Adrienne Monnier

F:\Monnier.photos\foto 3.tifGifted writer, editor, book seller, publisher, patron, salon keeper based in Paris, for the first half of the twentieth century, Adrienne Monnier (1892-1955) was at the center of an international intellectual network, a sought-after hostess who welcomed to her home and table many American friends of her companion, Sylvia Beach.

Her bookstore, **La Maison des Amis de Livres**, was located at 7 rue de l’Odeon. It was made possible by the indemnity money that Monnier’s father got from a train accident. Initially, it served as a lending library and specialized in modern authors, with a section on the “entire world” and another on Tibet and Tibetan yoga. Her love of books turned the place from an anonymous bookstore to, as *France Soir* put it in 1953, “un espáce de célebrité.” Monnier organized readings called “Les Séance des Amis des Livre” and held Wednesdays gatherings devoted to lectures and presentations. In her bookstore Larbaud lectured on **James Joyce** for the first time on 7 December 1921. An untiring cultural entrepreneur, she also edited and published her own review, *Le Navire d’Argent*.

She knew how to play with forms and went through transformations. In her early years she impersonated the new woman open to gender ambiguity and sexual transgression. Over time she favored the looks shown in a popular photograph by Gisèle Freund which captures Monnier in her trademark cape while she is slightly bent over the book box outside **Shakespeare and Company**, Sylvia Beach’s bookstore. She bears a certain iconic relation to the modern mind for her ability to reconcile opposites in her person. Despite her butch look, she charmed her public because of the provincial daughter in her. The press simultaneously perceived her as “une des femmes les plus intelligentes et le plus sensible de la literature” and a common woman among many, with her “yeux bleus de petite fille.”

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Image:

Adrienne Monnier in a bow tie at 18 rue de l’Odeon.

The Sylvia Beach Papers, Princeton University Library.

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