

'The Flowers of Friendship': Gertrude Stein and Georges Hugnet

Katharine Swarbrick and Jane Goldman

Abstract

Gertrude Stein's work *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded* started life as a translation of the poem *Enfances* by French Surrealist poet, Georges Hugnet. Ever since, literary criticism has emphasised, at many levels, the distance between them. 'The Flowers of Friendship' examines recent critical debates on the collaboration between Stein and Hugnet and asks whether there are other ways of thinking about distance and proximity in the case of these two poems. The authors question accepted views on *Enfances* and Stein's response to it, opening up the interface between poetics and psychoanalytic theory to explore the collaborative process afresh.

Sexuality, authority and translation are key terms at the core of ongoing analyses of the artistic contribution of Gertrude Stein. One work which brings into focus the significance of all these terms is her poem *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded: Written on a Poem by Georges Hugnet*. The historical context in which the publication came about is not without interest in itself, as it frames the well-known dispute between Stein and Hugnet over the question of authorial ownership and the status of Stein's 'translation' of Hugnet's poem *Enfances*. Prior to her 'translation,' or 'reflection' as she terms it, of his work in the summer of 1930, Stein enjoyed a productive and mutually beneficial literary friendship with Hugnet, whom she met in 1927. As poet, artist, publisher and critic, he translated into French and published a number of her texts, including *The Making of Americans* and *Portraits*. Following her work on *Enfances*, Stein objected to appearing as Hugnet's translator, her name listed beneath his, on the title page in the American journal *Pagany*, but she intervened too late to stop the publication of the *Pagany* Edition. So *Enfances* and her 'reflection' on it were published for the first time side by side in *Pagany* in 1931. But Stein did make the last minute addition in *Pagany* of a title for her 'reflection': *Poem Pritten on Pfances of Georges Hugnet*, a mocking, punning new heading ('on Pfances' is a homonym for Hugnet's French title, *Enfances*). Plans for a second edition of the two poems to be published in Paris were aborted, and Stein and Hugnet went their separate ways.

Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded was published separately by Alice Toklas in the Plain Edition series in 1931. Hugnet, who likewise recognised that the 'reflection' made no attempt at faithful translation, resorted to publishing his own poem separately in the Editions Cahiers d'art in 1933. Subsequently *Pagany's* editor, Richard Johns 'came to feel that he had printed a poem in French by Georges Hugnet and a completely original piece in English by Gertrude Stein, rather than a translation.'¹

The relationship between the two poems has nonetheless continued to be the subject of important critical debate. Stein's adaptation is negatively assessed by critics such as Marianne DeKoven and Richard Bridgman. Bridgman judges that 'Stein's version suffers badly in the presence of the original,'² presenting a poor job of translation suggestive of bad



French. On the other hand, Ulla Dydo's recent detailed analysis of the two works in *Gertrude Stein: The Language that rises*,³ is a negative assessment rather of Hugnet, arguing that the immature, over-lengthy *Enfances* exasperated Stein and that her irritation is apparent in her transposition of the original. Dydo presents aspects of the personal side of Hugnet and Stein's friendship to argue how the older, experienced poet becomes annoyed, even scornful, of her young collaborator's laboured romanticism.

Such evaluations stress the distance between the two works, and the idea that their parallel publication ironically marks a definitive separation from what went before, is highlighted in the discussions of Stein scholars who have come to see *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded* as a radical turning point in Stein's artistic career. Here Stein will understand and access the proactive, parodic voice which unleashes a startling new poetics. The result is an antagonistic rewriting of *Enfances*, specifically at the level of its depiction of a sexuality seen as markedly masculine in nature, which is displaced by Stein's celebration of lesbian love. Critical appraisals of this kind establish the radical, anti-patriarchal impact of Stein's work, through the act of eclipsing the original text. **KS**

'The Flowers of Friendship': Gertrude Stein

Stein's poem had a significance within her oeuvre which can be understood without access to Hugnet's poem. Stein saw *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded* as constituting a breakthrough in her poetic technique. It marks a departure from her technique in *Tender Buttons* where 'I was making poetry but and it seriously troubled me, dimly I knew that nouns made poetry but in prose I no longer needed the help of nouns and in poetry did I need the help of nouns. Was there not a way of naming things that would not invent names, but mean names without naming them.'⁴ In *Tender Buttons* Stein had sought to evade a 'naming' which we might consider patriarchal inscription (for to name is to claim dominion over, to own): 'Think of all that early poetry' she reminds us, 'think of Homer, think of Chaucer, think of the Bible and you will see what I mean you will really realize that they were drunk with nouns, to name to know how to name earth sea and sky and all that was in them was enough to make them live and love in names, and that is what poetry is.'⁵ In *Tender Buttons* Stein seeks to name without naming. The poem is divided into three parts: 'Objects,' 'Rooms' and 'Food.' It is now argued by feminist criticism that these are references to the feminine; and that Stein's project is to rescue the feminine from reification; from being the object, named and owned. This interpretation is assisted by recognising that the very title, *Tender Buttons*, refers to the clitoris - the site of autonomous feminine pleasure.

The poem *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded*, on the other hand, came about not from Stein's direct observation of things, objects or people; not from trying to give noun status to what has been suppressed (the feminine), we might gather, but from the attempt to *translate* a poem by a man. She summarises the debacle with Hugnet in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*:



Georges Hugnet wrote a poem called *Enfance*. Gertrude Stein offered to translate it for him but instead she wrote a poem about it. This at first pleased Georges Hugnet too much and then did not please him at all. Gertrude Stein then called the poem *Before the Flowers of Friendship Faded Friendship Faded*. Everybody mixed themselves up in all this. The group broke up.⁶

Here, we learn that afterwards 'Gertrude Stein was very upset and then consoled herself by telling all-about it in a delightful short story called *From Left to Right* and which was printed in the *London Harper's Bazaar*.' The story is in fact called 'Left to Right: A Study in the New Manner, by Gertrude Stein,' and sports a two line epigraph: 'Everybody/ Knows all about this Thing' Georges Hugnet appears in it as 'Arthur William'; Stein is presumably the first person narrator. The title, 'Left to Right,' which may refer to the parallel layout of Hugnet's original poem and Stein's translation in *Pagany*, also seems to describe Stein's precautions, after the row, against meeting with the Hugnet camp in the street: 'And now before I go out I always look up and down to see that none of them are coming.'⁷

In her portrait, *Henry James*, Stein gives a rather cryptic account of the great significance for her of her attempt to translate Hugnet's poem:

An accident is when a thing happens. A coincidence is when a thing is going to happen and does.

DUET

And so it is not an accident but a coincidence that there is a difference between Shakespeare's sonnets and Shakespeare's plays. The coincidence is with *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded*.⁸

Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded is somehow to embody the distinction between accident and coincidence and between Shakespeare's sonnets and plays. Stein plays upon this theory throughout *Henry James*, and titles the refrain a duet. A clearer explanation occurs in her essay, 'Narration':

Hitherto I had always been writing, with a concentration of recognition of the thing that was to be existing as my writing as it was being written. And now the recognition was prepared beforehand there it was already recognition a thing I could recognize because it had been recognized before I began my writing, and a very queer thing was happening. ... The words as they came out had a different relation than any words I had hitherto been writing ... I realized that words came out differently if there is no recognition as the words are forming because recognition had already taken place.⁹

Stein is in the act of translating - not objects, or experience into words - but words into other words. She seems to have had a Saussurean moment: language, she recognises, refers not to the object world, but to itself.

We might also consider the significance for Stein's poem of classical models of imitation. Traditionally, most (male) poets would try their hand at imitating Homer, Virgil, Horace, Ovid and Catullus - as well as paying some homage to the fragmented and elided Sappho. Marcel Proust, in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, provides a different model, and one more



contemporaneous with Stein.¹⁰ But Stein, translating a contemporary male poet, writes her own poem *on* his - as her subtitle tells us ('Written *on a poem by Georges Hugnet*'). This seems to me to constitute a reversal of the classical Delphic tradition, where according to the myth, Apollo, the God of poetry, founded his shrine at Delphi by slaying a terrifying she-dragon, who represents a 'monstrous' autonomous femininity, alien to that approved by, and approving of, patriarchy.¹¹ The feminine associations of Apollo's shrine are erased in later accounts so that Apollo appears to be founding a shrine for the first time, not displacing one he opposes. Women writers, acknowledging and resurrecting the classical *drakaina*, have to negotiate a poetic tradition founded on their own displacement and destruction. The act of inscription, of illumination, may otherwise be simultaneously an act of (self)-erasure and occlusion.

Stein is playfully reversing the patriarchal tradition of the erasure of the feminine, then, by writing on top of Hugnet's poem, and erasing the masculine origins of her 'translation.'¹² Yet published alongside Hugnet's poem, Stein's erasure is, of course, always and already undone. But this is not the form in which we have come to read Stein's poem. Presented alone, as *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded*, it may appear a brutal palimpsest in which, we are led to believe, hardly a fragment of Hugnet's original survives. Its subtitle, 'Written on a poem by Georges Hugnet,' boasts the act of erasure, leaving the reader to project an absent, patriarchal text.

In the title, subtitle, and opening lines of the poem published as *Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded* there seems to be a conflict between grammatical sense, verbal sensuality, free association, rhythm and repetition:

In the one hundred small places of myself my youth,
And myself in if it is the use of passion,
In this in it and in the nights alone
If the next to night which is indeed not well
I follow you without it having slept and went.
Without the pressure of a place with which to come unfolded folds are a pressure and
an abusive stain¹³

Are there perhaps here the remains of the persona created in George Hugnet's poem, now fading, or drowning in Stein's? Is Stein's poem 'following' or obliterating Hugnet's with her own 'abusive stain'? She is gleefully sleeping in his bed, messing up his sheets. In doing so she is leaving her pungent female mark on a surrealist tradition of celebrating male ejaculation, which is exemplified in such works as Marcel Duchamp's *La Sainte Vierge* and *Fountain*. In the many sections that follow there seems to be a struggle between masculine and feminine discourses and sexualities. There are references to bizarre arrangements or positions: 'So he says. It is easy to put heads together really. Head to head it is easily done and easily said head to head.' The rhythm builds up into moments of unison which in context



suggest the interrogation of sexual relations: the questioning of joining two into one in cadences suggestive of merging and splitting. Yet during all this the male seems to be on his way out: 'He went and came and had to go. No one has had to say he had to go come here to go go there to go go go to come to come to go to go and come and go.' Is this the masculine ebbing out of a poem about feminine experience? Is this the obliteration of a masculine discourse and the celebration on top of it of lesbian sexuality? This seems to be the position of the final poem which begins by declaring: 'There are a few here now and the rest can follow a cow.'¹⁴ 'Cow' in Gertrude Stein's circles, we now understand, was lesbian slang for orgasm.

In the last lines, added for the revised edition of the poem formerly known as *Poem Pritten on Pfances of Georges Hugnet*, Stein boastfully underscores her writerly imposition by replacing the text ('Pfances of Georges Hugnet') with the author himself as the superseded object:

What is my name.
That is the game
Georges Hugnet
By Gertrude Stein.¹⁵

She occupies his subjective terrain, disrupting Hugnet's authorial status. But perhaps her own authority is also undermined by this game. Who is the 'I' in the poem? Stein's subject here seems to be pulling itself free of a masculine subjectivity, to reinscribe and celebrate the feminine over - and on top of - the masculine. But, in this feminist/postmodernist reading of Stein's text, are we constructing or projecting, in the absence of Hugnet's poem (in French or in translation), a phantom 'heterosexist' and patriarchal version of *Enfances*? Interestingly, Juliana Spahr in introducing a recent reprinting of the *Pagany* edition of the poems in parallel, agrees with this reading, and finds Hugnet's poem heterosexist:

Stein actively opposes translation's normative impulse to make another culture discernible and digestible; while Hugnet's poems are often concerned with heterosexual sex, male genitalia, and onanism, these are all absent in Stein's poems. ... Moments like these, in which the writer/translator is also reader, are radical ones. Such moments, for example, allow Stein to pursue her own political, cultural agenda and to abandon the poems' heterosexism and replace it with her relationship with Toklas. As she writes, 'I love my love with an a/ Because she is a queen.'¹⁶

Stein's poem, by virtue of its apparently violent displacement of Hugnet's work, may be read as an overwhelming and in places authoritarian lesbian text. However, by restoring its encounter with Hugnet's poem, it may be read differently: as one part of a 'duet' as Stein termed it, or a 'dialogue' as it has been called since. **JG**



'The Flowers of Friendship': Georges Hugnet

The landmark status accorded to Gertrude Stein's *Poem Pritten on Pfances of George Hugnet*, means it has tended to attract greater attention than *Enfances*, and it is doubtless true that assumptions about Hugnet's less prominent work are made on the basis of arguments which focus on Stein's feminist displacement of it. However, recent debate has re-opened the question of the two poems' interaction with each other. The idea of an 'intertextual dialogue' is explored by Barbara Will in her article of 2004 'Lost in translation: Stein's Vichy collaboration,' which presents Stein's work as a playful subversion of Hugnet, illustrating the manner in which Stein understands 'translation' creatively, as 'listening' and 'talking back.' In doing so, Will's analysis shifts away from readings which present Stein's version as a feminist rewriting, and moves towards questions of language: traditional syntax and referentiality are deconstructed by the open-ended play of the signifier.

Language in Stein's transposition of Hugnet is likewise the focus of Marjorie Perloff's 'Barbed-Wire Entanglements.' Parody, pastiche and pun hold sway in a text which Perloff presents as exemplifying a shift in modernist poetics instigated by a new adversarial poetics of the early 1930s. Here, says Perloff 'reference ... does not insure mimetic representation. Nothing is taken for granted; nothing is quite what it seems to be.'¹⁷ Perloff, like Will, is at pains to show that Stein 'listens' closely to Hugnet's text, taking on its explicitly masturbatory references to male sexual arousal and pleasure, but Stein's text uses such references above all to subvert language, foregrounding the ambiguous play of the signifier as she moves toward a place which 'precludes reference entirely.'¹⁸ Meanwhile, the status of *Enfances* is largely unchanged in these discussions. It remains a less innovative text poetically, and a work which portrays sexuality as firmly under the dominion of a masculine erotics.

What is clear, however, from the critical perspectives explored above, is that these two major strands of analysis, sexual politics and language, which dominate discussions of the Stein/Hugnet collaboration, are not strictly separable. It seems impossible to discuss one without discussing the other. This goes back to a fundamental point about the collaboration between the two poets which has not yet been explicitly made: Stein unleashes a new powerful, decentred poetics by putting into play the signifiers of an original text, which is not just any text, but a poem about sexual discovery and phallic pleasure conveyed in the attitude of revolutionised consciousness which characterises surrealist poetry. This cannot be a coincidence.

What I aim to do in the discussion that follows is to indicate a space where an interface between sexuality and the signifier, the mimetic and the non-mimetic, the masculine and the feminist can be established, and where these terms can interconnect. Only through drawing all these points of interconnection together can we understand better how the 'translation' of Stein by Hugnet produced what it did. Let us start by looking at the relation between Hugnet and Stein, with a view to re-examining the former's alleged heterosexist, patriarchal credentials.



If we return briefly to the historical context in which Stein and Hugnet meet, a context recently illuminated by Ulla Dydo in *Gertrude Stein: The Language that rises*, what emerges is an unusual type of love relationship which is eclipsed by their subsequent quarrel, but is also its cause.¹⁹ The closeness and parting of the two poets is in fact the key to approaching not something that separated them, but something that they had in common. After all, Hugnet, like, Stein, is an avant-garde poet, and an experimenter in the field of sexuality; when Stein approaches his work, something holds her attention and moves her 'adaptation' of *Enfances* through a series of poetic transpositions, which, as critics have shown, continually interact with the Hugnet text in latent, playful and elaborate ways. There is an underlying link or insight between the two poets on which this interaction is based, and I would suggest it turns around the notion of recognition, which Stein repeatedly returns to in her insistence on the significance of her 'translation' of Hugnet's poem. What is it that Stein can recognise, because it had already been recognised – in this case, by Georges Hugnet?

In choosing his subject, and in the manner in which he treats it, Hugnet, writing *Enfances* in 1930, shows an affiliation with surrealist ideas that have been in the air since 1924. Hugnet joined the surrealist group in 1932, but was already familiar with key figures associated with the avant-garde at this time, including Pablo Picasso, Duchamp, Tristan Tzara, and Robert Desnos, whose company he had enjoyed since 1920. André Breton's *Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme* published in 1924, undertook to formulate the nature of surrealism by placing at its core the role of the imagination, the dream, the operations of the subconscious mind. Such an emphasis brought the perceived imaginative and irrational propensities of the child into new focus, and childhood became for surrealism, a privileged, exalted state of being.²⁰

Informing Breton's presentation of the surrealist propensities of the mind is his interpretation of the theories and practice of Freudian psychoanalysis which likewise gave new status to childhood. In 1922 Breton began reading the first translations in French of Freud's *Introduction to Psychoanalysis* and the *Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, texts in which Freud introduces his findings on the significance of the psychical life of children. Here Freud presents the child as expressing more directly, with fewer of the inhibitions of the adult, the unconscious operations which the analyst seeks to uncover, but more significantly, and controversially, he also insists on the presence of sexual drives and feelings in children. This coincidence in the arena of childhood of the irrational and the erotic, make it an exemplary theme for the explorations of the surrealist imagination.

My argument is that even before he joins the surrealist group, Hugnet shares its commitment to eroticism and that this in turn stems from the influence of Freud. But if the instinctual spontaneity of childhood sexuality is to be explored under the aegis of Freud, then the poet must sooner or later be confronted with the psychoanalytic discovery that heterosexual norms and the aims of genital satisfaction are marginalized in infancy in a primary bisexual disposition of the individual. In addition, the child's original libidinal eclecticism drives it to invest potentially any object or part of the body with erotic significance:



in fact this pregenital organisation of the drives leads Freud to summarise the sexual drives of the infant as polymorphously perverse.²¹ Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in which these ideas are introduced were published by Gallimard in French translation in 1925. They would have found an avid readership in surrealist circles. In *Enfances*, Hugnet's poetic exploration, as we shall see, will indeed lead him to an evocation of the primordial bisexuality of the erotic disposition which, because of its association to the child keeps its distance from the issue of homosexuality to which the surrealist group proved so averse. Hugnet will also be unable to avoid evoking a pregenital organisation of the drives, characteristic of infantile sexuality, which focuses in the first instance on oral satisfactions. All these evocations of sexuality certainly connote phallic pleasure as well, provided this phallus is understood, psychoanalytically, as an element of the Freudian concept of the drive, and not as normalised, masculine heterosexism. For all these facets of the erotic will take this work further and further away from the evocation of a heterosexual norm.

From the outset Hugnet evokes *Enfances* as a plural concept: it is a cycle of thirty poems presenting not a singular, univocal instance in memory and time, but a rather a chain of multiple, textual, imaged knots, each attempting to grasp an insurmountable moment, a facet of the organic, oneiric plasticity of the child's imagination:

Childhood in wool
in spite of the weeks
childhood in the street
no goodbye no harm done
playing with chance
with the laughing cotton,
compare your naked bodies
childhood in the farmyard
with the birds like dogs
announcing inept thieves
I lived that childhood
and so many others ...²²

Among this plurality of figures circulates a libidinal current which sexualises the senses, takes in the smell of love and tastes it as 'vanilla, vanilla.'²³ Strongly oral in character, it moves as 'an insatiable appetite' culminating in images of 'milky-mouthed childhood'²⁴ which evoke unmistakably the primordial object of oral desire - the breast. Multiple personifications of the term childhood are sometimes directly apostrophized:

I'm calling, and my voice goes straight
to where you can hear me. Do you hear me?²⁵



These personifications have a protean fluidity springing from the various nuances of the French term 'enfance,' which encompasses in its meanings both infancy and youth, boyhood and girlhood. While it is possible in almost all instances to read the interpellated figure of 'enfance' as an allegory of the narrator's lost youth - one with which he interacts throughout in splendid solitary and masturbatory dialogue - it is also impossible to remain unaware of the regular mutation of this figure, aided by the feminine gender of the term, into a specifically female persona, the narrator's other childhood, his feminine double; the one whose summoned presence coupled with her hallucinatory intimacy, places her both outside and inside the poet's own psyche. The metamorphosis of the figure, sustained by apposition in the line, 'and your childhood, this woman,'²⁶ continually evokes a composite figure, androgynous in nature, bisexual in its choice of object, which is given explicit visual representation in the engravings Hugnet selected to illustrate his publication of *Enfances* in Editions Cahiers d'art - the flowing, receptive and emissive orifices of the figures of Joan Miró. The projection of this feminine other, whilst it is in part absorbed and enveloped by the narrator, introduces nonetheless a potential radical otherness of sexual experience to which we shall return.

Permeated as it is by these kinds of image, the poem intimates at every turn its unconscious knowledge of infantile sexuality. And it is the labile quality of the libidinal drive which Hugnet conveys everywhere in his text that casts a different, more ambiguous and diffuse light on critical readings which emphasise the specifically masculine nature of sexual arousal presented in *Enfances*. Taking such a salient example as the image 'masturbation clothes me in your gowns,'²⁷ the Freudian reader will find allusions to transvestism as well as to the concept of the fetish due to the garments evoked in this line ('robes'), the primary sense of which suggests female clothing; female masturbation also figures as a veiled reference of the image, further problematising the supposed orthodoxy of representations of sexuality.

Other highly nuanced aspects of vocabulary and image tend at strategic moments in the text to filter or inflect sexual allusions; the narrator evokes the picture of himself wearing out his body, haphazardly abandoned on red eiderdowns,²⁸ but the cosy, domestic connotations of the French term greatly deflate the potential sexual abandon of the rest of the image. In a similar procedure the narrator is described, and I paraphrase - coming out the shadows, dressed as he always is, in clothes the colour of vegetables.²⁹ What do these vegetables suggest? An image of seeding erection? Or a comic trope in which unexpected juxtaposition subverts any serious picture of virile eroticism? Just such an effect is conjured up by the title of the collection of erotic writing by Hugnet, recently published under the title *Le Pantalon de la fauvette*.³⁰ If the trousers of 'pantaloon' suggest masculine genital obsessions to the reader, the impression is entirely offset by the wearer of the trousers, the 'fauvette,' which is a warbler bird.

If we read Hugnet's *Enfances* in this manner it becomes a different poem to the one which, according to Ulla Dydo, exasperated Stein with its romanticism.³¹ It also presents something other than the straightforward heterosexism with which Juliana Spahr associates it, as it implicitly deflates representations of hegemonic male sexuality at many points.³² We may



also start to become more aware of explicit themes of anxiety and separation which emphasise the limits of this sexuality at other levels. Here again, Freudian theory can provide a framework which helps to throw into relief the main narrative line of the poem. Freud's account of sexuality in children is inseparable from his introduction of the Oedipus complex, which describes how the first and most intense love object of the child, the mother, must be given up under the cultural pressures which pronounce her as sexually taboo. The interdiction weighing upon the pursuit of this sexual relationship is supported in the psyche by a punishment envisaged as the threat of castration. Substitutes for the first object must be found, and in a parallel development, the deviancy of the drives is reined in. In his account of pregenital pleasure, Freud describes how the freedom of drives succumbs to the perception of sexual difference and the polymorphous perversity of the child is inhibited and restructured by the normalizing strictures of the genital. At this point the assumption of masculine sexuality, and the pleasures of the substitute object, can only be realised by internalising the threat of castration.³³

Under the aegis of Oedipus the sexes are definitively separated, and the erotic life of the maturing self is reduced to the enactment of a failure - failure to retain the pregenital link to an other of the other sex. From a surrealist perspective, the individual has gone astray in terms of his/her erotic spontaneity. This inevitable trajectory is expressed by Hugnet in the following lines:

pleasure died on the way
from one climate to another
and its shadow no longer moves.³⁴

Several verses later he conveys an image of parting where the rigours of conventional emotion deliver the final blow to the intimacy of childhood, with the feminine other who is the poet's androgynous self:

The path ends in a big landscape
and your jealousy under a brimless hat³⁵

As Hugnet moves into the penultimate stanza, he gives us this image of childhood as a crime over which a queen weeps. It is not impossible to read the concluding verses of *Enfances* as the reification of a lost plenitude represented as a projection of the poet's hermaphroditic calling, which he is obliged to renounce in order to assume his genital direction. The polymorphous pleasures of the child presented throughout *Enfances* remain fundamentally tied to this loss - acquiring through it all their intoxicating, nostalgic power.

Taking all these elements of *Enfances* together, I would propose that Hugnet mobilises the resources of surrealist language to convey a certain type of sexual enjoyment associated with phallic pleasure; for phallic pleasure is certainly everywhere in *Enfances*



provided it is understood as distinct from the ideas of the rigidly masculine and genital. He then asks Gertrude Stein to 'translate' his text – and not by chance. He does so because what he delineates in *Enfances* is not the phallus itself as the dominant sexual organ, but the function of the phallus, which is something different - and this function points to something beyond itself which Stein is asked to recognise.

Freud stresses polymorphous perversity as the primary manifestation of human sexuality and this is taken up by his successor, Jacques Lacan, for whom this polymorphous pleasure is rooted in the function of the phallus. One place we might look for Lacan's succinct presentation of phallic *jouissance* - to use his term - is in the central chapters (6 and 7) of his Seminar XX, *Encore*, of 1975, where Lacan expounds his thesis of the absence of the sexual relation and where he consequently defines the act of love as 'the polymorphous perversion of the male in the case of the speaking being.'³⁶ Yet this phallic *jouissance* is far from unproblematic, nor does it connote mastery or power within the discourse of psychoanalysis; for it is based not on anatomical reality, but on the original, subjective meaning given to the phallus by the child of both sexes on whose own body it is recognised as lacking. In other words, the primacy of the phallus in the unconscious subjectivisation of desire comes about only in its articulation with lack - castration - where it is inscribed not in the domain of anatomy, but in the domain of representation.

Lacan's presentation of the phallic function in *Encore* then proceeds to address the concept of lack at every conceivable level. Without castration defined as 'something which says no to the phallic function,' the male subject cannot take on the woman - except he only believes he does so; 'what he takes on is the cause of his desire, the cause I have designated as the *object a*.'³⁷ What Lacan means is that phallic *jouissance* reaches only the partial object of the drive and is consigned to the path which the drive takes. It turns back on itself and fades almost instantaneously in a movement destined to highlight the curtailment of phallic enjoyment. It is on this failure of the phallus to reach the other of the other sex that Lacan bases his thesis of what he calls the absence of the sexual relation. The limits of phallic *jouissance* are then underlined by Lacan's delineation of an enjoyment which lies beyond the phallus, and he explicitly links this with the feminine. Despite the designations 'feminine' and 'phallic,' Lacan makes it clear that both types of *jouissance* are nonetheless open to individuals of either sex, whose subjective position, not gender, determines their experience in this respect.

My argument is that phallic *jouissance*, depicted through the imaginary satisfactions of polymorphous pleasure, is conveyed everywhere in Hugnet's *Enfances*. An entire scale of masturbatory, fetishised, infantilised excitement is sounded as the poem progresses. The androgynous protagonist is a reminder that phallic *jouissance* is open to masculine and feminine subjects alike, founded as it is in subjective meaning not anatomy. But *Enfances*, having sounded its scale, arrives also at its limits - its articulation with castration – and looks beyond. Beyond lies a *jouissance* of a different quality which Lacan finally comes to in *Encore*



- a supplementary *jouissance* - and it is possible to find allusions to this among the more enigmatic references evoked by Hugnet in *Enfances*. Poem 19 is striking in this respect:

And your childhood, this woman,
this woman like a woman
and no more and no less,
like a woman that's all
and that's more than a fountain
more than the sea, more and more³⁸

Here Hugnet evokes the concept of more – a surplus. And this surplus, this more than a fountain - and fountain is Hugnet's poetic rendering of the phallus - in turn evokes a *jouissance* which goes beyond a visible and finite horizon – the sea. In poem 17, surplus enjoyment is again expressed by Hugnet as sexual knowledge in the form of a song which the allegory of childhood, suggestive as ever of this feminine other, this real or dreamed of sexual partner, teaches the narrator through a subliminal transference of thoughts:

and I love this song
which I shouldn't have known in my head
if your head had remained on the other side.³⁹

Hugnet's song projects a feminine double who remains irreducibly other; and this other connotes a difference pointing away from phallic pleasure as the sole *jouissance* common to both sexes. If we become attuned to the expression of this surplus enjoyment, Stein's interpretation of the poem becomes particularly eloquent and dynamic: as she indicates in her rendering of Hugnet's lines from poem 17 above, 'Head to head it is easily done and easily said head to head in bed.' We could understand her meaning as being that this surplus enjoyment is easy to convey under the right conditions. These conditions entail the deployment of the signifier at a level which frays a path outside the limits of the phallic: as Stein puts it, 'Any pleasure leads to me and I lead them away from pleasure and from me.'⁴⁰ Such a reading of Stein demands a heightened awareness of the ways in which language and representation are linked with a sexual thematics in Stein's 'adaptation,' which effects a transposition of the organisation of phallic enjoyment conveyed in *Enfances* into a poetics which will allow this surplus enjoyment to come into its own.

At a linguistic level, Stein pushes poetic language to the limits of signification, producing the startling slippage of syntax and sentence structure whose coherence and direction become apparent once this objective of redrawing the map of sexual possibility becomes apparent. Stein systematically collapses Hugnet's representations of the sexual act, which implicitly, if not directly, evoke the familiar scenario - the heterosexual couple, the heterosexual act, the bed. Where Hugnet's text says:



I like having you like a bad habit
when we're in bed in your room⁴¹

Stein's replies:

He likes to be with her so he says does he like to be with her
so he says.⁴²

We could envisage the effects of Stein's occlusion of this central representation of sexuality as what happens when a circulating flow of meanings changes its patterns, the moment the main route - which is to say the dominant, hegemonic form of sexual expression - is blocked off. At this point a hundred rich networks and detours open up around the theme of sexuality and start to be heard in language; sex is nowhere directly represented, but everywhere alluded to; enjoyment no longer takes the phallus as its focal point, but is diffused along the poetic line. Hence sexual symbols (for example a bouquet or house representing the female genitalia; trees, hats mushrooms, representing those of the male) saturate Stein's text but tend, as it were, to lie on the surface of the verse, without being rooted, or organised, in a particular representation. Where Hugnet's poem says:

Even less would I be the tree in which your repose
used the main fork as two living arms⁴³

Stein's replies:

A house and a tree a little house and a large tree ...⁴⁴

What is achieved here by Stein, I would argue, is something that goes beyond an aggressive obliteration of masculine sexuality through lesbian reference and image. What comes into focus is a new proximity between the two writers which reveals a new form of translation. For Stein is not indifferent to the phallic function Hugnet invokes. This function is the starting point for the exploration of a something more, approached at the level of a structural and affective relocation of sexuality by Stein of Hugnet's intimation of more, which throws into relief a further dimension of sexual enjoyment. When Stein brings together two classic symbols representing the principles of the feminine and masculine, she proposes not an elision of one pole by the other, conventionally the elision of the feminine by the one representative of sexual difference seen as the masculine phallus, but a production of a surplus enjoyment - more - which lies beyond the phallus here evoked as 'the one':

And a bouquet makes a woods



A hat makes a man
And any little more is better than
The one.⁴⁵

This challenge to the notion of one occurs elsewhere:

'One might be one.
Might one be one.'⁴⁶

This is a sly question Stein asks implicitly throughout, whilst the emphasis on the 'more' is everywhere alluded to: 'And little things do feed a little more than all',⁴⁷ 'as which were more than the two made it do',⁴⁸ 'That they eat more when many are more there',⁴⁹ 'So when a little one has more and any one has more and who has more who has more....'⁵⁰ And what is Stein aiming above all to convey in the enigmatic lines which challenge the half that is a whole?

It is always just as well
That there is a better bell
Than that with which a half is a whole⁵¹

Let us bring these lines into relation with Lacan's presentation of sexuality in *Encore*, where we find an account in which phallic *jouissance* is only half the story.⁵² Phallic *jouissance* imposes itself as the sole representative of sexuality precisely because it represents, renders visible, or expresses sexual desire as based on want and lack. But to recognise this organisation of *jouissance* alone is tantamount to taking the half as a whole - to subscribe to an illusory oneness which the feminine is called upon to support. However, this supplementary *jouissance* to which the feminine accedes, precludes her disappearance in the fantasy of one phallic sexuality. This is what Lacan argues for in *Encore*: a feminine *jouissance* which cannot be absorbed into a phallic economy of enjoyment. If we interpret Stein's reflection on Hugnet from this Lacanian perspective we can see that Stein's 'translation' retains its feminist credentials. The celebrated complementarity of the sexual relation is overthrown by the experience of more - *encore* - an ineffable experience whose expression Stein mobilises all the non-mimetic resources of language to convey. What is the response of the masculine subject to this absence of the sexual relation? Lacan suggests that he has the option of becoming the courtly lover; acts of poetry in the place of acts of love are an elegant way of expressing the non-complementarity which is at stake - the absence of the sexual relation.⁵³ It is this which Hugnet and Stein express with particular trenchancy in their poetic dialogue of 1930. **KS**



Conclusion

The above study is an attempt to reengage with selected meeting points between the poems of Hugnet and Stein in a way which proposes a new dimension of collaboration between them. This dimension emerges if we put into play theories of sexuality and difference charted by Lacan in his study of the unconscious; for these allow us to examine the interconnection between the play of the signifier and modes of sexuality which both lie at the core of unconscious structures. That Stein resisted the theory of the unconscious and that Hugnet inherited only a limited understanding of the unbounded eclecticism of the sexual drives through his affiliation with surrealism, is a delicious irony in the context of this reading, highlighting that radical autonomy of artistic production which can liberate it so thoroughly from authorial intention and conscious directives.

The potential of this new legacy of Stein and Hugnet's work is highly significant if we consider the nature of supplementary *jouissance* as Lacan presents it. For him its nature is inexpressible, unknowable – even perhaps to the subject who experiences it. Yet a study of Stein's 'translation,' not in isolation, but precisely in terms of its uses of, and divergences with, the work of Hugnet, all the same communicates something of this enjoyment for which Lacan could imagine no means of expression. Stein's work may also prove particularly adept at indicating a sexuality which lies outside phallic definition without producing an essentialising of the feminine, or a mystification of woman as the locus of an ineffable truth. One point seems clear: the space which opens between the poems of Hugnet and Stein contains more than heterosexism and lesbian riposte, more than word play or exasperation, more than parody or cynicism or irony. It contains more and more in the sense of *encore*. **KS**

Jane Goldman and Katharine Swarbrick teamed up in 2000 in a project for Salford University's 2001 international conference 'Americans in Paris; Paris in Americans.' Uniting expertise from English and American Studies on the one hand, and French Studies on the other, they began close readings of the duet between Georges Hugnet's *Enfances* and Gertrude Stein's 'translation' of it. Their findings have prompted them to expand the project into a scholarly edition including a literal translation of Hugnet's poem forthcoming with Carcanet.



-
- ¹ Stephen Halpert and Richard Johns (eds), *A Return to Pagany: The History, Correspondence, and Selections from a Little Magazine, 1929-1932*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1969, 216.
- ² Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, New York and Oxford University Press, 1970, 201.
- ³ Ulla Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises 1923-1934*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston Illinois, 2003, 278-323.
- ⁴ Gertrude Stein, 'Poetry and Grammar,' in *Gertrude Stein: Look at Me Now and Here I Am: Writings and Lectures 1909-45*, ed. Patricia Meyerowitz, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1984, chapter 6, part 1, 141.
- ⁵ Stein, 'Poetry and Grammar,' 139-40.
- ⁶ Stein, *Writings (1903-1946)*, 2 vols, eds Catharine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman, Library of America, New York, 1988, vol. 2, 886.
- ⁷ Stein, 'Left to Right,' *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1931, no. 41, 82. The Hugnet camp (those who took his side in the dispute), Stein conveys simply as a vague, anonymous group in this fictional account of the event.
- ⁸ Stein, *Henry James*, in *Writings* vol. 2, 149.
- ⁹ Stein, 'Narration' 4, in *4 Lectures*, ed. Thornton Wilder, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1969 [first published in 1935].
- ¹⁰ Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, Editions Gallimard, Paris, 1954 [first written in 1909].
- ¹¹ See Joseph Fontenrose, *Python: A Study of Delphic Myth and its Origins*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1959.
- ¹² See Elizabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body: Death, Femininity and the Aesthetic*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1992, and Rachel DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar: Writing as Feminist Practice*, Routledge, London, 1985.
- ¹³ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded, gertrude stein & georges hugnet,' ed. Juliet Spahr, *Exact Change Yearbook*, no. 1, Carcarnet, Manchester, 1995, poem 1, 43.
- ¹⁴ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 30, 59.
- ¹⁵ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 30, 60.
- ¹⁶ Spahr in Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' 42.
- ¹⁷ Marjorie Perloff, 'Barbed-Wire entanglements: The New American Poetry 1930-32,' <http://wings.buffalo.edu/authors/perloff/barbed.html>, 16.
- ¹⁸ Barbara Will, 'Lost in Translation: Stein's Vichy Collaboration,' *Modernism/Modernity*, vol. 11, no. 4, Baltimore, November 2004, 658-60.
- ¹⁹ The age difference between Stein and Hugnet, who is only 21 when they meet, is significant in this respect. Hugnet's somewhat sheltered background and hypochondriac mind-set is worth noting in that both these circumstances undermine the image of Hugnet as an avatar of patriarchal authority. The initial affection between the two is marked. In 1928 Stein sent Hugnet her portrait of him *George Hugnet*. See Dydo (ed.), *A Stein Reader*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois, 1993, which celebrates his membership of her circle.
- ²⁰ André Breton, *Premier Manifeste du Surréalisme* (1924), Editions du Sagittaire, Paris, 1955, 7.
- ²¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Infantile Sexuality' (1905), in *On Sexuality*, The Penguin Freud Library, vol. 7, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1977, 88-176.
- ²² All references to the poem *Enfances* by Georges Hugnet are taken from Spahr ed. 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' 41-60, where it appears side by side with



Stein's 'translation.' These lines, poem 2, are as follows in the original: 'Enfance dans la laine/ en dépit des semaines,/ enfance dans la rue/ sans adieu et sans mal/ et jouant avec le hazard,/ au rire des cotonniers/ comparez vos corps nus,/ enfance dans la cour/ avec des oiseaux comme des chiens/ annonçant les voleurs sans talent,/ j'ai vécu cette enfance/ et tant d'autres encore ...,' 43. The translation is mine.

²³ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 26, 57.

²⁴ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 19, 53, 'enfance à la bouche laiteuse.'

²⁵ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 9, 48, 'j'appelle et ma voix va droit,/où tu m'entends, m'entends-tu?'

²⁶ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 19, 54, 'et ton enfance, cette femme.'

²⁷ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 20, 54, 'la masturbation m'habille de tes robes.'

²⁸ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 20, 55, 'édredons.'

²⁹ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 17, 53, 'couleur de légumes.'

³⁰ Georges Hugnet, *Le Pantalon de la fauvette*, Editions Blanche, Paris, 1998.

³¹ Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language that Rises*, 314.

³² Spahr in Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' 42.

³³ Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, The Penguin Freud Library vol. 1, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1973, 362-82.

³⁴ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 23, 55, 'Le plaisir mourut en chemin/ d'un climat à un autre/ et son ombre ne bouge plus.' An interesting biographical note to this image of two climates is the fact that Hugnet (b. 1906) spent his earliest years in Argentina, returning to France in 1913.

³⁵ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 28, 58, 'Le chemin finit par un gros paysage/ et ta jalousie sous un chapeau sans bord.'

³⁶ For non francophone speakers, I am citing from the accessible selection of Lacan's writings by Juliet Mitchell and Jacqueline Rose (eds), *Feminine Sexuality*, Macmillan, London, 1982, 137-48. Lacan's reference to polymorphous perversion appears on 143. The original text appears in *Encore*, Seuil, Paris, 1975, chapter 6, 61-71.

³⁷ Lacan cited in Mitchell and Rose, *Feminine Sexuality*, 143.

³⁸ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 19, 54, 'Et ton enfance, cette femme,/cette femme comme une femme/ et pas plus et pas moins,/ comme une femme et c'est tout/ et c'est davantage qu'une fontaine,/plus que la mer, plus et plus....'

³⁹ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 17, 53, '...et j'aime ce chant/ que je n'aurais pas dû connaître dans ma tête/ si ta tête était restée sur l'autre versant.'

⁴⁰ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 12, 50.

⁴¹ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 22, 55, 'J'aime t'avoir comme une mauvaise habitude/quand nous sommes couchés dans ta chambre.'

⁴² Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 22, 55.

⁴³ Hugnet, *Enfances*, poem 20, 54, 'Et je serais moins encore cet arbre dont ton repos/ prit la fourche principale pour deux bras vivants....'

⁴⁴ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 20, 54.

⁴⁵ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 30, 60.

⁴⁶ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 19, 53.

⁴⁷ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 5, 45.

⁴⁸ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 7, 46.

⁴⁹ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 10, 49.



⁵⁰ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 13, 50.

⁵¹ Stein, 'Before the Flowers of Friendship faded Friendship faded,' poem 15, 51.

⁵² Lacan, *Encore*, 69.

⁵³ Lacan, *Encore*, 65.

Jane Goldman, Reader in English and American Studies at the University of Glasgow, is General Editor of the Cambridge University Press Edition of the Writings of Virginia Woolf. She is author of *The Cambridge Introduction to Virginia Woolf* (Cambridge UP, 2006), *Modernism, 1910-1945: Image to Apocalypse* (Palgrave, 2004), and *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism, and the Politics of the Visual* (Cambridge UP, 1998). She is editing Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* for Cambridge, and writing a book: *Virginia Woolf and the Signifying Dog*.

Katharine Swarbrick, Lecturer in French at the University of Edinburgh, is Associate Researcher to The Centre for Freudian Analysis and Research, London, and author of *Lacan and the Uses of Iconoclasm* (Stirling French Studies, 1999). She has published articles on psychoanalysis and the avant-garde in Rodophi's 'Avant-Garde:Critical Studies' series 15 and 20, and is writing a book entitled *Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the Uses of Madness*.

