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FILM  
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## Woman to Woman

*Paris Was a Woman* would make a fine double bill with *Everything Relative*; though the former film is a documentary, it touches on many of the same difficult issues as Pollack's modern melodrama— independence vs. domesticity, fulfillment vs. responsibility, lust vs. love.

It's about Paris' Left Bank in the 20s, which became a mecca for women seeking to reinvent themselves and take control of what might otherwise have been a stultifyingly predictable existence. Through a mix of archival footage, newsreels, still photographs, documents and old and new interviews, Greta Schiller's film offers a fascinating glimpse into a world all too often buried inside the dismissive phrase, "Paris in the 20s"—a description that carries unavoidably macho connotations, invoking as it does our collective images of Hemingway and Picasso brawling and whoring their way through the city of lights, occasionally stopping by Gertrude Stein's apartment for gnomish wisdom and schnapps.

Schiller's documentary redefines this characterization of that time and place, most significantly by placing Stein at the center of a related but self-enclosed world—a world with a distinctly feminine character, a world of bold, eccentric, utterly unique women. The colorful characters we meet (and thanks to rare recordings and interview footage, hear and see) include Alice B. Toklas, who loved Stein both in spite of her eccentricities and because of them; Adrienne Monnier, an American who opened the first independent bookstore and lending library in France; Sylvia Beach, another bookstore owner who published James Joyce's *Ulysses* when nobody else would touch it, and suffered great scorn as a result; Djuna Barnes, the only woman writer the city's expatriate literary boys' club deigned to take seriously; and Janet Flanner, a fugitive from American puritanism who holed up at Les Deux Maggots and wrote *The New Yorker's* "Letter from Paris" column for five glorious decades.

*Paris Was a Woman* breaks no significant ground as a documentary; it's low key in tone, and structured so conventionally that it could be shown on PBS in a heartbeat. But if it's uninteresting as art, it's indispensable as history. It doesn't just tell us that behind every great man there is a woman; it makes the men step aside so we can get a better look.