

2000

The Dance: "Making Meaning" with Gertrude Stein

Sunny L. Bavaro

Follow this and additional works at: <http://preserve.lehigh.edu/cas-lehighreview-vol-8>

Recommended Citation

Bavaro, Sunny L., "The Dance: "Making Meaning" with Gertrude Stein" (2000). *Volume 8 - 2000*. Paper 7.
<http://preserve.lehigh.edu/cas-lehighreview-vol-8/7>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Lehigh Review at Lehigh Preserve. It has been accepted for inclusion in Volume 8 - 2000 by an authorized administrator of Lehigh Preserve. For more information, please contact preserve@lehigh.edu.



The Dance: “Making Meaning” with Gertrude Stein

SUNNY L. BAVARO

FROM GERTRUDE STEIN'S *PICASSO*

One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming.

Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one working and was one bringing out of himself then something (Stein 147).

A. At Once x 2: The First Go

To many, the work of Gertrude Stein, particularly the writing of the author's later years, amounts to not much more than words on a page. Readers can be heard to complain that they do not understand the point of a piece, the meaning constantly out of reach of their intellectual grasp. Not only is the point of a specific piece often called into question, but as a result of allusive plot and/or “meaning,” readers often are left to wonder: “why am I reading this if there seems to be nothing to gained from it except confusion and aggravation?”

Included in this question is the most appropriate answer, or at least the beginnings of one. Reading. Reading — this is what Stein is trying to draw our attention to — the act of reading. What do we do when we read? How is it that we come to “find meaning” in a work? Stein, through her work, forces the reader to make decisions about the text and, in the process, to become conscious of the fact that reading is a reader-engaging activity, rather than an endeavor in which text simply “speaks” to the reader. The difficulty in reading Stein rears its head when the reader fails to be cognizant of the fact that, even at a minute level of the word, one must make their own subjective (positioned/embodied) decision as to “meaning.” In other words, rather than the reader reading a text objectively, or reading such that one lays back and allows the language to carry one to the shore of meaning, one must *swim*

with the waves to the shore. This “swimming” is an active and subjective enterprise in that the reader must take part as a subject, using one’s reader position to make decisions as to what meaning to give a word, line, or paragraph and when exactly one meaning of a word should apply or when a different meaning of a repeated word would be more appropriate.

With Stein, the reader gives meaning to the text, rather than strictly the author or narrator. In this sense, Stein imbues the reader with a great power — the power to subjectively choose meaning. To avoid being as inaccessible as the woman herself sometimes is, I will use a section from her *Picasso* to illustrate how the reader becomes an active and subjective participant with Stein. In the first paragraph of *Picasso*, the word “certainly” is repeated three times; I have italicized them in the following citation. Stein doesn’t.

One whom some were *certainly* following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were *certainly* following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was *certainly* completely charming (Stein 147).

What happens when we read this opening paragraph? Initially, one may begin to read at a normal pace. Then, as a result of the repetition of words and phrases, the reader may assume the sentences are saying the same thing four times; this would result in more of a quick browsing of the sentences at the end, rather than a careful reading of them. In other words, frustrated by the repetition, a reader who is initially active, careful, and attentive to “what Stein is trying to say,” may end up becoming a passive reader, only taking in words without realizing that each sentence, although similarly phrased, can come to have quite different meanings.

It is this passive reading that Stein was trying to bring to the attention of the reader. To read Stein passively, or to approach the text as a separate object with a “meaning” which will be *bestowed upon* the reader, is not to read Stein at all. With any of her experimental works, the reader must actively *engage with* or *work with* the text to “create or make meaning” in the most literal sense. Passive reading, here manifesting itself in the assumption that the four similarly phrased sentences “mean” the same thing, is actually a mode of reading which prevents the reader from any “making meaning” when dealing with a Stein text. Reading Stein for “meaning” calls for interplay between the text and the reader; one must view the text as a subject, allowing one’s self (the reader) to inform the text concerning the “meaning” of the piece as much as the text itself informs the reader.

To read a Stein piece is to dance with it, and it must be a dance in which neither partner leads. Stein’s philosophical project was to point out to the reader how s/he habitually reads passively; the writer does this by forcing one to engage in a non-hierarchical dance with words, sentences, and paragraphs.

For example, in the first sentence of *Picasso*, when reading actively, the word “certainly” can take on a prescriptive meaning; this becomes clear if the word “definite” is substituted for “certainly,” as in, “there were some who were *definitely* following.” This meaning for the word “certainly” can be applied throughout the first paragraph.

As the reader moves on to the second paragraph, s/he finds that the word “certainly” again shows up, the first sentence being, “Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one working and one bringing out of himself then something” (Stein 147). Once again, the reader can replace “certainly” with “definitely” and “certain” with “definite,” the created meaning of the sentence being read as, “Some were *definitely* following and were *definite* that the one they were then following....” Essentially, a reader can *decide* that the meaning of “certainly” throughout the entire section of *Picasso* is “definitely” and then use this *choice of meaning* of the word as a tool to construct the meaning of the whole passage.

I have deliberately used words such as “created” and “construct[ed]” because these words most adequately describe the activity of the reader. It is important to note that the reader does not passively take in the “meaning” of the word “certainly,” but rather, s/he must *decide*, must *choose* which meaning for the word should be used while reading. The way in which Stein places the word “certainly” in the two opening paragraphs does not lend itself more to one definition of the word than it does any other; its placement leaves the “meaning” of the word ambiguous, or at least non-definitive. Thus, *the reader* must make the definitive choice, a decision which is left completely up to them with virtually no indication by Stein as to what the “proper” definition of “certainly” is to be. Perhaps it would be instructive here to use myself as a sample reader in order to illustrate how, even in the first two paragraphs, there is an almost infinite number of ways to “create meaning” with a Stein text.

Upon my initial reading of the first paragraph of this section of *Picasso*, I chose to give the word “certainly” the meaning, “definite,” as described above. I actively chose to replace Stein’s word “certainly” with “definitely,” and I constructed a “meaning” for the paragraph. Since this choice worked for me, I performed this substitution throughout the whole section, changing the syntactic form when necessary.

I was not convinced that reading such a complicated text just once was doing it justice, so I set out to read it again, even though I was pretty confident (and proud of myself) that I had already been able to decode what Stein “meant” for me to decode. Once again, I went through the first paragraph, replacing “certainly” with “definitely,” gaining more and more confidence as I went along. It was when I moved on to the second paragraph that something changed. In reading, “Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following....” and doing my substitution, I became uncomfortable with replacing the word “certain” with “definite.” What I realized was that in this sentence the initial “certainly,” although it has the same root, had a distinctly different feel to me than the word “certain;” to replace the former with “definitely” and the latter with “definite” was to imply too much similarity in meaning between the words for me to feel comfortable with my choice.

Something was going on and, in order to find out what it was, I needed to step back and see what I was doing as a reader.

The problem comes in the ambiguous nature of the word “certainly” as previously mentioned; the words “definitely” and “definite” were not ambiguous enough to match comfortably with what I thought was “meant” to be taken from the Stein word “certainly.” In other words, “definitely” had too strict a meaning to replace “certainly” and this was brought to light for me, as a reader, with Stein’s repetition of “certainly” coupled by her changing the syntax. As a reader, I had felt that the “certainly” of the initial sentence in paragraph two had a very different meaning from the “certain” that followed it. With this, it was brought to my attention that “certainly,” in addition to having the prescriptive meaning I had previously relied on, could also have a descriptive meaning. In using “certainly,” could Stein be trying to get across *the way* that “one” was followed? Was the meaning of “certainly” to be made, rather than “definitely,” something more like “confidently” or “intently,” as in, “One whom some were *intently* following was one who was completely charming”? Stein gives the reader no reason why the answer to both these questions could not be yes and yes.

At this point, it might seem that the problem of meaning is solved; rather than there being one meaning, there are two equally stable and plausible meanings and there have been many texts throughout history that have been said to allow for this type of multiplicity of “meaning.” Upon a closer examination, however, it becomes apparent that the dual natured meaning of “certainly” has actually exacerbated the problem, rather than curing it. Let us go back to the point in which I, as a reader, came to decide that there was more than one possible way to create meaning for “certainly,” namely the first sentence of the second paragraph: “Some were certainly following and were certain that the one they were then following was one working and was one bringing out of himself then something” (Stein 147). As I stated earlier, I decided upon re-reading the sentence that there had to be (for a sufficient reading according to the choice of me, the reader dancing with Stein’s words, and no one else) a marked difference in the meaning of the word “certainly” and “certain.” Thus, I eventually chose for the sentence to read as follows: “Some were *intently* following and were *definite* that the one they were then following....” What is important to note here is that this is only one out of many possible ways I could have created meaning for “certainly”/“certain.” I could have also chosen (2) “Some were *intently* following and were *intent*” or (3) “Some were *definitely* following and were *intent*” or (4) “Some were *definitely* following and *definite*....” (which were my very first substitutions). The substitutions that make the most “sense” to me, however, as an empowered reader are, “Some were *intently* following and were *definite*....”

There are two concepts that are important here. First, the *choice*, as I have been saying, is ultimately up to me, the reader, and I ultimately must settle on a meaning of “certainly,” as an individual reader, in order to even begin constructing a meaning for the paragraph and, eventually the piece as a whole. It is up to me as a reader, rather than being a passive depository of meaning bestowed/forced on me by the

text, to become active, to engage with the text to “create meaning.” Secondly, each of these four combinations offered up by me as a reader “create” four distinct meanings for this one sentence.

Once again, the problematics build, rather than breaking down. I chose “definitely” and “intently” as two possible meanings for “certainly,” but I could just as easily have chosen “sure” as a meaning, rather than “definite.” And there are many other possible meanings I could have chosen, as a reader, for “certainly.” Not only that, but each initial substituted “meaning” can be again substituted (substitution #1: “definite,” and be replaced by substitution #2: “sure”) and, theoretically, this substitution would add up to a large exponential number of possible substitutions and re-substitutions. And this is just one sentence; add to this the fact in the entire *Picasso* piece, Stein uses “certainly” in various forms at least twenty four times. If one thinks about how many different combinations are possible, one may begin to realize the gravity of what I am arguing: the ultimate decision as to the “meaning” of “certainly” is up to me, the reader and, in theory, I am left with the power (and the difficult task) of choosing from an infinite number of possible meanings for the specific “meaning” of the word “certainly” in each specific sentence where the word occurs.

To make matters more complicated, “certainly” is only *one* of the words in Stein’s piece that repeats. In addition, the fact that it is necessary to “make meanings” for words that are repeated calls into question the “stability” of non-repeated words. Would it not be just as appropriate, if not imperative, to use a similar systemic substitution with non-repeated words in “creating meaning” for “adequate comprehension.” Imagine the possibilities of meaning for the piece as a whole (and, I would argue, the freedom) available to the reader in Stein’s allowance, even insistence, on infinite substitution and, hence, infinite possible meanings for the work.

No wonder readers have such difficulty with Stein; in bestowing on us the ultimate power of “meaning” concerning a foundational element of language, the word, among other ideological projects she sets out for the reader which are too expansive to be adequately discussed here, Stein is demanding a great amount from us as readers. Perhaps this intricate dance is sometimes too much for even the most patient and diligent reader.

B. Then: The First Go x 2

In short, Stein forces the reader to come to terms with the idea that reading is an activity. But not activity in the sense of pulling pre-existing meaning; a text is not, as Stanley Fish puts it, “a container from which a reader extracts a message” (Fish 384). Although Fish goes in a different direction than I plan to — he believes that, ultimately *the* “sense” of a text is contained within the text, that the text acts upon the reader or, as he states it, making sense of a text is “an action made upon a reader...” (Fish 384). It is my contention that Stein’s writing defies not only the idea that a text is a mere container, an object from which we extract pre-existing meaning, but that it also rebels against the notion that the reader is simply one who is acted on by the

text, or that the reader is only an object which must deal with the force imposed on it by the text. In other words, where reading traditionally is thought of as a distanced dichotomy between subject and object—with the reader holding the former position, the text occupying the latter—Stein's work blurs the line separating the two. This blurring does not cause the existence of the subject or object to disappear but, rather, causes there to be a dynamic relation between the two. Essentially, Stein takes Fish's ideas one step further. With Fish, the two participants in question trade static roles (text as the subject acting on, and dictating the reactions of, the objectified reader); with Stein, they can be seen bouncing back and forth between subject and object, the affect they have on each other and the position they hold becomes a function of time (time with respect to the action of reading). In addition, this blurring of the separation between subject and object raises epistemological questions, namely how, particularly in western society, we come to "know." What does Stein's writing have to say about the process we use, and the structure we depend on, when we seek knowledge about ourselves and the world around us?

The major way or process we use to find "answers" to epistemological questions in western society is through science. The act of science, just like the act of (traditional) reading, is based on a strict dichotomy between the "knower" (subject) and the "knowable" (object) and in both acts, it is thought that the distance between is essential to finding the "truth" or "answer." The more the "knower" and the "knowable" are separated, or not allowed to commingle, the more sound the knowledge obtained or the more true the "Truth" extracted. In order, however, to discuss what it means for Stein to ask the "knower" and "knowable" to constantly trade places, or to dance dynamically without one partner consistently (and only) leading the other, it is necessary to understand how it comes to be that the work of Stein destroys this strict dichotomy. To do this, it must be explained how the posturing of the participants during the act of obtaining knowledge through science parallels how a reader comes to "know" the singular "true meaning" of a text through the act of (traditional) reading and how Stein's writing can be seen to undermine both processes.

According to Evelyn Fox Keller, Bacon wrote at the dawn of modern science, "let us establish a chaste and lawful marriage between Mind and Nature;" this is the metaphoric marriage of which science is the offspring " (Keller 190). Thus, there is a dichotomy in science, the "knower" (mind) and the "knowable" (nature). The act of science can be, "described in terms of [mind] 'conquering' and 'mastering' nature" and it is the interaction between the two which leads to scientific knowledge (Keller 190). Inherent in the use of such adjectives in describing this process of science is also a description of the relation between the "mastering" mind/knower and the "mastered" nature/knowable. Essentially, as Keller puts it, "the relation specified between knower and known is one of distance and separation. It is that between a subject and object radically divided. . . . Simply put, nature is objectified" (Keller 191). Thus, in science, the mind (or the scientist) is the subject and nature is the object investigated. Obtaining "true knowledge," then, depends on the two remaining in a

distanced and static relation to each other. In short, the process of obtaining knowledge through science is such that activity occurs in one direction and in which the dichotomy is static; the "knower/mind," as an active subject, attempts to "master" the objectified and passive "known/nature," the result of being "true" scientific knowledge. The use of the term "true" in describing the value of the knowledge obtained through science in this manner is important; in western society, to attempt to "know" a fact about something is to imply that there is something, separate from the investigator, out there to be known. In this sense, that which is investigated/mastered is thought of as an object, namely a discrete and self-contained container, from which the scientific mind can extract information. This information is only "true" to the container from which it is pulled if there is distance and separation between subject (mind) and object (nature). Thus, the process of coming to know depends on the objectification, or containerization, of the "knowable;" "true knowledge" in the western scientific tradition, to quote Keller, is only "guaranteed . . . by setting apart its modes of knowing from those in which the dichotomy is threatened" (Keller 191).

As the earlier quote by Fish indicates, in (traditional) reading, it is the text which is thought to be the discrete container from which "knowledge," or "meaning" is extracted by the reader. In this sense, the strict dichotomy on which science depends also shows up in the act of (traditional) reading. When reading, it is the reader who is the "knower," or the subject, which actively pulls information out of the "known," or the objectified and containerized, text. Thus, in the process of reading, as in the process of science, the reader (subject, mind) attempts to "master" the text (object, nature) by extracting a pre-existing "meaning" ("truth"). The knowledge that one seeks in both processes is singular and exists inherently within the text, regardless of who is investigating; the more distance and separation the subject has from the object it is attempting to "master," always carefully retaining the static dichotomy outlined by the process(es), the more true the scientific "truth" or literary "meaning." In western thought, separation between subject and object begets "real meaning," whether getting to know the nature of the earth, the nature of a text, or the nature of Gertrude Stein.

What about Gertrude Stein? In the beginning of this discussion, I stated that most readers have a difficult time with Stein, particularly her more experimental works, feeling that the "'meaning' [of a piece was] constantly out of reach of their intellectual grasp." It is my contention that the reason for this is that readers are applying the dichotomies of traditional reading, assuming that the text is a container from which they simply need to extract meaning. An experimental Stein text *does not allow this methodology to lead to meaning* but, rather, confusion; when it comes to Stein, the more distance you have the more bewilderment, not "knowledge" or "meaning" you find. Rather than the writing being conducive to finding meaning through separation of static subject and static object, Stein's writing has "meaning" only when there is a dynamic relationship between the text and the reader. In blurring the line between object and subject, the positions do not disappear but, rather, are in constant

motion, the text at points being the passive object, at others, the active subject. It is the destroying of the static subject/object dichotomy, that we consistently rely on out of habit, which allows Stein to point out that even though it seems as though there is this dichotomy in everything we read, in reality, the reader and text (no matter how linear) are always jumping from the position of subject to position of object, always making meaning rather than extracting it.

In this first section I analyzed how I read the opening paragraph of Stein's piece, *Picasso*, in which the word "certainly" is repeated three times:

One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were certainly following was one who was charming. One whom some were following was one who was completely charming. One whom some were following was one who was certainly completely charming (Stein 147).

As I stated earlier, the repetition may lead one to believe that each sentence is saying the same thing; as a result, the reader may become passive in the sense that they browse the paragraph, waiting for the "meaning" to present itself. Although I believe that my initial analysis of the way a reader may read the passage is relevant, it only taps the surface of what is going on. The mode of reading in which the reader attempts to find "what Stein is trying to say," is an attempt to read the passage by using the static dichotomies outlined previously in this second section. In other words, the reader approaches reading as a subject, and only a subject, seeking to "master" the objectified text; the reader tries to actively *take meaning out* of the passive container (text). But switching the dichotomy (text as only subject, reader as only object) does not work either. The relationship must be dynamic, both must be subject and object. Again: Reading Stein for "meaning" calls for interplay between the text and the reader; one must view the text as a subject, allowing one's self (the reader) to inform the text concerning the "meaning" of the piece as much as the text itself informs the reader. But this preliminary analysis of mine incomplete. What power does the text have, or what position is the text in, during the "making meaning" process?

In the first section, what I did was switch the subject/object dichotomy; the text becomes the subject, looking to me, the objectified container, for meaning. The problem arises when it is realized that even though I may be a container, within me are many different definitions of the same word. In this sense, then, I am not only an object, because to say something is an object is to say that there is singularity (*an* object). Even though I must decide on one meaning in order to go on to the next word, there are many word definitions I can chose to make meaning for a given word. In this way, the reader fluctuates between object (a container from which one meaning of a word is eventually deliberated on and decided on) and subject (who looks to the object of the text as to what word s/he must decide the definition of).

Perhaps it will be clearer if I use a specific example and attempt to show the positioning of the reader and the text during the process of making meaning. First, the reader reads the sentence, "One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming" (Stein 147). As a result of the way we are taught to read (i.e. out of habit), the reader will initially take the posture of the subject, seeing the text as an object. As a subject, the reader will, in seeing the text as a container/object with self-contained pre-existing "meaning," attempt to extract the "proper" definition for the word "certainly." This is the first step. With a traditional text, this will be followed quickly by looking to the context clues of the word, in other words, relying on the text primarily (it would appear), to bestow on the reader the "correct" definition. It is important to note however, that, while it seems that the dichotomy is static, even in a traditional reading, this is not actually the case. On one hand, the text is bestowing meaning on the reader, and, on the other hand, the reader is extracting meaning from the container/text.

In other words, with a traditional text, this process goes unnoticed by the reader as a result of a two-fold habit: (1) the reader relies on the context of the word to quickly (and subconsciously) decipher "pre-existing" meaning within the confines of the text (text as container/object, reader as decoder/subject) and (2) the reader, out of habit, relies on the fact that, for the individual person, there will be a definition of a particular word which offered by the text is privileged over all other possible "meanings" of a word (text as subject which, through use of a particular word, "investigates" the containerized/objectified reader). In reading a traditional text, this process occurs very rapidly and without conscious recognition; it appears as though the text is "saying something to the reader." With Stein, however, reading is an activity which forces the reader to be conscious that they are engaged in the activity of reading.

On the surface it would appear that Stein's prose is different from a traditional linear narrative because it forces the reader to make a decision; the meaning of each individual word must be decided, with Stein, by the reader before one can continue. To say this, however, would be to imply that the definition of each word in a traditional narrative is inherent to the word. As Saussure points out, words do not have inherent meaning but, rather, consist of a "signified" and a "signifier" which come together to form a "sign" (Selden, Widdowson, and Brooker 68). Since words do not have any inherent meaning nor do words appear in a text with the author's intended meaning spelled out along side them, it stands to reason that in every text that is read, one must make a decision as to the definition of each word, or come to some conclusion as to what the word "means" for them as a reader but, also, within the context of the phrase/sentence/passage. Thus, the process in which one reads Stein is, essentially, no different than how one reads any text.

But if this is true—the act of reading Stein is no different than the act of reading any text—why is Stein so difficult to read and understand. The answer to this question lies in one word: habit. As I said earlier, in reading a traditional text, we rely on habit outlined earlier; we depend on context clues and personally hierarchized defi-

nitions of words. These two habits work smoothly together, in the sense that I combine what I know as a subjective, multi-definition-possessing reader with the knowledge I draw from the context clues of the objectified text to decide on a definition. The result, is the feeling (and the illusion) that I am pulling out a pre-existing definition; in other words, a good subjective "mind" will be able to pull out the "true" and singular "nature" inherent to the word. It appears then, through relying on these habits, that a reader is merely decoding what the word is trying to say. With Stein, however, the reader's ability to rely on context clues is troubled, forcing the reader to come to terms with the fact that the idea of "meaning inherent in the text" is simply a mirage.

For example, let us return to the first sentence of the first paragraph of *Picasso*: it is written by Stein as, "One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming" (147). In the first section, I imply that it is a result of the fact that the word "certainly" is repeated throughout the first paragraph which makes the reader question whether only one definition of the word would be adequate each time the word appears. Although I do not retract that argument, I neglected to realize in my first analysis that, while the repetition may clue the reader in to the fact that s/he must choose a definition, I did not account for what it is that causes the reader to have to re-determine which "meaning" to give the word "certainly" each and every time it appears. As stated earlier, it is the habit of combining context clues with a reader's pre-determined "meaning" for a word that is depended on when reading. If we look at the first sentence of the Stein piece, however, we can see that the location of the word "certainly" robs the reader of her or his ability to easily rely on context clues. For example, as I state in the first section, I, as a reader, decided that the word "certainly" in the first Stein sentence could take on a prescriptive meaning if I replace the word "certainly" with "definitely" (i.e. "definitely following") or a descriptive meaning if I replace "certainly" with "intently" (i.e. "intently following"). Even though—as I have asserted—the reader continuously must choose a meaning for a word in the process of reading anything, the point is that with the Stein sentence, I was made to be conscious of the fact that I had to make a choice. What exactly is it that makes me conscious of this choice?

Broadly, it is the text acting as a subject on me, the objectified reader. The text, then, can be thought of as trying to actively pull meaning out of me. But, as I have said, this is what happens whenever we read; what exactly about the process of reading the Stein sentence is forcing me to become aware that I am making a choice? It is the placement of the location of the word "certainly" in the sentence; the location of the word takes away my ability to subconsciously (and safely, comfortably?) rely on context clues. For example, if Stein wanted to make the prescriptive meaning of the word "certainly" the primary choice for meaning, she could have written the sentence one way, to make the descriptive meaning stand out, she could have placed the word differently (and used internal punctuation). In reading the next two sentences, without thinking about it, decide which should be read with a descriptive meaning of "certainly" and which with a prescriptive meaning:

(1) "One whom some certainly were following, was one who was completely charming."

(2) "One whom some were following certainly, was one who was completely charming."

For me as a reader, I would, with virtually no conscious deciding, read the word "certainly" in sentence (1) with the prescriptive meaning of "definitely," and the "certainly" in sentence (2) with the descriptive meaning of "intently." Now, let us look back at the original sentence again, "One whom some were certainly following was one who was completely charming" (Stein 147). The placement of the word in this sentence does not allow the reader to use context clues; there is virtually nothing about the words before "certainly" or the words after it which would lead the reader to pick one definition over another. In taking away context clues, Stein destroys the illusion of the static object (text)/subject (reader) dichotomy which a reader depends on for making the "meaning" of a sentence. In doing this, the reader is made cognizant by the structure of the text that s/he is being acted on as an object. The reader is made to recognize that s/he must always become an object/container from which meaning must be pulled from and decided on. The point is this: when reading Stein, the reader is not quite asked to do anything differently from when s/he reads a traditional narrative but, rather, is asked to recognize and deal with what happens every time we read (even though we normally do not recognize it). It is in this sense that we can see through Stein's work that the reader, too, must become an object from which "meaning" is drawn each time we read a word.

Thus, in reading Stein, the reader is forced to recognize that s/he and the text must fluctuate between being both a subject and an object when engaged in the process of reading. It is at this point that I would like to go back to the parallel between the practice of science and the act of reading. As I stated early in this section, Keller implies that, in western civilization, any "true" knowledge can only be obtained through a strict, static separation between subject and object. Conversely, any knowledge obtained through a mode that does not uphold this dichotomy is not "true" knowledge at all. Since science, for our culture, tends to be thought of the primary most valid way of obtaining "true" knowledge, it stands to reason that, in obtaining knowledge about a literary text, a reader would assume the same posture as the scientist in hopes of decoding the "truth." Stein's experimental work challenges the validity of this process of obtaining knowledge, not by showing that the static dichotomy does not lead to knowledge but, rather, by raising doubt as to whether the process can ever actually exist. Her work calls into question for the reader at every moment of reading, what it means to "know."

Although it is not painless, the fact of the matter is, it is possible for a reader to obtain knowledge about a Stein text. The reader, however, must be willing to deal with some loss of autonomy and self, must be willing to endure being conscious of the fact that they are not always in control, be willing to think of the self as an object acted on *by* the text as a subject. In short, the reader must be willing to relive the separation anxiety that marks a child's introduction into emotional maturity. This, however, is a topic to be explored at a later date.

Works Cited

- Fish, Stanley. "Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics (Appendix)." *Self-consuming Artifacts*. Berkley: U. of Calif. Press, 1973. 383-399.
- Keller, Evelyn Fox. "Gender and Science." *Discovering Reality*. Ed. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Science, Inc., 1978. 187-205.
- Selden, Raman, Peter Widdowson and Peter Brooker. *A Readers Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, fourth edition. London: Prentice Hall, 1997.
- Stein, Gertrude. "Picasso." *A Stein Reader*. Ed. Ulla E. Dydo. Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1993. 147—148.



● "You refuse to wear clothes, because you're a nudist, eh? Well, well well."