

Example of research paper on tender buttons

[Literature](#), [Books](#)



Scholars and acolytes of Gertrude Stein prefer to refer to her as "The Mother of Us All" as the attribution of her last dramaturgical opera inspired by the figure of the American feminist Susan B. Anthony. This definition would suggest a bond of deferential respect and intimate cultural affiliation by certain groups of writers and critics positioned on the edge of the traditional culture. All these scholars were gathered around Gertrude Stein as around a true pioneer of feminism and gender studies. The linguistic revolution that took place in her works was astonishing and impressed all of them. She was a giant, a guru, and definitely a charismatic figure whose literary stature, though, was recognized as such only from the mid-seventies. After concentrating mainly on the biographical aspects, the studies about Stein opened the gate to the appreciation for the innovative research present in her work, as well as the cultural aura of the moment as a whole. Marianne DeKoven affirms that the work around the language used by Gertrude Stein has laid the basis for a "reinvention of literary form" (DeKoven 469-483). DeKoven adds that Stein's writings were in close connection with the "antipatriarchal theories of Julia Kristeva [], deeply imbricated in the poststructuralism she shared with Barthes, Derrida, and Lacan" (DeKoven 471). So, as a starting position in dealing with Stein we have to keep an eye on her role as innovator of English, opposer of the literary canon, a real milestone for non-traditional writings. Despite this undoubted function as a forerunner of many revolutionary literary streams, until all of the seventies she was studied by critics "more as a celebrity than as an important writer during her life" (DeKoven 471). DeKoven complains about this aspect, highlighting how the reputation of Stein in the eyes of her contemporaries

(with some exceptions) stemmed more from her home in the rue de Fleurus, 27, in Paris and from her extraordinary collection of Cubist paintings or from her famous friends rather than by the fact that she was a complex author. We could say that Stein, occupying a central role in the marginalization, has unwittingly created a school. She was portrayed as a holy woman, guru, geisha, Roman emperor, Aztec deity or Buddhist, she was a genius indeed. It is a title that Stein, through the indirect voice of Alice B. Toklas, ascribed to itself:

That I may say only three times in my life have I met a genius and each time a bell rang Within Me and I was not mistaken, and I may say in each case it was before there was any general recognition of the quality of genius in them. The three geniuses of-whom I wish to speak are Gertrude Stein, Pablo Picasso and Alfred Whitehead. (Stein 18)

The genius of Stein was pointed out by Barbara Will as well. In her essay she says that Stein was " located in a full but never static present [] a universal process of defamiliarizing" (Will 31).

One of the features of Stein, undoubtedly, is the anticipation of certain contemporary trends like globalization, displacement, or deterritorialization that today we might call transmigration, but that back then she labeled under the appropriate term of expatriate. As some intellectuals and other American writers of the first thirty years of the twentieth century, Stein chose as her own elective activity headquarters Paris, where at first she arrived, at the beginning of the twentieth century, to follow her brother Leo (art historian and collector of the future works of artistic vanguards) and to pursue her literary and cultural interests, but also to escape her current

present.

In the years 1903-4, writing became for Stein in Paris, the primary activity. In addition to the first notes and episodes for future monumental work "The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family's Progress", in those same years she wrote "Quod Erat Demonstrandum" (1903). It is a juvenile novel, published posthumous, composed of three parts, which tells of a relationship, if not love, certainly very affectionate, psychologically addictive, certainly complex, between three young women: Adele, Mabel, Helen. Each name corresponds to a "book" in the work and to a real person: Adele matches Gertrude Stein herself; Neathe to Mabel Haynes and Helen to May Bookstaver. This work can be considered minor and Gertrude Stein did not recognize to herself the work or the character in it, but why? It had been a very difficult work to compose and it forced her to become aware of the college years. Often, the reflections marked by the spirituality that she had learned from William James, are marked by a notion of wholeness. This difference certainly had come into collision with the acquired values of the new Parisian entourage to which she now belonged. From this new point of view, Gertrude Stein had assimilated that distant time to an adolescence agony. Gertrude Stein who had, until then, an education geared to verifiable and testable science, now she was experiencing and confronting with the unfathomable depths of her inner life and all her abysmal doubts. It is evident the lack of the obsessive reps that instead appeared, as a real personal characteristic, in the immediately following text, "Three Lives" (1907-1909). In "Things As They Are" lacks the notion of continuous time that creates the undifferentiated nominal and verbal forms. There is no

sense of poetic process, which always will characterize her future writings, and the plot, which actually exists here, proceeds with conventional and regular course, alternating dialogues, and passages both descriptive or introspective. The in-depth analysis of the psychological discipline will favor the future composition of " Three Lives", and particularly of the story Melanctha, with its innovative style similar to a cubist technique.

Beginning with " Three Lives" and " The Making of Americans Being a History of a Family's Progress" her writing was organized according to three principles, as stated in the published lectures " Composition as Explanation": " the using of everything", " the continuous present", " the beginning again and again." And that was the method used in the composition of Melanctha. Yet in her first works, Gertrude Stein did not like the names, especially the proper ones. This is true for her page in prose because, as it will be outlined, poetry will have different treatment. Nouns, as names who want to name things, were to Gertrude Stein dead parts of writing. While the verb is movement especially in gerund or participle tense, especially when it is used to express action.

This was the primary objective of " The Making of Americans Being a History of a Family's Progress": all her writings tools were used to prolong the existence of every single thing. It was, essentially, a problem of time. The composition, for Gertrude Stein, was basically a problem of time and the movement was a way to teach changes through writings. The movement was the key to capture the spirit of an era mirrored in an equivalent structure of writing. So for example, the Eighteenth century was the era of the " sentences", the Nineteenth century was the era of " phrases" and the

Twentieth century, Gertrude Stein, she discovered to be the era of “ paragraphs”. In “ The Making of Americans Being a History of a Family’s Progress” she tried to write paragraphs in order to catch the rhythm of her own century. The American way of life was mirrored precisely with the manifestation of this rhythm in her writings. It was a movement that would not stop, so, Gertrude Stein's will was to built a strong relation with those events and create a space, mimetically modern, in her writings.

The repetition, as an expressive strategy of Stein’s writings, was more a research for the variant and, especially, a way to reach the emphasis in words. The emphasis was the vibration of existence itself, exactly as the colors under the paintbrush of the cubist painters. It was the quality of expression which marked a particular pathos in language. It was the quality of expression which marked a particular pathos in language. The repetitions, also, dragged names in the dialogues and the items description into a writing space of pathetic tones. It was through these manipulations of syntax and grammar, through the insistence used mostly in *Melanchta*, that Stein spoke of loneliness and absent abstract and impersonal feelings. The phrases in “ Three Lives” were suspended holding the events in repeated monotonous movements.

Stein created the possibilities for an infinite number of nuances: the emphasis, in fact, were about the return of the same movement not the description of the absolutely identical. Rather than repetition, that writing technique, it is to be read as persistence. Between the two terms the difference is really transient, since the action becomes repetition when it is put in place of a forgotten feeling. When an event is transferred in an act of

which there is no memory, there always is something uncanny in the return whether it is insistently repeated. It is as if phrasal repetitions could reveal an automatism that leads all the characters' will to insist on the same emotions. The return would be harmless if it really were the coming back of the same events but it rather feel that those returns are the constant emerging of deepest instincts. Stein tried to transcribe the dynamic interplay of forces that happens in every life promoting or inhibiting actions.

Where doubtless it is possible to sense in a tangible way the stature of Gertrude Stein as a writer with an irrepressible innovative force, is "Tender Buttons", a work completed in 1911. The text is considered by Stein as belonging to the genre of poetry. "Tender Buttons" exemplifies Gertrude Stein's style and hers emblematic figure of composition where, precisely, the difference expands. The book is divided into three sections: "Objects", "Food", "Rooms", where Gertrude Stein aims to present a series of objects, places, actions and situations pertaining to her daily routine. The difference is not in the objects but in the way they are being portrayed. It is spoken of Cubist technique in respect of "Tender Buttons", namely, a polycentric way to describe reality. The lyrics present a point of view in dynamic movement and combine the space in simultaneous time in sequence. More than giving the object a real and concrete outline, Gertrude Stein provides an aggregate of experiences, sensory and mental, that evokes the object for the observing subject. For example, when she wanted to describe a pitcher, we will be faced with a series of propositions that hint or suggest the presence of the object, but in the sense of a dynamic processuality filtered from the mind that perceives, through a series of allusions that only transversely give us

back the subject in its perceptible contours. This poetic process is identified with precision only through close reading, deep inside we would say, that the interpretive process allows, upstream of the translational description. Let see, as an example, the opening composition, from the " Object" section, titled " A Carafe, that is a Blind Glass."

" A Carafe, that is a Blind Glass.

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading." (Stein 3)

It is to be noticed that " blind glass" alludes to the jug; the word glass is polysemic in English: in fact glass is, at the same time, glass and mirror, and if it is preceded by the verb looking it implies a different object. In this way the referenced material of the object includes also its extended function: glass as a transparent material, as a glass object to be use to drink liquids, as a mirror image. A single reference can suggest various experiences. But the glass is blind because the pitcher does not allow you to see through (as does the eye glass or, you may say, the eyewear lenses), nor allows you to flip the image (as does the looking glass namely the mirror). It has to be say that these two objects are also called with the term spectacle (without any further explanation). In fact, besides the meaning of glasses, as the tool to see, there is also the meaning of to show something. So the composition it ends to qualify this spectacle as nothing strange, implicitly alluding to deny its literal meaning.

The choice of not to use any punctuation mark was a typical modernist tool. The autonomy of the interpunction signs, as well as the lack of capitalization,

has to do with the need of arbitrary interruption of the writings. The full stop, whose function would be to indicate a complete closure, was emancipated from any intentional logic pursuing a narration. Stein had used the punctuations as an instrument, a way to create a musical text without bending her writings to syntactic needs, and favoring instead a recitative issue. In other words, her poetic had tried to recovery punctuations with a prosodic function not contemplated by common narrative. Her musical interest has no connection with realistic suggestions of onomatopoeia or imitative harmony. This use of repetition and punctuations had created verses with alliterations as part of her objectifying poetics. In “ Geography and Plays” Stein’s writings entered a phase of pure architectonic phonetic. Ordinary language is in turmoil. Everything was stated and everything is perversely banal, there were long chants, several composed by words monosyllabic short, often broken at irregular intervals with long stanzas. As it turns out, even with this simple example, the linguistic and stylistic choices of Gertrude Stein are such as to emphasize the intimate intrinsic polysemicity of the language, the juxtapositions of multipurpose morphology and the deconstructed syntax. The writing echoes itself by playing with assonances, alliterations, repetitions and other phonetic and rhetorical gimmicks. These solutions are always well put on display as well as the parallel alignment of similar elements with different meanings. All those writing strategies create a fabric of multiple but cohesive internal references, both logical and formal. As we see, Gertrude Stein converses with her own text, which becomes an active subject as, in fact, it is the reader, or rather, as it is the act of reading. For Stein the talking and listening activities were

the devices that allowed the creation of “ The Making of Americans Being a History of a Family’s Progress”. In “ Tender Buttons” she added to her tools the ability to look. Through the look her writing started to perceive movement, expression and to set similarities. Consequently all those new possibilities led her poetry, eventually, to explore memory. But she was aware that the action of the eye is not to be influenced by the memory. This was exactly the problem of her painters friends. In “ Tender Buttons” Gertrude Stein wonders if what is seen is really what is looked and, eventually, if it is possible to write just what one is looking without writing what he is seeing. The portraits of people or things in “ Tender Button”, in fact, are just enclosed spaces with or without someone, as Stein recalls. The structure of those poems are extremely close to cinematic images: they are made in the same way. Acts, additions and subsequent movements are added gradually. The work of art for Stein has to do with an absolute: it should be a thing in itself, without connections or allusions. For this reason, according to Stein, a real work of art is a rare and difficult thing to accomplish: because it requires to challenge the everyday life looking, repetition after repetition, for the absolute substrate of everything. Repetition is one of the tools that Gertrude Stein uses in order to eliminate the time dimension. In her writing, through repetition, takes place a substitution of time for space. This poetic is a strategy that allows, on the surface of text, the recursive presence of what was already said. The poems are filled with repetitions and all the space is saturated. The idea of movement does not concern different places, exactly as the concept of time does not require different days.

During her summer lectures in America (1935), collected in the book "Lectures in America", she illustrated her theories on the art of writing, in part resulting from the aesthetic theories of William James and in part from the concept of time as duration of Henri Bergson. Stein said that purpose of art was to live totally in the present and in reality. While she was describing her narrative technique she compared it to a film recordings. She used as an example two different shot of a same scene: although is the same subject, yet the whole sequence is perceived by the eye as a constant and continuous movement. Similarly, Stein used the repetitive sequences in the narrative parts. Each repeated sequence represents an advancement of the story, however, this progress is formed by an unbroken series of snapshot images through which you can grab the becoming of some action according to a precise and tidy setting. Her writings are very well explained as equivalent to Cubist aesthetic in order to clarify her writing theory about movement. In building a logic sequence created by a rhythmic pattern along the phrases, Stein has emphasized the importance of the verb. Stein opposed to the noun to the verb on which her had built the whole creation of her prose. Noun and verb were not to be opposed as representative of the staticity or dynamism. Instead, it was true that while the verb rather provided an activities interface between two preferential realities, the noun was a pure possibility of potentially obsessive accumulation. She adhered to a specific theory of poetic language: although the use of the noun or of the name of the object would clearly not be more than a label (and here it has to be noticed her constant lack of capitalization), the names are subject of a real love and, on several occasions, Gertrude Stein defined poetry as love for the

names of all things. In fact, Stein has thought Poetry as a method capable to treat anything that is standing still in space but that, at the same time, is changing due to the action of time. In “ Tender Buttons”.

Stein has been at the same time an ambassador of modernity in Europe and a popularizer of modernism in America. Curiously, coexisted in her poetry the opposing tendencies of conceptual abstraction and of pragmatism as well as the researches of an elitist writer with the popular acknowledgment. Slightest ripples of eros has underpinned a silent poetry of objects and presences.

Works Cited

Dekoven, Marianne. " Introduction: Transformations of Gertrude Stein." MFS Modern Fiction Studies 42. 3 (1996): 469-83. Web.

DeKoven, Marianne. A Different Language : Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing. Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983. Print.

Stein, Gertrude. Geography and Plays. , 1993. Internet resource.

Stein, Gertrude. Lectures in America. Boston: Beacon, 1957. Print.

Stein, Gertrude. The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966. Print

Stein, Gertrude. Composition as Explanation. London: Published by L. & V. Woolf at the Hogarth, 1926. Print.

Will, Barbara. Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and the Problem of " Genius". Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000. Print.