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# Gertrude Stein and her audience : small presses, little magazines, and the reconfiguration of modern authorship

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**GERTRUDE STEIN AND HER AUDIENCE: SMALL PRESSES, LITTLE  
MAGAZINES, AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF MODERN AUTHORSHIP**

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### **Abstract:**

This thesis examines the publishing career of Gertrude Stein, an American expatriate writer whose experimental style left her largely unpublished throughout much of her career. Stein's various attempts at dissemination illustrate the importance she placed on being paid for her work and highlight the paradoxical relationship between Stein and her audience. This study shows that there was an intimate relationship between literary modernism and mainstream culture as demonstrated by Stein's need for the public recognition and financial gains by which success had long been measured. Stein's attempt to embrace the definition of the author as a professional who earned a living through writing is indicative of the developments in art throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, and it problematizes modern authorship by re-emphasizing the importance of commercial success to artists previously believed to have been indifferent to the reaction of their audience.

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## Chapter One

Hostile readers of Gertrude Stein's work have frequently accused her of egotism, claiming that she was a talentless narcissist who imposed her maunderings on the public with an undeserved sense of self-satisfaction. Yet the anguish of her apprenticeship is plain to see. Largely unpublished throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, Stein became uncertain about herself and her work. Constantly living in the shadow of her older brother Leo, Stein lacked confidence in her own aesthetics and seemed content to accept Leo's opinions. However, it was the very act of writing that allowed her to work through her confusion, and through which she would establish her independence. Stein's writing granted her the means to prove herself, eventually displaying a confidence others would call egotism.

The vast majority of studies about Stein begin by announcing that she is primarily interesting as a personality, noting that she was seldom taken seriously as a writer by her contemporaries. This has confused her reception in literature, as most scholars assume she differs considerably from other modernist writers such as James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf, who successfully achieved canonical status without altering their artistic aims for popular audiences. The general purpose of this thesis is to examine Stein's efforts to be published, with an emphasis on the important role played by the little magazine *transition*. Stein's various attempts at publication, both before and after her appearance in the magazine, demonstrate the importance Stein placed on being paid for

her work and highlight the often tenuous relationship between Stein and her audience. By examining Stein's relationship to her audience in the context of her publishing difficulties, this study shows that there was an intimate relationship between literary modernism and mainstream culture demonstrated by Stein's need for public recognition and financial remuneration for her work. Chapter One provides a history of Stein and her earliest literary endeavors, examining the motivation behind her work and framing her story in the context of those by whom she was influenced. Chapter Two outlines her involvement with little magazines, specifically *transition*, and examines the limited critical response Stein's work received in the magazine. Chapter Three explores Stein's relationship to *transition* after she achieved commercial success with *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, outlining the hostile response of the writers who felt slighted by her memoir. Chapter Four assesses Stein's influence following the success of the *Autobiography*, tracing the way her desire to be paid for her writing influenced modernism's attempt to reconstruct artistic practice. To some extent, then, Stein's story is indicative of the developments in art throughout the first decades of the twentieth century and the entrenchment of a movement that we now recognize as modernism. Stein's literary history provides a framework for examining the role of authorship as defined in the modern period, for it was the freedoms and the constraints, the advantages and the disadvantages faced by this one author, that ultimately suggest the reconfiguration of modern authorship, generally.

Born on February 3, 1874 in Allegheny, Pennsylvania, Stein was the youngest of five children. Although she spent her early years in Europe, Stein was raised primarily in Oakland, California. Her father, having taken his children to Europe so they could

benefit from a European education, insisted that they forget the French and German they had learned abroad and be schooled entirely in English. “Her bookish life commenced at this time,” Stein writes assuming Toklas’s persona in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. “She read anything that was printed and came her way and a great deal came her way” (74). Stein, then, surrounded herself with literature at an early age and even admits in the *Autobiography* to worrying that “in a few years more she would have read everything and there would be nothing unread to read” (74). Losing both her parents at a young age, Stein and two of her siblings moved to Baltimore to be closer to her mother’s family. She describes the experience as a happy one and claims she began to “lose her lonesomeness” there (*Autobiography* 75). Stein attended Radcliffe College in 1893, where she studied psychology under William James. She seemed to enjoy the experience and later decided to continue her education at John Hopkins Medical School. However, medical school proved ultimately unrewarding for Stein. In 1901, she left John Hopkins without receiving a degree to follow her brother Leo, who was in Europe. After a period of travel, the siblings eventually settled at the now-famous 27, rue de Fleurus apartment in Paris. Their placement and timing was impeccable: in 1903, Paris was experiencing a sudden resurgence of artistic creativity as what was to become the modernist movement began to take shape.

Being in Paris at this particular time provided Stein the opportunity to experience various facets of modernism also in their infancy. The influence of other modern works on Stein’s writing is interesting. Writers commonly start their careers by studying fellow writers, and while Stein admitted to an admiration of the work of George Eliot, she also offers a rare example of the potential influence of other art forms on the mind of a writer,

demonstrating that creative techniques are transferable from one field to another, and representing the interdisciplinarity that the moderns would come to embrace. Stein had been exposed to art as a child, but it primarily consisted of old, oil on canvas landscapes which did little to stimulate her artistic sensibilities. Under Leo's tutelage, she began to frequent galleries and museums during her summers abroad in Europe. "When she was at last ready for paintings, modern paintings were ready for her," writes W. G. Rogers, who met Stein during the First World War, "when her eyes were opened, they were opened on the first examples of the sort of art of which she became the lifelong champion" (59). Paris had long been the world capital of art and culture, acting as a refuge to the artists of the world, and thus was home to many nineteenth-century artists; however, within a decade after the Steins settled on the rue de Fleurus, Paris was headed in a new aesthetic direction, one that would again revolutionize the art world. Gertrude and Leo Stein were at the foundation of this movement. At the turn of the century, they not only owned works by El Greco, Daumier, Gauguin, Cézanne, Renoir, Manet, and Toulouse-Lautrec, but they were also supporting the new age in art through extensive purchases of Picasso and Matisse (Mellow 7). "They bought pictures, not lavishly but with prescience and true passion, and soon their apartment was a fulcrum for the movement known as modernism;" writes Brenda Wineapple, "sister and brother were its advocates and promoters, collaborating in a profound intellectual and aesthetic adventure" (2). Discovering a profound love for innovative art, Stein became its most adamant supporter. "When she argued that people should buy them, hang them on their walls and defend them before all comers, she was speaking out of her own valuable experience," explains Rogers. "To admire works at an exhibition was one thing, but she had not stopped there;



she had taken the ultimate step of accepting personal responsibility for them, acknowledging that this was what her taste amounted to, what she liked to live with, where her money went. She had run up her flag and was ready to defend it” (60).

These paintings were the highlight of the Saturday evening salons hosted by the Steins, events which brought together an eclectic group of people to engage in excited talk about modern art. A guest at one of these events in the early years of the twentieth century might have seemed to have entered the first museum of modern art—a distinction the Steins could easily have claimed—as the walls were hung with an astounding collection of anything the tradition-bound art world considered outrageous and revolutionary. “The rue de Fleurus was a major, if amateur, gallery,” argues Wineapple, “and the Steins were enthusiasts ready to buy” (305). As one of the first Americans of the period to settle in Paris, Stein established contacts with artists from several different countries, and her home at 27, rue de Fleurus became a frequent gathering spot for the artists of the time. Guests at the salon represented an improbable mixture of nationalities, personalities, and types, ranging from impoverished art students to wealthy collectors, from unknown artists to respected pioneers of the modern movement. “In the decade before the war,” explains James Mellow, “the Stein salon was not limited to the celebrities of Parisian bohemia. It was at once democratic and congenial, an international meeting ground buzzing with transcontinental gossip” (13). After knocking on the large double door secured by the only Yale lock in Paris’s sixth *arrondissement*, a guest was usually asked, “*De la part de qui venez-vous?*,” for the Steins were frequently in the habit of meeting interesting people, inviting them to their salon, and promptly forgetting who they were or why they had been invited. However, because the gathering was open to

anyone, the question was a mere formality (Mellow 1). Inevitably, then, the tourists came because it was the thing to do when visiting Paris. Furthermore, among the French, it was considered good form to have attended the salon at least once, just to see the outrageous works the two gullible Americans had deemed great art. However, despite the fact that the Steins' home was known as a haven for the new art, the Steins did not have sole custody of this movement. Many of the guests who crowded their Saturday evening salons had come to the new art on their own and were simply looking for an assurance of the emerging movement's vitality and trying to catch up with the latest cultural gossip emanating from the French capital. However, the Steins "had so placed themselves at the center of the network of journalists, publicists, advocates, and collectors who were spreading the gospel of modernism," explains Mellow, "that, sooner or later, anyone interested in modern art would find his way to the rue de Fleurus," virtually assuring the Steins' continued involvement in the movement that was to become modernism (8).

Moreover, the Steins themselves were an attraction. Open-minded and extremely hospitable, the pair appeared at ease within the diverse crowd of enthusiastic talkers. In the early years, Stein, who was just beginning to take herself seriously as a writer, would often defer to Leo's more gregarious nature, content to leave him in charge of the aesthetic discussions. For his part, Leo discoursed on any subject from Picasso's evolving painting style to the latest theories on diet and exercise, and he was able to provide a seemingly unending supply of odd information and strange observations. Taller and thinner than Stein, Leo could usually be found in the centre of a heated discussion, confidently voicing his opinions to all who would listen (Wineapple 2-3). Stein took a different approach, remaining more elusive. She had strong opinions and

even admitted that argument was the very air she breathed, but she chose to speak only to a select few. It was in this way that Stein carefully cultivated the circle of friends and supporters that grew over the years to include artists, writers, amateurs, admirers, and the social elite, a sampling from the bohemian and traditional communities of the twentieth century that included Ernest Hemingway, Max Weber, and on one occasion the American hostess Mrs. Montgomery Sears (Mellow 13).

In the meantime, Alice Toklas was introduced to Stein's older brother, Michael Stein, and his family through her good friend Harriet Levy, when the Steins were in America following the San Francisco earthquake of 1906. Intrigued by the stories Sally Stein told of her family's life in Paris, Toklas began to consider a trip to Europe, although she was hesitant to mention it to her father. However, as time passed, Toklas began to consider life abroad more seriously, eventually broaching the subject with her father who responded with a "noncommittal sigh" and agreed to let her go (Toklas 18). Toklas and Harriet Levy made the trip in the fall of 1907. After arriving in Paris, it was not long before the two women called on the Michael Steins. Amid the clatter of tea things, and the talk of their trip, the figure of Gertrude Stein held Toklas's complete attention. "She was a golden brown presence, burned by the Tuscan sun and with a golden glint in her warm brown hair," records Toklas in *What Is Remembered*. "She was dressed in a warm corduroy suit. She wore a large round coral brooch and when she talked, very little, or laughed, a good deal, I thought her voice came from this brooch. It was unlike anyone else's voice—deep, full, velvety like a great contralto's, like two voices. She was large and heavy with delicate small hands and a beautifully modeled and unique head" (23). According to the legend that Stein later propagated in *The Autobiography of Alice B.*

*Toklas*, it was during this first encounter that Toklas heard the bells that signaled her encounter with genius, an event that was also to occur on being introduced to Picasso and Alfred North Whitehead. As Toklas prepared to leave that afternoon, Stein took her aside and instructed Toklas to join her the following afternoon for a walk in the Luxemburg Gardens. As it happened, Toklas was running late the next day and, not wanting to keep Stein waiting, sent a *petit bleu*, the convenient Parisian telegram, making her apologies in advance. “When I got to the rue de Fleurus and knocked on the very large studio door in the court, it was Gertrude Stein who opened it,” Toklas writes. She records her perception of Stein on their second meeting:

She was very different from the day before. She had my *petit bleu* in her hand. She had not her smiling countenance of the day before. She was now a vengeful goddess and I was afraid. I did not know what had happened or what was going to happen.

Nor is it possible for me to tell about it now. After she had paced for some time about the long Florentine table made longer by being flanked on either side by two smaller ones, she stood in front of me and said, Now you understand. It is over. It is not too late to go for a walk. You can look at the pictures while I change my clothes. (23-24)

Stein returned in a more accommodating frame of mind, and the two women proceeded on the first of many walks. While Toklas continued to puzzle over Stein’s frightening performance, the first day of their long lives together ended calmly in a pastry shop, where the two women exchanged familiarities as though they were old friends.

Stein and Toklas shared many similarities. In addition to both being Americans living in Paris, they came from similar backgrounds. Both were from second-generation Jewish-American business families, and both had lost their mothers to cancer. However, in appearance and temperament, the two women could not have been more different. In *European Experiences*, one of four volumes in Mabel Dodge Luhan’s memoirs *Intimate*

*Memories*, Luhan describes a visit she received from Stein and Toklas in 1912, drawing a vivid contrast between the two women. “Gertrude Stein was prodigious,” she recalls:

Pounds and pounds and pounds piled up on her skeleton—not the billowing kind, but massive heavy fat. She wore some covering of corduroy or velvet and her crinkly hair was brushed back and twisted up high behind her jolly, intelligent face. She intellectualized her fat, and her body seemed to be the large machine that her large nature required to carry it... When she got up she frankly used to pull her clothes off from where they stuck to her great legs. Yet with all this she was not repulsive. On the contrary, she was positively, richly attractive in her grand *ampleur*. (324-27)

As for Toklas, Luhan claims she:

was slight and dark, with beautiful gray eyes hung with black lashes—and she had a drooping, Jewish nose, and her eyelids drooped, and the corners of her red mouth and the lobes of her ears drooped under the black folded Hebraic hair, weighted down, as they were, with long heavy Oriental earrings... She looked like Leah, out of the Old Testament, in her half-Oriental get-up—her blues and browns and oyster whites—her black hair—her barbaric chains and jewels—and her melancholy nose. (324)

Luhan and Toklas were not on friendly terms, which could account for the severity of the description of Toklas in *European Experiences*. However, Luhan’s description matches that of other memoirs from the time, including Ernest Hemingway’s *A Moveable Feast* and Sylvia Beach’s *Shakespeare & Company*. These descriptions paint Stein as the fat, handsome, benevolent husband to Toklas’s thin, plain, sour wife, seemingly parodying a conventional couple’s society portrait.

Throughout this time, Stein was at work on what was to become her first critical success. *Three Lives*, Stein’s most important and influential early text, consists of three novellas, psychological portraits of impassive women: two German servants, Anna and Lena, and a young black woman, Melanctha Herbert. The central and longest portion of the book, the section featuring Melanctha, was to be recognized as a major triumph, and while it lacks racial sensitivity by today’s standards, it remains a landmark achievement

by a white American author in its representation of a black character. “Melanctha had not found it easy with herself to make her wants and what she had, agree,” writes Stein.

The description of Melanctha continues:

Melanctha Herbert was always losing what she had in wanting all the things she saw. Melanctha was always being left when she was not leaving others.

Melanctha Herbert always loved too hard and much too often. She was always full with mystery and subtle movements and denials and vague distrusts and complicated disillusionings. Then Melanctha would be sudden and impulsive and unbounded in some faith, and then she would suffer and be strong in her repression.

Melanctha Herbert was always seeking rest and quiet, and always she could only find new ways to be in trouble. (62)

The text would become indicative of Stein’s literary style. Her repetition of small words, like “always” in the section above, was an attempt to strip words of their associated meanings only to give those same words new meaning within her text. While this practice was often perceived as an abuse of language, Stein saw it as a means of achieving more accurate verbal expression.

For this reason, publishing the book was to prove more problematic than writing it. Reactions from friends asked to read the book were mixed, and Leo, whose approval Stein desperately wanted, was noncommittal about the work. She nonetheless sent the text to be typed by her good friend Etta Cone, hoping to eventually place it with a commercial publisher. Hutchins Hapgood was the first publisher with whom Stein attempted to place *Three Lives*, and while he was enthusiastic about the story, he was troubled by Stein’s unconventional writing style and suggested that she would have difficulties finding a publisher. Disappointed but not yet desperate, Stein continued to make the rounds of commercial publishing houses attempting to find someone interested in printing *Three Lives*. For more than a year, Stein and her supporters tried

unsuccessfully to place the book with a publisher. Since its completion in the spring of 1906, the book had been a source of disappointment, and ultimately Stein ended up funding the book's publication by Grafton Press in 1909. Grafton, a small New York publishing firm that specialized in limited editions published at the author's expense, offered to print a thousand copies, list the title in its catalogue, and distribute the book for \$660 (Wineapple 283). However, Stein's difficulties with the book were not yet done. Grafton Press was concerned with Stein's grammar and wanted to make corrections prior to printing the book. Stein refused, insisting that the book was to be printed exactly as it appeared in the manuscript. The publisher was so uneasy that they sent an editor to her door. This gentleman, surprised to be greeted by an American woman, informed her that the publisher had thought she was a foreigner, unfamiliar with the English language. Stein told him, in no uncertain terms, that she was an American and therefore thoroughly familiar with the English language, so that the stories were to be printed exactly as written. Despite many difficulties, *Three Lives* appeared in July of 1909.

*Three Lives* had disappointing sales. Mellow notes that by February 1910, only seventy-three of the five hundred bound copies had been sold, with another seventy-eight copies distributed to book reviewers and friends. Readership may have been sparse, but the book was being reviewed favorably. "Several of the influential and useful people Gertrude Stein met later in her career—the American critics Henry McBride and Carl Van Vechten, for example, and the English art critic Roger Fry—acknowledged that they had read the book when it first appeared, admired it, and had become curious about its author" notes Mellow (147-48). In the meantime, Stein took solace in her critical success and looked forward to new projects. While she believed *Three Lives* had been successful

in its depiction of other people, the book had also opened her mind to new possibilities. “Stated at a sufficiently high level of abstraction, individual problems appear to become universal dicta,” explains Richard Bridgman in his critical study, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (57). Bridgman argues that Stein sought to stabilize what she perceived as a chaotic world by progressively elevating individually isolating incidents until they become more general categories. By the end of *Three Lives*, Stein was encouraged in her ambition to prepare a story of all mankind, by which she did not mean a chronological narrative, but rather a perpetually valid description.

In the summer of 1906, after having finished writing *Three Lives* but long before it was ever to appear in print, Stein began work on a long, plodding book that she intended to be the history of an American family. However, over the course of the time spent writing the book, it became something more than a simple family narrative. It came to represent the strange psychological experiment that Stein had envisioned after finishing *Three Lives*. The text, which was to become *The Making of Americans*, tells the story of the Dehning and Hersland families, whose histories become interwoven when Julia Dehning marries Alfred Hersland. However, what begins as detailed descriptions of daily life eventually evolves into an intense character analysis, in which the author attempts to categorize her fictional characters in an effort to inventory their associated character types. In *The Making of Americans*, Stein writes:

I know some of the repeating coming out of Alfred Hersland and Julia Dehning and some others whom they know and some others who knew them and I will now be describing what I am desolately feeling is all being in them. I am desolate because I am not certainly hearing all repeating, I am almost sulking. I am beginning now to go on with my history of the Dehning family and of Julia Dehning and of her marrying and of the Hersland family and of Alfred Hersland and of every one they any of them came to know in their living. To begin again



then from pretty nearly the beginning. I am remembering everything I have been telling. I am loving all repeating. (611)

Stein again makes use of repetition throughout the text, using it to emphasize individual words that she finds of great significance. However, this technique draws away from the narrative itself and begins focusing on the sequential pockets of time between memorable acts and experiences. In *The Making of Americans*, Stein explores every possibility and every suggested variation brought to light within the text. “The pace of the novel is elephantine; the plot, such as it is, lumbers forward, foraging about in strange jungles of psychological observation. Gertrude was to make no concessions to the patience and endurance of her readers,” notes Mellow. “Yet, *The Making of Americans* was to serve as the laboratory of her later style, of her antic philosophy of human nature, and even of her habits as a creative writer” (115). Stein saw enormous potential in *The Making of Americans*, and therefore she afforded great time and energy to its completion, hoping that, one day, her literary experiment would revolutionize the world of letters.

As Stein was filling notebooks with what was to become *The Making of Americans*, Alice Toklas found a way of making herself useful, even indispensable, to the rue de Fleurus household. Learning to type specifically for the purpose of transcribing Stein’s often illegible handwriting, Toklas took on the formidable task of setting down Stein’s manuscripts in type, thereby filling the much-needed position of typist, a role that was to develop into a permanent occupation. Typically, Toklas arrived in the morning, while Stein was still asleep after having worked late into the night. Toklas would work diligently at the new Smith-Premier typewriter that had been bought for the purpose until Stein woke around noon. The two women then spent the afternoons together in the apartment or wandering through the streets of Paris, often discussing Stein’s work

(Wineapple 289). At some point, however, Toklas caught up with Stein's production of *The Making of Americans* and henceforth began copying the previous day's work. "Doing the typing of *The Making of Americans* was a very happy time for me," remembers Toklas. "Gertrude talked over her work of the day, which I typed the following morning. Frequently these were the characters or incidents of the previous day. It was like a living history. I hoped it would go on forever" (54). Toklas's belief in Stein's endeavor, evinced by the growing pile of typed pages, emboldened Stein in her literary mission. Stein was now speaking almost directly to someone in her writing. Moreover, that person was not an anonymous reader but rather an affectionate secretary. The immediate and individual attention Stein's writing received from Toklas finally granted Stein an audience, allowing her to put a face to the unknown reader she addressed in much of her early work. In fact, Mellow notes that Stein counted on Toklas transcribing the previous day's work and that, as their relationship developed, she often used it as a means of having the final word in disagreements, making notes in the margins, or sometimes directly into the text itself, knowing that Toklas would come across them in her transcribing (222).

One evening, shortly before supper, Stein asked Toklas to read over something she had recently written. Toklas was unenthusiastic, arguing that it was almost supper and that she would read over Stein's writing the next day when she came back to do the typing. Stein was insistent, maintaining that this particular piece had detached itself from the prose of *The Making of Americans*, and required Toklas's immediate attention. Toklas reluctantly followed Stein into the dining room, where she sat down to read what was to become Stein's first word portrait: "Ada" (Wineapple 325). The story begins with

a description of an indecisive young man, Barnes Colhard, and of his father, who both sound much like Toklas's own brother and father. It then moves on to describe a discontented young woman named Ada, trapped in an unrewarding family situation. Ada's mother dies and, as the only female in the household, she is required to take care of her father and her brother. "She had been a very good daughter to her mother. She and her mother had always told very pretty stories to each other," writes Stein. "Every one who knew her mother liked her mother. Many were sorry later that not every one liked the daughter. Many did like the daughter but not every one as every one had liked the mother. The daughter was charming inside in her, it did not show outside in her to every one. It certainly did to some" (15-16). Originally, Toklas thought Stein was making fun of her and began to get upset; however, Toklas soon realized that was not the intention of "Ada" which, as it progresses, tells the story of the young girl coming into her own. The coming of age takes place after Ada meets a genderless "some one," a writer who listens patiently to Ada's stories. The portrait of Ada, which opened up an important new vein in Stein's writing, ends on a note of affection. "Trembling was all living, living was all loving, some one was then the other one," explains Stein in a sonorous repetition of words. "Certainly this one was loving Ada then. And certainly Ada all her living then was happier than any one else ever could, who was, who is, who ever will be living" (16). "Ada" was, in effect, a love poem in which Stein declared her love for Toklas, verbalizing her belief that their happiness together would extend far into the future.

Toklas, then, eventually took a more permanent place in Stein's life, and in 1909 she joined Stein and her brother Leo at 27, rue de Fleurus. Stein, who at this time frequently deferred to Leo, had consulted her brother, who willingly gave his approval.

Drawn into management of the Stein household, Toklas took on the role of hostess, meal planner, and also cooked the occasional supper. Stein had never been more than selectively independent, and from childhood on, she had always left the practical responsibilities to others, arguing in *Everybody's Autobiography* that “[o]ne should always be the youngest member of the family” because it “saves you a lot of bother everybody takes care of you” (70). Toklas, then, was a welcome addition and effectively managed the daily routine, concentrating her efficiency and her cleverness both in furthering Stein’s literary career, as well as catering to any indulgence that the artist craved. “She was unswervingly loyal,” notes Bridgman, “capable of doing anything to assist her companion: typing, shopping, planning travel schedules, acting as a receptionist and cook, keeping up the correspondence” (110). However, many long-time members of Stein’s circle reacted with varying degrees of resentment to Toklas’s appropriation of Stein’s affections. In time, Leo began to feel the same way. Moreover, in addition to being displaced in her affections, Leo grew increasingly skeptical of Stein’s artistic abilities. Believing that he possessed a superior intelligence that he was unable to harness, Leo grew increasingly jealous of the attention afforded his sister. “Gertrude and I are just the contrary,” Leo wrote to a friend. “She’s basically stupid and I’m basically intelligent” (149). By the time of their final split, there was little that brother and sister agreed on, and in 1914 Leo and Gertrude divided the paintings and the furniture, and Leo moved out of the rue de Fleurus apartment. With Leo gone, Toklas officially took precedence in Stein’s life, a position she was never to relinquish. From her perspective, Stein had found not only companionship, but someone to manage practical affairs, to protect her from loneliness, and, most importantly, to love her.

To understand the severity of this separation, we must remember the closeness that had once existed between Gertrude and Leo Stein. Telling of her childhood in *Everybody's Autobiography*, Stein writes, "However as I say my brother and I were always together." She goes on to explain:

It is better if you are the youngest girl in a family to have a brother that is two years older, because that makes everything a pleasure to you, you go everywhere and do everything while he does it all for you which is a pleasant way to have everything happen to you, sometimes accidents happen to you but after all it is very easy not to have them hurt you and anyway it altogether is a pleasant excitement for you. Anyway as I say my brother and I were always together. (70-71)

As the youngest of five children, Stein and her brother were close throughout much of their childhood, a relationship that developed into a mutual dependence as the pair reached adulthood. For much of her adult life, Stein had docilely followed Leo wherever he went, eventually following him to Paris where the two settled in 1903 into the rue de Fleurus apartment. During the first years of her expatriation, Stein shared Leo's friends, listened to his opinions, and accepted his tastes. As her older brother, Leo had a comfortable sense of superiority which manifested itself in condescension and arrogance. He had come to expect an audience of one in his baby sister. However, as she reached her mid-thirties, Stein was changing. She was writing steadily, though with no encouragement from Leo, and in so doing was developing her own literary ideas and was beginning to see a connection to the larger modernist movement, as it was developing. Furthermore, she was developing relationships independent of her brother with people who shared her own aesthetic vision. Her determined productivity hardly pleased her brother, and the two began to grow distant. Stein's almost instant connection with

Toklas, who moved into the rue de Fleurus apartment in 1909, exacerbated the split. Without any dramatically explosive incidents, brother and sister went their separate ways.

Both parties agreed that the separation was for the best as it allowed them to pursue their own artistic endeavors without the restraint of the other. However, Stein had by this time gained some public recognition, while Leo struggled to harness his creative powers. Leo's contempt for her limited literary success bothered Stein, so she issued a rebuttal to her brother's comments in *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother*, which she wrote between 1910 and 1912. The work analyzes the Stein household situation, and although specific references are sometimes difficult to discern, the essential conflict is read between brother and sister. *Two* is a portrait of the artist as a young woman, and it demonstrates Stein learning about herself—but always in Leo's company. As the story develops, Stein eventually moves away from Leo and towards Alice. The book makes clear that while Stein and her brother had at one time shared a life, he had grown too self-absorbed to support her in any way, ultimately forcing her to look elsewhere for the support her own projects required. "The number two represents brother and sister, unified but separate, and imperceptibly pulling apart. Eventually it also stands for the two women friends," explains Bridgman in reference to the book's title. "Twoness at once suggests separateness and unity. 'One' has an equally complex meaning. It stands for the growing isolation of Leo, indifferent to anyone else's existence, save as an audience for his ideas. This inevitably destroyed the family unit" (113). The book dramatizes the isolation that resulted from the separate but equally powerful egos of Gertrude and Leo Stein. "The two and they were not a few, they were that which was the heart of that thing which was the same which was each one," writes Stein in *Two*. "They

were not differing as they were not hearing, they did not meet what there was to be met and they not meet them. They were not the last of remaining alone. They were not too immediate. They had the long ending and they did not rejoin everything. They were living then. They said the same” (121). Brother and sister played out their differences, with much of the debate centred on Stein’s increasingly obscure writing.

Moreover, because her writing was the basis of her independence, she could not afford to have it undermined. She continued to ignore the former head of her household, even as he insisted that her work meant nothing. “He said it was not it it was I,” tells Stein in the somewhat easier to understand language of *Everybody’s Autobiography*. “And it did not trouble me and as it did not trouble me I knew it was not true and a little as it did not trouble me he knew it was not true. But it destroyed him for me and it destroyed me for him” (76-77). Leo was implying Stein’s success was a result of her personality, not because of her work itself. However, writing was for Stein more than an occupation: it represented a crucial aspect of the way she lived and was a central aspect of her identity. Her desire to make a living by her writing was representative of a greater need to be accepted. In observing Stein’s own relationships, primarily those with Leo Stein and Alice Toklas, there is evidence of a compelling parallel between Stein’s own fears of non-being and the two major phases in the development of writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “In the nineteenth century the men when they were writing did invent all kinds and a great number of men,” explains Stein in *Everybody’s Autobiography*. She continues:

The women on the other hand never could invent women they always made the women be themselves seen splendidly or sadly or heroically or beautifully or despairingly or gently, and they never could make any other kind of woman. From Charlotte Brontë to George Eliot and many years later this was true. Now

in the twentieth century men were confident, the women were not but in the twentieth century the men have no confidence and so they have to make themselves as you say more beautiful more intriguing more everything and they cannot make any other man because they have to hold on to themselves not having any confidence. (5)

Stein, here, stresses the role of confidence in the creative process. Stein was often accused of being over-confident and displaying an egotism that was offensive to many. Catherine N. Parke, however, argues that Stein was merely overcompensating for a devastating lack of confidence. Because of her continued dependence on others, Stein had little opportunity to develop her independence, leading her to constantly question her own competence. Even in her artistic enterprise, Stein often deferred to Leo's aesthetic judgment, despite the fact that he had experienced less success than she. Following their split, Stein was finally free to express herself creatively without restraint. Her fragile confidence still required boosting, only now she sought approval from the larger public, as represented by commercial success and recognition. "The separation from Leo," notes Parke, "twin of her nonbeing and the millstone that weighted down her confidence, and her satisfying union with Alice B. Toklas combined with Stein's lifelong biographical project to create in herself a new and much needed confidence" (574). Aspiring to new heights, Stein continued her project in hopes of being recognized and to avoid disappearing altogether. Once very close to Leo, Stein saw her brother only one time after their separation in 1914. But the nature of her autonomy is questionable: Stein had gained independence from her brother only to establish a relationship with Alice Toklas.

The reserve with which Stein's relationship with Toklas has been treated in the past seems largely unnecessary now. Often describing Toklas as a dedicated friend, companion, and secretary of forty years, critics and even friends writing of the couple



treated the relationship as a privileged subject, leaving readers to infer the true nature of the association. This reticent form of address is contrasted with the often intimate, sometimes even explicit, expressions of this same relationship in Stein's own writing. As Bridgman puts it, "Amid domestic details, local gossip, references to failed ambition, to sewing, to writing, recriminations, apologies, and expressions of remorse come passages of intimate eroticism, sometimes quite overt in meaning" (149). Bridgman discusses the nature of the relationship openly, basing his assertions on allusions found in Stein's own writing and arguing that the relationship had a profound impact *on* and was often explored *in* Stein's prose. Sometimes using false names and creating code for censorable material, Stein writes of personal details in her work, hiding them amongst comments of uncertain significance. Ultimately proving more durable and productive than many more orthodox marriages, Stein often refers to herself and Toklas using the conventional terms of husband and wife: "I am a husband who is very good and I have a character that covers me like a hood and must be understood which it is by my wife whom I love with all my life," writes Stein in "Didn't Nelly and Lilly Love You," clearly outlining the marital identities assumed in the relationship (245). While Leigh Gilmore warns against assigning heterosexual labels to homosexual relationships, arguing that doing so negates the possibility of a unified lesbian subject, it is clear from much of Stein's work that she viewed her relationship with Toklas in very traditional terms and wished to explore it in her writing (72-73). It is significant that most of this material was published posthumously, and while discretion may have been one reason for withholding it from publication, the length of the pieces and Stein's difficulties finding a publisher could also be to blame.

As she reached her forties, Stein had thousands of pages of unpublished manuscripts, the neglect of which began to depress her. In the period following World War One, Stein's work displayed a large amount of variety and she feared her writing lacked focus. Furthermore, the emergence of the Dadaists and Surrealists threatened Stein's unique endeavor as the work of these avant-garde groups also examined the relationship of consciousness to language. "This flowering of the irrational in literature was at once an opportunity and a threat for Gertrude Stein," remarks Bridgman. "Practically speaking, it offered greater opportunities for publication. Through 1917, only eight of her submissions had been accepted by periodicals, but from the end of the war through 1925, she had twenty-three pieces and two books published. On the other hand, with these new and prodigiously bright competitors, Gertrude Stein felt obliged to clarify her aesthetic ideas" (162). Moreover, as she was making no particular progress in terms of commercial success, the time was ripe for a careful review of her career. Deciding to refocus her attention on the use of language, Stein entered a period of intense experimentation, producing some of her most inaccessible work. Arguing that words must be used precisely, she began to meditate on the production of language, returning to the words themselves in order to find the direction she was looking for.

Moreover, she was attracted to private meanderings, on the one hand, and to public enlightenment, on the other, and at this point Stein attempted to explain her literary goals with works such as *Composition as Explanation* which appeared in 1926. While the work was never as clear as its title may suggest, it did represent Stein's first attempt to explain her often difficult style. "There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each

generation has something different at which they are all looking,” explains Stein by way of introduction. “By this I mean so simply that anybody knows it that composition is the difference which makes each and all of them then different from other generations and this is what makes everything different otherwise they are all the alike and everybody knows it because everybody says it” (513). Delivered in a halting style, *Composition as Explanation* represents Stein’s candid attempt to communicate the struggle of writing to her audience, an activity she had begun to see as integral to artistic experimentation and one which she would carry on for the rest of her life.

All this time, Stein had continued to work on *The Making of Americans*, evolving it over several years as the words on the page continued to multiply exponentially. “Containing five hundred and fifty thousand words the printing of which required nine hundred and twenty-five generous pages,” records Bridgman, “it took her almost nine years to complete” (59). Stein began to regard the work as her masterpiece and, more importantly, as a landmark in the history of modern literature. However, few readers were to agree with her, but, in all fairness, few readers were given the opportunity to do so, as the book remained unpublished for more than a decade. Stein remained defensive about the book, and the manuscript was widely distributed to commercial publishing houses that appeared interested in publishing experimental modern works. Finally, early in 1925, Stein persuaded Robert McAlmon to publish an unabridged copy of *The Making of Americans* as one of his Contact Editions, a small press recognized for producing quality work for a limited audience. *The Making of Americans* is a mammoth work that ultimately cost more to produce than McAlmon was able to sell it for (Mellow 116). Nonetheless, it is impossible to overestimate the importance of this work in terms of the

tremendous effect it had on Stein, both professionally and personally. The book is only one attempt at a psychological inventory of mankind, a realm of examination she would never exhaust.

“Because the myth of Stein’s obscurity in the 1920s has been perpetuated for so long,” explains Leick, “critics who are interested in the celebrity status of Stein tend to focus on her reception in the 1930s and to ignore the first twenty years of her career” (8). Leick maintains that Stein’s name would have been familiar to many throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, even if her work was not. Stein lamented her celebrity status, complaining that the public showed more interest in her than in her work, and although she did not object to being seen, she wanted primarily to be read. She worked continuously throughout this period of her life, producing writing that was often too challenging for commercial publication. While Stein gained some critical recognition with *Three Lives*, the bulk of her work remained unpublished. The threat of anonymity was her principal fear and what she fought against throughout her career. However, during this period of literary obscurity, Stein was making real progress, despite evidence to the contrary. Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, Stein established a strong expatriate presence, formed a lasting relationship with Alice Toklas, freed herself from her brother Leo, and established a literary style that was all her own. While these accomplishments play a significant role in who Stein was and what she was to become, she continued to be concerned about her lack of a literary reputation. “She thought she had no personality aside from her writing,” explains Janet Flanner in her foreword to volume one of *The Yale Edition of the Unpublished Writings of Gertrude Stein*. “A publisher once said to her, ‘We want the comprehensible thing, the thing the

public can understand.’ She said to him, ‘My work would have been of no use to anyone if the public had understood me early and first’” (xvii). Ultimately, then, it was these formative years that provided direction for Stein, providing motivation in her literary endeavor, and eventually allowing her to delight in her success, unconcerned about the contradictory reasons for it.

## Chapter Two

By the 1920s, Gertrude Stein was paradoxically a recognized literary figure who had had very little of her work published or widely read. In 1924, over tea with William Carlos Williams, Stein pored over a stack of manuscripts, saying that she hoped that some day they would be printed. When asked what he would do if he were faced with the same situation, Williams rather abruptly told her to weed through them, saving the best, and to throw the rest into the fire (Mellow 291). This did not sit well with Stein who reportedly kept every sentence of what she wrote in hopes of eventually seeing it in print. However, her luck did not improve much throughout the decade, which included difficulties with most major commercial publishing houses.

It was Ernest Hemingway who first alerted Stein to the opportunities presented by the little magazines which flourished in the twenties. These various publications, which often did not last for more than a few numbers, were renowned for publishing some of the most challenging writing of the period. “She showed me the many volumes of manuscript that she had written and that her companion typed each day,” writes Hemingway years later in *A Moveable Feast*. “Writing every day made her happy, but as I got to know her better I found that for her to keep happy it was necessary that this daily output, which varied with her energy be published and that she receive recognition” (17). Following his own success in *The Little Review*, Hemingway persuaded Stein that little

magazines could provide her with a valuable outlet to promote her work. Using his recent appointment as subeditor of Ford Madox Ford's *transatlantic review*, Hemingway selected Stein's *The Making of Americans* for serial publication in the magazine (C. Baker 124). "Ford alleges he is delighted with the stuff," Hemingway wrote to Stein after securing the deal:

I told him it took you 4 ½ years to write it and that there were 6 volumes... He wondered if you would accept 30 francs a page (his magazine page) and I said I thought I could get you to. (Be haughty but not too haughty.) I made it clear it was a remarkable scoop for his magazine obtained only through my obtaining genius. He is under the impression you get big prices when you consent to publish. I did not give him this impression but did not discourage it. (Gallup 159)

The first installment appeared in the April 1924 number of the magazine, and Carlos Baker reports Stein was overcome with excitement (124). Not only would her work appear in print and be accessible to a large number of her contemporaries, but the *transatlantic review* was willing to pay her for the privilege.

Although her relationship with Hemingway eventually cooled, Stein continued to contribute to little magazines throughout the twenties. For most of the contributors, these publications were a means of keeping themselves in view, albeit for the limited audience they served. For Stein, they often represented the only opportunity to be paid for her writing. However, these precarious publications did not offer much stability. They often existed for a short period of time, financed by a wealthy investor who lost interest when debts began to accumulate after a few issues. In addition, because each little magazine claimed a unique artistic vision, Stein's work did not appeal to the artistic sensibilities of every editor, and she was encountering resistance in her attempts to be published.

Following her appearance in T. S. Eliot's *Criterion*, Eliot reportedly wrote that "the work

of Gertrude Stein was very fine but not for us,” politely summarizing Stein’s difficulties throughout the 1920s (*Autobiography* 202).

The inception of *transition* at this time was fortuitous, and Stein enjoyed regular appearances in the magazine throughout its first year of publication. However, while Stein’s work was appearing regularly in print, the critical attention she was receiving was not entirely positive. Off the pages of *transition*, critics responded violently to her prose, attacking it as a major negative influence on the magazine; in *transition*, Stein’s work received little critical notice, and her accomplishments were mentioned only in passing. While none of the critical writings that appeared in the magazine ever disparaged Gertrude Stein, the omission of critical attention, to her, was insulting. Early in the *transition* program, Laura Riding attempted to correct this oversight, publishing “The New Barbarism and Gertrude Stein” in *transition* 3 (June 1927), only two months after the magazine’s debut, thereby becoming the first critic to write an article devoted solely to Stein’s work. Riding’s article was followed by the appearance of Ralph Church’s “A Note on the Writing of Gertrude Stein” in the Fall 1928 number of the magazine. Reiterating many of Riding’s arguments, Church, too, attempted to recognize Stein’s achievements on the pages of the magazine. In their defense of her work, both Riding and Church afford Stein much needed critical attention in an attempt to legitimize her position in *transition* and define her role within high modernism.

Riding’s article was firstly a response to a literary review by T. S. Eliot written in 1927 entitled “Charleston, Hey! Hey.” In reviewing the work of several of his contemporaries, Eliot was led to consider the future of literature and began questioning “whether the thought and sensibility of the future may not become more simple and



indeed more crude than that of the present” (595). He considers Stein’s position in the expanding literary tradition noting that there “is something precisely ominous about Miss Stein” (595). Expanding on remarks made earlier by another critic, Eliot writes, “Moreover, her work is not improving, it is not amusing, it is not interesting, it is not good for one’s mind” (595). Despite his disparaging review, Eliot suspects that history, ultimately, will work in Stein’s favour, concluding that, “If this is the future, then the future is, as it very likely is, of the barbarians” (595). In her response to Eliot’s article, Riding contrasts the civilized professionalism of Eliot with Stein’s “primitive good-humour,” defending the very barbarism Eliot condemned (162):

No one but she has been willing to be as ordinary, as simple, as primitive, as stupid, as barbaric as successful barbarism demands.

Does no one but Miss Stein realize that to be abstract, mathematical, thematic, anti-Hellenic, anti-Renaissancist, anti-romantic, we must be barbaric? (157)

Riding’s article is based on the example of Stein’s writing presented in *Composition as Explanation*. First delivered as a lecture at Cambridge and Oxford, *Composition as Explanation* was published by the Hogarth Press in 1926. Never as clear as the title suggests, the essay represents one of Stein’s many attempts to explain her difficult writing style. “And now to begin as if to begin,” writes Stein as she considers her own writing: “Composition is not there, it is going to be there and we are here. This is some time ago for us naturally. There is something to be added afterwards” (517). Unsure of how much of her writing is familiar to those reading the essay, Stein enters into a brief description of some of her past works, including *Three Lives* and *The Making of Americans*, but only as a means to describe her unique literary project.

So then I as a contemporary creating the composition in the beginning was groping toward a continuous present, a using everything a beginning again and

again and then everything being alike then everything very simply everything was naturally simply different and so I as a contemporary was creating everything naturally being naturally simply different, everything being alike. (520)

In this way, Stein writes the analysis of her work using the very style she is describing.

The text is dense and repetitive as Stein attempts to break down all possible historical associations inherent in the words themselves, thereby restoring a lost absolute to artistic production. Riding recognizes Stein's attempts, and in "The New Barbarism and Gertrude Stein," she argues that Stein's unique style enables the successful merger of the creative and the critical, two seemingly separate activities. Riding supports this redefinition of criticism which acknowledges the general rethinking of critical discourse that occurred throughout the modern period, most notably defined by Ezra Pound, who viewed "criticism by translation" as one of five viable "categories" that also include "discussion," "exercise in the style of a given period," "via music," and "in new composition" (74-75).

Riding had first contacted Stein after she and Robert Graves had purchased a Crown Albion printing press with part of the advance from one of Graves's books. The Seizin Press, as it was to be named, aimed to provide another answer to Bloomsbury's Hogarth Press. In her brief prospectus, Riding claims that their "editions are decidedly not addressed to collectors but to those interested in work rather than printing—of a certain quality" (D. Baker 181). Soon after soliciting and accepting a work from Stein, Riding was invited to Paris, presumably to discuss Stein's work in greater detail. Riding had taken an immediate liking to Stein after having read *Composition as Explanation* when it was first published in 1926, and had been vocal about her appreciation for the work and its author. "Riding's demand in *Anarchism is Not Enough* for the purification

of language from the stale historical and mythic associations seemed to be amply answered by this woman who used words as if they had no ‘experience,’” notes Deborah Baker in her biography of Riding (184). Riding had found an example of the type of writing she both critically praised and aimed to emulate herself. “By isolating it, she hoped at last that the plague of fragmenting self-consciousness had been thwarted,” explains Baker. “By writing about it in *transition*, she also hoped to quiet those ‘literary harpies’ who had filled her head to begin with” (184). Stein was no doubt pleased with the essay, but she was probably even more pleased with seeing appear one of her many unpublished works, *An Acquaintance with Description*, thanks to the Seizin Press. A friendship developed between the two women, and Riding found great strength in the literary example set by Stein. Although not much came of Seizin’s publication of *An Acquaintance with Description*, Laura Riding remained an important ally for Stein, and “The New Barbarism and Gertrude Stein” can be hailed as a significant intervention, representing one of the first critical attempts to engage directly Stein’s work.

Riding bases much of her argument on the philosophy of T. E. Hulme, a British philosopher, poet, and essayist, who wrote early in the twentieth century. First influenced by the philosophy of Henri Bergson, Hulme later took interest in art history and literary criticism, synthesizing these seemingly disparate interests, and developing influential theories on art and literature. In much of his literary criticism, Hulme distinguishes between romanticism, a style informed by a belief in the infinite in man and nature, and classicism, a mode of art stressing human finitude, formal restraint, and concrete imagery. Foreshadowing modernism’s rejection of the romantic era, Hulme’s well-known essay “Romanticism and Classicism,” published in 1924, argues that

romanticism has reached its period of exhaustion and maintains that “we are in for a classical revival” (178). Holding that the literary tradition is founded upon the production of new artistic modes, Hulme contends that the current artistic era has run its natural course and must give way to the new artistic movement. “A particular convention or attitude in art has a strict analogy to the phenomena of organic life,” writes Hulme. “It grows old and decays. It has a definite period of life and must die.” Hulme encouraged innovation in the arts, maintaining that there will be no “new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention, to turn ourselves loose in” (181). His desire for innovative artistic techniques envisages the development of modernism, a movement which challenged perceptions of art held at the time of modernism’s original development.

Riding uses the language of Hulme’s philosophy in her defense of Stein, arguing that Stein represents “an ideal author for a one-man classical period” (167). However, Riding questions openly Hulme’s use of the terms “classic” and “romantic,” arguing that the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive and eventually redefining the terms for her own use. While Hulme appears to support a return to classicism, Riding claims his “romanticism is finally and completely confessed in his attachment to Bergson” who, she argues, merges romanticism with classicism, inventing “an elaborate, pleasurable and dreamy way for the modern classicist to be barbaric” (157). Riding writes of Bergson:

By defining the time world as an absolute duration which continuously interpenetrated itself and thus continuously produced new forms, he suggested a movement in the absolute without attacking its absoluteness; he made romanticism seem classical... (158)

Riding credits Stein’s work with a similar revolutionary quality, in its ability to merge the creative with the critical. “Her criticism is not distinct or separable from her other works,

nor is it merely an explanation of what she does elsewhere,” argued critic Frederick J. Hoffman shortly after Stein’s death. His conclusion echoes Riding’s own thoughts on Stein’s creative and critical endeavors: “The two kinds of work are often interchangeable, and at any rate she did not contradict herself in the one in order to gain converts to the other” (19). The creative and critical functions of literature are traditionally defined in opposition to one another and can be seen as existing in separate planes: “The criticism is talking backwards. The composition, because its time is a continuous present, is talking forwards,” explains Riding, who argues that traditional criticism “drops a perpendicular at the point where the continuous horizontal of composition begins again with the contemporary time-sense” (166). Stein’s work challenges this perception and, according to Riding, achieves what Hulme “called but could not properly envisage, ‘a perpendicular,’ an escape from the human horizontal plane” (164). This is subtly achieved in Stein’s writing “as the composition is something which goes on and in on a continuous present... beginning again and again and again, it does not seem to matter which came first, romanticism or classicism, or whether a work or attitude is attributed to one or to the other or whether, indeed, it is ever necessary to refer to either” (165).

By combining the functions of critic and poet, Stein’s writing achieves successfully what others before her had only imagined. Drawing on Hulme’s principles, Riding argues that criticism demands that art recognize a first principle, presumably beauty, and that all aspects of the work refer back to this single absolute quality. However, criticism fails to outline the features associated with this principle, assuming “all the prerogatives which belong to creation without assuming any of its concrete responsibilities” (154). Art is a way of expressing things but is not the things themselves,

Riding argues, emphasizing the instrumental qualities of the craft. In this sense, artistic creation represents an ideal in which the beauty of the piece is not inherent but must be supplied by the age in which the work is produced. “There is singularly nothing that makes a difference a difference in beginning and in the middle and in ending except that each generation has something different at which they are all looking,” explains Stein in *Composition as Explanation* (513). Ultimately, as this passage makes clear, it is the responsibility of the artist and his age to identify the absolute quality necessary for artistic production, ensuring that that particular quality is reproduced in the work. “The critical energy of the poet is supposed to be more concretely responsible than the creative energy of criticism,” contends Riding. “Half the energy of the poet, if not more, is to be consumed in making the age yield its version of the first principle” (155). This version is to be interpreted as the theme of the work and, if not clearly articulated, the poet is to blame for failing to meet the critical standards set out by the age. By taking nothing around her for granted, Stein “refused to be baffled by criticism’s haughty coyness and, taking the absolute, beauty and the first principle quite literally, saw no reason, all of these things being so, why we should not have a theme, why indeed, we cannot assume ‘a perfectly articulated given theme’” (Riding 156). In assuming a theme and not bothering to define it to her readers, Stein successfully produces a literary style that represents the absolute qualities required in art, and demonstrates her unique ability to merge the creative and the critical in new ways.

This absolute, which criticism argues is necessary for the production of art, is marked by a “penetrating obviousness,” which is available only to the artist who sees things “as no one else sees them” (Riding 160). However, this divine ability is not a

mark of privilege but rather emphasizes the ordinary, as the artist only sees the universal experience more concretely and expressively. This sentiment is expressed by Stein herself in *Composition as Explanation*, where she does not posit the artist as someone apart from the rest of the world, but as someone more sensitive, more receptive to the wave of the future, that will inevitably reach the rest of the public. “No one,” she writes early in the piece, “is ahead of his time, it is only that the particular variety of creating his time is the one that his contemporaries who are also creating their own time refuse to accept. And they refuse to accept it for a very simple reason and that is that they do not have to accept it for any reason” (514). This inspired ordinariness, which Riding’s barbarism ultimately champions, connects the artist to the greater community of poets, past and present, providing a timelessness necessary for the production of art. Riding asserts that language has been so debased that much of the artist’s creative energies are spent in attacking the ordinary means of communication in an attempt to be original. In contrast, the barbaric artist utilizes the language as it already exists, purging past associations and returning to the most basic styles of communication. “He may be regarded by his tribe as divinely inspired to communicate directly, but inspired in ordinariness,” maintains Riding, who labels Stein’s writing as barbaric. “Everybody is unable to understand her and thinks that this is because she is too original or is trying too hard to be original,” Riding writes of Stein, “But she is only divinely inspired in ordinariness” (160). In her barbarism, then, Stein’s artistic vision represents the universal in an attempt to speak to the collective.

All this, Riding argues, Stein has understood and executed effectively because of the perfect simplicity of her mind. Believing implicitly in an absolute, she has not

bothered to outline the first principle of her own time, assuming that it is evident in her writing. “Since she is alive and everybody around her seems to be alive, why of course there is an acting first principle, there is composition,” explains Riding. She continues:

This acting first principle provides a ‘perfectly articulated given theme’ because there is time, and everybody, and the beginning again and again and again, and composition. In her primitive good-humour she did not find it necessary to trouble to define the theme. The theme is to be inferred from the composition. The composition is clear because the language means nothing but what it means in her using of it. (162)

In this sense, all of Stein’s writing appears to be final because it represents a continuous present. “After all this,” explains Stein, “there is that, there has been that that there is a composition and that nothing changes except composition the composition and the time of and the time in the composition” (522). Stein creates an atmosphere of continuousness by her repetition and progressive use of the tenses of verbs, creating the feeling of beginning again and again. “This is how Gertrude Stein wrote in 1906 and this is how she was still writing in 1926,” reports Riding. “Writing by always beginning again and again and again keeps everything different and everything the same. It creates duration but makes it absolute by preventing anything from happening in the duration” (163). Stein denies the history of the words she uses as though she were the first person to use them, reinvigorating the existing language from within.

Riding labels this as “barbarism,” maintaining that this type of literary experiment represents an attempt to revitalize a language that had been degraded by its experiences, making ordinary words appear fresh and new. In this way, Stein shared with *transition* editor Eugene Jolas the desire to circumvent the traditional relationship between a word and its meaning in language, a practice that was in line with the aims of the magazine. However, that sense of belonging would soon come into question as Jolas’s method relied



heavily on the development of a new lexicon to effect the break, and Stein's work sought to revitalize language from within by returning to the words themselves and ignoring their traditional connection to meaning. "She uses language automatically to record pure, ultimate obviousness," writes Riding.

She makes it capable of direct communication not by caricaturing language in its present stage—attacking decadence with decadence—but by purging it of its discredited experiences. None of the words Miss Stein uses have ever had any experience. They are no older than her use of them, and she herself no older than her age conceived barbarically. (160)

In her attention to the purely verbal aspects of individual words, Stein was attempting to rejuvenate what she saw as a moribund language. Riding maintains that Stein's use of language denied any pre-existing reality in establishing a new form derived exclusively from the internal considerations of her material. This possibility was originally raised by Sherwood Anderson in the introduction to Stein's *Geography and Plays*, published in 1922. Anderson recognized "that every artist working with words as a medium, must at times be profoundly irritated by what seems the limitations of his medium." However, what most writers overlook are the simplest words, "the little soldiers with which we great generals must make our conquests" (6). Anderson, and later Riding, saw in Stein's method the rediscovery of these words. She was determined "to go live among the little housekeeping words, the swaggering bullying street-corner words, the honest-working, money saving words, and all the other forgotten and neglected citizens of the sacred and half forgotten city" (8). Stein valued the verbal qualities present in the existing language, and sought to recapture the power of individual words untarnished by the associations garnered through their repeated use.

Appearing later in the *transition* program, Ralph Church's "A Note on the Writing of Gertrude Stein" outlines many of the same points mentioned in the earlier article by Riding. In *transition* 14 (Fall 1928), Church once again argues that Stein's work is completely self-contained, represented by nothing more than the words on the page. "What Miss Stein says derives its meaning from nothing external to her writing, but from her realization of what she presents in, rather than merely suggests by her words," maintains Church (165). If there were real figures or events behind Stein's work, they are unimportant as the meaning of any given text is provided without reference to external reality. It is presented in the character of the writing itself. "For that reason its meaning is essential and given immediately as is the quality of a colour," explains Church, "and that fact renders absurd any curiosity seeking to find what Miss Stein means in anything not presented in the words she writes down" (165). Church notes the lack of external references in Stein's writing and contends that any effort to give meaning to her work using anything but the words themselves is futile because the true meaning behind the work is just what meets the mind in its reading. "In being the immediate experience which the reading of it is," writes Church, "her writing is often in every word final; as every intuition is final" (167). The finality of her prose allows Stein to communicate openly, and for those who appreciate the directness of her style, to understand what is not merely suggested, but rather inherent in the words on the page.

Church rejects the claim that all writing "must be about something not given in the writing itself and serve well the purpose of describing it," arguing that such a rigid prescription for literary production denies the power of the words themselves (166). He attacks conventional writing whose aim "is to present to the mind by some discursive

method an idea, character problem, tragedy, etc.,” maintaining that its methods are faulty and only occupy the reader with the “transitive significance of the words” rather than with the actual things described (166). Furthermore, he discredits the notion that words are mere signs on a page meant for interpretation by the reader, and he argues that the reader’s pleasure does not consist in being constantly reminded of an external reality and in having that reality restated in writing.

What words can much better be is not the description of something, but that thing transmuted by the spirit of the writer into words such that their meaning is not referential but given and exhausted in their presented character. When such transmutation of what is for book reviewers the subject matter is achieved—and it is just that which Miss Stein does achieve—it is impertinent to ask what the presented words are about. (166)

Church echoes Riding, supporting an art whose relation to external reality is unclear, asserting that it is through these abstract patterns that a true representation in words can be achieved.

The abstract quality of Stein’s work challenged critics, however, and while many violently rejected her prose, others sought new ways to explain her unorthodox technique. Interdisciplinary tropes, for example, were used throughout the modern period in an attempt to provide justification for unconventional new artistic styles by underlining the continuity between different artistic media. This technique was applied to Stein’s work in an effort to make readers more comfortable with Stein’s style by comparing it to similar innovations in other areas. As early as *transition* 3 (June 1927), an editorial appeared that compared the reception of Stein’s prose to the effect that work in other media had had on its audience. “They are as undecipherable as Bach fugues,” the editors wrote in “K.O.R.A.A.,” appearing in the June 1927. “They are abstract patterns, with more dimensions than sculpture, and subtler tone colours than painting and music” (175).

Stein's work was most often compared to techniques used in the visual arts, but there was also mention of the musical qualities inherent in much of her writing. Renowned for her use of repetition, Stein's work has an incanting effect, as in this contribution to *transition* 3 (June 1927):

And to in six and another. And to and in and six and another. And to and in and six and another. And to in six and and to and in and six and another. And to and in and six and another. And to and six and in and another and and to and six and another and and to and in and six and and to and six and in and another. ("As a Wife Has a Cow a Love Story" 9-10)

The same words, or slight variations on the same words, repeated in close proximity, have a distinctively aural quality, suggesting a continuity between literature and music. Many contemporary critics have argued that the use of interdisciplinary comparison should be read only as the loosest of analogies, and it should not form the basis of any real critical interpretation. Church's article takes a similar line of thought, arguing that Stein's writing has a literary value that does not require the support of other arts that had previously broken from traditional forms. "Sympathetic critics of Miss Stein's writing have praised its poetic values sometimes to the exclusion of all else," Church writes at the start of his article. "The prosaic harmonies and rhythms have thus come to be accepted as what constitutes its chief value as writing, and that acceptance is so definite that any attempt to consider another aspect may seem no more than a literary wild oat" (164). Acknowledging a value in interdisciplinary tropes, Church argues that Stein's work has other merits worth considering.

Church maintains, then, that the value of Stein's work lies in its abstraction and that it need not be explained in relation to anything external, not even other modern art forms. "That there is something more in what Miss Stein writes than the signaled values

is vouched for by those who say that it is meaningless or, if they prefer to sound technical and polite, that it is abstract,” writes Church, positing that many critics use the two words interchangeably (164). Critics attacked Stein’s prose violently, complaining that it refers to or signifies nothing in particular and that it fails to fulfill any of the literary processes presumed necessary in the development of more traditional literature. While Church acknowledges that Stein’s writing contains no external references, he denies that this is a flaw in her technique. Her work aims to provide “not obvious descriptions but things in their very immediate presence,” argues Church, maintaining that writing of this sort has a value beyond that assigned to more traditional work in the literary canon (165). Once again referencing Hulme’s theories on the absolute quality necessary for the production of art, Church writes of Stein’s work that “if such writing can be said to be without meaning, or abstract, that is saying only that what it presents is intrinsically individuated, without external reference, and ultimate” (167). For Church, Stein’s unconventional word patterns and syntax convey more than mere description allows, representing the richness and allusiveness of language. “That it should be said of Miss Stein’s writing that it is meaningless is inadvertent praise,” explains Church. “Such a dictum says only that Miss Stein finds it unnecessary to be discursive. Of what she writes Miss Stein realizes something of its nature and she is able perhaps miraculously to express that directly in words” (168). Abstraction, then, allows Stein the freedom to use words in order to represent the very essence of what she is describing, enabling her to communicate more directly than traditional patterns would permit. Church defends the merits of this type of writing, concluding that “[n]othing need nor can substitute for what in words is wholly given” (168).

Both Riding and Church utilize Hulme's theories in their defense of Stein's writing, arguing that her manipulation of language is an attempt to use her medium more accurately. "The great aim is accurate, precise and definite description," explains Hulme in outlining the aims of literature. However, he goes on to note the difficulty associated with such a task, writing:

It is no mere matter of carefulness; you have to use language, and language is by its very nature a communal thing; that is, it expresses never the exact thing but a compromise—that which is common to you, me and everybody. But each man sees a little differently, and to get out clearly and exactly what he does see, he must have a terrific struggle with language, whether it be with words or the technique of other arts. (183)

The difficulties Hulme associates with the artistic process relate directly to Stein's literary project. Although, Hulme maintains that, through a concentrated effort, an artist can use language to suit the purposes of his art. He compares the process to that of building an architectural curve, understanding that by selecting the appropriate pieces anyone can draw approximately any curve. However, according to Hulme, the artist "simply can't bear the idea of that 'approximately'" and therefore strives for greater accuracy. "Now the state of tension or concentration of mind, if he is doing anything really good in this struggle against the ingrained habit of the technique, may be represented by a man employing all his fingers to bend the steel out of its own curve and into the exact curve which you want," explains Hulme, "something different to what it would naturally assume" (184). Hulme endows the artist with the ability to manipulate his medium to accurately reflect the aims of his art, a quality both Riding and Church attribute to Stein.

Both critics argue that Stein manipulates language in an attempt to better represent that which she is describing. In this sense, her work reflects a profound

understanding of the power of language which she controls with great precision, affecting word patterns not seen elsewhere. This type of experiment in language, although not well-received critically, represents an important innovation in the literary arts. Arguing that contemporary literature often settles for less than the best that words can give, Church maintains that what “words can much better be is not the description of something, but that thing transmuted by the spirit of the writer into words such that their meaning is not referential but given and exhausted in their presented character” (166). This is precisely what Riding and Church argue that Stein’s writing accomplishes. By ignoring any previous associations inherent in the words she uses, Stein reinvigorates language, wielding it to suit her own purposes, just as in the analogy used by Hulme. Describing this use of words, Riding writes: “The design that Miss Stein makes of them is literally abstract and mathematical because they are etymologically transparent and commonplace, mechanical but not eccentric... Their author is a large-scale mystic, she is the darling priest of cultured infantilism to her age if her age but knew it” (161). Making reference to the simplicity of Stein’s word choices, Riding praises Stein’s methods, arguing that she represents the best the current age has to offer. Both Riding and Church acknowledge the abstraction present in much of Stein’s work, but contend that it does not represent a failure in her attempt to communicate. Rather, both maintain adamantly that Stein’s work represents an attempt to communicate more directly. This line of thinking, while not overly popular, represents a serious attempt to legitimize Stein’s role in both *transition* and the larger modernist movement of which it was a part.

The articles by Riding and Church numbered among the few devoted exclusively to Stein’s cause. Arguing that her experiments in language aligned her with the program

outlined for *transition*, both critics sought recognition for Stein's work and defended the importance of her writing to the magazine. While Stein's work can be seen to apply to the broadest aspects of *transition*'s "The Revolution of the Word," it was also quite different from the particular revolution Jolas was envisioning. Early in the *transition* program, Jolas had called for an art that sought to recapture "the simplicity of the word," the primitive power of language unsullied by any existing associations ("Suggestions for a New Magic" 179). In using language "automatically to record pure, ultimate obviousness," Stein strips away the existing meaning of words, at first glance achieving the aims of *transition* (Riding 160). However, as *transition* developed and changed, so did Eugene Jolas's original vision, culminating in "The Revolution of the Word" appearing in *transition* 16/17 (June 1929). While some of the articles listed in Jolas's manifesto could be applied to Stein's work, specifically the eighth clause as it refers to the "litany of words" as an independent unit, the overall emphasis was placed on the development of neologistic forms to fight against the moribund nature of the existing language. Later in life, Jolas admitted that he admired "certain of her rhythmic enchainments" but maintained that, overall, her "attitude was remote from anything I felt or thought. For not only did she seem to be quite devoid of metaphysical awareness, but I also found her aesthetic approach both gratuitous and lacking in substance... The little household words so dear to Sherwood Anderson never impressed me" (*Man From Babel* 201). Jolas wanted "new words, Millions of words" and Stein's dedication to the verbal experience could not outweigh her denial of the malady of language which Jolas saw plaguing the English lexicon, ultimately separating the two, at least theoretically (*Man From Babel* 201).



In explaining her methods, both Riding and Church attempt to justify Stein's place on the pages of *transition* and within the larger modernist movement. Riding's article, and later Church's, represent a significant contribution as much of Stein's work had apparently gone unnoticed on the pages of the magazine. Both Riding and Church engage directly her work, finding beauty in her often abstract manipulation of language and highlighting its significance. In her explication of Stein's method, Riding emphasizes the simplicity of the techniques used, arguing that they represent a return to the barbaric nature of language. However, Riding's argument is not meant to be disparaging: "Nothing that has been said here should be understood as disrespectful to Gertrude Stein," clarifies Riding within her article. "What has been said has been said in praise and not contempt" (164). Church's admiration of Stein's work echoes that of Riding, again emphasizing its merits and providing a means through which a marginalized author finds a voice. Noting the lack of critical attention Stein's work received, Church wonders: "That such an ultimate achievement should seem extraordinary is to be expected, but that common appreciation of it should be pale is hard to understand" (166). Both Riding and Church afford Stein much needed critical attention—and provide the only articles devoted solely to her work—in an attempt to legitimize her position in the magazine. Moreover, their intercession on Stein's behalf helped to establish a foundation for the prominent cultural and artistic position to which she felt she was entitled. Riding and Church not only acknowledge but also defend Stein's contribution to modernism, fighting to have her contribution recognized. Similarly, Sherwood Anderson's introduction to Stein's *Geography and Plays* concludes by identifying the potential influence of her work. He writes, "Would it not be a lovely

and charmingly ironic gesture of the gods if, in the end, the work of this artist were to prove the most lasting and important of all the word slingers of our generation!” (8).

Stein’s involvement with *transition*, thus, was based solely on the magazine’s ability to further her literary career. Stein had recently discovered the value in disseminating her work through alternate means and saw great potential in *transition* for her own professional advancement. The magazine presented Stein the opportunity to disseminate her work to a larger audience than she had previously had access to, and her regular appearances in *transition* introduced new readers to her reputedly difficult style and generated interest in her work. Initially believing *transition* existed exclusively to further her own literary career, Stein used the magazine to meet her own ends. However, the importance Stein placed on being paid for her work would eventually take precedence, and believing *transition* could do little more to further her literary career, Stein would terminate her relationship with the magazine and those associated with it.

### Chapter Three

Gertrude Stein never wavered in the conviction with which she nurtured her literary career. Demonstrating an amazing confidence in her own literary talent, despite the public's apparent lack of interest in her writing, Stein is often accused of taking her own importance for granted. However, Stein's professional path was carefully planned and her goal clear: she sought celebrity and fame. Introduced to little magazines by Ernest Hemingway, Stein accurately predicted that reaching a small audience through regular publication would eventually help her reach the much larger audience she ardently desired. Throughout the 1920s, however, Stein had limited success in placing pieces in these types of publications. She was therefore thrilled to hear that Elliot Paul, to whom she had recently been introduced, had been offered a position on a new little magazine soon to appear in Paris. According to Stein, it was she who advised Paul to accept Eugene Jolas's original offer to collaborate on *transition*, and in her description of events there is the implicit understanding that Paul would make the magazine a vehicle for her writing. "After all," she wrote in the *Autobiography*, "we do want to be printed" (240). Initially believing *transition* to be her mouthpiece, Stein provided Paul with enough manuscripts to fill an entire number of the magazine. He diligently sorted through them, carefully selecting the pieces he felt would best represent Stein in *transition*. In addition to his editorial abilities, he seems to have been the only figure who

could control Stein's often volatile personality. For these reasons, perhaps, the interest of Gertrude Stein in *transition* was inextricably linked to the active involvement of Elliot Paul throughout the early years of the magazine.

Stein was first introduced to Paul in 1926 through their mutual friend Bravig Imbs, a one-time member of the Stein circle. Paul displayed a flattering interest in Stein and her work which thoroughly pleased her, and he immediately secured an open-ended invitation to the Stein salon. Originally from New England, Paul was then working with Eugene Jolas on the Paris Edition of the *Chicago Tribune*. Despite their disparate backgrounds, the two men had much in common, and Paul was soon offered the position of co-editor on the new little magazine that Jolas was working on (Mellow 327). This represented an incredible opportunity for Stein, who had recently discovered the value in disseminating her work through alternate means. "A proposition had been made to him to edit a magazine in Paris and he was hesitating whether he should undertake it," writes Stein in the *Autobiography*. "Gertrude Stein was naturally all for it. After all, as she said, we do want to be printed. One writes for oneself and strangers but with no adventurous publishers how can one come in contact with those same strangers" (240). Stein was quick to realize the potential of Paul's position as co-editor of *transition*: Paul, who had published the first seriously popular estimation of her work in the *Paris Tribune*, was certain to advocate for her appearance in *transition*. Although she did not receive much individual critical attention in the magazine, Stein was successful in placing her work with *transition*. Over the course of Stein's involvement with the magazine, which began with the first number in April 1927 and ended with her contribution to number twenty-one in March 1932, *transition* printed fifteen pieces of Stein's writing. The works

selected to appear ranged from shorter pieces, such as “One Spaniard,” which would go unrecognized, to longer pieces like *Tender Buttons*, for which Stein would receive much attention.

“Transition began and of course it meant a great deal to everybody,” asserts Stein in her memoir. “Elliot Paul chose with great care what he wanted to put into transition” (240). While Paul worked alongside Eugene Jolas on *transition*, Stein fervently maintained that Paul was the operative intelligence of the magazine, ultimately going so far as to publish this opinion in the *Autobiography*. “This was our first realization of the mis-apprehension which had been left intact during long visits to the Rue de Fleurus,” explains Maria Jolas, “and Miss Stein’s subsequent refusal to listen to my proffered rectification of what had been told her brought about a coolness between us” (11). Although the Jolases had several times tried to disabuse her of this notion, Stein continued to favour Paul in all discussions surrounding *transition*. However, as Paul’s association with the magazine came to a close, Stein was forced to acknowledge those she had previously ignored. “Elliot Paul slowly disappeared and Eugene and Maria Jolas appeared,” writes Stein, insinuating that the Jolases were involved only after Paul’s departure from the magazine (241). Stein appeared less frequently on the pages of *transition* after Paul left the magazine; however, she continued to submit work, and she was able to print some of her longer pieces in *transition* during this period. “At Gertrude Stein’s request transition reprinted *Tender Buttons*, printed a bibliography of all her work up to date and later printed her opera, *Four Saints*. For these printings Gertrude Stein was very grateful,” remembers Stein in the *Autobiography* (241). Lacking the benefit of internal support, Stein was forced to grow more assertive in placing her manuscripts with

the magazine. Without Paul to advocate her cause, Stein dealt with Jolas directly, and, while Jolas had never disparaged her work, he was less inclined towards her particular experiments in language than Paul had been, and Stein was required to be much more persistent.

The Jolases attempted to maintain professional ties with Stein throughout this time, despite the obvious difficulties associated with a personality such as hers. Although they continued reviewing and accepting her submissions for the magazine, they were not willing to enable what they perceived was a need for constant veneration. Regarding Stein no differently than any of the other contributors to *transition*, the Jolases refused to give in to Stein's continuous demands on their attention. Moreover, as Jolas worked towards specific applications of his general ideas about literature, Joyce's "Work in Progress" emerged again and again as the archetypal text for a revolution in language. A number of the aspects in which the work of Stein and Joyce differs reveals the ways in which Stein's writing was truly less suitable to Jolas's thinking as *transition* moved forwards in the late 1920s. This eventually led to a confrontation between Stein and Jolas when he called on her at home. According to Jolas, in his biography *Man From Babel*, Stein called Joyce "a third-rate Irish politician" and declared that "the greatest living writer of the age is Gertrude Stein." Jolas disagreed and left, marking what he believed to be an end to their working relationship. Within the year, however, Stein had a change of heart and initiated a reconciliation with a telephone call (202). The call resulted in a temporary settlement of their differences, and Stein's "She Bowed to Her Brother" appeared in *transition* 21 (March 1932). However, the conciliation was to be short-lived, and "She Bowed to Her Brother" was Stein's last contribution to the magazine. By this

time, the value of *transition* to Stein had waned considerably. Moreover, Stein had already completed the work that would secure her fame and facilitate the final cut between her and the Jolases. “Her final capitulation to a Barnumesque publicity none of us could foresee,” remarks Maria Jolas in reference to the *Autobiography*. She continues this line of criticism:

What we should have foreseen however, was that she would eventually tolerate no relationship that did not bring with it adulation. This was undoubtedly lacking in our otherwise entirely correct and cordial attitude towards her, so when the moment came to play the mad queen in public, our heads had to come off with the others, despite the very real service we had rendered her. (*Testimony* 12)

*The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* appeared in 1933, and with it Stein achieved the celebrity status for which she had been longing. The book, written from the perspective of Stein’s long time companion, secretary, and lover Alice Toklas, is a memoir chronicling the early decades of twentieth century Paris, shedding light on the intricacies of the Parisian modernists, a group that had been gaining recognition steadily since after the first world war. “The *Autobiography* presented a crowded canvas,” writes James Mellow:

dense with personalities, ranging from figures such as Picasso, Matisse, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Anderson, who had become world famous, to all the minor but interesting people who had ever moved into Gertrude’s orbit—Constance Fletcher, the author of *Kismet*, their Moroccan guide Mohammed, their maidservant Hélène... The book did more than present a gallery of personalities, it chronicled a quarter of a century of the Parisian art world and the literary world in a historic period; the revolutionary exhibitions of the Fauves and the Cubists, the always intemperate and volatile world of the little magazines during the twenties, the lives and hard times of exiles and expatriates after the Great War. (352-53)

Stein had written the book over a six week period in Bilignin, France, with little access to documents and letters while writing, and, consequently, the book lacked the historical accuracy some felt was necessary for a memoir. It could be argued that the inaccuracies

of the *Autobiography* were simply the result of a subjective viewpoint thinly disguised by making Alice Toklas the ostensible author of the book. However, some of those mentioned felt Stein's representation of them was malicious and stemmed from a desire to alter the truth.

The book so angered the Jolases that they arranged for the Servire Press to print *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, a pamphlet that appeared in February of 1935. "Transition has opened its pages to several of those she mentions who, like ourselves, find that the book often lacks accuracy," explains Jolas. "This fact and the regrettable possibility that many less informed readers might accept Miss Stein's testimony about her contemporaries, make it seem wiser to straighten out those points with which we are familiar before the book has the time to assume the character of historic authenticity" (2). The fact that those involved felt the need to respond to Stein with "testimony," as indicated by the very title of the pamphlet, suggests the seriousness with which the charges were being laid. While Jolas claimed that *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein*, which appeared as a supplement to *transition 23* in February 1935, was meant to correct inaccuracies printed in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, the pamphlet was actually a merciless and wide-ranging attack on Stein from many of the artists who were disgruntled by her book, including Georges Braque, Henri Matisse, and Tristan Tzara. In turn, each of the six contributors takes the opportunity to refute those parts of Stein's book that they consider require it. Matisse, the most practical of her detractors, stuck largely to correcting some factual errors: he had not, for example, purchased his Cézanne with his wife's dowry; others, like André Salmon, criticized Stein's utter "incomprehension of an epoch" (15).



The insinuation that Elliot Paul was really the guiding intellectual force behind *transition* incensed Eugene and Maria Jolas. One must assume that the attention afforded the book on its publication further exacerbated the irritation felt by the Jolases, who had initiated and were funding the magazine's venture. Maria Jolas, who spoke on behalf of the magazine, used the pamphlet, first and foremost, to reaffirm her husband's editorial authority. "All those who were associated with the genesis of Transition—including Miss Stein—know that Eugene Jolas was its director and intellectual *animateur* from the very beginning," asserts Maria Jolas. "But since she has chosen to distort this fact—can it be through fault of memory?—I feel I should give the story in detail exactly as I told it to Miss Stein in 1931" (9). She admits that Paul did engage Stein in the *transition* project, simply because he knew her, but she maintains that he never asserted the editorial control Stein describes in the *Autobiography*. "Meanwhile he represented her to us as a sort of female Buddha who lived entirely apart from the world and saw very few people," explains Maria Jolas. "Being ourselves very busy we were not inclined to force ourselves upon her and accepted Paul's version, thus leaving a free field for false impressions" (10). It was following Paul's departure from the magazine in 1929 that the Jolases became more familiar with Stein, and they first became aware of the misapprehension that existed concerning the leadership of the magazine. She notes that several efforts were made to explain the situation to Stein once it became clear that there had been a misunderstanding. "[O]ne evening in the Spring of 1931, at her house, I reopened the subject and furnished her with the details I have given here," writes Maria Jolas. "We compared notes and she shared my surprise. Paul, by then, had completely disappeared from her house as well as our own, with an impartial indifference to certain elementary

obligations” (11). Unfortunately, her clarification took the form of an assault on the contributions and abilities of Elliot Paul, who probably had nothing to do with fostering Stein’s misconceptions. Moreover, despite their repeated efforts, Stein continued to favour Paul, ultimately publishing her misconceptions as fact in the *Autobiography*.

In addition to criticizing Jolas’s editorial abilities, the *Autobiography* also exaggerated the role Stein played in the larger *transition* program. “In the last numbers of transition nothing of hers appeared,” writes Stein. “Transition died” (241). The insinuation that the magazine was at her disposal, and that without her it failed, infuriated the Jolases who took full ownership of *transition*, both ideologically and financially, and believed the magazine to be, if not entirely separate from, at least distinct from the projects pursued by Gertrude Stein. Therefore, besides correcting certain inaccuracies, Maria Jolas also launched a direct attack on Stein’s creative talents, suggesting that Stein had only been included in *transition* because few other little magazines were sympathetic to her often unconventional writing style. “In conclusion it might be well to inform Miss Stein that *Transition* was not conceived by Eugene Jolas as a vehicle for the rehabilitation of her own reputation, although it undoubtedly did do this,” she asserts, negating any claims Stein had made regarding her profound influence on the magazine. “Nor was her rôle in its development different from that of many other well-wishing contributors” (11). That Stein’s appearance in *transition* furthered her literary career was merely the outgrowth of her involvement with the magazine and was not the primary focus of *transition* or its editors. Maria Jolas goes on to outline the purpose of the magazine as it was originally envisioned:

*Transition* was conceived, and the personal and financial sacrifice gladly accepted, in order to create a meeting place for all those artists on both sides of

the Atlantic who were working towards a complete renovation, both spiritual and technical, of the various art forms. Miss Stein seemed to be experimenting courageously, and while my husband was never enthusiastic about her solution of language, still it was a very personal one, and language being one of his chief preoccupations, she obviously belonged with us. (11)

The Jolases recognized that, at least in part, simply instilling in writers a will to experiment would be a profound accomplishment. In this way, Stein enjoyed standing in the magazine simply because she rejected traditional literary models of reality, and as late as 1933, Jolas was willing to identify “the impulse for the revolution of the word” in part with “certain experiments of Gertrude Stein” (“What is the Revolution of Language” 125). However, even as she admits Stein into the *transition* circle and acknowledges her analogous experiments in language, Maria Jolas is quick to dismiss the notion that Stein shared with *transition* anything more than the initial spirit of revolt against the existing linguistic forms.

The familiarity Stein demonstrated in relation to *transition*, and the larger movement of which the magazine was a part, had never before sought such wholesale disparagement from those around her. “There is a unanimity of opinion that she had no understanding of what really was happening around her,” notes Jolas in his own short piece, which serves as an introduction to the pamphlet, “that the mutation of ideas beneath the surface of the more obvious contacts and clashes of personalities during that period escaped her entirely” (2). Jolas invalidates the claim that Stein played any role in shaping the movement she attempts to describe and fears that the text’s “hollow, tinsel bohemianism and egocentric deformations” might become “the symbol of the decadence that hovers over contemporary literature” (2). Jolas’s opinion is echoed by Henri Matisse, Georges Braque, and André Salmon, who were concerned with Stein’s claim as

an expert on the intricacies of the modern movement in painting. Matisse points out that it was not Stein but her brother Michael's wife who had first noticed his paintings. This group of influential modernist painters argued that this, along with other events, though each of them was minor in itself, showed how poor Stein was in her observations, memory, and overall comprehension of the art circles in which she moved. "Miss Stein understood nothing of what went on around her," asserts Braque. "I have no intention of entering into a discussion with her, since it is obvious that she never knew French really well and that was always a barrier. But she has entirely misunderstood cubism which she sees simply in terms of personalities" (13). Accused of misrepresentation, the *Autobiography* was charged with being little more than a glorified gossip column. Dense with personalities, Stein's story is often told through her experiences with others, experiences that Braque and the others argued she was too distanced from to fully understand. "Miss Stein obviously saw everything from the outside and never the real struggle we were engaged in," writes Braque. "For one who poses as an authority on the epoch it is safe to say that she never went beyond the stage of the tourist" (14). Primarily referring to her misrepresentation of cubism, Braque's criticism extends much deeper, suggesting that Stein was never as much a part of the emerging movement as she believed herself to be.

Moreover, Tristan Tzara attacked the very idea of the *Autobiography*. "Miss Gertrude Stein has written a book dealing with the memoirs of Miss Alice Toklas. As it happens, the memoirs of Miss Alice Toklas deal with the life of Miss Gertrude Stein," he notes sarcastically. "Miss Stein expresses herself through the mouth of Miss Alice Toklas and makes her say that she is a genius" (12). Displeased by Stein's proclamation

of her own genius, Tzara is particularly offended by the collection of personal accounts upon which the assertion is founded, arguing that “all this would have no importance if it took place in the family circle between two maiden ladies greedy for fame and publicity.”

He continues:

But the immense apparatus which has been put in motion in order to arrive at this affirmation finds an obviously noisy echo in the well-known process by which the aforementioned maiden ladies thought they had the right to quote names and tales indiscriminately, thus accounting for the fact that, among others, my name is associated with what they so candidly call their memoirs. (12)

Furthermore, Tzara is disgusted by Stein’s capitalizing on her own art. “If the exploitation of man by man has found its shameful expression in the conduct of business, we have, up to now, rarely seen the application of this principal to the domain of art in the unexpected form of the exploitation of ideas” (13). Tzara goes on to accuse Stein of “literary prostitution,” of sacrificing her art for fame, something she would struggle with following the publication and the resulting commercial success of the *Autobiography*. Believing that only Stein was benefiting from this situation, Tzara maintains he has no alternative but to defend himself against what he perceives are the outlandish claims of the *Autobiography*.

What the *Testimony Against Gertrude Stein* fails to account for is that, while it lasted, Stein’s relationship with *transition* was mutually beneficial. As the magazine developed, it became increasingly important to promote the magazine in the United States. As one of the best known and most controversial American writers of the time, Stein on the pages of *transition* held clear advantages for Jolas as he attempted to defend the relevance of his magazine in their native land. For his part, he provided Stein an outlet to publish works not readily accepted elsewhere. At the time she appeared in the

magazine, Stein was a recognizable personality in Paris, but even some of the artists attending her Saturday evening salons failed to place in her within the current artistic movement. “We in Paris always heard that Miss Stein was a writer,” admits Braque, “but I don’t think any of us had ever read her work until *Transition* began to make her known in France” (*Testimony* 14). However, the relationship came to an abrupt end when Stein no longer needed the magazine to disseminate her work. Having used *transition* to establish her reputation as a serious writer, Stein decided she was no longer benefitting from the relationship, and decided to abandon the *transition* circle, going in search of greater celebrity on her own. “It is interesting to speculate as to just why Miss Stein should have chosen to create in her book false impressions which she knew to be such,” notes Maria Jolas. “Why has she sought to belittle so many of the artists whose friendship made it possible for her to share in the events of this epoch? The answer is obvious” (12). She charges that Stein’s dissatisfaction with *transition*, and her subsequent attack on magazine and those associated with it in the *Autobiography*, had come about when *transition* began promoting James Joyce, something that Stein’s fragile ego could not tolerate.

The general perception has always been that Eugene Jolas was primarily responsible for enlisting James Joyce for *transition* and that Elliot Paul recruited Gertrude Stein. While there is some truth to this assertion, such a simple generalization fails to address properly the complexity of the issue. Certainly, both editors took a great interest in Joyce, and with the possible exception of Samuel Beckett’s “Dante... Bruno. Vico... Joyce,” Elliot Paul’s apology for Joyce’s “Work in Progress” may have been the most valuable piece of criticism to appear in advance of the publication of *Finnigans Wake*.

The issue is no clearer upon consideration of the relationship of the editors with Gertrude Stein. It is true that her appearances in *transition* were more frequent during the magazine's first year when Paul was officially co-editor. But while she appeared less regularly as Eugene Jolas began to assert greater editorial control over the magazine, she was able to print a number of larger pieces in these later numbers. Moreover, as Jolas was trying to defend the relevance of *transition* to readers in the United States by emphasizing its connection with American writers, Stein's status as the best known and most frequent American contributor to *transition* held clear advantages for Jolas.

Initially, Stein valued her own links with *transition* above her pride, as the magazine enabled her to present her writing to what she believed was a hungry and expectant audience. Unlike Joyce, Stein was not a frequent visitor to the rue Fabert office, even while she was regularly contributing to the magazine, but she did remain acutely conscious of the manner in which her work was presented and received. When the first issue of *transition* appeared, Stein's "An Elucidation" had been printed out of order. While some argued that the error made little difference to the overall understanding of the work, which was never as clear as the title suggested, Stein demanded retribution and only a costly supplement introduced by Paul could appease her (McMillan 23-24). Similarly, she was able to place her literary eulogy for Juan Gris in the issue immediately following the painter's untimely death. It is fair to say that the examples of Stein's work that appeared in the magazine were chosen with the purpose of representing the various literary styles she employed. The effect was supposed to be that Stein's writing was revealed to its readers slowly and methodically, something Stein herself took great care in ensuring. This was confirmed in a note appearing in 1927 that

read “whenever she pleases, Gertrude Stein contributes what she pleases to *transition* and it pleases her and it pleases us” (*transition* 9 211).

Over time, however, Stein grew increasingly impatient with the attention afforded Joyce on the pages of *transition*. Her need for constant reverence is well documented, and she was not willing to accept competition from anyone, especially Joyce, whom she saw as her main literary rival and with whom she was often associated. Ernest Hemingway warned after visiting Stein’s rue de Fleurus salon, “If you brought up Joyce twice, you would not be invited back. It was like mentioning one general favorably to another general. You learned not to do it the first time you made the mistake” (28). Much of the criticism leveled at *transition* branded James Joyce and Gertrude Stein as offshoots of each other, leaders of a “single-minded Parisian literary society” attempting to impose a “cult of unintelligibility” on the English speaking world (McMillan 204-05). While the two shared a number of fundamental preoccupations, including the representation of modern reality in literature and the limitations of language, they are neither more alike nor more different than any other pair of modernist authors. Furthermore, the literary techniques they adopted to address these literary concerns were entirely different. And, though it seems ridiculous today to have to defend the individual accomplishments of Joyce and Stein, much of the critical attention Stein received on the pages of the magazine centred on discrediting those individuals who read Joyce and Stein as indistinguishably linked to one another. First and foremost among these antagonists was Wyndham Lewis, who maintained in *The Enemy* that Joyce “romps along at the head of fashionable literary world, hand in hand with Gertrude Stein, both outdoing all children in jolly quaintnesses” (73-74).



The editors worked at disentangling Stein and Joyce as early as the second number of the magazine, appearing in May 1927, with the article “K.O.R.A.A.” The acronym, representing “Kiss Our Royal American Ass,” was meant to echo the “KMRIA” heading for “Kiss My Royal Irish Ass” in Joyce’s *Ulysses* (McMillan 204). The article, which many argue was composed primarily by Elliot Paul, admits that Stein and Joyce “share an amazing ability to condense enormous and long-lived things into small paragraphs and to magnify the ordinary scale in the examination of details, revealing inner worlds which otherwise might be lost to the naked eye.” However, following a brief analysis of their writing, the article ultimately emphasizes that in their use of words, Stein and Joyce “differ as much as is humanly possible” (173). The article favoured neither author above the other, defending the literary practices of both Stein and Joyce with equal vehemence. However, the irony of defending a personality like Gertrude Stein was not lost on Paul who acknowledges that “[t]o anyone who knows her, there is something fundamentally comical in the idea of defending her.” He goes on to explain that she “has conducted her excursion for aesthetic adventurers so strenuously that almost everyone leaped from the car as it pulled out of the first station, *Three Lives*” (“K.O.R.A.A.” 174). Nonetheless, Paul guarded Stein against her most direct and hostile critics throughout the early numbers of the magazine.

Aside from the aforementioned articles by Laura Riding and Ralph Church, Stein’s achievements on the pages of *transition* were mentioned only in passing. The need to distinguish her accomplishments from those of Joyce allowed the editors, Paul in particular, the opportunity to discuss the merits of Stein’s work as it had appeared to date in *transition*. Paul’s description of her technique in “K.O.R.A.A.” is among the best

introductions to her work appearing in the magazine, as it repeats Stein's own position more directly than she would have put it herself. "She discovered that a phrase, if it can escape being specific, has an absolute or static quality which is more intricate and significant, as art, than a like composition in sound or color," explains Paul. He continues:

It is useless to seek any key or hidden meaning to such works of Miss Stein's as "An Elucidation" or "As a Wife Has a Cow, a Love Story." They are as undecipherable as Bach fugues. They are abstract patterns, with more dimensions than sculpture, and subtler tone colors than painting and music. To such as can enjoy abstract art, they offer unique pleasure, but do not attack them as a species of modern Sanskrit. (175)

Paul maintained that if there were real figures or events behind Stein's work, they were unimportant, as the writing itself was meant to evoke a response. By focusing on general descriptions of her methods, and the comparison of techniques similar to hers in other modern art forms, Paul is able to discuss the merits of Stein's work without the need for explanations. "Miss Stein has been reproached because she gave up adding to the great accumulation of human knowledge at an early age," writes Paul. However, he argued that in Stein's case explication and understanding in the usual sense were not possible and that "her greatness lies in this very fact" ("K.O.R.A.A." 176). Paul continued this line of defense in "First Aid to the Enemy," arguing that Stein owed no "explanation or apology for writing things which please her and interest and influence many others" (171). In attempting to define Stein's verbal abstraction to her readers and critics, Paul highlighted the uniqueness of her methods even going so far as to admit "[t]here is no telling what she will do next" (172).

However, while both "K.O.R.A.A." and "First Aid to the Enemy" did allow Paul the opportunity to defend Stein's work in the magazine, the articles still paid equal

attention to Joyce's writing. Connected by the world to which they were responding as well as by the artistic circles in which they moved, Stein and Joyce shared many of the same preoccupations, and while *transition* fervently maintained that they could differentiate between the two artists, Paul does acknowledge a connection. "A reader's pleasure does not consist exclusively in being reminded of things he already has noticed or in having familiar ideas restated," Paul argues in "K.O.R.A.A.," comparing the abstractionism used by both authors:

Mr. Joyce transcends the informatory function by combining so many references and associations that they shed their topical limitations. Miss Stein achieves this feat by composing her word patterns without an accompanying text of obvious explanations. Both of them have done a great deal to restore to the act of reading its integral and proper pleasures and to submerge extraneous moral, social and other values in an artistic composition. (177)

None of the critical writings that appeared in *transition* ever praised Joyce by disparaging Stein; however, the lack of individual critical attention her work received was upsetting to Stein who thought she held a prominent position in the magazine. In time, the situation was bound to produce conflict, as Stein not only wanted her work distinguished from that of Joyce but equally recognized as well.

Early in the *transition* program, Eugene Jolas called for an art that sought to recapture "the simplicity of the word," the primal power of language unsullied by the legacy of its use ("Suggestions for a New Magic" 179). By stripping away all the existing meaning of words, by approaching language as if she was the first person to use these words, Stein achieved through her art, according to Laura Riding, "a perpendicular, an escape from the human horizontal plane" (164). Jolas made this search for what he called the "vertical" or "vertigral" the major ambition of his creative career, and, in this way, gradually moving towards a belief in neo-romanticism that he would sustain

throughout the rest of his life. However, he came to believe that his ambitions could never be accomplished through the use of existing language. The transcendence of everyday human experience could only be accomplished through the skilled manipulation of new words. Above all else, Jolas's best example of this remained the work of James Joyce. While the specific differences between Joyce's work and that of Stein, as seen on the pages of *transition*, reveal that her departure from the magazine ultimately had to do with much more than simply petty personal differences. However, Stein's need for unquestioning adulation was well-documented, and she was not willing to accept competition from anyone, especially Joyce. While Elliot Paul was co-editor, Stein retained some hope that her work would achieve the recognition she felt she deserved. However, as Paul went from co-editor, to advisory editor, and then finally left Paris altogether, Stein realized that she would not reach the celebrity status she longed for on the pages of *transition*. In this way, the interest of Gertrude Stein in the magazine was inextricably linked to the active involvement of Elliot Paul, whom she saw as her champion within the *transition* circle. Seeking fame at all costs, Stein published the *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, severing ties with those who had helped her establish her career. The book, and the subsequent response, left little room for reconciliation and marked the end of the alliance between Gertrude Stein and *transition*. Having used the magazine to establish her career as a serious writer, Stein decided that *transition* could offer her no more and went in search of greater recognition, which she measured by financial success. Ultimately, the artistic credit offered by *transition* could not compete with Stein's need to be a commercially successful writer, and Stein's break with the

magazine was a conscious decision to seek out a more lucrative means of disseminating her work.

## Chapter Four

The first two decades of the twentieth century were for Gertrude Stein a period of enormous productivity. This period in her career can easily be traced through an examination of three of her major works: *Three Lives*, *The Making of Americans*, and *Tender Buttons*. Despite the artistic gains she had made, there was a lack of understanding for her place in the literary world and she had developed a reputation for inaccessibility that would last throughout the early decades of the twentieth century. “Her contemporaries at once responded to her warmly and commented on her giant ego or childlike complacency,” explains Cynthia Secor, looking back at the early decades of Stein’s illustrious career. “The latter comments often come from those jealous of her reputation, which grew steadily over forty years of writing, unsustained by such conventional props as critical success, publication, and a wide reading public” (27). While Stein was not yet a commercially viable artist, she continued to write and, surrounded by Toklas and a few close friends, appeared content to maintain her reputation as a writer of quality, if not of wide renown. However, as modernism influenced and was influenced by the artists who participated in the movement, new definitions of art and what it meant to be an artist began to emerge in the 1920s. It was not until the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, in 1933, that Stein’s role in that process would come to the forefront. Through the *Autobiography*, Stein

problematized modern authorship by re-emphasizing the importance of commercial success to artists we previously believed to have been indifferent to the reaction of their audience. Finishing what she had started long before with *Three Lives*, the *Autobiography* granted Stein the public recognition she desired and ensured she could demand payment for her work in the future, guaranteeing a stable income independent of family wealth.

Prior to the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein's work garnered little interest from commercial publishers in the United States. Catherine Turner notes that while Stein's early work was well-known in the publishing industry, the attention it received was not always geared towards the text itself. "*The Making of Americans* made the rounds of every commercial publisher in the United States who made any pretense of interest in experimental writing," explains Turner. "In 1924, Carl Van Vechten urged the manuscript on Knopf; Hemingway tried to interest Boni and Liveright's agent, Harold Stearns; F. Scott Fitzgerald gave it to Maxwell Perkins; and Jane Heap hoped to interest either B. W. Huebsch or Charles and Albert Boni" (118). Despite these interventions on Stein's behalf, *The Making of Americans* was not picked up by a commercial publisher at this time. In part, this was a result of the apparent inaccessibility for which she was notorious; however, the bulk of the original manuscript, which came to nearly a thousand pages, also became something of a joke amongst publishers. According to Turner, B. W. Huebsch, a publisher recognized for highbrow literary tastes, "did not remember reading it, but he did remember that one of his authors became fascinated with the sheer bulk of Stein's manuscript and would slip into

Huebsch's office to confirm its existence at every opportunity" (119). This was dim praise for the book Stein believed to be her masterpiece.

At least part of the difficulty in placing Stein's book with a commercial publisher was that, throughout much of her career, she consciously attempted to isolate herself, personally, from her audience. Spending her most productive years living in Europe, Stein distanced herself from Americans who were both her subject matter and her intended audience. While this distance liberated certain aspects of Stein's personal life, allowing her and Toklas to establish an openly homosexual relationship and allowing Stein to deal with that relationship more explicitly in her work, it also created a division she often upheld professionally. "Stein's project would expose the underlying assumptions of language by making linguistic forms a critical tool," explains Shari Benstock in the chapter on Stein and Toklas in her book *Women of the Left Bank: Paris, 1900-1940*. She continues:

A literary project that strips language of its natural associations necessarily frustrated its readership and alienated the writer. That Stein's subjects were often domestic, that she set out to divorce literary language from its etymological history, that her writing was devoid of allusions and the extratextual referents so common to Modernist writing, that the writing comically mimicked itself, making claims to childishness rather than intellectual pretension, virtually assured the kind of mockery to which Stein fell victim. Stein's project was the most radical of any twentieth-century writer, and the resulting isolation became the problematic of both her art and her life. (157-58)

Refusing to acknowledge the gap between the interiority of consciousness and the exteriority of writing, works such as *The Making of Americans* demonstrate the project Stein had laid out for herself. Setting aside the value of audience, Stein broke what Neil Schmitz labels "the discursive pact" that had traditionally bound writer to reader, and for this reason, was often not taken seriously (189).



Not giving up hope of being recognized in America, Stein investigated other avenues for distributing her work. Early in 1925, Stein persuaded Robert McAlmon to publish an unabridged copy of *The Making of Americans* as one of his Contact Editions, a small press recognized for producing quality work for a limited audience. Considering her reputation and her friends, Stein assured McAlmon that he could expect reasonably to sell fifty copies. While it could be argued that a press run of fifty copies would have little impact on the literary landscape, Stein believed interest in her work would increase when the limited number of books available were immediately purchased. McAlmon took great care in producing the book, assuming all the expense, but he did little in the way of advertising, relying heavily on Stein to promote her own work and to garner some word-of-mouth publicity. However, sales were slow and reviews were discouraging, and according to McAlmon, Stein “sold not more than ten of the fifty copies she had counted on selling, and the remaining forty she gave out as review copies, or to friends, who were at that time her only substantial public” (206-07). Unfortunately, the collaboration proved unrewarding for both parties. Stein’s work lacked easy marketability, and she actually had too much pride to actively promote the work, believing that those who knew it was available should naturally come to it on their own. Punctuated by disagreements over printing costs, author’s concessions, and distribution plans, both Stein and McAlmon felt slighted, and as Stein explains in the *Autobiography*, “The Making of Americans appeared but McAlmon and Gertrude Stein were no longer friends” (225). Embittered by the experience, McAlmon threatened to pulp the store of unsold copies, representing as much as eighty percent of the original print run (Mellow 116).

As a writer and poet himself, McAlmon's position in the literary community gave his small press a certain respectability. In addition, many modern authors were finding it difficult to place their work with commercial publishing houses, and Contact Editions granted them the opportunity to publish their works on a smaller scale. This type of publication was considered an investment that would hopefully provide opportunities within the more profitable commercial publication industry. Turner notes that "modernists turned to small, avant-garde presses where they found a highbrow audience capable of correctly understanding their artistic value" (140). The particular venue offered by McAlmon reached a smaller audience, attracting the attention of literary types rather than the more general public, but it allowed Stein to be published amongst a group of her peers. "The works of Ezra Pound, Mary Butts, Robert Coates, Gertrude Stein, Hemingway (his first two books appear), John Herrmann, Gertrude Beasley, Hilda Doolittle, Ford Madox Ford, Mina Loy, William Carlos Williams were all on the list of Contact Editions," notes McAlmon, placing Stein within a larger modernist cohort (305). However, as the collaboration with Stein indicates, McAlmon's press was not successful from a purely business perspective, and it remained in operation largely as a result of funds provided by McAlmon's in-laws, the Ellermans. "Possibly Contact Editions might more than have paid its expenses had we concentrated on the commercial aspect, that is, on collecting the monies that were due us on the books delivered to the bookshops," concedes McAlmon in the last chapter of his autobiography, *Being Geniuses Together*. "As it was, with great portions of each confiscated at the docks, the venture merely lost money" (305). McAlmon acknowledges his failure, and while he references other contributing factors, he admits that his focus was not on the business of publishing but

rather on gaining recognition for previously unrecognized modern works. While Stein appreciated the opportunity for greater exposure, she recognized that books published by McAlmon's press interested a limited market and did not offer the exposure she desired. A larger press would reach a larger public, thereby offering Stein greater earning potential. While she had initially seen value in placing *The Making of Americans* with Contact Editions, Stein was hoping for a larger circulation and a greater response to her book, and, ultimately, she was disappointed by the lack of sales. Although McAlmon's press provided Stein a respectable means of disseminating her work, it was not the venue she ultimately desired and she continued to work at attracting the attention of a larger publisher.

Part of her disappointment with Contact Editions was based on the lack of financial recognition such a small press offered. Although McAlmon, who had gone to the trouble of printing the book and assuming the expense of it, would sell the edition for little or no profit, Stein continued to insist on receiving some sort of payment for her work. There are few details of the contract available, as McAlmon appears to have preferred to keep it rather informal, but clearly the pair disagreed on what each owed the other. James Mellow follows the collaboration between McAlmon and Stein through their written correspondence in his book *Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company*. Quoting a particular letter addressed to Stein, McAlmon's tone is charged with anger at Stein's impudent requests:

Incidentally the whole publishing of the book was GIVEN you, at your request, quavering. No attitude on your part will delude me into believing that you did not know at the time it amounted to that. Incidentally you have never been financially incapable of putting your work before the public if *your* art is of prime importance to you. (Mellow 320)

Making clear that he published the book as a favour to Stein, McAlmon was enraged that she would ask for more. Furthermore, McAlmon's letter addresses an interesting issue in Stein's attempts to have her work recognized, in that it references her own financial ability to do so. Given that the manuscript had been some twenty years on her hands, Stein could reasonably have afforded to publish it herself, rather than expect others to assume the risks. However, for Stein, who defined her value as an author by remuneration for her work, this was no longer a viable option.

However, Stein was absolutely affronted by McAlmon's charge that she lacked faith in her own writing and consequently decided to establish her own press. As with many of Stein's endeavors, Alice Toklas was intimately involved, and it was she who decided to bring out an edition of Stein's unpublished works. In deciding upon a name for the edition, Stein laughingly suggested "Plain Edition," which was the name they finally chose. Stein was to be the sole and honoured author of the press, and Toklas assumed management of the new venture. In order to finance Plain Edition, Stein was obliged to sell one of her earliest Picassos, the lovely 1905 *Woman with a Fan* (Mellow 348-49). While both Stein and Toklas were upset by the loss of a favored piece in their collection, it seemed a small price to pay for the recognition Stein hoped to soon gain. *Lucy Church Amiably* appeared on January 5, 1931 under the Plain Edition imprint, and it was soon to be followed by several other of Stein's previously unknown works. However, Stein and Toklas soon encountered the same problem that McAlmon had faced only a few years earlier, in that Stein's books were not moving as readily as they had hoped. With her own capital invested, Stein cut back the print run for her last two volumes to five hundred copies each, down from the one thousand they had run for the

first few books issued by the press. “The Plain Edition was a brave venture,” writes Mellow, “and, possibly, an act of self-gratification by an author who had, for years, been frustrated in her attempts to get her work before the public by means of the established publishing houses” (350). Ultimately, self-publishing proved just as disappointing as the small avant-garde presses, however. Stein and Toklas found printing the books more difficult than originally anticipated, and the results were often unsatisfactory in appearance. Moreover, the venture was losing money; sales were barely covering Plain Edition’s printing costs, let alone making any profit. In her attempt to embrace the definition of the author as a professional who earned a living through writing, Stein needed to be paid for the appearance of her work, and clearly Plain Edition was not furthering her cause. While small, avant-garde presses maintained Stein’s status as a serious artist, they did little to promote the new vision of the modern author Stein aimed to embody. Luckily, self-publishing turned out to be only a temporary solution for Stein, who by 1933 had written the book that was to make her a best-selling author.

Acknowledging that her work lacked a certain level of marketability due to the fact that her reputation centred on a propensity for unreadable prose, Stein consciously attempted a new, more accessible style in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*. Written from the point-of-view of Stein’s long-time companion, secretary, and lover, the *Autobiography* was much more accessible than any of Stein’s previous works. Written in a breezy tone, as if gossiping about the Parisian art world, “The *Autobiography* became, in fact, a masterpiece of the genre,” expounds Mellow, “a history of the period, written, as with most things Gertrude wrote, from a vantage point unique to herself” (353). As evidenced by the response of the *transition* circle, Stein sheds light on the intricacies of

the Parisian art world, a scene which had been gaining recognition since the after the First World War. Most importantly, in the *Autobiography*, she does so in a style that lacks the pretentiousness of her earlier works. “The language of the *Autobiography* may surprise by its cleverness and felicity, but it never calls attention to itself by its difficulty,” notes Stein scholar Ulla E. Dydo. “The life and times of Alice Toklas and Gertrude Stein make easy reading” (4). Moreover, her attempt to mimic the straightforward speech patterns of Toklas opened Stein up to a much wider audience than she could have previously expected. Dydo continues, “The *Autobiography* was the first in a series of books which [Stein] characterized as her “open and public” books, or as “audience writing”: books written to satisfy demands of an imagined or real audience” (4). Recognizing that she could be promoted toward a much larger audience and that a larger audience would be critical to her financial success, Stein aimed the *Autobiography* at developing American tastes for a different type of literature. Desiring to expand her reputation beyond the literary world, Stein wrote a very saleable book that would be easily marketable to the more general public. “So this is what happened,” tells Stein in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, “we came back to Paris very late in the autumn and we installed a telephone and we talked over the telephone every morning Mr. Bradley and I and decided who was to publish the book because there was no doubt that everybody would be ready to publish this one” (47). Knowing that she had produced a marketable piece of writing, Stein sat back and awaited the recognition that had long eluded her.

Having alerted her agent, William Aspenwall Bradley, to the existence of the book, it was not long before Stein received word that Harcourt Brace & Company had accepted it for publication in America (Mellow 353). “Harcourt immediately saw the

commercial potential of Gertrude Stein's *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* and leaped at the opportunity to publish Stein," writes Turner, "an author whose earlier works Harcourt would have certainly rejected as too concerned with style at the expense of substance" (116). Fully aware that much of Stein's reputation centred on her reputation for unreadable prose, Harcourt knew he could generate interest in the *Autobiography* because it contained an accessible sample of Stein's ideas about art and writing. In an effort to promote this aspect of the work, Harcourt arranged to have sections of the book appear in the *Atlantic Monthly* prior to publication in an effort to help readers discover for themselves that Stein had toned down her notoriously strange style. This line of advertising promised consumers that they could access the cutting-edge ideas of one of modernism's most talked about authors in an easy and entertaining format. "The book was extraordinarily successful," exclaims Turner, "both in generating profits and in rehabilitating Stein's reputation for unreadable, pointless prose" (117). While she was writing the *Autobiography*, Stein had often asked Toklas if she thought it would be a best seller. Toklas was doubtful, claiming that she feared the book was not sentimental enough. However, as Stein achieved the long-held ambition of commercial publication, and watched with pleasure as the *Autobiography* ran to four printings by 1935, hitting 11,400 copies, Toklas was obliged to revise her opinion: the book was, after all, sentimental enough (Mellow 354-56). With the publication of *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein would achieve one of the ambitions that had dogged her throughout the twenties: commercial success.

The increased circulation of Stein's work meant a larger audience, confirming her quality by increasing her market value. For Stein, success was measured by dollar signs,

and for the first time in her career, she was to realize a considerable income from her writing. “We considered American publishers and Mr. Bradley said he thought that Harcourt Brace would be the right one and I said I wanted in England to have the Bodley Head for sentimental reasons, after all John Lane was the only real publisher who had really ever thought of publishing a book for me,” recounts Stein in *Everybody’s Autobiography*. “And so everything was settled we had advance royalties from every one and everything began” (48). While Karen Leick’s recently-published book *Gertrude Stein and the Making of an American Celebrity* argues that Stein was a well-known public figure long before the publication of the *Autobiography*, Stein was not receiving the recognition from the literary world she desired prior to the book’s publication (??). The very act of writing a story such as the *Autobiography* demonstrates an audaciousness never before seen and brings the character of Gertrude Stein to prominence both in the literary world and in the text itself. For Stein, then, everything began with the onset of commercial success represented by the royalties from sales of her book. As the *Autobiography* continued to top bestseller lists, Stein felt more and more significant because she had the financial means, independent of her inherited wealth, to back her high opinion of herself. “Like a Hollywood movie during the Depression of the 1930s, *The Autobiography* is a fable about going from rags to riches, not from riches to rags or rags to rags,” explains Catherine R. Stimpson. “It offers a fantasy about some people who became financial successes through their commitment to the arts, to the imagination, to fantasy itself” (156). Stein represents the bountiful nature of success in *Everybody’s Autobiography* describing the luxuries that a best-selling book can buy. “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 horse covers for race horses for Basket the white poodle and two collars studded for Basket,” she admits, “I has never made any money before in my life and I was most excited” (40). In addition, Stein and Toklas engaged two servants who immediately set to work giving both the studio and the pavilion a thorough cleaning, as well as repainting the studio (Mellow 354). Stein and Toklas left their relatively modest lifestyle behind them, opting to live more lavishly now that the opportunity had been afforded them. “[T]here is no doubt about it,” comments Stein in *Everybody’s Autobiography*, “there is no pleasure like it, the sudden splendid spending of money and we spent it” (47).

That the *Autobiography* was commercially successful meant a great deal to Stein who had long sought to earn a living by her writing. “When I was a child I used to be fascinated with the stories of how everybody had earned their first dollar,” tells Stein four years later in *Everybody’s Autobiography*. “I always wanted to have earned my first dollar but I never had. I know a lot about money just because I never had earned my first dollar and now I have” (40). This sudden wealth gave Stein a new appreciation for money, which she argues is one of the civilizing aspects of human culture. “I have been writing a lot about money lately, it is a fascinating subject,” admits Stein, “it is really the difference between men and animals, most of the things men feel animals feel and vice versa, but animals do not know about money, money is a purely human conception and that is very important to know very very important” (*Everybody’s Autobiography* 41). Money, then, changed everything for Stein who sees herself as belonging to a different world prior to the *Autobiography*. “It seems very long ago because at that time I had never made any money and since then I have made some and I feel differently now about

everything, so it is a long time ago four years ago that I wrote *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*” (43). The commercial success of the *Autobiography*, as represented by the sudden influx of wealth, moved Stein into the ranks of professional writers able to live off of their writing, and, this marked a profound shift in her enduring career.

Banking on the success of her first commercial work, Stein hoped that the accessibility of the *Autobiography* would provide some leverage for marketing her other texts. Presenting her ideas about art and writing in an easy and entertaining format, the *Autobiography* introduced publishers and readers alike to a readable sample of Stein’s prose. Using this as bait, she hoped to sign a contract for the *Autobiography* with a publisher who was willing to publish her other books, granting her access to a larger consumer market. “She hoped that by presenting a mainstream publisher with something a little more marketable, she could lure them into publishing her earlier works,” explains Turner. “She also hoped that by presenting consumers of her book with a description of her centrality to the modern movement, she could solidify her own position within that movement and generate interest in her other works” (119). Stein believed that, since Harcourt had seen the possibilities for commercial success with the *Autobiography*, the company would be willing to be her future American publisher. Stein’s agent, Bradley, also hoped to lure Harcourt into supporting a client that he had found demanding and, until that point, unprofitable. “Only a month after Harcourt accepted *The Autobiography*,” notes Turner, “Bradley sent Harcourt a plan that would allow Harcourt to “anticipate and profit” by the “unprecedented demand” for Stein’s work that the *Autobiography* would unleash (121). However, Harcourt still regarded much of Stein’s work as unmarketable, and he feared that if he published Stein’s other books, consumers

would come to associate his firm with this type of difficult and inaccessible literature. He did, however, want to continue to publish anything by Stein which he believed to be commercially viable, as he appreciated having Stein's well-known name on his list of authors. In an effort to keep Stein happy, and with the hope that by taking a non-commercial book he might gain another commercial book, Harcourt reluctantly agreed to publish an abridged copy of *The Making of Americans*. Regardless of how different the two books were, Stein hoped to use the popularity of the *Autobiography* to reach out to readers who would normally consider her writing too challenging.

However, soon after the popular success of the *Autobiography*, Stein began experiencing, for the first and only time in her life, writer's block. The problem reached its peak during the summer of 1933 spent in Bilignin. "All this time I did no writing," admits Stein four years later in *Everybody's Autobiography*. "I had written and was writing nothing. Nothing inside me needed to be written. Nothing needed any word and there was no word inside me that could not be spoken and so there was no word inside me. And I was not writing" (64). Suspecting that she had after all written a sentimental book, and "knowing," as Richard Bridgman observes, "that she now possessed a commercial value," Stein was disappointed in herself (276). For success to cause anxiety and interrupt a writer's concentration is not unique to Stein; however, her fear of having her talent turned into a commodity highlights her distinctive opinions on the relationship between writing, the writer, and the writer's audience. Believing that public resistance is welcomed by the author seriously interested in real writing, Stein's success led her to question the value of her enterprise. Success, Stein comments in *Everybody's Autobiography*, measures not what you do well, but rather what you are not doing well:

“After all if nobody refuses what you offer there must be something the matter” (46). The something that Stein believes to be the matter is the unhealthy exchange of mutual reassurance which characterizes the conventional relationship between writer and audience. “Stein’s suspicions about the conventional pact of mutual dependence between writer and audience, their often unhealthy agreement to reassure one another that each exists and has an identity,” explains Catherine N. Parke, “was one aspect of her more general concern with the political, social, and personal dangers of an immature dependence on others to prove one’s identity” (561). Having written a bestseller, Stein found herself suddenly identifying with an audience she had previously distanced herself from. “I am I because my little dog knows me,” writes Stein, referencing a means of knowing that, prior to the *Autobiography*, she had attempted to avoid. Identifying herself through others posed a dangerous threat to Stein, who asked: “was I I when I had no written word inside me” (*Everybody’s Autobiography* 64). Stein feared settling for a reflected relativity, which threatened, both literally and figuratively, to turn both her and her value as an artist inside out.

The integration of commerce and art, as represented by the success of the *Autobiography*, transformed Stein into a commercially viable highbrow artist, and while she could now measure her success in financial terms, Stein feared she had lost the integrity of her art. “[S]lowly everything changed inside me. Yes of course it did because suddenly it was all different,” explains Stein, “what I did had a value that made people ready to pay, up to that time everything I did had a value because nobody is ready to pay. It is funny about money” (*Everybody’s Autobiography* 44). Stein was notorious for having held onto every piece of writing she had ever written, arguing that each word

was as valuable as the next. Prior to the *Autobiography*, nothing Stein had written held any interest for commercial publishers, allowing her to value each of her literary works for the artistry required in its creation. However, with the success of the *Autobiography*, Stein was forced to recognize that the commercial publishing industry valued some of her works above others, leading Stein to question the difference between marketability and selling out. “Before one is successful that is before any one is ready to pay money for anything you do then you are certain that every word you have written is an important word to have written and that any word you have written is as important as any other word and you keep everything you have written with great care,” explains Stein in *Everybody’s Autobiography*. “And then it happens sometimes sooner and sometimes later that it has a money value I had mine very much later and it is upsetting because when nothing had any commercial value everything was important and when something began having a commercial value it was upsetting” (39).

In an interview given in the final year of her life, Stein refers to the artistic dilemma that led to the creation of the *Autobiography*: “I had struggled up to that time with the creation of reality, and then I became interested in how you tell this thing in a way that anybody could understand and still keep true to your values, and the thing bothered me a great deal at that time” (“A Transatlantic Interview” 18). Stein ultimately found it difficult to balance her pedagogic purpose with her desire to expand her audience through increased sales. Edmund Wilson sensed Stein’s suspicion of popular success and in his memoirs wrote that “[s]uccess, for her seems to imply some imposture and deterioration,” reflecting Stein’s own belief that popular success resulted in a lesser quality work. He goes on to note that up until the publication of the *Autobiography*,

“though her influence has always been felt at the sources of literature and art, her direct communications with this public have been intermittent and blurred, and, on the whole, neither the readers of modern books nor the collectors of modern painting have realized how much they owe her” (579). In acknowledging Stein’s inner conflict, Wilson emphasizes her importance to the modernist movement while at the same time recognizing the novelty of her predicament. While Stein had always played a significant role in the development of modernism, she was now forced to balance that with her newfound commercial success and had thereby entered unfamiliar territory.

While commercial success was new to Stein, who had spent much of her literary career in relative obscurity, this type of internal conflict was not uncommon among modern artists more generally. From the start, modernism took shape in contrast to the established artistic tradition, rebelling against the prescribed norms of the previous generation. Artists, like Stein, strived to find new and better ways to represent their changing world, and attempted a complete renovation of the institution of art. The opposition is so well established that it is easily misleading, for it implies a form of separation and an intensity of hostility often belied by experience. It is important to note that modernism developed as a result of what came before and often took advantage of the established artistic tradition. The polarities created by such an ambiguous relationship are central to the modernist vision of the opportunities and pitfalls of an artistic existence and outline the moral conflicts that often define the artistic life: easy wealth versus honest poverty, hard work versus self-indulgence, individual needs versus society’s demands. Unable to resolve this internal conflict, modernists often demonstrated loyalty to both poles, initially rejecting commercial success only to judge

their own artistic merit by this very metric. “After all,” as Stein noted in the *Autobiography*, “we do want to be printed” (240). In this way, a simple renovation of artistic practice becomes impossible as many modern artists relied heavily on the long-established means of artistic production and dissemination.

Modern artists worked towards a complete renovation of artistic practice but still desired the public recognition and financial gains by which success had long been measured. While smaller, avant-garde presses provided an outlet for non-commercial works and ensured a small coterie of cultured readers, the distributions were always modest and thereby offered a limited readership. Moreover, the remuneration was not dependable. Many modern authors sought to influence a larger audience and desired greater financial security, even arguing that more exposure could actually improve an author’s reputation by increasing their cultural capital. Ultimately, modern artists wanted new definitions of art to be recognized in traditional ways. Stein’s success and the resulting conflict it caused for her as an artist, then, is not atypical. Her efforts to achieve public recognition, while at the same time maintaining a sense of artistic integrity, point to some of the contradictions modern authors embraced in their search for larger audiences and financial stability. Rather than seeing these writers as attempting to reconcile contradictory definitions of artistic practice, it becomes more useful to see these artists taking advantage of that contradiction and exploiting it to their own ends. In comparing the publishing history of Stein and John Dos Passos for example, Turner notes that both authors “had much to do with the way they were typed, and their correspondence with Harcourt and with their agents show that they understood a great deal about how their works were published and how the market for books worked” (139).

As the market for literary production became increasingly complicated and because many commercial publishing houses were not interested in publishing the often-difficult works being produced at the time, modern authors recognized that they needed to commercialize their works in order to achieve success thus measured. Like any professional aiming to make a living, these authors believed that commercialization would widen their audience and improve their reputation. For writers, a larger audience typically means better royalties, and while many modern authors adamantly maintained that they were not always simply interested in more money, their desire to live by their writing would indicate otherwise. Although modernists wanted to be read by their highbrow friends, they also sought to expand their audience within the more general population. Artists like Stein, who manipulate their art in order to meet commercial demands, demonstrate the paradoxical importance of the audience to the modern literary project.

“The many material reasons for Stein’s artistic success in the United States are not insulting to her reputation, nor is her career idiosyncratic when compared with other modernist writers,” notes Leick. “Her triumph was a natural consequence of this strikingly literary moment in American history” (23). While she feigned a disinterested artistic vision, Stein was suddenly aware in writing the *Autobiography* of the audience for which her work was intended. The romantic ideal of the writer as a genius expressing an inner vision without regard for its potential influence was thus discarded only to be replaced by that of a modern artist who carefully merges high art and commercial success. Turner notes that Stein’s situation demonstrates that “attempts to appeal to a larger number of consumers could improve an artist’s reputation” (140). While the writings Stein produced after the *Autobiography* were never as commercially successful



as that particular text, her name garnered enough recognition to keep sales of her books afloat, allowing her to live by her writing. Noting further similarities between Stein and Dos Passos, Turner argues that “by raising their public profiles, both authors appear to improve their positions. Even if neither was a best-seller, once they became recognizable names while maintaining their critical reputation, they increased the likelihood of their works becoming steady sellers” (140). In writing *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Stein self-consciously sought to enlarge her audience by writing more marketable material. In this way, she demonstrates the tenuous and contentious relationship between literary genius and commercial success for the modern artist.

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