001) 86.

In addition to the fact that few white artists depicted black soldiers, the existent examples generally render their subjects in stereotypical fashion.²⁷³ Exhibited at The Allied War Salon in 1918 under the title *One of the Buffaloes*, sculptor Mahonri Young depicts in bronze a member of the 367th (an all-black regiment nicknamed “Buffalo Soldiers” after the African Americans who fought in the American Indian Wars of the late nineteenth century) with exaggerated physiognomy and slack regimental form (Figure 46).²⁷⁴ Though the racially charged portrayal may be subtle enough to elude reproach today, Duncan Phillips, a reviewer for *The American Magazine of Art* in 1919, elucidates the sculpture’s unpleasant subtext:

Seen in bronze for the first time was the delectably bow-legged, loose-limbed infantryman of the U.S.N.A. ‘Uncle Sam’s Nigga Army,’ modeled by that great sculptor Mahonri Young... Surely never was a sense of humor and a problem of portraiture more perfectly subordinated to that larger symbolism which is ever the prerogative of the sculptor. Young’s genius is manifest in the comic angle of this husky darky’s wrist, in the fling of his arms and legs in a soldierly rhythm, in the pugnacious thrust of his jaw as he goes, a first-class fighting man, ‘to make the world safe for the demktratic party.’ [sic]²⁷⁵

Phillips’ caustic evocation of the soldiers support for “the demktratic party” is double-edged in the context of its early twentieth-century political backdrop, as it both mocks stereotyped black speech patterns and suggests that the soldier is childlike and gullible, naively fighting for the party of historical black disenfranchisement. Although Wilson includes no such stereotypes, his choice to present the American Expeditionary Force as a wholly white body was neither disinterested nor benign. As American art historian

²⁷³ An exception to this may be found in Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney’s sculptural war scenes, who rendered Harlem fighters more sympathetically, such as in *Private of the Fifteenth*, c. 1919.

²⁷⁴ Gallatin, *Art and the Great War*, 115.

²⁷⁵ Duncan Phillips, “The Allied War Salon,” *The American Magazine of Art*, 10, n. 4 (Feb., 1919): 115-116.

Martin Berger has argued, though white viewers tend to look through whiteness, treating it as a standard, representations of whiteness that erase the presence of people of color in historical spaces quietly work to legitimate racial power structures.²⁷⁶ Reproduced in the popular presses, Wilson's images both reflect and work to reinforce the American public's nationalistic and racially biased vision of the war, exemplifying cultural historian Paul Fussell's assertion in his influential book *The Great War and Modern Memory* that art played important roles in how the war was "remembered, conventionalized, mythologized."²⁷⁷ Aided by the reality that Wilson had been indeed engaged in front line combat, his apparent corroboration of contemporary ideological norms made his paintings seem somehow more accurate because they worked to confirm the veracity of cultural myths that his public already held to be self-evident truths.

Subversive Ornament and Theatrical Humor

Nationalist though they are, Wilson's scenes also work to unyoke the battlefield from machine-age masculinity by punctuating the brutality of war with delicate ornamentation, erotic humor, and references to the stage. Many reviewers addressed Wilson's decorative edge head-on, spinning various poetic phrases to describe his ornate, Rococo-esque delineation of barbed wire. Perhaps most elaborately rendered in the scene *Dance of Death*, the artist's twisting lines of barbed wire take on the character of a

²⁷⁶ Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

²⁷⁷ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) ix.

wrought iron fence with a triad of dying Germans gruesomely waltzing toward its open gate (Figure 47). For Churchill Candee, Wilson's engagement with 'the decorative' gave his horrors more poignancy: "A fantastic touch comes in the use of barbed wire. Its loose ends seem to have caught the artist's fancy and he curves them into decorative spirals, as sharp contrast to the tragedy about them."²⁷⁸ In their later appreciations for Wilson's war scenes from 1928, McBride likened the thorny wire to rosebushes and, similarly, Alexander Woollcott envisioned the lines as "arabesques," the interlacing linear patterning prevalent in Islamic design.²⁷⁹ Like Churchill Candee, McBride agrees that Wilson's wedding of horror and beauty creates a tension that intensifies his scenes' appeal, much in the same way, he muses, that a destitute mother might maim her child to "make it the more appealing as a beggar."²⁸⁰ The artist courts ambivalence from his viewers, creating scenes that teeter between beauty and horror, attraction and aversion. Employing the language of the sublime, *Time* magazine describes the affective vacillation that these scenes prompt for a blurb about Wilson in 1928: "He did not forget horrible beauties compounded of corpses spitted on barbed wire, the atrocious shine of bayonets, the bright agony of lacerated flesh."²⁸¹ Indeed, one might admire in *Dance of Death*, for

²⁷⁸ Helen Churchill Candee, "Claggett Wilson as a War Painter," *The Spur*, 25, n. 3 (Feb. 1, 1920) p. 37. "The beauty of the scene and the strange, whimsical humor with which it is treated make it far more terrible than any solemn narrative could make it," "NOTES ON CURRENT ART," *The New York Times* (Feb. 8, 1920): 10.

²⁷⁹ McBride, 7; Woollcott, 3.

²⁸⁰ McBride, 7; At least one critic regarded Wilson's decorative aesthetic as a propagandistic measure: "They have a distinct posterlike quality, and could some of them have been reproduced carefully as posters at the time of the conflict they would have been genuine aids to the department of propaganda," "MANET'S 'WAITRESS' ON EXHIBITION HERE: OTHER'S WORKS ON VIEW," *The Sun and New York Herald* (Feb. 9, 1920): 6

²⁸¹ "Dollar and scents," *Time* 12 (17) (Oct. 22, 1928): 35-36.

example, the soft washes of muted color that dominate the lower half of the scene and the intricate barbed wire that crisscrosses tautly across the page before curling unduly at its tips, some strands coated in red. Aesthetic admiration turns to repulsion, however, as the artist confronts viewers with the violently contorting bodies and manifest suffering of the three men whose flesh catches in this ornate snare. Throughout the series, Wilson jarringly invites viewers to desire the surroundings and bodies of his hauntingly fragile soldiers but to also behold their undoing.

However, though some critics both recognized and praised the aestheticizing element of Wilson's work, his apparent collusion with hegemonic attitudes toward nationalism and race ostensibly blinded other viewers to the tension between his brutal subject matter and the traditionally feminine aesthetic with which he visualized it. In his write-up for the *New York Tribune*, for example, Cortissoz altogether erases Wilson's ornamental flare: "with the crude technique of an artist indifferent to niceties of form...He gives us the facts of war, raw and bleeding. There is no beauty in his work. There is, in its place, unmistakable truth."²⁸² A fairly conservative critic, Cortissoz's willful disregard of the artist's decorative touches might suggest, as Lubin has, that Wilson's "oddly inappropriate... rococo sensibility" is aggressively unsettling and potentially subversive.²⁸³ Indeed, while Churchill Candee and McBride found ways to reconcile Wilson's ornate sensibilities with his masculine subjects, for Modernists of the day the adjective "decorative" already took on gendered and pejorative associations.

²⁸² Royal Cortissoz, "High Tide Now Reached in the Art Galleries: A Period Packed With Shows, Chiefly American," *New York Tribune* (Feb. 15, 1920): B5.

²⁸³ Lubin, *Grand Illusions*, 196.

In the early twentieth century, western culture increasingly associated ornament with popular fashion and feminine domesticity.²⁸⁴ In 1913, Elsie de Wolfe, a leading authority in interior design and an American fashion icon, published *The House in Good Taste*, which recommended an approach to decoration that married modern simplicity with eighteenth-century French revival furnishings. As discussed in my introduction, de Wolfe, along with her long-time partner Elizabeth Marbury and Anne Morgan, heiress to the Morgan banking fortune, was famously one third of the so-called “Versailles Triumvirate.” This group of influential and independently wealthy women held a cluster of elaborate apartments on Sutton Place, which attracted anxious suspicions about a powerful sapphic enclave in the heart of New York City (Figure 48). An acquaintance and occasional collaborator of Wilson’s, de Wolfe’s fame brought Rococo-inspired forms back into vogue: the fashionable elite regularly employed her to decorate their Manhattan homes, which, almost inevitably, graced the pages of *Town & Country* and *Harper’s Bazaar*. Like Madame de Pompadour before her, de Wolfe’s association with Rococo design deepened existing cultural stereotypes about the style’s essentially feminine character. Further, as interior design’s most visible representative, she led a career that seemingly confirmed beliefs about the femininity of decorative art more broadly. Notably, Anne Vanderbilt, Morgan, and de Wolfe purportedly recognized the ornamental potential of Wilson’s war scenes and expressed an interest in having Gobelins

²⁸⁴ We know that this painting is a self-portrait because the canvas bag that hangs from the room’s dresser reads “C. Wilson.” Because Wilson also adds signed the work at the bottom, this is clearly intended to denote the identity of the subject rather than function as a creative signature.

Manufactory in France weave them into wall tapestries.²⁸⁵ It is also perhaps worth mentioning here that Helen Churchill Candee, another of Wilson's most enthusiastic reviewers, was also a well-known interior designer and a feminist, pursuits that she brought together in 1900 in her book *How a Woman May Earn a Living*.²⁸⁶

Rather than a disinterested style, I argue that Wilson's Rococo edge is a subversive strategy.²⁸⁷ As Linda Nochlin writes in "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive" about a similar tendency in the work of Wilson's peer and friend, the lighthearted aesthetic often ascribed to the Rococo should not be understood as irreconcilable with social consciousness.²⁸⁸ In the case of Wilson and Stettheimer, their works' feminine manner is the means by which social consciousness is communicated. Wilson's subversions in this regard are particularly cogent when one considers the series within his contemporary cultural contexts. According to historian George Mosse, during the years of the First World War, the constructed norms that delimited gender took on an increased rigidity that required men to conform physically to a bourgeois "aesthetic of masculinity" to an unprecedented degree.²⁸⁹ In this system of culturally mandated gender display, George Chauncey adds, queerness was primarily attributed to men who exhibited "inversion of their ascribed gender status by assuming the sexual and other cultural roles ascribed to

²⁸⁵ Press Clipping probably from the *Boston Evening Transcript*, c. 1928. Claggett Wilson website, created and maintained by Claggett Wilson Read, "Memoirs & Articles," www.claggettwilson.com (accessed on January 6, 2016).

²⁸⁶ Incidentally, Churchill Candee's current claim to fame is her rumored status as the inspiration for Rose in the film *Titanic*.

²⁸⁷ Lubin articulates a similar reading of this strategy in *Grand Illusions*.

²⁸⁸ Linda Nochlin, "Florine Stettheimer: Rococo Subversive," in *Critical Issues in American Art: A Book of Readings*, edited by Mary Ann Calo (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998) 303-318.

²⁸⁹ Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 19.

women.”²⁹⁰ Wilson’s adoption of traditionally feminine aesthetics might be therefore read in this context as a means through which to queer the very forms he uses to render his scenes. A vernacular of style and suggestion, many urban queer men of the early twentieth century employed a manner of “dress and demeanor and an interest in the arts, décor, fashion, and manners that were often regarded by outsiders as effete, if not downright effeminate” in order to make their sexuality visible to men likewise inclined.²⁹¹ It is, I think, no coincidence that in his lone self-portrait in the series, *The Billet at Bouy*, Wilson places himself in a decorative interior (Figure 32). Looking every inch a dandy in uniform, Wilson smiles happily amidst his host’s admittedly tacky floral décor, “with its religious pictures, quaint wax flowers under glass, and old time chintz curtains.”²⁹² By infusing his scenes with Rococo forms and by choosing to picture himself within a decorative interior, Wilson eschews masculine expectations in favor of a conventionally feminine (and potentially queer) aesthetic mode and personal stance.

While the swirling linear play of Wilson’s barbed wire conjures associations with Rococo aesthetic, two scenes, *Boudoir of Madame la Comtesse H.....* and *Bacchus Survivor*, make that reference more explicit and, moreover, begin to reveal the artist’s employment of erotic humor (Figures 33 & 34). In the first, a recumbent German soldier

²⁹⁰ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 13.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

²⁹² “MARINE PORTRAYS VIVID EXPERIENCES: Paintings of Wilson Create Favorable Comment From Many Critics, *The Brooklyn Standard Union*, August 8, 1920, 17; this scene is remarkably similar to a well-established trope during the war, as described by historian David M. Kennedy: France described by American doughboys “was rich with history, an old country inhabited by old people. No observation of French life was more common than remarking the elderly women in black who seemed to be the only residents of the ruined towns behind the front... All signs, in short, confirmed the American myth of the Old World as an exhausted place, peopled by effete and even effeminate races,” 207.

sprawls onto a disheveled eighteenth-century-inspired French toile canopy bed. Because Wilson includes representative headgear for both a German officer and enlisted man, the soldier's military rank and, by extension, economic standing remains undisclosed. The man grips his bandages in pain or, perhaps, given his bloated stomach and sickly pallor, rigor mortis has seized his now-lifeless body. Though, on the one hand, the painting offers commentary on death's indifference to class politics, the scene, on the other hand, visually imitates and uncomfortably invites comparison with popular eighteenth-century erotic French illustrations. An especially pervasive trope in such scenes, an engraving for Jacques Rochette de La Morlière's erotic novel *Angola* from 1746 shows an unconscious and partly nude woman in the process of being inspected by the gaze of a male voyeur (Figure 49).²⁹³ A bookish allusion, to be sure, Wilson's painting is undeniably similar to scenes like the *Angola* print in both composition and power dynamics, as the German soldier, now exposed and emasculated by the feminine interior, helplessly languishes under the Madame's decorous visage. By leaving an empty and dangling frame wherein we imagine a likeness of the Madame's husband once sat, Wilson more closely mimics the narrative of the earlier trope and makes clear that his reversal of gender roles therein is an intentional act. Contemporary audiences may have read the feminization and—given the scene's eighteenth-century antecedent—implied rape of this German soldier as a mocking emasculation of and means of asserting power over an enemy and the nation he represents. The image's subtitle "Black death lay heavy in the heart of this exquisite flower" teases this reading, as a viewer might wonder precisely to what or whom "exquisite flower" refers: the boudoir, Madame H., or (morbidly) the languishing German

²⁹³ See also the engraving for the frontispiece for Claude-Joseph Dorat's *Les Sacrifices de l'Amour* from 1772, for example.

soldier.²⁹⁴ Yet, conversely, in creating this darkly sexual joke and in picturing vulnerable male bodies, Wilson also confronts viewers with a vision of war as a space wherein class and gender conventions are inverted and dismantled.

Bacchus Survivor similarly derives meaning from Rococo inspiration and engages in erotic humor. In a particularly verbose subtitle, Wilson describes the picturesque scene: “In the ruined garden of an old chateau in the Champagne country, there remains triumphant, the statue of Bacchus, chipped and scarred, but still laughing as he squeezes the stone grapes into the stone cup.” While United States audiences were no strangers to scenes illustrating the miraculous survival of European statuary, such images were overwhelmingly limited to Christian iconography, as in AEF Eight artist J.A. Smith’s *Pathway to Peace*, which shows soldiers carefully navigating through the ruins of a French cathedral under a surviving crucifix that looms over them like a sentinel from its Gothic window perch (Figure 50).²⁹⁵ Rather than a still-standing crucifix or sculpture of the Virgin Mary, Wilson focuses his brush on Bacchus, a pagan god of debauchery and pleasure, a figure notorious for his gender bending attire and sexual fluidity.

Like *Boudoir of Madame la Comtesse H.....*, *Bacchus Survivor* also elicits multifaceted interpretations. Perhaps, for much of Wilson’s audience, the laughing Bacchus functions as an embodiment of chaos, standing erect among society’s rubble as a mocking reminder of man’s folly. Still, Bacchus/Dionysus is also a figure easily employed

²⁹⁴ Interestingly, the Knoedler exhibition catalog shows that the title for the original showing read: “Boudoir of Mme. la Comtesse H---The great heavy black insect lay dead in the heart of this exquisite flower.”

²⁹⁵ As George Mosse notes, Christian imagery was pervasive the visual culture of the war: “Christian themes of death and resurrection are found on the postcards of all nations during the First World War,” in *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) 49.

in the creation of an iconography of queerness, as he was frequently described in mythology as taking male lovers, was often portrayed in classical art wearing feminine attire, and his Bacchanalia or Dionysian sexual celebrations have been characterized in both ancient and modern times as countercultural events.²⁹⁶ Moreover, Wilson's visual and textual description of his ephebe Bacchus sculpture as a liminal figure that exists somewhere between stone and flesh, "still laughing as he squeezes the stone grapes," has historically erotic connotations. The *Metamorphoses* by the Roman poet Ovid most famously exemplified this trope of sensual living stone in the story of Pygmalion, a sculptor who falls in love with a statue of his own creation named Galatea:

From snowy ivory he formed a girl,
Of beauty more than human, and fell in love...

At home, Pygmalion sought his fictive girl,
Lay down beside her, kissed her. She was warm.
He kissed again. His hands explored her breasts;
Explored, the ivory softened, lost its hardness
In his fingers as Hymettan wax
In sun is handled into many shapes;
The more it's worked the more it softens up.²⁹⁷

A manifestation of desire, the more Pygmalion fanaticizes and fondles the stone the more real for him Galatea becomes. The story of Pygmalion became in the eighteenth and nineteenth century a hugely popular theme in French art especially, like, for example, Jean-Léon Gérôme's painting *Pygmalion et Galatea* from 1892 (Figure 51). Like

²⁹⁶ Gilad Pavda, *Queer Nostalgia in Cinema and Pop Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) n.p.; Wilbur Underwood, a decadent poet and romantic correspondent of Wilson's in the early 1920s, is also notably interested in Bacchus imagery. Underwood draws an effete faun surrounded in grape vines and a quote by Virgil ("Resonare Doce Silvas") in a draft for a frontispiece from 1897, Wilbur Underwood Papers, box 5, Miscellany Drawings and Sketches. Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

²⁹⁷ Ovid's The Story of Pygmalion from *Metamorphoses* Book 10, translated and reprinted in George L. Hersey, *Falling in Love with Statues: Artificial Humans from Pygmalion to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 91-92.

Gérôme's Galatea, Bacchus's upper body twists as if coming to life from the head down, slowly breaking free from the stone pedestal that restrains him. Likewise, just as the color of Galatea's body gradates upward from cold ivory to flesh tones as her skin blushes with life, so too does Bacchus's skin blossom from violet at his feet to warmer shades as the eye scans up to his smiling and parting mouth. For viewers who recognize the erotic potential of this scene, Wilson's layering of chaste and sexual themes again sets up a coded visual joke.

Today, almost a century removed, the structure of Wilson's humor is difficult to outline. Critics certainly recognized in Wilson's war scenes an uneasy elision between charm and horror, leading McBride, for example, to ally his works to Francisco Goya's *Desastres de la Guerra*.²⁹⁸ While rare and circumspectly worded, particular contemporary reviews and accounts of Wilson's work make it clear that some of the artist's peers recognized his naughty visual gags and references. Though culture today has mythologized the pre-Stonewall queer past as a time of tightly-shut closet doors, gay communities thrived throughout western urban centers and many privileged individuals, including Wilson, were able to safely express non-normative sexualities with relative openness. For these savvy queer urbanites, Wilson's humor was readable in ways that it may not have been for the average onlooker.²⁹⁹ Queer writer and photographer Carl Van Vechten was moved to respond with a dirty witticism upon viewing one of Wilson's paintings at the Art Independents show on the roof of the Waldorf-Astoria in 1921 and critic Henry McBride recounted the interaction in his review for the *New York Herald*:

²⁹⁸ McBride, 7.

²⁹⁹ Although, as discussed in my Introduction, Wilson's homoerotic coding may have been more visible to general audiences than today's viewers might suspect.

“Near by... is a decorative male figure by Claggett Wilson, bearing aloft a platter of fruit,” his body “partly screened by a flock of blue and green birds. The apparition of these birds struck a brilliant mot from Mr. Carl Van Vechtem on Friday night” [sic]. Regrettably, McBride concedes, said “mot” is too rude to publish “in any of the higher class New York journals.” “Those interested,” the critic tells us “may obtain the mot by enclosing a stamped envelope to Mr. Van Vechten direct.”³⁰⁰ Though daring not to speak its name, McBride’s description is evocative enough that most readers needn’t write Mr. Van Vechten in order to understand the thrust of his undoubtedly phallic joke. Such moments reveal a tension between how Wilson’s work was popularly discussed and how it was received by an informed queer subculture able to recognize the artist’s erotic references. As historian George Chauncey has argued of playwright Noël Coward, Wilson’s work would have addressed audiences in varying ways depending upon their knowledge of queer culture, covertly transforming “public gathering[s] into... ‘gay space[s].’”³⁰¹ In other words, Wilson’s art appeals to a range of audiences in a collapsed context wherein viewers might enjoy the works on multiple and sometimes contradictory planes.

The artist’s employment of erudite sexual humor, I would argue, most productively relates to high comedy strategies used in contemporary theater.³⁰² While best known for painting, Wilson’s career includes designing stage sets and theatrical costumes

³⁰⁰ Henry McBride, “The Independent Show” originally published in *New York Herald*, republished in *El Palacio, Semi-Monthly Review of the Arts and Sciences in the American Southwest*, X, n. 9 (Apr. 1, 1921): 5. “Mot” here is short for “bon mot,” a term borrowed from the French, meaning “joke.”

³⁰¹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 106-107.

³⁰² Though referencing theater, in *Grand Illusions* Lubin couches Wilson’s works in productive conversation with war cinema from the 1920s.

and, moreover, many of his friends and patrons were prominent Broadway figures. Most famously represented by the plays of Oscar Wilde, high comedy productions typically center on upper-class society characters and employ clever dialogue intended for specifically educated audiences. While high comedy has a well-mannered surface, seemingly dedicated to “outmoded codes of behavior,” queer playwrights like Wilde and Noël Coward (a contemporary of Wilson) historically employed its strategies to test societal norms.³⁰³ In Coward’s updated version of the drawing-room drama, a high comedy staple, posh characters leisurely sit and socialize, cracking erudite jokes. One common humor construction in high comedy, which Wilson’s art shares, is the “double entendre.” Employed since the fourteenth century by playwrights such as Shakespeare and, of course, Oscar Wilde, double entendre describes a word, phrase, or symbol that has two interpretations, one of which is usually sexual. It is up to the audience to recognize this double meaning.³⁰⁴ Though affluent, Coward’s characters are often sexually rebellious and morally bankrupt.³⁰⁵ Much of his humor is ambiguously referential and easy to miss, a trait that led fellow playwright Somerset Maugham to liken Coward’s stage language to “spoken hieroglyphs”³⁰⁶ If it is possible to understand Wilson’s paintings as a visualization of high comedy, then we might begin to imagine an audience for whom his

³⁰³ Steve Vineberg, *High Comedy in American Movies: Class and Humor from the 1920s to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005) 17; John Lahr, *Coward: The Playwright* (London: First Discus Printing, 1983) 42.

³⁰⁴ Strategies such as a “black-out,” wherein the spot-light is killed following a joke’s delivery, sometimes help to signal viewers to read the situation as comical, Andrew Davis, *Baggy Pants Comedy: Burlesque and the Oral Tradition* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011) 89.

³⁰⁵ Lahr, 42.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

erotically-charged, double-edged humor and his allegiance to aristocratic references and styles are not only readable but perhaps even rhetorically predictable.

Indeed, some of Wilson's reviewers recognized a certain theatrical quality to his works and especially his war scenes. Describing *Symphony of Terror*, a reviewer for *The New York Times* writes: "in the background stretches a row of men in gas masks as if they were coming on the stage in a modern opera bouffe," adding "[t]he artist, obviously, has played with the idea of the resemblance to a stage scene" (Figure 52).³⁰⁷ Wilson's captions make clear that the compositions' resemblance to theater is not coincidental. In his caption for the scene *Hospital*, for example, he writes "the feet of the row in front of me stuck up like footlights at the play" (Figure 53). The notion of war as a theatrical space is not of Wilson's own invention. Indeed, cultural historian Paul Fussell discusses the basis and iteration of the phrase "theater of war" to describe the front lines and suggests that the association organically follows: "The most obvious reason that 'theater' and modern war seem so compatible is that modern wars are fought by conscripted armies, whose members know they are only temporarily playing their ill-learned parts."³⁰⁸ Wilson amplifies this conventionalized metaphor here and renders it literal.

While, like in Coward's plays, the highbrowed multivalency of Wilson's humor in *Boudoir of Madame la Comtesse H....* and *Bacchus Survivor* renders queer references slippery enough to be exhibited without controversy, it is nonetheless initially difficult to explain a scene like *Encounter in the Darkness*, which is easily the artist's most brazen reference to queer sexuality (Figure 35). On its surface, *Encounter in the Darkness*

³⁰⁷ "NOTES ON CURRENT ART," *The New York Times* (Feb. 8, 1920): 10.

³⁰⁸ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 240.

portrays an American soldier overtaking a German in hand-to-hand combat. Framed by a schematically rendered wooden structure, the wrestling pair is backlit and silhouetted against a deep blue sky with graphite lines delineating, perhaps, a heraldic shield and adding a decorative quality to the otherwise simple aesthetic program. As Lubin notes, the composition is “patently theatrical” as viewers see the “‘onstage’ action as if through a proscenium arch made from ruined timbers of a shelled farmhouse.”³⁰⁹ Though in a war context, the ambiguity of the title *Encounter*, as opposed to, say, “fight,” and the scene itself, which shows no weaponry, leaves the nature of the encounter ambiguous. Viewers today easily recognize the scene as a potentially sexual one, the top figure thrusting forward flanked by the bottom figure’s open legs, the former penetrating the latter with an unseen bayonet, knife, or otherwise. Made unmistakably clear by the soldiers’ headgear, it is important to note that Wilson positions his “American boy” on top, a choice that reinforces the series’ nationalist reading as depicting American triumph.

This double meaning, the “encounter” as fight versus the “encounter” as sexual contact, relates to the theater strategy of the double entendre. The elision of combat and sex is not without a history. Artists have explored the erotics of war for centuries, from the intimacy between Achilles and Patroclus in Greek representations to sexually charged images of Joan of Arc in eighteenth-century erotica (Figure 54). Though certainly erotic, the trope of militarized sex often doubles as a demonstration of power, as the Greeks often employed scenes of sexualized violence as a way to illustrate dominance in battle. A more contemporary point of reference, men’s fitness magazines like *Physical Culture*—that incidentally or, perhaps, covertly courted queer readership in the early to mid-twentieth

³⁰⁹ Lubin, *Grand Illusions*, 198.

century—often filled their pages with classicized images of muscular nude men wrestling (Figure 55). For gay male viewers, scenes of scantily clad men flexing or tussling offered widely available and socially acceptable substitutes for more explicit and dangerous to own pornography.³¹⁰ Moreover, perhaps, as Lubin suggests, the violence pictured in *Encounter in the Darkness* may even nod to the implicit physical risk queer men of the day faced in “illicit sexual encounters braved by strangers in parks and public restrooms.”³¹¹

As a pictorial device, the silhouette is a loaded choice for depicting this scene for two reasons. First, Wilson again employs style as a means through which to erode gender expectations. Considered more a craft than a fine art, popular discourse largely described it as a decorative technique and the creation of which a suitable pursuit for upper class ladies. As a result of this characterization, the style was culturally gendered in the feminine.³¹² Second, if we take this scene as sexual, the anonymity and ambiguity of the silhouette in *Encounter* adds titillating mystery and awakens greater longing. As art historian Jonathan Weinberg points out, “[t]he erotic is often a matter of revealing only so much and letting our imagination do the rest.”³¹³ By illustrating the two soldiers in

³¹⁰ Wilson owned copies of similar magazines *Superman* and *Health and Strength* from the 1930s that were still among his belongings when he died. These magazines are now in the Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

³¹¹ Lubin goes on in *Grand Illusions* to suggest that the work conveys “the unacknowledged erotic underpinnings of war, aggression, and death-lust,” 199.

³¹² A 1918 article by Virginia Robie makes clear the gendering of this practice. According to Robie, silhouettist “Patience Wright... lived when the silhouette was the rage of the hour, when albums were filled with portraits in black and white... when the gentle craft was taught in fashionable schools for young ladies, together with music, manners, needlework and French,” “The Decorative Value of the Silhouette,” *The Art World*, 3, n. 4 (Jan. 1918): 348-351.

³¹³ Weinberg, *Male Desire*, 45.

Encounter as indistinguishable, morphing together into one chimerical form, the artist invites the viewer to wonder at the bodies' undisclosed contours.

The silhouette as a concept in Western literary and visual production often correlates to amorous longing. An origin of painting most often credited to Pliny the Elder, a woman traces her parting lover's shadow as a means of capturing his physical trace.³¹⁴ Wilson's contemporaries also discussed and visualized the silhouette as an erotic provocation, expressed, for example, by famed sexologist Havelock Ellis in his book *Erotic Symbolism* of 1906:

returning home one evening after a game of billiards with a friend, when, on chancing to raise his eyes, [a merchant in Paris] saw against a lighted window the shadow of a woman changing her chemise. He fell in love with that shadow and returned to the spot every evening for many months to gaze at the window. Yet—and herein lies the fetichism—he made no attempt to see the woman or to find out who she was; the shadow sufficed [sic].³¹⁵

Perhaps inspired by Ellis's tale, novelist Josephine Daskam Bacon employs a similar device in a romantic short story titled "Alice Through the Window Glass" for *Harper's Bazaar* in February 1920, coincidentally the same month that Wilson's works hung at Knoedler's.³¹⁶ In the story, illustrated by Frank Street, a young man has fallen in love with a woman's silhouette, who "appeared to be a moving statue... whose face in profile... looked like a Greek frieze," and he spends the rest of the story tracking down his mysterious shadowy beloved (Figure 56). Widely circulated throughout Europe in the

³¹⁴ Nancy Forgione, "'The Shadow Only': Shadow and Silhouette in Late Nineteenth-Century Paris," *The Art Bulletin*, 81, n. 3 (Sep. 1999): 506.

³¹⁵ Havelock Ellis, *Erotic Symbolism, The Mechanism of Detumescence, The Psychic State in Pregnancy, vol. V* (1906), in *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company Publishers, 1920) 8.

³¹⁶ Josephine Daskam Bacon, "Alice Through the Looking Glass: When a Lonely Man Falls in Love with a Shadow," illustrated by Frank Street, *Harper's Bazaar* (Feb. 20, 1920): 6.

years during and just after the war, erotic Art Deco postcards by artists such as Manni Grosze featured amorous couplings and naked women in darkened silhouette (Figure 57).

While Wilson's erotic double entendre in *Encounter in the Darkness* seems fairly obvious to today's viewers, his war series was exhibited and published without controversy, discussed as patriotic representations of American heroics. Tellingly, none of Wilson's critics ever addressed *Encounter* in their reviews, a somewhat startling omission that could—like double entendre—invite two complementary interpretations. First, the rather remarkable absence could speak to some critics' unwillingness to “out” their own recognition of the scene. Second, as I will argue, it is quite possible, if not probable, that most reviewers were incapable of reading the painting in this way, their epistemological situations altogether precluding it.

The Soldierly Body as National Emblem and Locus of Queer Fantasy

It is difficult for current viewers to imagine a worldview so encompassing that it would eclipse the ostensibly obvious sexual content of Wilson's *Encounter in the Darkness*. However, as Weinberg writes: “I do not think we can overestimate the power of hypermasculinity to act as a screen in the period between the wars.”³¹⁷ Indeed, the average American viewer's understanding of the series was impacted by the persistence in the twentieth century of nineteenth-century discourses characterizing war as the ultimate demonstration of virility, a cleansing social force that could purge insidious effeminacy from the culture at large. As Leo Braudy has argued, twentieth-century western nations

³¹⁷ Weinberg, *Male Desire*, 47.

“popularly believed that the military was the place where boys learned to be men.”³¹⁸ This belief heavily shaped the preparedness debate that consumed the media prior to the nation’s entry into the war in 1917, sometimes settling into disputes around whether war was a necessary evil to cure the United States of undesirable social behaviors. In 1915 American journalist James O’Donnell Bennett, for example, declared war “the greatest discipliner and steadier of a people” and scolded readers who may have hitherto considered Europeans “degenerate” or “effete,” declaring “it was these ‘effete’ gentlemen with arms of bronze and hairy breasts” that have entered willingly into battle, thus confirming their manliness.³¹⁹ Employing similar language, Rear Admiral Bradley A. Fiske shared concerns about America’s declining manhood at a dinner honoring General Wood in early 1917 where he delivered a speech contending that war could help the nation correct the feminizing forces damaging society. George Washington and General Grant, Fiske imagines, would be “shocked to see the difference in manner of carriage between the young men of today” and those born in more rigorous times.³²⁰ For war to best deliver its masculinizing tonic, Hamilton Fish Armstrong, the editorial chairman of *The Daily Princetonian*, asserts that America has a “biological” imperative to implement compulsory enlistment because too often the “cream” of the population (i.e. men of “the better sort... with the finest ideals of patriotism and duty, of hardihood and self-

³¹⁸ Leo Baudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) 373; this sentiment is also discussed in Angela K. Smith’s *Gender and Warfare in the Twentieth Century Textual Representations* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), among other sources.

³¹⁹ James O’Donnell Bennett, “SEES-GREAT WAR AS A DISCIPLINE: J. O’Donnell Bennett Tells of Some of the Fine Qualities Born Among Fighters,” *The New York Times* (Oct. 27, 1915): 3.

³²⁰ “FISKE SAYS NATION IS EFFEMINIZED: At Dinner to Gen. Wood, Admiral Asserts Washington and Grant Would Not Know Us,” *The New York Times* (Feb. 11, 1917): 1.5.

sacrifice... of education and attainments”) are likelier to volunteer for service than are those men of a weaker sort who may benefit from its trials.³²¹

Even those who argued against the preparedness movement resigned themselves to this powerful cultural sentiment. Harvard professor Walter B. Cannon, for example, agreed that war is a productive cultural discipliner, but suggests that athletics might be a suitable substitute, likewise able to remove “any tendency to superciliousness, childishness, snobbishness,” all traits strongly associated with women at this time.³²² Many intellectuals on both sides relied on the language of eugenics and social purity to make their point. Stanford President and famed pacifist David Starr Jordan, for example, warned that war leaves “inferior stock for parentage” and argues that even “[a]ssuming such discipline gives increased physical and mental vigor, that fact would not appear in heredity.”³²³ Famed psychologist Havelock Ellis concurred, stating “as savagery passes into civilization, [war’s] beneficial effects are lost.”³²⁴ That such powerful names were

³²¹ Hamilton Fish Armstrong, “BIOLOGICAL NEED OF CONSCRIPTION FIRST: Then War Would Begin by Taking the Whole Milk of Population and Not the Cream, as in England,” *The New York Times* (Jun. 21, 1916): 10.

³²² “ATHLETICS A SUBSTITUTE FOR WAR: Dr. Walter B. Cannon of Harvard Says Physical Contests Will Provide Outlet for Warlike Emotions,” *The New York Times* (Apr. 25, 1915) 5.9; John Pettegrew discusses this strange elision of war and athletics in *Brutes in Suits: Male Sensibility in America, 1890-1920* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007).

³²³ David Starr Jordan, “How Wars Breed Nations of Weaklings: A Distinguished Educator’s Interesting Argument that War, by Destroying the Young and Brave, Destroys the Qualities of Virility and Courage in a Nation with a Glorious Military History,” *The Times Dispatch* (Richmond, VA) (Mar. 29, 1914): 60; a similar sentiment is expressed here: “SCIENTISTS ATTACK THEORIES ON WAR: Conflict Is Not Necessary to the Virility of Any Nation,” *The Sun* (Dec. 30, 1916): 4; and here: Edward Marshall interviewing Dr. Frederic C. Howe, United States Commissioner of Immigration, “EUROPEAN WAR SURE TO HARM FUTURE AMERICAN TYPE: Preponderance of Women, Children and Deteriorated Males to be Expected in Immigration, Says Dr. Howe, the New Commissioner,” *The New York Times* (Oct. 4, 1914): 4.5

³²⁴ Havelock Ellis, “War Is Not Necessary in Man’s ‘Struggle for Existence’: Havelock Ellis Shows that German Militaristic Kultur Is an Ideal Useless and Out of Date, a Relic of an

forced to weigh in to counter beliefs about war's power (or lack there of) to purge society of its undesirables makes clear that this conceit was well established among United States readers. However, after the United States' entry into the war, debates about the nation's involvement were tantamount to treason. Any hint of disagreement with America's participation threw the dissenter's character and even physiology into question. Possibly one of the boldest examples of this silencing comes from neurologist Mary Keyt Isham, a writer for *The New York Times*. In late December of 1917 she writes that "the peace-at-any-price pacifist" was mentally defective and bore "a very close relation" to "a certain type of unconscious pervert."³²⁵ Though not synonymous, "pervert" was a common term used in the American presses to suggest queerness. Certainly, this rhetoric enacted real violence upon the minds and bodies of those who did not fit the masculine ideal, justifying oppressive legal and medical measures against queer men in particular. At the same time, such a worldview also sometimes screened queer soldiers from scrutiny, as the idea of a soldier being also gay proved difficult for many to reconcile.

The donning of a uniform has historically been an integral part of the nationalizing and masculinizing process. Because western society imbues the uniform with a lexicon of positive characteristics, the uniform, in turn, superficially transforms the wearer's body into the perfect embodiment of a nation's ideals.³²⁶ In the 1917 article "What the Uniform

Outgrown Primitive State—Allied Countries' Higher Civilization," *New York Tribune* (Jul. 11, 1915): 2.

³²⁵ Mary Keyt Isham, "Passivism Diagnosed as Disease of the Mind: Suffering a Genuine Pleasure to Peace-at-Any-Price Pacifist, Who Cannot Help Standing By and Watching Spectacle of Prussian Cruelty," *The New York Times* (Dec. 30, 1917): 7.11-7.12.

³²⁶ Craik, 29.

means to the Navy and the Marine Corps,” Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels recounted a story in order to demonstrate the costume’s positive effects:

The man who wears a uniform worthily embodies the best American spirit. The reply to the question, which a slacker asked, ‘What are the best styles of clothing for a young man this fall?’ was ‘The uniform of the fighting forces of his country.’ The reply so shamed him that he went to the recruiting station and enlisted... With the wearing of the uniform comes a new and erect bearing, and its helpful accompaniment is the welcoming of discipline. And without discipline... there is no hope that American manhood can give the best account of itself.³²⁷

In other words, the uniform was a garment thought capable of physically and socially transforming the wearer and, moreover, that transformation is one that always arches toward and improves upon manliness. Military dress codes had more at stake than merely convention. As Fussell notes, the ideal soldier is predictable and disciplined and his bodily comportment is “tightly focused, with no looseness or indication of comfort about him.”³²⁸ As the olive-drab outer shell of the soldier, the ideal uniform should also reflect that same control, transforming any physique into a streamlined and highly legible body. “However a man was really built,” Fussell states, “his tailor [can replace] his old short-legged pear-shaped body with a lean well-muscled... body with long legs” and broad shoulders.³²⁹

For American viewers steeped in nationalist rhetoric, the uniform and the soldier’s body would have represented masculinity at its best and most indisputable. Indeed, discussing the potentially “dandified and dudish” appearance of police

³²⁷ Josephus Daniels, Secretary of the Navy, “What the Uniform Means to the Navy and the Marine Corps,” in *Our Navy and How to Know It*, ed. Albert A. Hopkins (New York: Munn & Co., Inc., 1917) 1.

³²⁸ Paul Fussell, *Uniforms: Why We Are What We Wear* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002) 14.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

wristwatches, *The New York Times* reassures readers that their concerns are unfounded based on the fact that soldiers had worn them in the First World War:

It is of historic record, however, that soldiers against whom there was no suspicion of effeminacy really started the wearing of ‘watches’ in this manner, and that they continued it because they found the doing so of real and practical convenience in their daily business... Surely the New York policemen would not lose anything of manly dignity if they fell in with a practice that has been found good by officers and privates alike on every firing line in the great war.³³⁰

The uniform, therefore, functioned as a sort of social camouflage, imbuing the soldier’s body with an assumed credibility and heteronormativity. To these ends, queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that “the political and the erotic, necessarily obscure and misrepresent each other—but in ways that offer important and shifting affordances to all parties in historical gender and class struggles.”³³¹ Indeed, by their inevitable participation in nationalist politics, early twentieth-century representations of the uniformed-body moved largely above suspicion, even those produced by artists like Wilson or illustrator J.C. Leyendecker that also had decidedly homoerotic connotations (Figure 58).

However, at the same time that societal beliefs concealed Wilson’s sexual subversions, his focus on the soldier’s body also reads as a response to common experiences and fantasies of gay men during the war. Though the military harshly punished queer men when caught, the confusion of the front, which brought men from various backgrounds together into close proximity and away from the watchful gaze of

³³⁰ “TOPICS OF THE TIMES: Their Fears Have No Foundation,” *The New York Times* (Sep. 4, 1917): 10.

³³¹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) 15.

their families, also enabled many to experiment sexually for the first time.³³² After becoming increasingly aware of this fact in 1918 and 1919, some in America's medical community anxiously warned against the seemingly growing social phenomenon. In an article titled "Homosexuality—A Military Menace" from 1918, Dr. Albert Abrams describes the situation as insidious and almost inevitable, cautioning readers against "the corruption that must necessarily ensue among the soldierly if ['homosexualist' clubs are] not summarily suppressed." "It is a matter of common knowledge," he goes on, "what propinquity and the impossibility of satisfying sexual desire in the natural way will do in encouraging perverse acts."³³³ Fed and partly inspired by the libertine experiences and reputations of men in the European theater of war, the uniform and the venerated men who wore them became mainstays in both textual and visual representations of queer fantasy in the years that followed. The homoeroticization of the military's masculine aesthetic and homosocial environs during the First World War and interwar years is well documented and is elaborated upon further in the following chapter.

As established in my first chapter, Wilson worked very hard to craft a public image that would allow him to safely navigate the New York art world and American society more broadly. His identity as "the Marine" was a large part of that strategy. Notably, Florine Stettheimer featured a uniform-clad Wilson in *The Cathedrals of Wall Street* in 1939, suggesting that the soldier remained part of his personal identity and public allure for decades after his service (Figure 59). Wilson's emphasis on the uniform and

³³² Paul Baker and Jo Stanley, *Hello Sailor!: The Hidden History of Gay Life at Sea* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2003).

³³³ Albert Abrams, "Homosexuality: A Military Menace," *Medical Review of Reviews* 24 (1918): 528.

other patriotic trappings in his art and public persona invited a heteronormatizing gaze. The American public's willful faith in the soldierly-body as always-already respectable allowed his both his body and his body of work to move through society relatively unscathed, his general audience either unable or unwilling to see the alternative.

The Afterlife of Wilson's War Scenes

Having successfully debuted the paintings to the New York gallery scene, Wilson solicited his acquaintance W.H. Fox, director of the Brooklyn Museum, in May of 1920 to facilitate a nationally touring exhibition of his war paintings.³³⁴ Fox obliged, pitching Wilson's show to several of his connections at museums and galleries throughout the east coast and mid-western states. Though Fox vouched for the quality of the works, telling the secretary at the Detroit Institute of Arts, for example, that the exhibition would "make a very novel and attractive show," the museum officials unanimously and roundly rejected the proposal.³³⁵ While some expressed interest in Wilson's other work, all concluded that the time for American war scenes had passed. Cornelia B. Sage Quinton, Director of the Albright Gallery in Buffalo New York, put it thusly:

In regard to the Claggett Wilson pictures, I am sorry but my people here do not want any more war pictures. I am sure the collection is all right but they rather stopped me on the war question and so I think I will 'call that off,' at least for the present. I am sure it is a good one if you selected it.³³⁶

³³⁴ Claggett Wilson to W.H. Fox, 20 May 1920, Brooklyn Museum Archives. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

³³⁵ From W.H. Fox to Mr. Clyde H. Burroghs, Secretary at the Detroit Institute of Arts, 4 June 1920. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

³³⁶ Cornelia B. Sage Quinton, Director of The Buffalo Fine Arts Academy, Albright Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY to W.H. Fox, 10 June 1920. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

George L. Herdle and Dudley Crafts Watson, the directors at the Memorial Art Gallery in Rochester, NY and the Milwaukee Arts Institute respectively, concurred, the former stating “if the collection is dominated by war pictures I doubt whether we shall be able to show it” and the latter bluntly declaring “we have quite determined to eliminate all war pictures during the coming year.”³³⁷ Indeed, it is clear from his initial letters that Fox had known of this building sentiment toward war scenes; had anticipated such a reaction, acknowledging to his addressees that the Brooklyn Museum was also “somewhat fed up with war pictures;” and had even tried to head off these concerns by attesting to the works’ merit as “an interpretation of the emotions aroused by the War... not purely objective in character.”³³⁸ These assurances, it seems, fell on unbending ears. Though Wilson and Fox later collaborated on a national tour of the artist’s Spanish scenes that would prove relatively more successful, it is safe to say that this earlier campaign was an abject failure.

Unable to further exhibit his war paintings in traditional art spaces, Wilson was forced to look to smaller military-focused venues like the Victory Hall Association.³³⁹ Following their initial warm reception, the galleries’ rejection of Wilson’s series is messy to explain. Despite all the heavy praise, Wilson, in fact, sold just two canvases from the series’ Knoedler’s debut and the others, it seems, were at some point procured by the

³³⁷ George L. Herdle, Director of The Memorial Art Gallery of Rochester, NY to W.H. Fox, 8 June 1920. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives; Dudley Crafts Watson, Director of the Milwaukee Arts Institute to W.H. Fox, 11 June 1920. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

³³⁸ W.H. Fox to Mr. Blake-More Goodwin, Curator of the Toledo Museum of Art, 28 May 1920. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

³³⁹ “NOTES ON CURRENT ART,” *The New York Times* (Aug. 15, 1920): 12.

family of Adolph Lewisohn, one of Wilson's main patrons, and eventually gifted to the Smithsonian American Art Museum where they have mostly sat in storage. In this respect, the lifespan of Wilson's war art is typical of the American art produced in response to the Great War. Of the fate of the AEF Eight images, Alfred Emile Cornebise writes that "few people were interested in war art in the 1920s and early 1930s" and "[t]he U.S. Army seemed as eager to divest itself of the art as it had been to discharge its creators."³⁴⁰ Their art, too, has mostly lived in storage at the Smithsonian. Writing for *Vogue* in April of 1920, Marion E. Fenton delivered, as it turns out, a somewhat generous forecast for the future of American art of the First World War: "it is doubtful whether any one of the canvases it has brought, striking though they are, will be honoured even so long as were the famous portraits of Napoleon on his white horse or Meissonier's cavalry charges."³⁴¹ Ultimately, the excitement around Wilson's war art in New York and the popular press burned in a bright flash of acclaim and then quickly expired.

Still, in addition to matters of taste and the critical dissatisfaction with America's war art that the nation's poor showing at the Allied War Salon engendered, the public's revulsion was surely sharpened by frustrations about the war and its aftermath. Not long after peace was declared, American presses began sounding off about disappointments about the Treaty of Versailles, distrust of the League of Nations, and growing resentments toward the government's failure to uphold their end of the social contract: the belief among labor movements, racial minorities, and feminists that their active participation in

³⁴⁰ Cornebise, 57 and 59; Nibbe agrees: "By 1920 major museums had closed their doors to military pictures and exhibition committees reverted to their peacetime preferences..." "America built the necessary memorials... but otherwise tried to put the war behind them as quickly as possible, 481 and 482.

³⁴¹ Marion E. Fenton, "ART," *Vogue*, 77, n. 7 (Apr., 1920): 86, 140.

the war efforts would be repaid with “social, political, and professional equality.”³⁴² Indeed, in his influential book *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* from 1989, historian Modris Eksteins writes: “For many the war became absurd in retrospect, not because of the war experience in itself but because of the failure of the postwar experience to justify the war.”³⁴³ This retrospective absurdity that became firm within a matter of months increasingly rendered celebratory war art incongruous with current and rapidly evolving politics. It is, after all, difficult to view war as a romantic undertaking when faced with international death tolls in the millions. Simply put, Americans no longer had confidence that war could somehow keep the world safe.³⁴⁴ C. Clipson Sturgis in the *American Magazine of Art* articulated the popular wish to leave such war art behind: “We do not wish to remember the submarine’s dastardly attacks nor the poison gas, nor any other engine of war which was but the means to an end. We wish to remember our ideals.”³⁴⁵ With the patriotic fervor of wartime now tempered by postwar disappointments, Wilson’s scenes might have seemed a bit tone-deaf.

Conclusion

As I have shown, Wilson’s war paintings are at once traditionally nationalistic and also subversive in his queer reimagining of the western front. Because of his soldier

³⁴² Kennedy, 362; Keene, 163.

³⁴³ Eksteins, 297.

³⁴⁴ David Reynolds discusses this in “America’s ‘Forgotten War’ and the Long Twentieth Century,” in *World War I and American Art*, edited by Robert Cozzolino, Anne Claussen Knutson, David M. Lubin, et. al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016) 19-29.

³⁴⁵ C. Clipson Sturgis, “War’s Teachings,” *American Magazine of Art* (May 1919): 251.

status and the paintings' apparent confirmation of myths already popular among his white and middle- to upper-class audience, Wilson's series appeared to be an authoritative and highly respectable view of the American front. Ultimately, it was Wilson's very collusion with conservative American beliefs about the war and depiction of the soldierly-body that enabled his sexual interventions. However, after the initial gut rejection of war art had subsided, by the time the scenes reemerged in 1928 with the publication of *The War Paintings of Claggett Wilson: With Appreciations by Alexander Woollcott and Henry McBride* published by J.H. Sears & Company in New York, remaining vestiges of "the decorative" had been critically "trumped by the intellectual asceticism of modernism."³⁴⁶ The large, elegantly printed book sold for \$10 in a very limited release.³⁴⁷ Though praised, the book ultimately had little impact on Wilson's career or the longevity of the series.

Early twentieth-century art critics and creators increasingly invoked the decorative arts pejoratively as the feminine other to the masculine force of Modernism.³⁴⁸ According to art historian Bram Dijkstra, this marriage between Modernism and masculinity is foundational, formed during the avant-garde's fin de siècle inception:

to be a stylistic innovator in the arts was to use artistic muscle to push aside any potential accusation of artistic effeminacy. To be original was to be masculine in the best sense. To rebel against the 'fathers'—the great satraps of academic art—was to be the toughest kid on the block in the realm of art. The antifeminine mentality and the artistic avant-garde went hand in hand.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁶ Woollcott and McBride; Coffin, et. al., 10.

³⁴⁷ *Publishers Weekly*, 114, pt. 1 (Sep. 22, 1928): 1269.

³⁴⁸ Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland, "Introduction," in *Women Artists and the Decorative Arts*, eds. Bridget Elliott and Janice Helland (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003) 2.

³⁴⁹ Dijkstra, 207.

Typifying these sentiments in “The Decorative Art of Today” from 1925, Le Corbusier notoriously dismisses “decorative objects” as cheap bobbles purchased by “shop girls.”³⁵⁰ Christopher Reed argues convincingly that the masculine bravado of Le Corbusier’s rhetoric is informed by deepening associations between the decorative and queerness, that he positions his minimalist style as a tonic for the comparatively effeminate work of interior design.³⁵¹

Given the contemporary gendering of ornament, it seems worth noting that Wilson’s most enthusiastic supporters in the press—including Helen Churchill Candee, Augusta Owen Patterson, Henry McBride, and Alexander Woolcott—were women and queer men, and, further, that his paintings were most regularly reproduced in fashion-oriented publications more geared to a female readership. Time and the growing field of art history and criticism in the early twentieth century was not forgiving in regard to “decorative” art. Feminist art historian Norma Broude has noted that early Modernist art critics, in an effort to fashion a compelling legacy for later styles, sometimes crafted an improbably linear narrative wherein artists pushed increasingly toward austerity.³⁵² Austere, Wilson was not. The question about the affects of Modernism’s uncomfortable relationship with ornament upon Wilson’s art is one to which I will return at more length in my conclusion.

After the war, Wilson continued to buck against the masculinizing trend in Modernism, diving further into the decorative. While, in 1920, Wilson fit the model of a

³⁵⁰ Le Corbusier, *The Decorative Art of Today* (1925), translated and introduced by James I. Dunnett (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987) 87.

³⁵¹ Reed, 133.

³⁵² Norma Broude, *Impressionism: A Feminist Reading, The Gendering of Art, Science, and Nature* (New York: Rizzoli, 1991).

modern artist, his enduring investment in the decorative increasingly placed him at odds with the movement's growing cult of the pared-down and hyper-masculine. Perhaps, too, once the public's nationalistic zeal was tamped down by the social reality of the war's repercussions, the cultural beliefs about American heroics and the soldierly body that had shielded his art from sexual suspicion were no longer able to keep such anxieties at bay. His work eventually suppressed under this discursive tide toward aggressively masculine definitions of Modern art, Wilson found himself uncomfortably located at the intersection of gender and sexuality, his unwillingness to conform in his art to norms of the former threatening to betray and make visible his subversion of the latter.

Chapter Three

A Portrait of Alfred Lunt as a “swarthy, long-jawed Basque”

Around 1923, Alfred Lunt, one half of Broadway’s favorite acting team ‘The Lunts,’ posed for his friend Claggett Wilson, the latter reimagining the former as a man from Basque Country, a culturally-autonomous region along the western border joining Spain and France (Figure 60). The oil on canvas portrait features a flushed and boyish Lunt who dons traditional Basque costuming and gazes dreamily out at the viewer, chin perched atop crossed arms that support his weight as he casually leans against a red, earthen wall. Though the National Portrait Gallery in Washington D.C. lists the work simply as *Alfred Lunt*, the image’s explicit connection to the actor is a relatively recent development in the history of its reception.³⁵³ In January 1923, Knoedler & Company Gallery in New York exhibited the painting under the title *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*, hanging it alongside other Spanish scenes by Wilson in oil and watercolor, including *The Music of the Doroa*, *Basque Sea-Captain*, *Spanish Harbor*, and *Basque Sailors*, among others (Figures 61-64).³⁵⁴ The following month, the portrait of Lunt was reproduced in

³⁵³ National Portrait Gallery online catalog entry for *Alfred Lunt*, http://npg.si.edu/object/npg_NPG.2010.16?destination=portraits/search%3Fedan_q%3Dalfred%2520lunt%26edan_local%3D1%26op%3DSearch (accessed September 2, 2014). Though it is unclear where this connection was first made, The National Portrait Gallery’s identification of this as Lunt seems reasonable; In addition to the convincing likeness that I discuss later in this chapter, *Time*’s write-up on Claggett Wilson in 1928 notes “he has painted portraits of Actor Alfred Lunt” among their list of his accomplishments, “Dollar and Scents,” *Time*, 12, n. 17 (Oct. 22, 1928): 35; Further suggesting the painting’s personal importance for Wilson, *The Watcher on the Sea Wall* is assigned the highest price (\$2,500) in Knoedler’s pamphlet for the 1923 exhibition of his Basque scenes—all other works in Wilson’s exhibition range from \$100-\$1750, *Messrs. M. Knoelder & Co presents the recent paintings of Claggett Wilson: January 22nd-February 3rd, 1923*, exhibition catalog (New York: Messrs. M. Knoelder & Company, 1923).

³⁵⁴ Mssrs. M. Knoedler & Co, 1923.

Town & Country, wherein Augusta Owen Patterson, the magazine's regular "Arts & Decoration" contributor and an admirer of Wilson's oeuvre, described the picture as one depicting a "young Basque sailor."³⁵⁵

Wilson's choice of Basque subject matter is a loaded one. In visual and literary representations of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, including Pierre Loti's enduringly popular novel *Ramuntcho* (1897), the figure of "the Basque" is associated with primitivizing connotations of ruggedness, cultural purity, and nostalgia for a bygone time.³⁵⁶ The painting also taps into the ongoing cultural investment in modernist primitivism, made popular in various forms at the end of the previous century, which constituted an artistic preoccupation with the appropriation of racial and ethnic otherness. Camouflaged among Wilson's sailor retinue, Lunt, an actor of Scandinavian origins, engages in primitivism by playing the part of the ethnic other, "going native."³⁵⁷ In its early appearances, this portrait of Lunt was presented as an anonymous portrayal of a romantic archetype, making the sitter's true identity fodder for a playful game between friends, a secret recognizable only to those in the know. Indeed, the painting is visually similar to Wilson's other representations of Basque personages created throughout the 1920s and early 30s, to which the art-viewing public hereafter would be regularly exposed in exhibitions and publications, one painting even appearing on the cover of a

³⁵⁵ Augusta Owen Patterson's caption for *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* notes that the work was on loan from the collection of Sam Adolph Lewisohn, prominent art patron, and was "to be presented to the Metropolitan Museum of Art" by its owner, in "ARTS AND DECORATION," *Town & Country* (Feb. 15, 1923): 94.

³⁵⁶ Pierre Loti, *Ramuntcho*, translated by Henri Pène du Bois (New York: R.F. Fenno & Company, 1897).

³⁵⁷ Abigail Solomon-Godeau, "Going Native: Paul Gauguin and the Invention of Primitivist Modernism," In *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, edited by Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: IconEditions, 1992).

Town & Country issue on February 1st, 1928 (Figure 65). Wilson's paintings largely present Basque men one-dimensionally as beautiful and removed, like romantic ideals taken directly out of Loti's narratives.

Although problematic in his primitivizing representation of Basque men, Wilson employs racial otherness as a categorical language through which to examine sexual identities, allowing colonial tropes about Basque racial difference to merge indeterminately with popular gay fantasies about cruising for *rough trade* in the United States.³⁵⁸ Wilson's Basques were produced and received in the wake of the Newport naval base scandal of 1919 and 1920, when the Newport Naval Training Station recruited and dispatched into the civilian population a group of enlisted men to "investigate the 'immoral conditions'" there, resulting in several trials, a staggering "3,500 pages of testimony," and a full-blown public scandal.³⁵⁹ Consequently, tales of oversexed sailors engaged in queer behavior commonly appeared throughout the 1920s and 1930s in sources ranging from *The New York Times*, to *Broadway Brevities* (a queer humor periodical in New York) to early gay-themed novels like *The Young and Evil* (1933) by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler. In this chapter I argue that by painting beautiful Basque sailors Wilson makes use of pervasive cultural discourses to, especially in the case of *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*, undermine hegemonic sexual politics by

³⁵⁸ While today we might understand Basque as an ethnic category, in the context of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century United States, Basque people were described and studied as a racial type. As such, I will mirror that language throughout my discussion.

³⁵⁹ George Chauncey Jr., "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion? Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era," *Journal of Social History*, 19 (Winter 1985) 189.

engendering an intimate game among his and Lunt's shared friends and, by extension, a queer urban audience.

The Reception of *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*

While difficult to pinpoint the specific date of Wilson and Lunt's first meeting, it is clear from *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*, which first appeared to the public in early 1923, that their friendship and artistic collaboration extends back to the early 1920s, more than a decade before the artist worked on and resided within Lunt's Ten Chimneys estate in Genesee Depot, Wisconsin. In the painting Lunt wears the same black beret that appears in Wilson's other portraits of Basque men, such as in *Untitled I (Basque sailors)*, painted circa the 1920s (Figure 66). Though Wilson painted a convincing yet idealized approximation of Lunt's appearance. *The Watcher* is full of life and beautiful with fleshy lips, full cheeks, a ruddy smolder, powerful eyebrows, and a slight hint of beard growth that makes clear that this otherwise youthful face belongs to an adult man (Figure 67 and 68). Cementing Wilson's allusion to the famous actor, the painting's concave wood frame produces a perspectival illusion resembling the proscenium arch and stage of a traditional Italian theatre. Further framed by the clouds behind him, the background isolates Lunt's head against the bright blue sky with a halo of glowing pink and yellow sunlight. Wilson limits his finer detailing to his sitter's striking facial features, leaving other areas of the canvas brushy and unfinished. In his review in *The New York Herald*, critic Henry McBride likened this "broad, plastic brushwork" to "the slashing decorations upon

Spanish faience.”³⁶⁰ In contrast to the vacant expression of the main figure in Untitled I (Basque sailors), *The Watcher*’s heavily rimmed eyes are piercing, peering assertively out at the viewer rather than off into the unknown distance. A dutiful yet rose-tinted likeness, Lunt is soft-faced and informal with something familiar in his gaze. Though an earlier reviewer from *The Christian Science Monitor* dubbed Wilson’s Basque scenes at the National Arts Club in New York as “more decoration than portraiture,” the central figure of *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* is developed and fully individualized.³⁶¹ That Wilson pictures *The Watcher* as an individualized and active subject, lends credence to the National Portrait Gallery’s identification of the painting as a portrait of Alfred Lunt.

As noted above, *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* made its first known appearance from January 22nd to February 3rd in 1923 in an exhibition of Wilson’s current work at the Messrs. M. Knoedler & Company Gallery at 556 Fifth Avenue in New York. According to the gallery’s exhibition pamphlet, the paintings in this show were “the result of a Spring and Summer and Fall passed in Portugal and the Basque Country of Northern Spain.”³⁶² Both the paintings and the reviews subsequently written about them treat Basques as romantic vestiges of a disappearing primitive culture. In addition to Augusta Owen Patterson’s write-up about the exhibition in *Town & Country*, the show earned a favorable review in *The New York Times*, which described Wilson’s Basque subjects as handsome monuments:

³⁶⁰ Henry McBride, “Styka and Wilson Exhibit at Knoedler’s,” *The New York Herald* (Jan. 28, 1923): 7.

³⁶¹ “Retrospective Examples of American Painting Schools,” *The Christian Science Monitor* (Apr. 10, 1922): 6.

³⁶² Messrs. M. Knoedler & Co, 1923.

Sailors, low-browed, long-faced, with richly molded features... The subjects are unusual and interesting, but they easily could have been pulled down to the level of postcard picturesqueness. Mr. Wilson has raised them almost to the level of the monumental... It is all very handsome and worth while [sic].³⁶³

The reviewer's focus on the sailors' distinctive physiognomy and use of the term "picturesque" to (in this case hypothetically) describe paintings of people rather than ruin-peppered landscapes makes plain the romantic and racial lens through which white, educated urban audiences viewed Wilson's subject matter.

An article in *The New York Times* about an exhibition of Wilson's art at the Brooklyn Museum of Art in November of 1924 makes the perceived *otherness* of Basques even more explicit:

Claggett Wilson is known to most of us by his paintings of the Basque people in which he has brought into the complex and iridescent atmosphere of New York positive and unchanging types, strong, unwavering color and his personal reaction to the ancient race, so obstinate and proud and noble, waning without degeneration. Indifferent to towns, loving solitude and sea.³⁶⁴

Characterizing the Basque people as an ancient race who nobly resist the all-changing forces of modernization, the reviewer evokes the historical idea of the "noble savage," a belief that primitive societies are uncorrupted, more true to nature and therefore more authentic. Such rhetoric is not unrelated to the contemporaneously mounting cultural interest in folk cultures throughout Europe, often celebrated in service of nationalist agendas. Describing the Basques as "waning without degeneration," the reviewer also mirrors language used by Euro-Americans to discuss Native Americans as a "vanishing race," a trope famously exemplified by Edward S. Curtis' photo series *Vanishing Indian*

³⁶³ "THE HEIGHTS OF EXHIBITION SEASON—HOME AND FOREIGN NOTES: Claggett Wilson and Tadé Styka," *The New York Times* (Jan. 28, 1923): 7.

³⁶⁴ "THE WORLD OF ART: Sculpture by Mestrovic at the Brooklyn Museum; Mural Decoration by Claggett Wilson," *The New York Times* (Nov. 16, 1924): 10.

Types published in *Scribners* in 1906.³⁶⁵ Curtis reifies colonialist fantasies by representing Native Americans on horseback as they move toward an unknown horizon, as if toward their inevitable extinction (Figure 69).³⁶⁶ Anthropologist Renato Rosaldo has characterized the trope of the vanishing native as a form of “imperialist nostalgia” in which Westerners long for an idealized past that they themselves “altered or destroyed.”³⁶⁷ Like Native Americans, the Basque people are an indigenous culture that has been historically oppressed by the ruling governments within the national borders of which their people reside. As such, the reviewer’s employment of these tropes roots Wilson’s work, or at least the popular reception of his work, within Western colonialist logic.

It is clear from Curtis’ popularity that some early twentieth-century Euro-American viewers took pleasure from the repeated reenactment of the colonial gaze. Indeed, apart from Wilson’s war paintings, his Basque scenes were among his most widely seen and lauded works, suggesting that his chosen subject matter was a fashionable one. Though W.H. Fox, Director of the Brooklyn Museum, had failed years earlier in his efforts to facilitate a traveling exhibition of Wilson’s war series, the pair collaborated again in 1927, this time successfully, to circulate the artist’s Spanish and Greek inspired works. Fox proposed the exhibition at the Association of Art Museum

³⁶⁵ E.S. Curtis, “Vanishing Indian Types: The Tribes of the Northwest Plains,” *Scribner’s Magazine* (Jun. 1906): 657-672.

³⁶⁶ Rupturing his images further from reality, evidence shows that Curtis retouched his negatives, negating traces of colonization by “eliminating hats, suspenders, and other signs of white intrusions.” Victor Masayesva Jr. and Erin Younger, eds. *Hopi Photographers/Hopi Image, Sun Tracks: An American Indian Literary Series* (Tuscon, AZ: Sun Tracks & University of Arizona Press, 1983) 18

³⁶⁷ Renato Rosaldo, *Culture & Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993) 69.

Directors meeting, at which time he garnered offers from several museums.³⁶⁸ The Brooklyn director further endorsed the show through correspondence, describing the works as “modern in spirit but not ‘modernistic’”³⁶⁹—made modern, it seems, not by aesthetic but by Wilson’s appropriation of a primitive other. In 1927 and 1928 the show visited the Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts, the Columbus Museum of Art, the Worcester Art Museum, and Rehn Gallery in Brooklyn.³⁷⁰ Because Wilson spent much of 1927 in France and Spain, Clara L. Rossin (friend, patron, and daughter of art collector Adolph Lewisohn) was heavily involved in handling Wilson’s interests in this matter.³⁷¹ From all reports, the exhibition was well received by its publics, with Benjamin H. Stone, the secretary at the Worcester Art Museum, reporting to Fox: “The exhibition has been very much enjoyed by our visitors and makes an attractive looking gallery.”³⁷² Art critic Lula Merrick with *The Spur* declared it “one of the most pleasurable [exhibitions] of the

³⁶⁸ W.H. Fox to Claggett Wilson, 10 August 1927. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

³⁶⁹ W.H. Fox to Katherine Innes, Director of the Montclair Art Museum, New Jersey, 23 February 1928. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

³⁷⁰ W. H. Fox to Robert B. Harshe, Director of The Chicago Art Institute, 6 December 1927. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives; Benjamin H. Stone, Secretary of the Worcester Art Museum to W. H. Fox, 21 February 1928. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives; “NEWS AND VIEWS ON CURRENT ART: Decorative Paintings By Claggett Wilson,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Apr. 8, 1928): 6E.

³⁷¹ In a letter to Claggett Wilson, Fox writes: “I am rather relying on Mrs. Rossin to get the things together in the case the Museums want to start on a date prior to your return. I am glad to know that you are busy in Spain, believing that means that you are enjoying your work,” 10 August 1927. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

³⁷² Benjamin H. Stone, Secretary of the Worcester Art Museum to W.H. Fox, 21 February 21, 1928. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives.

season.”³⁷³ A reviewer at *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* covering the exhibition at Rehn Gallery, likewise, spoke highly of Wilson’s “[s]warthy, long-jawed Basques wearing blue berets and indigo-colored blouses,” a description that emphasizes the figures’ dark complexions and perhaps includes *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*.³⁷⁴ Not characterized as particularly challenging work, museum officials and critics alike highlighted the show’s ability to please, to elicit delight from general audiences. The relative success of this exhibition and the writing that it generated illustrates the salability of racially charged fantasy in the early-twentieth-century art world.

Basques as an Ethnic and Sexual Other

In his Basque sailor paintings Wilson is tapping into a market for colonialist subject matter popularized by European movements of the previous century, perhaps exemplified by Paul Gauguin’s paintings of Breton and Tahiti as timeless utopias. Modern artists both in the United States and abroad continued to engage in similar practices in the 1920s and 1930s, pervasively employing ‘primitive’ styles and producing images of colonized peoples. Marsden Hartley and Georgia O’Keeffe, for example, sought inspiration from Native American culture in the American Southwest and Polish artist Jankel Adler spent years painting in Mallorca, a Balearic island off of Spain’s eastern coast. Writing about the politics of such appropriations in the Tahitian paintings

³⁷³ Lula Merrick, “The New York Art Galleries,” *The Spur* (May 1, 1928): 101.

³⁷⁴ “NEWS AND VIEWS ON CURRENT ART: Decorative Paintings By Claggett Wilson,” *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Apr. 8, 1928): 6E; likewise, *The Syracuse Herald* describes a portrait of a “stylish young man of a seaside type,” in “Brooklyn Museum Lends Exhibit” (Nov. 10, 1927): 3.

of Paul Gauguin for her book *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History*, feminist art historian Griselda Pollock argues that the exploitation of otherness was one of the primary ways in which artists have asserted avant-gardism. In the case of Gauguin, Pollock tells us, his primitivist interests both mirrored and obscured commercial shifts in tourism, by creating a touristic gaze that transformed the colonized body into fetishized spectacle.³⁷⁵ Like Gauguin's paintings of Tahiti, Wilson's Basque paintings, I would argue, foster a similar touristic gaze and tell us more about colonialist discourses of Basqueness than they do about the actual social circumstances of the peoples depicted. Wilson resolutely hides the exact site of his travels from the press, effectively claiming ownership over the region as a touristic experience.³⁷⁶

Narratives about Basque people as pure and untouched appear in European texts as early as the fifteenth century.³⁷⁷ In the eighteenth century, Jean Jacques Rousseau popularized these notions, romanticizing Basque culture through his description of his friend Ignacio Manuel Altuna in his autobiographical book *Confessions*. Writing about *Confessions* in 1945, sociologist José Antonio de Aguirre notes that Rousseau was “so strongly attracted” to the cultural isolation of the Basque “that he cherished the thought of living in the Basque country.”³⁷⁸ Other eighteenth-century writers, according to de

³⁷⁵ Griselda Pollock, *Avant-Garde Gambits 1888-1893: Gender and the Color of Art History* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993) 62.

³⁷⁶ “The Lunts and a Basque or Two,” *Town & Country* (Mar. 1, 1928): 31.

³⁷⁷ Jorge Uría, “The Myth of the Peaceable Peasant in Northern Spain: Asturias 1898-1914,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, n. 67 (Spring, 2005): 102.

³⁷⁸ José Antonio de Aguirre, “Basque Thought at the Present Moment,” *Journal of Educational Sociology*, 18, n. 8 (Apr., 1945): 492. Aguirre continues on the subject of Rousseau: “when, referring to his friend the Basque Ignacio Manuel Altuna, he says, ‘I must after a few years, go to Azcoitia to live with him in his country’”; Jean-Jacques Rousseau writes of Ignacio: “We were so intimately united, that our intention was to pass our days together. In a few years I

Aguirre, believed that Euzkera, the Basque language, “was spoken in the Garden of Eden and was one of the few languages that survived the confusion of Babel.”³⁷⁹ That Euzkera is a pre-Indo-European language isolate, unrelated to either Spanish or French, generated myriad speculative theories about the origins of Basque culture, some of which persist to current day.³⁸⁰

In the late nineteenth century Western interest in Basque culture pervasively took hold, exemplified most famously by the writing of the French novelist Julien Viaud under the penname Pierre Loti.³⁸¹ Loti’s *Ramuntcho*, a novel about seafaring Basque smugglers, was published in both French and English in 1897. Through the eyes of the title character, Loti invites his readers to imagine the exotic physiognomy and customs of the Basque region, musing that “by the ampleness of their brown necks, by the width of their shoulders, one divines their great strength, the strength of that old, sober, and religious race.”³⁸² In the novel, Loti often likens the Basque people to animals; for example, when

was to go to Ascoytia to live with him at his estate,” in *The Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau*, volume 3, preface by Jules Claretie, illustrated by Maurice Leloir (Philadelphia, PA: Gebbie and Company, 1904) 76.

³⁷⁹ De Aguirre, 492; Joaquín Gorrochategui traces the language’s origins in Babel to at least the sixteenth century in “The Basque Language and Its Neighbors in Antiquity,” in *Towards a History of the Basque Language*, edited by José Ignacio Hualde (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995) 33.

³⁸⁰ José Ignacio Hualde, “Editor’s Foreword,” in *Towards a History of the Basque Language*, edited by José Ignacio Hualde (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 1995) 1.

³⁸¹ According to early twentieth-century legend, Loti’s penname, meaning “oceanic flower,” was supposedly gifted him by a Tahitian queen. Such narratives fed into the colonialist fantasy with which Loti was associated: Frank Harris, “Pierre Loti: A Lord of Language,” *Pearson’s Magazine* (Jul. 1918) 174-176. Clearly of fascination to his contemporaries, Wilson’s romantic interest Wilbur Underwood kept a clipping of this article in his personal papers, Wilbur Underwood Papers, box 6, Miscellany printed matter, Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

³⁸² Loti, *Ramuntcho*, 61.

reflecting on the *irrintzina*, the Basque shepherds' cry commonly used in regional festivals, Ramuntcho anxiously asserts "it has the bite of the voice of jackals."³⁸³ Written in sexually-charged language, many of Loti's novels eroticize the racial otherness of colonized peoples. It was Loti's autobiographical *Le mariage de Loti*, wherein the author writes about sexual encounters with a young Tahitian woman that famously inspired Gauguin's move to the French colony.³⁸⁴

Though temporally and geographically removed, it would be difficult to exaggerate Loti's impact on American discourses surrounding both sailors and the Basque peoples in the first half of the twentieth century. *Ramuntcho*, in particular, enjoyed longstanding international cultural currency, inspiring four French cinematic adaptations between 1919 and 1959, the most popular of which (1938) was distributed in wide release throughout Europe and the Americas.³⁸⁵ Moreover, newspapers in the Northeast regularly updated readers about Loti's comings and goings, including a write-up in *The New York Times* on the Paris debut of the 1908 theatrical adaptation of *Ramuntcho* that features several dreamy photographs of the author's vacation retreat in Basque country (Figure 70).³⁸⁶ Reverently dubbing Loti as "One of the Immortals," *The*

³⁸³ Ibid., 85.

³⁸⁴ Miriam Kahn, *Tahiti Beyond the Postcard: Power, Place, and Everyday Life* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2011) 56.

³⁸⁵ *Ramuntcho* (short), directed and adapted for screen by Jacques de Baroncelli, 1919; *Ramuntcho* (full-length), directed by René Barberis, adapted for screen by René Barberis and Emile Allard, 1938, released throughout Europe in the 1930s and 1940s, released in the United States in 1953; *The Marriage of Ramuntcho*, directed by Max de Vaucorbeil, 1947; *Ramuntcho*, directed by Pierre Schoendoerffer, adapted for screen by Jean Lartéguy and Pierre Schoendoerffer, 1959.

³⁸⁶ "PIERRE LOTI'S NEW PLAY CHARMS PARIS: Dramatization of 'Ramuntcho' Full of Basque Country Life and Color," *The New York Times* (Mar. 15, 1908): 17.

Times also published a full-page article and several follow-ups detailing the author's first visit to the States in 1912 (Figure 71).³⁸⁷

By the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the trope of the Basque as a mysterious European primitive reigned supreme in mainstream American descriptions of the region. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers for popular and literary magazines sexualized and mystified Basque culture by describing the men as aggressively passionate and offering titillating glimpses of their hitherto unknown customs. *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, for example, published a sordid tale in 1854 featuring a fictional Basque love quarrel that ends with one man killing another in a jealous rage. Concluding this account, the unnamed author supposes that "the Basque... know no bounds in their attachments; their love, like their hate, is always in the extreme."³⁸⁸ In 1926, well-known American novelist and historian Waldo Frank wrote a piece titled "Basque Towns" for *The North American Review* that describes the Basque in terms similar to those employed contemporaneously in discussions of gypsies as a culture-less culture. Calling the Basques a "peculiar people," Frank attempts to parse out what special attributes exactly constitute Basque nationality:

An indelible people! The Basques seem even to be a race in an exploded, archaic fashion: a race by blood!... the Basques appear to have had no culture. Their language was unwritten. They possessed no history, no social records. They had no underlying base of ethics, or of religion. If they possessed a culture, it was almost biologic. It persisted in blood, in instinct, rather than in conscious concept.³⁸⁹

³⁸⁷ "PIERRE LOTI, ONE OF THE IMMORTALS, TO VISIT US: Famous Writer of Things Oriental Will See Broadway for the First Time and Mayhap Write of It," *The New York Times* (Sep. 8, 1912): 79.

³⁸⁸ "Basque Blood," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 9, n. 51(Aug. 1854): 370.

³⁸⁹ Waldo Frank, "Basque Towns," *The North American Review*, 223, n. 830 (Mar.-May, 1926): 122.

Rather than locating Basque identity within the culture's shared beliefs and traditions, Frank argues that it is Basque purity, with "their blood... unmixed; and their heads unmixed also" that distinguishes them.³⁹⁰

The pervasiveness of such discourses by the 1920s also inflected ethnographic and anthropological studies about Basque people, imparting cultural fantasy with scientific authority. Academics produced essays scrutinizing Basque language, their ceremonial dancing, their ethnic origins, and even their craniology. Characterized as outsiders in their own home, popular writers and scholars alike described Basques as an inexplicable racial other whose presence in Europe is a great ancestral puzzle to be solved. In 1929, British biometrician G.M. Morant completed a detailed study of Basque skulls in order to determine the culture's racial heritage, noting that most scientists have connected the Basque to Northern Africa, namely Egypt.³⁹¹ Remarking with suggestive diction that "the Basque skull is characterized by a peculiarly extreme facial skeleton," he argues that it is nonetheless probable that the people are "more closely related to some existing or extinct races of Western Europe," thus simultaneously reaffirming the mysterious otherness of the Basque, while still concluding that they are comfortingly European.³⁹²

Codifying western culture's persistent hyper-sexualization of Basque men in scientific terms, renown British anthropologist Violet Alford writes about "Ceremonial

³⁹⁰ Frank, 123.

³⁹¹ G. M. Morant, "A Contribution to Basque Craniometry," *Biometrika*, 21, n. ¼ (Dec. 1929): 68.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 82.

Dances of the Spanish Basques” for *The Musical Quarterly* in 1932, describing the Basque *Aurresku*, or “The Dance of Honor,” as a violent sexual encounter:

The Aurresku sends four of his men to beg his chosen lady to honour him... She is led to the place of honour and there stands prisoner, two men on either side... Off comes his beret again, he bursts into showers of steps different and more wonderful than his first display. He leaps violently three feet off the ground throwing up each foot alternatively until it nearly hits him in the face... He makes one think of the bower bird posturing before his mate... one wonders how the object of this animal display can stand there unmoved.³⁹³

In this thrilling and hyperbolic passage, Alford compares the dance to a mating ritual wherein two savage, carnal beasts forcefully woo their lady. Throughout the article Alford paints Basque men as strong and visually striking, noting that “the men are in white, [with] scarlet waist-sashes showing off their lithe Basque figures.”³⁹⁴ In the mythologized figure of the Basque, long-standing stereotypes of Spain as a land inhabited by a sexually heated population are magnified by racialized fantasies of animalistic virility.

These primitivizing discourses are inseparable from contemporaneous colonial engagement. In the nineteenth century, wealthy regional landowners transformed the West’s Basque fascination into financial profit, marketing the area to wealthy travelers as an exciting locale for cultural tourism. Affluent vacationers from both America and Europe flocked to Basque port towns like Biarritz, seduced by the promise of scenic views of the Bay of Biscay as well as voyeuristic opportunities to observe a strange and primitive people firsthand. Popular American magazines made fashionable the practice of vacation voyeurism and reinforced the dichotomy between primitive locals and the

³⁹³ Violet Alford, “Ceremonial Dances of the Spanish Basques,” *The Musical Quarterly*, 18, n. 3 (Jul. 1932): 472.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 471.

stylish visitors who surveyed them. In 1884, Lucy C. Lillie gave an animated account of her visit to the Biarritz resort for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, declaring “the whole suggestion of place and people was mediaeval, for so much of the past clings to these Basques” [sic].³⁹⁵ Still a popular destination in the early twentieth century, *Vogue* published multiple articles in the 1920s that gave readers advice on resort etiquette and couture in addition to rehashing colonialist fantasies about Basque peoples. One such article from 1928, for example, offered suggestions to readers on how Biarritz resort ladies might dress for various local activities.³⁹⁶ In another from 1929, Mary Bromfield delightedly tells *Vogue* readers that a Basque ceremony at Saint-Jean de Luz “approaches in appearance the ancient Saturnalia as nearly as any festival surviving into this dull, prosaic, and scientific century.”³⁹⁷ While I do not mean to suggest that these examples constitute a constant discourse about Basqueness in the West that spans, unchanged over centuries, I would argue that they, joined with the writings on Wilson’s work, nonetheless illustrate a persistent fascination and general belief in the Basque as a mysterious European primitive whose passionate aspect renders them particularly exciting as subject matter.

Basque Bodies in Representation

³⁹⁵ Lucy C. Lillie, “Biarritz,” *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, LXIX, n. CCCCIX (Jun. 1884): 19.

³⁹⁶ “Biarritz: The Bathing, Berets, and Bars Add to the Test of Life at This French Resort with a Spanish Flavour,” *Vogue*, 72, n. 10 (Nov. 10, 1928): 73-75, 188, 190.

³⁹⁷ Mary Bromfield, “Saint-Jean de Luz,” *Vogue*, 74, n. 6 (Sep. 14, 1929): 164.

Much like Violet Alford's heated passage, Wilson's images sexualize Basque sailors. In the case of *Untitled I (Basque sailors)*, Wilson bestows the sailor in the foreground with a ruggedly square jaw, glossy pink lips that stand out against his lightly-tanned skin, deep-hooded bedroom eyes, and shiny blond locks. His doe-eyed expression seems vacant but open, with the soft hint of a smile creeping across his alluring lips. Bringing to mind Alford's description of Basque men with dramatically cinched silhouettes, blue belts accentuate the waists of Wilson's two rear figures, emphasizing their wide, manly shoulders. The figures' broad shoulders and dramatically long necks, evocative of the paintings of Modigliani, also bring to mind Loti's description of Basque morphology in *Ramuntcho*. *Untitled II (Basque sailors)* circa 1920s—a second, similarly composed, but seemingly unfinished canvas—further demonstrates the erotic spirit of Wilson's Basque depictions (Figure 72). Here, Wilson's sketchy underpainting reveals an effort to define the muscular chest of the central figure. In the background, two schematized men turn inward on a tiered structure, bracketing the sailor in the foreground. On the left, the sailor twists his body to place a foot on the step above, lunging slightly forward to give viewers an ideal three-quarters view of his curved buttocks. On the right, a sailor sits with splayed legs, his blank face craning, perhaps to admire his comrade on the left. Likewise placing emphasis on Basque physiology, a sketch from Wilson's personal collection marked "Spain 1926" shows a sailor from the back, hands at his crotch as if in the act of urination or, as viewers might conjecture, masturbation (Figure 73).

Wilson's sexualization of the Basque sailor in *Untitled I (Basque sailors)* and elsewhere is made apparent when compared to Spanish artist Valentín de Zubiaurre

Aguirrezábal's *Basque Types*, a contemporaneous painting published in *Town & Country* in May of 1920 (Figure 74).³⁹⁸ In *Basque Types*, de Zubiaurre Aguirrezábal pictures a proud-looking family of seemingly simple means that includes an older couple seated in the foreground and a regal young girl standing in the rear. He surrounds the figures with signs of agricultural life. The patriarch of the family, perhaps a father or grandfather to the young girl, is seated on the left with pipe in hand, wearing the traditional Basque beret that appears so often in Wilson's work. The male figure, perhaps a fisherman or more likely a farmer, is plain and aged, possessing a wrinkled face, gnarled hands, and a lanky, unidealized frame. Though clearly a romanticized image, the painting's title, *Basque Types*, evokes anthropological associations and calls upon the seemingly authoritative and neutral language of ethnographic illustration.

Wilson's art, too, is rooted in colonial visual practices, a relationship to which his critics alluded when referring to his Basque sitters as "types." Photographs from the artist's personal collection further cement this connection. One especially telling set features a young man in Basque dress in frontal, three-quarter, and profile views (Figure 75). While working photographs, to be sure, these images also constitute physiognomic race studies, employing the formal strategies and cool detachment of traditional ethnographic and criminal photography. Still, when filtered through Wilson's sensual and

³⁹⁸ While other examples of his work exist, this comparison is particularly apropos because it comes from a publication wherein Wilson's work was regularly featured. Though a Madrid resident, Valentín de Zubiaurre Aguirrezábal's family had roots in the Garai region of Biscay, a Basque area of Spain. Certainly, that heritage complicates my discussion of his work in an ethnographic context; however, *Basque Types* was reproduced for American audiences devoid of any contextualizing information that might have disrupted the colonial narrative therein. Such an image would have likely been distributed and received differently in Basque contexts, accruing alternate meanings. I chose to focus on this example from his oeuvre because of its established American viewership. I am considering this image in the context of its specific publication in *Town & Country* and the meanings with which this periodical's readers might have associated it, Augusta Owen Patterson, "Arts and Decoration," *Town & Country* (May 20, 1920).

decorative aesthetic, his paintings bear little resemblance to the style of stylelessness from which modern archives draw their ideological power. Whereas de Zubiaurre Aguirrezábal's didactic setting (i.e. still lifes of locally grown fruits and earthenware) communicates information to the viewer about Basque agriculture and folk production, Wilson's sailors, as epitomized by the paintings *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*, *Untitled III* (Basque man), *Untitled IV* (Basque man), among others, are often closely cropped studies of attractive young men that place special emphasis on the suppleness of their youthful skin, the fullness of their pink lips, and their masculine physiques (Figures 76 & 77).³⁹⁹

Despite their differences, neither the didactically examined *Basque Types* of de Zubiaurre Aguirrezábal nor the aestheticized young sailors of Wilson speak productively to the reality of the Basque people in the early twentieth century. According to German sociologist Andreas Hess, Spanish colonization of the Basque region began in the sixteenth-century. Though their leaders financially benefited from Spanish involvement, poor Basques, like members of Basque fishing brotherhoods, were "heavily burdened with taxes."⁴⁰⁰ In other words, tales and depictions of simple and carefree Basque villagers who are untouched by modern Europe serve to obfuscate the actual encumbrance imposed upon them by the very culture from whom they were purportedly isolated. Moreover, these representations ignore the ways in which the Basque people of

³⁹⁹ Though Wilson does at times picture the Basque family unit, such explorations of the sailor as a lone or small homosocial group is one that appears again and again in Wilson's work. A review in *The New York Times* from 1921 refers to a painting by Wilson titled *Basque Fisherman's Family*—location unknown, "THE WORLD OF ART: A Retrospective Exhibition," *The New York Times* (May 15, 1921): 26.

⁴⁰⁰ Andreas Hess, "'Working the Waves': The Plebian Culture and Moral Economy of Traditional Basque Fishing Brotherhoods," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (Spr., 2010): 555.

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were, indeed, in the process of modernizing. As Hess notes, though “industrialization took off slowly in the first half of the nineteenth century,” the culture eventually took on increasingly modern technologies such as steam and, eventually, diesel motors.⁴⁰¹

Escalating to a boil during the years of the First World War, the region, known to its people as Euskadi, was also home to a growing Basque separatist movement that, allied with a sister movement in Catalonia, sought autonomy from Spanish rule.⁴⁰² Though embroiled in contemporary politics, the Basque Nationalist faction was conservative in its visual production, focusing its propaganda around pre-industrial, rural symbolism.⁴⁰³ The work of Ramiro Arrue, a Basque artist, is representative of this imagery. Ostensibly simple and pastoral, Arrue’s paintings, like *Un Homme Tient sur le Dos un Panier de Verdure*, often center on laboring bodies, presenting Basque workers as active agents in the perpetuation and prosperity of Euskadi (Figure 78).⁴⁰⁴ While Arrue’s

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 568-9.

⁴⁰² “Turmoil in Spain is More Menacing: Government Takes Steps to Prevent Assembling of Rump Parliament Today,” *The New York Times* (Jul. 19, 1917): 10.

⁴⁰³ As Schlomo Ben-Ami more fully articulates in this article, the Basque Separatist movement was eventually forced underground in 1937 after siding against the fascist Nationalists by fighting with the Second Spanish Republic, the losing side in the Spanish Civil War, “Basque Nationalism between Archaism and Modernity,” *Journal of Contemporary History*, 26, n. ¾ (Sep. 1991): 494.

⁴⁰⁴ Oliver Ribeton, *Ramiro Arrue (1892-1971): Un Artiste Basque dans le Collections Publiques Françaises* (Bayonne, FR: Musée Basque, 1991) 9; While here used in the service of indigenous sovereignty, such representations of an idyllic pre-modern arcadia are, in fact, unavoidably in conversation with the so-called *call to order*, a homogenizing trend toward classical themes and aesthetics widespread in Western art during World War I and the interwar years. *Call to order* artists, many of whom had pursued plastic innovation before the war, employed traditional styles in order to reflect national dignity, stability, and patriotism. Indeed, the connection is confirmed by Arrue’s stated admiration for the work of Puvis de Chavannes, a popular point of departure for French *call to order* artists. Through his appropriation of potentially imperialist styles, Arrue engages with and counters the ideologies of Europe’s colonialist practices. Kenneth E. Silver, *Espirit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde*

idyllic pre-industrial scenes initially seem more reactionary than revolutionary, intellectual historian Walter Adamson has argued that *avant-gardism* can be articulated through myriad aesthetic wrappings.⁴⁰⁵ Indeed, a preparatory sketch for Arrue's unassumingly titled *Une Scène de Campagne*, a seemingly straightforward agrarian scene, makes physically manifest the politics behind his depictions of labor, as the artist boldly emblazons its verso with Spanish and Basque calls for revolution ("always enslaved... the people handcuffed, not sovereign") (Figures 79 & 80).⁴⁰⁶

In contrast to Arrue's radical laboring bodies, Wilson's Basque sailors constitute an erasure of the modern political conditions of Euskadi. Moreover, by deriving pleasure from Basque bodies through this erasure, Wilson's images constitute a fetishization of racial difference. In other words, like Gauguin's paintings of Tahitian women, Wilson's erotic paintings of Basque men are fetishes in that they reduce Basque people to objects, rendered newly pleasurable through the mystification of their social realities.⁴⁰⁷ However, for queer New York viewers, the rehearsal of racial difference would not have been the only pleasure taken when viewing Wilson's sailor paintings.

and the First World War, 1914-1925 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989); See also: Teresa A. Carbone, ed. *Youth and Beauty: Art of the American Twenties* (New York: Skira Rizzoli, 2011).

⁴⁰⁵ Adamson.

⁴⁰⁶ Ramiro Arrue later helped to found the Musée Basque in Bayonne, France, Ribeton, 8.

⁴⁰⁷ Karl Marx first adopted the ethnographic term "fetish" in the mid-1900s, extrapolating it to describe the process by which capitalism divorces commodity goods from the social realities of their production: Karl Marx, "Capital, Volume I" (1867). "Fetish" was later employed by psychoanalysts to discuss sexual power dynamics: Sigmund Freud, "Fetishism" (1927).

Sailors as Homoerotic Ideal

Starting as early as the eighteenth century, sailors regularly appeared in popular illustration as both raucous and desirable lovers.⁴⁰⁸ Notably, Wilson himself was an avid collector of nineteenth-century romantic naval memorabilia.⁴⁰⁹ In July of 1942, at the age of 55, Wilson wrote an article titled “Jack Afloat and Susan Ashore” for *Antiques* about nineteenth-century collectible lithographs by Currier & Ives that picture sailors as romantic leading men that are paired with “amorous quatrains.”⁴¹⁰ The lithographs, which are reproduced from the artist’s private collection, feature handsome sailors departing to, engaging in, and returning from their voyages abroad. Wilson describes the sailors as “spirited, ruddy young fellows” who “conform to the classic idea of manly beauty fashionable at the time.”⁴¹¹ One lithograph, titled *The Sailor—Far—Far at Sea*, focuses on a lone, forlorn sailor, who, now separated from his female romantic interest, “gazes dolefully” at a miniature of “his beloved”⁴¹² (Figure 81). The accompanying quatrain ruminates on parting kisses and warm vows exchanged between lovers:

The night was still when last on shore
 We took a parting kiss
 And warmed the vows we each other gave
 To meet again in bliss

⁴⁰⁸ See the Navy themed works of British caricaturist Thomas Rowlandson, for example.

⁴⁰⁹ Wilson’s large collection of naval memorabilia was included in his property at the time of his death, estimated to be worth \$2,285. Appraisal of Claggett Wilson’s Estate by Isaac Sobel for Samuel Mark, Inc. Appraisers—Accountants—Auctioneers, New York City, 30 June 1952. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection.

⁴¹⁰ Claggett Wilson, “Jack Afloat and Susan Ashore,” *Antiques* (Jul. 1942): 22-23.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

A token then my sally gave
 'Tis this which now I view
 And in my heart shall ever live
 Which throbs alone for you⁴¹³

Though thematically heterosexual, Wilson's interest in collecting lithographs that specifically center on sailors as ideal suitors speaks to his desire to view them in romantic roles. This desire was not at all exclusive to Wilson; rather, visual and literary representations of seamen as a homoerotic ideal extend at least as far back as the nineteenth century and sailors were, in fact, a common fantasy among gay men of the early twentieth century. This fantasy had enduring popularity in the decades that followed, as seen in *Tom of Finland* in the 1950s and *the Village People* in the 1970s.

In addition to writing *Ramuntcho*, Pierre Loti spent much of his career penning homoerotic tales of sailors on the open seas.⁴¹⁴ In one notable example, Loti's *An Iceland Fisherman* (published in French in 1886; published in English by 1902), a group of Breton fisherman sail to Iceland every summer and on the way they "forge[t] about women while at sea."⁴¹⁵ Yann—Loti's main character whom he describes as "a girlish boy"—is pursued throughout the novel by a woman at home in Brittany named Gaud.⁴¹⁶ Though Yann possesses feelings of affection for Gaud, he is resistant to marriage and prefers the freedom of the sea and the brotherhood that he experiences there with his shipmate Sylvestre. Loti employs sexually suggestive language to describe the sailors as

⁴¹³ Ibid.

⁴¹⁴ Richard M. Berrong, *In Love with a Handsome Sailor: The Emergence of Gay Identity and the Novels of Pierre Loti* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press Incorporated, 2003).

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 172.

⁴¹⁶ Pierre Loti, *An Iceland Fisherman*, translated and introduced by M. Jules Cambon (New York: P.F. Collier & Sons, 1902) 9.

“crews of lusty fellows” who “began the life out upon the open sea, in the solitude of three or four rough companions, on the moving thin planks in the midst of the seething waters of the northern seas.”⁴¹⁷ Loti’s “lusty” and “rough” sailors never engage with each other sexually; however, it is easy to see how readers open to queer innuendos might recognize the homoerotic implications in his narratives. Though sexual encounters never overtly occur in these novels, Xavier Mayne (pseudonym of Edward J. Stevenson), an early American annalist of gay culture, articulates Loti’s homoerotic reception by queer readers in his 1908 book *The Intersexes*, stating that “sailor-homosexuality is admirably expressed” in the novels by “the passional affection” between men that goes “beyond mere friendship.”⁴¹⁸ Indeed, Loti has in recent years become a significant figure to scholars interested in queer-themed literature. As H el ene de Burgh has argued in her book *Sex, Sailors, and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti*, his works are queer in the sense that “sexuality is suffused onto many different people... Loti’s desire becomes unfixed, shifting and intangible.”⁴¹⁹

In addition to discussing Loti, Mayne, a sort of amateur sexologist, usefully expresses in words existing—but largely unwritten—stereotypes about queer sexuality from an early twentieth-century American perspective. Notably, he devotes an entire subsection to sailors. Though at times he includes individual experiences via interviews with anonymous gay men, Mayne also engages in sweeping generalizations and trades in the same romantic fantasies that undergird Loti’s texts. For Mayne, “homosexuality

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 18-19.

⁴¹⁸ Xavier Mayne (pseudonym of Edward J. Stevenson), *The Intersexes: A History of Similsexuality as a Problem in Social Life* (Printed Privately in Naples, 1908) 187.

⁴¹⁹ H el ene de Burgh, *Sex Sailors and Colonies: Narratives of Ambiguity in the Works of Pierre Loti* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, 2005) 89.

[among sailors] seems in a considerable degree, a cultivated... condition,” the inevitable outgrowth of the homosocial environment of ships on long sea voyages “where men are continually in companionship only with men; where solitudes, duty and the battles of the elements emphasize masculine nearness.”⁴²⁰ “It has been said,” Mayne continues, “that ‘every sailor in two or three’ is more or less homosexual... It is a sort of sea-secret.”⁴²¹ Mayne’s suppositions codify, perhaps, not strict reality, but wishful thinking and fantasy enjoyed by contemporary gay men. While naval ships were one site of male intimacy, he tells us, sailors also made themselves available to same-sex suitors at every port:

The common sailor is not averse to sell his person, to gratify his homosexual taste... in certain ports especially, he is always ‘to be had’—Russian, German, English, Italian, Spanish. He has his regular rendezvous in many such localities, where homosexuals, who like the sailor as a ‘type’, can be met.⁴²²

Though Mayne circulated his book in a private limited release, his writing hints at shared knowledges and suggests that such stereotypes were available to gay men of his day, transmitted through clandestine word of mouth and innuendo.

Though, as Loti’s novels suggest, such associations were made at least as early as the nineteenth century, the public flurry following the Newport scandal would have only intensified stereotypes about queer sailors in the United States. In the spring of 1919, the Newport Naval Training Station assembled a vice squad composed of enlisted men slated with the task of investigating the civilian population for the purposes of defending the moral decency of the naval men stationed in Newport, RI.⁴²³ According George

⁴²⁰ Mayne, 184-85.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 185.

⁴²² Ibid., 224.

⁴²³ Chauncey, “Christian Brotherhood,” 189.

Chauncey, the men were chosen based on their youth and attractiveness and were instructed to act as decoys, to seek out and build relationships with civilians and other enlisted men that they suspected of sexual perversion. As a means of investigating the suspected deviants, the decoys were told to socialize and, if necessary, even participate in sexual contact with suspects in order to gather evidence.⁴²⁴ The probe resulted in a series of highly public trials which produced thousands of pages of testimony “from the decoys, suspected ‘perverts,’ ministers, and town and naval officials about their relations with men, their often conflicting understandings of sexuality, and their reactions to the investigation itself.”⁴²⁵ In 1920 U.S. newspapers, especially those in New York, were flooded with stories sensationalizing the naval trials. The story broke in early 1920 when John R. Rathom, editor of *The Providence Journal* wrote a scathing editorial that implicated even the highest authorities in the Naval department, including Assistant Secretary of the Navy Franklin D. Roosevelt and Secretary of the Navy Josephus Daniels. In a telegram addressed to Roosevelt that was released in *The New York Times* on January 27th, 1920, Rathom disdainfully writes:

In bringing these matters to the attention of the Senate Committee on Naval Affairs we are performing what we conceive to be a public duty for the protection of the honor of the United States Navy, which officials of the Navy Department have sought to undermine by the most bestial and dishonorable methods known to man. Many boys wearing the uniform of the United States Navy have been forced into the position of moral perverts by specific orders of officers in the Navy Department, and these conditions were known to the Secretary of the Navy and yourself months ago.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁴ Ibid.

⁴²⁵ Ibid.

⁴²⁶ “Rathom Attacks, Roosevelt Replies: Sharp Messages Pass Between Editor and Daniels’s Assistant Over Navy Vice Inquiry,” *The New York Times* (Jan. 27, 1920).

Though the articles were published in vague terms, readers would have known what Rathom meant by “moral perverts,” “perverts” being a term used commonly in the early twentieth century to describe gay men in the public realm.

In the end, naval and municipal authorities arrested over twenty sailors and sixteen civilians. However, it was not until the Navy publically accused Samuel Kent, a well-known Episcopal clergyman employed by the local Y.M.C.A., that the trials became a major scandal.⁴²⁷ In his trial, Kent accused the government of entrapment, turning the tables on the decoys, pointing the spotlight toward questions about the sexuality and character of these Naval volunteers.⁴²⁸ The strategy worked, and an earlier court that had, according to an article in *The New York Times* on March 18th of 1920, “recommended that notation be made in the service records commending several men who acted as operatives on the anti-vice squad,” was scolded by later courts and prodded to justify their reasoning with such questions as “Do you recall if any of the men who were subsequently recommended for notation testified that they had committed immoral acts?” Lieutenant Commander Foster, president of the first court of inquiry, purportedly resisted this line of questioning but ultimately asserted that “They must have, to collect evidence.”⁴²⁹ Ultimately, in 1921, the Senate Naval Affairs Committee issued a report that lifted the original civilian charges and reprimanded some of the highest officials involved.⁴³⁰ The dropping of civilian charges allowed the dust of the controversy to

⁴²⁷ Chauncey, “Christian Brotherhood,” 189.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, 197.

⁴²⁹ “Praised Navy Vice Squad: First Court of Inquiry Commended Work in Newport,” *The New York Times* (Mar. 18, 1920): 11.

⁴³⁰ “Minority Report Dissents: Senator King Holds Innuendos Against Officials Unjustified,” *The New York Times* (Jul. 20, 1921): 4.

settle; however, the halo of protection generated by public outrage was not extended to enlisted men. Soldiers found guilty of homosexual acts received dishonorable discharges and typically served lengthy prison terms.⁴³¹ All in all, articles about the scandal appeared commonly from 1920 to 1921 in newspapers throughout the northeastern United States including *The Providence Journal*, *The New York Times*, the *New York Tribune*, to *The New York Sun*, and the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, among several others.⁴³² Given Wilson's military history, news of a Naval scandal, especially one so pervasively disseminated in the public sphere, would have certainly been on the artist's mind. Although some of Wilson's Basque scenes predate the Newport scandal, it is worth noting that his specific emphasis on Basque sailors and sea captains emerges in the early 1920s.⁴³³

Bolstered by public discussions of queer men engaged with Naval men that proliferated in the wake of this scandal, sailors occupied a good deal of territory in the sexual imagination of early twentieth-century gay men. In his book *Gay New York*, Chauncey discusses the tendency of gay men in New York to eroticize the large "working-class bachelor subculture" that lived there, primarily comprised of seamen,

⁴³¹ Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009) 77.

⁴³² "Navy Court on Newport Vice Can Call Daniels: Everybody Within Reach of Inquiry, Rear Admiral Dunn Tells Clergymen," *New York Tribune* (Jan. 27, 1920): 5; "Newport Warned Again by Daniels: Vice Conditions Still Bad, Says Navy Head," *The New York Sun* (Dec. 2, 1917): 3; "Senate Committee for Full Inquiry: Daniels Declares Admiral Sims Must Make Good his Allegations" *Richmond Times Dispatch* (Jan. 20, 1920): 2.

⁴³³ A painting titled *Basque Boy*, for example, is shown alongside works by Marsden Hartley, Charles Demuth, and Guy Pène du Bois at the opening show of Daniels Galleries at W. 47th St, a Modern gallery modeled after Stieglitz's 291. "Front Notes," *American Art News*, 15, n. 2 (Oct. 21, 1916): 2.

transient agricultural laborers, and “other heavy manual-labor” workers.⁴³⁴ According to Chauncey, gay men flocked to the spaces occupied by these blue collar men, such as bars near ports and the Y.M.C.A., and the laborers’ “haunts become the haunts of gay men as well.”⁴³⁵ The ostensible unattainability and roughness of these men only served to heighten their allure. As Chauncey states:

Many fairies and queers socialized into the dominant prewar homosexual culture considered the ideal sexual partner to be ‘trade,’ a ‘real man,’ that is, ideally a sailor, a soldier, or some other embodiment of the aggressive masculine ideal, who was neither homosexually interested nor effeminately gendered himself but who would accept the sexual advances of a queer.⁴³⁶

Although these men, known colloquially as *rough trade*, would have self-identified as normal, or not queer, it is clear from the Newport trials that, at least in some cases, they were willing to engage in sexual activity with queer men in exchange for money or to meet their sexual needs when women were unavailable or unwilling.

The practice of going out into public spaces to find and proposition such men is historically known as cruising. Cruising, according to Mark W. Turner, a historian of English literature, is largely about “the moment of visual exchange,” wherein a cruiser catches the eye of another “whose gaze returns and validates his own,” constituting “an act of mutual recognition.”⁴³⁷ In this most basic sense, Lunt in the *The Watcher* is both cruising and being cruised. Our sailor leans, loiters, watches, and makes himself available to be watched. Though, in the fictive narrative of the scene, it is left unclear as to whether

⁴³⁴ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 77-8.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁴³⁷ Mark W. Turner, *Backward Glances: Cruising the Queer Streets of New York and London* (London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 2003) 9, 59.

our *Watcher* is watching waves lap the shore or watching sailors and civilians stroll past, the physical presence of the painting in the space of the gallery positions the viewers themselves as cruiser and cruised. Though cruising is often described as a fleeting moment, Wilson froze the moment of glancing visual affirmation and pinned it on the wall for viewers' prolonged desirous inspection. Because here our cruiser is characterized as a classed and racial other, it is important to note that in the context of the early twentieth century, cruising often meant bringing white upper-class men into sexual contact with their social "inferiors."⁴³⁸ Ports, both in Europe and the United States, were known sites for cruising.

In addition to newspaper articles, sailors often appear in both popular culture and fine art representations in situations that suggest a sexual role. The New York humor periodical *Broadway Brevities*, for example, ran cartoons pitting *fairies* against women as suitors who compete for the sexual attentions of sailors. In the cartoon "Pickled Corned Beef," published on October 19, 1933, a dandified gentleman clings to the arm of a strapping (albeit inebriated, or "pickled"), broad-shouldered sailor clad in a white Naval uniform (Figure 82). The gay man saunters smugly, his free hand on his hip, and his tongue pushed out in the direction of a seated New Woman, sporting the short haircut and bold lipstick popular in that day. Another *Broadway Brevities* illustration, titled "Little Accident" from March 7th of 1932, shows an ostentatiously-dressed gay man in an ankle-length fur coat with rouged lips and cheeks, who drops his hankie on the ground directly in the path of the sailor walking behind him (Figure 83). "Oh, shucks!" the sailor glibly mutters, "There goes my hankie again." These representations imply an awareness of

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 1.

such tropes among the magazine's readership. Though appearing well after the exhibition of Wilson's earliest Basque sailors, the widespread appearance and readability of the scenes in American popular culture by the 1930s suggests that the stereotype had become fully integrated into mainstream culture. Because Wilson's sailors appeared before the trope had been fully proliferated and made available to the general public, his images would have been able to rise above scrutiny in ways that they could not have a decade later.

Scenes similar to those depicted in the *Broadway Brevities* cartoons, namely of *fairies* pursuing sailor companionship, appear in written form in early gay-themed novels, such as *The Young and Evil* by Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, first published in 1933.⁴³⁹ Though banned in the U.S., Henry McBride gave Wilson his copy of *The Young and Evil* in 1936, the former not preferring it to be "found among [his] effects after [his] death" but confessed, nonetheless, to "wishing it back for, scandalous as it may have been, it was amusing."⁴⁴⁰ Heavily influenced by the writings of James Joyce and Gertrude Stein, the experimental novel is set in New York City in the 1920s and early 1930s and follows a group of gay men who drunkenly hop from party to party, discuss eyebrow make-up, live on the cheap, smoke cigarettes together in bed, and write poetry. Focusing primarily on the comings and goings of Julian and Karel, an inexperienced

⁴³⁹ Charles Henri Ford and Parker Tyler, *The Young and Evil* (1933) (Salem, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, Inc., 1993); No stranger to the art world, Ford was the partner of the artist Pavel Tchelitchew. Art Critic Henry McBride also later became acquainted with Ford and they, along with Wilson, frequented the same parties in the thirties and forties, as evidenced by his letters to Malcolm MacAdam on 23 October 1936 and 22 September 1945, McBride Papers, NMcB5. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

⁴⁴⁰ Henry McBride to Malcolm MacAdam, 1 February 1936, published in Steven Watson and Catherine Morris, *An Eye on the Modern Century: Selected Letters of Henry McBride* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000) 276.

youngster from the south and a mischievous “fairy” respectively, as they explore New York’s nightlife at the apex of its sexual openness. The figure of the sailor features rather prominently in *The Young and Evil*. So much so, in fact, that the book includes an entire chapter titled “The Sailor” wherein Julian ruminates about masculine workers who are willing to trade sex for money (i.e. rough trade) and attempts to come to terms with his ambivalent desire for this bawdy, racially diverse, ill-mannered set:

I have often imagined the curve of them next to me in bed colored like coffee or like cream or like peaches and cream powder but without peaches and cream powder in their perspiring dear pores... I have often caught them going into toilets and coming out too. I know the strange as it may seem pull towards the goodlooking ones, the ones with the proud rumps and the careless underlips [sic].⁴⁴¹

Though it is true that effeminate Julian develops feelings for the similarly-dandified Karel, much of the novel is spent with queer men in pursuit of so-called “normal” male companions. As Louis, Karel’s hyper-masculine live-in boyfriend, puts it to Karel: “You homos don’t like each other... You’ve got your eyes fixed on the male symbol. Your feet get mixed up with each other’s in the rush. You couldn’t fall in love with each other.”⁴⁴²

The characters’ pursuit of rough trade was not without its trials, however. While cruising on Riverside Drive, for example, Karel and his friend Frederick were chased and accosted by sailors and subsequently arrested for suspicion of queer behavior. This violence, the book implies, goes hand and hand with sex in encounters with masculine companions: “The audacity, the cussedness Karel thought as one had tried to hit him

⁴⁴¹ Ford and Tyler, 75.

⁴⁴² Ibid., 143.

before that one sailor had his fly open the white showing...Fredrick cried SAVE US FROM THESE SAILORS!”⁴⁴³

Not strictly fodder for popular culture, several Modern artists in America looked to the sailor as a potent symbol for gay desire. Most markedly, both Charles Demuth and Paul Cadmus eroticized the uniforms worn and spaces frequented by sailors in their art. Demuth’s watercolor *Dancing Sailors* from 1917 famously shows two naval men dancing in the center of the composition while a third sailor, though dancing with a woman, focuses his gaze upon the pair (Figure 84). Conspicuously delineated by dark outlines, Demuth calls attention to the sailors’ uniformed anatomy, namely their sturdy backs, buttocks, and legs. More than just a signifier of a profession, the sartorial characteristics of the sailor’s uniform itself had erotic appeal, its shape tailored to accentuate those attributes that Western culture has idealized in masculine bodies. Writing about his experiences in the 1920s gay scene, one anonymous man described the allure of the sailor’s uniform as follows:

Sailors had the advantage of having a genuinely erotic uniform. It was very flattering, quite unlike the uniform of recent times... The neck of their tunic... gave the wearer a very masculine appeal... The trousers must have been made to titillate. They were very tight around the waist and bottoms, but baggy round the ankles. If the sailor wore no underwear then very little was left to imagination.⁴⁴⁴

At times rendered more subtly, the spaces wherein sailors gather take on erotic significance in Demuth’s work. *On “That” Street* of 1932, for example, pictures a huddled group of men, two of them sailors, whose body language implies the passing along of shared community secrets, perhaps in the pursuit of sex (Figure 85). The title

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁴⁴ Author unknown, “From a memoir of ‘Gay life’ During the Twenties,” in *A Queer Reader*, edited by Patrick Higgins (New York: New York Press, 1993) 178.

further adds to this sense of community knowledge, as “That” street is left unnamed, known only, one assumes, to those within “That” community. Likewise, Cadmus’s *The Fleet’s In!* from 1934 satirizes the various forms of vice with which sailors entangle themselves, namely prostitution and the pursuit of rough trade (Figure 86). On the left a sailor takes a cigarette from an effeminate blonde civilian clad in a red tie, another sailor sprawled out between them. Similarly, Wilson’s *Spanish Port* c. 1923 brings a ‘rough trade’ cruising locale to the center stage, lining the colorful port with loitering, peacocking sailors who preen themselves and thrust their hips toward passing civilians or each other (Figure 63). However, whereas Demuth’s sailor paintings were largely hidden from the public in the 1920s, more suitable for private viewing among close acquaintances,⁴⁴⁵ and whereas Cadmus’s audacious scenes exploded into the art world amid controversy and charges of indecency,⁴⁴⁶ Wilson’s early, relatively restrained, and racially-veiled employment of sailors as homoerotic imagery permitted his art to pass as morally decent in the eyes of the general public. As evidenced by Wilson’s provocation in *Encounter in the Darkness*, as discussed in the previous chapter, he had a savvy understanding of how far he could push his employment of homoerotic discourses.

In his book *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley*, Jonathan Weinberg argues that gay men developed insider codes—worn attributes like the red tie, heavy eyebrow make-up, gestural cues, etc.—that contemporary viewers might have either received (if they were part of the community to whom those symbols spoke) or perhaps not (if they were not). In the context of 1920s and

⁴⁴⁵ Jonathan Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice: Homosexuality in the Art of Charles Demuth and Marsden Hartley* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 99.

⁴⁴⁶ Meyer, *Outlaw Representation*.

1930s America, the sailor's uniform was one such symbol. However, as I discuss in my dissertation introduction, Weinberg clarifies that codes like the red tie should not be taken as hard and fast rules; rather, "there is no real iconography of homosexuality...the codes used to convey sexual difference were necessarily unstable even among homosexuals."⁴⁴⁷ In fact, it is their very multivalent quality and instability that renders such codes somewhat safe and usable in a society intolerant of sexual and gender diversity. Thus, in Wilson's art the Basque sailor could have functioned as a symbol for same-sex desire—the ultimate "rough trade," a hyper-masculine and primitive other that is nonetheless beautiful by Eurocentric standards of the moment—but it was a symbol only explicitly available to be read by those who would have known how to view it.

In addition to the sailor's uniform functioning like a code, I would argue that the features that Wilson chooses to underscore in stereotyped Basque physiognomy—exaggerated lips and eyebrows—are also homoerotic signs that would have been readable as such in New York's gay scene. Namely, the bold eyebrows exhibited both in *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* and *Untitled I (Basque sailors)* speak both to beliefs about Basque physiognomy as well as modes of fashion preferred among *fairies* in the United States. When describing Itchoua, the head smuggler in *Ramuntcho*, Loti states "he was of the Basque type, excessively accentuated; eyes caved-in too much under the frontal arcade; eyebrows of rare length, the points of which lowered as on the figures of tearful madonnas, almost touched the hair at the temples."⁴⁴⁸ Indeed, Wilson exaggerates the sailors' eyebrows in *Untitled I (Basque sailors)*, rendering them thick and darker than the

⁴⁴⁷ Weinberg, *Speaking for Vice*, 41.

⁴⁴⁸ Loti, *Ramuntcho*, 20-21.

hair on the central figure's head, which appears golden in tone. While on the one hand Wilson's exaggeration conforms to such descriptions of Basque features, it is worth noting that eyebrows also played a large role in contemporary urban gay men's fashion. According to Chauncey, "men used unconventional styles in personal grooming to signal their anomalous gender status. 'Plucked eyebrows, rouged lips, powdered face, and marcelled, blondined hair' were the essential attributes of the fairy, one straight observer noted in 1933."⁴⁴⁹ Indeed, in the novel *The Young and Evil*, Karel spends much time worrying about the state of his eyebrows, which, according to the book, "could be penciled into almost any expression: Clara Bow, Joan Crawford, Norma Shearer, etc."⁴⁵⁰ In fact, Karel's eyebrows at times function as an indicator of his mood, as after his altercation with the sailors, his eyebrows "didn't come back... after the way he rubbed them."⁴⁵¹

Queer Slumming

While I have thus far mostly discussed racial fetishization and queer culture in the United States as discrete discourses, the two would have occupied shared territory in the sexual imaginations and social practices of Wilson's urban audiences. Early twentieth-century sexologists often characterized individuals belonging to what hegemonic white culture deemed the "lower" or "primitive" races and classes as innately more inclined toward same-sex attraction. Mayne, for example, declared that "the more or less

⁴⁴⁹ Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 54.

⁴⁵⁰ Ford and Tyler, 56.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 183.

barbarous and primitive races of the world today” including “the Jew, the Gipsy and the North-American Negro” are “excessively simlsexual” with an “inborn tendency to it.”⁴⁵² Influential English sexologist Havelock Ellis, though using less inflammatory language, likewise writes in *Sexual Inversion (Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II)* that “[a]mong the American Indians, from the Eskimo of Alaska downward to Brazil and still farther south, homosexual customs have been very frequently observed.”⁴⁵³ Emphasizing the relative sexual tolerance among “lower” cultures (both European and non-European), he goes on to state “[o]n the whole, the evidence shows that among lower races homosexual practices are regarded with considerable indifference... Even in Europe today a considerable lack of repugnance to homosexual practices may be found.”⁴⁵⁴ Both Havelock Ellis and Berlin sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld pointed to such characterizations as evidence to attest to the naturalness of same-sex desire.⁴⁵⁵ Interestingly, sexologists sometimes specifically named Spain’s lower classes in these discussions. Hirschfeld, for instance, included titillating personal observations about traveling to the Bay of Biscay in his book *The Homosexuality of Men and Women*, writing that male “Basque ‘hustlers,’ who looked anything but trustworthy, made propositions” to other men “along the Concha, the enclosed bay.”⁴⁵⁶ Mayne concurs that in Spain “the peasantry are strongly

⁴⁵² Mayne, 76.

⁴⁵³ Havelock Ellis, *Sexual Inversion, Volume II, Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis Company, 1915) 8.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 4; Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women* (1914) (New York: Prometheus Books, 2000) 599.

⁴⁵⁶ Hirschfeld, 656.

homosexual.”⁴⁵⁷

The racial fetishization documented and spread by sexologists perhaps found its clearest expression in the cultural phenomenon of *slumming*. In his book *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940*, Chad Heap, a scholar of American Studies, examines the late nineteenth- early twentieth-century voyeuristic practice wherein affluent white “pleasure seekers” ventured into urban spaces to socialize with “racialized immigrant and working-class groups” that they deemed somehow baser, more primitive, more sexually wild.⁴⁵⁸ Many of these “pleasure seekers” were intellectuals or artists like Florine Stettheimer, whose painting *Asbury Park* from 1920 is suggestive of the practice (Figure 87). Famously described in the 1926 novel *Nigger Heaven* by Carl Van Vechten, an author in Wilson’s social circle, New York neighborhoods like Harlem and The Village became common sites of racial tourism, attracting fashionable young white people looking for “sexual spectacle... an opportunity to explore new social and sexual terrain.”⁴⁵⁹ As noted by Carl Van Vechten’s biographer Edward White, *slummers* derived thrill from the simultaneously perceived “threat of violence and... promise of casual sex” that seemed “ever present,” even “palpable” in these spaces.⁴⁶⁰ Because *slummers* were already committing the social indiscretions of

⁴⁵⁷ Mayne, 76.

⁴⁵⁸ Chad Heap, *Slumming: Sexual and Racial Encounters in American Nightlife, 1885-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) 2, 102; Christine Stansell articulates a similar point in *American Moderns*: “Ethnic and racial primitivism were bound up with notions of sexual licentiousness. The racialist thought that was ubiquitous at the time held the darker, poorer ‘races’... to be animalistic and uninhibited in their sexual excesses,” 296.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 101.

⁴⁶⁰ Edward White, *The Tastemaker: Carl Van Vechten and the Birth of Modern America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2014) 200.

racial mixing and drinking—as the practice was most widespread during the Prohibition years (1920-1933)—room was made available for further indiscretion and, thus, popular *slumming* spots also became “vital meeting places where white lesbians and gay men established a sense of community within the vast physical spaces and anonymity” of 1920s and 1930s New York.⁴⁶¹ Though the people of Harlem viewed white avant-garde intruders ambivalently, at best, white gay men felt identification and kinship with black communities.⁴⁶² While the trend was certainly rooted in social and racial elitism and the surrounding discourse is disturbing to modern interpreters, Heap warns against viewing the practice too reductively. *Slummers*, he points out, were fueled by the seemingly conflicting but nonetheless overlapping motivations of sexual voyeurism and a well-meaning desire for social change. The movement, moreover, helped to “spu[r] the development of an array of new commercialized leisure spaces that simultaneously promoted social mixing and recast the sexual and racial landscape of American urban culture and space.”⁴⁶³

No stranger to this phenomenon, Wilson bragged to romantic interest Wilbur Underwood about visiting one such spot in 1921, the Sioux T. Room, a bar in a Village basement opened by a Native American man that the artist enthusiastically called “a lewd hole!”⁴⁶⁴ Wilson’s friend Henry McBride likewise wrote to a correspondent about his experiences rubbing up against lower social classes, divulging “I sat next to a raw-boned,

⁴⁶¹ Heap, 244.

⁴⁶² Reed, 122.

⁴⁶³ Heap, 2.

⁴⁶⁴ Claggett Wilson to Wilbur Underwood, December 11th, 1921, in *The Papers of Wilbur Underwood*, Manuscript Division of the Library of Congress, box 2, Correspondence with Claggett Wilson, 1921-1930; Heap, 185.

hard-boiled sailor” at the 1930 prizefight between boxers Max Baer and Ernie Schaaf, adding that “people from up around 80th street might have been amused at our conversation.”⁴⁶⁵ For his primarily middle- to upper-class white urban audiences, Wilson’s paintings, which draw viewers into intimate proximity to sensuously depicted Basque primitives, might have elicited a similarly erotic thrill to that of dancing in the mixed racial crowd at Harlem’s famous Cotton Club. In the context of early twentieth-century discourses about race and homosexuality, the racial-otherness of his beautiful male youths would have rendered them more sexually available in the minds of his queer white audiences.

Alfred Lunt’s Performance

Lunt and his wife Lynn Fontanne were seemingly entranced by Wilson’s tales of Basque Country, as the three traveled there together at length in the 1920s. A photograph by Wilson of ‘the Lunts’ in a small town on the Bay of Biscay, likely Ondarroa, appears in the March 1st issue of *Town & Country* in 1928 in the “People We Know” section (Figure 88).⁴⁶⁶ In the photo the couple sits smiling, Alfred in a similar black beret to the one he wore in *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*, seated “with a Basque sailor or two.” According to the text that accompanies the photo, the couple “went there as Mr. Wilson’s

⁴⁶⁵ Henry McBride of Malcom MacAdam, 21 December 1930, McBride Papers, NMcB5. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

⁴⁶⁶ Wilson sent a letter to Brooklyn Museum Director W.H. Fox from Ondarroa, Spain in 1927. Claggett Wilson to W. H. Fox, 24 July 1927, Brooklyn Museum Archives. Records of the Office of the Director (W.H. Fox), 683, Brooklyn Museum Archives; “People We Know,” *Town & Country* (Mar. 1, 1928): 24.

guests for a week last summer, but the magic of Spain fastened on them and they remained for a month.” That they decided to pose with “a Basque sailor or two” rather than a chapel or historic structure suggests that the real draw of Basque country is the laboring men who reside there. Indeed, Wilson echoed this sentiment in a letter to Wilbur Underwood in 1926, excitedly describing Ondarroa as a “lively harbor” town with “swarms of Basque sailors.”⁴⁶⁷

When Lunt sat for *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* he had been married to fellow Broadway star Fontanne since May of the previous year. Nevertheless, the exact nature of his marriage and the pair’s respective sexualities remains a mystery.⁴⁶⁸ While it is certainly apparent that the two shared a deep affection for one another, biographer Margot Peters notes in her book *Design for Living: Alfred and Lynn Fontanne* that it is difficult to altogether ignore the persistent rumors that the two had a “sexless marriage” and, indeed, most biographers have “suspected, or assumed, both Alfred and Lynn were bisexual or gay.”⁴⁶⁹ What can be said with certainty, however, is that Lunt and Fontanne had a penchant for befriending prominent gay men in the arts—including Noël Coward, Alexander Woollcott, and Wilson—and, in many ways, they built their lives around cultivating these friendships. Lunt and Fontanne hired queer men to work on their homes, acted in plays that queer men wrote for them, and regularly hosted queer men for dinners, elaborate parties, and extended stays at their Wisconsin estate. The couple sometimes included their queer friends in their family holiday celebrations—as in 1939 when Wilson

⁴⁶⁷ Claggett Wilson to Wilbur Underwood, 29 August c. 1926, Wilbur Underwood Papers, box 2, Correspondence with Claggett Wilson. Library of Congress Manuscript Division.

⁴⁶⁸ Peters, 56.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 58.

attended the couple's Christmas dinner alongside Lunt's mother, his two sisters, and his sisters' husbands and children.⁴⁷⁰ Describing Lunt and Fontanne's life together, Peters states:

Alfred and Lynn worked out a design for living to suit them both. There would be no children... There would be deep devotion—to each other, to the theater, to their Genesee Depot home. There would be close friendships, particularly the triangle kind that Lynn preferred: Lynn, Alfred, and a gay or indeterminately sexed male. Possessive, insecure, she would risk losing him to a man, never to a woman.⁴⁷¹

As is made clear in the above quote, Peters confidently falls on the side of Lunt having been gay or bisexual. Indeed, it is tempting to speculate about whether *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* constitutes a sort of quiet acknowledgement of Lunt's desires or Wilson's desire for Lunt. In any case, it is enough to say that Lunt and Fontanne were deeply invested in the lives and culture of queer men and, as such, would have been well versed in their popular iconography and, therefore, the homoerotic potential of Lunt posing as a beautiful young sailor could not have been lost on them.

By 1923 when this painting was first exhibited at Knoedler, Wilson was already acquainted with Lunt and, thus, likely friendly with Lunt and Fontanne's band of gay male associates.⁴⁷² Both in their recognition of Lunt as the painting's true subject and in their recognition of the signs employed by gay men to identify themselves, Wilson's *The*

⁴⁷⁰ Jared Brown, *The Fabulous Lunts: A Biography of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne*, forward by Helen Hayes (New York: Atheneum, 1986) 269.

⁴⁷¹ Peters, 58.

⁴⁷² Though Wilson and McBride knew of each other by 1920 after Wilson's war series was shown at Knoedler's, the artist first initiated a friendly correspondence with McBride in early 1922 after the latter gave the former's *Songs of Solomon* exhibition at Chamberlain Dodd's a favorable review in *The New York Herald*. Henry McBride, "The Song of Solomon By Claggett Wilson" in *The New York Herald* (Feb. 5, 1922): 3.7. Claggett Wilson to Henry McBride, 7 February 1922, McBride Papers, NMcB13. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

Watcher on the Sea-Wall would have been readable to men in the artist's world in ways that it would not have been to the general public. It is important to note that Lunt and Fontanne were happy to playfully don roles that challenged gender and sexual norms. Notably, in 1932 the famous couple acted in the innuendo-laden ménage à trois production *Design for Living*, a play written by Noël Coward specifically with the Lunts and himself in mind as the three starring leads. Further, the playful willingness of Lunt and Fontanne to pose for paintings under an assumed identity is not an isolated incident. According to an article in *The Milwaukee Journal* published in 1934, when painting Scandinavian inspired panels for the cottage on their Ten Chimneys estate, Fontanne merrily posed for her husband as he painted the faces of both Adam and Eve.⁴⁷³

Though, without question, *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* is a faithful likeness of Lunt, it is worth considering to what extent the painting constitutes a portrait or, rather, to what extent the painting complicates traditional limitations of portraiture as a genre. Rearticulating a schema outlined by art historian Richard Brilliant in his book on portraiture, Cynthia Freeland has noted that portraits typically conform to two essential, albeit sometimes contradictory, aims: “a *revelatory* aim, requiring accuracy and faithfulness to the subject, and a *creative* aim, presupposing artistic expression and freedom.”⁴⁷⁴ Whether through likeness or through “captur[ing] a person's essence or unique air” the “revelatory aim” of a portrait purports to “reveal” a subject in an image,

⁴⁷³ “Home at Genesee Depot is Retreat of Players of ‘Reunion in Vienna,’” *The Milwaukee Journal* (Feb. 4, 1934): 3.

⁴⁷⁴ Cynthia Freeland, “Portraits and Photography,” *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 135, n. 1 (Aug. 2007): 95.

to speak authentically of the sitter's "true" self.⁴⁷⁵ However, art historians and post-structural philosophers alike have challenged portraiture's revelatory potential, arguing, as Brilliant does, that "whatever the mimetic quality of a portrait," it nonetheless fundamentally remains "a representation of and distinct from the Subject."⁴⁷⁶ In other words, while a portrait proposes to relay an image of the sitter's identity, this identity is mediated on several levels. Though discussing photographic portraiture, semiotician Roland Barthes offers a useful illustration of this point in his rehearsal of the multiple roles of the photographed subject: "in front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art."⁴⁷⁷ While, on the one hand, Barthes' sketch of the self in representation calls on the artist's "creative aim" to explain the fragmentation of the subject, it also, on the other hand, introduces a third and perhaps less obvious aim in portraiture: the desire to create a dialog with the audience, an aim that philosopher Patrick Maynard has characterized as portrait "display."⁴⁷⁸ For Maynard, a portrait is comprised of several imbricated displays by both the artist and sitter, including, for the former, displays of artistic mastery and cultural knowledge, and, for the latter, displays of beauty, of wealth, etc.

Wilson's *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* undeniably resembles Lunt physically and

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid., 101.

⁴⁷⁶ Richard Brilliant. "Portraits: The Limitations of Likeness," *Art Journal*, 46, n. 3(Autumn, 1987): 172.

⁴⁷⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981) 13.

⁴⁷⁸ Patrick Maynard, "Portraits as Displays" *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, 135, n. 1 (Aug., 2007): 114.

the artist seems to capture something soft and romantic about the actor's personality—or, at any rate, Wilson's perception of Lunt's personality. Further, Wilson effectively employs this painting to display his skillful ability to render a convincing likeness and his keen awareness of both historic literary tropes and, for the benefit of certain viewers, contemporary queer culture. Likewise, for his part, Lunt displays his good looks as well as his good humor in his willingness to participate in Wilson's ruse. However, the painting breaks with traditional portraiture in one glaring way: both Wilson's accurate rendering of Lunt and the parties' various cultural displays would have only been readable to audiences that recognized *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* as a representation of Alfred Lunt, a distinction to which the general public was not privy when it was initially displayed in the 1920s.

While portraiture is always *performative* in queer theorist Judith Butler's use of the word, it is not always overtly theatrical, wherein the sitter's performance of a role is self-aware and made explicit to the viewer. Viewers who happened to recognize Lunt's visage in *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* would have been immediately aware that they were looking at an actor playing a character separate from himself, a distinction made explicit by the wood frame's stage-like structure. First made famous in 1921 by his lead role as an awkward American soldier in Booth Tarkington's *Clarence*, Lunt's public partnership with Fontanne granted the couple an ostensible air of decency and rocketed the pair to theatre royalty, reigning from the early 1920s through the 1940s as the premier married couple on the stage.⁴⁷⁹ Beloved patriarch and matriarch of theatre though they were, Peters notes that the pair chose their roles carefully and never acted independently,

⁴⁷⁹ Peters, 40.

relying on the union to validate the performance of their respective genders, “counteract[ing] a certain androgyny” about their comportment.⁴⁸⁰ By anonymously assuming the role of a Basque sailor, Wilson invites Lunt to temporarily shed his public role as ‘Alfred-the-doting-husband’ (as he performed both on and off stage) and indulge instead in the imagined costuming, backdrop, and countenance of a romanticized racial other.

Given, then, that Wilson’s painting depicts an actor playing a part, it seems useful to compare the strategies employed therein to other categories of performance and impersonation. Not wholly unlike conventional drag acts, wherein a performer assumes the normative clothing and demeanor of a gendered other, *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* encourages the initiated viewer to recognize two seemingly irreconcilable roles (‘Alfred-the-doting-husband’ and the homoerotic Basque sailor) as coexisting. In drag, in the moment of recognition the ostensibly opposing poles of “realness” and “illusion” rub together to distort expectations and call the authenticity of identities into question.⁴⁸¹ Similarly, *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* invites those viewers who recognize the ruse to question the irreconcilability of Lunt’s two performed roles.

Still, Wilson’s image is quite unlike drag in one important sense: while drag subversion is typically achieved through deliberate reveals, when a performer reveals the illusory nature of the act, the safety of Wilson and Lunt’s joke in 1923 was dependent upon both the ability of the central figure to pass consistently as a Basque sailor and the

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 97.

⁴⁸¹ Judith Butler, “From Interiority to Gender Performatives,” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1999) 364.

sailor as a type to pass as a relatively wholesome theme for most viewers. For the average gallery attendee, *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* presented itself as an authentic, albeit romanticized, example of Basque dress and physiognomy. Viewing the work concurrently, the initiated queer viewer was treated with a witty joke, the exclusive and forbidden nature of which would have only served to heighten its viewer's enjoyment.

Conclusion

In the context of contemporary written and visual representations of both Basque fishermen and sailors in Western culture more broadly, Wilson's paintings function as an early example in twentieth-century American art of the use of the sailor to reference homosocial groups and spaces in which homoerotic encounters might occur, a trope that Demuth explores more privately in his Naval scenes and Cadmus infamously flaunts in the 1930s. Employing a colonialist language with which early twentieth-century white Americans were well accustomed, the illusory nature and safety of Wilson's gambit in *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* was dependent upon Lunt's ability to pass as a Basque 'primitive' for the majority of viewers. In the guise of a Basque sailor, Lunt temporarily sheds his public role and indulges instead in the imagined identity of an eroticized other.

In this chapter I have argued that Wilson's Basque paintings simultaneously constitute a fetishization of racial difference as well as a subversive joke that undermined contemporary standards of sexual respectability. While many scholars, such as film theorist Laura Mulvey, have examined fetishization in exclusively negative terms, regarding it strictly as an act of mastery, art historian Kobena Mercer offers a more

complicated reading. In the now canonical essay “Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary,” Mercer famously responds to a scathing critique of Robert Mapplethorpe’s fetishistic photographs of black bodies that Mercer himself had written just three years earlier, declaring that he had begun to “revis[e] the assumption that ‘fetishism’ is necessarily a bad thing.”⁴⁸²

Mercer’s re-evaluation of Mapplethorpe’s work is mainly twofold. First, he acknowledges a “logical slippage” in his previous essay in which he had too easily elided “Mapplethorpe as the artist” and the “ideological subject-position into which the spectator is interpellated... the categorical position of ‘the white male subject.’”⁴⁸³ After all, Mercer observes, Mapplethorpe, too, was a member of an oppressed group, marginalized due to his gay identity, subordinate to artists whose persona more closely aligns with the masculine ideal traditionally privileged by the Modern canon.⁴⁸⁴ Second, Mercer was confronted by the realization that he also desired the men in Mapplethorpe’s photographs:

Once I acknowledge my own location in the image reservoir as a gay subject—a desiring subject not only in terms of sharing a desire to look, but in terms of an identical object-choice already there in my own fantasies and wishes—then the articulation of meanings about eroticism, race, and homosexuality becomes a lot more complicated. Indeed, I am forced to confront the rather unwelcome fact that I would actually occupy the same position in the fantasy of mastery that I said was that of the white male subject!⁴⁸⁵

⁴⁸² Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures: Language, Discourse, Society* (1972) (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989) 21; Kobena Mercer, “Skin Head Sex Thing: Racial Difference and the Homoerotic Imaginary” (1989), in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies*, edited by Kobena Mercer (New York: Routledge, 1994) 190.

⁴⁸³ Mercer, 192.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

With these two acknowledgements in mind, Mercer concludes that Mapplethorpe's photographs might be both fetishizing *and* revolutionary, categories that he can no longer regard as having mutually exclusive affects. Thus, the functional meaning of Mapplethorpe's images is therefore manifold, able to "confirm a racist reading as easily as they can produce an antiracist one" and "elicit a homophobic reading as easily as they can confirm a homoerotic one."⁴⁸⁶

Through Mercer's reconsideration of the power dynamics involved in racial fetishization, it is possible to recognize Wilson's Basque sailors as both problematic in the artist's over-simplification of a racialized other and at the same time socially rebellious in his brazen employment of queer discourses. Further, in this view, Wilson's appropriation of the other can be regarded as a tactic, a language through which he might address his own otherness and interrogate hegemonic categories of identity and desire. By 1923 New York had amassed a sizable group of savvy queer urbanites who may have read *The Watcher* in ways not available to the general public, for whom the primitive identity of 'the Basque' might elide with and intensify existing gay fantasies about rough trade and primal masculinity. In his Basque paintings, Wilson makes use of the visual signs and discourses of power as a quietly rebellion against a society that would oppress him.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid., 203.

Chapter Four

Staging Interiors: Wilson's Designs for Lunt and Fontanne's Ten Chimneys Estate

Around 1934, with pockets flush on the proceeds from Noël Coward's *Design for Living* and other successful productions that preceded it, actors Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne set upon expanding their country estate in Genesee Depot, Wisconsin. Twenty-eight miles west of Milwaukee, nestled in the glacially formed forest of southeast Wisconsin known as the Kettle Moraine, Genesee Depot was a beloved childhood destination for Lunt.⁴⁸⁷ 'The Lunts,' still jointly reigning as king and queen of Broadway, named the property Ten Chimneys, a nod toward the home's many prominent chimneys and imported Swedish *kakelugn* stoves. Loosely modeled on a gentleman's farm, their estate's acreage varied over the years but was consistently spacious and groomed for carefully weighed rusticity.⁴⁸⁸ The couple hired Chicago architect Charles Dornbusch to plan the armature of the addition and enlisted their friend Claggett Wilson to tackle the decor.⁴⁸⁹ The resulting interior is a dizzyingly indulgent pastiche of historic styles peppered with erotic humor and Wilson's interest in the theater is palpably manifest. Upon entering for the first time, actor Richard Whorf exclaimed "My God! Every room's

⁴⁸⁷ Ten Chimneys stood in sharp contrast to Lunt's boyhood home. Lunt was born in a "drab two-story house at Wisconsin Avenue and North Seventeenth Street, Milwaukee," Ward Morehouse, "Lynn Fontanne and Alfred Lunt, of Genesee, Wisconsin," *Vogue*, 95, n. 9 (May 1, 1940): 71.

⁴⁸⁸ At the time Wilson was working on the estate the property consisted of fifty-acres or so, Morehouse, p. 71; later the farm grew to 110 acres, "On the Farm With the Lunts," *Christian Science Monitor* (Oct. 28, 1950): WM18.

⁴⁸⁹ "Home at Genesee Depot is Retreat of Players of 'Reunion in Vienna,'" *The Milwaukee Journal* (Feb. 4, 1934): 3.

a stage!” and the basis for his declaration is largely self-evident.⁴⁹⁰ The mural-laden entrance, for example, transports viewers to a fantastic pleasure garden wherein near-life-sized attendants act as both supporting cast and audience to the starring players’ impending entrance at stage left (Figure 89).

Though Lunt and Fontanne’s famous dwelling teeters between public and private space, Wilson’s designs presume a specific audience that is both willing to engage with his patrons’ dramaturgical sensibility and able to understand his bookish allusions.⁴⁹¹ In the decades following the renovations, the Midwestern home became a legendary haven for Hollywood and New York theater elite, hosting guests like Carol Channing, Helen Hayes, Audrey Hepburn, and Lawrence Olivier. It was also, synchronously, a gathering place for the couple’s cadre of queer friends, most of whom were also in the theater, including Wilson, Noël Coward, Alexander Woollcott, and Cecil Beaton—a factor that added fuel to later accounts of their marriage as more companionate than romantic. Though many of these guests delighted in Ten Chimneys, the home’s florid aesthetic is a clear rejection of the Modern restraint preferred by many individuals in Lunt, Fontanne, and Wilson’s professional circles. Writing to his wife actress Lotte Lenya after visiting Ten Chimneys in 1942, Kurt Weill, the modern German composer best known for music in Bertolt Brecht’s *Three Penny Opera*, warned “And if you see Alfred’s house, love it,

⁴⁹⁰ Brown, 367.

⁴⁹¹ Though a private residence, region and national periodicals reproduced photographs of Ten Chimneys several times over the years. These publications reproduced, almost exclusively, photographs of Lunt and Fontanne either in the Swedish kitchen and salon or posing in the estate’s exterior. Because the home was lived in and visited over several decades, it is important to acknowledge that Ten Chimneys’ reception would have evolved over time as both ‘the Lunts’, their home, and the allusions therein aged. That said, this chapter will situate Wilson’s decor in the context of the years leading up to and during the project, hopefully providing clues to how the home might have been read by its inhabitants and its earliest viewers.

he is so proud of it. It's awful in parts. Done by a fairy."⁴⁹² The last pronouncement, "Done by a fairy," is likely more matter-of-factual than derisive, per se, as Weill and Lenya seemed to pride themselves on fashionable association with lesbians and gay men.⁴⁹³ Still, given the proximity of Weill's assessment that the house is "awful in parts" to the revelation that it was "Done by a fairy," it is tempting to wonder to what extent, for the composer's taste, the former observation naturally followed the latter. Weill's commentary on the home's excess (and excessive queerness, perhaps) and Whorf's experience of the house as emphatically stage-like suggests an immersive, performative aesthetic that confounded and challenged visitors and anticipated a specific point of departure apparently alien to Weill.

Addressing Ten Chimney's narrow, theatrical, and largely queer audience, Wilson's designs playfully employ humorist methods akin to those found in the work of contemporary high comedy playwrights Noël Coward and Robert Sherwood, whose scripts are driven by erudite banter, obscure quotation, naughty double entendre, and an almost hedonistic devotion to hokum. As frequent guests in Lunt and Fontanne's home, these playwrights were also part of the décor's target audience. Though clothed in conservative upper-class urbanity, high comedy playwrights have historically used the genre as a conduit through which to question the hegemony of bourgeois morality. Wilson's Ten Chimneys aesthetic—in particular in the home's entertainment areas that

⁴⁹² Kurt Weill to Lotte Lenya, 23 April 1942, in *Speak Low (When You Speak of Love): The Letters of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya*, edited and translated by Lys Symonette and Kim H. Kowalke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996) 337.

⁴⁹³ For example, on March 17, 1942 Lenya writes to Weill: "I had diner on Monday at Ruth's house. It was quite nice. I met Cecil Smith (a nice fairy)" [sic]; on April 13, 1942 Weill writes to Lenya: "Louise Crane (a rich Lesbian who is crazy about Negroes) took us to a Spanish-negro place in Haarlem where we heard a good orchestra" [sic], in *Speak Low*, 313, 324.

include the foyer, the Swedish salon, and the Flirtation Room—aggressively thrust guests into the spotlight where Lunt and Fontanne set the tone by modeling a deeply fashionable and paganistic social posture that visitors might mirror back at them. Wilson’s over-the-top decoration is spatialized high comedy *hokum*, a term I am using here to describe a theater strategy wherein players revel in trivial aristocratic repartee and erotically charged spectacle ancillary to the plot. The artist’s exaggerated approach and imbricated evocation of contemporary and historic styles is also potentially disorienting for viewers as they attempt to navigate through a pictorial forest of latent, inexact, and sometimes bold sexual entendres. In *Ten Chimneys* pleasure becomes a politic and queer viewership gets top billing. Looking at Wilson’s aesthetic strategies as well as the home’s use, in particular the main entertainment areas, I argue that Wilson’s interior decoration strategies emboldened and provided an affirming backdrop to Lunt, Fontanne, and their guests’ performance of marginalized social identities.

Farm Romance: *Ten Chimneys*’ Agricultural Facade

After coming into a \$30,000 family inheritance in 1913 at the age of twenty-one, Lunt purchased a three-acre plot of land in Genesee Depot.⁴⁹⁴ In 1922 the actor married Fontanne, who shared his fantasy vision of a rural life, and the couple added an additional forty acres to their property.⁴⁹⁵ Requiring a Broadway-adjacent residence for the theater season, Lunt and Fontanne lived a large part of the year in a posh New York apartment

⁴⁹⁴ Peters, 30.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 57.

and later a townhouse, both located in the affluent Upper East Side.⁴⁹⁶ Notably, Wilson and actor Richard Whorf jointly decorated the former of Lunt and Fontanne's metropolitan homes in 1937, pairing a cool color scheme with Swedish style and Baroque flower embellishments.⁴⁹⁷ Despite the convenience and status associated with their New York apartments, the theater couple funneled much of their money and time into their rural Wisconsin home. They spent nearly every summer and holiday thereafter living and working on the property and would even halt popular tours for the sake of their annual respite.⁴⁹⁸ After their careers wound down in the 1960s, the estate became Lunt and Fontanne's primary residence.⁴⁹⁹ Far exceeding the attention paid to their urban apartments, the contrast between these two glamorous Broadway lights and their ostensibly quaint lives seemingly enthralled the popular media. A *Vogue* article in 1933, for example, calls their rural home a "pastoral idyll...a life of rustic simplicity undreamed of by the hundreds and thousands who see them behind the footlights" and reproduced a photograph of Lunt bending over to tend crops with a four-pronged pitchfork while Fontanne looks on offering assistance.⁵⁰⁰

Correspondent Ward Morehouse for *Vogue* magazine in 1940 gently chided the actors' inflated agricultural claims, calling the property "A 'farm,' if you insist, but one

⁴⁹⁶ 130 East 75th St.; Lunt and Fontanne bought a townhouse in 1950, 150 East End Avenue, Brown, 239.

⁴⁹⁷ Claggett Wilson and Richard Whorf decorated the Lunts apartment at 130 East 75th St. There are no known photographs, but biographer Jared Brown describes it as "in Swedish style, with different shades of gray for the bedroom, and rich blue-green for the dining room, and baroque floral designs on many of the walls," Brown, 239.

⁴⁹⁸ Peters, 140.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 286.

⁵⁰⁰ "Reunion in Genesee," *Vogue*, 82, n. 9 (Nov. 1, 1933): 51.

without barn, silo, or tractors.”⁵⁰¹ Though Morehouse is not entirely off base in his assessment, Ten Chimneys, at its height, boasted a greenhouse, a hennery, a dairy, a side house, vegetable and flower patches, fruit trees, and certainly required a tractor or two. The actors’ rolling property was covered in pine, Chinese elms, box elders, and poplars, some local to the area, others transplanted for aesthetic reasons.⁵⁰² Though the planting imitates natural growth, appearing almost effortless, the arrangement is controlled disorder, a landscaping style awash with fantasies about idyllic fecundity and tamed American wilderness. Magazines of the day gave advice on how to plant to these ends, like Margaret O. Goldsmith’s article “Natural Planting” for *House Beautiful* in September 1937, which recommends that readers include natural vistas and intersecting paths, à la Capability Brown’s eighteenth-century gardens, that “make... exploring easy” in their “informal landscaping plan.”⁵⁰³

Lunt and Fontanne basked in the romance of their rural life, rising early to garden, churn butter, and arrange table centerpieces for their legendarily decadent dinner tables.⁵⁰⁴ The actors donned peasant-chic costuming for these tasks, Fontanne in her Austrian dirndl dress gifted to her by American stage actress Katharine Cornell.⁵⁰⁵ The couple’s photographer friend Warren O’Brien visited Ten Chimneys several times to take

⁵⁰¹ Morehouse, 110.

⁵⁰² This information is communicated by Larry Bartell, a young farmer who helped out at the Lunts from time to time from the late 20s on. Larry Bartell, interview by Thomas H. Garver, September 23, 1998, transcript, Ten Chimneys Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI.

⁵⁰³ Margaret O. Goldsmith, “Natural Planting,” *House Beautiful* (Sep. 1937): 40-41, 84.

⁵⁰⁴ “On the Farm with the Lunts,” *Christian Science Monitor* (Jun. 11, 1928): WM18.

⁵⁰⁵ “Reunion in Genesee,” *Vogue*, 82. n. 9 (Nov. 1, 1933): 51.

promotional photos, including trips in 1933, 1935, 1942, and 1949, and many of the ensuing images feature the acting team dressed in their stagiest farm get-ups.⁵⁰⁶ Standing outside a bucolic chalet on the property in 1935, Fontanne pairs her dirndl dress with a smartly fastened headscarf and dark lip (Figure 90). She stands in slack contrapposto, her frame gracefully leaning against a young tree as she gazes off into the unseen distance, apparently contemplating her wooded surroundings. Lunt, who stands at her right, looks out with an air of determination, one leg confidently thrown astride as he positions a hand at his hip with a wide-brimmed work hat pressed in between. Though the couple's costuming, not to mention Fontanne's makeup, appear unsullied from a day's work, the viewer is invited to imagine the pair as farmers pausing between tasks to admire the land upon which they themselves have toiled. Another photograph from 1942 shows the couple resting against a pile of freshly cut hay about to enjoy a picnic (Figure 91). Lunt, who flaunts an absurdly large straw hat, hams it up for O'Brien's camera. No waterspout in view, he sits poised to drink from a deliberately humble ladle. The narrative posited by this photograph works, perhaps, to reinforce the gendered appearance of their respective marital roles. Fontanne, the image seems to imply, has just brought refreshments from the home to bolster her husband's strength, allowing Lunt to better conquer the physical tasks at hand. While certainly the pair took pleasure in easy agricultural work, they also employed several laborers who assumed the brunt of the property's upkeep. The performance is campy farmer drag, an idealized vision of peasantry in quotes. Reproduced in various local and national publications, these photographs helped to establish and confirm the dominant public narrative about the couple as happily keeping

⁵⁰⁶ Warren O'Brien photographs from 1935 and 1942 are now in the O'Brien Family Collection, circa 1880-2000, PH6027, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI.

inconspicuous lives in heteronormative roles. It also anticipates the postwar suburban fantasy of young married couples tending to their own plot of land.

The couple's Millet-esque attire notwithstanding, light agriculture was a popular leisure pursuit among the middle and upper classes in 1930s and 1940s United States. Their enthusiasm for the pastoral was in the tradition of gentlemen's farming, the eighteenth-century aristocratic pastime of casual cultivation. Indeed, in her later autobiography, actress Helen Hayes, frequent Ten Chimneys guest, observed a tension between Lunt and Fontanne's rural performance and the material reality of their estate: "The Lunts had a big spread where they played gentlemen farmers... but there was nothing rustic about their house."⁵⁰⁷ As hinted by Hayes's statement, the concept of a gentleman's farm was not foreign to educated American audiences. Though often discursively linked to France, the gentleman's farm was also famously at the heart of Thomas Jefferson's political vision for America, imbuing the practice with patriotic appeal. Writing for *House Beautiful* in 1934, architectural historian Harold D. Eberlein profiles Renfrew Farm, Chestnut Hill, PA, characterizing it as a successful contemporary "adaptation... of the eighteenth century gentilhomme or country gentlemen's abode of provincial France." Viewed through this historical lens, prosaic agricultural activities do not interfere with the classed respectability of an estate's inhabitants; rather, Eberlein notes, "The French country gentlemen recognized" these duties "as both necessary and agreeable incidents of rural life."⁵⁰⁸ Though rural, it would be difficult to view Lunt and

⁵⁰⁷ Helen Hayes, *My Life in Three Acts* (San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990) 106.

⁵⁰⁸ Harold D. Eberlein, "Farm House in the Urbane French Manner," *House Beautiful* (Jan. 1934): 35.

Fontanne's property as particularly old-fashioned. Not exactly a requisite farm amenity, Lunt and Fontanne installed an "L" shaped swimming pool for 'The Lunts' in the mid-1930s. To accommodate poolside guests, Wilson designed a red and white bathhouse equipped with modern plumbing that was later dubbed the "Mermaid Pavilion" after the bronze decorative statue gifted by Cecil Beaton that tops the structure's cupola (Figure 92).⁵⁰⁹

Off and on, from around 1934 to 1940, Wilson spent a good deal time living and working with Lunt and Fontanne at Ten Chimneys. Though the primary purpose of Wilson's stay was the completion of his interior design program, he was also invited to mend, as he was still suffering from complications brought on by his injuries in the First World War.⁵¹⁰ This belief that spending time in nature might assuage Wilson's suffering seems like a throwback to earlier notions of convalescence (though the practice was still pervasive during World War I, especially), and suggests, perhaps, that the artist likewise indulged in Lunt and Fontanne's romantic rural conceit.⁵¹¹ More than a passing acquaintance, the Broadway couple integrated Wilson into their home and family life. Wilson was sometimes tasked with accompanying Lunt's mother Hattie Sederholm to their plays' opening nights; he joined them at holiday meals; and he aided in mundane domestic duties, like helping to eject an owl who had taken up residence in one of the

⁵⁰⁹ Peters, 110.

⁵¹⁰ "I had an operation in February which laid me up for such time as kept me from the screams and applause of your opening," in letter from Claggett Wilson to Florine Stettheimer, April 12, 1934, Yale Archives, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. I, box 5, flr. 104; "Claggett Wilson, whom [Lunt and Fontanne] had dragged down from Boston and out of a sick bed, worked on costume designs in a corner," *Stage*, 13 (Nov. 1935): 52.

⁵¹¹ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*.

home's bedrooms.⁵¹² While some accounts suggest that Wilson lived at Ten Chimneys for multiple years, it seems clear from his letters and exhibition history that this residence was intermittent at best.⁵¹³ Wilson's painting assistant recalls that the artist traveled back to New York often to spend time with his "lover," Douglas Robbins.⁵¹⁴ During these New York visits, Wilson found time to socialize with his cluster of stylish urban friends, including Henry McBride and the Stettheimer sisters.⁵¹⁵ He also gave art talks at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, participated in gallery exhibitions, and completed murals for other private residences.⁵¹⁶

⁵¹² Wilson brings Hattie Sederholm to *Design for Living*, McBride to Malc. Jan 22, 1933, Archives of American Art; Brown, p. 269; Hattie Sederholm to Karin Sederholm Bugbee, undated 24, c. 1939. Ten Chimneys Foundation Archives, Genesee Depot, WI.

⁵¹³ Peters, 137; A letter from Wilson to Dornbusch in October 19, 1938 does speak of a room being made up in Ten Chimneys within which Wilson might reside rather than commuting, but most letters written by Wilson from this time are nonetheless postmarked from Squirrel Island, Maine and Hotel Duane in New York (Wilson's apartment), Lunt and Fontanne Papers, 5/85-3-410 Reel 8. Microfilmed at the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

⁵¹⁴ John Hale, Claggett Wilson's painting assistant, interviewed by Thomas H. Garver, July 1, 1998, transcript, Ten Chimneys Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI.

⁵¹⁵ "Clagg" and "H. Mc. B." listed among guests at a Stettheimer dinner party on May 5, 1935, in Florine Stettheimer's diary, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, n. II, box 6, flr. 119, Yale University Library; Ettie writes that Florine and Wilson attended a museum opening together, letter from Ettie Stettheimer to Carl Sprinchorn, 14 June 1938, Sprinchorn Papers, Reel 3008. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

⁵¹⁶ Wilson gives a talk at the Met titled "Dramatizing Color," "Museum Events," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 31, n. 1 (Jan. 1936): 19; Wilson gives a talk at the Met titled "The Painter's Color Box," "Museum Events," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, 32, n. 3 (Mar., 1937): 78; a dining room with a mural by Wilson is featured in the show "Murals and Interiors" hosted by the Decorators Club Gallery, 745 Fifth Avenue, Walter Rendell Storey, "MURALS SEEN AS ONE WITH THEIR SETTINGS," *The New York Times Magazine* (Nov. 1, 1936): 14; Wilson paints flower murals for the entrance hall of A.O.R. Baldrige's apartment, "4 New Apartments," *Town & Country* (Apr. 1938): 83; Wilson created Swedish inspired interiors for the Boston home of H.K. Chamberlain, Christine Ferry, "Swedish Primitive in the Game Room of Mr. and Mrs. H.K. Chamberlain," *Country Life and the Sportsman* (Jul. 1938): 32-33.

Pastiche and Affect: Pleasure as Politic

By the mid-1930s Wilson had already painted murals for an impressive list of prominent New Yorkers. Like *Ten Chimneys*, his murals for these commissions were characteristically theatrical, amorous, and packed with historical quotation. He crafted, for example, a Renaissance-themed music room in 1924 for President of the Public National Bank Alfred S. Rossin; a flirty music room for Solomon R. Guggenheim in 1926 featuring hastily strewn “symbol[s] of gallantry;” and haughty tennis court scenes for the summer home of financier James Cox Brady in 1928, to name a few.⁵¹⁷ While the modern art scene in New York increasingly marginalized continental styles in both art and décor, Wilson’s referential mode finds an obvious ally in the paintings and interior design projects of his friend Florine Stettheimer, whose work elicits pleasure and nods toward eighteenth-century aesthetics. Carl van Vechten described the studio Florine designed for herself the 1930s, for instance, as “a nest of white-draped cellophane, red rugs and carved white and gold furniture” adorned with beaded crystal flowers (Figure 93).⁵¹⁸ Though Wilson was a muralist, his style and allegiance to upper-class themes would not have translated well for the public works generated by the Works Progress Administration that employed many of his art world colleagues during these years. Instead, Wilson subsisted quite comfortably on his inheritance and commissions from

⁵¹⁷ “An Artist Creates a Background for Music,” *Town & Country* (Oct. 1, 1924): 31; Augusta Owen Patterson, “THE DECORATIVE ARTS,” *Town & Country* (Jun. 15, 1926): 42-43; “Newport Tennis: Vintage of 1902, Panel by Claggett Wilson,” *Town & Country* (Dec. 1, 1928).

⁵¹⁸ Carl van Vechten, “The World of Florine Stettheimer,” *Harper’s Bazaar*, 79 (Oct. 1946): 354.

private homeowners and businesses.

Ten Chimneys is far and away Wilson's most expansive and expensive interior design commission. Encouraged by his Broadway patrons' proclivities toward excess and theatricality, the artist seems to have held nothing back. Wilson's glitzy interiors clash jarringly with Lunt and Fontanne's public performance of peasantry and inspired the artist to affectionately dub the main house "the palace."⁵¹⁹ Indeed, despite the devastating effects of the national economic depression in the 1930s, Lunt and Fontanne likely spent well over \$100,000 to build their home.⁵²⁰ Collaboratively conceived over dinner conversation, Wilson's patrons involved themselves in nearly all aspects of the renovation, providing him with clearly stated ambitions for the main house.⁵²¹ These contributions extended beyond conception. Lunt, for example, designed and personally crafted the Swedish primitive kitchen and hallways for the "hen house" (a smaller side house that eventually housed his mother Hattie) and collected much of the Scandinavian folk art that adorns Ten Chimneys' walls and mantels. For her part, Fontanne took the lead on the soft fixtures: she and Lunt's sisters sewed curtains, embroidered cushions, and upholstered divans and armchairs. Still, Wilson's responsibilities far exceeded that of a craftsman. He took on a significant role in curating the space and purchased furniture and fixtures during his regular travels to New York and Maine.

⁵¹⁹ Claggett Wilson to Charles Dornbusch, 19 October 1938, Lunt and Fontanne Papers 5/85-3-410 Reel 8. Microfilmed at the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

⁵²⁰ Winifred Eschweiler (wife of one of the architects at Ten Chimneys in the early 1930s), interviewed by Thomas H. Garver, February 23, 1999, transcript, Ten Chimneys Foundation Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI.

⁵²¹ "They used to have dinner every night. Claggett would sit down with them for the dinner and I know in the morning Claggett would say, 'well, last night at dinner, we discussed this and this and this,'" Hale interview.

Wilson spent no small amount of energy in this endeavor, designing original fixtures for the space and modifying nearly all of the pre-made objects that he procured. According to John Hale, Wilson's assistant and the son of Lunt and Fontanne's painting subcontractor, the artist turned his nose up at the thought of installing mass-manufactured items as they were sold.⁵²² He painted, for example, chinoiserie flourishes on the side of the living room's grand piano and miniature Scandinavian-inspired scenes on the dining room credenza depicting agricultural yields and laborers. Hale recalls painstakingly using a perforator to excise ornamental patterns from larger sheets of wallpaper at Wilson's direction before they could be adhered to the wall.⁵²³ Fortifying the home's distinctive quality, the artist worked closely with the project's head architect Dornbusch to design and order fabrication of one-of-a-kind rugs to suit each room's aesthetic and square footage.⁵²⁴ Most who saw the interior were awed by its novelty and over-the-top splendor. For example, John C. Wilson, an American theater director, producer, and sometimes lover to Noël Coward gushed over Ten Chimneys' excessive comforts:

In the bedrooms, for instance, there are three sets of curtains: blackouts for late sleeping, organdy for elegance, and a beautiful chintz to complete the trilogy. The bathrooms are not only carpeted, but also decorated with murals. And I don't think I have ever seen such luxurious clothes closets.⁵²⁵

⁵²² Hale interview.

⁵²³ Ibid; Wilson recommends this method to readers in "Just a Little Guidance All a Housewife Needs to Make Her Own Murals..." *The Christian Science Monitor* (Oct. 16, 1946): 8.

⁵²⁴ Claggett Wilson writes to Charles Dornbusch: "I hope to Him there has been no change in the floor coverage; I have had the carpets woven to the blue-print measurements and there's going to be some fancy pants wetting if they don't fit!" 19 October 1938, Lunt and Fontanne Papers, 5/85-3-410 Reel 8. Microfilmed at the Wisconsin State Historical Society.

⁵²⁵ John C. Wilson, *Noël, Tallulah, Cole, and Me: A Memoir of Broadway's Golden Age* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015) 92; Lunt's mother Hattie campily summarized the couple's tongue-in-cheek attitude toward intemperance, declaring "You can do without the necessities but you can't live without the luxuries," in Hannah Heidi Levy, *Famous Wisconsin*

Though grand, Wilson faked many of the fineries, playfully including faux marbling and trompe l'oeil moldings in the foyer. It is, after all, a stage set.

The overall appearance of Ten Chimneys is a colorful blend of styles difficult to neatly parse out. Though the living room murals are near facsimiles of a late eighteenth-century Swedish salon, that salon's aesthetic owes much to Medieval folk tradition, which I discuss at more length later in the chapter (Figure 94). The imagery, now doubly appropriated, is here paired with chinoiserie and other Rococo trappings. Combining all hitherto named styles, the dining room is distinguished by a custom Art Deco rug and ceiling mural (Figure 95). Wilson himself wittily described the style as “peasant Rococo.”⁵²⁶ *Vogue* gestured at Wilson's visual barrage in 1940, declaring the home a Swedish manor but its décor mostly French Restoration or Baroque.⁵²⁷ The artist's brazen integration of styles may be thanks in part to the powerful influence of Elsie de Wolfe—a leading tastemaker in interior design, a famed socialite, and Wilson's professional acquaintance.⁵²⁸ In her 1913 book *The House in Good Taste*, she recommends eclecticism and period mixing in decoration. Though de Wolfe's career and celebrity thrived through the 1940s, she was best known for her work at The Colony Club in New York in 1905 and the private rooms in Henry Clay Frick's mansion in 1913, including, for example, The Boucher Room, a delicate mint-colored room originally intended as the ladies'

Artists and Architects (Oregon, WI: Badget Books Inc., 2004) 237.

⁵²⁶ Press Clipping probably from the *Boston Evening Transcript*, c. 1928. Claggett Wilson website, created and maintained by Claggett Wilson Read, “Memoirs & Articles,” www.claggettwilson.com (accessed on January 6, 2016).

⁵²⁷ Morehouse, 108.

⁵²⁸ Elsie de Wolfe asks Claggett Wilson to help “bedizen” her New York shop, “Dollar and Scents,” *Time* (Oct. 22, 1928): 35.

reception room, which is adorned with panels by François Boucher (Figure 96).⁵²⁹ As discussed in chapter two, de Wolfe's popularity helped to bring Rococo-inspired art and furnishings, in particular, back into fashion.⁵³⁰ Though, for French viewers, the opulence of the Rococo constituted a symptom of social inequality before the revolution, design historian Penny Sparke has argued that, for Americans, de Wolfe and followers' turn to the pastel palette and sumptuous furnishings of the eighteenth century "represented a break" with the stifling Victorian conservatism that still hung in the air during the first decades of the twentieth century.⁵³¹ Lunt and Fontanne, like Wilson, were friendly with de Wolfe and familiar with her characteristic style, having visited her at her lavish vacation chateau in Versailles in 1926.⁵³² In the 1930s and 1940s, Lady Mendl, as she was known after her marriage in 1926, increasingly produced rooms characterized by dramatically clashing furniture and patterns drawn from various stylistic periods.⁵³³

Scholars may describe aesthetic amalgamations such as Wilson and de Wolfe's interiors as pastiche. Derived from the Latin word for paste (*pasta*), pastiche is first defined in the 1762 French Academy Dictionary as art produced by one artist that

⁵²⁹ John Esten and Rose Bennett Gilbert, *Manhattan Style* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1990) 3.

⁵³⁰ Elsie de Wolfe, *The House in Good Taste* (New York: The Century Co., 1913).

⁵³¹ Penny Sparke, "The Domestic Interior and the Construction of Self: The New York Homes of Elsie de Wolfe," in *Interior Design and Identity*, edited by Susie McKellar and Penny Sparke (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2004) 81.

⁵³² "LYNN FONTANNE RETURNS: Actress, Back From Europe, Rejoins Guild Theatre Tonight," *The New York Times* (Aug. 31, 1926): 8.

⁵³³ See, for example: "Lady Mendl's House: A Famous Decorator Remodels a California House," *Vogue*, 102, n. 5 (Sep. 1, 1943): 116-121; Though Elsie de Wolfe eventually married Sir Charles Mendl, she lived openly for many years in a relationship with Miss Elizabeth Marbury at 13 Sutton Place. Scholars largely regard the marriage as companionate and, tellingly, de Wolfe's 1935 autobiography does not even mention her marriage to Mendl, Elsie de Wolfe, *After All* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1935).

imitates “the manner, the taste, the coloring, and so on” of another.⁵³⁴ Though an imitation, the above definition suggests a distinction between pastiche and reproduction, as the former is described not an exact copy but rather an approximation of or homage to another artist’s “manner” and “taste.” Later theorized by cultural historian Richard Dyer among others, pastiche has come to describe an image or text fashioned from borrowed elements combined to create something other, ambiguously referential, a copy with no original. Though derivative by definition, Dyer notes that works of pastiche are still documents of their time, observing that “an eighteenth century pastiche of Shakespeare would almost certainly be recognizably Shakespearean, but it would also be recognizably eighteenth century.”⁵³⁵

Pastiche has garnered an unusual amount of theoretical attention in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Usually wielded pejoratively to describe charming works of apparent frippery, pastiche is often discursively detached from politics. Notable twentieth-century scholars, however, have debated the style in serious terms, demonstrating the social power at stake in otherwise fun art. Marxist theorist Frederic Jameson, for example, famously declared pastiche “blank parody” in his influential and now canonical book *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.⁵³⁶ Pastiche’s imprecise quotation, its “random cannibalization of all the styles

⁵³⁴ Paula Radisich, *Pastiche, Fashion, and Galanterie in Chardin’s Genre Subjects: Looking Smart* (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2014) 34.

⁵³⁵ Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (New York: Routledge, 2007) 54; Hinted at by Dyer’s chosen example, theater is “fertile territory for pastiche,” as historian of art and literature Ingeborg Hoesterey writes, “[p]urlouining style” and trafficking in reaffirming the “newness of the old,” Ingeborg Hoesterey, *Pastiche: Cultural Memory in Art, Film, and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001) 117.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, 23, 157; Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, Duke University Press, 1991) 17.

of the past, the play of random allusion,” Jameson warns, renders it devoid of clear moral intentionality and distinguishes it from the explicitly political strategies of parody.⁵³⁷ As seemingly “random allusion,” pastiche is at once familiar and strange. Anticipating the postmodern simulacrum, it possesses a dislocating ambiguity, a tendency to dissolve into meaninglessness. It is nonlinear and inexact in its signification. Its imagery seduces viewers with the promise of interpretation, but meanings ultimately slip away into a multiplicity of potential referents. Whereas Jameson might see *Ten Chimneys* as toothless design with no message, later non-Marxist scholars locate value in pastiche’s inexact allusions, offering a more flexible assessment of the strategy’s efficacy. It is pastiche’s shifting signification that leads queer theorist Judith Butler to complicate Jameson’s negative appraisal in her book *Gender Trouble*. For Butler, it is precisely pastiche’s disavowal of clarity, its campy mocking of “the notion of an original” referent that gives the visual strategy potential for “subversive laughter.”⁵³⁸ Though landing on opposite sides of the issue, Jameson and Butler’s critical examinations of pastiche’s pleasing affects remind us that pleasure is not necessarily devoid of political import.

Though likewise deviating from Jameson’s conception to suggest that pastiche has social usefulness, Dyer sees the mode as more cathartic than subversive. For Dyer, modern culture’s discomfort with pastiche stems from a historical privileging of genius, originality, and critical distance, which are, in Western patriarchal societies, constructs primarily available to those already in possession of social currency. Pastiche, he suggests, is presented as the feminized other of invention. Despite pastiche’s lack of

⁵³⁷ Jameson, 65-66.

⁵³⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999) 188, 200.

satirical bite, Dyer contends that it does affective work, demystifying ideologies that regulate emotion. The best of it, he writes, can “allow us to feel our connection to the affective frameworks, the structures of feeling, past and present, that we inherit and pass on.”⁵³⁹ In other words, by collapsing the past into present form, pastiche like that at Ten Chimneys may invite viewers to examine and even reframe their relationship to the normative constraints that guided the fears and desires of individuals that came before and those that guide their own fears and desires today.

Various scholars of the current century point to pastiche’s relational quality as a reason artists might chose to employ it. Following Dyer to discuss the writings of Marcel Proust, cultural historian James Austin argues that pastiche is inherently social, garnering affective strength by placing demands on a beholder’s engagement: “reading pastiche may be liminal between reading and writing, as when one reads a pastiche, one also has the feeling of somehow re-writing a former text.”⁵⁴⁰ This process of reading and re-writing, Austin asserts, grants beholders the power to redefine styles and histories retroactively.⁵⁴¹ While there is danger in such rewriting in its potential to erase the realities of past inequalities, it might also enable socially-oppressed subjects to reclaim historical moments for their own uses. Art historian Paula Radisich agrees, adding that pastiche’s open-ended invitation for interpretation is above all “grounded in sociability, and the desire of the self to share pleasure with others.”⁵⁴² Through pastiche artists may

⁵³⁹ Dyer, 180.

⁵⁴⁰ James Austin, *Proust, Pastiche, and the Postmodern, or Why Style Matters* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2013) 72.

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁵⁴² Radisich, 22.

perform their wit, taste, skill, and judgment, Radisich writes, and viewers may take pleasure in their ostensibly exclusive ability to tease out the various possible innuendos.⁵⁴³ Viewed through the observations of these scholars, we might say that Wilson's pastiche trades in affect rather than authority, it is nonprescriptive in its refashioning of the past, and locates meaning (albeit never fixedly) through social encounters with audiences. When wielded and read by queer subjects, as is the case in *Ten Chimneys*, pastiche offers covert pleasures but also plausible deniability, able to suggest many meanings, but none exactly.

Affective pastiche indeed, as Dyer would have it, *Ten Chimneys* is deftly arranged, designed to surprise and seduce. Illustrated by the aptly named Flirtation Room—a lavish furnished hall with six entrances that lead to the main rooms, corridors, and levels of the home—the interior invites discovery as functionally superfluous stairs conceal and reveal one exciting vista after another (Figure 97). As multiple biographers for 'The Lunts' have observed, the porous Flirtation Room seems to be “[f]ashioned after the romantic intrigue of a French farce,” an erotically-charged form of comedy theater wherein characters encounter and then abandon a rapid succession of implausible scenarios.⁵⁴⁴ Lunt likely had this space in mind when he boasted of *Ten Chimneys* that “[e]ven the levels have levels.”⁵⁴⁵ Living up to its name, the Flirtation Room is replete

⁵⁴³ Ibid., 37, 22; Film historian Kylo-Patrick R. Hart likewise describes this exchange as a “reward” wherein viewers enjoy the “pleasure that comes from being in the know, from recognizing a reference that others do not,” “Auteur/Bricoleur/Provocateur: Gregg Araki and Postpunk Style in The Doom Generation,” *Journal of Film and Video*, 55, n. 1 (Spring, 2003): 30-38.

⁵⁴⁴ Diana Enright and Tanya Ann Hazelton, *Ten Chimneys* (Portland, OR: Inkwater Press, 2007) 12; Peters, 176.

⁵⁴⁵ Peters, 130.

with amorous imagery. For instance, Wilson decorated the tall, cream-colored façade of a Swedish grandfather clock with silvery grisaille scenes of orientalized hens, cocks, and offspring intermingling in a yard—a pastiche that reinforces the estate’s pastoral theme, appropriates the exotic, and alludes to erotic coupling.

The décor throughout the house is amusing and immersive. Hundreds of faces and figures beckon visitors from distant geographic and temporal realms, including flirting grisaille peasants arranged in pastoral settings in Flirtation Hall (a hallway on the top floor that leads to the bedrooms), exoticized blackamoor slaves in the Belasco Room (a small sitting room off of the Flirtation Room) and living room, and, in the dining room, a quartet of comedy masks that exhibit mounting degrees of drunkenness (Figure 98).⁵⁴⁶ As guests move through the already-populated space, these figures attract and return their wandering gaze. Rococo mirrors abound, facilitating voyeurism and autovoyeurism, pressing the home and its occupants together onto flat glittering surfaces for easy consumption (Figure 99). The play of light reflecting off the metallic planes animates the home’s painted and porcelain tenants. Though framed by eighteenth-century organic flourishes, Ten Chimneys’ mirrors were in line with current fashions. Contemporary periodicals and design experts of the 1920s and 1930s worked in concert, recommending mirrors to enliven space and facilitate sociality. In her 1926 book on wall-treatments, Nancy McClelland asserted: “a room without a mirror is like a face with closed eyes. Hang a mirror... and the room immediately wakes up, becoming animated and alive...

⁵⁴⁶ “Clagg... painted images of Antoinette, Lynn’s sister. Diana noticed each figure progressively revealing Antoinette’s face growing more and more gay with drink. In childhood she had not discerned this erotic gradation,” Enright and Hazelton, 11.

and repeats the colour and ‘gossip’ of a room.’⁵⁴⁷ Using anthropomorphizing language, McClelland characterizes mirrors as figurative organs of vision that duplicate and inspirit interiors. Regularly bookending fashionable home magazines, advertisements for Libbey Owens Ford Glass concur, coaxing readers with slick color images replete with heady glances sometimes thrice iterated (Figure 100). Mirrors, these advertisements make clear, offer enhanced views of social interactions and are a medium through which to transmit clandestine flirtations.

The home’s surfaces are also deeply tactile. Historic photographs indicate that several of the rooms were once adorned with plush fur rugs, and the “Syrie Maugham Bedroom” in the Hen House is still completely carpeted in cream-colored fleeces (Figure 101).⁵⁴⁸ Much of the furniture in the seating areas is upholstered in pastel or jewel-toned velvet and the distribution of fringe is plentiful. Workers laboriously hand-rubbed the balustrade of the central spiral staircase—now the only surface of the home that visitors are invited to touch—with burnishing stones to achieve a high gloss finish that is smooth and cool to the palm.⁵⁴⁹ Taken as a whole, Ten Chimneys rouses the senses, it engages viewers’ imaginations, and—with its built-in audience and reflective surfaces that offer framed visual echoes—is always already primed for performance.

⁵⁴⁷ Nancy McClelland, *The Practical Book of Decorative Wall-Treatments* (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1926) 249.

⁵⁴⁸ Syrie Maugham, wife of playwright Somerset Maugham, was famous interior decorator in her own right and was renown for decorating rooms in monochromatic white. Lunt and Fontanne named the “Syrie Maugham Bedroom” after their friend who had popularized its all-white aesthetic.

⁵⁴⁹ Hale interview.

The Foyer Sets the High Comedy Stage

Nowhere is Ten Chimneys' seduction more developed than in the foyer, begun in 1938, which approximates a stage in both appearance and use. In *Death in the Dining Room* art historian Kenneth Ames emphasizes the importance of the foyer for "impression management," arguing that entrances "pla[y] important roles... in framing and manipulating [homeowners'] perceptions of themselves and their relationships to others."⁵⁵⁰ The foyer, he argues, is transitional terrain, wherein one moves from the relative distance of public life, gendered in modern Western culture as masculine, into the more intimate, traditionally feminine sphere of someone's home.⁵⁵¹ Though Ames is here referring to nineteenth-century taste and social ritual, contemporary periodicals like *House Beautiful* and *Better Homes & Gardens* make evident that, despite the foyer's mundane functionality and intermediary use, homeowners of the 1930s continued to invest significant time and energy into decorating this liminal space.⁵⁵² A *House Beautiful* article on "Good Entrances" in 1935, for example, tells readers that this important space "indicates what lies beyond," and pictures examples of small apartment foyers enhanced by murals—one with flowers and birds and another with skyscrapers (Figure 102).⁵⁵³ In Ten Chimneys, the foyer served to buttress the highborn persona preferred by 'The Lunts', whom the media had christened as "brilliant aristocrats of the

⁵⁵⁰ Kenneth Ames, *Death in the Dining Room and Other Tales of Victorian Culture* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1992) 7.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁵⁵² "Entrance Cues: Ideas for a Foyer," *House Beautiful*, (Mar. 1934).

⁵⁵³ "Good Entrances: The Foyer of Your Apartment Indicates What Lies Beyond. It is Easily Made Charming," *House Beautiful* (Nov. 1935): 46-47.

stage.”⁵⁵⁴ Cementing the theme, a Napoleon-era gilded portrait hangs above a marble hallstand, a category of foyer furniture popular since the nineteenth-century for its “courtly associations.”⁵⁵⁵

As visitors pass the threshold into the checked marble vestibule, six court attendants transplanted from centuries past greet them, offering gastronomic delights and comforts (Figure 103). The staff is likewise offered up to our gaze, frozen in anticipation, an ever-wakeful audience primed to sate guests’ every bodily desire. Viewing the walls in a counterclockwise direction from the entrance, guests are welcomed by a male and female pair of attendants offering cordials and pineapple, another pair that presents a pink molded gelatin and recently-hunted game, a female servant in blue who holds a silver tea urn, an imported Swedish *kakelugn* stove that sits against the wall opposite the entrance and is surrounded by a trompe l’oeil curtain and archway, a flirtatious chambermaid in orange in the far left corner, a dramatic spiral staircase, and finally a two-dimensional tea service that Wilson humorously painted above the room’s heating vent. Cartoonish in their rendering, the figures are whimsical ideals, floating almost weightless in an exclusive paradise. Their faces are full and peachy with few normative markers to distinguish gender. Framed by serpentine shrubbery in a formal garden, complete with topiaries and classical statuary, the elaborately coiffed troupe offers privileged access to the land’s bounty, presumably *this* land. Though guests’ bodies move from a three-dimensional informal landscape into a two-dimensional highly manicured garden, the foyer backdrop bleeds the estate’s exterior into the interior and suggests to viewers that

⁵⁵⁴ “Reunion in Genesee,” *Vogue*, 82. n. 9 (Nov. 1, 1933): 52.

⁵⁵⁵ Ames, 25.

they should regard Ten Chimneys and its occupants with veneration.

A red-carpeted staircase with polished balustrade, the foyer's most prominent architectural feature, twists the length of all four levels of the home toward a Czechoslovakian crystal chandelier zenith, priming the room for dramatic entrances. Lunt reportedly met guests at the door or in the large arrival court out front. Once inside Fontanne might croon from above, her voice melodic and disembodied, 'be right with you darlings' before floating down to join them, her figure dipping in and out of view.⁵⁵⁶ Fontanne, it is told, refused to share stairs with others. Mauric Zolotow, one of Lunt and Fontanne's earliest biographers, writes "She retreats to the nearest landing or pops into a nearby dressing room and waits until the stair is clear."⁵⁵⁷ Though the practice was based on theater superstition, it is easy to imagine that the couple, known by intimates as "scene-stealers," would have also recognized a stair's potential for teasingly slow reveals.⁵⁵⁸ Cinema, stage productions, and fashion spreads all exploited stairs in the 1930s to these ends, one notably dominating the stage in Noël Coward's bisexual ménage-à-trois production *Design for Living* in 1933, written as a star vehicle for Lunt, Fontanne, and the playwright himself (Figure 104).⁵⁵⁹

A pastiche to be sure, Wilson's eccentric and historically-inspired designs for this room also correspond to contemporary fashions. Though the mural figures seem

⁵⁵⁶ Peters, 176.

⁵⁵⁷ Mauric Zolotow, *Stagestruck: The Romance of Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1964) 77.

⁵⁵⁸ Mary Carole McCauley, "Lunt, Fontanne starred in Genesee Depot, too: Friends reminisce about life of acting greats," *The Milwaukee Journal* (Sep. 17, 1987): B2.

⁵⁵⁹ Stairs also feature prominently, for example, in *Swing Time*, starring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, 1936; a model uses stairs to pose in *Vogue* (Oct. 1, 1937).

transplanted from the past, it is interesting to note that gelatin molds and pineapple were major culinary trends in the 1930s, often dominating cooking sections and advertisements in popular periodicals like *The American Home* (Figure 105). In terms of the room's appearance, Emily Post writes in her influential book on interior design that "black-and-white-marble floor...are still epidemic among the decorators, are always good style for a small hall."⁵⁶⁰ Similarly, though there are certainly eighteenth-century European precedents for life-size garden murals (see Johann Wenzel Bergl's murals in the Schönbrunn Palace or the Raunacher State Room at Eggenberg Palace, both in Austria, for example), Rococo-inspired formal gardens were also a popular wallpaper choice for early twentieth-century homeowners in the United States. French-manufactured Zuber scenic wallpapers, in particular, of which French gardens were a major subject category, were hugely popular among well-to-do Americans from the early nineteenth century and into the twentieth.⁵⁶¹ Homeowners apparently regarded these sophisticated designs as appropriate for entrance halls in order to make the space more impactful, as wallpaper historian Catherine Lynn names the foyer as the room wherein fine imported wallpapers have most frequently survived.⁵⁶² Still popular in the 1930s, an advertisement for Crane's Fine Papers in 1934 offers a peephole view into an elegant Rococo Revival salon inside which a woman reads under the watchful eye of her husband. The nostalgic vignette is enclosed by walls papered with thin, undulating trees that vine upwards toward the

⁵⁶⁰ Emily Post, *The Personality of a House: The Blue Book of Home Design and Decoration* (1930) (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1939) 324-5.

⁵⁶¹ Catherine Lynn, *Wallpaper in America: From the Seventeenth Century to World War I* (New York: The Barra Foundation, Inc, 1980) 201.

⁵⁶² Lynn, 229.

room's vaulted ceiling (Figure 106).⁵⁶³ *House Beautiful* in October 1936 declared the eighteenth-century as one of the four current prevailing schools of thought in interior decoration, rounding out a quartet that also included Regency, Modern, and Early American styles.⁵⁶⁴ Wilson's chosen theme is also temptingly similar to the "vue d'optique" formal French Garden foyer in Carrie Stettheimer's dollhouse constructed largely in the 1920s (to which Wilson contributed miniature artworks), indicating either direct inspiration or that the trope of a garden fading into the interior was relatively common for entrance halls at this time (Figure 107).⁵⁶⁵ Such a trend is not unexpected as the theme logically echoes the space's transitional function.

Full of pomp and innuendo, Ten Chimneys' foyer sets an ideal stage for splashy highbrow performances by 'the Lunts' and their Broadway guests. It is hardly surprising that Wilson here employs strategies gleaned from his patron's vocation. In addition to his fine art successes and interior decoration work, Wilson also notably enjoyed important commissions for the production of stage sets and theatrical costumes, including Lunt and Fontanne's over-the-top 1936 rendition of *The Taming of the Shrew*.⁵⁶⁶ For art critics, this engagement with the theater sometimes crept too far into his gallery work, with *The New*

⁵⁶³ Below the image verbiage reads: "Down the long halls of remembrance we walk and at each turning discover yesterday upon yesterday... Borrowing here and there from the past, weaving it into a pattern that looks to the future, we fashion today," Crane's Fine Papers advertisement, *House Beautiful* (Mar. 1934): 17.

⁵⁶⁴ "Four Schools of Thought," *House Beautiful* (Oct. 1936): 52-55.

⁵⁶⁵ "Introductory Foreword" by Ettie Stettheimer, June 12, 1947, in Pamphlet for the dollhouse from 1947, Yale Archives, Stettheimer Papers, YCAL20, IV, box 10, flr. 172, p. 7.

⁵⁶⁶ "The Stage: Colonial Theatre, *The Taming of the Shrew*," *Daily Boston Globe* (Jan. 21, 1936): 14.

York Times notably reproaching his *Songs of Solomon* series for imparting a “hint of the comedy stage.”⁵⁶⁷

One of the major genres of American and British theater with which Wilson would have certainly been acquainted, high comedy plays generally focus on the leisurely lives of posh members of the talentocracy who engage one another in quick-witted banter. Though affluent, Noël Coward’s characters, in particular, are sexually rebellious, ensconcing naughty allusions into otherwise tame lines.⁵⁶⁸ In *Design for Living*, for example, Gilda (an interior decorator played by Fontanne) irreverently invites Ernest (a stuffy art dealer friend played by Campbell Gullan), to regard her love triangle as a side show: “People pay to see freaks. Walk up! Walk up and see the Fat Lady and the Monkey Man and the Living Skeleton and the Three Famous Hermaphrodites!”⁵⁶⁹ Though the love triangle in question consisted of two men pivoting around a shared romantic interest in Gilda, Coward’s cryptic lines led contemporary critics to worry whether there might be “a touch of lavender in the thing.”⁵⁷⁰ Lunt and Fontanne excelled at high comedy’s pointed style, achieving renown for their quick overlapping dialog and steady understated delivery, leading Alexander Woollcott to inform actor Louis Calhern: “God, you ought to

⁵⁶⁷ “Claggett Wilson’s ‘Song of Solomon.’ *The New York Times* (Feb. 8, 1922): 16; Despite these critiques, and though many modern American artists would increasingly move toward stricter specialization as the twentieth-century wore on, Wilson’s ambitiously multi-media approach was not exceptional among his peers. Most notably, Florine Stettheimer likewise translated her aesthetic to theatrical and interior design.

⁵⁶⁸ John Lahr, *Coward: The Playwright* (London: First Discus Printing, 1983) 42.

⁵⁶⁹ Coward quoted by Kaier Curtin, “*We Can Always Call Them Bulgarians*”: *The Emergence of Lesbians and Gay Men on the American Stage* (Boston: Alyson Publications, 1987) 175.

⁵⁷⁰ Arthur Pollock of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* quoted in Curtin, 171.

see the Lunts work. Never raise their voices. Just throw away their line. They're marvelous."⁵⁷¹

Like high comedy, Wilson's multivalent imagery would have roused an emphatically classed form of erotic imagining. Here, at the close of the Great Depression, 'The Lunts' reclaim the fantasy of aristocracy, of living above and beyond the reach of economic concerns. With echoes of Versailles, the murals transport viewers to a fantasy world, a Baroque/Rococo mash-up wherein, one is assured, sensory pleasures overflow, always already on hand. Guests are cast as sojourning gentry for whom no desire is off limits. Images of consumable delights invite olfactory, gustatory, and somatic remembering: the smell of tea and pastries heating; the juicy snap of pineapple flesh as it yields to a bite; the quickly melting viscosity of gelatin on the tongue; the bloody promise of a fresh kill; and the soft warmth of a chambermaid's linens and bosom (Figure 108 and 109). There is, I would argue, something libidinous in the mural's persistent invitation to gorge and imbibe. The courtly context imbues these sensory cues, and the experiences that they herald (i.e. decadent meals and erotic misbehaving), with historical precedence and layered meaning.

Like Coward's, Wilson's wit was infamously naughty. Writing in 1922, critic Hamilton Easter Field relishes the artist's rejection of American Puritanism, musing "Mr. Wilson I am quite sure never had any conscientious scruples about a brandied peach or even two."⁵⁷² However, as in high comedy, erotic references are communicated

⁵⁷¹ Howard Teichmann, *Smart Aleck: The Wit, World, and Life of Alexander Woollcott* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1976) 241.

⁵⁷² Hamilton Easter Field, "NEW PAINTINGS ON EXHIBITION," *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Feb. 5, 1922): 4C.

obliquely, veiled in chaste dressings. A pastiche, Wilson's allusions are elusive and interpretation may vary widely from viewer to viewer. For example, the first female attendant who greets guests at the door balances a pineapple in her palm as an offering. This gesture can be interpreted through various contexts as one might process a double entendre in a play. While pineapple traditionally "symbolizes hospitality" in decoration, it is also inextricably linked to colonial power and racialized sexual fantasies, aligned in art with brown female bodies and foreign goods.⁵⁷³ *Portrait d'une femme Haïtienne* by Beaucourt François, for example, pictures a Haitian servant whose exposed breast is made visually parallel to the tropical fruits she holds (Figure 110). Described by Hawaiian historian Gary Y. Okihiro as a "trophy of empire," the pineapple has a storied past as an exotic import and aristocratic hobby among seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europeans.⁵⁷⁴ During this time, Okihiro contends, the pineapple came to signify "a tropical, womanly paradise, fecundity, health, and bodily pleasures and freedoms."⁵⁷⁵ In 1898, when the United States annexed Hawaii and seized the islands' natural resources, pineapple was summarily industrialized and made available for mass consumption. Though fully primed for the market by the 1930s, pineapple retained its decidedly sexy reputation, an observation verified by fashion spreads and Dole advertisements' continued reliance on the erotics of colonialism to charm Western audiences.⁵⁷⁶ An advertisement for Dole from 1938 shows an idealized, scantily-clad pair

⁵⁷³ "Pendant for Pineapples," *House Beautiful* (Sep. 1939).

⁵⁷⁴ Gary Y. Okihiro, *Pineapple Culture: A History of the Tropical and Temperate Zones* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009) 173.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 160.

of Hawaiians, who offer generous platters of pineapple to readers of *The American Home* (Figure 111). The tagline's evocative wording promises an experience that is "pure" and "Truly Hawaiian" with "pleasure in full measure," using the assumed authenticity and sensuality of native bodies to corroborate the desirability of the islands' agricultural resources. Though the woman who holds the pineapple in Wilson's foyer mural is white, barely-dressed blackamoor slave figurines and chinoiserie appear pervasively throughout the house creating an atmosphere of sexualized exoticism.⁵⁷⁷

It is also possible to read the opulent historic costuming worn by Wilson's figures as acutely sexual in an early twentieth-century milieu. Throughout the 1920s French perfumer Houbigant attracted potential customers by leveraging stereotypes about the flirtatiousness, overindulgence, and exaggerated curve of eighteenth-century attire (Figure 112).⁵⁷⁸ Covering the Met's 1932 costume exhibition for *Creative Art*, critic Herman Patrick Tappé finds himself mesmerized by the juxtaposition of a nude Venus beside eighteenth-century gowned mannequins. He muses:

There she stood, clad in the eternal beauty of classic grace and ivory-tinted nudity. I failed to catch her eye and turned once more to the headless mannequins whose forms were discreetly curtained with silks and buckram, embroideries and

⁵⁷⁷ A *Vogue* article from 1926 describes the growing resurgence of interest in eighteenth-century inspired blackamoor sculptures for contemporary homes in deeply colonial and sexualized language: "From slave and body-servant, petted *exotique* though he was, to a place of almost equal importance with the pictured mandarin of the chinoiserie or the painted monkey of the *singerie*, to become the garmented, garlanded, jeweled, and aigretted blackamoor, carved and polychrome, of the salon or boudoir à la Nègre, was no small step for the African negro or Nubian slave boy," in "Blackamoor As Novel Decorations," *Vogue*, 68, n. 3 (Aug 1, 1926): 56.

⁵⁷⁸ Advertisement for Houbigant Quelques Fleurs Talcum Powder, *Town and Country* (May 20, 1920): 81; An advertisement for Houbigant perfume in *Harpers Bazaar* from 1922 pictures an amorous Rococo vignette and states "It is a charming trifle which might have been inspired by Marie Antoinette herself. Certainly, the scent bottles carried by the patrician ladies of the old French Courts were not more fascinating. Now Houbigant has revived this delightful Louis XVI mode for Paris and America," Houbigant advertisement, *Harper's Bazaar*, 57 (Nov. 1922): 115.

sequins.... At night, after the visitors have gone home and the night watchman has made his rounds, she springs from her pedestal and tries those dresses on.⁵⁷⁹

Though eternally seductive, Tappé supposes that not even Venus herself can resist the titillating charms and “sartorial splendors” of “slender tapering waists and... swaying crinolines.”⁵⁸⁰

Moreover, contemporary viewers could have read the male attendants’ high-heeled shoes, pastel garb, and delicate features as feminine, eliding with dandified fashions preferred by many queer men of the day. Their historically couched rosy lips, lithe waists, and well-turned calves refuse to yield to the norms of twentieth-century masculinity and invite a homoerotic beholding. Indeed, I would argue that Wilson’s focus on Rococo period dress, subject, and aesthetic—especially the androgynous cherub-like faces of the attendants—works to destabilize contemporary gender and sexual boundaries. According to eighteenth-century art historian Melissa Hyde, by the twentieth century the Rococo had become “associated with an innately feminine smallness of mind and love of adornment and artificiality and also with an effeminized arriviste aristocracy.”⁵⁸¹ To call the Rococo somehow objectively feminine is an ahistorical oversimplification, but as Hyde argues, this belief dominates the period’s historiography and the perception may be in part a reaction to the relative gender parity among the era’s upper class. Elite men and women of the eighteenth century attended salons together where they “shared ideas and tastes in art, literature, and theater, just as they shared

⁵⁷⁹ Herman Patrick Tappé, “An Interlacing Century of Costume Art at the Metropolitan Museum of Art,” *Creative Art* (Sep. 1932): 39, 41.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

⁵⁸¹ Melissa Hyde, *Making Up the Rococo: Francois Boucher and His Critics* (Los Angeles, CA: Texts & Documents and The Getty Research Institute, 2006) 47.

manners, language, and comportment” and “[t]o some degree, with their powdered wigs and lavish fabrics and laces, they shared appearances.”⁵⁸² This gender blurring extended to the art of the day, particularly in the paintings of François Boucher whose use of “a single facial type for male and female figures...eroded distinctions” by positing genders as almost “interchangeable.”⁵⁸³ Whereas during the Rococo androgyny was arguably more about “acquiring, exhibiting—performing—the cultural symbols of class (politeness, softness, fine delicacy)” than it was about material equality per se,⁵⁸⁴ such a nuanced reading would not have been available to average contemporary Americans. In addition to the ostensible comparative femininity of eighteenth-century men, renewed American interest in eighteenth-century novels like Tobias Smollett’s *The Adventures of Roderick Random* in the 1920s reinforced the belief that the Rococo era was marked by tacit acceptance of queer activity, as one character defends same sex “taste in love” as a “fashionable vice” and argues that condemnation of its “exquisite pleasure[s]” “may be owing more to prejudice... than to true reason.”⁵⁸⁵ Indeed, cultural historian George Mosse has argued that eighteenth-century European culture, often discursively linked to aristocratic excess and a relative tolerance of same sex relationships, has long been the foil against which modern middle-class definitions of masculinity as familial responsibility and physical strength are shaped.⁵⁸⁶ In light of this, Wilson’s pastiche could

⁵⁸² Ibid., 147.

⁵⁸³ Ibid., 192.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid., 148.

⁵⁸⁵ Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748), edited with an Introduction by Paul Gabriel Boucé (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) xix, 310.

⁵⁸⁶ Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 7.

reclaim the performance of eighteenth-century aristocracy for his twentieth-century viewers as a liberatory, implicitly erotic, and queer-friendly space.

Wilson's aristocratically-garbed and rosy-lipped men are not dissimilar to characters that Lunt himself regularly played. With his job requiring him to wear exaggerated attire and heavy stage makeup, Lunt was no stranger to wearing costuming of potentially androgynous appearance. Starring as Charles II in *Sweet Nell of Old Drury* in 1923, for example, Lunt donned a long curly wig, lacy ruffles, and heeled shoes (Figure 113). For *The Taming of the Shrew*, Wilson designed Lunt an over-the-top costume with silver earrings, "barber pole-striped tights," and "knee high laced boots" (Figure 114).⁵⁸⁷ Writing to his friend Malcolm MacAdam, Wilson's art critic Henry McBride gushed about sneaking backstage with the artist after watching Lunt and Fontanne in *Idiot's Delight*, reporting "I wish you could see Alfred's dressing table. I could scarcely pay attention to the talk, I was so busy looking at all the make-up things."⁵⁸⁸ Though a necessary part of Lunt's profession, it is perhaps worth pointing out that in any other 1930s or 1940s context—once removed from the bright lights and fantasy of the stage—the painted faces and ostentatious attire of leading men might have been read as signs of sexually deviancy.⁵⁸⁹ According to D.J. West, an early historian of

⁵⁸⁷ Peters, 140.

⁵⁸⁸ Henry McBride to Malcolm MacAdam, 8 May 1936, McBride Papers, NMcB5. Microfilmed at the Archives of American Art.

⁵⁸⁹ Novels of the 1930s that deal with queer subjects often emphasize makeup as a visible sign of same sex interest. In a scene in *The Young and Evil* a more knowledgeable urban gay man helps to initiate a rural transplant in the ways of cosmetics: "Karel, as he had promised, came by three hours before the others bringing his box of beauty that included eyelash curlers mascara, various shades of powder, lip and eyebrow pencils, blue and brown eyeshadow and tweezers for the eyebrows. Julian submitted to his artistry, only drawing the line at his eyebrows being plucked," 55.

queer culture in the United States, stereotypical notions of the theater as a haven for sexual difference were readily available to and pervasive among early twentieth-century Americans of the era.⁵⁹⁰

In his most direct sexual allusion, Wilson's chambermaid—who is shown by herself and tucked away in the far left corner of the space as one enters the room—peers knowingly at her would-be-masters, keys dangling, signaling her exclusive knowledge of their spaces and bodies. She will be, after all, privy to private rituals of dress and undress. Though the joke here is potentially crass, it is couched in aristocratic terms and one can almost sense the witty banter waiting to unfold. Notoriously, in 1745, Marie-Madeleine Bonafon, a Versailles *femme de chambre*, was sent to the Bastille for publishing “a roman à clef about the sex life of Louis XV,” implicitly enumerating his mistresses who included Mme de Pompadour among others.⁵⁹¹ Rococo artists like François Boucher popularly depicted servants as sexually desirable in paintings like *La Belle Cuisinière* c. 1735 (Figure 115). In the painting, which was immediately engraved and serialized by Pierre-Alexandre Aveline, Boucher depicts an ardent young man embracing a demure and tightly corseted kitchen maid. The blushing maid gently holds her white apron aloft to cradle two eggs. The weight of her fragile cargo presses the fabric into a bowl-shaped recess below her waist, an unambiguous allusion to her sex, youth, fertility, and perhaps virginity, as the eggs remain precariously unbroken. Like Wilson's maid, Boucher's *belle cuisinière* wears keys, gesturing to special access to her masters' home and also, perhaps,

⁵⁹⁰ “Male homosexuality has long been associated in the public mind with Bohemian artistic and theatrical circles,” D.J. West, 1955, quoted in Lahr, 52.

⁵⁹¹ Robert Darnton, “Mademoiselle Bonafon and the Private Life of Louis XV: Communication Circuits in Eighteenth-Century France,” *Representations*, 87, n. 1 (Summer, 2004): 102-3.

offering viewers private access to her person. Taken up in 1934, a subtly Sapphic advertisement for French Line cruises offers customers their very own chambermaid à la Versailles, picturing a stereotypical French maid who tenderly grooms her mistress (Figure 116). She is, the text promises, “concerned... intimately” with her mistress’s needs and “merely to wish is to be obeyed.”⁵⁹² The most voluptuous figure in Wilson’s mural and the only not holding food or drink, the chambermaid is herself consumable.

Sexy Scandinavia, or Swedishness as Coding in the Salon and Flirtation Room

Though the sensuality of the foyer is perhaps clear enough for today’s viewers to recognize, particularly in the company of Wilson’s chambermaid, the home’s recurrent foray into Swedish imagery seems chaste by comparison. Scandinavian motifs, the primary decorative program throughout *Ten Chimneys*, functions on the surface as a reference to Lunt’s family lineage and a nationalistic investment in Northern European culture. Lunt, whose father was a Swede, spent long stretches of his youth in Finland visiting Swedish cousins.⁵⁹³ Apparently inspired by his early exposure to Scandinavian art and customs, Lunt chose wall paintings for the salon that are almost exact copies of murals by Johan Wikström—completed circa 1790 in the Brategården manor house in Bråfors, Sweden (Figure 117).⁵⁹⁴ Most likely, Wilson did not encounter these murals in situ, but through photographs produced for the series *Svenska Kulturbilder* (Swedish

⁵⁹² Advertisement for French Line cruises, *House Beautiful* (Mar. 1934): 111.

⁵⁹³ Peters, 22.

⁵⁹⁴ Website for Swedish Women’s Educational Association International, Inc., “SWEA besökte Bråfors bergmansby,” <http://vasteras.swea.org/2015/swea-besokte-brafors-bergmansby/> (accessed on May 2, 2016).

Culture) found in Lunt and Fontanne's library (Figure 118).⁵⁹⁵ Not an exact duplicate of its precedent, Wilson's mural plan excludes all New Testament scenes in favor of more theatrical Old Testament panels and deletes the text scrolls, effectively distancing the imagery from the didactic and moralizing tone of the original. Though biographers tell us that neither Lunt nor Fontanne were particularly religious, the pair purportedly appreciated the drama and tradition of biblical narratives.⁵⁹⁶ The overall effect of the salon is more playful than its model, reimagined in pastel colors and made more dynamic, as Wilson moved the scene of Elijah Ascending to Heaven from a corner to above the fireplace giving the appearance that the chariot's fire emerges from and invades the space (Figure 119). Strengthening the room's Northern European theme, Wilson also encircled the fireplace with Dutch lavender delft tiles of pastoral themes that he purchased in Maine.⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁵ Speaking of the living room Wilson writes Dornbusch: "Karl, please let me have that paper-bound Swedish book back as soon as you can," Claggett Wilson to Carl Dornbusch, 30 July 1938, Lunt and Fontanne Papers, 5/85-3-410 Reel 8. Microfilmed at the Wisconsin State Historical Society; Sigurd Erixon and Sigurd Wallin, *Svenska Kulturbilder, Del III Och IV* (Stockholm, Sweden: Aktiebolaget Skolunds Bokförlag, 1930).

⁵⁹⁶ Peters, 140; figures from classical mythology are also scattered throughout the room.

⁵⁹⁷ Claggett Wilson to Carl Dornbusch, 30 July 1938, Lunt and Fontanne Papers, 5/85-3-410 Reel 8. Microfilmed at the Wisconsin State Historical Society; Though the Netherlands is decidedly not Scandinavian, American presses often elided distinctions between European nations and, in particular, Northern Europe at this time, where perceived similarities in the nations' geography (circling the North Sea), progressivism, relative secularity, and military neutrality (Americans grouped Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Holland together as the "Northern Neutrals") blurred their borders. See: "Small European Nations Combine: Holland, Switzerland, Denmark, and Sweden Forming a League for Defense," *The New York Times* (Jun. 16, 1914): 1; "Will Allies Force Scandinavia Into War? Dr. Nansen Says Norway Will Starve Rather Than Cease Neutrality of Her own Volition—The Case of Sweden, Holland, and Denmark," *The New York Times* (Oct. 21, 1917): 92; "Scandinavia Talks of Leaving League: Ministers of Four Northern Countries and Holland to Discuss Geneva Plans. Common Front Sought Balkan Entente Is Weakened by Decision to Limit Mutual Defense Liability," *The New York Times* (May 7, 1936): 15; "The Scandinavian countries are constantly held up to us as models of democracy. According to the Statesmen's Year Book, the voting age in Holland and Denmark is 25 and in Norway and Sweden it is 23," in A.P. Ostle, "Letters to the Times: Voting

At face value, like with his foyer designs, Wilson's Swedish references also respond to current fashions in the United States. Americans increasingly regarded Scandinavia as a stylish vacation locale. Advertisements for Scandinavian cruise lines like Swedish American Line's Kungsholm Viking Wonder Cruise are pervasive throughout Northeastern newspapers in the 1930s.⁵⁹⁸ The First World War and interwar years saw the Scandinavian region seemingly transform from a place where peasants live to a forward-looking leader in Europe. The region's neutrality during the wars and governmental policies based on non-emotional rationality increased its global prestige.⁵⁹⁹ Though tourist advertisements still sometimes traded in stereotypes about Scandinavian peasants living in picturesque landscapes, others emphasized their modern thinking. A travel writer for *The New York Times* tells readers in 1938: "Perhaps the tourist's greatest interest is in the people and their way of living. These Northern countries have been the experimental laboratories for many of the most progressive movements in government, sociology and economics."⁶⁰⁰ As more and more well-to-do vacationers from the United States became acquainted with Scandinavian aesthetics, the region also inspired popular interior decoration motifs. An article for *House Beautiful* suggests: "For light-hearted

Ages in Scandinavia," *The New York Times* (Mar. 1, 1944): 18; "Plight of the Northern Neutrals," *The Independent* (Nov. 3, 1917): 211.

⁵⁹⁸ "It's only logical to take a Modern Viking Ship manned by descendants of the Vikings for a cruise to Viking Lands," Swedish American Line's Kungsholm Viking Wonder Cruise, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (May 7, 1933): 39; "Travel in the hospitable and peaceful countries of the North... We specialize in Scandinavian travel," advertisement for Bennett's Travel Bureau, *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* (Feb. 18, 1934): 29; a Cruise of Scandinavia and a week in the Netherlands, "Cruise to North Cape: Highlights of Scandinavia to Draw Summer Throngs," *The New York Times* (May 14, 1939): 152.

⁵⁹⁹ T.K. Derry, *A History of Scandinavia: Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979) 304.

⁶⁰⁰ Leonard Cox, "Scandinavia Calls Many: Travelers Are Learning That the Lands of the North Have a Wide Appeal," *The New York Times* (Mar. 20, 1938): 164.

variations on sturdy peasant themes try a decorative excursion to the Tyrol or Sweden.”⁶⁰¹ Indeed, Wilson himself found work producing Scandinavian rooms for private homes beyond Ten Chimneys.⁶⁰²

However, Wilson and his patrons’ interest in Scandinavian imagery was neither, I would argue, a coincidence nor merely a matter of Lunt’s heritage. While nationalism and prevailing taste no doubt played a part in Lunt and Fontanne’s decision to focus on Scandinavia, I would also argue that it is also possible to read Wilson’s Swedish pastiche as coding queerness. Ten Chimneys’ intended audience could have read the design program as one large double entendre, a humorous reference that elicits two collapsing interpretations with one straightforward and the other circuitously sexual. Painted by Wilson, pastel colored pendant portraits of an eighteenth-century Swedish king and queen—King Gustav III, renowned for his patronage of the opera, and his wife Queen Sophia Magdalena—fittingly bracket the passage that connects the Flirtation Room to the Swedish living room (Figure 120). Though the smiling husband and wife face each other, their sightline is directed toward the Flirtation Room rather than each other. The royal couple, who seem to posit themselves as parallels to the aristocratic personas of Lunt and Fontanne, watch visitors as they descend the stairs and step through the impressive double doors that lead to the salon. The portraits are encircled by trompe l’oeil gold frames capped by crowns and surrounded by delicate wreaths of flowers in baby blue, pink, and pale yellow. Similarly rendered to the male foyer attendants, Wilson’s Gustav

⁶⁰¹ Though both regions are associated with the picturesque, this pairing is otherwise aesthetically confounding, “Influenced by the Tyrol/Influenced by Sweden,” *House Beautiful* (Aug. 1937).

⁶⁰² Christine Ferry, “Swedish Primitive in the Game Room of Mr. and Mrs. H.K. Chamberlain,” *Country Life and the Sportsman* (Jul. 1938): 32-33.

is youthful and idealized with soft features and full pink lips. Though, like Lunt and Fontanne, the monarchs were married, writers of their time nonetheless circulated rumors about Gustav III's same-sex affairs and twentieth-century sexologists typically treated his sexuality as known fact.⁶⁰³ This knowledge was particularly available to theater circles in the form of Giuseppe Verdi's opera *Un ballo in maschera* (A Masked Ball) that premiered in 1859 based on the monarch's life. According to theater historian Ralph Hexter the opera was plagued with controversy throughout the following decades due to its depiction of a royal assassination, but also in no small part thanks to Gustav III's "widely known homosexual inclinations."⁶⁰⁴ While the character Gustavo pursues a relationship with a woman, he also fosters a tender relationship with a young beardless page named Oscar, traditionally played by a female singer in cross-dress. Given this history, Wilson's portraits of the king and queen are the boldest reference to same-sex desire in the house. The allusion is seductively on-the-nose: an image of a productive companionate marriage between individuals of ambiguous sexual proclivities. As the visual introduction to the Swedish salon, the portrait of Gustav III works to couch the home's remaining Scandinavian imagery in the context of Sweden's assumed gay past and present.

Indeed, Sweden's sexually rebellious reputation was not limited to Gustav III or his era. Early twentieth-century American publications sometimes ambivalently characterized Northern European cultures as bastions of loose sexual morality. Widely

⁶⁰³ In 1818 John Brown wrote in *Les Cours du Nord* that Gustav "did not pay homage at the shrine of Venus" but surrounded himself with "voluptuous and depraved parasites, such as might be expected to abound in an Asiatic court," Ralph Hexter, "Masked Balls," *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 14, n. ½ (Mar. 2002): 98; Hirschfeld, 607; Mayne, 232.

⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 97.

circulated writings of Scandinavian feminists stoked the fire and seemed to confirm this burgeoning stereotype in the minds of American readers. Ellen Key, the former Chair of History of Civilization in Sweden at Popular University of Stockholm, burst onto the American scene in 1911 with her book *Love and Marriage* that advocated for a flexible view of monogamy.⁶⁰⁵ After the book's release, Key became a much sought after relationship correspondent for popular American publications like *The Atlantic* and *Harper's*.⁶⁰⁶ Expressing radical views for the time, Key writes: "we ought to perceive that unconditional fidelity to one person may be just as disastrous to the personality as unconditional continuance in a faith or an employment."⁶⁰⁷ The book attracted ire and delicious controversy, leading women throughout the United States to gather and discuss its implications, to condemn or quietly delight in the foreign author's ideas.⁶⁰⁸ It was, one reporter tells readers, "a treatise putting forward sex schemes that rather fussed up some of the old fathers when they heard what their wives had been reading in their clubs."⁶⁰⁹ A pleasurable yet dangerous vice, if an American woman delighted in Key's works too

⁶⁰⁵ Key is just one of several examples of prominent Swedish feminist authors at this time. Similarly sensationalized, with its main character declared "the most talked about woman in Europe at the moment," American audiences read *The Dangerous Age* in 1913 by Swedish feminist author Karin Michaëlis. Imagining a "more accurately descriptive title" for the story, which centers on the sexual desires of a Swedish divorcee, a critic for *The New York Times* suggests "The Impenitent Confessions of a Perverted Soul," "LAYING BARE A WOMAN'S SOUL: 'The Dangerous Age,' Europe's Literary Sensation, Has Been Translated Into English," *The New York Times* (Sep. 3, 1911): RB530.

⁶⁰⁶ "MISS LUSK NOT SANE, ALIENIST SAYS ON STAND: Record of 'Family's Mental Taint' Follows End of Her Story," *The Chicago Sunday Tribune* (May 26, 1918): A8.

⁶⁰⁷ "Religion and Ethics: Ellen Key's Startling Views on Love and Marriage," *Current Literature*, L, n. 4 (Apr. 1911): 5.

⁶⁰⁸ Ellen Key's book "Love and Marriage" discussed at fortnightly meeting of a women's club, "Friday Club Had Interesting Meeting," *The Duluth Herald* (Jan. 17, 1920): 6.

⁶⁰⁹ "MISS LUSK NOT SANE, ALIENIST SAYS ON STAND," A1.

openly, her sanity and morality might be thrown into suspicion. In 1918 a defense lawyer for a female homicide suspect logged excerpts of Key's writings into evidence, using his client's interest in the writer as grounds to declare her legally insane.⁶¹⁰ In 1920 a woman from Duluth, Minnesota was fired for her suspected connection to the appearance of *Love and Marriage* in a school library's collection.⁶¹¹ Importantly, American newspapers often foregrounded Key's Northern heritage.⁶¹²

Reporters and sexologists alike in both Europe and the United States relied on the Northern Europe's libidinous reputation to shock and delight their readers.⁶¹³ Indicating the pervasiveness of this trope, writers sometimes relayed stereotypes of Scandinavian sinfulness in passing, as if a well-established scientific fact. Enumerating various national strategies to combat venereal disease 1912, physician James Krauss, for example, introduces Sweden as a nation "where the people are not generally given to too much

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ "Ellen Key's Books: To the Editor of the Herald," *The Duluth Herald* (Jan. 6, 1920): 9.

⁶¹² A review for Key's book *Love and Marriage* in 1911 uses the words "Swede" and "Sweden" three times, the phrase "Northern Europe" twice, and "Scandinavia" once, "'LOVE AND MARRIAGE': Miss Ellen Key Maintains That Motherhood is Not Only the Destiny, but the Highest Privilege of Womanhood," *The New York Times* (Mar. 26, 1911): BR165.

⁶¹³ Hyperbolically relishing in his personal observations of the Netherlands for his book *Sexual Ethics* in 1914, for example, Robert Michels writes: "Most startling of all to a stranger, even to a German, is the amatory life of Holland. Here eroticism is everywhere displayed, in a manner to touch the nerves even of the strongest... we see thousands of young lovers of every possible variety... all these are mingled pell-mell in the streets, or throng in the cafes... they pass from pavement to pavement, cuddling and tickling one another shamelessly, grossly, screaming the while, recalling a picture by Jan Van Ostade or Jan Steen; it is savage, abandoned, brutally sensual, a continuous bacchanal, surpassing all bounds, resembling a herd of rutting kine; the air is filled with a confusion of innumerable voices, and from all these varying tones rises the same dominant strain—love of the senses, love of the senses, love of the senses," with a new introduction by Terry R. Kandal (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2002) 70-71.

sexual restraint.”⁶¹⁴ In addition to describing a general climate of lasciviousness, sexologists characterized Scandinavia as a haven for gay men in particular, largely evidenced by narratives provided by their patients. Xavier Mayne, an American author who wrote under a pseudonym to protect his identity, codifies burgeoning stereotypes in his privately circulated book of 1908 *The Intersexes: A History of Similsexualism as a Problem in Social Life*, declaring that “[i]n Norway and Sweden, in Denmark... homosexualism is in frequent demonstration.”⁶¹⁵ Medicalizing these observations in the more widely circulated book *The Homosexuality of Men and Women* from 1914, Magnus Hirschfeld, a well-known Berlin sexologist and a leading advocate for the decriminalization of sexuality, includes anecdotes from interviewees as well as his own impressions of the region. Hirschfeld lists Denmark and Sweden, in particular, as nations known to be friendly to gay foreigners and cites a “well-traveled businessman” who told him “I had the experience that same-sex love occurs less in France, Spain, Italy, and Turkey than in Germany, Sweden, and Denmark.”⁶¹⁶ Speculating about the root of the region’s queer appeal, Hirschfeld points to nude communal bathing, offering it as “a main reason why many homosexual tourists prefer to go to Scandinavia in the summer.”⁶¹⁷ Listing Magnus IV, Karl XII, Queen Christina, and, notably, Gustav III—four Swedish

⁶¹⁴ James Krauss, M.D. “The Problem of Sexual Hygiene and Sanitation,” *North American Journal of Homeopathy*, XXVII, Series III (1912): 14-21

⁶¹⁵ Mayne, 70, 61.

⁶¹⁶ Hirschfeld, 598.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 607. A similar theory is enthusiastically offered by Dr. Wilhelm Stekel in *The Homosexual Neurosis*. Discussing “Patient 84”: “He has carried out a number of homosexual acts at public baths. In Denmark the men bathe together in steam rooms. Thus he had the opportunity to permit himself bodily contact with others,” translated by James S. Van Teslaar, M.D. (Boston: The Gorham Press, 1922) 261.

monarchs whom early twentieth century experts commonly regarded as gay—Hirschfeld speculates that Sweden may be the Scandinavian nation wherein “Urnings” (as he called gay men) are most widely “disseminated.”⁶¹⁸ Famed English sexologist Havelock Ellis also includes a tale of queer men in Scandinavia in the 1915 edition of *Sexual Inversion (Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume II)*. A 32-year-old man called T.S. (or Patient XV) reports to Havelock Ellis of his years in Sweden: “What I saw in the parks during the long summer nights was quite a revelation. During the summer, when the husbands had sent their families in the country, many of them led a very indiscreet life... I had to do with heaps of men of all classes.”⁶¹⁹ Characteristic of early twentieth-century psychological writings on sex, these stories are at least as titillating and voyeuristic as they may be informative. While the above quotes suggest that a culture of sex tourism was already well underway in Scandinavia, queer readers of the time might have also read against the grain of the potentially-pathologizing rhetoric to regard these descriptions as recommendations for the region, whether to visit in actuality or to hold as a locus for homoerotic fantasy—as the case may be in Ten Chimneys.

Indeed, Scandinavian nations in the early twentieth century were sexually progressive relative to other Western nations and American writers regularly published accounts detailing their relaxed policies. Both Norway and Denmark had laws allowing divorce based on “mutual consent;” the region as a whole was acknowledged for its

⁶¹⁸ Hirschfeld, 607.

⁶¹⁹ Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 132; other accounts of the region’s sexual openness include a patient history by Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel in his 1922 book *The Homosexual Neurosis*. In the book Stekel includes an interview with a man referred to as “Patient 84,” a 28-year-old from Denmark, who recalls spying on fellow male students while they defecate: “In Denmark there is a greater freedom about these matters than elsewhere. Sexual freedom, too, seems to me to be greater in our country. In later years I found sufficient opportunity to satisfy my craving,” Stekel, 245.

progressive sex education; led by Norway, ‘illegitimate children’ received equal legal recognition; and perhaps most radical, several of the Northern nations moved to decriminalize prostitution starting with Denmark in 1906.⁶²⁰ American sexologists espoused the wisdom of this latter decision as a measure against venereal disease, with Abraham Flexner writing in 1914:

The Scandinavian experiment, generally speaking, aims to reach all those suffering with venereal disease... by transferring the function from the police to the health department, by the provision of free treatment, and by endeavoring to enlist the patient’s aid in ascertaining the source of infection, and in the isolation and cure of disease. Separation from the police is intended to allay the patient’s dread of becoming involved with the criminal authority, and... to establish the feeling that venereal disease is after all a disease and not a crime.⁶²¹

For these reasons, Scandinavian nations, along with the Netherlands and Germany, became important centers (both physically and discursively) for early twentieth-century sex-focused debates. Fittingly, Copenhagen, Denmark hosted a Convention for the League for Sexual Reform in 1928, led by Hirschfeld and attended by Havelock Ellis and Margaret Sanger, among others, with the goal to “free human beings from the feeling of sin and crime in the field of its deepest emotions.”⁶²²

However, during the same years that Ten Chimneys renovations were underway,

⁶²⁰ Joseph Richardson Parke, *Human Sexuality: A Medico-Literary Treatise on the History and Pathology of the Sex Instinct for the Use of Physicians and Jurists* (Philadelphia: Professional Publishing Company, 1912) 147; Abraham Flexner, *Prostitution, the Moral Bearings of the Problem*, with Introduction by John D. Rockefeller Jr., Chairman of the Bureau of Social Hygiene (New York: The Century Co., 1914) 52; Katharine Anthony, “Norway’s Treatment of the Illegitimate Child,” *The New Republic*, IV, n. 42 (Aug. 21, 1915): 70-71; because of their similar laws, Britain included Holland in a study of Scandinavian venereal disease, “Anti-Venereal Measures in Scandinavia: Commission’s Report,” *The British Medical Journal*, 1, n.4040 (Jun. 11, 1938): 1277-1278.

⁶²¹ Flexner, 344.

⁶²² “DISCUSSES SEX PROBLEMS: League for Sexual Reform Holds Convention in Copenhagen,” *The New York Times* (Jul. 4, 1928): 14.

the region's legislative lenience did not always extend to gay men. In the first three decades of the century, gay men were largely tolerated, jailed only in cases with alleged victims (whether due to age, public exhibitionism, or rape).⁶²³ Accompanied by an era of radical social engineering, Denmark officially decriminalized same sex behavior in 1933 and Sweden in 1944. Despite this apparent progress, Scandinavian nations continued to view homosexuality as a mental disorder until well into the second half of the twentieth-century and the threat of both medical and random violence policed gay men's activities and bodies.⁶²⁴ The Sterilization Act passed by Denmark in 1929, for example, legally mandated the castration of "sexual offenders," which included men suffering from "recurrent homosexuality."⁶²⁵

Still, characterizations of Northern Europe as a queer paradise were available to and perpetuated by European and American intellectuals. Some early twentieth-century Americans must have seen Scandinavian cultural output and art as inherently reflective of these progressive sexual politics. Indeed, according to Mayne, Scandinavia's "similsexualism was a rooted passion, alluded to by the literature of the races; the

⁶²³ Jens Rydström, "'Sodomitical Sins are Threefold': Typologies of Bestiality, Masturbation, and Homosexuality in Sweden, 1880-1950," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, 9, n. 3 (Jul. 2000): 240-276; Hirschfeld describes the Netherlands as leaders at this time: "When Berliners were leading the way in organizing the emancipation of homosexuals, Holland was the first country in which people took up this battle on their own part... In this movement, three educated men especially became prominent, who feared no hostility in order to support homosexuals in word and in writing: Dr. L.S.A.M. von Römer; Aletrino, the splendid Amsterdam forensics expert; and Schorer, a country gentleman, a doctor of law, and the president of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Holland who authored *Tweeelei Maat* (Double Standards)," 603.

⁶²⁴ Rydström, 240-276; Larsson and Håkan Thörn, "Conclusions: Re-Engineering the Swedish Welfare State," in *Transformations of the Swedish Welfare State: From Social Engineering to Governance?* edited by Bengt Larsson, Martin Letell, and Håkan Thörn (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012) 275.

⁶²⁵ "H.O. Wildenskov, "Sterilization in Denmark: A Eugenic as Well as a Therapeutic Clause," *The Eugenics Review*, 23, n. 4 (Jan. 1932): 312.

attribute of their deities.”⁶²⁶ Though, for the most part, Ten Chimneys’ potential evocation of Sweden as a sexual utopia churned below the surface of easy visibility, Wilson’s insertion of Gustav III into the scheme can be seen as a direct acknowledgement of the country’s queer reputation. The portrait’s function as an introduction into the home’s Swedish salon helps to establish a homoerotic gaze through which the following might be viewed. Indeed, it would not be a stretch to imagine that for the home’s highly educated audiences, this reference was anything but subtle.

Ten Chimneys as a Romping Ground for High Comedy Hokum

Visitors remember the home as an exhibitionist stage with Lunt and Fontanne as its starring players. In a later oral history interview Dean O’Brien, son of photographer Warren O’Brien, expounded on the couple’s tendency to don specific (and highly exaggerated) costuming for specific tasks:

They’d change in and out of clothes so freely and so casually and so quickly you know, their theater background, I suppose, and so they were ready to zip on, you know, he was wearing that formal outfit and then the next thing he’d put on was some sort of cooking outfit or something... and they were very casual about that.⁶²⁷

Thomas W. Bugbee, Lunt’s brother-in-law’s nephew, recalls the Lunt and Fontanne as animated, noting that “they’d be walking in and out and talking, and weren’t prone to

⁶²⁶ Mayne: 70, 61.

⁶²⁷ Dean O’Brien (son of Warren O’Brien, Lunt and Fontanne’s official photographer), interview by Thomas H. Garver, July 15, 1999, transcript, Ten Chimneys Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI.

sitting for great lengths of time.”⁶²⁸ Especially with Lynn, visitors remember the performances taking an erotic turn. John Hale, Wilson’s young painting assistant, speaks in his oral history about an overheard exchange between Fontanne and Larry Farrell, the couple’s financial advisor. In Hale’s account, Fontanne calls Farrell into the room to get his opinion about hats she had just purchased in New York, when “all of a sudden, I hear this shrieking (laughing) and Larry said, ‘but Linnie, you don’t have anything on!!’ and she said, ‘well, look at the hat.’ (laughing).”⁶²⁹ Carolyn Every, a local young woman who worked at Ten Chimneys as a housekeeper and cook, shared a nearly identical remembrance, wherein Lunt and Coward called her in to admire Fontanne’s new floor length cape. Fontanne, Every recounts, “was regally striding away from us,” but when she got to the other side of the room, she “gracefully swung around toward us. The cape was open and she was stark naked!”⁶³⁰

Queer men like Wilson, Alexander Woollcott, Cecil Beaton, Somerset Maugham, and especially Coward, after whom a guestroom in Ten Chimneys is named, regularly trekked from New York to spend days or weeks with ‘The Lunts’ at their country estate. Though the exact expression of Lunt and Fontanne’s respective sexualities remains a much-discussed mystery, the pair courted the attentions of artistic gay men and integrated them into their lives and home. While it is unclear whether any of these relationships

⁶²⁸ Thomas W. Bugbee (nephew of George Bugbee, who was married to Karen Sederholm Bugbee, Alfred’s half-sister), interview by Thomas H. Garver, September 20, 1998, transcript, Ten Chimneys Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI.

⁶²⁹ According to Peters, Larry Farrell was a financial adviser from New York and a gay man, 119; Hale interview; Peters includes a similar story, but in her version it happened to Bill Pronold, a local high-school kid who worked for the Lunts in summers, 123.

⁶³⁰ Peters, 122.

were sexual, *per se*, the couple was hyperbolically flirtatious with their intimates. Fontanne regularly addressed letters to Coward to her “Darling-est Rabbit’s bottom,” while Alfred teased the playwright: “Well Baby: I shall in all probability be quite dead when you receive this—killed by kindness—but I want you to remember always that I loved you to the very end.”⁶³¹

At Ten Chimneys, guests dressed to the nines, ate heavy meals, drank liquor, spun sordid yarns, and generally engaged in exhibitionist fun.⁶³² Alfred’s cooking was oleaginous and heavy on red meats and organs, acclaimed by acquaintances for serving such indulgences as Bombay bisque, cardamom bread, *crème vichyssoise*, maple syrup dumplings, roast legs of lamb with coffee, wild plum jelly, and so on.⁶³³ Woolcott, a famed gourmand, wrote to Alfred declaring, “after considerable gastric meditation I have come to the conclusion that you set the best table I know in America.”⁶³⁴ Combining multiple sensorial delights, Woolcott, Coward, and Fontanne all purportedly swam nude and enjoyed naked poolside lunches.⁶³⁵ This amusement was common enough that Lunt,

⁶³¹ Lynn Fontanne to Noël Coward, n.d., Alfred Lunt to Noël Coward, n.d., circa 1948, Lunt and Fontanne Papers, Ten Chimneys Foundation.

⁶³² Dinners were formal and servants were required to wear a white jacket and bowtie, Richard Perkins, interviewed by Thomas H. Garver, August 2, 1998, transcript, Ten Chimneys Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI; “with Alfred, every conversation was a performance, regardless of how short it was. If you met Alfred on the street, it was a performance. Ah, and after you’d way away, you’d be trying to restructure what he said. He said it so elegantly,” Clarence Bundy, interviewed by Thomas H. Garver, August 2, 1998, transcript, Ten Chimneys Oral History Project 1998-1999, Ten Chimneys Foundation, Genesee Depot, WI.

⁶³³ Peters, 118, 141, 177, 200, 223.

⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁶³⁵ Zolotaw, 169; They “always swam in here nude and (laughing) Miss Fontanne didn’t say a word, but Mrs. Whorf let out a horrible whoop and she jumped into the pool,” Hale interview.

unprompted by Fontanne, put up a sign warning workers to avoid the pool area during certain hours of the day.⁶³⁶

If *Ten Chimneys* is a high comedy stage, the occupants' debaucherous social philosophy, might be viewed as so much hokum. An especially popular strategy in early twentieth-century vaudeville and popular comedy, hokum pleases audiences with traditionally vulgar manner, through easily digested sentimentality, sexual humor, and frivolity. In his inventory of theatrical terms for the periodical *American Speech* in 1926, linguist Percy W. White called hokum "the most discussed word in the entire vernacular of the stage" that "has been defined in various ways," but is most often used to describe "any old, time-worn line, gag, or piece of business which... may be depended upon to get across and wow 'em." While this definition potentially paints hokum as innocuous fun, White notes that the strategy ranges from "the waiter bearing the tray heavily laden with dishes who suddenly trips over nothing" to something that "borders on pathos" like "when the poor factory girl defied the immaculately dressed villain from the upper crust."⁶³⁷ The latter example is a loaded one, as, in its earliest iterations, the term always possessed some bite in its treatment of class politics as fodder for popular entertainment. In reference to tropes commonly employed by actors in nineteenth-century minstrel shows, black southerners originated the term hokum to describe humor that "put it over on" polite society.⁶³⁸ The term also connotes fakery and puffed-up artifice, a meaning perpetuated by early twentieth-century critics who sometimes deployed it as an insult

⁶³⁶ Hale interview; Peters, 122.

⁶³⁷ Percy W. White, "Stage Terms," *American Speech*, 1, n. 8, (May, 1926): 437.

⁶³⁸ Leonard Keene Hirshberg, "Negro Origin of 'Hokum,'" originally in the *New York World*, March 28, 1923, reprinted in *American Speech*, 4, n. 2 (Dec. 1928): 159.

interchangeable with “bunk,” which is its common meaning today. Conjuring both hokum’s “low” minstrel origins and undertones of duplicity to mock the intellectual activities of Harlem Renaissance artists and writers, George S. Schuyler’s article “The Negro-Art Hokum” published in *Nation* in 1926 takes black cultural leaders to task for being, in his estimation, too prescriptive, morally superior, and racially-minded.⁶³⁹

Though initially associated with entertainment for the masses, by the 1920s hokum was a widely used term to describe crowd-pleasing clichés in “high” art as well. Lacking explicit seriousness, twentieth-century theater critics increasingly viewed hokum as unwelcome fluff and roundly expressed distaste for its incursion. John Rosenfield Jr., for example, declared it “a stupefaction” that “deliberately lowered” “the taste of the American theatergoer.”⁶⁴⁰ Still concerned with class relations, high comedy hokum was its own brand, relying on a paganistic spirit and a frank contempt for bourgeois Puritanism. Visibly represented by the long indulgent party scene in the later film *Breakfast at Tiffany’s*, hokum in high comedy consists of characters engaging in seemingly empty aristocratic nonsense, decadent activity that often stands peripheral to a play’s central narrative. This is not to say, however, that high comedy hokum is without message. In the essay “Hokum of the Intelligenzia” in 1928 for *The North American Review*, art critic Catherine Beach Ely wrote a scathing appraisal of the strategy’s increasing occurrence in contemporary literature and theater. For Beach Ely, hokum in the fine arts indicates an unfortunate and mounting predilection toward brash intellect over intuition and morality. The critic supports this argument by enumerating and

⁶³⁹ George S. Schuyler, “The Negro-Art Hokum,” *Nation*, 122 (Jun. 16, 1926): 662–3.

⁶⁴⁰ John Rosenfield Jr., “The Movie Talks,” *Southwest Review*, 14, n. 1 (1928): 19.

condemning the strategy's common forms, sardonically pronouncing "we shall hold up for inspection a few of the most luxuriously flaunting specimens of the hokum cultivated by [modern intellectuals] to get the applause of their audience." Beach Ely includes, among others: the hokum of "The Middle Class is Thickheaded and Hardhearted," wherein writers treat the middle class as "unprogressive, domineering, crude"; the hokum of "Realism Consists in Details of Unchastity," wherein the intelligentsia "can discover no more novel theme than the weakest physical moments of the race"; and the hokum of "Degeneracy is Piquant," wherein writers concoct "reeking corruptive dish[es]...malodorous flowers of the night," believing that "the epicurean modern reader desires tainted meat...hence only the odors of decay will arouse [the age's] jaded faculties."⁶⁴¹ Hokum, Beach Ely contends, is an assault on both truth and man's spirituality, but "what interest have these things," she disdainfully inquires, "for Joe and Jim between cocktails?"⁶⁴² While baldly censorious of the growing intrusion of a "low" phenomenon into "high" art forms, Beach Ely's essay usefully spells out the contours and functions of high comedy hokum, describing it as a literary and theatrical tendency that favors the moral ambiguity of the upper class and elicits pleasure, outrage, and pleasurable outrage from its presumably well-educated audiences.

'The Lunts' were nothing if not crowd-pleasers. The *Daily Boston Globe*, for example, lauded *The Taming of the Shrew* as "fantastically ludicrous" and "Luntonian to the limit... with the prodigality of a three-ring circus, with acrobats, dwarfs, songs and dances" that "emblazoned the stage with harlequinade costumes of glaringly gorgeous

⁶⁴¹ Catherine Beach Ely, "Hokum of the Intelligentsia," *The North American Review*, 226, n. 1 (Jul., 1928): 67.

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, 66.

color.”⁶⁴³ Starring ‘The Lunts’, Robert Sherwood’s 1931 *Reunion in Vienna* relishes in “extravagant hokum...champagne is drunk, waltzes are danced, banter is exchanged, faces are slapped...” all without much regard for plot or intellectual argument (Figure 121).⁶⁴⁴ The style’s best known, albeit somewhat reluctant, defender, Sherwood introduced his 1928 play *The Queen’s Husband* with an argument for hokum, calling it the “life-blood” of the theater. “The theatre,” Sherwood asserts “is and always has been a nursery of the arts, a romping-ground for man’s more childish emotions.”⁶⁴⁵ Historian Robert F. Gross spins high comedy’s use of hokum in more progressive terms. Gross argues that, in its rejection of universal idealism as a disingenuous, even narcissistic, pursuit, high comedies posit hokum as “the most democratic mode of expression” that “celebrates the mysterious, the confused, the unpredictable and, above all, free element in human beings.”⁶⁴⁶ In its taste for pleasing disorder over restrictive moral limitations, hokum, Gross suggests, provides playwrights with an alternative and cautiously resistant worldview. If we imagine *Ten Chimneys* as a “romping ground” for hokum, and if we therefore extend Gross’s arguments to conceptualize the bacchanalian social performances therein, it becomes possible to read the home as a space for cheerful subversion and sexualized catharsis.

⁶⁴³ “The Stage: Colonial Theatre The Taming of the Shrew,” *Daily Boston Globe* (Jan. 21, 1936): 14.

⁶⁴⁴ Robert F. Gross, “Servant of Three Masters: Realism, Idealism, and ‘Hokum’ in American High Comedy,” in *Realism and the American Dramatic Tradition*, edited by William W. Demastes (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 1996) 85.

⁶⁴⁵ Quoted in Harriet Hyman Alonso, *Robert E. Sherwood: The Playwright in Peace and War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007) 109.

⁶⁴⁶ Gross, 88.

Conclusion

The affective interiors at Ten Chimneys were agents in Lunt, Fontanne, and guests' hokum-filled performances. Like high comedy hokum, I would argue, the political thrust of Wilson's designs is in his positioning of pleasure as a driving imperative, a move that eschews norms of bourgeois propriety and self-discipline. Ten Chimneys, perhaps more so than other homes, is experiential: the surfaces beg to be touched, the mirrors neatly frame visual stimuli, and the often-illogical passageways facilitate exploration. Speaking to *Vogue* in 1940, Fontanne compares the prospect of living in too modern a space to physical vulnerability, like "sitting nude... in the centre of a huge white dinner-plate."⁶⁴⁷ In contrast, then, we might assume that the decadent décor of Ten Chimneys was a more comfortable fit, a space that costumed its inhabitants and suggested how they might feel and behave within its borders. Rejecting prevailing Modernist tendencies, Wilson liberally blends current and past styles, pushing both to excess. The call and response of his affective pastiche ensured a constant redefining of what the home's imagery might confer. Wilson's Ten Chimneys pastiche, however, is not a disinterested repetition of styles; rather, in the context of 1930s theater practices and popular discourses, Wilson helped Lunt and Fontanne to create a space wherein viewers

⁶⁴⁷ Morehouse, 108; Homes in early twentieth-century rhetoric were deeply wedded to bodies that occupied them, seemingly able to reflect, clothe, or influence their (especially female) owners. In *The Personality of a House* of 1930, Emily Post advises decorating for "personal becomingness," stating that it behooves "women of fading beauty" to choose color schemes to flatter their "florid" or "sallow" skin tones. Blondes, Post says, are wise to avoid showy blues and excessive ornamentation: "one danger threatens her: the vulgarity of too much gilding. Just as she must be careful to stay slim or she will become too full-blown, she must choose surroundings of distinction and simplicity or she will make them as well as herself look tawdry," Emily Post, *The Personality of a House: The Blue Book of Home Design and Decoration* (first published 1930) (New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1939) 199.

might reclaim for themselves the Rococo, Swedishness, and so on as arenas for erotic freedom. Because his work for Ten Chimneys existed in a comparatively private realm and his audience was a known and narrow quantity, Wilson operated here with less restraint than he might in his public gallery work. Though for Kurt Weill the interiors were “awful in parts,” it seems clear that the Modernist composer was decidedly not the ideal audience for Wilson’s spatial hokum.

In his Ten Chimneys’ interiors, Wilson renders the rhetorical strategies of contemporary high comedy in visual terms, employing the aristocratic tenor and double-edged humor popular among his theater colleagues. Once inhabited, the performers activated and gave heightened meaning to the spaces that prefigured their routines. In *Sexual Stigma* of 1975, Kenneth Plummer argues that sexual minorities “are likely to be aware of ‘passing,’” of “‘presenting a self,’” and “‘keeping up an act’” and therefore possess a “‘dramaturgical consciousness.’”⁶⁴⁸ Though social performance is decidedly different from the explicitly performative realm of theater, Ten Chimneys’ décor and Lunt and Fontanne’s exhibitionist example created for their guests a space wherein everyday social interactions were overtly theatricalized. In addition to offering a delightful escape from the policing gaze of public life, such an overtly performative sensibility playfully undercuts the culturally-assumed essentialness of guests’ various cultural identities. On the one hand, Wilson’s allegiance to upper-class white aesthetic worked to reify class and racial hierarchies. On the other, the multifaceted subtext in his Rococo and Swedish pastiche pushed up against contemporary norms of sexuality and gender expression. By channeling the high comedy stage, Wilson’s interiors allowed him,

⁶⁴⁸ Kenneth Plummer quoted by Sinfield, “Private Lives/Public Theatre,” 43.

his patrons, and their guests to be reticently open about their respective sexualities and offered new ways of performing self both within these walls and outside them.

Conclusion

In 1950, just two years before his death, Wilson filed the play *Jin Jin: A Comedy in Three Acts* with the Copyright Office of Library of Congress under “Drama and Works Prepared for Oral Presentation.”⁶⁴⁹ Set in the Upper East Side in contemporary New York, the script is a drawing room comedy send-up of upper-class pretension, America’s prudishness regarding sexuality, and the fleeting whims of the Modern art scene. The play centers on Charles and Nelly Van der Dam, whose dialog practically screams for Lunt and Fontanne’s delivery style; their daughter Virginia, Virginia’s two suitors, Ramsey and Teddy, respectively a strapping lad and a “glamor man” [sic]; and Dr. Fraulein Geheimrat Frieda Schonschnitte, a “mannish” Austrian psychoanalyst who rails against America’s overly “moralisch” attitudes and who later reveals herself to be intersexual.⁶⁵⁰ Like his art, Wilson’s script walks a strange line between provocation and deep conservatism, as Nelly’s progressiveness, the Doctor’s sexual rebellion and inconceivable body, and Teddy’s barely-veiled queerness, are ultimately the vehicles for the play’s comedic thrust. The play opens with old-school Charles skeptically prodding fashionable Nelly about the virtues of her newly-purchased “masterpiece,” in celebration of which the pair are that evening throwing a dinner party. Not to worry, Nelly reassures Charles, Modern paintings make for a good investment and surely “Noodler’s” gallery

⁶⁴⁹ Claggett Wilson, *Jin Jin: A Comedy in Three Acts*, c. 1950. Claggett Wilson Papers, in a private collection; “Drama and Works Prepared for Oral Delivery,” *Catalog of Copyright Entries: January-June, 1950*, v. 4, pt. 2, n. 1 (Washington D.C.: Copyright Office of Library of Congress, 1950) 87.

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-5, 2-21, 2-22.

will pay a fortune for it in a few years.⁶⁵¹ Hung amid a stylish interior punctuated by African sculptures and modernist paintings, including, Wilson tells us, a canvas featuring “a very fat, distorted female with four breasts and three eyes,” the new painting is a work by Quipaso, a fictional Spanish artist whose life on the French Riviera and association with Gertrude Stein begs more than a passing, if not tacky, resemblance to Picasso’s biography.⁶⁵² With the conversation quickly morphing into a debate over Virginia’s aristocratic nose, Nelly’s interests in Quipaso’s painting are shown to be superficial at best and both the painting and those who would purchase it are made ridiculous through the exchange.

Writing at the end of his life, having watched the comparative loosening of sexual norms in the 1920s and 1930s regress into a renewed Puritanism in postwar United States and having lived through the decline and eventual erasure of his artistic career, the subtext in Wilson’s *Jin Jin* reveals a disenchanting relationship with contemporary sexual discourses as well as the current state of affairs of the Modern art world that has all but left him behind. With his tone vacillating between humor and implicit self-pity, it would be tempting to view this play as the ambivalent final reflections of a single artist martyred to cultural forgetfulness. However, in order to account for Wilson’s art world disappearance, I would argue, it is necessary to unpack the stories that art critics and historians have told about the development of Modernism in the American art scene more broadly. What can the dramatically arched trajectory of Wilson’s career tell us about the art world and the modern critical apparatus that shaped it? To think about how critical

⁶⁵¹ Ibid., 1-4.

⁶⁵² Ibid., 1-1, 1-5.

discourses may have impacted the devolution of Wilson's career, I will look to the writing of three hugely influential American art critics who rose to prominence in the 1920s and 1930s—namely Thomas Craven, Meyer Schapiro, and Clement Greenberg—whose prescriptive models for American art both set an agenda for contemporary artists and created new frameworks for understanding the art that preceded it.

The most vitriolic of the three writers, Thomas Craven was an anti-modernist critic who championed the careers of Thomas Hart Benton and other regionalist painters of the American scene. Following critic Paul Rosenberg in this respect, Craven wrote polemically against continental influences in American art and celebrated explicitly nationalist styles and subjects. For Craven, the American scene was best expressed through masculine forms and best displayed in monumental, public works. In “Men of Art: American Style” published in *The American Mercury* in 1925, he offers a critical history of modernism in the United States and imparts a new direction for contemporary artists, who he describes as currently impotent in their efforts to affect society. The impotent artist today, he writes, naming Charles Demuth as an example, “is an effeminate creature who paints still-life, tepid landscapes, and incomprehensible abstractions purporting to express the aesthetic states of his wounded soul.”⁶⁵³ In his estimation, female artists, the decorative arts, and canvas paintings are largely to blame for the loss of virility in modern art:

Painting is essentially a man's art, and all great painters have been coarse, earthy and intolerable. In the entire range of art there is not a single picture entitled to a moment's consideration that has been done by a woman. The notion that painting is something 'to be lived with' is a modern sophistry born of that innocuous

⁶⁵³ Thomas Craven, “Men of Art: American Style,” *The American Mercury* (Dec. 1925): 432.

ornament called the easel-picture... it is only when art is emasculated that it can be lived with.⁶⁵⁴

Wilson's decorative and pleasing art would, no doubt, displease Craven, whose perspective would become increasingly prominent in the following decade. Although Wilson painted murals throughout the 1920s and 1930s, as did many of his contemporaries, his larger works were commissioned by private citizens for residences or businesses, never for the Works Progress Administration. Even more damning, his aesthetic was delicate and referential of European modes, not aggressively masculine and stylistically nationalist. Though the critic approved of figuration in art to which Wilson remained loyal for the entirety of his career, in Craven's narrative of masculine artists battling to take back the art scene from effeminate forces, Wilson's decorative brand of art making is precisely the problem.

Though also largely, albeit not exclusively, supporting figurative styles, Meyer Schapiro's early ideas about American art are nonetheless in many ways at odds with Craven's model. More political than Craven, Schapiro in the 1930s wrote criticism for Marxist publications like *New Masses*, *The Partisan Review*, and *The Marxist Quarterly* and offered his support for the left-leaning Art Front.⁶⁵⁵ Not satisfied with celebratory scenes of American life, the rise of nationalism in Nazi Germany left Schapiro suspicious of nationalist art and led him to advocate for an art overtly engaged with radical politics, which he located in social realism. In "Social Bases of Art" from 1936, Schapiro argues

⁶⁵⁴ Ibid., 432.

⁶⁵⁵ Patricia Hills, "1936: Meyer Schapiro, 'Art Front,' and the Popular Front," *Oxford Art Journal*, 17, n. 1 (Jan. 1994): 30-41.

that a too-narrow focus on formal concerns and artist individuality has mystified the reality that all art is politically-wrought:

[T]he apparent isolation of the modern artist from practical activities, the discrepancy between his archaic, individual handicraft and the collective, mechanical character of most modern production, do not necessarily mean that he is outside society or that his work is unaffected by social and economic changes. The social aspect of his art has been further obscured by two things, the insistently personal character of the modern painter's work and his preoccupation with formal problems alone.⁶⁵⁶

Ultimately, Schapiro argues that contemporary artists should seize upon the politics of the moment and create art that revolts against powers of inequality, to which their art is already inextricably tied. While Schapiro was not explicitly anti-feminine, especially when considered alongside Craven, his call for an active, politically aggressive art would have been nonetheless implicitly gendered in the cultural climate of 1930s United States for the average viewer. Though I have made a case in this dissertation that Wilson's art is indeed engaged in contemporary sexual politics, his potential subversions were necessarily veiled by his multivalent cultural references and the larger political thrust of his work is murky at best. As such, Wilson decidedly does not fit into Schapiro's model for the modern American artist as a revolutionary.

The same political climate that led Schapiro to advocate for Marxist social realism also, alternatively, led critic Clement Greenberg to question the politics of figuration itself. Though coming to very different conclusions in terms of what modern art should look like, Greenberg shared Schapiro's view that art is an agent in larger political apparatuses. In his essay "Avant-Garde and Kitsch" from 1939, Greenberg argues that to avoid "Alexandrianism," a decadent academicism that decays progress, avant-garde

⁶⁵⁶ Meyer Schapiro, "Social Bases of Art," *First American Artists' Congress Against War and Fascism* (New York: 1936): 31-37.

artists should resist literature and theater and turn inward to explore the properties of their own discipline.⁶⁵⁷ If the arts were allowed to fall into a state of “Alexandrianism,” Greenberg warns, the field may be subsumed into the commodity world of “kitsch” (read here: popular figurative representations). Though kitsch may seem innocuous, it is not, according to Greenberg, a matter to be taken lightly. Because the misinformed and overworked peasant may prefer a work of kitsch by Repin over a work of genius by Picasso without realizing that the latter is better for him, kitsch, Greenberg writes, is too easily employed as a tool of dictators.⁶⁵⁸ Not just a matter of aesthetics, Greenberg implicitly moralizes abstract forms and thereby positions avant-garde artists as cultural heroes who can help safeguard society from dictatorship. Conversely, non-abstracted figurative art was not only formally inferior, but morally suspect. While differing on whether art should focus on form or content, Greenberg agrees with Craven that art should be challenging and uncomfortable for the average viewer. Here again, Wilson’s figurative art, whose cultural challenges are nuanced, indirect, and rooted in the very forms of theatricality and literariness that Greenberg warns against, finds no home in this third proposed model for contemporary art. As a catalyst to the critical triumph of high Modernism in the United States, Greenberg was hugely influential in shaping the Modern American canon.

Under the weight of the influence of Craven, Schapiro, and Greenberg, and with the benefit of hindsight (able to see the aesthetic “winners” and “losers,” so to speak), early art historians crafted a linear narrative of progression that favored artists whose

⁶⁵⁷ Clement Greenberg, “Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” in *Pollock and After: The Critical Debate*, edited by Francis Frascina, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2000) 49.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 57.

work seemed to foretell later, more austere and hyperbolically masculine artistic movements. While Craven, Schapiro, and Greenberg presented three fairly different visions for what contemporary art should look like and accomplish, none of these models would have looked favorably upon Wilson's aesthetic, which was historically referential, superficially pleasing, and, perhaps worst of all, "feminine." As noted by feminist art historian Norma Broude, the rise of Modernist art criticism in the United States has had a dramatic impact on the canonization of art in ways that still haunt art history today, limiting both who is canonized and with what rhetoric they are framed. In *Impressionism: A Feminist Reading, The Gendering of Art, Science, and Nature*, Broude argues that in order to posit Impressionism as a direct forefather to later Modernist abstraction, art critics and, subsequently, art historians focused on the movement's formal innovations and minimized its more feminine qualities. Though the movement was initially described in culturally feminized terms, Broude writes that later critics worked to highlight Impressionism as an empirical art "devoid of significant content or feeling," effectively "enshrin[ing] the culturally masculinized values of objectivity, materialism, and cerebral detachment."⁶⁵⁹ For Broude, this later reevaluation of Impressionist work operated in tandem with the rise in hyper-masculinist rhetoric in modern art that became increasingly hegemonic as the twentieth century rolled on.

In her state of the field essay "Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art" from 1988, Wanda Corn writes that Barbara Novak, John McCoubrey, and other early historians of American art, partly influenced by the continuing impact of thinkers like Craven, Schapiro, and Greenberg, invented a usable past for the celebrated

⁶⁵⁹ Broude, 8, 110.

American art of their day. Locating styles and attitudes perceived by 1950s and 1960s United States arbiters of culture to be “good” and distinctly American, they traced a lineage into the past and created a narrative wherein American art as a field could seem to reveal a “pragmatic,” “blunt,” and “unsensuous” national temperament. While on the one hand these scholars brought newfound attention to American art created before the 1940s, that art was typically “presented as leading the way to the ‘triumph’ of 1945.” In other words, American art underwent the same kind of rewriting that Broude identifies in mid-twentieth-century scholarship on Impressionism, but with a nationalist twist. Paintings by artists like Winslow Homer and Thomas Eakins were celebrated both as early models for abstract painting as well as indicative of a tendency toward masculine restraint and rationality in the United States.⁶⁶⁰

Although femininity in men is not synonymous with queerness, in Wilson’s historical moment the two were discursively entangled. While it is too simplistic to say that Wilson’s art was left behind due to his sexuality, I would argue that his chosen aesthetic, which ultimately lost the battle for critical favor, cannot be wholly separated from queerness. Moreover, Wilson’s coded references, once partly veiled by his contemporary viewers’ limited knowledge of queer culture, would have been increasingly visible to general audiences and, more significantly, increasingly dangerous both in terms of criminal persecution and oppression at the hands of his artist peers. As Christopher

⁶⁶⁰ Wanda Corn, “Coming of Age: Historical Scholarship in American Art” in *The Art Bulletin*, 70, n. 2 (June 1988): 191-192; Coming from a social art history perspective, Serge Guilbaut also writes at length about the affect of early American art criticism on later art historical scholarship, arguing that the worship of form and artistic individualism set in motion by high-power players such as Alfred Barr and Clement Greenberg has served to mystify complex histories, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art: Abstract Expressionism, Freedom, and the Cold War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Reed notes, starting in the 1930s, artists increasingly discriminated against their gay colleagues, spouting off anti-gay rhetoric as part of their hyper-masculine posturing as well as explicitly denying women and queer men membership into artist organizations.⁶⁶¹ That queer artists were more likely to destroy their letters and erotic art, that Hartley and Demuth both withdrew from urban centers and returned to “the rural areas they came from,” that gay artists were forced to code their homoerotic references in the first place, all of these factors, Reed argues, attest to the subjugation of gay artists within the early- to mid-twentieth-century art world and “belies common myths of a freewheeling avant-garde that never hesitated to shock the public by championing freedom of persona and aesthetic expression.”⁶⁶² In other words, while Wilson found a degree of freedom in the 1920s and found pockets for queer expression in the 1930s, this freedom was never absolute and would have been increasingly thin as his career progressed.

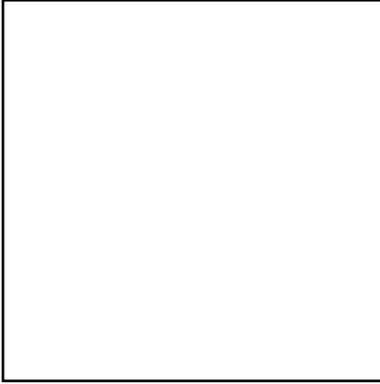
Through skilled social-networking, self-promotion, and a willingness to reach outside of the boundaries of his fine art discipline, Wilson successfully navigated the contemporary art world, securing exhibitions, garnering critical favor, and attracting prominent commissions and benefactors. When viewed in the context of early twentieth-century discourses, Wilson’s art was at once conservative in its upholding of certain national, racial, and class values, while at the same time sexually rebellious, pushing against the norms of bourgeois respectability. To these ends, Wilson employed a range of references, from historical aesthetic styles to contemporary racial stereotypes and political events, and spoke to particular interpretive communities that became

⁶⁶¹ Reed, 153-154.

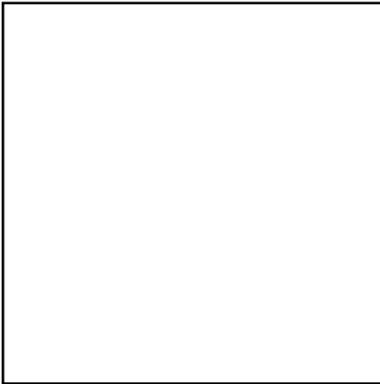
⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, 131, 132, 134.

increasingly narrow as his artistic projects moved from the New York art scene to Midwestern domestic interiors and back.

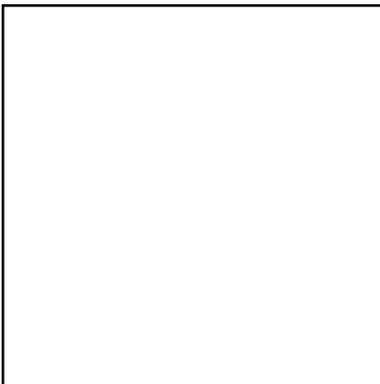
Illustrations



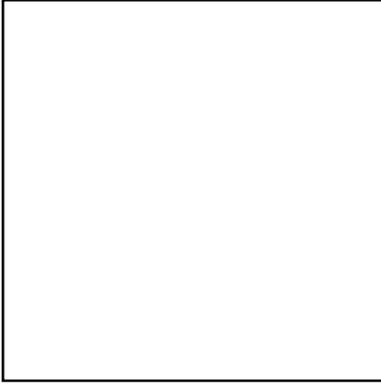
(Figure 1) How the 'Debs' Shocked Society with 'Solomon's Song': Artistic but Very Scantily Clothed Biblical Ladies and the Trouble That Started When the Smart Set's Girl Editors Dared to Put Them in Their New Magazine," *The Illustrated Buffalo Express* (May 28, 1922).



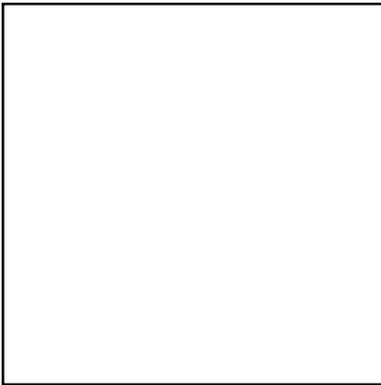
(Figure 2) Claggett Wilson, *Thy lips are a thread of scarlet*, *Songs of Solomon*, watercolor, 1922, photographed by Peter A. Juley Photography of Fine Arts, New York. Photograph in a private collection.



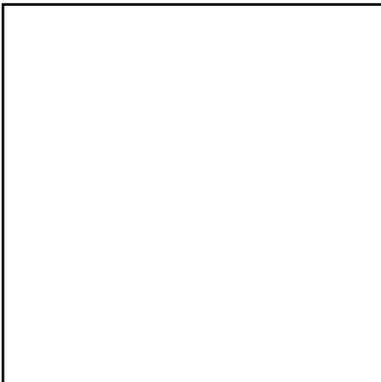
(Figure 3) Claggett Wilson, *He brought me into the banqueting-house and his banner over me was love...stay me with flagons, comfort me with apples for I am sick with love*, *Songs of Solomon*, watercolor, 1922, photographed by Peter A. Juley Photography of Fine Arts, New York. Photograph in a private collection.



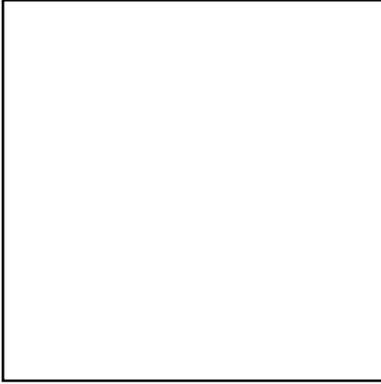
(Figure 4) Claggett Wilson, *Behold thou art fair my love...thy hair is as a flock of goats that appear from Mount Gilead~thy two breasts are like two young roes that are twins which feed among the lilies*, *Songs of Solomon*, watercolor, 1922, photographed by Peter A. Juley Photography of Fine Arts, New York. Photograph in a private collection.



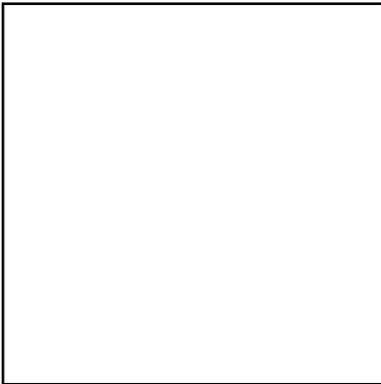
(Figure 5) Peggy Bacon, *The Whitney Studio Club (Frenzied Effort)*, drypoint, 1925. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



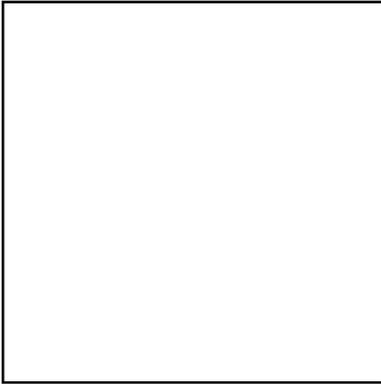
(Figure 6) Claggett Wilson, *Look not upon me because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me; my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of their vineyards, but mine own vineyards have I not kept*, *Songs of Solomon*, watercolor, 1922, photographed by Peter A. Juley Photography of Fine Arts, New York. Photograph in a private collection.



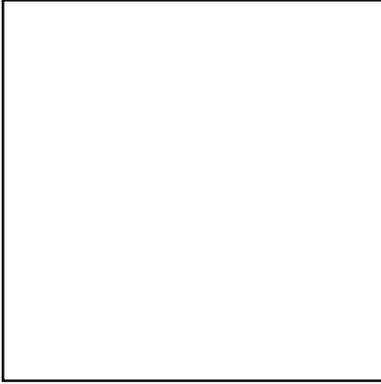
(Figure 7) Paul Thevenaz, *Portrait of a Negro*, pencil and watercolor, 1915. In *Paul Thevenaz: A Record of his Life and Work* (Alice de la Mar, 1922).



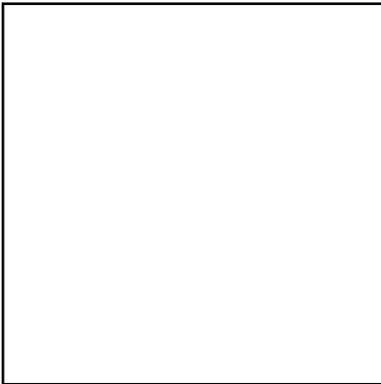
(Figure 8) "Dollar and scents," *Time*, v. 12, 17 (Oct. 22, 1928): 35.



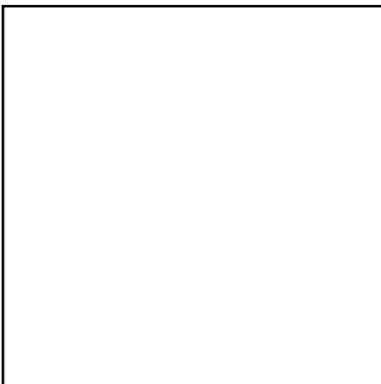
(Figure 9) Claggett Wilson and Douglas Robbins with an unknown man in Smyrna (now Izmir), Turkey, 1926. Photograph in a private collection.



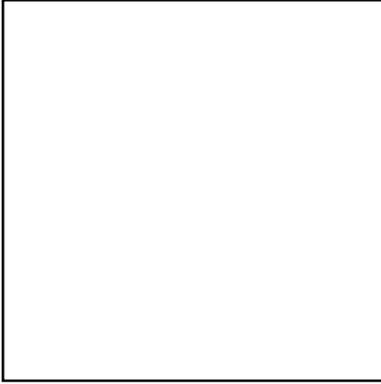
(Figure 10) Claggett Wilson, *En Fiesta*, printed in *New York American* (Apr. 13, 1914). Clipping in the archives of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Claggett Wilson folder.



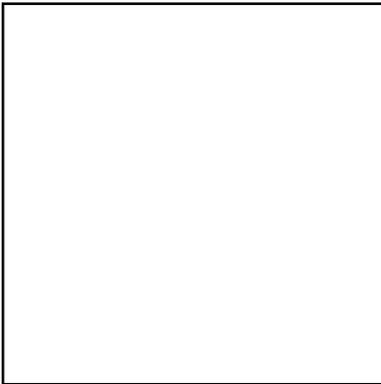
(Figure 11) "Duke of Osuna, In the collection of Claggett Wilson, Esquire, of Columbia University," Helen Churchill Candee, "Certain Goyas in America: Francisco Goya Y Lucientes, 1746-1828," *Scribner's Magazine*, v. 62, 4 (Oct. 1917): 430.



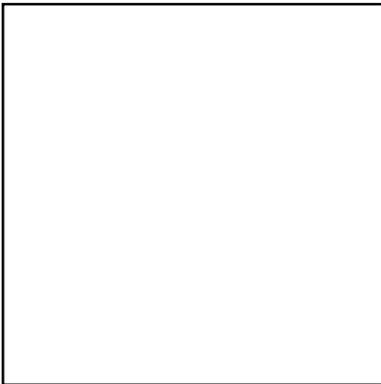
(Figure 12) Henry C. Wilson and Claggett Wilson, July 1918. Photograph in a private collection.



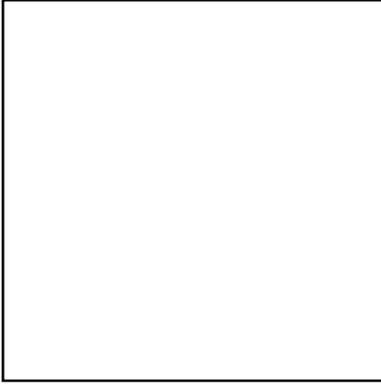
(Figure 13) Aline Fruhauf, caricature of Henry McBride, in Elisabeth Luther Cary, "Henry McBride," *Creative Art: A Magazine of Fine & Applied Art* (Dec. 1932): 281.



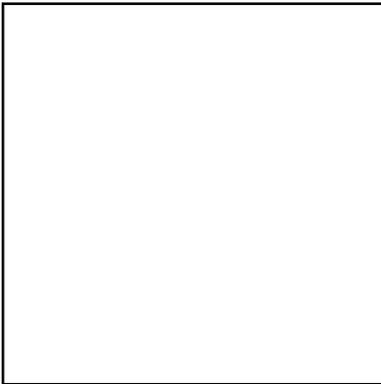
(Figure 14) R. Tebbs, Mr. Adolph Lewisohn's Residence, 881 Fifth Ave., N.Y.C. Library, c. 1915-1930, Museum of the City of New York. In the collection of the Museum of the City of New York.



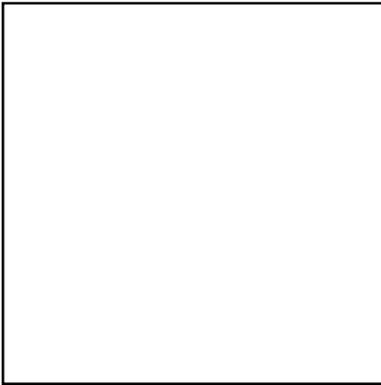
(Figure 15) Adolph Lewisohn's estate in Ardsley, New York, in *The American Hebrew*, v. 110 (Apr. 15, 1922).



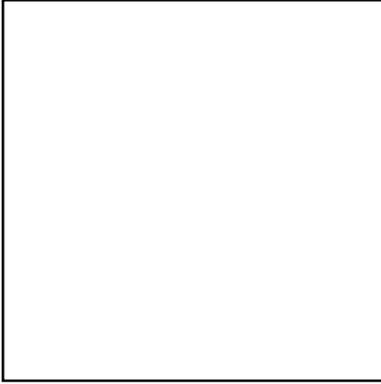
(Figure 16) Claggett Wilson's mural for the music room in Solomon R. Guggenheim's Port Washington home, 1926. Photograph in a private collection.



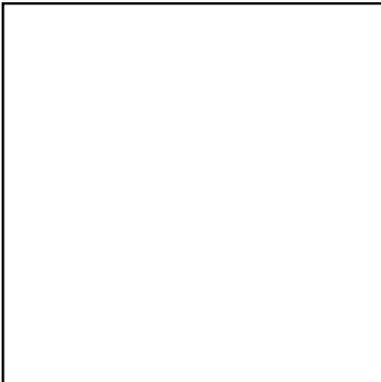
(Figure 17) Wilbur Underwood "appear[s] as Habitu[é] of the Opium Den," *The Washington Times* (Apr. 20, 1915): 9.



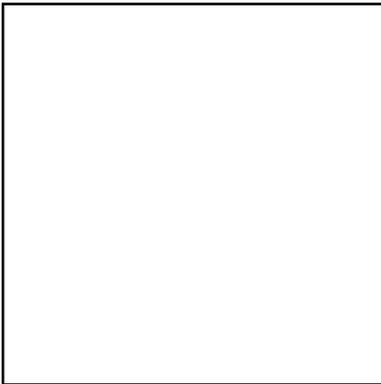
(Figure 18) Claggett Wilson at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Residence in Port Washington, New York, c. 1926. Photograph in a private collection.



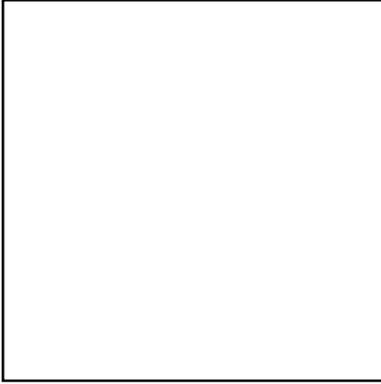
(Figure 19) Henry Wilson with his son, Henry Jr. Photograph in a private collection.



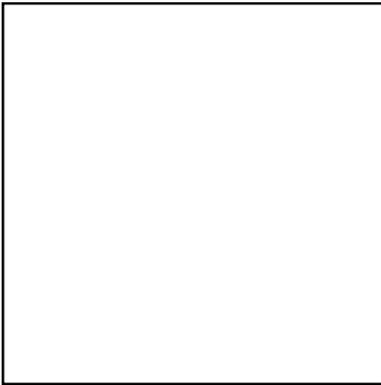
(Figure 20) Claggett Wilson, *Maine Fisherman*, c. 1929, photograph on www.claggettwilson.com, accessed on April 20, 2015. In a private collection.



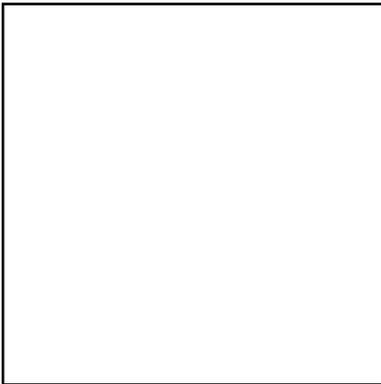
(Figure 21) Claggett Wilson, *Bullfighters in a Cafe*, watercolor, c. 1921. In a private collection.



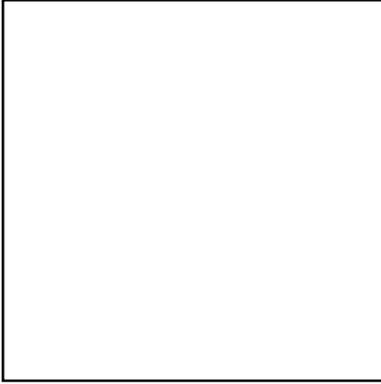
(Figure 22) Claggett Wilson, Untitled, n.d. In a private collection.



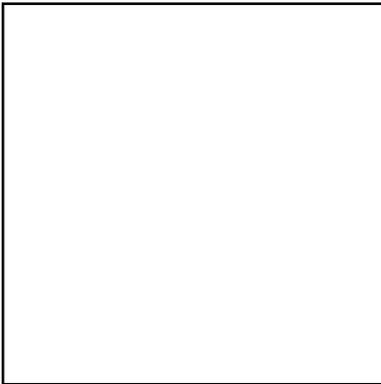
(Figure 23) Claggett Wilson, Untitled (bath scene), watercolor, n.d. In a private collection.



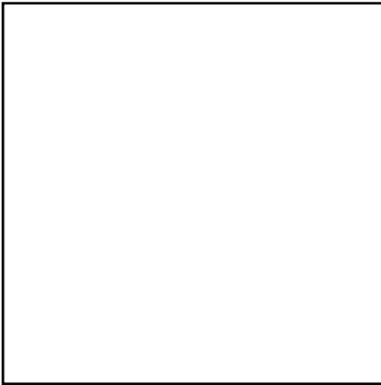
(Figure 24) Claggett Wilson, Untitled (bath scene), watercolor, n.d. In a private collection.



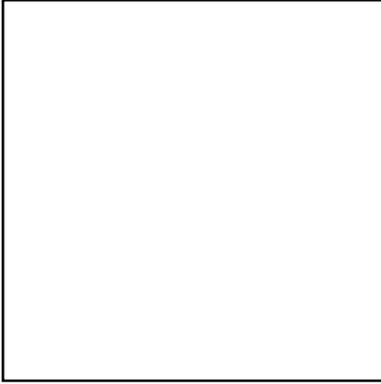
(Figure 25) Charles Demuth, *Turkish Bath with Self-portrait*, watercolor, 1918. In the collection of the Yale University Art Gallery.



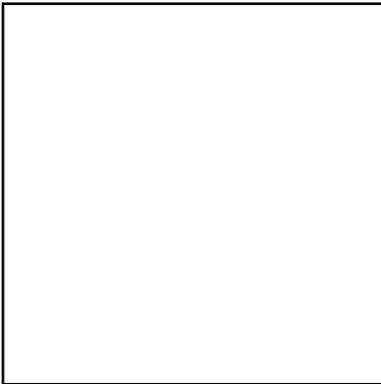
(Figure 26) Florine Stettheimer, *The Cathedrals of Wall Street*, oil on canvas, 1939. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



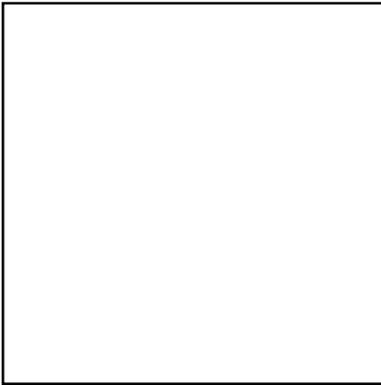
(Figure 27) Carrie Stettheimer, *Dollhouse*, c. 1920s, photograph for John Noble's *A Fabulous Dollhouse of the Twenties: The Famous Stettheimer Dollhouse at the Museum of the City of New York*, New York: Dover Publications, 1976.



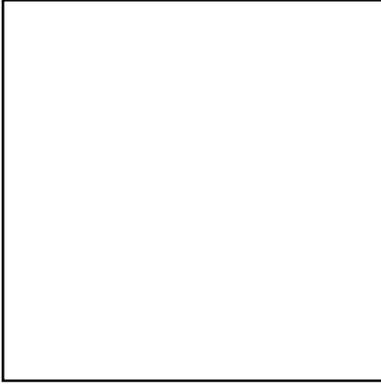
(Figure 28) Claggett Wilson, *Basque Sailors* for Carrie Stettheimer's Dollhouse, c. 1925. In the collection of the Museum of the City of New York.



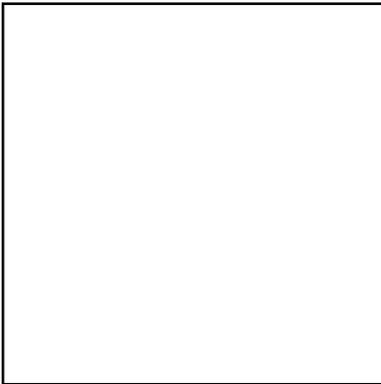
(Figure 29) Claggett Wilson, icon for Carrie Stettheimer's Dollhouse, c. 1925, gouche on gold ground. In the collection of the Museum of the City of New York.



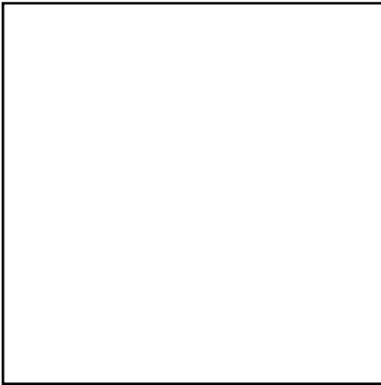
(Figure 30) "Claggett Wilson, Mural Painter, 64," *The New York Times* (May 21, 1952), clipping from Alfred Steiglitz/Georgia O'Keeffe Archive, Yale Archives, Collection no. YCAL MSS 85, Box 215, folder, 3798.



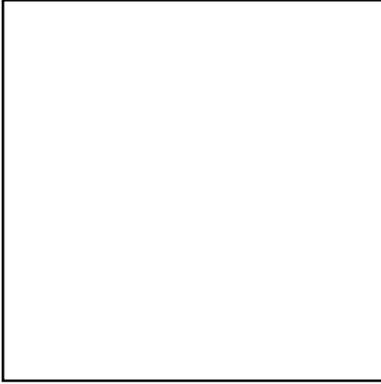
(Figure 31) Marsden Hartley, *Portrait of a German Officer*, oil on canvas, 1914. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



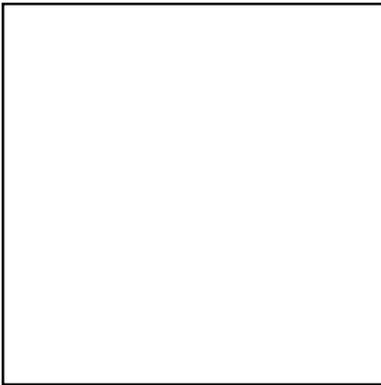
(Figure 32) Claggett Wilson, *The Billet at Bouy (Self-Portrait)*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



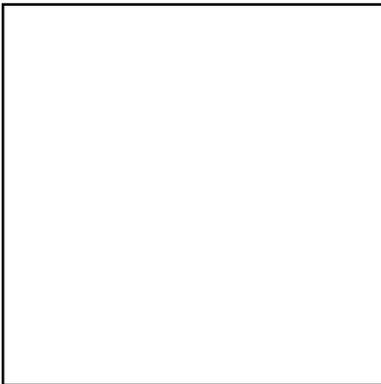
(Figure 33) Claggett Wilson, *Boudoir of Madame la Comtesse H....Black Death lay heavy in the heart of this exquisite flower*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



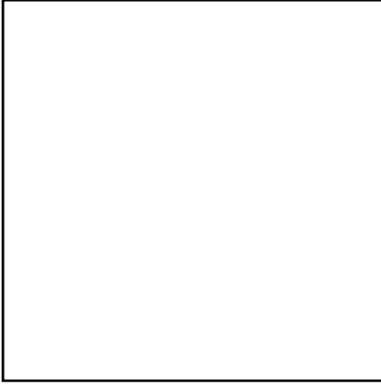
(Figure 34) Claggett Wilson, *Bacchus Survivor: In the ruined garden of an old chateau in the Champagne country, there remains triumphant, the statue of Bacchus, chipped and scarred, but still laughing as he squeezes the stone grapes into the stone cup*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



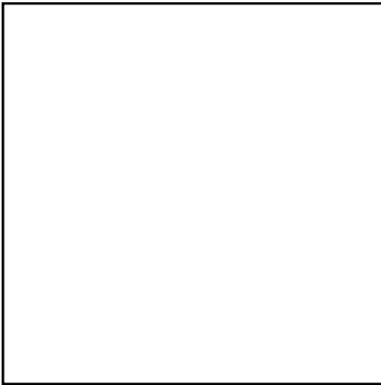
(Figure 35) Claggett Wilson, *Encounter in the Darkness*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



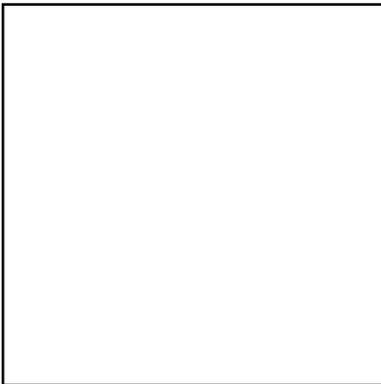
(Figure 36) Claggett Wilson, sketch, c. 1918. In a private collection.



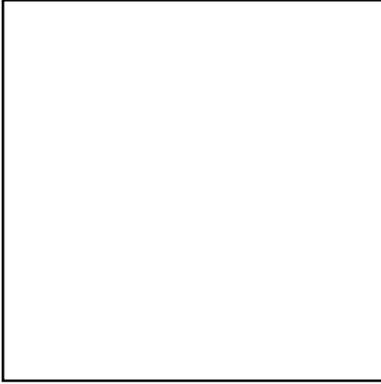
(Figure 37) Claggett Wilson, sketch, c. 1918. In a private collection.



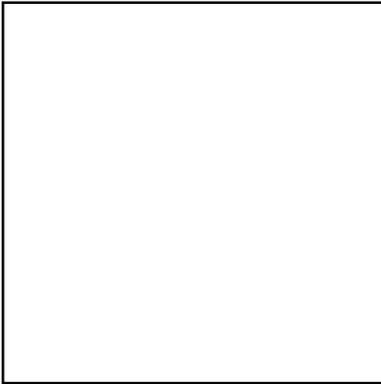
(Figure 38) Claggett Wilson, *Saviors of France—In the spirit, Jeanne d’Arc, St. Louis Clovis; in the flesh, the raised hands of the common soldier, protecting the eternal flame that is France. Over the steaming battlefield there hovers, like a sea of pale lilies, a myriad of up-reaching hands*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



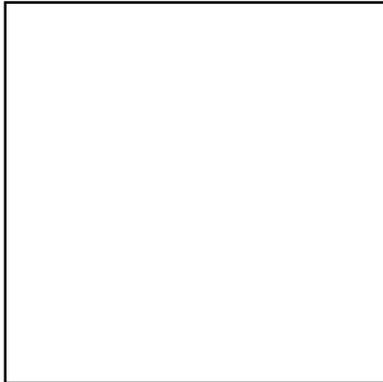
(Figure 39) Claggett Wilson, *Stragglers: French Wounded in the Retreat of Château-Thierry*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum



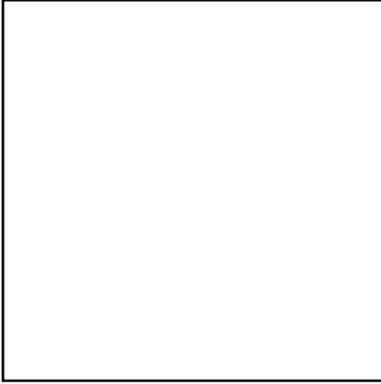
(Figure 40) Claggett Wilson, *Runner Through the Barrage: Bois de Belleau, Château-Thierry Sector*. *His arm shot away, his mind gone*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



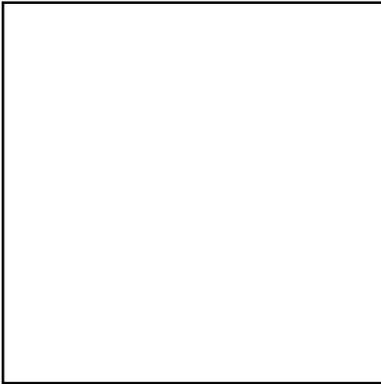
(Figure 41) Claggett Wilson, *Flower of Death: The bursting of a heavy shell—not as it looks, but as it feels and sounds and smells*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



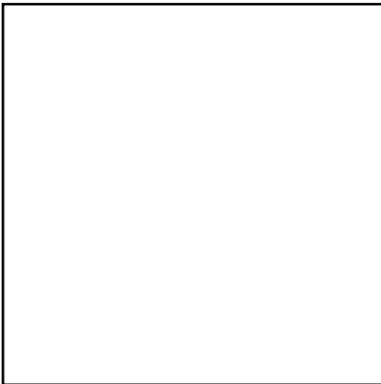
(Figure 42) Harry Everett Townsend (AEF Eight), *Soldiers of the Telephone*, charcoal, 1918.



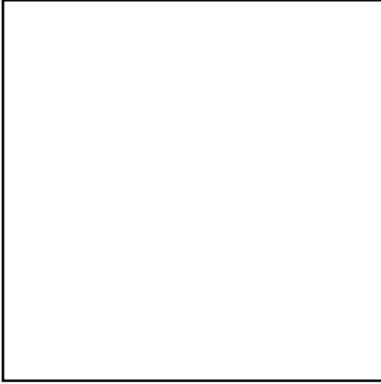
(Figure 43) George Matthews Harding (AEF Eight), *American-French Conference*, charcoal and crayon, 1918, exhibited at The Allied War Salon. In the collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.



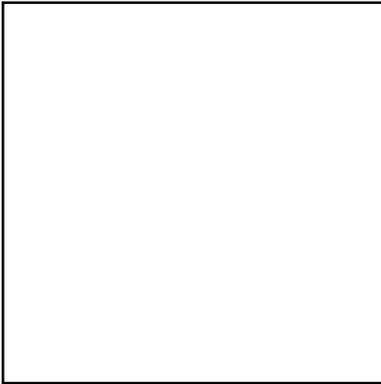
(Figure 44) Claggett Wilson, *Salad—A Cleaned-Up Machine-Gun Nest, Bois de Belleau*, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



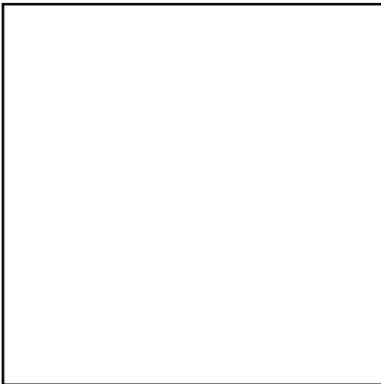
(Figure 45) Claggett Wilson, *Belleau Woods Post*, published by The Veterans of Foreign Wars (Nov. 28, 1920). Copy in a private collection.



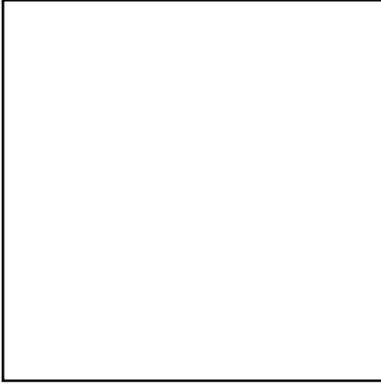
(Figure 46) Mahonri Young, *One of the Buffaloes*, bronze, 1918, exhibited at the Allied War Salon. Reproduced in Albert Eugene Gallatin, *Art and the Great War* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1919)



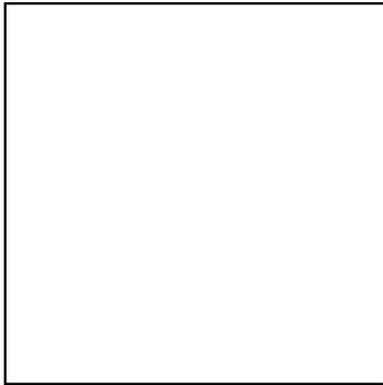
(Figure 47) Claggett Wilson, *Dance of Death*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



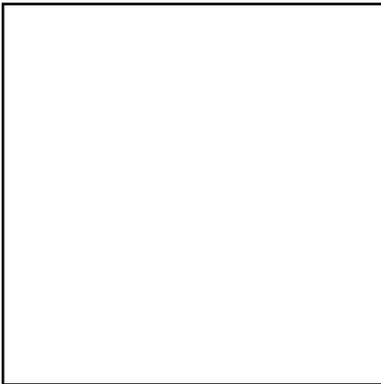
(Figure 48) Elsie de Wolfe, bedroom for Elizabeth Marbury's Sutton Place apartment, 1920.



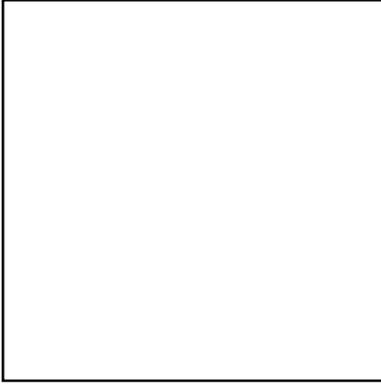
(Figure 49) Jacques Rochette de la Morlière, *Angola* (frontispiece), engraving, 1746.



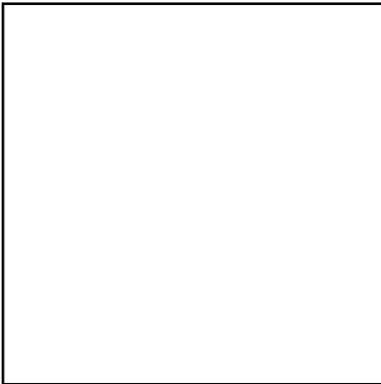
(Figure 50) J.A. Smith (AEF Eight), *Pathway to Peace*, charcoal, c. 1918. In the collection of the Smithsonian National Museum of American History.



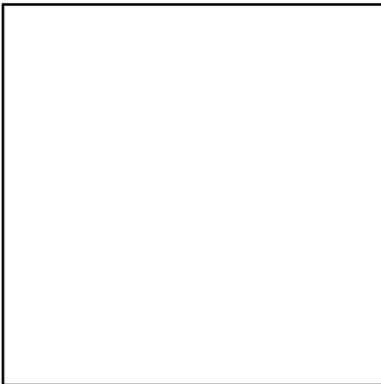
(Figure 51) Jean-Léon Gérôme, *Pygmalion et Galatea*, oil on canvas, 1892. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



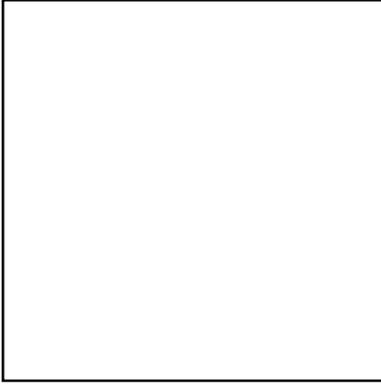
(Figure 52) Claggett Wilson, *Symphony of Terror*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum.



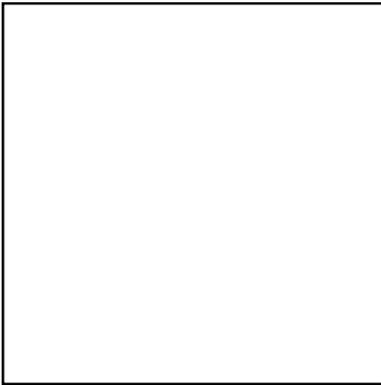
(Figure 53) Claggett Wilson, *Hospital: On the stretcher where I lay, I opened my eyes and great shadows quivered on the wall. The feet of the row in front of me stuck up like footlights at the play*, watercolor, c. 1919. In the collection of the Smithsonian American Art Museum



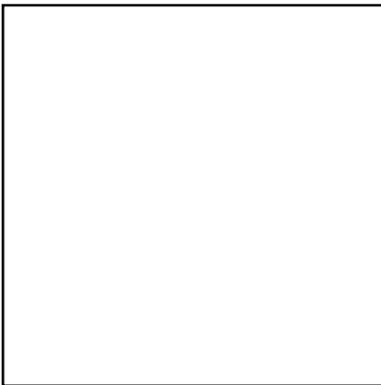
(Figure 54) Engraving for Voltaire's "Chandos awake-how flowed thy boiling blood..." in *La Pucelle d'Orléans*, 1730.



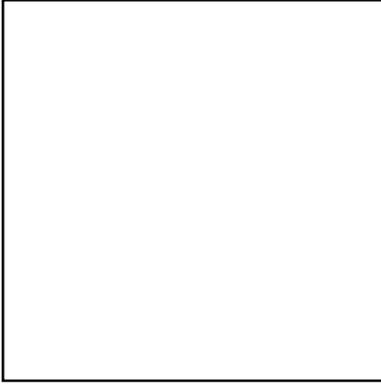
(Figure 55) *Physical Culture* magazine (Jan. 1915).



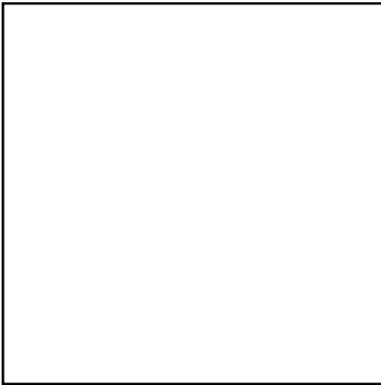
(Figure 56) Frank Street (illustrator), "Alice Through the Looking Glass: When a Lonely Man Falls in Love with a Shadow," written by Josephine Daskam Bacan, *Harper's Bazaar* (Feb. 20, 1920): 60.



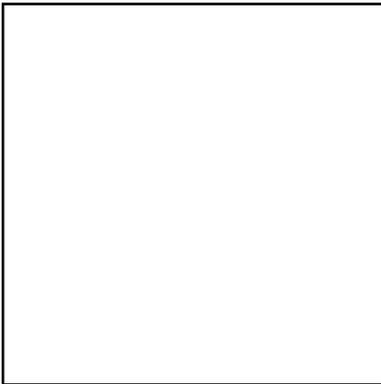
(Figure 57) Manni Grosze (German), erotic postcard, c. 1910s.



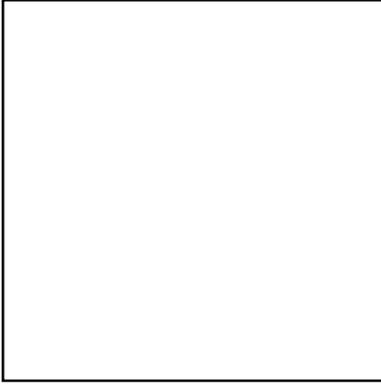
(Figure 58) J.C. Leyendecker, *Collier's Weekly*, (Nov. 10, 1917).



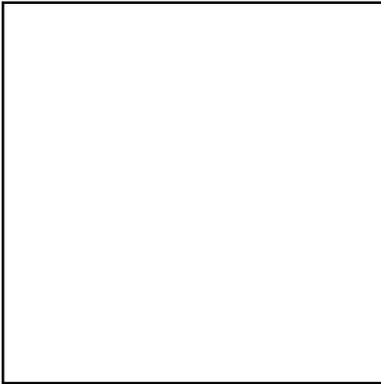
(Figure 59) Florine Stettheimer, *The Cathedrals of Wall Street* (detail showing portrait of Wilson), oil on canvas, 1939. In the collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.



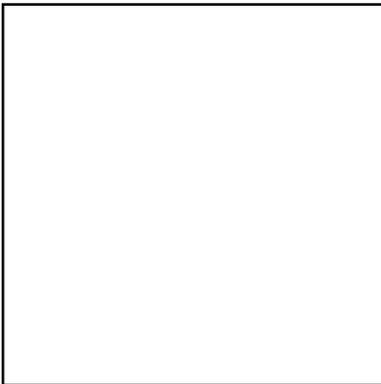
(Figure 60) Claggett Wilson, *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall*, oil on canvas, c. 1923. In the collection of The National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.



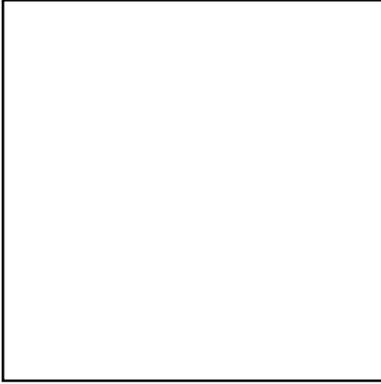
(Figure 61) Claggett Wilson, *Music of the Doroa*, oil, c. 1923, reproduction produced by Peter A. Juley & Son Photographers of Fine Arts for Knoedler & Co. Gallery. Photograph in a private collection.



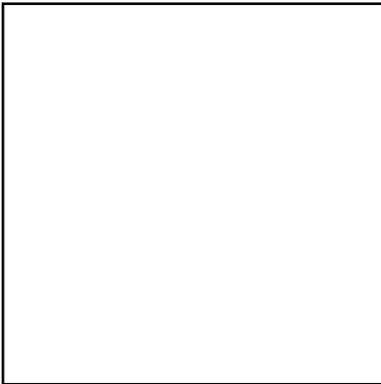
(Figure 62) Claggett Wilson, *Basque Sea-Captain*, oil, c. 1923, reproduction produced by Peter A. Juley & Son Photographers of Fine Arts for Knoedler & Co. Gallery. Photograph in a private collection.



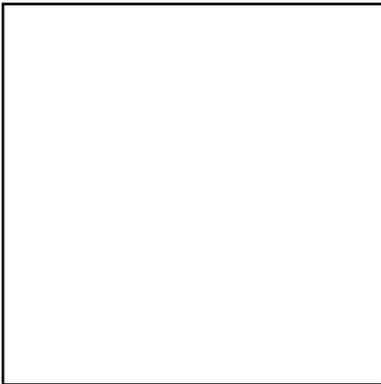
(Figure 63) Claggett Wilson, *Spanish Port* (perhaps *A Basque Port* from the Knoedler & Co. exhibition, as the low \$150 price in the exhibition pamphlet is likely indicative of work on paper), watercolor, c. 1923. In a private collection.



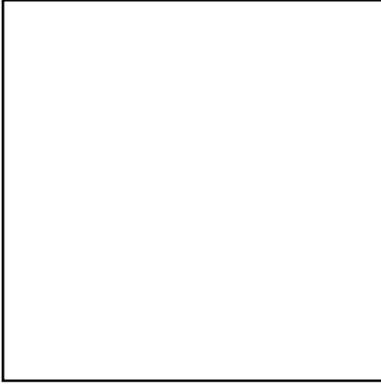
(Figure 64) Claggett Wilson, *Basque Sailors*, oil, reproduced in *The New York Times* (Jan. 21, 1923).



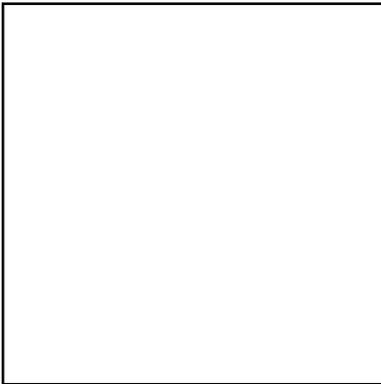
(Figure 65) Claggett Wilson, *Town & Country* (Feb. 14, 1928).



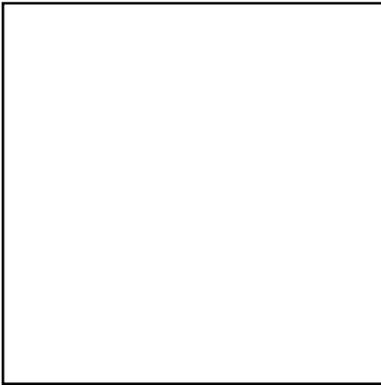
(Figure 66) Claggett Wilson, *Untitled I (Basque sailors)*, oil on board, c. 1920s. In a private collection.



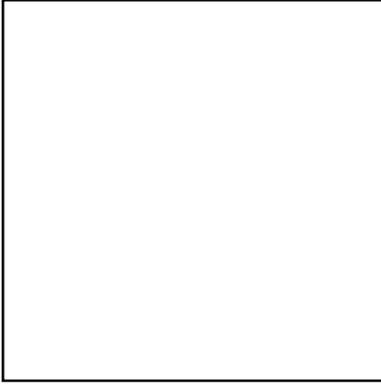
(Figure 67) Carl Van Vechten, *Alfred Lunt*, photograph, 1932. In the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.



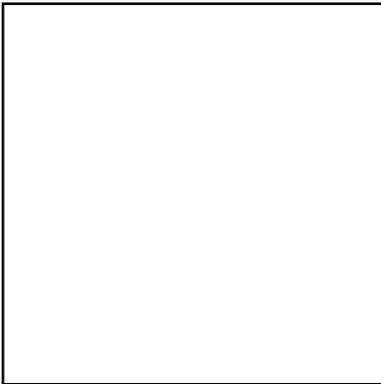
(Figure 68) Claggett Wilson, *The Watcher on the Sea-Wall* (detail), oil on canvas, c. 1923, in the collection of The National Portrait Gallery, Washington D.C.



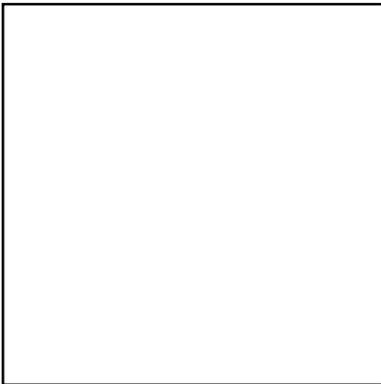
(Figure 69) Edward S. Curtis, "Vanishing Indian Types," *Scribner's* (Jun. 1906).



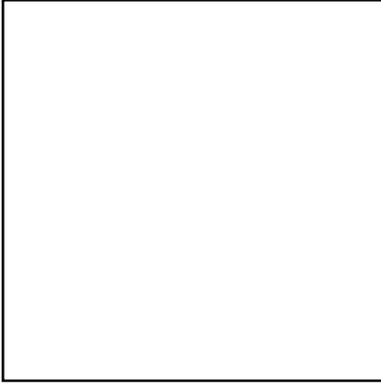
(Figure 70) “Pierre Loti’s New Play Charms Paris: Scenes Around Pierre Loti’s Basque Home,” *The New York Times* (Mar. 15, 1908).



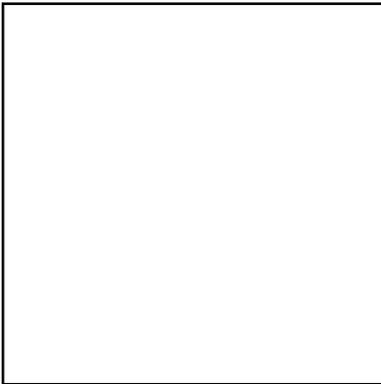
(Figure 71) “Pierre Loti, One of the Immortals, To Visit Us: Famous Writer of All Things Oriental Will See Broadway for the First Time and Mayhap Write of It,” *The New York Times* (Sep. 8, 1912).



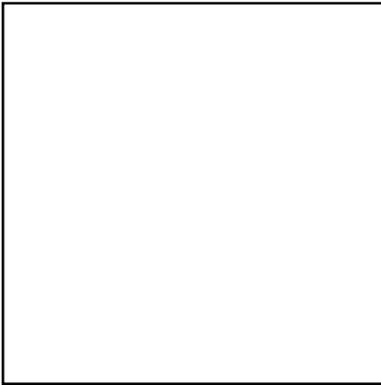
(Figure 72) Claggett Wilson, *Untitled II (Basque sailors)*, oil on board, c. 1920s. In a private collection.



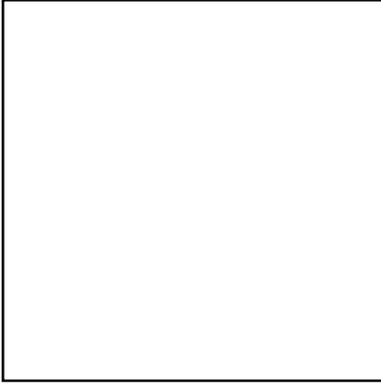
(Figure 73) Claggett Wilson, *Spain 1926* (Urinating sailor), graphite on paper, 1926. In a private collection.



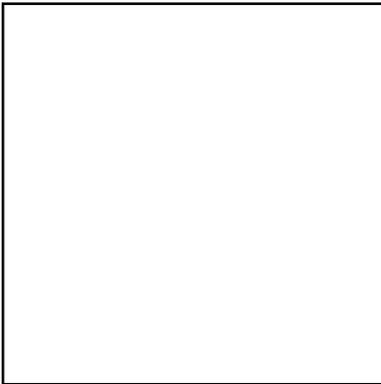
(Figure 74) Valentín de Zubiaurre Aguirrezábal, *Basque Types*, reproduced in *Town & Country* (May 20, 1920).



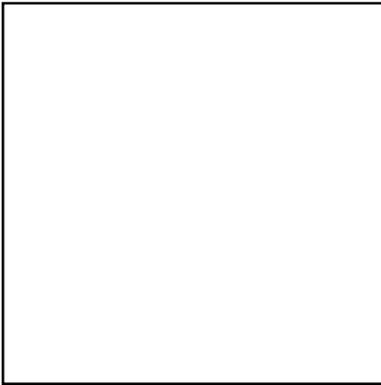
(Figure 75) Photographs of Basque man from the personal affects of Claggett Wilson, c. 1920s. In a private collection.



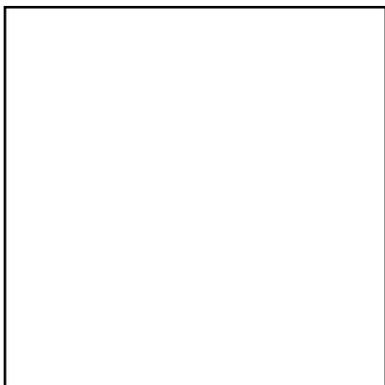
(Figure 76) Claggett Wilson, *Untitled III (Basque man)*, oil on board, c. 1920s. In a private collection.



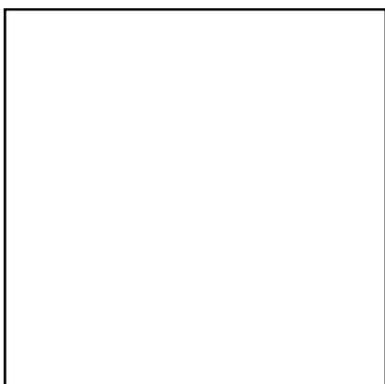
(Figure 76) Claggett Wilson, *Untitled IV (Basque man)*, oil on board, c. 1920s. In a private collection.



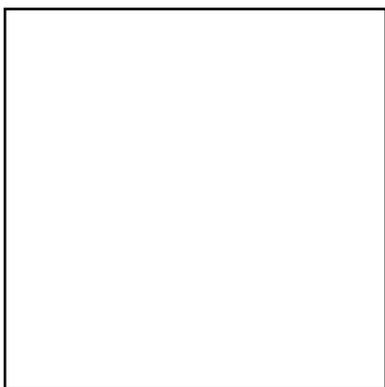
(Figure 78) Ramiro Arrue, *Un Homme Tient sur le Dos un Panier de Verdure*, oil on canvas, n.d. (active from 1911-1960s).



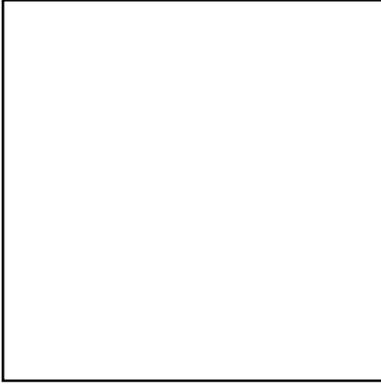
(Figure 79) Ramiro Arrue, preparatory sketch for *Une Scène de Campagne*, c. 1930s.



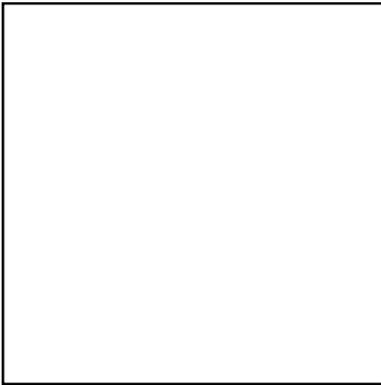
(Figure 80) Ramiro Arrue, preparatory sketch for *Une Scène de Campagne* (verso), c. 1930s.



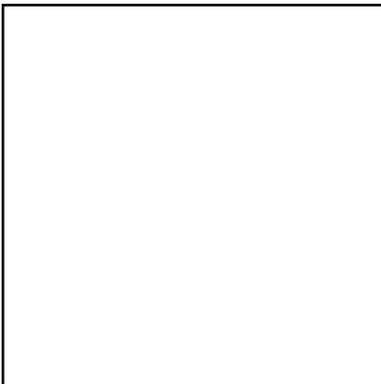
(Figure 81) Nathaniel Currier, *The Sailor—Far—Far at Sea*, 1845. In a private collection.



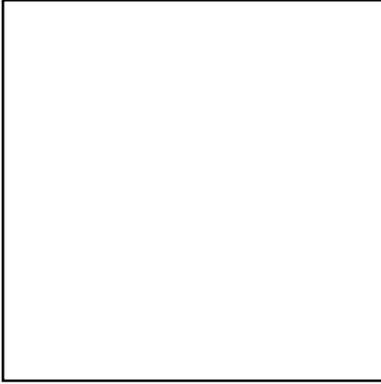
(Figure 82) "Pickled Corn Beef" in *Broadway Brevities* (Oct. 19, 1933).



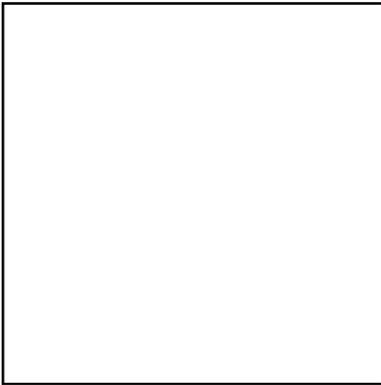
(Figure 83) "Little Accident" in *Broadway Brevities* (Mar. 7, 1932).



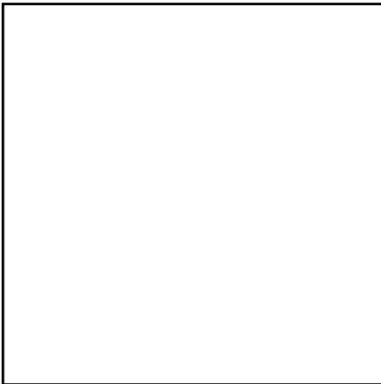
(Figure 84) Charles Demuth, *Dancing Sailors*, watercolor on graphite, 1917. In the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.



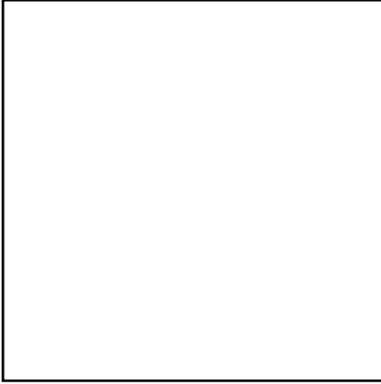
(Figure 85) Charles Demuth, *On "That" Street*, watercolor over graphite, 1932. In the collection of the Art Institute of Chicago.



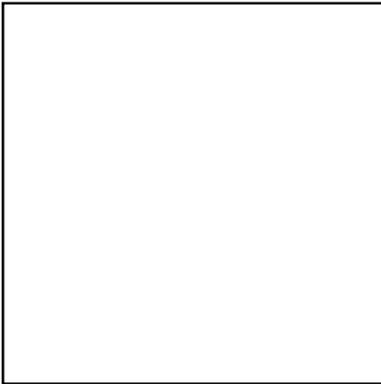
(Figure 86) Paul Cadmus, *The Fleet's In!*, oil on canvas, 1934. In the collection of the Navy Museum.



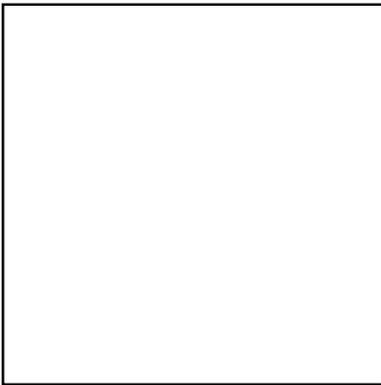
(Figure 87) Florine Stettheimer, *Asbury Park South*, oil on canvas, 1920. In a private collection.



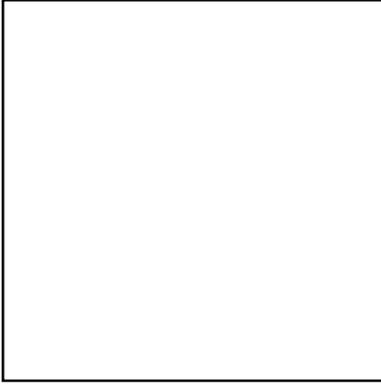
(Figure 88) “The Lunts and a Basque or Two,” in *Town & Country* (Mar. 1, 1928).



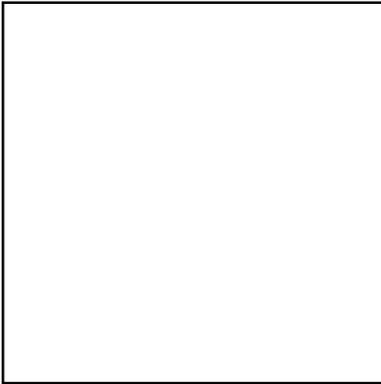
(Figure 89) Claggett Wilson, Foyer in Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, c. 1938-1939.



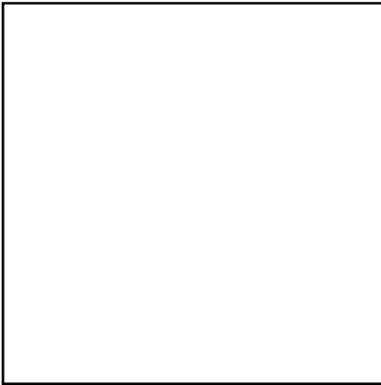
(Figure 90) Warren O’Brien (photographer), Lunt and Fontanne posing outside the Chalet, Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, 1935. In the collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI, O’Brien family collection, circa 1880-2000, PH6027.



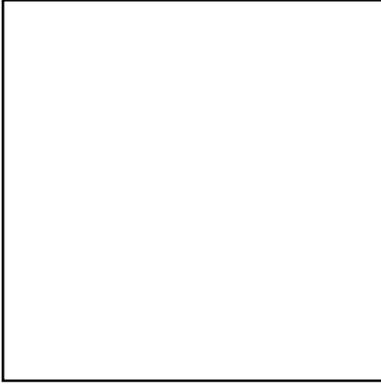
(Figure 91) Warren O'Brien (photographer), Lunt and Fontanne picnicking, Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, 1942. In the collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society, Madison, WI, O'Brien family collection, circa 1880-2000, PH6027.



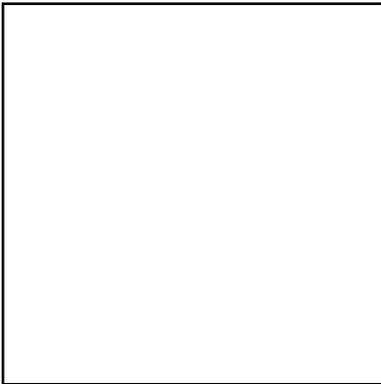
(Figure 92) Claggett Wilson, Pool house, Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, c. 1930s.



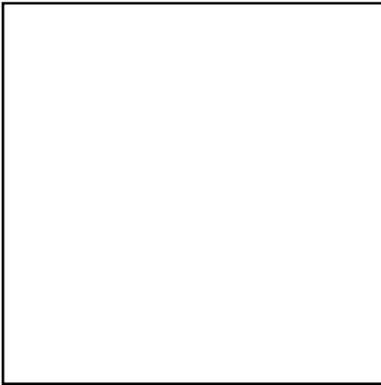
(Figure 93) Peter A. Juley & Son (photographer), Florine Stettheimer's studio at the Beaux-Arts Building, 1944.



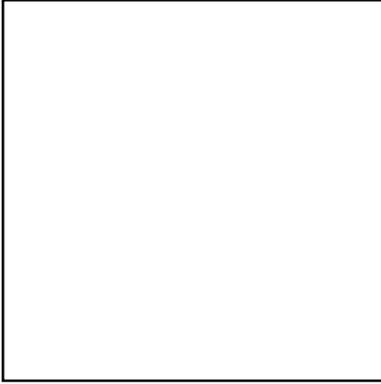
(Figure 94) Claggett Wilson, Living Room in Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, c. 1930s.



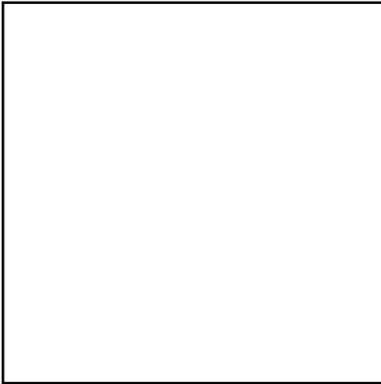
(Figure 95) Claggett Wilson, Dining Room in Ten Chimneys, c. 1930s. Photograph in a personal collection.



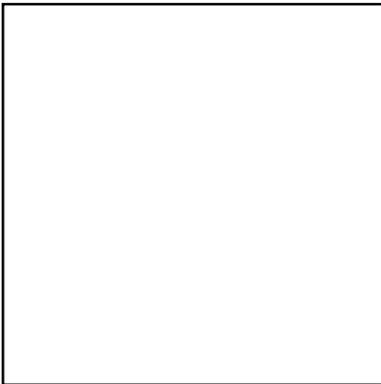
(Figure 96) Elsie de Wolfe, "The Boucher Room" in the Henry Clay Frick Mansion in New York, 1913.



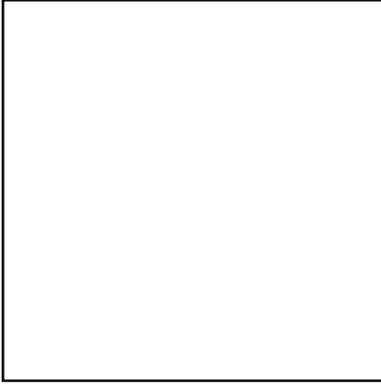
(Figure 97) Warren O'Brien (photographer), Lunt and Fontanne posing in the Flirtation Room in Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, 1949, in the collection of the Wisconsin State Historical Society.



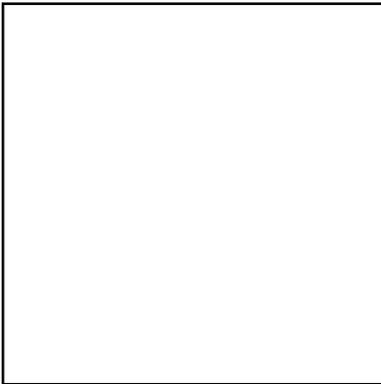
(Figure 98) Claggett Wilson, Grisaille Pastorals in "Flirtation Hall," Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, c. 1930s.



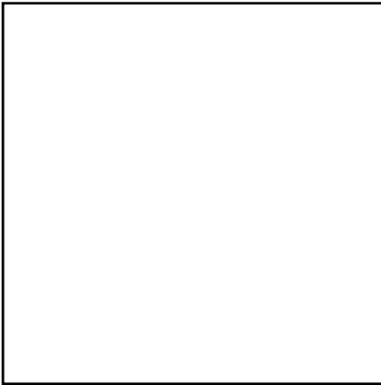
(Figure 99) Mirror in the "Belasco Room," Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI.



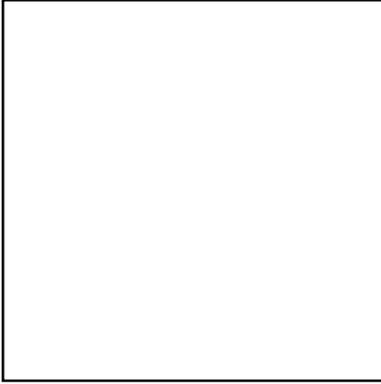
(Figure 100) Libbey Owens Ford Quality Glass advertisement, *House Beautiful* (Dec. 1937).



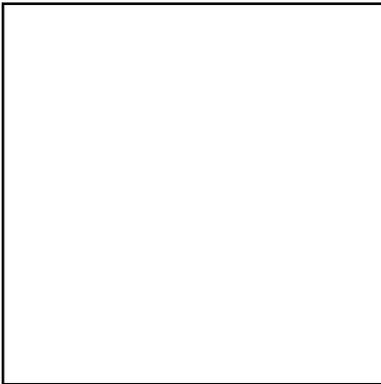
(Figure 101) Warren O'Brien (photographer), "Syrie Maugham Bedroom," Ten Chimneys' Hen House, c. 1933.



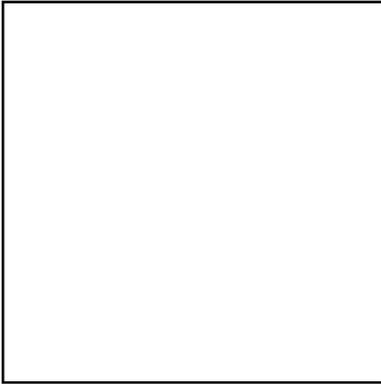
(Figure 102) "Good Entrances: The Foyer of Your Apartment Indicates What Lies Beyond. It is Easily Made Charming," *House Beautiful* (Nov. 1935): 46-47.



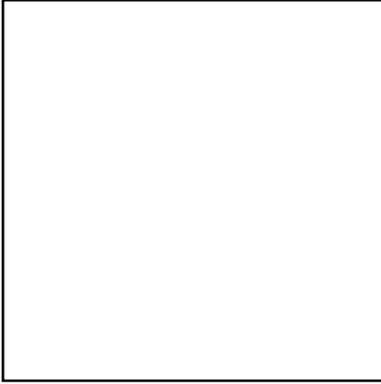
(Figure 103) Claggett Wilson, Foyer in Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, c. 1938-1939.



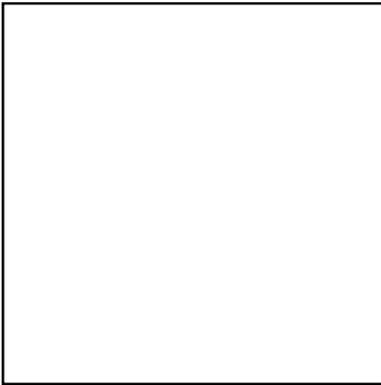
(Figure 104) *Design for Living* stage set, 1933.



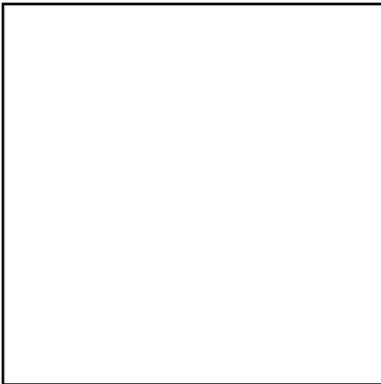
(Figure 105) Advertisement for Hellmann's Mayonnaise featuring a savory fruit salad gelatin mold with pineapple, *The American Home* (Nov. 1938).



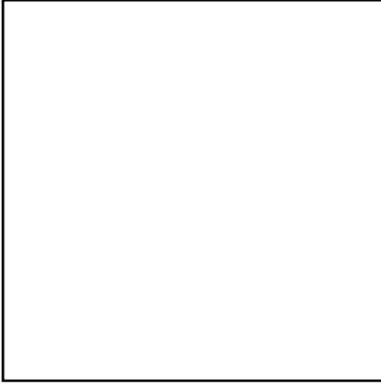
(Figure 106) Crane's Fine Papers advertisement, *House Beautiful* (Mar. 1934): 17.



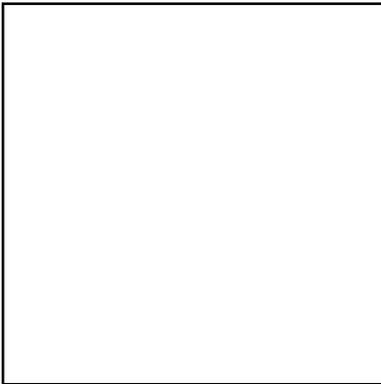
(Figure 107) Carrie Stetheimer, Dollhouse Foyer, c. 1920s, Museum of the City of New York.



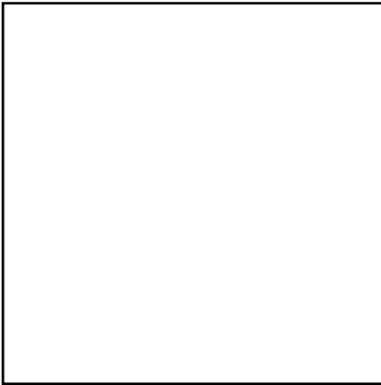
(Figure 108) Claggett Wilson, Foyer in Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, c. 1938-1939.



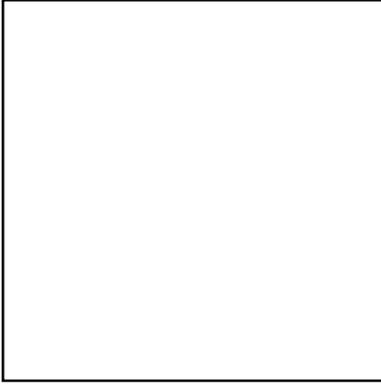
(Figure 109) Claggett Wilson, Foyer in Ten Chimneys, Genesee Depot, WI, c. 1938-1939.



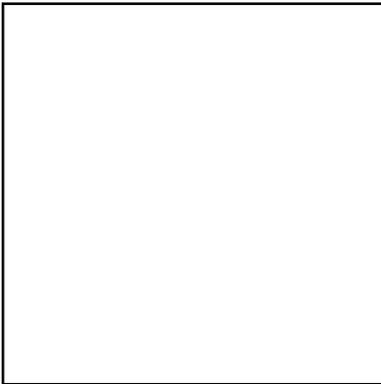
(Figure 110) Beaucourt François, *Portrait d'une femme Haïtienne*, oil on canvas, 1786. In the collection of the Musée McCord, Montreal.



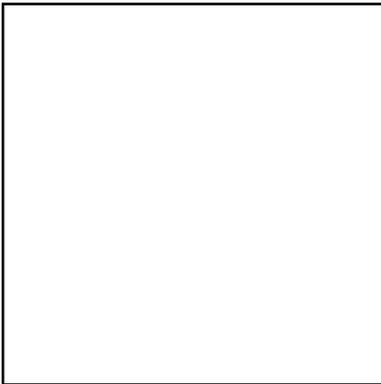
(Figure 111) "Truly Hawaiian," Dole advertisement, *The American Home*, v. XX, 3 (Oct. 1938): 10.



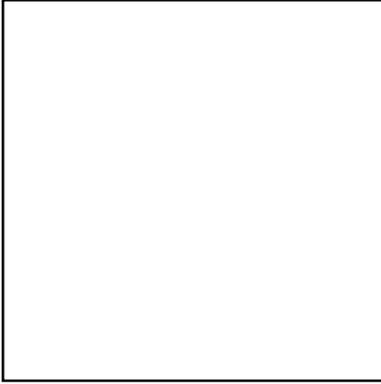
(Figure 112) Advertisement for Houbigant Quelques Fleurs Talcum Powder, *Town and Country* (May 20, 1920): 81.



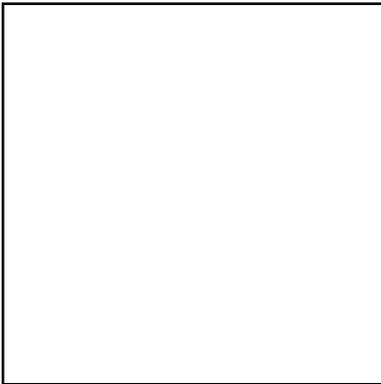
(Figure 113) Alfred Lunt as Charles II, *Sweet Nell of Old Drury*, 1923.



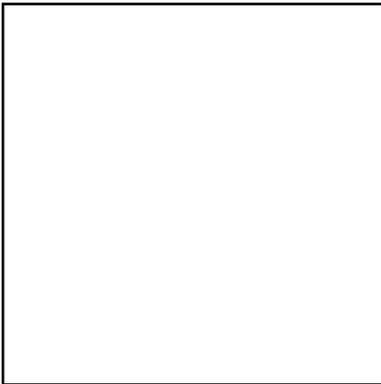
(Figure 114) Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne as Petruchio and Katharine, program for *The Taming of the Shrew*, 1936. Photograph in a private collection.



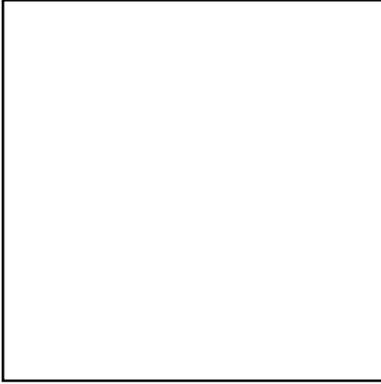
(Figure 115) François Boucher, *La Belle Cuisiniere*, oil on canvas, c. 1735. In the collection of the Musée Cognacq-Jay, Paris.



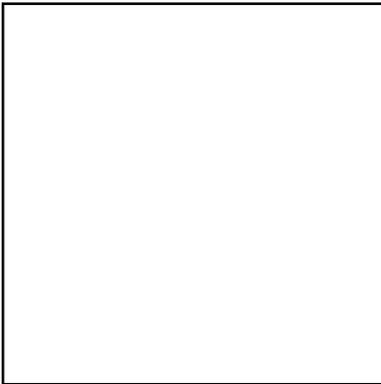
(Figure 116) Advertisement for French Line cruises, *House Beautiful* (Mar. 1934): 111.



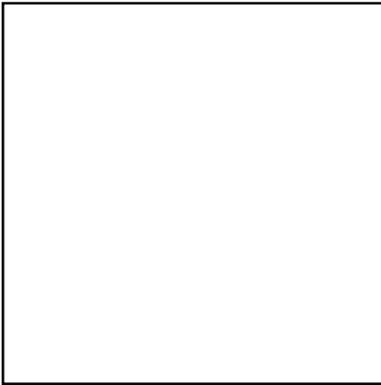
(Figure 117) Johan Wikström, Brategården manor house in Bråfors, Sweden, c. 1790.



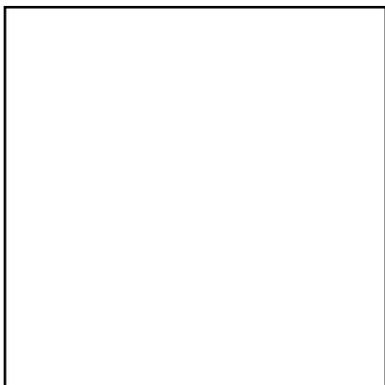
(Figure 118) Sigurd Erixon and Sigurd Wallin, *Svenska Kulturbilder*, Del III Och IV (Stockholm, Sweden: Aktiebolaget Skolunds Bokförlag, 1930).



(Figure 119) Claggett Wilson, Living Room in Ten Chimneys with *Elijah Ascending to Heaven*, c. 1930s.



(Figure 120) Claggett Wilson, pendant portraits of King Gustav III and Queen Sophia Magdalena in the “Flirtation Room” at Ten Chimneys, c. 1930s.



(Figure 121) Lunt and Fontanne in promotional photograph for *Reunion in Vienna*, written by Robert E. Sherwood, c. 1931.

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Claggett Wilson Folder
Stettheimer Folder

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