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GERTRUDE STEIN AND THE POLITICS OF GRAMMAR

by

LORNA J. SMEDMAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

GERTRUDE STEIN AND THE POLITICS OF GRAMMAR

by

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Advisor: Distinguished Professor Nancy K. Miller

This dissertation develops a method of reading Gertrude Stein's innovative texts through an analysis of her use and abuse of particular grammatical laws. Stein's concern with syntactic and semantic conventions can best be understood in the contexts of poststructuralist linguistics, and feminist and queer studies explorations of the connections between language and representation, sexuality and politics. Her identities as a woman, a lesbian, and a Jew made Stein wary of the way language categories were arbitrarily organized. Even more so, she resisted the rules governing relationships between words according to their classes. Stein's struggle with issues of signification involved a vision of a "democratic poetics," which would ignore the inherent hierarchical organization of word classes. In the more innovative texts, she also attempted to "queer" regular syntax, opening up a space for a freer relationship between words which could express a nonheterosexual erotics.

Acknowledgements

This dissertation grew out of a long engagement with the work of Gertrude Stein, one that is hardly finished yet.

I owe many people debts of gratitude for encouraging and sustaining me prior to and during this writing project. I first want to offer both personal and professional thanks to Ulla Dydo. Her lucid and meticulous Stein scholarship has been inspirational, and her generous sharing of time, talk, close readings, and information has been incredibly important to this project. I want to thank my advisor, Nancy K. Miller for introducing me to such a range of feminist and postmodern theory and texts, and for setting such high intellectual standards in course work, readings of this dissertation, and in her own brilliant writing. Jane Marcus's enthusiasm for Stein and her wide-ranging knowledge of modernist writers and feminist criticism allowed me to expand the scope of my project in important political directions; I was honored to work with her and have her as a reader. The insightful--and challenging--comments of Louis Menand, continue to resonate. I also want to thank Joan Richardson for her unflagging support for this project, both during and after my first class with her.

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The following abbreviations are used for frequently cited texts.

Texts by Gertrude Stein

ABT	<u>The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas</u>
AFAM	<u>As Fine As Melanctha</u>
AWHC	<u>A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story</u>
BTV	<u>Bee Time Vine</u>
EA	<u>Everybody's Autobiography</u>
GP	<u>Geography and Plays</u>
HTW	<u>How To Write</u>
AG	"Arthur A Grammar"
G	"Grammarians"
IN	"In Narrative"
S	"Sentences"
SP	"Sentences and Paragraphs"
LIA	<u>Lectures in America</u>
PG	"Poetry and Grammar"
WIEL	"What Is English Literature"
LOP	<u>Last Operas and Plays</u>
MOA	<u>The Making of Americans</u>
MOUA	<u>The Mother of Us All</u>
OP	<u>Operas and Plays</u>
P	<u>Picasso</u>
PL	<u>Painted Lace</u>
PP	"Patriarchal Poetry"
SW	<u>Selected Writings</u> (ed. Carl Van Vechten)
TB	<u>Tender Buttons</u>
WIHS	<u>Wars I Have Seen</u>

Other Texts

Judith Butler

BTM	<u>Bodies That Matter</u>
GT	<u>Gender Trouble</u>

Marianne De Koven

DL	<u>A Different Language</u>
RS	<u>Rich and Strange: Gender, History, Modernism</u>

INTRODUCTION

Gertrude Stein and the Politics of Grammar

I say that even abstract philosophical categories act upon the real as social. Language casts sheaves of reality upon the social body, stamping it and violently shaping it (Monique Wittig, "The Mark of Gender" 78).

It follows that language functions as the instrument of human knowledge and communication only because it simplifies the complexity of experience by reducing the infinite variety to a finite set of categories--the categories of a particular language, that is, for no two languages use the same set (John Ellis 28-29).

Forget grammar and think about potatoes (Gertrude Stein, "A Grammarian" 109).

The most effective method for understanding Gertrude Stein's innovative writing is to pay attention to the specific ways she performatively interrogates standard grammatical conventions through resistance, refusal, or parody. By pushing against and beyond the boundaries of "sense," Stein's grammatical play uncovers the dominant systems of organization which structure the way we use language--and the way language identifies, places, and polices us. In this dissertation, I closely read a range of texts in order to identify several of the particular strategies which constitute Stein's grammatical terrorist poetics: holding conventional meaning hostage in the pursuit of alternative conceptions of relationship, textual erotics, and representation which challenge the phallogocentric, heterosexist metastructures of traditional literature. I use the loaded term "terrorism" deliberately, to stress the

political nature of Stein's project to "undo" the grammatical linchpins which make language make sense. By politics I mean an investment in creating and sustaining specific power structures and power relations within a culture. Stein's work shows us that grammar is not only one of the "technologies of gender,"¹ but also one of the technologies which reinforce compulsory heterosexuality.

Stein begins by posing the most basic of questions: How do names come to be attached to things, or people, or conversely, how do things, and people, become the names to which they are attached; if the act of writing is always an immediate experience, why must it be mediated through linear narrative; what is a sentence; what is grammar. Such questions were inspired in part by William James's musings about language,² in part by similar interrogations of the basic rules of painting which she witnessed in the first years of the twentieth century in Paris,³ and in part by the charged intellectual, social, and political atmosphere of her time.⁴ Stein wanted to strip down the elements of literary representation to their basic materiality in order to arrive at a mode of representation which would adequately reflect the experience of the twentieth century, just as Picasso was bringing elements of visual representation back to the primal drawing board for redefinition. Several Stein critics have quoted art historian David Antin on the modernist project: ". . . it is necessary to begin from a

radical act of definition or redefinition of the domain of the elements and the operations of the art or of art itself" (31). While many readers would agree that Stein was interested in such a "radical act of...redefinition," the philosophical--and political--significance of her project has often been misunderstood or undervalued.

Stein's texts do more than pose cogent linguistic questions. Her various textual experiments expose the rules of grammar as they move beyond these rules, creating alternative means of expression which defy the conventional limitations of semantic signification and syntactic ordering. My method of reading focuses on the formal, linguistic aspects of Stein's work, but I propose that her abiding interest in studying the complexities of grammar in order to unravel its power must also be understood in the context of Stein's identity as a woman, a lesbian, and a Jew. She may have held that "really writing" is a product of entity, or the human mind, the immediate, creative part of the self which is unaware of outsiders, time, or memory; "identity" tends, in contrast, to have a pejorative connotation in Stein's lexicon, as does "public writing." But identity is not just a complex of accidental and acquired names, positions, and experiences which we are free to pick up or abandon at will. The categories, hierarchies, and discourses of identity are formulated through language--and language operates to keep us all in our respective

"proper" places. This is what Monique Wittig refers to when she claims that "language casts sheaves of reality on the social body." Stein's innovative writing is her attempt to communicate a sense of self and an experience of the world which normative grammar, inherently structured around phallogocentric, heterocentric logics, did not permit. Her texts demonstrate how this can be done; at the same time, they reveal how effectively language reinforces the dominant logics of our culture by making other modes of speaking nearly impossible.

Stein's writing has recently been discussed in relation to many of the major twentieth-century and poststructuralist theories of language;⁵ it is more difficult to locate Stein's own theory of language, given her aversion to "explanation." One model which has influenced my own formulation of Stein's "grammatical terrorism" is Philip Kuberski's analysis of Ezra Pound's aesthetics in relation to his political agendas: "Pound's political, economic, and racist views are in large measure governed by what could be called 'sign anxiety,' a suspicion that human representations are grounded--not in 'nature' or 'vision'--but by a force of a rhetoric deploying empty words" (preface). Faced with the dislocations, fragmentations, and disunity of Modernist thought and art, Pound sought for a return to some mythical Fenollosian linguistic system where the signifier was not arbitrary. As Kuberski states,

"Because he was unable or unwilling to consider the possibility that language was not fully masterable or scientifically precise, Pound's diagnoses of cultural decay and his recommendations for revitalization return again and again to the familiar drama wherein subversive elements (whether newspaper critics, philologists, bankers, or Jews) are found to obstruct natural harmony and clear language. . . ." (intro). Kuberski links Pound's sign anxiety back to his American origin, as well: ". . . because he was an American, he had no traditional language, form, or sign" (22).

Stein arrived at the conclusion that language should not be grounded in any unified, unifying natural law. Her imperative, "Act so that there is no use in a centre" (TB as exemplary of Stein's aesthetic. Most readers fail to notice that the center remains in place; what Stein calls for is a different stance towards that center (of authority, tradition, power)--a stance which is performatively subversive. Pound may have been anxious that "the center" was not holding; Stein, however, did not notice any such radical shift in the dominant cultural, social, or political powers. Women may have gained rights to education, careers, public political roles, and eventually, the vote. But at the turn of the century, Stein's optimism about the new role of women had already grown tarnished as a result of her own experiences in the misogynist environment of Johns Hopkins.⁶ The unhappy outcome of the Oscar Wilde trial and

the ensuing medical literature defining same-sex as deviant put her at risk as she became aware of her own sexual desires. The long saga of the Alfred Dreyfus case was a reminder of the persistence of anti-Semitism. Stein and Pound may have had different reactions to the issues which were being raised by such cases, but both decided that intervening in the workings of language would provide the "solution" each hoped for.

As someone who grew up within several languages and cultures--Stein was born in the United States, into a family who also spoke German and Yiddish, and then spent her third and fourth years in Austria and France--Stein may have had an inclination to view the operations of languages as arbitrary.⁷ As someone who was positioned outside of traditional centers of authority and privilege by her sex, sexuality, and ethnic affiliation, Stein viewed the arbitrary nature of signification as potentially liberatory; unlike Pound, she celebrated the "disembodied" nature of American literature (WIEL 53).⁸

Celebrating disconnection, arbitrariness, fragmentation, and polysemic indeterminacy can be seen as the watermark of modernist and postmodernist writing (including Pound's own poetry); whether this celebration is necessarily "political," or necessarily "liberating" is open to question.⁹ The strongest claims for politicizing Stein's work have been made within feminist and lesbian contexts.

Marianne DeKoven paved the way towards seeing Stein's experimental texts as implicitly "political" given the anti-patriarchal nature of her stylistic and linguistic choices (although she posits that all experimental writing is anti-patriarchal by nature). Shari Benstock more explicitly claims Stein's work as a "precursor of grammatology," a site where "psychosexual-textual structures fail to represent woman-in-the-feminine and . . . the feminine works within the cultural construct to support and subvert systems of representation (xvii). Lesbian critics such as Elizabeth Meese find liberatory political value in Stein's expression of same-sex erotics. Quoting Claudie Lesselier, Meese writes "The lesbian subject exhibits a 'tension between, on the one hand, claiming a category (by giving it meaning) and, on the other, subverting the whole system of categorization'" (8).

I find Benstock's reading of Modernist texts through marginalized textual aspects--the "apostrophes, ellipses, footnotes, and certain epistolary forms, orthographical conventions, and alphabetic signifiers [that] occupy a textual space of loss or oversight"--provocative. Benstock reads these literary tropes and forms within poststructural definitions of "the feminine": "Apparently escaping the law of representation, . . . these signifiers occupy a textual space that overlaps a cultural space, a margin of difference or a vanishing point of meaning, that is psychosexually coded 'feminine'" (xvii). In contrast to Benstock's focus on

these seemingly unimportant rhetorical and grammatical tropes, I look at grammatical conventions which are more basic, pervasive, and inescapable: the function and relation between word classes such as nouns, verbs, prepositions, and conjunctions; the processes by which words are imbued with semantic meaning and connotation; the social and material effects of the indexical signifier, the proper name. Like Benstock, I want to claim that there is an "overlap" or system of analogies between the basic structurings of grammatical categories and relations and the structurings of identity and relation in the material social world.¹⁰

Was Stein aware of this "overlap"? Was she cognizant of the political, philosophical ramifications of her "grammatical terrorism"? It is sometimes assumed that Stein sat down to write each night, that she filled her legions of manuscript books out of unmitigated hubris, and that these texts are at best interesting sound experiments, and at worst, incomprehensible repetitive gibberish. Systematic overviews of her daunting oeuvre, first undertaken by Donald Sutherland, Richard Bridgman, and Marianne DeKoven, have revealed the complexity of Stein's thinking about narrative, semantics, syntax, and genre, these various aspects of literature taking ascendancy at different time periods in her long writing career; the closer analyses of Leon Katz, Jayne Walker, and Ulla Dydo make this complexity even richer. Trained as a scientist, and immersed in the

revolutionary atmosphere of Modernist painting, Stein's investigation of language and literature was incisive and precise; she was self-conscious about the radical implications of her "excreation"--within the boundaries of the aesthetic text. However, Stein's desire to topple the hierarchal structuring of patriarchal literary authority and linguistic word classes was grounded in a radically democratic ethos which did not necessarily inform Stein's own worldly political views or actions, and which are often difficult to reconcile with some of her later "public" writings.¹⁰

Although she stayed away from "explaining" her work, occasionally her word-play coalesces into something resembling a theoretical statement. Half-way through the linguistic acrobatics of "Emp Lace" (BTV 1914), for instance, Stein states:

It comes to the present interdicted and really
poised really poison really pointed necessity to be
collided agreeable and a commoner a comprehensive
rendered so present and nearly persuadable nearly power
(161)

Against the prohibitions which obscured the present moment of composition or reading, especially those prescribed by the rules of syntax, logic, and genre, Stein envisions a happy collision which would block the linear progression of signification, grounding the act of writing/reading in the

present moment. It (the indeterminant referent pointing towards words, the moment of composition, communication) always arrives under the interdictions of habitual thinking, grammatical rules, standards of propriety, standards concerned with "poise"--or manners and deportment; the word "interdict" has an ecclesiastical usage (in Catholicism, the act of prohibiting someone from participating in sacraments or proper burial), legal usage, and interesting for 1914, was military parlance for destroying an enemy line of communication. The Latin roots combine the prefix meaning "prevent" and the verb for speaking, dicere. Language is also "poised" in the sense that any word is always hovering, always held in suspension, its meaning endlessly deferred, endlessly proliferating. But interdictions are poison in that the Law regulates the polysemous play of the word. For Stein, the goal of rendering expression that is democratically "commoner," intellectually "comprehensive," and "so present" remained paramount.

This stanza may sound like a manifesto, but the author pokes holes in such rhetorical posturing as she enacts it. The three terms--poised, poison, pointed--are full of suggestive possibilities here, but they are also words which would be listed together in the dictionary. Stein creates collisions between such arbitrary happenstance and intentional meaning constantly. The goal of this kind of writing is to change the modes of representation through the

act of "collided agreeable"--Stein's grammatical terrorism is, for all its violence, eminently seductive, humorous, and "inviting" (Chessman); she doesn't want to "one-up" as much as she wants to engage readers--albeit on the terms of her texts.

These Latinate words--interdicted, poised, poison, necessity, collided, persuadable--are not the kind of "common" everyday little words in Stein's usual lexicon; such semantic choices here are part of a parodic tone that Stein often adopts when she is dealing in the realm of "theory" and explanation--with the vocabulary of "power." Such parody aims to mock the covert hierarchy that American English perpetuates between Latinate vocabulary which permeates authoritative rhetoric and the everyday words rooted in Anglo-Saxon heritage.

In my first chapter, "Exsexing the Grammar in A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story" (1926), I examine the way Stein rearranged the traditional figure-ground relationship of the text by foregrounding "little" words--the transitive parts of language such as indexical referents, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and adverbs, and disempowering nouns and verbs. As early as 1922, in his introduction to Geography and Plays, Sherwood Anderson had claimed that this rearrangement had democratic implications. Neil Schmitz, speaking about her description of the parts of speech in the lecture "Poetry and Grammar,"

observes that Stein "politicises their function, so that we truly see in grammar a recognisable structure of power--hierarchies, classes, divisions of labour" (135). While I think that this Modernist democratic ethos is an important part of Stein's aesthetics, her championing of little words is an important part of her antipatriarchal, antiheterosexist ethos as well.

This binary division of substantives and transitives falls into the always already gendered categorization which underlies Western binary thinking. Pointing to the lists of binary opposites which have informed philosophy, mythology, and social structures, Helene Cixous asks the rhetorical question, "And all these pairs of oppositions are couples. . . . Is the fact that Logocentrism subjects thought--all concepts, codes and values--to a binary system, related to 'the' couple, man/woman?" (Newly Born 64). I have coined the term "exsex" to refer to Stein's strategies for resisting the sex/gender dualism which operates at the basic levels of syntax and plot as in much the same way that it operates within the institutions of sexuality, family, and state.

In the first section of A Book Concluding. . ., Stein "exsexes" grammar by using, abusing, and deliberately mistaking nouns and verbs. In the second section, she nearly banishes the noun altogether. When the noun is absent, a space is opened for new kinds of charged connections between relational words which complicate and undermine the use of

the heterosexual identity categories, husband and wife, in this radical revision of the love story.

Stein's use of the terms "husband and wife" in connection to her own relationship with Alice Toklas has been problematic for feminist and lesbian critics, and is responsible for many of the negative charges that Stein was "male-identified." The irony of such readings is that the signifiers "husband" and "wife" usually show up in the midst of deconstructive, parodic texts which call into question the validity of categorization and hierarchies. In her more nuanced reading of Stein, Harriet Chessman notes that in her texts "gender's inscriptions can be mimed, parodied, reinstated, critiqued, loosened, and often erased" (8). Catharine Stimpson similarly demonstrates how Stein shifted between several of these strategies in "Gertrude Stein and the Transposition of Gender." Like racial categorization, Stein found the categories of gender and sex perniciously difficult to unsettle. As Domna Stanton reiterates, "Throughout the history of Western thought...the Logos has been founded on the structure of the binary--the dichotomy between such culturally determined oppositions as rationality and emotionality, activity and passivity, presence and absence, in a word, 'male' and 'female.'" (qtd in Chessman 5). Like no other Modernist writer, Stein resisted this gendered binary in the structure of grammar itself, at the level of syntax, semantics, and the

materiality of the word.

Because she was so resistant to categorization, Stein makes herself hard to place. There has been much disagreement about whether or not Stein can be labeled a "feminist writer," or a "lesbian writer."¹¹ I am in agreement with those critics who broadly interpret her poetic and compositional choices to be feminist or lesbian, given their non-hierarchical, non-linear, and anti-patriarchal agenda (DeKoven, Dydo, Zimmerman). However, Stein's grammatical terrorism is not simply anti-patriarchal. As Monique Wittig, Adrienne Rich, and Judith Butler have argued, one of the modern functions of the sex/gender binary is the institutionalization of compulsory heterosexuality in the service of capitalist economy and culture. Stein did become increasingly vocal about the abusive power of "patriarchy" in such texts as "Patriarchal Poetry" (1927), Everybody's Autobiography (1935), and The Mother of Us All (1946), but her revisioning of grammatical structures was more anti-heterosexist than feminist. Instead of reversing the dynamics between the "feminine" and "masculine," or simply concentrating on a valorized "feminine," Stein's main literary project was to find a means of expression beyond the economy of the sentence where "meaning" is always an exchange between heavily connotated substantives and nearly invisible function words, an economy which I am labelling as inherently heterosexist. This new

kind of linguistic representation was not intended to be hermetic nor elitist; although she became increasingly aware that her work might not be appreciated in her lifetime, she never gave up hope that it was important and would eventually have a wide audience.¹²

Such a viewpoint contradicts one influential strand of Stein criticism, which explains her iconoclastic texts as an attempt to disguise or encode her illegal sexuality. Following Richard Bridgman's judgmental "psychological" reading of Stein's representation of her sexuality, DeKoven, Stimpson, Elizabeth Fifer, and Ruddick, among others, work diligently to "uncode" Stein's work--an uncoding which depends on the assumption that Stein "naturally" was disturbed by her own sexuality, and that heterocentric expressions of eroticism are somehow uncoded. Stein's writing is best understood as a resistance to modes of expression which are always already "coded"; in particular, she resists the way language is constructed through a heterosexual norm--a norm which also depends on a "readable" construction of its opposite, homosexual desire.¹³ While Stein moved in the circle of lesbian writers and associates of the Paris Left Bank and Modernist circles (see Benstock, Women of the Left Bank), she neither chose to identify herself publicly "as a lesbian," nor to utilize the mythic-Sapphic modes of expression this group was evolving. Meese suggests that "what strikes us as ambiguous or

oblique...might be seen as an effort to construct rather than to mask a lesbian (sem)eroticism" (69). Ulla Dydo cogently warns that "[i]f her language is read as a lesbian code, her work becomes restricted to a single dimension, which is precisely what she rebelled against" ("Must Horses" 279, note 10). Cynthia Secor also provides a positive reading of the intersection between textuality and sexuality in Stein's work. I agree with Secor that "Stein's most serious contribution may be in her challenge to gender as a significant category in human experience" (30); however, while Secor goes on to interpret this to mean that Stein believed that "gender is meaningless," my own reading shows that the force of her resistance to gendered categories demonstrates how central an organizing principle gender is, and how difficult it is to move beyond. Monique Wittig offers a hopeful vision when she says that "The designation 'woman' will disappear no doubt just as the designation 'man' with the oppression/exploitation of women as a class by men as class." However, this collapse of these major oppressive categories and their material effects will necessitate reordering of thinking that goes far beyond the legislation of equal rights. Wittig continues, "Humankind must find another name for itself and another system of grammar that will do away with genders, the linguistic indicator of political oppression" ("Paradigm" 121; qtd in Meese 11).

Stein's early heady success at unlinking signifier from signified, the lively word-play which opened up a space for polysemic resignifications, could not entirely escape the oppression of conventional semantics, a lesson she learned when she attempted, unsuccessfully, to empty racialized words (such as "nigger," "chink") of their semantic force. In my second chapter, "'A Cousin to Cooning: Relation, Difference, and Racialized Language in Stein's Experimental Texts," I look at the many instances of racialized language in the nonrepresentational texts from the twenties in the context of current theories about white Modernist appropriation and eroticization of racial "others," and Stein's definition of a "democratic poetics" within the context of her contemporary Modernists. While many of Stein's assumptions paralleled the racist views of her contemporaries, her use of racialized language in nonrepresentational texts makes her intentions more difficult to interpret. Her attraction is partially explained by Toni Morrison's analytic term, "Africanism," characterized by the fear and longing inherent in representations of racial others (a dynamic further complicated in Stein's texts by the parallels between this kind of taboo desire and the taboos against same-sex desire). Although it is useful to view these experimental texts within these various contexts, I argue that the major reason Stein was drawn to terms like "nigger," "coon," and

"chink" was because these words resisted resignification. The presence of racialized language in Stein's nonrepresentational texts also points out the limits of Stein's radically democratic poetics. Wish as she might that all words could be recreated equally, Stein found that racial categories were not so amenable to change, either at the level of lexicon and semantics, or at the social, material level.

The term "democratic poetics" places Stein at the center of one American Modernist project (a project Stein took much farther than the American contemporaries she influenced: William Carlos Williams, Ernest Hemingway, Sherwood Anderson, Mina Loy, Nella Larsen, and Richard Wright, for instance).¹⁴ Although many frustrated readers have felt that Stein practiced an "allusive difficulty smacking of elitism," this difficulty never results from the dense layering of myth, etymology, and literary allusion which characterizes the work of Joyce, or American expatriates such as Eliot, Pound, or H.D. For Stein, the act of composition was the practice which enabled her to articulate or translate the processes of her mind at work--sensing, associating, apprehending, playing--with as little mediation as possible. Citing Cezanne as the primary influence on her early writing, Stein explains, "Up to that time composition had consisted of a central idea, to which everything else was an accompaniment and separate but was

not an end in itself, and Cezanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing." Just as Cezanne attempted to give equal weight or value to each element in his painting, Stein tried to achieve this in the medium of language: "I was a little obsessed by words of equal value. . . . I felt I had to recapture the value of the individual word, find out what it meant and act within it" ("Transatlantic Interview," in The Gender of Modernism 504). There is something democratic about such an unmediated access to consciousness, just as there is something democratic about making all words--from the lowly article to the value-laden noun--equal. It is this anti-hierarchical arrangement of words which often frustrates Stein's readers.

Geography and Plays (1922) contained a wide-ranging selection of Stein's innovative writing from 1908 to 1921, and as such its publication was extremely important to Gertrude Stein. In a sympathetic introduction, Sherwood Anderson set out to explain how this baffling writing actually "recreate[d] life in words" (7). He focused on Stein's foregrounding of "little words" as a kind of healthy proletariat aesthetic, an antidote to the "neglect" and devaluing of language through mediums such as advertising. Anderson's homage to Stein's project seems to align her with the Union Square Studio social realist painters and Greenwich Village socialist activists:

For me the work of Gertrude Stein consists in a

rebuilding, an entire new recasting of life, in the city of words. Here is one artist who has been able to accept ridicule. . .to go live among the little housekeeping words, the swaggering bullying street-corner words, the honest working, money saving words, and all the other forgotten and neglected citizens of the sacred and half forgotten city (8).

While she had nothing in common with actual proletarian social movements, Stein still thought Anderson's introduction was insightful.

For Anderson, then, Stein's attention to "little words" had a definite social/political resonance--one quite at odds with a more current and widespread notion of Stein as self-involved elitist snob. Anderson, like her other contemporary critics William Carlos Williams and Mina Loy, positioned Stein against decadent literary experimentalism, which had mixed up language in a negative way: "Strong broad shouldered words, that should be marching across open fields under the blue sky, are clerking in little dusty dry goods stores, young virgin words are being allowed to consort with whores, learned words have been put to the ditch digger's trade" (7). For her contemporary American champions, Stein's accomplishment was to "get words back clean" (Williams), and to promote a new kind of aesthetic "democracy." Mina Loy invoked this term in her tribute essay to Gertrude Stein, exclaiming that

The pragmatic value of modernism lies in its tremendous recognition of the compensation due to the spirit of democracy. Modernism is a prophet crying in the wilderness of stabilized nature that humanity is wasting its aesthetic time. For there is a considerable extension of time between the visits to the picture gallery, the museum, the library. It asks "what is happening to your aesthetic consciousness during the long long intervals?" (297).

Like Anderson's, Loy's idealization of "democracy" was about refocusing attention from the privileged aesthetic centers (the museum, the classical canon) to the ordinary stuff of our days; she was more apt to celebrate the consorting of virgins with whores, however. Loy finds perfect examples of this new democratic attention in two pieces from Geography and Plays which focus on ethnic "others": "Italians" and "A Sweet Tail (Gypsies)." However, it is not so much their ordinariness, which Stein develops in repetition of banal "truths" ("There are very many being existing who are ones who are talking quite often and they are sounding as they are looking, as they are acting, as they are being. They are certainly sounding very pleasant when they are not sounding harsh and terrifying and unpleasant" ("Italians" 52)), but the perceived "strangeness" of these groups which really excites Loy, a strangeness which is aligned with darkness, sexuality and the body, making them particularly "ripe" for

modernist delectation. This fascination with degraded otherness is much more in tune with the aesthetics of Joyce and Barnes than with Stein's actual aesthetics.

While she certainly took her own privileged class and economic status for granted, and was in no way politically active in progressive causes, Stein prided herself on her American ability to mingle democratically. Her personal circle of friends and acquaintances might have been chosen and maintained according to middle class codes of status and propriety, but she could also acknowledge a common humanity with anyone. This ethos, by no means unproblematic, also fascinated William Carlos Williams. Although her influence on him is seldom acknowledged, William Carlos Williams wrote about "Gert" often in his essays.¹⁶ In "The Work of Gertrude Stein," written in 1936, Williams heralded Stein's achievements on a grand scale: "It is a revolution of some proportions that is contemplated, the exact nature of which may be no more than sketched here but whose basis is humanity in a relationship with literature hitherto little contemplated." While Williams had a sketchy idea of what it meant when Stein "unlinked" the words in her sentences from the stifling weight of accumulated literary connotation, the importance of what was gained by doing so was less clear. In trying to find direct correlations between all the things which he finds offensive or baffling in Stein's writing, and some "actual" American phenomena, Williams betrays a

reductive understanding of what Stein meant when she tried to name things as she was seeing them without using the old names, as well as his own ambivalence over the values of an American culture:

Stein's pages have become like the United States viewed from an airplane--the same senseless repetitions, the endless multiplications of toneless words, with these she had to work The thing, the United States, the unmitigated stupidity, the drab tediousness of the democracy, the overwhelming number of the offensively ignorant, the dull nerve--is there in the artist's mind and cannot be escaped by taking a ship" (119).

When Stein did fly in an airplane for the first time, during her 1934 American lecture tour, she saw not the drab ignorant tediousness which Williams imagined, but lines and planes which affirmed the cubist vision she and her contemporaries had formulated of their time period (EA).

In a later essay comparing Stein and Pound, Williams would give credit to "the disinfecting effect of the Stein manner. . . its releasing force." He praised her for finally taking down the stifling house of language, for "systematically" going to work and "smashing every connotation that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean" (163). (Her chores finished, it would be Pound's task to rebuild this house, using "unbound thinking" and "straight, sharp words.")

This image of Gertrude Stein, a bottle of Ajax and a sledgehammer in one hand, the other raised in solidarity with the downtrodden working class of language, is certainly one of her lesser-known incarnations. While they acknowledged the importance of her democratic poetics, particularly the unsentimental, "clinical" approach to phenomena which might be considered traditionally "masculine," neither Anderson nor Williams traveled too far down the path Stein opened between American Modernism and postmodernism.

Stein's thinking about language may have begun with William James's "stream-of-consciousness" metaphor, as Jayne Walker and Lisa Ruddick analyze, but she soon applied her mentor's concepts of attention, immediacy, and meaning-making in radical aesthetic projects which challenged James's ideas of social order. Walker traces Stein's earliest development from Three Lives, which "foreground[ed] the material reality of language as an arbitrary and problematic system, far from a transparent medium of communication" (22), to the more anarchic innovations of Tender Buttons, "her brilliantly subversive demonstration of the unbreachable gulf that separates the chaotic plentitude of the sensory world from the arbitrary order of language" (xviii). These earliest texts both grappled with the problem of the inadequacy of conventionally grammatical American-English, as shown in the failure of immigrant women to

express, or even understand, their experiences of self, desire, and power, or in the more aesthetic project of trying to capture perceptual experience with an immediacy which the ordering of lexicon and syntax disallowed.

Thinking of language as an inadequate or constrictive medium of expression was antithetical to the Modernist celebration of individual artistic "freedom" to make an intervention in the machine. As nineteenth-century, universal sources of authority failed, died, or dwindled, literature was suddenly thrust into competition with the various sciences which were making linguistics part of their purview (anthropology, ethnography, sociology, psychology, as well as the new science of linguistics itself) . As Shari Benstock says,

The Word was sacred: it survived wars and resisted the prerogatives of materialist culture. It masked despair and exposed cultural hypocrisy. The Word held within it the power to restructure and rewrite the world; the writer would succeed where God had failed (Textualizing xxiii).

I agree with Benstock that Stein "refused to worship before the altar of the Modernist Word" (xxviii). As much as she believed in her own vision, Stein had no pretensions to godhead; parodic titles like How To Write notwithstanding, she never tried to institute an aesthetic "movement" or "school" which would imitate her linguistics innovations.

Indeed, while her most astute contemporaries--including Loy, Williams, Anderson, Laura Riding, and Hemingway--gave her credit, at least, for allowing them to "see" the word stripped of old associations, they balked at the prospect of leaving behind recoverable symbolic meaning.¹⁷

Unlike her contemporaries, Stein was not anxious to recreate literature along new-and-improved lines; her project was instead an excreation of normative sense, a project that refused the linear safe harbor of a "happy ending." As Benstock states, "For Stein's project to be radical in the ways she declared it to be, she had to do more than substitute lexical codes. She had to uncover, examine, and unsettle the structures that support those codes. . . . Stein not only resisted confining social-cultural roles but wrestled with the linguistic categories that represent those structures. We are only beginning to learn how she went about a project that questioned the founding categories of thought and language" (Textualizing xxvi).

Thinking of Stein's work in terms of a democratic poetics makes sense of the importance Stein gave to "little" words such as prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, and adverbs in her most experimental texts, as well as her radical anti-heterosexism. It also accounts for the degree to which racialized signifiers, which embodied connotations with deep historical roots and far-reaching material

effects, fascinated, puzzled, and ultimately baffled Stein's attempts to disempower them.

In the "grammatical meditations" (some of which are collected in How To Write (1931), some of which are not), Stein shifted her focus from the workings of semantics to the operations of syntax. She had discovered that the connections between signifier and signified were arbitrary, and the materiality of the word malleable; was the sentence arbitrary, as well? While individual words could be misused so that their semantic content disintegrated, syntactic structures turned out to be more resistant to such play. Of all Stein's various strategies for making the sentence "arbitrary," I pay particular attention to her use of parody to create what I call "sentences in drag." These parodies create anomalous sentences which raise questions about the "natural" or innate quality of grammatical structures by cleverly imitating the rhetorical force of normative prose while withholding all linear sense.

The grammatical meditations are important in Stein's oeuvre because they raise questions about the "bottom nature" of language itself. Is language an innate or natural phenomenon, or is it an arbitrary system of categorization? Does grammar reflect natural perceptual processes, or does it institutionalize "proper" relationships, in accord with a particular system of logic which values hierarchical

relationships, binary division, and unequal distribution of power? How does one begin to answer these questions when the very structures of language obstruct such questioning?

In A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing (1983), Marianne DeKoven argued "for the importance of experimental writing as an alternative to privileged patriarchal language" (xiv). DeKoven makes a distinction, however, based on Chomsky's "degrees of grammaticalness," between those texts which are "readable," and those which go too far, becoming "unreadable," or in DeKoven's term, "unsuccessful." "As Chomsky shows, the difference between the second and third degrees is precisely their accessibility to reading through purposive articulation of meaning, or, as Chomsky puts it, through deviation from, rather than total negation of, conventional grammar" (11). The grammatical meditations offer a range of sentences which could be classified as fitting Chomsky's first, second, and third degrees of grammaticalness; while DeKoven judges these texts to be largely "unsuccessful," I argue that they challenge the very conception of "normative" and "deviant" upon which Chomsky's grammatical theories are based.

Stein's meditations end up being closer to John Ellis's explanation of linguistic function and grammar. Ellis claims that "categorization, not syntax, is the most basic aspect of language" (27); these categories are basically arbitrary in that they "establish what is to count as equivalence,

rather than merely taking it passively from like things" (31). "Any kind of complication is simple that is the real use of grammar" (AG 101), Stein writes; she balked against this reductive simplification.

Monique Wittig states in "The Straight Mind" that "[the] discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms" (25). Against the tyranny of "normative syntax," Stein's formulation of a "deviant" grammar was necessary if she was going to find a way to speak her queer desire, her queer sense of relations, her queer ordering of the world outside of heterosexist terms--but in ways that would be comprehensible, shareable, by this normative audience.

I am using "queer" to mean the refusal of identity categories formulated along binary axes of heterosexual/homosexual or feminine/masculine, which are necessary to the construction of either a "feminist" or "lesbian" identity. I don't want to suggest that "queer" is a "better" term which can or should replace the identity category "lesbian," nor that queer theory can be used to cut through the Gordian knot of how the sex/gender system constructs and regulates identity. If Benstock's term, "textualizing the feminine," refers to the foregrounding of marginal rhetorical tropes in experimental modernist texts for the purpose of upsetting a gendered (im)balance inherent in the way such tropes are defined and ranked, Stein's

parody of the authoritative sentence--where there is no "there" there, no consensus meaning arising from the proper coupling of transcendent substantive and relational transitive--could be considered a method of "textualizing the queer."

Difference in the Steinian text (in terms of sex, or sound, or word class) is not arranged in hierarchical fashion or according to strict taxonomies of membership or usage, and each element of her texts (whether on the level of sound, or word function, or association) has a wider range of possibilities: transitive words (prepositions, conjunctions, articles) can create lively meaning without nouns or verbs; the narrator of an autobiography turns out to be the "narrator's" significant other mimicking the voice of her significant other, an intertwining of voice and identity which destabilizes the basic premise of the "autobiographical pact" by calling into question the functions of the proper name. In chapter four, "The Proper Name and the Subject of Identity," I read The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas as a "meditation" on the proper name. Philippe Lejeune claims that "the deep subject of autobiography is the proper name" (20), and indeed, Stein arranges her autobiographical narrative so that "Gertrude Stein" appears on nearly every page of the text. This repetitive citing of her own name is not the effect of a

monstrous egotism, but a culmination her long-term fascination with the grammatical functions of the proper name. I show this by placing The Autobiography in relation to Stein's experimental playing with names, and in particular, her name plays from the late twenties and early thirties.

The proper name was similar to the noun, but it was also indexical; it was the most private of signifiers, and the most public. Stein had, for the most part, side-stepped the problems of "identity" in her iconoclastic texts, foregoing the traditional paternal position of "author" through dialogic, democratic, decentered language play. The Autobiography is a complex negotiation between Stein's identities as an author and participant in the Modernist "revolution" which took place in Paris, and her identities as a Jewish woman who, being unmarried, carried her father's name. Stein may have won fame, but she temporarily lost her ability to write as a result. In Everybody's Autobiography, she sought an explanation for this, circling back again and again to talking about the meaning of names. In her last play, The Mother Of Us All, Stein's discussion of the proper name occurs in reference to heterosexual marriage and women's suffrage. The whole tenor of this play is grim, as Susan B. Anthony reflects on the equivocal nature of her "successes." This pessimism is shown in the last exchange between Indiana Elliot and Jo the Loiterer. Indiana is a

spunky American woman who will only marry Jo if he agrees to a double exchange of names. However, this supposedly egalitarian "solution" to women's inequality is revealed to be a sham when Indiana says, "I am a loiterer Indiana Loiterer and I can vote," and her husband replies, "You only have the name, you have not got the game" (200).

Stein's despair over the position of women and democracy and racial relations and economics at the end of the Second World War is in sharp contrast to the mythical figure she projected for so long of an untroubled, contented genius. The sharper and more explicit political discourse in The Mother Of Us All can be attributed to Stein's very explicit immersion in material politics while living in occupied France through the duration of the war. In my concluding chapter, I discuss the meaning of the politics of grammar, as evidenced in the experimental strategies and poetics Stein had developed to expose and decenter dominant systems of logic and categorization at the level of grammatical functions and features, in relation to Stein's later political discourse. Dealing with difference in the realms of semantics and syntax has political implications, even if the material effects of such play are hard to tabulate. When she made the decision to remain living in occupied France, cognizant of the dangers this posed for her as a Jew and a lesbian, the problem of "difference" took on new and vivid resonance. In a brief reading of Wars I Have

Seen, I read Stein's problematic politicized discourse in the context of her grammatical terrorist poetics, which ultimately has the more subversive political power.

1. I am extending Teresa de Lauretis's use of the term. She explains that, following Foucault's analysis of sexuality, ". . . we might then say, gender is not a property of bodies or something originally existent in human beings, but 'the set of effects produced in bodies, behaviors, and social relations'. . . by the deployment of 'a complex political technology'" (3).

2. Stein's intellectual debt to her professor is well-documented in Lisa Ruddick, Jane Walker, and others.

3. For instance, Stein explains Picasso's art in the context of late nineteenth-century views on art: "From Seurat to Courbet they were all of them looking with their eyes and Seurat's eyes began to tremble at what his eyes were seeing, he commenced to doubt if in looking he could see. Matisse too began to doubt what his eyes could see. So there was a world ready for Picasso. . ." (p 1-2).

4. Marianne DeKoven, for example, suggests that modernist writing "evolved precisely as an adequate means of representing [the] terrifying appeal" of turn of the century socialist and feminist movements (RS 4). Stein's creative study of linguistic conventions occurred at the same time Charles Sanders Peirce, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Ferdinand Saussure were formulating their respective theories about language functions.

5. Norman Weinstein was one of the earliest critics to place Stein's work in relation to Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf; Marianne DeKoven used the language of French theorists Roland Barthes, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, as well as the ideas of Noam Chomsky in A Different Language; Jane Walker refers to the ideas of Emile Benevise, Roman Jakobson, and Victor Shklovsky; the "dialogic poetics" which Harriet Chessman describes builds on the narrative theory of Mikhail Bakhtin and object-relations theory. Other Stein critics use or discard various permutations of these approaches.

6. Brenda Wineapple supplies some fascinating background information about this period of Stein's life which goes far in explaining her seemingly abrupt shift from women's rights activist to someone who may have written the article, "Degeneration in American Women" (151-154; Appendix).

7. The different reactions of Stein and Pound to revolutionary potential of modernism seems to verify DeKoven's suggestion that female and male writers reacted differently: ". . . male modernists generally feared the loss of their own hegemony implicit in such a wholesale

revision of culture, while female modernists generally feared punishment for their dangerous desire for that revision" (RS 20). Unlike DeKoven, I do not find this fear of punishment in Gertrude Stein's writing.

8. See Suleiman; Benstock; Gilbert and Gubar, No Man's Land.

9. There are other similar "analogical" readings of Stein. Penelope Englebrecht uses Stein as the model for a "lesbian metaphysic," where "[t]he lesbian dynamic, which I term Desire, corresponds structurally to the verb (action) of the linguistic model, but because it is so interactive and nonhierarchical, it makes terms of 'position' obsolete. . . . This lesbian metaphysic is best demonstrated by examining texts that similarly recast or manipulate linguistic relationships. . . ." (86-87). Englebrecht concentrates on Stein's recasting of the traditionally hierarchical and gendered Subject-Object dyad in her erotic and autobiographical texts.

10. DeKoven summarizes some of Stein's "equivocal" political stances: "She hated Roosevelt and the New Deal, distrusted 'big government,' and allied herself politically, if at all, with an anarchic but generally right-wing American 'rugged individualism.'" Also listed as possible damning evidence is Stein's friendship with Bernard Fay, who would have a high position in the Vichy government, and the fact that she survived the German occupation unmolested. On the other hand, DeKoven mentions her post-World War II texts as being more egalitarian, more aligned with the Cezannian aesthetic which gives equal importance to all parts (RS 200-201).

11. Feminist Steinian critics who have used her texts to exemplify contemporary, poststructuralist, and postmodern theories ranging from object-relations to anti-phallogocentric deconstruction, écriture féminine, the semiotic, and Bakhtinian dialogics include Marianne DeKoven, Harriet Chessman, Lisa Ruddick, Lynn Hejinian, and Ellen Berry. Lesbian theorists such as Penelope Englebrecht, Elizabeth Meese, Leigh Gilmore, and Judith Roof have found Stein useful for illustrating and questioning textual play and erotics grounded in the specifics of a lesbian sexual orientation. DeKoven, along with feminist literary scholars such as Susan Stanford Friedman, Shari Benstock, Rachel Blau DuPlessis, Catharine Stimpson, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, among others, have begun corrective historical, cultural scholarship, offering alternative genealogies of Modernist literature which take into account the issues of gender, sexual orientation, and race. These scholars analyze the effects of social, political, and cultural movements--women's suffrage and labor organization, for

example, as well as the World Wars--using this information in various ways to account for Stein's place in the Modernist pantheon. On the other hand, Stein has been maligned as a male-identified, ego-maniacal, racist, classist, fascist-sympathizer, and a "bad" lesbian, to boot, by Benstock, Stimpson, Sonia Hull-Saldivar, Blanche Wiesen Cook, and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar.

12. Shari Benstock encapsulates Stein's odd position when she asks, regarding feminist criticism and the Modernist "Pantheon": "Do we claim the center for ourselves (taking up the modernist project) or do we redefine the limits of authority by which the center constitutes itself (taking up the post-modernist project)? Or do we, like Gertrude Stein, try to do both?" ("Beyond the Reaches" 12).

13. See Judith Butler, particularly "Imitation and Gender Insubordination."

14. My view of Stein's radically democratic poetics is similar to Harriet Chessman's reading of the "dialogic" character of Stein's work, and her "poetics of intimacy." In Chessman's reading "Stein holds out the possibility for a Utopian mode of relationship to the world and to language, in which one's difference from an other is as valuable and undestructive as one's similarities or near-mergence" (4). Chessman makes use of Kristeva's idea of a disruptive "pre-Oedipal" language, and Irigaray's own quasi-Utopian model of female merging (from "The One Doesn't Speak...") to construct a positive psychosexual space in which to read Stein's texts in terms of a reappropriation of the feminine body.

15. I discuss Stein's influence on Williams at length in "Skeleton in the Closet: Williams's Debt to Gertrude Stein," in The William Carlos Williams Review, Fall 1995.

16. The vehement reassessment of Stein's work by Laura Riding Jackson, who originally found her work praiseworthy, is interesting in this regard. She admits that "The writing of Gertrude Stein were seductive in the seeming elementalness of their verbal characteristics. Though they were canny contrivances of non-meaning, they invited reception as artifacts that might have been produced in an age of verbal innocence." While Riding originally seemed to find this "innocence" salutary (see her 1928 essay, "T.E. Hulme, The New Barbarism, and Gertrude Stein"), she later found Stein's appeal to be "unhealthy": "As a spectacle, the work looks massively, primitively simple. But read, verbally followed, not just looked at, it could only take the mind on an ever-turning course in which reason is thwarted at every turn" (241).

CHAPTER ONE

"'Words Are Shocks': Exsexing the Grammar in
A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story

Recent postmodern feminist criticism has been concerned with tracing the ways that binary logic, which has structured different knowledges from psychoanalytic models to biological sciences, supports and perpetuates binary gender distinctions and inequality. Using more empirical methodology, the sexism inherent in language has been tabulated, remedies have been sought and instituted, and sex-specific differences in language usage continue to be debated. However, the notion that grammar itself might be gendered is a trickier proposition to pin down. As Deborah Cameron points out, in one way it is not difficult to see how the "masculine/feminine dichotomy has entered very deeply into the system of linguistic analysis we call grammar. Gender is the basic grammatical category in the languages of the world" (85). But on what other levels might gender be implicated in grammar, aside from the phenomenon of gendering nouns as female, male, or neutral, a distinction which is required in some languages, and "metaphorical" in English? Is the noun somehow gendered "masculine"? Is the verb more "feminine"? Neil Schmitz suggest as much when he writes, "The parts of speech describe the roles in the family romance: Fathers and Sons

(nouns and adjectives), Mothers and Daughters (verbs and adverbs), the substantive Head of the household and the transitive Body of the sentence" (177). Within this scenario, Schmitz figures the "girlish" Stein as a transgressive daughter (note how difficult it is to avoid figuring anything except in the terms of noun and adjective). Schmitz offers this description of the "primal scene" of the sentence playfully, in passing, without any theoretical substantiation. However, the divisions he makes between static substantives and moving transactives, head and body, Father and Mother do pinpoint the way the binary of gender does color all our perceptions of language.

In A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story (written in 1923; published, with lithographs by Juan Gris, in 1927), Gertrude Stein forces us to reexamine how language, through syntactical, semantic and grammatical rules, positions words in relative positions of power and powerlessness, and so supports the structuring of relative positions of dominance and subordination for everyone within the culture. She shows us that language is normally gendered by "exsexing" the language: to conceive of what might be beyond, outside of, away from and yet most entirely implicated in "sex."

In coining the term "exsex," I refer back to Stein's "invented" verb, "excreate," which shows up in one of the Tender Buttons titled "Orange In": ". . . only excreate,

only excreate a no since." Stein's term "excreate" plays with all the meanings of the Latin prefix: "create out of" or "create away from" or "create completely." At the same time, she puns on the words "excrete" and "nuisance." This catchy, indeterminate phrase can be read and paraphrased in many contradictory ways: Only create at a distance from a no (a prohibition) since. . . since unfettered expression is otherwise not possible. Only create out of a nuisance--use the source of irritation as a spur to writing. Only by completely creating the No can this negative be expunged, defeated, gotten around. Only excrete a nuisance.

"Exsex" has a similar profusion of meanings, and can be extended to embrace the Barthesian notion of "excess," while zeroing in on the issue of sex/gender which is elided in his account of the pleasure of the text (Pleasure 42). My claim that Stein "exsexed" American/English grammar in order to expose and destabilize the heterosexist, phallogocentric roots of language is based on the proposition that grammar (those rules and patterns responsible for "competent" use of language) is linked to other social and cultural systems, or technologies, which define and police notions of sex and gender. Stein may have shared the Modernist delight in "defamiliarization," but she was also suspicious about the power naming had, a sensitivity which may have been intensified by her own position as a Jewish woman and a lesbian. How did grammar limit the way perception could be

represented? How could she express her own sense of identity and experience outside of the restrictive boundaries of the categories related to sex, gender, and sexuality? By "exsexing" the grammar, Stein was able to propose new terms, new relationships.

In the first part of this text, (which I will refer to as A Book), Stein continued her struggle with "using" and "abusing" the noun in order to make old, tired substantives more "lively." Beyond this modernist concern with "defamiliarization," Stein had an antipathy towards the fixed categories and associations naming produced (and as a jewish woman and a lesbian, she may well have felt a particular sensitivity toward the dangerous power of naming). In the second part, separately titled "As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story" (which I will refer to subsequently as "As A Wife"), substantives pretty much disappear, and the little words--conjunctions, prepositions, adverbs, articles--take the foreground. While Stein's attempt to give equal time to the little, invisible, hard-working words of the language can be interpreted as part of a modernist concern with democratization, her intense play with the transitive parts of language can best be understood as an investigation of--and resistance to--the way linguistic word classes are structured within a grammatical hierarchy that privileges the (illusory) transcendent presence of the substantive word

over the immanent relational functions of the transitive word.

Stein's deconstruction of nouns and her attention to little words are the poetic strategies which make up what I am calling her "grammatical terrorism," her commitment to undoing the linchpins of signification and expression. Her texts hold conventional meaning hostage while they negotiate for alternative conceptions of reading and writing, an alternative textual erotics, and a decentered mode of representation which would destabilize the patriarchal, heterosexist structures of thinking and literary expression.

What do Stein's grammatical terrorist plays reveal about the ideological underpinnings of Western modes of composition and expression? What happens to heterosexist ideology in a text which celebrates a lesbian "marriage"? Through its play with substantives and transitives, subject and object positions, this text begins to question the relationship between language and gender, and language and sexuality. It goes further, questioning the implications of gender and genre, of the relationship between body and text. Is there, as Luce Irigaray claims, a "feminine syntax" which could speak (about) female sexuality which is repressed and silenced under the Law of the Father and the masculine "economy of the self-same"? Could A Book Concluding with a Wife be an expression of such an envisioned female symbolic?

What kind of love story is told with so few verbs? Where is the body (where is the sex) in a love poem with hardly any nouns?

Stein's refusal to represent "sex" or erotic love explicitly has usually been interpreted as a sign of lesbian guilt, compounded with bourgeois conservatism. She explained her rejection of explicit representations of the sexual, what she calls "literary sex," in an interview in 1935. "Literature--creative literature--unconnected with sex is inconceivable. But not literary sex, because sex is a part of something of which the other parts are not sex at all" (Preston 191; qtd in Stimpson, "Somagrams" 646). The patriarchal, heterosexist model of eros and sexuality, particularly the representation of sexuality in literature, traditionally locates "sex" in the body of the woman, and this body becomes an item of exchange, a commodity. Such a model left no space for her own kind of love story.

Monique Wittig explicitly articulates how the "discourses of heterosexuality oppress us in the sense that they prevent us from speaking unless we speak in their terms" ("Straight Mind" 25). The aim of Stein's grammatical terrorist project was to find an alternative way of speaking her own desire in spite of the prohibitions set up by the laws of language and culture against her experience, the constrictive binary categories of gender and sex, and the institutionalized channeling of desire from certain "parts"

to certain other "parts." While the second part of this text, the poem titled "As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story," is obviously one of Stein's erotic texts (especially when "having a cow" is understood to signify female sexual pleasure), the tension Stein sets up between semantic content and syntactic ordering in the first part of this text explores the intersection of sex/gender and grammar from a different angle.

Another way to understand this grammatical terrorist project is within the terms Teresa de Lauretis lays out in her brief discussion of the "diverse strategies" modernist lesbian writers employed to escape "the paradox of sexual (in)difference," the bind Luce Irigaray invokes when she concludes that there is "a single practice and representation of the sexual," that being a male model. This is the condition that makes lesbian sexuality impossible, since all women (and men) are stuck with "just a hommo-sexuality in which woman will be involved in the process of specularizing the phallus" (qtd in "Sexual Indifference" 142). In searching for a way to maintain the differences between homosexuality and hommo-sexuality, de Lauretis considers "how lesbian writers and artists have sought variously to escape gender, to deny it, transcend it, or perform it in excess, and to inscribe the erotic in cryptic, allegorical, realistic, camp, or other modes of representation. . ." (144).

She begins with Gertrude Stein. Echoing the assessment of Catharine Stimpson, de Lauretis concludes that Stein "strove to obliterate the boundaries of gender identity" by developing a cryptic, coded "anti-language" (144-45). I am uneasy with the chronological, psychosexual narrative Stimpson sketches in her essay, "The Somagrams of Gertrude Stein," where Stein's innovative writing is described first as a symptom of her guilty, ambivalent feelings about her lesbianism, "a suspect evasion," and later on as "a privileged, and a distinguished, 'anti-language'" (648). While Stimpson recognizes Stein's complexity (or, as she calls it, her "impurity"), she cannot understand Stein's work outside of a binary, either/or logic ("[Her language] could bend to patriarchal pressures, or lash against them" (651)). In her final analysis, however, this binary collapses when Stimpson finds "a deep structure" in Stein's language which is "as genderless as an atom of platinum" (651).¹ Certainly the actual metal substance named platinum cannot be assigned a gender. As soon as this word is liberated from the elements chart, however, its connotations of incorruptible purity are fraught with gender--there are no platinum-blond male movie stars. Genderlessness is not so easily found, neither in the deep structure of grammar, nor in science's allegedly objective structuring of the physical world. When Mina Loy wanted to find an elemental metaphor for Stein's language, she chose

radium--significant not only for its double-edged implications for the twentieth-century, but because it had been--unlike the other elements--discovered by a woman.²

Instead of trying to locate an originary, genderless "deep structure" in Stein's work, I am interested in the linguistic means Stein used to destabilize the sex/gender binary. I want to situate my discussion of this text between Irigaray's vision of a "feminine syntax" and de Lauretis's idea of "a view from elsewhere" or the "space-off," an "elsewhere" which Stein's texts inhabit (although de Lauretis does not recognize them as such in her brief discussion of Stein). However, I also want to heed de Lauretis's warning against conflating gender with sexuality, and so remaining within heterosexuality (TOG 2). Even though Stein makes use of heterosexual relational terms like "wife," this does not (as Catharine Stimpson claims) "reconstitute" conventional ideas of gender ("Transposition" 12). Instead, Stein exposes and destabilizes the phallogocentric roots of linguistic expression by "exsexing" the grammar which has been one of the "technologies of gender."

This view of grammar, as opposed to "humanist" conceptions which regard it as natural or innate, is a indebted to poststructuralist theory; Stein anticipates this politicized skepticism in her iconoclastic compositions.

Judith Butler, for example, quotes Michael Haar at length regarding grammar and the construction of subjectivities:

All psychological categories (the ego, the individual, the person) derive from the illusion of substantial identity. But this illusion goes back basically to a superstition that deceives not only common sense but also philosophers--namely, the belief in language and, more precisely, in the truth of grammatical categories. It was grammar (the structure of subject and predicate) that inspired Descartes' certainty that 'I' is the subject of 'think,' whereas it is rather the thoughts that come to 'me'; at bottom, faith in grammar simply conveys the will to be the 'cause' of one's thoughts. The subject, the self, the individual, are just so many false concepts, since they transform into substances fictitious unities having at the start only a linguistic reality (qtd in Butler, GT 20-21).

This dichotomy between genders usually presupposes a corresponding "natural" originary difference, often termed "sex." As Judith Butler has theorized, we should be aware that sexual difference is just as much an ideological construction as gender difference. If gender is mutable, is sex? "Specifically, how does the capacity of the law to produce and constrain at once play itself out in the securing for every body a sex, a sexed position within language, a sexed position which is in some sense presumed

by any body who comes to speak as a subject, an 'I,' one who is constituted through the act of taking its sexed place within a language that insistently forces the question of sex?" (BTM 95). Stein's exsexing poetics was a reaction to this aspect of "the law." In forcing the issue of sex and gender through her play with pronouns, semantics, and syntax, her work does not "transcend" the sex/gender system; rather this work makes more visible aspects of this law which usually have the privilege of remaining invisible.

In A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story, Stein forces us to reexamine the ways that language, through syntactical, semantic and grammatical rules, positions words in relative positions of power and powerlessness, and how this grammar ends up structuring the relative positions of dominance and subordination for everyone within the culture.

The first part of A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story is a series of 49 short, sub-titled pieces, each consisting of several sentences.³ Many of Stein's texts use the "series" format, with each short piece sporting a sub-title ("IIIIIIIIII," "Advertisements," "Pink Melon Joy," "If You Had Three Husbands," "Work Again," to name a few). In a short piece from 1930, she addressed this stylistic decision head-on in a piece called "Title, Sub-Title." "I have invented many titles and I have invented

many sub-titles. What is in this sense the meaning of invention" (AFAM 386). Within the piece she breaks the sequence of her lines several times to illustrate the difference between

a title
a sub-title.

Typically, Stein shows rather than tells, though she does pause to comment: "It [a title] is a necessity because it comes after or before. A sub-title is a pleasure always a pleasurable diversion" (387). Since sub-titles are extraneous, indeed excessive, they give her more pleasure than the standard feature expected of a literary piece, a title which identifies a specific piece of writing just as a proper name identifies a person. "I undertake to overthrow their undertaking," Stein writes later on in this literary meditation, an illuminating remark if "their undertaking" is interpreted as the literary work of other authors, previous and contemporary. If titles are a capitulation to literary convention, the use of sub-titles pleasurably undermines this convention by excessively parodying the necessity for categorizing and naming. "A title may make windows be the place at which they sew," is another line from this piece, where Stein compares the title to a frame, inside of which collaborative, female creative activity occurs; the frame or title is arbitrary and static, while actually making something, and the sub-title, is in motion. In a similar

way, the "love story" produced by the wife's pleasure is framed by the more encompassing, unitary idea of "a book" within the title of this text.

Most of the sub-titles in Tender Buttons identify the "thing" being "named without using its name" (PG 237) with an article and noun: "A Piano"; "A Chair"; "A Frightful Release." In A Book, only 17 of the 49 section titles use nouns or proper names, although there are references to food and clothing ("Fish"; "And Soup"; "Knives"; "A Hat"). Outside of these similarities, the word play in A Book is subtler and more stream-lined than the riotous play in Tender Buttons. A comparison might be in order here.

From Tender Buttons:

Red Roses

A cool red rose and a pink cut pink, a collapse and a sold hole, a little less hot (24).

Here the word play depends on double meanings, or words that can be "mistaken": "rose" as noun or verb, "pink" the name of a color and a flower, the homonymic resonance between "sold" and "souled," "hole" and "whole." The tension provided by these doublings is compounded by the distinction between "cool" and "a little less hot," and the actions of rising and collapsing. There are layers of potential imagery competing here--sexual, floral, the artist's palette.

In contrast, this section from A Book:

Pink

Pink looks as pink, pink looks as pink, as pink as pink
supposes, suppose.

The chain of contrast and connection provided by the conjunction "as" leads us to one of Stein's favorite latinate words, "suppose": to assume, or believe, in the face of possible uncertainty. To suppose is an act of imagination, although it often sounds prescriptive ("all sentences are supposed to have a subject and verb"). The word also contains "sup," and "pose," two activities Stein was fond of. In this piece, though, pink is not as pink as it is supposed to be (whatever that might be), but just as pink as pink supposes, a self-reflexive phrase which does not create motion through grammatical and semantic plurality as much as it creates a self-contained shimmering, an oscillation between the logic of comparison (as _____ as _____) and the impossibility of this comparison. In the earlier piece, it is the doubleness of the word "cut"--which could be either a verb or a noun--which creates the oscillation in "a pink cut pink." The explosion of multiplying, jostling possibilities of "Red Roses" is different from the energy in "Pink," which depends on an implosion of potential.

Within the context of part one, "Pink" might refer to an actual incident where Julia Ford was the recipient of one of the famous Toklas cakes,⁴ but pink also resonates

through many other texts, with accumulated images of domestic pleasures (rosebuds, roses, fruit, candy and cakes), including female genitals ("Wet inside and pink outside. Pink outside and wet inside wet inside and pink outside latterly nearly near near pink. . ." ("Patriarchal Poetry" 121)). "Pink Melon Joy," for instance, is the title of one love poem from 1915. The "joy" of eating melon is mixed up in this poem with the pleasures of shopping, borrowing books from the lending library, and being in love: "Go to Mudie's first./Go slowly and carefully and love your dearest" (Reader 289). If "sex is part of something of which the other parts are not sex," the delicious pink flesh of the melon is a metonym for the pleasure of the sexual flesh, and bodily well-being: "We came to be rosy." "Would you have another," this poem ends, but instead of proffering an edible, the speaker offers the erotic: "What./ Kiss."

This thread which Stein uses to sew the sexual and the nonsexual together is erotic in the sense of defined by Audre Lorde in her essay, "The Uses of the Erotic":

Another important way in which the erotic connection functions is the open and fearless underlining of my capacity for joy. . . . so every level upon which I sense also opens to the erotically satisfying experience, whether it is dancing, building a bookcase, writing a poem, examining an idea (341).

Stein's relationship with Toklas, with words, with ideas, with the world, and with her own body were not merely the subject matter for her aesthetic play, but these relationships fueled the erotic joy which makes all of her compositions, on some level, love stories. Stein's attention to punning, the deconstruction of syntax, and the questions she raises about representation in this first part are anti-patriarchal strategies which open a space for Stein's alternative love story.

A Book opens with a piece titled "Key To Closet.", as if anticipating the mania for "decoding" which has surrounded much of Stein's "difficult" writing.⁵ "There is a key," she begins, but like the "key to a closet that opens the drawer," my reading will resist one-to-one correspondences or translations. Instead, I will look for the patterns of grammatical structuring (or de-structuring) within the pieces. In locating particular poetic strategies, I am also locating the "themes" or ideas (such as notions of time, or representation, or sexual pleasure) which can be traced throughout.

In her introduction to A Book, Ulla Dydo makes note of Stein's play with puns, such as "Hands and Grateful" playing on the fairy-tale "Hansel and Gretel", or the difference between "letter" and "let her" (452). There is a whimsical, nursery-rhyme flavor to several of the other pieces, especially those which mention animals: "Much Later./

Elephants and birds of beauty and a gold-fish. Gold-fish or a superstition. They always bring bad luck. . . ." We get led by the nose through an ersatz riddle: "Fish./ Can fish be wives. . . ." "Had a Horse./ If in place of a nose she had a horse and in place of a flower she had wax and in place of a melon she had a stone and in place of perfume buckles how many days would it be." These sections present Stein's radical linguistic play within the context of the ordinary verbal puzzles to which everyone--children and adults--can relate.

The pieces of A Book are written in sentences (or phrases), with alternation between declarative and interrogatory forms. The most common subject words are either pronouns (she, he, it, they, I, one), proper names (Julia, Emily, Agnes, Peter), or the indexical adverb "there." Stein considered pronouns and proper names to be more interesting than nouns. While proper names are usually clearly gendered, Stein liked to use them since they are arbitrary and potentially changeable; they act more as indexical items than substantives. Part of the appeal of pronouns was that they were resistant to that second category of most tired, static words, adjectives. Also, pronouns, "[i]n not being his or its or her name they already have a greater possibility of being something than if they were as the noun is the name of anything" (PG 213-14). For Stein, the indeterminacy of "being something" was

preferable to being inscribed by the noun, because nouns are so invested (infested) with categories, ranks, hierarchies, and connotations.

It was this very instability which Emile Benveniste noticed in the personal pronouns. The first person pronoun "is a term that cannot be identified except in what we have called elsewhere an instance of discourse and that has only a momentary reference." As such, these terms validate Stein's idea of a "continuous present" as opposed to the linearity of narrative. More important to Stein's poetics is Benveniste's focus on the personal pronouns "I" and "you" as a way to show how "the basis of subjectivity is in the exercise of language." (226). As he explained, "'subjectivity,' whether it is placed in phenomenology or in psychology . . . is only the emergence into being of a fundamental property of language. 'Ego' is he who says 'ego'" (224). Of course, the use of the masculine pronoun here reveals more than the sexist convention; for women writers, subjectivity is not so easily assumed within a phallogocentric symbolic order. Stein's play with pronouns, whether the "I" or "we" or "they," without providing narrative context, does not allow these subjectivities to be easily pinned down. For instance, since she also refers to herself sometimes with masculine terms (husband, Caesar), we know that "he" does not always have a male referent. Characteristically, she often chooses

the most indeterminant pronoun, "they" instead of "we":

"They had no children."

More indeterminant are pieces where semantic substitution and elision work against logical meaning even though the sentences sound as if they are using fairly "normal" syntax:

Right Away

Active at a glance and said, said it again. Active at a glance and then to change gold right away. Active at a glance and not to change gold right away.

The phrase that begins the sentence, "Active at a glance," sounds at first like a plausible dependent adverbial clause; however, the subject which is being modified is missing. In fact, in the first independent clause the subject-verb pair is elided, and presumably this same subject is absent in the next independent clause, "(someone) said." We can assume that the missing subject here is a person, someone who can speak. What could it mean to be "active at a glance"? At a glance from whom? There seems to be another subject lurking behind this phrase.

We don't know at first who it is who "said it again," but then the author says it again, looping us from whatever abstract cognitive disjunction we might have begun with back to the immediate activity of our reading. This second phrase turns on the adverb "then": ". . . and then to change gold right away." "Then" signals narrative, a sequence of

events in time. Time is scrambled, though, by use of the infinitive verb form, instead of the past tense of the first sentence. The infinitive also dispenses with the necessity of any subject. We are dealing with abstract activity now, potential, somehow outside of the context of time. But time comes back in with the phrase "right away."

"Right away" is actually one of those simple everyday phrases which are actually quite complicated. It means "immediately," a meaning intensified by the fact that both terms of the phrase carry this denotation (think of "fire away," or "get right on it"). If "then" moves us forward on a time line, "right away" entrenches us in the immediate active moment. Our language allows us to imagine this kind of future immediacy. Language designating time, either in its sequential or qualitative aspects, is one of the paradigmatic patterns in part one. Other titles include "Quickly," "To-day," "Longer," and "Much Later." Corollary titles, dealing more with the realm of literary narrative, include "A Little Beginning," and "Introduction."

Time and narrative both depend upon operations of memory, which is the ostensible "subject" of some of the later pieces, entitled "An Aid to Memory," "To Remind," and "How To Remember." In service to A Book, memory, time, and narrative are reformulated; in the "love story" of the second part, these basic structures will be pushed to further limits.

The most substantive part of the piece "Right Away" is the phrase "to change gold right away." Stein gives the flip side as well: ". . . not to change gold right away." Is this negation actually the flip-side? Does the binary X, not X hold in this case?

"To change" is a transitive verb, and we expect a completion. The elision within this phrase--to change gold into what--leads out of the abstract and cognitive into the material world. Of course, the whole Western economy relies on the fact of the gold standard, in which this precious metal is changed into currency, an arbitrary system of values and measures at the heart of the greatest power exchanges in Western culture. Anxiety or interest about money matters shows up in a slightly later text, "Business in Baltimore," and in the '30s with her three pieces on "Money" written for the Atlantic Monthly. "To change gold" also might have implicit racial undertones; exaggerated anxieties about Jewish involvement in money-lending or banking has been a pervasive part of anti-Semitism.

This play with gold, time, and specular activity is analogous to Stein's own textual activity. If gold is (or was) the underlying unit of currency which gives meaning to our economic system, what is the corollary in language? Could it be the substantive parts of our language, the nouns and verbs which carry so much of the weight of meaning, especially in written texts? For Stein, this is the

currency which impedes an immediate, active engagement with written language. Audre Lorde articulates a similar insight when she writes that "any system which defines the good in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need. . . . robs our work of its erotic value, its erotic power and life appeal and fulfillment" (340). With the arbitrary, the improper, and the easily mistaken in the subject position, the sentences of A Book are more concerned with exploring relation, difference, and immediacy. This kind of writing was work that was erotic and fulfilling for Stein. In Stein's "counterfeit" sentences, then, the coin of the realm, the noun, with its fixed denotation and cloud of connotations, is turned into play money. In so doing, she creates the syntactical equivalent of drag: by parodying correct syntactic functions, these sentences construct meaning "unnaturally," thereby putting into question the "naturalness" of the structures we assume are "correct."⁶

Luce Irigaray might appreciate such a grammatical terrorist move. She locates gender within the structure of traditional syntax, which valorize nouns, or subjects, over objects and predicates. This syntax arises out of and perpetuates the asymmetry of sexual difference, allowing masculine desire to be represented, while feminine desire and sexuality is rendered unrepresentable. Irigaray calls for a feminine discourse and a feminine symbolic which would be able to reflect the different "imaginary" of woman. In

This Sex, she introduces the idea of "the double syntax (masculine-feminine)" ("Questions" 132-34). The masculine syntax, which is also the syntax "of discursive logic--more generally, too, the syntax of social organization, 'political' syntax" (132), perpetuates "masculine self-affection," an economy of finding sameness in all it encompasses, including the (silenced) feminine. Within a feminine syntax, on the other hand,

there would no longer be either subject or object, "oneness" would no longer be privileged, there would no longer be proper meanings, proper names, "proper" attributes. . . . Instead, that "syntax" would involve nearness, proximity, but in such an extreme form that it would preclude any distinction of identities, any establishment of ownership, thus any form of appropriation (134).

The most controversial aspect of Irigaray's notion of a different language for women is her insistence that this difference depends on the female experience of sexuality and the body, an experience which is "not unifiable" and therefore not able to be represented by "the syntax we have used for centuries, namely . . . subject, predicate or subject, verb, object" ("Women's Exile" 82). Irigaray's analogy between the plurality of female sexuality and feminine language is a revision of Lacan's psycho-sexual-linguistic model, where woman's entry into the Symbolic

defines her according to what she "lacks" in contrast to what the man "has."

Irigaray's body-based propositions have been widely criticized for promoting a biological essentialism which threatens to trap women in a universal idea(l) of femaleness which elides the multiplicity of lived experience, and is itself dependent on the same binary system which it purportedly is attacking (see Fuss on the criticism of Faure, Burke, Moi). Fuss, who argues that essentialism and anti-essentialism are always interdependent concepts, concludes that Irigaray's "point is not to imprison women within their bodies but to rescue them from enculturating definitions by men" (61). Fuss also tries to pin down the exact nature of the relationship between body and language: is it literal or metaphoric? She concludes that it is metonymic, based on contiguity (sharing borders, touching), rather than metaphoric, based on similarity (one thing substituted for another) (62-65). Just as essentialism and anti-essentialism are shown to finally deconstruct each other, Irigaray's "two lips"

operate as a metaphor for metonymy; through this collapse of boundaries, Irigaray gestures toward the deconstruction of the classic metaphor/metonymy binarism. In fact, her work persistently attempts to effect a historical displacement of metaphor's dominance over metonymy . . . (66).

Irigaray's vision of a feminine syntax, described variously as nonunitary, contiguous, fluid, and nonspecular, is hard to "picture" (though "pink as pink supposes" is both contiguous and nonspecular). Cameron, for one, concludes that "[i]t is, perhaps, difficult to imagine a concrete instance of such a language" (Feminism 171). Irigaray, herself, admits the inherent contradiction of calling for such a discourse using the "Aristolean" logic which prevents it. "But why would this situation be unchanging? Why can one not transcend that logic? To speak outside of it?" ("Women in Exile" 82).

Teresa de Lauretis also cautions feminists against trapping their discourses within "male narratives of gender. . . bound by the heterosexual contract"; she calls for "a view from 'elsewhere'":

. . .that 'elsewhere' is not some mythic distant past or some utopian future history: it is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparatus (TOG 24).

Stein titled a 1928 collection of pieces Useful Knowledge; a later collection of grammatical meditations would be called How to Write. These titles signal Stein's

awareness of the seriousness of her literary endeavors as a challenge to what had constituted "knowledge," and her confidence that she could articulate an alternative way of knowing. This importance has largely gone unseen since what Stein "represents" is situated outside phallogocentric models of grammar and discourse. A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow certainly defies the old logics of syntax, semantics, genre, and gender. Might this text be the expression of an embodied female sexuality Irigaray wants to hear? The "crossing back and forth of the boundaries--and of the limits--of sexual difference(s)" which de Lauretis posits as necessary for a "different construction of gender" (25)?

I am tempted to say yes. Stein's suspicion of the noun and her refusal of standard sentence structure fulfill Irigaray's requirements for a feminine syntax; her use of eroticized female imagery, such as the "pink melon" suggestive of pink genitalia, gesture towards a poetics which speaks the female body. However, feminist readers looking for validation of a female symbolic which might speak universally to all women about the essential nature of being in a female-sexed body (a task which, in identifying "woman" as being different from "man," perpetuates the binary system), will be put off by Stein's play with gender, especially her incorporation of heterosexual terms like "wife" into her poem. De Lauretis's deconstructive strategy

offers a more productive way to interpret Stein's play with and against the "universal sex opposition" (Technologies 2). In the face of this binary, Stein worked on strategies to "exsex" the technologies of grammar which contribute to the institutionalization of subjectivity and sexuality.

Gertrude Stein's feelings about substantives, particularly nouns, are well-known through her lecture, "Poetry and Grammar." For instance, referring to her early "break-through" work, Tender Buttons, Stein explains, ". . . I too felt in me the need of making it be a thing that could be named without using its name. After all one had known its name anything's name for so long, and so the name was not new but the thing being alive was always new" (237). That words needed to be "refreshed" was a common tenet among many modernist writers, but the primacy of the noun, the proper name, the substantive, would not be challenged.⁷

Stein's suspicion of the noun was tempered by her delight in language play. Defining the difference between "prose" and "poetry," she stated:

Poetry is concerned with using with abusing, with losing with wanting, with denying with avoiding with adoring with replacing the noun. . . . Poetry is doing nothing but using losing refusing and pleasing and betraying and caressing nouns (231).

Harriet Chessman concentrates on this last gerundive verb in her chapter titled "The Caressing of Nouns:

Representation and the Female Body," where she places Stein's twentieth-century modernism within the context of nineteenth-century Romanticism. She concludes that "Stein's attempt to bring together her two impulses--toward the word as entity, and the world made present in the word--represents an attempt to bring the female world into her writing without having to ensure its absence through figuration" (87) I am more interested in the way Stein refused, abused, avoided and finally lost the noun within the text.

**"Woman takes pleasure more from touching than from looking."
(Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 26)**

The second part of the text, titled separately as "As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story," was described by Carl Van Vechten as "an excellent example of Gertrude Stein's adverbial or participial style" (SW 540). A Book also plays with adverbial clauses, as well as playing with prepositions, as in the shifts of meaning when "An Aid to Memory" transmutes into "In aid of memory." This play with adverbs and prepositions pales, however, before the dense, almost nounless constructions of "As A Wife Has A Cow. A Love Story." This part contains only seven definitively recognizable nouns (or noun phrases) in the poem: a wife, a cow, a love story, a day, the fifteenth of October, and the numbers two and six; this list pretty much sums up what this poem is "about."

"Nearly all of it to be as a wife has a cow, a love story," the poem begins, starting off on a slippery foot with the adverb "nearly." This word has the competing denotations "almost but not quite" or "closely, intimately" (ex: "a matter nearly affecting our interest"). Here, the first denotation is suggested, but the concern with intimacy will hover over this the poem. When "nearly" modifies the adjective "all," the word suggests degree: "almost but not quite the full extent." The word evokes the concept of fullness, completeness, by backing off from it. What is suggested, then, is that there are many possible degrees between the desirable "all" and the falling short of it. Whatever this continuum of desire and wholeness, it's kept floating by the infinitive "to be." Not pinned to any particular temporal mode, the infinitive lets "Nearly all of it to be" encompass the (almost but not quite) full extent of anything which might come into being.

Using a minimum of small, everyday words, including many "little" words like adverbs, prepositions, and conjunctions, Stein constructs a first sentence which resists determinate meaning, while it brings up the concepts of degree, simultaneity, similarity, possession (the wife has a cow, but which phrase does "as" belong to?), relationship, intimacy, possibility and impossibility. She omits a proper subject in the first phrase, switches tenses, fools with semantics, and makes such transitive words as

"of" and "as" visible, even fascinating. There is a further pleasure in the way "as"--with its multiple functions opened up here--will pass through "a wife" to rest in "has"; this "as/has" rhyme, barely audible between a transitive and a "helping verb," patterns the first three stanzas.

The title immediately suggests that this text is not concerned with the subject-verb-predicate structure of a sentence, which would have read, "A wife has a cow." Not only is the phrase in the title of the poem subordinate, but the indefinite article "a" makes this wife equivalent to any wife. "A wife" doesn't get particularized until the last stanza, when a first person narrative voice uses the possessive: "My wife has a cow." "As a wife has a cow" is not finished; the subordinate clause waits for something else to happen--an event occurring simultaneously (As a wife has a cow, I write this), or something to compare itself to (As a wife has a cow, a husband has a wife? Or as Dydo suggests, "As making love concludes with the cow, so writing concludes with a book" (Reader 451)).

Wife, cow, and the unnamed "husband" whose existence is called into being by the word wife might be the coordinates of a bourgeois, rural love triangle, a sturdy model of contentment that Stein appropriates and then makes her own by emptying out the usual semantic content of these nouns and re-juicing them. In this part of the text, the politics of semantics enter in as much as the politics of syntax.

Standard literary lore figures Stein as a male-identified, self-proclaimed genius, the "masculine" member of the butch-femme team of Stein and Toklas. Toklas not only sat with the wives of important and artistic men, but, like a properly domestic wife, she did everything she could to make Stein's writing life easier. Stein's grammatical terrorism is often interpreted as a hermetics of subterfuge, a densely encoded language which she employed in order to conceal her lesbianism. I would suggest that the biographical data available about these two fiercely private women needs to be examined in the light of recent lesbian studies, and with a careful consciousness about heterosexist assumptions that might be operating in the formation of the popular Stein character. Whatever the actual terms of the Stein-Toklas relationship were, Stein's love stories are not shaped by a dominant/submissive, masculine/feminine paradigm, but rather by the fluctuations of relation, anxious moving toward separation and ecstatic closing of degrees towards reunion. I don't think that these love stories (and all of Stein's writings are love stories, in a sense, all concerned with exploration of relation) can be read, or savored in all their complex jouissance, except by accepting that these texts are written partly out of a lesbian sensibility of pleasure, and partly out of an anti-hierarchical, anti-authoritarian engagement with language which would reject the whole identity category "lesbian."

What does it mean when Stein writes about a wife? Catharine Stimpson, in an article titled "Gertrude Stein and the Transposition of Gender," concluded that Stein's attitudes about gender are often contradictory, and that things like Stein's frequent use of the term "wife" can be seen either as a "repudiation" and/or "reconstitution" of patriarchal values (11-16).

For instance, there is this more autobiographical reference from "A Sonatina Followed By Another":

Little Alice B. is the wife for me. Little Alice B so tenderly is born so long so she can be born along by a husband strong who has not his hair shorn (295).

(Stein would eventually have her hair shorn by Alice Toklas, her "barber.")

Is this use of the terms husband and wife giving in to the dominant heterosexual system? Or by claiming those terms, does Stein aggressively confer legitimacy upon her relationship, radically defying denotations that make her relations illegal and invisible, unnameable? Or can Stein's use of these terms be read as a way to destabilize the heterosexual contract?

Dennis Baron, in his study of the histories of the etymologies and usages of some gendered language, reveals the blind spots in this "science": "Words for women are more likely to call up notions of physiology or social-- particularly domestic--function in the minds of the

invariably male etymologist" (6). Once in the history of the language the word wife referred to any mature female member of the community. In Old English, one could speak of a house-mistress (husbonde) or house-master (husbonda). Stein's systematic use of the loaded words "husband" and "wife" reminds us of the both the arbitrary nature of signification, and the role of political ideology in semantics.

Penelope Englebrecht attempts to read Stein's occasional use of "the heterosexual disguise" through the way relations between subject and other are set up. In "Lifting Belly," for instance, Englebrecht concludes that since the boundaries between subject and object of desire do not hold fast in this poem, we can assume that "the private, material power dynamic [between Stein and Alice Toklas] was not hierarchical, but mutual" (101). The popular legends of Stein's biography, including negative images of her as domineering and male-identified, have colored critical interpretations of her linguistic play; Englebrecht here tries to do the reverse and read the "facts" of her life through the implications of her grammar. However, Stein's use of terms like "husband" and "wife" end up being nothing more than "an elaborate 'inside joke' at the expense of public and posterity" in her analysis (101).

Contemporary lesbian and queer theorists, such as Judith Roof and Judith Butler, have taken a more suspicious

stance towards the metastructures and categories of sexuality. Butler's philosophical arguments point to the inherent instabilities within the seemingly "natural" identity positions like the heterosexual couple:

Reconsider then the homophobic charge that queens and butches and femmes are imitations of the heterosexual real. Here "imitation" carries the meaning of "derivative" or "secondary," a copy of an origin which is itself the ground of all copies, but which itself is a copy of nothing. . . . The origin requires its derivations in order to affirm itself as an origin. . . . Hence, if it were not for the notion of the homosexual as copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality as origin ("Imitation" 313).

In the absence of any other terms to describe her relationship with Toklas, Stein appropriated the terms of heterosexual marriage. This seemingly "conservative" choice within the semantic arena needs to be seen in connection to her radical, anti-hierarchical choices within the syntactic arena (as Englebrecht attempts to do). However, the more radical importance of Stein's completely unapologetic use of heterosexual terms is the way this choice denaturalizes such terms.

"She writes in white ink." (Helene Cixous, "Laugh of the Medusa," 251).

Stein critics have generally accepted that "cow" is Stein's own euphemism for female orgasm. Richard Bridgman discusses what he calls the "erotic symbolism" of the texts from the period of WWI, including "cow" and "Caesar" (which puns on "seize her," "seizure," and may also pun on the oft iterated observation that Stein resembled a Roman emperor). However, when he runs across these "symbols" in later works, he dismisses their eroticism. "The bovine associations now appear to refer to her literary productivity. . . . Placid, ruminative, regularly productive: these were the attributes of the cow and of the writer for whom Alice Toklas, like Milton's daughters, served as milkmaid" (153-54). The fact that Bridgman notes that Stein coined these terms "even as she approached her fifties" betrays some of his discomfort and narrowness in trying to read the eroticism in Stein's texts.

In the midst of all of Stein's word play which is sexually explicit or implicit (i.e., "Why is pussy like the great American Army. Because she buds so many buddies"--"A Sonatina," 298), "cow" does seem hermetic, a very private association. But is also dazzlingly solid, complicated, "crowded." The word "cow" has levels of gendered history that Stein excavates in her repeated use of the word. "Cow" not only denotes the female milk-producing half of the species, but is the generic as well, one of the only cases where this occurs (unlike, for instance, the terms dog,

horse, or sheep, where the generic is identical with the masculine). As such, it is a fortuitous choice as stand-in for female sexual pleasure. However, cow also has derogatory connotations, once upon a time referring to "a clumsy, obese, coarse and otherwise unpleasant person," then more specifically to female persons, "a degraded woman. . . a prostitute" (Schultz 139). But while these derogatory meanings might lurk on the periphery of Stein's playful use of her bovine sign for jouissance, no one is a cow. Rather someone has a cow; a cow comes out. Again, from "A Sonatina":

Can a cow keep sweet. Yes if it has a blessing.
Can a cow keep its retreat. No not if it has a
blessing. Can a cow have feet. Yes if it has a
blessing. Can a cow be perfect. Yes if it has a
blessing. I bless the cow. It is formed, it is
pressed, it is large it is crowded. It is out. Cow
come out. Cow come out and shout (292).

Is Stein hiding her sexual expression behind the cow? It would be as easy to hide a cow in a treeless meadow in broad daylight. What is accomplished is an escape from a noun which is virtually meaningless for women's sexual pleasure, since "orgasm" is reductive, totalizing, mono. Because this word is semantically far removed from our conception of orgasm, Stein leaves a large space open for multiplicity to happen.

We can imagine, then, that when this kind of "wife" has this kind of "cow" we are listening to a new kind of love story. It is a story that ends, like Joyce's Ulysses, with jouissance, woman's pleasure, certainly a more indeterminate closure than the standard ending which is analogous to masculine pleasure. Stein's destabilizing semantic play is an attempt to find a more "direct relation" between doer (wife/writer) and thing done (having a cow/having a text). But the words wife and cow virtually disappear between the opening and closing stanzas, and this is where I think the sex in the poem really happens, along the syntactic axis of the poem when Stein jams small relational words together.

Stein certainly was not the first writer or thinker to discover how important small words are. Nathaniel Hawthorne once jotted down this idea in his notebook: "To personify If--But--And--Though, etc.," a project never realized. William James speculated that we actually have a "feeling of" transitive words, although these feelings seemed to defy catching or articulation. "We ought to say a feeling of and, a feeling of if, a feeling of but, and a feeling of by, quite as naturally as we say a feeling of blue or a feeling of cold" ("The Stream of Thought" 245-46). Other modernist writers also paid attention to the power of small words. James Joyce ended Finnegans Wake with the word "the." The last line of Wallace Stevens' poem, "Man on the Dump," ends dramatically with a double instance of the definite article:

"Where was it one first heard of the truth? The the." Here "the" becomes the paradoxical place to start speaking when speech has failed. While Stevens foregrounds "The the" for a moment, Stein's project entails a more radical and permanent rearrangement of foreground and background.

Stein indulged in the type of word play I have been talking about throughout her novels, plays, poems, and prose work. Little words were important to her because they are important in intellectual or meditative processes; they are, in fact, the essential muscles in any written representation of "thoughts" or "thinking." It is not the "things" that we think about that are so important, but how we establish connections between things. This is a point where Stein's experimental writing clearly reflects the thinking of her influential teacher, William James, who was curious about how "verbal skeletons of logical relation," such as the phrases "naught but," "either one or the other," among others, could have "felt meaning" (252).

The seventh stanza of the poem does a lot without substantives:

Feeling or for it, as feeling or for it, came in
or come in, or come out there or feeling as feeling or
feeling as for it.

Since there are no articles before "feeling," I am claiming that there are no clearly marked substantives, or nouns, here. "Feeling" floats indeterminately, suggesting a noun

without an article, or a gerundive phrase, in which case there would be an assumed agent attached. Of course, the noun "feeling" can mean either recognition of an emotion, or a tactile sensation. (Stein plays with this double connotation in stanza 17 in the sentence, "We feel we feel.") Even though the word "feeling" is cut loose of any article, when it is opposed to "for it" by the conjunction, it gains substantive weight to match the pronoun "it." This substantive weight is not determinable or fixable since "it" is a cipher.

The odd phrase which initiates the stanza, "Feeling or for it," simultaneously sets up and breaks the phrase "feeling for it." To have a feeling for something usually has a positive connotation; in personal relationships to have a feeling for another person is a euphemistic admission of love or attraction. Having a feeling for something is not the same as having a feeling of something, either and, if, blue or cold, to return to William James's musings a moment. Why does the preposition make such a difference? This is just one question which Stein investigates in this stanza. By cutting the phrase we might read comfortably-- "feeling for it"--with the conjunction or, Stein sets the stanza scintillating. Can we make sense of the opposition "feeling or for it"?

In the context of a love poem, the last phrase of the stanza does suggest some sensible notions. Is there a pure

"feeling as feeling," or is any emotion, especially love, dependent upon other factors, "feeling as for it"? Given the sexual content of this poem, "for it" can be read euphemistically as condoning sexual activity, a euphemism perhaps more highly charged for being within a lesbian context. What I am introducing here is not an attempt at a definitive reading or interpretation of the stanza, but just some possible reactions to the play of words within the context of the rest of the poem.

The ways words work, (or, more explicitly, take their pleasure), in stanza thirteen is typical of what goes on in these middle stanzas:

And in that, as and in that, in that and and in that, so that, so that and in that, and in that and so that and as for that and as for that and that. In that. In that and and for that as for that and in that. Just as soon and in that. In that as that and just as soon. Just as soon as that.

This is not a stanza where broken syntax can be reconstituted or word "codes" unlocked. We all know these words, conjunctions, prepositions, relative pronouns, those tricky hard-to-define words, funny adjectives like soon, just. However, we're not used to seeing them all together, untied from nouns or verbs.

On the surface, Roland Barthes's description of what makes the word erotic seems made to order for approaching

this kind of textual play: "if it is extravagantly repeated, or. . . if it is unexpected, succulent in its newness" (Pleasure 42). However, most readers would be hard pressed to find the extravagant repetitions above erotic, or even thrilling. But it is within these stanzas made of little transitive words, within the interstices of the sentence's syntax, that Stein's "love story," with its anxieties about relation and separation, gets told.

Stein liked little words a lot. About prepositions she wrote, "Prepositions can live one long life being really being nothing but absolutely nothing but mistaken and that makes them irritating if you feel that way about mistakes but certainly something that you can be continually using and everlastingly enjoying" (PG 212). About conjunctions: "Conjunctions have made themselves live by their work" (213).

William Gass wrote a delightful essay called "And," a detailed meditation on the multiple meanings of six "ands" in a sentence from Stein's story "Melanctha." He described "and" in one instance as "a desperate part of speech precisely because it separates and joins at the same time" (116). "As" and "in that" are in some kind of relation in this stanza, simultaneously particular and bounded, but they are also components of a larger entity. One plus one equals a more complex one might be the romantic equation underlying some of these phrases.

Gass mentions another daring function of "and": "But when an and appears between two terms,. . . a place where these two "things" belong together has been implied" (124). This general observation gives a rich insight into how Stein's poem works. The "place" implied by the "and" in "so that and in that" is certainly abstract, a mental or cognitive place, dependent also on the factor of time necessary for one thought (or phrase) to occur, and then the other. Relation creates place, and Stein is able to construct a noun-less poem which nevertheless exists.

Beginning the stanza with "And" places us in media res, creating history as well as place. It is not difficult to maneuver in this abstract world of the poem. The additions to the original equation, "And in that," are logical: "so that," "for that," "as for that." Between the commas (which are themselves implied "ands"), Stein varies the number and order of the terms, testing the limits of what our attention can cognitively process, "and in that and so that and as for that and as for that and that." Not content to just let "And" inscribe time and space, she forces it into positions where it can be "mistaken," such as the double "and" in the phrase, "in that and and in that," where the function of each is ambiguous, "and" as part of the larger term, "and in that," as well as being the conjunction between the terms. The "ands" echo and waver, dissolve any solid ground where this "sentence" might come to rest. When they meet face to

face, "in that and and in that," which "and" is the conjunction? Does one "and" have to be subordinated to the other? Here the "ands," like Irigaray's two lips, subvert the hierarchical ordering and linear unity of the sentence.

One seldom has the opportunity or the necessity to read these functional words with so much care, except perhaps if one is teaching a composition class, and late at night, in front of a stack of student essays, one ponders suddenly how to explain why a student should or shouldn't use "that" in a sentence. In lieu of a noun, "that" becomes the object (or is it the subject?) of stanza thirteen. Just as Stein uses the indefinite article "a", "As a wife has a cow," she picks "that," the further removed indexical term, further removed than "this." The inaccessibility of "that" produces tension; it is too far away, not within grasp. On the level of the word to word relations, "that" is the "Other" which all the prepositions struggle to possess and remake. But "that" turns out to be both promiscuous and attachable, and self-contained. "Just as soon as that," echoes the final line of stanza twelve, "Just as soon as now": "that" and "now" give these two phrases different balances, "now" on the side of time, "that" more smugly material.

What does all this have to do with a love story, a wife and a cow? This word-play is also fore-play, leading up to the ecstatic last stanza. Variations on having, happen and happening accumulate, bunch up, take the breath away in the

long first part of the second sentence, and then resolve in a litany of cows, which more than matches the fulfillment of Molly Bloom's famous soliloquy.

"Having to have it as happening" was Stein's desire in writing, where "it" is the immediate act of writing. Direct relation requires immediacy. While "happening" expresses Stein's absorption in the present moment, the very word "having" is also threatening, since it too aurally close to "halving," being split, separated, cut off from the sustaining relations. The paradoxical opposition in this homonym occupied Stein on several occasions. The first section of "An Elucidation" (1922): "Halve and have./Halve Rivers and Harbors./Have rivers and harbors" (Reader 430).

Though Stein seldom seems to wrestle with literary predecessors in her work, Shakespeare's conjugation of the verb "to have" in Sonnet 129 ("Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame"), "Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme," makes this poem an interesting intertext.⁸ Contrary to Shakespeare's dark meditation on the hell lurking in the fulfillment of sexual desire (significantly sexual desire focused on the lady, and not on the young man of the earlier sequence), *jouissance* wins in Stein's poem:

. . . and my wife has a cow as now, my wife having
a cow as now, my wife having a cow as now and
having a cow as now and having a cow now, my wife
has a cow and now. My wife has a cow."

The indefinite article "a" is replaced by the possessive "my." And "they" live happily ever after?

"As A Wife Has A Cow" is successful as a sound poem, an incantation full of sex magic, a chant to ward off the evils of exile and war (the fifteenth of October referred to in the poem is the date Stein and Toklas were allowed to return to Paris after being stranded in England at the outbreak of WWI, another separation and reunion). It is a sustained investigation into the mysteries of how words, particularly little words, work. And it is a catalogue of relations happening, between lovers, between the writer's mind and word, between words, between legs.

Stein's interest in relation, and its problems and processes, was apparent early in her career. Her first literary projects, the novels O.E.D. and The Making of Americans, were, in part, attempts to systematically describe and categorize every kind of character type and how each type might affect every other type, as if accomplishing this would make living in the world fool-proof. Her relationship with Alice B. Toklas gave her the security she needed to change course. The idea of "relation" became less threatening when Alice replaced her unsupportive brother Leo at 42 Rue de Fleurus. Even when Stein was not writing love poems to Alice, or about Alice, she was associating the pleasures and struggles of composition with the struggles and pleasures of loving. The lover/Other was not a distant

muse, and not really an absent inspiration to writing. (Alice typed Stein's notebooks daily.) Boundaries shifted and overlapped; her interest was in the small daily details of a shared life that never seemed to lose their miraculousness.

Stein's interest in spot-lighting the transitive parts of language was rooted in a scientific interest in how cognition operated, but here was also an abstract association between her own marginal status and the status of little words in comparison with substantives. Stein's experimentation with substantive and transitive words creates a metonymy between the politics of social reality and the politics of word classes within grammar. Their quality of being easily mistaken, of shifting, of attaching endlessly, of being everlasting irritation, of going wild in the absence of regulatory nouns, makes Stein's little words the grammatical terrorist's most potent tools in destabilizing the "Unity of one Thought," the notion that remained William James's most comfortable resting-place.

"But isn't the surest pleasure of all the pleasure of talking about love? What is more, in order to tell the truth?" (Luce Irigaray, This Sex Which Is Not One, 99).

One of the most sympathetic readings of Gertrude Stein's lesbian textual erotics (i.e., the psychosexual dynamics which shape her grammar, syntax and genre) is

Elizabeth Meese's discussion in (Sem)Erotics: Theorizing Lesbian : Writing. Meese's literary/political analysis of Stein and other lesbian writers is intercut throughout with "love letters," the performative flip-side to her argument for the necessity of writing/theorizing a lesbian subjectivity. She begins with the assumption that "[w]riting the lesbian means writing someone who does not yet exist" (3), an erasure or prohibition secured by the Law of the Father, the phallogocentric system of language under which some things remain unrepresentable. Skeptical of essentializing definitions of "lesbian" or "lesbian experience," Meese suggests that we recognize the subversive, metaphorical potential of the term "lesbian" and inhabit this space, play in and with this space. Against the postmodern skepticism about representing a lesbian, or even a female subjectivity, Meese acts on her intuition about the relation between making love and writing:

Or when my tongue slides over the osmotic, lively breathing surfaces of your skin like words in the more elusive glissement. . .they produce signification which we take as meanings. Or as the pen makes its tracks across the body of the page, its frictions and its struggle to mark the course faithfully, our passions inscribed energetically in the body of language in the mind: a love letter (3).

Such a claim echoes other contemporary feminist or lesbian theorists and writers: Luce Irigaray's "When Our Lips Speak Together," Helene Cixous's ecstatic poetics, Nicole Brossard's provocative texts. It also shows a real understanding of Stein's conflation of love making and book making, an analogy or metaphor or "site" which structures many of her radical texts, particularly the longer pieces. "Lifting Belly" ends famously: "In the midst of writing there is merriment," where "merriment" is linked to singing, signs, and Stein's own signifier for female orgasmic pleasure, "cows."⁹ In her reading of this poem, Harriet Chessman remarks on the "continuum" which "emerges between a bodily intimacy and 'composing' of this work. The composition takes on a bodily and erotic dimension, as the literal touching of belly to belly enters into the writing" (104).

We might start with Stein's basic terms, and the questions surrounding these terms. What is a "book," and what, for that matter, constitutes a "love story"? Can we first explore what might be called the "grammar" of the love story, whatever is understood by that generic designation?

In an essay titled "The Orgastic Pattern of Fiction," Robert Scholes makes some large claims: "The archetype of all fiction is the sexual act. . . . For what connects fiction--and music--with sex is the fundamental orgastic rhythm of tumescence and detumescence, of tension and

resolution, of intensification to the point of climax and consummation" (qtd in Winnett 506). Susan Winnett points out some of the problems with Scholes's assumptions (his failure to define his terms within an understandable context, his hedging his heterosexual analogy when his argument suddenly turns homoerotic). However, Scholes describes here, in explicit terms, what has often been merely taken for granted about the grammar, or structure, of most narrative plots. Her conclusion, "It is time to start again, to see what comes of unstringing the Masterplot that wants to have told us in advance where it is that we should take our pleasures and what must inevitably come of them" (516), is a good lead back to Stein's "love story."

Instead of replicating a heterosexual dynamic in this text (as Stimpson suggests because of her emphatic use of the term "wife"), the fact that this story concludes with female sexual/textual pleasure (a cow) describes a movement quite different from Scholes's tumescence/detumescence. The very act of reading from beginning to end cannot help but create a kind of progression or building up, and the "mysterious" references to a specific date (the fifteenth of October) and "preparation" pin the text to some idea of before and after. However, each pushing and pulling between conjunctions, prepositions, and adverbials grounds the poem in an abstract drama occurring only with the act of reading. Each stanza pulses with its own peculiarly individual

energy, but these energies are allowed to coexist, arranged on the page, without being required to propel the others along towards a greater "meaning." "Having to have it as happening" makes it happen differently.

1. Cynthia Secor suggests, similarly, that Stein "was truly radical in her belief that gender is meaningless" (30).
2. See Loy's poem, "Gertrude Stein," The Last Lunar Baedeker 26.
3. In her manuscript, each "piece" is written on a separate sheet of 4" x 8 1/2" paper, sometimes on both sides. This method of writing might account for the regularity of the composition of each piece. It is interesting that Stein was still using the series format, with sub-titled sections, ten years after first experimenting with it in Tender Buttons. This "series" format is common, however, to many of Stein's texts besides Tender Buttons and A Book. In "Composition as Explanation" (1926), Stein attributed this development in her writing style to having "naturally kept simply different as an intention" (519).
4. The Julia who is mentioned throughout is the Julia Ford to whom this book was dedicated. Julia was the daughter of Ford Maddox Ford and Stella Bowen; Ford had agreed to publish The Making of Americans in the Transatlantic in 1924. Dydo provides the biographical, "daily life" reference--a "gift of ice cream and cake"--for the section called "Julia":

She asked for white and it was refused, she asked for pink and it was refused she asked for white and pink and it was agreed. . .

Interestingly, Natalie Clifford Barney, a long-time friend of Stein's, remembered Alice Toklas's coconut layer cake in similar terms: "Its white icing, edged with ornamental pink, matched Basket's like coating and incidental pinks" (intro to AFAM).

As Ulla Dydo warns, "Stein's text absorbs daily life," but to focus too much on this aspect "distracts from the words that are here" (Reader 452).
5. Stein offers an odd "key" when she credits one of her servants as the inspiration for Part I. In Everybody's Autobiography (1935), Stein says that she knew a great deal about "the children of the armistice, I told a good deal about one named Celestine in the first part of the book called As a Wife Has a Cow a Love Story" (93). Celestine, one of their servants who "came to us from the cows," was a country bumpkin whose ignorance of Parisian life was a source of amusement. It is interesting that Stein thought she "told a great deal about" this female servant, since there seems to be no reference, implicit or explicit, to Celestine in the content of A Book. Stein was not given to in-depth analysis of her own writing processes or history, and the Celestine connection may be a red herring. But

Stein's interest in the story of the rapid social and sexual transformation of a naive country girl, signified by a change from "Modigliani" (soulfulness?) to "Rubens" (fleshiness?), from "postal cards" to an indiscretion in a movie theater, is another return to the subjects of racial and class difference, female sexuality, and the generational shifts away from the nineteenth century and its mores and habits. Of course, Celestine might also have been the cause, real or imagined, of the disappearance of money and candy from the closet, and hence the "key" to the "key." More interesting to me is the fact that Stein later credited Celestine, who was able to transform herself from a naive nineteenth century country wench to a post-Armistice well-to-do, sexual "upper servant," with "inspiring" this first part of A Book, where Stein works a similar transformation on the syntax of the sentence.

6. I expand on this figure in Chapter 3.

7. This attempt to "defamiliarize" was a concern for many modernist writers. William Carlos Williams could credit Stein for carrying out this project:

Writing, like everything else, is a question of refreshed interest. It is directed, not idly, but as most often happens (though not necessarily so) toward that point not to be predetermined where movement is blocked (by the end of logic perhaps). It is about these parts . . . that Gertrude Stein will be found" ("The Work of Gertrude Stein" 118).

While Williams could appreciate the way Stein refreshed language, by "smashing every connotation that words have ever had, in order to get them back clean" ("A 1 Pound Stein" 163), there were definite limits on how far he could follow her towards the "end of logic perhaps." In the final analysis, Pound and Joyce were his literary heroes, and for all their linguistic and generic experimentation, their work doesn't stray outside patriarchal, heterosexist systems of logic or representation.

8. I thank Alicia Ostriker for pointing out this echo between Stein and the Shakespeare sonnet.

9. See Chessman (111). "Accents in Alsace" (1919) ends similarly: "In the midst of our happiness we were very pleased" (Reader 321).

CHAPTER TWO

"Cousin to Cooning": Difference, Democracy, and Racialized Language in Stein's Nonrepresentational Texts

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to direct a dramatic reading of White Wines, a short play by Gertrude Stein, written in 1913. After a month of rehearsals, one of the actors, an African-American woman, called me on the phone to say that she was upset by the line, "A cousin to cooning, a cousin to that and mixed labor and a strange orange and a height and a piece of holy phone and a catching hat glass and a bit of undertaking" (214). Wasn't this reference to "coonin'" racist? We discussed this question at the next few rehearsals, where I presented some etymological background on the word "coon," which turned out to have a slang usage as a verb, meaning to steal something, and an even more obscure usage attributed to hobo slang, regarding hopping trains. The actress was too disturbed by this line to remain in the production, however. The rest of the cast, all of us white, did not read this use of the term "coonin'" as having an explicitly racist intention, and we went ahead and performed the play.

Looking back, however, the question of how to interpret the phrase, "A cousin to cooning," is still not settled in my mind. Once the racialized noun is discovered in the gerund, then other words in the sentence cease to be so innocuous, "mixed labor" suggesting an anxiety over

miscegenation and class, and even "strange orange" glowing more ominously. The whole play, a dense four pages, has the lively, suggestive style of Tender Buttons. References to "cunning," "trembling," "wet," "clutch," "habit," "corset," "cake," "butter," and "stain" can be read as instances of sexualized language within the nonreferential context of the play, while a line like "Change the sucking with a little sucking" jumps out as surprisingly explicit. Later, Stein's plays would get more abstract and pared down, but here language is like butter-laden cake, rich and sweet. Except for "cooning," which leaves a bitter taste in the contemporary mouth.

The appearance of such racialized language is not unique to White Wines. Many of Stein's experimental texts contain the "sudden" eruption of racialized, sometimes derogatory terms. For instance, in another text from 1913 titled "Miguel (Collusion). Guimpe. Candle.," "coon" shows up in the noun position, though again overt intention is obscured by the odd syntactic logic and the use of rhyme: "A lamb a white long loan and an ostrich and a tin bin a real cold cake with season and a little blind oak, a coon is sooner" (BTV 37). While there have been several conflicting interpretations of Stein's views of race and racism in her more traditional narrative "Melanctha,"¹ few critics have commented on the many instances of racialized or ethnic terms in her more experimental texts. Given that these texts

are largely "nonrepresentational"--they continually set up barriers between sign and referent--how can the racialized terms in these texts be read? What are the connections between intellectual play with linguistic difference, and categories of difference in the social/political world? If experimental writing deconstructs these categories through various linguistic techniques and play, what ramifications, if any, does this play have any in the material world?²

Stein's use of racialized language is best understood in the context of her play with difference and contiguity in the linguistic arenas of semantics and syntax. Racialized signifiers, which foregrounded the issue of difference by embodying American's brutal racist history, posed the greatest challenge to Stein's project: to unlink the signifier from the signified, to foster a plurality of meaning, to reformulate relations between words outside the laws of grammar. If she was drawn to racialized terms and references again and again, it was because unlike many others, these signifiers could not be separated from what they signified.

Racialized signifiers cannot easily be detached from their overcharged signifieds because their functions are so overdetermined. Aldon Nielsen, for instance, analyzes the way in which the word "nigger" serves as "a linguistic nexus of white thought" (3), implicating the entire complex structure of racial division and inequality each time it

appears. Stein's early play with signification was an attempt to "[smash] every connotation that words have ever had in order to get them back clean" (Williams, "A 1 Pound Stein" 163)--clean words being necessary for expressing twentieth-century perceptions, as well as her more personal perceptions of relationship, power, and eros from her marginal position. The leveling of connotation was a necessary step toward leveling the literary playing field in order to make room for her own innovative and challenging compositions. It is not surprising, then, that Stein's attention was drawn to the words which had the most deeply rooted and virulent connotations in American English.

The presence of intractable racialized words and tropes of dark and light in Stein's early work was probably prompted by her aesthetic concerns with similarity and difference at the level of the signifier, and an anxiety about the effects of binary categorization, rather than by any overt desire on her part to comment, one way or the other, about racism. However, her use of racialized language can also be understood in relation to the "Africanism" which Toni Morrison's defines as the literal or symbolic representations of blackness which become, in white-authored American literature, "both a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power, and meditations on ethics and accountability" (7). Stein may

have blindly held racist stereotypes about sexualized, racialized "others," but she was also implicated in these stereotypes as a lesbian and a Jew. As Brenda Wineapple explains, "And Gertrude, the medical student whose specialty had been the nervous diseases of women, was probably aware that much of the medical and scientific world linked the black female's sexuality with that of the lesbian."

Wineapple repeats Stein's comment to a close friend regarding a sketch of her made by her brother: "it looks like me, I think it looks like a nigger, he says that certainly comes to the same thing" (235).³ Since Stein's linguistic tampering involved an erotics and experience outside of the normative heterosexual boundaries, it is not surprising that she makes the link between "improper" racialized language and "taboo" sexuality so often in these texts.

I am not interested in quantifying Gertrude Stein's racism, nor do I want to ignore instances of prejudice in her literary or extra-literary texts. However, if the motivations behind her "experimental" use of racialized language are a matter of conjecture, the extra-literary sources--letters, the autobiographies, and the extended "portrait" of Picasso--offer little straightforward information regarding Stein's own views. For instance, in a letter to Carl Van Vechten, Stein reiterates her desire that he pay a visit to Paris by quoting Paul Robeson's similar

desire as additional bait: "Absolutely, as dear Paul [Robeson] says. . ." The sentence then continues without pause: "by the way the little nigger thing is in Useful Knowledge" (162) (referring to a group portrait titled "Among Negroes," which Van Vechten had asked to see several times). Stein seems to have no consciousness (nor self-consciousness) about invoking "dear Paul" and then calling her portrait "the little nigger thing."

Stein's explicit comments about race are patronizing, wrong-headed, and eccentric; however, her attitudes never turn into the kind of virulent political and aesthetic stance taken by Pound, Eliot or Stevens (or any number of other modernist writers). Philip Kuberski notes how Pound needed a "toxic" other in order to define an idea of purity in language: "the Jew is the toxic image of the Cantos' exiled author" (19). The "function" of race and racialized language in Stein's texts is more difficult to pin down, complicated by her own status as an "other"--as a woman, a Jew, and a lesbian. However, psychological speculations about Stein's possible projection of anxieties attendant upon her own identity onto conventional figures of "otherness" are of limited value when trying to interpret the nonrepresentational texts. My own conclusion about the function of race in Stein's texts is similar to DeKoven's: "Race is a highly ambiguous force of disruptive fascination or fascinating disruption, contributing to the generic

indeterminacy. . . of these narratives. . . rather than to any racist or antiracist, conservative or subversive, thematic configuration" (RS 68-69).

If "Africanist idiom is used to establish difference," a particularly modern concern, Modernist texts further appropriated black dialect and language "for the associative value they lend to modernism--to being hip, sophisticated, ultra-urbane" (Morrison 52). Stein's eccentric approximation of black dialect in "Melanctha" may have paved the way for other white writers, from Sherwood Anderson to William Carlos Williams, to attempt their own appropriations. These contemporaries viewed Stein's work as ground-breaking for touching on issues of race and ethnic difference (think of Williams's assessment of "Melanctha" as "a thrilling clinical record of the life of a colored woman...told with directness and truth" (119)).⁴ She may have hosted parties for the Revue Nègre and received visits from Carl Van Vechten's Black or Latino proteges, but Stein did not employ racialized language in her texts as a way of signalling that she had some special cache as a hip white person. Aldon Nielsen labels Stein's attitude towards the black characters and culture in "Melanctha" as "romantic racism": a blend of sympathy and stereotypical racist assumptions (21). As she turned away from representational narrative writing, however, Stein increasingly eschewed the "romantic racism" which white writers like Mina Loy invoked

in connection to Modernist sensibility: "Plopping a finger/In Stephen's ink/Made you hybrid-negro" ("To You" 89). Instead, racialized language became the magnetized site for the kinds of linguistic investigations she was pursuing.

Although Stein's primary interest may have been focused on the linguistic problems posed by overcharged racialized language, it is extremely difficult to separate her word play from the political and social realities of racism which have invested the signifiers "nigger," "coon," "white," "black" with so much power in the first place. Stubbornly committed to a radically democratic conception of language-- a poetics which has revisionary political implications-- Stein's decision to not foreground these realities in her work after Three Lives makes for contradictory implications. For instance, the piece "Dinner," from Tender Buttons, contains the phrase "needless are niggers." ("It was a time when in the acres in late there was a wheel that shot a burst of land and needless are niggers and a sample sample set of old eaten butterflies with spoons..." (55)). Here indeterminant syntax meets ambiguous social commentary. The use of the derogatory racial term implies a ready-made negative attitude towards African-Americans--perhaps that "we" whites don't need niggers; Nielsen wonders if such a phrase can be "wholly unmotivated" by Stein's own racist attitudes (27). However, the phrase can also be read-- "niggers" are needless, i.e., they have no needs.

This seems an intimation of the "theory" Stein would later expound to Carl Van Vechten about the completeness of African-American culture: "their sophistication is complete and so beautifully finished and it is the only one that can resist the United States of America" (Letters, 152). More infamous is her defensive comment about "primitivism" from The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas: "Gertrude Stein concluded that negroes were not suffering from persecution, they were suffering from nothingness. She always contends that the african is not primitive, he has a very ancient but a narrow culture and there it remains. Consequently nothing does or can happen" (292). Stein may have wanted to distance herself from "primitivism" once that term gained popular appeal in European art circles. But the ambiguously phrased sentiment, "needless are niggers," does seem to participate--Stein's protests notwithstanding--in the sort of exoticization of the "primitive" that John Cooley critiques in "White Writers and the Harlem Renaissance": many white Modernists, including Stein "described blacks as another kind of primitive; for them . . . blacks were regarded as childlike and their lives were simplistic. . . . To these white writers, blacks symbolized those qualities so striking for their absence from white America" (18). Hal Foster also points out that white male heterosexual artists' "identification with 'the primitive,' however imagined as

dark, feminine, and profligate, remained a disidentification with white, patriarchal, bourgeois society" (76).

Stein certainly felt a similar disidentification. In The Making of Americans, for instance, the "middle class" is described as "sordid material unillusioned unaspiring and always monotonous" (34)--qualities she repudiated. In one of her early notebooks, Stein distinguished her own developing aesthetics from the pragmatist philosophy of her teacher William James and her brother Leo: "I believe in reality as Cezanne or Caliban believe in it" (qtd in Ruddick 99), placing herself in the middle of an intriguing double pairing.⁵ Stein may have chafed under the constrictions of middle-class norms, but identifying with the "dark, feminine, and profligate" was dangerous for her--given her sex and sexuality.

In a letter to a friend, Stein explained some of her motives for writing Three Lives: "I am afraid that I can never write the great American novel. . . .so I have to content myself with niggers and servant girls and the foreign population generally. . . .Dey is very simple and very vulgar and I don't think they will interest the great American public" (qtd in Charters, xv). Here Stein affects the stereotypical black dialect ("dey") which she avoided in "Melanctha," such "dialect" serving as that "sign of hipness" between these white, privileged middle-class college educated women. Like other Modernist writers and

painters, Stein chose these "others" as her subject matter, partly to shock the bourgeoisie, partly out of her own identification with the "very simple and very vulgar," but also because these "others" radically destabilized the status quo--aesthetically and politically.⁶

In "Dinner," then, Stein anticipates the primitivist move where darkness, figured metaphorically or in the bodies and culture of Africans and African-Americans, is seen as an alternative to a confining, dull whiteness. While her attitude about "niggers" remains murky, "Dinner" ends with an unambiguous refusal of whiteness: "All to be not a white old chat churner" (55). In her attempt to create a new sort of literary expression, Stein's "to be or not to be" has no easy answers. She clearly does not want to be "a white old chat churner" (note how her rearrangement of adjectives foregrounds whiteness), nor a crazy white hunter (see "A White Hunter" in Tender Buttons). Poe and Melville made whiteness the romantic symbol for the chilling, awesome culmination of "the American Dream" (Morrison 31-35). Stein's stake in this American literary tradition was dubious. She was cognizant of the fact that for all her class privilege, this reified whiteness was part of a system of categorization and ranking where her own identity as a lesbian, a Jew, and a woman positioned her as a subordinate, an outsider. For instance, in a reply to Henri-Pierre Roche's condescending criticism of Three Lives, Stein

answered: "Now you if I were a man would not write me such a letter because you would respect the inevitable character of my art" (qtd in Wineapple 335). In her bid for authorial power on the cusp of a new century, Stein may have rejected the "white old chat churner" along with patriarchal poetry, but the alternative--a blackness which she saw as static, dirty, sexual--was double-edged, both liberating and confining. Unlike other white Modernists, Stein did not embrace an appropriated, commodified "negroness" as the alternative to stultifying bourgeois sensibility. The radically democratic overturning of hierarchies and power structures required an undermining of categories and ranking systems, including this white/black binary. Therefore, her attack would zero in on the words which most denoted race.

Stein's early nonrepresentational texts work with the materiality of the word, self-consciously playing with the plastic aspects of language such as aural puns (including mistranslations from other languages to English and transyllabification), rhyme, morphemes, visual format, and punctuation. The 1913 text "Bee Time Vine" illustrates all of these kind of play. The change in one letter can alter meaning: "bee" and "be," "Class grass", "sooth for soot;" these words become closely related within the proximity of the text. But what happens when several letters are added to a phoneme, as in "Go gout," or there are words which are aurally similar which have different spelling, such as "Coal

hole." Are these words still related, still "cousins"? The more inclusive term of relation, "cousin" is a word that shows up often in these early texts where Stein tests the boundaries of relation and difference, as if illustrating Saussure's conceptualization of meaning as based on differences, rather than being transparent, transcendent: "a difference generally implies positive terms between which the difference is set up; but in language there are only differences without positive terms. . . . The idea or phonic substance that a sign contains is of less importance than the other signs that surround it" (120). Playing between languages and pronunciation further foregrounds the arbitrary nature of language, the French verb "mange" having very different associations than the English noun.

This arbitrariness results in punning or double meanings which demolish linear, straightforward movement in the text. Such movement is also frustrated by phrases or sentences which seem to be syntactically correct, but actually make no sense, at least not initially. Cynthia N. Pondrom describes the early phase of Stein's stylistic play (represented in Geography and Plays, 1908/09-1915), as her "brilliantly irrational style," where "vivid nouns dominate and the axis of combination is undermined with non-sequitur and logical fallacy" (xv). In Roman Jakobson's structuralist analysis, "The addressee perceives that the given utterance (message) is a combination of constituent parts (sentences,

words, phonemes) selected from the repository of all possible constituent parts (the code)" (99). In a sentence such as "If coal oil means water and a memory and fine" ("BTV" 35), the conjunctions signal readers to make certain relations between the nouns and verbs--cause and effect, contiguity and sequence. However, Stein's selections do not immediately "make sense" since we are not habitually used to making such causal or contiguous connections between "coal oil," "water," "a memory," and "fine"; further, the sentence sounds unfinished, since "If" presumes a corresponding "then" to complete its logic. As Pondrom goes on to explain, "The immediate effect of the suppression of the axis of combination is to disseminate meaning across the surface of the text, resisting the restrictions on the play of the signifier traditionally imposed by both context and the hierarchy of grammar" (xxxiii).⁶ Such freeing up of the signifier occurs because readers will attempt to interpret the unorthodox relationships Stein establishes between words, and their placement within the sentence. But when heavily freighted racialized signifiers appear along this suppressed axis of combination, can meaning be disseminated in the same way?

In her texts from the teens through the twenties, Stein exuberantly played with loaded signifiers--"wife," "wedding," "Caesar," and most famously, "rose"--shaking them so hard that they were emptied of their gendered, historical

denotations and connotations, available for her own particular significations.⁹ She attempted the same thing with racialized signifiers such as "nigger," or "coon," but these terms did not have the elasticity of "wife" or "rose." Nielsen focuses on the "epithet 'nigger'" as a prime example of one of the "frozen metaphors within American speech" (3). Given the vehemently anti-metaphorical nature of Stein's abstract texts, how solid do these "frozen metaphors" remain in her texts?

The short text titled "Bee Time Vine" (1913) is a good example of the ways Stein crossed the wires of normative syntax and semantics in order to frustrate "normal" signification. While it starts out as a parody of lyric love poetry, in the last half of the text words disintegrate into morphemes, and then even these units lose coherence as the molecular structure of language flies apart. This disintegration will be baffled, however, by the ultimate racialized term, "nigger." The following close reading will attempt to account for the appearance of this epithet in the context of Stein's lesbian lyric.

The text begins, "Bee time vine be vine truth devine truth." The senses of sound ("be," "bee") and sight ("devine," "be vine"), which are usually subordinated in reading to "grammatical competence," are foregrounded. The joke here is that "devine," a made up word which nevertheless has a strong relation to eye-rhymes and other

words in the line, modifies "truth." If "divine truth" is the ultimate transcendental signifier, Stein, the Modernist gardener, will rip away the overgrown connotations and contexts which make this term meaningful.

In Stein's de-evolved Eden, the babble of "devine" sounds continues off the margins of the page, between the lines. One echo tossed back off the word is the romantic "Be mine." Less obvious is the American slang "bee line."¹⁰ Such spinning of collateral phrases might seem off the track, until we realize that this text is nothing like a bee line, where signifiers point to clearly delineated signifieds.

The text begins pastorally, in a world of bees and vines, and goes on to gently parody romantic lyric tradition. Renaissance diction is implicit in the plays on archaic English: "with sooth for soot"; "neathless which never bless"; "A lass" (one of Stein's aural puns on the name "Alice"). In this love poem, the goddess of love is invoked, only to be belittled: "Wee nus." Stein invokes this older lyric tradition in order to express her own different erotics: "Love callous kidding with little lozenges and a mouth and moist neglected pens pens full of under standing" For Stein, as with traditional poets, love inspires writing (metonymically invoked by "pens"), but not a writing which participates in the heterosexist tradition where the pen is also always "a metaphorical penis" (Gilbert and Gubar

Madwoman 3); notice here that the "moist neglected pens" aren't standing up, but under standing. The adjective "moist," already redolent of feminine sexuality, is turned into an active verb: "A lass which moistens the beat wax so and it was a ring it was a necessary trim." Not only does "ring" suggest marriage, but the "ring" or circle is Stein's alternative to linear movement. As Ulla Dydo explains, Stein's fondness for circles--in imagery, in her "Rose is a rose is a rose" letterhead seal--has a strong aesthetic corollary. "A Stein reader is wise to remember that like stones dropped into a quiet pool, her word ideas make circles upon new and unexpected circles in her work" (Reader 326). So the adjective turns verb, "Beat wax" takes us back to "bees' wax" (American slang for "business"), and through the sentimental "A lass" rings the name of Stein's lover.

I want to concentrate, however, on the word play in the last half of the piece, where phrasing gets smaller and more intense, until the words disintegrate under the pressure of Stein's pressing:

Covers, covers, little lamb.

No poe, coop ham.

Leaf as not.

Ixtact, lime.

Co hie.

Wee nus, poodle nut, all bow with cut hup. Leave len. A

go

lash. Lips tip. No pie. Rest.

We tight, Nigger. Nasal, noseite. Not we when. Butt,
but set. All that, cold. nigh jigger.

Pea sells. All.

Way mouth, soph, chive, bee,
so, it, any, muse, in, lee, vie.

While this text may initially appear unreadable, paying close attention to the particular grammatical, linguistic features Stein is fooling with reveals patterns which can themselves be read and interpreted. For instance, one unusual feature here is the appearance of the morpheme "co" in the line "Co hie." The morpheme can act as a prefix meaning togetherness, similarity, although its earlier appearance in the coinage "colloose" stretches our ability to make meaning to the limit.¹¹ In contrast, these two letters cannot be considered a morphemic unit in "coal," "covers," "coop," or "cold," although these words are related by the simple fact that they look alike. In a different way, the numerous words that rhyme with "co" ("poe"--which might be a shortened "poem," or a reference to the American author, "go," "so," and "no") are phonetically related to the "co-" words; the meaningless phrase "Co hie" is also an exact rhyme with the seemingly clear "No pie." Focusing her attention on this prefix which facilitates togetherness, similarity, Stein goes on to formulate other kinds of similarity based on sight and sound. Contrarily,

the idea of similarity gives way to the flip-side. If "co-" is the morpheme signifying kinship, "no" is the sign of negation, refusal, prohibition--a word that Stein is particularly fond of playing with. "No" and "not" appear four times in this section. "Coop" is also be a transliteration of the french "coupe," to cut--another word which frustrates togetherness. And just as "co-" attracts "go" and "cold," so "no/not" will bring in "nut" and "noseite." What Stein is doing here is making connections between words on many levels beyond the semantic--using sight, sound, and the logic of negation to link words together.

In the odd word "Ixtact," "ix-" seems to be a morpheme, a prefix which could be related to the more familiar "ex-"; "-tact" can be derived from the Latin "tactus," from the verb "to touch." If "intact" means "not touched, what might "Ixtact" mean?"¹² Whatever it could be, the word again has to do with touching, proximity--putting things (words, morphemes, letters) together in order to recognize and sort out similarity and difference--which is the actual basis for the way we make meaning. And, as poststructuralists, reading linguistic theory through psychoanalytic theory have posited, subjectivity works in a corollary fashion: "Subjectivity--like objectivity--is an effect of difference, an effect inscribed in a system of differences" (Derrida).

If all of Stein's word play seemed abstract, even comical ("Wee nus, poodle nut..."), the issue of subjectivity returns in the startling phrase "We tight, Nigger," this epithet calling up the issue of relation and difference more powerfully than any other. "Nigger" cannot be just another noun, subject to distortion and word-play (and interestingly here, the word is capitalized, further suggesting its function as "name" rather than "noun"). Aldon Lynn Nielsen claims that "nigger" "is the one signifier, which, even when unspoken, serves as the organizing principle of the entire discourse, the white man's name for the nonwhite..." (intro). As she does with other nouns, Stein attempts to defuse this signifier through variation and rhyme ("nigh jigger").¹³ But even in the rhyming of "Nigger" with "jigger" there are inescapable racist relations: "jigger" is related to "chigger" or "flea," and carries echoes of the derogatory racist term "jigaboo" (which was sometimes shortened to "jig"). That this highly-charged term of racial difference resists non-sense was one of the reasons Stein returned to it again and again.

The word "Nigger" is the focal point in this text, where rigorous play with morphemes and phonemes at the linguistic level slips into the cultural world where it becomes morphology, the ways the body has come to be read in order to signify difference, which is subject to inquiry, where the materiality of the word is suddenly grounded in

the materiality of the body. The taboos and violence surrounding sexualized, racialized body parts which Stein calls up are part of the fear/fascination that Morrison analyzes within white-authored American literature. It also illustrates Hortense Spillers' theory of an "American grammar," the symbolic dehumanizing of the black body within white racism, which has a historical precedent in the actual mutilation of black flesh (60). If skin color has been the primary "declension" by which this culture reads race, particular body parts--lips, nose, and butt--are related sites of alleged white/black racial difference.

Who is the "we" of "We tight, Nigger"? Who is speaking this phrase which does slip into an appropriated Black dialect momentarily? Jews were also traditionally stereotyped as being different from Christians, both spiritually and physiologically, a difference allegedly signified most clearly by nose shape. The term "noseite" seems to combine "nose" with the morpheme "-ite"--as in "Israelite." (Stein would also have been familiar with the biological term "somite," meaning a body part or segment.) The suggestion that Stein might be (unconsciously) acknowledging that the Jew was "nigh" to the African-American in terms of white supremacist racism might be an over-reading this passage. However, as Hal Foster notes, "In racist discourse Jews were often regarded as too civilized, that is, as deracinated, decadent, degenerate,

and so as 'primitive' once again" (72). Within the context of her rigorous deconstruction of sameness and difference through a tampering with the materiality of the word, such a suggestion is not so farfetched.

Foregrounding the arbitrary nature of signification immediately undermines "truth," particularly the divine "truth" of the monotheistic people of the book. Once the transcendental nature of "truth" and signification is put into question, what categories of sameness, difference, and hierarchy are left? Stein's ability to "devine" truth by appropriating and distorting Western lyrical tradition lends the erotic charge to the text--the figure of the muse reduced to the lisping "Wee nus," and patriarchal authority/authorship mocked in "moist neglected pens." Stein delights in creating category confusion along the axis of selection and combination, thereby opening up a space for a different relationship between words, a new expression: "and below, below whites, glaze and exchange water with sooth for soot and lower for a cat which a goat. It was so fine." Stein's different system of "exchange" resists linear logic and metaphor. The items exchanged here--water, sooth, soot, cat--don't even belong to the same class of items (natural substances, animals, exclamation); her indexical pointers--below, lower--are meant to lead us astray, pointing us in a direction loaded with connotations. ("Lower" and "below" are where sexuality, femaleness, and

the unconscious all can be found...Hades too.) A series of "exchanges" here also leads us from "white" to "soot," metonymic sign of blackness, dirtiness. Critics such as Neil Schmitz and Lisa Ruddick have noted the many references to dirt and excrement in Tender Buttons, Schmitz concluding that such imagery "is, humorously, the fundamental rhythm of life, one's consummate metaphor" (123). Neither, however, notes the racial implications of such white/black imagery.

If the categories of cat and goat are so easily made exchangeable, arbitrary, what about racial/ethnic categories? Anxieties about racial difference are not so easily solved through semantic, syntactic, or linguistic play. "Butt," the most sexualized of the body parts mentioned here, may also be just "but"--but racialized connotations and the eroticizing and sexualizing of certain body sites, the "frozen metaphors" within the American language and psyche, constantly resist Stein's attempts to render them empty. But she did keep trying. Other pieces from 1913 display the same combination of rigorous linguistic deconstruction and inclusion of racial/ethnic signifiers. "Miguel (Collusion). Guimpe. Candle." is a longer, more syntactically coherent piece than "Bee Time Vine," referring more specifically to her 1912 trip to Granada. The proper name "Miguel," for instance, introduces a Spanish context, but why is "collusion" mentioned? Who is colluding with Miguel, or with whom does he collude, and for

what purpose? The word "collusion," slipped in parenthetically as if to illustrate its denotation, means a conspiratorial agreement, a secret and forbidden coming together. (I have not been able to decipher "Guimpe," either transyllabically or as a given name; the word "guile" shows up later in the poem, so perhaps "Guimpe" is a combination of "guile" and "imp"?)

The poem begins with a sly play on whiteness: "Collection of eggs white, white as know excellent." Read aloud, "Know" would sound like the negative, putting the excellence of white into question. The line contains another kind of aural pun, though: "white as know" echoing the superlative "white as snow," and implicitly suggesting the sterile coldness of this ideal of purity. (There are further echoes between "eggs" and "excellent.") However, this color--or lack of color--is never pure, and is not even meaningful without some differentiating other: "A glass white is a shadow in the bun." Such play in the realm of abstract color continues in the more solid imagery Stein provides. "A lamb a white long loan and an ostrich and a tin bin a real cold cake with season and a little blind oak, a coon is sooner" The lamb, Christian symbol of purity is first conjoined with white (again the inversion of adjectives foregrounds this word over long), and then with the exotic ostrich. The sentence ends up invoking one of the American signifiers on the other end of the skin-color spectrum. Of

course, in Stein's menagerie of lambs and ostriches, "coon" might just be the short form of raccoon here, an animal as noted for its cleverness and cunning as the lamb is for meekness and passivity.

The trip that Stein and Toklas took to Spain in 1912 has been well-documented as a turning point in her writing career. She mythologized it as such in The Autobiography: "We finally came to Granada and stayed there for some time and there Gertrude Stein worked terrifically" (SW 111). The well-known pieces "Susie Asado" and "Preciosilla" belong to this immediate period. These pieces are among the first where Stein attempted to capture "the rhythms of the visible world" (Pondrom 426), moving her focus from the "inside" to the "outside." She also began to work in her own feelings about sexuality, positive and negative, albeit in abstract fashion. As Pondrom points out, a piece like "A Sweet Tail (Gypsies)," "is one of Stein's explorations of the meaning of the sex/gender system, a 'tale' of the implications of the search for 'tail'" (426). This text, like the others, is also an exploration of how racial/ethnic categories are set up and used. Stein continually maps ethnic difference onto the binary of white/dark. In "A Sweet Tail (Gypsies)," there is a see-sawing between "dark white dark" and "Catch white color white sober, call white sold sacks, crimp white colored harness, crimp it with ferocious white saffron hides, hurry up clothes with calm calm bright capable

engines of pink and choice and press" (GP 67-68) Legends about the ethnic origins of the gypsy people, as well as the geographical proximity of Spain to the "dark" continent may have prompted "Call africa, call africa cod liver..." (66) (where "africa" gets aligned with health, and the unpleasantness associated with this alleged medicinal tonic).

Whether Stein's intention in this kind of word play was ultimately to bolster her own proximity to whiteness, to "romanticize" racial difference out of misplaced condescending sympathy, or to deconstruct such hierarchical categories in pursuit of "individual freedom," her failure to render such loaded signifiers harmless demonstrates the awful power such frozen linguistic formulations have over American speech--and thought.

Stein's attempt to defuse the power of "Nigger" in "Bee Time Vine" was unsuccessful; this noun refuses to become polysemous or indeterminant when placed in an ambiguous semantic contexts--in proximity to rhyming words or "cousin" words like "nigh." In other texts, Stein's attempt to undermine the racialized or ethnic signifiers was more "violent," and perhaps more successful. In this period, there are many instances of aural puns, or paronomasia, where "a nonsense phrase has a sensical twin pronounced the same but spelled differently" (Pondrom 427). For instance, in "Miguel (Collusion). Guimpe. Candle.," the line ending "a

coon is sooner" is closely followed by "Cup up, Cube in, Cube in a sand curl" (37). Stein's play on "Cuban" (again, capitalized as a proper name) may have associations to her trip to Spain. Stein also makes a sly association here with Picasso and cubism.

Similarly, another 1913 piece, "Yet Dish," is a play on "yiddish": Virgil Thomson's prefatory note refers to it as "a portrait of the Jews" which "will yield up many amusing, and some barbed, remarks to those who read it with its subject in mind" (53). Of course, without this helpful note, many (most?) readers would probably miss the pun, given the paucity of clear pointers within the text. With the "subject in mind," a reader can note the references to "shawl," "meal," "pray seat," "blessings;" the first line, "Put a sun in Sunday, Sunday," seems to differentiate the Jewish and Christian holy days. Mentioning "ham" may also be a reference to Jewish dietary laws: "Coop pour./Never a single ham./Charlie. Charlie" (55). (It is interesting to note that "Bee Time Vine," written around the same time, plays with some of the same words in the line "No poe, coop ham.") In general though, this text remains "hermetic." While the meaning of all of Stein's associations remains impossible to ferret out, the 69 short sections of the text demonstrate Stein's linguistic concerns of this period with difference and relation, the arbitrary nature of language, and dissemination of meaning. There are many instances of the

paronomasia and aural punning: "Bull it bull it bull it bull it"; "Witness a way go. Wetness./Wetness"; "Lessons lettuce"; "A R. nuisance....A R not new since"; "Leaves of gas..." [a play on "Leaves of grass"]; "Necklaces, neck laces." Just as "Yet Dish" echoes "Yiddish," so there are plays on "Polish" ("Polish polish is it a hand...or all poles sick") and "Russian" ("Rush in rush in slice"). These ethnic puns have a different weight than "witness/wetness" or "necklace/neck lace" since the terms have clearer referents. Given Stein's interest in these texts in the exact boundaries between linguistic similarity and difference, the appearance of these heavily laden categorical terms is not surprising, however.

Stein's desire to disempower racialized language also explains the many instances of the children's counting rhyme, "eeny meeny miny mo," which appear in her texts. In one section of A Book Concluding with As A Wife Has A Cow (1923), "Seven," for instance, the nonsense takes the form of a nursery-rhyme; the rhyme being played with might not be immediately obvious on first reading.

If she follows let her go, one two three four five
six seven. She is let go if she follows. If she
follows she is let go. If she follows let her go, she
is let go if she follows.

These fiddlings with the syntax, moving the preposition from the initial clause to the secondary clause, are

consistent with Stein's interest in running these variations to catch the subtle shadings of difference. But this "counting chant" is also a variation on the counting rhyme, "Eeney meeney miney mo, catch a nigger by the toe, if he hollers, let him go, Eeney meeney miney mo." This rhyme appears in many other pieces from 1918 to 1926, testifying to the fact that "Stein's astonishing verbal memory echoes in words and phrases that reappear, never by accident, across the years" (Dydo Reader 280).

The earliest instance of the rhyme I found is in "Accents in Alsace" (1918): "In me meeney miney mo./You are my love and I tell you so" (GP 410). The chant is altered in the service of a love poem full of silly forced rhymes. Here, the dynamic of catching, hollering (or following), and releasing are skipped over; instead, this rhyme begins with the sexually suggestive "in me" instead of a "eeney." In "Equally So. A Description of All the Incidents Which I Have Observed in Traveling and On My Return" (1923), the counting rhyme conjoins racism and sexuality differently:

In insistence. The text of a marriage in
insistence. To notice eeney meeney miney mo catch a
nigger by the toe. In this new sphere of liberty.

Now I wish to tell about the marriage of the
daughter may we say illegally . . . (AFAM 275).

What does it mean to notice this racist counting rhyme "in this new sphere of liberty," and in context of marriage?

The conflict between freedom and servitude (the idea of "catching" a Black person strongly associated with America's peculiar institution) is related here to the difference between legitimate and illegitimate marriages, a difference which mattered very much to Stein, given the illegal nature of her own "marriage" to Toklas.¹⁴

Stein may have been drawn to this rhyme because of the initial string of nonsense words, or because of the oddness of the image (catching someone by the toe), or because it contained the loaded term "nigger." She liked to count, to say numbers, to repeat. Her repetition of it over the span of eight years allows us to read the overlap Stein recognized between sexuality and racial/ethnic difference.

This overlap is also present, in an obscurer manner, in the text called "Thank You":

Thank you thank you thank you I'll be there.

Thank you. I'll be there. Thank you. Thank you. A good time in knee grows hands (BTV 43).

Virgil Thomson's headnote (which is longer than the text) credits the "inspiration" of this piece to a story about one of Sylvia Pankhurst's arrests and court appearances. The women's suffrage activist promised to return to court for her trial, saying "Thank you, I'll be there." "When questioned about her breach of parole she replied that the word "there" had not, in her mind, as she said it, meant the courtroom" (Thomson 43). It's obvious that this story would

have tickled Stein, who loved indexical words for their inherent indeterminacy. (Remember her ultimate put-down of her hometown, Oakland: "There is no there there.") Such indeterminant pointing steers Stein towards racialized language again. Here she almost manages to successfully make race invisible in her bizarre paronomasic phrase "knee grows hands." But how does the racial pun follow on the heels of the Pankhurst incident?

One explanation might be that Stein is attempting to "hide" or disguise a sexually suggestive, racially incendiary phrase as nonsense. A more plausible explanation is the inherent connection between the threat posed by women's suffrage and the increasing push for African-American civil rights to the existing social order. Stein had repudiated any interest in organized feminist groups or causes after she was out of college. In this short piece, however, she obliquely refers to the complicated relationships which arose out of the suffrage campaigns between African-American men and African-American and American white women (a conflict which appears in her last play, The Mother of Us All).¹⁵

One "lesson" of "Thank You," if I can apply that tired pedagogical word to this piece for a moment, is that not all indeterminacy is created equal. "There" can refer to whatever one has in mind while saying it; the indexical word can "point" in numerous directions (though constrained

somewhat by context). In contrast, the paronomastic "knee grows hands" is much less "free." Once the pun is recognized, the reader see-saws back and forth between the nonsensical "picture" of biology gone berserk and the "sensical" "Negro's/s' hands." To be in these hands invokes white racist fears--to be in someone's hands means you are in their power. This threat was symbolized and solidified in white American racist ideology by the image of a white woman in the hands of a Black man--an image which allowed white men to escape all responsibility for several centuries of their sexual assault on Black women. Putting it together with the suggestive phrase "A good time", the pun could be read as a threat (if they transgress the boundaries of propriety, women's rights activists will be vulnerable to sexual assault--here represented by the stereotype of Black men), or as a challenge to the patriarchal order (women are not only defying judges in court, but racial and sexual boundaries are being defied as well). There is no way to decide on one or the other.

This conflation of gender, sexuality, and race has been noted again and again in revisionist criticism on Modernism. As Morrison states, "Africanism" is "a way of talking about and a way of policing matters of class, sexual license, and repression, formations and exercises of power . . ." (6). In the writing from the teens and early twenties, Stein discovered how her intensive word play could embody the

sexuality and wider sense of eroticism she was discovering in her relationship with Alice Toklas. Some critics have followed in Richard Bridgman's psychoanalytical footsteps, interpreting Stein's grammatical abuses as a way of "coding" such sexual feelings because she was ashamed of them.¹⁶ Such a view assumes that normative grammatical compositions are somehow not coded, that the meaning in such writing is transparent, obvious. Through her experimentation, Stein realized how much the laws of grammar regulate the ways we speak, and what we can and cannot speak; if anything, her experiments with semantics and syntax were attempts to decode normative linguistic usage. Stein also envisioned her attempt to equalize relations between all words--to give little words like conjunctions and prepositions the same status as nouns and verbs, or to defuse racialized signifiers--as a kind of democratic move. It is not surprising that her erotically-charged play, full of oblique references to "taboo" subject matter, is intertwined with a play on racialized signifiers and tropes.

I began by discussing the difficulty of interpreting the phrase "cousin to cooning" in the 1913 play White Wines. This phrase initially seems opaque--the gerund "cooning" both obscure and shocking. Close reading of the text offers another solution, however: the word "cunning," which starts the text and is then repeated eight times in the next few lines, is the closest "cousin," at the material level of

phoneme, to cooning. Both are also loaded words, with similar connotations in American slang of craftiness, slyness. Cunning refers to knowing, or guile, sometimes of the magical kind. In Elizabethan England, the word had bawdy connotations related to the sexualized meaning of "to know," as well as to the Latin cunnus, the vulva; Stein's reading in Shakespeare and eighteenth-century English literature would have alerted her to this connotation. The Latin etymology of the word goes back to the goddess Cunti, from where we derive "country," "kin," "cunning," and "ken" (Pratt 111). American slang would demote the meaning of cunning to "cute."

The first line of the text can be read on several registers then: "Cunning very cunning and cheap, at that rate a sale is a place to use type writing." Aggressively shopping the sales was one public arena considered acceptable for women, who were being refashioned as an important consumer group in the early twentieth century. When the industriousness of female shoppers bargaining for "cute" items is sexualized by the bawdy connotations of "cunning" and "cheap," we end up within the space of patriarchal authority, metonymically called up by the phrase "type writing."

The wild non-sequiturs, double-entendres, and headlong breathless "speeches" in "White Wines" result in a creative freedom that is erotically transgressive ("Change the

sucking with a little sucking") and charged. The racialized signifiers which crop up in the play--"Show the old chink," and "cousin to cooning"--are instances of distinctly "unladylike" language, however veiled by ambiguous usage, and so lend additional "transgressive" mileage to the text. But these signifiers are also called up by the logic of Stein's linguistic play: "A change a real change is made by a piece, by any piece by a whole mixture of words and likenesses and whole outlines and ranges...." (214). Mixing up words--using nouns as verbs, for instance--was a way to resist phallogentric logic and authority. In effecting a radical "reorganization" in the way language could be expressive and meaningful, Stein challenged the categories of gender and sexuality and created a space for a nonheterosexist erotics. But since "race and class are frequently suppressed co-referents of representations of woman and the feminine" (De Koven, RS 35), these categories end up getting called up, and mixed in, as well. Stein use of the term "cooning," with its buried racial epithet and its aural echoes to the feminine "cunning," participates in the paradoxes Morrison outlines: "chaos and civilization, desire and fear" (7). If its kinship with "cunning" can be read as a positive value, "cooning" is also kin to "mixed labor and a strange orange..." (orange punning on "origin"). This colorful mixing, however, leads Stein back to the more primary binary of dark and white: "The best excuse for

shadows is in the time when white is starched and hair is released and all the old clothes are in the best bag." If "white is starched," i.e., the signifier for propriety, stiffness, and confinement, Stein opts for letting the hair down, and mixing things up by putting the old clothes in the best bag.

Such linguistic sleight of hand promises more than it delivers; the connotations of "old" and "best" remain intact, as does the polarization of dark and white. Stein's deconstruction of such binary divisions was more successful at the level of particular grammatical subversions than at this level of imagery and semantics; after World War II, her views on race relations in the United States would sound much less naive in texts such as The Mother of Us All and Brewsie and Willie. Throughout this earlier period of her writing, however, Stein was drawn back to racialized language, again and again, attempting in a variety of ways to defuse this language, to disempower it. That she failed to do so shows how deeply rooted these linguistic formulations have are in American speech and writing.

1. The views of two contemporary feminist critics will serve as examples for the range of interpretation "Melanctha" has generated. In "Gertrude Stein and Universal Sympathy," Kate Fullbrook finds that "Stein's idiosyncratic writing...constitutes an attempt to embody a democratic ethos in a non-realist mode" (57). Fullbrook characterizes the primary ethos of this story to be a "rejection of any devaluation of its subject on the grounds of sex or race," even though she acknowledges that Stein's views are partly shaped by her own "contemporary theories of racial classification which now look pernicious" (69). For critic Sonia Saldivar-Hull, these "pernicious" theories are reason enough to exclude Stein from feminist literary canons; despite some "exceptions," she thinks "Melanctha" maintains the rule that "'white' is the privileged center" (191). Saldivar-Hull finds a racial "hierarchical scale" that "is as obvious as it is vicious" (190).

2. Barbara Johnson asks a similar series of questions: "How can the study of suppressed, disseminated, or marginalized messages within texts equip us to intervene against oppression and injustice in the world? Is a willingness to carry an inquiry to the point of undecidability necessarily at odds with political engagement? Is the exploration of logics other than the logic of binary opposition necessarily a way of avoiding participation in the process of change?" (7).

3. This comment resonates with a comment in Stein's notebook where she aligns herself with Cezanne and Caliban.

4. See also Aldon Lynn Nielsen's assessment of "Melanctha"'s influence on white, and black, Modernists (21-23).

5. What Cezanne and Caliban have in common is not immediately apparent. Much later, in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, the narrator would explain how the portrait of Madame Cezanne "had not seemed natural, it had taken [Gertrude Stein] some time to feel that it was natural" (35). What made Cezanne seem unnatural at first was his new conception of composition: "Cezanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing" ("Transatlantic Interview" 15). Cezanne's "democratic" ordering of elements in the painting was something Stein attempted to achieve in writing; what's interesting to me here is that she moves from this aesthetic democraticizing to the social and racial inequalities called up by the figure of Caliban, the "other" who is given just enough language to be properly oppressed.

6. See Wineapple's note: "Stein's racism is not inconsistent with her use of race to subvert standard moral and aesthetic conventions" (457).

7. "Coal" is a word which appears often in these early texts, suggesting that it had particular resonance for Stein. During the years of the First World War, heating fuel would have been a daily concern, as well as butter and other items which were scarce. One of the first lines from "Lifting Belly" (1915-17) reads, "Bed of coals made out of wood" (65). The word "bed" leads from the daily domestic to the erotic, a direction which is enacted all through "Lifting Belly." The erotic metaphor of the image also echoes the third quatrain of Shakespeare's Sonnet 73: "In me thou seest the glowing of such fire,/That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,/As the death-bed whereon it must expire,/Consumed by that which it was nourished by." (64).

8. "Roughly put, an almost all-noun text belongs to the mode of selection, while a text made up largely of verbs and verbals belongs to the mode of combination. . . . Metaphor, lexicon, and synchrony can be associated with the axis of selection; metonymy, grammar, and diachrony with the axis of combination. Hierarchy comes into being with acts of combination, as do narrative and history" (Pondrom xxxiii).

9. This emptying of signifiers is a different move than Stein's use of "emblematic words" in Three Lives, which De Koven discusses (A Different Language 44-45).

10. The phrase "bee line" shows up in another 1913 text, "Miguel. Collusion....": "Could not a bee line a coat..." (37).

11. This prefix "co-" is significant as it sets up an equal relation between things, the kind of relation Stein was striving to attain between words. Play with this prefix shows up earlier in Tender Buttons: "Dinner" contains the made-up word "cocups" (55); In "Miguel. (Collusion). Guimpe. Candle", the parenthetical "Collusion" sounds similar to "colloose."

12. Similar play with the "ex-" prefix results in "excreate" (TB), and "exstate" ("Preciosilla").

13. Monique Wittig dismisses the idea of altering gender-marked words like "women" through new spellings such as "womyn, wimmin." "To patch it up with the use of a y or an i. . . does not alter the political reality of the word. If one tries to imagine nogger or niggir, instead of nigger, one may realize the futility of the attempt" ("The Mark of Gender" 86).

14. Other instances of this rhyme are not explicitly linked to sexual themes. The dense prose piece titled "Yes You Do" (1922) alters the spelling: "Ini meeni miney mo. . . .Iny meeny miney mo" (PL 121); "Felicity in Moon-light. A Traveler's Story" (1926) slides from the racist American epithet to the other continents: "Iney meeny miney mo catch a nigger by the toe if he hollers let him go iny meeny miney mo. In Europe there are houses and Chinese. Also in New Zealand and India. Every one is as welcome as every day" (PL 65).

15. In Act II, Scene III, Susan B. Anthony asks a negro man (who appears with a silent negro woman), "Negro man would you vote if you only can and not she." He replies, "You bet." She continues, "I fought for you that you could vote would you vote if they would not let me." To which he ambiguously replies, "Holy gee" (67-68).

16. Critics who expand on Bridgman's "psychoanalytic" interpretation of Stein's aesthetic project include Fifer, Stimpson, Ruddick, among others; alternative views of her poetics and sexuality include Secor, Meese, and Chessman.

CHAPTER THREE

How To Write: Queer Grammar and the Arbitrary Sentence

Who polices questions of grammar, parts of speech, connection, and connotation? Whose order is shut inside the structure of a sentence? (Susan Howe, My Emily Dickinson 11)

Knowledge is nothing other than an effect of syntax, not merely because any affirmation creates an illusion of knowledge, but precisely because syntax is what makes it possible for us to treat as known anything that we do not know we do not know. And this, in one form or another, is what poetry has always known (Barbara Johnson, "What the Gypsy Knew" 75).

And although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis--a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship (Monique Wittig, "The Straight Mind" 27).

Authority in afternoon and after grammar. Grammar is in our power (Gertrude Stein, "Arthur A Grammar" 73).

"What is a sentence." "What is grammar." In the grammatical meditations written in the late twenties and early thirties, some of which were collected under the title How To Write (1931), Stein poses these seemingly simple questions again and again. In so doing, Stein focuses her attention on the complex relationship between semantics and syntax instead of on the dynamic between sign and referent. Stein's interrogation of the word had been an attempt to free the material substance of language from congealed, hierarchical connotations. Her success in forcing nouns to

act as verbs, foregrounding transitional words instead of substantives, skewing the rules of number and case and conjunction, and resignifying words so that they took on alternative meaning proved, again and again, the arbitrary nature of the lexicon. However, the "power" of this subversive word play was paradoxically dependent on the (mis)placement of words within a normative syntactic context. Stein may have broken many syntactical rules, but these rules stayed in place much more firmly than the meanings of individual words.

Attempting to democratize the word by resignifying or defamiliarizing in particular contexts was possible (though some words were more plastic than others); democratizing syntax turned out to be a much more difficult venture. In the grammatical meditations composed from 1927 to 1931, Stein tries out all types of syntactic and rhetorical structurings in order to circumvent the "order" of the sentence. As Richard Bridgman points out, Stein regarded the sentence as "a compromise at best, a surrender to predictability rather than an acceptance of the perils of audacity" (197). However, predictability was not the most serious problem with sentences. The Western conception of grammar and syntax, with its hierarchies of subject and predicate, substantive and transitive words, was complicit with phallogocentric logic and authority in both literary and social realms.¹ Andrea Nye summarizes the Derridean

insight which has become the basis for the poststructural critique of language, "Necessary relations between signifiers depend upon a 'myth' of presence, the presence of the voice of God the father" (Philosophy and Feminism 32). It is this philosophical tradition that Irigaray questions when she asks whether "[t]his syntax of discourse, of discursive logic--more generally, too, the syntax of social organization, 'political' syntax--isn't this syntax always...a means of masculine self-affection, or masculine self-production or reproduction..." (132). The structures of phallogocentric logic, reflected in notions of linguistic structures and rules, produce difference through categorization, and then subsume this difference through hierarchical privileging of one term over the other. Stein, with her scientific background in studying cognition and her bent for analyzing logical categories, worked to understand the "bottom nature" of the sentence. In doing so, she came to the conclusion that "There is no such thing as a natural sentence and why because a sentence is not naturally" (MGFAS 551).²

Such a declaration is a resistance to prevailing philosophical and social authority. Stein saw grammar not as a descriptive "science," but rather as the set of linguistic rules which limited expression by naturalizing artificial categories and relations. The sentence was an artificial construct which "mistranslated" actual cognitive processes,

and so distorted the expression of experience, which was one of Stein's main aesthetic projects. Stein arrived at her linguistic skepticism through her writing, though this skepticism was also fueled by her own positioning through language in terms of gender and sexuality.

It is interesting to notice, in Julia Kristeva's explanation of the vexed relationship between language and reality, how many of Stein's important literary concerns are catalogued:

We can see how language, with the categories of verbs, tenses, and persons and by their precise combination, at least overdetermines if it does not determine the temporal oppositions experienced by speaking subjects....La langue seems to forge by its very categories what has been designated "subjectivity," "subject," "interlocutor," "dialogue," or "tense," "history," "present," etc. Is that to say that la langue produces these realities, or, on the contrary, that they are reflected in la langue? This is an insoluble, metaphysical problem...(Language 36).

Stein's texts not only question the categories of "subjectivity," "subject," "interlocutor," "dialogue," or "tense," "history," and the "present," but also question what constitutes authority, knowledge, eros, and proper relations.

"A sentence should be arbitrary it should not please be

better" (SP 26) is one of Stein's answers to her own question, the second part of the statement echoing the reprimanding tone of a querulous parent--"please be better"--more than a pedagogical schoolteacher. Stein had resisted the notion that grammatically correct sentences are a reflection of a higher order of cognitive intelligence. Think of the story she tells in The Autobiography about the publication of Three Lives about a visit from an agent of the publisher:

You see, he said slightly hesitant, the director of Grafton Press is under the impression that perhaps your knowledge of english. But I am an american, said Gertrude Stein indignantly. Yes yes I understand that perfectly now, he said, but perhaps you have not had much experience in writing. I suppose, said she laughing, you were under the impression that I was imperfectly educated (83-84).

Stein gives herself the last laugh here, but her commitment to the disordering of vocabulary and syntax had a high price. Her insights into the politics of the ordering of the sentence have not been taken seriously, nor has her vision of a democratic linguistic order been understood.

The sentence resisted democratic arbitrariness since its function was to "couple" according to strict rules of distinction, exclusion, and hierarchical ranking. The text called "Sentences" (1928) begins: "A sentence is made by

coupling meanwhile ride around to be a couple there makes grateful dubeyty named atlas coin in a loan" (115). The word "couple" (usefully a noun or a verb) shows up again and again in these texts, and indeed, the job of syntax is to couple words and phrases in such a way that they represent what is recognized as "a complete thought."

Stein had successfully "recreated" coupling outside of the normative rules of grammar, for instance, in her erotic textual play with prepositions, conjunctions, and other little words in As A Wife Has A Cow. Speaking of her dialogic play with pronouns in other texts, where the boundaries of "I" and "you" are fluid, indeterminant, Harriet Chessman concludes "...language allows the possibility for a democratic nonhierarchic mutuality in which the I and you participate in an unlimited exchange....She creates couples that could contain any combination of gender, in a pleasurably polymorphous field of dialogue" (75-76). Within dialogue, the rules governing the boundaries of subject and object, author and reader, could be democratized, but such play always remained a local transgression which did nothing to permanently alter the hierarchical foundations of grammar. Stein was interested in creating a space for the expression and celebration of lesbian coupling, but beyond that, she wanted a radically democratic "field of dialogue" where all sorts of combinations could occur. Such a vision was not only an

attempt to more closely approximate cognitive processes, but it was reactive against the social ordering of relationships which refused to recognize the kind of coupling she had made with Toklas.

Stein's sentences marry things--words, phrases, thoughts--in unorthodox, radically democratic fashion. Several times in the grammatical texts, she clearly marks this analogy between syntactic coupling and the social institution: "A sentence is their wedding" (S 123); "A sentence refers to wedding weddings" (A 72). Such an analogy not only refers to that most cited of speech acts, "I now pronounce you man and wife...", but gets to the heart of what syntax is all about, which is to regulate the relations between words according to their word classes. Traugott and Pratt, in discussing the open-ended dynamic they see between syntax and semantics, state that ". . . we can consider the sentence as a kind of miniature drama, expressing in language the drama that we perceive in the interaction of things around us with each other and with ourselves. It is an approach which stresses the fact that, however unconscious we may be about it, every time we speak we express our interpretation of interactions and interrelations among entities and events in the world" (190-91). Stein's meditations aim to be conscious of interactions and interrelations--and then to intervene on the level of syntax to create word marriages outside of heterosexist

norms.

Stein's approach to the syntactical sexual politics of the sentence was different from modernist contemporaries like Woolf or Joyce, whose linguistic play did not question heterosexist assumptions. For instance, Colin McCabe describes Joyce's sexualized understanding of language as "a constant struggle between a 'feminine libido' which threatens to break all boundaries and a 'male fist' which threatens to fix everything in place" (qtd in Ricorso 206); Joyce's experimental sentence, then, is a "marriage" between traditionally gendered qualities in a traditional power dynamic. In the arena of the lexicon, Stein resisted patriarchal, hierarchical logic by foregrounding transitive words, using small ordinary words, and attempting to defuse loaded racialized terms. To "name something without using its name" was a radically democratic impulse, an insistence that the lexicon be available to her own expression of same-sex eroticism and female authorial power as it was to traditional expressions of masculine authority and eros.

But syntax was a different kind of stumbling block. For while the material of language was plastic, ordering this material meaningfully through grammar was much less so. In fact, any coupling within the sentence, with its paired categories of subject and object, head and predicate, noun and verb, ends up replicating or mirroring the structures of heterosexual marriage and the patriarchal family, with the

"masculine" elements subordinating "feminine" elements. And while syntax and semantics are complicated enough that sentences can be constructed in an infinite number of ways, normative grammar, as part of what Wittig calls "the core of nature" hidden within any cultural construction, collapses these many variations into the self-same logic of the "straight mind." Not surprisingly, the main institutions of the "straight mind"--family and marriage--show up again and again in these texts: "Grammar makes a mother. / A mother and trumpets" (AG 75); "Grammar is contained in father which made old men thinner and old men thinner" (AG 99). "A sentence is their wedding" (S 123). Traugott and Pratt acknowledge that the categories set up through language often have oppressive consequences. They also acknowledge that "Language may be abused, but it can potentially lead us away from our tendency to categorize by allowing us to make new combinations of meanings and to qualify every semantic distinction we make" (110). This is the radical political importance of Stein's grammatical meditations. While her intention may have been to democratize the sentence, Stein's insistence on making other kinds of combinations within the sentence succeeds in showing that syntax is, itself, one of the technologies of heterosexuality.

The nine grammatical meditations (including those in How To Write, and "More Grammar For a Sentence") vary stylistically; "Sentences" runs to over 100 pages; "Finally

George: A Vocabulary of Thinking" contains single sentences which fill two or more pages. My readings will concentrate primarily on the first five texts in How To Write where Stein's project was to elucidate the struggles she had had with syntax since the beginning of her writing career. "The question is if you have a vocabulary have you any need of grammar except for explanation that is the question, communication and direction repetition and intuition that is the question" (60). The object of the "lively word" phase, the main stylistic focus in texts such as Tender Buttons and "Bee Time Vine," was primarily vocabulary; Stein set herself the challenge of "naming something without using its name." Attention to "lively words" was one focus of the early work; the other was use of repetition.

The oppositions between "communication and direction" and "repetition and intuition" can be easily overlaid with gendered assumptions: linear communication, or writing that is directed, can be thought of as part of a masculine tradition and authority, the rhythms and anti-linear logic of repetition and associative meaning-making based on "intuition" by contrast feminine. "Repetition and intuition" were two of the dominant "stylistic" registers Stein developed in her writing before the 1920s, but as inherently "feminine" modes of expression, such texts were much more likely to be classified as eccentric and charming rather than intellectually rigorous or authoritative. Stein had

turned her hand to explanatory works as early as 1923 with "An Elucidation," and followed that with such pieces as "Composition as Explanation" (originally given as a lecture), Acquaintance With Description, "Patriarchal Poetry," and the grammatical meditations.³ When Stein's focus shifted from developing a textual erotics--her play with the relations between signifier and signified, between word and word--to delineating a textual poetics in the explanatory texts, there was a new challenge: could she write about writing without compromising the highly experimental nature of her writing itself? Could she communicate the importance of her thinking about language and writing without resorting to the normative grammar she had been so busy taking apart? As Ulla Dydo stresses, "She believed in writing, not in explaining writing. To her, writing that required explanation was deficient" (Reader 493).

For some readers the explanatory texts are stylistic failures. Marianne DeKoven, for instance, finds a paradoxical focus in How To Write: ostensibly about sentences and paragraphs, "Stein's interest in the force of the single word becomes central. . . .It is dominated, in fact, by the opposite motive of restoring to the single word the integrity it loses in assimilation to the sentence" (DL 119). DeKoven divides Stein's writing from the twenties into two different projects: "narrative writing. . . in which the

movement is not only continuous, but also interesting, in that it imparts...a sense of opening onto half-glimpsed territories of meaning" (DL 118), and the "much less fruitful direction, investigating the possibilities of establishing in writing the absolute integrity of the single word, thereby obliterating continuity altogether" (DL 119). Speaking of How To Write, she concludes that "This writing offers nothing but the attempt to work out a polemical idea of language. Though all of Stein's radical work is frequently read as such, mere illustration of her theory is actually a limitation of only her least successful writing. Stein's experiments in the integrity of the single word go as far as any of her work toward the complete, and therefore sterile, triumph of the purity of language" (DL 120-21).

Unlike DeKoven, I do not consider these ungrammatical experimental texts unreadable or uninteresting, nor do I see the individual word as their focus. Stein had grappled with the tension between semantics and syntax throughout her writing career; while these two concerns are not separable, her different stylistic periods shift between a greater concern with sentences and grammar, and with the materiality of the word. Many readers might find it difficult to follow the grammatical meditations, since they offer little narrative thread and minimal autobiographical references; the lyrical musicality which many readers enjoy in other Stein texts is overridden by prosodic rhetorical structure.

Instead Stein offers meticulous catalogues of "arbitrary" sentences, and pedagogical spoofs: "Poor dog whose nose is cold. Poor dog of whom the nose is cold" (S 212). Stein doesn't tell; rather she shows, through parodic demonstrations, who or what "polices" syntax, and how the rules governing word order, word class functions, and relations between parts of the sentences might be rethought, reformulated in relation to a pervasive heterosexist logic.

WHAT IS A SENTENCE, AND FROM WHAT DOES IT NEED TO BE SAVED?

When Stein asks, again and again, the seemingly "simple" question, "What is a sentence," she is actually engaging a host of philosophical issues at the heart of linguistic studies of syntax and semantics: what constitutes "meaning"; how do the parts of the sentence work together to produce meaning; how much does language structure the way we think, the way we experience the world? Clive Bush defines the "key issues" in How To Write as "the nature of linguistic representation, problems of knowledge, the play between sign and reference, and between sign and sign" (331). To these standard linguistic questions I would like to add questions raised by poststructuralist feminist and lesbian theorists regarding the construction of subjectivity, gender and sexuality, and authority through language. For instance, Irigaray posits that ". . .female sexuality is not unifiable, it cannot be subsumed under the

concept of the subject. Which brings into question all the syntactical norms..." ("Exile" 82). Stein does not explicitly name the "feminine" in relation to language, as Virginia Woolf does when she envisions a "feminine sentence," but gender was not irrelevant to her. One cryptic comment reads "Analysis is a womanly word. It means that they discover there are laws" (SP 32). Laws are most apparent to those who find them most restrictive.

Stein's attack on the sentence, which she slyly calls "saving the sentence," is a resistance to the Law of the Father and compulsory heterosexuality. Sandra Gilbert, in a discussion of Virginia Woolf's "utopian" fantasy of a woman's sentence, plays with the pun between the syntactical structure, and the juridical verb: "The utopian concept of woman's grammatical sentence is thus a sort of mask for the more practical idea woman's legal sentence. . . . woman, who has been sentenced by man, will now sentence man. . . ." (209-10). I think that the juridical meaning of "sentence" does haunt the grammatical meditations, though Stein's "utopian" project of making the sentence arbitrary was not about turning the sexist tables, but rather envisioning an open syntax where neither the binary of sexual difference nor sexual orientation would be binding.

The syntactic laws brought to light by her experimental writing not only regulate gender and female sexuality, on structural and symbolic levels, but also enforce compulsory

heterosexuality. Relevant to this is Monique Wittig's location of an inherent heterosexist logic at the heart of the all cultural production: "And although it has been accepted in recent years that there is no such thing as nature, that everything is culture, there remains within that culture a core of nature which resists examination, a relationship excluded from the social in the analysis--a relationship whose characteristic is ineluctability in culture, as well as in nature, and which is the heterosexual relationship" ("The Straight Mind" 27). Syntax is part of this "ineluctable" cultural core; in Stein's texts, the heterosexist nature of syntax is examined, on the formal level where she examines the definitions and functions of parts of speech, and on a thematic, analogic level in her creation of "sentences in drag."

Traditional descriptive grammar says that a sentence consists of a subject and predicate which together represent a complete thought. Stein reiterates this tradition when she rehashes the primary school grammar lesson: "A sentence can be very reduced there can be in it a noun and a verb. Well done" (S 137). The noun-verb formulation is indeed the most reductive description of the sentence; this particular reductive assertion gets labelled "Well done," even though this is a runon sentence and the syntax in the second part is rather awkward.

The ordering of "noun and verb" reflects the way

meaning is conceptualized to reside primarily in the noun, sometimes labeled as the "head" of the sentence. In such a pairing, it is difficult not to overlay metaphoric gender. As Helene Cixous argues, "the thinkable" is always organized into "couples," making male-female coupling one of the epistemological cornerstones of Western philosophy. "Theory of culture, theory of society, symbolic systems in general-- art, religion, family, language--it is all developed while bringing the same schemes to light" ("Sorties" 64). Cixous speaks of this ordering as part of a constant "war," where phallogocentric hierarchy is always the victor.

So when Neil Schmitz offers this description of the "primal scene" of the sentence playfully, without theoretical substantiation, it sounds plausible: "The parts of speech describe the roles in the family romance; Fathers and Sons (nouns and adjectives), Mothers and Daughters (verbs and adverbs), the substantive Head of the household and the transitive Body of the sentence" (Of Huck and Alice 177). These binary divisions he makes between weighted substantives and relational transitives--head and body, Father and Mother--are possible and plausible because the binary of gender is one of the primary modes of dividing and ranking in the logic of our culture, a mode which shapes not just social relations, but the relations between words themselves.⁴ Cameron points out in her discussion of "metaphorical gender" that "the concepts of 'masculine' and

'feminine' operate conceptually at a highly abstract level, subsuming a number of lower-level contrasts such as 'strong/weak' and 'active/passive.'" For instance, the uncanny agreement shown by respondents, when asked to assign "gender" to each member of idiomatic word pairs, such as knife/fork, or salt/pepper, suggests that speakers assign gender even within a supposedly ungendered language like English (83).⁵ The gendered binary of male/female may not be inherently asymmetrical, but it has become so to such an extent that it is difficult not to view reality through this pair of lens. DeKoven shows how this binary has structured the basics of postmodern thinking when she states, "Our language is distorted, for all of us, not by the male itself, but by the dominance of the male over the female, the Father over the Mother: conscious over unconscious, symbolic over presymbolic, signified over signifier" (xix).

Stein's understanding of the way metaphoric gendering can be applied to grammatical terms may be behind her reversal of the traditional terms: "A verb with a noun which is a verb with a noun is a sentence which is a verb with a noun" (S 192). "Remember a sentence should not have a noun" (145), she admonishes at one point. In her later lectures, Stein would explain this antipathy towards nouns: "Nouns and adjectives never can make mistakes can never be mistaken but verbs can be so endlessly, both as to what they do and how they agree or disagree with whatever they do" (PG 212).

Nouns and adjectives may have various definitions or homonyms which provide an occasion for a slipping of meaning, but such meanings are easily codified in a dictionary. Verbs, in contrast, become meaningful and open to misinterpretation through their relationships with other words.

"Sentences" spends a lot of time musing over the basic functional parts of the sentence, sometimes lampooning the barren logic which distinguishes the various word classes. "A is an article met is a verb well is a noun" (141). The word "well," introduced here sans article, might cause a reader to stumble over its other functions as adverb, adjective, or exclamation. In fact, readers might first rearrange these words into the archaic phrase "well met." In a strictly grammatical sense, this is a "good" sentence (albeit absent normative punctuation). However, the sentence is puzzling because it slyly "couples" a verb and a noun which do not usually "go together." But why is this? The mind balks at finding relationships between certain objects and actions because we have already conceptualized them as belonging to exclusive categories; their epistemological borders do not meet. Stein's skepticism about categories led to her skepticism about nouns; not only are individual names arbitrary, but the way larger conceptual groupings are set up for classification is also arbitrary. John Ellis, who views categorization as the "most basic aspect of language,"

explains that there is a logical mistake in assuming that categorization is a simple grouping of like things, since in reality it is "the grouping together of things that are not the same in order that they will count as the same" (25). And while they might be arbitrary, laws of categorization and relation have very real effects on those who speak (and are spoken by) the language.

Ellis goes on to argue that the function of language is to make categories which simplify the phenomena of the world in order that people may practically communicate within it. Therefore, ". . . to talk about something presupposes both that it has been assigned to a category of equivalent things, and that a stable identity has been assigned to a changing sequence of states. Both processes impose an order; to deal with things as if they were stable and constant (which they are not) is again to simplify and thus to distort" (51). Ellis is taking issue with the prevailing linguistic belief, following Chomsky, that grammar is "natural," and that organizing the world through the structures of noun-verb-object is innate, biological, and universal. This epistemological distortion (necessary though it might be) bothered Gertrude Stein. While she was drawn to the structural aspects of grammar and language ("Why is grammar not dull./ Because it is a diagram" (AG 75)), she was not always satisfied with the way categories were defined.

The search for an arbitrary sentence sometimes involves lampooning pedagogical textbook lessons.

A noun. Horace.

A verb. Coaling.

A preposition. With him.

An article. The.

A sentence. The coaling that they did when he was with them they were there with them (135).

Since a noun is "the name of anything," Stein democratically includes the name of "Horace" as a good exemplum; in her sentence, this interesting proper name (referring to the Latin poet? to Horus, the sun god?) will be replaced, presumably, by the masculine pronoun. "Coaling" (a gerund which she had played with in other texts) is, of course, not a proper verb. Can the noun "coal" be reimagined as some activity?⁶ The noun is surrounded by associations of blackness and commonness; as a source of fuel, there are also associations with heat, warmth, and sustenance. All this suggestiveness might be allowed under poetic license. However, Stein undercuts the polysemous possibilities here by linking the words in so that the sentence prosaically turns in on itself, completely self-referential. "The coaling that they did when he was with them they were there with them." Successions of the indeterminant third person pronoun do radiate multiple possibilities, but of a flat, formal kind quite different from the colorful multi-layered

play generated by
earlier texts.

"Successions of words are so agreeable," begins one grammatical meditation (AG 39). The successions of arbitrary sentences which make up the long text "Sentences" drive some readers to distraction. While it is charming to highlight the occasional quirky or clever construction ("He was neighbored by a bean" 116), the real work Stein does in this text is at the meta-structural and epistemological level. If the texts in the "lively word" style explode with associational and aural multiplicity, the grammatical meditations link together words in sentences, and sentences in various paragraphs, so that multiplicity implodes. The relations which are set up syntactically may be indeterminant, but the work the mind does to grasp these relations outside of narrative context is much different from the work inspired by indeterminant semantic play. Stein would use this same implosive mode--spare, grammatical, self-contained--in Stanzas in Meditation (1932).

In "More Grammar For A Sentence" (1929-30), Stein summarized her findings regarding the nature of the sentence: Sentences are not "natural" because the rules of grammar create categories--of person, of time, of action, of place--which are to a large extent arbitrary. (Paragraphs, on the other hand, had fewer constraints; for Stein, composing a paragraph had less to do with the standard topic

sentence, evidence, conclusion model than with rhythms of intensity, length, and lyricism.) Categories collapse the complexity of things (people, objects, concepts, forces) based on some equivalence; as a grammarian, Stein wanted to make room for both resemblance and difference, and so institute a radically democratic leveling of hierarchy. The grammatical meditations do indulge in some word play of the lively sort, but her attention is elsewhere. "No words in grammar" (AAG 54), Stein cogently observes; while she could get her hands on the aural, graphic, and semantic materiality of the word, the structures of grammar were elusive, impersonal, coldly authoritative. The rules of grammar categorize the different parts of speech, determine how number, person, gender, and mood are to be signified, and order the relationship between parts of speech syntactically. These meta-structures are of a different register than lexical rules. "Essentially grammar has no use for distinctions had no use for distinctions now had it. To grammar it is the same thing whether they are urgent or whether they are useful" (AG 109).

This is a sober observation for a writer who had taken such delight in turning her intense attention on the ways words could be made distinct, semantically or materially. "There is a difference between knowing Nelly from Frank and vice versa" (S 180). The meanings of the adjectives "urgent" and "useful" are different, but as long as these words

words functioned correctly as adjectives--by modifying a proper subject--the requirements of grammar were fulfilled. In Stein's radically democratic grammatical universe, it is not enough that each word function semantically within a proper grammatical slot. Nouns and verbs do not have pride of place over prepositions and conjunctions, subjects do not dominate objects, and gender is just as arbitrary as anything else ("Louis. A grammar..../ Louisa. A grammar" 87).

How does the ordering of syntax reshape, reformulate how we experience the world? The mediation between experiential immediate present and language was one of the main problems Stein grappled with throughout her career. "The great question is can you think a sentence" (SP 35). This question had been posed by William James, who noticed that the hierarchical ordering of substantives and transitives do not truly describe the way thoughts and feelings occur or are experienced. The "substantives" which seemed to carry the weight of meaning in a sentence were often are just the "resting places" for much more active processes of thinking and feeling. "A grammar is in need of little words," Stein lectures, "There can be no grammar without and and if if you are prevailed upon to be very well and thank you" (AG 73). If the How To Write texts seem to go on and on interminably, it is partly because the relationship between thought and linguistic structures is,

as Kristeva puts it, such an insoluble metaphysical problem. "Whenever words come before the mind there is a mistake" (AG 66), Stein observes, trying to truthfully represent the thought that occurs before the word within grammar--if such thought existed.

II. Queer Grammar

"I am a grammarian" asserts Stein at the opening of "A Grammarian" (1930). Chomskians might argue that indeed, we all are grammarians given the innate nature of the human brain; Lacanians might argue that being able to speak, or write, at all means that one has been successfully initiated into the grammar of the Law of the Father. But what sort of grammarian was Gertrude Stein?

One of the effects of normative grammar is "to forge by it very categories what has been designated 'subjectivity,' 'subject'. . ." (Kristeva 36). As a woman and as a lesbian, Stein's position within the social order and within language was precarious, improper.⁷ Andrea Nye, reiterating Benveniste's view, states "To become a speaker it is necessary to become this subject formed in the confrontation between 'I' and 'you.'" Nye goes on to explain that this means a woman "is not the appropriating, masterful 'I,' with his compliment of masculine pronouns, hierarchical meaning, overt or covert gender" (Feminist Theory 186). DeKoven viewed Stein's writing as a resistance to this kind of

hierarchy on thematic and linguistic levels. Other critics such as Secor, Chessman, Englebrecht and Meese have shown how Stein's texts reject the masculine appropriation of the other/lover, expressing, instead, a nonhierarchical lesbian erotics. Both views--Stein as implicit feminist grammarian or lesbian grammarian--give her writing too narrow a purview. Anti-patriarchal intentions and lesbian "(sem)erotics" (Meese) are certainly important aspects of Stein's work, but her radically democratic grammar might be better thought of as inherently queer: a resistance to the very binary categories which allow for feminist and lesbian identities.

"There are no men no women needed for love there are no women no men needed for love. There are no women no men needed for love" (IN 219). This musing seems to reiterate Stein's much earlier statement in The Making of Americans that any kind of love should be acceptable. While a cursory reading of the statement might be that relations between women and men are not needed for love, I think Stein is questioning categories much more radically here. After all, "Nobody knows the difference between a girl and a boy" (IN 232). If this is the case then all that is needed for love are lovers--and a freer system of relation.

But grammar pretends to know the difference between the sexes and genders. "Any kind of complication is simple that

is the real use of grammar" (AG 101). Stein's queer grammar works to recomplicate what language use has simplified through reductive predictable ordering of categories and relations. "I am a grammarian I do not hesitate but I rearrange prepositions" (AG 109). A rearrangement in prepositions--those little words which signal logics of relation--disorders normative systems of linguistic meaning. By analogy, such disorderly grammar also challenges the interrelated institutions of social relation, family and compulsory heterosexuality.

Stein had been developing this queer grammar for several decades before she began writing her explanatory texts. Titling the collection of these pieces How to Write was a kind of joke--surely anyone picking up this volume expecting a pedagogical lesson would quickly be disabused of this expectation early on. But Stein is also serious about the value of her work to "teach" lessons about the way language works. Other collections and individual texts such as Geography and Plays, Useful Knowledge, and "Patriarchal Poetry" are similarly parodic. The issues of authority and knowledge are subtexts of the explanatory works.

Stein's use of the first-person assertion "I am a grammarian" is unusual in the context of the dense pieces in How To Write, where Stein seldom employs the first or second person pronoun. (The employment of the imperative throughout does, however, strongly imply the presence of a first person

speaker.) In "Arthur A Grammar" (1928) Stein invokes the issues of authorship, authority, and gender, slipping between the allegedly genderless noun "author" to the male proper name, Arthur. The use of the male proper name here is more loaded than most of Stein's free-wheeling play with female and male names ("How is Howard" (57)). The aural pun called up by this name--"Arthur is an author" (58)--aims at the question of who gets to decide the rules by which we speak and write. When she melodramatically warns, "Grammar. Ladies may be at stake" (68), she is wryly looking at the prescription that dictates that women writers (or speakers)--"lady" writers--do not have the authority to mess with the rules of the language. (This sentence also brings up images of women tied to stakes; it is appropriate to pause here and remember that the etymology of "glamour," now the staple of beauty magazines, was grammar, and that wise women's grammars were sometimes fatal to them.) Whether or not "ladies" do, in fact, tend to speak more grammatically than men is open to debate.'

When Stein positions herself as a grammarian, she questions the proper social position assigned to women. "What is the difference between talkative and grammar," Stein asks, posing an opposition between linguistic authority--grammar--and the stereotype of women's speech as gossip, idle talk. The difference she sees may not be comprehensible at first: ". . . grammar makes a parlor a

nun's affair..." (A 56). In "A Grammarian" Stein returns to this most proper of rooms: "A parlor is where the sisters receive their parents and their parents friends. It makes me smile to be a grammarian and I am" (107).⁹ Clive Bush glosses the first quote as the tension between speech and language: "Grammar's relation to speech here seems constricting--placing speech under rule and confining it socially..." (328). He also notes that the parlor in a traditional monastery was the one place social speech was permitted; however, Stein designates this space as the site of repressive female propriety, the place of supervised social intercourse. Whence Stein's smile then? This smile is medusa-like; within her grammar, the authority of the parents (and their friends) will be subverted and another the site of speaking/writing (parlor suggesting the french parler) discovered which will allow for an erotics outside of heterosexuality--the nun's affair, presumably with another/other nuns.¹⁰

The issue of what is proper and improper, within sentences or between people, is also suggested in the opening lines of "Sentences and Paragraphs":

He looks like a young man grown old. That is
a sentence they could use.

I was overcome with remorse. It was my fault that
my wife did not have a cow. This sentence they cannot use.

(25)

Given that "wife" was a kinship term Stein habitually used in referring to Toklas, and "having a cow" was her particular euphemism for female orgasm, a phrase suggesting the jouissance which Irigaray and Cixous theorize within écriture féminine,¹¹ this second was certainly a risky sentence. By saying so, I am reading into it a concern about homophobia; "they" cannot use a sentence about lesbian sexuality since the subject is "improper." Just as the phrase "grammar makes a parlor a nun's affair" contains a sly double-entendre by suggesting that a woman outside of compulsory heterosexuality might find access to pleasure within the very structures that seek to contain her, so there is a sly ambiguity in the admission that this sentence about lesbian sexuality cannot be used. Perhaps "they" cannot use such a sentence like "It is my fault that my wife did not have a cow" because it isn't true. Stein's erotic texts from the twenties are filled with cows, whole herds.

The text "Arthur A Grammar" (1928) contains many kinds of sentences, ranging from fragments, "Thought far out" (59), "Surprise attacks" (60), to complex semi- or ungrammatical constructions, to sharp statements--"Grammar is useless because there is nothing to say" (62). Sentences such as "Grammar. Ladies may be at stake" (68) or "There is a grammarian who was born where they now make pale cake" (95) may evoke a chuckle, because the connection between

subject and predicate is so surprising. Within some odd context, it could make sense to link a geographical location with a particular culinary specialty, but this is a stretch. On closer inspection, the actual logical inconsistency in this sentence is the fact that the subject and topic of discussion, "a grammarian," could not have existed at the time of her birth--unless, of course, following Chomsky, we consider the infant to have been a grammarian from day one. Logically, one would have to say, "There is a person who later became a grammarian who was born. . .; for some reason, however, grammar allows for this lapse in chronological sense.

When Stein's sentences approach the further extremes of what Noam Chomsky called the "degrees of grammaticality," they become more challenging: "They included rapidly and vegetation" (84); "Grammar. Dismantle a prevailing shawl or pleasure" (86). These sentences also use correct syntactic structure, but the words can make no "sense" when strung together: an adverb (rapidly) and noun (vegetation) have, by virtue of their different grammatical functions, totally different relationships to the verb "included" and so cannot be included in the same set except as words divorced from semantic meaning. In the second example, it is the fact that shawls do not prevail, and if they do, we generally don't "dismantle" them any more than we do pleasure, which makes this "nonsensical."¹²

These anomalous sentences, which appear at first glance to have "regular" syntax, but which resist, through unorthodox choices along the axis of selection and combination, any coherent, transcendental meaning, perform a kind of syntactical "drag."¹³ Like the philosophical and cultural moments Judith Butler analyzes in Bodies That Matter, Stein's parodic sentences can be "understood as repetitions of hegemonic forms of power which fail to repeat loyally and, in that failure, open possibilities for resignifying the terms of violation against their violating aims" (124).

Noam Chomsky concedes that anomalous sentences, those which employ regular syntax but make surprising semantic selections, like his famous example "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously," might be meaningful. "That is, these sentences are apparently interpreted by a direct analogy to well-formed sentences that observe the selectional rules in question" (149). For Chomsky, all variations on sentences deemed "correct," by virtue of a consensus among speakers that they are so, are termed "deviant." These sentences may follow syntactical rules, but then refuse to insert the right words in their designated slots, or to recognize the proper hierarchy of relationships between words. Chomsky's colorless green sentence also makes sense because anomaly is often a feature of metaphor (Traugott and Pratt 207). Stein tends, however, to eschew this literary trope.

Chomsky's assumption that semi-grammatical "deviations" were only intelligible in reference to "real" sentences employs the same logic that can only see drag performance as imitative of "natural" heterosexual identity. Arguing for the logical impossibility of an "originary" sexual identity, Judith Butler points out that "The origin requires its derivations in order to affirm itself as an origin, for origins only make sense to the extent that they are differentiated from that which they produce as derivatives. Hence, if it were not for the notion of the homosexual as copy, there would be no construct of heterosexuality as origin" (GT 313). Just as drag performances put into question the relationships between the sexed body, gender performance and sexuality, so Stein's parodic syntactical performances question the relationship between signifier, syntactic function, and intelligibility. And if Butler's questions ultimately point to larger political questions about identity and oppression, so do Stein's parodic sentences raise questions about the politics of grammar--the relationship between social structures, syntax and semantics.

In "A Grammarian," Stein defended the integrity of her parodic play:

Think well of this. You cannot repeat a duplicate you can duplicate. You can duplicate a duplicate. Now think of the difference of repeat and of duplicate. I

am a grammarian. I think of the differences there are. The difference is that they do duplicate. The whole thing arouses no contention (110-11).

"Duplicate" means to make a copy; "repeat" means to say it again. Bridgman parses this statement as "A sentence is as incapable of repeating any other sentence as it is of repeating experience. But it duplicate experience by embodying it in another form" (198). For Stein, repetition was not possible, because each time one said or wrote something, it was a different moment, hence a different experience. In her early innovative work, such as Tender Buttons, Stein was trying to represent her experience of the world in words in an unmediated manner--"making it be a thing that could be named without using its name" (Lectures 236). The results were scintillating compositions centered around her juxtapositions of the semantic and lyric values of the word. In the explanatory prose works, however, Stein widened her purview to include the structural complexities of syntax. Every utterance might be unique, unrepeatable--arbitrary--but speaking within grammatical structures (even cursorily) resulted in "resemblance."

If "resemblance" was inevitable within grammar, parody was a strategy which could use resemblance against itself. While much feminist discussion of parody's subversive implications focus on narrative or thematic aspects of texts, following Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque, I am

arguing for the subversive implications of parody occurring at the micro-level of syntax. Susan Suleiman, for instance, pushes Bakhtin's notion of parody towards an explicitly feminist conclusion: "the stories we tell about reality construe the real, rather than merely reflect it. Whence the possibility, or the hope, that through the rewriting of old stories and the invention of new forms of language for doing so, it is the world as well as words which will be transformed" (143). This utopian vision of "the invention of a new form of language" adequate for telling stories repressed or silenced within dominant forms of discourse fueled Stein's experimental writing; this new form would be a radical intervention in linguistic superstructures. Stein explained in one of her lectures, in regard to her defamiliarizing project in Tender Buttons: "Of course you might say why not invent new names new languages but that cannot be done. It takes a tremendous amount of inner necessity to invent even one word. . ." (PG 238). Stein wanted her experimental writing to be comprehensible and so she needed to stay within the lexicon. At the same time, the story she wanted to tell could not be told through parodic retellings of mythical or canonical stories since these had already been constructed around an innately phallogocentric, heterosexist logic.¹⁴

Here's a good example of one particularly outrageous syntactic performance:

Grammar can be contained on account of their providing medaling in a ground of allowing with or without meant because which made coupled become blanketed with a candidly increased just as if in predicting example of which without meant and coupled inclined as much without meant to be thought as if it were as ably rested too (62).

This is, in fact, an impersonation of a Henry James sentence, from the later period.¹⁵

This sentence draws the reader in with a subtle rhetorical trick. The first phrase here, "Grammar can be contained," actually only makes sense because it brings to mind its opposite--the idea of uncontained grammar, of grammar running amuck; a tension between freedom and containment is therefore created. As Stein piles on prepositional phrases and subordinate clauses, it becomes more and more difficult to keep track of the "sense," though at each instance my mind scrambles to do so, taking cues from the various prepositions and conjunctions. Cognitive science experiments have shown that the mind can only pay attention to 5-7 items at once and here there are no "resting places" which might ground the clauses. Because so many of the boundaries between clauses are not clear, thereby creating multiple reading possibilities, the right-branching direction of this hypotactic construction takes us far away from and contradicts the core sentence "Grammar can

be contained." Grammar "contains" by instituting clear syntactical relations between what is considered "independent" and what "dependent." Stein's rearrangement levels the field, making all phrases interdependent. "Dear me grammar. Supposing grammar made diagram have felicity never dependent clauses. Jumped up again" (AG 66). The awkward-sounding phrase "on account of" is just the kind of phrase which Stein was drawn to, since the preposition of place really does not point in any direction here. "On account of" is synonymous with "because of"--"grammar can be contained because of their providing medaling...." Stein usually does not invent words or usages, but with "medaling" she changes the noun, with all its connotations of valor and war and heroism, to a verb--which distinctly echoes the crabby verb "meddling."

While this sentence is nearly impossible to "read," it is not gibberish; the phrases do have a logical relation to each other, though in such an unexpected way as to stretch our cognitive categories. The only nouns here are "grammar" and "ground," and neither are concrete enough to create substantive representation. The only "actors" are the off-stage kind suggested by the possessive "their," and "it." With all heavy subjects dispatched, the boundaries between the various phrases become fluid, slippery. Do we read "of allowing with OR without," this opposition representing two different choices, or is it "allowing with or without"--

allowing both? Is "meant" attached to "with or without," or is it that allowing with or without then meant...what did it mean?

Stein opts for experiential immediacy in lieu of normative representation by suppressing any clear subject and concentrating on the relationships between various registers of action, motion or emotion (providing medaling, allowing, become blanketed, predicting, to be thought). Instead of the "complete thought" which is one of the defining characteristics of the normative sentence, this sentence presents continuous thought, thought processes which endlessly generate more thought. The problem with a "complete thought" was that it was also a "completed" thought. "If you try to make a sentence lie where it has been put it stays. This is why they will try to have it matter" (S 187). Stein's antipathy to this notion of a "completed thought" had an aesthetic component--like the overburdened, tired noun, completed thought was static. She was working against the hierarchical ordering which placed nouns ahead of verbs, substantives over transitive words, and independent clauses before dependent clauses, finding "felicity" in the democratic mingling of phrases.

By parodying normative hypotactic syntax, this sentence makes a case for Stein's aesthetics. But the choice of diction is a cue to another level of engagement. Qualifying or causal phrases such as "on account of," "with or

without," "just as if," and "as much. . . as if" suggest a subtle level of discrimination and explanation. The repetitions of "with" and "without" perform a kind of logical sleight-of-hand, offering some kind of alternative, but then obscuring where (or what) this outcome actually is. These are the syntactical tricks of philosophical discourse, or philosophical novelists like James. Stein not only enacts an arbitrary, democratic jostling of prepositional and relational clauses, but she adds a layer of parody, setting her own grammar against the discourse of the authorities.

Stein also steals this kind of authority for herself by composing this copular assertion. This formulation is used extensively in the grammatical meditations which provide many, many predicates to the statements "Grammar is....," "A sentence is...." Even when the verb "to be" is made subjunctive by the modal "can," the logic of the copulative still operates. Speaking of Emily Dickinson's similar fondness for this construction, Cristanne Miller explains that "Like the paratactic 'and' and nonspecific or indefinitely referring 'it,' 'to be' is a vehicle Dickinson uses to move from the expected sequence of logic or reference or assertion to an unexpected one" (97). Like Dickinson, the logic of Stein's syntax reflects her nonnormative vision of relations and consequences. But Stein's appropriation of this defining voice is also part of the running "joke" set up by the pedagogical title for the

collected meditations, How To Write. In order to write--in ways that break beyond the limitations of grammar--one must first learn to recognize what writing entails, and then unwrite the confining sentence. Stein's parodies of philosophically discursive sentence structures are subversive unwritings, rewritings that challenge the ground of knowledge and authority. Barbara Johnson concludes, in a reading of Mallarme's syntactical play, that "Knowledge is nothing other than an effect of syntax, not merely because any affirmation creates an illusion of knowledge, but precisely because syntax is what makes it possible for us to treat as known anything that we do not know we do not know. And this, in one form or another, is what poetry has always known" (75). Alice Toklas remembered that as she waited in hospital for her last operation, Stein asked "What is the answer," then rephrased her last words "In that case . . . what is the question" (173). This was always a more productive starting point for Stein.

1. Andrea Nye points out that there is no one masculine system of logic, but rather a variety of logics-- "Aristotelian, Stoic, nominalist, mathematical--each a codification and remnant of specific historical forms of institutional and professional speaking that silenced protest and diversity, including, but not limited to, the protests of women" (Philosophy and Feminism 18).
2. Stein also wonders in this piece "There is no such thing as a natural sentence but there is such a thing as a natural paragraph and it must be found" (MGFAS 551); see Dydo on sentences and paragraphs (Reader 547-48).
3. See Ulla Dydo's introductions to these pieces in A Reader.
4. The easy slippage between patriarchal family structure and phallogocentric linguistic structures made by Schmitz or DeKoven is not so easy to make in empirical linguistic studies. Traditional linguistics attends to the role of gender as a linguistic concept, but would not recognize gender outside of the semantic surface of vocabulary and connotation. As Sandra Gilbert points out in her discussion of Virginia Woolf's famous "woman's sentence," "the special traits of 'a woman's sentence' or . . . those secondary sexual characteristics which define Woolf's normative 'man's sentence'" have been undetectable under the microscope of "empirical linguistics" (209). Gilbert assumes Woolf is being metaphorical, then, or visionary, when she posits this idea.
5. Cameron concludes from this study that "the attribution of gender is relational: it depends on the contrast between two terms....If fork is feminine in relation to knife and masculine in relation to spoon, clearly there is nothing inherently masculine or feminine. . . in the word fork itself" (83).
6. Deborah Cameron explains that "The process of becoming a (proper) social subject is the process of learning language and positioning oneself within it" (162). Post-Lacanian feminists have analyzed woman's possible position within language which is structured in such a way as to deny them full subjectivity [Cornell; Jardine; Gallop]; American feminist literary critics have discussed the ways women writers have claimed authority through a remaking of the literary tradition.

7. There is some debate on the empirical evidence from sociolinguists. See Cameron's criticism of this research in Chapter 4 of her book.

8. Sisters and parlors--and Christian religious practices--are the subjects of a play written in 1930, Parlor, A Play, between parlor of the sisters and parlor of the Earls. Stein knew Mabel Earle at Radcliffe, where they lived in the same boardinghouse; she was one of Stein's few non-Jewish friends (Wineapple 57). Parlor, A Play mentions Mabel Earle by name, and the year 1897, Stein's last year at Radcliffe, as well as references to Easter ceremonies and praying; these seem to be the most salient memories Stein can muster regarding her old school chum.

9. Nuns had appeared in the 1922-23 text Saints and Singing. Ulla Dydo explains how "A twist of a word converts nuns to Hollywood starlets. Canticles '[c]an tickle can tickle'" (Reader 381).

10. I discuss this euphemism in Chapter 1. Stein used the term "cow" or "having a cow" in referring to female orgasm, and further, as a kind of textual jouissance. "Cow," besides its use as slang epithet against women, is one of the only "generic" species terms which is female.

11. An imaginative literary critic might make a case that Stein is metaphorically setting up a contrast between the specifically feminine image of a "prevailing shawl"--the obsessive wrapping or hiding of the female body, with "pleasure"--often forbidden to women, and then calling for a different attitude about bodies, sexuality, jouissance; note also the connection between "shawl" and the related words "mantle," and the "veil" which is aurally hiding in "prevail."

12. DeKoven refers to such seemingly coherent syntactical structures as a "trompe l'oeil" effect: "These logical structures work to make us expect coherent meaning. . . .this expectation must be aroused for the "lively words" to have their subversive, jolting effect" (72).

13. Many other Modernist authors did take the rewriting of myth and history as an experimental form, most famously Joyce in Ulysses and Eliot in "The Wasteland." Women writers were also attracted to this form. See H.D., Laura Riding (A Trojan Women), Mary Butts (Scenes From the Life of Cleopatra).

14. For instance, this from The Golden Bowl: "He had taken from her, on the spot, in a word, before going to dress for dinner, all she then had to give--after which, on the morrow, he had asked her for more, a good deal as if she might have renewed her supply during the night; but he had had at his command for this latter purpose an air of extraordinary detachment and discretion, an air amounting really to an appeal which, if she could have brought herself to describe it vulgarly, she would have described as cool, just as he himself would have described it to anyone else as 'cheeky'; a suggestion that she should trust him on the particular ground since she didn't on the general" (447).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Proper Name and the Subject of Identity

What defines autobiography for the one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name. And this is true also for the one who is writing the text (Philippe Lejeune 19).

The name thus functions as a kind of prohibition, but also as an enabling occasion. Consider that the name is a token of the symbolic order, an order of social law, that which legislates viable social subjects through the institution of sexual difference and compulsory heterosexuality. In what ways can these institutions be worked against themselves to spawn possibilities that begin to question their hegemony? (Butler, BTM 152).

The name "Gertrude Stein" became widely recognized in Europe and the United States after the success of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas in 1933. On her 1935-36 tour of her home country, Stein was more well-known as an eccentric popular culture figure than a serious Modernist writer, despite her successes on the lecture circuit. Yet for all of her alleged egotism, Stein's reaction to "making a name for herself" was mixed. In her account of the States tour in Everybody's Autobiography, Stein describes the shock of she felt seeing her name in lights:

... and then we saw an electric sign moving around a building and it said Gertrude Stein has come and that was upsetting. Anybody saying how do you do to you and knowing your name may be upsetting but on the whole it is natural enough but to suddenly see your name is

always upsetting. Of course it has happened to me pretty often and I like it to happen just as often but always it does give me a little shock of recognition and nonrecognition. It is one of the things most worrying in the subject of identity.(175)

Stein's experience of seeing her own name trumpeted on the Times Square news ribbon--and her shock at recognizing it there--is illustrative of Althusser's scene of interpellation--the subject turning upon hearing the proper name. As Judith Butler puts it, "The call is formative, if not performative, precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject" (BTM 121).¹ Here, though, the subject comes into being by being called not by the police, but by the even scarier voice of the written word. Stein's attendant moment of "nonrecognition" had everything to do with the gap there was between the sense of an autonomous self called up by her name, and the fact that she--through her written, electrified name--was now the "subject" of the news.

Interestingly, Stein makes a distinction between the "normal" upsetting experience of being hailed by strangers in the street, and the more extreme instance of being hailed by her own name written in oversized electric letters. That people felt free to violate the social code which usually allows such hailing only between acquaintances may have been jarring, but she had the choice of responding in return--or

not. But once her name was in public print, either in the newspapers or above Times Square (a situation that her literary agent and friends were encouraging), that power to respond, to control the text, was gone.

Becoming a bestselling author and public figure through the popularity of The Autobiography paradoxically brought about Stein's first major writing block. Making a name for herself seems to have left no room for the constant questioning of categories and signification which fueled so much of her textual play. The double paradox is that The Autobiography--written, in part, to gain a wider audience for her "real" writing--has become the most widely read of Stein's texts, and the only Stein text many readers will ever pick up.

The Autobiography was also a subversive experiment in the genre.² In one of the first analyses of the autobiographical genre, Philippe Lejeune claimed that "The deep subject of autobiography is the proper name" (20). Lejeune's analysis of the implicit and obvious ways in which "[t]he identity of name between author, narrator, and protagonist can be established" (14) ends up being a complicated task, given the cases of pseudonyms, use of first or third person, etc.; Stein's case, however, is not mentioned. Nonetheless, The Autobiography can be viewed, pace Lejeune, as a deep meditation on this deep subject, more specifically, on the problems posed by the grammatical

and social functions of the proper name in relation to signification and identity. This grammatical concern had been brewing for a long time; Stein had long been interested in the private and public properties of the proper name.

In her earlier play with signification, Stein had focused on detaching nouns from the calcified weight of their signification. In contrast to nouns, proper names--at least first names--seemed inherently arbitrary and therefore more "lively." "Call anybody Paul and they get to be a Paul call anybody Alice and they get to be an Alice perhaps yes perhaps no...but generally speaking, things once they are named the name does not go on doing anything to them and so why write in nouns" (PG 210). What does it mean to "get to be a Paul," or an Alice....or, more significantly, a Gertrude Stein? Even though one's name usually remains constant throughout one's life (Stein was interested in nick-names, and people who changed their first names), one's name does not get laden with the definitions, connotations or usages which make nouns "static." Each time one's name is called, it is an immediate experience. Indeed, we are so attached to our proper names that most people register the instance their own name is spoken in the babble of a crowded conversation.

Just as she had with nouns, Stein explored how proper names, particularly first names, could be "mistaken." Hence all her aural puns on "Alice B.": a lass, alas, "bee time

vine"; private associations with nicknames (especially her own--Lovey, Caesar, and Toklas's--Pussy); her sly plays on names like "Ernest" or "May" which corresponded to nouns, verbs or adjectives; her fascination with transgendered names; her interest in how persons with the same first name were similar and not similar. Actual proper names appear endlessly in Stein's texts in reference to events and people in her private life; these names function as private markers, a means to represent autobiographical information, though most often with a minimum of reproduceable context. Given her early pessimistic observation that she was writing "for myself and strangers," perhaps Stein found comfort in populating her texts with the presences called up by the proper names.

When Stein's dramatic texts moved out of the "lively noun" phase, her interrogation of the proper name became more intense. In "A List" (1923), for example, there are four "characters" with names beginning with M: Martha, Maryas, Marius, Mabel. The first line of "They Must. Be Wedded. To Their Wife" (1931) seems to set out a rationale for the choice of characters' names: "Any name. Of which. One. Has known. At least two." Stein latches onto certain names, using them over and over in the plays and also includes well-known historical and political figures. As James Mellow describes, "There are gossip, name-dropping plays in which famous friends and acquaintances--Picasso, E.

Berman, A Masson, V Thomson, for instance--arrive on the scene, much as they might have done at Stein's legendary studio..." (intro, OP). By the early '30s, however, in more esoteric plays like "The Five Georges" and "They Weighed Weigh-Layed," witty dialogue and action become nearly totally subordinated to the presentation of proper names, as if Stein's invocation--or creation and recreation--of the idea of the personages attached to the names was drama enough.

Stein's experimental play with the aural, arbitrary, and dramatic functions of the name provides an important context for her most intensive play with the proper name, The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. Here the full name "Gertrude Stein" appears at least once on almost every page. Sidonie Smith compares the repetition of "Gertrude Stein" with the circular "rose is a rose is a rose" logo which appeared on the original book cover: ". . . 'Stein' becomes a noun full of thingness just at the rose . . . is full of its thingness" (70). This text is jammed with other names, as well; we may tend to remember only the more famous ones, but Bridgman's index of names which appear in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas and the subsequent Everybody's Autobiography runs to ten double-columned pages. In The Autobiography, the grammatical problem of the proper name--exactly how and what it signifies--runs head on into the material, political consequences of the proper name--the

way it confers social and gender status, and functions within patriarchal family structures.

Bridgman's index of names "mentioned" in The Autobiography include references to Stein's father, Daniel, and her brothers Michael and Leo, as well as Toklas's male relatives. The Autobiography refers to these relatives in several places, yet Stein does not use any of their proper names; instead she refers to them generically: "her brother" or "the father." In fact, the only relative actually named is Emilie Toklas, Alice's mother. In order to "make a name for herself," Stein elided the names of the fathers in her own and Toklas's families. This ghosting of the families allowed her to tell the story of her life with Toklas. Although Stein had long played with heterosexual terms, referring to herself as husband and Toklas as wife, the two could not in actuality share a name; each remained, nominally, even after living together for thirty years, their fathers' daughters. The Autobiography rewrites this genealogy by erasing the names of the fathers, and then effecting a kind of exchange of names between the two women through the ambiguously doubled narrator.

Stein's attempt to work through her own dilemmas with her proper name in The Autobiography, given her improper choices in terms of sexuality and profession, ended up backfiring by making her a "character," a caricature of herself. This transformation cast a disabling shadow over

her writing. Stein had always worked to keep her experiential sense of self--"entity"--and her narrative, historical sense of her self--"identity"--separate; the first fueled her creative energy, the second was the result of the social and personal roles she played in private and public. With fame, "identity" eclipsed "entity," and Stein's engagement with her writing faltered. In Everybody's Autobiography, published four years after the first autobiography, Stein waxed philosophical about the proper name at several points, naming her male relatives and discussing the "shock of recognition and misrecognition" which attended her fame. Ten years later, Stein's anxiety about the father's name becomes an explicit political discussion in the The Mother of Us All (1945-46). Here Stein brings together her fascination with the grammatical status and formal function of the name and the very real social, political, and material consequences these have for women.

Plays on Names//Name Plays

My tumults were at the very most concentrated under a name, and not just any name! Cixous--a tumultuous, indocile name. That, a "name"? This bizarre, barbarous word, so poorly borne by the French tongue, this was "my" name. . . . Thanks to this name, I knew very early that there was a carnal bond between name and body (Helene Cixous, Coming to Writing 26).

Stein was fascinated with the proper name, particularly "Christian" names, because this grammatical category was fraught with so many of her major linguistic concerns: the

arbitrary relation between signifier and signified; the relation between the material (aural, phonetic, graphemic) and conventional (gendered, associative, connotive) aspects of the word; and the double-edged function of the proper name as simultaneously private and public, particular and universal, endearing and dangerous. In the proper name, Stein most explicitly confronted the tangled mesh of social effects that were woven around and by a particular grammatical category.

First names are arbitrary--to an extent: "Call anybody Paul and they get to be a Paul call anybody Alice and they get to be an Alice perhaps yes perhaps no..." (PG 210). Stein attempted to differentiate the proper name from the noun--nouns are more static, laden with more convention and connotation--but the differentiation was not entirely clear. Grammatically, both "common" nouns and "proper" nouns (or names) refer to beings or things; the "common" is formally distinguished from the "proper" in that the former does not take any modifier, such as an article or adjective. When Stein attaches articles to the names--"a Paul," "an Alice"--she technically makes the proper common. Of course, most names are both proper, and common, in that they do not really "belong" to one person, but to a host of others as well.

Gayatri Spivak explains that "The proper name is always already common by virtue of belonging to the category

'proper'" (lxxxiii). This latter use of the term 'proper' refers to the systems of signification which legitimize the name and endow it with the ability to create the illusion of individual selfhood. Accordingly, Spivak claims that Jacques Derrida's "chief concern" in Grammatology is "to problematize the proper name and proper (literal) meaning, the proper in general" (lxxxiii). In reference to Levi-Straus's story about of Nambikwara prohibitions on the proper name, Derrida himself concludes that "...the proper name has never been, as the unique appellation reserved for the presence of a unique being, anything but the original myth of transparent legibility present under the obliteration; . . .the proper name was never possible except through its function within a classification and therefore within a system of differences. . . ." (109).³ Stein's sensitivity to the various "systems of differences" effected by language made the proper name a particularly potent linguistic site for her, as it is for Derrida.

Stein may have "preferred" proper names over nouns because the proper name, as signifier, was simultaneously complete, self-contained, and essentially meaningless, empty. Slavoj Žižek, describing this part of speech, says: "...the proper name elaborates no content; it is a function of speech that designates an identity without providing implicitly or explicitly any description of that identity" (qtd in Butler, BTM 153). The name is proper in that it was

"one's own," a private signifier, but the name is also one's address in the public, social sense. More problematically, we formulate our identities and sense of self in response to the information coded within the name we are called. When Stein says "anyone" can "be a Paul," she suggests that the way anyone is classified by gender or ethnicity doesn't really matter.'

Stein's uncertainty about the effect of names on identity--"perhaps yes perhaps no"--points to two readings. Literally, people become accustomed to respond to whatever name has been attached to them; so do dogs, for that matter. However, people can just as easily get accustomed to answering to several different names. Some people have "nick-names" or alternative names to which they respond; others elect to change their names. For Stein's Chinese servants, the proper name seemed to be an item of exchange:

I used to think the name of anybody was very important and the name made you and I have often said so. Perhaps I still think so but still there are so many names and anybody nowadays can call anybody any name they like. We have Chinese servants now and sometimes the name they say they are has nothing to do with what they are they may have borrowed or gambled away their reference and they seem to be there or not there as well with any name and anyway the Oriental, and perhaps a name there is not a name... (EA 10)

Stein's cross-cultural musings are myoptically ethnocentric; however, it is possible that "a name there is not a name" was not intended as a negative comment. The signifying power of "the proper name" in Western culture, despite any individual's attempt to recreate it, is dependent on other orders of signification: patrilineal descent, gender, ethnicity. Stein's name playing was an attempt to find yet another escape route beyond these categories.

In Western culture, the proper name carries its own "historical" baggage. Historical narratives, for instance, are written around proper names, which then accrue particular connotations. Many families traditionally pass the father's first and last name onto a first son; Jewish tradition stipulates that children bear a name of a deceased relative. Stein tells the story of her own name this way: "Then when any of us were named we were named after some one who is already dead, after all if they are living the name belongs to them so any one can be named after a dead one, so there was a grandmother she was dead and her name not an easy one began with G so my mother preferred it should be an easy one so they named me Gertrude Stein. All right that is my name" (EA 115). Interestingly, Stein's mother alters the tradition--giving her youngest daughter "an easy" name, perhaps to make it sound more American. Stein's association with names beginning with "G" is rooted here; the story of her naming is also a lesson in the mutability of tradition.

The immigrant experience of "Americanizing" the proper name--meaning to adopt an Anglicized translation--can be read as a release from the load of information coded in an older tradition. However, it is always a capitulation to a homogenizing dominant culture and language as well. Stein's uncertainty about the real power of a name to secure identity partakes of this mixed sense of freedom and loss.

Along with that, she continually returns to the mystical notion that a name does have connotation, or coded information, which influences identity, the fateful "carnal bond" which Cixous speaks of in relation to her own patronymic. Four In America, a meditation on the careers of George Washington, Ulysses S. Grant, Wilbur Wright, and Henry James, was inspired by the fact that Grant had changed his name from Hiram Ulysses, a name which she predicted would have led to a career in religion instead of warfare (Bridgman 238). Underlying this mysticism about the name, (a mysticism which showed up as well in Stein's interest in palm reading), there is also an attempt to unlink American history from the significant names around which it is organized.

Four in America is a rewriting of American history, predictably centered around masculine achievements, as much as it is a tribute to these famous men. In an earlier piece, "An Instant Answer or A Hundred Prominent Men," part of the "American" texts collected in Useful Knowledge, Stein

had omitted proper names in favor of numeric titles ranging from first to The Hundredth. The twelfth, for instance, "was the man who restrained Abel and Genoa." Stein follows this mismatch of proper names--one a person, one a place--with the question "Why do men like names. they like names because they like calling. A calling is something to follow" (145). Stein, however, was not a very good follower.

William James may have acknowledged the arbitrary nature of signification, but ultimately he found a pragmatic reason for following tradition, and accepting the primary "understanding" which has accrued around names:

Hence, we must talk consistently just as we must think consistently; for both in talk and thought we deal with kinds. Names are arbitrary, but once understood they must be kept to. We mustn't now call Abel 'Cain' or Cain 'Abel.' If we do, we ungear ourselves from the whole book of Genesis, and from all its connexions with the universe of speech and fact down to the present time. We throw ourselves out of whatever truth that entire system of speech and fact may embody (Essays in Pragmatism, 166; qtd Chessman 157-58).

Unlike James, Stein's "disembodied" writing, which she characterized as being distinctly American (WIEL 53), made disconnection the condition for a democratic, decentered arrangement of elements; disconnecting the proper name from its gendered, familial, geographical and historical

connotations cleared the historical slate and ushered in the twentieth-century.

Stein may have attributed mystical powers in "fixing" personal identity and fate to the proper name, but she also wanted to "unfix" that power by manipulating the materiality of the name in the same way she manipulated the materiality of other word classes. For instance, the 1914 text called "Emp Lace" plays with nouns as well as proper names in several ways. The text is full of plays on phrases ("Are perches in cream."), aural punning between English and French ("Emp Lace" a version of the verb "emplacer"), homonyms that could act as nouns or verbs ("beneath pants"), and shifts in letters which change semantic and connotative content ("Angel of weeding cake..."). Similarly, the line "Earnest. Earnest is a chamber" (232), confuses the adjective "earnest" with the proper name "Ernest." The line "Heap heap heap" (235) not only sounds comical, but might also be a reference to Jane Heap (237). French names are transsyllabified in the line "Not a louis in filip," while the actual function of the proper names in the lines "Vestibule paul" and "Near jenny" (236) becomes unclear due to the absence of the initial capital letter. Stein experiments with proper names using all the aural and visual punning techniques she had inflicted on other words, particularly nouns.

The similarity here between Stein's (mis)treatment of

nouns and names has a formal and aesthetic aspect, but the ramifications of experimenting with the signifying power of nouns and of names also differs. The function of the proper name to each person who carries one is not simply a matter of signifier and signified, a relationship which can be reconceptualized once its arbitrary nature is realized. The proper name may be a more narrowly defined signifier than the noun, essentially indexical rather than iconic,⁵ but it always points toward the core of what constitutes identity in this culture while the noun refers to larger scale classification. Speaking of Willa Cather's fiction, Judith Butler links skepticism about the the power of language to transparently represent what is true with a break-down of the proper name's ability to signify personhood around the axis of sex/gender. "The crisis in the symbolic, understood as a crisis over what constitutes the limits of intelligibility, will register as a crisis in the name and in the morphological stability that the name is said to confer" (BTM 138). For Stein, the "crisis in the symbolic" allowed her to play with the materiality of the word in ways which made possible alternative relationships between word and word, signifier and signified. Similarly, the proper name could be made meaningful apart from gendered, patrilineal systems of meaning.

Foregrounding the materiality of the name--the phonic and graphic elements--allowed for relations between "cousin"

names, and thereby created alternative "genealogies." Thus Stein's fascination with certain names, particularly George, and some strings of names in the May-Mary "family."⁶ In this way, she created lineages based on the arbitrary fact of a shared first name, or even on the coincidence of sounds and letters between names. Her own first name (which she seemed to have some ambivalence about) gave her a "cousinship" with Georges for instance. The material substance of the name itself--the initial "Ge--" of Gertrude was close enough then to "George" to put them in the same family of names.

Stein's feeling of relation with "G" name may account for the occurrence of the names "Geronimo" and "Germaine" in the 1928 play "Paisieu." Interestingly, these names are first introduced along with "Caesar," which was one of the erotic nicknames Stein used for herself, playing on the sound of "seizure," as well as the conquering, heroic qualities attached to the name by history. The play presents a hodge-podge of English, French and European names--including, among others, Nancy, Arthur, Mauricette, Sebastian, Carolus, Kate, Camille--and also makes reference to Gertrude and Alice. When names are doubled--"Mary Louise"--this might refer to the same person, or perhaps to a list of people "Mary and Louise" (159). The long list, "Mary Augustine France Perrine" (159), could refer to one person, or could be an assorted list, naming people and

places. At one point, the speaker in the play describes that "He had after all fifty names to his credit. He thought of half of them and may be he made a mistake" (160). In another instance, one might assume that in the case of "Gregory Alice photographed in earrings" (157), the person wearing the earrings is male; most readers with any knowledge of Stein's biography will assume she refers to Alice Toklas here. Many of the names in the play end up being coupled with "Geronimo," beginning with "Gertrude Geronimo" (157)-- "Gerald Geronimo," "Gabrielle Geronimo," "Joseph Geronimo," and so on; by the end of the play, nearly everyone is a Geronimo.⁷ The choice of Geronimo, name of a well-known Apache warrior (1829-1909) among such an international list of names not only emphasizes the American element, but also destabilizes the Euro-American identities called up by the other names by linking them with an ethnic, racial "other." (In one place, a "Howard Mather Geronimo" makes an appearance, in another "Philadelphia Geronimo," these older American referent subsumed by the Apache.) Of course, "Geronimo" has been bowdlerized in the United States as a generic war cry in children's games. "Geronimo makes a middle" (158), remarks the author, and the name does serve this purpose, acting as the common denominator between so many of the other names, either in its ostensible place as patronymic, or through sharing the initial "Ger-" syllable.

This same logic of material relations between "G" names

also explains Stein's fondness for the name George; there was an American association with George Washington, as well as with actual people in her life. "Finally George A Vocabulary of Thinking," for instance, begins: "George is the name of George George Lynes George, George Braque, George Ullman George Joinville, George Williams and will with it and George Middleton. This makes it recognizable as the name George" (How To Write 273). There is also a special relation between this name and her own through associations with the cross-gendered writers George Eliot and George Sand. Eliot, one of Stein's favorite early writers, inspired at least one of her college themes, "The Red Deeps." The French writer appears in "A Sonata Followed By Another": "Misses meet Mister. . . Georgie Sand is in my hand and what are omelettes made of . . ." (YGS 298). The sentence can refer to having one of Sand's texts "in hand," though the line has more salacious possibilities given the erotic context of the poem, and the references to gender confusion (omelettes are made of eggs; "hommelettes" are a different matter). Both Eliot and Sand regendered their signatures in the face of prohibitions over female authority and authorship. Stein seems to be fascinated by these women who had escaped their own names; her texts contain very few references to other women writers. Interestingly, when she first thought of publishing Three Lives, she contemplated using the pseudonym "George Sand," and then settled on "Jane

Sands" (Wineapple 222)--a conscious, or perhaps unconscious, alignment with one of the women who early on insisted on being taken seriously as an author.⁸

The plays which Stein wrote in the late twenties and early thirties increasing focus on the proper name, in lieu of lively word play, dialogue, or erotic content. In "They Must. Be Wedded. To Their Wife" (1931), the alleged rationale for the seven Dramatis Personae is given in the first line: "Any name. Of which. One. Has known. At least two" (OP 161). This accidental factor circumvents any illusion of conventional character creation. In "They Weighed Weigh-Layed" (1930), each character has at least two, if not eight "twins," differentiated by roman numerals. The effect of this is to simultaneously crowd the presumptive "stage" with characters--the eight Maurices, the seven Leons, the five Marguerites, and so on. Since most of the lines are said ensemble--by shifting pair or trios of characters, any attempt to make sense of the content of the spoken lines becomes subordinated to the logistics of trying to keep track of so many voices.⁹ For instance, the grouping "Leon V Maurice IV Eugene I" is given the formal-sounding line "In apt to be asked for them;" this is followed by "Leon VI Maurice V Eugene II" saying, "But why do they make it regrettable" (OP 237). While most of Stein's plays offer very little in the way of recognizable characters, "They Weighed. Weighed-Layed" makes character

completely abstract; given that most lines are shared, there is little hope of distinguishing characters by anything but the Roman numeral which tags each name. Further, the play works to radically deconstruct dramatic conventions: the name "Leon VII" is ostensibly a stage direction when it appear centered on the page; when the aural quality of this name becomes the only context for the line of speech, "All good children go to heaven" (241), the indexical function of the name becomes subordinate to its function as sound. When Stein gives the extra-textual elements of the play the same weight as the textual, the primary subject of the play becomes the proper name itself, its power to mean anything put into question.

While the name may be "empty," in that it "elaborates no content" (Žižek), it cannot help but create a powerful illusion of "place and time," or presence; the name as indexical element points, and by this active gesture peoples the "stage" of Stein's abstract drama. "They Weighed. Weighed-Layed" sets up a tension between this illusion and the lack of all context outside the immediate moment of the play. Lacan pointed out that "The name is the time of the subject'" (Seminar II, 169; qtd in BTM 152-53), referring to the function of the proper name to override an originary incoherence of the ego by giving an illusion of stability. Stein had anticipated this Lacanian bon mot, musing that "A name and a noun is not the same that is a great discovery. A

name is a place and a time a noun is once in awhile" (HTW 207).¹⁰ Stein used this illusion in her plays, allowing the sheer presence of proper names to carry the burden of marking place and time, so that the other elements of the play which revolved around these names--spoken dialogue, gender, relation--were "free" from traditional narrative constraints.

In the play "The Five Georges" (1931), the "characters"--each named George--are distinguished only with differing last initials--L., M., G., S., or, in the case of "George of England," with a title. Sutherland claims that this play "is based on the rather convincing fancy that a person has the character of his name..." (131). Although we might initially assume that all the Georges are male, George S. could very well be George Sand. Whether or not there is something definable as "Georgeness" is one of the questions the play ponders. At one point, an unnamed speaker enigmatically says, "The five Georges never made the nearness to likeness be amazing" (296), suggesting that indeed, the "nearness to likeness" occasioned by having the same name was not much more than accidental. "Nearness to likeness," in this play, is achieved through the suppression of the patronymic, which puts all the Georges, even the king of England, on the same level playing field. And the paradox of the play is that although the five Georges might seem similar, ultimately the shared Christian name does not

prescribe identity: "Five Georges make a difference" (313). The "place and time" secured by the name is both the same and not the same.

The patronymic, on the other hand, is a different story in that it "fixes" the subject much more systematically than the Christian name might. As Butler explains, "Once the proper name is elaborated as a patronymic, then it can be read as an abbreviation for a social pact or symbolic order that structures the subjects named through their position in a patrilineal social structure. The durability of the subject is not, then, a function of the proper name, but a function of a patronymic, the abbreviated instance of a hierarchical kinship regime" (BTM 154). At one point, George M. muses, "Love and delight. They might./Beneath Bequeath. Remain. Name" (294). The phrase "Beneath Bequeath." with its formal capitalization invokes legal language; even from the grave, "Beneath," the father's name is passed on, inherited through the sons, insuring the continuence of the family. Stein had been apprised of the "logic" of inheritance laws when she and Toklas drew up wills in 1928. A play written in that year, "A Bouquet. Their Wills," returns again and again to a piece of information she found "surprising": if a married couple was killed at the same time, in a car accident for instance, "for legal purposes the man was presumed to have lived the longer, and therefore inherits the wife's portion" (Bridgman 200). Stein reasoned in her

play that this would mean that a husband's half-brother would inherit over a wife's "natural" children in such a case. Of course, such legal reasoning did not apply to her and Toklas's case. As Bridgman concludes, "It was a law that had paradoxical meaning for this particular household, and that could not fail to re-enforce Gertrude Stein's sense of the insufficiency of the word" (200). Stein may have referred to herself and Toklas as "husband and wife," but in the eyes of the law, both remained their father's daughters, by name.

In an earlier play, "The King or Something (The Public Is Invited to Dance)" (1917), Stein had written, "I have a name./She has the same./Expression" (129). A sympathy of understanding and "expression" (whether the mute language of the face or personal conversation) were the private daily "signs" of the partnership between the two women. Interestingly, while Stein loved to play with Alice Toklas's first name, slipping it into many texts, as well as spinning out puns and creating nicknames, she almost never mentions nor puns on her lover's patronymic. She may have effected a kind of name exchange in one of the notebooks when she mixed up "Gertrice/Altrude" (an exchange which never showed up in a text)¹¹, but aside from arranging for a "Gertrude Geronimo" and an "Alice Geronimo" within the lines of "Paiseu," Stein never took her play with heterosexual roles so far as exchanging or playing with their patronymics.

Mingling "Christian" names to create the touchingly private love note "Gertrice/Altrude" (Toklas would have seen this notebook scribble when Stein turned over her night's work to be typed) remained a private affair; Stein balked at taking liberties with Toklas's or her own patronymic.¹² In The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, however, she hit upon a strategy which allowed her to exchange names with Toklas while making a public name for herself as an author.

The Autobiographies...Making a Name for Yourself

A name is a powerful symbol, and one might argue that a name helps to create the bond between one's self-image and one's social image even more than other aspects of language. (Joyce Penfield 118).

[Derrida's argument about names] points also to the theme of the play of desire around the proper name: The narcissistic desire to make one's own 'proper' name 'common,' to make it enter and be at one with the body of the mother tongue; and at the same time, the oedipal desire to preserve one's proper name, to see it as the anologon of the name of the father" (Gayatri Spivak, Preface to Grammatology lxxxiv).

For women, then, propriety is achieved through having a changeable name, through the exchange of names, which means that the name is never permanent, and that the identity secured through the name is always dependent on the social exigencies of paternity and marriage. Expropriation is thus the condition of identity for women. Identity is secured precisely in and through the transfer of the name, the name as a site of transfer or substitution, the name, then, as precisely what is always impermanent, different from itself, more than itself, the non-self-identical (Judith Butler BTM 153-4).

The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas is full of small detailed anecdotes; I want to begin this chapter by retailing two of them. In the chapter "The War," Toklas, the

ostensible narrator, tells how Stein's refusal to deal with bureaucratic paperwork led to a confusion of identities. "All this time of course he [a french major] called me Mademoiselle Stein because Gertrude Stein's name was on all the papers that I presented to him, she being the driver....I was very confused. I hesitated. But I am not Mademoiselle Stein, I said" (218-19). Later on, "Alice Toklas" describes the aftermath of the first tense meeting between Stein and T.S. Eliot. "Then began a long correspondence, not between Gertrude Stein and T.S. Eliot, but between T.S. Eliot's secretary and myself. We each addressed the other as Sir, I signing myself A.B. Toklas and she signing initials. It was only considerably afterwards that I found out his secretary was not a young man. I don't know whether she ever found out that I was not" (247).

Both stories, seemingly forgettable at first glance, are sly. Since the first edition of the text did not feature Stein's name on the cover nor on the titlepage, readers of The Autobiography were supposed to jump out of their chairs, like the French major, and shout "Where is Mademoiselle Stein" upon reaching the last paragraph of the book where the true nature of the authorship is revealed (or perhaps they were supposed to shout for the absent Mademoiselle Toklas). Alice Toklas's use of first initials mimics T.S. Eliot's own self-presentation, but is also a way for her to "pass" as a male secretary, ostensibly with a greater

authority. Of course, the question of Toklas "passing" as Stein's male secretary is disingenuous, given the nature of their public and private relationship--a relationship which anyone who knew anything about Gertrude Stein would have been aware of. Both stories touch on the function and effect of the name--the name linked to official identity papers, as marker of marital status (that insistent 'Mademoiselle'), as marking gender.

As previously mentioned, Lejeune claims that it is the proper name, not the facts of a life, which is "[t]he deep subject of autobiography" (20). After the mirror stage, the acquisition of the proper name "fixes" a person, for better or worse. "The name received and assumed first--the father's name--and especially the Christian name that distinguishes you from it, are no doubt essential basic principles in the story of me" (21). By making Alice B. Toklas appear to be the author of the book and leaving "Gertrude Stein" off the title page, Stein violates the "autobiographical pact" that Lejeune describes. By eliding the names of their relatives and stressing that the true "origin" of the "story" (the story of the making of Stein's writing) was the moment Toklas showed up at Stein's door, she also attempts to break contract with the "social pact based on the Law of the Father, a patrilineal organization that implies that is is the patronymic names that endure over time. . ." (Butler, BTM 153).

But is there any way that a female author can wrest her name from the grip of patronymic identification? The very fact that Stein "exchanges" names with Toklas in order to make a name for "Gertrude Stein" reinforces the power of the patronymic, as well. Butler points out that "The changeableness of the feminine name is essential to the permanent appearance of the patronymic, indeed, to the securing of an illusory permanence through a continuing patrilineality. . . ." (BTM 153). Stein may have identified with the role of "husband" in her "marriage," but curiously, it is she who loses her signature on the title page, sacrificing it in order to make a name for the Modernist genius named "Gertrude Stein." She may have avoided the names "Stein" and "Toklas" in the midst of her exuberant erotic texts, but in The Autobiography there was no escaping the problems the patronymic posed for a female author attempting to sidestep categories instituted through compulsory heterosexuality. Following on the heels of her name plays of the late twenties and early thirties, The Autobiography focuses Stein's anxiety and suspicions about signification home to her own proper name--and concomitant anxieties about identity: individuality and family, authorship and authority, nationality and "race," sexuality and gender. These concerns would be more apparent to readers if The Autobiography were read in the context of the numerous experimental texts which preceeded it.

In setting out to write an advertisement for her writing in the guise of an autobiography, Stein was undertaking a risky business. Women writers such as H.D., Mina Loy, Marianne Moore and Djuna Barnes were approved, championed, and "placed" in the Modernist pantheon by Pound and Eliot. Stein had her supporters, including Hemingway, Williams, Anderson, Thomson, and Van Vechten, but even so had not been able to secure much in the way of publication or large readership. Stein challenged the foundations of masculine authority when she boldly announced her own status as "genius." As Domna Stanton acknowledges, "For a symbolic order that equates the idea(1) of the author with a phallic pen transmitted from father to son places the female writer in contradiction to the dominant definition of woman and casts her as the usurper of male prerogatives" (15). Acknowledging how much her writing career depended upon the supportive presence of Alice B. Toklas challenged the heterosexual dynamic of genius and muse, the subject-object dynamic she had resisted and rewritten in her experimental texts: "I double you, of course you do. You double me, very likely to be. You double I double I double you double. . . ." (PP 115).

The creation of an authorial double allowed Stein to evade the philosophical and aesthetic implications of confusing the idea of the author with the textual "I," a confusion she had successfully evaded in her "real" writing.

As Sidonie Smith puts it, "How could she displace the center of autobiographical narrative away from a unified subject?" (65). In his famous essay, "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes makes a distinction between the traditional idea of Author as someone "in the same relation of antecedence to his work as a father to his child," and the "the modern scriptor [who] is born simultaneously with the text, is in no way equipped with a being preceding or exceeding the writing, is not the subject with the book as predicate." The effect of this modern author-text syntax is that "there is no other time than that of the enunciation and every text is eternally written here and now. (qtd in Newton 156). Stein gave up this kind of eternal immediacy--the sense of "continuous present" which was such a constant desire in her texts--when she took on the narrative project of autobiography. Recalcitrant, however, she refused to put her name in the proper place within the grammar of the autobiographical pact, refusing "paternity" of the text.

When she inserts an "improper" name in the "auto-" slot of the biographical genre, Stein does succeed in leaving the subject of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas indeterminant. Ostensibly Stein's most "transparent" text, it has generated a range of conflicting readings. Susan Stanford Friedman summarizes some of the current feminist interpretations of The Autobiography, which "can be simultaneously regarded as a hoax (since the book focuses on

Stein, not Toklas); as an ultimate act of arrogance (since Stein played the role of masculine genius to Toklas's domesticity, at least publicly); as a sign of a 'self in hiding,' to echo Patricia Spacks' phrase for women's autobiographical selves (since Stein masks her voice behind that of a fictional Toklas); and as a testament to a fluid identity that Stein shared with her lover" (54-55). The Autobiography has also been cited as a postmodern monkey-wrench which shows the impossibility of the autobiographical genre (Stanton), an exemplary lesbian rewriting of autobiography (Gilmore), or a "lesbian lie" (Stimpson).¹³ Based on research of the manuscript of Stanzas in Meditation, written simultaneously with The Autobiography, Ulla Dydo has surmised that it might have been written to appease Toklas, who felt terribly jealous after finally finding out about Stein's first lesbian relationship with May Bookstaver ("Stanzas in Meditation: The Other Autobiography"). As Smith describes it, "Instead of the autobiographical narrative emanating from the consciousness of the autobiographical subject, that subject is situated as an object of autobiographical discourse" (68). Of course, what all these readings miss is that the important "subject" of the book is not the historical being who lived under the name Gertrude Stein, who lived in Paris and hobnobbed with the famous writers and painters in her weekly salon, but rather the proper name "Gertrude Stein"--the signifier which

is meant to represent the radically experimental corpus of texts.¹⁴ Paradoxically, this attempt to recreate her self as a signifier--simultaneously resonant with historical context and empty of private revelatory confession--focused readers' attention more fiercely onto the missing signified.

Barthes's further description of the "modern scriptor" rings an uncanny echo with the original text of The Autobiography. He describes the act of killing off and burying the Author as an act of disembodiment: ". . . the hand, cut off from any voice, borne by a pure gesture of inscription. . . traces a field without origin--or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins" (156). In the original edition, Stein's name did not appear on titlepage nor book jacket. However, the frontispiece--a photograph by Man Ray--showed an unnamed Stein writing, while Toklas stands in the doorway.¹⁵ The book ended with a photograph of Stein's famous scrawl, with the title "First page of manuscript of this book". These photographs provided extra-textual "clues" to the hoax of authorship--the frontispiece "framing" Toklas as if she was the subject of a portrait being sketched by the foregrounded Stein at her desk, and not vice versa; the holograph standing as material proof of the act of writing, the immediate moment of inscription. Like the ring of roses on the cover of the book, these extra-textual elements resist traditional

narrative's linear movement from beginning, to middle, to end by setting up the fiction that the handwriting we see on the last page is the writing that we see being produced upon first opening the book. The way these photographs draw the beginning and ending together reinforces the movement of the text itself, which begins with the generic "I was born," but ends with the revelation of authorship: "About six weeks ago Gertrude Stein said, it does not look to me as if you were ever going to write that autobiography. . . . I am going to write it for you. . . . And she has and this is it" (310). Readers were meant to be so astonished by this revelation that they would hurriedly return to the start of the book in order to rethink the entire story.¹⁶ In this autobiography which is not one, Stein would try to baffle the problematic issue of "origins" aesthetically, through the form of the book and the circular shape of the narrative, and more personally, by restructuring the tale of her own origin.

The Autobiography may begin with the conventional autobiographical words, "I was born," but it then resists linear chronology, constantly shifting between present and past events with digressive ease. One of the results of this cutting back and forth is that Alice B. Toklas arrives "at the door" of Stein's atelier six times within the first chapters. According to George Wickes, Stein thus "keeps the narrative returning to one pivotal point, the moment of Alice B. Toklas's arrival in Paris, and the beginning of

their 25 years together" (qtd in Benstock 162). This moment is also pointed to by the somewhat odd description underneath the frontispiece, "Alice at the door, photograph by Man Ray."¹⁷ Chapter One ends with the narrator's famous description of her encounters with three geniuses, including Gertrude Stein, and the words "In this way my new full life began" (7). Sidonie Smith "doubles" this statement, reading it back to Stein. "Gertrude Stein's 'life' begins, she implies through the voice of 'Alice,' not in childhood and not in her paternal legacy. It begins when Alice B. Toklas displaces, both physically and emotionally, Stein's brother Leo, son of the father, and as such the figure of patriarchal lineage, power, and control. . ." (73-74).¹⁸

Stein had begun writing before Alice Toklas got to Paris in 1907; she had completed Q.E.D., Fernhurst, and Three Lives, and hired Toklas to type the first drafts of The Making of Americans, which had been developing for several years in accumulating notebooks. Toklas's arrival, however, marked the turning point in Stein's writing career. She may have figured herself as the "genius" of The Autobiography, but this was only important in relation to the texts produced--texts which she might not have produced had it not been for Toklas's unconditional support, and the confidence Stein gained through their emotional, sexual relationship.

In her account of "coming to writing," Stein leaves out

the proper names of her forefathers; in fact, the only proper name that gets a mention on either the Stein or Toklas side is Toklas's mother. "My mother was a quiet charming woman named Emilie," says the narrator; no need to mention her last names, the second one being understood. Toklas's father is simply described as being "of polish patriotic stock." Brief anecdotes about her father's "grand-uncle" and "father" and their war-time experiences are retold, but not their proper names. In fact, these anecdotes centered around Napoleon and his wars allow the narrator to distance herself from the masculine side of her family: "I myself have had no liking for violence. . ." (1).

The telling of Gertrude Stein's early history similarly elides proper names; all the other Steins are designated by generic kinship terms: the father, her brothers, her elder sister. Most notable is the absence of Leo Stein's name; perhaps part of his pique with this book was that he is mentioned throughout as "her brother," with no other identity. Most readers have missed the significance of these missing proper names in The Autobiography; Bridgman even suggests that the proper names are there when he indexes them.

Stein's second autobiography did include her authorial signature, although the title, Everybody's Autobiography, again signalled her resistance to pinning her self down

under the problematic weight of the proper name. If her argument with the proper name was woven into The Autobiography slyly, in this second one, the proper name becomes a foregrounded subject for discussion, beginning on the first page with a revelation about Toklas's feeling about her name: "In the first place she did not want it to be Alice B. Toklas, if it has to be at all it should be Alice Toklas. . . ." (3). Stein capitulates to her companion's wishes in this book, referring to her as Alice Toklas. (Other friends, however, are referred to casually by their first or last names.) The first thing Stein mentions about Pablo Picasso is that he chose his mother's name over his father's name, a choice which reminds Stein of the way her Chinese servants seem to barter with their names (10); Picasso's repudiation of his paternal patronymic, Ruiz, is also a point of connection Stein feels between Picasso and herself.

Stein also reiterates the names of her family members (with the exception of her mother) as she fills in the more conventional details about childhood and growing up which were irrelevant to The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. "Daniel was my father's name, it is a good sounding name and yet not a very real name to me and I have never found out whether it is a name that I like or not, anyway it was my father's name" (138). After creating a name for herself, Stein could be more explicit about her antipathy towards

patrilineage: "There is too much fathering going on just now
 and there is no doubt about it fathers are depressing;" the
 proper names of the "fathers" Mussolini, Hitler, Roosevelt,
 Stalin, Lewis, Blum, and Franco were listed as evidence
 (133).

Stein wrote Everybody's Autobiography in the aftermath
 of her sudden fame, a fame which had been surprisingly
 violent, and which had caused Stein to stop writing.
 Reflecting on this writing block, Stein decided:

It is all a question of the outside being outside and
 the inside being inside. As long as the outside does
 not put a value on you it remains outside but when it
 does put a value on you then it gets inside. . . then
 all your inside gets to be outside. I used to tell all
 the men who were being successful young how bad this
 was for them and then I who was no longer young was
 having it happen (47).

No longer young, and not a young man, Stein, a Jewish
 expatriated lesbian writer of subversive Modernist texts,
 did well to worry about the "value" that would be assigned
 to her work--and to herself as well--from the "outside." As
 confident as she felt about what was "inside" herself--a
 vision of a radically decentered, democratic rearrangement
 of categories and hierarchies, and an attendant joy in the
 creative, erotic potential this vision offered--the proper
 name hovered at the borders of her texts, threatening to

override her aesthetic vision and reassign her to her "proper" place.

"Identity always worries me," she wrote, "and memory and eternity" (115). Throughout the thirties and forties, Stein worked hard to maintain the public stature she had secured; she became more comfortable speaking and writing as an authoritative public persona. One of the last texts she wrote, the play called The Mother of Us All, shows how much the issues of authority, the proper name, and gender continued to haunt Stein.

Private/Public/Political: The Name of the Father and The Mother Of Us All

Women who acquired a professional identity in public, such as actresses and authors, and whose surname became well-known soon discovered the disadvantages of changing their surname at marriage. They were the first to realize that part of their identity was their name and erasing their surname meant erasing their professional trademark and the remarkable achievements with which they were associated (Joyce Penfield, "Surnaming: The Struggle for Personal Identity" 119).

Daniel: Ladies and gentlemen let me present you let me present to you Henrietta M. it is rare in this troubled world to find a woman without a last name rare delicious and troubling. . . (176).

The Mother of Us All (1945-46) offers a last word about genealogy, gender, family and relationship, and politicizes the connections between these issues explicitly. With her choice of Susan B. Anthony as misunderstood heroine, Gertrude Stein returned to her earlier involvement with

discussion of *The New Woman* and women's rights. Robert K. Martin dispells the "simplistic view" of the opera as "barely disguised autobiography" by grounding the play in its historical context, and in the context of Stein's increasingly political awareness after WWII. As he explains, "Anthony is an appropriate heroine for Stein's 1946 works because she illustrates the failure of the Civil War to realize its potential for the union of black emancipation with women's freedom and because her own unconventional life represents the commitment to individual fulfilment joined with a sense of social justice that Stein believes may offer an alternative to the group identities of mid-twentieth-century America" (212). After all her early experimental "play" with the notion of happy, democratic, nonheterosexist coupling at the level of word and word, reader and text, queerly defined "husband" and "wife," Stein ends up being sharply critical about the reality of women's social position, linking their inequality to the patriarchal exchange of women in marriage, symbolized by the erasure of the woman's name. In the first scene of the opera, the consummate American woman named Indiana Elliot asks, "What's in a name;" Susan B. Anthony answers, "Everything." Decades earlier, Stein had turned Juliet's plaintive dialogue with Romeo--"What's in a name? that which we call a rose,/By any other name would smell as sweet" (901)--on its head by answering, "A rose is a rose is a rose." The word "rose"

became sweeter when she focused on its materiality--the aural pleasure of its repetition, its pun with the french "eros," the added resonances made when she had it printed as a circular logo. After WWII, names--particularly proper names--no longer smelled so sweet. The loaded question "what's in a name" dictates much of the opera's text.

In this same scene, for instance, Susan B. Anthony implies that names might be oppressive, since they are handed down through the fathers, but she sees no easy way to circumvent their power: "to choose a name is feeble." Making up another names, particularly a new patronymic, would do nothing to alter the systematic operations of male dominance, especially if one chose to continue living within the dominant culture. The alternative, however, was to be burdened by the power of the name to position one in socially "proper" spheres. One of the characters in this scene is a "G. S.," who, like Stein herself, confides that her father's name was Daniel; all her protests notwithstanding, this name itself carries inescapable Biblical connotations. In the opera, the Stein patriarch is transformed into Daniel Webster, pompous master of political rhetoric. Indiana Elliot, in contrast, informs us that she "had no father no father." The double negative here is interesting in light of the possibility that this character might be the daughter of George Sand (Indiana was Sand's first novel) and George Eliot, Stein's early influences.

One of the "subplots" of the opera is the relationship between Indiana Elliot and Jo the Loiterer. If Indiana is disenfranchised due to her sex, Jo is barred from voting because he has no property or fixed place of residence. This seems as though it would place them on the same "side" of the suffrage debate, but Jo continually asserts the male-privilege which he does have. He is willing to support Anthony's suffrage platform (even though as a loiterer, he cannot officially vote for her) "as long as I don't have to change my name don't have to don't have to change my name" (190).

But Indiana Elliot makes it a condition of their marriage that they both exchange names: ". . .Indiana Loiterer is such a pretty name I think all the same he will have to change his name, he must be Jo Elliot." Jo gives in, "what can I do but do as she tells me," but this new-fangled notion of marriage causes him some anxiety: ". . . nobody will know it's men, but what can I do, if I am not she and I am not me, what can I do, if a name is not true. . ." (195); for Jo, the pronoun "me" and the word "men" seem to be synonymous.¹⁹

Indiana Elliot's interest in the exchange of the patronymic is grounded in American suffrage history. Joyce Penfield notes that "The option of using only one's birthname and maintaining this practice even after marriage was debated in 1848 at the Women's Rights Convention during

a discussion of equality in marriage." In fact, Elizabeth Cady Stanton had found it paradoxical that the penultimate act of declaring freedom from slavery occurred when escaped slaves took on new names, while "free" women lost their names upon marrying (119-20).

"What is marriage," asks Susan B. at one point, officiating at the marriage of Jo the Loiterer and Indiana Elliot. "[I]s marriage protection or religion, is marriage renunciation or abundance, is marriage a stepping-stone or an end" (185). Anthony's philosophical speculations here are undercut by a much earlier discussion between Jo the Loiterer and his pal, Chris the Citizen. Unsure about whether he actually has a wife, or just the desire for one, Jo launches upon a kind of shaggy-dog story, but the way Stein sets up this comic scene has deeper resonances.

Jo the Loiterer.	My wife, she had a garden.
Chris the Citizen.	Yes
Jo the Loiterer.	And I bought one.
Chris the Citizen.	A wife.
	No said Jo I was poor and I bought
	a garden. . . (162)

Martin interprets this exchange as proof of Stein's awareness "that marriage is, as Engels pointed out, fundamentally a relationship of property. . . . As long as women are seen as a means of production, they are a garden to be planted and reaped. . ." (215-16). The quick assumption that Chris the Citizen makes, that wives can be bought (even by poor loiterers like Jo), is made more

ridiculous in the play by the difference in the characters of Jo and Indiana; he is passive and unrealistic, while she is always bold, forthright, and assertive.

Such individual character traits end up being meaningless in the face of larger institutionalized forces, however. At one point Susan B. seems to attribute women's inequality to their psychological conditioning: "Men want to be half slave half free. Women want to be all slave or all free therefore men govern and women know, and yet" (183). Part of Anthony's--and Stein's--pessimism about the passage of the Suffrage Bill is her worry that this inclusion in the political process will make women "become like men" (193). Chessman states that The Mother of Us All "raises problematic questions about the efficacy of action within the world (or at least within the U.S.A., "Us All") as it is presently constructed. . . . How possible is it for someone--a woman or a man--to enter this arena without reproducing the authoritarian structures against which one is struggling. . . ." (200). Stein may have been troubled by the ironic workings of political power, apparent in her cogent observation after WWII that "the winner loses," but the last we hear of Indiana Loiterer and Jo Elliot in the opera suggests that women have a long way to go before becoming their oppressors. Suffrage passed, Indiana Elliot proudly claims, "I am a loiterer Indiana Loiterer and I can vote." Her husband comments, "You only have the name, you have not

got the game" (200).

Stein may have absented herself from overt political engagement before WWII, in favor of grammatical terrorism and the democracy of the word in the realm of the text. Her attempts to make the name mean something else, to exsex the word, and queer the gramma. With the success of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, Stein gained name recognition--in fact, the book made a name of her--although this notoriety did not translate into a hoped-for wide readership for her more innovative texts. The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, for all its narrative charm, should be understood as one of Stein's meditations on the problem of the proper name--particularly its function in accordance with the patriarchal system of compulsory heterosexuality. As such, the name "Gertrude Stein" becomes the site not just of legends about famous painters, salons, and apt quips, but the occasion where assumptions about gender, sexuality, ethnicity, authority--all central to current discussions of autobiography--are questioned, and resisted.

1. Teresa de Lauretis extends Althusser's definition of ideology ("not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live") and subjectivity formation to the operations of gender. While Althusser saw the operations of ideology as seamless, allowing no "outside," de Lauretis argues that the operations of gender, as "the product and process of both representation and self-representation," leave room for self-consciousness and agency (Technologies 6-9).
2. See the essays of James E. Breslin, Bella Brodzski and Celeste Schenk, Susan Stanford Friedman, Leigh Gilmore, Biddy Martin, Sidonie Smith, and Domna Stanton for various perspectives on the subversive quality of The Autobiography.
3. Derrida reads Levi-Strauss's account of his sojourn with the South American Nambikwara people with particular attention to his account of the prohibition against voicing anyone's proper name; for Derrida, this prohibition, which, as it turns out, is hardly absolute, is symptomatic of the presence of an "arche-writing" even within a nonliterate culture. Where Levi-Strauss reads an originary "innocence" in this pre-literate society, Derrida reads the same sort of "violence of the letter" which affects our own literate culture and history.
4. In Radclyffe Hall's novel, The Well of Loneliness, for example, the female protagonist becomes a Stephen, her adoption of masculine attributes and even bodily morphology coincidentally cued by her father's eccentric name choice; she becomes a "Stephen." Similarly, Leslie Feinberg gives the transgendered protagonist of Stone Butch Blues the ambiguous first name Jess.
5. Kaja Silverman, summarizing Charles Sanders Peirce's sign system, explains "Indexical elements help to transform general assertions into specific statements, to locate a discourse in relation to time and space. For example, a proper name elicits the mental image of a living person, or one specific to a particular historical period, a work of literature, or a legal fiction. Thus, instead of referring to a whole class of things, the way the word 'tree' does, a proper name makes a direct and individual reference, functioning like a pointing hand" (21).
6. Dydo discusses Stein's "M" names, particularly the connection between May and Mary (which pun on "may" and "marry") and Stein's first lover Mary Bookstaver (Reader 383).

7. The name "Geronimo" shows up in "Arthur A Grammar" (1928): "Bertha Geronimo has a mother named Danny and a brother named Danny" (95). As Dydo remarks, . . . Stein sentences liberate the names from functions, roles, and birth relations, coupling words freely to make brothers mothers, sisters wives" ("Must Horses" 275).
8. Bridgman also discusses Stein's uncertainty about using "Jane Sands" as a pseudonym for Three Lives. Bridgman remarks, without making the connection to the other George, that "The name 'Sands' had some deep significance for her." He also quotes a letter, written in 1929, in which Stein also seems to miss this connection; she writes that the name "Sands" is "'for some psychological reasons which I have never fathomed' unacceptable 'for names for nom de plumes for almost anything and it should always be refused'" (46).
9. I once attempted to persuade a informal group of actors to attempt this play. Dividing up so many roles among a small group and then trying to keep track of the many permutations of speakers absorbed so much energy that the group flatly refused to consider the play further after one and a half painful read-throughs.
10. Donald Sutherland's text originally pointed me to this quote.
11. For discussion of this marginal note, see Stimpson, "Gertrice/Altrude: Stein, Toklas, and the Paradox of the Happy Marriage." Leigh Gilmore's article, "A Signature of Lesbian Autobiography: 'Gertrude/Altrice'" reads more into this notation than I would.
12. Stein did pun on her own name in the phrase "leaves of stone," putting the americanized translation of her name squarely within the American literary tradition. She also played with patronyms in some of her portraits, such as "Marry. Nettie" and throughout "Braque."
13. Based on The Autobiography, Stein is often labeled as being "male-identified," a criticism most often centered upon the narrator's observation that she (Toklas) sat with "the wives" while Gertrude Stein engaged with the talented men. More recently, Catharine Stimpson read this text as "a lesbian lie": "In a complex act of deception, confession, and assertion, a misunderstood, under-published author is giving the public what she calculates it can take" (153). Stein's decision not to make the text an explicit lesbian love story is problematic for contemporary readers, but not surprising given her deep ambivalence about identity categories in the first place. Like her contemporary Willa

Cather, Stein has been both claimed and rejected by feminist and lesbian feminist camps. As Butler explains:

It is not easy to know how to read gender or sexuality in Willa Cather's fiction. Cather has appeared not to place herself in a legible relation to women or to lesbianism. For her reader, then, to place or affirm her with a name engages a certain violence against her texts, texts which have as one of their persistent features the destabilization of gender and sexuality through the name (BTM 143).

Stein's case presents a very similar situation.

14. James E. Breslin credits Stein with creating this "character," "an abstraction, a deliberate simplification--a mythical figure whose peaceful self-sufficiency allows her to transcend external circumstances" (156).

15. Bridgman reads the Man Ray frontispiece photo through the scrim of his narrow understanding of the Stein-Toklas relationship: "The photograph symbolizes the book, not only by introducing Miss Toklas through Gertrude Stein's writing, but also by suggesting the two women's respective positions and personalities" (219). Schmitz's view is also that the photo "depicts the proper relation of the two women"--muse and writer. "It is also describes spatially Alice's 'place' in the composition. . . . Alice looking in at the scene of writing, . . . " (*Of Huck and Alice* 204).

James Breslin has a different interpretation: "The photograph with its obscure foreground and distinct background, has no clear primary subject--like the book that follows. . . ." (152). Harriet Chessman begins her analysis of the "doubling" of voice and identity in *abt* with a more detailed, double reading of Man Ray's "eery and uncanny" photo: overtly, it represents s as the writer, sitting "at a kind of altar, replete with votive candles, and on the shelf above, religious icons, including a heavy cross"; Toklas might be her ghostlike doppelganger. Alternatively, the two candles and the cross can be read as a "visual chiasmus, suggestive of the way in which Alice may take Gertrude's 'place,' and Gertrude Alice's" (61-62).

While I find Chessman's reading of the Man Ray photograph compelling, I am interested in its relation to the holograph which ends the book; the frontispiece then can be seen within the puzzle of the extra-textual elements in the first edition, a puzzle which was meant to provide "clues" to the authorship of the text, as well as an implicit commentary on the inadequacy of the text.

16. In his correspondence with Stein's literary agent, William Bradley, Alfred Harcourt approved of the "surprise" ending of The Autobiography. Assuring Bradley that he had

read the book "per instructions," i.e., straight through from beginning to end, Harcourt understood "the full force of the extraordinary last paragraph" (ltr 1/18/33). Bradley was simultaneously trying to arrange for advance publication of a portion of the text in the Atlantic Monthly. Ellery Sedgwick would not agree to Stein's condition that her authorship be kept "secret." "Your instructions would make Stein unintelligible to readers. Imperative we use name" (cable 1/31/33). Stein capitulated.

17. Chessman calls our attention to the details within the domestic space of the photograph; she does not, however, notice the caption: "Alice B. Toklas at the door, photographed by Man Ray." An echo of the caption can be heard in Chapter Two: ". . . one rang the bell of the pavillion or knocked at the door of the atelier....I was privileged to do both" (7). The caption also contains one of Stein's favorite puns: at the door, adore, Ada/or ("Ada" being the title of the first portrait Stein wrote for Toklas celebrating their relationship and an early alternative "name" for her). The absence of Gertrude Stein's name from the caption is conspicuous, a loud calling of attention to the name not named. (This absence, however, would be remedied in full, as the name Gertrude Stein appears on almost every page of the text. ". . .if you love a name then saying that name any number of times only makes you love it more, more violently and more persistently more tormentedly. Anybody knows how anybody calls out the name of anybody one loves," she noted in her lecture "Poetry and Grammar" (232)). Just as the arrangement of poses within this photo raises questions about the relationship between foreground and background, the caption should raise a question in the mind of an astute reader about who is in charge of the narrative perspective: Would the ostensible autobiographer name herself like this, using the intimate first name only, or is this Man Ray's caption, or, perhaps, the observation of the woman who is writing?

18. Smith concludes that Stein herself then occupies this "paternalistic" space. I think Smith is perhaps assuming that Leo Stein had more "patriarchal" standing than he did (Michael Stein, the eldest brother who took over the functions of family patriarch after Daniel Stein's death, controlled the finances of Leo and Gertrude throughout their adulthoods). Smith acknowledges that Stein's identification as a "'man/woman of genius" and the sexual politics of her ventriloquism.

19. Jo's loss of male privilege through this exchange of patronyms is hinted at by the ambiguous spelling of his first name; within the American context of the play, the most well-known "Jo" would be Jo March from Louisa May Alcott's novel Little Women.

CONCLUSION

The Politics of Grammar//The Grammar of Political Rhetoric:
Civil Wars, World Wars, Word Wars

The 1914-1918 war was a simple war with simple feelings and all the veterans of that war are confused with this war, . . . everything is so opposed to anything that is straightforward. . . . I do not like to fish in troubled waters but I do like to see the troubled water and the fish and the fishermen. I suppose I do not like to fish in troubled waters because I do not care about fishing at all, but that is another matter (WIHS 45).

When I say that it is quite possible for a work of literature to operate as a war machine upon its epoch, it is not about committed literature I am talking about. Committed literature and écriture féminine have in common that they are mythic formations and function like myths, in the sense Barthes gave to this word. . . . Literary work cannot be influenced directly by history, politics, and ideology because these two fields belong to parallel systems of signs which function differently in the social corpus and use language in a different way (Monique Wittig, "The Trojan Horse" 69).

G.I.s and G.I.s and G.I.s and they have made me come all over patriotic. I was always patriotic, I was always in my way a Civil War veteran, but in between, there were other things, but now there are no other things (Gertrude Stein, "To Americans," Brewsie and Willie 113).

Contrary to their usual compositional practice, where Alice Toklas daily typed up Gertrude Stein's literary output, Stein's memoir of living in occupied France, Wars I Have Seen, remained in manuscript until the allied forces arrived; as Stein explains, "my handwriting is so bad that it is not likely that any German would be able to read it" (150). It is paradoxical that in the midst of very real danger, Stein, infamous for baffling readers with incomprehensible textual innovation, decided to stick with

the more accessible style she had adopted in her two earlier autobiographies.

After the popularity of The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, Stein's textual negotiations between the poles of subversion and "sense" were complicated by her desire to be an authoritative, publically recognized "woman of letters," on the one hand, and her commitment to the radical importance of her "real" writing--which remained largely unread--on the other. These competing agendas, what Wittig refers to as "committed writing" versus "literary work," were further complicated by the course of political events in Europe leading up to and culminating in WWII, which would turn out to be a very different kind of war for Gertrude Stein than the first one. The period of the First World War had resulted in an enormous creative outpouring, including "Pink Melon Joy" and "Lifting Belly," and the plays and conversational texts written during the Mallorcan exile; the erotic, gleefully innovative energy of these texts belie the realities of the war which Stein and Toklas witnessed in their work as ambulance drivers. For instance, "Work Again" (1918) begins with a reference to the Ford car which had been named after Stein's aunt:

Fatten it fat we say Aunt Pauline.
Not snow now nor that in between.
Now we are bold.
All the weights are measures.
Splendid.
Are they plateful.
Girls are.

Women.

. . .

The stanza ends, "Hurrah for America" (GP 392). The Second World War, as Stein says, was more complicated.

My argument for the radical political implications of Stein's grammatical terrorism are in many ways similar to feminist critical appraisals of her work. Marianne DeKoven claimed that as "a different language," Stein's experimental writing "both disrupts conventional modes of signification and provides alternatives to them" (DL xiii). Sandra B. Gilbert and Susan Gubar use a similar metaphor when they speak of "The 'alternative tongue' [Stein] devises undermines the language it interrogates, pointing the way out of silence and opening the language to new sites of enunciation" (qtd in Friedman and Fuchs 17). In their overview of twentieth-century women's experimental fiction, Ellen G. Friedman and Miriam Fuchs generalize the subversive strategies women writers have used to "undermin[e] the patriarchal assumptions that inform these narrative modes":

Plot linearity that implies a story's purposeful forward movement; a single, authoritative storyteller; well-motivated characters interacting in recognisable social patterns; the crucial conflict deterring the protagonist from the ultimate goal; the movement to closure--all are parts of dominant fictional structure. Since this fiction is metonymic, reflecting cultural

values in its order and progression, its themes and ideals, this fiction represents patriarchal mastery in Western culture. . . . Thus the rupturing of traditional forms becomes a political act, and the feminine narrative resulting from such a rupture is allied with the feminist project (4).

Friedman and Fuchs' understanding of the metonymic function of literary form in relation to dominant patriarchal social structures is close to the analogy which underlies my own reading of the political nature of Stein's textual play; I locate an even more deeply rooted metonymy in the order and "ideals" of grammatical structures themselves. I would argue, however, that Stein's intervention in the normative operations of grammar--at the levels of semantics, syntax, and genre--is best understood not as an inherently "feminine" textuality, but as a "queer" poetics which attempts to undermine the binary logic which fashions the categories of sex, gender, sexuality, and race in this culture in the service of a radically democratic ethos.

Binary logic is not so easily circumvented, however, nor is the democratic ideal of "one word, one vote" so easily translated into "real world" politics, a realization which Stein struggles with in the later texts. Her turn away from radical textual experimentation towards "public writing" has been interpreted as a triumph for normative

fiction, evidence that she realized her long writing career had been on the wrong track all along, or as her "ravening need for recognition" (Bridgman 331). Alternately, Robert K. Martin views these later texts as a culmination of her earlier vision: "The formalist experiments of the Paris years in part gave way to a new literature of engagement, one which did not, of course, reject linguistic play, but one which sought to employ it as part of a critique of power" (219).¹

What interests me about these texts, however, is how problematic it was for Stein to create bridges between her private and public texts, between her democratic poetics and her populist leanings, between her individual sense of self and the gendered, sexed, and raced identities which her audiences required.

As she moved from "writerly" to more "readerly" texts (to use Barthes' terminology) Stein's freedom to interrogate or disregard normative notions of identity became constrained by the censoring presence of a real anonymous audience. Her desire to play with or refuse identity, one which her class privilege and living an expatriate life in Paris had allowed her to pursue to a certain degree, suddenly became dangerous as the Nazi German occupation and European responses to the war simplified identity and difference along borderlines of nation, race, class, sexuality, and gender, in a manner which threatened to

reduce all of Stein to three terms--Jew, enemy alien, lesbian.² Stein's struggle with the political implications of refusing or accepting ascribed and chosen identities becomes a tension which undermines the cheerful banality of the narrative surface of Wars I Have Seen (1945).

I've described this text as being more "readerly" since it is a fairly coherent narrative, ordered by the day-to-day accounting of the "business of daily living," though within this memoir structure there is plenty of meandering off the strictly linear path in the form of digressions, abrupt jumps from one subject to another, and "floating" poetic word play. Stein's awareness of the increasingly frequent "unpleasant" or "frightening" incidents are slipped into the text underhandedly. For instance, a discussion of the Oscar Wilde trial suddenly segues into a cryptic comment about the current situation in France. Stein states that the Oscar Wilde trial (1895) and his prison poem "impressed" her with the unpleasant revelation that "anybody whose business it was not naturally because of natural or accidental crime to be in prison" could be imprisoned anyway; seemingly California justice was much more tolerant of "natural or accidental crime." She goes on, "And now in 1943 the large part of the men of a whole nation are in prison" (34). Stein's neighbors were being imprisoned for a variety of political, economic, and "racial" crimes, crimes she dismisses, along with Wilde's as "natural or accidental."

Implicitly, Stein links the persecution of homosexuality with the fascist ideology of the occupation.

After the Wilde story came the Dreyfus affair (also 1895), and here Stein names the matter explicitly: ". . . that is anti-semitism, and that is a very strange thing in connection with medievalism and nineteenth century and how a century is so hard to kill, anything is hard to kill, thank heaven" (35). This comment--with its mix of criticism about the pervasiveness of medieval thinking and relief that killing is "hard"--is followed by a particularly odd digression:

He can read acasias, hands and faces.

Acasias are for the goat, and the goat gives milk, very necessary these days and hands and faces are hands and faces, and dreams when one is dancing and falls asleep are real, and all this has this to do with anti-semitism that is true and real and real and not true.

Through and through.

There is a strange delusion (35).

Such a digression about acasias, faces, goats and dreaming of dancing might be symptomatic of the anxieties engendered by the subject of anti-semitism--and killing. Stein records similar feelings of "unreality" in the text. The day before they moved to Culoz, for instance, Stein and Toklas were warned to leave France, or they would be put in a

concentration camp (32). After much deliberation, they decided to take their chances with certain insecurity and friends rather than risk an uncertain security and the unknown. Reflecting back on this crisis, Stein remarks, "But what was so curious in the whole affair was its unreality, like things are unreal when you are a child. . . ." (32). The surprising phrase, not quite a nursery rhyme, "He can read acasias, hands and faces," creates a lacuna, a space of refusal in the middle of this discussion of anti-semitism, which seems "true and not real and real and not true," like falling asleep in the middle of a dream.

Stein does go on to attack the "strange delusion" underlying fascist economic theories. Emphatically she states that "all the Jewish money in the world is only a drop in the bucket and all of it together could never buy anybody to make war or to make peace, not a bit" (35). This refutation of fascist propaganda with rational sense is laudable, but then she places some of the blame for this delusion about their financial power on the Jews themselves by making the sweeping generalization that they want to appear more important than they really are "as they always as the chosen people have felt themselves to themselves to be important."

This kind of attempt to argue both sides of an issue without implicating herself, to muddy the troubled water without getting her feet wet, enrages some readers of this

text, who find Stein's refusal to "take a side" politically damning. Shari Benstock, for instance, wonders whether Stein "ever understood what was at stake in this war, what had led to it, or what her own position was in it" (342). The quick associations Stein makes between homophobia, antisemitism, and fascist ideology in the above passage suggests to be that Stein understood perfectly well what was at stake. In the face of this "real," however, free associational textual "play" and aural delight in rhyming strike a jarring note.

That the operations of language have pervasive--and often oppressive--material effects on speakers is a postmodern tenet. Whether innovative textual "play" which subverts these operations has any real world effects--either on readers, or culture, or the writers--is a much more difficult question. However, the evolution of Stein's own world view, as evidenced in Wars I Have Seen, Brewsie and Willie, and The Mother Of Us All suggests that the complications of oppressive political rhetorics and regimes became less and less acceptable to Stein, especially in comparison to the happy textual world she had created where hierarchies, dominance, and constrictive role functions were undermined and subverted. The last texts may have arisen out of a desire to speak within the public sphere, about public events and issues--in the public's parlance, but ultimately Stein's earlier experimental texts have the greater authoritative power and political importance. Always less

interdiction than invitation, Stein's grammatical terrorist texts can be thought of as the kind of literary "Trojan Horse" Wittig describes, which, once accepted, will "sap and blast out the ground where it was planted" (69), the collision Stein foresaw as the necessary condition for "a commoner a comprehensive rendered so present and nearly persuadable nearly power" ("Emp Lace" 161).

1. Rather than a "critique of power," Shari Benstock interprets the politics--and the writing--of the well-known lesbian writers of the Left Bank as a participation with fascist power. Benstock lumps Stein and Toklas together with Natalie Barney, Romaine Brooks, Radclyffe Hall, Una Troubridge, and others, as "[t]hose with right-wing sympathies, who guardedly or openly supported Fascist causes" (333), and then links this with a generalization about avant-garde aesthetics: "The right-wing lesbianism fostered by this culture developed among the economically and socially privileged, who identified less with the value of totalitarian politics than with the underlying fears those values hoped to assuage. It replicated in many respects the ideology of the male avant-garde, for was male-identified, misogynist, and homophobic, and displaced onto Jews a fear of the 'other'. . . .The women who most wholeheartedly accepted the tenets of the Parisian male avant-garde were most unable to see totalitarianism as an exaggerated form of the patriarchy they had fled from in England and America" (336). Benstock's assumptions about Stein's anti-Semitism and male-identification are reductive readings of Stein's texts and biography, and is an example of the need to fit Stein binary categories.

2. There has been much discussion about how Stein and Toklas managed to survive the occupation given their status as alien Jews (and lesbians). Their close friend Bernard Fay did receive an appointment within the Vichy government (as director of the Bibliotheque Nationale, and he supposedly arranged for special protection (see Bridgman 316). Stein and Toklas also had roots in the community where they summered, and may have been had local protection as well.

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