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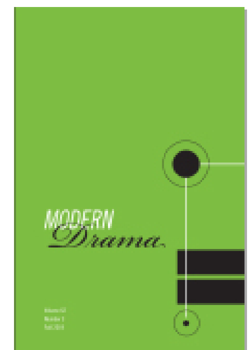

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An Acquaintance with Religion: Pluralizing Knowledge in Gertrude Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*

REBECCA KASTLEMAN

ABSTRACT: *This article explores the central role of religion in Gertrude Stein's 1938 libretto,* Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights. *Relative to other modern Faust plays, Stein emphasizes the religious character of pre-modern life, demonstrating how it is entangled with gendered ways of existing and moving in space. I argue that Stein extends modern investigations of Faustus's pursuit of knowledge by harnessing the pragmatic philosophy of William James, who makes a crucial distinction between knowledge of acquaintance and "knowledge-about." Examining the Faust narrative through these epistemological categories, Stein finds that Faust's failures arise from an excessively narrow understanding of the knowledge that he seeks. Stein's* Doctor Faustus*, then, recuperates a broader range of embodied and sensory understandings for modernity. The article thus suggests that representations of religion played a larger role in dramatic modernism than has been previously acknowledged or understood.*

KEYWORDS: *modernism, closet drama, opera, Christianity, William James*

When Gertrude Stein attended a production of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in Paris on 23 February 1938, she used the back of her program to scribble some of her earliest notes toward a Faust play. The program featured a photograph of the scenic design from another Faust opera, Hector Berlioz's *La damnation de Faust*, which had been recently staged at the same theatre (Stein, Manuscript fragments).[1] In this image, a cross perches atop a sloping hillside, sitting slightly askew; seven smaller hunched figures approach the cross, a widening arc of light radiating behind them and casting them in shadow. In her own Faust drama, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, Stein reworks this scenic image in the opening lines, in which Faustus stands "with his arms up at the door lintel looking out, behind him a blaze of electric light" (89), so that his body forms a backlit cross reminiscent of the Berlioz stage design (Bay-Cheng 76). Citing the Paris staging of Berlioz's opera, Stein shows her careful attention

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to the tradition of Faust performance in which her drama intervenes.[2] Like other modern adaptations of the Faust story, Stein's *Doctor Faustus* takes a nostalgic view of the pre-modern world that Faust rejects in his pursuit of worldly knowledge. In contrast to other versions of the tale, however, Stein's drama emphasizes the religious character of pre-modern life, which she shows to be entangled with gendered ways of moving, being, and traversing space. Stein thus reappraises modernity's displacement of religious understanding by demonstrating how secular knowledge disciplines the body. Through engagement with religion in its formal structure, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* celebrates a shift from singular, Faustian knowledge to a plural array of embodied and sensory understandings that Stein's theatre exuberantly recuperates for modernity.

Stein's dizzying *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* poses significant challenges for the taxonomy and interpretation of her dramatic writing. She began to compose the work in the late spring of 1938, completing it in June of the same year (Letter, 20 June 1938). She undertook the project together with Lord Berners – a composer with whom she had previously collaborated on the 1937 production of *A Wedding Bouquet* (*Everybody's* 222–23) – but Berners never finished the music (Letter, 4 Feb. 1938). The resulting difficulty about whether to identify this magnetizing text as a "play" or as an "unfinished opera" is one of the many perplexities surrounding it. While it is generally described as one of Stein's more "theatrical" plays – and indeed, the scaffolding of the Faust tale means the plot is more discernible than in many of Stein's dramatic works – it nevertheless does not accord with most conventions of dramatic structure.[3] In Stein's telling, the characters and plot incidents are largely unfamiliar and sometimes incongruous, as if Stein's audience were not reading or watching but rather dreaming about the tale. Where we would expect to find spectacular displays of Mephistophelean sorcery, we are instead presented with a "[b]allet" of electric lights (91); in place of the unfortunate Gretchen, we meet Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, a single character who may consist of one, two, or even four persons.[4] A reader familiar with the Faust plays by Goethe and Marlowe would also be surprised by the inclusion of such characters as a venomous viper, a dog who says "thank you," and a mysterious "man from over the seas" (109). Stein's play is something like a spell cast in three acts, alternating between mesmerizing repetitions and vibrant splashes of action, between forest shadows and the glare of electric lights. The legend of Faust supplies the occasion for this drama, but it does not determine its structure.

Stein subverts dramatic expectations surrounding the Faust tale by divesting Faustus of his magical potency and attributing agency to non-human

actors. She withholds many of the most familiar aspects of the Faust story, including the scene where Faust sells his soul to the devil: the play begins after this event has already occurred. Moreover, spectators never see Faust's contrition or damnation at the end of his life. Rather, Stein's Faustus is a melancholic figure, apparently bereft of his appetite for sorcery and his thirst for power; he barely leaves his study throughout the play. Having sold his soul, not for eternal knowledge but for electric lights – making him a sort of charmed doppelgänger of Thomas Edison – Stein's Faustus is disappointed to discover, upon realizing his invention, that he is stuck in a world that never changes: in that the electric lights create perpetual daylight and thus abolish time. Longing to depart for hell, where presumably he will be able to do as he pleases, Faustus finds that he is unable to get there. The demonic Mephisto prods Faustus to murder a boy and a dog; meanwhile, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is bitten by a viper in the woods and later unhappily pursued by the man from over the seas. Stein's drama thus follows modern adaptations of the Faust story in taking stock of the gains yielded by Faustus's pursuit of knowledge – which seem to be limited to the lively presence of the electric ballet – relative to the losses, which include one human casualty, one animal casualty, one viper bite, and some other intangibles, together with Faustus's very bad mood. This *Doctor Faustus* realizes the conventions of the Faust play with such whimsy and unpredictability that the work refuses to be constrained by allegorical readings of the Faust story.

Just as Stein was deliberate in situating *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* within the Faust tradition, she was equally intentional in positioning the work as part of her own dramatic and literary oeuvre. The extent of this operation is evident from Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's name. In drafts of the libretto, Stein referred to her protagonist as "Ida and Annabel" (Manuscript notebooks); only later did she admit the names "Marguerite" and "Helena." Indeed, the handwritten insertion of "Marguerite" and "Helena" is among the only edits Stein made to an early manuscript of Act One (Manuscript notebooks). "Ida" and "Annabel," the names in the early draft, are significant characters in Stein's earlier compositions: the novel *Ida*, then unfinished, supplied some of the material for her Faust opera, and "The Good Anna" is one of the stories in *Three Lives*. The name "Ida and Annabel" may also support Stein's claim to a place in literary modernism, in that it seems to echo James Joyce's "Anna Livia Plurabelle" while also literalizing the multiplicity of the name "Plurabelle" (Posman 191). "Marguerite" and "Helena," of course, are both characters from earlier versions of the Faust story: Marguerite is the Gretchen character in Berlioz's opera as well as in other renditions, and Helena refers to the character of Helen of Troy in Marlowe and Goethe. By grafting character names from other versions of Faust onto the names of characters from her

prior works, Stein makes legible the process by which she situates her Faust tale in the context of her own literary production, even as she inscribes her own texts into the canon of world literature.

Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights not only reimagines the Faust story but also iterates a genre of Stein's own invention known as the "landscape play." Stein's landscape plays tend to feature religious subject matter, including saints, prayers, and other representations of piety. The prevalence of religion in Stein's preferred dramatic genre may seem surprising, given her own professed lack of interest in religion, yet she disengages this content from organized religious practice, making it available as a mode of embodied experience in the nominally secular world.[5] The forms of religious representation characteristic of the landscape play are vital to Stein's adaptation of the Faust story, enabling her to expand the narrow notion of worldly knowledge that is typically contrasted with religion in other adaptations. In *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, then, Stein supplements the binary categories of faith and knowledge with another concept, the knowledge of acquaintance, which she borrows from her mentor William James. In Stein's telling, Faust's failures do not follow from his pursuit of knowledge at the expense of faith but, rather, from an insufficiently broad conception of the knowledge that he seeks. He lacks what Stein might call, after her essay "An Acquaintance with Description," "an acquaintance with religion" – that is, an apprehension of the forms of understanding that exceed a rational, secular worldview.[6] While the secular perspective represented by Faust devalues embodied and experiential knowledge, these modes of perception are magnified in Stein's version of the tale.

FAUSTIAN LANDSCAPES: GOETHE, JAMES, STEIN

Since the Faust story first entered into circulation at the height of the Protestant Reformation, the figure of Faust, a scholar and theologian who sells his soul to the devil for unlimited worldly power, has been understood to convey the apparent irreconcilability of faith and knowledge.[7] In particular, the story of Faust cautions against the tantalizing seductions of the latter, which threatens to shatter faith entirely. In their versions of the legend, Marlowe and Goethe both attempted to harmonize the conflict between faith and knowledge. In the twentieth century, amidst seismic changes in the public function of religious belief, it became possible – perhaps for the first time – for readers to entertain the possibility that faith and knowledge were irretrievably opposed. The Faust plays of the twentieth century, then, express a special curiosity about Faust's zealous pursuit of knowledge and desire for self-realization, finding in Faust's life not an allegory of the fall from Paradise but, rather, an account of political and economic modernization and the corresponding process of individual self-actualization. Marshall Berman has called this

tendency, already emerging in Goethe's *Faust*, "the Tragedy of Development" (37). A major objective of modern Faust adaptations is, thus, to take account of the gains and losses yielded by Faust's pursuit of knowledge and his diminished belief and to evaluate the consequences of these for modern life.

For Berman, the character of Faust represents the quintessential experience of modernity: "For as long as there has been a modern culture," he writes, "Faust has been one of its culture heroes" (38). Berman's argument is borne out by the centrality of Faust to the dramatic avant-garde at the turn of the twentieth century. The fascination with Faust began with Henrik Ibsen, whose early verse drama *Peer Gynt* (1876) was strongly influenced by the *Faust* of Goethe (Puchner 40). *Faust* was also wildly popular among the French symbolists. It had a particular influence on Alfred Jarry, who was involved in a production of *Peer Gynt* at the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre in 1896, in which he is thought to have played one of the trolls (Gillespie 96–97); Jarry later expressed his aesthetic philosophy of "pataphysics" through the persona of a hybrid Gynt–Faust figure called Doctor Faustroll. Similarly, the Nietzschean dramas of George Bernard Shaw borrowed implicitly from *Faust*, on whom Nietzsche's *Übermensch* was based; in *Man and Superman* (1903), for instance, Shaw's debts to *Faust* are made explicit (Bloom 162). Such examples of the modern Faust play multiply, in addition to adaptations of *Faust* produced in other performative forms such as opera – the composer Ferruccio Busoni began his *Doktor Faust* in 1916, leaving it unfinished at his death – and cinema, the medium revolutionized by F.W. Murnau's monumental *Faust* of 1926. Some might consider Thomas Mann's seminal novel *Doktor Faustus*, published in 1947, to be the definitive Faust adaptation of the twentieth century; however, for the moderns, Faust was reborn in the theatre before he was reawakened in the novel.[8]

The widespread interest in the Faust legend in the modern theatre has been explored in multiple recent studies (see, e.g., Schulte et al.; Hedges), but existing scholarship seldom acknowledges Stein, perhaps because her text appears to defy most of the tale's familiar conventions. This omission belies the tremendous impact that Stein's text has had on the modern theatre. While never produced in her lifetime, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* has since been performed by many pioneering figures of the American experimental theatre, including the Living Theatre in 1951, Robert Wilson in 1992, and the Wooster Group (as *House/Lights*) in 1997. These artists understood that Stein's adaptation of the Faust story offers a striking reassessment of the modes of perception and understanding available in the theatre.

Stein's *Faustus* intervenes in the modern project of extending investigations of Faust's pursuit of knowledge by harnessing a definition of knowledge borrowed from William James's pragmatic philosophy. James was a great

admirer of Goethe's *Faust*; while studying in Germany, he wrote to his friend Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. that Goethe's text was "almost worth learning the language for" (101), and James later cited Faust's famous exclamation "Gefühl ist Alles" ["feeling is all"] in "Reflex Action and Theism," one of his accounts of the psychology of religious belief (107). Of greatest relevance to Stein's *Faustus*, however, is James's *Principles of Psychology* (1890), in which he makes an important distinction between two ways of knowing: "knowledge of acquaintance" and "knowledge-about." The "knowledge of acquaintance," according to James, is a passing familiarity that gives rise to feelings rather than to thought; "knowledge-about," by contrast, is a more complete and rational way of knowing something. James elaborates on the knowledge of acquaintance and its distinctness from knowledge-about:

> I am acquainted with many people and things, which I know very little about, except their presence in the places where I have met them. I know the color blue when I see it, and the flavor of a pear when I taste it; I know an inch when I move my finger through it; a second of time, when I feel it pass; an effort of attention when I make it; a difference between two things when I notice it; but *about* the inner nature of these facts or what makes them what they are, I can say nothing at all. I cannot impart acquaintance with them to any one who has not already made it himself [. . .]. At most, I can say to my friends, Go to certain places and act in certain ways, and these objects will probably come. All the elementary natures of the world, its highest genera, the simple qualities of matter and mind, together with the kinds of relation that subsist between them, must either not be known at all, or known in this dumb way of acquaintance without *knowledge-about*. (*Principles* 221; emphasis in original)

For James, the colour blue, the flavour of a pear, the length of an inch, and a second of time are all objects of perception of which there can be no "knowledge-about." James can only be acquainted with these features "in the places where I have met them," and his knowledge of them must be experienced directly and cannot be imparted to others. This knowledge, the knowledge of acquaintance, is an embodied, sensory understanding that is received in a rush of apprehension and deeply enmeshed in the place in which a certain subject perceives the world. It has something of a spiritual character, in that it typifies a form of keenly felt familiarity with "elementary natures." James further explores how the knowledge of acquaintance relates to religious feeling in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), in which he classifies the knowledge stemming from religious mysticism as something with which one can only be acquainted.[9] Religious experience, he claims, cannot be known "about": it simply is apprehended or it is not, and the nature of such experience cannot be conveyed to others.

As scholars have shown, the Jamesian paradigm of knowledge was integral to Stein's method of writing. It is evident, for instance, in her essay "An Acquaintance with Description" as well as in her 1926 lecture "Composition as Explanation."[10] The influence of James on Stein's work for the theatre also has been acknowledged.[11] However, critics have not yet shown how Stein's treatment of Jamesian conditions of knowledge shifted as her project for the theatre evolved. As I argue, Stein's representation of knowledge in her Faust play emphasizes the potential for injury that inheres in Jamesian "knowledge-about." By grasping that the Faustian problem of knowledge in *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* is bound up with James's knowledge categories, we gain a clearer picture of how Stein understood the Faust narrative in relation to her writing practice. At the same time, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* does not simply adopt the paradigms of knowledge formulated by James as categories pertinent to literary or dramatic experience. Instead, Stein reveals and critiques the gendered terms of James's knowledge paradigms by celebrating the knowledge of acquaintance as a form of intimate understanding between women.

Stein's dramatic explorations of the knowledge of acquaintance are most powerfully evident in the genre of the landscape play, a genre she explicitly describes in relation to "acquaintance," showing its imbrication with James's thought. Her most robust theorization of the landscape play appears in the 1934 lecture "Plays," in which she explains that, by envisioning a play as a landscape, she is able to assemble the elements of her drama visually, coordinating them in the same place at the same time. This effect, as Stein describes it, is "the landscape not moving but being always in relation, the trees to the hills the hills to the fields the trees to each other any piece of it to any sky and then any detail to any other detail" (xlvii). In this passage, Stein allows this formulation of her plays as landscapes to remain suggestive, so that it encompasses a variety of related perspectives on the presentation of action, emotion, character, place, and the materiality of the theatre. Stein's description of her landscape plays resonates closely with James's definition of the knowledge of acquaintance, in which knowledge of the colour blue or of the flavour of a pear can only be apprehended by an embodied subject located in a particular place. As Stein writes, "the landscape does not have to make acquaintance. You may have to make acquaintance with it, but it does not with you, it is there and so the play being written the relation between you at any time is so exactly that that it is of no importance unless you look at it" ("Plays" xlvi). Here Stein shows that the landscape play is something with which the spectator can become acquainted but which she cannot survey and master. The spectator cannot know much "about" her surroundings but can cultivate an impression of them in their sensory immediacy. Stein's landscape play thus

combines the attributes of multiplicity, synchronicity, and simultaneity; it gives an impression of intensely vivid presence, one we might describe as being there, among them, all at once, right then. This form of synthetic apprehension comes readily to Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, while Faustus is perpetually unable to access it.

In Stein's rendition, the havoc wrought by Faust's pursuit of knowledge is represented through its effects on the landscape play as a genre. Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel features in a landscape, and she demonstrates the relations of acquaintance that characterize this form. Meanwhile Faustus, with his ceaseless striving to attain knowledge about the world, threatens to undermine the embodied and experiential understandings cultivated within Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's landscape. *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* can thus be described as a landscape play that the character of Faustus has surrounded. He "surrounds" the landscape play in two senses. First, structurally speaking, the core of the drama consists of the landscape play starring Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, which is framed by scenes featuring Faustus that open and conclude the work. Second, the character of Faustus has the landscape play surrounded in that he imperils its survival; his imperialistic ways of knowing threaten to seize control of the landscape that Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel inhabits. Stein's text, then, enacts the colonization of the landscape play and its relations of acquaintance by Faustus's disciplining "knowledge-about."

RELIGION AND THE LANDSCAPE PLAY MAKE ACQUAINTANCE

Stein's landscape plays frequently represent religious subjects, which may reflect the prevalence of churches and monasteries in the countryside near her home in Bilignin, where her ideas about the landscape play were first forged. Yet these features of the Rhône Valley can only partially explain why saints, nuns, prayers, choirs, gestures of devotion, acts of piety, and other references to Christian beliefs and practices populate so many of these dramas. Stein's landscape plays do not always incorporate religious content, nor does her religious source material always appear in the form of the landscape play: consider, for example, the poem "Sacred Emily" and the novel *Lucy Church Amiably*, as well as parts of the essay "Regular Regularly in Narrative" (see Dydo 153). However, the landscape play eventually emerged as Stein's preferred genre for religious content. As I argue, Stein takes up James's notion that the knowledge of acquaintance is epitomized by religion, which represents a form of knowledge that is experienced and felt but not fully available to thought. Her representation of religion in the landscape play, then, promotes plural forms of knowledge that are concerned with the sensory essences of persons and objects as well as with the changeable relations among them.

The assigning of religious content to the landscape play begins with Stein's very first work in this genre, *Lend a Hand or Four Religions*, which she composed in 1922 and called her "first conception of landscape as a play" (*Autobiography* 864). In it, the titular four religions are personified as women who kneel before a span of flowing water. The surrounding landscape is described in repetitive, almost incantatory language, creating an atmosphere of serenity and stillness; the rhythm of the four religions' speech aligns with the natural rhythms they describe, including the daily wanderings of shepherds, the plants growing from the land, and the passage of the seasons. This is a drama that resounds like the continual peal of bells across hillsides, conveying a message of pleasure and rejoicing. *Lend a Hand or Four Religions*, then, weaves together the representation of religion with the pleasing intimacy of mutual acquaintance between women. It is suggestive that the French word *accointance* connotes a love affair, showing how Stein weaves James's knowledge of acquaintance together with an evocation of queer love.

These themes are echoed in *Saints and Singing: A Play*, also composed in 1922 and also written during an extended period in which Stein and Alice Toklas were staying in Provence (Dydo 45). While *Saints and Singing* is not identified as an opera, the play's constant references to song show that it aspires to become one; it can thus be understood as a vocal study for *Four Saints in Three Acts*, which Stein would write five years later. *Saints and Singing* was followed shortly thereafter by another landscape play on the same subject, *A Saint in Seven* (1922), which incorporates similar material but makes varying use of the conventions of dramatic notation – for instance, by omitting act and scene divisions. Ulla Dydo has observed how *A Saint in Seven* is bustling with the pleasurable activities of domestic life, depicting saints who are "undoubtedly human saints in a human heaven full of humor, laughter, and activity, though not sequential action moving toward a prescribed end or resolution of a plot" (97). Again the representation of religion is bound up with the queer pleasure of domestic life among women. These early landscape plays anticipate the representational project Stein would outline for *Four Saints in Three Acts*: as she recalls in "Plays," she wanted the work "to have the movement of nuns very busy and in continuous movement but placid as a landscape has to be because after all the life in a convent is the life of a landscape" (li–lii). *Lend a Hand or Four Religions*, *Saints and Singing*, and *A Saint in Seven* all represent the landscape of religion as a gratifying, intimate sociality which cannot be "known about" from outside.[12]

The convergence of religious content with the form of the landscape play reaches an apogee in *Four Saints in Three Acts* (1927), Stein's most widely known work for the theatre. Here, the gentle movement of saints in tableaux is represented as an incantation of eccentrically enumerated acts. (Nine scenes

in a row are called "Scene V," in line with Stein's belief that "[c]ounting is the religion of this generation" [*Everybody's* 120].) Her saints represent the principle of equilibrium and harmony through which difference is perceived. One can get acquainted with these saints: the first line of the play, "To know to know to love her so," recalls the idiomatic phrase "to know her is to love her," but the form of knowing available in the play is private, incommunicable, and for the audience, irreconcilable with "knowing about." The spectator of *Four Saints* thus has an experience similar to James's encountering the colour blue: she knows these saints because she sees them. But Stein extends James's fleeting apprehension into an infinite temporal distance, making an eternity of blue, blue, blue – an endless prayer, an infinite string of numbers, a musical phrase in a perpetually repeating loop (Albright 330).

In *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, the knowledge of acquaintance expands the Faustian category of worldly knowledge to include more inchoate ways of knowing. This expansion is demonstrated through the character of Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, the protagonist of the landscape play within the play. Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel always sees the world as if for the first time. We are introduced to her in the play's second scene, when she is found sitting alone in the "wild woods," and we watch her come to life, her eyes blinking: "she stands up with her hands at her sides she opens and closes her eyes and opens them again" (96). With each blink, she must become reacquainted with her surroundings. The bright light seems to dazzle her, and so she sits with her back to the sun. In Stein's theatre landscape, light shines from upstage as though from a horizon line. It calls attention to the depth of the theatre and hence of the woods where we find Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, producing downstage-sloping shadows and elongating the spectator's field of vision: we see that "[i]n the distance there is daylight and near to there is none" (96). The sun illuminates Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, surrounding her with a corona of sunlight; at the same time, this sunlight is cast upon the audience, reversing the direction of the spectacle. Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is also watching us, discovering projections of herself in the bodies of the spectators. As Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's sun-blinded blinking is mirrored in the gaze of the sun-struck audience, the spectators are invited to perceive the scene without forming a coherent image and, instead, to swim in the immediacy of their visual perception.

Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel closely resembles the saints in Stein's landscape plays; indeed, this quadripartite character may be all "four religions" in one. When Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is bitten by a deadly viper, the idyllic scene of the landscape play begins to unravel, as if she had been cast out of Eden, while this allusion to the biblical serpent further emphasizes the questions of knowledge central to the play (Bay-Cheng 82–83). Marguerite

Ida and Helena Annabel begs Doctor Faustus to cure her viper bite, but he refuses. After her body grows weak from the poison, she rises again before the audience, this time wearing a halo: "The curtain at the corner raises and there she is Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel and she has an artificial viper there beside her and a halo is around her not of electric light but of candle light, and she sits there and waits" (104). Here, perhaps, is an icon of Saint Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, accompanied by her emblem, the viper. Or perhaps she has, instead, become four saints: Marguerite, Ida, Helena, Annabel. Just as the real viper that bit her has been transformed into an artificial viper, so the crown of sunshine surrounding Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel in the first scene has been renewed in the halo of candles. Stein writes of this scene that "Ida and Annabel has become a legend" and that "she is hallowed by having been bitten by a viper" (Manuscript fragments). The deadly viper bite has made Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel a saintly object of adoration.

Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's hallowed presence on stage continues to facilitate the relations of acquaintance apparent throughout the play. Under the crepuscular glow of a ballet of lights, she is visited by many persons – pilgrims, perhaps – who "come from everywhere" to bask in her unchanging radiance, recalling the line from *Four Saints in Three Acts*, 'to know to know to love her so.' Although many followers come, "nobody can know" her (106); they can only become acquainted with her as she is bathed in twilight. While her story resembles that of the biblical Eve, then, she is an Eve who is never tempted by the serpent's promise of knowledge; instead, she is assaulted by it. Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel never sought to consume the fruit of forbidden knowledge but, rather, wished to sit with herselves and become acquainted with her environment. Thus, in Stein's *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, she is absolved of the sins that caused the fall. Still, her dramatic landscape is not prelapsarian: there is no paradisal garden, only a wild wood teeming with devilish spirits. Faustus's pursuit of "knowledge-about" the world has summoned them there, presaging his intrusion into the landscape play and his disruption of the knowledge of acquaintance that it supports.

FAUSTIAN KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE WORLD

Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights tracks Stein's evolving view of the modes of knowledge that are available to spectators in the theatre. Her plot enacts the epistemological shifts that occur as Faustus's pursuit of "knowledge-about" the world works to suppress the landscape play and its relations of acquaintance. In the landscape play within a play, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is attuned to the shifting relations among human and non-human agents, always wide-eyed and encountering her surroundings anew; Faustus, however, insists that all entities are discrete and temporally bound. His greatest desire

is to be autonomous: "Let me alone / Oh let me alone," he laments in the song that becomes his leitmotif throughout the play (93; see also 100, 112, 117). Stein's Faustus aspires to individuation: having once wished to raise himself above all other things and persons in the world, he now intends to distinguish these things absolutely from each other. Faustus's pursuit of self-realization, then, is fundamentally opposed to the relational, choral structure of Stein's landscape plays.

The drama of *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* unfolds in the friction between two places: the woods where Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is found, which is the site of the landscape play and its relations of acquaintance, and Faustus's study, which is the locus of his "knowledge-about." The play begins in this study, with an extended aria in which Faustus proclaims that he knows everything there is to know: "I am Doctor Faustus who knows everything can do everything" (89). Faustus insists that he did not need any help from the devil to figure out how to light the electric lights, railing against the devil's temptations and using the pronouns "I" and "me" dozens of times: "if I am the only one who can know what I know then no devil can know what I know and no devil can tell me so" (90). We discover Stein's Faustus not as he zealously pursues higher planes of knowledge, but as he throws a bit of a tantrum. When Mephisto comes nearer to Faustus and tries to pat his arm, indulgently crooning words of consolation, Faustus stamps and cries and gives Mephisto "an awful kick" at the end of the scene (91). What has so irritated Faustus? He is not especially pleased to have been deceived by the devil, but his real concern seems to be that history has apparently come to an end: "there is no hope there is no death there is no life there is no breath, there just is every day all day and when there is no day there is no day" (90). Under the continual glare of the electric lights, the ordinary rhythms of life have stopped, and Faustus has grown restless and bored. Alone in his study, Faustus is confined in a space in which time no longer advances. Like a character in a baroque *Trauerspiel*, Faustus is overburdened by his knowledge that time is out of joint.[13]

Faustus's confinement to his study limits his ability to acquire knowledge about the world. Although he claims to know all there is to know, the first scene repeatedly demonstrates the limits of his awareness and influence. The extent of Faustus's frustration is evident when Mephisto exits and the electric ballet appears. While we might anticipate that the electric lights would be under Faustus's control – Faustus sold his soul in order to access their power, after all – the electric ballet instead has a will of its own, freely swirling across the stage heedless of Faustus's commands. The ballet then gives way to an attendant chorus: "The electric lights glow and a chorus in the distance sings / Her name is her name is her name is Marguerite Ida and

Helena Annabel" (94). Like the glittering lights on a Broadway marquee, Stein's electric lights announce the appearance of Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, suggesting that she is the true star of the play, Faustus merely a diverting opening act. The penumbra of celebrity that surrounds Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel marks a horizon beyond which Faustus's knowledge cannot extend.

The glimmering allure of Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel fascinates and attracts Doctor Faustus, even as her plural identity frustrates his desire to know anything about her. Meeting Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, Faustus is blinded by her duality: "you you are the two and I cannot cannot see you" (101), Faustus says, the doubled "you" and "cannot" emphasizing her multiple identity. The chorus elaborates, "Why cannot he see her / Because he cannot look at her / He cannot look at Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel" (102). The emphasis in this line belongs on the word *and*: that is, Faustus cannot see Marguerite Ida *and* Helena Annabel because he cannot observe both at once. Here, Marguerite Ida might be construed as a particle of light and Helena Annabel as a wave: it is impossible for Doctor Faustus to observe both simultaneously. His inability to see her may recall the physical blinding of Goethe's Faust by the spirit of Care, while the accumulating darkness in this scene – as the electric lights "flicker and flicker" (102) – reinforces the perception that Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel cannot be fully known, by either Faustus or the spectators.

In revealing the limits of Faustus's ability to see or know Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, this scene returns us to the question of what Jamesian "knowledge-about" is all about. Faustus's knowledge circumscribes: he moves "about" the thing there is to know, circumnavigating its exterior and thereby encompassing it. (Dismissing the value of his electric light, Faustus complains that "you can go around just as well without it" [89–90].) As "the electric lights come and go" in his study, Faustus has knowledge both "about" and about them (92). Stein intends for her audience to hear the double sense of "about": for instance, she calls for "A duet between Doctor Faustus and the dog about the electric light about the electric lights" (92), the "about" describing both the content of Faustus's song and his encircling movement. Faustus's attempts to know a thing from all its exterior surfaces, moreover, connects him to the Fausts of Marlowe and Goethe. To know about the world is to travel around it, just as Faust does in Marlowe's and Goethe's versions: "knowledge-about" converts the landscape into a map, imposing order onto an amorphous spatial field, as when Goethe's Faust flies about with Mephistopheles.

Stein's interest in the globally traversing gaze is reinforced in her book of children's poems, *The World Is Round*, which she began just months after

finishing *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (Letter, 15 Aug. 1938) and which bears more than a passing resemblance to her Faust play. This work follows a child named Rose who refuses the idea that the world is round, meets a devil, and ensconces herself on a mountaintop, where she remains alone until she is saved by her cousin's orbiting searchlight. Barbara Will observes that, for Rose, "[s]ubscribing to the belief that the world is round requires subordinating lived experience to abstract knowledge" (341); like Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, Rose favours her own perceptions over "knowledge-about." In both works, Stein shows how empirical knowledge is entangled with the act of mapping, producing a violent relation to space that disciplines and subordinates the forms of understanding that arise through the body. In *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, such knowledge threatens to rationalize the plural personhood of Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel and to subdivide the landscape play, as it were, into separate plots of land. Like Baucis and Philemon, who appear in Goethe's *Faust* as an elderly couple whose cottage by the sea Faust plans to raze (ll. 11,239–42), Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel is two persons intertwining. Faustus cannot know "about" her, since he cannot survey the helical curvature that binds together her two selves; this entwining shape is represented by the curves of the viper, her emblem, which she holds aloft to ward off Faustus's approach.

Faustus is so insistent on "knowing" Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel – if necessary, through violence – that he takes on the guise of another character, the man from over the seas, in whose persona he seeks to establish control over Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's body and her orientation in space. The man from over the seas first materializes after Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel reappears in a halo. As throngs of followers arrive to behold her, the scene swerves from pilgrimage to siege: "They commence to come and more and more come and they come from the sea from the land and from the air. / And she sits. / A man comes from over the seas and a great many are around him" (107). What had seemed to be a burgeoning crowd of devotees now resembles a military incursion.[14] The man speaks to Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel in a sinister, sing-song rhyme: "Pretty pretty dear / She is all my love and always here / And I am hers and she is mine / And I love her all the time" (107). The chorus attempts to turn the crooning man away, yet he continues to assert his presence, singing, "I have won I have won I am your sun" (108). The man's claim to "have won" reinforces the notion that Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel has been subject to a surprise attack, one whose primary aim is to lay sole claim to her. The man then tells her ominously, "I am the only he and you are the only she and we are the only we" (108). This sentence, with its insistently individuated pronouns, rings out in Faustus's voice, echoing his claim in the

first scene that "I am the only one who can know what I know" (90) and refuting Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's plural identity. The resemblance between the lines shows that the man from over the seas is a mask assumed by Faustus, his power newly magnified.

In the scene that follows, the plural and relational forms of knowledge modelled by the saintly Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel compete with Faustus's secular, empirical "knowledge-about." Seeking to repel the treacherous seductions of Faustus in his role as the man from over the seas, Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel reminds him of the limits of his self-knowledge: "No one is one when there are two, look behind you look behind you you are not one you are two" (108), she says, indicating the man's shadow. Against the man's claim that "I am your sun," Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel reminds him that he is lit by the sun's light, just as she is. The man attempts to draw Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel into his orbit, such that he will finally have knowledge about her. But Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel defends the relations of acquaintance by insisting that the man reveal himself in relation to others and in accordance with his position in a landscape. Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel thus resists the totalizing, tautological grammar of the man from over the seas in his claim that "I am the only he and you are the only she and we are the only we" (108). In confronting the man with sensuous evidence of his duality, she also points out that he is double in another sense: he is at once Faustus and the man from over the seas. By taking on that role, Faustus reproduces the division between actor and character in the theatre, exposing the plurality of persons within himself.

The scene in which Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel recognizes the man's shadow is crucial to Stein's account of the gains and losses that result from Faustus's pursuit of knowledge. The significance of this scene is announced by its resonance with the conclusion of Part One of Goethe's *Faust*, when Faust appears before Gretchen in her dungeon cell. In Goethe's poem, Gretchen recognizes Faustus by the sound of his voice, and then, in a second act of recognition, is able to see the devil behind him: "Heinrich! I shrink from thee!" she cries (l. 4610). Stein's Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel, like Goethe's Gretchen, experiences this double recognition of Faustus and his shadow. This scene suggests that the landscape where Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel dwells has been transformed into a dungeon. The intrusion of the man from over the seas, accompanied by Mephisto, into the forest space inhabited by Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel thus threatens to confine the landscape play and to extinguish its relations of acquaintance. This scene marks the climactic conflict of Stein's *Faustus*: as "the ballet of lights fades away" in the second act (110) and the darkness of the dungeon gathers,

the triumph of "knowledge-about" over the knowledge of acquaintance seems assured.

Yet as Act Three begins, Stein suddenly reverses this dynamic, and Faustus discovers that he cannot fully supplant the knowledge of acquaintance and replace it with the particularizing logic of his knowledge about his surroundings. Instead, the knowledge of acquaintance appears to take hold in the very epicentre of Faustus's power. When we find Faustus again in his study, his wish to be solitary, individuated, now seems to have faded: "Ah I do not like that word me, / Why not even if it does rhyme with she" (111), he wonders aloud. Gone is the Faustus of Act One, who claimed, "I am the only one who can know what I know" (90): this Faustus now takes an interest in other pronouns. When the dog barks at Faustus with his signature phrase, "thank you," for the first time Faustus turns around and says "thank you" in return (111). With this small gesture, he begins to acknowledge his relationship to others in his environment. It appears that Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel has taught Faustus to attend to other minds. This qualifying of Faustus's desire to be alone reflects his realization that other persons generate the conditions for his knowledge about them – just as spectators create the conditions for his own existence in the theatre.

This modest act of epistemological contrition is not enough to save Faustus from damnation. In the final scene, Stein fully rejects the notion that the theatre generates knowledge about the world, instead showing how performance forges plural understandings. The closing scene hinges on the repetition of the word *deceive*, as if, through its incantation, to reveal the duplicity of theatrical spectacle; Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel rebukes Faustus for deceiving her (118), while Mephisto and Faustus accuse each other of deceit (117). The theatre is a space of manifold truths, Stein reminds us, not singular illuminations. Faustus realizes that no one is interested in his electric light anymore (115), and without the spirited presence of the electric ballet, *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* descends into darkness. Faustus's zeal for worldly knowledge culminates in an act of murder, fulfilling the threat of violence that has attended his colonizing "knowledge-about" from the outset of the play: urged by Mephisto to "[c]ommit a sin" (116) in order to escape the stasis of his soulless life, Faustus kills the boy and the dog, and Mephisto delivers Faustus to hell. Ensnared by the world of illuminated saints that he had tried desperately to escape, Faustus "sinks into the darkness" until the stage "is all dark" (118). *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* thus exposes the fallacy of Faustus's pursuit of enlightenment by extinguishing the light in the theatre. Instead of a final image, the play closes with a sound – a short duet sung by a boy and a girl who call out, "we are we" (118), their voices entwining like the plural body of Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel. Together, the voices of these characters once again affirm the relational understandings of acquaintance.

Taking their cue from Pericles Lewis's *Religious Experience and the Modernist Novel*, recent scholars have challenged the assumption that literary modernism was a secular movement, revealing instead how writers harnessed religious beliefs and practices in order to discover new resources for modernist form. Far from abandoning an interest in religion, modernist writers in fact rehabilitated religious experience as an aspect of the aesthetic.[15] In *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, Stein participates in this reassessment of religion in modernity in order to probe the limits of modern formations of knowledge. The text reflects on the genre of the landscape play and its syncretic modes of knowing, and tracing how this reappraisal is enacted helps to explain Stein's bewitching treatment of the Faust tale. Modern Faust plays allegorize the transition between two epochs, with Gretchen representing the relations of the pre-modern world and Faust staging the drama of modernity. Stein attends to this formulation but multiplies Gretchen's role in the drama, celebrating the relations of acquaintance that are entangled with religious apprehension.

Throughout *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights*, Stein draws out the significance of Christianity to Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel's theatrical landscape. Stein's choice should not be misconstrued as expressing nostalgia for religious observance. On the contrary, her reappraisal of religion in the Faust narrative critiques how enlightenment knowledge accrues legitimacy through its unyielding, masculine-coded rationalism, with the result that all extra-rational forms of understanding – religious, embodied, experiential – are devalued through their association with the feminine. The character of Faustus illustrates how secular knowledge seeks to rationalize the female body while denying the particularities of female-bodied experience. As Stein presents it, too ardent a desire for modern knowledge leads to a narrowed conception of the varieties of worldly knowing. Stein's reappraisal of religious experience in the play thus celebrates a shift from singular to plural knowledges, reclaiming for modernity what it seemed to have forsaken: the sensory and embodied understandings forged through a proliferation of unscripted encounters.

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NOTES

1. Sarah Bay-Cheng persuasively links this program with *Doctor Faustus Lights the Lights* (76). Like all retellings of the Don Juan story, *Don Giovanni* is also a kind of Faust play; on the affinities between Faust and Don Juan, see Osterkamp.
2. Throughout this article, I use the German name "Faust" to refer to the character across versions of the Faust story, independently of the character's name in any particular work. The name "Faustus" is reserved for the character in Stein's play.
3. Many of Stein's interpreters have claimed that Stein's *Faustus* is especially "theatrical" (see Bay-Cheng 74). Betsy Alayne Ryan has attempted to quantify the extent to which this is the case, introducing an instrument for assessing putatively theatrical attributes such as monologue, dialogue, stage directions, and the presence of background or context (161–64). Ryan's account affirms that *Doctor Faustus* does exhibit more of the attributes associated with Aristotelian, conflict-based drama than do many of Stein's other plays, but her data also suggests that the claims to *Faustus*'s being uniquely "theatrical" may be overstated.
4. Stein's idea for a "ballet of electric lights" may have been inspired by Francis Picabia's set design for the ballet *Relâche*, staged at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris in 1924, which featured a wall of electric lights that blinded the audience. The ballet included a tableau after Lucas Cranach's painting "Adam and Eve" (1528), suggesting further resonance with Stein's *Faustus*, which plays with the imagery of this myth. There is no evidence that Stein attended the 1924 ballet, but she may well have known about it: she and Picabia became friends in the 1930s (Dydo 542), and *Relâche* was a significant Dada event. I am grateful to Samuel Adams for calling my attention to Picabia's ballet.
5. Stein was of Jewish descent, but she gave no indication of a personal investment in religious practice. For example, her friend Sammy Steward reported her as saying "that's enough talk about religion. I am really not all that concerned about it" during a conversation in 1937 (Steward 13).
6. In the 1926 essay, Stein reflects on the significance of description to her writing practice. As Ulla Dydo observes, the term "acquaintance" alludes to James's construct of the "knowledge of acquaintance," even as Stein's repetition of the phrase "acquaintance with description" throughout the essay "takes on the overtones of a welcome, an invocation, or a prayer" (123).
7. The first written version of the Faust legend, *Faustbuch*, properly titled *Historia von D. Johann Fausten*, was printed in Frankfurt in 1587; the text claims to relay the life of a historical Faust born in the late fifteenth century. Christopher Marlowe was the first to adapt the tale for the stage in

The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus (1594). While many other dramatic works followed, it is Goethe's *Faust* – the composition of which occupied many decades of the author's life, with the final version appearing posthumously in 1832 – which earned the tale its highest literary fame. Goethe's *Faust* catalyzed a string of quixotic attempts to produce his closet drama for the stage, as well as the creation of new dramatic adaptations on the Faust theme.

8. Other significant modern Faust plays include Paul Valéry's unfinished *Mon Faust* (Weinberg 4) as well as Else Lasker-Schüler's *IchundIch*, composed in the early forties and suppressed until 1970 (Fraiman-Morris 337). The fashion for Faust extended to dramatists such as Edward Gordon Craig, who was enamoured of Goethe and described plans for a *Faust* that he never staged (Newman 246n43).
9. For instance, James writes of mystical experiences:

> You will then be convinced, I trust, that these states of consciousness of "union" form a perfectly definite class of experiences, of which the soul may occasionally partake, and which certain persons may live by in a deeper sense than they live by anything else with which they have acquaintance. (*Varieties* 96)

10. On James's influence on Stein, see Ruddick; Watson. On Stein's debt to James in "Composition as Explanation," see Meyer 95.
11. Bonnie Marranca writes that Stein had a "probing, empirical style when it came to questions of human thought, as if to corroborate James's contention that 'the mind is at every stage a theatre of simultaneous possibilities'" ("Presence" 5). Multiple critics have suggested that Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts* may borrow from *Varieties of Religious Experience*, whose chapters on "saintliness" resonate with Stein's presentation of saints in the play (Sutherland 128; Marranca, "St. Gertrude").
12. Marc Robinson argues that *Four Saints in Three Acts* unsettles the distinction between internal and external, which he calls "the most persistent theme in Stein's theater" (187). By relaxing this boundary, the libretto reveals how Stein "subtly refuses to endorse the disciple's typical subservience to God in favor of a more egalitarian union" (191–92).
13. Walter Benjamin develops his theory of the *Trauerspiel* in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). Joseph Cermatori argues persuasively that this theory can illuminate Stein's *Four Saints in Three Acts*, a claim that I extend here.
14. In an unpublished draft, the man from over the seas is named John, an almost comically prosaic name when juxtaposed with Marguerite Ida and Helena Annabel (Stein, Manuscript fragments). The name suggests

that the man from over the seas may be American, as implied by the geography.

15. Following on Lewis's contribution, scholars including Matthew Mutter, Suzanne Hobson, and Gregory Erickson have explored how modernist letters entered into dialogue with religious beliefs and structures. Relatedly, scholars of nineteenth- and twentieth-century theatre – including, among others, Edmund B. Lingan and Craig Prentiss – have investigated the persistence of religion on the modern stage.

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