CHAPTER 4

The Face of a Genius
Picasso, Stein, and the Struggle with Facial Form

Man Ray first photographed Gertrude Stein in her Parisian salon in 1922. In the photograph, Stein sits in a chair next to her portrait by Pablo Picasso. Man Ray's photograph stages an eloquent encounter between Picasso's Stein and the 1922 Stein. Each Stein takes up half of the photographic space, the painting on the left, the sitter on the right. The symmetry of the photograph is constructed through the black-and-white contrast between Stein's two outfits – dark in the painting, white in the photograph. Otherwise, the two Steins have the same crown hairdo, the same scarf and signature brooch, the same masculine pose. What is most striking, however, is the encounter between the two faces. It is as if the painted Stein is gazing at the photographed Stein, with the latter impassively repeating the gaze, directing it toward the left of the camera. The painted face, positioned slightly higher on the wall behind the photographed scene, dominates the sitter, who seems to be aware of the gaze behind her. The sitter's pose is a response to the gaze of the painting. Whereas Dorian Gray hides from the gaze of his portrait, Stein, a reader of Oscar Wilde who has daily encounters with her portrait, identifies with hers. The sitter is quoting the face of the painting.[1]

In her 1938 biography of the painter, *Picasso*, Stein wrote about her portrait: "For me, it is I, and it is the only reproduction of me which is always I, for me."[2] Posing for Ray, as well as for other photographers, Stein self-fashioned this "I" under the auspices of Picasso's portrait.[3] The repetition of "for me" bookends a sentence that announces the painting as a "reproduction" of Gertrude Stein, which in turn becomes "always I." Knowing what we know about Stein, especially through the lens of the exhibit curated by Wanda M. Corn and Tirza True Latimer, *Seeing Gertrude Stein*, we can infer that she coauthored not only Picasso's painting, but also Ray's photograph.[4] Stein as photographic model is not only the author of her pose, but coauthor of the photograph. The photograph is one in a series of efforts at self-styling, which centrally included

the production of a face. It also included – for Picasso, Stein, and Ray – racial otherness in its production.[5] Through these gestures of self-styling, in her social life as well as her writing, Stein reframed the genre of the modernist portrait – on an intermedial continuum from the painted portrait to the photographic portrait to the literary portrait.

Stein's face, as staged for Man Ray's photograph, constitutes one of the most forceful instantiations of Mina Loy's "auto-facial-construction," an attempt to take control of one's "facial destiny." Loy composed her own poses for Man Ray's camera and she worked on a series of unfinished autobiographical writings.[6] She was an admirer of Stein, whom she met in Florence and Paris.[7] Loy wrote a Stein-inspired word portrait titled "Gertrude Stein," in which she famously described her as "Curie of the laboratory of vocabulary."[8] She gave a lecture in 1927, in which she decried the lack of critical attention to a genius like Stein.[9] In turn, Stein credited Loy with being one of the few readers who understood her writing.[10] Loy thus developed her ironic notion of "auto-facial-construction" in conversation with Stein's painterly and photographic poses and the author's literary reflections on these poses.

This chapter does not rehearse the narrative of Stein's relationship with Picasso and the adventures of his portrait, or the question of Stein's writing as a literary version of cubism, which have received a lot of critical attention.[11] Instead, it zooms in on Stein's accounts – in *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Picasso*, and Stein's portrait writing – of how modernism *struggled* (Stein's verb) with the form of the face and how this struggle, in turn, created a version of modernist faciality. Previous chapters of this book traced versions of this struggle, especially as it negotiated rudiments of physiognomy. For Stein, who in the first stage of her career experimented with the concept of physiognomic type, the struggle eventually involved a refusal of resemblance, a literal effacement of the "sitter" from the scene of the portrait, only for the form of the face to inevitably return in the use of the proper name (Picasso) and via the intermediality that prompted the project of effacement in the first place. The impossibility of resolving this contradiction – effacement followed by an inevitable return of the face – remains one of the most eloquent nodes in modernism.

In the previous chapter, we have seen Virginia Woolf announce that modernist artists were beginning to see with new eyes, and that what modernist eyes saw was a new face. I reread Woolf's work in light of the revised statement, "In or about 1910 the human face changed." In view of this change, Woolf intervened in the history of the portrait through an ironic twist on the sister genre of biography. A meditation on the face,

Orlando: A Biography (1928) functioned simultaneously as the fictional biography of Vita Sackville-West and a veiled autobiography of Woolf. Stein, whose lecture "Composition as Explanation" was published by the Hogarth Press in 1926, wrote *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in 1932 and published it in 1933. A twin project to *Orlando* within modernist literature, the autobiography, which I read here in conjunction with Stein's 1938 *Picasso*, itself an autobiographical exercise, joins the modernist experimentation with face while pushing the intertwined genres of autobiography and literary portraiture to their limit. A self-portrait of Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, like Man Ray's photograph, dramatizes Stein's self-styling in relation to the portrait Picasso made in 1905/6. In turn, Stein's portrait writing, which she thought of as the literary counterpoint to Picasso's painting, is prompted by, in Stein's words, a shaken "faith in what the eyes were seeing" and a sense of "doubt that in looking he could see."[12] One might look, but Stein doubts one can see – a dichotomy we also saw at work in Chapter 3. In response to this doubt, Stein's work stages the scene of an active "forgetting" of the face, an erasure of the face from memory.

Posing as Gertrude Stein

Picasso's portrait was made during 1905/6 as a gift to Stein. The writer was working on "Melanctha," one of the stories in *Three Lives* (1909), at the time of her sitting for the portrait in the fall of 1905 and early spring of 1906. The scene of the making of the portrait has been mythologized by the two artists, especially Stein. There were multiple sittings (eighty or ninety), during which Picasso painted a draft of a portrait of Stein. Unsatisfied, after numerous sittings in which the two artists encountered each other face-to-face (in an "interfacial space," in Peter Sloterdijk's terms), one day Picasso painted over Stein's face, effectively leaving the portrait faceless (one is reminded of Vanessa Bell's painting of a faceless Woolf). "I can't see you any longer when I look," Picasso reportedly said to Stein.[13] Picasso subsequently took a break from the project. After a stay in the village of Gosol and then in Barcelona, Picasso returned to Paris in July 1906 and completed the portrait in one day without seeing Stein again. Picasso had visited an exhibit of Iberian art at the Louvre and reacquainted himself with it during his visit to Andalusia. Upon his return, painting without a model, he gave Stein the face of an Iberian mask, which he had used in a self-portrait (*Self-Portrait with a Pallete*, 1906) and which also appears as one of the faces in *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). The

anecdote – one of the most mythical in modernism – is loaded with possibility. What is clear in the context of this book is that Picasso struggled with Stein's face – and with the problem of the face more generally.

Stein's portrait challenged Picasso. We are invited to imagine the two artists looking at each other for long sessions. What did Picasso see when he looked at Stein? How did Stein return the gaze? To be sure, Picasso wanted to do justice to Stein's queerness, and possibly his own.[14] But how? In what visual register? Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres's *Portrait of Louis-François Bertin* (1832) functioned as a reference for a masculine pose, with clear limits. A double move of effacement and masking imposed itself as a solution. In the process, as the narrative they helped build has it, the two artists collaboratively redefined "looking." As Stein puts it in *Picasso*, "Nothing changes from one generation to another except the way of seeing and of being seen."[15] How, then, did this generation see the face?

Picasso's portrait of Stein is remarkable in a number of ways. It depicts a large body seated in an old armchair, draped in a loose brown suit (*Autobiography* refers to it as a costume).[16] A brooch appears as the only identifying personal object. The body takes up the bulk of the pictorial space. It sits at an angle, gazing impassively over the right shoulder of the viewer. The hands stand out against the dark costume, large and strong. The body and its rough, dark-brown accessories seem to be props for the staging of the face. This is a face like no other in the history of portraiture. Its mask qualities are evident, as the lighter color of the face stands out against the neck and ears. The eyes are asymmetric and fixed, deliberately inexpressive, impassive. The nose, hyperbolically angular. Critics describe the eyebrows as sculpted. There is a sense of gravitas in the feeling of calm but momentous reflection that emanates from the portrait. The mask pressures the viewer to speculate, and quickly withdraw such speculation, about what lies beneath it. In a revised pose of a thinker, we are perhaps to imagine Stein "making sentences."[17]

In *Autobiography*, Toklas as narrator bemoans the fact that no photograph of the erased face painted by Picasso was taken. In the aftermath of the erasure, as this expression of regret has it, none of the people who saw it remember what the original face looked like, including, or especially, Picasso and Stein.[18] A photograph could have immortalized the draft of Stein's resemblance. The rhetorical invocation of a missed opportunity for a photograph suggests that an erasure from memory followed the erasure of Stein's face from the painting. Both acts of erasures were purposeful projects. Stein and Picasso collaborated in actively forgetting Stein's face,

which they supplemented with a project of refacialization. The invocation of a potential photograph draws attention to the indexical nature of Picasso's portrait: It was *once* referential; Stein once *posed* for it. The photograph occupies the place of "that-has-been," in Roland Barthes's vocabulary.[19] The narrative of the making of the portrait is part of the composition of the portrait: In all its versions, it reports on a transition from an indexical portrait, which could have been photographed to reveal likeness, to a portrait that purposefully disposes with indexicality, only to retain it through its title and the narrative that accompanies it.

Today, traces of Stein's face behind the top layer of paint are legible to X-ray technology.[20] This use of technology might be eloquent for art historians, but it is a misleading path in the context of this chapter. Picasso did not finish Stein's portrait painting from memory, but rather against memory. While, as we have seen in Chapter 2, Marcel Proust's narrator struggled with the many faces of Albertine, sifting through memory in search of a lost first scene of an encounter with her face, Stein's portrait belongs to a moment "after Proust." In the 1938 *Picasso*, the biographer offers an implacable mise-en-scène for modernist art: "In the nineteenth century painters discovered the need of always having a model in front of them, in the twentieth century they discovered that they must never look at a model."[21] Picasso and Stein stage the origin story for this shift through the anecdote about the making of Stein's portrait, which started with a model and ended without a model. It is important to this story that Picasso in fact did not use models at the time of the Stein sittings and that, according to *Autobiography*, no one remembers why he decided to have Stein sit for him. Numerous accounts from the period report on artists and writers being "struck" by Stein's appearance, often describing the singularity of her face ("a strong German-Jewish face," wrote Ernest Hemingway).[22] The two artists, Picasso and Stein, collaboratively staged the failure of one kind of vision, so that the need for another mode of vision imposed itself. The portrait was a "gift" to Stein in multiple senses of the word, which is why the idea of financial remuneration seemed calumnious to Stein.

Picasso's use of an Iberian mask in his portrait of Stein belongs to a period in his work that included his turn to African masks. This was a crucial period in Picasso's work, which saw a transition toward cubism. Importantly, in 1906 Picasso visited the Old Trocadéro museum, where he encountered a number of African masks. As Simon Gikandi puts it in an influential essay, Picasso "eloquently discussed the magical influence of those African objects discovered at the Old Trocadéro on that fateful day

in 1906."[23] A so-called African period (1906–8) followed. *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* was made in 1907 – its abstract, sculptural faces standing out. Picasso's portrait of Stein thus constituted a threshold into a new register of dealing with the face in modernism. On this threshold, one finds a mask. When Picasso could no longer see ("I can't see you any longer when I look"), or refused to see in the old ways, he had recourse to a mask – increasingly, in this period, an African mask.[24] This mask did not so much cover the old face as placate the viewer's old habits of seeing. In order to attribute the aesthetic innovation involved in the transition to cubism to Picasso's creative genius, which Stein tied to her own, she dismissed the painter's use of African art as a "crutch."[25] Gikandi sees this kind of dismissal as key to modernist aesthetic formation – one of both attraction to and repulsion to an other framed in racial terms. In the process, as Tina Post argues, abstraction evacuated Blackness at the very moment it appropriated it.[26]

In Picasso's paintings from this period, the face is not covered by a mask; rather, the face is a mask.[27] This move flips a long-standing principle in portraiture, articulated by E. H. Gombrich: A great portrait gives "an illusion of seeing the face behind the mask."[28] Following a physiognomic assumption that the face often dissimulates true character, thus effectively masking itself, a good portraitist is thought to be able to see through such a mask and reveal the face. This is why a portrait was often trusted to be more "real" than the sitter's face ("a portrait that is more like the sitter than he is himself").[29] Moving away from the mask/true face dichotomy, Picasso's painting of Stein enlists the mask in the composition of the face itself. There is no face behind the mask; the mask constitutes the face. In the context of this book, the Stein/Picasso node in modernism helps us retrace a moment when the mask – this mask – is reimagined as the ground for a specifically modernist regime of faciality. Man Ray's photograph of Stein posing in front of the portrait made by Picasso captures the moment when the face rearranges itself as a mask – a metalepsis from the world of painting, the production of which had invoked a missing photograph, back to the world of photography.

Self-Production as Gertrude Stein

Stein was not known as a writer when Picasso painted her portrait. She was working on the "Melanctha" chapter of *Three Lives*, which she published in 1909, and which engaged in its own dynamic of masking. "Melanctha" is rewriting *Q.E.D.*, an earlier novel inspired by a same-sex love interest.

Toklas as narrator of *Autobiography* recounts that Stein wove incidents she witnessed in her walks through Paris, on her way to Picasso's studio, into the fabric of this text about the sexual "wandering" of an African American woman in Baltimore.[30] The narrative technique, anchored in stylized repetition, which Stein is not shy to frame as the shift from nineteenth- to twentieth-century literature, embeds the trope of the mask in the text's literary project.[31] In order for Stein to represent the kind of sexual "wandering" she projects onto Melanctha, she enlists race in the description of sexual undecidability, which the text processes in relation to both Melanctha's sexual experimentation and Jeff's rigid masculinity.[32]

Although it was not immediately appreciated, *Three Lives* would help propel Stein's career. It was crucial to this development that Picasso respected and admired Stein as a fellow artist. The portrait constitutes the stage of an encounter between two artists and two strong artistic personalities. The anecdote of the many sittings, which Stein rehearsed repeatedly, retrospectively produces the moment Stein was consecrated by a fellow artist with a similar aesthetic project. Stein used the anecdote and Picasso's painting to reproduce and mythologize this moment. If she were to be a genius, she had to be recognized as such by another genius – a leitmotif in *Autobiography*. To Stein, Picasso's portrait functioned as evidence of genius.

What to make of the language of genius Stein uses? We might remember that Johann Kaspar Lavater looked for genius in the faces of his contemporaries. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe had the face of genius. Lithographs illustrated Lavater's essays with purportedly self-evident characteristics of artistic and philosophical exceptionality. In Chapter 3, we have seen Woolf challenge the tradition of portraiture that, to a large extent, reproduced tenets of this premise (the National Portrait Gallery in London as a collection of male geniuses). Insisting on the theme of genius, Stein seems to risk entering this problematic terrain – what I called "enemy territory" in previous chapters. In her notebooks, Stein drew out the maleness of the genius: "Pablo & Matisse have a maleness that belongs to genius. Moi aussi perhaps."[33] *Moi aussi*: I, too, am a male genius. Of course, Picasso's genius came at a cost, as a series of recent exhibits have shown.[34] In analogizing her genius to Picasso's, Stein risks reproducing, and excusing, these costs. In turn, in *Autobiography*, Toklas as narrator describes herself as the wife of a genius: "The geniuses came and talked to Gertrude Stein and the wives sat with me."[35] The notion of genius as deployed in these formulations reproduces a conventional gender dynamic: Male geniuses discuss art, their wives sit around. Among other

things, it is a wife's loving gaze that constitutes a genius. Picasso painted a portrait of Toklas, too, but this portrait did not make it into a place of honor in the Stein/Toklas salon or in the story of these paintings as recounted in the *Autobiography*. Toklas therefore did not become a conventional "muse," but she was concomitantly excluded from the possibility of becoming a genius herself.[36]

At the same time, Stein can be said to be hacking the figure of the genius.[37] As Chris Coffman argues, although some of her formulations were "implicated with reactionary forces," Stein embraced a broad and unstable notion of transmasculinity formed through her desire for Toklas as well as "homosociality with other geniuses."[38] The homosocial relation to another genius was primarily her friendship with Picasso (Coffman adds Hemingway and Carl Van Vechten). Stein positioned herself as Picasso's benefactor in the early days of his career – a discoverer of genius. The reciprocal gifting of portraits constituted a horizontal form of exchange in homosocial camaraderie. But, in attaching genius to her masculinity through her homosocial association with Picasso, Stein effectively disassociated genius from its modernist normative framing.[39] Stein repeated the theme of male genius, with a crucial difference.

In the context of this book, Stein's reproduction of "Gertrude Stein" as framed by the Picasso painting becomes legible as her attempt at Loy's "auto-facial-construction": mastery through the control of face. Stein worked through two intertwined aesthetic projects: her self-styling for a range of poses and her portrait writing. The pose in the Man Ray photograph with which I began this chapter is one such exercise in self-styling. But Stein's autobiographical exercises report on multiple such occasions. In *Autobiography*, Toklas as narrator recounts a conversation with Picasso: "I murmured to Picasso that I liked the portrait of Gertrude Stein. Yes, he said, everybody says that she does not look like it but that does not make any difference, she will, he said."[40] The implication, reminiscent of Proust's framing of the character of Bloch in relation to Bellini's portrait of Mehmet II, is that Stein would come to resemble the portrait over time.[41] This is, on the one hand, because what the portrait captured is more Stein than Stein herself; in time, with age, Stein would catch up with the portrait, which prefigures her mature, consecrated self.[42] But this is also because Stein designed a project to become the portrait. At stake is a concept that Stein was profoundly invested in: repetition, deployed here in the composition of her face.[43]

A further turn in the narrative reports on the moment Stein changed her hairstyle, away from the crown style of the portrait and toward what would

become her signature "Caesar" look.[44] Hair, we have seen in previous chapters in the description of Tadzio and Odette, functions as a frame for the face; its styling is therefore highly consequential to exercises in auto-facial-construction. In this case, Picasso had not been consulted on Stein's initiative – a reminder that the two were co-conspirators in the project of Stein's self-composition. The collaboration reached a small, comical impasse. Both artists wanted to reassure themselves that the relation to the portrait had not been compromised. "All the same, it is all there," Picasso is said to have concluded.[45] In a cubist play with perspective, *Autobiography* recounts this scene and Picasso's conclusion twice.[46] On both occasions, we are to imagine a sigh of relief. "It" (the punctum of the face, Barthes might say) is a function of repetition.[47] Picasso's prediction that Stein would come to resemble the portrait came true; Stein worked on the project through repeated acts of self-composition, like her posing for Man Ray's photograph. "A mask tells us more than a face," Wilde stated.[48] "Nature did nothing but copy art," Stein echoed.[49] Stein made sure that her face copied art, the mask Picasso used for her portrait.

The painting – both object and story – helped Stein become a celebrity and a canonical author. As a "vehicle of reputation," in Aaron Jaffe's terms, it functioned as a prop in the creation and reproduction of Stein's "imprimatur."[50] Over time, the portrait was used as a marketing tool, amplifying the commodification of Stein's name after the publication of the bestselling *Autobiography*. The marketing campaign needed a face; the portrait provided it. As Maurizia Boscagli and Enda Duffy have argued, James Joyce had deployed a similar marketing strategy, using his photographs for *Time* in an effort to give his writing a face.[51] Although Stein too was photographed for *Time*, she largely used her Picasso portrait to render herself an author-commodity – *as if* the portrait were an "author photo." The modernist celebrity nexus here is a reminder that Loy's auto-facial-construction is inherently a commercial exercise, inseparable from the institutions of capitalist modernity, including publishing. As Christina Walter argues, Loy herself played with the "author photo" she used for the cover of the 1958 *Lunar Baedeker & Time-Tables*, which framed only the upper part of her face.[52] If, as Tim Armstrong writes, Loy "is, above all, a *face*," having been photographed repeatedly and often rendered a modernist spectacle, her manipulation of her author photo constitutes a gesture of both self-effacement and self-commodification.[53] Modernist auto-facial-construction thus repurposes the assumption that, despite modernist narrative strategies attending projects of authorial self-effacement (Michel Foucault would invoke writing "in order to have no face," within a

genealogy of effacement that centrally included modernist literature), readers attach a face to their commodified experience of reading a book.[54] "The face cannot tell, but only sell," Boscagli and Duffy conclude.[55]

It is no surprise, then, that *Autobiography* presents Picasso's portrait as famous: "Picasso had just finished his portrait of her which nobody at the time liked except the painter and the painted and which is now so famous."[56] The painting is projected retrospectively to have always been a portrait worthy of someone who one day would have her biography written.[57] Vincent Giroud writes: "It [Picasso's portrait] made her an immediately recognizable, unmistakable modern icon even before she had made her mark as a modern writer."[58] Giroud quotes Pierre Daix arguing that Picasso "created for Gertrude Stein a face as a woman of the avant-garde. Her portrait now corresponded to the role she wanted to play in writing literature for the twentieth century."[59] Amplifying these efforts, with an ambition echoing Proust's Odette, Stein took on a project of refacialization as her portrait by Picasso. Once she initiated the project, others reinforced and reproduced it. Roger Fry helped the canonization project in 1917, when he juxtaposed Picasso's painting with a Rafael drawing, sedimenting its reception as a monument of art history.[60]

The portrait functioned as the cornerstone of Stein's myriad autobiographical strategies, themselves exercises in facialization. As if anticipating Paul de Man, Stein's autobiographies are formally self-effacing ("Gertrude's Alice's Gertrude" is what Neil Schmitz calls one of the narrative personas of *Autobiography*).[61] Anchored in a modernist play with memory, they are also self-styling and self-mythologizing.[62] An important part of Stein's use of the portrait as the central prop for her autobiographical efforts was its placement in the salon in Rue de Fleurus in Paris – often juxtaposed with other carefully selected paintings.[63] We know the portrait's place in the salon from the many photographs of the salon – including Man Ray's. The narrator of the *Autobiography* relies on these photographs to "refresh her memory" of the space.[64] The portrait sat for a while, unframed, above Matisse's *Woman with a Hat*. It was subsequently framed and moved. Man Ray photographed it again in 1922.[65] The photographs, the staging of which Stein co-curated, reinforced the indexical effect claimed through the narrative about the making of the portrait.[66] They effectively confirmed the performative statement, "I am the person in this famous and important portrait." As with Dorian Gray but to different effect, the portrait functioned as a mirror of sorts. The more Stein wrote about Picasso, the larger the aura of her own portrait, and the closer the proximity to genius.

Stein bequeathed Picasso's portrait to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, with instructions on where it should be displayed.[67] The gesture was an attempt to continue to control her face, postmortem. Originally a gift, although from a painter whom Stein and her brother helped financially, the portrait became a gift again. Having propped up the marketing of Stein's work, it became an interested donation. Before it was shipped to New York, Picasso came to say goodbye to the portrait. "Oh my dear . . . I will never see it again," Toklas is said to have lamented.[68] Toklas would live another twenty years not only without Stein but also without her portrait. The anecdote reconfirms the identification of Stein with her portrait, which Toklas came to perceive as an extension of Stein. In the autobiography written in her own name, *What Is Remembered* (1963), Toklas describes her final parting with Stein as the moment when she parts with the portrait.[69]

Portrait Writing

Stein's *Picasso* (1938), written five years after *Autobiography*, is a faux biography of Picasso. It was drafted in French, translated by Toklas into English, and edited by Stein and Toklas.[70] In Stein's hands, Picasso's biography becomes literary history: "I was alone at this time in understanding him, perhaps because I was expressing the same thing in literature."[71] Stein likens Picasso to Basarof, Ivan Turgenev's nihilistic character, loyal to his credo to the end.[72] Stein frames Picasso's biography as a struggle over "looking." In the process, she sifts through Picasso's work, deciding what fits her vision and placing everything else aside. Throughout, Stein is pursuing a question that preoccupies her in her own artistic medium: How to stage the relation to the object of literary representation (or what was formerly known as representation), centrally the representation of the face? If, as Erich Auerbach argued, literary history is a series of realisms, a series of representational styles, each structuring its own relation to history, what happens when representation itself is suspended?[73] By analogy with portrait painting, how does one write about a face without a "sitter" either present or recalled?

The portrait has long offered conventions for the framing of the face. Halfway into *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein's Toklas reports on a shift in the oeuvre of Gertrude Stein whereby the author discovered "portrait writing."[74] The narrator elaborates: "She has written portraits of practically everybody she has known, and written them in all manners and in all styles."[75] While Stein had absolute clarity as to her vocation

("one can have only one métier and only one language"), and this vocation was writing, *Autobiography* posits that it was through portrait writing specifically that Stein found her calling. Why the portrait? Wendy Steiner reminds us that the portrait was the paradigmatic and most economical genre for modernist artists engaging the question of modern subjectivity.[76] Given the centrality ascribed to the face in the modern period, the portrait has been seen as co-constitutive of modern subjectivity.[77] As such, the portrait was Picasso's preferred genre. In *Picasso*, Stein observed that while the painter produced some landscapes, "he always knew that people were the only interesting thing to him."[78] Thus, Stein continued, "the head the face the human body these are all that exist for Picasso."[79] Of these three objects, the face stands out – for Picasso and Stein. Picasso's struggle, as Stein represents it, is centrally a struggle over the face. A reconfigured genre of portraiture would frame this face anew. If we take seriously Stein's claim that her writing was conceived in relation to Picasso's aesthetic project, we arrive at Stein's need to confront the genre of the portrait. Her métier being writing, Stein turned to portrait writing.

Literature developed its own take on the portrait – the literary portrait. The most central way in which physiognomy infused the realist novel, according to Graeme Tytler, was through the composite portrait.[80] Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* can be said to be both participating in this tradition and reflecting on it. In counterpoint to this tradition and in conjunction with developments in photography and cinema, modernist writers became deeply invested in the genre of the portrait themselves.[81] In Chapter 3, I read *Orlando* as a portrait, but one can imagine Woolf's entire oeuvre under the rubric of "The Portrait of Mrs. Brown."[82] Similarly, portrait writing imposed itself to Stein as the genre in which she could test the aesthetic project she designed in relation to Picasso. Stein's experiments with the genre of the portrait follow and, in many ways, exceed their modernist predicament. While Kamila Pawlikowska argues that modernism witnesses a shift in the genre to what she calls the a-physiognomic anti-portrait, this book has traced residues of physiognomy in modernism – in portraits and beyond them.[83] Stein's portraits function as a limit-case for this argument. Like Mann and Proust, Stein was interested in physiognomic types, especially women types.[84] But while Stein's work reproduced some of the tenets of physiognomy, often to ambivalent effect, it also dramatized one of the most forceful modernist challenges to the tradition of face reading.

As Stein took on portraiture, she used Picasso as an exemplary figure.[85] The series of portraits of Picasso starts with Stein's 1909 "Pablo Picasso."

"If I Told Him, a Completed Portrait of Picasso" followed in 1922. As we have seen, the 1933 *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was centrally concerned with Picasso. *Everybody's Autobiography* followed in 1937. *Picasso* came out in 1938. There is a Picasso for every decade of Stein's work, with the 1930s bringing no less than three exercises in Picasso portraiture. If Picasso rejected likeness in favor of a mask-turned-face, how does Stein frame the face – Picasso's face?

Stein's first portrait of Picasso is titled "Pablo Picasso." The title reproduces the convention of captioning the portrait with the sitter's proper name. The convention brings with it the promise of indexicality – the portrait represents a particular person in the world. The proper name functions as a linchpin between the world of the portrait and the real world. Having established this premise, Stein's portrait proceeds synecdochally to identify one feature of Picasso as the signature trait of his portrait: work. The poem repeats the word "work." The synecdoche is prompted by Picasso's own use of language. In the letters he sent to Leo and Gertrude Stein, Picasso presented himself as always working.[86] Stein's project is to capture the language of Picasso's letters in her portrait of the painter, his own linguistic self-styling. As Steiner writes, "A whole new mimetic range in portraiture is opened up by the idea of characterizing a subject through his own speech, since speech is one of those processes which the written word can truly imitate."[87] Mimesis is at work here, not as representation, as Auerbach's literary history has it, but as the repetition of a subject's language tics. The portraitist is legible in the poem as the observer of Picasso's letters about working. Writing retrospectively in *Picasso*, in relation to this earlier poem, Stein reveals her desire for Picasso to maintain his energy as a creator, his Basarof-like dedication to his work. Picasso's identifying trait ("the one"), for this portraitist, at this time, is his work.

Stein's first portrait of Picasso remains recognizable as a portrait, even as it reduces its subject to one act/feature. Picasso is molded as a type: the working one. Is there a face in this portrait? Like Picasso, Stein does not believe in likeness, physical likeness. Steiner writes: "A written imitation of the physical appearance of a subject (a temporal sequence for a spatial juxtaposition) is a virtual impossibility."[88] Description is out of the question. The titular use of the proper name nonetheless raises the question of face. As we have seen in Chapter 2 on the margins of Proust's literary project, names and faces co-implicate each other. De Man frames a broad literary predicament: The proper name facializes.[89] "The one" in Stein's first portrait of Picasso acquires a face – if not within the poem, then in the

act of reading. Importantly, Picasso's name is already a form of self-fashioning. Stein recounts how Picasso chose his mother's name as a signature, noting: "Pablo Picasso was the better name."[90] Picasso thought that his chosen name not only sounded better, but it also looked better, visually. With Picasso's signature, we return to the second face of handwriting: The painter liked the face he saw in his handwritten name. The painter who is always working thus acquires a face through the proper name of Picasso.

Stein's second portrait of Picasso, written in 1922, is titled "If I Told Him, a Completed Portrait of Picasso." A "completed" version of the first portrait, the poem belongs to a different phase in Stein's oeuvre. Like Picasso taking a break from his portrait of Stein before he could complete it, Stein retrospectively stages the need for a break from her first Picasso portrait. In the gap between the two portraits, Stein found new clarity of vision. "Looking" remains central, but a different regime of looking: "With my eyes I see words and sentences."[91] This kind of looking does not go behind surfaces, and surfaces are made of words. In search of a soul, or any depth, let alone a type, one encounters language and more language. Although the poem invokes Napoleon, Picasso is not "the one" here, and the question of a signature gesture or feature (work) is left behind. This second portrait of Picasso returns not to likeness but to the *question* of likeness: "Exact resemblance to exact resemblance the exact resemblance as exact as a resemblance, exactly as resembling, exactly resembling, exactly in resemblance exactly as a resemblance, exactly as resemblance. For this is so. Because."[92] What, the poem asks, is writing's equivalent of exact resemblance? (Exactitude echoes the statement we encountered in Chapter 3 vis-à-vis Orlando: "an exact description of Vita.") Can a written portrait, as a piece of writing, resemble its subject? ("The words look like Carl Van Vechten," Stein declared in an interview when asked about another portrait.)[93] Who would perform the observation of resemblance, and according to what conventions? What would exactitude mean in this context?

To be sure, the reader of the second portrait of Picasso, trained in the history of literary portraiture, brings a set of assumptions to the experience of reading. The invocation of Napoleon teases the reader into speculation that involves facialization: The proper name refers to a series of painted portraits of Napoleon and, as such, brings Picasso's physicality into view. "Napoleon does not exist, nor ever existed anywhere except in his portraits," Jean-Paul Sartre would provocatively declare.[94] One might even speculate that a minimalist form of ekphrasis is at work in conjuring the

visual images of Napoleon. The portraitist posits a sense of intimacy in crisis ("if I told him, would he like it?"): The portrait is a playful, witty joke among friends. The same reader, known to make connections across "the author function," might link the poem to the later *Picasso* biography and thus posit that Picasso might not have liked Stein's sense of his "looking career," her Basarof-lens onto his work, but perhaps the time of "telling" was over. This reader, for sure, is tempted by Steiner's reading of the portraitist's laughter (the repetition of he he he, both masculine pronoun and laughter) and the accompanying implication that the portraitist is mocking Picasso's Napoleon-like masculinity, his masculine genius, potentially weighed in relation to Stein's masculinity.[95] Reports of Stein's enjoyment of uproarious bursts of laughter could be invoked in support of such a reading.[96]

Stein's second portrait of Picasso is playing with these possibilities – invoking them and withdrawing them at the same time. Ultimately, however, the questioning of "exact resemblance" forecloses a reading in these terms. Stein's second poem works with no mimetic outside, no realm of history in Auerbach's sense, to which representation would correspond. There is no "memory" that would bridge the world of the poem and that of Picasso's life, however mediated. Nothing "recalls" (the verb used in ekphrastic exercises, as we have seen in Chapters 1 and 2) anything. Stein's method at this point in her career is anchored in an awareness that "nobody looks as they look like";[97] sensing oneself from within and seeing cannot be reconciled – not only across age, as in Proust and Walter Benjamin, but in principle. What is left is a series of words, linked according to a logic of composition that belongs to this singular poem, with each part as necessary as the other. This logic of composition is in an analogous formal relation to the composition of a Picasso painting, whereby lines in a portrait do not represent a facial feature of a historical subject, but rather impose themselves as necessary to the form of the face projected by the portrait. Once again, the formal intermediality invoked by way of this analogy returns us to the proper name Picasso. The poem nonetheless goes as far as any literary experiment can to erase the face. As with Picasso's portrait of Stein, there is a sense that there used to be a face in the frame (this is a *completed* portrait of Picasso, and it follows the first Picasso poem in the 1934 *Portraits and Prayers*), but this face has been successfully erased – from memory and representation alike.

Or has it been erased? Stein's texts themselves and scholarly monographs on Stein and Picasso reproduce visual images of faces – paintings

and photographs. *Autobiography* was published with a photograph of Toklas and Stein, taken by Man Ray in 1922, on the same day as the photograph that opens this chapter. Photographs of Stein with the Picasso painting, including Man Ray's, were used throughout the 1930s in the marketing of *Autobiography*.[98] The 1939 English edition of *Picasso* listed sixty-one illustrations, including photographs of Stein and Picasso.[99] Virtually all studies of the Stein/Picasso node in modernism reproduce Picasso's portrait of Stein. Many reproduce photographs of Stein and Picasso – and their friends and collaborators. Indeed, many such studies are produced as high-quality art albums and include multiple reproductions of artworks and photographs. Much as the two artists struggled to eliminate old ways of looking at the face, their own photographed faces often reappear in these books. In addition to the proper name as a mode of facialization, then, the intermediality that helped inaugurate the project of effacement returns as a mode of refacialization. Readers of Stein's portraits of Picasso might be called upon to forget the face, but that is difficult to do when reading an edited collection that includes photographs of the painter (it is for this reason that, experimentally, I decided not to include illustrations in this book). The proliferation of photographic portraiture in modernism itself and in modernist studies renders the forgetting of the face a radical but ultimately impossible project.

Finally, in Stein's work, the face endures as an analogy to art. In a lecture she gave in 1935, "Pictures," Stein reflected on the role of the face in her formation as a consumer of art: "Gradually getting more and more familiar with oil paintings was like getting gradually more and more familiar with faces as you look very hard at all of them and you do this very often."[100] Stein claims that she learned to look at paintings because she had already learned to look at faces – repeatedly. The observation of faces foreshadowed an aesthetic education: "Faces gradually tell you something, there is no doubt about that as you grow more and more familiar with any and all faces and so it is with oil paintings." As in other instances we encountered in this book, faces speak, they emit signs; by spending time with them, one becomes familiar with their language, knowledge one can subsequently transfer to other surfaces. An ethics of the face emerges: "You may like or not like a new kind of a face but you cannot refuse a face. You must accept a face as a face. And so with an oil painting."[101] Faces can serve as analogy for painting because, for Stein, they always already "hold attention."[102] Multiply repressed, the face returns again and again, in this case as a function of one's early education in "seeing."

The Face of Whiteness

The question of the modernist face returned with renewed urgency in Rebecca Hall's 2021 black-and-white adaptation of Nella Larsen's novel *Passing* (1929). The film is a symptom of a recent return to Larsen's work and its modernist entanglements, especially with Stein. As Clark Barwick documents, after a long period of neglect, editors, scholars, and artists have transformed *Passing* into one of the most canonical texts of American literature. Translations into numerous languages followed, finally lending a global dimension to an always already international text. Barwick notes that many translations use modernist artworks – paintings and photographs – on their covers. Most are portraits: "The most arresting cover appeared on the Arabic edition of *Passing*. Here, a single oversized face, with large eyes, chalk-white skin, red eyelids and lips, and a billowing Afro, stared back at the potential reader."[103] The recent return to Larsen – Hall's adaptation and the reading of the novel embedded in its translations – invites a reevaluation of the author's relation to transatlantic modernism, especially the Stein/Picasso node this chapter traced – and its experimentation with the face.

In 1929, Larsen sent Stein a copy of her recently published novel, *Quicksand* (1928). In the letter accompanying the novel, Larsen shared her admiration for "Melanctha," a text she encountered through Carl Van Vechten, a collaborator Stein had enlisted to market her work in the United States. A photographer himself, Van Vechten was a collector of modernist faces. He photographed both Stein and Larsen.[104] In her letter to Stein, having described "Melanctha" as a "truly great story," Larsen noted: "I never cease to wonder how you came to write it and just why you and not some one of us should so accurately have caught the spirit of this race of mine."[105] Larsen's *Passing*, which she dedicated to Van Vechten, was in production at the time. The novel can be read as an exercise in "writing back" – to the European modernist tradition and Stein specifically.[106] *Passing* enlists the trope of the mask into its own project, in the process supplementing the modernist narrative about the face staged by Picasso/Stein and traced by this chapter. The mask that interests Larsen, which she sees in an intertextual relation to Stein, is the mask of whiteness.[107]

The opening of *Passing*, within a section of the novel titled "Encounter," has the character of Irene Redfield reacquaint herself with her lost friend Clare Kendry – initially not face-to-face, but rather through her

handwriting. Irene reads Clare's handwriting along lines that Proust describes as a second face: "Its almost illegible scrawl seemed out of place and alien. And there, too, was something mysterious and slightly furtive about it.... Furtive, but yet in some peculiar, determined way a little flaunting."[108] The same adjectives (mysterious, furtive, flaunting, Italian) later come to describe Clare's face. When the two women meet face-to-face, Irene's recollection presents the scene as a stage of facial observation, similar to others we have witnessed in this book: a scene of "steady scrutiny," "continued inspection," and "persistent attention."[109] This is a stage of two-way face reading, as Clare returns Irene's stare, as if "determined to impress firmly and accurately each detail of Irene's features upon her memory for all time."[110] The two women are reading each other's faces across age, trying to decipher on the face in front of them the youthful face of a childhood friend – and a name. Like Proust's narrator in the matinee scene, they are perceiving the face in front of them through the eye of both vision and memory. Memory is impeded by the fact that, as the text suggests in a later scene, the two friends are "disguised" as white women. Looking at Clare, Irene is "searching her face" in an attempt to unravel the workings of an "ivory mask."[111] The two women, who are attracted to each other, are passing for white – where race is imbricated with the visuality of class (a "having way").[112] In the context of this book, Larsen's exercise in writing back reveals the semiotics of passing as a supplement to the modernist semiotics of the face.[113]

The exercise in passing enlists a crucial assumption about faces: Against physiognomy's entrenched racializing taxonomies (recall Aschenbach's assumption of a relation between face and group appurtenance in Chapter 1), race is not legible: "Nobody can [tell race]. Not by looking."[114] Importantly, the text displays familiarity with racialized physiognomy.[115] It nonetheless reiterates that there is no "trick" that would allow one to "place" a face. Eventually, across repeated scenes of reading, Clare's face remains "unfathomable" – illegible.[116]

The two passing women in Larsen's novel convert this knowledge into a strategy of auto-facial-construction. Clare, in particular, develops it into an art – at the risk of "losing face" in Irene's world.[117] In the scene in the hotel (a privileged setting for international modernism and a sign of class positioning), Irene deploys this strategy, with which she clearly has a history, to placate the possibility of exposure. Irene instrumentalizes her insight that white observers

> were so stupid about such things for all that they usually asserted that they were able to tell; and by the most ridiculous means, fingernails, palms of hands, shapes of ears, teeth, and other equally silly rot. They always took

> her for an Italian, a Spaniard, a Mexican, or a Gypsy. Never, when she was alone, had they even remotely seemed to suspect that she was a Negro.[118]

Irene knows that "white observers," would-be physiognomic readers, project familiar stereotypes onto her face. As she confidently arranges her face into the face of whiteness, she meets their expectations. She enlists ethnic and racial difference in the production of her own face – she presents herself as ambiguously Italian, Spanish, or Mexican. In terms of the narrative traced by this chapter, the scene frames a Black face wearing a white face wearing a Spanish mask. The formulation also takes us back to Woolf's invocation of the Roma in *Orlando* as a way of giving her queer character "a certain darkness in the complexion" (O 121).[119]

All in all, the scene of passing involves the strategic instrumentalization of a complex field of comparative racialization.[120] The opening scene in Larsen's novel concomitantly reveals the portability of the face as a form – a theme I explore in the next chapter. Irene is quoting a white face. This is a face she and Clare know as a function of W. E. B. Du Bois's concept of double consciousness. It is also a face they know from literature, including early modernist literature – the work of Woolf or Stein. Ultimately, Larsen's exercise in writing back reveals Stein's struggle over the form of the face to be imbricated with the politics of whiteness, including the aspirational whiteness of early twentieth-century American Jewishness.