

**An unconventional narrative approach in Gertrude Stein's
Avant Garde works *Three Lives*, *Tender Buttons* and *The
Making of Americans*.**

**Dr. Juan Abdulla Ibrahim Al-Banna
Asst. Professor/ Literature/Modern Novel
Dept. of English, College of Languages
University of Salahaddin/ Erbil
Banaali_juan@yahoo.com**

Abstract:

Gertrude Stein (1874-1946) is an influential writer of the twentieth century whose studies were mostly biographical concentrating on her relations with important modernist, avant-garde artists and writers. Stein's experimental works *Three Lives* (1909), *Tender Buttons* (1914), and *The making of Americans* (1925) have established her reputation as an Avant-garde stylist whose works were characterized by being revolutionary for she invented a literary language far from conventional, patriarchal mode. Instead, she follows a different stylistic mode, which was complex and open-ended syntactical and semantic Polysemy. The theories of prose composition that Stein delivered in Oxford carry much of her literary practice. Through this theory, she clarifies that each part in her work is as important as other parts with no specific difference.

Gertrude Stein's works are characterized by having a simple, strange, informality in writing. She was a literary theorist and practitioner as well who depended on philosophical ideas linking them with Arts and the realistic, contemporary experimental form. Her style suggests a defense for women who reject passivity, depending on the psychological approach and the process of consciousness, Stein adopts a unique formation of character type by following an unconventional style and a challenging, complex thought. Incidents and developments are not crucial in Stein's work but the way the character is made or formed is important. Following an unconventional, experimental language becomes a means to identify

the conscious psychological aspect of the characters in her prose works. It also reveals her own desire to penetrate her identity through certain biographical notes depending on synchronic sense of time rather than Diachronic. She explains that the synchrony of the Twentieth Century implies modes of juxtaposition that destroys the linearity of nineteenth-century narrative realism. She prefers the synchronic, rational mode of expression that made her to be attracted to the Twentieth century mode of writing.

Section One :

1.1 Temporality in an Unconventional , Modern , synchronic narrative structures

In *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Narrative Theory*, narrative structure is said to “be regarded as relating exclusively to story or as relating to the discourse that presents that story” (366). Many critics attempted to present notions about narrative structures among the outstanding ones is David Herman whose views is unavoidable in such study. Frederik De Bosschere claims that In classical and medieval times, literary authors were expected to structure their plays and novels according to certain prescriptive principles (9). However, modern narratives have shown themselves “increasingly hostile to normative notions of structure,” and it can even be said that one of the main characteristics of modern literature has become “its overt willingness to transgress prescriptive structural dogma” (Herman et al. 367).

Unarguably, formal prescriptions for modern literary works have become far less rigid than in times past. Yet many novels still continue to rely heavily on the repetition of basic plot formulae. However, some works of fiction deliberately distance themselves from such traditional narrative plots. Repetition leads to laziness of mind (Herman et al.438-439 qtd in Frederik De Bosschere).In order to avoid this ‘laziness’, certain authors consciously avoid employing traditional schemes of events in their narratives, but instead choose more challenging, unconventional story structures. Although there is a great deal of variation to be found in the

way these structures differ from their traditional counterparts (De Bosschere 10).

Herman claims that modernists in particular have expressed explicit hostility to clockwork chronology because , as Virginia Woolf states in *Modern Fiction*, “life is not a series... symmetrically arranged” (qtd. in Herman et al. 317). Important when dealing with this innovation in terms of temporality, is the distinction between narrating time (or discourse time) and narrated time (or story time), where discourse time is “measured in words or pages of text or in the hours of reading time”

and story time represents “the temporal duration and chronology of the underlying plot”(608). According to Narratologist Monika Fludernik temporality is conceptualized in the common sense ‘objective’ manner that we all take for granted. On the discourse level, with the reading or viewing of narrative discourse, however, a cognitive order of temporality is instituted which is based, not on sequentiality or chronology, but on holistic structures of narrative comprehension (Herman et al. 610 qtd in De Bosschere11).

The main motive for modern writers was that they experienced clockwork temporality as being too restrictive and artificial. Consequently, instead of relying on “time on the clock,” as Woolf puts it, they relied on “time in the mind” (qtd. in Herman et al.319). This allowed authors to add a more subjective component to their narrations, “foregrounding significant personal values rather than objective causal links, and emphasizing the psychological ... qualities of non-linearity” (592).This redefinition of narrative as rendering not necessarily a plot but a character’s or narrator’s experiential reality was influenced by insights from conversational narratives in which the point of the story is not merely ‘what happened’ but, especially, what the experience meant to the narrator and what he or she wanted to convey with it (610). Gertrude Stein sticks to her character's or narrator's experiences through their conversational styles , she does not stick to the conventional way of narrating stories because it is linear, so she expresses her character's

thoughts about their lives and through stream of consciousness and achieves modernity furthermore through the characters subjective insights, the reader was able to understand the characters state by sticking to their perceptual world. Repetition of the plot structures in the conventional narrative structures are completely different from Stein's unconventional repetition in *Three lives*, *The making of Americans* and *Tender Buttons* for she repeats words, phrases that will let the reader to concentrate on the language and neglect the narration process .The following passage reveals Anna's (the first servant heroine in *Three Lives*) character, how personally she hated to submit to those who wanted to oblige her to take wrong decisions and resists strongly those (here little Jane, relative to Miss Mary Wadsmith, the owner of the home) who underestimated her :

many times during the preparations for this summer, Jane had met Anna with sharp resistance, in opposition to her ways. It was simple for little Jane to give unpleasant orders, not from herself but from Miss Mary, large, docile, helpless Miss Mary Wadsmith who could never think out any orders to give Anna from herself (Three Lives 15)

Stein clarifies more in the same page this, through conversational style:

"Oh, Anna!" cried little Jane running back into the house, " Miss Mary says that you are to bring along the blue dressings out of her room and mine." Anna's body stiffened, " we never use them in the summer, Miss Jane," she said thickly. "Yes Anna, but Miss Mary thinks it would be nice, and she told me to tell you not to forget, good-by!" and the little girl skipped lightly down the steps into the carriage and they drove away.

This was in fact Stein's way of describing the character's state , her thoughts, feelings mood but there was no plot , the phrases and repeated sentences indicated a kind of continuity attributed to the character as if it is fixed without change , even if the tenses are in past forms, she uses elements like 'and', 'always' , 'more' to indicate a kind of continuity:

Anna worked, and thought, and saved , and scolded , and took care of all the boarders , and of Peter and of Rags, and all the others. There was never any end to Anna's effort and she grew always more tired , more pale yellow, and in her face more thin and worn and worried. Sometimes she went farther in not being well (55).

Anna's behavior is fixed without change, the reader does not find any change in Anna because there is repetition of the essence of Anna's belief of what she does , how she lives . Anna at the beginning of the novella is the same as Anna at the end .

Marianne Dekoven in her introduction *Gertrude Stein* believes that Stein went a great deal further than anyone else in the modernist period in reinventing literary language in a way that undoes conventional, hierarchical, patriarchal modes of signification, substituting, in diverse stylistic modes, a rich, complex, open-ended syntactical and semantic polysemy (qtd in Scott 479). In Dekoven's view Stein was well aware of what was she doing; she was eminently a literary theorist as well as a practitioner whereas In Anne Charter's view, the era in which Gertrude Stein had written was as Malcolm Cowley and other critics have said, an era of bold experimentation with literary form and language that has continued throughout our century (vii). Charters adds that *Three Lives* is a proof of the unconventionality of Steins narrative approach and evidence of her invincible will to write as she pleased regardless of the publics' response(Ibid). Like most authors of her time, she was under the influence of realism, the literary mode that had prevailed in European and American fiction for more than a quarter of century.

1.2 Art Portraits of Cezanne, Picasso and Stein's *Composition as Explanation* as an experimental basis in Stein's *Three Lives*

Stein was eager to try something new when she started "The Good Anna" , taking Gustave Flaubert's story 'Un Coeur Simple' (1877),as her point of departure was part of her experiment. She set out to do unique thing concerning her own experience, this was an attempt to put into practice certain theories about prose composition that she had conceived

after being introduced to Impressionist and post impressionist painters by her brother Leo. After she settled in Paris, her ideas about writing were stimulated by the excitement of being able to afford to buy Canvases by artists who were then just beginning to make their reputation in France – Cezanne, Matisse, and Picasso (Charters viii).

In her essay *Composition as Explanation* , Stein stated that Cezanne was the most important influence on her approach to experimenting with prose narrative when she began "The Good Anna", "Cezanne conceived the idea that in composition one thing was as important as another thing. Each part is as important as the whole , and that impressed me enormously....I was obsessed by this idea of composition." As the biographer James R. Mellow has pointed out, Gertrude Stein began writing *Three Lives* while sitting under Cezanne's painting of "portrait of Mme. Cezanne," (Charters ix).Stein's central concern in her lectures is the issue of contemporaneity in art . She claims , simply, that everyone , including writers and artists , lives in the present , because there is no other time available to live in : the past is gone and the future does not yet exist. The writer who is truly expressing 'the present' is outcast by her or his contemporaries precisely because they cannot recognize contemporaneity in art. Stein adapted this notion to a mode of writing with one's attention constantly focused on the present moment, which she calls (in "*composition as Explanation*") writing in the "continuous present".

Stein further developed her explanation in " The Gradual Making of *The Making of Americans*," in *Lectures in America*. Stein also clarifies the notion of the difference in "time-sense" between 19th and 20th century. In the 19th century, the time sense was linear , diachronic. In the American 20th century , the time-sense is synchronic. Dekovan further clarifies that the synchrony of the twentieth century implies modes of juxtaposition and collage that annihilate the linearity of nineteenth century narrative realism.(qtd in Scott 482).This synchrony has an internal dynamic, however : "the Twentieth century gives of itself a feeling of movement". This movement is not teleological but highly abstract. Not only is it an end

in itself; it is also "static". Stein defines it in opposition to what she calls "events".

And so what I am trying to make you understand is that every contemporary writer has to find out what is the inner time-sense of his contemporariness. The writer or painter, or what not, feels this thing more vibrantly , and he has a passionate need of putting it down; and that is what creativeness does.... If he doesn't put down the contemporary thing, he isn't a great writer, for he has to live in the past (Stein How Writing is written).

In her essay Stein clarifies more why she repeats continuously certain words, expressions, adjectives and different kinds of adverbs to give the reader a sense of continuity especially with the word "always" and the structure of verb +ing) form of her run on sentences.

Beginning again and again is a natural thing even when there is a series

Beginning again and again and again explaining composition and time is a natural thing

It is understood by this time that everything is the same except composition and time, composition and the time of the composition and the time in the composition.

Everything is the same except composition and as the composition is different and always going to be different

everything is not the same. Everything is not the same as the time when of the composition and the time in the composition is different. The composition is different, that is certain(composition as Explanation1)

1.3 Stein's "Melanctha" in relation to *Composition as Explanation*

Stein states in her essay *Composition and Explanation* :

In beginning writing I wrote a book called Three Lives this was written in 1905. I wrote a negro story called Melanctha. In that there was a constant

recurring and beginning there was a marked direction in the direction of being in the present although naturally I had been accustomed to past present and future, and why, because the composition forming around me was a prolonged present. A composition of a prolonged present is a natural composition in the world as it has been these thirty years it was more and more a prolonged present. I created then a prolonged present naturally I knew nothing of a continuous present but it came naturally to me to make one, it was

simple it was clear to me and nobody knew why it was done like that I did not myself although naturally to me it..was natural.

Since Stein was not interested in linear , conventional narrative , she tried to present opposite narrative structures. Emboldened by the example of Cezanne, in the opening pages of her first story, " The Good Anna," Stein tried to replace conventional linear narrative with incremental blocks of description chronicling the relationships in her heroine's life, including repetition in her descriptions and dialogue as a conscious literary device. It is this absence of dramatic plots and the extraordinary repetitions of words and phrases that often give the most trouble to new readers of Gertrude Stein's prose (Charters ix).

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 (qtd in McKay 10). 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 disillusion. 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 words, like "always" and her overuse of verb to be + ing form 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. On one hand Stein wanted to prove to her readers that repeating does not mean the same thing, even if you repeat the expressions woven by the word "always" each repetitive structure is not necessarily means the same. Being a methodological writer Stein was interested in creating a realistic kind of discourse. On the other hand the moment Stein plays with words through repetition and juxtaposition, the reader realizes the way her characters are portrayed. One can feel the psychological state of Melanctha, she is resisting the patriarchal society and really repressed. She wants excitement, the way Melanctha discussed the theme of love with Dr. Jeff Campbell was not the way Jeff understood love. Contrast and different point of view rises in a rebellious kind of discussion between Melanctha and Dr. Jeff.

These months had been an uncertain time for Jeff Campbell . He never knew how much he really knew about Melanctha. He saw her now for long times and very often. He was beginning always more and more to like her . But he didn't seem to himself to know very much about her. He was beginning to feel he could almost trust the goodness in her. But then , always, really , he was not very sure about her. Melanctha always had ways that made him feel uncertain with her, and yet he was so near in his feeling for her. He now never thought about all this in real words any more. He was always letting it fight itself out in him. He was now never taking any part in this fighting that was always going on inside him(95).

Truly the critics also have the same uncertain feeling about Stein, for she was aiming at creating truth and honest moments related to her psychological agonies by using repetition and the word 'always' . Her style which she wanted to be authentic and real is conveyed methodologically

but the content of her style really conveys Stein's contradictory sense about her sex, being lesbian and full of questions about her identity. As if there is a terrible Volcano inside her, she wants excitement and happiness . The very reason that made critics like Rabin consider both *Melanctha* and *Dr. Jeff* are the same person intermingled in Stein (67).

Stein in *The Making of Americans* , chapter two writes:

BEAR IT IN MIND my reader if indeed there be any such that the thing I mean to write here is not a simple novel with a plot and conversations but a record of a family progress respectably lived and to be carefully set down and so arm yourself with patience for you must hear more of the character of these four children before we can proceed with the story of their lives as they one after the other grow old enough to determine their own fortune and their own relations (8).

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 again 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)

While Stein was repeating, she was shedding lights on the moods, feelings and habits of the characters in the novella revealing their agonies and miseries at the same time , she does so again in her essays and again using continuous temporal sense . Sometimes she repeats names of the characters for emphatic purpose . As an example, in *Melanctha*, Rose who was *Melanctha*'s friend was neglecting her duties towards her husband,

and she had a newly born baby, being selfish , Stein reveals this selfishness through repetition of names, pronouns, words and other expressions:

I don't see Melanctha why you should talk like you would kill yourself just because you are blue. I'd never kill myself Melanctha just 'cause

I was blue. I'd maybe kill somebody else Melanctha 'cause I was blue, but I'd never kill myself. If I ever killed myself Melanctha it'd be by accident, and if I ever killed myself by accident Melanctha, I'd be awful sorry (60).

Stein repeats most of the expressions and pronouns 'I' and 'You' to let the reader feel the difference between two different characters. Stein tries to reject patriarchy that sticks to one voice and deliberately wanted to give an identity to the female characters with the repetition of names of the characters (here Melanctha). Stein further expresses her character formation in her work, "The Good Anna":

The good Anna was a small, spare, german woman, at this time about forty years of age. Her face was worn, her cheeks were thin , her mouth drawn and firm, and her light blue eyes were very bright. Sometimes they were full of lightning and sometimes full of humor, but they were always sharp and clear(5).

Stein in this sample, gives us a character sketch of Anna , using many modifiers : good, small, spare, german, worn face, thin cheeks, firm mouth, light blue eyes, very bright, full of lightning, full of humor, repeating commas , lengthening expressions , giving the reader a fixed picture of Anna specially when Stein repeats the word "always" followed by adjectives "sharp" and "clear". Stein continues writing about Anna stating:

Her voice was a pleasant one, when she told the histories of bad Peter and of Baby and of little Rags. Her voice was a high and piercing one when she called to the teamsters and to the other wicked men, what she wanted that should come to them, when she saw them beat a horse or kick a dog. She did not belong to any society that could stop them and she told them so most frankly, but her strained voice and her glittering eyes, and her queer piercing german english first made them afraid and then ashamed (Ibid).

In her description of an underclass woman servant in the same page Stein writes :

For five years Anna managed the little house for Miss Mathilda. In these five years there were four different under servants. The one that came first was a pretty, cheerful irish girl. Anna took her with a doubting mind. Lizzie was an obedient, happy servant, and Anna began to have a little faith. This was not for long. The pretty, cheerful Lizzie disappeared one day without her notice and with all her baggage and returned no more.

This pretty, cheerful Lizzie was succeeded by a melancholy Molly. Molly was born in America, of german parents. All her people had been long dead or gone away. Molly had always been alone. She was a tall , dark, sallow, thin-haired creature, and she was always troubled with a cough, and she had a bad temper, and always said ugly dreadful swear words.

As it is clear in the above-mentioned samples in "The Good Anna" , Stein sticks to present a group of women servants , mentioning different nationalities, one is German, another Irish with different moods. Repetition dominates most part of the narrative structures. It is no more than a description of women's world and Stein does not pay attention even to matters of capitalization like (german, irish , english) , putting full stops etc. On the contrary Stein never sticks to conventional structures, does not present a story of incidents. Stein through repetition of certain words and syntactical expressions or adjectives refer to certain sounds as if she has written the text to be heard like the adjectives used for Anna's voice as a fixed issue like, pleasant, high, piercing, strained. Or certain verbs denote the narrator's refusal to men's world like tough verbs, beat, kick used to modify men behavior deliberately by Stein. Other kind of adjectives indicate a fixed feature attributed to a woman character like, doubting, melancholic .

Stein previously explained that she was excited by Cezanne's approach to painting because it seemed to her to exemplify theories of human perception she had studied at Harvard with William James, who believed that consciousness was experienced in repetitive, short incremental

stages, not in logical sequences. Such perceptions are clear in the way she uses verbs, adjectives to portray her women characters, Anna, Lena, Melanctha. Later on , Stein said the key to understanding her books was realizing that she wrote "by ear" rather than "by eye,"not imagining pictures of what she was describing in words but concentrating on hearing the words she was putting down on paper, thereby achieving in prose what she called a "continuous present."The way her "ear" dominated the language and tone of the narrative in "The Good Anna," "The Gentle Lena," and "Melanctha" is easily appreciated (Charters xvi).Stein portrays a woman's world in *Three Lives*, one in which women's voices are heard expressing their inner feelings, wishes, moods, ideas, and confusions, and above all else, earnestly advising one another the best way to live. Because plot action in the stories is virtually static, Stein depended on simple, concrete language and a carefully nuanced tone to move the narrative.

Section Two

2.1 The Impact of Biographical information on Stein's works: A Psychological exploratory study

No matter what method or style Gertrude Stein follows in her writings, the essence of her works carry features from her real life. For instance her story in *The Making of Americans* is about her life. There are certain personal aspect in her in which it turned to be repeated again in her narrative aspects. This also includes what had happened to her when she was a student at Johns Hopkins . Leon Katz clarifies this when he states that *The Making of Americans* can be considered as the first steps of Gertrude Stein's literary progress .In this story Stein presents the problem of describing the "last touch" of human being , or to put it another way , of passing beyond the practical acquaintance with human being which anyone can have to a total description of human being such as no one before her had dreamed of formulating (ix). Stein uses her intense vision of human psychology , she began to channel all the matter of her book *The Making of Americans* into a massive description of the psychological

landscape of human being in its totality (x). There are many passages in the story in which Stein criticizes the image of a weak women, or mother living in a patriarchal society when a father presents an image of an old generation compared to his family members who are proud of themselves due to their educational system. So Stein mentions in her biographical story of her family, and through such descriptions she attacks the notion of a passive women who have no active role in the family:

Well in a few years we will see who knows best for then you can show me what these modern improvements that you think so much of are going to do for you; in a few years I say we will see". He paused and again looked at them keenly with the same mixture of reproach and pride and with the same side glance of cheerful challenge towards his wife. She however had heard all this matter disputed so often and was without interest in it from the beginning and so she soon withdrew into the house (142).

Stein clarifies the image of her Patriarchal father in the story and also criticizes such image when she conveys her mother's role in the story. Then Stein feels really terrible because her mother did not pay attention to her being a little child brought up by governesses stating in *The Making of Americans* :

Hortense the youngest now a little girl of ten is at this time too little to be very important to us She was a nice little girl not very strong in health. Being the baby of the family she was much petted by the father and overawed by the brother but left by the mother more to the care of governesses than had been the case with the other children of the family (145)

More than once, Stein suffers due to her mother's weakness and her negligence towards her. In addition to critics views about such traumatic experience of Stein during her childhood, the reader realizes that the childhood experience had terrible impact on the psychological state of Stein throughout her life. In her grandest work, *The Making of Americans*, a book which started as a history of her own German Jewish family and their arrival in America; in her need to leave a legacy to future

generations, nothing would do other than knowing everything, and always being right. Lucy claims that when Gertrude was a little girl, she overheard a conversation that would still make her shudder when she remembered it a lifetime later. Gertrude, the youngest of five siblings, was idly listening to her parents' conversation when she gleaned the fact that another sister had been still born, and another brother had died very young (11). She agrees that She would live forever with the fear of her own insignificance. And from then on, it seemed, she had, also an intention on creating 'a life' for herself (ibid). Stein expresses her agonies of her childhood in *Melanctha* when she writes:

Melanctha Herbert had not loved herself in childhood. All of her youth was bitter to remember .

Melanctha had not loved her father and her mother and they had found it very troublesome to have her (63).

The story of her commitment to psychological exploration and of her final bleak image of human relations is at bottom the story of an obsessive personal yearning for explanation. Notice how Stein repeats sentences as if they are parallel structures in a poem. In Katz's view, the very obsessiveness of her curiosity charged her and formulistic psychological ruminations finally with almost visionary intensity . The story begins , with an affair which was to serve as Stein's paradigm for the underlying struggle and the maddening obfuscation at the bottom of all human relations (x-xi). Stein had a love affair with a fellow student at John Hopkins, May Bookstaver. Stein had been living an agonizing love affair , and was not sure whether May loved her in return or was capable of loving at all. The affair ended after a year. These years with May marked Stein's disappointment about herself and her psychological state. Another biographical information of similar view is stated by Ann Charters claiming that while Gertrude was in a medical school , her brother, Leo, came to live with her for a time. At this point in his life he was advocating that people "free themselves of all conventions," and Gertrude was his willing disciple. She was naïve enough to try to preach this doctrine to a new

group of friends at Johns Hopkins, apparently unaware that they were more sophisticated than the young women she had known at Radcliffe. This group included May Bookstaver, her lover Mabel Haynes, and other wealthy Bryn Mawr graduates, whose lesbian involvements with one another apparently surprised Stein. They found her naiveté comical, which upset her (xii). During the course of the year, as she lived through the increasingly entangling relations with May and Mabel Haynes, several notions emerged from her attempt to understand the drives that governed May's behavior, and the increasingly astonishing depths out of which her own behavior seemed to spring. This simple formula becomes one of the leit – motifs of the character analyses in *The Making of Americans*: the interplay of two or more whole "characters" in a single personality. On the model of her analysis of May, Stein in her novel begins her psychological descriptions by asserting her initial bewilderment, after which her fragmentary recognitions of her subjects' fundamental traits polarize into sets of contradictory "selves"; then, after a regimen on Stein's part of intense listening and watching, the separate "persons" are observed to reintegrate.

It seems that in addition to Stein's *The Making of Americans* another early work of her like *Three Lives*' "Melanctha" based on the "understanding" of the affair with May, that love, friendship, even conversation are viewed as fundamentally naked struggles for dominance and power.

Stein certainly claims to have first hand knowledge of the kind of people about whom she writes, referring to *Three Lives* as "' a book about different characters, three different people I knew long ago'" (qtd. In Wagner-Martin, *Favored* 87). In *Three lives*, the three heroines of her story, The Good Anna, The Gentle Lena, are two stories about working-class German- American (white) women. Melanctha is a story about a black girl. No white characters of any importance appear within the context of the story, and few are even mentioned. And yet the white world impinges on Melanctha's from both sides. Melanctha in Rabin's view is a first definite step away from the nineteenth century and into the

twentieth century in literature(54). As the middle narrative of *Three Lives*, "melanctha" occupies a symbolic discursive position.

Stein projects aspects of herself onto both a male and a female character in "Melanctha". She is Jeff Campbell, steady and reliable man, and Melanctha Herbert, wild and Wandering woman . Critics started to analyze the way Stein had used her characters in her works, among them Ruddick who sees Melanctha as a repository for the "parts of Stein that Jeff (and William James) did not express" (4), Ruddick also points out that " James " runs in Melanctha's blood, as well. There are many contradictory views.

Jessica G Rabin asserts the same view in her book *Surviving the crossing* that fiction for Gertrude Stein was another way of telling the truth. Stein showed a career-long interest in the potential of modern narrative, particularly as it related to the virtually concomitant coming of age of Modernity and of her own sense of self (64).Notions of self, identity and frustration are all intermingled through Stein's repetitive unconventional narrative style to portray her character.

2.2 Tender Buttons

Tender Buttons is a 1914 book by American writer Gertrude Stein consisting of three sections titled "Objects", "Food", and "Rooms". While the short book consists of multiple poems covering the everyday mundane, Stein's experimental use of language renders the poems unorthodox and their subjects unfamiliar. *Tender Buttons* is renowned for its Modernist approach to portraying the everyday object and is lauded as a "masterpiece of verbal Cubism". Its first poem, "A Carafe, That Is a Blind Glass", is arguable its most famous and is usually cited as one of the quintessential pieces of Cubist literature. While it has been praised for its avant-garde approach at portraying the mundane, it has also been criticized as "a modernist triumph, a spectacular failure, a collection of confusing gibberish, and an intentional hoax"(Poets).

Stein's innovative writing emphasizes the sounds and rhythms rather than the sense of words. By departing from conventional meaning, grammar and syntax, she attempted to capture "moments of

consciousness," independent of time and memory. Stein's avant-garde approach to writing deconstructs the relationship between the signified and the signifier. In *Tender Buttons*, Stein tries to find a link between two ideas in order to challenge their established authenticity. Many of the titles of the individual poems likewise use similar juxtapositions: "Glazed Glitter", "A Piece of Coffee", etc.

In Dekoven's view, the pre-war culmination of Stein's early experimental career, the best known work in this style is *Tender Buttons*. Stein became interested in the vibrancy of word juxtapositions, generally within short pieces which she considered word-portraits or prose poems rather than in the mammoth accretions of steadily shifting repetition, using a flattened, radically reduced vocabulary, that characterize the extremely lengthy volumes, containing extremely lengthy sentences and paragraphs of her earlier experimental work, most notably *The Making of Americans* (1906-1911) (485).

With a close observation to Stein's poem, readers can decide how abstract the language of *Tender Buttons* is and how she presents an explanation for repeating the object with title and subtitle.

Tender Buttons is a narrative of naming- a narrative with no plot, character, or action in the conventional sense- simply a narrative of the mind encouraging language and print*1

With a close observation to Stein's poem, readers can decide how abstract the language of *Tender Buttons* is and how she presents an explanation for repeating the object with title and subtitle.

The first four pieces of the narrative, "carafe," "Glazed Glitter", "a substance in a Cushion," and "A Box," center on her assessment of what

language has become and illustrate her methods of overcoming its condition (Kaufmann 450). Consider the following lines of the poem:

A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS.

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

According to Kaufmann, the descriptions of *Tender Buttons*, are descriptions in the original sense-writings. They are descriptions not of things but of words. As it is clear from the title, it is written in bold " **A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS/** A kind in a glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange..." The heavy, dark typeface of the titles isolates the words and makes it clear that she is focusing on language (and its physical embodiment in type). Kaufmann believes that Reconsidering the entire arrangement, we find that title and piece are

*1 In addition to redefining language, she also redefines narrative. "if one, Stein writes, "goes on calling on that name more and more calling upon that name as poetry does then poetry does make of that calling upon a name of a narrative it is a narrative of calling upon that name"(*Narration* [university of Chicago Press, 1933],p.26).

one; this explains the fragmentation of the title and the abruptness of the beginning.

The blurred distinction between title and piece, which eventually becomes apparent, initiates an immediate confusion between the 'outside' [the title] and the "inside" [the description]of the piece, a confusion that the

"carafe" develops (451)Stein cites her torment " by the problem of the external and the internal" as an inspiration for the work (*writings* 112)

In Walker's view "the grammatical structure of the piece forces us to see its confusion. The structure of " Carafe," as in much of the work, depends on apposition" (133). Such apposition makes the reader to search for the meaning and find the similarity between the appositives, for kinds and cousin. we must ask why the glass is blind, why a spectacle. It may be blind in the sense of covered or dark, a sense which takes extra force from its apposition with "spectacle"- a glass lens, an aid to perception. The transparent body of the glass " blends" with its immediate surroundings, as it does with its contents like the large type of the title and the smaller, lighter type of the piece. The " single hurt color" of the Carafe is actually the blended color of the glass, its contents, and its surroundings*1

So words too are blind glasses, concealing as much as they reveal. The meaning in "spectacle" seem straightforward enough, but the word itself

also contains hidden relations. "Spectacle" derives from the Latin *specere*, "to see," and is related to species (literally, a "kind").

Focusing on Stein's description of an object and on the play of her language, it seems that the piece is not a re-creation of a Carafe, but an anatomy of language and culture revealed in the blindness of the glass.

The glass –language-no longer differentiates. Her final statement in the piece. "The difference is spreading," reveals the 'automatic' nature of language; it reveals that language "thinks itself" as it is pointed by Roland Barthes that "as soon as language thinks itself, it becomes corrosive (66).

*1 The mixed state of the carafe describes the condition which William James remarks of images in the mind, "steeped and dyed in the free water that floats around it." Quoted in Richard Bridgman, *Gertrude Stein in Pieces* (Oxford University Press, 1970) 133.

Tender Buttons is a counterpart of Stein's portraits in which she attempted to

express "what went on inside them [people]" (*Writings* 112). Kaufmann asserts that Stein is not attempting to see the inside of objects, but rather to see the inside of the human mind, of language (452).

The glass is a spectacle in the sense of a lens but it is "nothing strange" not in the sense of ordinary, but in the original sense of having nothing

outside it. These pairs which seem different are actually the same. Both words derive from "order", an "arrangement." Stein's work resembles only itself, refuses to be "seen through". In Pavlovski's view "*Tender Buttons* only partially relates to the outside world. It uses familiar words, but does not use them in familiar ways ("A Substance in a Cushion"?) (19). It simply does not make sense as traditional communication.

2.4 Melanctha & *Tender Buttons* : Codes to Female Body

Recent criticisms have turned to Stein's gender to form feminist and domestic readings of the work, or used her sexuality to form homoerotic interpretations (Pavlovski 42). *Tender Buttons* is too abstract but while reading it gives us an insight that Stein knew what she was doing by such an abstract way of writing. Lisa Ruddick believes that Stein's texts look like a private code:

*I believe that there is a code- one that, while hardly making every word or even most of Stein accessible, is more extensive than has been suspected. More importantly, the code is not only a means of referring to Stein's erotic life, although those who have identified disguised lesbian content are accurate (see Bridgeman 472). Ruddick adds that the central themes of *Tender Buttons* are meditations on the female body and its relation to a symbolic order that suppresses the female (qtd in Hoffman 225).*

Stein's early work- particularly *Three Lives* and *The making of Americans*- is indebted to the psychology of William James. But the ideas of language and attention in slightly later texts, like *Tender Buttons*, both extend and radically deviate from James and from Stein's ideas when she was most influenced by him (ibid).

The text in which Stein is closest to James is "Melanctha"; the heroine of the story reawakens her lover to the world of sensation by challenging his habits of selection. Melanctha shows Jeff Campbell the minutiae that he has characteristically ignored or dismissed as trivial. What he sees under her guidance is a chaotic field of "new things, little pieces all different (*Three Lives* 158). There is a shift, however, in Stein's thinking: with *Tender Buttons* and the texts of 1912, she comes to think of the things that every mind suppresses as images connected with femaleness. Whereas Melanctha did her work by alerting Jeff Campbell to objects like plants and insects, in the later texts the "little pieces" of the world

that move into view in moments of perceptual upheaval tend to be pieces of the female body.

The Female body itself is very much present in *Tender Buttons*. Richard Bridgman was the first to notice that *Tender Buttons* is unified by clusters of images, among them "dirt" and "versions of red- pink, scarlet, crimson, rose (126). Although Bridgman does not analyze these images, they have sexual associations, in *Tender buttons* and the other texts. Red and roses, for example, are used to suggest menstrual blood, sometimes with a negative association of something shameful or dirty: ' **A PETTICOT**: A light white, a disgrace, an ink spot, a rosy charm' (*TB*, 471). Or the sexual organs themselves are red roses: " A shallow hole rose on red, a shallow hole in and in this makes ale less [Alice]" (*TB*, 474). Finally, the female body is a white flower stained, marked red, by sexual experience:

A RED STAMP .

If lilies are lily white if they exhaust noise and distance and even dust, if they dusty will dirt a surface that has no extreme grace, if they do this and it is not necessary it is not at all necessary if they do this they need a catalogue (TB 465).*

" The white flower has not been bled."

*refers to *Tender Buttons*.

These images of menstruation and defloration are reinforced by abundant allusions in the texts to "stains," "tiny spots" "bleeding" and "secretions." (see *TB*, 457, 481;).

IN BETWEEN.

*In between a place and candy is a narrow foot-path that shows more mounting than anything, so much really that a calling meaning a bolster measured a whole thing with that. A **virgin** a whole virgin is judged made and so between curves and outlines and real seasons and more out glasses and a perfectly unprecedented arrangement between old ladies and mild colds there is no satin wood shining.*

As it is clear, Stein is doing more than to challenge the reader's delicacy. By focusing on an unconventional or even suppressed subject, a "disgrace," she is doing just what she began to do with "Melanctha": she brings into view a region of common experience that is conventionally overlooked. James would call this an undoing of selective attention (Ruddick 226). Stein's task in these texts is not unlike Melanctha's with , Jeff Campbell, that of forcing us to concentrate on "little pieces" of the world that are always there but that we normally do not like to think about. One theme of these texts is that nothing is really disgusting if one looks at it carefully.. "[i]t is not dirty. Any little thing is clean" (*TB*, 479-80). This is why the idea of the red spot or the disgrace is often juxtaposed with the theme of seeing: " A BOX: Out of a kindness comes redness...out of an eye comes research" (*TB* 463).Stein writes, " There is no disgrace in looking" (*TB*, 505); on the contrary, the act of looking with care eliminates the illusion of disgrace.

When Stein converts a menstrual spot from a " disgrace" to a 'charm," she reverses conventional valuations. Stein wants to convey a message out of stating and reversing these conventional values that no one thing is finer than

another, or by inverting them in individual instances to suggest that discredited objects can be just as 'charming" as anything else. One of the things Stein sees herself doing throughout *Tender Buttons* is to assemble little nothings –trivial objects, fragmentary sensation- and show that they are as noteworthy as anything else(237).

Conclusion

Stein manipulates unconventional narrative structures through repeating sentences, overusing "always" at the beginning of clauses, creating a continuity by using "ing" verb forms as a step to move away from diachronic sense in narration. She supported the synchronic aspect of the twentieth century .She stretches the language like a flexible

material and does not present complication of plots or development of incidents .

Stein overuses conversational style to support subjective views of the characters involved in the conversational processes. The very reason that reminds the reader of the role of psychology in understanding such subjective aspects of her characters in novels or poems that show Jamesian effect on the texts. Being associated with Cezanne, and Picasso and living in Paris as her second home encouraged her to follow the same way in writing which revealed their impacts on her writings.

The period between Stein's writing of *three Lives* and *Tender Buttons* , is a sign of her movement from a Jamesian notion of selective attention to psychoanalytic one. In Stein's view, what goes on in our mind, or the mental life is unavoidable and should not be underestimated or ignored but this experience of our mental life results in a kind of repression . This kind of repression is not trivial but very important, and such repressed mental state can be revealed at any moment. Stein always tried to refuse men's underestimation of women and through her texts she depicts the result of such repression through Melanctha's conduct due to her melancholic lonely state in a family which was fragmentary or other female characters in *The Making of Americans* like the image of a mother always submissive to what her husband says or does.

Stein depicts women's world by using erotic language specifically in *Tender Buttons* revealing the way women are created and sheds lights daringly on her sexual aspects. She reverses the conventional image of disgrace and disgust that such sensitive women's sexual organs are portrayed and changes the image of disgust to a charming state. She believes that every ting or small thing is important.

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