

Syn-theses, or, The Mechanics of Oppression
in Western Literary Criticism

A Thesis
by
THOMAS ALBERT YOUNG

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THOMAS ALBERT YOUNG
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APPROVED BY:

Carl Eby, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Thesis Committee

Kathryn Kirkpatrick, Ph.D.
Member, Thesis Committee

Joseph Bathanti
Member, Thesis Committee

Leo Flores, Ph.D.
Chairperson, Department of English

Mike McKenzie, Ph.D.
Dean, Cratis D. Williams School of Graduate Studies

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Abstract

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Thomas Albert Young

B.A. Appalachian State University

M.A. Appalachian State University

Chairperson: Carl Eby, Ph.D.

The intent of my life is to ensure that all we do, beyond personal enrichment, is oriented at the betterment of all people, or the widest array of population possible. As a result, this project endeavours towards rectification. At its heart, it endeavors to redress various forms of oppression--racism, misogyny, and queerphobia--that pervade and frustrate the goals of Literary Criticism, literature, and literary studies. And, by force, as students, we are required to cite and reference back towards historical socialism.

Yet, what if you are queer and the texts you must reckon with are homophobic? Should you be expected to accommodate, and then suggest why the text is homophobic? In that sense, your work is then to explain and defend your own existence and its validity. How remarkably unfair, and, further, fucking disgusting. Absolutely, after all, atrocious to lay the burden of rectification upon the people who are harmed by the majority's actions: this is another of the defense mechanism that enable the oppression of all minority peoples by the masculine West.

My project examines why a quite famous, celebrity author, Gertrude Stein, is so readily untaught except through the most visible of her forward, and public, facing works. This misrepresentation renders her queer body as incapable of being fully understood. I wanted to assess, after years of reading and exploration of Stein's work, why I had, in an advanced English program, I

had never encountered Stein's work whatsoever, even where my specialization was both lesbian literature and modernism. Disturbing, to say the least!

This project proves that the primary source of Stein scholarship, the in-demand text which any "reputable" critic would reference, Richard Bridgman's *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, is the root of the reason why her queerness will never fully be understood, and thus her writing project will never be adequately assessed. As a result, the queer autobiography her work constructed can never reach a queer audience which could greatly benefit from her articulations of self.

Prior to this exploration of criticism, however—an exploration that is meant to metaphor the remainder of much of literary theory—I construct and develop my theory of how the mechanics of this oppression—through literary criticism—functions. This section, developed from a reading of French feminist theory, moves feminist inquiry into analogy with the queer, suggesting that the masculine oppressors hate all non-hetero males in similar ways. Bitch, fag, tranny: these are the terms upon which we are met simply because our sexual life is distinctly different from that.

In order to contextualize the project, I offer my undergraduate thesis, in revised form, as a matter of demonstrating the idiosyncratic, and obviously queer, nature of Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas's sex life so that readers of the final section can have a stable grounding. However, this project is and always will be oriented upon an attack at the establishment of literary theory.

Acknowledgments

I have made it an effort in my life to always show gratitude for the contributions others have made to me. If I go on, that is only because this section, more so than the rest, is for me and not for you.

I want to first thank all those who generously supported this project financially and dialogically: Bruce Kellner, William Young, and Hans Gallas. Bruce, my dear telephone friend, died in February of 2019, and this project is in many ways for him. We never met physically, but I spoke to him almost every Sunday for two hours, for two and a half years. He encouraged me throughout my reading to not fade away, or throw the books all out.

Having begun this research self-funding my book purchases, I want to especially thank all the book dealers and shops that I have come to befriend over the past few years. Stein is a specialty market, and when you enter into that book-buying world, you start to see a lot of the same faces. Many of these folks were willing to sell to me at discounted rates, and even often donated materials to me in hopes that they would be read and used—which should, perhaps, help illustrate my point made later on that nobody really reads Stein anymore.

“We hear her sentences,” the paper that “Prelude” is drawn from, was partly supported by two grants through the Appalachian State University Office of Student Research, as well as a grant through the University’s College of Arts and Sciences SAFE program. I wish to thank both offices for generously funding travel to present a shortened version of that paper at the American Literature Association conference in Boston in 2016.

Laurie Klein, my contact, up until her retirement in 2017, at the Beinecke Library, was immediately helpful and provided me with much archival material by Stein that ultimately proved the key to the realizations I have had. Without her willingness, rare from an archival librarian in my

experience, I wonder if my interest in textual studies would have tapered off into feeling fruitless at the immeasurable waits that archives have.

I also want to thank Carl Eby, who clearly recognized that my ideas were not average nor run-of-the-mill, but trucked with them and supported me. We have met regularly for the past five years, and I feel this is as much his as is mine. None of this would look this way were it not for the conversations we had. I will miss the opportunity to work with him further.

I will have (had) readers read this: Kathryn Kirkpatrick and Joseph Bathanti, both of whom I admire deeply. In fact, I sought them out as readers because I appreciate that both are writers of literature, in addition to their academic work.

A curious acknowledgment to the dead: Leon Katz, whose own long work on Stein never made it into print. After his death, a large part of his collection ended up in my hands. Delivered on two pallets, it included the most valuable of books: his edition of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*. It was the edition he used to write his Master's thesis as well as his famous paper (in Stein circles), "Weininger and *The Making of Americans*." This fascinating object is filled with his notes and annotations, and I cherish the transitory bond limining life and death that that book has brought us.

Elizabeth Fifer, Noam Chomsky, Linda Voris, Luce Irigaray, Linda Wagner-Martin, Lyn Hejinian, Gary Heidt, Jill Ehnenn, Robert Wilson (deceased), Bruce Dick, Dana Cairns Watson, William Gass, and many others were willing to speak with me and even share resources as I undertook the writing of this work over the past several years. They all contributed in some way or other to various aspects of this project.

The completion of this work would not also have been possible without Dutchess.

For Bruce Kellner

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Introduction

This volume seeks to respond to, in my view, a failure on the part of the apparatus of literary criticism in the West to respond accurately and honestly to increased inclusion of minority perspectives in societal conversations. Simply put, as we have grown to be more accepting of other bodies and their voices, we have maintained academic expectations that we resort to past scholarship in order to, where possible, build the foundation for future studies on subjects, including our own research. While the expectation that you look towards the past to begin settling your answers about the future is logical, not to mention honest, in its endeavoring towards efficacy and ensuring the non-repetition of ideas, such an attitude also ignores the presence of the newly included minority bodies now able to participate in the conversation. It especially ignores the often violent rhetoric underlying much of past scholastic work that is almost inevitably encountered because of the nature of how things have been. Ultimately, this ignorance negates any inclusivity at all, leaving the othered body still othered in more vital ways than public perception might indicate. It is at this rupture of public belief in a minimized form or lack thereof at all of oppression towards these others who at the same time so often experience hatred, repression—oppression by other names—that I situate this conversation.

What I am speaking of in *Syn-theses: The Mechanics of Oppression in Western Literary Criticism*, is specifically this, but as this applies to the queer body. I note here with caution that, as I suggest elsewhere in this project, I believe similar theories may be contained within the *double-consciousness* DuBois discussed or else the *colonization of the mind* proposed by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, I believe the mechanics—the background and deployed methodologies of racist forms of oppression—are exercised in different ways towards a body because of their race and a body because of their sexuality and sexual nature. I believe this because everyone can engage in oppression of people for their gender and sexuality, across all cultures, while the systemic racism we see in the United States

against black Americans, while still not unheard of globally, is an American problem. Other nations experience race hate differently, and go through various phases of civil rights discourse. Gender based oppression and discrimination, however, is a far more different experience that seems related back to our animal selves in how dominant it is across so many cultures of various levels of development.

The fact that gender based discrimination is present in similar methodologies across so many societies in face of a racialized discrimination that orients itself at different groups, and with different motivations, suggests that such animalistic behaviors, such as preservation, are intrinsic to the practice of gender discrimination. In this way, the system I describe teeters between animal and human, or, between inadvertance and sentience. Typically, the division between human- and non-human animal experience is limned by the notion of a human consciousness that establishes an order of thinking. This project emerges from an ontological posture in which the human animal is regarded for what it is: largely an animal body. Look at your home or apartment and see it as a nest. Your clothes are an externalized fur. Your shelf of books, video game collection, or over-stocked pantry? Hoarding. All these show most of our objects are simply our evolved aspects of our own bodies which were rendered ineffective in face of our technological progress (the true villain in the schema being techno-science). But, most prominent as our “human” feature, resultant from this consciousness, is the establishment of meaning stemming from the view that there are broad patterns across the world, and arrangements and explanations (vocalized through what is seen as a *human* language) of said patterns. Ultimately, however, there is no broader pattern because there is no explainable, nor empirical, reasoning or logic for our existence except for a consideration of the ways in which there are no ulterior motives reasoning our being.

I focus primarily on the queer body in order to assess how queer writers fit into literary criticism. But I anchor the queer body in previously standing conversations about being *woman*,

which allow me to tease out and explore where feminist inquiry, as relates to methods of oppression and alteration of practices of thinking, may have much to enhance our understandings of queerness and its societal reception. This project upends many traditional customs and practices of literary criticism in order to fit more directly into a model of praxis based on my own claims. As such, I want to take this moment to clarify and explain some actions I take in what follows so that the reader can most readily use the volume.

My word, *syn-thesis*, and its plural, comes from the drafting stages producing this volume. While reading works that had no digitized version available to me to word search, I had to type up the quotations I was planning on using. I then added notes to those quotations underneath them, annotations, and later started piecing them into the document as it was written. In this way, it felt that quote, analysis, and writing process were all distinct and then synthesized together in a way I am not used to, and this also reframed to me the quoted material that I wanted to include. It is perhaps this, choice, then, which led me to realize I should bold some of the lines that appear throughout.

The most unusual and visually prominent feature of this work must be my use of boldfaced text. These are all, and only ever, quotations from cited material. Instead of using traditional quotation marks, I opt to bold these quotations because in the first part of this book (the “Prelude” being an accessory), “Bathsheba, Daughter of the Oath,” I am emulating Luce Irigaray's practice in her work of including Freud's lines diegetically—that is to say, without explicit reference or explicit citation, nor page reference, over using them as parts of her voice, sentences, and phrases, sewing them into the broader piece while also critiquing them as an author would reveal details only through narrative, context—into her essay “Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry.” Further, the nature of this project is to critique traditional standards and practices of literary criticism. Therefore, the intention of the bolding is also to upend the tired practice of using quotation marks, which end up equating all the quoted material by standardizing the appearance of said material. In my system,

in important instances, misogynistic or historically oppressive materials can be clearly demarcated from more progressive or ethical materials. In addition, this bolding, along both these lines, emphasizes, especially, the voices of historically underrepresented scholars, predominantly female, whose voices need to be re-heard and witnessed in more emphatic ways than the traditional stylistic allows.

In the first section, following my own voice and style, I deploy many quotations synergistically, and it seems unethical, not to mention unfair, to remainder these words to quotation marks when they need to be readily visible in a far more apparent way. Another operative reason behind this move is to emphasize the voices of Helene Cixous and Irigaray, scholars who, as I point out, began a conversation that, due to sociocultural and political change, too quickly faded away. Readers of my generation are rarely familiar with Irigaray, although many have some knowledge of Cixous vis-a-vis “The Laugh of the Medusa.” In “Body, in Pieces,” I intend Stein’s words to be so bolded in this vein, but also, at that point, to maintain continuity with the previous section so that there are not jarring distractive stylistic elements that must be navigated on top of, what I understand and admit, is a complicated idea with wide reaching implications and intensive fixations on a number of interrelated, though sequentially unlinked at times, concepts.

My use of boldface may seem jarring, but I argue in the second part, “Body, in Pieces,” that we have to hear the sentences of the queer authors we are dis-membering by our unethical academic readings. In many ways, the choice furthers the practical goals of the second part, and the calls for that sort of aesthetic stirring from the first part.

On that note, rather than deploy smaller chapters, I have structured this work into three long parts, two main sections and an initial “Prelude.” The first proper section, “Bathsheba (Daughter of the Oath),” is an intertwined reading of Helene Cixous’ “Bathsheba, or the interior Bible” and Luce Irigaray’s “Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry.” I include these authors, and focus upon them

so heavily and not newer thinkers, because I believe that much of what Irigaray and Cixous had to say can apply more adequately to queer bodies, even where they focused on women primarily, than the work of newer scholars. I specifically cite the extremities of academic, onerous, prose which are present in the writings of Sara Amed and Jasbir Puar. These scholars, in my opinion, argue nothing substantial and exist in such conceptual frames of witnessing that their work is meaningless to the actual queer body. For those desiring contact with contemporary scholarship (although Cixous and Irigaray are both still alive and, on that point, viable in and of themselves as they continue to support these ideas), there is discussion of contemporary queer theory as relates to Chris Coffman's 2019 book *Gertrude Stein's Transmasculinity*. Irigaray, Cixous, and Wittig—the latter of whom who appears spontaneously, though with some frequency—all wrote of alterations to the practice of writing achieved to varying degrees through the dissemination of their ideas to the people. Irigaray can be singled out as a major, and most severe, critic of Freud that proves how misogynistic his work is, and, like my own appeal at the end of this project, effectively “cancels” his scholarship. Cixous' “Laugh of the Medusa” is probably one of the most-cited and read essays of the modern era. And Wittig, well, I'd have to lend you a biography, but she created activist groups, went to rallies, effected major change, and wrote in a way that remains immediately clear and readable—this is truly socialistic writing for the masses (at least, in her essays). I deal with their work heavily, and follow Cixous' orientation at examining visual art—a new practice for me, although I have published several ekphrastic poems . But, whereas Cixous had her genealogy of paintings, most of the ones I include are of mine own choosing. This section, vastly theoretical, is where I lay out the foundations of my thinking. In the subsequent part, “Body, in Pieces,” I intend to demonstrate, through a sustained reading of one critical volume on an author, the ways in which the *masculinate*—my term proposed in “Bathsheba (Daughter of the Oath),” for the phallogocentric and its siblings—functions occlude and misrepresent queer experience.

The “Prelude” presents another beast. I struggled over whether or not to include it, and if so, how? My thesis advisor, Carl Eby, recommended initially that the piece be an “Appendix,” or else culled from in order to scaffold points I make without necessary context in “Body, in Pieces.” I decided to follow through with that and planned that an unrevised version be included at the end of this project. Now, I see it belongs, in a somewhat revised form, at the start, because that is where I started. I see this project as demonstrating my growth in thinking over the past five years. The first versions of “Prelude” were produced in 2015, and I have been heavily involved in research on the subject since. When you go on to read my gestures at disagreeing with the “Prelude” (this final version is predominantly written in 2018), know that I personally do not believe that the Freudian aspects of my argument hold up to scrutiny as more than a reading of her sexual life within a heterosexual framework, though I would argue that Stein does indeed engage in a very familial, maternalized sexual practice. I further would suggest, now, that roles parents fulfill for queer people are vastly different than for non-queer people, meaning we have to alter the basis of the complexes which do hold up to scrutiny when applied to heterosexual men--especially, in many ways, the Oedipal. For instance, I go on to argue in “Prelude” for a reading of a bastardized rendering of the Electra Complex, something I would argue now is untrue. Ultimately, again, my motivation is to give you a sketched out view of the ways in which their sexuality is practiced and in what frameworks we can place this practice into, demonstrating the scholastic ability I have with Stein’s work, if nothing else. That is why the main aspect of this work resides, as demarcated by the half-title page after the “Prelude,” in the two bulky parts. The material in the “Prelude,” however, is vitally contextual to the conversation that I have later in the third portion of the project. I especially reflect upon the graphic epigraphs I chose to include, which are here presented as they appeared in the original, for intentional stylistic reasons. Citations for these can be found in the bibliography, for those whom are so interested.

As such, readers will be provided that necessary information here and not expected to have knowledge I cannot presume anyone would have. Reading Stein can be a lonely project, sometimes you have the feeling when you look at her more obscure pieces that you are likely the only person in the world reading that page at that time, maybe that week, that month, that year, in years, even.

I also want to tag a caveat that the “Prelude” should not color your expectations that this volume is about Stein. I do not believe the work here is about Stein so much as it deploys Stein as an example of an institutional problematic of discrimination and oppression, not to mention rampant unethical academic practices—primarily engaged in by heteronormative men.

Syn-theses is an articulation of how we oppress queer bodies, a theory of how we oppress and free those bodies, and a case study demonstrating my ideas of the mechanics of said oppression in an actual scenario. That case study, a reading of Richard Bridgman’s *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, is performed using the same deconstructive critical strategies I learned to apply to works of literature. I see “Body, in Pieces” as inherently a work of literary criticism, although some might call it an excoriation.

There is also the matter of the second-person “you” that I use frequently. I do this intentionally. I know from experience that many literary critics, some of them having been professors in the past, do not regard work I did in college as anything but an assignment *for them*. They witness and construct a conversation that is a closed circle, with no exterior benefit or motive. As such, I want this, too, to have ways of being read in which it is directly addressed, as they are satisfied by, towards those literary critics who engage in circular vacuums. Where this “you” is met, readers should also expect that I am also writing from a universal (a term that will be defined and explored throughout this work) perspective of queerness. As a queer, my worldview/perspective is queer. Therefore, I assume a straight readership because of statistical evidence, I can feel assured by

the ability to make an assumption (which is certainly done to me often), that I can put pressure on heteronormative readers to self reflect.

And, a lot of this project is tasking people with self-reflection. That is the call to action upon which I conclude the project. And it is the most ethical way of experiencing.

Throughout, I create and define my own terminology, sometimes for words that we already have and use. I think this is fair because much of my stylistic choices here were guided through my creative writing background. Reading Kristeva, Irigaray, and Cixous, I felt it was unreasonable to meet their words with traditional academic stylization and voicing. Their words have always called us to rethink how we write. I hope this project, then, is also seen as me engaging in that rethinking and following their own calls to actions.

N.B. I acknowledge that my thinking builds on reading numerous scholars. My failure to mention many of them may be regarded as an oversight, and I feel that is fair. Certainly, I could have taken time to cite and explain their behaviors, but this project ultimately deals with a reckoning with the past, not the present. I do feel that “Body, in Pieces” contains a lengthy enough critical genealogy that my readers can hardly feel I am not steeped in a chronology of scholarship ranging over five decades—nor that this lack is not self-designed. I also admit to any parallel thinking and the fact that theory is typically merely one’s own vision of how things work which they explain to other people, thus reframing how those people see the world.

Prelude

Afterwards I wiped my bum, said Gargantua, with a kerchief, with a pillow, with a pantoufle, with a pouch, with a pannier ... then with a hat.... The best of all these is the shaggy hat, for it makes a very neat abstersion of the fecal matter.

Afterwards I wiped my tail with a hen, with a cock, with a pullet, with a calf's skin, with a hare, with a pigeon, with a cormorant, with an attorney's bag, with a montero, with a coif, with a falconer's lure. But, to conclude, I say and maintain, that of all torcheculs, arsewisps, bumfodders, tail-napkins, bung-hole cleansers, and wipe-breeches, there is none in the world comparable to the neck of a goose, that is well downed, if you hold her head betwixt your legs. And believe me therein upon mine honour, for you will thereby feel in your nockhole a most wonderful pleasure, both in regard of the softness of the said down and of the temperate heat of the goose, which is easily communicated to the bum-gut and the rest of the inwards, in so far as to come even to the regions of the heart and brains. And think not that the felicity of the heroes and demigods in the Elysian fields consisteth either in their asphodel, ambrosia, or nectar, as our old women here used to say; but in this, according to my judgment, that they wipe their tails with the neck of a goose, holding her head betwixt their legs, and such is the opinion of Master John of Scotland, alias Scotus.

—Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, Chapter XIII, 1534

I myself would prefer a peasant lad who is not ashamed to shit and piss right in front of me.

—Mozart, in a letter to his father, 31 October 1783

Through me forbidden voices,
Voices of sexes and lusts, voices veil'd and I remove the veil,
Voices indecent by me clarified and transfigur'd.

I do not press my fingers across my mouth,
I keep as delicate around the bowels as around the head and heart...

—Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*, 1882

Do you come in the act of shitting or do you frig yourself off first and then shit? It must be a fearfully lecherous thing to see a girl with her clothes up friggng furiously at her cunt, to see her pretty white drawers pulled open behind and her bum sticking out and a fat brown thing stuck half-way out of her hole. You say you will shit your drawers, dear, and let me fuck you then. I would like to hear you shit them, dear, first and then fuck you.

—James Joyce, in a letter to Nora Barnacle, 20 December 1909

1. *Entrance with concerned history*

How is it that two of history's most famous lesbians—Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas—icons celebrated by those of us in the queer community and so many others, have been so continuously misportrayed to us by scholars who proclaim to *know* her? Attitudes towards the queer community may have steadily improved in the West, but Stein criticism, at least in regards to psychosexual biography, remains rooted in the works of scholars (and a scholar, Richard Bridgman, in particular) writing as many as five decades ago when, no matter how progressive these same scholars might have been, their biases, and the biases of their times, unavoidably shaped their work—and shapes the work of scholars to this day.

Despite her canonization by queers, Stein has been rendered via a heterocentrist lens as a woman behaving like the stereotype of a masculine, dominant, heterosexual male. Her wife, Alice B. Toklas, is supposed to be her submissive, feminine, secretary. In other words, what we historically perceive to be as “wife.” Scholars writing about this image highlight the couple's usage of gendered terms, such as masculine and feminine pronouns and the monikers ‘hubby’ and ‘wifey,’ in order to validate their assumptions which are in reality their stereotypes.

True, Stein lived at a time when non-queer marriage provided the only available paradigm on which queer individuals could model their long-term relationships. And indeed Stein and Toklas engaged in a performative voicing of heterosexual identifications in order to explore and actualize their decidedly non-heterosexual relationship, but these male/female nominative references are part of a larger psychosexual matrix pervading Stein and Toklas' ultimately lesbian relationship.

Yet, scholars since Richard Bridgman have too often adopted a superficial reading of Stein's erotic work, based on his interpretations, by implying that such pseudo-heterosexual identities played a primary role in structuring the relationship between both women. I want to complicate these previous portrayals of Stein's lesbianism by extending the discussion of Stein's sexuality into

new territories through the acknowledgment of a major, albeit critically ignored, element of Stein and Toklas' relationship: a pervasive mother-child dynamic at play in their sexual identifications, a dynamic that is both exemplified by and helps to explain a pervasive and truly important anal eroticism that Stein critics have been only too eager to overlook, ignore, and deny.

Reading Gertrude Stein has never been easy. Critics too often enjoy confounding the difficulty of her texts with their own onerous prose. But Stein's work and biography have suffered immensely as a direct consequence of her mismanagement by academia. Radically repetitive texts such as *The Making of Americans* have been treated not as modernist innovations akin to *Nightwood*, *Mrs. Dalloway*, or *The Ambassadors*, but as curios for the shelf—the pretentious collector benefitting from an imposing tome that rivals their pristine, unread copy of Wallace's *Infinite Jest*. Instead of reading Stein, critics have largely regurgitated various iterations of ideas formulated long ago by Richard Bridgman. Bridgman is heavily involved with biographical and sexual explication—and yet, instead of diving into the bowels of Stein's sexuality, Bridgeman strangely presses his fingers across his mouth.

In order to explain why a new approach to Stein must be undertaken this paper begins with a critical overview. The primary analyses of Stein's infantile identification with a maternal figure embodied in Toklas follows, connected with readings from Stein's most explicit autobiographical works. I then add complications to this argument in the form of a reconsideration of how we regard audiences in Stein's writing, as well as indices of the anal erotic argument in earlier writings by Stein. The overall intention of this paper is to present my 'unified field theory' in how one should read psychosexuality in Stein's writing.

This paper is devoted to two groups of Stein texts. The first is made up of what I refer to as 'matrimonial autobiographies,' texts written between 1913 and 1926 into which Stein wove her

romantic and domestic life with Alice B. Toklas.¹ In these works, autobiographical elements are so pronounced—be that through geographical, nominative, or epistolary referents—that a reader would be hard-pressed, once even superficially familiar with Stein’s biography, to ignore the glaring presence of life-writing on the page. I deploy the term to raise awareness of the intensely personal nature of Stein’s work, so often made absent of its author by today’s critics and readers.

These matrimonial autobiographies, which evince a pronounced and pervasive fascination with anal eroticism, defy generic categorization. Discernable neither easily as prose nor poetry, they are not fictions, and they are not explicitly non-fictional; they are multi-generic works that transgress conventional identification. Although the texts in which anal erotic references are made come within this matrimonially autobiographical phase, some of Stein’s works prior to 1913, primarily *The Making of Americans*, are also deployed here in order to elaborate on autobiographical and familial references being discussed within her writing.

The second textual group is made up of the correspondence between Stein and Toklas. Written, though rarely dated, in the years spanning their thirty-eight year partnership, these letters are highly erotic. Referred to in Stein’s Yale archive as *autrerespondance*, literally “other correspondence,” these letters were hidden from the public eye for decades until their partial publication in the edited volume *Baby Precious Always Shines* (1999). The letters as published represent an extraordinary testament to Stein and Toklas’ relationship. Though the folders in which they are contained include around 300 scraps of paper upon which Stein wrote to Toklas, and only around three dozen typed responses from Toklas, the publication of these letters only marked a

¹ Stein’s matrimonial autobiographies were written in the period between 1913, when Stein first used the words ‘cow’ and ‘baby’ in an anal erotic way in the pieces “Sacred Emily” and “Old and Old,” and 1926, the year in which eroticism largely left Stein’s work due to her attraction to new themes while writing *Composition as Explanation* and *A Novel of Thank You*. That thirteen year period marks Stein’s second compositional phase, and a maturity in her writing absent from her previous work. With *The Making of Americans*, *Three Lives*, and *Tender Buttons* completed, her brother Leo gone, and Alice Toklas firmly residing in her life, Stein entered into a new phase of composition in which she abandoned her early portrait style and worked towards incorporating meaning and reference into her work in an abstract, albeit tangible, way.

confirmation of their existence. Stein, whose compositional process was often unorganized, wrote countless letters into her manuscript notebooks as well and, while she would demarcate these erotic deviations with a helpful asterisk to tell typist Toklas not to include them in her work, they occasionally have made their way into published texts—inadvertently or intentionally.

The letters in *Baby Precious Always Shines* provide a key to understanding Stein's so-called coded language. Kay Turner's introduction to the volume suggests a Stein radically different from the one proposed by Richard Bridgman (elaborated in my final chapter) and Linda Simon, going so far as to claim that Bridgman and Simon avoided fully defining key Steinian erotic terms like *cow*—a word which appears with ridiculous frequency between 1913 and 1926 in Stein's works—and instead elucidated only passages that directly supported the assertion that *cow* means *orgasm*. I agree with Turner's widely ignored insight that Stein often deploys the word *cow* in order to discuss **Toklas'** **feces**.²

In fact, Stein's eroticization of feces is far more profound than Turner implies and is a pivotal part of a sexuality that has been misunderstood and overlooked for too long, largely because it does not conform to non-queer expectations. Since these letters are the only primary source 'non-fictional' texts composed by Stein and Toklas documenting their relationship, and since the words and subject matter they help us to understand are so central to so much of the writing Stein published during her lifetime, the widespread scholarly silence about them amounts to nothing less than collective denial.

2. *The Stein school*

The reasons for denying the importance of Turner's slim volume are numerous, and they help explain a troubling trend in Stein criticism.

² Gertrude Stein, *Baby Precious Always Shines*. (New York: St. Marten's, 2000), 25.

Richard Bridgman describes Stein in his study *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (1970) as **kittenishly erotic** and her work as **lurid**, hetero/sexist by any definition, but most perturbing is his reductive line: **Gertrude Stein thought of her relationship with Alice Toklas in heterosexual terms.**³ Bridgman's book did much to advance Stein critically. He was the first to track down Stein's academic transcript, clarifying a number of false statements made by Stein in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. He also presented a reading not of a handful of Stein texts, but rather her entire corpus—placing works in chronological order and in context with each other, delineating compositional periods. (His 'Mallorcan Period' falls within what I'm calling the matrimonial autobiography period.) Bridgman's volume provided Stein readers with the first, and so far only, critical analyses of all her writing (including her juvenilia) in chronological order. His comments on Stein's lesbianism are those of a heterosexual man struggling to understand a far more complex sexuality than the term 'lesbian' defines, and doing so in the 60s and 70s when the hetero/sexist systems still pervasive today were far more powerful. Bridgman deploys his heterosexualization of Stein as a means of logically reducing her to conventional, understandable terms—something that, considering the evidence in her writing, cannot be fairly done. The evidence is there for his argument, but there is far more to show that this apparent heterosexual masquerade is part of a larger psychosexual matrix.

Elizabeth Fifer's book *Rescued Readings* (1992) follows Bridgman's by expanding upon Stein's lesbianism as a subject warranting primacy in critical discussion. Fifer begins her book with an idolization of Bridgman, whom she finds a **revelation**.⁴ She paints him as the progenitor of Stein criticism, the person who established the platform of study, and without whom it would be impossible to perform any critical work whatsoever. She accepts his terms for Stein and Toklas'

³ Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1970), 151; *ibid.*, 24; *ibid.*, 150.

⁴ Elizabeth Fifer, *Rescued Readings: Reconstructing Gertrude Stein's Difficult Texts* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993), 13.

lesbianism without disputation claiming that **[Stein and Toklas] obeyed heterosexual terms in a homosexual marriage**, with a male Stein and female Toklas.⁵

The postmodern rejection of biographical criticism and static meaning is decidedly pronounced in criticism of Stein.⁶ Such readings of Stein, which resist biographical interpretation, do not rectify the failures of critics to recognize Stein's sexuality—leaving Stein without reevaluation in sexual analyses and understandings that have developed in conjunction with the progressive trajectory of literary theory. Linda Voris' 2017 study *The Composition of Sense in Gertrude Stein's Landscape Writing* is an important case in point. She frames her argument as follows:

While critics have made bold claims for Stein's transgressive modernism, no one has yet proposed that we change our critical approach from interpretation based on rationalist tenets to one that corresponds to her radical epistemology.⁷

⁵ Ibid., 15.

⁶ Stein's earliest interactions with critics were reviews of her books—often appearing anonymously in various newspapers, and usually discouraging the reader (and buyer) from purchasing her work; or else written by friends—notably Carl Van Vechten, Sherwood Anderson, and Mabel Dodge—who praised Stein's radical experimentalism. Scant attempts were made to theorize what Stein was doing in her writing until after her death.

Stein's death in 1946 preceded several decades of critical interest, seemingly as a result of growing appreciation and acceptance not only of Stein's work, but that of the modernist writers in general. While syllabi more frequently included *Tender Buttons* and *Three Lives*, other texts fell out of print. Scholars studying Stein in the early 1970s, when Richard Bridgman produced what is considered a standard amongst Stein readers—*Gertrude Stein in Pieces*—had to resort to libraries or costly purchases in order to review most Stein texts discussed in critical volumes. The declining availability of most of her work, however, did not push critics away. Rather, scholars began writing to each other—not to readers interested in learning more about Stein, to readers who could benefit from reading Stein—readers familiar with Stein, and with access to rare volumes.

That Stein is relegated to elitist circles capable of accessing her oeuvre is an unfortunate effect of her unavailability, but those who dedicate their academic careers to her work do little to effect change in her readership. As though desiring to prevent her work from reaching audiences outside academia, or even allowing Stein to be co-opted by queer theory, psychology, and women's studies, critics have pushed for Stein's inclusion in postmodern schools of interpretation—Lyn Hejinian includes her early lectures "Two Stein Talks" in *The Language of Inquiry*, and Charles Bernstein, Marjorie Perloff, and Susan Howe have presented Stein's work within a canon of Language or Postmodern poetics.

⁷ Linda Voris, *The Composition of Sense in Gertrude Stein's Landscape Writing* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), xvi. This comes from an endnote in Voris' volume that is highly recommended in its entirety to the reader—not only does Voris make the case against the *autre-respondance*, which she frames as a fault of Turner's, she also points to Toklas' desire for sexual reference to be denied—advocating against meaning created explicitly by Stein throughout her book while accepting Toklas' desires as law. The note also connects groundbreaking avant-garde poet Charles Bernstein to Stein (a vital connection that points towards a location, poetry, wherein Stein's aesthetics have found their students), and the volume as a whole is undermined by contradiction, aloofness, and its availability (contextual need to be familiar with certain apparatuses of thinking, schools, or communities of writers) primarily to readers associated with Hejinian, Perloff, Altieri, and Dworkin.

Voris goes on to argue against the exploration of *carnets*, the small French school notebooks in which Stein initially drafted much of her work—claiming, **Stein did not want [them] preserved—** and the *autrerespondance*—

As I have argued throughout, in Stein’s work words derive their sense from context as elements in the overall composition. If the word ‘cow’ refers to excrement in some of the love notes, we have no license to assert that this is a fixed meaning (the ‘evidence’ that Turner supposes) and that the word will have the same meaning in a text intended for publication.⁸

It cannot be said with enough emphasis that the disregard, ignorance, and outright denial of Stein’s sexuality and biography today are incredibly damaging to her reputation and readership. To place Stein readily into a position in which meaning is discussed as arbitrary to the reader and to the author is to allow decades of criticism on Stein to be tacitly accepted without commenting on the problems present within her portrayal by past scholars. It is a pact not only to refuse to understand Stein as she was; it is a pact to go on misunderstanding Stein indefinitely.

Whereas Bridgman, Fifer, Voris, and many others attempt to elide the truth about Gertrude Stein, I aim to show how fecal eroticism, heterosexual language, and sexuality as a whole, are part of a large schema of life-writing, performativity, and sexual expression that Stein intended differently for different audiences.

3. *Beginnings: Babies/Mamas*

In the opening paragraph to *Wars I Have Seen* (1945), Stein writes of the impact familial affection and favoritism had upon her, recalling how her father told her she **was born a perfect baby**.⁹ The paragraph concludes with a meditation on the effects of being the youngest child:

I was the youngest of the children and as such naturally I had privileges the privilege of petting the privilege of being the youngest one. If that does happen it is not

⁸ Ibid., xix; *ibid.*, 201-2.

⁹ Gertrude Stein, *Wars I Have Seen* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 3. This paper makes use of Richard Bridgman’s abbreviations for Stein’s works as is standard within Stein scholarship. Stein’s titles frequently are entirely capitalized per her stylization.

lost all the rest of one's life, there you are, that is the way I was and that is the way I still am, and any one who is like that necessarily liked it. I did and do.¹⁰

Stein clearly believed the youngest child is psychologically influenced by their status and that such children carry throughout their lives certain traits that make their behavior, at times, childlike. Stein's lifelong identification as 'baby' began, logically, in childhood. After a bout of diarrhea at age four, a problem which apparently plagued Stein throughout her youth, her mother, Amelia, wrote in her diary, **thank god the baby is alright.**¹¹ That Stein was still 'baby' at age four indicates that she was the 'baby' of the family, and 'baby' remained a nickname Stein carried with her throughout her adolescence. The youngest of five children, Stein was the favorite of her mother, whose use of 'baby' as a pet name is not directed at any of her other children, whom she referred to, with the exception of Bertha and Leo (both referred to by their given names), with affectionate truncations: 'Mikey' (Michael) and 'Simey' (Simon). Gertrude, though bearing the potential to be the common derivative 'Gertie,' was never referred to as such, only by 'baby' or by name.

While Gertrude's fourth birthday party warrants an uncharacteristically lengthy thirty-four word entry from Amelia in her diary, one for Bertha reads tersely, **Bertha's birthday, she was eleven years old.**¹² Even accounting for the difference in age between Bertha and Gertrude, Gertrude's life is the subject of far more attention than those of her siblings within Amelia's diary—that is, until Amelia's last diary begins detailing the visits of 'Dr. Fine' that mark her decline to her cancer. At that point, Bertha, older and more mature, becomes her mother's confidant, accompanying her to appointments while Gertrude is scant discussed—likely to prevent the

¹⁰ Ibid., 3-4.

¹¹ Unpublished diary material from the Bancroft Library of the University of California.

¹² Amelia's entries were predominately clinical—she recorded, without emotional commentary, the weather, costs of running the household, if her children had any lessons (and what number the lesson was), any letters received or sent, where people went, and the general mood of the house. Entries about Gertrude, however, tend to contain more emotion than those towards the other children. This may be the result of the death of Amelia's 4th and 5th children, who preceded Leo and Gertrude, who were conceived as replacements for the two dead infants.

youngest child from the trauma of witnessing in totality her mother's steady decline in health, but no doubt infuriating the impetuous favorite.

Throughout the follow-up to *The Making of Americans*, "A Long Gay Book" (1913), Stein interrogates the psychology of the 'baby,' or youngest/favored child, and suggests that there are different psychological qualities in siblings based on their relative birth order. Consider, for instance, the following passage:

There are some who do not feel it to be bad inside them to have been a baby without any conscious feeling of themselves inside them, to have been a little thing and that was all there was then of them....

They are some who like it in their later living that they were then such a very little thing and that was then all there was of them and then others kissed and dandled and fixed them. They are those who are within them weak or tender as the strongest thing inside them and to them it is very much to have been a baby and to have had others to feel gently toward them, who kissed and dandled and fixed the helpless bundle they were then.¹³

Here, Stein clearly values her own position as the youngest child: 'helpless,' the recipient of love, care, and affectionate touch. Significantly, Stein started "A Long Gay Book" in 1909 after she met Toklas and began her relationship with her, indicating that this has resonance not just within her autobiographical actualization of her childhood, but within the relationship she had begun to establish with Toklas. The pampered and loved position of the baby is something Stein sought and desired in her relationship with Toklas, and the evidence of it is abundant in her later writing of the matrimonial-autobiographical period.

We see Stein's self-identification as baby again in "Pink Melon Joy" (1915). A lesbian love lyric, "Pink Melon Joy" celebrates Stein's life with Toklas, the nature of their intercourse, their portrayal of each other, and their household. In this piece, Stein writes, **baby mine baby mine/I am learning letters.**¹⁴ Although dialogically presenting Toklas as 'baby mine,' Stein's action in these

¹³ Gertrude Stein, *GMP* (Paris: Plain Edition, 1932), 14.

¹⁴ Gertrude Stein, *Geography and Plays*, ed. Cyrena M. Pondrom (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 357.

lines reveals her psychosexual maternal drive. The idea of a child learning, developing, and growing mirrors her compositional and sexual trajectories, and is matched by similar Stein lines such as the title to a 1918 work “A Lesson For Baby.” That she is ‘learning letters’ reflects not just an author aware that she is reinventing text, but a playful posturing as a child subject to Toklas’ maternal authority. This reference helps explain why ‘baby’ is often applied to Toklas in the way ‘sweetheart’ or ‘honey’ is often used towards one’s partner. Toklas is the object of Stein’s desire. And Stein, though the real ‘baby’ in the mother/child performance, is far more often obliquely baby and directly child—the need to have more awareness and agency than an infant interjecting itself in the identification and pushing Stein towards a variety of terms, of which ‘baby’ is but one, to reflect her child-self. The fact that both identifiers—romantic and familial—are at play is shown in a line from “Lifting Belly,” another lesbian lyric that was written in 1917. Here, Stein writes **baby is so good to baby** in order to show the two connotations at play in the same sentence, this is not an equation, but a semantic switch occurring in the space of six words; multiple levels of interpretation are required in order to understand the multi-layered nature of their sexuality.¹⁵

A particularly well-defined example of these constructions can be found in the 1921 work of matrimonial-autobiography “A Sonatina Followed By Another” (here on referred to as “Sonatina”), published posthumously in *Bee Time Vine*. “Sonatina” features several sections, much like the musical form it alludes to, all of which are devoted to Toklas. Indeed, the erotic correspondence highlights an interesting elision that indicates this devotion and an inability on Toklas’ part to reconcile something about her and Stein’s matrimonial biography. In his prefatory notes to the work in *Bee Time Vine*, Virgil Thomson—Stein’s close friend and the composer of two of her operas— calls attention to the dedication of “Sonatina,” claiming that **the dedication ‘to D.D.’ is, according to**

¹⁵ Gertrude Stein, *Lifting Belly* (Tallahassee: Naiad Press, 1989), 26.

[his] chief informant,¹⁶ ‘one of Gertrude’s fantasies. There was no D.D.’¹⁷ However, as discussed in *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder*, and is clear from both the published and unpublished *autrespondance*, ‘D.D.’ is no fantasy, but rather is Toklas: ‘Dearest Darling’ or ‘Dainty Darling’ and other variations on the line, including **dear dainty delicious darling**.¹⁸ The final manuscript notebook for “Sonatina” also contains a short piece entitled “A Poem” signed **B.B. Biggest Baby**.¹⁹ Stein’s self-identification as ‘biggest baby’ demonstrates that ‘baby’ is something more than a casual pet name; she is truly identifying as an infant/child, which serves to match the linguistic variance Stein readers must wade through in terms of reading a single word throughout a work. Stein closes the “dear dainty delicious darling” letter with the similar abbreviation “yb”—or ‘your baby.’

Stein thus juxtaposes herself as ‘baby’ with Toklas as ‘D.D.,’ not only explaining the oblique dedication of “Sonatina,” but also pointing to a complication in Steinian terminology. She uses the word ‘baby’ in contrast to the reader’s expectations to signify several things simultaneously. Adding to the difficulty in analyzing her work is the shifting moods for these terms--romantic, erotic, humorous--all of which influence the word’s meaning.

Stein is likewise referred to as ‘baby’ in the imaginary family constructed in the correspondence between the quartet of Carl Van Vechten, Fania Marinoff, Stein, and Toklas. After Stein’s 1934-35 American lecture tour, the four began to use the surname ‘Woojums’ as a symbol of their close friendship. Carl Van Vechten was *Papa Woojums*, his wife was *Fania Woojums*, Stein was

¹⁶ e.g. Toklas, functioning as cipher.

¹⁷ Gertrude Stein, *Bee Time Vine and Other Pieces*, ed., Thornton Wilder (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), 3.

¹⁸ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 57.

¹⁹ Unpublished, Yale Collection of American Literature. Mirroring the Swiftian style of signature that appears across the correspondence (see Dydo and Burns, *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder*) and the dedication “D.D.”—“dearest Darling” or Toklas.

Baby Woojums, and Toklas was *Mama Woojums*.²⁰ That Carl Van Vechten and Toklas were Stein's main promoters implies that "Mama," "Papa," and "Baby" are more than casual affinities—they are part of a custodial network.

The Steinian domestic sphere is dominated by the ever-present 'Mama'—Toklas—even if this domination may at times appear in the guise of submission. Toklas's behavior often seems to be guided by domestic oppression—cleaning, cooking, writing letters,²¹ speaking to wives, not driving—living in the shadow of the other in the house. And Stein's matrimonial autobiographies, indeed, revolve around food, household chores, events around home, walks or rides through town and the surrounding countryside—in other words, a mundane diary of daily life. Stein outshines Toklas just as the patriarchal husband and child, historically speaking, are more empowered than the wife-mother.

Yet other roles move Toklas into a powerful and controlling guardianship over Stein, who placed complete and total trust in her companion much as a young child does in the god-like figure of the parent. Toklas became Stein's agent, ran the Plain Edition, typed all her manuscripts, translated Stein's memoir *Picasso* from Stein's original French manuscript (it was composed and first published in French) into English for the American and British editions, and even exercised some editorial control over Stein's work. More than a merely submissive secretary, Toklas wielded genuine power in the relationship, as these aforementioned actions reject critically accepted ideas of Stein as a writer who neither revised nor readily accepted feedback from her peers and circle of friends.²²

²⁰ Burns, Edward. *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Carl Van Vechten 1913-1946*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 3. Toklas continued to refer to Stein as 'baby' when she resumed writing personal letters after Stein died. See *Staying on Alone*, edited by Edward Burns, for examples of this.

²¹ Toklas' letters as archived at Yale University indicate that from 1909 to 1946, she wrote primarily on behalf of Stein—next to no letters from Toklas to friends, associates, and family members either survived, were considered important enough to be archived, or, based on Stein's comments about Toklas' ability to write, were ever written. This is an important exclusion that merits some investigation.

²² The critical discussion on Stein's novel *Ida*, as appears in the 2012 workshop edition from Yale, and in part within *The Letters of Gertrude Stein and Thornton Wilder*, indicates that Stein's portrayal as a writer who did not revise or seek other writers' comments is largely incorrect. Stein desired to have Wilder collaborate with her on the novel, and Toklas' ability

Contemporary accounts of Toklas confirm this. In his unpublished 1933 parody “The Autobiography of Alice B. Hemingway,” Ernest Hemingway wrote **[Toklas] runs the show you know. She’s a very severe disciplinarian.**²³ In short, Toklas provided the space in which Stein could create, developing their relationship into one of shared dependency, suggesting that Stein’s and Toklas’s affectionate monikers were more than just terms of endearment. Just as the mother (and a primary caregiver in general) is latched to the baby out of custodial responsibility, so is the baby chained to the mother out of the impossibility of surviving without her. This is symbiotic: the baby is the mother’s master—controlling her life—as, simultaneously, the mother is the prison warden, defining the child’s space of freedom.

‘Mother’ Toklas’ control over Stein figures prominently in several of Stein’s notes. In one titled “Command Poem,” Stein writes of being

**commanded by wifey, written by hubbie
who is always commanded by wifey to be wifey’s
and he is, would be even if he wasn’t commanded
cause he just is but loves to be commanded**

—highlighting how Stein willingly submits to, even craves, female authority. Toklas’ own words similarly convey this matriarchal dynamic.²⁴ In a letter to Stein, she writes

**Husband is an instantaneous obedience
he likes to be well
and be hers Mrs. speaks he ups and obeys her.**²⁵

Cutting through the implicitly hetero hubbie/wifey dynamic is a voice that strongly resembles a doting mother, proud of her child’s behavior. To the degree that this sounds at all hetero, the

to control some form of Stein’s texts, be it through production of the typescript (without which Stein would have had less time to work), or through her supposed intervention in the writing of *Stanzas in Meditation*. The latter situation is heavily discussed throughout Dydo’s work on the poem and in the workshop edition published by Yale in 2012. All this is to say that Toklas goes beyond the role of the secretary and becomes an agent/editor for Stein—a collaborator.

²³ Hemingway, Ernest. “The Autobiography of Alice B. Hemingway.” Item 265a. (Boston: John F. Kennedy Presidential Library. 1933), unpaginated.

²⁴ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 109.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 160.

imperative language of obedience suggests that it is perversely so—which is but another way of saying that what is at stake here is more essentially the mother/child dynamic. Toklas continues this line of thought in another letter—

**know wifie thinks you
are better behaved [...] & she loves
the behaviours you are
giving her & she will
have more thank you so
much.²⁶**

Though loving, ‘Mother Toklas’ reminds Stein that this behavior must be constant, while affirming it with a display of gratitude.²⁷ In her letters, Toklas often refers to Stein as her infant, toddler, child, or son, as in

**baby love
call your dove.
She’s your own
She’s not gone
Just quietly waiting
knowing always she’s mating
with her dored own boy.²⁸**

There is much going on in this letter. Toklas identifies herself with a bird, telling the child-Stein to ‘call’ her—summon the mother. The third and fourth line identify the nature of Toklas’ motherhood: she is the property of Stein and she is always there for her, which reads as a soothing way of appealing to the child. This opening is reminiscent of nursery rhymes or lullabies told to children by their mothers, with the rhyme and simplistic language working to that effect. However, we also have Toklas calling Stein ‘baby love’ in a way that reads romantically, but much more so in the pseudo-infantile sexual matrix. This is confirmed by the false incest reported in the last two lines—‘mating’ indicating intercourse and, through the presence of ‘always’ a perpetual state of

²⁶ Ibid., 159.

²⁷ It should also be said that the spelling of ‘wifey/wifie/ varies in several letters, there is no apparent standard established between the two. This variation implies a lack of seriousness about these terms that allows the reader to understand gendered matrimonial language as playful and humorous.

²⁸ Ibid., 157.

union.

Other letters expand upon this interaction of maternity and childhood:

**baby boy
you're no toy
but a strong-strong husband
I don't obey.²⁹**

Stein is certainly husband, but she is as a boy-child being husband—pretending the role; and, because Stein is really child, the mother pretends submission as wife but in general avers that she is power. Nancy Chodorow speaks of maternal authority in such terms:

The mother can [...] manipulate. She can love, reward, and frustrate [her son] at appropriate moments in order to get him to delay gratification and sublimate or repress erotic needs. This close, exclusive, preoedipal mother-child relationship first develops dependency in a son, creating a motivational basis for early learning and a foundation for dependency on others. When a mother “rejects” her son or pushes him to be more independent, the son carries his still powerful dependence with him, creating in him both a general need to please and conform outside of the relationship to the mother herself and a strong assertion of independence. The isolated, husband-absent mother thus helps to create in her son a pseudo-independence masking real dependence, and a generalized sense that he ought to “do well” rather than an orientation to specific goals.³⁰

4. *False Idylls: Stein and the Construction of Family*

Without commentary on Stein's family life, her works dealing with families and mothers, and her conception of her family life (essentially a hybridization of the two former elements), the above discussion is inconsequential. None of this has any bearing on psychology without any definitive link between Stein's own family life and her need to capture Toklas as a mother.

The idyllic childhood presented by Stein in the opening to *Wars I Have Seen* in many ways contradicts what is known about Stein's childhood. Stein's war memoir was one of her last major works and finds an aged writer looking back positively upon her life, with much of the upbeat

²⁹ Ibid., 158.

³⁰ Nancy Chodorow, *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 187.

writing coming from her hopefulness and eventual elation at the war's coming to an end with a decisive Allied victory. (She wrote in one letter to Toklas **as surely as *Life* publishes/me and we get material/and baby has a cow so/surely will the allies/win. You think so.**)³¹ While her childhood before her mother's death was, by all accounts, peaceful, what came after changed how she considered much of her upbringing. Her earliest writing, far more honest in terms of familial autobiography, demonstrates this change of opinion. This is most profoundly found in *The Making of Americans*, the most autobiographical text Stein ever produced.

The compositional history of *The Making of Americans* is difficult to trace. Stein wrote a number of satellite works, including her daily themes from her college writing course (where the opening lines were first conceived), a work of unknown length that shared the same title that exists in manuscript form in a notebook from which the last two thirds have been excised from the binding, the novella *Fernhurst*, and the autobiographical lesbian novel *Q.E.D.* What is clear is that Stein entered her writing career preoccupied by issues of family and romance, which she merged. In particular, the sexual elements of the *Fernhurst* scandal, based on Stein's well known Bryn Mawr affair, is entered into *The Making of Americans*, and her opinions on sexuality and its impact on human behavior were driving forces in these earliest writings.

That family was dominant in Stein's mind is no surprise. Many of us are plagued by familial woe, or else joy, but Stein's familial experiences were of another nature from those generally experienced. Much as has been the case with Kay Turner's presentation of Stein's fecal eroticism, Linda Wagner-Martin's claim that Stein likely experienced sexual abuse by male relatives has been largely ignored. In *Favored Strangers: Gertrude Stein and Her Family*, Wagner-Martin writes:

Gertrude quoted [her mother's] early saying that she hoped "to outlive Papa for our sakes. Good man as he was he would need a woman to lead him."

This sexual dimension may be one reason for obscurity in her texts. Her notes suggest that not only was Daniel courting other women, but—much more

³¹ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 83.

disturbing—he had approached Bertha sexually, “*coming in to her one night to come and keep him warm.*” Writing about an attempted sexual encounter was dangerous for Gertrude [...] she added to the risk by combining her account of that incident with her memory of “*my experiences with Uncle Sol.*” [...] She mentioned, too, another “*scene like the kind I had with Sol*” and later drew the comparison “*like me what he tried to do.*”³²

Wagner-Martin’s reading of Stein’s notebooks is disturbing, and she makes important mention of how the men of the Stein family behaved in a way that led to social ostracism from the surrounding community. The combination of alienation and molestation isolated Stein, leaving her without a role model or advisor to help her negotiate adolescence and sexual maturation. Her vague recollections of these events point towards traumatic sexual abuse and molestation at the hands of her father and her uncle. Could this trauma reveal something deeper? Daniel’s struggle with women—*his* struggle solely, not that of the women he desired—positioned him in a precarious way. While Stein’s Oedipal conflict—so clearly central to *The Making of Americans*, as I shall soon demonstrate—had been determinedly damaged by the early death of her mother, now Daniel’s sexual encounters with (unknown) females presented new and confusing sexual rivals. Amelia’s death removed her from a position in which she could control Daniel’s incestuous urges. In other words, Stein was able to reposition her mother after her death in a negative way by blaming her mother for her father’s perceived immorality and the decline of her family in public perception. This may, indeed, account for Stein’s mischaracterization of Amelia in *The Making of Americans* as a vapid woman good only for supporting and containing a husband.

Many scholars have noted the deeply autobiographical nature of *The Making of Americans*, but only Leon Katz, Clive Bush, and Janice Doane have attempted to tackle the book and its relation to Stein as the author. The book’s length is prohibitive to a degree that it has been referenced heavily, discussed sparsely, and understood hardly at all. Doane constructs a critical evaluation of familial

³² Linda Wagner-Martin, *Favored Strangers: Gertrude Stein and Her Family* (New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1997), 25.

representation and construction in her study of Stein's early work, *Silence and Narrative*. In her book, she identifies a complicated problem: while the narrative is anti-patriarchal in its subversion of linearity and the male-oriented epic family novel, the representations of weak men are paired with weak women. Doane notes how Stein's female characters **like her own mother, have no history**.³³ They exist as satellites around their husbands, sons, and (to a lesser degree) women. These others have histories, and the women are part of those histories, but they are not given stories of their own.

Stein deepens this disparagement of women by placing a woman (the simulacrum of her mother) in a locus of oppression in *Fernhurst*, a novella dealing with the Bryn Mawr affair that became part of *The Making of Americans*. Doane explains this positioning thusly: **In the triangular narrative, authority and its power of repression resides not simply in the biological father or male, but in Miss Thornton, who occupies the place of the father**.³⁴ By replacing the father with the mother in the Oedipal conflict, Stein regards her mother as a sexual rival.³⁵ In such a reading of familial/sexual conflict, Stein manages to overcome latent sexual combat with herself by producing a 'new mother,' a position eventually occupied by Toklas. In his 1908 essay "Family Romances," Freud discusses a similar schema of false construction of the family as an intentional act performed so as to shield the psyche from sexual defeat:

a younger child is very specially inclined to use imaginative stories [...] to rob those born before him of their prerogatives—in a way which reminds one of historical intrigues; and he often has no hesitation in attributing to his mother as many fictitious love-affairs as he himself has competitors.³⁶

³³ Janice Doane, *Silence and Narrative: The Early Novels of Gertrude Stein* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996), 99.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁵ N.B. Looking back upon this now, this early presence of an Electra Complex, while seemingly evident textually, is not, as Freudians might argue (though Freud rejected the Electra Complex entirely), so dominant throughout her life to warrant emphasizing so seriously. Ultimately, our effort is to raise awareness of the *whole* of a queer's being, not just cherry pick the lines that are most sensational and then reduce them to those elements. The subject of the Electra Complex, or, at least, Freud's ideation of women's interactions with these continuous moments of the psyche, is taken up again in "Bathsheba (Daughter of the Oath)."

³⁶ Sigmund Freud, *The Sexual Enlightenment of Children*. (New York: Collier, 1969), 44.

Freud's words are not bolded in this book because there should never be an emphasis on his misogyny, but there has been a historical over-emphasis on his ideas, many of which have been thoroughly disproven.

Stein's disparagement of women, in *The Making of Americans* also reveals her indebtedness to the anti-Semitic, turn-of-the-century, misogynist sexologist Otto Weininger.³⁷ That no male character in *The Making of Americans* can effectively lead a successful life without the help of a woman, but that these women are manipulative, weak-willed, and non-assertive, is an acceptance of Weininger's theory that all humans are innately bisexual. Stein merely splits the human in half and creates from that bifurcation two characters, not a singular bisexual, but dual avatars of one being. Martha Hersland, for example, is the female side of the character that is completed by the male half, David Hersland.

Out of desperation or oppression, Stein fails to advance feminist ideals and instead portrays both genders as equally ineffective at survival. Stein provides no reasoning or explanation for this. She creates two characters that represent herself, and both are just as ineffective, in a broad and philosophical way, at living as their peers. Stein's rejection of both genders does not represent an acceptance of a queer lifestyle—it embodies Stein's depression coming out of the 19th century: failed romances with Leon Solomons and various women, abuse at the hands of her parents, rejection by academia, her failure to graduate from medical school, and financial hardship. Stein's familiarity with psychological theory, both from her reading and from her training under William James and others at Harvard, enabled her to feel comfortable disembodied her own struggles and allowing them to be 'writ large' as the ineffectuality of all humanity.

³⁷ Weininger's impact upon Stein is the subject of Leon Katz' work. Katz, an acclaimed playwright, wrote his PhD dissertation on Stein, and this dissertation is available through dissemination services. In the early 60's, he received grant funds to interview Toklas, which ended up developing into an eight month tenure in France in which he spent upwards of seven hours a day, five days a week, going through Stein's draft notebooks of *The Making of Americans* with Toklas—she having neither seen nor heard of them before. This culminated in Katz' lifelong critical project, *The Notebooks of Gertrude Stein*, which was contracted to be published by Liveright in 1974 (according to Robert Wilson's bibliography of Stein). This book was never released, leaving Katz' published work on Stein quite minimal despite the thousands of pages of criticism he wrote: an article, "Weininger and *The Making of Americans*" appeared in the Gertrude Stein issue of *Twentieth Century Literature* (which he was originally supposed to guest edit, but gave that position to Edward Burns), the introduction to Liveright's publication of *Fernhurst, Q.E.D., and Other Early Writings*, and the introduction to Stein's collected writings on Picasso. Additionally, he published, with Something Else Press, *The Making of Americans: An Opera and a Play*, which merge his dramatic and critical interests, as well as explore, through quotes, some notebook material. Katz' heavily annotated copy of *Sex and Character*, which he used in composing his critical studies, is in my possession and reveals some extension of his thought on Weininger, however, I have not portrayed nor used any of his theories in the composition of this paper.

While Stein's own performance of childhood to Toklas' motherhood recalls the portrayal of female characters in *The Making of Americans* in that Stein demands of Toklas that 'mother' be out of sight and out of mind—serving, that is to say, the whims of the child (the man—authority)—Stein's ultimate role in her sexual life was one of submission, that being the power posture Chodorow's 'dependence' takes on in the adult body. Her psychosexual performance was not as misogynistic as Weininger's rejection of the female side of human bisexuality, however, as her lesbianism and idolization of the mother speak toward a respect and regard for the female. Critics who portray Stein as a *failed man*, a *masculine woman*, have rarely pointed towards her acceptance of masculinity in a Weiningerean sense. In *Sex and Character*, Weininger writes, "If our formula were used to discover the complement of the male invert, it would point to the most man-like woman, the Lesbian or the Sapphist."³⁸ Stein's acceptance of Weininger in the first decade of the twentieth century contextualizes the gendered language she used throughout her writing—that is to say, she builds into her performance of sexuality as a perversion of Weininger's theories; even if she reads as male, she is ultimately female in a Weiningerean way, through a masque of masculinity or a Chodorowian pseudo-dominance. Wagner-Martin identifies the moment Stein first encountered Weininger's philosophy: **In the midst of her personal turmoil over her relationship with Toklas, Gertrude, browsing in a bookstore with Leo, found a copy of Otto Weininger's *Sex and Character*.**³⁹ Soon she was so enthusiastic about it that she **sent copies [of it] to American friends** and deployed it in her early writing so **that her descriptions of character are based on her protagonist's erotic practices.**⁴⁰ Wagner-Martin asserts that *The Making of Americans* is **almost pure Weininger.**⁴¹

³⁸ Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character* (London: Heinemann, 1906), 50. Like with Freud's words, the immense hate of Weininger does not warrant the boldfaced emphasis.

³⁹ Wagner-Martin, *Favored Strangers*, 93.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 93.

Weininger's influence on Stein should primarily be read within her earliest compositions. The racism and sexism of *The Making of Americans* and *Three Lives* is in part attributable to Stein's reading of Weininger's study. Though she moved away from Weiningerean thought when writing the works of the matrimonial-autobiographical period, her relationship, her model of sexual behavior and character, and her first interactions with Toklas, all occurred under his influence. Only through maturing as a writer and moving away from her family did Stein move away from direct Weiningerean thought.

Though Stein certainly portrayed others under Weininger's influence, her portrayal of herself is far more complicated. First, Stein is in no way an adherent of Weininger's anti-Semitic philosophy: his line "the Jewish Woman, accordingly, plays the part required of her, as house-mother or odalisque."⁴² applies to Stein only in a subversive form of the latter term—through her submission to Toklas, not that that 'submission' should be regarded as slavery or concubinage in any form. In fact, to many, outwardly, she appears a very egotistical and narcissistic person—a common reference point for this characterization being the device used—the cipher of Toklas' voice—in writing *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

Elizabeth Meese interrogates the popular nature of the 'ego-maniac' Stein aptly within the Stein chapter of her book *(Sem)erotics: what is there in the charge that Stein is narcissistic? People frequently describe her that way. I wonder if it is because Toklas cooked, cleaned, and typed for her—performed the domestic tasks other women urged Stein to fulfill herself.*⁴³ Stein's appearance of egotism is contrived critically as masculine, aligning with the heterosexualization of her character, and an early Stein can be said to fall within the 'masculine woman = lesbian' model proposed by Stein. Yet, even early on, Stein's public and private characters

⁴² Weininger, *Sex & Character*, 320.

⁴³ Elizabeth Meese, *(Sem)erotics: Theorizing Lesbian Writing* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 66.

were split, with a pre-Weininger Stein describing herself as **pure servant female. I like insolence [sic] I find it difficult to work up energy to dominate.**⁴⁴ Stein's pre-Weininger sexuality matches her post-Weininger sexuality in terms of power dynamics (she is always the submissive one, not that submission/dominance are actual determinant factors in power within sexual relationships), as would be expected when one observes the mature nature of Stein as around thirty years old when she first read *Sex and Character*.

But Stein took at least one thing away from her reading of *Sex and Character*. Despite the aggressively hateful nature of Weininger's book, his assertion that all humans were bisexual and that **homosexuality is merely the sexual condition of these intermediate sexual forms that stretch from one ideally sexual condition to the other sexual condition. In my view all actual organisms have both homo-sexuality and hetero-sexuality,**⁴⁵ enabled Stein to accept her lesbianism. As Wagner-Martin notes, **Gertrude's life was voicing the story of herself as sexual being, a woman who took the chance of committing herself to a lesbian love and therefore saved her life. Gertrude's decision to make that commitment was the most significant result of her reading Weininger.**⁴⁶

5. *Reams of Middling Cattle*

Attention to this mother/child matrix in Stein's sexuality can help us to understand her seemingly coded language. 'Cow' is but one of Stein's code words, occurring throughout her erotic correspondence and texts, and is widely accepted by the academy to mean *orgasm*, or as Bridgman vaguely and euphemistically phrased it: **physical acts and character traits.**⁴⁷ Yet consider these lines from an erotic letter:

⁴⁴ qtd. Wagner-Martin, *Favored Strangers*, 53.

⁴⁵ Weininger, *Sex & Character*, 43.

⁴⁶ Wagner-Martin, *Favored Strangers*, 93.

⁴⁷ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 152.

**Baby is to have a sweet cow, a strong cow
a nice cow a real cow, not a milk
cow but a splash cow.**⁴⁸

Here Stein uses ‘splash’ to indicate the sound of the cow coming out and separates her ‘cow’ contextually from ‘a real cow.’ In “A Lyrical Opera Made By Two,” Stein describes **a cow cake**, writing, **a cow will be a large and loose caramel**, and **what the cow does it sinks and a little it sinks so sweetly**; she then connects ‘sweetly’ with odor through the word **jasmine** and the line **to have it come and be left odorously**.⁴⁹ In “A Sonatina Followed By Another,” after saying **we have eaten heartily of food**, Stein spends a page on digressions before returning to the table with the passage **“the cows produce reduce reduce they reduce the produce. Cows are necessary after feeding. We are needing what we have after feeding. After feeding we find cows out.**⁵⁰ Additionally, Stein writes in a note **Baby’s full dinner just is/giving her a good cow now.**⁵¹ These references all indicate that Stein is talking about the shape, sound, smell and color of feces, which she calls ‘cows.’

Stein writes of the main recipient of the sexual act in the title for her pamphlet *A Book Concluding With As A Wife Has A Cow A Love Story*. Since Stein universally attributes the wife and its derivatives to Toklas, it is Toklas who ‘has a cow.’ The erotic nature of the piece is marked by its subtitle “A Love Story.” Stein concludes the final eponymous section with **“My wife has a cow,**⁵² and throughout the text, no mention of the author, the husband, or anyone other than *she, the wife*, having a cow is made. Heralding the attribution of the cow to Toklas is an earlier section of *As A Wife Has A Cow* called “Choose” in which Stein writes **usually she sent them and usually he**

⁴⁸ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 65.

⁴⁹ Gertrude Stein, *Operas & Plays* (Barrytown: Station Hill Press, 2010), 49-53.

⁵⁰ Stein, *Bee Time Vine*, 23-4.

⁵¹ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 141.

⁵² Gertrude Stein, *A Stein Reader*, ed. Ulla Dydo. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 462.

brought them.⁵³ The cow is sent out of the wife by the work of the husband, the author, Stein. Thus, Stein's role, according to "Choose," is to bring out the feces, while Toklas' role is to produce them. That Toklas receives sexual pleasure while Stein provides it runs counter to the popular idea of Stein's masculinity and subverts the hetero/sexist role of the husband in sexual intercourse. In the hetero/sexist model, the male receives sexual pleasure while the female is more passive. Stein must receive sexual pleasure from something else, however, as all this interaction between Toklas and Stein represents an exchange.

Stein's writing, then, becomes an erotic act that gives her sexual gratification. When 'cow' appears, the subject of the cow is almost always the *other*, rarely the *author*. One rare instance of Stein's 'having a cow' comes from "A Sonatina Followed By Another." In a line in which Stein talks of Toklas' cow, she writes **I had a cow you have a cow, you have a cow now.**⁵⁴ Here, Stein disembodies her cow from the present time—this cow came in the past, it was *had*, it is not *now*. Toklas' cow is *now*, she will 'have' it and does 'have' it in the present. Stein's receipt of sex is in the past, she no longer receives, only performs. The language of such lines is one of childish imploring—Stein wants, and she wants *now*. The deployment of impatience in calling for Toklas' feces and love is evocative of the mother/child space inhabited by Toklas and Stein sexually; the child is demanding and incapable of waiting, when they want, they want with immediacy.

Fecal cows are, if not logical, at least understandable when considering Stein's sexuality within the structure of the baby/mama dynamic. Psychoanalytically, Stein's eroticization of excreta is explainable as she sexually inhabits the space of child. Freud writes that "faeces were the first gift that an infant could make, something that he could part with out of love for whoever was looking after him"⁵⁵—much as 'Baby' Gertrude produced feces for a mother anxious about her bowel

⁵³ Ibid., 455.

⁵⁴ Gertrude Stein, *The Yale Gertrude Stein*, ed. Richard Kostolanetz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 314.

⁵⁵ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 125.

movements. When Stein writes in “Choose” that “usually” the wife produces the cow, the exceptions to this are ones in which Stein gives her cow to Toklas, as a gift and sexual favor. In one letter, this is presented with the cows being replaced by the term ‘hotties’: **I will get in beside her and/shove the hotties too near.**⁵⁶ Defecating on the bed, possibly even on Toklas, Stein likely expects something in return, for elsewhere she writes about how “his cow will make her cow.” In “A Lyrical Opera Made By Two,” this exchange between the two is seen when Stein describes her writing as a gift designed to receive Toklas’ feces in this passage

**to give
 to she
 with a melody
 a renown
 for a crown
 of a cow
 which
 will
 come out now.**⁵⁷

Stein’s reference to ‘melody’ falls into a theme of music underlying her erotic composition—in “A Sonatina Followed By Another” she writes “**I would have you sing songs to your little jew,** and the title of “A Lyrical Opera Made By Two” alone speaks to musicality.⁵⁸ Music is also important to observe when considering the abstraction of sensory details in Stein’s work—music heralds the sound of the cow. Much like the ‘splash cow,’ Stein’s development of the moment a cow is produced seems abstract, but is actually vaguely concrete in a way only Stein could write: the melody indicates sound, the hum of anticipation that precedes the appearance of the idol—the ‘renown,’ or praise and worship that the cow desires, the adulation Stein gives to Toklas—the crown, literally the emergence of stool from the anus, but metaphorically paired with ‘renown’ to emphasize the

⁵⁶ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 62. Contextually bearing similar usage and meaning as ‘cow.’ Pages 85-6 of *Baby Precious* show Stein deploying the word “hot” in a sexual manner that seems to relate to feces. These lines read to me not as literal but as a fantasy of Stein’s.

⁵⁷ Stein, *Operas & Plays*, 50.

⁵⁸ Stein, *Bee Time Vine*, 5.

imperious nature Stein's obsession takes over her. That Stein will make a conceptual cow so as to receive Toklas' literal cow is in harmony with Freud's signification of the fecal 'gift,' as Stein, in eroticizing Toklas' feces, will be able to receive the sexual pleasure she desires through the trigger of her own defecation, or writing—the satisfaction of giving, or performing, the sexual act. Stein is obsessed not with her own, but with Toklas' feces. Her fixation is so intense that the bovine definition of cow is superseded by the fecal within her matrimonial autobiographies. She declares that a **real cow** is a **brown** one, **not a milk cow**, and even attempts to universalize this experience, writing, **we all worship a cow**.⁵⁹

Freud associates anal eroticism with infantile conceptions of birth, explaining that “it is a universal conviction among children [...] that babies are born from the bowel like a piece of faeces.”⁶⁰ According to Louise Kaplan, **the anal-birth theory has definite advantages. Babies that emerge out of the anus [...] are babies that little boys can give birth to as easily as mothers can**.⁶¹ Ironically, Kaplan's highlighting of the gender of the child at play is especially relevant to Stein, despite my rejection of critical framing of Stein as a man. Stein's consideration, after all, by Toklas when within the context of the mother/child sexual matrix, was as a little boy, not a little girl. The anal-birth theory also brings further symbolic meaning to Stein's treatment of composition as an erotic act. Her conceptual cow—the compositions she is producing to encourage Toklas to defecate in maintenance of their sexual life—is her baby. At one point, Stein writes **I have made so many babies**, and elsewhere **I made lots of literature and I loved my baby**.⁶²

⁵⁹ Ibid., 31.

⁶⁰ Freud, *Sexual Enlightenment*, 125. I will take this moment to point out that such a consideration is difficult to prove and reflects the essential postures often held by Freud. Just take the word *universal*, for instance, and you can see why. In the “Bathsheba” chapter which follows, this same sort of rhetoric is witnessed in the ways in which men almost lazily enact their implementation of masculinate programming.

⁶¹ Louise Kaplan, *Female Perversions* (New York: Anchor, 1991), 58.

⁶² Stein, *Baby Precious*, 119; *ibid.*, 121.

Kristeva ties anal eroticism to the mother by pointing out that **maternal authority is experienced first and above all [...] as sphincter training**.⁶³ Stein's life, as an aspect of her eroticism, models itself on the search for maternal authority. Her childhood under Amelia was positive, despite her suppression of such in *The Making of Americans*. Gertrude was the favorite—she was 'baby.' Amelia's death triggered a series of depressive episodes that followed Stein through her last years at home with her father and into the years when she lived with her brothers. When she entered college, the distractions of the university were enough to diminish this depression for a time, but it resurfaced as she approached her doctorate, sending her to Britain after two other women spurned her. Her self-portrait in *Q.E.D.*—the narrative of the romantic depressions—reveals her trepidations as a self-perceived sexual novice in a time before Weininger's theories engaged her with her own body. Leon Katz sums up this aspect of Stein's view of her sexuality readily in his assessment of *Q.E.D.*: "Privately and uneasily, she confessed to May [an early sexual interest of Stein's]—as she reports in *Q.E.D.*—that she had an almost puritanical horror of **passion in its many disguised forms**."⁶⁴ Stein left the *Q.E.D.* affair behind her and moved in with Leo in France in 1903, only to be controlled and repressed by his patriarchal, masculine, authority. In response to his attempts to suppress her creative endeavors and aesthetic interests, Stein rejected his control and claimed a selfhood of her own. Toklas' arrival in Paris and entry into Stein's life on September 9, 1907 provided Stein with an avenue of escape. Here was an authority figure who allowed her agency and creative independence at the price of the entire life and loyalty of the artist. Stein had found her mother. Whether one buys a strictly Freudian interpretation or not, what is clear is that Stein's eroticization of feces dominates her sexuality and is rooted within the search and desire for the mother figure and sexual character, represented by Toklas.

⁶³ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 71.

⁶⁴ Gertrude Stein, *Fernhurst, Q.E.D., and other Early Writings*, ed. Donald Gallup. (New York: Liveright, 1965), xiii.

There are two early indicators of Stein's maternal anal-erotic drive in *The Making of Americans*.

As Bridgman and Doane note, the opening paragraph of the novel—

Once an angry man dragged his father along the ground of his own orchard. "Stop !" cried the groaning old man at last, "Stop ! I did not drag my father beyond this tree.

It is hard living down the tempers we are born with. We all begin well, for in our youth there is nothing we are more intolerant of than our own sins writ large in others and we fight them fiercely in ourselves; but we grow old and we see that these our sins are of all sins the really harmless ones to own, nay that they give a charm to any character, and so our struggle with them dies away.⁶⁵—

is reminiscent of Aristotle: the epigraph is a paraphrase of a story Stein found in Aristotle's

Nicomachean Ethics and Aristotle had introduced the story of the dragged father as part of an essay on [of all things] incontinence.⁶⁶

No scholar has as of yet identified the specific passage from Aristotle that Stein—whose philosophical coursework with George Santayana likely exposed her to Aristotelian thought—but it is clearly this portion from Book VII of *Nicomachean Ethics*:

Further we pardon people more easily for following natural desires, since we pardon them more easily for following such appetites as are common to all men, and in so far as they are common; now anger and bad temper are more natural than the appetites for excess, i.e., for unnecessary objects. Take for instance the man who defended himself on the charge of striking his father by saying 'yes, but he struck his father, and he struck his, and (pointing at his child) this boy will strike me when he is a man; it runs in the family'; or the man who when he was being dragged along by his son bade him stop at the doorway, since he himself had dragged his father only as far as that.⁶⁷

By directly inverting Aristotle's rumination on atavistic patrilineal violence, Stein parodies Aristotle's fixation on the male in his *Ethics*—calling into question the nature of men and their violent actions when women are absented from philosophical discussion.⁶⁸ This subversion falls in line with the

⁶⁵ Gertrude Stein, *The Making of Americans* (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 1996), 3.

⁶⁶ Doane, *Silence and Narrative*, 92; Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 67.

⁶⁷ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 115.

⁶⁸ 3 of the 6 references to women in Aristotle's *Ethics* are in passim—discussing men having sex with women. The other three are also fleeting—one being a reference to feminine men, while the other two refer to the expected domesticity of women. Stein wrote of the rampant misogyny in her education in one of her daily themes at Radcliffe College.

upending of linear, or patrilineal, chronology in *The Making of Americans*, but also points towards Stein's anal eroticism. While written works evidencing anal eroticism occur primarily in the matrimonial autobiographies written between 1913 and 1926, it would be flawed, psychologically, to assume that Stein's anal eroticism developed when she was thirty-nine years old. Someone who has lived more than half of their life, and had major sexual realizations in the two decades prior, is unlikely to be undergoing major sexual development. Though Stein's focus in *The Making of Americans* is on her family members' characters and sexuality far more than her own (the fractured nature of her own avatars—of which there are two females and, striking in the notes of Weininger presented, one male who evidences a female side that is Stein and a male side that is Leon Solomons—David Hersland II), she leaves two markers of her possibly suppressed anal eroticism in the novel. Aristotle's seventh book in the *Ethics* is devoted to metaphorical and literal incontinence, that of the mind and the body. With heavy references to the consumption of food, though excising any explicit relation of bodily incontinence (which is not to say that Aristotle was not referring to physical incontinence and defecation—the *Ethics* are largely veiled with prudence), Book VII reads as though a merger of the Weininger of *The Making of Americans* and the lyricism of “A Sonatina Followed By Another” and “A Lyrical Opera Made By Two.” The parallels are compelling and also resonate with other indices of Stein's educational experience in her writing.

Aside from Aristotle, the character of Fanny Hersland—specifically her name, ‘Fanny’—is an esoteric reference to this sexual matrix. Stein made several remarks on her typological goals in *The Making of Americans* and *A Long Gay Book*, with both works exploring the relationships and interactions between people, but also, with *The Making of Americans*, to examine **her concept of ‘bottom nature.’ A person's bottom nature can be known by his or her repetitive behavior.**⁶⁹ Wagner-Martin expands this with a reflection on how the *Q. E. D.* affair altered Stein's sexual

⁶⁹ Doane, *Silence and Narrative*, 99.

understanding of people: **her traumatic relationship made Gertrude see that her earlier concept of a person's 'bottom nature' had to be expanded to include the quality she now called the 'sexual base.'**⁷⁰ 'Bottom nature' is an exploration of how one's character and action is determined by one's sexuality and sexual behavior—a theory of Stein's that loosely aligns with Butler's concept of performativity and the overall linking of gender/sexuality/behavior within queer theory. While outwardly clear in regarding themes of *Sex and Character* and early sexological studies, Stein's 'bottom nature' gets at anal eroticism in a relatively explicit way. That '*bottom nature*' and '*sexual base*' are direct quotes from her notebooks allow one to explore these terms as Stein's own creation. In both, references to the bottom, the lowest point, are made. These references indicate an equation of bottom with the center, or the locus of action in the human being. Stein's sexual fixation was on the human anus, the 'bottom' of a person. Stein's obsessive undertaking of human sexuality in *The Making of Americans*, as well as her notebooks, comes out of her desire to explore the 'bottom nature' of human sexuality. Her anal-erotic drive is the result of her compulsion towards writing as a sexual act through her performance of childhood under the maternal watch of Toklas.

Fanny Hissen, a minor character in *The Making of Americans*—and, yes, *another* Fanny—takes on a rare role when she takes over the narrative from the men preceding her. Doane regards this as a determined narratological choice on Stein's part within the frame of 'bottom nature': **“Since the narrator decides to proceed in the name of the mother, rather than the name of the father, the name ‘Fanny Hissen’ should be discussed.... ‘Fanny,’ [...] alludes, of course, to the narrator’s own quest for the bottom—absolute certainty as well as ‘bottom natures.’**⁷¹ Indeed, the name 'Fanny,' present not only in Fanny Hissen's name but also in that of Fanny Hersland, should be discussed. The *OED* notes that “fanny” has been used since the late 1870s as a

⁷⁰ Wagner-Martin, *Favored Strangers*, 63.

⁷¹ Doane, *Silence and Narrative*, 138.

colloquialism for **the female genitals** while the more familiar definition, the buttocks, is slightly more contemporary with an earliest recorded date of print usage being 1928.⁷² Though Stein's creation of new words, or word meanings, by no means compares to modernists such as Joyce, she is regarded to have adopted the word 'gay' in "Miss Furr and Miss Skeene" to relate to homosexuality. Certainly, Stein could be deploying "Fanny" in *The Making of Americans* to new effect similarly, though it is much more likely that, since the *OED* relates the date of origin for the word as "unknown," Stein was deploying it in the sense of the name, with the association to 'bottom nature' being, much like the anally erotic associativity of the term, a secondary, unconscious link to the sexual matrix discussed above.

6. *A Split Readership*

The silence surrounding Stein's anal-erotic maternal drive is at the root of a major problem in Stein criticism. Not only has her sexuality been distorted into hetero/sexist terms, but her radical experimentation has hardly been treated with such careful consideration such unique texts deserve. This point is especially true when trying to understand who is the intended audience of a Stein work. For too long, we readers have made the selfish narratological wager that *we* are meant to be Stein's only readers. Therefore, we assume that Stein's 'coded' or 'hermetic' language is meant to be decoded. But I would argue that reference and meaning are determined on the basis of the intended readership and the period of time in which a Stein composition was written. Stein wrote for two audiences, and they read with great difference.

The first of Stein's audiences is the public, reading all Stein's work but understanding and accepting primarily those compositions designated for 'mammon,' as she described her 'audience writing' in her lecture "What is English Literature" in *Lectures in America*. For the implied audience in

⁷² "Fanny." The *OED* has not updated this entry in over thirty years, meaning the concordance of print appearances could date back farther than is determined by the definition provided.

the public sphere, Stein's experiments in genre, narrative, form, and construction are dominant. These readers experience Stein in praxis—her tutorial works *How To Write*, *Lectures In America*, *Composition as Explanation*, and *Narration*, all discuss her goals in textual experimentation for the public reader. To this audience, Stein's comment on *Four Saints in Three Acts* would apply, and contradict a number of critics: **If you enjoy it, you understand it.**⁷³ The scarcity of Stein's works in print today affirms the notion of an audience familiar with Stein, but desirous of appealing works such as *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Three Lives*, and *Tender Buttons*, with the latter being a literary oddity that is successful due to its affordability and brevity.

The other audience, the 'god' Stein desired to write to, is Alice B. Toklas. As an ideal reader of these same texts, Toklas would understand all the erotic language utilized by Stein, as the *autrespondance* demonstrate through their often identical language and structures. For that other, erotic reader—Toklas—these 'hermetic terms' are not hermetic or encoded but part of what I would call the couple's *interior language*—this sexual conversation not intended for the implied public reader. Proof of this double audience through erotic textual layering can be seen in the meshing of *autrespondance* and published composition. Such meshing occurs startlingly in "Vacation in Brittany," written and published in 1922, in which Stein repeats the following lines from an erotic letter to Toklas:

**little fool little stool little
fool for me. Little stool little
fool little stool for me. And
what is a stool. That was
the elegant name for a cow.**⁷⁴

⁷³Gertrude Stein, *Gertrude Stein (Poets for the Millenium)* ed. Joan Retallack. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008) 10.

⁷⁴ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 79.

"Vacation in Brittany" is included in the readily available, though out of print, Black Sparrow Press volume *Reflection on the Atomic Bomb*. I have quoted the letter as it appears in *Baby Precious Always Shines* so as to direct the reader towards the more unfamiliar source—the *autrespondance* being largely undiscussed in comparison to Stein's published compositions. The passage, however, does appear exactly within the text of "Vacation in Brittany."

Calling into question Voris' dismissal of the *autrerespondance*, Stein's writing across erotic layer and public text indicates eroticism as direct address to a specific reader—Toklas—thus demanding a revision of a 'one audience' reading of Stein in terms of sexual and biographical reference. Stein's primary reader was Toklas. While critics can argue that the 'cow' in a Stein text is not scatological, the burden of proof is on them. Yes, sometimes a cow is just a cow, as in the pastoral war allegory *Mrs. Reynolds*—but there is far more evidence for the anal-erotic reference of these terms than there is for a bovine context when they occur in the matrimonial-autobiographical period.

After Stein's death, Toklas carefully manipulated the representation of Stein within criticism and the archive. Edward Burns and Kay Turner have both identified instances where Toklas desired the *autrerespondance* and *carnets* to be burned, while Virgil Thomson's disputation of the clearly intentional 'D.D.' dedication in "Sonatina" finds Toklas actively altering how readers perceived Stein through provision of misinformation. Donald Sutherland's *Gertrude Stein: A Biography of Her Work* makes no significant reference to Toklas or sexual biography and was met with approval by Toklas upon its publication in the 1950s. Toklas remained friends with Sutherland throughout her life, and he would not only accompany her on trips around Europe, but he also financially supported her in her impoverished final years. Toklas rejected, however, Elizabeth Sprigge's book *Gertrude Stein: Her Life and Work*, according to some letters in *Staying on Alone*. Though Toklas was slightly oblique in her rejection of the book, it is clear that she was troubled by the presence of repeated references to herself and Sprigge's implication of a deeper relationship between Stein and Toklas than the euphemistic 'close friends' then used in the media to refer to lesbians. It is my opinion that Toklas' behavior in this regard is a direct response to the eroticism of Stein's writing in the matrimonial-autobiographical period. Out of fear that Stein's already precarious legacy would be damaged irreparably, Toklas stayed on as 'mother' and tried to show the world only the 'good' in her child,

eliding the psychosexual dynamics here discussed due to the indisputable fact that the hetero/sexist public would regard them as morally reprehensible and deviant.

The critic can agree with Toklas and her actions and point towards the public audience as the locus of Stein's textual address. In this way, Stein's critics are often right in their theories and approaches, including her adoption by poststructuralists and postmodernists. However, one can also take a text like "A Sonatina Followed By Another" and regard the dialogic narrative structure as representative of the text's appearance as a long love letter to Toklas, pairing it with "Birth and Marriage," "Pink Melon Joy," and a list of other texts that could continue for pages. In this case the ideal audience is Toklas. To consider the author Stein and understand the erotic content of this work, no reader or critic can deny the presence of the second audience. The problems plaguing Stein scholarship today come from the merging of these two audiences. To say that Stein is *hermetic* is to put too much weight on erotic meaning inaccessible to a public audience; yet dismissing erotic meaning is only acceptable when referring to the public sphere. Even then, however, dismissing erotic reference in the public sphere entirely is a faulty method of reading Stein in that the reader then disregards critical thinking on sexuality, gender, and identity—refusing Stein a place in a number of critical conversations that could greatly benefit from her unique psychosexual life, as well as hiding her away from a developing readership (outside the academic world) of younger people interested in exploring and understanding their own sexualities and genders. The selfish wager is to assert that a text is entirely for the reader reading that text; Stein carefully cultivated a textual field in which this is not so.

It should be noted when discussing Stein's split audiences that such a split only holds true for works written mainly in the matrimonial-autobiographical period. However, Stein scholars often break her work apart based upon perceived changes to her compositional style after her celebrity status was acquired upon the publication in 1933 of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and Stein's

1934-35 lecture tour. After Stein's lecture tour, a new voice and theme dominated her compositions—conversational and appealing, as found in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, *Paris France*, *Everybody's Autobiography*, and *Wars I Have Seen*—her movement away from the Weiningerean psychology of sexuality and character and towards her own existence and selfhood in a world where she is famous—explored most heavily in *The Geographical History of America or the Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind*, which is a direct counterpart to the psychological ruminations of *The Making of Americans*—and generic works—memoirs, reviews, introductions to exhibit catalogs, essays, and a handful of plays, operas, and children's stories.

To say that Stein was compelled to visit new concepts solely as a response to her celebrity would be too reductive. It is important to note that Stein's fame came when she was sixty years old, just as it is important to note that she first met Toklas when she was thirty-three years old. Richard Bridgman argued that Stein's highly erotic Mallorcan Period (during which "Sonatina" was composed) was caused by the fact that Stein had **entered her forties, the demon of noon caper[ing] openly into her work.**⁷⁵ To point at Stein's age as a reason for an outburst of affection towards Toklas, but to then say her age has nothing to do with a major shift in her writing later, is nearsighted. After all, by the age of sixty, Stein had spent almost twenty-seven years dealing with erotic themes in her writing. In the years leading up to 1932, when Stein composed her bestselling novel, erotic language had already begun to dwindle—and there are no matrimonial autobiographies written after 1926. Stein's 1926 lecture *Composition as Explanation* introduced a more important transitional period in Stein's writing, a movement away from erotic themes from the matrimonial-autobiographical period and into meditations on writing, the self, and existence in the post-*Autobiography* period, than the conventional splitting of Stein's career into a pre/post *Autobiography*

⁷⁵ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 149.

dichotomy.⁷⁶ The division of audiences and an understanding of Stein's age in conjunction with her work are of immense importance when considering Stein's erotic writing of the pre-*Composition as Explanation* period.

Equally important is an acceptance of Toklas' role in Stein's composition. Toklas not only held maternal authority over Stein—with Stein appreciating the act of being commanded by her—Toklas' authority stretched into the compositional act, as some of the *autrerespondance* resulted from her explicit request for love notes. She writes that: **notes are a very beautiful form of literature...do not be afraid to overwhelm me with [them].**⁷⁷

7. *(Q)uod (E)rat (D)emonstrandum*

Be it metaphorical in appearance or not, Stein's erotic schema is undeniable. There can be no doubt or indecisiveness when approaching a matrimonial autobiography that one is dealing with a text that is neither for them nor absent of erotic signs. Barthes would regard much of Stein's work as erotic, for **repetition itself creates bliss.**⁷⁸ But repetition alone is not all that is at work here—the effect of repetition in the anal erotic works here discussed is as information overload: how can the reader deny what is right before them when it occurs with so much insistence, so much emphasis, and such frequency?

That Stein's idiosyncratic sexuality—so central to her texts and hidden for so long in plain sight—has been unrecognized, disregarded, ignored, and bowdlerized, is unforgivable. As Kaja

⁷⁶ Ulla Dydo's *The Language That Rises* explores this liminal period of Stein's career—1926-33—in depth and points to the misrepresentation of her lecture tour as a direct cause of her radically different later works. And Stein herself describes some of her audience writing after *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* in a letter to Toklas (dated based on the mention of *The World Is Round* and *Ida*, both coming after Stein's fame): "ain't it nice to write to order" (*Baby Precious* 124), referencing Bennett Cerf's standing order to publish one Stein book of her choosing a year after the success of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

⁷⁷ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 163.

Exploring Toklas' typed letters to Stein is difficult because of the numerous grammatical, syntactical, and lexical errors, compounded with intentional misspellings and errors in usage. Toklas' claim that she could type nothing but Stein's work seems to be validated by the few typed notes left from her. In this instance, the bracketed section appears as "the." in *Baby Precious Always Shines*.

⁷⁸ Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1971) 41. i.e. *jouissance*.

Silverman has recognized, **when a woman doesn't identify with a classically female position, she is expected to identify with a classically male one.**⁷⁹ To place Stein solely in the masculine role is to make a series of assumptions that ignore far too much evidence to the contrary in Stein's texts—especially in her matrimonial autobiography. We should, as Stein says, 'hear her sentences' and evaluate her from her work first and foremost with ears open to the unfamiliar sounds that there for us to discover.

⁷⁹ Marjorie Garber, *Bisexuality and the Eroticism of Everyday Life* (New York: Routledge, 2000) 13.

Syn-theses, or, The Mechanics of Oppression in Western Literary Criticism

Bathsheba (Daughter of the Oath)

has she, moreover, become fixed in the representation of “femininity”
—Luce Irigaray, “The Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry”

who gave the psychoanalysts their knowledge
—Monique Wittig, “The Straight Mind”

1. *En-trance with poisoned history*

A. “*Thou art the man*”⁸⁰

I want to read something with you, from Helene Cixous. I want to read lots of things, and in time I will. The other day, Cixous told me this: **She becomes sad under the insistence of our gaze.**⁸¹ She’s talking about a painting we are both looking at, Rembrandt’s *Bathsheba at her Bath*. We all know the story: Man sees⁸² woman *vulnerable*, and gestures towards her his desire to possess her. For Bathsheba, she is bathing and David catches sight of her with his eye. His letter is his gesture. David, the most powerful of his name (we will get to his power), progenitor of a line of Kings. Do we really believe Bathsheba has power against him? Woman succumbs. Or does she relent to his insistence? This is an old fantasy. Is her face caught up in a smirk or a grimace? I wonder, too, what she feels with her servant touching her feet. What are her bodily responses? Our sight is transfixed by the emotion of things, the soul of the matter. We go so far as to read her movement and consider it a somatic language indicative of her thinking—trying to interpret nervous responses. In the ‘David and Bathsheba’ episode, she is named but once or twice. Though she appears elsewhere, it is this moment, her becoming with David, that has become the primary narrative around her being. But we have so much to say about her. Who is Bathsheba without David and how can we know her?

⁸⁰ 2 Samuel 12:7: Nathan, to David.

⁸¹ Helene Cixous, *Stigmata: Escaping Texts*. (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15. I aim to emulate Irigaray’s diegetic integration of source material instead of adopting the strictures of traditional academic style. The introduction to this volume explains this effort more fully. See the introduction for a more extensive discussion of this practice.

⁸² **Has a mere look been able to change her “constitution”?** Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), 93.

This story is supposed to be about David's sin. After all, David has committed a very serious wrong. He rapes Bathsheba, who is already married, and he has her husband, Uriah the Hittite, killed. After David's crime and in the next chapter, Nathan—a prophet—rebukes David for his actions:

And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him, but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.⁸³

David is the man who stole the sheep, and in 2 Samuel, it is of his crime that we are to focus on in such a little moral story as this. However, if we turn towards the more poetic Psalms, we find the problematic of David's reconciliation revisited as beseeching:

(To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David, when Nathan the prophet came unto him, after he had gone in to Bathsheba.) Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions.⁸⁴

“Blot out my transgressions,” David implores (to God). For him, this is a simple calculus: acknowledge your wrongdoing (confess!) and He will absolve you of what you have done. After this, proviso you continue offering supplication to Him, you can go on living. David is cleared of his sin and goes on to build a great lineage. Bathsheba, however, cannot be absolved of what has been done to her. She has had not one, but two children by David, and her husband has been murdered (which is to say taken from her). Her life, already attached to Uriah the Hittite, has been simply re-attached to David and her living son by him, Solomon. She is always wrapped into the masculine genealogy of the text.

In the portrait of Bathsheba by Rembrandt, we see this attachment to male heritage in the way in which we see Bathsheba succumb, relent or give in to David.

⁸³ 2 Samuel 12:4. These passages, along with Freud, are not bolded because they do not bear the same need for emphasis as the bolded works. Biblical texts have no singular author, and do not need to be preserved additionally beyond their already massive fixation within society's mind.

⁸⁴ Psalms 51:1



*Fig. 1: Rembrandt's Bathsheba at her Bath, (1654)*⁸⁵

I profess, I believe Bathsheba succumbs. As the story is told, I understand Bathsheba as an object, manipulated by David. But I want Bathsheba to be a subject, though in the way I have this desire she is still an object. At the insistence of my gaze (which is the witnessing that becomes my desire), I interpret in her a stern independence; a frown that is a sadness; a reluctance at the news delivered in the letter. She holds the letter down and away from her— between her knees—to keep it from us, showing she has already read the news within and reluctantly accepts the proposition. Her body is in a state of analysis of her future, enacting an understanding of the reading.

⁸⁵ Rembrandt, "Bathsheba at Her Bath" (Paris: Louvre, 1654), <https://www.louvre.fr/en/oeuvre-notices/bathsheba-her-bath>.

This is a painting of a reader who is a machine. We are observing a computer, a body not operative without an input—she does not talk to me. She does not, immediately or at all, desire David on her own, or, her desire was never for David whom she did not know before his letter arrived. My own opinion is another in the chain of exploitations faced by Bathsheba. I allow her no existence, no agency to make her own choice. I want her to behave a certain way, and in my explication I go about addressing how my interpretation confirms her subject thinking my way. I am doing little to *understand her being*, which is different from her subject. My understanding her as a subject (her conception of her self) is an impossible task, for I would then *know* her subject, which is to say I would define her subject in my own terms, something I have already done. This *definition* is one of the cruel ‘insights’ of an insistent gaze.

B. Origins of t(He)ir power

Bathsheba is always my object, never her subject. At this fracture, we have cause to ask whether or not a character (Bathsheba) has agency? Cixous, considering my struggle, asks: **What must resemblance resemble?**⁸⁶ These portraits can’t resemble her, for she is a fiction (a painting), they can only confirm the myth of her and act as vessels for the telling. And the story told? a history in painting, a history of telling how she is, a history of defining her. Bathsheba, who is raped by the power of David, but we turn instead towards her son, her legacies, her dead first son. Does she have other children before David comes along? What is her heritage? Where does she die? Where is she born?

Which leads us back to this: the interaction we have with Bathsheba is extant only in how she comes into the life of another—David. It is his story, his-story, that she falls into as *all women*, as all queers who don’t appear as David does, do: objects for the advancement of male lives. We queer

⁸⁶ Cixous, *Stigmata*, 16.

bodies appear in literature often only as a lesson or tool for the continuation of a masculine project of dominance.

The access with which he rapes her? the law, or Law, of the father—of course—seeing as he penetrates her *to make child(ren)*. Though in English, perhaps a more appropriate turn of phrase would be *law from the father*, as we are asserting that the law comes out of fathers/men in order to maintain their dominant existence and not, as ‘of’ would suggest, that the role of the father in its manifested form in human society is pre-originary to human existence.

Some might call this law ‘phallogocentric,’ though in this space I want to introduce an alternative term for the same institution: *masculinate*. I prefer the derivative of ‘masculine’ because, unlike ‘phallogocentric,’ ‘masculinate’ has verb potential. By allowing this idea to function as a verb, the speaker can show how the phallogocentric perspective is working to preserve itself and oppress others. Further, I want to indict the conventional man participant in phallogocentrism as the progenitor of such a system, rather than offset what is actually happening into the conceptual space of the phallus that is removed from the body/anatomy by not being labeled as a ‘penis.’ Beyond that, positing a phallus as a root logic of the world feels inordinately sexist. Yes, there is a problematic of masculine oppression of non-heteronormative non-men, but that does not necessitate that we must enter as victims that world when we exist in our queer selves separately from, erstwhile also attached to masculine programming, the masculine perspective. Phalluses don’t control our worldview, but the men who wield them viciously control our access to the world.

Irigaray finds this law from the father to be a way of depositing in woman the whole logic of a masculine history, which is one of always negating the other who is not dominant before they can become dominant (keeping them in stasis at their station of life): **is there any more obvious device or more explicit way of banishing the auto-erotic, homosexual, or indeed fetishistic**

character of the relationship of man to woman than to stress the production of a child?⁸⁷

Marriage and mothering become the yoke by which the genealogy is extrapolated. Bathsheba, mothered, is just another step on David's way towards expanding and solidifying the base of his power. Already married, and marrying many more times, David and compatriot men make their power through multiplication—the more they breed, the more they promote believers in the cult of their cultural view (their attitude). Parasitically, man stretches across history.

Multiplication is his game. **The “subject” plays at multiplying himself, even deforming himself, in this process.**⁸⁸ Historical examples are apparent: when the Vikings invaded, they raped the women. During war, women are raped by the victors. In the colonial process of assimilation that is war, and the war-like attack which is rape—which Bathsheba suffers—the parasite takes the control over the body's agency through a negation as well as an attempted (re)production. This is a denial of her body in the manufacture of a copy of his own, a vile and truly vain solipsism.

What founds society, any society, is heterosexuality.⁸⁹ The man's assumption of control through the force of his taking denies the body's ability to react. It is enough to make any one a victim, and any victim a body riddled with dejection. Which is to say we are observing the way in which the cultural narrativization about Bathsheba demands she be a victim and allows her little choice not to be. She is not actively desirous or choosing to be a victim, just as women don't elect to be victimized by the patriarchal value-system which negates their being.

C. Death-text

Poor Bathsheba, sad indeed! And really never herself. She isn't a real person, but rather a character in the narrative of another who, by all intents and purposes, has left the narrative and made a mark on actual history. Or else the narrative he is part of is actually *his* biography (his-story

⁸⁷ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 30.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 136.

⁸⁹ Monique Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). 84.

again). She enters the world in Rembrandt's visioning holding the letter, a little poison to her, though David never really sent a letter, "sent messengers" the text reads. She enters the world expected to accept her fate contained in the letter. Perhaps the cultural version of the narrative, the letter included, is simply an interpretation of David's 'messengers' being more letter-carriers, the point remains that the written epistle is an addition to the story. In telling the story, the tellers must have found along the way that the intention of the programming imprinted within the text was dissatisfactory, or not working hard enough to advance the masculine cause. They intervened and interacted with the text and applied correctives. One of these changes was the interpretation of the letter, which became a focal point of the story. But Bathsheba's original configuration is a bit more murky, and in that murkiness lies a potential liberation. Without a letter, after all, might she have chosen David? Or else perhaps his force upon her was greater than we imagined. Regardless, those uncontrolled permutations across the collective cultural body endanger the message—the intent—of the Bathsheba story.

All sorts of adornments are encountered in the gilded frame of the painting which are uncertain in the texts. We can only accept the need to interpret the visual scene, though a letter is certainly a step further than seeing that Bathsheba's servant bathes her. In the latter, an economy is developed where before there was none. Bathsheba is elevated above others as a woman of status. Highborn women are more familiar to the old masters, of course, but we are led to understand that Bathsheba was a woman of high birth all along. David, of course, would only hold a desire for a woman of his status. Such a program modifies us to think that we must remain within our class, about our labors and loves attracted and isolated within our economic position. Advancement is always discouraged, except in rare cases and as an illusory narrative (the American Dream).

And there is the notion of emotionality: that uncertain smile (or frown) which greeted us—evoking the ambiguity of *La Gioconda*. Attracted to the pathetic body unfolding before us, we

become readers of Bathsheba as she reads the note, finding that emotion comes from her sight of the letter as we see her on the canvas. The letter should be heralded, the story dictates, as good news: Bathsheba will bear David a child! But such news is only good to a few people, and even then only under certain circumstances.

The letter brings bad news—the (total) end of her life. We are to pity her in recognizing **the violence of the letter**.⁹⁰ The letter is a violence as it is a negation of her choice, her life, in forcing her to become mother, wife, and lover (three roles, none reflexive). Our sight rarely catches her in mourning for her first dead son by David, the victim of cosmic punishment. No, she is always bathing, because she can be shown nude morally according to the Church⁹¹ when about hygiene (a convenient ignoring of her rape furthers the program of her narrative). Bath-she-ba (whose fall is in her name) has only just been seen: we have only just seen her. Her sadness is our collective interpretation of her (en)visage, her reading of the letter.

2. She who inhabits the frame: a rhetoric

Readers have an undeniable function in validating what has been written, and they succeed in accomplishing this function through their act of reading—which is not the sighting of words alone, but the application of them through intellectual digestion. Through performance of what is learned from the text, the writer or producer (or system of production) can observe/*confirm* that the text has succeeded in its functions towards the audience. If it goes further, so be it, only further confirmation the text has accomplished what it set out to do and then some.

As we are all at some time or other reading some text or other, it is our existence which predicates the text, and our work is upon it. We come before the text, necessitate its production⁹²

⁹⁰ Cixous, *Stigmata*, 13.

⁹¹ Nudity was once only permissible if the nude figure was nude in the biblical scene in which they were featured. Hence the significant amount of rape paintings in antiquity.

⁹² I would argue we would not write without an audience. Without a concern for an audience for what we don't express out loud with words, or for an audience to have any need for language at all, we wouldn't have writing. Writing is

(although this need easily becomes an addiction to text), assuming as we are that communication is almost always a socialized event. In our reading—our operation and technology about the task—systems of production at play develop institutions and culturality. One can locate the praxis-in-progress of our culture through the reading process as an anthropology of literacy, a historiographic reading such as that of the Bathsheba figure. To what ends are we reading? For the personal, which is political, or the cultural, which is ingrained in us—pre-programmed. One could just as well say programmed.

The moment we begin reading, we operate on (our) judgement. We enter into a love relationship. **As soon as we enter a 'love story,' what is imperceptible, colorless and odorless in ordinary life becomes extraordinarily insistent.**⁹³ The insistence with which we imagine away Bathsheba, the *Woman*, all these Bathshebas, is another form of love. Which is how we must approach reading, by weaponizing or directing the balance of our knowledge about how we are reading.

A. The sex act(s) of reading

What is it about the personal and the cultural that suggest some bifurcation of the sex act? If Freud can call the male role in intercourse active and the female passive in his misogynistic binarism,⁹⁴ perhaps I can take cautious steps in suggesting that there are sexuate types of reading?

When we read, we fall in love. Irigaray took Nietzsche as a lover in her *Amant marine*, I want to take those I discuss in this work as lovers. A romantic relationship moves beyond sight. We know it is intimately tactile. There are extrasensory understandings of the mentalities of the partner. The olfactory system roars back to life and you begin to taste again, too. The oculocentric voice inside

braided with an audience. The produced material, however, does not have to be *for* an audience. It could be singular, with a desire to have it be read by another.

⁹³ Ibid., 79.

⁹⁴ Especially pronounced in his “Femininity” essay.

your thought-ways begins to be troubled. This is an integrative relationship merging the one and the other, though that is not to say that the two are becoming a new 'one.' Rather, the two are understanding themselves (their selves and each other) through a communicative and communal conversation between each other. When carrying that romance over to the text, it is a matter of accepting the text to have a power—not over you, but, rather—in you. This could be as simple as addressing our thoughts during and just after reading towards understanding not just what we read, but how we understand what we read. What informs us? What do we agree with? Critical engagement, annotation, the traditional intimacy with text that came before the distractions of millenarian technologies, all of these afford routes to approaching a romance with the text. But more steps are required to really develop this relationship. As we argue towards an appreciation of the writer's role in producing the text, we need to know some about their biographical contexts—contexts which prove that the biographical aspects of their writing destabilize claims that there is no productive maker behind the text worth knowing. What informs their writing, which is a reading of their personal, professional, and other histories?

We also must turn to writing ourselves. Take the implementation of the Gospel. The goal of the text is to be spread, to be used in order to advance the message of 'God.' Many people, however, need guidance in understanding the text so writers took up the mantle of criticism in order to interrogate the text and bring it to the masses (the sad belief in 'unlocking the text'). This writing is not without merit, as in writing, we deploy what we know, much of which comes from reading. We use this writing to interact with and *actively* deploy what we understand (or do not) from our readings. These are the earliest motivations of literary criticism, though that movement has moved so far astray.

B. The agent-object hypothesis

Haunted by the death of the author, the mainstream cultural power takes the voice of the author speaking away from you, along with the means of production, and suggests as a result that there is no (writing) self and therefore no authorial subject who is talking to you. Barthes argues that we undertake to reintegrate ourselves with how primitive societies portrayed narrative as an act of mediation. But to argue that all narrative is a mediation of something outside the author is incoherent. In fact, life writing is a mediation of the self to the outside world, not some exterior event witnessed by the author, but instead something deeply experienced in the gestalt of their life.

Instead, the same modes of cultural understanding which come into a possessive (or closed) reading of the text, socialized as you are, are all stemming from a masculinated matrilineal theory. The societal always proceeds the personal in your possessive reading, for the socialization of cultural thought is more about a collective overall, or group subject made of an integrated hive-body of agent object figures, or *agent-objects*.

Saussure argued that the ‘prestige of writing,’ synonymous with ‘authenticity’ or ‘authority’ in many ways, though indicative, too, of what attracts us to writing and gives it those latter aspects, arose from four facets of its nature. The first and second facets belie the sensory aspects of writing

- 1. The written form of a word strikes us as a permanent, solid object and hence more fitting than its sound to act as a linguistic unit persisting through time. Although the connexion between word and written form is superficial and establishes a purely artificial unit, it is none the less much easier to grasp than the natural and only authentic connexion, which links word and sound.**
- 2. For most people, visual impressions are clearer and more lasting than auditory impressions. So for preference people cling to the former. The written image in the end takes over from the sound.⁹⁵**

In Saussure’s breakdown of our evaluations between written and spoken, the verbal is a stand-in, as writing is always a stand-in for the subject/person/producer. The written is the product that comes

⁹⁵ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (Chicago: Open Court Press, 2009), 26.

from within me, while the verbal is what I give you ephemerally through speech. Both are, true, products, though the written has an immediate superiority in a linguistic economy because it has a more lasting potential. Preference for the written 'over' the verbal is an interesting ideation. After all, one need not prefer the one or the other, but could recognize that, emergent from similar systems or needs, both writing and the spoken are uniquely different and incompatible except where writing is as response to the verbal. By establishing a preference for the written, however, Saussure goes about engendering a masturbatory reading that is not subject-oriented, but is fixed in definition.

The written has more authority than the verbal, according to the Saussurean model, although we must consider why. The crux of the issue is temporal. The written word locks in the message or the intent of the linguistic utterance, allowing it to be regarded over and over again so long as the written is extant and still understood by the readers. Such an understanding of language, however, is problematic and revelatory in terms of the masculine. The genius of such a proposition as Saussure's is that it perpetuates consistency and reticence against change in suggesting an unmeaning linked to the written. This is the other extreme of intention which becomes singularly possessive. Instead of evolving, adapting, and growing, the preference is towards what can be recorded, preserved, and maintained. Saussure's breakdown is but part of the overriding system of maintaining society through produced variables such as this. He himself gets caught up in the contradictions familiar to those who take to task those like Saussure and Freud who promote masculine cultural heritages. Language, Saussure's model, like Freud's of the family, changes. **To ask which type a group of languages belongs to is to forget that languages evolve**, though we are to accept his edict that writing remain fixed on the page and in interpretation.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Ibid., 227.

The operative mood of his linguistics is to ensure that the structural purpose of language is preserved, conscious or not about this task. A fixed interpretation reduces the potential for sedition and maintains control upon the subjectivity of the reader.

Resultant from the designed programming of the computer of social life, the *agent-object* is the complicit body which acts in order to support the overarching society which exploits their body for the dominant members of society's gain. This is a body which acts to harm itself in order to advance the oppressor's goals (a thought-slave). Their actions are endorsements of their own mistreatment. In this role, the body works to further its oppression out of an implanted love for the master's well-being.

The agent-object is the preferred position through which the masculine encounters everyone outside of them. It is in this posture, a broader and more specular location than the role of *woman*, that the actions of a masculine system come to full realization. In their attempts to preserve themselves, all queers are negated. The queer is misunderstood as a space of sexual identity. I ask what is an identity if it is designed for you by someone other than you? In this study, *queer* should be understood in the preferred sense as a body who is not masculine.

I say *masturbatory* because such a reading is actually solipsistic, it is not engaged in a binarism between the reader and the author in acultural dialogue, but how the reader perceives the author to be acting in cultural dialogue, a defining of the author's subject through societal values imposed upon them and not an attempt at understanding their being.⁹⁷ This is also a presupposition of culture as occurring regardless of humanity, as preceding humanity and thus warranting the location of language *within* a cultural system even when the two can function separately or are, perhaps, both

⁹⁷ One could also see this as a use of the author by the reader in what is never a communicative relationship. So, while intensely societal, the masturbatory position is so named because of the ways in which the reader adopts a one-sided or reflexive interaction with the text. The alternative term, *copulatory*, highlights the connection between two that comes from an enhanced appreciation of the author/interlocutory role.

equivalent constructions of humanity that rely upon each other. From such a mentality arises the broad mindset within contemporary queer phenomenologies, a program which largely masquerades as a progressive escape from the masculine but actually functions as an arm of that imperialism: that the self is fleeting and perpetually in definition from the other, that therefore there is no stable self. As a result, subject-development, which is a liberational process, is not an advanced philosophy. The message of queer phenomenology mirrors the dangerous neuter of the masculine. When success or production emerge from the agent-object, this is co-opted and neutered by the dominant powers. Because how can a system of exterior observation ever enable a (speaking) self, a verbal subject? This is where we return to the need for an *understanding of the author's being*.

A romantic reading addresses the need to believe that meaning making is not simply a methodology of masculinated thought, but is instead culturally programmed by masculinized thought-ways. Meaning making is an explicit function of linguistic aspects of our ocularcentrism. This is expressed by the desire or the need to define what we see. Everyone is culpable. Everyone engages in meaning making. The modes by which our production of meanings is informed, however, vary wildly. These *thought-ways*, a phrase which is modeled on the same tread as a *footway*, are also propped up by the linguistic turns on which we utter the logics of the thought-way. Operative words inform entire frames of thinking. For example, when earlier I made the distinction between 'over you' and 'within you.': were I to have opted for 'over you' or '*me*,' I would be vesting within the text a control upon me that is illogical when I precede it and need it equally. However, if we regard the text as becoming *interior*, we can recognize the ways in which we process them *through* ourselves and our experiences, not just vis-a-vis the cultural documents that arise superficially reading the meaning of the words of the text itself. Such a rhetorical stance pre-formulates the amatory relationship we want to develop with the text.

Some queer bodies are liberated from the masculinated matrix. Their thought-ways are not (any longer) informed by the cultural patterns from which society dictates agent-object behavior. These figures, iconoclastic, idiosyncratic, align themselves with Bathsheba in their interpretation and interaction with the popular paradigms. They stand isolated and discomfited by the meanings we levy upon them. They are inscrutable because their bodies reject definition in the traditional sense. The writings of Gertrude Stein, or the queer encounter with the analyst and the analytical situation, these moments, when examined, prove the core aspects of my theory of the Bathsheba, of the iconoclast. The technology of the masculine is unsatisfactory when addressing these bodies, though it is expected that we place them within that discourse: Female, queer, other. These bodies exist outside, not against, thought and are acted upon by the discourse to pervert their understandings by society. But, like Bathsheba, they are only another's object of desire. In other words, hers and all these other bodies are seen as they are made: heteronormative. Bathsheba shows us the installation of the heterosexual program in all bodies. The critical response to Gertrude Stein, for instance, demands further discussion as a technology of intentionally denying the subject-work of Stein's intimate writing and oppressing the queer.

The works of these outsider figures read similarly as to how we (or should I say "the critic") read Bathsheba, which is to say, we approach them in a psychological way. By considering a personal relationship with the text, as apposite to the masturbatory mode, the strangely reflexive reading is the *copulatory*. We want to know not just the 'what' which Bathsheba has to say, but how she is saying it. We realize there is a 'she' present and not just a text.⁹⁸

The personal reading, the copulation, recognizes the importance of *citation*. This paradoxical arraignment of thought is innate to both reader and writer, so we must explore their role in both.

⁹⁸ The Kristevan 'genotext'?

C. *The reader as corrector—Citation—An ethics of reading*

As we read things we do not like, we correct them (refusing them). We note why we don't like certain works in comparison to other works we have read that we do like. Just as on the inverse, we track what we like and cite those materials as emblematic of our taste when developing our personal aesthetic interests. The gross output of masculinated literature is a system of such correctives⁹⁹ to read 'problematics' (other bodies) in the appropriate way.

Through such a remediated discourse, we are given the *Bildungsroman*, a novel of (how) a life (should be), the novel of education. In the male version, *David Copperfield* or *Great Expectations*, the man eventually gets some wage labor/gainful employment as he moves towards building house and family, with a subplot of a romance leading towards a marriage often being annexed. In the masculine 'female,' however, a novel of manners may find the woman (always high born in this case) propelled towards an (arranged) marriage in order to guarantee her position in society, which is security and comfort. Yet, her location within society is only insofar as it serves to maintain the male storyline, which is to suggest what that society's actual function is. She is a task he must accomplish to complete his quest. We should consider the power of didactic literature as a means of correcting the culture.

And, in visual art, too, we are able to see the false alterity of the corrective. That a picture is not just a picture, but has a purpose of narration. We project into *her* place Bathsheba, and make her to be sad. The woman, in so many postures, classically receives as vessel for melancholy. This imposition of sadness, be it through read and understood emotions (perceiving the subject) or implantation (designing the object) depend upon one's own subjectivity, which is the originator of each individual's gaze. Bathsheba's sadness brings to bear her attraction to David, whom she has not met, nor seen, though he is the King she inevitably knows. She is supposed to love David, and why?

⁹⁹ As with the Bathsheba story itself—the introduction of the letter. Is it a penetration? Or another violence...

Because we are designed to read her heterosexually. Bathsheba desires David, and his letter—a rebuke—wounds her. This is not singular to Rembrandt, but is born out of the tradition of ‘her’ tale, as slim as it appears in the Bible.

What we cite in our destructive, masturbatory readings is that malicious programming which designs us to be agent-objects. When we enter into a copulatory reading, however, we work within the space in which we evaluate culture from a personal-societal and not a societal-personal approach, that space in which the body can separate from the masculine thought-way. For those of us who are not free from the dominant perspective, fleeting moments, often frustrating or confusing, in which we see ‘outside the box,’ which is actually without the thought-way, still occur.

A praxis in which we can understand and build on the confusions and contradictions of spaces which operate in uncertain terms looks to us much like annotation and the processing of our reading. Much innovative criticism has been made in this direction. Elizabeth Meese’s work *Semerotics* is a hybridization of criticism and playful epistolary erotic meditations in rereading noted queer women, while Maggie Nelson’s *The Argonauts* moves between memoir and queer theory in writing the own self, and this essay itself is part of that same tradition, which dates back to Irigaray’s *Amante marine*.¹⁰⁰

As desirous as we are of seeing the citation as idolatry, praise, or glorification, Irigaray shows how the act of citation is parody, satire, or mockery. Not the first to do so, but the first whose aesthetics seamlessly explain and show at the same time the need for a referential methodology of citation to capture what it is that is marking as different the articulations of an othered subject *without* the intervention of the masculine thought-way.

The annotation, itself a citation, is a mark of love on paper, and is as much an annotation of how we feel as it is of what we are trying to track in our reading. This ‘mark’ is a coupling, and

¹⁰⁰ Jane Gallop’s *Reading Lacan* and *Deaths of the Authors* are other exemplary texts.

formulates one of the ways in which the reader and author go about copulating. The space of theory becomes a love letter and an annotation, and can be addressed at both the author and the reader (of our own work). This regurgitative process is itself citation, with theory becoming a *reading that is a reading between*—a cross-talk, or translation. If all readers responded as the theorist could, through in-part emotive documentation of the experience they had reading braided with the interpretation of the text (and the space of reading), then the cultural forces of onanism would be greatly reduced. That is, if the mechanics of liberation, which occur through such citational writing of thought, are taught to all who are interested.

D. The author is the interlocutor of language, or The route of language

Language is processed, always the result from a chemistry of experience: the writer, the society, the reader. Language is the result of this trilogy's interaction with each other. Society dictates the reasoning behind communication, and it is here that we can take on the rationale of this project as being inherently subversive and 'against.' Many writers do turn upon a reactionary philosophy that finding their subjectivity must come through a complete and utter destruction of the literary paradigm in its apparent form. Gertrude Stein enters into writing upon an upheaval surrounding the very specific aspect of *meaning*. The LANGUAGE poets take up a similar mantle, wherein the reader works to construct meaning from the text as field, a geographical realm left explored by the reader.

This reaction 'against,' structured as it is upon a reaction, does not afford the ability of losing works that are reactionary, however. We must not refuse the composers of these texts their subject simply because they are reactionary, for a formulation 'against' still satisfies in the making of new, personal meanings. Such a cancellation ignores that writing, ultimately, is the location of bringing a subject into being, and the interior processes of analysis and understanding of the cultural mode are inherently unique and singular, regardless of how they are informed by broader concerns. While a body may be an agent-object, they always still have the potential to think away from the masculine

and compose into order their own ideation of the way things are. Since meaning is not the precedent of origination, its lack of stability and fixation enable many routes of interpretation and interaction. Simply interacting with the masculine by reaction and opposition, while perhaps not enabling a full actualization of the self to come into being, still finds the author endeavoring at subject-oriented writing.

Bathsheba's smirk, the oblique turn of the lips which is present across Classical art, is an archaic smile. It lacks (intended) meaning except in interpretation, which is a shy way of saying that all things lack meaning without interpretation. Meaning is in interpretation. Herein, we wrap in the discomfort which comes from any concept of the pre-oedipal. There are no originary meanings which our language simply explains, for all meaning making is the result of narrativization after the divergence between human and non-human animal. As a result, we have spent our human history telling stories to inscribe meaning upon all things, and that ur-meaning swiftly, so our history seems to accord in observation, became a politically charged force.

Thus, any attempt to describe any entity, concept, or bare thing is impossible without some interaction with the cultivated etymology of that thing. A writer, about the focus of telling something (defining through narrative), must interact with etymological knowledge, even where they lack specific knowledges of their subjects. The cultural lineage follows the word wherever it goes. The reader, already operating on their invested cultural programming (itself a citation), will work to fill in the blank spaces. This reading side is struggling between confirming cultural institutions, often oppressive, and defining its own self with an ethics and morality rooted in the self's/subject's experience. The author is intending, often, to assist in that subject's development, and they, too, similarly *read* cultural documents and ideologies in order to present, as a theorist will do, their perspective. This is how we enter into a reading of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* with a feminist

framework, as we see the text attached to a cultural entity. They, the author, present their own evaluation of the cultural program to the reader as interlocutor.

E. The citational juncture

The reader orbits between the citational force of writing and reading, while the writer/interlocutor actively engages in both. If the reader annotates, or copulates with the text in any way intellectually (digesting), they will begin to approach the writing/production that the interlocutor is about. Generally speaking, however, the reader only superficially begins to encounter citational energy in the text. This identifies for us the route of language as is generally regarded by the larger reading populace (troubled by economies of expectation: time, relationships, career, child-rearing, self-love: all these take away from our time to read, to aesthetically interact).

After Barthes, the role of the author, or our ability to regard the author as a powerful force, was significantly impaired. Barthes, early in his crime “The Death of the Author” writes that **writing is that neutral, composite, oblique space where our subject slips away, the negative where all identity is lost, starting with the very identity of the body writing.**¹⁰¹ The Barthesian thought-way—be it in the typical juvenile confabulation that it is regarded as non-authorial (the author truly dead or authorial intent/biography are completely absconded, in other words, a total denial of the conditions of production of the text) or else more advanced and nuanced in an affixation of an equity between reader and author that the author does not impose one standardized meaning outside of which there are no interpretations (an important consideration of how the genotext arises)—presupposes itself upon the notion of a writing in which the self becomes other, the written is not a subject but an entity separate from the body. Such a masculinate theory closes off three abilities of writing: to perceive a writing at the juncture of citation, a writing that enables a reader to find themselves and understand the nature of being another, and a writing that allows that

¹⁰¹ Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 142.

‘other’ its own subjectivity. Another trilogy, this time that which writing is arranged upon, though such an arrangement is only observed—not pre-designed.

The reader can observe how cultural systems are expressed in the text on their own, which is how Barthes intends his own essay. That the text is not solely an author-God figured work in which the writer dictates all knowledge away from interpretation and into classification. Rather, interpretation and its exterior forces pass through the text from a source greater than the writer. Simply observing those forces at play, however, ignores the evaluatory means upon which the self, in part acting upon that unknown realm from which *disagreement* with the desire to confirm a text (idea, entity, concept) emerges. That unknown realm is the same unconscious which demands that we see writing is not simply *of* the author, but of the systems at play as well. However, in a queer body, the system at play has to be understood as designing bodies in disservice to themselves while also as dissatisfactory, ultimately, in understanding how the subject of the queer body comes into being since they have to be removed from the masculine in order to be themselves.

That evaluation through which the author may decide that part of what is told to them is not something they agree with, this is the way in which we break down a thought-way and engage in liberation. Barthes and his disciples abandon, in their phenomenological quest, this agent-subject.



Fig. 2: Degas' *Woman Having her Hair Combed*, (1886)¹⁰²

3. Heritages

Cixous calls the vortices of expectations towards and developments of a subject an *interior Bible*. If it is an interior one, it is one we all seemingly share, computers as we are. One must merely take a glance at other paintings like Rembrandt's and find this truth in many utterances. **She doesn't know who, shortly, she'll be.**¹⁰³ Bathsheba isn't allowed, that is, to know her (and again, can a character have agency, know itself?) future. This uncertainty is on full view in Degas' *Woman Having Her Hair Combed*, which almost mimes Bathsheba's posture in Rembrandt's vision of her—akimbo arms and attendant drawing her towards an upward gaze in expectance, expectation.

¹⁰² Edgar Degas, "Woman Having Her Hair Combed" (New York: Metropolitan Museum, 1886) <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/436173>. Not to be confused with the similarly titled Degas work, the reflexive *Woman Combing her Hair*.

¹⁰³ Cixous, *Stigmata*, 17.

Degas' unnamed subject's upwards glance is as though towards the center, towards (a sky) God. And, in this looking towards God, she recognizes what is her future—submission. Whatever she becomes is him. She doesn't know who that S/he will be. Submission is truly a loss of control. This is also the reaction Bathsheba has, David's letter being an external stimuli from a producer who does not inhabit this frame. Notice that David, and the letter, are absent, replaced by the servant: the success of the economy. Only around two centuries apart and already we see how the whole economy of oppression has finetuned itself while the Woman herself remains isolated. Her hair is being combed and it is almost as though she has been penetrated (which is what the thought-way wants us to think of), or she is caught up. But still, an external force, a producer outside the Bathsheba figure, designs her behavior.

A. The Trinity

And, who is this producer? What is their attitude, which acts upon the unnamed She who inhabits the frame? **Which disposition? It must surely be concluded that up to this point the element defined as both specific to each and common to both sexes involves nothing but a process of *reproduction* and *production*. And that it is a function of the way they participate in this economy that one will with certainty label some male and others female.**¹⁰⁴ Irigaray notes how the paradigm establishes the group-think of a passive woman, a receiving woman, a vessel. And this receipt, is it not intended as the result of an economic exchange? The man imposing on woman his definition, a son, himself? All this production is designed as part of the larger definition, which woman only re-produces. Irigaray's concern is not simply how the woman is being exploited, otherwise her argument would be the essential equation to Wittig's materialist feminism. It is the dark continent of every body who is not conventionally male, who becomes other. And all these bodies are, inevitably, used.

¹⁰⁴ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 14.

As we regard our other, we are met concisely with discomfort, a troubling of our being. Therefore, the heterosexually engaged male, who holds the perspective, is troubled at and extends even further their classifying exploitation of the woman's body onto the queer body,¹⁰⁵ with there being little difference, ultimately, in the nature of the exploitation between them, or, at least, the intent behind the exploitation. Both are designed to provide security and authority to the primary disposition. After all, what we are talking about here is an *other*, which only exists to develop the strange distance that formulates a queer body: **the Other, who is always to some extent *his* Other.**¹⁰⁶

The disposition?: male. That there is an equivocation between male and female or female and male (the paradigm evolves its own particular biases) is only in the primordial nature of maturation—supposed by the psychoanalytic school to be ‘pre-Oedipal.’ The space of creation or becoming into meaning, the outside from the paradigmatic *polis*, is restrained by the mandate of the hegemonic force of conventional masculinity (the colloquial *patriarchy*), which places it in the context of designed programs, or complexes... Oedipus. We know, though, that because Electra, as a female counterpoint (an alternative or escape from service to the Oedipal deity, the Father, the Law) is forbidden—“I do not see any progress or advantage in the introduction of the term “Electra-Complex,” and do not advocate its use”¹⁰⁷—that these complexes are accepted into masculine

¹⁰⁵ It is important to remember here the reasons for which I adopt Irigaray and Cixous, amongst others. I believe the specific gender themed concerns of their approach to subject/being/object is preferable to more broad phenomenological approaches because the man is at the root of a world-wide perspective making that is denied in a theory of the *human*. However, one cannot simply consider the queer in the stead of the woman in these theorists works. For instance, when it comes to the specific materialist concerns with which Wittig extrapolates her similar concept to the masculine, The Straight Mind, woman is exchanged and exploited in an economy through which a recognition of the queer affords a resolution. Ultimately, the same system of subject-repression and agent-objectification with which the masculine thought-way seeks to elide the bodies of woman are levied upon the queer as well, and I wager that ultimately woman is a queer body in that the queer is an agendered space that contains everyone in service to the masculine, whose sexuality is either defined as subordinate (in service to) or exterior and other (*ergo inferior*).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 135. Her emphasis.

¹⁰⁷ Sigmund Freud, “The Psychogenesis of a Case of Female Homosexuality.” *The International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 1, no. 2 (1920): 133.

thought only insofar as they continue to, through corrective readings (of which there are countless), confirm the his-story.

Language is the technology for the slow execution of this meaning, which is to say the space of pre-existence, which is not ‘pre-oedipal’ but pre-human (animal) and survives in all life around us, but within us as the space of subjectivity, of self design, *disagreement*. **“Nature” is forever dodging his projects of representation, of reproduction.**¹⁰⁸ The true frustration is how, though meaning emerges, to its originating place (our fracture from nature) we can ascribe no meaning. This *chora*¹⁰⁹, a space of constant/perpetual re-creating, creation out of creation, (re-production), is the distinguishing marker of human and non-human distinction, a concept as important as sexual difference.

When working in terms of reproduction/production we are forced to consider anatomical features: the sperm and ovum, the process of fertilization, not exclusively human. Here, already troubled by an urge towards *creation*—(for the hegemonic view is that sex is, as it is for most animals, humanity’s reproductive function and not an entertaining one; for the queer body is excised when their sexual functions become oriented at pleasure and entertainment rituals), marked subliminally positive through the appendage of ‘*pro-*’—sex becomes all-encompassing. In this instance, we see how the affixing of the prefix ‘*pro-*’ becomes another rhetorical moment in which a whole thought-way is inscribed. The active/passive paradigm hinges upon the same disparity in the analogy positive:negative::pro:con. The active force is the positive one, the one with the privileged role and impact.

¹⁰⁸ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 134.

¹⁰⁹ The term *chora* comes from Platonic tradition, and is used by Kristeva, as well as most philosophers deploying it, to her own end. My reading of the various meanings of *chora* suggests that the *chora* is a *space*. I regard this as a space of origination, unknowable to us, at which we locate the start of so many aspects of our perception. *Chora*, in Plato, was the space outside the city—an unknown to civilization. As such, because life comes from the outside of the city and creates the city, the origination of our society comes from this space. Thus, I construct this definition to render that geography as a concept of coming into being.

Omniscient, sex creates all. Through the produced body (production), the creator. The active, presumed more engaged in the world, more ready to take on the cultural assignments they design themselves. The man desires more men through the machine of woman, men who are predisposed towards action, towards creation. Thus procreation is production, which is desirous of a particular re-production: “Her happiness is great if later on this wish for a baby finds fulfillment in reality, and quite especially so if the baby is a little boy who brings the longed for penis with him.”¹¹⁰

B. The urge to analyze is an urge to become—Cosmetics and agent-object appearance

Bathsheba-Woman on her divan, a gesture at the analytical position. If only she were to lie down, what would we learn from her? This is our insistence: the desire to know not *the other*, but what that other is thinking, how they think, to understand the world as they perceive it. This is the natural result of our paradigms, of our readings. As we have yet to escape this hegemonic thought which is everywhere, in every textbook and every bible, our urge to analyze her is yet another attempt to restrain what lies outside the city, the *poli(s)tic*. If only we could know how another body thought—that another does think, does exist—and to answer how we exist: knowing how we are by knowing how *they* are. And the abundant question that creates a dark continent... if only one could be that continent, that shadow body—this merging. Then, to know how they are, or perhaps still how to make that body mandatory.

This mandatory body is alluded to in how Degas has her hair being combed: she is not in control of her body or her appearance. The agent-object can be prefigured through the introduction of equipment for altering the appearance. Appearance and the expectation of beauty develop their own regime as an aspect of the masculine force of oppression. In this phalanx, the agent-object truly becomes snared in a rough entanglement. Do we consider the cosmetics industry as overall a toxic force participating in a systematic genocide to a woman’s naturally appearing body? Cosmetics

¹¹⁰ Freud, *New Introductory Lectures*, 159.

create a spectacle of the gaze: deploying, as they do, a sexual vision in economizing whom they objectify.

So frequently appearance is an aspect of control that becomes exterior, even when it is the goal of a subject. Consider the motivations for masquerade, *maquillage*: they are not interior, they are actually exterior. **The cosmetics, the disguises of all kinds that women cover themselves with are intended to deceive, to promise more value than can be delivered.**¹¹¹ The self, the subject, ‘wants’ to appear as different for the other, the viewer who designs that desire from the outside. The edict: appear as so because you must be *beautiful* to be advanced in society—to get married, to reproduce, to get a good job, catch a wealthy man—for protection.

An economy built around beauty privilege is centered at distances of beauty. For some, as with the *Woman*, this beauty, this appearing, is controlled by the servant who combs her hair. She cannot even be entrusted to groom herself, though luxury tells her this is simply a benefit of the pinnings her wealth affords her. When the body is roped into operating outside the subject for the other who is the ultimate Subject (man), their agent-object position has been fully realized. No longer even operative over their own manifestations of desire, they are fully reliant on another (man) for the entirety of their experience.

I speculate that replacing man with the equivalent dominant holder of the reigns in a society or organization, the idea would remain fully functional with only slight tweaking needed to accommodate cultural distinctions, but I do not endeavor to apply these theories here to what I do not know from my own experience. The best anthropology is the compassionate form that involves only that which the anthropologist by their own heart knows: memoir.

¹¹¹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 114.



Fig. 3: Bazille's *La Toilette*, (1869-70)¹¹²

4. *Speculations*

Frédéric Bazille, in his equitable evocation, finds Woman in a state of crucifixion. The preparations for the day not only resemble the binding the cross presents (a regimented control over the body), but somatically manifest the symptoms of schedule and constraint. Her outstretched arms along the horizontal axis of the crucifix place her in fixed repose. Her servant is the soldier nailing her feet to the cross by confining her mobility in the shoe, holding the right foot carefully before securing it to the lower part of the vertical axis of the cross' frame. Looking on, the white servant/soldier does nothing but gaze at her naked body, emphasizing the visibility and vulnerability located therein.

¹¹² Frederic Bazille, "La Toilette" (Montpellier: Musee Fabre, 1870).

Here, we find the woman not only sexually prostrate, but violently surrounded by the ‘other,’ highlighting the woman’s singularity and *isolar*¹¹³ position. Now, Woman’s head is cocked towards another servant, another attendant, who acts the role of David’s messenger, though we forget that the painting is only spiritually about Bathsheba. No, no, this is much more about Woman. Though she is listening to something. Again, the exterior acts upon her, though that force, female, is brought into Bazille’s frame just as Rembrandt has her listening (reading) to the letter.

She’s listening to this: this transformation in herself.¹¹⁴ I am inclined to agree. As we see her, change her, we must remember that Rembrandt, too, sees Bathsheba-woman (reads her and the visual tradition of her) and levies his gaze upon her. She is become (his) story and is born of narrative. And that narrative always is and always has been masculine. Already, He has changed her, and we are seeing both the change and the impact of the change in his painted articulation of this tale. Bathsheba is in flux, her body in some way expecting.

Almost equitable, too, that the washing of feet (so comfortable and homely in Bathsheba’s time) is replaced by the brushing of the hair, a transference of intimacy along the lines of cultural development. Other economies have shifted, though they manifest that same sense of exactitude, of resemblance: A black servant (a corrective where before racial difference was less fixed), a clothed woman (to present the Bathsheba figure’s vulnerability in anticipation of penetration and her readiness in advance of penetration). Neither represent *her*, and both are in service, in some way, to her. Over and over again, the image of Bathsheba, not spurned, for David never really wrote a letter, he just saw her. Who is she? Rembrandt asks. But it is how does she look (Degas), where is she (Bazille)? We see her, we make her.

¹¹³ A word I mean as both isolation, soleness (solarity), and soul (soular). The objectified subject prior to the writing/definition/redefinition of their subject in a queer writing (écriture feminine).

¹¹⁴ Cixous, *Stigmata*, 17.

For she is *made*, by us, by our (insistent) gaze. The medium itself a making: **With what mud is Bathsheba painted? With what earth?**¹¹⁵ Cixous asks, and it is an appropriate question. ‘God’ does, after all, make us in ‘their’ image out of clay, mud, E/earth. Cixous identifies the ways in which men view the expressive tools of their craft, how the paint, itself a mud, becomes flesh on canvas. In the room which is a body,¹¹⁶ the space of our heart, Bathsheba is placed. Under the economy of the painter’s gaze, the masculine sniping, she is constructed. **Bathsheba is seated in our room,**¹¹⁷ though didn’t she choose to sit, sat herself, before the story began? We know it is ourselves who want to seat her, comb her hair, possess her, like David—whose thought is our own. (Bathsheba-woman on her divan.) And it is her choice, her seating, that makes her sighted by David, her fatal error: a destiny.

To paint a letter seen from the back! The Door is closed. It is David, an old tale whispers to me.¹¹⁸ Operating a trick, the gesture is withheld from us, the culture segregated into the hands of the producers. An old tale more a dictation: the telling of things as they are to be. Rembrandt’s trick is to hide the letter, telling the same way as David—we are forbidden the interpretation. Telling is but a part of our technology of moral (re)enforcement. Destiny, and defining the paradigm, fix themselves as the interpreters of production. Interpreting production itself is a production. Is not reading after all an interpretation of a production (writing)? This is why we see Bathsheba as through David’s *intention* or through our gaze. (Not)Reading his letter to her, impressed by what he *tells* her.

The letter is a summons. A reflexivity (a call back to his-self): **The desire for the auto...the homo...the male, dominates the representational economy.**¹¹⁹ Our images of each other, of

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁶ N.B. The interior Bible.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 14.

¹¹⁹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 26.

ourselves, are re-presentations of an overwhelmingly cultural demand for masculine pleasure. Consider the nature of desire in homosexual men. Often, in a very active, very assertive homosexual man, the sexual desire, as a wing of aesthetic and entertaining forces (pleasure), may manifest as extremely submissive, malleable, and diminished. This instinctual depiction of a culturally inherited ordinance of attraction towards a conventional male conceptualized as a desire for brawn, for psychosis, for departure, is a route that is a failed attempt at an escape in that it is a return to an examination and immersion within the discourse of repression and suppression of queer identities. Out of this diversion arises much of our understanding today about sex, as though it is some sort of fatalistic aspect of human identity. Dare we remember the body preceding consciousness is animal? Or *without meaning*? Meaning is a made destiny.

Transcendental laws, written ‘within,’ will make man both judge and defendant in the suit of his destiny, even the world’s destiny.¹²⁰ The written masculine is the nature of the Law, an action (enforcement) written into being, a codified corrective. A force of control. David’s letter, a request which cannot be avoided or denied (without fatal consequence), is a law. Were I Irigaray, perhaps it would not be a matter of extension, rhetorically, to say ‘even,’ but ‘his destiny *and* the world’s,’ for the two are interlinked. By force of masculine consequence, we know history has been a his-story. His destiny (legislative) is the world’s (law).

5. *(Fore)Fathering*

The phallus, quite to the contrary, functions all too often in psychoanalysis as the guarantee of sense, the sense of sense(s), the ‘figure,’ the ‘form,’ the ultimate signifier through which the ancient metaphors of onto-theology would be set straight.¹²¹ Irigaray calls this ‘phallogentrism’ in “Blind Spot of an Old Dream of Symmetry,” though she pairs it frequently

¹²⁰ Ibid., 81.

¹²¹ Ibid., 44.

with *logos*, so it is clear she refers to the phallogocentrism which abhors us from the Culture. Western metaphysics lacks not just a female symbolic or imaginary, but one of every body designated to behave in the mode of an agent-object. By this I mean, often by a simple substitution of the derivatives of ‘female’ in Irigaray’s rejection of ‘femininity’ in the Freudian sense, as well as in the motivations of an *écriture féminine*, the substitution of the queer body (agent-object as the non-gendered are) is often seamless. Yet, in queer phenomenology, the writing act is often co-opted for the use and exploitation of the other over the benefit of a gain for the self. Woman is always (still?) a family tool—even where the family is a psychical construction.

Freud deems in society a sickness. Even though his theories readily fit into a rationale for being, especially if you are a man, Irigaray is right in her rejection: **Every time Freud—and anyone else after him—falls back upon the unavoidable facts of anatomy, biology, or genetics, an important historical objective is thereby revealed and concealed. Or is it repressed? Or censored?**¹²² Destiny does not warrant any space for the queer body. As one operates as an agent-object for the support of a heterosexual male’s ulterior well-being, there really shouldn’t be a matter to explain why there is no destiny programmed into the queer body (and I reiterate: *woman is a queer body*)¹²³).

To go on with Irigaray for a moment: **woman’s symbolization of her beginning, of the specificity of her relationship to the origin, has always already been erased, or is it repressed? by the economy that man seeks to put in place in order to resolve the problem of his primary cause.**¹²⁴ What we see across Irigaray’s refutation is the consistency (or is it insistency?) with which it is confirmed that men have stolen away an aspect of being from the agent-object.

¹²² Ibid., 90.

¹²³ Every agent-object body is a queer body. Not every queer body is an agent-object. Some queer bodies have liberated subjects.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 60.

N.B. If that is the case, I would argue it is not here a matter of simply translating the word woman into queer. If woman has had her originary story taken from her, and I would suppose she has—the depictions of women, culturally, are ultimately the result of men or their permission, in a patronistic sense, only giving the *sense* of a liberated woman in order to mollify the female body into believing in some fashion of independence—then the queer body has had no history afforded to them at all. Not until recently had scientists generally agreed even in the cause of the most acceptably visible of the queer bodies: the homosexual male. And, in the scope of civil rights history, queers have achieved their rights last. Marriage equality is of this decade.

Why wouldn't Freud have anything to say about Rembrandt? Because there is no family scene [...] No violence. Only insistence and profundity. And to each, his or her profound destinal mission: becoming human. ¹²⁵ Human, which is to say a subject. Latched to the family, the woman is always *wife, mother, sister, daughter*, possessed, not possessing. And in the matrilineal systems of Freudian familial complexes, the woman is not just an object, but a hollowed out one: her organs removed by our sight.

We have been caught up in citation ever since we said the first words mama or papa. ¹²⁶ Our first citations, mythologized throughout much media around birth and maturation, are often those first utterances “mama” or “papa” or whatever variation might arise. We are mandated, programmed that is to say, by originary mythology, and that mythology is primarily of a designed agent-object mother, which plays out in all the threads we have touched upon above. What this does, then, is paradoxically unfold how assertions in citation can function both to support a liberational body writing, while they can equally act to detriment the body. Out of this arises the earlier element of the *corrective*, in which we can either confirm or deny an element of the text.

¹²⁵ Cixous, *Stigmata*, 4.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 135.

What we must remember, however, is how we still interact with the denied literature, often through the form of subversion and play, mock or satire.

6. (Re)Productions

The difference between a visual and written economy is that the visual is about perception whereas the written is about understanding. The painting is not as often a self-portrait as writing. And though an insistent gaze can warp writing extremely (offer a major misreading), there are far more corrective opportunities for addressing misinterpretation in a written economy than there are in a visual one.

Interesting, then, to turn to another. Since Bathsheba cannot paint her/self-portrait, someone who knows what it is to be as Bathsheba, which is to say in some way as agent-object. I want to know how a queer body views Bathsheba, how a woman might tell the same story, and I chance upon Artemesia Gentileschi. My friend Caleb once introduced me to a question: **Can you name five woman artists?**¹²⁷ Reading Gentileschi's biography on the internet, I come across an essay that mentions her, bearing much affection to Caleb's interrogative "Why have there been no great woman artists?"—an article of the same name comes under my eyes when I begin to examine Gentileschi's life. Though Artemisia's paintings are not radical and she herself came into the arts through family connection (her father was an artist), they do show Bathsheba in a slightly different light.

One must recall, before we approach her, the presence we find in the masculine images:

1). the call to action: this is the gesture which represents the external force come in to program the agent-object body. For David, this is the letter. In reading, this is the corrective force that implements the system.

¹²⁷ Betye Saar, Clarissa Sligh, Yoko Ono, Helen Frankenthaler, Sappho.

2.) the absence of David as progenitor of the fall: this is the denial of the masculine force at play which serves to repress or hide the fact that there is a preferred (male) body in society that erases the queer body. This is the shrug which suggests “what problem?”

3.) the body in reaction: this is Bathsheba responding to the call to action and either (further) becoming the agent-object or else finding this moment to be one of *disagreement*. The *body in reaction* is a moment in which the body may begin to enter into the process of liberation.

4.) the manipulator(s): this is David, or the masculine, the painters and producers who tell stories in such a way so that they are made or remain masculine.

Primarily somatic, we observe that in a visual economy, what we most connect with is our opinion of the body—quite simply, what we see.



Fig. 4: *Artemisia Gentileschi's Bathing Bathsheba, 1650.*¹²⁸

I notice that, though allowable because of its Biblical origin, the painting *Bathing Bathsheba's* nudity is actually concealed. Bathsheba's breasts and genitals are not exposed to the viewer. David, a viewer of Bathsheba just like us, though from another vantage, cannot see her as her back is to him, leaving her covered both in the front and the back from all (male) viewers. This expression acts as a reduction of Bathsheba's vulnerability, but noticeably it appears that Bathsheba is seen here,

¹²⁸ Artemisia Gentileschi, "Bathing Bathsheba" (Potsdam: New Palace, 1650).

witnessed, in the act that causes her fall. Gentileschi still captures the moment as a tragedy. David, far off on the balcony in the background, on the edge, almost slipping out of frame—if only he would. His presence reminds us that there is a story here beyond the bath. This is the call to action. He is the cause, and we see him sighting her. Bathsheba hasn't been negated by his gaze, she has no cognizance of his gaze at all. This is the bath, a moment of vanity. What we see change here is that the body behind her fall is made visible and this telling works to contextualize much of the story within the repressions the others continue to shroud it inside of.

In Bathsheba's vanity, her gaze is into a looking-glass. The reader is reminded of the logic for the mirror: the need to ensure (of) the self.¹²⁹ In looking into a mirror, one enters into a reading of their own body, a moment where the self can see themselves as the other might. Gentileschi is observing that what the story of Bathsheba is about is the subjugation of woman's body. Although, I caution we remember we have not forgotten that the other is informed and programmed out of the same system as us, though that reacts differently within them. Bathsheba, acknowledging that she is a subject, or at least a body, by looking at her gaze in the mirror, is inscribing her body with some purpose. While she may see her, and her name, she is also enacting a desire from others for her in which she performs beauty for the other to have a more pleasurable viewing experience. In cultivating her own appearance, we are reminded of David from far off, the spectre of her destruction, and how the mirror is the centerpiece. This telling finds woman considering her subject within his world.

Gentileschi reminds us of woman's posture in the expectation upon them, their cosmetic oppression. Beauty entails so many other costs, an economy in which women buy and buy in order to make men love them more, to make others love them more. But we know Bathsheba can afford

¹²⁹ Especially in an uncertain self.

it, just as those other Women have had such wealth. The gaze upon them was of wealth, or of the tier above the subordinate.

So, this is Bathsheba as she was before David interfered with her, (in anticipation of) his gesture. The call to action here has become interior, the mirror calling attention to Bathsheba's flawed agency, no longer the exterior letter. David here is indicted, or else not absented. Here, we must face him as cause, not Bathsheba, of her fall. This is putting him in our sight, when before we were voyeurs just like him. We, instead, are friendly with Bathsheba, painting her on her bath. A memorial of the time before the fall, a memento.

In the quest for agency, too, we see Gentilischi countering, thinking without, some of the thought-way which informs the other portraits of women. Bathsheba's body is acting, not in reaction. Since she knows not that David is there looking upon her, her looking in the mirror, though still presupposed by the expectation of beauty upon her, is not an improvement in appearance for him specifically (as a response to his letter). Rather, it is the upending of the beauty expectation: that because she is expected to become beautiful, to look a certain way, she is going to fall, to be submitted to his control. The result of the cultural values which oppress her is a furthering of her oppression. We aren't interpreting her gaze as someone acts upon her (after the reading of his letter). She is going about her life. Bathsheba, we remember, is a producer, this is the other half of her story.

The primary complication in all of this is when we arrive to that fourth point in our earlier list. While Gentilischi as *woman* only exists in the masculine so far as her agent-objectivity finds her distanced from her own subject, is she outside of the masculine? Liberated? I would argue that she is not, just as Nochlin, while not focusing at all on Gentilischi's work, suggests that familial ties destabilize the approach with which Gentilischi and noted historical examples of women in the arts, holistically enter into the arts. Because of her already established position of privilege and the

humanities. Her father was a noted painter, enabling her the technical training and the professional network to enter into a (at the time) highly skilled and stylistic field whereas artists once the abstract-expressionism of the past century and a half did not necessarily require the know-how to produce as much as the vision of what was to be produced.

Specifically, I have reason to pause at the fact that her father, too, was a painter. While there is no evidence of her father, Orazio, painting his own version of Bathsheba (though he visited David several times, and his battle with Goliath), in looking over catalogs of his work, I learn that father and daughter shared a workshop. In fact, some catalogs don't even bother with splitting the two painters and instead see them as one. In 2002, the Met held a joint exhibition of the two, and they shared, of course, a catalog. One entry in particular stands out, for the work *Cleopatra*.



Fig. 5: *Orazio or Artemisia Gentileschi's Cleopatra (date uncertain)*¹³⁰

In the Met catalog, the entry opens “This extraordinary image, possessing an almost shocking effect of carnality, stands at the heart of our understanding of Orazio’s art and that of his daughter, Artemisia. It has been ascribed to each.”¹³¹ In this assessment, Artemisia becomes an after-thought,

¹³⁰ Christiansen, Kieth and Judith Mann. *Orazio and Artemisia Gentileschi*. New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013. 98.

¹³¹ Ibid. 97. I should be fully honest in divulging that the entry goes on to provide not only an analysis of the painting, but also a thorough history and argumentation on the cataloguer’s behalf of why the painting is more likely Orazio’s.

despite the uncertain nature of its production. Somehow confirming aspects of the one or the other, in how it might confirm a bias or misogyny, however, we run into confusion.

If Orazio painted the image, a critic could readily find instances of sexism in the painting, or interpret how the narrative around Cleopatra, just as that around Bathsheba, is one of eroticism and desire for the masculine. Absent from the picture is the cause of Cleopatra's carnality. We expect there is a cause because, just as with Bathsheba, we cannot be satisfied with an agent-object body becoming itself.

But, if Artemesia painted it, then what do we do with the critique we have hypothetically levied upon Orazio? Do we forget it? Or can we turn it upon Artemesia, too? After all, we are addressing how Artemesia is a *manipulator* of the Bathsheba story, of a body. The technical skills which father could agreeably be understood to pass on his daughter are no differently passed along than the law of the father. In fact, painting becomes a form of the father's law, as careers often do for the male-line of a family and the expectation of a son to follow in a father's footsteps.¹³² The critique we could suggest against Orazio is transferable onto his agent-object daughter who could have conceived of the same image as the father. The two shared a workshop, only heightening the discrepancy in attribution.

The dating and attribution have been disputed in the past. Luckily, the argument I make here is only conceptual and relies on Orazio producing the painting. Many pieces by Artemisia prove challenging to correctly attribute because of her great fame, which led to much emulation and also enable her to run a significant workshop through which come many paintings misattributed to her.

¹³² Orazio had three sons, none of whom went on to become artists.



Fig. 6: Artemisia Gentileschi's *David and Bathsheba*, date uncertain.¹³³

Artemisia painted several versions of Bathsheba's bath. This other response, *David and Bathsheba*, leads us down the same paths. Whereas before she was not visibly nude, now she is even more covered. She hasn't yet bathed, the servant holding the foot-bath and the dry floor around it tell us. As a result, there is no mirror. Her hair hasn't been combed, her face unwashed. Perhaps this, too, finds Gentileschi looking in the mirror, reflecting, correcting. In this case, the correction would

¹³³ Artemisia Gentileschi, "David and Bathsheba" (Columbus: Columbus Museum of Art, n.d.)

be to remove the mirror, finding it oppresses Bathsheba rather than comments on the oppression Bathsheba faces.

We cannot be certain that the one picture predates the other, however. Because of this, we should erase the ‘corrective’ with which we assess the absented mirror in the second iteration. Instead, we come to the full realization that we can see Artemisia telling her version of the story across several frames. Putting them together, then, we come to a fuller picture.

What is defensible in a reading of the two together is that in both, Bathsheba is clearly unaware of David’s presence and the destiny which always precedes her. She is happily about her own task of hygiene. For Rembrandt, it was about how Bathsheba would respond. For Artemisia, it is a realization that Bathsheba cannot respond because she isn’t supposed to, she is to do what she is told to do. Her reaction isn’t really a reaction, it is a response. The removal of the letter puts the agency in Bathsheba’s hands and returns to her actions within the course of her own life.

The sad remainder of all this calculus, however, is that in the process of showing in Bathsheba a becoming subject, we have always already erased the rest of Bathsheba’s life. We don’t imagine other moments in her life or fill out the missing elements of her tale, but focus on what is already laid out in the narrative. The moment of the bath (the fall), for instance, which is the moment in which we have found her, over and over again, here. Whoever wrote the story didn’t think her life worth mentioning. Let us not forget that other Bathsheba’s, other denied agent-object bodies, have written their own story and brought themselves into existence . Self inscriptions surround us. **I will never know then but half of Bathsheba, the illumined part.**¹³⁴ Let us make that illumination the whole.

¹³⁴ Cixous, *Stigmata*, 11

Body, in Pieces

*She was not an inventive writer.
These tortured writings are hard to endure.
A thoroughly ruined enterprise.*

Richard Bridgman, from Gertrude Stein in Pieces

1. *Narrative of an Approach*

A. *Entrance with personal history/Questions*

Lew Welch is something like me. A poet (I prefer "writer" myself) and a graduate student, Welch wrote his thesis on Gertrude Stein, though his is wildly different from what follows below. Rather, Welch opted to write his on what Gertrude Stein meant to him. *How I Read Gertrude Stein* was one of the first critical volumes, if it can be called that, I ever read on Stein's work. And it has informed and touched my interactions with literary criticism on Stein—what I call "Stein Studies." How should we read Gertrude Stein? Welch put it this way: **I think that it is obvious that [Stein's] personality is such a dominant factor in the work that one cannot avoid it.**¹³⁵ But, what do poets know? The voice of Stein lives on in them, and yet, here I am, forced to reckon with critics.

I first came to read Gertrude Stein my freshman year in college. Pretentious and angry, I wanted big books that told long stories. Detailed, rich plots, characters popping up hundreds of pages into the story (Who is this? you ask, wondering how this relates back to what you just spent so much time reading. Not knowing you should say, ask: what. What is this? I ask you to hold on). I believed that a long book, unlike a short one, took more of an effort and had more of a payoff in the end. Naturally, I had to add *The Making of Americans* to my list. It comes up from time to time on lists of the hardest books to read. One will note it doesn't appear on the lists ranking the best books in English language literature.

¹³⁵ Lew Welch, *How I Read Gertrude Stein*. (San Francisco: Gray Fox Press, 1996) 83. This was a MA thesis.

My copy of *The Making of Americans* has proved most useful as a ward against my entomophobia, and there is a smear on the last page where it was used as a weapon. I still remember a second usage of the book—for the same reason. I woke up the first morning after I had moved into my first college apartment and saw a millipede crawling along my ceiling tiles. I threw the book at the ceiling and let it smack back down to the floor, millipede evicted wholly from my domicile.

But, I wasn't deterred by a book I couldn't then read. I took to Stein easily and readily. I ordered all her work, and spent most of my earnings from working at the university library on amassing her writings, almost all of which are out of print. This set me up for an enviable position. For the past five years, I have been steeped in Stein and scholarship on her, and my shelf of works by her (all of them), as well as works on her, mean that I never really need to go the library or use an inter-library loan system to access more on her work. As I write this now, for instance, revising how I originally started this chapter, I am looking at a copy of *Rescued Readings: A Reconstruction of Gertrude Stein's Difficult Texts*, by Elizabeth Fifer. I can write all over it because the book is mine.

When I ordered Fifer's volume, I was hoping it would clear the air for me about a major question encountered by any queer reader of Stein, and many heteronormative readers, of Stein: what the hell is her sexuality all about? This is the question which guided me in my first three years of study on Stein, and was the subject of my paper, "We hear her sentences: Reading Gertrude Stein's Matrimonial Autobiographies" which I presented at the 2016 American Literature Association conference on a panel entitled "New Directions in Stein Studies."¹³⁶ That paper is couched in a Freudian approach to fetish sexuality, examining how Stein's clearly anal erotic drives play out in her work. In it, I index her private love letters to Alice B. Toklas alongside her often erotic work—work

¹³⁶ A longer version of this paper is offered, as discussed in the introduction, as the "Prelude" to this thesis. I again direct readers wanting a fuller discussion of the nature of Stein's idiosyncratic sexuality, to that section for, while pertinent, such a discussion doesn't ideally mesh into the body of this project without altering the intent away from the mechanics of oppression and centering instead on the nature of her own writing and life.

characterized as so *hermetic* or *coded* that Stein could mask her sexual life and yet still write about it at length.¹³⁷

My goal, then, was to emerge as the holder of the key to the castle. I alone could explain to you what her sex life was. Over time, however, I came to see how wrong I was, and how misguided so many of my critical readings had been. Such a perspective held that I knew what Stein was thinking, and that I could put words, ideas, and actions into her mouth and puppeted by her body.

The question that started to arise—amidst my troubling at my own interpretation—was why Gertrude Stein is so rarely read by students or taught by teachers in the classroom. My whole time in university, one professor, Bruce Dick, taught Stein, having his students read *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and writing in Stein's style. An admirable assignment, although I wasn't in his class. But, on the other hand, taking a Modernist American literature class my sophomore year, I had a professor opt to teach Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* in lieu of any Stein text, while showing a slideshow that featured numerous works of art owned by Stein without mentioning her massive role in Modernism whatsoever. Even where she is taught, as by the director of this project Carl Eby, or even by Bruce Dick, the usage is not so as to center Stein as the subject of discussion, but to instead place her in tandem with others or as part of the broader movement of Modernism. This only highlights one aspect of her importance, while remaining away from the problematics of her regard by the critical apparatus. The approach is frustratingly incoherent.

¹³⁷ The terms *coded* and *hermetic* took hold sometime during Stein's life, perhaps from a critic or reviewer who, much like many in the literary establishment, puzzled over the lack of meaning in her work (for them). These terms come into more prominence through usages by Donald Sutherland (not the actor, but a literary critic), who was encouraged by Alice Toklas to use them (they were friends), as well as Virgil Thomson, also friendly with Stein, who uses them regularly throughout his introduction and editorial notes to *Bee Time Vine*. These usages seem to have encouraged their deployment rather than their interrogation by later scholars who opt to engage in the idea of a hermetic "castle" of writing that can be "unlocked" by readers and critics. The key, however, has never been found. As I said, I once thought I had a unifying field theory that encompassed all her writing, but I have now abandoned that idea as arrogant and masculine.

This frustration leads me to where I write from today—not about Stein’s work, but the oppression operations which form our interpretations. There must be a reason why, whereas Virginia Woolf lives on in the classroom, the body of Stein is rotten and dead throughout. Let us call it a mystery, a murder-mystery. Her favorite genre was the mystery novel. She loved Dashiell Hammet. Writing in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, she said

I never was interested in cross word puzzles or any kind of puzzles but I do like detective stories. I never try to guess who has done the crime and if I did I would be sure to guess wrong but I like somebody being dead and how it moves along and Dashiell Hammett was all that and more. So Alice Toklas rang up Mrs. Ehrman and said we wanted to meet Dashiell Hammet.¹³⁸

So, reading Stein is to linger in mystery. Not to mention you could read her own detective novel, lusciously entitled *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*, and never get a full grasp of who is the murderer. Is there a culprit? Instead, everything is ambiguous. She never wanted to guess the perpetrator, so she doesn’t write a killer into the story’s resolution, either.¹³⁹ And, lingering in mystery, the inevitable inclination of a student of literature is to read, read everything to find an answer. Which brings us to the critics, the onus of answering falling upon their Atlantean shoulders.

B. *Genealogy of the wrong*

Everywhere one turns—in most volumes on Stein since 1970—if you were to read the acknowledgments section, or these books in their entirety and not cherry-pick chapters or gloss an index (highlighting, perhaps, the oft inscrutable lack of research, or rather evidence-based practice engaged in by many critics), you will come across a name: Bridgman, Richard Bridgman. In the world of Stein criticism, his *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (1970) is of central importance.

¹³⁸ Gertrude Stein, *Everybody’s Autobiography*. (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1993) 2.

¹³⁹ Interestingly, critics have taken this lack as indicating a bad quality to *Blood on the Dining Room Floor*, but if one took that oft-quoted Toni Morrison maxim that says something along the lines of “write the book you want read that no one has written,” they’d likely come to a much different interpretation of why the book lacks some of the major features of the detective story.

His name comes up on the first page of Elizabeth Fifer's *Rescued Readings: Reconstructing Gertrude Stein's Difficult Texts* (1993), highlighting the pivotal stature he holds in the eyes of the Stein critic. According to Fifer, **The recovery [of Stein's] texts—I mean our ability to read them—begins with Richard Bridgman's *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*.**¹⁴⁰ I'd argue the exact opposite: that our *inability* to read Stein's work arises from Bridgman's incoherently homophobic, patriarchal, and heteronormative—I catch myself and substitute my preferred term *masculinate*—reading of Stein's idiosyncratic writing. If we are to “rescue” Stein, it will be by rescuing her from the critical genealogy which begins with Bridgman's work.

And, Fifer is not the only one who positions Bridgman in the central role. Harriet Chessman, who I offer as endeavoring towards promoting a more radically feminist reading of Stein's work (she deploys Chodorow, Cixous, Irigaray, and others to read Stein, yet collapses into obscurity in her Jungian constructs), emphasizes the new genealogy that Bridgman created with his singular work:

a body of criticism deciphering Stein's encodings, especially of lesbian experience, has emerged in the work of Catherine Stimpson, Elizabeth Fifer, and Lisa Ruddick, among others, who build upon and revise Richard Bridgman's earlier decodings in *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*.¹⁴¹

Critiquing Bridgman, Janice L. Doan, a minor Stein scholar, highlights his influence in her volume *Silence and Narrative* (1986) while pointing at the problems I want to here express:

Richard Bridgman [...] who is perhaps her most influential critic, reveals his resolve to take Stein seriously by claiming that he is more concerned with writing a “description of her works” than a description of her life, and, if nothing else, by the ambitious nature of his task, which is carefully to survey the whole of Stein's career. Yet, Bridgman can barely suppress his disdain either for Stein's prose or for what he

¹⁴⁰ Fifer, *Rescued Readings*, 13.

¹⁴¹ Harriet Chessman, *The Public is Invited to Dance: Representation, the Body, and Dialogue in Gertrude Stein* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1989), 11-12.

clearly perceives to be her excessive emotional life. Stein borders perilously close to hysteria in Bridgman's account of her early career.¹⁴²

It is Doane's line of assessment which initially struck me, not the very least because she seemed brave enough to attack the system of power which comes to bear in the broader mainstream of Stein Studies. *Silence and Narrative* works to refute much of the damaging criticism done by Bridgman, though it has hardly been referenced or cited, despite its ready affordability. In the major encyclopedic volume on Stein, produced by Bruce Kellner, the entry on Doane notes **The tone of the dissertation is not entirely absent from Doane's sensitive reading,**¹⁴³ Perhaps this accounts for her round dismissal by others. Not only is her's a dissertation, it is also published—through the same press as Kellner's research encyclopedia—removing it from simply being a dissertation. Now a book, the marking of tone is no different when read in Kellner than it when read as will occur later in Bridgman. By emphasizing her tone, Kellner refutes and removes authority from this woman, not the least of which to harm her scholasticism when it disputes his own opinion. The academic dismissal comes out of broader institutional problems that are ethical in nature, but are not exactly removed from the same issues I am here raising about scholarship in general. What we are seeing is a guarding of the gates of knowledge, even when the “knowledge” preserved is neither knowable nor of innate value when disconnected from the body that produced it (Stein).

In the same encyclopedic volume, just one page before his assessment of Doane, Kellner sadly postures Bridgman in an entirely alternative way, and I feel it important to include the annotated bibliographic entry in its entirety:

Like Donald Sutherland's book, accounted for elsewhere in this bibliography, Bridgman's study is essentially a biography of her work, but unlike Sutherland's *New Criticism*, ruling out any reference to Stein's personal life, Bridgman reads each of her compositions through her personal life and, equally significantly, chronologically. Perhaps the most valuable assessment of Stein's achievement thus far published, it is luminously informative, completely nonpartisan, and crucial to

¹⁴² Doane, *Silence and Narrative*, xvi-xvii. Copies on Amazon begin at \$3.50.

¹⁴³ Bruce Kellner, *A Gertrude Stein Companion: Content With the Example* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1988), 313.

preliminary reading. If subsequent Stein scholarship has ranged more widely in focusing on sexual politics, psychobiographical implications, deconstructionist theory, feminism, or linguistic explication, in each of these approaches as contradiction to genre, it has done so in part because of Bridgman's skillful work.¹⁴⁴

In personal interviews I conducted with Kellner starting twenty-three years after his book was published, I would learn that changing times and energies in our society had equally shifted Kellner's estimation of Bridgman to the negative, with Kellner no longer supporting Bridgman's line of attack against Stein, nor holding the belief that Stein was a self-hating lesbian. But, in Bridgman's stature and this genealogy, the damage was already done.

Ulla Dydo, who should be the preeminent Stein scholar (she spent forty years in the archives at Yale examining Stein's manuscripts and contributed vital information that has entirely changed how we understand Stein's compositional process), doesn't really bother to engage with Bridgman, for her project is so far afield of his constrained approach. She does point out some of the ridiculous contrivances present in his study. She writes in *The Language That Rises* (2003) that

Bridgman, after examining the notebooks for "Ada" and *A Novel of Thank You*, which also show the hand of Toklas, as do some other manuscripts, concludes, given the manuscript in two hands; and given the conclusion that the two people are one, the evidence is persuasive that this was a collaboration of symbolic significance, sealing the relationship between the two women. (211)

What confusion of writing and love! Surely union in love is central for Stein and Toklas, but union in writing, especially in Stein's manner, including the beginning of a new piece? The very thought is preposterous.¹⁴⁵

For Dydo, Bridgman's vision is clearly not empirical. For one, there is the matter of convenience in Bridgman's assumption: it works better for him to have this idea play out, while reader's of Dydo will see that his work ignores other information pertinent to readings of, particularly, *A Novel Of Thank You*. Bridgman emphasizes one minor aspect of the text. For another, it negates the dominant interests at play in those texts, which Dydo teases out by demonstrating that *A Novel Of*

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 312.

¹⁴⁵ Ulla Dydo, *Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises (1923-1934)* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 35.

Thank You was written—in part (the first half or so)—in conjunction with Stein’s noted *Composition as Explanation* and a third piece, “Natural Phenomena,” all navigating the specific anxieties surrounding Stein’s being asked and her agreeing to give a series of lectures at Oxford and Cambridge. This excision in Bridgman reveals the benefit of Dydo’s long archival research, while also shows the complications of limiting Stein to any one perspective or other, as the interlocking nature of Stein’s compositional practice proves much too intensive to pull any one particular piece out without another likely being needed in order to scaffold critical claims. By connecting *A Novel Of Thank You* in the way he does Bridgman actually presents an argument that does not hold up against reading the book itself, though he likely understood very few would read this of Stein’s works as it holds an extremely minor stature in her canon.¹⁴⁶

Linda Voris, who I attacked on the following grounds in the paper I presented at the 2016 American Literature Association Conference, roundly dismisses Dydo in a way that highlights the circuitous logic at hand here. Her volume, *The Construction of Sense in Gertrude Stein’s Landscape Writing* (2016), fundamentally misreads Dydo’s 750 page study (bafflingly long, and intensely researched):

Only Dydo has attempted the time-consuming practice of analyzing the texts of a given period in compositional sequence. While she observes that certain words and phrases recur such that “[o]ne text connects with another and spreads reading across more than one piece of this time,” Dydo does not recognize that Stein

¹⁴⁶ I want to take a moment now to discuss Stein’s relationship to print today. While *A Novel Of Thank You* is “minor in stature,” it remains in print thanks to the work of Dalkey Archive Press, who also continue to keep in print the minor novel *Lucy Church Amiably*, both of which are not in any conventional sense of expectation novels. While these books may hold critical importance, they are not representative of the Stein who appears in the “Prelude” chapter of this volume, and thus don’t paint a picture of that aspect of her career. Dalkey also maintains publication of *The Making of Americans*. In addition, Yale has maintained printing, starting in the early 2010s, of *Ida* and *Stanzas in Meditation*. These last three are significant volumes. Of course, *Tender Buttons*, *Three Lives*, and her famed *Autobiography* have been steady mainstays to the print industry. In addition, there are a handful of anthologies, as well as continued printing of her various memoirs. Dover includes *How To Write* and *Picasso*, and *The Geographical History Of America* as well as *Lectures in America* and *Narration* are all in print. But, this leaves the fact that, despite such a rich publication market, seemingly, today, about fifty percent of Stein’s work, mostly published in the 1950s as a provision in her will in what was called *The Yale Edition of the Previously Unpublished Works of Gertrude Stein*, remains out of print. These are her most important pieces, but were unread largely because they were priced prohibitively and went into libraries primarily. They have faded away and were not heavily studied and especially not widely read by public readers. As a result, the reading public is left with an image of Stein heavily slanted towards her earliest and latest writings, leaving about fifteen years of her most intensely personal writing unaccounted for except through second-hand sources. This makes it difficult for readers to then assess the veracity of critical claims about these hard to find pieces.

sustains a compositional task, but instead seeks to identify the biographical context that informs successive texts.¹⁴⁷

Voris' complaint is not couched in scholarly evidence. It is merely that the book Dydo produced actively works against the ideas in Voris' work, which my conference paper roundly proved were selectively deployed in order to construct an artificial analysis which does not hold up to scrutiny and textual evidence.

Elsewhere in Voris' volume, we see her erratic approach when she claims that, despite the fact that Stein copied passages from love notes into published works (something Voris roundly denied¹⁴⁸ to me in conversation and in her book despite the obvious evidence of such between the piece "Vacation in Brittany" and a love note in the epistolary collection *Baby Precious Always Shines*), **If the word "cow" refers to excrement or defecation in some of the love notes, we have no license to assert that this is a fixed meaning [...] and that the word will have the same meaning in a text intended for publication.**¹⁴⁹ What happens when the same word appears in the same phrase, in the same long passage, in a love note and in a published work? Her case falls apart, as do many of these critics when examined with a scrutinizing eye and not, instead, the eye of a critic hoping to merely cite a text and move on. Let me suggest, then, that part of the problem here is an ethics of research: how much expectation falls upon the critic to cite rather than argue their own new perspective? One can engage in collective masturbations day in and day out, but it is much more difficult to be original. This is where Dydo's line of attack against Bridgman, as metonymic of the Steinian critical apparatus, does not do the work required to fully understand. I would point out that this comes down, as well, to a system of perspectives we see emerge in which

¹⁴⁷ Voris, *The Composition of Sense*, xxii.

¹⁴⁸ Present in the "Prelude," the particular pages in question are a paragraph on page 72 of *Reflection on the Atomic Bomb* and page 79 of *Baby Precious Always Shines*.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 201.

the critic co-opts the writer and text to layout their own understanding to another rather than approach the writer and text as something they themselves are trying to understand.

And, the most egregious of these instances, is the appearance in 2019 of Chris Coffman's *Gertrude Stein's Transmasculinity*. Rooted, as the title suggests, in a visioning of Stein within a heterosexual matrix, this volume fulfills Bridgman's project of rendering Stein's body as heterosexually as possible by finding a trans- scholar arguing, agent-objectively, this perspective without any critical engagement in the possibility of an underlying rationale behind a performative heterosexual schema (as portrayed in "Prelude"). Coffman makes no outright gesture at Bridgman's project, although obviously his is a follow-up of the work already undertaken by the subject of our study. I direct readers to this volume as a realization of Bridgman's work, but also point out how Coffman several times in endnotes gestures at looking to Bridgman for **critiques of Stein's masculine identification similar to DeKoven's, see Benstock, *Women [of the Left Bank]*; Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*; Doane, *Silence and Narrative*.**¹⁵⁰ Coffman, as we see so many scholars do, selectively argues that Bridgman somehow critiques Stein's supposed masculinity, when in actuality Bridgman is the originator of the argument that Stein engaged in masculine actualization of her lesbian experience.

Marianne DeKoven is clearest in her estimation of Bridgman, so we will conclude with her. In her *A Different Language: Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (1983), DeKoven summarizes his role with these lines:

Of recent books on Stein, Richard Bridgman's *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* has been most influential. Its influence is not surprising: his is the first exhaustive, detailed, chronological study of all of Stein's work; he writes with great insight, care, and authority, and his psychobiographical approach is persuasively implemented.¹⁵¹

¹⁵⁰ Chris Coffman, *Gertrude Stein's Transmasculinity*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 99.

¹⁵¹ Marianne Dekoven, *A Different Language: Reading Gertrude Stein's Experimental Writing* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), xxii-xxiii.

I cannot wait to show you how wrong DeKoven is, not the very least because she herself chooses to ignore the numerous critical studies, several of which were produced by women, which preceded Bridgman's work (for instance, Allegra Stewart's Jungian reading of Stein's corpus: *Gertrude Stein and the Present*, published in 1966 by Harvard University Press). As I hope to demonstrate, Bridgman lacks the care and authority essential to approaching this writer, though the critical apparatus, as it is structured, continually props his work up with reverence and citation.

C. *Introit frucifer*

When Richard Bridgman released *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* through Oxford University Press, I can only imagine that he likely knew that the volume would prove highly influential. This I believe for a number of reasons.

On the one hand, criticism at this time was stodgy, male-driven, and still in America rang of the same back-rooms of cigar-smoking that Allen Tate and Edmund Wilson engaged in. If a man spoke, his voice was that of an untestable authority, and not of a questioning interpreter, or, better yet, a stumbling reader trying to make things clear. We should be reticent to even qualify much of this early criticism as even *interpretation*, for there is not much by way of interpreting when what you say becomes a sort of law. Interpretations are all opinions, they are not the factual meanings the text does itself hold, they are your readerly responses or understandings. If I write a poem about a daffodil, and you say it is about death, you are not interpreting the poem differently, you are constructing a myth of interpretation surrounding your own misreading. It is on those terms that Bridgman and all these critics, and many today, are working about a masturbatory systematic that is a closed circle in which the critic is simply talking to the other critic, free of any former notion of social responsibility to the outside community.

There is also that, as a man, Bridgman comes across as one convicted of his own opinions—unswayable by the alternative interpretations. It is not simply that every man is culpable of this, but, much more, going back to “Daughter of the Oath,” the problematic of the superficial.

I refuse to acknowledge that the time period in which scholars such as Bridgman write is in part complicit without first hearing how society acknowledges that such a consideration is itself refusing the brunt of historical evidence that, in tandem with the abuse and oppression faced by minority groups, so were there always abolitionists, always queer activists, and always feminists speaking loudly enough to be entered into the historical register. Consider, for instance, how we read Sappho today. Michael Field, in another light, or Oscar Wilde. George Eliot and Hannah Crafts are other positive examples, while Susan B. Anthony and Ida B. Wells precede the mainstream academic feminism which we often constrain ourselves around in our readings of feminist trajectories more broadly. Some have long been included in the canon, while others had to be reintroduced in a conversation that took years, though has now been seemingly forgotten. White American critics—primarily male, though I must emphasize that agent-object women proliferate the discourse of what is now known as “white-feminism”¹⁵²—be grudge any redressment of their violent wrongs as a result of their white fragility.

If a male critic seeks to posit the world-logic as the masculine system which he deploys for his self-preservation, then he negates the liberational endeavors of the queer body that he examines. Rather, as we will see with William Gass, a sympathetic or empathetic lens can be adopted in order to engage in the work from the posture of the writer themselves. This is the project white non-queer men must engage in, and, rather than cite examples of other projects which do this, I offer this project in and of itself, alongside my life-work, as evidence in the conversation we are having.

¹⁵² *Agent-objectivity* is not an attack on the agent-object when expressed, but a consideration of the reasons for the perspectives taken by those bodies which often distance or negate their rights or abilities.

The critic must not risk that they position themselves as the superior body over the writer for they then run the risk of becoming the subject of their study. Consider this within yourself as an exercise in self-reflection: Your opinion is only effective insofar as you are relating evidence. Voris, for instance, reads much like Bridgman because all of her statements are articulated in such a way as to preserve the fragile platform of her argument. Bridgman becomes what we could refer to as an *authority-male* as compared to an *ally-male*, refusing to relate to the queer and instead maintaining his toxifying heteronormativity which then pervades his argumentation. And Voris takes on the subordinate position, in being programmed by his language (in this instance, the mechanic of his oppression), becomes his agent-object follower. Even where her work actively harms, as his does, in this following, the queer community and herself (Voris happens to be lesbian). Bridgman's project isn't simply nefarious towards Stein, it is also one that entraps into his way of thinking the critics that follow, complicating our ability to simply dismiss them all without also pointing out that the reasoning behind their argumentation is their own enslavement to the masculine thoughtway contained therein.

I myself share this predilection toward critical malfeasance. For instance, just last week I found myself criticizing a friend's inability to read Shirley Jackson's "The Summer People" as being about the potential for body-snatching and the doppelganger— in the framework of my own interpretation—before I stepped back inside my mind to realize that, as a matter of fact, I was doing just the same. Listening, instead, I was able to realize how reading literature is seen as an interpretive act and that there are multiple viable approaches that allow us a rich array of responses. Criticism is not interpretation. What is not under debate is the biographical details of an author's life, and the autobiographical nature of their writing.

Further, her idiosyncrasy warrants we refuse the masculine practice of literary theory and instead build a new framework of understanding. It is this that becomes her radical liberational

philosophy. We simply cannot deploy the same mechanism of reading onto her work as we map over books such as *An American Tragedy* or *Black Beauty*. Let us recall Welch's assertion that Stein's personality is so dominant over her work one can only read it as obvious. Voris argues that we cannot index Stein's personal life, in part because Bridgman already has. For her, removed from the concerns at hand about queer subjectivity because hers is an agent-object body, this discussion is satisfactory, although it seems unfair even to herself. As a result, Welch's assertion has been downplayed in such a way as to say that in terms of Stein's personal life, which Welch knew very little about due to lacking now available documents, *we already know it*. And we know it through Bridgman. It is enough to see the above genealogy to know which figures are right and which ones are wrong, without this becoming a matter, simply, of my own tastes.

D. *Exeunt frucifer*

But, Bridgman had other reasons to believe his book would prove lastingly useful. His was a study unlike any preceding one. Specifically, no one had undertaken to read all of Gertrude Stein's writing, roughly in chronological order, and examine her stylistic and aesthetic development through her career. While chronological studies of this sort are in no way unfamiliar to those steeped in literary theory—seminars and books such as Michel Fabre's *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* and Susan Howe's *My Emily Dickinson*, albeit from polarly opposed perspectives, are frequently organized in some semblance of this fashion—a work of this size, considering the over 13,000 pages Stein produced, is a feat in and of itself. I agree with DeKoven, at the very least, that readers can be impressed by Bridgman's fortitude. For of that there can be no doubt.

And *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* certainly is an admirable effort. Unfolding over three sections and beginning with her youth, Bridgman provides a more biographical lens in the first part than for the subsequent two parts. Few pieces Bridgman discusses had been critically assessed nor even appreciated prior, and few have been dealt with to any similar extent since. Even where Bridgman is

sparse in his analysis, as with, say, a piece I have long been interested in called “A Sonatina Followed By Another,” his is often the only moment of critical interaction with appendages of Stein’s bloated corpus. This assists his ready inclusion in the canon of Stein Studies because, when considering the impetus to cite and reference other academics, his is often the only place to go for any statement on much of Stein’s oeuvre.

All praise aside, however, critical influence is only so important insofar as laudation goes. Critical respect is a marker just as readily of the critic’s superiority (an entrenchment of the capitalist regime that replicates the masculine project) over us as it is an ethical communicative strategy. And Bridgman poses a stern series of questions. His is a homophobic, masculine, and aggressive voice that transfuses the volume and renders it riddled with bias. Doane gestures at this, but no one has yet sat back to really address what is at play in Bridgman’s volume. At one point, for instance, writing of Stein’s romantic poetry, written predominantly privately for Alice Toklas and in an intimate language indexed more cogently between them, Bridgman laments how her pieces are **kittenishly erotic**.¹⁵³

Belittling as he can be, his intention is relatively clear when assessed from a queer platform. His design is to paint Gertrude Stein, her lesbianism, and her life in such a way as to be read and understood in non-queer terms. Whether or not this is directly intentional is less important than the previously proven mechanics through which such an action occurs. Rather than advocate for the truth or read Stein ethically, the point remains that Bridgman is in denial of the *autobiographics*¹⁵⁴ of Stein’s work. This, too, helps position him against such readers as Gass and Meyer, who readily invite themselves into Stein’s world rather than bring Stein into their world. One explanation for this

¹⁵³ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 151.

¹⁵⁴ I borrow this term from Leigh Gilmore, who writes that she uses it because “Autobiographics gives initial conceptual precedence to positioning the subject, to recognizing the shifting sands of identity on which theories of autobiography build, and to describing ‘identity’ and the networks of identification.” Gilmore, Leigh. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Literary Representation*. (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1994) 42.

problematic can be found in the work of Monique Wittig, who points out in her essay “Point of View: Universal or Particular” (which continues themes found in her work “The Trojan Horse”) that:

Since Proust, the subject has never been the same, for throughout *Remembrance of Things Past* he made the “homosexual” the axis of categorization from which to universalize. The minority subject is not self-centered as is the straight subject. Its extension into space could be described as being like Pascal’s circle, whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere.¹⁵⁵

Instead, writers who are queer bodies have to follow Proust’s impetus towards positioning their worldview as the universal (from which they write). **A text by a minority writer is effective only if it succeeds in making the minority point of view universal, only if it is an important literary text.**¹⁵⁶ As Wittig suggests, then, we must see that the queer writer must be read as positing themselves, as Stein certainly did, as queer with the minority in their mind being the heteronormative/non-queer. Such a project requires a reading entirely different from Bridgman’s, though I ask to defer that discussion until we arrive at “Sexion” below.

The danger of Bridgman’s supposition is not just a misreading of Stein’s own writing project, but also comes through the channeling of Bridgman performed by critics—as shown above. In his wake, critics demonstrate through their positive citations of him their preference towards continuing and supporting his line of attack rather than interrogating his disparagement of Stein. His work consistently proves to be more influential than that of any other scholar in the field, despite the numerous argumentative problems it is riddled with. This is scholarly ignorance, or, even worse, scholastic malpractice, and it is this which we can gesture towards as the culprit in the murder of Stein’s body of work.

¹⁵⁵ Wittig, *The Straight Mind*, 61-2.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 64.

Just the page before he belittles her affections, Bridgman can be overheard stipulating that **Gertrude Stein thought of her relationship with Alice Toklas in heterosexual terms.**¹⁵⁷ The problem we have here is man speaking for woman, *speaking for her*. **Man-father will be the guarantor of the *systems of representation*.**¹⁵⁸ He will determine who she was and what her body will become. Let us see how a life (veiled as legacy) is made non-queer.

2. *Inborn Flaw*

A. *Structuration*

The fundamental problem in any conversation is a lack of understanding. When we have failures in communication, they stem from either our incorrect interpretation of others, or else our refusal to come around to their method of thinking. We often are so staunchly entrenched within our worldview in so deep a commitment that we cannot regard others. The lenses through which the masculine see so blind them to the fact that others hold different ocular perspectives informing their own psychical responses to the world and life around them. It isn't that they ignore that others see differently as much as they intend that everyone see in Their way, refusing *alterior*¹⁵⁹ conceptions. Queer bodies are allied with each other in matrilineal ways that allow us queer individuals to more readily regard each other just as we have to regard, engage, and interact with the masculine thought-ways dominant in our time. We are constantly expected to reckon with our other, which is the dominant heteronormative. But the dominant side, in this expectation, doesn't realize the reverse is expected also. In the academic system and position of power he holds, Bridgman has no right to be ignorant in light of his responsibility—shared with all majority bodies—to recognize and work to understand minority bodies.

¹⁵⁷ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 150.

¹⁵⁸ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 96.

¹⁵⁹ A portmanteau of *alterity* and *ulterior*.

This underlying problem, it seems, is the case too with our man Bridgman, whose very name points to his weakness and the potential for resolution. According to him, Stein's early work is indicative of what can only be inferred as an autistic (in the classical sense of the word) approach to writing. Bridgman carefully reads the themes Stein wrote while a student Radcliffe College (what became the Harvard Annex)—which she attended prior to her medical training at Johns Hopkins University—to establish a schema for approaching all her idiosyncratic writing. **The themes that she submitted to the Harvard composition course, English 22, show that her problems were manifold. They affected her spelling, her syntax, her tone, and her logic, and she was never entirely cured of them.**¹⁶⁰

For the authority-male, these idiosyncrasies are the “problems.” They are structural and linked to non-adherence to their presumed correct and superior masculine literary tradition. They represent the totems of literary development that are ascribed to a narratology which is ultimately both patriarchal and monolithic in the near-universal engagement with this model by the writing populace at large. Whereas Stein's work embodies a move away from conventional or classical description, as is quite evident in her *Tender Buttons* where objects and their descriptions are dislocated from each other in order to destabilize communicative practices encouraged by logic-defining habits, Bridgman abusively mis-places her in that classical mode.

Spelling, syntax, tone, logic: these categories move us from appearance—the formations and markings of the sentence and text as they are displayed on the geographical surface of the page—into emotion and how things are said, the nuance of their sound, and finally into thinking and how one's perspective is their logos.

¹⁶⁰ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 5.

<u>Literary Structure</u>	<u>Psychological Aspect</u>
Spelling/Syntax	Appearance
Tone	Emotion
Logic	Thought/Perspective

Fig. 7: Charting Bridgman's narratological aspects with their psychodynamic counterparts.

By linking spelling and syntax to appearance, Stein's writing (and her pages themselves) comes across as *wrong*, echoing a sentiment of Bridgman's in which he avers that Stein's writing is **unmistakably seeking to validate her own condition**.¹⁶¹ "Condition" connotes an interior wrongness which inevitably means that the other (in this case, woman) will always appear as odd or querulous when any apparent indicator of her femininity is present.¹⁶² Her condition and her abnormal prose mark her as different, other, and less than: not a desired commodity to be produced, thus denied is she from the means of attainment.¹⁶³ Bridgman may have fine motivations to revitalize interest in Stein's work, but his authoritarian approach to her linguistic practices warps our perception of her and constrains her work in a way that debilitates her reception permanently. *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* ultimately imprisoned the critic around his structures and not hers.

But, Bridgman's assertion of error in Stein's syntax is absolutely also antithetical to the way in which William Gass, a far more sympathetic reader of her writing, approaches Steinian syntax. In his introduction to *The Making of Americans*, Stein's earliest work of career fiction (it was begun as early as 1895), Gass suggests two iterations of structural analysis of the complex sentences which dominate that long work. Taking the sentence **A man in his living has many things inside**

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 37.

¹⁶² I reserve the right to suggest that, while an apparent indicator will reveal a woman as being woman (most of the time), that when examined side by side, one can't necessarily indicate the gendered identity of the writer at all. In this way, text can't be gendered, or rather shouldn't be. Empirical evidence in this regard is wanting.

¹⁶³ Attainment being the resultant value-based commodities received from successful production. These are goods, markers of wealth, and masculine to the core in how they are designed around external articulations of status.

him,¹⁶⁴ Gass first creates what he calls a *spindle diagram*, as he says **So named because we can run our eye, the way one used to be able to thrust a knitting needle through holes punched in IBM cards, counting the common points of verbal return to see how the sentence revolves.**¹⁶⁵

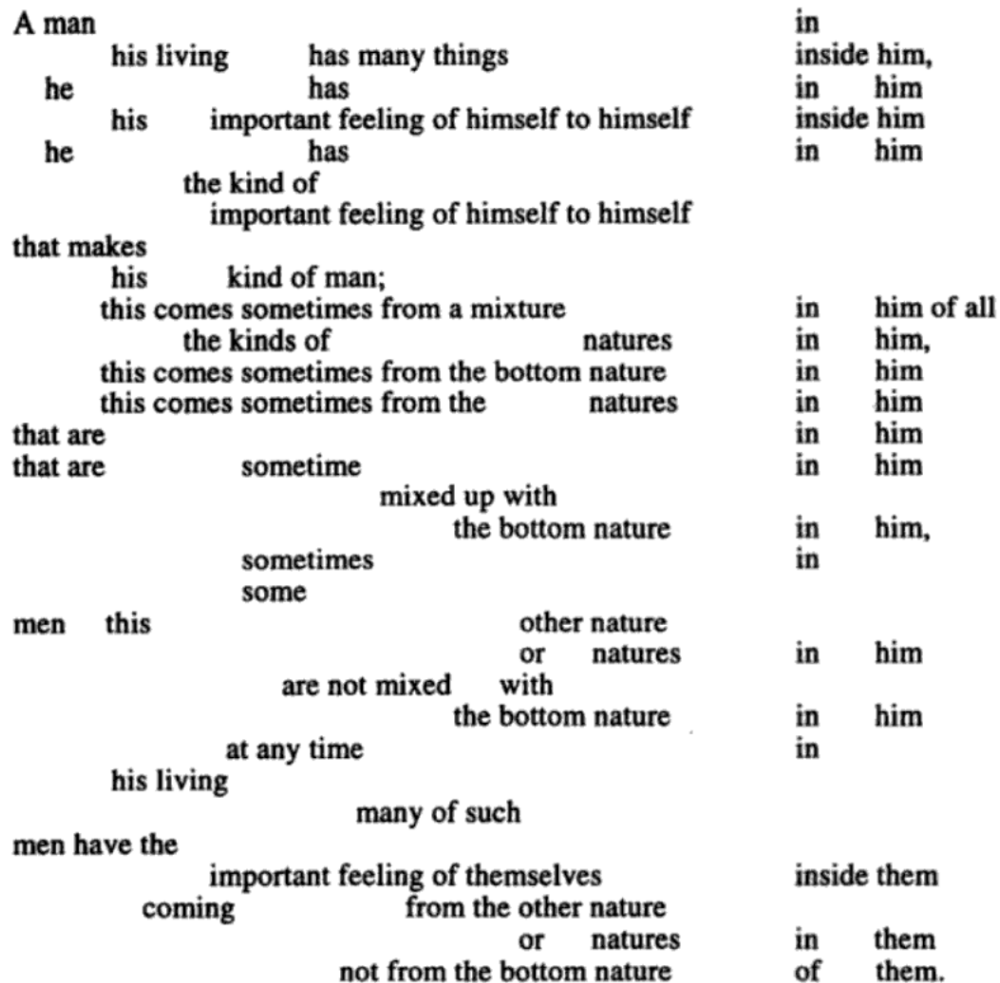


Fig. 8: William Gass' "Spindle Diagram" for a sentence in *The Making of Americans*.¹⁶⁶

Such an innovative diagrammatic interpretation reacts against Bridgman's critical assumption that her syntax is merely flawed by showing how suggestive, open, and innovative the prose is. Even ahead of its time, or *avant garde*, one could say. Innovation is accepted over critique. This goes all the

¹⁶⁴ Stein, *The Making of Americans*, viii.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, ix.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, x.

way back to the core problem of academics, especially within Literary Criticism. The base of critique is to take to task, to take apart. It is far easier to reject or refuse an idea or facet of an author's work than it is to praise it and highlight why it is important that the author spoke that way. In this instance, we see Bridgman setting himself up for further failure also in that he closes the door on later credibility when he praises her developing stylistics. Bridgman opts to maintain that there is an inborn flaw in Stein that never leaves her her entire career. Gass, meanwhile, again enables a further distinct critique of Bridgman when he deploys the concept of the sentence diagram (one of Stein's favorite hobbies). **We could easily draw up a phrase diagram.**¹⁶⁷

Gass concludes that, rather than turning on syntactical flaws, Stein's work actively engages in syntax, romps in it, in order to develop its *harmonices mundi*.

Assonance, consonance, rhyme, rhythm, religion, phrase placement, the movement of singulars to plurals, the elaborate colloquial vagueness of reference, the careful distinctions which underlie the meaning, are used together to give emotional weight to the journey.¹⁶⁸

Bridgman's assertion is another of selective reading, a charge I do not levy lightly. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein wrote ecstatically of her use of language:

you see I feel with my eyes and it does not make any difference to me what language I hear, I don't hear a language, I hear tones of voices and rhythms, but with my eyes I see words and sentences and there is for me only one language and that is english.¹⁶⁹

Tone, equated to emotion, gets at the heart of expressive means. One's tone is the perceived way in which the reader understands the writer to be speaking. For a man, this can be especially problematizing when, for instance, one assumes that a woman is being *bossy* or *bitchy*, words that are distinctly applied as violence against women and not as effectively against men. In the same way that Joe Biden was critiqued as racist for complimenting the *articulate* senator Barack Obama, so do these

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., xi.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., x.

¹⁶⁹ Gertrude Stein, *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* (New York: Vintage, 1990), 70.

tones indicate thought-ways of oppression. Emotion will be returned to as we reflect below upon the specific interplay of lesbianism, prose, and self-perception.

While Bridgman busies himself with finding serious errors in Stein's tone, Steven Meyer, who first undertook to study Stein's writing as it corresponds to her heavy engagement with science throughout her life—Stein having originally trained to be a doctor as well as having had her first two publications as technical papers in psychological reviews—finds in Stein's tonality aspects of what Gass admired in her syntax. Specifically relating Stein to Alfred North Whitehead, with whom she was friendly, Meyer states that:

A common interest in organic mechanisms, and therefore in creativity (as they understood it), led Stein and Whitehead to an appreciation of the essential role of the irregular, aperiodic rhythms in life. In turn, each came to believe that the actual world, "nature alive," was ultimately a function of "vibratory existence."¹⁷⁰

Bridgman, who will over time and time again that Stein was minimally influenced by her reading here fails to acknowledge the strength of Stein's scientific friendships—one cannot take a moment but to wonder if longstanding rejections of women from the scientific community are not also at play in this situation, which they most definitely were during Stein's own scientific training.¹⁷¹ In this instance, Stein's association with Whitehead enabled her to receive a teaching which was a reading, and participate in his and her own philosophical development. Certainly, *these* influences made their way into her work, and clearly in this area we can see how effectively her tone captured her belief in such an approach to world-being.

Lastly, there is Bridgman's critique of logic. The center of thought, logic perpetuates a certain idealized philosophical approach to the order of knowledge. For Irigaray, it is the linchpin of the male project:

The culture that he has elaborated thanks to the logos, thanks to a language obeying a certain logic, seeks to construct a closed world at his disposal: to shelter himself, to

¹⁷⁰ Steven Meyer, *Irresistible Dictation* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2003), 201.

¹⁷¹ Linda Wagner-Martin discusses this heavily in her biography *Favored Strangers: Gertrude Stein and her Family* (1995).

communicate with those who are the same as himself, to act as a basis or an instrument so that he can continue building a world of his own starting from pre-existing or living being(s).¹⁷²

In the male project, as Irigaray frames it, preservation is the ultimate goal. An attack upon this *closed world* must be met with a stern response. The function of Bridgman's logic is to guarantee masculine preservation, just as this schematized approach to writing preserves a patriarchal literature. And the schema Bridgman articulates is decidedly one in which the language obeys only a certain logic.

Applied as narratology, Stein's work acknowledges these masculine schema when she writes in *A Novel of Thank You*, **A novel makes a man.**¹⁷³ Why does Bridgman spend so much time on his arrogant redundancies when Stein goes out of her way to undo them?

B. *Finding her operation*

Readers can see in a variety of locations across Stein's body of writing the ways in which she constantly insists upon upending or destroying the rhetoric and syntax of conventional literary practice. *Tender Buttons* is deployed by mainstream literary practitioners as the primary example of this, although *The Making of Americans* has been touted as representative of the wider trajectory of women writing against masculine constraints of continuous forward progressing plotted narratives (Stein begins her "continuous present" here). But it helps to see Stein at her most extreme in order to recognize Bridgman's fallacy. Take this page from Stein's "We Came. A History":

¹⁷² Irigaray, *Speculum*, 11.

¹⁷³ Gertrude Stein, *A Novel Of Thank You*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New Haven: Yale, 1957), 30.

to do with it.=It is the only reason for it not being made better.
 =The change from all of it is well enough.=They have it=As they
 like=Which they regulate.=IX=Acrobacy fools them.=X=Just
 when they went=They knew as well=As if it was=Their wish to
 go=In which in case=They were as often=Left alone with it=
 As it might be=Too much coming there=Without its being said=
 Jackets are necessary here=In a little while=Very often a veil=
 Is what they know=When they hear it=In the meanwhile too=
 It is actually read=By the time only=In case of separation=Two
 have to order=All that they need=May be she will=But in and
 about=It is not likely=Which she means.=XI=Autobiography
 ought to=Have made doors=They will scare them=XII=By their
 help=It is usual=To succeed nicely=Without their help=Which
 they give=As it is=Ought to go=They must and=Will have what-
 ever=They want here=By the time=They are willing=To allow
 banking=Which have helped them.=XIII=It is easy to see that
 they move differently=XIV=I called it audience and then frame
 or form but the question is not that it is not composition it is not
 that it is beginning and middle and ending without that anybody
 can end and begin and the middle is easier than anything.=XV=I
 am not busy=When he is neglected=This is not often=Because
 she is there=XVI=Ours are made for them=They will ask for it
 =They need two rests for it=Because it is helped more than they
 like by it=Because in searching for doves=Doves are named pig-
 cons by butter.=Do not be blamed for failure=Ask them are they
 ready=But is it wise to=Because it may annoy them=Press them
 to remain here=They will like it if they stay=Little by little it will
 help=Not to be restless like that=He wants his dinner=After it is
 over he will be=Just as restless=This is why they never pay any
 attention to what he does.=They must call him anyway.=XVII=I
 do not think it would do=To bathe him on a Sunday=This is the
 reason=It is easy to be quiet=And to give it as a reason=For com-
 ing to-day=Florence is made to George=Now listen to that.=It
 does surprise you=Florence is not yet married to George but they
 have had the dinner of betrothal which was later than noon and
 a good deal of bother.=The first of September Florence is to be
 married to George.=XVIII=Any one believes that things equal to
 the same thing are equal to each other. Any little way that is like
 a pleasure.=Just why they came=Is the same way=In which they
 waited=In liking having bought it=Which made them go=They
 went away at once.=XIX=It is easy to keep count.=One two three
 all out but she.=It is easy to keep count and make a mistake.=

Fig. 9: Page from Stein's "We Came. A History"¹⁷⁴

Even turning to another piece, we can see her humorous approach to this deconstruction of the habit of convention. In another piece contained in the volume in which "We Came. A History," appears, and I do acknowledge that this volume had yet to be printed at the time of Bridgman's study (though as a scholar in the archive, and having claimed to read "all of her writing" this caveat

¹⁷⁴ Gertrude Stein, *Reflection on the Atomic Bomb*, ed. Robert Bartlett Haas (Los Angeles: Black Sparrow Press, 1975), 169.

is not without its own caveat that such caveat is meaningless to Bridgman, who acknowledges the piece “Five Words in a Line” in his book), “Five Words in a Line,” we see the emphasis on pure description. **Five words in a line,**¹⁷⁵ Stein writes, and the sentence is self-contained from the rest of the piece, with this commencing line offset from the rest of the body. Here, the sentence describes itself as what it is, simply words in an order. There are five words in the sentence, and it is as it is saying it is. This is what Stein, throughout her life, would call “pure description.” It is this *pure description* which Bridgman cannot see as a movement outside of practicable conventionality.

C. Convention and its discontents/ educational experience of the woman

It is Bridgman’s fixation upon Stein’s juvenalia that develops this concern towards right and wrong aspects of convention. *The Radcliffe Themes*, edited by Rosalind S. Miller, represent the basis out of which Bridgman formulates the above schema, and also ground his reading of Stein’s later work. Miller provides excellent synoptic rendering of Stein’s themes, including editorial remarks (down to the color of the pen used by her instructor, William Vaughn Moody), but also a lengthy introduction that reads the themes alongside the development of later works by Stein. This becomes especially important in tracking how certain ideas, such as anecdotes in *Ida*, or motifs of Baltimore that are deployed in *Three Lives*, make their way into Stein’s later work.

What happens if we do engage in the masculine apparatus that Bridgman lays out? In the following sequence, I want to take a step back and approach Bridgman at his own thinking, and see if his work holds up. The inevitable conclusion is that such thought does not hold up. In this section, then, I want to reckon with the underlying idea Bridgman lays out in the opening biographical section of *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* that Stein failed to be properly educated, or learn, the correct methodology of putting her own ideas down on paper—basically that she didn’t come into the fold of what is the masculine instruction which she was participant in. This issue arises from

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 160.

Stein's presence in the classroom, which I believe is already rife with contingent issues of sexism in the educational sphere. Bridgman then must address the sexism of the classroom as a possible root of why someone, especially a woman, might react against what they are taught. I intend this section not to be taken as much as my own line of thinking as much as another refutation of Bridgman's project at large.

Bridgman's argument surrounding Stein's educational process requires the following elaboration in order to make the point that, by attempting to work at the notion that Stein *failed to be normal* early on, despite access to normalcy through her education, she rather had never held such normalcy in her sights. This then collapses the later discussion Bridgman, and any reputable Stein scholar, makes when discussing Stein's late struggles at audience and private writing arising from the publication of her immensely popular *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. That publication fractured her mentally as a writer and it is there that we can see Stein attempting to engage with some measure of "normative" expression, albeit for expediency in that she had her suspicions such a volume would be quite popular.

It seems that the potential for a learning curve accounting for the disadvantaged woman's progress through school (though readers of Stein should be familiar enough with her later writing that they know she won't, as Bridgman so desires, 'normalize'), especially considering the unequal approach to education faced by women of the time—even if we do appreciate Stein's upper-middle class upbringing—could explain away the abnormalities and aberrations that Bridgman regularly bemoans. Yet, Bridgman, in his own argument, doesn't acknowledge the societal problems with which women and grammar complicate themselves as a result of oppression. At one point, Bridgman, already stewing on the Harvard themes, complains further that **Her vision was lucid enough, but she lacked the means to express it.**¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 50.

While Stein doesn't lack the means to express her vision for her approach is—rather than attempting to reside in the masculine literary project, her own experimental voicing, if she were to be an *agent-object woman*—writing towards the traditional, Bridgman is still wrong in his application. Because Stein is disadvantaged from education, the lack of *means* to express herself has a clear cause and root. Rather, Bridgman opts not to consider this, for were he to do so, the platform of his argument would disintegrate—for no reason other than not to encounter a clear and important development in academics at the time: preeminent belief that feminist theory had viability. Bridgman regards the wave of feminism developing around him and vital to his assessment of Stein with nothing less than ignorance, if not complete blindness.

Where do those *means* come from?—the school, through education. To begin with, we can go back to the Bathsheba figure and remember that women always already are discounted from the system of meaning making and production. This system removes them from *attainment*, which follows as a result of successful production and allows the producer to have commodified representation of their production and its value.

Irigaray challenges the ways in which **The phallus [...] functions all too often in psychoanalysis as the guarantee of sense, the sense of sense(s), the 'figure,' the 'form,' the ultimate signifier through which the ancient metaphors of onto-theology would be set straight.**¹⁷⁷ It isn't in psychoanalysis alone that we see such prominence of the phallic order. Sense, logic—these concepts as rendered (in the masculine), excise the corresponding identitarian aspects of gender within the woman or the queer body from being part of the ongoing production of cultural understanding. Whereas for Bathsheba this came through masculine genealogies as promulgated via rape and marriage, with Stein, Bridgman's methodology of oppression entails this initial problem of lacking coherent literary traditional value, alongside a reduction of her lesbian

¹⁷⁷ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 44.

desire (see “Sexion” below) into a psychological complex of self-hatred, and by marketing her career trajectory generally alongside a masculine matrix. This approach, essentially, functions to present Stein’s corpus within the same light as a male writer à la Philip Roth, and not with the nuance that is demanded from various calls to actions within the work of such practitioners as Helene Cixous and Monique Wittig, suggesting as I am that Stein’s work anticipates and exemplifies what they call *l’écriture féminine*. Look at the title of one of Stein’s pieces, “Winning His Way. A Narrative Poem of Poetry.” This title exemplifies the mood of Stein’s rejection of the masculine by proffering a clear understanding that poetry was a male-centric school at the time she produced this work. This recognition, as part of the presumptive creation of a chronological rendering of the poetic school, asserts the position of woman against the literary mainstream. It is a praxis that renders the female as the universal in a critique of the male, which, while still tethered to the masculine through this refutation, still embodies a liberational drive. It is directly this liberational drive, in fact, that finds this as *woman writing*, in that liberation, as compared to simply writing the world of the minority into the university, is the second stage of the liberational trajectory that leads into the negation of such concepts as *l’écriture féminine*. The first stage is recognition, the third is the development of the minority culture in various literatures, and the third, as with all goals of diversity and inclusivity, is the removal of the idea of diversity and inclusivity because such ideas are so accepted that they no longer need exist. In no society has this final stage occurred.

As proof that Stein is aware of the political problem Bridgman avoids broaching (that is, sexism), I offer her 1899 lecture “The Value of College Education for Women,” which Stein gave to a group of Baltimore women. Stein begins **I will consider the demands upon women under present conditions then the inadequacy of the present system of training to meet those**

demands and finally the advantages of a college training to prepare one adequately for the complexities of this nineteenth century existence.¹⁷⁸

For her, the woman, expected to perform all manner of duties and integrate into society in a certain way, is also disprivileged from having the preparatory means to engage in society and be a more complete person. The means of attainment and production both are taken away from her so that she cannot develop herself just as the means of production are removed from the indigenous hands of all these states which the West has infrastructurally colonized to continue resource extraction. The masculine program mirrors the capitalist one in that both recognize that existent systems—education, in the case of Stein’s lecture—can be manipulated in liberational ways by minoritized groups, allowing themselves to free themselves. Stein ends her above thesis with that same recognition by implicating the college as the locus for this potential, at least for women.

The problems which women must face, enhanced as they are by their college education? these are primarily domestic, as is expected of a woman at the time. Just as Bathsheba is attached to the masculine genealogy of David (and, therefore, Jesus), so is the woman attached to the family life, especially at a time when one would be rendered legally a ‘spinster’ or colloquially an ‘old maid.’ One’s identity is determined based upon one’s marriage. In names, as well, can we recognize whether a person has leveled up to their expected place: if you had the last name you were born with in the nineteenth century, and were a woman, then you were unmarried.

Indeed, Stein continues that **the men of today do not want a wife to at least be able to read a newspaper and understand a little something of the affairs that are apparent in men’s minds.**¹⁷⁹ So, women in the nineteenth century, at the very least in Stein’s position, aren’t even required (or should it be phrased *desired*) to have literacy. In terms of educational problems—the

¹⁷⁸ Gertrude Stein, “The Value of College Education for Women” (Baltimore: Cone Museum, 1899), 1.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1

“flaw” that Stein’s prose bears so prominently—going back to our thought-experiment, in Bridgman’s schema: how can Stein be culpable, even with her intensive and privileged education, for misunderstanding, or rather not ‘correctly’ deploying, proper narratological and stylistic strategies? If a woman can’t read a newspaper, how can they be expected to write prose? The spectre of incoherence always dogged Stein, not the very least at the start of her career when, as Stein reports it:

He said, I have come at the request of the Grafton Press. Yes, she said. You see, he said slightly hesitant, the director of the 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, she said laughing, you were under the impression that I was imperfectly educated. He blushed, why no, he said, but you might not have had much experience in writing. Oh yes, she said, oh yes. Well it’s alright. I will write to the director and you might as well tell him also that everything that is written in the manuscript is written with the intention of its being written and all he has to do is to print it and I will take the responsibility.¹⁸⁰

In this early legend—and legend we must first believe it to be—we see two major concerns trickling into the purview of the call by the publisher’s agent: education and nationality. When it becomes apparent that Stein is an ‘american’ (she rarely capitalized proper nouns like nationalities), the subject shifts towards education, at which point we see the publisher expressing the very same doubts towards her stylistic ability as Bridgman. The fact that the manuscript bore the name *Gertrude*, a woman’s name, which heralded the identity of the author prior to this house-call, should not be forgotten by the reader for the presuppositions of nationality and education act in tandem with Stein’s gender in order to structure the agent’s diminishment and disavowal of this production. From the outset, the newness of her style confronts masculinate sensibilities. Irigaray, as always, phrases it best: **if woman’s instincts try to command public recognition [on her own terms], their demand and demonstration will be met with derision, anathema, and punishment.**¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Stein, *The Autobiography*, 68.

¹⁸¹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 125.

We could revisit Bridgman's concerns in his schema here and identify his own statement of Stein's flawed writing—thus, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* is delivered—as the punishment resulting from Stein's commanding attention by refusing to obey a language subordinate to a male logic.

D. Attaining production's rewards/fracture

And, perhaps it is this very disavowal, connected with an attempt at denying Stein a *production* that leads to the legendary reaction she had to successful production and its incumbent virtue: *attainment*. It wasn't until *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* was published that Stein made a significant quantity of money that she felt any degree of comfort from her writing as a means of production. Prior, while she had experienced enviable publications in such venues as *The Dial*, *Transition*, and *Poetry*, she hadn't earned enough money that she could live free from the earnings her inheritance brought her (which, while many of us would desire the comfort provided by such a trust fund, in actuality amounted to, seemingly, enough to just get by on without working). As she relates in *Everybody's Autobiography*, the sequel to her bestselling memoir:

I wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and it was published and it became a best seller and first it was printed by the Atlantic Monthly and there is a nice story about that but first I bought myself a new eight cylinder Ford car, and the most expensive coat made to order by Hermes and fitted by the man who makes coats for race horses for Basket and two collars studded for Basket. I had never made any money before in my life and I was most excited.¹⁸²

Here we come to the actual fracture that Stein met with when she tried normalizing her writing style. The success which the book brought her was financial. The success the book had stylistically was far more disturbing to Stein, who appreciated the financial benefits but bemoaned the diminishment of her style in favor of commercialism. In her lecture "What Is English Literature," she described this divide between writing for "God" and "Mammon." The success with Mammon, however, afforded her the ability to attain a higher status. Navigating a misogynistic society, possessing financial

¹⁸² Stein, *Everybody's Autobiography*, 28.

security and non-reliance on others, not to mention validation in occupational ability, this status elevation meant more visibility and respect. The skepticism with which the agent had long ago arrived at her door had been fully supplanted (though there were always going to be doubters).

The downside, above warged, came at the expense of Stein's stylistic experimentation. Some sacrifices to expression had to be made in order to appease the reading public in the ways implied by the Grafton Press agent asking about *Three Lives*. As Bridgman, who makes no unbiased claim that this is his favorite of Stein's work (**it won its reputation legitimately**, whereas Stein's witticisms and humor don't give credence to her comic abilities: **Gertrude Stein has the not altogether deserved reputation of being a comic writer**), puts the linguistic register of *The Autobiography*: **Gertrude Stein achieved her effects with the commonest of words and gestures [...], such precise miniatures.**¹⁸³

By accommodating to male desire and by stimulating male pleasure and aesthetic drives, Stein achieved the height of her success. Bridgman almost acknowledges this, though he defers to a lesser interpretation when he assesses the synchronous writing, in tandem with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, of *Stanzas in Meditation*. Referred to by John Ashbery in his review of the original Yale edition as "The Impossible," this near-impenetrable epic poem meditates on the fracturing of identity that arises when making that choice to circumscribe one's own creations by vocalizing them in the voice people desire of you. It's a disastrous conflict that left Stein musing on, amongst many topics, a prominent "They." Bridgman correctly presumes this other "They" to represent **the normal reading public, [...] the verbal conservatives**, of which he is one. But his reading audience is not being written to by Stein.¹⁸⁴ Her address is surrounding her own self in the project of saying who and how she is. Considerations of the reading public are only pertinent insofar as they

¹⁸³ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 217; *ibid.*, 14; *ibid.*, 218-219.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 214.

arise to Stein, and not as they relate back to the expectations of the reader who represents a majority that already lacks the apparatus required to understand the project being read.

Let us consider another thought-experiment. Having read *Stanzas in Meditation* in its entirety, let me pull two completely different sections and demonstrate to you how Stein deploys the word “They” in order to directly criticize the expectations of her/the reading public.

E. First Proof

Think how often it does not change and mind

They are not glad to sit and find

Find it nearly out.¹⁸⁵

In this sentence (selected because it is a contained sentence), we see Stein discussing the reading public’s reading practices. Stein’s work can appear to the average reader as onerous because it is so wildly unlike anything that that average reader has ever interacted with before. The haptic experience of holding a Stein novel, in and of itself, is one of disorientation. As such, she warrants in-depth and close reading, whether you are approaching her for autobiographical reference (which would be a contemporaneous reaction based on archival and biographical developments since Stein’s death), or else historical (Stein’s World War One poetry, collected in the second and fourth sections of *Bee Time Vine*, for instance), or else sexual, or however the reader chooses, it does not matter.

But, as Stein points out, the average reader does not want to “sit and find out” what she has to say, they want her to outright say it. This is the distinction between a masculine language and a queer language. The queer body is not understood by the masculine majority and therefore always undergoes interpretation and renders its reader confused. *They* always want us to reveal ourselves, explain our actions. It is why my mother demands to know why I occasionally wear lipstick, or why my biography on my first book uses they/them pronouns. I understand Stein because, like her, I

¹⁸⁵ Gertrude Stein, *Stanzas in Meditation*. (New Haven: Yale, 1957) 196.

have been expected to explain my queer behaviors—the key to the castle. Even when her work doesn't change, just as my representation of myself outwardly doesn't change, or else my queerness remains stable to me, people still puzzle over it even with time. Writing *Stanzas in Meditation* over thirty years after her Radcliffe Themes, readers like Bridgman demand an explanation that has been provided all along through demonstration and queer(ing) engagement. This is the reason why Stein called her acclaimed lecture, published by Leonard and Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press and delivered at Oxford and Cambridge, *Composition as Explanation*, because the action—the production—should and does speak for itself.

F. *Second Proof*

**I caught a bird which made a ball
And they thought better of it.
But it is all of which they taught
That they were in a hurry yet
In a kind of way they meant it best
That they should change in and on account
But they must not stare when they manage¹⁸⁶**

This passage is rife with the secrets and gossip that permeate conversations surrounding queer bodies and their introduction to cisgendered spaces. Rumors, turning upon 'are they,' 'I have heard,' 'Did you hear,' and 'Someone told me,' are representative of the way in which the majority has been, at least in a masculine way, supposed to harbor their beginning fright at the possibility of queerness. It is a secret issue when dealt with by Them. The bird Stein speaks of is a marital symbol of her wife (birds are a pivotal symbol in epithalamiums), Alice B. Toklas, whom, with Stein together forms a ball of flesh—an erotic object that melds the two as one. In "A Sonatina Followed By Another," Stein captures this bird-Toklas in another way ("Pussy" was Stein's nickname for Toklas, and is used heavily in Tom Hachtman's comic strip *Gertrude's Follies*, which plays into the sexual nature of her writing at a time when):

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 57.

Pussy said that I was to wake her in an hour and a half if it didn't rain. It is still raining what should I do. Should I wake her or should I let her sleep longer. Coo, coo.

The coo coo bird is sitting on the coo coo tree, budding the rose buds for me. Why is pussy like the great American Army. Because she buds so many buddies.¹⁸⁷

Here, Stein begins to coo at Toklas before Toklas becomes the bird stimulating Stein's desirous attraction for her sleeping body. The transformation and fluid movement between reference to one's body or the other between the two suggests what Bruce Kellner has referred to as their *symbiosis*.

Because the nature of this marriage was an affront to contemporary convention—even if such convention was wrong then as it is known to be wrong now—in France, America, or anywhere else, They think better of it, which is their attempt to censor and reduce (oppress) Stein and Toklas. Because Stein and Toklas were frequently seen walking together, intimately, Parisians were forced to regard the nature of their relationship, creating the vortex of rumors and suggestions which Stein here uses to open the entire epic poem (these being the first lines).

For Stein, both situations rely on an understanding of They as a *reading* public. Whether that public is reading her body or her body of work does not matter. The opinions they hold about her are critical regardless. If she is a lesbian, there is another “flaw” than simply her syntax and difficult writing, and that flaw permeates through her work in an entirely different way—this is the actual “flaw” Bridgman supposes, he just cannot bear to recognize it as it is.

Q.E.D

The “normal” reading public are the cultivators of culture and taste, which, as is historically known, but outlined more generally in the prior chapter, is a position that resides firmly within the masculine. The “punishment” Irigaray suggests for Stein's commanding attention, prior to her fame with this memoir, was struggle (monetary, critically, publically). So, Stein adapted to the model provided to her and received praise and gain. But, the inverse of Irigaray's maxim also incurs

¹⁸⁷ Stein, *The Yale Gertrude Stein*, 289.

punishment. Just as attempting to attain on one's own ground public acknowledgment is met with scorn by the majority, so does accommodating to the majority's desires incur the wrath of the majority, even as they assimilate you and hail your finally coming around to the right way of thinking (the[ir] logos). Take Bridgman, for instance, who points out also that *The Autobiography* **yields such immediate pleasure in such an artless way**¹⁸⁸ and is **at times [...] utterly pointless.**¹⁸⁹ "They" can never be satisfied.

3. *Sexion*

A. *Against empiricism*

"The Value of College Education for Women" is veritably rejected by Bridgman, who presumes Stein is **unmistakably seeking to validate her own condition.**¹⁹⁰ Lost in this dismissal is the fact that Stein's recognition of her self mirrors itself with that of Irigaray's. For, given the fixation upon woman's connection with family in her lecture, Stein's own life, albeit skewed by her sexual identity—an identity which contemporaneously refused the (nuclear) family life if lived as the masculine dictates—was distanced from the rearing of children. Irigaray notes the posture of women in a helpful way, writing that:

It is necessary to add, or repeat, that woman's 'improper' access to representation, her entry into a specular and speculative economy that affords her instincts no signs, no symbols or emblems, or methods of writing that could figure her instincts, make it impossible for her to work out or transpose specific representatives of her instinctual object-goals.¹⁹¹

It is especially difficult for the queer body to articulate their demands of society when intersected with being woman for the female position is one that lacks representation. As we saw Stein

¹⁸⁸ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 261.

¹⁸⁹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 228.

¹⁹⁰ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 37. It is ironic to me that Bridgman bemoans Stein's hermeticism while readers today will note his selfsame hermetic approach to stating that Stein was a lesbian. He uses the word "lesbian" one time in the entirety of *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*. Yes, sexuality shouldn't be our dominant fixation upon the individual, but it is a necessary aspect of the identity that has to be addressed in clear and direct terms when apparent. Without such critical truthfulness, the work done is not scrutable.

¹⁹¹ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 124.

ruminating over her lesbian marriage's perception by the Parisian public in *Stanzas in Meditation*, so can we see Bridgman struggling over how to phrase that Stein *is a lesbian*.

It can be read as brutally ironic that while Bridgman bemoans needing the key to open the castle, he blames Stein's oblique approach to language for his own misreading. And, it is in the language of his homophobia that the damage of this misreading becomes fully pronounced. As has already been shown, Bridgman recognized Stein's lesbianism, or queerness, not as an aspect of her identity, but instead as a "condition." This language, while anchored in the problematics of hate experienced by queer communities, is not redressed by an academic recognition of the changing perceptions of even the late 1960s and early 1970s during which Bridgman wrote.

Let's start with that line, and give it its fuller context: **Not only did Gertrude Stein dismiss contemporary marital arrangements, but she also asserted the greater force and purity of sexuality in the independent woman. She was unmistakable seeking to validate her own condition.**¹⁹² It isn't here made solely a matter of Stein's lesbianism. Assessing her body of work, Bridgman reads lesbianism in and of itself as a reactionary endeavor against the standard model of marriage, which he relates as "contemporary." This action moves beyond a simple homophobia and brings us into the same long-standing argument that has been experienced by queer bodies around the world: their efforts to gain marriage rights are roundly rejected by many as self-seeking and not natural. Speaking from the position of power, Bridgman fails to recognize that Stein's writing is working against masculine discourse to a feminist lens. Instead, Bridgman pathologizes. His dog-whistle (can it be anything else?) signals to readers what will be an ongoing rejection of Stein herself. If he cannot accept or support Stein's lesbianism—itsself the backbone of her identity in the ways it forces her to re-engage and interact with the world as an outsider—how can he accept her work and its project?

¹⁹² Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 37.

This dismissal becomes daunting and sickening to read, almost harmful. Harmful to readers. Certainly harmful to our ability to understand Stein. While I have suggested that his is a refusal to acknowledge the sociocultural reasons underlying the mechanisms which show Stein as “self-hating” (a term Bridgman frequently deploys), we can read that lack of awareness or refusal to provide full scope to his arguments when we see him writing about *Q.E.D.*, that early novel about a love triangle Stein engaged in in college. Here, Bridgman says that **[Stein] was too puritanic to accept unrestrained hedonism, and yet circumstance was denying her the expression of her considerable passions in conventional ways.**¹⁹³ What is left unsaid is the system in which Stein wanted to, and indeed did, engage in queer sexual practice far beyond the standard, expected, or conventional methodology of such expression accepted at the time. Bridgman instead opts to look at the societal problems, in his crippled fashion, queers face and then expects Stein to be *more* direct than safely possible at the time. Whereas Stein, as she opens *Stanzas in Meditation* with a consideration of how the world (mainly the Parisian public) perceived her, in effect, marriage with Toklas, Bridgman refuses evidence to indicate that Stein was strung between two poles of expression: the masculine and the queer.

On the one hand, Stein could not actively demonstrate the full extent of her sexual life publicly because she would have faced severe backlash. The vagueness of *The Well of Loneliness* and even some of the more explicit passages of *Ulysses* were both challenged legally, and show how the reading public—dominantly non-queer—were against queer writing from an early point in time, and they were still there in the 1920s.

Inversely, Stein largely locates her sexual life in her writing, arguably not a privatization because of the immense weight of memoir in her oeuvre. Yet, yes, many of Stein’s most erotic pieces went unpublished in her lifetime. This is not to say, however, that erotic pieces were meant

¹⁹³ Ibid., 55.

not for publication but for private consumption. We know this because Stein separated the two realms decidedly.

There are pieces Stein wrote which are clearly private. They take the form of letters, referred to as the *Autrespondance* in Stein's Yale archive. These "other correspondences" (a name which *others* these letters beyond ready description by removing their context and recipient from metadata cataloguing) are explicit letters to Toklas (and occasionally back to Stein) that often refer to their decidedly contemporaneously taboo sexual practices. Take, for instance, these lines from one letter (most of which are undated, proving it difficult to place these chronologically with works intended for the reading public):

**Baby is hot
So she will sit on the pot.
Only she stands
With the pot in her hands.
And what does her little face do.
It nods.
Can you see a sea.
Not unless from a shore.
We love baby.
I do not say this especially.¹⁹⁴**

The opening of this sequence describes an incoming bowel movement on Toklas' end, which leads her to sit on the toilet or chamber pot and then present the results of this bowel movement back to Stein. This is also the case with the sexually suggestive euphemistic use of the word "cow," so obviously devoid of its bovine context in situations where it is used in the letters thusly:

**Baby precious, you is going to have
a lovely movement cow come out just
nicely, and little hubby never means
to be anything but good to his wifey,
and he never means to do anything
but agree with his wifey and he
never means to do anything
but give his wifey a cow right**

¹⁹⁴ Stein, *Baby Precious*, 86.

**now, bless she bless she bless she
dear wifey whose hubby is all hers
and adores her and gives her a cow now.**¹⁹⁵

Here, the fecal cow is signalled by the use of “movement,” with the idea of cow as an orgasmic reaction to external stimulus (much of this is made explicitly clear in the “Prelude,” where a broader discussion of Stein and her sexuality is the focal point). This, too, attaches with the fecal cow as the bowel movement is itself the response to food being consumed. Stein said this much in her piece “A Sonatina Followed By Another,”

B. Third Proof

Now let us say pussy. When did I say pussy. You are so full of a cow factory. You manufacture cows by vows. The cows produce reduce reduce they reduce the produce. Cows are necessary after feeding. We are needing what we have after feeding. After feeding we find cows out. How are cows multiplied. By proper treatment. Thank you so much for being so explicit.¹⁹⁶

This sequence is all about elucidating the meaning of the cow, which rejects, first, Bridgman’s complaints about lack of clarity or the provision of explanation. Stein, while charges are levied against her for being unclear—*hermetic*—is rather clear when met on her own terms and read across her oeuvre to learn those terms’ meanings (unlocking them through participation), as will be demonstrated here. Stein even ends this paragraph with a readerly expression of gratitude for being so clear. But, to break it down knowing that the non-practiced reader of Stein is likely having some trouble seeing what is meant here.

The passage begins with Stein appealing to Toklas, which signals to the reader that the address has the potential of eroticism. It also limits our reading to an explicit consideration of the relationship between the two, meaning that this passage should open us up to some partial understanding of their relationship. After that appeal, we see *the cow factory*. These are the bowels and

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 136.

¹⁹⁶ Stein, *The Yale Gertrude Stein*, 307.

sexual organs at large (the anus and intestines are often sexualized beyond heteronormative comfort in queer sex lives), which fills the body in this moment, but also point towards a celebration of the body and its sexual abilities—an action that is decidedly queer as it removes the anatomical drives of heteronormative reproductive sex into a simply erotic sexual body that reconnects to vital anatomical functions in new ways. We know this because the discussion moves into the issue of reduction of produce. “Produce” here functions metonymically as a “groceries” or “food.” Because of the marital appeal, sex is clearly the predominant emphasis of this experience, allowing such a focus to linger on those parts of the anatomy. The continued meditation then says that cows *reduce the produce*. In other words, they negate the consumed material and rearticulate it through the “cow factory” into the fecal matter to be expelled (or expressed or given, as with Freud’s cloaca theory or the idea of the child’s fecal gift to their guardians), within the locus of the cow factory. Next, we see that not only is the cow clearly fecal because it comes *after feeding*, the logical moment for one to excrete, but that after eating, the speaker will *find cows out*. This comes from “treatment,” a term Stein deployed throughout her private and erotic correspondence with Toklas. “Treatment” relates the idea of the sex act as it finds Stein coaxing out the cow, which shows her acting with Toklas in an amatory way. This participation between speaker and recipient of address leads us to understanding fully that the sex act is under discussion, or, rather, that a shared erotic experience is being detailed to the reader. This is clearly a collaborative amatory practice that socializes the eating and excretion processes into a shared sexual moment. This can then link the sexual practice of defecation back into the practice of cooking and providing meals to a partner (already disengaged from strict heteronormative masculine/feminine divisions), as well as surround the entire domestic situation in the process of sexual excitement and ritual. Overall, this is a passage that can be read within functionally logical ways.

Q.E.D.

“A Sonatina Followed By Another” is dealt with by Bridgman, although his response is ambivalent:

The heavy concentration of authoritarian demands—“address me as sir”—in the writing of the Mallorcan year¹⁹⁷ may have nothing to do with Gertrude Stein’s actual life. Still, it is probably significant that most of the pieces in this general period were published, like *Things As They Are*, posthumously. In part this delay may be ascribed to their length. The most revealing, like “Possessive Case,” “No,” “Pink Melon Joy,” “A Sonatina Followed By Another,” and “Lifting Belly,”—are in general also the longest. But discretion would also argue withholding them from publication.¹⁹⁸

Discretion does indeed seem to be the primary factor in withholding information from publication, but the reasoning for that discretion (the masculine system of power which rejects queer voices), is never addressed by Bridgman. In fact, Bridgman’s refusal to state the truth makes him not only a liar, but also shows this same system at play. Why reveal this information to the world when the world’s response is to never even try to understand what is at play? It is his failure to see his own programming at work. Here, Bridgman asks for an answer again and again: why is Stein this way? But the impetus for the question is not disbelief that the answer at hand could even be true, it is a rejection of the truth in search of a more puritanical answer. Puritanical, a word he ascribes to Stein that seems far more fitting for his own sensibility.

But, Bridgman also rejects the potentiality that Stein is engaging in life-writing. This is not based in empirical data. In the passage from “A Sonatina Followed By Another,” Stein used her nickname for Alice B. Toklas, “pussy,” in order to signal to the audience the address of her affection. Elsewhere in that same piece, Stein writes **little Alice B. is the wife for me**, which would seem to suggest against Bridgman’s idea that we can cherry-pick which pieces of data have and do

¹⁹⁷ This period loosely corresponds with my delineated “Matrimonial Autobiography” phase. I will continue to deploy my term because it more accurately characterizes the broad majority of Stein’s output during this period of time.

¹⁹⁸ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 148.

not have anything to do with Stein's life, not to mention challenges Voris' follow-up to Bridgman's work that life details should be absconded with in our reading of Stein.¹⁹⁹

The above passage indicates that Bridgman, like many early scholars, understood the anal erotic aspect of Stein's sexual expression. Although, ultimately, this is not specifically an anal as much as a fecal erotics within a larger engagement in so-called taboo behavior. Do I even have to mention that the taboo in question is one developed by the heteronormative gaze onto the queer, and their masculine prescription for sexual practices limiting queer lifestyles as much as possible into the non-queer field? They simply refused to articulate it. This knowing and not telling is indicative of the broader problem I here have addressed, that scholars have selectively voiced what they know of Stein in their academic projects not to advance Stein, but instead to do the tasks expected of them professionally and not do that work ethically. They do this all the while hiding behind their own inability to regard what it means to be that other queer body under discussion.

And, beyond that, this queer sex is often seen expressed in a rhetorical or epistemological way—being written by Stein—so that we cannot explicitly suggest an actual physical deployment of these sexual practices so much as a fantastical writing of them between the two. It would be better for us to suggest that this practice is primarily written because we do not have Stein nor Toklas in the room with us, and most of us are not sex therapists, and therefore we can do better than to pathologize and instead focus our efforts on understanding what is there—and what Stein is saying to us.

But, in face of that understanding, Bridgman and others chose to ignore it or even to refuse that it was true. Linda Simon indexes Stein's sexual euphemisms in her *Biography of Alice B. Toklas*, ignoring the evidence that Ulla Dydo early on shared with the world in her reading of "An Elucidation" that here she saw how the word "cow" was being used beyond simply an orgasmic

¹⁹⁹ Stein, *The Yale Gertrude Stein*, 295.

connotation. This, as evoked heavily by Kay Turner in her introduction to selected letters of the *autrerespondance*, has been widely dismissed because it seems far too triggering for heteronromative sensibilities to wrap their head around.

Again, the underlying issue here is a decided refusal to enter the author's world, and instead comes out of the placement of the author within the critic's world. At the base, such murderous instincts ignore the mode of production in which all things written pass through (as in the "Route of Language" in the previous chapter) the interlocuting author and are altered in their elocution by the perspective held within that body. If the world is universalized queer as Wittig implores the agent queer body does (and something that the agent-object queer body cannot do), then the world can in no way be made non-queer. Beyond this, is there the probability that the queer reader would be the better interpetor, provided their agency, than the masculine male reader who is Bridgman? Such an ethics deserves further exploration in the coming years.

C. False logic of the Breeder/Masculinate social engineering in the academic world

In the above passage from *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*, we also see this mention of "authoritarian demands," something which dogs Stein in the lingering impact of Bridgman's inculpatory vision. It is here that the brunt of Irigaray's project expresses itself as vital in praxis and community participation. First, however, is to show where Bridgman went most astray. The vision of the lesbian body has so long been rendered as one enacted within a heterosexual logic (heterodoxy?) that it should come as no surprise to read this same invention practiced by Bridgman in *Gertrude Stein in Pieces*.

Bridgman argues that **Gertrude Stein thought of her relationship with Alice Toklas in heterosexual terms.**²⁰⁰ If for no other marker than this, we can indict Bridgman and his non-trepidatious approach to dictating the interior-monologue of the lesbian, and the queer body. To

²⁰⁰ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 150.

even begin to suggest what someone else *thought*, let alone refuse their words in making such a suggestion, is enough to tell me that we do more to promote and savor careerism and hearsay than we do to check the validity of academic motivation in the first place. This statement has gone highly influential and largely unchecked in the decades since it was made.

Take, as an example, Marianne DeKoven's assertion of Bridgman's influence. She writes that he **demonstrates beyond doubt that Stein was tormented by guilt and confusion concerning her sexuality.**²⁰¹ But this declaration is not paired with that sociocultural outline which might explain the source of those feelings of torment and guilt as arising from contemporaneous and historiographical treatment of the queer body. If anything, the modern queer turning to scholastic aide in exploring or trying to understand Stein is left feeling only more guilt and sustained embarrassment about who and how they are because such writing as Stein's—which deals explicitly with such feelings— is met with shaming and decisive derision.

One might begin to suggest that Bridgman's single sentence about how Stein perceived her marriage is too insignificant to mention, considering he has thousands more sentences unlike that one filling his book. I would argue that this logic misses the picture already elaborated. His presumption about her marriage is the presumption which leads him to all his other derisive markers. Rather, it arises from this masculine position.

I come back now, in conclusion, to the work of Irigaray. What is behind all this masculine programming? Well, for one, Freud. Freud's model, Irigaray's work shows, applies most adequately and readily when scribed on the life of a heterosexual man. When brought to bear on the woman, and further on the queer, these institutions fall apart. I have shown this in "Bathsheba: Daughter of the Oath," but want to take a few minutes to show how it connects up with Bridgman. Where is he coming from in this posture?

²⁰¹ Dekoven, *Different Language*, xxiii.

In Irigaray, the major confrontation resides within how the masculine thought-way—manifesting in *Speculum of the Other Woman* as the Freudian logics of Western psychoanalysis—relegate the other body which is not heterosexually male into an inferior position. The primary mechanism for this programming is always in the subsumption or refusal of the othered identity that should hold a perspective of equal weight and consideration societally alongside the made-superior etiologies of the masculine. This is most pronounced for Irigaray in the treatment of female homosexuals (her terminology) by the mainstream. She frames the problem in this way: **The essential thing, in any case, is to show that the object choice of the homosexual woman is determined by a *masculine* desire and tropism.**²⁰² Of course, in this phrasing, *essential* refers to the object-choice of universalizing the masculine perspective as the worldview, regarding in all situations the tenets of that perspective as shared experiences.

So, the operative intention is to render as masculine the interactions between two women. I'd argue that from the first positioning of being *woman*, one is inherently incapable of being *masculine*, not acting that way as performance, but of truly encompassing that subjectivity because carried with woman throughout her life is the inalterable impact that such forces as masculinity, when deployed in its masculine articulation, change who that queer other body is. It is not to assume they have so much power against the woman's identity, but rather that the perspective left behind in woman, in part as violence against the self (from the natural agent-objectivity that comes from childhood and the disposition of the parents resident in the masculine thought-way), is far removed from masculinity. Should we even desire a reading in which the lesbian body is regarded as masculine? Or should we work further from what is inherently essential in order to promote a deeper understanding of the actual underlying body. If the body is female, then their perspective is

²⁰² Irigaray, *Speculum*, 99.

made as woman, even when scholars such as Bridgman find it convenient to transmute that body into one that behaves as masculine. This is a matter of convenience for the straight mind.

Elizabeth Fifer writes that **Bridgman develops and expands [analysis of Stein’s “encoded sexual references”] by demonstrating how Stein’s obscurity protected her “concealed confessions” not only from a homophobic culture but from Stein’s own internal censor and from Alice B. Toklas.**²⁰³ But how can a confession be a confession if it is concealed?

And what of this statement about the *homophobic culture* as though the very culture that produced Fifer’s book, stemming from Bridgman, isn’t homophobic? Can They even realize their illogicality?

D. Fallout of heterosexual argumentation

The ultimate problematic we arrive at is that it is convenient for Bridgman, and his acolytes, to presume this dangerous and wounding gleaming that I have now finally proven lacks evidence. Because their worldview is masculine, or they so readily accept this homophobic masculine posture (as is the case for Fifer, Voris and DeKoven—who demonstrate their agent-objectivity in the process), they want everything to fall in line with masculinization. This is less dangerous when talking about a painting, and more violent when dealing with actual lives.

And, it does seem that there has been a disconnection between the authorial figure—their lived life as an actual reality—and the scholastic response to life. This can be evidenced within Bridgman’s own argumentation of the heterosexualization of the queer body: this is an impossible task. By collapsing her work and life into a non-queer construction, he ignores the actual life there and what is truly going on: a deeply idiosyncratic sexual practice that screams to us now that it is *queer*.

Even as the field of queer studies has grown and become decidedly prominent, Bridgman’s work still stands as highly influential, proving scholarly reticence to yield to change. This inability to

²⁰³ Fifer, *Rescued Readings*, 14.

yield to change also explains why there has yet to be any of the redressing I have called for so frequently. Emailing with Elizaebeth Fifer, I learned she said “I don’t have the time to go back to what I said,” although her career still benefits from the hateful ideas she argues. Queers don’t have the time to explain themselves, either. In the end, who bears the responsibility of fixing their communicative practice? Does the queer have to fall in line with dominant modes of articulation that the majority can understand, or should the majority engage in a learning of the queer other that opens up their eyes to new methods of engaging and living within the world?

Sadly, reading through the long-awaited Modern Language Association’s *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Gertrude Stein* volume—intended to reintroduce Stein to the classroom by using new voices in Stein scholarship in addition to some more classical critics—I see that it includes the statement that, amongst others, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces [offers] useful and necessary contexts for her story*.²⁰⁴ Useful and necessary to whom?

The reasoning behind this fixation on Bridgman is two-fold. First, there are the ethical and professional mechanics of scholarship which do make comfortable the entrenched systems of power which, when not critiqued in a prominent way (as Irigaray did to Freud, or as the Feminists did to the Western Canon), find critiques falling to the wayside. Note the inability in my earlier critical genealogy for the works which most directly attacked Bridgman’s position to break into the scholastic apparatus. They are tagged for their newness as *theses* or *dissertations*. This devaluation or ludditesque fear of the new work emergent as times and society change underscores a broader situation in which queer theory has become an elitist locale for advanced grammatical structures and stylistic flourish, not a praxis designed to improve and elevate the lives and considerations of queer bodies throughout the world. This is because queer theory as practiced by queer bodies has moved

²⁰⁴ Logan Esdale Deborah M. Mix, *Approaches to Teaching the Works of Gertrude Stein* (New York: Modern Language Association, 2018), 9.

far beyond heterosexual inscription and into its own complexities, while the queer theoretical aspects of works like Fifer's are far behind that new logic. And this complexity has far distanced itself from the redressment I call for. Simultaneously, while we emphasize new discussions in queer studies, we also do not go back regularly to the practices of past generations, as academic feminism did in its "Images of Women" phase and rescue readings that are disparaging. I take a moment here to suggest we take time and go back to our past writings and revise them in the mode of current thinking about inclusion and the status of the queer. I suggest this because the difficulty of reading queer texts which I just alluded to is apparent when one turns towards Sara Amed's *Queer Phenomenology* or Jasbir Puar's *Homonationalism in Queer Times*. These texts written about queer bodies are so impenetrable that the queer, historically underprivileged in access to education and literacy skills, may never even be able to fully understand nor read. The goals of literary theory and criticism should be, and once were, to bring readers into the fold of literature, not to distance academics and readers from each other. It is this that this project has been about: how we read and how we talk about what we have read. The systems of education, understanding, and communication are all changing with the increased acceptance of huge swaths of minority populations, but the scholastic systems at play haven't brought themselves up to date with these changes.

The second reason for this continued deployment of Bridgman comes back to Irigaray, and the already present discourse surrounding the power of the masculine situation in society. Irigaray writes that **It seems that the phallic instinctual script is never written out so clearly as in the case of female homosexuality.**²⁰⁵ The thought-way is, perhaps, too dominant for us queer bodies to ever become fully liberated. As Irigaray suggests, the same system which oppresses us queers also carries with it intense stereotypical identitarian values directed against queer subjects. For the homosexual woman as defined by the heterosexual authority-male, the origination of their desire,

²⁰⁵ Irigaray, *Speculum*, 99.

their sexual practice, and their lives as praxis all come back to male issues. Their desire, as she first said, is made to be masculine. She cannot love or experience in any way other than the masculine according to the masculine. Bridgman writes that **It was not stupidity that caused her miserable prose, but a lack of experience in using the conventions by which people channeled the tumult of their inner life.**²⁰⁶ But the conventions which Bridgman desires she write within are not satisfactory to the nature of her queering expressions. So, why bother even trying to address the larger body, that cruel majority, which won't endeavor to address us—the queer subject—or to correct and redress their past mistakes? So long as the majority won't address that they exist outside the perspective the queer subject holds, there can be no communal understanding of what these identities mean. One cannot establish themselves as a scholar on a backbone of exploitation for their own advancement, they must hear the sentences of that other they claim they desire to understand and instead learn that others are not like them: perspectives are not universal.

Where does this leave us, then? Frustrated as we are with the critic, can we have any trust within their scholarship at all? Look at it how Dydo frames it, spelling out all the problems here at hand:

Is Stein worth the effort to figure her out? Like those who read her when she first appeared, readers today still demand a key to her bewildering work or, in the absence of a key, they wonder whether there is anything to figure out. Recently, theoreticians have offered keys to Stein in feminist, lesbian, and other readings. Yet none of these accommodates more than selections of her texts. Stein remains more confusing and irritating than other modernists. We have learned to read Joyce, Pound, Olson, and others with the help of scholarly tools. But Stein, older than they, remains difficult because she is primitive and naif. Her simple vocabulary requires little learning. Her refusal of the conventions of English defamiliarizes her writing and angers readers. She demands total concentration on the naked text before eye and ear. The rewards are as great as the effort is difficult.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein*, 7.

²⁰⁷ Dydo, *The Language*, 63.

What we have extant scholastically does not work. Theory fails us, as does scholarship, too. It's about use, exploitation, and professional life over subject of study. It is about collective deafness. So long as we elect not to afford her the same considerations we afford and expect to have afforded to ourselves, we will never know what Stein's project was, nor hear her work as it was meant to be regarded. All this is but evidence in the murder case that began us with the question: who killed Gertrude Stein? You didn't even know she'd been murdered, but now you have the answer.

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Collatio Tomi

As though to say
that all this will ever
mean something
go somewhere

can a car without tires
travel, a book without
binding be sold

or else should you
see this as as meaningless
as everything else
I did before?

Huntsman, what quarry?
You, this last reader,
be careful to see
that I mean you,
you that can't
and won't
understand these words
which once meant so much to me.

As though to say
that all this will ever
mean something
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Vita

Thom Young was born in South Carolina, adopted by William and Kathy Young, and continued living there until moving to Asheville, North Carolina, in 2009. They attended T.C. Roberson High School before receiving a BA in Creative Writing and Literary Studies at Appalachian State University. They subsequently published their first book, an epic poem called *BESPOKE*, in 2019 through Saint Andrews University Press. They currently live in Boone, NC, with Dutchess, a 19 year old korat, while completing their MA in English.